

Citizens Jury®

On Early Childhood Education and Deliberative Democracy

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"I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome direction, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion."

- Thomas Jefferson, 1820

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Introduction

The concept of citizen deliberation has become a central area of concern among democratic theorists and empirical researchers. The tensions between broadly based political participation and more thoughtful and time-consuming deliberation have never been more evident than in the current era of effortless but superficial modalities of political communication. Political scientists increasingly recognize that the ease and breadth of access of citizen input into the political process has the potential to reduce the quality of deliberation.

To explore some of the potential advantages—as well as potential pitfalls—of a deeper citizen deliberation, the students in Political Science 8360 partnered with the Jefferson Center and Ned Crosby to sponsor and study this Citizens' Jury on Early Childhood Education Policy. As background reading, the students reviewed the academic work on deliberative democracy and pre-K education policy. They then worked with Ned Crosby to help set the parameters for the citizens' jury process, prepare materials for the jurors, and arrange for expert witnesses to testify before the jury. The students attended and, to some extent, helped facilitate the process. They served as researchers when jurors wanted additional information or had questions they wanted answered. The students also constructed questionnaires for the jurors to answer which, along with participant observation techniques, provided the data and understanding that the students needed in order to analyze the process as well as its impact on the citizens who participated.

In the end, the students discovered that the process did have some immediate effects on the jurors, including enhancing their attention to and interest in the political process, their sense of external efficacy, and even, among the moderates, modifying their opinions on some issues. It is of course very difficult to assess whether this process affected the three interested members of the state legislature who attended, heard the citizens' reports, and asked and answered questions in a dialogue with the jurors. To the extent that it might have affected them, they will take that influence back with them as they engage in another round of legislative action dealing with the issues of pre-K education policy.

The students in the seminar and their instructor wish to express our profound gratitude to Ned Crosby and the Jefferson Center staff for making this learning/research experience available to us. Just as the jurors were, quite clearly, affected in a positive way by this experience, so also were the students and their professor. Special thanks to the graduate RA for the project, Serena Laws, who helped identify and overcome a significant number of hurdles that appeared during this process.

John Sullivan,

Regents Professor of Political Science

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Project Overview

The purpose of this Citizens Jury was to advance public policy in the area of early childhood education. Regardless of where people align themselves along the political spectrum they tend to agree on the value of our children and desire to give them a promising future. Research in the area of quality preschool education shows that it can lead to many improvements in learning and behavior, especially for at-risk kids. Despite this convincing research, however, early childhood policy in Minnesota does not provide the quality standards, outreach, and funding that would be necessary for quality preschool to be available statewide.

The Citizens Jury is a unique process that generates input from a group of representative citizens who are brought together to become informed about an issue. Sufficient time is allowed for discussion and deliberation by the jurors to develop thoughtful and useful recommendations. The Citizens Jury on Early Childhood Education and Deliberative Democracy consisted of 17 randomly selected citizens of Minnesota representing a microcosm of the public. The jurors were paid to come together for five days over two consecutive weekends: April 11, 12, 13 and April 18, 19, 2008, to be informed on the issues of early childhood education and, later, deliberative democracy. The jury heard expert witness presentations on a range of issues and perspectives related to early childhood education.

The jurors were assigned the charge of deciding whether they felt Minnesota should be spending more, the same, or less in the area of early childhood education. The jury deliberated on many aspects of this complex issue, including whether something was indeed wrong with the current state of early childhood spending in Minnesota, who should be included in public preschool, and what early childhood education programs should consist of. The jurors deliberated together as they developed recommendations for legislators, policy makers, and the public to consider. The jury eventually divided into three groups differing in whether they wanted to spend more, the same, or less in the area. Each group then further developed its own proposal.

On Day Four, the jury was given the opportunity to present their proposals and opinions to three legislators who came to the citizens jury: Representative Eastlund, Representative Peterson, and Senator Hann. An appointed spokesperson from each group presented that group's plan to the legislators, who in turn asked questions and provided information to jurors.

On Day Five Jefferson Center Chair Ned Crosby presented the jury with information on the Citizens Assembly Process and deliberative democracy. The jury was asked to consider whether they liked the idea of a Minnesota Citizens' Assembly. Though not directly related to the main topic of early childhood education, this exercise allowed jurors to reflect on the deliberative process they had gone through and to consider whether an expanded version of the citizens jury—the citizens assembly—would be a useful policymaker in Minnesota.

Prior to the actual event, the citizens' jury process and the issue of early childhood education was studied in a seminar taught by John Sullivan, Regents professor of political science at the University of Minnesota, and Ned Crosby, inventor of the Citizens Jury process and Chair of the Jefferson Center. The students in the class helped organize and run the jury, and were present throughout the entire process.

The Jefferson Center

The Jefferson Center is a non-profit, non-partisan organization located in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Established in 1974, the Center is committed to generating thoughtful citizen input on issues of public significance. The central focus of the Center is the Citizens Jury process, through which randomly selected and demographically representative panels of citizens meet for several days to examine public policy issues and present their findings to decision-makers and the public. To date, the Jefferson Center has conducted 30 Citizens Jury projects on a wide range of issues. Information on the Jefferson Center can be found at www.jefferson-center.org.

Political Science 8360/001: *Early Childhood Education and Deliberative Methods*

The jury was organized and run in conjunction with a graduate seminar in the Political Science Department at the University of Minnesota. The seminar had four students and was co-taught by Regents Professor John Sullivan and Ned Crosby. A list of students may be found on the staff page.

Juror Selection

The Jefferson Center hired the non-profit group Clean Water Action to canvass different neighborhoods in the Twin Cities Metro area in search of a representative jury sample. Though Clean Water Action has a particular interest in environmental issues, they were hired simply because they had experience and expertise in canvassing door-to-door.

Jurors were selected in the following manner. First, we identified all the census tracts[·] in the greater Twin Cities area. Then, within each of four counties, census tracts were rank ordered based on the average income of citizens living in that area. We then randomly selected census tracts in each county, and then randomly selected a search area within the census tract. We provided maps of the randomly selected census tracts and the search areas within them to Clean Water Action staff. These staff went door-to-door and asked if people would be interested in participating in the jury. From this pool of potential jurors, we selected a group that was as representative of the population of Minnesota according to a number of demographic factors (race, gender, age, political party identification, and place of residence—urban, suburban, rural). A breakdown of the goal distribution of these factors and the actual distribution can be found in the Juror Composition Table on page 17.

