

*Smart*  
**INVESTMENTS**<sup>SM</sup>  
IN MINNESOTA'S STUDENTS

**We're All in this Together:  
Educational Achievement and Attainment by  
Minnesotans of Color**

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**GROWTH & JUSTICE**

Growth & Justice is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that researches and recommends public policies to make Minnesota's economy simultaneously more prosperous and fair. We support fair taxation and smart public sector investment — fiscally responsible, accountable investment that advances prosperity for all Minnesotans. Growth & Justice is a leading progressive voice on state issues.

## Minnesota's challenge and opportunity

Education drives growth and prosperity in Minnesota. It is a key factor in the success of our state and critical to our economic outlook. But Minnesota's record when it comes to educational achievement and attainment is marred by inequities. Minnesota's students of color have not had the same levels of opportunity and success as the state's White students. And if Minnesota is to depend upon well-educated residents and workers, the state must ensure success for all when it comes to education.

The continuation of Minnesota's lead in education and the payoff for our state's economy and people require real progress by students of color. Minnesota's current educational inequities affect a sizable and growing share of the state's population and in this way adversely affect us all. Consider this:

- Unless action is taken to boost graduation rates for the state's growing population of Blacks, Latinos, Asian Americans and American Indians, Minnesota will likely see a decline by 2020 in the share of students completing high school and the share of residents ages 25-34 holding college degrees at the bachelor's level or higher.
- Inequities, unless addressed, will undermine Minnesota's lead in educational achievement. As it stands, if Minnesota had the same racial and ethnic mix as the United States as a whole, the state's overall combined score for White students and students of color on the national 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading test would drop below the U.S. mark to the same level as Alabama, Arkansas, South Carolina and West Virginia.

The challenge is clear but not overwhelming. Data analysis from the Organizing Apprenticeship Project shows that improvements for fewer than 61,000 students of color, out of fewer than 215,000 total, will close the gap with White students on the standardized test for the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment II. The state needs to move beyond excuses for why gaps exist to action that will narrow and close them. ([More](#))

## Diverse talent in Minnesota

Minnesotans of color and American Indians are a crucial share of the state's overall population and its workforce. Increases by the state's communities of color gave Minnesota a faster population growth rate than all but one Midwestern state from 2000 to 2010. Statewide among all residents, persons of color now account for about 17% of Minnesota's population, up from just more than 6% in 1990. Already students of color account for more than one in four of the state's students enrolled in school from the pre-kindergarten level through fifth grade. ([More](#))

## Educational achievement and attainment matter to both Minnesota's residents and the state

Educational achievement and attainment have a tremendous impact on the well-being of Minnesotans and on the economic strength of our state. It's estimated that total personal income in Minnesota would increase by about \$4 billion annually if all ethnic and racial groups had the same educational attainment levels and earnings as Whites.

Education has a strong and positive effect on individuals. Unemployment and poverty rates are considerably lower for those with higher educations. And earnings increase as educational attainment increases, with the median annual earnings for U.S. workers who have bachelor's degrees at a level almost two and a half times the earnings for workers who didn't finish high school, according to Census estimates for 2009.

# Executive Summary

Researchers Henry Levin and Clive Belfield in 2007 calculated that, on average, a Minnesotan who graduates from high school earns \$476,000 more over a lifetime than someone without a high school diploma. What's more, the gains include another \$252,000 in increased tax revenues and lower expenditures on health, welfare and crime-related issues. Adding up these gains, plus expected impacts on state economic growth and other factors, Levin and Belfield estimate that the total benefits from just high school graduation for a Minnesotan amount to more than \$1 million. [\(More\)](#)

## High school graduation rates must increase for Minnesotans of color

Minnesota is a national leader when it comes to the share of its population with at least a high school education. More than 90% of all Minnesotans ages 25 and older are high school graduates or the equivalent, compared to just less than 85% for the United States as a whole. But as it stands now, the overall share of students graduating from high school will decline unless Minnesota takes action.

Graduation rates for Minnesotans of color – particularly Blacks and Latinos – are much lower than the rate for Whites. And the high school dropout rates are higher for Minnesotans of color, with the rate for Minnesota's American Indian students at seven times the rate for the state's White students, and the rates for Blacks and Latinos at about four times the White rate, based on data from the federal government for the 2008-09 school year. As communities of color become a larger proportion of the total Minnesota population, they will represent a larger proportion of Minnesota's students. Growth & Justice estimates that unless Minnesota addresses the educational inequities, Minnesotans in the 25-34 age range, as a group, will be relatively less educated in 10 years time than that age group is today. [\(More\)](#)

## The state needs more Minnesotans of color graduating from college

As with high school completion, college education is a clear strength for Minnesota, but the share of Minnesotans holding bachelor's degrees is expected to drop over the next decade unless attainment rates increase for Minnesotans of color, according to Growth & Justice estimates. Students of color represent the fastest growing population segment in the state, but they are not doing as well as their White peers on post-secondary enrollment and completion.

This issue of post-secondary attainment is a fundamental one for Minnesota. Growth & Justice has advocated strongly for increasing the state's higher education attainment rate to 75% by the year 2020, and we cannot reach this goal unless significantly greater shares of Black, Latino, Asian American and American Indian students complete high school, enroll in college and earn degrees. [\(More\)](#)

## Elementary school achievement

Minnesotans are proud that the state's educational achievement scores for elementary students overall exceed those of many other states and the nation as a whole. Growth & Justice analyzed educational achievement patterns for Minnesota's elementary school students using the 2009 tests from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math. Research shows that language and math skills are crucial to educational success and future educational attainment.

But breakdowns for Minnesota's achievement scores expose serious warning signs, especially in the critical area of early and proficient reading. The state's Black, Latino and Asian American 4<sup>th</sup> grade students on average did worse than their counterparts nationally on the 2009 NAEP reading test, and our White and American Indian 4<sup>th</sup> grade students did no better than their peers nationwide.

A particularly worrisome trend is that while the national average NAEP 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores have increased for Blacks and Latinos – two key and growing demographic groups – Minnesota's average scores for these students have not. Minnesota's average score for White students didn't rise either from 2003 to 2009.

# Executive Summary

When it comes to 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores, Minnesota may be paying a price for too small an investment in early education. Minnesota lags well behind other states for government-funded preschool education options – initiatives that can have a significant impact on educational achievement for students, especially students of color.

An examination of the 2009 NAEP results not by average scores but by proficiency levels also shows striking disparities for Minnesota's students of color. For example, large proportions of the state's students of color registered below the basic level for the 2009 NAEP 4th grade reading test – 61% for Blacks, 62% for Latinos, 37% for Asian Americans and 57% for American Indians. Of the state's White 4th graders, 22% were below the basic level for reading. ([More](#))

Some argue that Minnesota's reading scores may suffer because the state has a relatively high percentage of students who are English language learners (ELL). Interestingly, however, Minnesota's 2009 NAEP scores for 4th and 8th grade reading would not increase in a statistically significant way even if the state's percentage of ELL students were to drop from the actual level (7.4%) down to 1%. From these calculations, it seems that the state's higher-than-average percentage of ELL students is not a significant drag on Minnesota's overall NAEP reading scores. It is possible, however, that lower scores by Minnesota's ELL students dampen the average reading scores for some of Minnesota's racial and ethnic groups, something that we cannot explore using the NAEP data available for the state. ([More](#))

And some have argued that Minnesotans of color are more likely to score lower on achievement tests because a greater share of these students live in low-income households and, in general, low-income students score lower on standardized tests. But the Minnesota 2009 NAEP data show that in most cases significant gaps exist between low-income White students and low-income students of color for these math and reading test scores, using eligibility for the nation's free and reduced-price school meal program as a stand-in for income. This suggests that household income levels alone may not explain the gap for students of color. ([More](#))

## A Smart Investment Agenda for Education in Minnesota

Clearly, Minnesota must rise to the challenge and improve educational achievement and attainment for the state's students of color and American Indian students, even as the state continues to boost success for all. The economic strength of the state and the well-being of all its residents depend upon ending inequities and advancing education for Minnesotans of color.

