

# 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**

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*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**

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September 2006

# A Letter from the Superintendents: Coming Together Becomes a Call to Action

*Dear Friends,*

The journey described in this document began in February 2005, when more than twenty-five school system leaders came together for a weekend in Saint Paul at the invitation of Dr. Patricia Harvey, who was then the Superintendent of the Saint Paul Public Schools, and Dr. Charles Kyte, the Executive Director of the Minnesota Association of School Administrators, for an effort they called the Superintendent Symposium. Their objective was simple: bring together a group of Minnesota school system leaders to get to know each other in a more personal and sustained way than is normally possible in the course of their professional lives.

The Superintendent Symposium grew out of Dr. Harvey's ongoing conversations with the board of the Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi Foundation for Education, Public Health and Social Justice, a supporting organization of The Minneapolis Foundation, which provided a grant to the Saint Paul Public Schools to enable the superintendents to meet with facilitation and support. From the outset, it was clear that the Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi Foundation's idea of creating a "safe space" for school district leaders to share ideas and strategies for improvement was powerful and desperately needed.

Despite the fact that we led rural, urban, and suburban school districts, we began to develop a common language and a shared sense of understanding. Three meetings originally scheduled in the winter and spring of 2005 stretched into six meetings, which extended into the spring of 2006. Along the way, a share of the group's members changed as superintendents came and left their districts. Most notably given the leadership role she played in creating the Symposium, Dr. Harvey moved from Saint Paul Public Schools to

a joint appointment at the University of Minnesota and at the Washington, D.C.-based National Center on Education and the Economy. As part of her work as the University's first Visiting Carmen Starkson Campbell Endowed Chair in Urban Education, she remained actively involved.

As our conversations progressed, a common theme emerged. Whether the subject was literacy, teacher preparation, or school finance, we found ourselves looking at the educational issues our districts face through the lens of globalization—the process through which the world is becoming more and more closely connected by advances in technology, increased travel and immigration, and the elimination of the political and ideological boundaries that divided the globe during the Cold War. We found ourselves returning again and again to the fact that in a world where jobs and opportunities will go where the quality of work is highest and the cost of work is the lowest, Minnesota's students must be educated to even higher levels than they are today. We agreed that while this challenge is greatest for the districts that serve large numbers of students living in poverty and facing other educational challenges, it is also an urgent challenge for even Minnesota's most affluent communities.

The realities of globalization forced us to ask ourselves tough questions as educators and leaders:

- Although, on average, Minnesota students score well on standardized tests compared to students in other U.S. states, is this an adequate measure of success in a global market for knowledge and skills?
- While overall student achievement in Minnesota is high relative to the rest of the United States, the

achievement gaps between student groups in our state are among the largest in the country.<sup>1</sup> What can be done to close these gaps to prepare all Minnesota students to succeed in the Information Age?

- How can pre-K–12 education meet the needs of our future economy and society? To cite just one area in which our current investment is mismatched with our future needs, only 1.6 percent of the twenty-four-year-olds in the United States have a bachelor's degree in engineering, compared to figures roughly two times higher in Russia, three times higher in China, and four times higher in South Korea and Japan.<sup>2</sup>
- If a college graduate now earns, on average, 70 percent more than a high school graduate and the earnings gap is growing fast,<sup>3</sup> should we make higher education a goal for every one of our students, and orient our schools and families to achieve that goal?
- When recent research on the global economy has shown that improvements in math and science scores in elementary and secondary school generate economic growth,<sup>4</sup> how do we convince Minnesotans that funding for education is an investment and not an expense?
- How can school reform efforts in Minnesota focus on a limited number of key priorities and stick to them over time, rather than switching educational objectives with each change in political power or school and district leadership?

One of the key conclusions that we reached through our conversations during the Superintendent

Symposium was that these questions need to be asked and broadly answered at the state rather than the national or local levels. In the U.S. system, it is states that have the authority and the responsibility to help all students complete an adequate education. And internationally it is countries the size of some U.S. states—from Finland to Korea to Singapore—that are reaching levels of student achievement to which Minnesota can and should aspire.

Before it will be possible to move toward a coherent statewide educational system in Minnesota, it is essential that we begin a dialogue on the future of education in our state that leads to consensus and, ultimately, to action. This report is our effort to spark that larger conversation.