Witness Selection

Experts in early childhood education and legislators were recruited by Project Consultant John Hottinger. He identified experts in early childhood education and explained the citizens' jury process to them. Witnesses were identified to represent an array of points of view. Legislators were chosen based on their interest in early childhood education. An equal number of House and Senate members were invited, and there were equal numbers of Republicans and Democrats, to ensure an unbiased set of viewpoints.

[·] A census tract is a small geographic area that the census divides each state into.

Recommendations

The jury's recommendations included their answers to the charge questions. The jurors eventually split into three groups based on their similar points of view. Each group then made its own recommendations. The jurors presented their recommendations to three legislators and other interested individuals in a public session. Outlines of the three groups' recommendations can be found later in this report

Evaluation by Jurors

At the conclusion of this process, the jurors completed an evaluation of the project. A key question on the evaluation form asked the jurors to consider the overall integrity of the project. The results of the final evaluation by the jurors can be found at the end of this report. The jurors were also given an opportunity to write a personal statement about the project for inclusion in this report.

Jury Charge

The charge to the jury outlined the jury's focus and provided direction for the deliberations. It informed the jury of their overall goals and objectives. In this project, the jurors were asked to respond to three questions. Background and advocate testimony provided key information that enabled the jury to answer the questions in a knowledgeable manner. The charge to the jury was as follows:

1. Should the state of Minnesota spend more, less or about the same amount on intensive preschool education?

The hearings for the first three days will concentrate on this question. But you will not take a final vote on it until Day 5.

- A. On Day 2, you will be given a choice between four general approaches to intensive preschool education and asked which of them seems most appealing to you. You will also be given the opportunity of choosing none of them.
 - B. On the morning of Day 3 you will be given more information on the approach currently being taken in Minnesota. On the afternoon of Day 3, you may choose up to three approaches that you like and modify them as you wish. (You will also be given a chance to modify your ideas on the afternoon of Day 4, after discussions with some Minnesota legislators.)
2. Should something like a Citizens Jury be used to make important decisions about early childhood education and childcare?
 - A. On Day 4, you will have a chance to present your decisions from Day 3 to some Minnesota legislators. You will then get a chance to discuss with them whether something like a Citizens Jury would be helpful to them in making public policy on early childhood education and childcare.
 - B. On Day 5 you will be presented with a novel way for decisions to be made on early childhood education in a way that is isolated from political pressures. It proposes that legislators and randomly selected citizens work together to make decisions on this issue. You will then be asked when, if at all, you think this proposal should be given serious consideration.

Jury Recommendations

Question # 1 of the Charge: Should the state of Minnesota spend more, less or about the same amount on intensive preschool education?

In response to the first question in the Charge (the question on early childhood education), jurors divided themselves into three groups based on whether they felt Minnesota should spend more, less, or the same on early childhood education after participating in the jury for two days. These three groups generated three different sets of recommendations which are printed below.

After they finished their deliberations, the jurors were also asked if they wanted to vote *individually* on the first question in the charge—“Should the state of Minnesota spend more, less or about the same amount on intensive preschool education?” This would give jurors who had changed their minds a chance to state their final opinion. The jurors decided to vote on the charge by secret ballot on the last day of the jury. The responses are recorded below.

Anonymous votes on the first part of the charge: “Should the state of Minnesota spend more, less, or about the same amount on intensive preschool education?”

Minnesota Should Spend...	# of jurors	% of jurors
More	6	35 %
Same	6	35 %
Less	5	30 %

The jury also generated detailed recommendations in three groups. The groups were formed on Day 3—jurors were asked at that point to join a group based on whether they wanted to spend more or spend less on early childhood education, or if they wanted to tweak the existing system. Jurors were invited to switch groups if they found their views corresponded more with another group, which a few did.

The three groups met several times during Days 3, 4, and 5. During that time, they generated a series of proposals, recommendations, and reasons for their point of view. The groups were also asked to change their name if they wished to do so, which all three did. The results of the three groups deliberations are printed in the next three pages.

Group: *Citizens For the Future*^{*}

Main Points:

- Universal Access (but optional)
- Quality
- Parent Involvement
- Every day, half day
- Wrap-around day care option
- Ongoing Program Evaluation
- Transportation
- Infrastructure
- Timeline
- Funding—no tuition, funded with taxes*#
- Outreach, information, education

Details:

1. Universal Access--Equal Opportunity for all (regardless of background)
2. Quality-
 - teachers-- B.A. minimum
 - teacher:child ratio 1:10 ratio (1 teacher + 1 certified aide)
 - curriculum—play-based, developed by early childhood specialists
 - CEU-training
3. Parent Involvement
 - workshops-twice a year, explain curriculum, observe kids
 - home site visits
 - evaluation conferences
 - volunteerism
4. Wrap-around day care option as needed
 - fee for use
 - uses existing moneys for those who qualify for income assistance
5. Employee and Program Evaluation Process
 - Day care Employee Workshops and Evaluation Process
6. Transportation
 - incorporate existing busing system
7. Infrastructure
 - use existing buildings where possible

* Started out as the “Spend More” group. They changed their name on Day 4.

- use existing school boards and staff where possible
8. Implement over 6-10 years--allows possibility to evaluate success/failures on an ongoing basis
- school districts request funding to implement program as they are ready
 - state gives priority to districts with low-income/at-risk children
9. Funding
- *Some group members suggest that those with kids in the program pay more
 - #Parent volunteerism to defray tuition cost
10. Outreach
- let people know what programs are out there and how to get them

Group: *Family Values*^{*}

1. Emphasize Optional Home Schooling/Home Teaching
 - providing materials
 - i.e. curriculum, parenting & teaching skills
2. Promote Strong Family Base is important & ideal
 - billboards & advertising
 - provide English classes for parents
 - Need to see it and hear it
3. If anything, make Kindergarten education mandatory
 - either through school system or home schooling
 - Instead of relying on preschool, ensure Kindergarten does its job
 - Preschool is a kickstand for Kindergarten
4. Cutting Spending is a priority
 - Public Preschool is not necessary
 - government funded preschool specifically

^{*} This group started out as the “spend less” group. They chose to change their name to this one on Day 4.

Group: *Don't Reinvent the Wheel**

Fix the Spokes and Grease the Axle

(Minnesota ranks 5th in education in U.S.)

