

# WHOLE TOWNS COMING TOGETHER FOR ALL STUDENTS

*A Growth & Justice Education Policy Report*

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**GROWTH & JUSTICE**

Growth & Justice is a nonprofit, nonpartisan 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.

# Overview

This report describes progress being made by community engagement initiatives toward improving student success and closing achievement and attainment gaps in an increasingly diverse Greater Minnesota. We highlight some promising community efforts happening across the state in rural towns and cities outside the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

## Key Findings and Recommendations

- Historical precedent is strong in Minnesota for vigorous and inclusive community involvement in educational success for all. Despite economic challenges and increasing racial diversity, evidence shows the effectiveness of community engagement and points to a revival in such activity across the nation.
- Many communities across Minnesota already are coming together in purposeful and energetic ways to plan for greater success for all students. We describe examples of initiatives happening in regions and communities outside the Twin Cities area, including: the Brainerd Lakes area; Cook County and Grand Marais; Itasca County and Grand Rapids; Northfield; Rochester; St. Cloud; Willmar; and Worthington. In addition, we cite other models and programs sponsored by foundations, nonprofits and other organizations.
- Bolder and broader “cradle-to-career” strategies – comprehensive, data-driven plans that begin near birth and focus on improving measurable progress all the way to career readiness – show the most promise for success.



*The changing complexion and the hopeful faces of tomorrow’s rural Minnesota are reflected here. Students eat breakfast at Prairie Elementary School in Worthington, Minn., the town’s only elementary school, bulging with more than 1,000 students for grades K-4 and a non-white enrollment approaching 40 percent. Despite this challenge, graduation rates and test scores for minority youth are improving in Worthington and citizen engagement focused on fostering similar student success is emerging in Minnesota communities from Willmar to Grand Rapids and Grand Marais, and from Rochester to Brainerd and many points in between.*

*Photo by Ben Garvin/Pioneer Press/Associated Press*



# Historical Precedent and Evidence Are Strong for Community Engagement in Student Success

Urban and metropolitan areas have dominated the stage in the vital national and state policy debate over how to improve education attainment and achievement, and how to diminish the stubborn gaps on both attainment and achievement between races and income levels. Most of the best-selling books, documentaries and news coverage of the challenges facing our students and our educational system have focused on schools in New York City or Los Angeles or Chicago, and in Minnesota, on the densely populated city neighborhoods in Minneapolis and St. Paul.

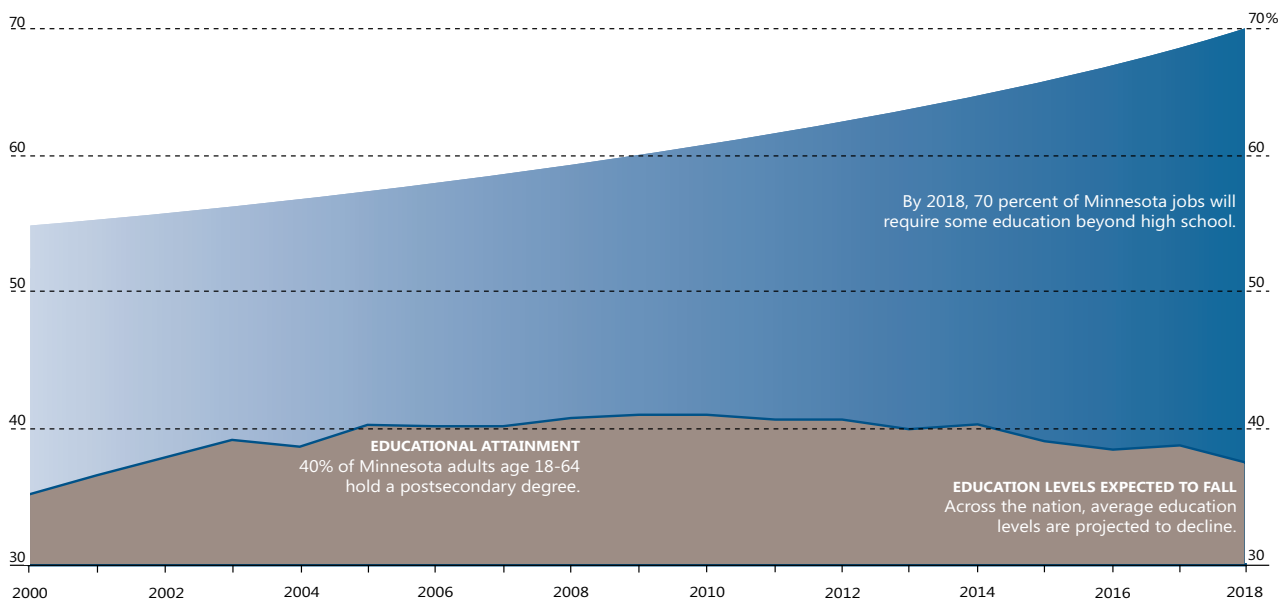
The result has been a comparative neglect in the national consciousness of rural and non-metro students. This tendency was flagged in a scholarly review of the state of rural youth more than a decade ago by University of Nebraska researchers, who proposed that inattention to rural youth may reflect the perception that their problems are less pressing than those of inner-city and minority adolescents, and that these rural kids are insulated from the problems of contemporary urban America (Crockett, Shanahan, & Jackson-Newsom, 2000).

