

IN THIS ISSUE

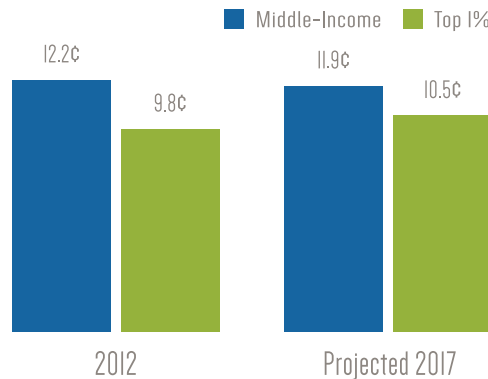
- 1 Making progress against tax regressivity
- 1 Competitiveness depends on workforce equity
- 1 North Star Summit
- 2 From the President
- 3 Rural Partnerships Gaining Broad Support
- 3 Inequality Trends in Minnesota: A County-Level Analysis
- 6 Thank you 2014 donors!

MAKING PROGRESS AGAINST TAX REGRESSIVITY

Over the last two years, Minnesota has made more progress than any other state in reducing the regressivity of the state-and-local tax system, according to a Growth & Justice report authored this spring by Policy Fellow Jeff Van Wychen.

Our report, “Minnesota’s Progress Against Regressivity,” shows what experts have long known, that almost every state has slightly to woefully regressive tax systems. This means those at the very top income levels pay a smaller percentage of their income in state and

STATE & LOCAL TAX PER DOLLAR OF INCOME 2012 VS. 2017



local taxes than those in the middle and bottom. And despite the widely acknowledged national crisis of growing overall economic inequality, tax regressivity in most states actually worsened over the last two years. Minnesota was one of just 10 states that bucked this trend, reducing regressivity and climbing from the 16th to 7th least regressive state, the Growth & Justice report shows.

The sobering context, as many have observed, is that Minnesota’s tax system remains regressive. Households in the very top income brackets continue to capture a disproportionate share of economic growth and an

continued on pages 4 & 5

COMPETITIVENESS DEPENDS ON WORKFORCE EQUITY

Growth & Justice is in strong agreement with the main thrust of a recent policy brief by the highly regarded business-led Itasca Project:

“Our regional competitiveness depends on broadening opportunities for a more diverse and inclusive workforce.”

“**Depends on.**” Not “would improve with” or “might be better with.”

By 2040, about 40 percent of our Twin Cities metropolitan area workforce will be people of color, and our state and region will not stay strong economically with the current racial disparities that exist in employment and education attainment.

The Twin Cities, despite robust job growth overall in recent years, ranks just above Detroit and St. Louis, or 23rd among 25 major metropolitan areas, in the employment rate gap between white workers and workers of color. The Itasca Project’s report is directed at private-sector managers and employers themselves, and it implores them to accelerate diversification efforts, by making personal commitments, setting goals and making and implementing plans for a more inclusive workforce.

Growth & Justice is keenly focused on identifying and supporting public policies that advance workforce equity. We helped capture public attention and bipartisan resolve

continued on page 4

NORTH STAR SUMMIT

More than 250 people gathered at the Minnesota History Center in early December for the North Star Summit, which focused on the future workforce needs of our state and how to best address them. Growth & Justice, the Minnesota Senate, and the Citizens League led the planning of this event, which included many co-sponsors, including the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, the Minnesota Business Partnership, Minnesota Education Equity Partnership and the Bush Foundation.

The summit featured an extended conversation with metro-area DFL Sen. Terri Bonoff, the chair of the Higher Education and Workforce Development Division of the Senate Finance Committee; Sen. Jeremy Miller, a Republican business owner from Winona who is earning a

continued on page 5

FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dane Smith

At Hamline University's Community Economic Development Symposium in May, we were asked to be the first presenter on a panel of five Minnesota policy leaders. We were charged with providing an opening overview of economic inequality in Minnesota and how that relates to workforce needs.

I began our presentation by noting that if you search the internet for "Inequality in Minnesota," links to our work pop up near the top of the page. I asserted that we had become "the keepers of the flame" on inequality, and racial disparity in particular, and how both of those conditions threaten economic growth.

