Workforce Development—Challenges and Opportunities

In the coming decade, 70 percent of jobs in Minnesota will require education beyond high school. Yet today only 40 percent of working-age adults in the state possess a post-secondary degree—a group that is disproportionately white.

As the (mostly white) baby boom generation begins to retire in large numbers, employers will rely on the state’s increasingly diverse population to fill its jobs.

People of color make up the fastest growing segment of the state’s population; in the Twin Cities, people of color will grow from 24 percent of the metro area’s overall population in 2010 to a projected 43 percent by 2040.

The current racial gap in educational attainment in Minnesota will have serious consequences for the economy.

At greatest risk for non-completion are students of color, first generation college students, those with limited English language proficiency, and returning adult students—precisely the groups upon which our workforce will be most reliant in the coming years.

In Minnesota, the persistence rate from the first year to the second year for students who attend two-year institutions (57 percent) is substantially lower than the rate for students who attend...

Legislative wrap-up for 2013-14: Historic progress

The second year of the 2013-14 legislative session is headed toward an outcome that will earn this legislative biennium a place in Minnesota history as one of the most constructive and progressive since the 1970s.

After a decade of disinvestment in public goods and services, accompanied by economic stagnation and marked by anti-government animus, Minnesota forged ahead in 2013-14 with breakthroughs on several fronts.

Hundreds of nonprofits, business associations, labor unions, religious organizations and other citizens’ groups played a part in this progress. Growth & Justice is one of them, as we helped chart the course and provide context and rationale for a broad array of policy reforms and reversals.

Let’s count the ways:

• The pressing inequality problem finally got some attention. Restoring higher marginal tax rates to the wealthiest Minnesotans in 2013 and the largest minimum wage increase in recent history will slow the growing inequality that threatens our economy. The forces that drive this inequality are global and national in scope, but Minnesota has reasserted itself as a state that will act locally to broaden prosperity.

• Early childhood education, the first and critically important building block in our trademarked Smart Investments in Minnesota’s Students framework, took a giant leap forward with funding for parent-directed scholarships for...

Greater Minnesota education initiatives

What does educational success mean to you? That’s the question we asked in Austin, Minnesota earlier this month, at a lively and engaging “Feast and Conversation” event. This gathering was hosted by Riverland Community College, the Parenting Resource Center, Marnita’s Table and Growth & Justice, and is part of our ongoing work in rural Minnesota to support and connect communities that are creating collaborative educational initiatives.

Growth & Justice has established and is nurturing an unofficial network of five communities in Greater Minnesota that are making real, measurable progress toward collaborative community partnerships that improve student outcomes from cradle-to-career. Our efforts are helping build a spirit of teamwork and cohesiveness and a feeling that a rural statewide student success movement is...
Leaders must always watch their bottom line. And here’s the bottom line on why you should increase your financial contribution (or make your first donation) to Growth & Justice this year. **No other organization in Minnesota makes the case more persistently and more effectively that reducing economic inequality and eliminating racial disparities (the Justice part) is good for business and the broader economy (the Growth part).**

Amid partisan division and in the face of anti-government extremism, we argue constructively for economy-strengthening public investment in education, infrastructure, and health care. Progressive policies that benefit the average Minnesotan AND the business sector are the best way to build broader prosperity and enhance our quality of life. Growth & Justice does this work and makes this case like no other organization.

**How do we know?**

- Twin Cities Business magazine named us as one of the region’s “most dynamic business and policy leaders.” I forcefully argued in TCB’s profile on us that inequality and racial opportunity gaps had become our state’s most important policy concern, reminding readers that “our human capital is always going to be our strong suit and we have to invest in it.”
- The McKnight Foundation invited us to present a legislative session overview in early 2014, for all McKnight grantees who seek policy changes at the state level. Our presentation made the case for “competitiveness, writ larger” as the overarching theme.
- We wrote the well-received cover commentary in the Sunday (March 23) Star Tribune Op-Ex section, calling for a more holistic understanding of Minnesota’s economic competitiveness.
- We’ve been an active partner in legislative coalitions this session, seeking sufficient early childhood funding to meet the needs of children on long waiting lists, advocating for an ambitious and much-needed transportation/ transit package, supporting an increase in the minimum wage, and working on proposals for reducing racial disparities in education and employment measures.
- As a recognized voice for broader prosperity and public investment, we frequently are called on to testify at the state Capitol, speak to civic groups, participate in forums and panels, write commentary, and appear on a variety of broadcast media.
- Our presence in suburban and rural Minnesota is strong and expanding. We’ve recently been featured at business and community forums with the Twin West Chamber of Commerce and on transportation issues in Woodbury, and participated in a panel on business issues for AM1570 in Eagan. Our current major project—supported by the Blandin Foundation—is helping build a movement in Greater Minnesota for community partnerships that drive student success, increase postsecondary completion, and close racial and income disparities in education outcomes.