This attention deficit never was fair or justified, but changing social and economic conditions in Minnesota and across rural America render this neglect less valid than ever. Rural areas and smaller and medium-sized towns and cities outside the Twin Cities area are undergoing a significant demographic and socio-economic transition, and families in those communities are feeling the stress of economic hardship and a growing inequality in wealth and income. In Minnesota, while a great deal of attention has been focused on the fact that the metro population is changing, the statewide non-white population has grown to 15 percent of the total, from less than 2 percent in 1970. In towns such as Willmar and Worthington in the west and south, in the cities of St. Cloud and Rochester that bookend the Twin Cities, and in northern towns such as Pelican Rapids, non-white enrollment in many schools now exceeds 20 percent or more.

A fast approaching convergence of trends compels attention and citizen involvement on this policy front. Globalization and technological change dictate that the Minnesota economy has been and will continue to demand more educated workers than ever before. (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). A yawning “skills gap” is projected for Minnesota’s economy over the next decade, owing to greater demand for higher-level skills and degrees or certificates coupled with declining rates of educational attainment, due in part to the achievement gap for students of color. (Governor’s Workforce Development Council, 2011).

## Minnesota’s Growing Skills Gap

*Minnesota’s need for a highly-skilled workforce is among the greatest in the nation. However, the state faces a growing skills gap due to increasing educational demand among employers and projected declines in education levels.*



Source: Governor’s Workforce Development Council, *All Hands on Deck: Sixteen Ideas for Strengthening Minnesota’s Workforce*, 2011.

Rural Minnesota communities are coming together to improve student success, demonstrating that civic mobilization to address inequity really works. Non-metro communities are using a combination of classic civic engagement, closer attention to basic measurable indicators of academic and developmental success, and an approach that begins early in life and is sustained all the way through to career launch. Each effort is different and tailored to local needs and conditions, but has in common a shared commitment from local community leadership, business and philanthropic support, and ordinary parents and citizens. Taxpayer dollars from federal, state and local sources are indispensable to these efforts, but the animating spirit is local community engagement.

Simple intuition tells us that kids will do better in a milieu of total community engagement focused on improving their success as students and in preparation for adult life. Concern and constructive action in behalf of children of all ages by a broad array of adult stakeholders – from parents to teachers to business owners to Rotary and Kiwanis club leaders and everyone in between – is bound to produce positive results. Scientific and sociological research in recent years is showing that a culture that embraces educational attainment and equity makes a real difference.