Simply put, the idea we are seeking to advance is this: we need a new, long-term vision for education in Minnesota that will guide our state toward becoming one of the highest-performing educational systems in the world. The vision we develop must be broad enough to guide the work not just of our pre-K–12 schools but also of institutions of higher education, parent groups and community organizations, policy makers, and the public as a whole. It must have broad support across the political spectrum, and progress must be sustained through changes in leadership and political power.

Absent a clear and compelling educational vision, Minnesota cannot hope to compete with the world's educational leaders, who not only have developed visions of their own but who are already working toward them in sustained and disciplined ways. Vivien Stewart, the Asia Society's Vice President for Education, recently described just one of those countries in the journal *Education Week*, writing,

1. For more information on Minnesota's achievement gaps, see the Minnesota's Promise Web site at [www.minnesotaspromise.org](http://www.minnesotaspromise.org).

2. Craig Barrett, "The Next Economy," *Foreign Policy* (November/December 2004). As cited in "Getting Smarter, Becoming Fairer: A Progressive Education Agenda for a Stronger Nation," (August 2005): 10.

3. Hillary Pennington, "High Schools' New Mission," in *The American High School Crisis and State Policy Solutions*, NCEE Policy Forum, September 29, 2003: 8.

4. Eric Hanushek, "Why Quality Matters in Education," *Finance and Development* 42, no. 2 (June 2005). See [www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2005/06/hanushek.htm](http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2005/06/hanushek.htm).

“China has a bold long-term vision for education and the structures to meet it.”<sup>5</sup> Minnesota students need and deserve the same.

We release this report not in an effort to advocate a rush toward any specific reforms but, rather, to spark a lively statewide dialogue about what a truly world-class educational system in Minnesota will look like. In fact, we would argue that the change we are calling for requires a shift in mindset and priorities as much as it does in policies and procedures.

Over the year ahead, each of us will be sharing our thoughts and gathering feedback in our own communities and across the state as a whole. Because we have intentionally focused our recommendations for change on the areas that we can directly influence in the schools and districts that we lead—from curriculum to instruction to finance—we know that

our vision must be broadened to encompass a number of critical influences that largely lie beyond school walls, such as parent and community involvement and students’ physical and emotional health. We hope that our fellow citizens will fill in the gaps in our vision, so that the final result can be understood and embraced by a broad cross-section of Minnesota parents, teachers and administrators, school board members, policy makers, business and community leaders, and, of course, students themselves.

Our promise as superintendents—and Minnesota’s promise as a state—is to work together with many others to do whatever it takes to prepare all students to succeed in the global Information Age in which they will live their lives. We have always been deeply committed to our students, but in this new age we must aim higher and stretch further. We are ready for that challenge, and we ask you to join us in meeting it.

*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;  
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

5. Vivien Stewart, “China’s Modernization Plan: What U.S. Education Leaders Can Learn,” Education Week 25, no. 28 (March 22, 2005).

# Introduction: The Quest for Coherence

**B**y definition, a world-class system of schools in Minnesota must be a true *system*, a group of independent but interrelated elements that create a unified whole. The world's highest-performing educational systems are distinguished by the coherence of their policies and practices, which are carefully constructed to align decisions at the highest levels with what really happens in schools and classrooms. These top-performing nations also place a high priority on ensuring that the various institutions and organizations that serve students over the course of their education—from early childhood to higher education—work together toward the same objectives.

The world's educational leaders design reforms to be implemented over many years and even decades, rather than between election cycles. Marc Tucker, President of the National Center on Education and the Economy, captures the idea of coherence when he writes of Singapore that “the design of the Singaporean educational system was notable for its coherence. It was as if it had been consciously engineered so that all of its pieces joined together in such a way that each element reinforced the others.”<sup>6</sup> If Minnesota hopes to compete with the likes of Singapore in the global marketplace, we will have to ensure that our own systems of education are equally coherent and effective.

In the world-class system we envision for Minnesota, state standards, curricular frameworks, and assessments will all be closely aligned, enabling districts, schools, and teachers to design, implement, and continuously refine practices that help all students perform at high levels. High-quality textbooks, educational software, and other instructional supports will also be closely connected to state standards and curricular

frameworks. At the end of the K–12 continuum, high school graduation standards will serve as the basis for admission to various forms of post-secondary education. Equally important, the preparation that future teachers receive in our colleges and universities will be deeply connected to what—and whom—those future educators will teach when they begin working in Minnesota's classrooms.