**So, you might say, that’s fine for sustaining our support, but why are you asking for an increase?**

Over more than a decade of work on a practical and progressive agenda for Minnesota, we have received substantial support from Minnesota’s leading philanthropic foundations. But nonprofit experts will tell you that this foundation support should not be relied upon for long-term operational support. Indeed, we are shifting our fundraising mix to satisfy our long-term revenue outlook, and plan to increase the portion of our budget raised from individual donors. We are challenging all our supporters large and small to increase their giving this year, by 10% or more, if you can.

We know you give to other worthy causes, and it takes many to do this important prosperity-broadening work. **But few groups tie it all together the way that Growth & Justice does, with a coherent world-view that appeals to intelligent, practical-minded citizens and voters.**

Our voice appeals to the wide ideological center, and builds on the historic tradition of consensus in Minnesota, shared by those who value both the private sector and the public sector, and who understand that policies to help all our people reach their fullest potential will be good for the broader Minnesota economy.
A “Competitiveness” theme for 2014 and beyond

One foundational theme of Growth & Justice is that reducing economic inequality is good for economic growth. A particularly persuasive way of explaining this philosophy is with a new definition of “competitiveness.”

“Competitiveness” has been an effective buzzword in advancing a business-driven agenda with a rather narrow focus over the last 30 years. Since the early 1980s, in Minnesota and across America, we have been told that for the sake of international competitiveness, jobs had to be outsourced, wages and pensions and health care benefits downsized, and environmental and financial regulations reduced.

In the name of competitiveness, we were persuaded to cut federal and state income tax rates and capital gains taxes, and to treat our public sector as a beast to be starved. And to ensure regional and state competitiveness, we spent billions in direct aid or tax favors for businesses through mechanisms such as the JOBZ program, ethanol subsidies, or for sports stadiums.

The results have not been impressive, except for those at the very top. Mountains of wealth were created during a couple of long growth spurts and several speculative bubbles, with a climactic crash in 2008. And a consensus has emerged that too narrow a focus on cheap labor and lower taxes has increased economic insecurity and inequality within almost every nation, badly damaging the basic economic health of middle-income and working-class families.

The very good news is that competitiveness is being redefined, writ wiser and larger. The word increasingly is being used to describe the things we do with tax dollars and public policies to realize human potential, to equalize opportunity and education, to improve physical infrastructure and basic research, and to expand cultural and social amenities enjoyed by everyone.

An example of this thinking is the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development and its recent “State Economic Competitiveness Summit” featuring workshops with titles like “Driving the Talent Pipeline,” “Aligning Business Needs with Training and Education,” “Broadband Expansion and Economic Opportunity” and “Regional Collaboration Through Public/
underway.

A premier example of local leadership includes new “student success” partnerships that are germinating in Austin, the Itasca County area, Northfield, Red Wing and St. Cloud. These partnerships have in common a theory of change developed by the Strive Together network based in Cincinnati.

Each of the Strive partnerships relies on a broad and formal collaboration among local schools and colleges, parents and students, nonprofits, businesses, philanthropies, and other community partners. Each partnership is developing a birth-to-career roadmap for their students, with specific goals such as kindergarten readiness or reading proficiency by third grade, and establishing action networks to identify specific interventions to achieve the goals. There is strong emphasis on data and results and multiple measures of academic, social and developmental success, as well as the fostering of personal relationships that can be crucial to unlocking human potential.

Although the Strive model aims to close opportunity gaps for low-income students and students of color, the framework is focused on improving the performance of all students. All children will do better when the entire community has a stake in birth-to-career improvements and supports postsecondary and career readiness.

Cradle-to-career partnerships that have developed in rural Minnesota fit right into the Growth & Justice Smart Investments in Minnesota’s Students framework that calls for comprehensive interventions and evidence-tested methods to improve students success and to prepare more students for career and college readiness.

A recent national report echoed the call for establishing these partnerships as a key strategy for equitable economic development in the state. Among the report’s policy recommendations for moving Minnesota toward more equitable growth, one stands out: Minnesota must create cradle-to-career pipelines to prepare students and workers for lifelong success. The report, Minnesota’s Tomorrow, Equity is the Superior Growth Model, commissioned by leading foundations in Minnesota and written by PolicyLink, puts extra emphasis on meeting the needs of children, reflecting the growing consensus in Minnesota—shared by experts and business leaders—that our economic future depends on eliminating the education opportunity gap that exists for low-income students and students of color across the state. The authors of the report advise communities to develop local “pipeline approaches that follow children throughout their education.”

Most people in rural Minnesota don’t need national experts to tell them this common sense fact. And many communities are already forming broad multi-sector partnerships to work on their birth-to-career pipelines. These partnerships are working in collaborative and comprehensive ways, in and out of schools, focusing on the best evidence and data to find out what’s most needed and what’s most effective in getting kids all the way to career and college readiness. Growth & Justice is playing a key role in nurturing the partnerships, collecting evidence and telling the story about what is working in rural Minnesota to support student success, economic development and community vitality.