Our drumbeat of recent commentary and research underscores that an "equity agenda" must become the driving force in public policy in Minnesota, supplanting a once prevailing anti-government and anti-tax mentality. No other group makes the business case for the equity agenda as effectively and persistently as we do.

You, as supporters of Growth & Justice, are helping us make this happen, through both your contributions to us and your attention to these issues. The individuals, foundations and many other partners that donate to us or

otherwise ally with our work have helped turn both the tide of public opinion and the ship of state in Minnesota. Through timely research projects and reports, and presentations to groups from one end of the state to the other, we have changed the dominant public policy narrative.

One recent example is our "Equity" op-ed, which landed on the cover of the Sunday Star Tribune Op-Ex section on March 27. The article describes the recent ascendance of the word "equity" in public policy discourse, and the wrong-headed pushback against it. We argue further that this word is not just trendy, but that it is the very best word to describe policies that invest in human capital and human potential, and that build assets for families and individuals on the wrong side of widening inequality.

Striving for economic fairness and racial justice is righteous work, a form of civil rights advocacy for which Minnesotans can be proud. We Minnesotans have a legacy of more than 150 years of leadership on this cause, from all our major political parties, going back to early statehood and the Civil War.

Equity is not only about doing what's right. It also makes perfect business sense. A recent Itasca Project report cites four specific competitive advantages of a more diverse and equitable workforce: stronger connections to a more diverse customer base; less "groupthink" and better decisions; increased innovation; and better financial results on the company bottom line. This line from the Itasca Project policy brief sums it up pretty well, as an opportunity rather than a problem: "We have yet to tap the full potential of our region's human capital."

Influential as we have been in nonpartisan framing of the big

picture, our fingerprints are all over the important details of new laws and policy in Minnesota. Recommendations from our special projects on rural education partnerships and workforce equity, in particular, are finding their way into statute books. (See more details on these two projects elsewhere in this newsletter).

Progress toward equity is underway but much more needs to be done, and progress made always needs to be fiercely defended. Our recent report on Minnesota's success in reducing tax regressivity is an example of progress, while our report on inequalities within the state, county-by-county, shows that we still have far to go. (See articles on both those reports in this newsletter).

We humbly and earnestly seek your continued attention, your financial support and your unflagging efforts to help us win more hearts and minds in Minnesota for an equity agenda.

GROWTH & JUSTICE

- Growth & Justice is a research and advocacy organization that develops innovative public policy proposals based on independent research and civic engagement. We believe when Minnesota makes *smart investments in practical solutions* it leads to *broader prosperity* for all.

GROWTH & JUSTICE
 970 Raymond Avenue
 Suite 105
 Saint Paul, MN 55114
 phone: 651-917-6037
info@growthandjustice.org
growthandjustice.org

Newsletter design & layout by
 Mark Tundel

RURAL PARTNERSHIPS GAINING BROAD SUPPORT

Growth & Justice continues to connect, nurture and publicize five communities in Greater Minnesota (the “Strive Five”) that are making real, measurable progress on collaborative community partnerships that improve student outcomes from cradle to career. Our efforts are building a spirit of teamwork and cohesiveness and a growing statewide awareness that a rural student success movement is underway. In addition, we are establishing new connections with other partnerships in rural Minnesota, including Grand Marais and Alexandria, with an eye toward including them in this network.

A recent development in this work is the formation of new relationships between rural Strive partners and the Promise Neighborhoods in Minneapolis and St Paul. Growth & Justice, led by Policy & Research Director Maureen Ramirez, was instrumental in initiating and forging a close alliance among five partnerships (Red Wing, Northfield, St. Cloud, Northside Achievement Zone in Minneapolis, and the St. Paul Promise Neighborhood) in support of the Minnesota Education Partnerships Fund. The legislation proposes a state fund that would invest in Minnesota communities that are establishing, building or sustaining educational partnerships aimed at coordinating and collaborating for student success. The bill supports cradle-to-career educational initiatives that are data-driven and cross-sector, and establishes a competitive grant program for funding the work of the initiatives. The legislation advanced through several House and Senate committees but was not included in its entirety in the K-12 omnibus education bill.

Although the immediate fate of the legislation is uncertain as we go to press, this progress is a positive step forward in educating and familiarizing decision-makers about the depth and breadth of rural educational partnerships in Minnesota, and their importance to the students in those communities. Maureen Ramirez and Dane Smith testified several times before House and Senate committees about the rural education partnership movement. In addition, rural and urban allies for the legislation visited with dozens of legislators from all over the state—rural, urban and suburban—making the case for state support of both rural and urban partnerships.