This theory and theme gained broad exposure in the mid-1990s with former First Lady Hillary Clinton’s book, *It Takes a Village*, which received general acclaim as well as pushback from some social conservatives, who insisted that only parents should be entrusted with the role of raising children and that governmental and public roles ought to be minimized. More recently, support for “village” involvement was advanced with the publication of *The Social Animal* by conservative syndicated columnist David Brooks, who makes the case for more community, less individualism, and this idea: “In a densely connected society, people can see the gradual chain of institutions that connect family to neighborhood, neighborhood to town, town to regional association, regional associations to national associations and national associations to the federal government” (Brooks, 2011, p. 319). When Brooks spoke to the Minnesota Business Partnership in the fall of 2011 about his wife’s roots in the small lake district town of Detroit Lakes, he paid tribute to Minnesota’s reputation as a place rich in social capital and its capacity to muster broad civic engagement and to form large networks in a common cause.

Brooks is joined by an ever larger cohort of social scientists and education experts who agree that communities have drifted away from the principle of village as educator, but who also are discovering that communities are beginning to renew themselves around it. Understanding Minnesota’s educational past, as prologue to the task that lies ahead, is helpful.

## **A Sacred Minnesota Tradition: Community Support for Education**

Total community responsibility for a universal and egalitarian educational product has been an emblematic historical feature of Midwestern American culture, especially in Minnesota, from the village days of our original native Minnesotans and the early Euro-Americans in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The role of everyone in the North American Indian village doing educational work is described by Reyhner (2006):

*North American Indian education was geared to teaching children how to survive. Social education taught children their responsibilities to their extended family and the group, the clan, band, or tribe. Vocational education taught children about child rearing, home management, farming, hunting, gathering, fishing, and so forth. Each tribe had its own religion that told the children their place in the cosmos through stories and ceremonies. Members of the extended family taught their children by example, and children copied adult activities as they played.*

Minnesota was settled under the organizing principles of the Land Ordinance of 1785 and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, requiring that considerable public resources be set aside for free, universal and mandatory public schooling. This founding American principle, particularly strong in New England and the Midwest, would serve the United States as an economy-building and nation-building tool. The original Northwest Ordinance stipulated that knowledge “being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged” and the founding families across the Midwest took that very seriously.

Midwestern pioneers set aside one whole section of land in each township, sold parts of it to raise money for schools, then raised other taxes to support them, set up school boards, found teachers and continue to invest in and expand public education. Their descendants erected ever better and bigger schoolhouses, opened teacher colleges in the

growing regional centers, and modernized and professionalized education as the community grew, all with the underlying conviction that education was essential for their self-government and their long-term prosperity. This ethic of community strength and pride tied to schooling became a defining symbol of Midwestern culture.

*By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, district schooling, locally funded and managed by representatives of the community, was particularly popular in sparsely populated rural communities. The diverse architecture, curriculum, classroom practice, and teacher models developed in these rural schools coalesced into the powerful iconography of American education as pastoral, community based and traditional (Clayton, Sisson, & Zacher, 2006).*

While initiated in Minnesota by highly literate Protestants of mostly English stock from the original New England and Mid-Atlantic colonies, the Midwestern education imperative was embraced and carried forward by wave after wave of immigrants from northern, central and eastern Europe, who settled in rural southern and western farm country, and in the forests and mining center of northern Minnesota. Following the first settlers, Minnesota's rural landscape was populated by Scandinavians and Germans and other ethnic groups who greatly valued the educational tradition already established, as well as the cooperative and egalitarian models of delivering it. This ethic contrasted with conservative and traditional and hierarchical culture in the American South and mid-South, where education was often more of a private concern, not considered a public right of the non-white minority cultures, and often simply not available to poorer whites and African American slaves and their descendants. (Rosenfeld, 1988). Today's public education advocates in Minnesota often note that compared to other states, the language in Minnesota's state constitution is unusually unequivocal and strong about the community's obligation to educate, and equally so.

This unusual emphasis on education, and in the 1930s the dedication of the state's new income tax to public schools, a momentous step by Gov. Floyd B. Olson, had a further profound impact. By the end of World War II, Minnesota was earning a reputation as an outlier in education achievement and attainment. TIME magazine, in an August 1973 cover story celebrating the state's superior quality of life, cited civic engagement and dedication to education as its secret ingredients. The article noted that Minnesota's superior performance on economic and quality-of-life measures were linked to "a near-worship for education and a high civic tradition in Minnesota life." (Minnesota: A state that works, 1973).