Progress is both required and possible. We already know many research-based, cost-effective policies and strategies for improving education – policies and strategies of particular importance to students of color. Growth & Justice's 2011 *Smart Investment Agenda for Education in Minnesota* spells out the following evidence-based recommendations and priorities for improving education from birth to higher education, with the goal of increasing the higher education attainment rate to 75% by the year 2020.

- *For children from birth through age 3:* Improve prenatal care and health care in the first years of life; increase visits to at-risk pregnant mothers and families with young children by nurses, social workers, parent educators and other well-trained staff; and expand needs-based high quality childcare from skilled, educated staff in settings with low child-to-teacher ratios.
- *For children from age 4 through grade 3:* Expand high quality, half-day, affordable preschool for more Minnesota children by age 4; use small class sizes for the early education years; improve effective instruction in reading and other critical skills; and increase parent involvement and family support initiatives that encourage partnerships between schools and families.

# Executive Summary

- *For students in grades 4 through 8:* Provide intensive tutoring assistance targeted to low-performing students; offer quality academic preparation through good instruction, strong curriculum and meaningful assessments of student progress; improve both school-based and out-of-school support efforts that better connect students to teachers, parents and other adults; and initiate in-school programs and reforms aimed at helping students achieve, preventing problems with academic progress, and intervening with students when problems occur.
- *For high school and the transition to college:* Offer rigorous coursework matched with ongoing assessments to ensure progress; allow students to earn college credits while in high school; institute high school reforms and improvement initiatives that establish small learning communities within schools, offer academic support when needed, and better connect teachers with students and schools with parents; hire more high school counselors to reduce Minnesota's very high student-counselor ratio; improve out-of-school support for high school students, including tutoring initiatives, mentoring programs, and efforts to reduce teen pregnancy rates; ramp up 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; increase need-based financial aid to make higher education affordable for students with limited means; and expand counseling and academic preparation for college readiness, with a focus on promising, low-income students.

[\(More\)](#)

Other groups have made important policy recommendations that target educational equity issues, with strong, notable proposals from the [Minnesota Minority Education Partnership](#) and the [Organizing Apprenticeship Project](#).

## The greatest return on investment

There is good news when it comes to education. The nation overall and many other states have raised the achievement scores of students of color, so Minnesota can as well. On average, Minnesota's Blacks, Latinos and American Indians score on par with their counterparts nationwide, statistically speaking, for a number of important NAEP tests – 4th grade math and 8th grade reading and math – and the state's White students rank above the national marks for those tests. From a statistical standpoint, Minnesota's gaps between White students and Black, Latino and American Indian students are even with the gaps nationally, not worse, for those same three achievement tests. Minnesota must build on its positives and significantly advance educational achievement and attainment for its students of color.

The greatest return on education investment comes from addressing the greatest disparities in opportunity and achievement. This is true for individual students but also true for gains to the state. Minnesota must make progress on educational achievement and attainment by students of color in particular, something that will advance both individual well-being and the state's economy.



# A Challenge for All of Minnesota

Education drives growth and prosperity in Minnesota. We outpace the nation on many measures of economic activity, quality of life and personal well-being<sup>1</sup> in large part because of the state's well-educated citizenry and workforce.<sup>2</sup> But our record when it comes to educational achievement and attainment is marred by inequities. Minnesotans of color have not had the same levels of educational opportunity and success as the state's White students. Now with Minnesota's population becoming increasingly diverse, we as a state have the chance to address and overcome these educational inequities, tap the talent and potential of all Minnesotans, and secure the Minnesota advantage well into the future.

The challenge is clear but not overwhelming. With Minnesota's communities of color growing faster than its White population, the state can no longer dismiss inequities in education as a limited problem that affects only a small portion of state residents. The continuation of Minnesota's lead in education and the payoff for our state's economy and people require real progress for all students. Minnesota now must secure higher-than-average achievement levels for its students of color as well as its White students. The state needs to move beyond excuses for why gaps exist to action that will narrow and close them.

## Students of color are critical to the outlook for education in Minnesota

Minnesota's advantage as a state when it comes to educational achievement and attainment will slip unless many more young Minnesotans of color master reading, writing, mathematics and other key subject areas as they move through the education continuum from early childhood through the college years. This challenge matters to us all.

### Consider these points:

- Minnesota will see a decline by 2020 in the share of students completing high school unless action is taken to boost graduation rates for the state's growing population of Blacks, Latinos, Asian Americans and American Indians.
- Growth & Justice estimates that the share of Minnesotans ages 25-34 holding bachelor's degrees or higher also will fall by 2020 unless attainment rates increase for Minnesotans of color.
- Minnesota has room for improvement when it comes to the crucial issue of early reading. The state's Black, Latino and Asian American 4th grade students on average did worse than their counterparts nationally on the 2009 reading test for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and our 4<sup>th</sup> grade White and American Indian students did no better than their peers nationwide.
- The state's disparities, unless they are addressed, will undermine Minnesota's lead in educational achievement. Because of these inequities, if Minnesota looked like the nation in terms of its racial and ethnic mix, then the state's advantage on overall NAEP scores for 4th grade math and 8th grade reading and math, for White students and students of color combined, would drop considerably, and 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores overall would fall below the U.S. mark to the level of Alabama, Arkansas, South Carolina and West Virginia.

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1 While the recent recession and slow recovery have taken a toll, Minnesota as a whole continues to enjoy higher-than-average income levels, a lower unemployment rate and a lower poverty rate than the nation. The state's gross domestic product per capita is above the U.S. mark despite slower growth in Minnesota's economic output in recent years. And the state is home to a disproportionately large number of the nation's Fortune 500 firms.

2 For example, Minnesota's State Economist Tom Stinson and State Demographer Tom Gillaspay link the state's productivity and prosperity to education, as noted in their May 2011 presentation on "Minnesota and the New Normal."

## Accelerating achievement for all students

Education is an investment. And the greatest return from the public sector's investment in education will come from targeting the greatest disparities. We know many research-based, cost-effective policies and strategies for improving education and reducing disparities. These ideas and recommendations are important for all students but are especially valuable for students of color. For the good of the state as a whole, Minnesota needs to end educational inequities and boost achievement and attainment for all. Hard work and smart policy will yield results. Data analysis from the Organizing Apprenticeship Project shows that improvements for fewer than 61,000 students of color, out of fewer than 215,000 total, will close the gap with White students on the standardized test for the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment II.<sup>3</sup> The time has come to stop throwing up our hands and, instead, roll up our sleeves.

Growth & Justice has laid out [A Smart Investment Agenda for Education in Minnesota](#), presenting evidence-based, cost-effective approaches for improving education from birth through higher education – approaches particularly important for Minnesotans of color. (See the section [below](#)). Other groups have made important policy recommendations that target educational equity issues, with strong, notable proposals from the [Minnesota Minority Education Partnership](#) and the [Organizing Apprenticeship Project](#).

And there is good news when it comes to education. The nation overall and many other states have raised achievement scores, so Minnesota can as well. On average, Minnesota's Blacks, Latinos and American Indians score on par with their counterparts nationwide, statistically speaking, for a number of important NAEP tests – 4<sup>th</sup> grade math and 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math – and the state's White students rank above the national marks for those tests. From a statistical standpoint, Minnesota's gaps between White students and Black, Latino and American Indian students are even with the gaps nationally, not worse, for those same three achievement tests. And the Massachusetts-based Schott Foundation for Public Education, in analyzing data for the 2007-08 school year, reports that the high school graduation rate for Minnesota's Black males is higher than the rate for Black males nationwide (although Minnesota's gap between the graduation rate for Black males and White males is about on par with that of the nation).<sup>4</sup> Minnesota must build on its positives and significantly advance educational achievement and attainment for its students of color.

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3 Jermaine Toney and Hillary Rodgers, *16 Solutions that Deliver Equity and Excellence in Education*, Organizing Apprenticeship Project, June 2011, p. 3. (Available at [www.oaproject.org](http://www.oaproject.org).)

