

Smart INVESTMENTSSM IN MINNESOTA'S STUDENTS

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT ISSUES AND POLICY FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

THE ISSUE

Minnesota must engage all students throughout their high school years, offering them the rigorous coursework and social supports that will propel them through graduation and prepare them for higher education – especially students of color and students from low-income families.

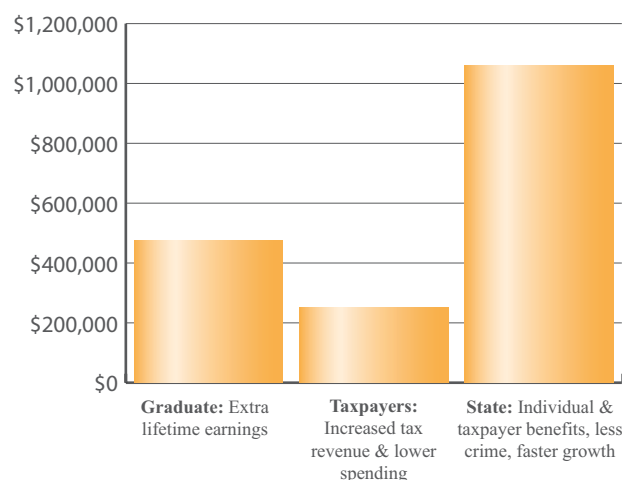
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS FOR MINNESOTA

- **Offer rigorous high school coursework** with sustained quality instruction and meaningful assessments to improve graduation rates and to prepare for success in higher education.
- **Establish social-support initiatives** both inside and outside high schools to mentor, monitor and assist students as a cost-effective way to boost achievement and graduation rates.
- **Institute proven education reforms** that establish small learning communities within high schools, improve the atmosphere, and better connect quality teachers to students.

WHY IT MATTERS

- The strength of Minnesota's economy depends on an educated workforce.¹ The education needed for today's jobs has increased,² making high school learning, high school graduation and post-secondary education more important to employment and productivity.
- Strong correlation exists between measures of academic achievement and high school graduation, indicating that improved mastery of school subjects reduces the likelihood that students will drop out.³
- Successful completion of high school yields significant economic benefits, with earnings for the average graduate rising by an estimated \$476,000 and the public sector gaining \$252,000 in increased tax revenue and lower expenditures over the graduate's lifetime.⁴

WIDESPREAD GAINS FOR EACH ADDITIONAL HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE



Henry Levin & Clive Belfield, 2007, for U.S. graduates

- Minnesota high school students who take more advanced coursework and college preparatory classes do better on assessment tests and college entrance exams.⁵ And research into success with higher education indicates that students who take and pass rigorous coursework are more likely to enroll in and finish post-secondary programs.⁶

CHALLENGES FOR MINNESOTA

- Some 8,500 Minnesota students drop out of public high school each year.⁷ A higher proportion of students of color drop out, but more than half the dropouts (50.3 percent) are white.
- More than one in three (37.2 percent) of Minnesota's 11th graders failed to meet the math standards when they took the state's 2009 assessment test, and another one in five (21.8 percent) only partially met the standards. Among 11th graders from low-income families, more than three in five (62.0 percent) failed to meet the math standards, and another one in five (18.5 percent) only partially met the standards.⁸

GROWTH & JUSTICE

- Minnesota’s challenge is to boost the performance of students who lag behind. Research shows that improvements on assessment tests for students who scored below the mid-point in previous tests increase the likelihood that they will graduate from high school.⁹
- Minnesota’s low-income students and students of color are far less likely than higher-income students and white students to reach proficiency levels in math and reading on the assessment exams and more likely to drop out of high school. The dropout rates for Minnesota’s Latino and American Indian students are more than five times the rate for white students, and the African American rate is more than four times the white rate.¹⁰
- With demographic projections showing an expected decline in white students and an increase in students of color,¹¹ Minnesota’s graduation rates, achievement test scores and educational attainment levels will decline unless more Minnesotans of color succeed in school.
- **Out-of-school support for high school students**, including tutoring initiatives after school and in the summer, mentoring programs like Big Brothers/Big Sisters, and efforts to reduce teen pregnancy rates.
- **Concerted, in-school efforts to prevent students from dropping out** and to boost graduation rates using proven initiatives like Check & Connect and Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success (ALAS) to monitor student progress, offer remediation and feedback, build relationships, and link schools to families and students.