Rep. Tim Kelly and other supporters of Rural Partnerships.

As a result, new supporters for community partnerships have been created throughout Minnesota, with some legislators expressing an interest in starting similar initiatives in their own districts.

INEQUALITY TRENDS IN MINNESOTA: A COUNTY-LEVEL ANALYSIS

The 2014 election and the 2015 legislative session have brought a new focus in Minnesota on regional inequalities between the Twin Cities metropolitan area and rural or Greater Minnesota.

A new report by Tom Legg and Ngoc Nguyen provides important factual context for understanding these disparities, for policymakers and for all Minnesotans concerned about the immediate and long-term damage that growing regional inequity could do to our state.

In essence, the report paints a picture of three divergent Minnesotas, rather than simply a metro-rural divide, and shows how urban core and rural areas suffer most from inequality and poverty, while suburban and exurban counties are much more prosperous and more evenly so.

This work builds on a previous Growth & Justice report which showed that Minnesota, as a whole, is indeed suffering from growing inequality that tracks with national trends. That report demonstrated how inequality had worsened in Minnesota over time, and compared our measures of inequality to those in other states.

The latest report reveals how inequality varies among the 87 counties across the state, and how these measure have been changing in recent years. While it’s long been known that the Twin Cities metropolitan area overall has significantly higher incomes than Greater Minnesota, the new report shows that poverty and inequality is greatest in the two urban core counties of Hennepin and Ramsey, and in the most

continued on page 8

WORKFORCE EQUITY

continued from page 1

by co-sponsoring a North Star Summit for policymakers which focused on these issues before the 2015 session began.

Here are eight key types of policy reforms and investments that we and many other allied groups have advocated for during the 2015 legislative session, and which we will continue to emphasize:

Career Pathways: Making higher education and training available on a come-and-get-it basis is no longer enough. Young people need more help and support in this increasingly complex economy. A career pathways grant program, which will fund and expand a variety of innovative efforts to obtain faster training and credentials for jobs in high demand, must be approved. The “pathways” approach is a comprehensive and effective strategy that simultaneously provides skills instruction, job training and support services.

Remediation reform: Disadvantaged students who are compelled to spend money and time on postsecondary remedial courses, for no credit, seldom graduate. Creative proposals to break through that obstacle are advancing, led by the group Students for Education Reform.

Apprenticeships: Efforts like the very promising Minnesota PIPELINE Project, modeled on the widely admired German model of simultaneous employment and training, need to be funded and expanded.

Evaluation and performance funding: MSPWin, a collaboration of foundations seeking workforce equity and efficiency, is urging a variety of improvements in outcome reporting and evaluation of all the various higher-ed and workforce training programs, with an eye on steering more

funding to those that are most effective.

Early credits: Proposals to increase the variety of dual-credit courses offered in high school and to expand opportunities for all ninth- and 10th-graders, not just gifted students in the higher grades, must advance.

Statewide goals: Many other states in recent years have set a specific goal for overall higher education attainment—Growth & Justice has long advocated for a 75 percent postsecondary completion goal—as well as long-term goals for ending racial disparities, and interim goals for reducing them.

Cost reduction: The price tag and debt burden for credentials remains a prohibitive barrier for too many young people of color and those

from low-income families. We support proposals that move toward free or reduced community and technical college, that freeze tuition and reduce education debt, that increase need-based student aid, and that restore basic state funding for public higher-ed systems.

Full employment, at livable wages: Recent national research highlights how workforce equity and dramatic gains for communities of color really begins to happen when full employment is reached, as was almost the case in the 1990s, and when wages rise. Tens of thousands of Minnesotans are still unemployed, or underemployed. Thousands more jobs, most of them in the private sector, would be created with a larger transportation funding bill, and a larger bonding bill for state infrastructure construction projects.

REGRESSIVITY

continued from page 1

even more lopsided share of assets and wealth. Recent national reports continue to document that this inequality trend, underway since the 1970s, is not relenting.