But in nearly four decades that have elapsed since then, Minnesota's rural economics and demographics have changed rapidly. Although medium-sized cities and regional centers outside of the Twin Cities area, in what is often called Greater Minnesota, are holding up relatively well or even thriving, many smaller towns and communities have withered. The number of working farms has continued a century-long decline and with mechanization the number of people living and working on farms has declined. Meanwhile, test scores and graduation rates have stagnated or declined in some districts. The rural population is aging and at the same time becoming more racially diverse, meaning that fewer households have children in the schools, and ever fewer members of the older majority culture have ever fewer children or grandchildren in the schools.

## Evidence that Civic Engagement is Reviving

Despite this context, a renaissance of interest and enthusiasm for community engagement may be taking hold in the United States and in Minnesota in particular.

The idea that a crisis of civic disengagement was damaging America's social fabric gained credence in the national consciousness more than a decade ago with Harvard professor Robert Putnam's seminal book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Putnam and others since have found causative factors including suburbanization, the influence of television and media, and changes in gender roles and family structure. Rural areas, they agreed, did not escape the malaise. Putnam in an earlier essay on the subject observed that:

*residents of very small towns and rural areas are ... slightly more trusting and civically engaged than other Americans...but overall rates of associational membership are not very different (and) downtrends in trusting and joining are virtually identical everywhere – in cities, big and small, in suburbs, in small towns, and in the countryside. (Putnam, 1996).*

Peter Block and John McKnight document pioneering community-building efforts across the Midwest and the nation and conclude that strong community connections lead to improvements in child development and school performance. (McKnight & Block, 2010). Conversely, localities with very little social connection consistently experience negative lives for their children – gangs, “mall-centered” youth, and other negative behavior resulting from the local community not surrounding and guiding the young. (McKnight & Block, 2010).

A broader concept of community education with applications to rural and non-metro areas has been advanced for many years by Jack D. Minzey and Clyde LeTarte, who define community education as “a philosophical concept which serves the entire community by providing for all of the educational needs of all its community members.” (Minzey & LeTarte, 1994).

Harry Boyte of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at Augsburg College in Minneapolis argued in a recent lecture that civic agency and public work are poised for a resurgence. He advocates for a spirit in which

*citizens learn to work together on public issues out of diverse “self-interests” (not narrow selfishness but core passions and relationships). They solve problems, win victories for disadvantaged groups, and create public things with those with whom they may disagree, or whom they may even dislike. Such activity often broadens people’s interests toward “standing for the whole.” (Boyte, 2011).*

Several efforts to enlist community participation are underway across Minnesota, one of which is the InCommons project, led by the Bush Foundation, The Saint Paul Foundation, Minnesota Public Radio, Twin Cities Public Television and their rural partners. Numerous events and meetings are being organized outside the Twin Cities in an effort to engage and inspire greater community involvement in non-metro areas.

Kathy Gardner Chadwick, the former Husby-Johnson Chair of Business and Economics at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, asserts that there is a widespread consensus that the public has been abdicating its responsibility for public education over the past forty to fifty years. (Chadwick, 2003). Drawing on two decades of national research on the subject of community engagement and its effects on student success, Chadwick claims:

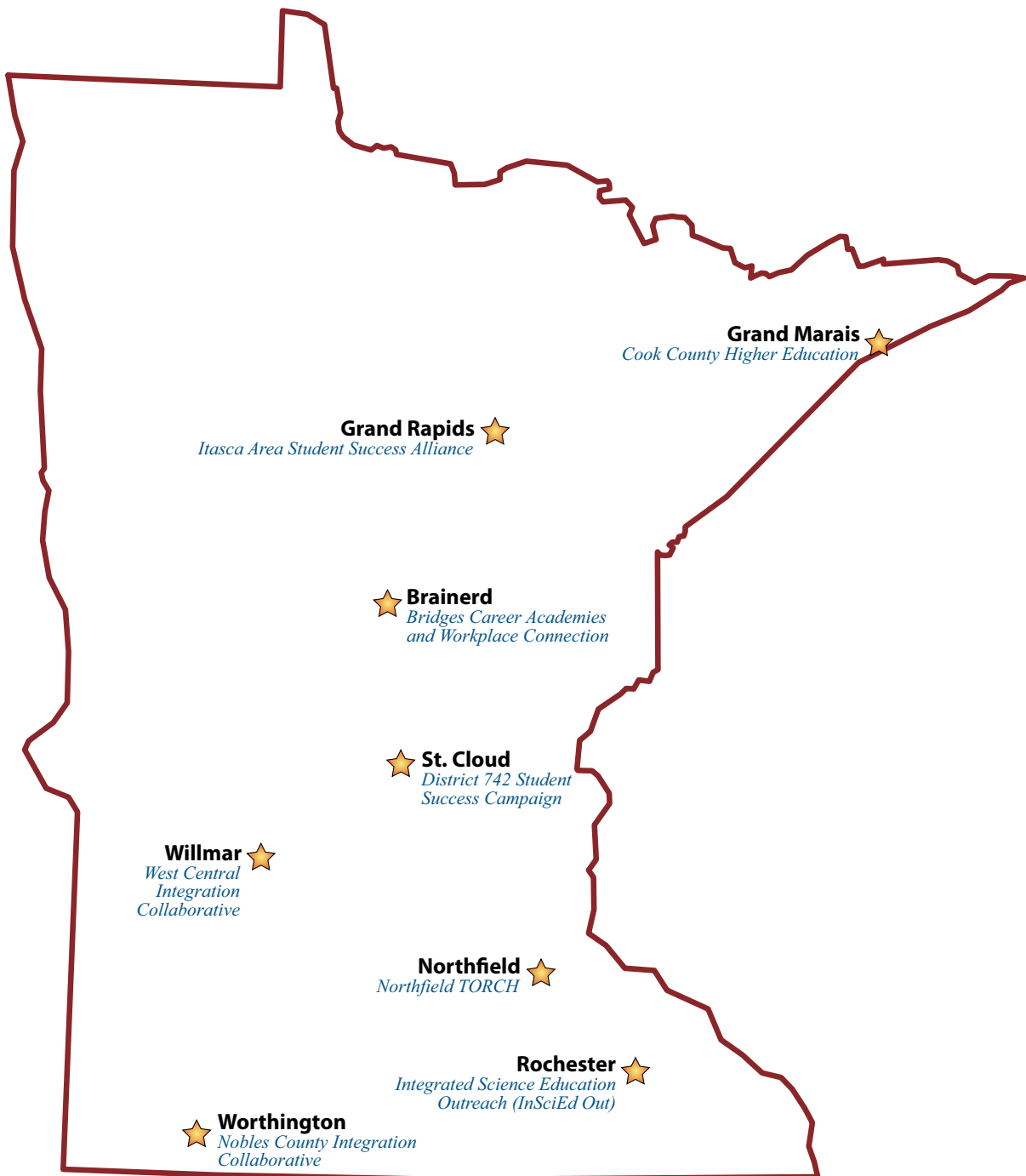
*If the public were truly to become a partner with public schools in educating our children, we would ultimately see an improvement in student achievement ... the involvement of family and community members has a significant impact on student achievement. More involved parents and community members mean more adults working together to educate children both within and outside the classroom. An engaged public means more people working together to find the best approaches to the need for adequate funding and school accountability. (Chadwick, 2003).*

One of the reports that supported Chadwick’s verdict was a report by Anne Henderson and Karen Mapp that synthesized 51 studies from across the nation on the impact of family and community involvement on student achievement, and effective strategies to connect schools, families and community. Their report found a strong and growing body of evidence that families of all backgrounds can have a major impact on their children’s academic success. (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Our study of the current state of community educational involvement in rural Minnesota will show a growing wave of success.