Our call for coherence may sound like an argument for the end of Minnesota's tradition of local control, but nothing could be further from our intent as current and former superintendents. Calling for greater attention to how all the parts of our statewide system fit together and reinforce each other does not mean eliminating the ability of teachers, principals, and superintendents to serve their students. Like doctors who decide how to treat their patients within clearly defined standards and best practices, in a truly coherent educational system, teachers and school leaders will have the flexibility to meet their students' needs within a larger system that guides and supports their efforts.

In our view, the quest for coherence from the capitol to the classroom should be a cornerstone of all Minnesota's efforts to raise student achievement in the years ahead. With this goal in mind, we offer the following Eight Traits of a World-Class Educational System in Minnesota that, if implemented as a whole, would move our state a long way toward coherence. While taking any one of these steps will benefit many students, we believe that the power of this vision lies in moving forward on all of them over a sustained period of time. It is only when all the pieces of our state's educational puzzle fit together that the picture will be clear and we will have a real chance at high performance.

6. Marc Tucker, “Building the Capacity of Schools, Districts and States to Educate All Students to High Standards: The Case of the America's Choice School Design” (Washington, D.C.: National Center on Education and the Economy, September 2, 2002), 8.

# Eight Traits of a World-Class Educational System in Minnesota

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

When many of us began our careers in education, academic rigor—challenging classroom studies and activities that involve students in complex, high-level thinking—was seen as something that only a limited percentage of students needed and wanted. In fact, our schools were fundamentally organized around this premise, with some students on a path that led to college and other students on an educational road that stressed basic skills in reading, math, and other subjects and that led straight to the workplace after high school graduation.

While many—perhaps most—Americans now recognize that the low-skill jobs on which one could raise a family have all but disappeared, we have only recently begun to seriously reorganize our educational systems to reflect this reality. Courses that are frequently seen in the United States as “accelerated” or “gifted and talented” options for a small minority of very capable students—such as foreign language in elementary school, algebra in junior high, and calculus in high school—are taken by the majority of students in many of the world’s highest-performing nations.

In the world-class educational system we envision for Minnesota, there will be no academic low road for students to choose or be placed upon. For some, this will mean taking and completing Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and other rigorous courses. Many of these students will initially require additional support to succeed in these accelerated classes, but our experience

indicates that over time they will thrive amidst greater challenge and rigor. For many other students, the academic high road will not lead to AP or IB classes, but to vocational and alternative coursework that is infused with high standards and academic challenge. Vocational education in Denmark offers just one of many good examples for Minnesota to consider of systems in which education takes place in a nonacademic setting but helps students master skills for success in the global Information Age.<sup>7</sup>

A growing body of research combined with the practical experience we share as superintendents convinces us that providing every student with academic rigor is the single most powerful step we can take toward closing the achievement gaps that exist between student groups in Minnesota. Students rise to the expectations that are set for them, and if the state expects every student to complete an academically rigorous K–12 program, it sends the right message to school staff, parents, and the students themselves.

And for *all* students in a world-class Minnesota, the K–12 road must lead to some form of post-secondary education, whether it be technical school, community college, or a four-year institution. In today’s economy, a college graduate will earn approximately \$1 million more than a high school graduate over the course of his or her career.<sup>8</sup> Given these economic realities, we must make enrollment in and graduation from post-secondary education an explicit expectation for all of our students.

7. “Denmark,” “Finland,” in *World Data on Education*, ed. Massimo Amadio (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2004).

8. American Competitiveness Initiative, Testimony of U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings before the Committee on House Education and the Workforce, April 6, 2006.

We believe that an emphasis on higher education for all is a key to addressing one of the most pressing problems we face in U.S. education today: low student motivation to succeed in school. It is clear that for many students, the goal of graduating from high school is not compelling enough to cause them to study hard during their elementary and secondary school years. Especially given the economic realities of our time, the goal of preparing for post-secondary academic success can help to fill the student motivation gap.

That said, like many challenges we face in education today, the answers to the problem of student motivation do not lie exclusively within our schools. Parents and other caregivers in particular must be full partners in helping their children understand how and why education is the key to their future success and happiness in a high-stakes, high-skills global economy. And from music to television to radio, the media must also stop encouraging disdain for school and start celebrating the educational success of all our children.

