

Minnesota's Promise

World-Class Schools, World-Class State



A CALL TO ACTION FROM TWENTY-SEVEN PAST AND PRESENT
SUPERINTENDENTS TO TRANSFORM EDUCATION IN MINNESOTA
FOR THE GLOBAL INFORMATION AGE



Minnesota's Promise

World-Class Schools, World-Class State

We must create a coherent system of education in Minnesota—from the capitol to the classroom—that prepares every student for success in the global Information Age. The world-class system we envision can be characterized by eight traits:



THERE ARE MANY ACADEMIC ROADS, BUT ALL ARE RIGOROUS AND ALL LEAD TO HIGHER EDUCATION



EDUCATIONAL INVESTMENT STARTS EARLY



LEARNING TAKES AS MUCH TIME AS IT TAKES



GREAT EDUCATORS HAVE GREAT SUPPORT



DATA AND RESEARCH INFORM TEACHING AND IMPROVE LEARNING EVERY DAY



FUNDING IS PREDICTABLE AND SUFFICIENT TO PRODUCE WORLD-CLASS PERFORMANCE



SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS EMPHASIZE OUTCOMES, NOT PROCESSES



GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP IS A CORE ACADEMIC SUBJECT



A Letter from the Superintendents of Minnesota's Promise

Dear Fellow Minnesotans,

The time has come for Minnesota to raise its sights from being one of the best-educated states in the United States to becoming one of the highest-performing educational systems in the world. We came to embrace this goal through almost two years of participation in an effort called the Superintendent Symposium. As we shared strategies for improving the school systems we lead, we came to recognize that we are all working toward—and struggling with—the same core challenge: preparing all students to succeed in the high-skill, hyper-competitive global Information Age.

To achieve this goal, not only do we need to work together more closely as superintendents, but the entire state needs to come together around a shared vision of education. Equally important, we need to work toward this vision over the long term, staying on course through shifts in political power and changes in school and district leadership.

This document is an effort to spark a statewide conversation about what a truly world-class system of schools might look like in Minnesota. This dialogue will no doubt deepen and broaden the vision we present here, based on eight core traits of a world-class educational system. It is our hope that a widely shared vision emerges from this effort to guide the future of public education in Minnesota.

Even as we think big, we want to be realistic and deliver real results. As superintendents, our ability to make good on “Minnesota’s Promise” is largely limited to student experiences in school, and so this is how we have focused our vision. And yet we’re acutely aware that factors like the physical and emotional health of students play a critical role in their academic success.

An urgent objective that requires new levels of commitment and creativity both inside and outside our schools is closing the achievement gaps that too often divide our students along racial, economic, and linguistic lines. We believe that moving toward the world-class educational system we envision will significantly reduce these gaps, but we are clear that eliminating them altogether will require partnerships with parents, community organizations, businesses, policy makers, and students themselves.

As superintendents, we have the unique challenge of helping students across entire communities achieve their full educational potential. Independently we have made progress, but collectively we can and must do better. As educational leaders, we promise to embrace the vision outlined in Minnesota’s Promise within and beyond the school districts we serve. We hope that you will join us in the months and years ahead as we work to realize that promise in the interest of our students, our schools, and our state.

Sincerely,

Gary Amoroso, Superintendent, Lakeville
Mark Bezek, Superintendent, Elk River
Ted Blaesing, Superintendent, White Bear Lake
John Currie, Superintendent, Rosemount–
Apple Valley–Eagan
Barbara Devlin, Superintendent, Richfield
Kenneth Dragseth, Former Superintendent, Edina
Ric Dressen, Superintendent, Edina
Roger Giroux, Superintendent, Anoka–Hennepin
William Green, Superintendent, Minneapolis
Patricia Harvey, Former Superintendent, Saint Paul
James Hess, Superintendent, Bemidji
Melissa Krull, Superintendent, Eden Prairie
Charles Kyte, Executive Director, Minnesota
Association of School Administrators, and
Former Superintendent, Northfield

Kathryn Leedom, Superintendent, Willmar
Kathleen Macy, Former Superintendent, Stillwater
Tom Nelson, Superintendent, South Washington County
Gerald Ness, Superintendent, Fergus Falls
Patty Phillips, Superintendent, North St. Paul–
Oakdale–Maplewood
Chris Richardson, Superintendent, Northfield
Mark Robertson, Superintendent, Fridley
Todd Sesker, Superintendent, Cannon Falls
Beverly Stofferahn, Former Superintendent, Chaska
Dwayne Strand, Superintendent, Yellow Medicine East
Jerry Walseth, Superintendent, Brainerd
Ed Waltman, Superintendent, Mankato
Thomas Westerhaus, Superintendent, Prior Lake–Savage
Jerry Williams, Superintendent, Rochester





1 THERE ARE MANY ACADEMIC ROADS, BUT ALL ARE RIGOROUS AND ALL LEAD TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Where We Stand Today

Previous generations could expect to provide well for their families with only a high school diploma, but in the Information Age, completing some form of post-secondary education must be the goal for every student. We must prepare students to reach this goal by providing them with academic rigor at every step of the way through elementary and secondary school.

