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Berg pushes new integration plan

By Joyce Dehli
Education reporter

Madison School Board member Rick Berg wants the school district to drop its current integration plan after next year and replace it with a magnet-school plan by 1990.

"What my plan does is simply restore choice to parents," Berg said about the proposal he sent to fellow board members Tuesday.

Berg said his plan has three major goals: to improve the academic achievement of minority students, to make participation in integration programs voluntary and to more widely distribute the resources now offered in the six integration-plan schools.

Berg said the district should continue its current integration plan for another year to give school officials time to devise one centered on magnet schools.

Under Berg's plan, the district would create at least four magnet schools. (Berg calls them "lighthouse schools" but said they correspond to what are traditionally termed magnet schools.)

Each magnet school would offer special programs, such as full-day kindergarten, smaller class sizes and flexible school times, to attract students from across the district. Each school would reserve a certain number of spaces for minority students, and at least one of those magnet

schools would be on the South Side, where many minority students live, Berg said.

"I believe there are plenty of people who would be willing to send their kids to these schools," he said. "The special resources would be a powerful incentive."

Superintendent James Travis recommended Monday that the board continue its current integration program without major structural changes.

But Travis also said the plan's top priority should become improving minority students' academic achievement rather than creating a racial mix in classrooms.

Berg, who has opposed the current integration plan since its start in August 1984, called Travis "a Jimmy-come-lately to the idea of educational quality."

Some minority leaders and parents have criticized the district's plan for not improving academic achievement of minority students. And some argue further that the integration plan, which buses children across town, makes it hard for parents to participate in the children's education.

Under the district's so-called pairing plan, the attendance areas of Lincoln and Midvale elementary schools are combined and those of Franklin and Randall schools are combined. Kindergarten through second-grade pupils attend Franklin and Midvale,



Rick Berg

third- through fifth-graders go to Lincoln and Randall.

Berg's proposal would eliminate the pairing plan, which is the district's chief strategy for reducing the concentration of minority students at Franklin and Lincoln elementary schools on the South Side.

Under Berg's plan, each of the four schools would return to teaching kindergarten through fifth grade in 1990, as each did before pairing began in August 1984.

Berg said he would rely on magnet schools and perhaps some redrawn boundaries to prevent a high concentration of minority students in any school. The district should consider redrawing the boundaries of Lincoln, Franklin, Randall and Midvale for that reason, he said.

The school board is scheduled to make a final decision on integration by Feb. 15.

Teachers say current plan is OK

Most teachers and other staff in Madison's six integration-plan schools think the plan is working without significant problems, according to a school district survey.

The survey, given last spring, shows 66 percent of the staff members found no problems, or only minor ones, with the integration plan. Twenty-six percent believe there are some serious problems and 8 percent found many serious problems with integration in their schools, the district reported.

The survey results were released Monday in the district's fourth annual report on integration in Franklin, Randall, Lincoln, Midvale, Allis and Glendale elementary schools.

Teachers in those schools said the greatest challenge they face is meeting the diverse needs of their students, the district's report states.

And Superintendent James Travis said he wants to create a special committee to address concerns raised by teachers and staff at Midvale and Lincoln.

A high percentage of teachers at those schools — 46.7 percent at Midvale and 40.7 percent at Lincoln — told surveyers they were dissatisfied with the way the integration plan deals with students who risk failing. Lincoln and Midvale have more "at risk" students than the four other schools involved in integration, Travis said.

In addition to creating a Lincoln-Midvale committee, Travis said he wants the school board to give those schools more staff members, equipment and instructional materials to help meet the needs of students who risk failing or have other special needs.

According to the district's report, the surveyed teachers generally described interracial relationships between students as good: 27 percent reported many interracial friendships, 57 percent reported a few friendships but said overall in-class relationships between races were good, 12 percent reported no friendships but good in-class relationships and 1 percent described the relationship between races as tense.

— By Joyce Dehli

Kasten enjoys fatherhood

State Journal staff

It appears Sen. Robert Kasten, R-Wis., enjoys being a father, even the diaper-changing duties.

"That first 3 a.m. diaper is pretty educational," Kasten said in a news release this week.

Kasten and his wife, Eva, had their first child, Nora Anita, on Nov. 24.

"There's nothing like having a baby to make you feel really fully human," Kasten said. "Becoming a parent for the very first time is the Super Bowl of life. Both Eva and I feel like we've been initiated into the most sacred mystery of life."

Kasten said you don't realize what being a parent is like until you become one.

"Getting up in the middle of the night and attending to the baby's myriad needs is rough," he said. "But you're doing it for your own brand-new flesh and blood. And that makes it not a job, but a joy."

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