## 2. EDUCATIONAL INVESTMENT STARTS EARLY

Across the globe, many of the nations against which the United States competes for jobs and growth are investing in early childhood education. Belgium, France, Italy, and the Netherlands, for example, now provide free universal preschool for three- and four-year-olds. New Zealand, Sweden, Spain, and Korea are among the countries that have taken steps to more closely integrate early childhood services with what happens in their K–12 schools.<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately, Minnesota not only trails these and other foreign countries in its attention to early childhood education, but also lags behind many other U.S. states. The unfortunate result is that many students, particularly from underserved populations, lack the basic literacy and numeracy skills they will need for success in the K–12 system. Ironically, some of the most powerful economic and educational arguments for investing in early learning have originated in our state, from research at the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank and the University of Minnesota to advocacy by major corporate leaders.

For example, Dr. Arthur Rolnick and Rob Grunewald of the Federal Reserve have attracted international attention for their research that estimates that investment in early care and education produces an extraordinary 16 percent rate of return for every dollar spent. As they have aptly put it, “Here the literature is clear: Dollars invested in ECE (early childhood education) yield extraordinary public returns.”<sup>10</sup>

As we design a world-class educational system in Minnesota, we must listen to the advice of leaders here at home and learn from best practices around the world. In particular, the time has come to provide universal access to high-quality pre-kindergarten programs for four-year-olds and to offer all-day, every-day kindergarten for all five-year-olds in our state. While Minnesota’s ultimate goal should be to provide these services to all students, we can begin working toward this objective by funding them for children whose families live in poverty and who face other serious educational challenges.

## 3. LEARNING TAKES AS MUCH TIME AS IT TAKES

Today, many Minnesota students are prisoners of time. Too often, the hours we allot for learning are either too short or too rigidly structured to accommodate individual students’ learning needs. In contrast, in

the world-class schools that we seek, students will be given the amount of time they need to meet and exceed state standards and other educational goals. Students who are behind in key areas such as literacy

9. Michelle J. Neuman, “Global Early Care and Education: Challenges, Responses, and Lessons,” *Phi Delta Kappan* (November 2005): 189–91.

10. Robert Grunewald and Arthur Rolnick, “Early Childhood Development: Economic Development with a High Public Return,” in *Fedgazette* (Minneapolis: Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, 2003).

and mathematics will be provided with extended time blocks during the school day to help them master the skills they need to move on to higher levels. With community involvement and support, after-school programs will extend learning time still further beyond the boundaries of today's school schedules. Transportation service within and among districts will enable students who move during the school year to continue attending their current schools, providing continuity in instruction and the learning environment. Other ideas for increasing and enhancing learning time include establishing multi-age classrooms and allowing students to continue in school beyond eighteen years of age.

It is particularly important that Minnesota schools, districts, and state policy makers consider expanding and restructuring the school year in order to extend learning into the summer days that were once reserved for work on the farm. It is striking to note that in the Information Age, our school calendar does not even meet the needs of the Industrial Age in which parents worked year-round in factories and other businesses. Instead, it reflects the realities of the agrarian economy that ceased to affect the lives of the vast majority of Minnesotans more than a hundred years ago. Taking

the summer off forces teachers to devote several weeks at the start of each school year to reviewing what students have “lost” during the summer rather than moving on to new material.

One option for restructuring Minnesota's current 172-day school year is to move toward the type of “45-15” calendar (45 days of school followed by 15 days of vacation) that has been used successfully in Rochester, Saint Paul, and elsewhere. In addition, the state as a whole should continue its dialogue about an idea that grew out of our discussions and became a subject of public debate during the early months of 2006: to increase the school year to 200 days for students and 230 days for teachers. Today Minnesota is the only state with neither a minimum number of days nor a minimum number of instructional hours. Our average is 172 days, while the majority of other U.S. states require 180 days. And our global competitors in England go to school 190 days, in Japan and Australia 210, and in China 230.<sup>11</sup>

As we build a world-class educational system for the twenty-first century, we must leave behind an educational calendar designed to meet the needs of the nineteenth.