State tax-and-budget policy alone cannot solve this inequality crisis, which generally is attributed to the dynamics of global capitalism, a technology revolution and federal policy-making. But a more progressive tax structure can reduce the severity of these trends and enhance the purchasing power of low and moderate income households. In addition, a more progressive and ample revenue system will be better able to generate the resources needed to adequately fund schools, roads, health care, economic security and other public services and investments that reduce inequality.

Minnesota’s new marginal rates on top incomes still are not as high as they were as recently as the 1970s. Minnesota’s Tax Incidence Study shows that—even after the progress in reducing tax regressivity resulting from the 2013 and 2014 tax legislation—state and local taxes per dollar of income for the top one percent of Minnesota households are 12 percent lower than they are for middle income families.

The wealthiest Minnesotans thus are still paying less in state and local taxes per dollar of income than any other group in the state. Their income and wealth is growing in part due to an enviable system of public investments

continued on page 5

REGRESSIVITY that puts Minnesota near the top on most measures of business growth, quality of life, and socio-economic health.

Numerous bills that advanced in the 2015 legislative session would potentially erase this progress. Growth & Justice testified before legislative committees against proposals to dramatically

reduce the state's progressive estate tax, to provide state income tax breaks on Social Security income that would primarily benefit high-income households, and to cut the highly progressive renters property tax refund.

Fairness can't be the only criterion for decision-making on our state's tax and budget policy. Stability, revenue sufficiency, and economic competitiveness

must also be factored in. But Minnesota, which has long had a more progressive tax system than the average state, has also fared better than most of those other states on most measures of well-being. Backsliding again toward regressivity makes no sense at all, and Growth & Justice will continue speaking against policies that would allow this to happen.

NORTH STAR SUMMIT

continued from page 1



A small group, including MnSCU Chancellor Steven Rosenstone and Senator Dave Senjem, discuss setting goals for higher education at the North Star Summit.

of the Minnesota Education Equity Partnership; Steve Hine from the State Department of Employment and Economic Development; and Larry Isek, president of the Minnesota Higher Education Compact.

Responding to questions and policy options in real time with interactive "clickers," almost 90 percent of attendees said it was either "absolutely necessary" or "important" that Minnesota establish goals for higher education attainment, an idea first advanced by Growth & Justice in the foundational *Smart Investments in Minnesota's Students* report.

ages of 25 and 44, who hold postsecondary degrees or certificates, to be increased to at least 70 percent by 2025.

Growth & Justice's commitment to a statewide attainment goal began with the Smart Investments in Minnesota's Students project in 2007. This year's passage of statewide goal language marks a significant accomplishment, and creates a unifying vision for the state and institutions to work toward. The Office of Higher Education will work over the summer, with input from stakeholders, including Growth & Justice, to address the measurement and interim benchmarks for the goal.

reputation for working across the aisle; and Rep. Carlos Mariani, longtime leader of the Minnesota Education Equity Partnership, a respected senior legislator and champion of race equity policies, and former chair of the House Education Policy Committee.

Participants heard a compelling case for rethinking how to accelerate specialized training and postsecondary credential attainment, especially for our fast-growing communities of color. Presenters included State Demographer Susan Brower; Jennifer Godinez, acting director

The summit generated lively group conversations which produced dozens of creative ideas and strategies for equitable workforce development in Minnesota. It also resulted in specific proposals being advanced at the Legislature, including a bill for setting a statewide postsecondary attainment goal. This attainment goal was passed as part of the Higher Education Omnibus bill and calls for the share of Minnesota residents between the



Left to Right: Representative Carlos Mariani, Senator Terri Bonoff, Nate Garvis, and Senator Jeremy Miller discuss statewide higher education attainment at the North Star Summit in St Paul on December 8.

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INEQUALITY

continued from page 3

rural counties of northern Minnesota. In contrast, the Twin Cities' outer suburban and exurban counties enjoy high levels of homogenous affluence, low rates of poverty, and relatively low rates of inequality.

This research challenges the notion that the geographic inequality divide in Minnesota is essentially between the Twin Cities and Greater Minnesota. Rather, this divide is better understood as a chasm between an evenly affluent suburban and exurban ring, and the less prosperous, more unequal places inside and outside that ring.

Growth & Justice is committed to maintaining a strong focus in our research and advocacy on reducing overall economic inequality and unsustainable disparities whether by geographic region, by race, or by gender.

