



Blueprint for Education Policy Reform

Historically, Minnesota’s K-12 public education system has been recognized as one of the top performing systems in the nation, with our students generally performing well on national exams. However, Minnesota’s demographics have masked large achievement gaps between white, non-white, and low-income students.

In addition, as the state continues to focus on reducing economic disparities the connection between education and economic opportunity becomes more obvious, and the urgency to eliminate education gaps between groups of students rises. This urgency is heightened by the pressures of a global, knowledge-based economy that increasingly requires people to complete at least some level of post-secondary education.

There is significant room for improvement given that only about half of Minnesota high school graduates complete a post-secondary certificate or degree within six years of high school graduation.

The gaps in post-secondary attainment reflect the achievement gaps we see in our K-12 system (see Tables 1 and 2). As a result, by closing K-12 student achievement gaps we can help more graduates be better prepared to complete a post-secondary education – and begin to address growing concerns about workforce shortages and economic disparities.

To help create a world-class education system, the MBP follows four guiding principles. Below each of the four principles are priority actions for the 2018 legislative session.

Table 1: Post-secondary attainment (2011 high school graduating class)

	Total HS graduates	Total completing post-secondary within 6 years	Post-secondary completion rate
All students	59,245	28,455	48%
White	48,246	25,253	52%
Students of color	10,999	3,202	29%
Low-income students	14,839	4,096	28%

Table 2: High school students meeting state standards in reading and math (2017 MCA results)

	Reading	Math
All students	60%	48%
White	68%	55%
Students of color	41%	30%
Low-income students	39%	26%

Principle 1

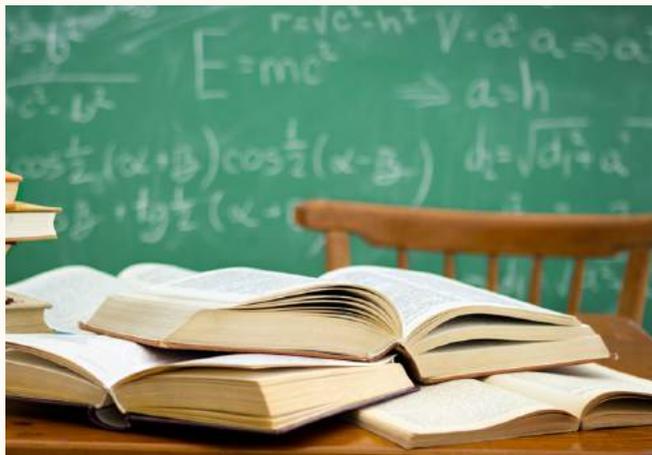
Set rigorous, world-class academic standards for students.

At a minimum, school and district professional development should ensure teachers understand and can incorporate state standards in their instructional practices.

Minnesota has developed some of the best student academic standards in the country through cooperative efforts with K-12 and post-secondary educators, employers and the public. By adopting a standards-based strategy the state not only created more flexibility for teachers to provide instruction, but also increased expectations and opportunities for all students.

Unfortunately, according to a 2015 survey by the Minnesota Department of education (MDE), only 17% of students are in a district that has fully implemented the state's English language arts standards. We cannot close our student achievement gaps if all students are not given an opportunity to learn our standards.

The state and school districts should encourage student participation in Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs). The state's MCAs are the only assessments specifically aligned to Minnesota's academic standards, so student participation in the MCAs is critical to accurately gauge student performance and progress.



Principle 2

Measure and report student progress towards Minnesota standards.

Require school districts to use one of four state-designated school readiness assessments. A key goal for early education services is to help ensure children are prepared to enter kindergarten. In addition, the state requires all school districts to report the number of children entering kindergarten that are prepared for school.

Unfortunately, there is no consistency in measuring and reporting school readiness by school districts since the state has left this process up to district discretion. As a result, families, the public and policymakers have no common base of information on child preparation.

Implement OLA recommendations that streamline state early education programs to better serve eligible families and their children. The Office of Legislative Auditor (OLA) is evaluating selected early education programs to determine how effectively the programs are coordinated so eligible families can maximize their intended benefits (e.g. access to quality early education services on a full-time basis). Based on the OLA recommendations, policymakers should adopt changes that improve the delivery of early education services.

Create performance-based summative ratings as the primary component of school and district report cards. The state should create a concise, understandable rating system for families and the public to assess the relative performance of schools and districts. Ratings should be based on key student outcomes and help families prioritize the schools and districts they want to learn more about.

Principle 3

Give educators the flexibility to offer the programs they believe will be most effective.

Work with the new Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board to ensure the teacher licensure reforms are implemented consistent with law. Following the Legislative Auditor's finding that the state's teacher licensure system was "broken", the legislature and governor passed significant improvements in 2017. These reforms streamlined the governance of teacher licensure by consolidating responsibilities into a new Board, and created a new tiered licensure system to provide clarity about requirements.

Principle 4

Give families the ability to choose the programs that best meet their children's academic needs.

Expand school choice for families. A number of independent evaluations have shown that expanding school options for low-income families can improve educational outcomes and encourage school districts to improve school performance.

Minnesota currently provides an education tax credit to about 55,000 low-income families to help with a variety of education-related expenses, but it does not cover expenses associated with non-public school tuition.

- Expand the current education tax credit to include tuition expenses.



Expand the Parent Aware quality rating system and related scholarships. The Parent Aware rating system helps early education providers improve their services while also giving families information on program effectiveness. Low-income families that choose a Parent Aware rated provider are also eligible for financial assistance through scholarships.

- If funding is available, expand scholarships so more eligible families have access to Parent Aware providers.

Give families a stronger voice in deciding when and how our lowest performing schools should improve. The federal ESSA law requires the state to identify the lowest performing 5% of public schools that receive Title 1 funds. The state, on a three-year cycle, will identify these schools and provide support so they can improve. If student performance at these schools fails to sufficiently improve, the schools will be re-identified and receive extra state support.

While it's appropriate to provide state support to improve the lowest performing schools, families at these schools should have a stronger voice in directing changes in school leadership and staff and the use of Title 1 funds.

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