## 4. GREAT EDUCATORS HAVE GREAT SUPPORT

A significant and growing body of research has found that the factor within the school environment that has the greatest effect on student learning is the quality of a student's teacher. Recent studies also highlight the critical role that skilled principals and other school leaders play in raising student achievement. More than anything else, creating a world-class educational system in Minnesota will depend on recruiting, developing, supporting, and motivating world-class educators for our schools.

In order to ensure that our state has a sufficient number of talented, dedicated, and well-prepared teachers and administrators to meet our future needs, a major new effort should begin today to encourage

Minnesota's best and brightest to go into education. This challenge is particularly urgent given that over the next decade, many career educators from the baby boom generation will begin to retire. In particular, given ongoing demographic changes, Minnesota's schools must attract and Minnesota's institutions of higher education must prepare many more people of color to serve as K-12 teachers and administrators.

To address these and other challenges, creative new approaches to recruitment and preparation are needed. For teachers, this is especially true in subject areas and specialties where shortages already exist, such as math, science, special education, and English Language Learner instruction. The sweeping effort that the

11. National Association for Year-Round Education (NAYRE). See [www.nayre.org](http://www.nayre.org).

United Kingdom has had in place for several years to strengthen the qualifications of its teachers and improve the visibility and desirability of the teaching profession could serve as a useful starting point for Minnesota’s own efforts toward the same end.<sup>12</sup> Here at home, our state’s recent efforts to develop new approaches to teacher compensation may prove to be a productive component of a world-class system of incentives and support for teachers. Over the next several years, the impact that Minnesota’s Q-Comp program has on instruction, school organization, and staff morale should be carefully observed and evaluated.

And for teachers from all cultural backgrounds and at every point along the career continuum, a vitally important force for improvement will be professional development that is sustained, intensive, collaborative, and rooted in academic content. Although other strategies may seem to offer quicker returns on the public’s investment in school reform, we believe

that ongoing professional development is the key to long-term educational improvement. Especially at a time when budgets are tight and political and organizational priorities shift rapidly, it is important to stress that unless Minnesota maintains and strengthens its commitment to high-quality teacher professional development, its world-class aspirations will not be realized.

Just as urgently, in the years ahead we must put in place world-class leadership development programs for principals and other administrators. One need look no further than successful Minnesota corporations like 3M to witness the positive effect that leadership development can have on organizational improvement. While a number of districts within Minnesota have begun to focus on the importance of leadership, economies of scale—especially given the need to reach principals in Greater Minnesota—suggest that this may be an area in which a statewide effort could benefit districts and schools.

## 5. DATA AND RESEARCH INFORM TEACHING AND IMPROVE LEARNING EVERY DAY

In the era of No Child Left Behind and the disaggregation of data that the law requires, we accumulate mountains of information on student performance, from standardized test scores to attendance and graduation rates. But while collecting educational data is critical to knowing our present status and determining our future goals, too frequently our current information does not help us determine the means by which to achieve these goals. The challenge looking forward is to build our capacity at every level—from the classroom to the Commissioner of Education’s office—to make productive decisions based on data and research.

As superintendents, we are committed to act on the insights we gain from analyzing data and to invest in the educational strategies that produce real results—and to stop using those that do not. This

means departing from a practice that has too often characterized school reform: piling promising new initiatives on top of older ones that have constituencies within schools or the community. The result is the type of incoherent and overburdened school environment that we believe is a major obstacle to high performance. A truly world-class educational system in Minnesota will be characterized not only by the implementation of successful initiatives but also by the ability to recognize what isn’t working, to stop doing it, and to chart a new course.

In our view, one of the best ways to determine what is and isn’t working is to focus on *growth* in student achievement, which tells us how much progress a student made from an earlier point in time. In contrast, the federal No Child Left Behind education law currently holds schools and districts accountable for

12. “Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners,” Department for Education and Skills, United Kingdom (July 2004).

improvements in student status, specifically in the percentage of students who score proficient or above in reading and mathematics on state tests compared to the previous year's group of students. While measuring status is important, it does not tell us enough about how well districts, schools, and teachers are helping students improve. A school that serves many students who live in poverty and who face other educational challenges might have relatively few students who score proficient or above, but could still be making great gains from a comparatively low starting point. An assessment and accountability system focused on growth would enable our state to identify and learn

from the schools and teachers that are making strong progress, and to provide support for those that are not.