1. Coordinate existing programs
2. Prioritize current spending
3. Target parents to empower them as primary educators
4. Target children's needs with optional programs we already have.

DETAILS

1. Create "Office of Early Learning" (not a new department)
 - A. Coordinates services to eliminate redundant programs.
 - B. Has a broader picture of differing needs within the state to make funding recommendations based on need.
 - C. Becomes an information hub for parents and service providers.
 - D. Provide community with a pathway to critique the program to ensure uniform quality is maintained.
 - E. Provide evaluation of successful and failed programs.
2. Priorities: Why spend new money on pre-K when K-12 fails them later?
 - A. Raise E-12 funding to pre-Pawlenty levels by shifting funds and potentially raising money.
 - Fix K-12 first.
 - Example: Global stats for science decline after 4th grade from 92% to 29% by 12th grade.
 - B. For the Head Start program, decrease waiting list by focusing on four year olds only and use funding here first – then ECFE, etc.
3. Target parents/children needs:
 - A. Examples: affordable housing, English language learners, jobs, adult literacy, health care, parent education (for completion of GED, degree, etc.), parenting education, at home resources and home teaching opportunities.
 - B. Fewer families in crisis mode equals more children ready to learn.
 - C. Target children of parents in crisis (see 3A for examples) with existing services.

* This group started out wanting to spend the same/tweak the system Minnesota currently has. They chose their new name on Day 4.

Question # 2 of the Charge: What do you think about the Minnesota Citizens' Assembly?

NOTE: This question was modified from the original charge. Because of the complexity of the early childhood education issue, the staff together decided to change the agenda to allow one more day to discuss the issue of early childhood education. As a result, when Minnesota legislators came to hear from the jurors, they only heard about the three groups' early childhood education proposals (and not about the second question of the charge, as originally was the plan).

The second question of the original Charge read "Should something like a Citizens Jury be used to make important decisions about early childhood education and childcare?" Due to the change in agenda, and the time constraints of addressing this question for only one day (on Day 5), the question was simplified. Jurors were presented with the idea of a Minnesota Citizens' Assembly, and were asked what they thought about the idea.

To address this second, modified question of the Charge, jurors were first asked to respond to two questions related to a brief presentation by Ned Crosby introducing the idea of a Minnesota Citizens' Assembly.

A. How well do you think government is working in Minnesota?

	# jurors	% jurors
Very well	0	0 %
Well	8	47 %
Medium (I'm unsure)	6	35 %
Not well	3	18 %
Not at all well	0	0 %

B. What do you think about the Minnesota Citizens' Assembly?

	# jurors	% jurors
I like it a lot	7	41 %
I like it	8	47 %
I'm neutral (I'm unsure)	1	6 %
I don't like it	1	6 %
I don't like it at all	0	0 %

Jurors then split into randomly assigned groups to discuss the possibility of a Minnesota Citizens' Assembly further. They were invited to propose changes to the structure introduced by Ned Crosby.

After generating a list of proposed changes, jurors then indicated whether or not they liked the proposed change. A summary of the results of that exercise is presented in the table below.

<i>Proposed Changes to Citizens' Assembly Model</i>	<i># Jurors</i>	<i>% Jurors</i>
Once every two weekends	4	24 %
Once every three weekends	9	53 %
Once every four weekends	5	29 %
Receive literature about the topic in advance	11	65 %
Add profession as a category in selection of jurors	9	53 %
Eliminate a weekend (why spend 3 on 'the problem' if there's an issue?)	15	88 %
Receive literature about the process in advance	16	94 %
Flexibility to decide meeting times (pace)	4	24 %
Citizens' Assembly process would be established by the legislature	6	35 %
Scale down to 1 rep of every 2 districts	10	59 %
Do two separate assemblies	6	35 %
Number of jurors now in support with majority recommended changes	13	76 %

Jurors then were presented with a more radical proposal for institutional change. They were then asked when, if at all, that proposal should be given any consideration.

The question was "You have heard about a proposal called the Minnesota Citizens' Department. When, if at all, should this proposal be given serious consideration?"

Jurors responded:

	# jurors	%
Not at all	2	12 %
8 Years	0	0 %
4 Years	2	12 %
2 Years	3	18 %
Right Away	10	59 %

Juror Comments

This was a great experience! Being one of the few jurors that does not have children, I feel that I am very informed about E.C.E. [Early Childhood Education] way more than I was prior to being involved. All in all, I just wanna say Thanks!!

- *Sa'koree Fondren*

I have a much wider knowledge of Early Childhood Development Programs and reasons, cost and the priorities. I am still not convinced that these programs are necessary for everyone and need to be funded by the state, that education funding should be done at higher age levels.

- *James R. Duerr*

Through this process I have learned that a group of people from different backgrounds, with differing opinions can come together regarding a subject and collectively formulate a plan. And in doing so, this plan will be more thought out, and take more things into consideration.

- *Bill Anderson*

This was an interesting process. I have never really experienced anything like this and have felt it to be a wonderful and interesting thing to be a part of. I have come out of this with a new light on the subject of early childhood education. If chosen for another I would gladly do it again for just the opportunity to be involved with this process. It has really informed me a great deal. Thank you for the chance to be in something I feel is very important.

- *Larry C. Banks II*

I feel this was a very positive experience for me. Meeting people from around the city and state gave me a new perspective on people in general, but specifically ideas they have on intensive pre-school education. It made me feel that I still have a voice in what can happen in Minnesota.

- *Star McCoy*

I love the idea of a citizens' jury. I am glad I was able to participate. I hope I was able to make a difference. Thank you.

- *Andy Spike*

I think this was a very educational important process. Even if we don't have the opportunity to make changes, we are now each an informed resource for our home communities. It would be great to see more of these in the state so we can educate more people on the issues, taxation legislative process and stimulate community/citizen involvement in general.

- *Kari Tauring*

I was honored to be a part of this experience. How do we put a price on the value of education? The future of our society is at stake, so all leaders, legislators, and parents must always understand the importance of education and maintain their commitments to it! Funding is always going to be an issue with the economy as it is but there always can be a way to accomplish things when we put our own minds to it. Pre-school education is so important and the statistics prove it! I believe legislators should approve funding for it even if it means reallocating the current K-12 system to a 4-yr old-12 system instead. I also believe that parents who have students in the

program should also help fund the program more so than just opening it up to the taxpayers totally. The people whose children are in these programs are the ones that benefit the most. Therefore, they should pay more, not all but at least their fair share. Harry Truman once said, "It is what you learn after you think you know it all that counts!"