# Models of Community Engagement for Student Success in Rural and Greater Minnesota

We have identified the following examples of civic engagement for broader and more equitable student success in rural and Greater Minnesota. Some of these models involve a comprehensive birth-to-career strategy and some are focused on just one segment of the education pipeline, such as early childhood education, transition to higher learning, or enhanced STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) instruction in elementary and middle school. The common denominator is that all are products of local initiatives in community engagement, support and collaboration from outside the K-12 establishment, and they all involve multiple civic partners and more than one sector. One important disclaimer: Every community in Minnesota has committed citizens and groups who actively care about their children and the examples we offer are by no means the only, nor perhaps even the best, examples of citizen engagement for student success.



## Brainerd/Central Lakes Area: Bridges Career Academies and Workplace Connection

Attention and praise has been gathering for several years now for an extraordinary and practical everybody-on-board effort aimed at helping students in the Brainerd Lakes area. The region is the heart of Minnesota resort country, with a diversified economy ranging from forest products to light manufacturing to the hospitality industry.

Business and commercial interests are the driving force in this example. Along with public high schools in 23 districts, Central Lakes College, and local foundations and nonprofits, employers and the Brainerd Lakes Chamber have for five years been collaborating through a joint effort called the Bridges Career Academies and Workplace Connection. Its origins were in a federal-state school-to-work program that lost its funding due to budget cuts in the early 2000s. “The program went away, but the people here, business leaders and school leaders, looked at each other and said ‘this is too important to go away,’” according to Mary Gottsch, director of the Bridges Workplace Connection.

The organization is described as being about the future of the area’s community and helping students understand the local career options they have in industries that will need them. This ambitious and well-organized effort employs a two-pronged approach: formalized Career Academies that place high school students in early post-secondary coursework and on track toward one of five career areas, and the Workplace Connection component that uses a variety of creative outreach efforts to link students with the actual experience of the local workplaces.

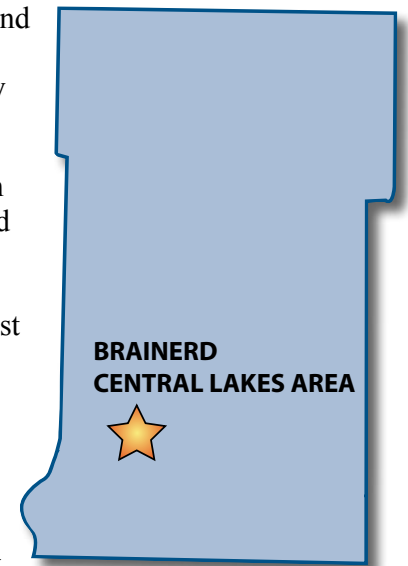
These academies reflect the region’s workforce needs, offering studies in Health Sciences & Nursing; Applied Engineering, Manufacturing & Technology; Business & Administration; Criminal Justice; and Information Technology. The academies offer an integrated approach that breaks down the boundaries between high school and post-secondary credential attainment, with programs of study that are often a combination of traditional classroom and online courses.

Among the efforts to interest and motivate students toward local career preparation, the Bridges project puts on annual Career Exploration Day. The 2011 event at Central Lakes College was attended by an estimated 2,400 students from 23 area high schools, from Sebeka to Onamia. The event provided students with an interactive experience showcasing the basics of more than 150 career and educational opportunities in everything from hands-on theatrical production to building rocket launchers. Other connections opportunities include career tours in businesses, internships, job shadowing, speakers in the classroom, and teachers in the workplace, which allows educators to spend time at a business to understand the application of areas they teach, discuss workplace realities, and the skills needed for success.

Eighty percent of the students who participated in the most recent Career Exploration Day said that they had a better understanding of the connection between their future career and education, according to Brainerd Lakes Chamber CEO Lisa Paxton (“Workforce Program Targets the Middle Majority”). More than 80 percent also said they got enough information to decide that they wanted to continue their education past high school. And more than 85 percent said they were more motivated to gain additional skills.