4 For more on the *Schott 50 State Report on Black Males and Education*, visit <http://blackboysreport.org>.



# A Growing Opportunity: The Diverse Talent in Minnesota

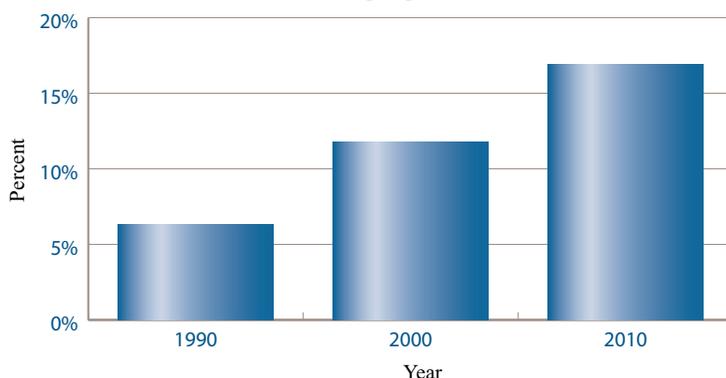
Minnesotans of color and American Indians are a growing and crucial share of the state’s overall population and its workforce. This is both an important fact and an important opportunity for the state. Significant growth among diverse racial and ethnic communities in the last decade has made Minnesota a standout state in the region when it comes to population growth. Of the 12 states in the Census Bureau’s Midwest region, only Minnesota and South Dakota grew by more than 7% from 2000 to 2010.<sup>5</sup> The increased count for Minnesotans of color allowed the state to keep its eight members of Congress, whereas many other Midwestern states lost congressional seats following the 2010 Census.

## A declining percentage of Minnesotans are Whites

Minnesota remains less diverse than the United States overall, but Minnesotans of color account for a much larger share of the state’s population now than just 20 years ago. Whites<sup>6</sup> made up 83.1% of Minnesota’s population in 2010, down more than 10 percentage points from 93.7% in 1990, according to the Census Bureau. For just the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area, Whites totaled 78.6% of the population in 2010. In the United States as a whole in 2010, Whites made up 63.7% of the population.

The number of Minnesotans of color has increased much faster than the number of Whites. Minnesota’s population overall grew 7.8% from 2000 to 5.3 million in 2010. Among Minnesotans reporting only one race, the growth rates were just 1.6% for Whites, but 59.4% for Blacks, 51.0% for Asian Americans and 6.6% for American Indians. Latinos grew by 74.5% over the period.

**Persons of color as a percentage of Minnesota’s total population, 1990 - 2010**



*Source: 2010 Census data. Percentages show shares for Minnesota’s population other than non-Hispanic Whites.*

## Greater diversity among state’s students

The signs of change are even clearer in the demographic breakdowns for Minnesota’s youngest residents – our future workers and leaders. Minnesotans of color constitute more than one in four (28.0%) of the students statewide who are enrolled in schooling from the pre-kindergarten level through fifth grade, according to data for the 2010-11 school year from the Minnesota Department of Education. Minnesotans of color account for more than 30% of the students enrolled in 43 different school districts in the state, including 22 districts in Greater Minnesota, 19 suburban districts in the Twin Cities area, and the Minneapolis and St. Paul districts, according to a 2009 report from the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership.<sup>7</sup>

5 Population growth rates from 2000 to 2010 for states in the Census Bureau’s Midwest region are as follows: Illinois +3.3%, Indiana +6.6%, Iowa +4.1%, Kansas +6.1%, Michigan -0.6%, Minnesota +7.8%, Missouri +7.0%, Nebraska +6.7%, North Dakota +4.7%, Ohio +1.6, South Dakota +7.9% and Wisconsin +6.0%. The U.S. population rose 9.7% over that decade.

6 Throughout the report, Latinos are separated out as a category, so counts and percentages for Whites, Blacks, Asian Americans and American Indians are for non-Latinos. Based on Census Bureau categories, Latinos – or Hispanics – may categorize themselves among any of the racial groups.

7 Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, *2009 State of Students of Color and American Indian Students: Executive Summary*, 2009, p. 5.



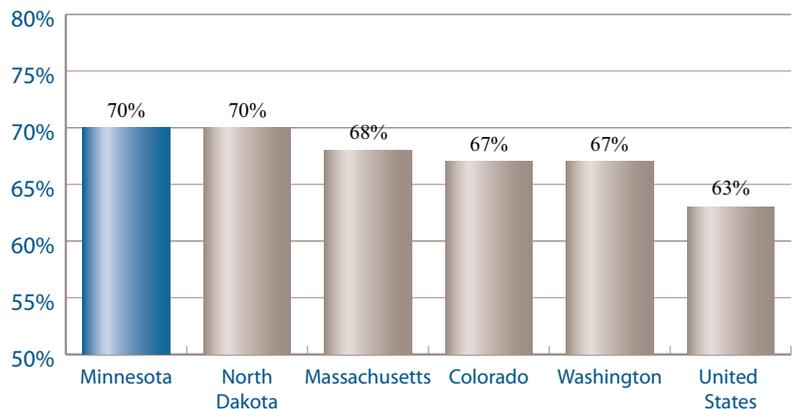
# Educational Achievement and Attainment Matter to All Minnesotans

Educational achievement and attainment in this state lag for Minnesotans of color – a situation that must change for the well-being of residents and for the economic strength of our state. Consider this: It’s estimated that total personal income in Minnesota would increase by about \$4 billion annually if all ethnic and racial groups had the same educational attainment levels and earnings as Whites.<sup>8</sup>

## Impacts from education

Minnesota’s highly educated population has been a key contributor to the state’s economic success for decades.<sup>9</sup> And education will be critical to the state going forward. New jobs increasingly require at least some postsecondary education, and the educational requirements have been rising for all jobs, including those that once required only a high school education.<sup>10</sup> A recent Georgetown University study estimates that 70% of all job openings in Minnesota in 2018 will require some education and training beyond high school – a percentage that puts Minnesota in the top five states on this measure and a share that’s higher than the estimated percentages needed for Massachusetts, Colorado, Washington State and the United States as a whole.<sup>11</sup> (See graph to the right.)

**Estimated share of job openings requiring post-secondary education in 2018 for top states and U.S.**



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce

As Minnesota’s communities of color account for a larger part of the working age population, the educational achievement and attainment of Minnesotans of color will have striking impacts on the state’s economic outlook. If Minnesota is to depend upon its educated residents and workers, the state must ensure the success of all Minnesotans when it comes to education and raise the educational attainment of Minnesota’s Blacks, Latinos, Asian Americans and American Indians. Minnesota can no longer ignore the inequities that have marred our education system because those inequities affect a sizable and growing share of the state’s population and in this way adversely affect us all.

## Education yields benefits for individuals and the state as a whole

Education matters because it has a strong and positive effect on the earnings and employment of individuals. On average, unemployment rates and poverty rates are considerably lower for those with higher educations. And earnings increase as educational attainment increases. The median annual earnings for high school graduates (about \$27,400) is almost \$8,000 more than for workers with some high school education but no diploma or its equivalent, according to Census estimates for 2009 median earnings among U.S. earners age 25 or older. The estimated median annual earnings for U.S. workers with bachelor’s degrees is higher still: At about \$47,000, it’s almost two and a half times

8 The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, *Measuring Up: The State Report Card on Education (Minnesota)*, 2008, p. 10. (Available at <http://measuringup2008.highereducation.org/>.)

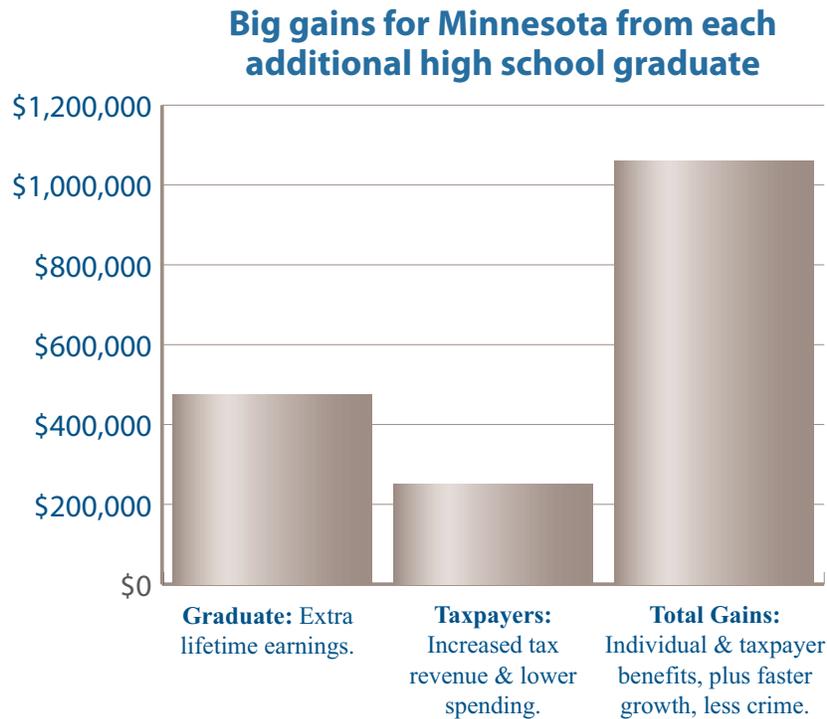
9 Tom Stinson and Tom Gillaspay, “Minnesota’s Economics & Demographics: Looking To 2030 & Beyond,” presentation slides, July 2008, p. 2.