- *Brian M. Stark*

I thought the subject matter was very interesting. I found it helpful to find out about the many childcare programs available for preschool children today. I enjoyed working as a team with individuals that the same opinions on childcare education as I did and come up with a proposal that we all agreed on without really any disagreements on the things we wanted in the program. I thought the facilitators and the students helped make the citizens' jury a success by letting us know what we would be doing every step of the way. I am glad I had the opportunity to be selected for this valuable learning experience. I hope to be a part of another citizens' jury in the future.

- *Joan Hobbs*

Juror List

<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Home Town</i>	<i>Occupation</i>
Alice Fay Lloyd-Fossum	--	Golden Valley	Sales
Ameranetti Moore	27	Minneapolis	Homemaker
Andrew Strike	24	Buffalo	Tree Climber
Aricela Batres	22	Minneapolis	Homemaker
Bill Anderson	38	Cleveland	Self Employed
Brian M. Stark	52	Hutchinson	Retail Sales Manager
Carol Meyer	57	Minnetonka	Sales Analyst
James R. Duerr	72	Champlin	Retired
Joan Hobbs	47	Osseo	Health Information Administration, RHIA/CPC
Kari Tauring	41	Minneapolis	Author/Educator/Musician
Larry Banks	25	Minneapolis	Target
Lydia Schwartz	22	Minneapolis	Student
SA'Koree Fondren	24	Minnetonka	CEO Trap City Muzik Group
Senja Lopac	25	Champlin	Chemical Engineer
Star McCoy	50	Minneapolis	Housewife
Susan B. Kligherz	--	Savage	None
Warren Lester	40	Chanhassen	Graphic Design

Jury Composition

The Jefferson Center hired the non-profit group Clean Water Action to canvass different neighborhoods in the Twin Cities Metro area in search of a representative jury sample. Though Clean Water Action has a particular interest in environmental issues, they were hired simply because they had experience and expertise in going door-to-door.

Witnesses were selected in the following manner. First, we identified all the census tracts in the greater Twin Cities area. Then, within each of four counties, census tracts were rank ordered based on the average income of citizens living in that area. The canvasser knocked on doors and asked who were interested in participating in a citizen's jury. From this pool, a representative group was telephoned and asked to participate.

Juror Composition Table – Goals and Resulting Jury

		GOAL	TOTAL	Percentage
GENDER	Male	9	7	41%
	Female	9	10	59%
AGE	18 - 34	5	7	41%
	35 - 54	8	7	41%
	55 or older	5	3	18%
RACE	White	14	12	71%
	Other	4	5	29%
RESIDENCE	Urban	6	7	41%
	Suburban	6	8	47%
	Rural	6	2	12%
INCOME	Upper	6	5	29%
	Middle	6	6	35%
	Lower	6	6	35%
PARTY	Democrat	6	8	47%
	Republican	6	5	29%
	None/Other	6	4	24%
TOTAL		18	17	

· A census tract is a small geographic area that the census divides each state into.

Juror Evaluation

Jurors were asked to evaluate various elements of the citizens' jury process at the end of Day 5. Answers to the first two questions are summarized below.

1. In general, how do you feel about the Citizens Jury on Early Childhood Education now that you have completed the project?

	<i># jurors</i>	<i>% jurors</i>
Very Satisfied	7	41 %
Satisfied	7	41 %
Neutral	1	6 %
Dissatisfied	2	12 %
Very Dissatisfied	0	0 %

2. One of our aims is to have the Jefferson Center staff conduct the project in an unbiased way. How satisfied are you with their performance in this regard?

	<i># jurors</i>	<i>% jurors</i>
Very Satisfied	3	18 %
Satisfied	8	47 %
Neutral	2	12 %
Dissatisfied	4	24 %
Very Dissatisfied	0	0 %

EVALUATION FORM FOR JURORS *Citizens Jury on Early Childhood Education*

1. In general, how do you feel about the Citizens Jury on Early Childhood Education now that you have completed the project?

_____ Very satisfied
_____ Satisfied
_____ Neutral
_____ Dissatisfied
_____ Very dissatisfied

2. One of our aims is to have the Jefferson Center staff conduct the project in an unbiased way. How satisfied are you with their performance in this regard?

- _____ Very satisfied
- _____ Satisfied
- _____ Neutral
- _____ Dissatisfied
- _____ Very dissatisfied

3. How do you feel about the witness presenters? Do you have any comments about specific presenters, the witnesses as a whole, or about the information that was presented to you?
4. Was there any information or witness that was particularly helpful or useful to your understanding of the issues?
5. Was there any information or witness that you felt was not useful or was unnecessary to your understanding of the issues?
6. Was there any part of the project which was particularly satisfying or well done?
7. Was there any part of the project which was particularly dissatisfying or poorly done?
8. Are there any suggestions in the proceedings which you would recommend? Any additional comments? (you may use the back side of this paper, if necessary)

Name (optional): _____

Staff Comments

Comments by Ned Crosby

As a class exercise, this Citizens Jury was quite successful. The class learned about the Citizens Jury process and worked hard to bring together some top witnesses to discuss the issues at hand. The moderating was done in the usual professional way, led by Kim Boyce (one of the most experienced moderators of Citizens Juries) and ably assisted by Elliot Shuford from Healthy Democracy Oregon. Prof. Sullivan devoted an unusual amount of time to make the seminar and the Citizens Jury project a success.

Nevertheless, this project had some major flaws. For reasons explained below, several jurors felt by the end of Day 1 that they were participating in a project that was not being conducted in a fair way. They felt that the project was biased in favor of quality preschool education. This became apparent by the morning of Day 2. As a result, staff modified the agenda for the rest of the project. An extra day was added to the topic of quality preschool education and the second question in the charge received only a single day of consideration.

In the evaluations done on the final day, 65% of the jurors were either “very satisfied” or “satisfied” that the project was conducted in an unbiased way. But this obscures the fact that this project received the worst “bias rating” of any Citizens Jury conducted by the Jefferson Center, since these ratings began in 1981. The standard question posed to the jurors is: “One of our aims is to have the Jefferson Center staff conduct the project in an unbiased way. How satisfied are you with their performance in this regard?” Although 11 of the 17 jurors were “very satisfied” or “satisfied”, the fact that only 3 (18%) were “very satisfied” makes this the lowest level of top satisfaction of any project conducted by the Center. Before this project, the average of the “very satisfied” rating was 70%.