Success often begets success and the Bridges collaboration appears to have reached a level of success that will be conducive to sustainability. More than 225 businesses, a rather astonishing number for a rural community with just a few small cities, have participated in sundry Bridges programs.

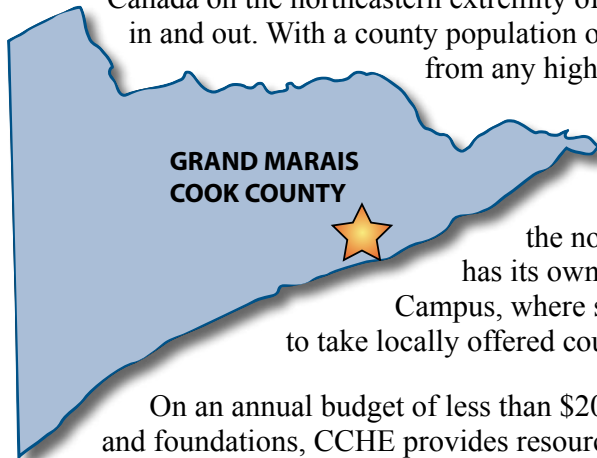
“It amazes me to this day, to walk into the room and see 30 to 40 people, superintendents, business leaders, DEED [state Department of Employment and Economic Development] officials...everybody always ready to jump in,” director Gottsch says.





## Grand Marais/Cook County: Cook County Higher Education

Cook County and its seat of government in the picturesque North Shore town of Grand Marais are situated next to Canada on the northeastern extremity of the state, at the end of the line, so to speak, with one major road in and out. With a county population of just 5,000 and less than 1,500 in the city, the area is far removed from any higher education campus, public or private.



Concerned about this lack of access, and aware that the local economy would need a workforce with more post-secondary skills, civic and business leaders more than a decade ago launched the nonprofit organization Cook County Higher Education. CCHE now has its own building, converted from a Baptist church, dubbed the North Shore Campus, where students can get the personal help and technology access they need to take locally offered courses onsite or online courses from institutions around the world.

On an annual budget of less than \$200,000 and with grant support from state and county governments and foundations, CCHE provides resources for students that include mentors, expert advice on student aid, and technology and computer access. In 2010 more than 700 residents participated in workshops and training programs, and 112 students were enrolled in degree programs. Since opening for business in 1997, the organization has helped more than 500 people complete certificates or degrees, and met with or otherwise served a total of 2,800 Cook County residents.

Courses at the Grand Marais campus or nearby that have recently been offered include: Basic Welding; Outdoor Emergency Care, an award-winning training program of the National Ski Patrol for those who work in the outdoor recreation field; and Nursing Assistant and Home Health Aide training.

Cook County Commissioner Sue Hakes says “CCHE does an excellent job of providing a variety of training and education, enabling residents to fill jobs and create career opportunities, allowing them to remain in Cook County. In doing so, CCHE plays a critical role in the economic development of our community.”

CCHE has been called a lifeline for many in Cook County, and not just for practical learning that helps people get real jobs. It’s also one of the places in Grand Marais where you can get a good internet connection (Vogel, 2011).

## Itasca County: Itasca Area Student Success Alliance

In early 2010, a broad-based group of leaders and citizens from the public sector, private sector and nonprofit community in the Itasca County area was convened by the Itasca Area Schools Collaborative and Blandin Foundation to talk about how to provide opportunities for all students in the Itasca area to succeed. A “core team” of community members has continued to meet regularly as the Itasca Area Student Success Alliance.

Student Success Alliance core team members cite a number of factors that stimulated their decision to join the work, including poverty in the region, lagging achievement, and a recognition that “total community” efforts elsewhere in the nation were showing great promise. A key spark was exposure by some community activists to a presentation on the Harlem Children’s Zone, a nationally celebrated total community student success effort that describes itself as a coordinated effort by hundreds of men and women devoted to changing the odds for children by addressing the needs of the entire community.