10 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 at <http://www.growthandjustice.org/Perna>.)

11 Anthony Carnevale, Nicole Smith and Jeff Strohl, *Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Educational Requirements through 2018*, Georgetown University, June 2010, p. 57. (Available at <http://cew.georgetown.edu/jobs2018/>.)

the median earnings for workers who attended some high school but did not graduate, and it's more than one and a half times the median for those with a high school diploma.<sup>12</sup>

And the individual gains from education yield quantifiable payoffs for the state as a whole. Researchers Henry Levin and Clive Belfield in 2007 calculated that, on average, a Minnesotan who graduates from high school earns \$476,000 more over a lifetime than someone without a high school diploma. What's more, the gains include another \$252,000 in increased tax revenues and lower expenditures on health, welfare and crime-related issues. Adding up these gains, plus expected impacts on state economic growth and other factors, Levin and Belfield estimate that the total benefits from just high school graduation for a Minnesotan amount to more than \$1 million.<sup>13</sup> (See graph below.)



*Source: Henry Levin & Clive Belfield, 2007. Dollar levels expressed as present value, using a 3.5% discount rate.*

12 Data from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, Table PINC-03 on educational attainment and earnings, May 2011.

13 Henry M. Levin and Clive R. Belfield, "Investments in K-12 Education for Minnesota," Growth & Justice, November 12, 2007, p. 1. (Available at [http://www.growthandjustice.org/Levin\\_Belfield](http://www.growthandjustice.org/Levin_Belfield).) The Levin and Belfield calculations are adjusted to reflect present values. Of note: Others have issued higher estimates for the lifetime loss of income from failure to complete high school; for example, Chris Chapman, et. al., place the nationwide number at \$630,000 in *Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States*, December 2010, National Center for Education Statistics, p. 1. (Available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011012.pdf>.)



## High School Graduation Rates for Minnesotans of Color Must Increase or the State's Graduation Rate Will Decline

Minnesota is a national leader when it comes to the share of its population with at least a high school education. Census data for the 2005-09 period show that an estimated 91.1% of all Minnesotans age 25 and older are high school graduates or the equivalent, compared to 84.5% of all U.S. residents in that age category. Not surprisingly, the state's success on this attainment measure stems in large part from high overall high school graduation rates. With an estimated on-time graduation rate of 86.4% for the 2007-08 school year, Minnesota was one of only four states nationwide that exceeded 85% for this measure, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).<sup>14</sup>

But Minnesota will see a drop in the share of students completing high school unless action is taken to end inequities and boost graduation rates for the state's growing population of Blacks, Latinos, Asian Americans and American Indians. At the current graduation rates and with projected population trends, Minnesotans in the 25-34 age range, as a group, will be relatively less educated in 10 years time than that age group is today.

More precisely, Growth & Justice estimates that the share of Minnesotans earning high school diplomas or the equivalent in 2020 will decline by about 4 percentage points among those ages 25 to 34<sup>15</sup> – a group for which the percentage attaining high school graduation has been rising. These estimates were calculated conservatively based on current trends and circumstances and factoring in statewide school enrollments, high school completions, persons likely to earn GED credentials (judged equivalent to high school diplomas), and adults likely to earn diplomas after their high school years.

The explanation for this projected drop in high school attainment is simple. As communities of color become a larger proportion of the total Minnesota population, they will also represent a larger proportion of our students. As it stands now, graduation rates for Minnesotans of color – particularly Blacks and Latinos – are much lower than those for Whites. So the overall share of students graduating from high school will decline over time unless Minnesota tackles this problem and addresses the inequities.

Of the Minnesotans who drop out of public high school each year, a highly disproportionate share is made up of students of color. According to NCES data for the 2008-09 school year, just about half the dropouts are White. But the dropout rate for Minnesota's American Indian students that year is seven times the rate for White students, and the rates for Blacks and Latinos are about four times the White rate. Asian American students are estimated to have dropped out at about one and a half times the rate for Whites. Minnesota's estimated dropout rates for the 2008-09 school year are lower than the national average for Whites, Blacks, Latinos and Asian Americans but higher for American Indians, based on data for the reporting states.<sup>16</sup>

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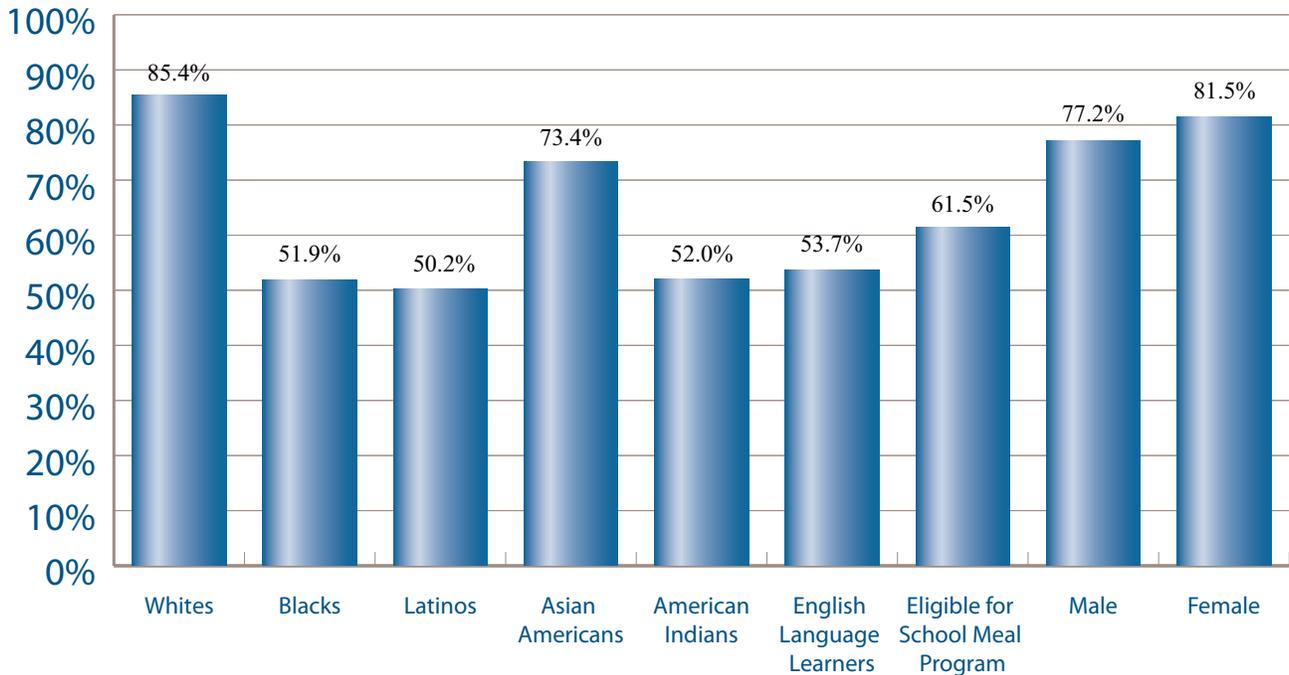
14 Chris Chapman, Jennifer Laird and Angelina KewalRamani, *Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States*, December 2010, National Center for Education Statistics, p. 52. (Available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011012.pdf>.) The estimates do not include South Carolina because data for that state were unavailable. These estimates differ from those by the Minnesota Department of Education, noted on the next page.