This rating has been important for the Center because it has been our experience that it is an accurate reflection of whether the project was indeed conducted with low bias. There is no project I remember where we received really high ratings when staff felt that it had not done the best job, nor any project with low ratings where the staff was puzzled and could not figure out why.

In this project, it was my impression that the staff performed well in terms of not introducing any of their attitudes into discussions. The reasons for the poor rating stem largely from my mistakes in setting the agenda and selecting the witnesses. There were several factors involved.

- I have been saying for over a decade that on any kind of complicated issue, a project using randomly selected citizens should be run for at least five days. Yet in this project, I thought it would be possible to pose two different questions to the jurors: (1) Should the state of Minnesota spend more, less or about the same on intensive preschool education? (2) Should something like a Citizens Jury be used to make important decisions about early childhood education and childcare? Only the first three days were devoted to the

first question. It turned out not to be enough, given that the jurors were rushed into considering intensive preschool education (along the lines of what is being done in New Jersey or Oklahoma) before they were convinced that there was a problem to be solved.

- No one should sponsor a Citizens Jury project with the expectation that the jurors will support the favorite approach of the sponsors. Often there have been major attitude changes in projects that were not foreseen by either staff or sponsors. At times this has resulted in considerable disappointment on the part of the sponsors. In spite of this, it seemed obvious to me that Minnesota (ranked 37th among states in terms of access for 4-year olds to quality preschool projects) was in great need for more to be spent on such preschool projects. This was why I limited the time given to the jurors to consider whether any problems existed. But without such a discussion jurors may feel they are being forced to agree with sponsors that there is a problem. I should have known better than to assume that this corner could be cut, especially because students in the class challenged me on this point.
- If there is any indication that sponsors are hoping for a particular result, then the staff of the project should be sure that there is what lawyers call a “firewall” separating those who are sponsoring the project from those who are designing the charge and the agenda. Perhaps because this was a class exercise, I ignored this. After all, the aim was to demonstrate the Citizens Jury process to students in a graduate seminar, while allowing me and the Jefferson Center to pursue topics that interested us.
- One of the more obvious things about a Citizens Jury project is that the topic itself must be clear. But Prof. John Sullivan and I let slide the fact that he kept on referring to the project as one on early childhood education, while I kept referring to it as one on quality (or intensive) preschool education. There is a big difference. If the Citizens Jury is about early childhood education, then one ought first to give the jurors a grounding about what is going on in the area, let them discover whether there is anything that needs fixing, and then review several proposals for improving things. If one starts with a focus on quality preschool education, then one is already starting with the examination of a proposal for fixing a problem that is assumed to exist. The Center has assumed that it is proper to do the latter, so long as equal time is given to opponents and proponents – as was done with the Citizens Jury on the Clinton health care plan in 1993. But the course was announced with the title of early childhood and ended up being called that. Given that we only had four students who signed up for the course (it was announced late), I was hesitant to point out that I wanted to concentrate on quality preschool because I thought one student might drop out if this were made clear. This is not the way one ought to start a project.

In retrospect, it seems to me that I ignored these good guidelines not out of mere carelessness, but more out of blindness. The students in the class challenged me on the agenda for several weeks, as did both moderators. I spent considerable time listening to these challenges, dialoguing with both students and moderators, and writing memos both to them and to myself. But in the end I still did not foresee how things would turn out.

It is interesting to me that it does not seem fashionable to be blunt about one's own mistakes. When I have spoken about this to some friends, they refer to it as "Ned is beating up on himself", or something similar. Of course it is never easy to get just the right tone when talking about one's own mistakes, but it seems very important that those in the field of deliberative democracy try to be reflective and honest about how they have conducted their projects.

For me, one of the ironies of the project was that the jurors' perception of bias arose in part because of the fact that we searched out the best opponent to quality preschool education that we could find, Dr. Karen Effram. But we did not structure the event so that there was a good dialogue between pro and con witnesses. Instead, we structured it to ask the jurors how much, if any, they would like to increase the amount spent on quality preschool. This meant that we did not schedule Dr. Effram, or anyone sharing her opinions, to return for more discussion. We simply structured Day 2 to start a discussion of whether to spend more, less or the same amount on quality preschool.

This framing of the main question in terms of cost was a mistake. We should have framed it in terms of whether they liked the concept of quality preschool. If so, then how much should be spent on it? By focusing on cost before a good discussion of quality preschool, lasting at least two days, we led the jurors to focus on money and taxes before learning whether or not they really wanted the program. I believe that several jurors felt they were being pushed into spending money on a program they didn't like and they reacted as the public usually does when asked to raise taxes.

With only four students in the class, most of the witnesses were contacted and convinced to come by John Hottinger. He was engaged to help with the class rather late in the day, meaning that he and I were scrambling to find witnesses to fill the agenda. The witness we selected to introduce the jurors to the challenges faced by K-12 education was Dr. Jay Haugen, Superintendent of the West St. Paul School District. He was a very articulate witness, but also one who was very much aware of the performance gap between students from middle class families and students from minority and poor families. He discussed this problem at some length and clearly favored quality preschool education as the best solution. In other words, he came across as an advocate rather than as someone merely describing what is going on with education in Minnesota.

The witness whom we selected to present the case for quality preschool education was Henriët Hendriks, a graduate student from the Netherlands. She did a fine job of presenting the case, but did it with a concentration on the experimental evidence indicating the merits of the Perry Preschool model and the Chicago Child-Parent centers. We had tried to get a Kindergarten teacher to come to speak from experience about the need for quality preschool, but were unable to get anyone to come. The result was a rather cerebral presentation.

When Dr. Effram finished her presentation at the end of Day 1, several of jurors were dismayed. They appeared to feel that they had been listening to witnesses during most of the day who all agreed with one another about the importance of quality preschool education and then, all of a sudden, heard something very different from the last witness. They felt that all of the

witnesses before her were in favor of quality preschool education. This, in fact, was a correct perception. The witnesses who spoke during the middle of the day about programs other than quality preschool were taking that position not because they disliked quality preschool, but because they felt there was not enough political will to get the legislature to introduce a significant program in this area.