With a growth-based accountability system in place, we would eagerly make the following commitment to our districts and communities: every student that we educate for a year's worth of sustained learning time will demonstrate at least a year's worth of growth in achievement—and significantly more than that if they start out behind. This is a goal toward which we can work with confidence, enthusiasm, and a real readiness to be held accountable.

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

In the United Kingdom's current "Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners," the government commits to implement the following simple but extraordinary reform: "Guaranteed three-year budgets for every school from 2006, geared to pupil numbers, with every school also guaranteed a minimum per pupil increase each year." The plan explains that this approach "will give head teachers and governors unprecedented financial security and confidence, and the ability to plan for the future."<sup>13</sup>

If Minnesota is to succeed in developing and implementing its own world-class strategy for children and learners, we must take a similarly far-sighted approach to school funding. The ability of educators to undertake the improvements called for in this report will be greatly enhanced if they have a clear sense of the resources that they have to work with over a reasonable period of time, adjusted for changes in enrollment. In contrast, under the current approach to school funding in Minnesota, the longest that educators can look ahead with financial certainty is the end of the state's two-year budget cycle. After that point, political decisions at the state capitol can result in budgetary increases or decreases in real dollars.

But establishing predictability in school funding is only half of the financial challenge that we face in creating a world-class school system in Minnesota. The other half is defining the levels of funding that are sufficient to help Minnesota students equal the academic performance of the world's educational leaders. Unless we undertake this difficult but critical task, even a more predictable approach to educational funding is likely to leave many Minnesota schools and districts without the resources necessary to do the job.

Defining adequate educational funding in Minnesota will not eliminate the tough decisions that Minnesota policy makers must make every two years in designing the overall state budget. It will, however, change the nature of the discussion at the capitol and across the state in profound and positive ways. Rather than debating the merits of a 2 percent versus a 4 percent increase in the general fund formula (both percentages having been set by arbitrarily dividing up the "new money" that is available for education that year), the question for debate should be whether funding for schools should be set above, below, or at the levels the state has defined as adequate. This is a discussion worthy of a state that is striving to be world-class.

13. Ibid.

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

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 their needs rather than identifying desired outcomes and then expecting and trusting schools to reach those outcomes in ways that work for their students and school communities. Such a process-driven approach too often reduces flexibility and creativity and increases paperwork and inefficiency.

In a state where students with disabilities comprise 13.5 percent of the overall student population,<sup>14</sup>

it is essential that services for students with special needs focus on best practices that improve student achievement. As superintendents, we share a deep commitment to serving those students and are proud of the professionals who provide special education services to students in our schools every day. We also believe, however, that the current approach to serving many of those students can be significantly enhanced in order to prepare them for success in higher education and high-skill employment.

## 8. GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP IS A CORE ACADEMIC SUBJECT

As Minnesota creates its world-class system of schools, the world itself must become an increasingly important subject of study at every grade level and across the curriculum. We must undertake the type of effort that nations from China to Australia to Holland have launched to enhance their students' knowledge and understanding of international affairs, world history, geography, global economics, and foreign languages. In particular, we must do whatever it takes to ensure that every student who graduates from a Minnesota high school attains at least basic fluency in a language other than English.

Given that students in countries as diverse as China, Morocco, the Netherlands, and South Korea are all mandated to learn English from primary school, it is a disturbing trend that there are no statewide graduation requirements or academic standards concerning foreign languages in Minnesota. And considering that 50 percent of European adults—as well as even higher numbers of adults in countries like Singapore and South Korea—are fluent in a second language,

as compared to only 9 percent of American adults, Minnesota's students must master a foreign language to remain competitive in an increasingly global job market.<sup>15</sup>

We must also work to ensure that our students see the increasing cultural, racial, and linguistic diversity of our state as an asset rather than a liability, and to equip them with the skills and sensitivity to interact with people and communities whose backgrounds are very different from their own. That effort to reach students must begin with teachers, including in schools and districts that are relatively homogeneous today but are likely to become more diverse in the years ahead. High-quality professional development can help our educators connect with students across cultural and other divides, as can partnerships with community organizations that share our commitment to creating a state in which students from all backgrounds succeed in school and go on to become beneficiaries of and contributors to a thriving twenty-first century Minnesota.

14. Minnesota State Education Highlights, "School Matters: A Service of Standard and Poor's" (Summer 2006). See [www.SchoolMatters.com](http://www.SchoolMatters.com).