15 The Census data used for this estimate came from the 2008 American Community Survey, which showed 92.6% of Minnesotans ages 25-34 having a high school diploma or a GED equivalent – a level higher than estimates from the 2005-09 American Community Survey data. The conservative Growth & Justice projections show an estimated drop by 2020 of 4.1% to 88.5%.

16 Dropout estimates are based on data from the 2008-09 school year from the federal government's National Center for Education Statistics via [http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/pub\\_dropouts.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/pub_dropouts.asp). The 2008-09 report is available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011312.pdf>. The estimated dropout rates for 2008-09 from one year to the next are 1.2% for Whites, 1.9% for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, 4.7% for Blacks, 5.0% for Hispanics, and 8.5% for American Indians and Alaska Natives. As reported at <http://www.ecs.org/html/issue.asp?issueid=13&subIssueID=74>, the Education Commission of the States notes that federal estimates for high school dropouts likely undercount the actual number of dropouts.

The racial and ethnic disparities are alarming, too, for the counts of Minnesota students earning high school diplomas in six years' time. Using data from the Minnesota Department of Education for the 2009-10 school year – as distinct from the NCES data cited above – the rates at which Minnesota students graduated from high school that year within the six-year time frame are at just over half for Blacks (51.9%), Latinos (50.2%), American Indians (52.0%) and English language learners (53.7%). Minnesota's graduation rate is only 73.4% for Asian Americans, and 61.5% for low-income students who qualify for the free and reduced-price school meal program. Whites graduated at a rate of 85.4%. The MDE data for 2009-10 leave out 11.8% percent of the students for whom graduation status is unknown.<sup>17</sup> (See graph below.)

### Six-year high school graduation rates in Minnesota for 2009-2010



Source: Minnesota Department of Education. Calculations exclude 11.8% of the students because their graduation status is unknown.

<sup>17</sup> The data on Minnesota's graduation rates is available at [http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Data/Data\\_Downloads/Student/Graduation\\_Rates/index.html](http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Data/Data_Downloads/Student/Graduation_Rates/index.html). As noted, the calculations for the percentages factor out the number of students for whom graduation status is unknown. This number amounts to 11.8 percent of the overall students but is a higher percentage for all the subgroups except Whites and amounts to as much as 26.9% (for Blacks) of the totals for the subgroups.



# State Needs More Minnesotans of Color Graduating from College

As with high school attainment, college education is a clear strength for Minnesota, but the share of Minnesotans holding bachelor's degrees is expected to drop over the next decade unless attainment rates increase for Minnesotans of color. At present, the share of Minnesotans age 25 and older with college degrees at the associate level or higher stands at 40.7%, compared to 34.9% for the United States as a whole, according to the latest available Census data for the 2005-09 period. The share of these residents with bachelor's degrees or higher is 31.2% for Minnesota and 27.5% for the United States.

The share of Minnesotans ages 25-34 who hold bachelor's degrees or higher degrees (37.5%) is greater than the share of all Minnesotans ages 25 and older who have earned those degrees (31.2%). But Growth & Justice estimates the share of Minnesotans ages 25-34 with bachelor's degrees or higher will likely decline to about one-third by 2020 if current trends and inequities hold.<sup>18</sup> In recent decades, of course, the percentage of Minnesotans with college degrees has increased, not fallen. For these projections, Growth & Justice once again used conservative assumptions in its calculations, which factored in rates for high school graduation, college enrollments and college completions by race and ethnicity. The projected level for bachelor's degrees depends upon a number of uncertainties, and therefore the projected downward trend for the share of Minnesotans with bachelor's degrees or higher is of more interest than the projected percentage drop.

## Lower rates of enrollment and completion by students of color

The projected decline in the share of Minnesotans ages 25-34 with bachelor's degrees is driven in large part by two trends: 1) students of color, particularly Latinos, represent the fastest growing population segment in the state, but 2) they are not doing as well in post-secondary enrollment and completion rates as their White peers. Minnesotans of color ages 18-24 enroll in college at a rate 9 percentage points lower than Minnesota's White students. And the disparities are worse for college completion. Minnesota's four-year colleges and universities graduate just 37% of their Black students and 51% of Latinos – the state's two largest minority populations – in six years' time. This compares to a 63% completion rate for White students.<sup>19</sup> Only about 11% of the bachelor's degrees and 13% of the associate degrees awarded by Minnesota's colleges and universities in 2008-09 went to students of color.<sup>20</sup>

## Minnesota needs its students of color in order to reach the higher education attainment goal

This issue of post-secondary attainment is a fundamental one for the state. Growth & Justice has advocated strongly for increasing Minnesota's higher education attainment rate to 75% by the year 2020, counting associate degrees and higher degrees plus completion of recognized post-secondary certificate programs. We cannot reach this goal unless significantly greater shares of Black, Latino, Asian American and American Indian students complete high school, enroll in college and earn degrees.

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18 Growth & Justice projections, assuming current trends, show a drop to 33% in the proportion of Minnesotans ages 25-34 with bachelor's degrees or higher. The Growth & Justice sensitivity analysis indicated a potential range of 30% to 33%. A detailed memo regarding the projections is available upon request.

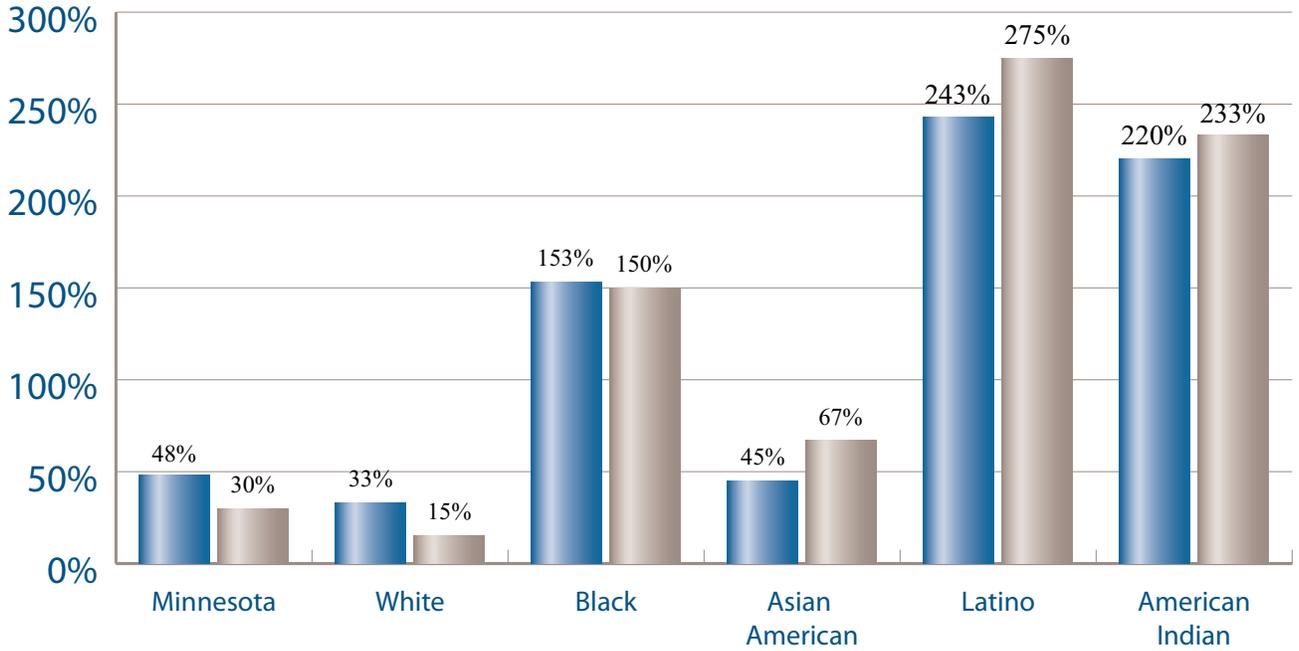
19 The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, *Measuring Up: The State Report Card on Education (Minnesota)*, 2008, pp. 6 and 9. (Available at <http://measuringup2008.highereducation.org>)

20 Data extracted from the National Center for Education Statistics' Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, accessible via <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/sdc/>.