This led a number of the jurors to wonder what was going on. Dr. Effram's presentation had a ring of truth to it. Why had she not appeared earlier in the day? If that question had been posed to me at that point, I would have had to say that she was on the agenda simply because I felt an obligation that her views be presented, but that I believed that the weight of the evidence was so strong on the other side that I did not think her position would be taken seriously. This not only was factually incorrect on my part, but my attitude was very incorrect for anyone setting a Citizens Jury agenda.

In retrospect, the agenda should have been set so that the first day was devoted to exploring whether or not there was a problem that needed to be solved. The Jefferson Center has long been aware that the perception of a problem in an area is often colored by the solution one has in mind. Therefore, in a Citizens Jury that concentrated on a specific solution to a problem, the advocates of that solution and the opponents should be given equal time to define the problem. We had not bothered to do this. If one accepted the definition of the problem given by Dr. Haugen, then quality preschool education was very likely to be seen as the best solution. But it seemed rather clear that Dr. Effram would have defined the problem differently. The jurors should have been given a good chance to decide on whether there is a problem and how big it is before getting into a discussion of whether quality preschool is a good way to fix that problem.

There was something else left out of Day 1 as well. In many Citizens Juries there has been an exercise on the morning of Day 1 to help the jurors get to know each other and bond as a group. Often something called a values review has been used. The jurors are asked to put themselves in an imaginary setting where the facts are stipulated and the jurors are given an opportunity to explore their values. For example, in a 2005 Citizens Jury the jurors were asked to imagine they lived on a very pleasant island, but one where some major wells supplying water had gone bad. Should there be some kind of rationing in order to conserve, or should they tap the water that currently is off limits in a famous nature preserve that is important to the tourist industry?

The advantage of asking panelists to discuss an imaginary problem is that it helps them get to know each other by talking about a public policy issue that they know does not count. They can relax and talk about a situation that is interesting and not too complex. It helps those panelists who do not pay much attention to public policy to see that they do have opinions on the topics, that they are capable of discussing them, and that the discussions are interesting. Most importantly, it helps them bond as a group and prepare to discuss issues from the point of view of what is good for the group as a whole.

This means that the merits of quality preschool would not have been explored until the afternoon of Day 2, or perhaps even the morning of Day3. By this time the jurors should have bonded as a group and hopefully would have come to some agreement about what the problem

was to be solved. Then they could have had the opportunity to hear witnesses pro and con quality preschool, with ample opportunity for them to hear claim and counter claim from the witnesses, unlike the situation where Dr. Effram appeared once and then was not called again.

Reflections

Does this mean that quality preschool education would have been favored if the agenda had been set properly? Possibly, but it is important to explore this question and its implications. One of the worst mistakes that could be made by the Jefferson Center would be to structure the process to lead to favored results.

Those who favor quality preschool education (I am a strong proponent) might think that if the agenda had been set correctly, the jurors would have gained a much better understanding of the achievement gap in urban schools in Minnesota. This would have enabled them to see that quality preschool education is the most cost-effective way to solve that problem. But this is too facile an assumption. One of the most important things I learned from this project was how some less-well educated jurors viewed quality preschool programs, especially those modeled after the Perry Preschool experiments. They reacted very negatively to the notion that the teachers in a high quality preschool program should have a BA plus additional training in order to do a good job of teaching at-risk children. Their reaction: are you trying to tell me that I don't know how to raise my children because I don't have that kind of education? That implication was enough to make them negative toward quality preschool, especially if it might require a tax increase.

In other words, the concept of quality preschool must be presented very carefully to less well-educated parents if they are to be convinced that it is a good idea. My understanding of the Perry Preschool experiment was that it was conducted in such a way that the parents of the children were treated with respect and felt that they and their children were participating in a valuable program. But, too often, I have heard advocates of quality preschool talk in terms that imply that the parents are inadequate and that their children need special help to make up for the inadequacies of the parents. Such an attitude (which I fear I allowed to slip into the agenda as I set it) is sufficient to undercut support from the very families for whose children the programs are designed.

So when do we know that a Citizens Jury agenda has been set correctly? This is a big topic that can only be addressed with a brief sketch here. Suffice it to say that the agenda should be fair, that it should allow the main points of view to be presented in sufficient detail so that the jurors understand them, and that there is time enough for people to take a significant fresh look at their values and beliefs relevant to the question at hand. This may mean that a single Citizens Jury is not enough. Certainly, there are some questions that can be dealt with properly in the five days typical of a Citizens Jury, as run by the Jefferson Center. This is the case with most proposed ballot initiatives (see the proposed Citizens Initiative Review in Oregon: www.healthydemocracyoregon.org). On the other hand, there are some issues such as health care that are so complex that a single Citizens Jury is unlikely to do justice to them. In light of the Jefferson Center experience with the Clinton health care plan in 1993, I now prefer the Citizens' Assembly method for an issue this complicated (see www.citizensassembly.bc.ca).

Of course it is likely that those whose views are not supported by a Citizens Jury will claim that the agenda has not been set properly. Such a claim would receive strong support if the “bias ratings” were as poor as they were in the current Citizens Jury. But even if the bias ratings are good, it may be that some group feels that they did not have enough time to get their views presented properly. If the Citizens Jury process ever did become a significant element in legislative decision-making, then the solution to such a claim is to run another Citizens Jury or something longer such as a Citizens’ Assembly. My view is that this would be worth doing this if the cost of the deliberative methods remains less than 1% of the costs of the program area under discussion. Most citizens routinely hire realtors who charge 5% or more of the cost of the house they are buying or selling. In other words, when there is a major decision facing your life (or the lives of people you care about), where costs are high, it is worthwhile spending at least 1% of the total cost getting advice that will help you make the correct decision.

Assume then that a future Citizens Jury on quality preschool education is properly run. Is it likely that such a Citizens Jury would show more support for quality preschool education? The only way to answer this is to conduct such a project and see what happens. If the results were similar to this project, there might be a variety of reasons why the support for quality preschool education remained low.

