Series on impact of school enrollment shifts, proposed for June.

Proposal: MaryJo has done groundbreaking analysis on Minnesota public school enrollment data, and we propose a series examining the dramatic enrollment shifts occurring and their impact on metro schools, particularly on the budget problems in St. Paul and the achievement gap in Minneapolis.

* What is the core thesis or premise?
  + The number of students defecting from their home school districts has accelerated in the past 10 years and is having huge economic impact, particularly on the state’s two urban districts.
* Scale and consequences: Why will this story resonate with our readers?
  + Parents will see what’s at stake for them. State money follows students, so this analysis shows why Minneapolis and St. Paul are cutting scores of employees and millions of dollars, while other districts are advertising to siphon off students from their neighbors. We also hope to show that families bailing out to charter schools are aggravating Minneapolis’ achievement gap.
* Does this project have the potential to drive change?
  + It likely will focus attention on race-based charter schools and on attempts by Minneapolis to win back black students and St. Paul to keep whites and Asians.
* Who else has covered this (provide links)?
  + The numbers for open enrollment and the racial segregation in charter schools have been reported, but this is the first analysis that shows the departures of students by race and where students are going.
* How is your angle different or fresh?
  + Nobody has looked at the combination of open enrollment and charter school exodus from school districts, nor has it been broken down by race. This allows us to see the full effect of “self-segregation” and help explain why the two main districts – especially St Paull – have become more segregated than they were in the past (following up on our reporting about segregation last year). In addition, this helps us get a new perspective on the enrollment problems in St. Paul and Minneapolis. Instead of simply saying the districts are losing thousands of students, we can show specifically where they are going and which students are going. And we can also show that, although this trend is most acute in Minneapolis and St Paul, it’s also starting to happen in the suburbs and those districts could be facing the same budget crises in the not-too-distant future.

Description: A 4-part series of 40-inch stories (maybe 50 for opener) plus graphics, photo and data viz. Imagining an open page for overview and then less for the rest, unless we want to do more with the graphic component. Ideal timing would be June, as school lets out and districts finalize their budgets (due by June 30).

* Who is/are the reporters and lead story editor?
  + MaryJo will run the data and Maureen will run the words.
  + Reporters are Tony Lonetree, Beena Raghavendran and Beatrice Dupuy.
* List in bullets the unique findings your story will reveal
  + In 2000, only about 5% or fewer students left their home district. Over time, that share has climbed steadily, and in Minneapolis and St. Paul is now at 30%. In the Suburbs and Out state Minnesota the percentages are at about 12%  (as you might expect this percentage gets bigger depending how close the district is to Minneapolis or St. Paul)
  + 25 districts lose more students than they take in; 23 districts take more in than they lose. For most districts we’re talking a few hundred students’ difference, but in Minneapolis we’re talking a difference of 4,500 and in St. Paul a difference of just over 2,000 students. (for comparison, Anoka-Hennepin’s difference is about 650 students; that’s a stark difference considering the three districts are pretty much the same size)
  + Minneapolis is losing black students to charter schools. St. Paul is losing white and Asian students.
  + Percentage of St. Paul residents who attend school elsewhere, by race/ethnicity:
    - White – 32%  (3,468 students)
    - Asian – 28%  (4,539 students)
    - Black – 28% (3,736 students)
    - Hispanic – 29% (2,016 students)
    - American Indian – 30% (176 students)
  + Suburban snapshot:
    - Brooklyn Center has the largest outflow of students – 40% -- but nearly half (48%) its enrollment is made up of students coming in from elsewhere.
    - Hopkins, where we’re seeing a lot of racial upheaval, is also fairly balanced, gaining about 200 students more than it loses. (it loses about 26% of its resident students; gains about 24% of its enrollment from elsewhere)
    - Of course, Minnetonka is the big winner – 31% of its enrollment is made up of students from elsewhere and it only loses 3% of its resident students
    - While Minnetonka is recruiting students, Mahtomedi (which draws 26% of its enrollment from outside) is closing its borders.
* What documents/data/audio/video have you already gathered that support the premise?
  + Data analysis is mostly complete. Waiting on some test score data, which should arrive shortly.
* Identify potential main characters and scenes
  + In St. Paul we’ll focus on the district’s efforts to tweak individual school enrollment to keep parents and on the Hmong charter school that is taking so many away.
  + In Minneapolis, we’ll pair a North Side charter school with its feeder district school and analyze test scores
  + In the suburbs, we’ll contrast Minnetonka and Mahtomedi
* How will we drive audience engagement?
  + We can build a data visualization that will let users see the movement of students in their district, including how that has changed over time and where the students are going. This will allow readers to find their own story within the material we’re giving them.
* How much reporting remains?
  + We need to identify schools to focus on and gain access. We have requested data that will allow us to compare test performance of black students who have left MPS and those who remain.

Proposed budgets

Overview

FLEE: More and more Minnesota parents are moving their children from their home school districts to charter schools, according to a Star Tribune analysis of state enrollment data. The number has taken off in the past 10 years, with the growth in the number of charter schools. The trend is most acute in Minneapolis and St. Paul, though suburban districts have also seen an increase in defections. The state's two urban districts have seen their percentage of defections to charter schools rise from 5% in 2000 to 30% in the past school year. The impact is stark. Minneapolis and St. Paul, both facing budget deficits of about $27M, are poised to make painful budget cuts. LONETREE.

STPAUL: A look at what the loss of students to charter schools and other districts is having on St. Paul schools. White flight is a major component here, unlike Minneapolis. The district is struggling to find a configuration of schools that will keep the students they have and win back some of those who have left, satisfying the demands of both middle-class and low-income families. One problem is that parents that don't get their first choice of elementary school in the annual lottery do not move to their second choice in St. Paul. Instead they go to a neighboring school district or charter school. Another is that Hmong families who make up a significant segment of the city are opting for Hmong charter schools. LONETREE

MPS: Black families are bailing out of Minneapolis schools to charter schools in the city in ever-increasing numbers despite numerous attempts to satisfy them. We'll use this trend as an opportunity to look at impact the defections have on the academic performance of the schools left behind. We’re going to see if we can find historical data to show if the achievement gap in MPS has widened over time, and whether there’s a relationship between that and black kids fleeing the district. Are the most proficient black students leaving the district? BEENA

BURB: Suburban school districts may not see as many defections as Minneapolis and St. Paul, but many suburban families are moving their kids out of their home districts as more charter schools have set up in suburban areas. We'll take a closer look at the winners and losers. Among the winners are Minnetonka and Mahtomedi, which have taken very different approaches to open enrollment. Minnetonka has advertised itself in neighboring districts. Mahtomedi has closed itself off. Among the losers are districts like Forest Lake, where 25% of students living there attend a charter school or other district.  Still shaping this story, but could be a series of vignettes showing the various impacts on districts when families move in or out. BEATRICE.