The share of Minnesota’s students who earn a post-secondary educational credential will need to increase by as much as 50 percent in order for the state to hit the 75% attainment goal.<sup>21</sup> What that means in terms of increases in college completion for any of Minnesota’s demographic groups depends upon shares of completion for each of the other groups and the shares pursuing college rather than post-secondary certificates. According to one set of estimates for reaching a 50% increase in the share of Minnesota’s students who earn college degrees, the following jumps would be needed if the share of White students were to increase by about 35% for bachelor’s degrees and 15% for associate degrees: for Blacks, about 150% for both bachelor’s and associate degrees; for Latinos, about 245% for bachelor’s degrees and 275% for associate degrees; for American Indians, about 220% for bachelor’s degrees and 235% for associate degrees; and for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, about 45% percent for bachelor’s degrees and 70% for associate degrees. (See graph below.)

### Potential percentage increases needed to produce a 50% rise in Minnesota’s overall post-secondary attainment level

■ 6 year rate (bachelor’s)      ■ 3 year rate (associate)



Source: Analysis from Robert Johnson, St. Cloud State University.

21 Growth & Justice estimates that currently between 50% and 60% of Minnesotans ages 25-34 have successfully completed post-secondary education. This range is based on the fact that 50% of the state’s residents ages 25-34 hold associate degrees or higher and a significant share of the state’s high school graduates – estimated to be another 5-10% – go on to earn formal certificates in occupational skills. The Growth & Justice estimate for certificates is based on data from the National Center for Education Statistics and the American Community Survey.



# Warning Signs from Minnesota's Achievement Scores for 4th Grade Reading

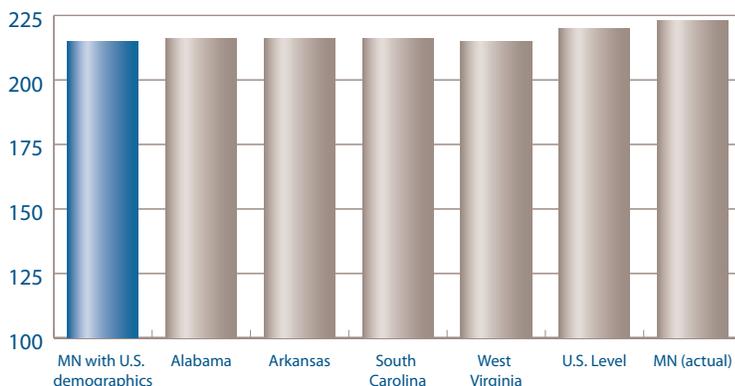
Minnesotans are proud that the state's educational achievement scores for elementary students exceed those of many other states and the nation as a whole. But breakdowns for national achievement scores by race and ethnicity expose serious issues and warning signs for the state, especially in the critical area of early and proficient reading. Reading skills are essential building blocks for success in education as very young students move from learning to read in the early years to reading to learn as they progress through school.

The most recent 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)<sup>22</sup> show that Minnesota's overall average (223) is slightly higher than that of the U.S. (220) but only because a greater share of Minnesota's students are White, and Whites generally score higher on standardized tests. Minnesota's White and American Indian 4<sup>th</sup> graders do no better than the nation's on the NAEP reading test, and Minnesota's Black, Latino and Asian American students do worse.<sup>23</sup> (In all cases in this report, scores are cited as different only if the differences are statistically significant, falling outside the identified ranges for actual scores based on sample sizes, standard errors and confidence intervals.)

When it comes to 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores, Minnesota may be paying a price for too small an investment in early education. Minnesota lags well behind other states for government-funded preschool education options – initiatives that can have a significant impact on educational achievement for students of color.<sup>24</sup> And Minnesota has not adopted other early childhood education initiatives and programs that some other states have instituted.

Minnesota must focus on boosting achievement and securing equitable educational outcomes for students of color. Progress on this front is essential if Minnesota is to avoid growing inequities that undercut the economic well-being of residents and undermine the economic strength of the state. Already our current inequities are glaring ones. Consider this: Minnesota's overall 4<sup>th</sup> grade NAEP reading scores for all students combined would drop below the national mark if the state had the same demographic mix as the nation in terms of percentages of White, Black, Latino, Asian American, and American Indian students. In fact, if Minnesota looked like the nation, the state's overall score for 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading in 2009 – for Whites and students of color together – would be just 215, a score that's as low as that of Alabama, Arkansas, South Carolina and West Virginia. (See graph to the right.) And the educational disparities extend beyond 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading. Minnesota's

**Inequities hurt the state: If MN looked like the nation, 4th grade reading scores would fall to AL, AR, SC, and WV levels**



Source: The 2009 results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress and Growth & Justice calculations.

22 Scores throughout are from the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress results, as listed in May 2011. National NAEP scores from later dates may differ because of data updates.

23 The results from the 2009 NAEP 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading tests show an average score of 230 for Minnesota's White students and 229 for U.S. White students, but because the scores are calculated from a sample of students, rather than all students, the possible values for these two scores fall within the same range and therefore aren't statistically different. This important point about the data ranges for NAEP scores is often overlooked in discussions about achievement levels. Throughout this report, differences in levels and ranks are cited only if they are statistically significant.

24 For example, Minnesota lags behind when it comes to twice-a-week preschool education funded by the state and federal governments. Only about 15 percent of Minnesota's four year olds were enrolled in such programs for the 2007-08 school year, compared to 38 percent for all 50 states. This tally counts a) state-funded programs, b) the federally funded Head Start program, and c) special education programs, but it misses some Minnesota four-year olds who participate in preschool at least twice a week through school districts and other local entities using funds from the state government's School Readiness initiative. This data on twice-a-week preschool education comes from W. Steven Barnett, et al, in *The State of Preschool 2008*, National Institute for Early Education Research, April 2009, pp. 17 and 80. (Available at <http://nieer.org/yearbook/pdf/yearbook.pdf>.)

advantage when it comes to 2009 NAEP test scores would drop considerably for 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading and 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade math if the state's demographic mix were the same as the nation's.<sup>25</sup> As we grow more diverse, Minnesota must tackle these educational inequities or collectively suffer the consequences.

This incongruity – a higher overall NAEP score for Minnesota on 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading in 2009 but no advantage for any of Minnesota's racial and ethnic groups – is both striking and startling. Statistically speaking, Minnesota's 4<sup>th</sup> grade White students have not scored higher than their national counterparts on the NAEP reading test since 2003. And Minnesota's students of color consistently score lower than the state's White students for the 4<sup>th</sup> grade NAEP reading test.

While no one measure captures the concept of educational achievement, the test results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress do matter. First carried out nationally in 1969, the federally administered NAEP has as its goal to continuously monitor the knowledge, skills and performance of the nation's students. At present, the NAEP program tests 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders on math, reading, science and writing, as well as a range of other subject areas. Because NAEP tests are administered uniformly using the same sets of test booklets across the nation, the NAEP results serve as a common measure over time for what school students in all states know about the featured subjects.

The average 2009 NAEP 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores for Minnesota's Black and Latino students fall below the U.S. scores for those groups. Scores for Minnesota's Asian American students also lag those of their national counterparts on the 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading test.<sup>26</sup>

For 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores for Black, Latino and Asian American students compared to White students, Minnesota's gaps are higher than the national gap. The state's gap for American Indians is statistically the same as the national gap.

## **While U.S. NAEP scores for 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading have improved for some groups, Minnesota scores have not**

A particularly worrisome trend is that while the national average NAEP 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores have increased for Blacks and Latinos – two key and growing demographic groups – Minnesota's average scores for these students of color have not. Looking at test results from 2003 forward, the national 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading score overall for Latino students has risen consistently in the United States, but in Minnesota the average NAEP reading score for 4<sup>th</sup> grade Latino students who took the test in 2009 is down from the average score for those taking the test in 2005. And while the 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading score for Black students nationwide went up consistently from 2003 to 2007 and then stayed even in 2009, the score for 4<sup>th</sup> grade Blacks in Minnesota has remained static throughout the period. The overall NAEP 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading score for White students nationally rose slightly from 2003 to 2009, but Minnesota's average score for White students did not.