- A. There is a significant portion of jurors who agree with some of the concerns raised by Bruce Fuller in his book, *Standardized Childhood: The Political and Cultural Struggle over Early Childhood* (Standord University Press, 2008). Fuller agrees that quality preschool education can be beneficial when run in small programs. He does raise considerable concerns, however, about how such a program would work if made a statewide program for all four year old children. Such programs can come under control of ideologues who are out to promote a philosophy of education that is shared only by a minority. Also, such large programs can often be insensitive to cultural minorities. These are valid concerns which the proponents of quality preschool must address.
- B. A large majority of the jurors agree that quality preschool education will improve the lives of at-risk children in their school systems, but they are unwilling to see their taxes go up to pay for it and they can see no way that the legislature will cut spending in other areas in order to fund quality preschool. When asked why they will not support a modest tax increase, they simply reply that they don’t want their taxes raised now for rewards that won’t come back to them for some 10 to 15 years. This is a rational, although not very altruistic, position for people to take.
- C. It is also possible that a significant portion of the jurors refuse to support quality preschool education because they are not being rational. I do not remember any Citizens Jury I observed closely where a significant portion of the jurors acted in an irrational way, but it still is possible. The judgment of irrationality would have to be made very carefully. We must avoid the facile claim that people must be irrational if they don’t agree with us about what we see as clear facts. But if we discovered a group of jurors who could not repeat accurately the most basic claims made by quality preschool advocates, but they could repeat accurately the claims made by opponents, even though

these claims are demonstrably false, then we have good grounds for claiming that these jurors were irrational.

- D. A complicated situation would be where there are jurors who do not support quality preschool because they don't think it will bring quality lives to those at-risk children who are now four years old. They may not be articulate about this, but they may sense that even if at-risk four year old children are enabled to do much better in the current educational system, they still will not end up with quality jobs. They may sense that the only good jobs in the America of 2030 are going to go to those who graduate in the top 1/3 of their high school class, and quality preschool education for at-risk children is unlikely to help them to achieve at that level. It seems to me that virtually all of the proponents of quality preschool education assume that it is a wonderful achievement if we can close the existing achievement gap in our current educational system. But is that enough? In the 1950s and 1960s those graduating high school could look forward to decent jobs and a solid middle class existence. But the less likely this is true, the more rational it is to oppose quality preschool as an expensive program that still will not bring at-risk children the kinds of jobs and lives they deserve.

Things I learned from this project

1. This project showed how even a person very committed to fairness can do a poor job of designing the agenda when also taking a strong stand on the topic under consideration. This is obvious, but still an important lesson.
2. This showed why less well-educated people could react negatively to proposals for quality preschool.
3. It showed the importance of something like a values review on the morning of the first day in order for the jurors to bond as a group before they start to learn about the issue under consideration.
4. Susan Jacoby in *The Age of American Unreason* (Pantheon, 2008) has written about the increasing irrationality of the American public. Those who believe in deliberative democracy need to conduct projects very carefully in order to learn what proportion of the public, even in well-designed deliberative events that last five days or more, remain irrational in their policy stands.
5. The ease with which even an experienced person can do a poor job of project design shows how challenging it will be to include something like a Citizens Jury or a Citizens' Assembly as a routine element in public policy making.
6. In spite of the above, it was interesting to see the high level of support the jurors gave to the concept of a Minnesota Citizens' Assembly. This is a concept that deserves further attention.

Project Staff

Moderators

Kim Boyce
Elliot Shuford

Jury Organizers

Jefferson Center Founder.....Ned Crosby
Project Director/Research Assistant.....Serena Laws
Professor of Political Science 8360: Citizen's Jury Process.....John Sullivan
Consultant to Project.....John Hottinger
Assistant to Project Director.....Tyrone Reitman

Students of Political Science 8360

Kathryn Fischer	Undergraduate Political Science Major
Joshua Pratscher	Undergraduate Political Science Major
Ellen Hoerle	Masters of Public Policy Candidate at the Humphrey Institute
Pakou Hang	Graduate Student in Political Science

Agenda

***Note: The schedule below represents the agenda as it actually occurred during the jury. As noted elsewhere, the agenda shifted substantially during the jury.*

Agenda For Citizens Jury On Preschool Education And Deliberative Methods

The event will be held on April 11, 12, 13, 18 and 19. The hearings will take place at the Humphrey Institute. April 11 and 18 will be in Room 130; the other days in Room 215.

DAY 1

Morning:

8:45 Welcome to the jurors This is a time to greet and register the jurors

9:00 Introduction to Citizens' Jury process

- Introductions
- Housekeeping and logistics
- Overview of purpose of the Citizens' Jury and the agenda
- Review Rules of Procedure

10:00 Break

10:15 Introduction to the major challenges facing K-12 education in Minnesota
Jay Haugen, Superintendent of Schools, West St. Paul

11:15 Break

11:30 Introduction to early childhood programs in Minnesota

Todd Otis, President Ready4K

Karen Cadigan, Director of Outreach & Public Policy at the Center for Early Education

12:30 Lunch

1:15 (Optional) Process check-in with jurors.

1:30 Proposal for continuing current Minnesota early childhood reform efforts
Karen Kingsley, Policy Director, Ready4K

2:30 Break

2:45 Introduce the concept of intensive preschool for at-risk children
Presentation by Henriët Hendriks and witnesses she may choose.

3:45 Break

4:00 Opposition to further state involvement in early childhood efforts
Dr. Karen Effrem, EdWatch Board

5:00 Adjourn

Day 2:

Morning:

8:45 Moderators review with jurors how things are going.

9:00 Small group discussions – Commonalities, differences and questions

9:45 Report back to larger group

10:15 Break

10:30 The research-based approach to intensive preschool education
Presentation by Henriët Hendriks

11:45 Break

12:00 Presentation of three approaches for consideration in afternoon

12:30 Lunch

1:30 Students present information they have researched.

2:00 Ned Crosby presents information about NJ, OK.

2:30 Break

2:45 Convene in three small groups, with jurors randomly assigned. Their task is to:

- Go around the group and each juror expresses a preference or raises questions.
- Make a list of important insights
- Make a list of important questions
- Each juror indicates which approach they would like to work on tomorrow.

3:45 Break

4:00 Dot voting on different approaches to preschool.

5:00 Adjourn

Day 3, Sunday, April 13

This part of the agenda was significantly modified from the original agenda

Morning:

8:45 Moderators review with jurors how things are going.

9:00 Moderators explain the flexible day with the jurors. The goals of the day are explained:

12:30 Lunch

1:15 (Optional) Process check-in with jurors.

1:30 Reconvene for afternoon. Continue work on agenda that was decided in the morning.

(there will be two 15-minute breaks)

5:00 Adjourn for the day.

The Citizens Jury will not meet again until Friday, April 18th.