15. Donna Christian, Ingrid Pufhal, and Nancy C. Rhodes, "Fostering Foreign Language Proficiency: What the U.S. Can Learn from Other Countries," *Phi Delta Kappan* (November 2005): 226–28.

## Conclusion: Change Is the Only Choice

Some of our colleagues who work in education across the state may question the value of a report such as this one that is focused on a long-term vision rather than on the many immediate challenges we face. We share those colleagues' sense of urgency and desire for action, but the work we have done together for almost two years through the Superintendent Symposium has convinced us that a long-range and widely shared vision for the future is *precisely* what education in Minnesota needs if we are to prepare our students for the challenges of globalization.

As is often said, if you don't have a destination, any road will do. For Minnesota's students in the Information Age, it is clear that the only roads that will do are those that lead to high standards and high performance. And we will only be able to finish this journey if all of the diverse stakeholders in our state's educational system—including not just those of us who work in and with K–12 schools but also institutions of higher education, businesses, community organizations, and all levels of government—are headed together toward a common destination.

In contrast, if our approach to school reform in the years ahead is characterized by uncoordinated and contradictory new initiatives, incoherent policies and practices, short-term thinking, and political division, a decade or two from now Minnesota students will have no chance of competing with the best in the world. That is true because even though our schools and districts will unquestionably work to sustain the solid progress they have made in recent years, other countries—and other U.S. states—will be thinking bigger and bolder.

The world-class vision we have attempted to describe here should not become the property or responsibility of any one organization, agency, or group of

individuals. It certainly doesn't belong exclusively to those of us who contributed to this report. Instead, it must be everyone's vision and everyone's work.

Although achieving this vision over the next decade will require us to implement many different reforms—passing new laws, crafting new policies, designing new organizational structures, and trying new ways of teaching in and leading schools—an equally important part of creating a world-class educational system will be changing the way we think and talk about education in our state.

**For educators at every level,** it means abandoning the “not invented here” attitude we have too often taken toward educational policies and practices that are working across the country or the globe. If we want to achieve student performance that is equal to the world leaders, we must learn from their strategies and structures.

**For government leaders,** it means building bipartisan consensus around long-term support for reform.

**For individuals and businesses,** it means seeing funding for education as a direct investment in future prosperity, and cuts in education as admitting defeat in the global economic war for jobs and growth.

**For parents and other caregivers and for students themselves,** it means understanding that what is learned in our schools today will directly influence what can be earned in the workplace of tomorrow.

Some who read this report will agree with many of our conclusions but still wonder if a transition to a world-class educational system in Minnesota is actually

possible. They will understandably ask if there is any realistic chance that our state can muster the financial resources, the political will, the consensus, and the community engagement necessary to get from where we are today to where we want to go.

Our answer as superintendents is a resounding **yes:** we *can* make it happen. We believe that it is possible, particularly since Minnesota's schools start this journey with many strengths and assets on which we can build. Though achievement gaps between student groups are large, achievement overall is high. Our schools are served by deeply committed and talented educators who have repeatedly demonstrated their willingness to put students first. And from corporations to nonprofit organizations, foundations, and religious institutions, community support for education in Minnesota is high.

As we face these challenges, we can be encouraged by the example of the U.S. business community in the 1980s and 1990s. When faced by threats to their continued existence from competitors in Germany and Japan, U.S. corporations like G.E., Motorola, and Xerox reinvented themselves and not only survived but thrived in the world economy.

Similarly, American education today must change and adapt in response to the challenges of globalization, and no U.S. state is better prepared than Minnesota to lead the way. We hope that this report and the ongoing work that each of us will do to share its ideas within our school districts and across the state will help to develop a vision of and support for the world-class schools that Minnesota needs to remain a world-class state in the global Information Age.

Our thanks to the Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi LLP Foundation for Education, Public Health and Social Justice for their generous support. From the very outset, their funding made possible a series of symposia among the superintendents to forge Minnesota's Promise.

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*Ongoing support for and coordination of Minnesota's Promise are being provided by the Consortium for Post-Secondary Academic Success at the University of Minnesota. For more information, call 612-625-7002 or visit [www.minnesotaspromise.org](http://www.minnesotaspromise.org).*

*This report was drafted based on the superintendents' conversations by Kent Pekel, Executive Director of the Consortium for Post-Secondary Academic Success at the University of Minnesota.*