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25 For these simple calculations, the nation's actual 2009 NAEP scores were compared to hypothetical 2009 NAEP scores for Minnesota recalculated so that the state's demographic mix was proportionately the same as the nation's actual mix in 2009. So for example, Black students were assumed to account for the same share of Minnesota's total students as they accounted for total number of students in the states for which NAEP scores for 2009 were available.

The national shares were not adjusted to take into account the hypothetical shifts in Minnesota's shares. The hypothetical change to the state's demographic mix would drop Minnesota's 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading score from 223 to 215. It is assumed here that Minnesota's five-point spread for the confidence interval would fall within the same range as that of Alabama, which had a 2009 NAEP 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading score of 216 with a five-point spread and was statistically below the national mark. Using this hypothetical change to Minnesota's demographics, 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores for the state would fall from 270 to 263, 4<sup>th</sup> grade math scores would fall from 249 to 244, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade math would fall from 294 to 286.

26 For detailed data on NAEP scores, see the Growth & Justice research report on the 2009 NAEP results, released in February 2011 (Available at [http://www.growthandjustice.org/NAEP\\_Report](http://www.growthandjustice.org/NAEP_Report)). The NAEP data for the 2008-09 school year used for the February 2011 report differed slightly from NAEP results available in May 2011 (and used here) because of updates to the national data. Minnesota data has remained the same.

## Minnesota's 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores are no better and often worse than Texas'

In some cases, Minnesota scores higher on average than other states for NAEP tests only because of its large share of White students. Case in point: Texas. While Minnesota's overall NAEP score on 4th grade reading for all students combined in 2009 is statistically higher than the Texas score, Minnesota's scores are no higher and often worse than the Texas scores when the results are disaggregated for Whites, Blacks, Latinos and low-income students.<sup>27</sup> The overall Minnesota advantage compared to the overall score for Texas stems from White students scoring higher on the NAEP test. What's more, Minnesota's gaps in 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores are larger than those in Texas between White students and these students of color, as well as between low-income students who qualify for free and reduced-price school meals and higher income students who do not. (See table to the right.)

### Minnesota's overall 2009 NAEP score for 4th grade reading exceeds that of TX, but MN does not surpass TX for any group of students

All Students	MN	>	TX
White Students	MN	=	TX
Black Students	MN	<	TX
Latino Students	MN	<	TX
Eligible for School Meal Program	MN	<	TX

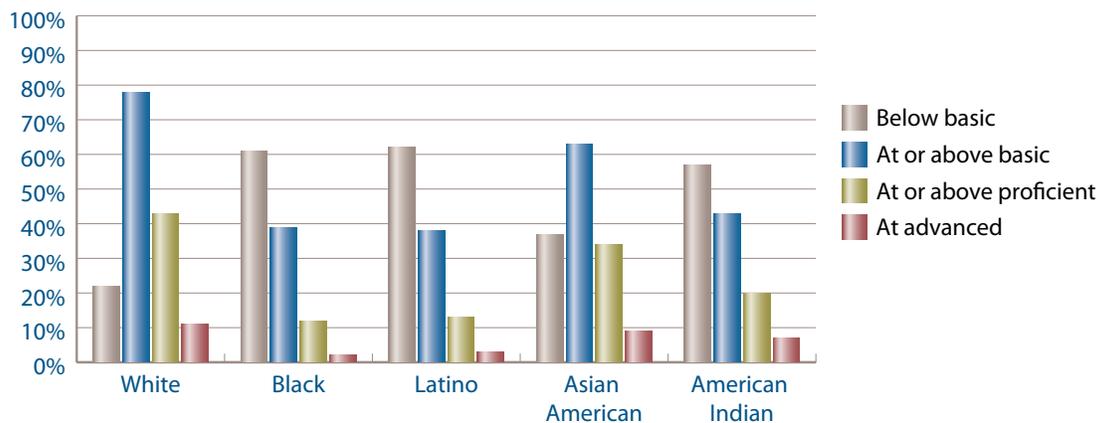
Gap Black/White	MN	>	TX
Gap Latino/White	MN	>	TX
Gap Eligible/Not for Meal Program	MN	>	TX

Based on statistically significant differences in NAEP scores.

## Reading proficiency levels

More troubling signs emerge from an alternative way to analyze the NAEP 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores – looking not at average scores but instead at the percentage of students who are at or above certain achievement levels. This analysis shows a disconcerting picture for Minnesota's students of color: Large proportions of the state's students of color are below the basic level for 4th grade reading. Indeed, the share of Minnesota's 4th graders reading below the basic level for the 2009 NAEP test registered at 61% for the state's Blacks, 62% for Latinos, 37% for Asian Americans and 57% for American Indians. Of the state's White 4th graders, 22% were below the basic level for reading. (See graph below.)

### 4th grade reading: Percentage of MN students by achievement levels



Source: The 2009 results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress

27 The average 2009 NAEP fourth grade reading scores for these groups of students are as follows: All students = 223 for Minnesota and 219 for Texas; White students = 230 for Minnesota and 232 for Texas (not a statistically significant difference); Black students = 195 for Minnesota and 213 for Texas; Latino students = 194 for Minnesota and 210 for Texas; and students eligible for the free and reduced-price school meal program = 203 for Minnesota and 209 for Texas. University of Minnesota Associate Professor Ernest C. Davenport, Jr., uncovered similar findings when he analyzed the 2005 NAEP scores in a paper entitled "Adjusting for Simpson's Paradox: Comparing Apples to Apples in Relating School and District Performance," presented at the Third Annual Minnesota Assessment Conference in August 2007. This statistical circumstance, whereby the results for comparisons between subpopulations for two variables will differ from the comparison for the overall populations, is known as "Simpson's paradox."

## English language learners aren't dragging down the state's overall reading scores

Some have argued that Minnesota faces greater challenges than most states when it comes to reading proficiency because the state has a relatively high percentage of students who are English language learners (ELL). For its share of ELL students, Minnesota ranks relatively high – 15<sup>th</sup> among the 45 states for which 2009 data are available on students enrolled in limited English proficiency programs.<sup>28</sup> And Minnesota has a higher percentage of ELL students than its neighboring states. Because of data limitations, NAEP scores are not available for ELL students by race and ethnicity for Minnesota, and consequently we cannot better explore whether Minnesota's low scores for different groups of students might tie to its high share of students with limited proficiency in English. We do know that Minnesota's ELL students score overall at the national average for ELL students on the 4th and 8th grade reading tests, statistically speaking, and on average they score higher on the 4th and 8th grade math tests than do ELL students nationwide.

Interestingly, Minnesota's 2009 NAEP scores for 4th and 8th grade reading would not increase in a statistically significant way unless the state's percentage of ELL students were to drop near zero. To examine this issue, we reweighted Minnesota's overall NAEP scores for 4th and 8th grade reading using a hypothetical 1% for the share of Minnesota's students in limited English proficiency programs, in place of the actual 7.4% share. Even at this level, the change in Minnesota's overall average reading scores for 4th and 8th graders would not have been statistically different from the actual scores.<sup>29</sup> It seems from these calculations that the state's high percentage of ELL students is not a significant drag on Minnesota's overall NAEP scores for 4th and 8th grade reading. But it remains possible that lower scores by Minnesota's ELL students dampen the average reading scores for some of Minnesota's racial and ethnic groups, something that we cannot explore using the NAEP data available for the state.

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28 The data for students who are English language learners is taken from the Common Core Data of the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics. Shares are based on the students enrolled in limited English proficiency programs for the 2008-09 school year.

29 For a hypothetical situation with the share of Minnesota's students enrolled in limited English proficiency programs set to 1%, the recalculation of 4<sup>th</sup> grade scores from the 2009 NAEP reading test show an overall level of 226, compared to the actual level for 2009 of 223. The confidence interval for the actual score ranges from 221 to 226, so the difference is not statistically significant. The hypothetical recalculation for 8<sup>th</sup> grade readings scores show an overall level of 271, compared to the actual 2009 level of 270, again with the difference not being statistically significant. For the recalculations, it was assumed that the share of students in those grade levels enrolled in limited English proficiency programs in 2009 was equal to the share of all Minnesota students enrolled in such programs (7.4%).



