

A Smart Investment Agenda for Education in Minnesota

A growing body of research shows that smart investments in education can **strengthen economic growth, raise the earnings power of more families and lower public costs.**

The Growth & Justice proposal for [*Smart InvestmentsSM in Minnesota's Students*](#) (SIMS) highlights **research-based, cost-effective strategies and programs for improving education from early childhood through post-secondary study.** The end goal is to increase to 75 percent the share of Minnesota students who successfully complete education beyond high school. Unless Minnesota pays careful attention to and invests in the entire education continuum, we cannot reach this goal. Based on the SIMS initiative, Growth & Justice presents the following education agenda to address needed improvements at all levels.

Top Priorities for Action by the State of Minnesota

- **Commit to increasing the higher education attainment rate to 75% by the year 2020.**
- **Maintain current funding for early childhood care and education**, especially for low-income children and children of color; support reforms to link resources with quality and expand Quality Rating and Improvement System statewide; and expand access to affordable, high quality early education options.
- **Invest in proven strategies for ensuring grade-level reading proficiency by 3rd grade.** Reading is an essential gateway skill for success, and reading by 3rd grade prevents the need later for high-cost remedial instruction.
- **Establish a clearinghouse for evaluating best practices** and evidence-based innovations to improve achievement along the entire pathway from birth through college, especially for students of color and from low-income families.

Important Recommendations to Drive Improvement across the Education Continuum

For children from birth through age 3

- ☑ **Prenatal care and health care in the first years of life** to foster vital brain development and a strong start, targeting families most at risk. *Action levels: State, County*
- ☑ **Visits to at-risk pregnant mothers and families with young children by nurses, social workers, parent educators and other well-trained staff** to promote preventative health practices, good nutrition, responsible and competent parenting, child development and learning within the family, and strong parent-child interactions. *Action levels: State, County*
- ☑ **Needs-based high quality childcare** from skilled, educated staff, provided in settings with low child-to-teacher ratios. One key principle of effective early childhood development is to have a coordinated system of early education in place at age 3, including, for some children, enrollment in preschool programs. *Action levels: State, County, School District*

For children from age 4 through grade 3

- ✓ **High quality, half-day, affordable preschool for more Minnesota children by age 4.** Solid research shows impressive, long-lasting benefits from high quality preschool programs, especially for low-income children and children of color. *Action levels: State, County, School District*
- ✓ **Small class sizes for the early education years.** Reduced class sizes in kindergarten through 2nd grade proves more cost-effective than class-size reductions for grades 3 through 6, with the small-size classes having effects through to high school graduation. *Action levels: State, School District*
- ✓ **Effective instruction in critical skills, especially reading.** Reading is an essential gateway skill, and reading success by 3rd grade prevents the need for high-cost special education and remedial instruction. *Action levels: School District, School*
- ✓ **Parent involvement and family support initiatives** that encourage partnerships between schools and families to boost children's academic development and social skills. Effective early education programs incorporate parental involvement. *Action levels: County, School District, School*

For students in grades 4 through 8

- ✓ **Intensive tutoring assistance** targeted to increase the academic success of low-performing students as they take rigorous coursework. *Action levels: State, School District, School*
- ✓ **Quality academic preparation** through good instruction, strong curriculum and meaningful assessments of student progress. Academics in grades 4 through 8 should align with what students need to succeed in high school and in their post-secondary education, with an emphasis on math and reading. *Action levels: State, School District, School*
- ✓ **Both school-based and out-of-school support efforts** that better connect students to teachers, parents and other adults who can serve as mentors, help with school work and keep kids on track in school. *Action levels: State, School District, School*
- ✓ **In-school programs and reforms** rooted in evidence-based research and aimed at helping students achieve, preventing problems with academic progress and intervening with students when problems occur. *Action levels: School District, School*

For high school and the transition to college

- ✓ **Rigorous coursework matched with ongoing assessments** to ensure progress toward increased knowledge, high school graduation and opportunities for higher education. *Action levels: State, School District, School*
- ✓ **Academic offerings that allow students to earn college credits while in high school** through Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses; dual enrollment initiatives blending high school and post-secondary study; and the Post-Secondary Enrollment Options program that allows students to take classes at public colleges and universities. *Action levels: State, School District, School*
- ✓ **High school reforms and improvement initiatives** that establish small learning communities within the schools, offer academic support when needed, and better connect teachers with students and schools with parents. *Action levels: School District, School*
- ✓ **More high school counselors**, reducing the student-counselor ratio from near 800-to-1 down to 500-to-1 or better, given the important role they play in providing information and offering guidance on the academic requirements needed for higher education. *Action levels: State, School District*
- ✓ **Out-of-school support for high school students**, including tutoring initiatives, mentoring programs, and efforts to reduce teen pregnancy rates. *Action levels: State, County, School District, School*
- ✓ **Concerted, in-school efforts to prevent students from dropping out** and to boost graduation rates using proven initiatives to monitor student progress, offer remediation and feedback, build relationships, and link schools to families and students. *Action levels: State, School District, School*
- ✓ **Increased need-based financial aid** to make higher education affordable for students with limited means. *Action level: State*
- ✓ **Counseling and academic preparation for college readiness**, with a focus on promising, low-income students with academic potential. *Action levels: State, School District, School*

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