The Vision for Tomorrow

- Challenge all students with rigorous coursework that meets their academic needs, builds on their interests, and takes advantage of their learning styles.
- Expect all students to enroll and succeed in post-secondary education—be it trade school, community college, or a four-year institution—to prepare for a high-skill, high-wage future.

2 EDUCATIONAL INVESTMENT STARTS EARLY

Where We Stand Today

Across the globe, powerful measures have been taken to provide universal access to early education and to align it with the K–12 curriculum. Unfortunately, Minnesota has not made a major investment in early education, despite the fact that it has been linked to school readiness, higher academic achievement, lower special education costs, and lower crime rates.

The Vision for Tomorrow

- Universalize access to high-quality pre-kindergarten programs for four-year-olds and all-day, every-day kindergarten for five-year-olds, beginning with Minnesota's underserved populations.
- Align early education with K–12 classroom expectations.

3 LEARNING TAKES AS MUCH TIME AS IT TAKES

Where We Stand Today

Minnesota's students today are too often prisoners of time. Long summer vacations that were created to accommodate farming practices are now months when far too many students lose academic ground. In addition, after-school hours that could extend learning for students who need it are often not being utilized. Meanwhile, in the world's highest-performing nations, students are using summers and extended school days to prepare for success in the global knowledge economy.

The Vision for Tomorrow

- Provide students with additional learning time through extended learning blocks during the school day and after-school programs.
- Permit students to stay in school beyond age eighteen.
- Consider increasing the number of school days in the calendar year to remain competitive with international best practices.

4 GREAT EDUCATORS HAVE GREAT SUPPORT

Where We Stand Today

Research indicates that the educational factor within schools that plays the greatest role in student learning is the quality of a student's teacher. In addition, research has shown that the caliber of school leadership is also critical. At a time when many of Minnesota's teachers are due to retire in the next decade, these issues take on even greater urgency.

The Vision for Tomorrow

- Increase teacher recruitment and retention through creative and visible campaigns, particularly in areas where shortages already exist, such as math, science, and English Language Learners.
- Encourage students of color to pursue careers in education.
- Offer high-quality professional development for teachers.
- Consider replicating successful leadership development models, such as the Saint Paul Public Schools Leadership Institute.



5 DATA AND RESEARCH INFORM TEACHING AND IMPROVE LEARNING EVERY DAY

Where We Stand Today

No Child Left Behind has helped to increase and improve schools' use of data, but one of the law's shortcomings is that it measures school success by comparing the achievement of one year's group of students to the following year's cohort. A better measure would be the growth that the *same* students make over time. For every year students spend in school, they should make at least a year's growth in achievement—and more than that if they start out substantially behind.

The Vision for Tomorrow

- Measure school performance by the growth that the same students make over time.
- Emphasize data that informs teaching and improves learning, such as short classroom assessments that can be used to measure how well students have learned what has been taught.

6 FUNDING IS PREDICTABLE AND SUFFICIENT TO PRODUCE WORLD-CLASS PERFORMANCE

Where We Stand Today

Minnesota's current approach to school funding, based on the state's two-year budget cycle, does not allow educators to look ahead with any degree of financial certainty. This unpredictability—coupled with a lack of consensus on adequate levels of funding for education—poses a significant barrier to sustaining educational reforms and student progress.

The Vision for Tomorrow

- Develop an approach to funding schools that is stable and predictable.
- Define a sufficient level of funding to help Minnesota students equal the academic performance of the world's educational leaders.

7 SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS EMPHASIZE OUTCOMES, NOT PROCESSES

Where We Stand Today

Well-intentioned efforts to support students with special needs—from English Language Learners to students with disabilities—have in many cases mandated particular approaches to meeting those needs rather than identifying outcomes and then expecting and trusting schools to meet them. A process-driven approach too often reduces flexibility and creativity and increases paperwork and inefficiency.

The Vision for Tomorrow

- Identify expected outcomes for students with special needs and then expect and empower schools to work toward them.
- Research educational best practices in serving students with special needs and aggressively disseminate them throughout the state.

8 GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP IS A CORE ACADEMIC SUBJECT

Where We Stand Today

Across the globe, from Europe to Africa and Asia, students are studying English and learning about other countries and cultures. In contrast, surveys frequently find that students in the United States know comparatively little about the world. Even in an internationally oriented state such as Minnesota, there is no statewide requirement that students study a language other than English.

The Vision for Tomorrow

- Mandate that all students graduate with basic fluency in a language other than English.
- Increase instruction at all levels in matters of global significance.
- Ensure that our students see the increasing cultural, racial, and linguistic diversity of our state as an asset rather than a liability.
- Equip students with the skills and sensitivity to interact with people whose backgrounds are different from their own.

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ROBINS, KAPLAN, MILLER & CIRESI LLP



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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