Growth & Justice is taking a lead role in connecting and supporting several communities in rural Minnesota that are undertaking these community-led educational initiatives. The principles in this theory are being replicated in rural communities around the state, as demonstrated by the diverse, enthusiastic, and engaged attendees at the Austin Feast and Conversation. Along with initiatives already underway in Worthington, Willmar, Northfield, and other communities, we see this trend growing into a statewide movement.

**Congratulations Maureen & Tane**

Growth & Justice is proud to recognize and commend two of our own in the 2014 class of Bush Leadership Fellows: board member Tane Danger, and policy and research director Maureen Ramirez. The Bush Foundation “seeks leaders who have already demonstrated exceptional gifts, who could benefit from intensive development through self-designed or academic programs, and who are committed to making the region a better place.”
four-year institutions (78 percent). Further, graduation rates are highly stratified by race: while 63 percent of white students enrolled in the state’s four-year institutions graduate within six years, just 37 percent of black students and 51 percent of Hispanic students do so. And only 16 degrees are awarded for every 100 students of color in the state, while among white students, 21 degrees are awarded for every 100 students. This is one of the largest gaps in the country.

Four-year institutions graduate within six years, just 37 percent of black students and 51 percent of Hispanic students do so. And only 16 degrees are awarded for every 100 students of color in the state, while among white students, 21 degrees are awarded for every 100 students. This is one of the largest gaps in the country. These figures represent lost opportunities for individuals and lost economic capacity for our region.

Access to high quality, relevant education and training are imperative to all workers’ labor market prospects, and “skilling up” an increasingly diverse workforce is critical to economic growth and competitiveness in the Twin Cities. Increasing career pathways opportunities for Minnesota residents is a strategy that will move our region toward workforce equity, for a competitive economy.

Career pathways programs are designed to minimize the time it takes for adult students to earn industry-recognized credentials that pay off in the labor market. Minnesota FastTRAC (Training, Resources and Credentialing) is perhaps our best known homegrown example of career pathways programming.

FastTRAC, like a number of other career pathways programs, joins vocational and basic skills instruction. Rather than requiring students to spend time in basic or remedial courses before they can pursue occupational training, FastTRAC combines the two. Under this model, Adult Basic Education and community college instructors together teach courses that weave foundational math and literacy skills into occupational training. In addition, career pathways programs typically offer a range of support services to students, helping them to overcome the academic and personal challenges that can make staying in school difficult. Often these services are provided by community-based organizations working in conjunction with educational institutions.

Spotlight on MN FastTRAC

MN FastTRAC Adult Career Pathway programs are on 29 MnSCU campuses, training students for careers in industry sectors important to the state economy: healthcare, manufacturing, education, business, energy, and more.

As of December 2012, Minnesota FastTRAC programs have served more than 1,900 adults.

- 88% of these adults received an industry recognized credential or earned credits toward that credential.
- 69% of these adults had success either gaining employment and/or continuing into further career pathway education. Initial employment analysis of FastTRAC is available on a limited data set of program graduates; as of May 2012, 70% entered employment and 61% retained employment for 6 months.

For more information, visit: mnfasttrac.org.


Competitiveness

Private Partnerships.” There were no breakout sessions on reducing taxes, regulations or labor costs (although pressure for those policies will no doubt continue).

Meanwhile, some of Minnesota’s leading philanthropic foundations, originally funded largely by the state’s most successful and magnanimous capitalists of the last century, have been stressing competitiveness achieved through improved human development, as opposed to charity. Typical mission statements for the nonprofits they fund call for a more inclusive prosperity, creating vibrant communities and, increasingly, attacking racial disparities head-on.

The Metropolitan Council, the key agency that helps coordinate and plan growth and public infrastructure in the entire Twin Cities region, recently launched Thrive MSP 2040, a long-term plan for the region based more explicitly on achieving racial equity, and on the premise that concentrations of racial poverty will harm the region’s competitiveness.

Greater MSP, a coalition of business groups, foundations and city leaders committed to promotion and economic development for the metropolitan region, is all about competitiveness, writ larger. The coalition emphasizes the region’s diversity, its overall rankings in education attainment, our first-rate infrastructure and public amenities, and a highly competitive overall cost of doing business—rather than focusing on a particular ranking for a certain type of income or corporate tax.

In the coming months, we will amplify this competitiveness theme, reclaiming the word and expanding and improving its meaning. Throughout 156 years of statehood, Minnesotans have distinguished themselves by understanding that building a better place and stronger people is the best recipe for economic growth.
The following is a list of contributions received in 2013. Please contact us at info@growthandjustice.org regarding any errors or omissions.

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key issues for board consideration during the Plan development process include: fundraising and long-term financial health, governance and board committees, and policy development. The Plan is expected to provide focus to help guide key decisions for the organization over the three years covered in the Plan.

Some new areas may be explored, including ways to identify measures and goals for organizational success. The work of Growth & Justice is often long-term and cumulative, which can be difficult to measure with the usual metrics. The focus on Minnesota policy will remain, as will our fundamental commitment to increasing access to prosperity for all Minnesotans.