Day 4, Friday, April 18

Morning:

8:45 Introduction

9:15 Review small group work and possible commonalities

10:15 Break

10:30 Groups meet and work on their proposals

11:30 Break

11:45 Final review of group reports for legislators

12:00 Re-convene to discuss commonalities

12:30 Lunch

Afternoon:

1:30 3 groups present their proposals to legislators (15 minutes each). Spokespeople present commonalities

2:30 Break

2:45 Discussion and Q&A with legislators

3:45 Break

4:00 Discussion – Return to small groups and continue to work on reports

5:00 Adjourn

Day 5, Saturday, April 19

8:45 Moderators review with jurors how things are going.

9:00 (1) Jurors finish their final reports
(2) Introduce idea of the final report
(3) Jurors complete Post-Questionnaires

10:00 Break

10:15 Ned Crosby presents alternate 5-day agenda and introduces Citizens' Assembly

11:15 Break

11:30 Small Group discussion of Crosby's proposals.

12:00 Reconvene, groups report to whole and vote on proposals

12:30 Lunch

Afternoon:

1:30 Polish the final report

2:30 Break

2:45 Jefferson Center Evaluation and Personal Statements

3:45 Break

4:00 Closing. Adjourn – **Checks and cash reimbursements will be handed out at the end of the day.**

Witness Biographical Sketches

Karen Cadigan

Karen Cadigan is Director of Outreach and Public Policy for the Center for Early Education and Development at the University of Minnesota. She also serves as the Policy Director of the University's Children, Youth and Family Consortium. She is a nationally certified school psychologist and worked in public schools for Seven years with children across the age range, most recently as the coordinator of the Minneapolis Public Schools' early childhood autism programs. She worked as a research assistant for several projects including the Preschool Families Project at the University of Washington, examining behavior problems in preschool boys, and the Improving Preschoolers' Reading Outcomes through Measurement and Intervention in Classroom Environments (I'PROMICE) project at the University of Minnesota.

Her current teaching, training and research efforts focus on early childhood assessment, early literacy development, autism in early childhood and linking early childhood research to public policies. She coordinates the University of Minnesota's graduate certificate program in Early Childhood Policy studies and provides ongoing assistance to Minnesota's Legislative Early Childhood Caucus. Ms. Cadigan also provides technical support and training to providers nationwide who use the Early Literacy Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDI's) and the related Get it, Got it, Go! website.

During her abundant free time, Cadigan is finishing her doctorate in educational psychology at the University of Minnesota with a thesis examining the relations between preschoolers' phonemic awareness skills and vocabulary development. Cadigan has an Educational Specialist degree from James Madison University and a Master's degree from the University of Washington. She is a 2002 Bush Leadership Fellow and 2006 recipient of the President's Student Leadership and Service award and the Mary A. McEvoy Award for Public Engagement and Leadership. Cadigan is a graduate of Minnesota's Head Start program.

Dr. Karen Effrem

Dr. Karen Effrem is a pediatrician, researcher and conference speaker. Effrem's medical degree is from Johns Hopkins University, and her pediatric training is from the University of Minnesota. She has provided testimony for Congress, as well as in-depth analysis of numerous pieces of major federal education, health and early childhood legislation for congressional staff and many organizations. Effrem serves on the boards of four national organizations: EdWatch, the Alliance for Human Research Protection, ICSPP and the National Physicians Center. She has spoken at numerous state and national conferences. She has been interviewed by or quoted in WorldNetDaily, NewsMax, newspapers and radio and television stations across the country. Dr. Karen Effrem and her husband, Paul, have three children and live in the Minneapolis metro area.

Henriet Hendriks

Henriet Hendriks is a Ph.D. candidate in Political Science at the University of Minnesota. Henriet is originally from the Netherlands. She went to college at the University of Amsterdam where she majored in American Studies. She studied abroad at the University of Minnesota as an undergraduate, then returned for graduate study. Hendriks research is concerned with battleground states in presidential electoral politics. After completing her studies, she hopes to remain in the U.S. as a professor and researcher.

Jay Haugen

Since 2006, Jay Haugen has been the Superintendent at District 197, serving the communities of West St. Paul, Mendota Heights, Eagan, Inver Grove Heights, Lilydale, Mendota and Sunfish Lake.

Haugen previously served for 10 years as superintendent of schools in Sleepy Eye, MN. A former region coordinator for the Minnesota Department of Education, he also worked on curriculum and staff development for the Redwood River Education District and was a teacher at North Dakota State University.

Haugen uses all the tools available to serve his school district, including recording podcasts which can be found at the school's website, www.isd197.org, which reflects his prior involvement as a Board Member with the Southwest Telecommunications Cooperative while he was superintending in Sleepy Eye.

Karen Kingsley

Karen Kingsley is the Director of Policy & Civic Engagement at Ready 4 K, where she is responsible for developing the organization's policy proposals and overseeing its grassroots organizing strategies. She leads the policy & civic engagement team, which includes a government affairs specialist and two grassroots organizers, and works closely with Ready 4 K's President/CEO. Before joining Ready 4 K in June 2005, Kingsley was the Director of the Affirmative Options Coalition where she worked to advocate and organize on policy issues related to welfare reform, workforce development and childcare. For the past 17 years, Kingsley has worked for a variety of nonprofit organizations building partnerships to advance the well being of Minnesota families through policy and systems change. Her experience includes work with a faith-based affordable housing advocacy group, a community action agency in the suburbs of Minneapolis, and with a public-private welfare-to-work partnership in Ramsey County.

Originally from Philadelphia, she holds a B.A. in political science from Duke University and a Masters in Public Policy from the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs.

Todd Otis

Todd Otis has been President of Ready4K since its founding in 2001, Ready4K's mission is to assure that every young child in Minnesota enters kindergarten encouraged, supported, and fully prepared for learning success. Ready 4K's policy direction is based on four key principles: Support Parents, Increase Access, Promote Quality, and Produce

Results, with a goal of getting 80% of our children school ready by 2012 (a 30% increase).

Otis received his B.A. from Harvard in 1967 and served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Senegal from 1967 to 1969. Upon completion of service he attended Columbia University to complete a Masters in Journalism. His professional career began in Minneapolis in the fields of public relations and community affairs, where his work staffing the Minnesota Legislature eventually led him to run for public office from 1979 to 1990. Otis served in the Minnesota House of Representatives before being appointed State DFL Chair from 1990 to 1993. After leaving public office, he worked as public affairs consultant on issues related to the environment, energy and early childhood education until 2001, when he accepted his current position with Ready 4 K.