## More NAEP Results for Minnesota's Students

Growth & Justice analyzed the 2009 NAEP results for Minnesota, focusing on the performance of 4th and 8th graders on tests for mathematics and reading because research shows that language and math skills are crucial to educational success and future educational attainment.<sup>30</sup> A detailed Growth & Justice research report on the 2009 NAEP results, released in February 2011, is available at [http://www.growthandjustice.org/NAEP\\_Report](http://www.growthandjustice.org/NAEP_Report).<sup>31</sup> Here is additional information on Minnesota's results for the NAEP tests for 4<sup>th</sup> grade math and 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math.

### Significant gaps in Minnesota's test scores

The state's overall NAEP scores exceed the national averages for the grade levels and subjects examined, with Minnesota's 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade math results well above the U.S. mark, with the 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores higher also, and with the 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading just above the national average, as noted above. With the exception of 4th grade reading, Minnesota's White students performed above the national average on these 2009 NAEP tests, while the state's Black, Latino and American Indian students performed at the national averages, statistically speaking. For all the NAEP grade levels and subjects examined, Minnesota's Asian American students on average scored below the average for Asian Americans nationwide.

For the NAEP tests for 4<sup>th</sup> grade math and 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math, persistent and significant gaps exist in scores between Minnesota's White students and the state's students of color – as is true for 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading, too.

An examination of the 2009 NAEP results not by average scores but by proficiency levels also shows striking disparities between Minnesota's Whites and Minnesotans of color. Much smaller percentages of Black, Latino, Asian American and American Indian students in the state registered at levels above basic, proficient and advanced on the NAEP tests analyzed by Growth & Justice.

Startlingly, the percentage of Minnesota's 4th graders who scored at or above the advanced level for the 2009 NAEP 4<sup>th</sup> grade math test stands at only 2% of Black and Latino students and 5% of American Indian students. By contrast, 14% of Minnesota's White 4th graders scored at the advanced level for math. The 4<sup>th</sup> grade math results for Minnesota's Asian American students show 11% scored at the advanced level.

### Gaps common for low-income students

Low-income students in Minnesota – and nationwide – score lower on NAEP tests than students with higher household incomes. For average scores, Minnesota's low-income students exceeded their national peers for 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading and for 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade math. The Minnesota and national scores for 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading by low-income students were statistically even. The gaps in Minnesota between scores for low-income students and higher income students on the 2009 NAEP 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math tests and the 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math tests were statistically the same as the gaps nationally.

But Minnesota's gap for the 4th grade reading test for the state's low-income Blacks and Latinos – compared to Whites – is statistically larger than the national gaps. By contrast for 8th grade reading, only the state's gap between low-income Asian Americans and low-income White students is statistically larger than the national gap.

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30 For information on research regarding educational achievement and attainment, see *Smart Investments<sup>SM</sup> in Minnesota's Students: A Research-Based Investment Proposal*, Growth & Justice, October 2008. (Available at [http://growthandjustice.org/SIMS\\_REPORT](http://growthandjustice.org/SIMS_REPORT))

31 As noted, the NAEP data for the 2008-09 school year used for the Growth & Justice February 2011 report may differ slightly from NAEP results available in May 2011 and used here because of updates to the national data. Minnesota data has remained the same.

For this analysis of NAEP scores by both race and income levels, we used NAEP data on students who, because of low household income levels, qualify for the nation’s free and reduced-price school meal program. It’s worth noting that use of the data on students eligible for free or reduced-price meals does not capture the range for poverty, but rather looks at a single set of markers for all students falling under the established household income thresholds. It’s possible that greater degrees of poverty adversely affect scores.

## **Race and ethnicity matter**

Some argue that achievement gaps among Minnesota’s demographic groups tie back to issues of income, not race and ethnicity – that is, that Minnesotans of color are more likely to score lower on achievement tests because a greater share of these students live in low-income households and, in general, low-income students from all racial and ethnic backgrounds score lower on standardized tests. If income is the driver, we would expect to see students of color from low-income families score similarly to students from low-income White families when it comes to NAEP tests. But the Minnesota NAEP data show that significant gaps exist between low-income White students and low-income students of color in most cases for these math and reading test scores. This suggests that household income levels alone may not explain the gap for students of color. For this analysis, we again used data on students qualifying for the nation’s free or reduced-price school meal program, and these data do not factor in levels of poverty.



# A Smart Investment Agenda for Education in Minnesota

Clearly, Minnesota must rise to the challenge and improve educational achievement and attainment for the state's students of color and American Indian students, even as the state continues to boost success for all. With continued rapid growth expected in Minnesota's communities of color, the state's high performance on many educational benchmarks will slip unless many more Minnesotans of color excel in school. Growing numbers of Minnesota's leaders from business, government and the classroom recognize that the economic strength of the state and the well-being of all its residents depend upon ending inequities and advancing education for Minnesotans of color. Attention to early learning might be of particular importance, given that the NAEP 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores show trouble for the state.

Progress is both required and possible. We already know many research-based, cost-effective policies and strategies for improving education from early childhood through post-secondary study. Effective efforts will benefit all children and youth, of course, but will be particularly valuable for improving educational success among students of color and American Indian students. Growth & Justice's 2011 *Smart Investment Agenda for Education in Minnesota* spells out the following evidence-based recommendations and priorities for improving education across the continuum from birth to higher education, with the goal of increasing the higher education attainment rate to 75% by the year 2020.<sup>32</sup>

## For children from birth through age 3

- Improve prenatal care and health care in the first years of life to foster vital brain development and a strong start, targeting low-income families and families of color.
- Increase 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, strong parent-child interactions, child development and learning within the family.
- Expand 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.

## For children from age 4 through grade 3

- Expand 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.
- Use 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 small-size classes having effects through high school graduation.
- Improve 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.
- Increase 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.

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<sup>32</sup> The complete agenda is available at [www.growthandjustice.org/2011EdAgenda](http://www.growthandjustice.org/2011EdAgenda). For more detail on the recommendations and the evidence that supports them, see the separate Growth & Justice education briefs for each of five stages of education available at [www.growthandjustice.org/Ed\\_Briefs](http://www.growthandjustice.org/Ed_Briefs) and see also *Smart Investments<sup>SM</sup> in Minnesota's Students: A Research-Based Proposal*. Additional research findings are available in the education policy publications listed under "Research Reports" at [www.growthandjustice.org/Ed\\_Research](http://www.growthandjustice.org/Ed_Research).

## For students in grades 4 through 8

- Provide intensive tutoring assistance targeted to increase the academic success of low-performing students as they take rigorous coursework.
- Offer 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.
- Improve 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.
- Initiate 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.

## For high school and the transition to college

- Offer rigorous coursework matched with ongoing assessments to ensure progress toward increased knowledge, high school graduation and opportunities for higher education.
- Put forth 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 Minnesota's Post-Secondary Enrollment Options program that allows students to take classes at public colleges and universities.
- Institute 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.
- Hire more high school counselors in order to reduce Minnesota's 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.
- Improve out-of-school support for high school students, including tutoring initiatives, mentoring programs, and efforts to reduce teen pregnancy rates.
- Ramp up 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.
- Increase need-based financial aid to make higher education affordable for students with limited means.
- Expand counseling and academic preparation for college readiness, with a focus on promising, low-income students with academic potential.

## Other Resources and Recommendations

A number of Minnesota organizations have identified additional recommendations aimed at improving educational outcomes and specifically targeted for students of color. Notable among them are the ideas presented by the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership in its 2010 [College Access Matters II](#) report and its report on [The State of Students of Color and American Indian Students](#). And the Minneapolis-based Organizing Apprenticeship Project has released a report on [16 Solutions that Deliver Equity and Excellence in Education](#) with other valuable ideas for improving education for all students, particularly Minnesotans of color.

## The Greatest Return on Investment

For Growth & Justice, a key guiding principle for public-sector investment in education is this: The greatest return on education investment comes from addressing the greatest disparities in opportunity and achievement. This is true for the individual students but true as well for the gains to the state. Effective investments address the needs of the whole student — social support, academic preparation, and improved access to early childhood and post-secondary learning opportunities. Minnesota must make necessary progress on educational achievement and attainment by students of color in particular, something that will advance both individual well-being and the economy of our state.

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