SMART INVESTMENTSSM IN MINNESOTA’S STUDENTS

The Growth & Justice proposal for *Smart InvestmentsSM in Minnesota’s Students*, available [here](#), highlights research-based, cost-effective policies, strategies and programs for improving education from the early childhood years through to post-secondary study, with the aim, by 2020, of increasing by 50 percent the share of Minnesota students who successfully complete post-secondary education.

Growth & Justice identified five key education stages across three critical developmental phases – Ready to Launch, Ready for Higher Learning, and Ready for Life. This issue brief focuses on the stage for high school grades 9 to 12, but unless Minnesota pays careful attention to and invests in the entire continuum, we cannot reach our goal. For issue briefs on other key *Smart Investment* stages for Minnesota’s students, click [here](#).

A growing body of economic research suggests that the right investments in education can strengthen economic growth, raise the earnings power of more families and lower public costs. Educational research and economic analysis indicate that an added investment of \$1 billion a year in human capital by Minnesota would more than pay for itself.

ENDNOTES

1. Tom Stinson and Tom Gillaspay, “Minnesota’s Economics & Demographics: Looking To 2030 & Beyond,” presentation slides, July 2008, p. 2.
2. Laura W. Perna, “Improving the Transition from High School to College in Minnesota: Recommendations Based on a Review of Effective Programs,” Growth & Justice, abridged, November 2007, p. 3. (Available [here](#).)
3. Henry M. Levin and Clive R. Belfield, “Investments in K-12 Education for Minnesota,” Growth & Justice, November 12, 2007, pp. 16-17. (Available [here](#).)
4. Levin and Belfield, p. 1. Calculations adjusted to reflect present value.
5. M.L. Davison, E.C. Davenport, Y-C Wu, et. al, The 2004 Minnesota Education Yearbook: The Status of Pre-K-12 Education in Minnesota, Office of Educational Accountability, College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota, 2004, pp. 67 and 91. (Available [here](#).)
6. Growth & Justice, *Smart InvestmentsSM in Minnesota’s Students: A Research-Based Investment Proposal*, October 2008, p. 15, citing C. Adelman (1999). (Growth & Justice report available [here](#).)
7. Estimates based on the most recent data, from the 2006-07 school year. Data are available from the federal government’s National Center for Education Statistics via http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/pub_dropouts.asp. As reported [here](#), the Education Commission of the States says that federal estimates for high school dropouts likely undercount the actual number of dropouts.
8. Based on 11th grade scores for the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment II and the Math Test for English Language Learners, with data provided by the Minnesota Department of Education. The tests are used to measure student progress toward the state’s academic standards. “Students from low-income families” refers to those who qualify for free and reduced-price school lunches.
9. Levin and Belfield, pp. 17-18
10. National Center for Education Statistics, http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/pub_dropouts.asp. The federal data set uses the labels “Hispanic” and “Black, non-Hispanic.”
11. For an example of the projections, see the Minnesota Office of Higher Education article “Minnesota High School Graduates Will Peak in 2009,” *Insight*, April 2006. (Available [here](#).)

SMART APPROACHES

For its initiative on *Smart InvestmentsSM in Minnesota’s Students*, Growth & Justice assembled a stellar steering committee of experts and practitioners to review research on cost-effective approaches and programs to improve education. Smart investments address real disparities and actual student needs. The steering committee called for a significant increase in public-sector investment and private-sector engagement in the following smart approaches for students in grades 9 through 12.

- **Rigorous coursework matched with ongoing assessments** to ensure progress toward increased knowledge, high school graduation and opportunities for higher education.
- **Academic offerings that allow students to earn college credits while in high school** through challenging courses like the Advanced Placement Program; dual enrollment initiatives like Early College High Schools that blend high school and post-secondary study; and Minnesota’s Post-Secondary Enrollment Options program that allows high school students to take classes at public community colleges and universities.
- **High school reforms and improvement initiatives** like First Things First and Talent Development High School that establish small learning communities within the schools, increase the rigor of the courses, offer academic support when needed, and better connect teachers with students and schools with parents. The new What Works Clearinghouse from the U.S. Education Department offers evidence-based [practice guides](#) for educational improvements.