

An Executive Summary of Conversations and Comments From the Launch of
MINNESOTA’S PROMISE: WORLD-CLASS SCHOOLS, WORLD-CLASS STATE

University of Minnesota

October 6, 2006

On October 6, 2006, two hundred and twenty-five diverse stakeholders in Minnesota’s public schools came together at the University of Minnesota to review Minnesota’s Promise: World-Class Schools, World-Class State, a report from 27 current and former superintendents of schools on the conclusions they reached over the course of a two-year effort to promote improvement within and among their school districts. This executive summary describes the major themes of the conversation that took place following the superintendents’ presentation of their report. During the discussion, participants used handheld voting technology to respond to key ideas and questions. The results of those votes were instantly tabulated and projected to summarize feedback and promote further conversation.

To download a copy of the report, for more detailed information on the conversation that took place on October 6, or for an update on the progress of Minnesota’s Promise, please visit www.minnesotaspromise.org.

Major Themes from the Launch of Minnesota’s Promise

- A. Discussion at the Minnesota’s Promise event gave voice to some of the diverse perspectives of the participants, 65% of whom said their primary work environment is urban, 26% suburban and 9% rural. They identified themselves as primarily working in the following sectors: higher education (20%), community non-profit (17%), K-12 school or system employee (16%), superintendent (11%), foundation (8%), state government (7%), early childhood (6%), business (6%), the faith community (3%) and other (5%).
- B. Participants discussed the need to educate *all* Minnesota students for life in the highly-competitive global Information Age in which they will live their lives. Participants also discussed the rapidly changing demographic composition of Minnesota’s schools and communities. Participants generally agreed that meeting these global and local challenges will require significant changes in the work of Minnesota’s schools and districts and in how students, families, communities and the state as a whole view education.
- C. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that there is no single vision for education in Minnesota today that is clear, widely understood and supported.
- D. Participants expressed very strong support for developing a common vision of Minnesota’s educational future that is broad enough to encompass the diverse needs of the state’s students and communities but specific enough to meaningfully guide improvement efforts. Participants also expressed strong support for sticking to a

common educational vision and agenda for improvement over time, through changes in leadership and political power.

- E. A significant number of participants stressed that a common vision must not neglect the needs and must include the ideas of people of color, people whose first language is not English and people who live below the poverty line.
- F. Participants also reviewed the “8 Traits of a World-Class Educational System in Minnesota” that the superintendents of Minnesota’s Promise developed over the course of their work together. Those traits are:
 - 1. There are many academic roads, but all are rigorous and all lead to higher education
 - 2. Educational investment starts early
 - 3. Learning takes as much time as it takes
 - 4. Great educators have great support
 - 5. Data and research inform teaching and improve learning every day
 - 6. Funding is predictable and sufficient to produce world-class performance
 - 7. Services for students with special needs emphasize outcomes, not processes
 - 8. Global citizenship is a core academic subject
- G. Using electronic voting technology, the participants ranked traits 1 (there are many academic roads, but all are rigorous and all lead to higher education) and 2 (educational investment starts early) as the most important for students overall.
- H. By a significant margin, the participants ranked trait 2 (educational investment starts early) as the most important for underachieving students.
- I. The participants ranked trait 7 (services for students with special needs emphasize outcomes, not processes) and trait 8 (global citizenship is a core academic subject) as least important.
- J. During the discussion, many participants expressed strong support for adding traits to the superintendents’ framework that address student health and nutrition and parent and community involvement.
- K. Many participants expressed a desire to remain involved with Minnesota’s Promise and a significant number noted that they wished a clear next step had been identified prior to the October 6 meeting. Members of the discussion panel explained that the superintendents’ plan is to base next steps on the feedback received during and after the October 6 event. They explained that the group will identify next steps for all participants who asked to be kept informed by December 1, 2006.

- L. During the discussion and in written comments on feedback forms, participants expressed many ideas for next steps with Minnesota's Promise, including:
1. Revise the "8 Traits of a High-Performing Educational System" to reflect feedback gained on October 6, particularly incorporating the issues of student health and nutrition and parent and community involvement.
 2. Superintendents across the state should convene in-depth discussions of the Minnesota's Promise framework within their districts, and the initiative's partner organizations (The University of Minnesota, the Minnesota Association of School Administrators and the Robbins, Kaplan, Miller and Ciresi Foundation) should convene discussions on a state-wide level. Diverse perspectives — especially students and communities of color — should be included in all of these conversations.
 3. The University of Minnesota should convene conferences or working groups to identify local, national and international best practices in the area of each "Trait of a High-Performing System," such as early childhood education (trait 2) or school funding (trait 6).
 4. Provide information on Minnesota's Promise to all state policy makers and legislators at the start of the upcoming legislative session.
 5. Conduct a media campaign to raise public awareness of the urgent educational challenge that Minnesota faces and of the strategies for addressing that challenge that are outlined in Minnesota's Promise.
 6. Create a program like the Baldrige awards in the business world to recognize world-class schools that exemplify the traits of Minnesota's Promise.
 7. Create an "action plan" for implementing the changes identified under each "Trait of a High-Performing System" with clearly defined outcomes and process steps.
 8. Integrate the components of Minnesota's Promise into teacher preparation and other programs at the higher education level.
 9. Provide schools and districts with a "toolkit" to build public awareness of and support for the Minnesota's Promise vision.
 10. Develop clear college/work success expectations and communicate them to parents, students and schools.
 11. Conduct cost-benefit analyses to identify the most effective and efficient ways to move toward overall system coherence.
 12. Create data and feedback systems to monitor progress toward the Minnesota's Promise vision.
 13. Report back to participants in the October 6 event on how the Minnesota's Promise vision has been received by communities across the state and on how it has changed as a result.