Although the streets of Harlem are a long way from the sparsely populated woods and lakes of Itasca County, community leaders were struck by similarities, and the promising principle and the inspiring success of community engagement in the face of great challenges. Another spark was the recognition that educational attainment for all plays a key role in the future vitality of the region.



Obstacles to student success were discussed during an early planning meeting of the group, including: the area's vast geography and low population (transportation challenges); stressed families dealing with low wages, mental health issues and substance abuse; public apathy; time constraints (school calendar); a generational cycle of poverty; and the expense of keeping up with emerging technology. While there were 17 other obstacles listed, the list of opportunities turned out to be more than twice as long, with 44 cited, ranging from better education for new parents, to changing the school calendar, to after-school programs, to partnership and mentoring opportunities. (Blandin Foundation, 2010).

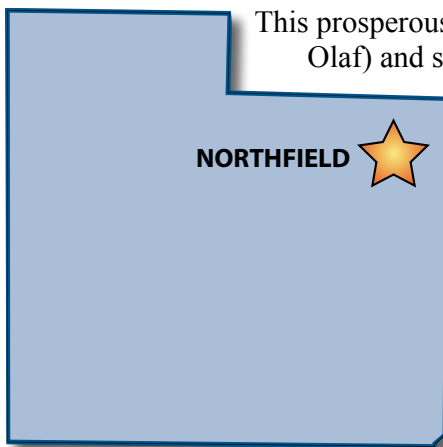
After learning of the Strive Partnership, a national network based on a total community model for school success developed in Cincinnati and northern Kentucky, 18 core team members went to Cincinnati to meet with Strive's national leaders and more than a dozen participating school officials, business and corporate executives, and various leaders of foundations, nonprofits and parents' groups. The group also talked with an official from the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio, which is committed to improving student success in the largely rural and poorer eastern sections of the state.

The group returned enthused and committed to replicating some of the most applicable principles and strategies of the Strive Partnership. Deer River School District superintendent Matt Grose described the first-hand look at a community coming together to dramatically improve success for all students as a powerful experience and noted the importance of alignment among organizations and communities around goals that put kids first and result in improved outcomes for all children. Marian Barcus, chair of the Blandin Foundation board, praised the Strive strategy for demonstrating the power of data, relationships and leadership, but most of all, for putting students first. She believes that the lessons learned from Strive can be applied to help close the achievement gap in Itasca County (Blandin Foundation, 2011).

The Student Success Alliance has set a course for developing its own version of Strive's roadmap for student success, and team members hope in future years that they will be able to produce a report card like the signature document used by Strive of Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky to measure improvement on indicators of student success.

In the meantime, cross-sector community involvement in education is already happening in the area. Grand Rapids High School principal Jim Smokrovich welcomed the involvement of finance and business leaders in the area who helped strengthen a financial literacy curriculum for the high school, saying it was "really nice to bring in an expert to reinforce the teacher. We're not experts in everything we teach." (Smith, 2011).

## Northfield: Northfield TORCH



This prosperous college town, home to two prestigious private institutions (Carleton and St. Olaf) and situated just to the south of the Twin Cities exurban area, recognized a problem several years ago with achievement and attainment for its Latino students. The area did not have high enrollment numbers for minority students, but it was not doing well at all educating those it did have in the schools, with a graduation rate of 36% for Latino students, in contrast with an overall graduation rate of more than 91%. (Northfield TORCH, n.d.).

In response, school and community leaders developed the Northfield TORCH (Tackling Obstacles and Raising College Hopes) program and the improved results from a decade ago are striking. From 2001 to 2004, only 15 of 42 Latino students in the Northfield School District graduated from high school, and less than 12 percent went on to any type of college. Since then, the graduation rate for Latino students has climbed to 90 percent, with 85 percent of recent graduates planning to enroll in college. The early success of the program led to it being expanded to serve Northfield's growing low-income student population as well. The program's mission is to improve the graduation and post-secondary participation rates of Northfield's minority students, low-income students and youth who would be first-generation college attendees. (Northfield TORCH, n.d.).

TORCH's success is instructive for communities that have not yet reached a non-white student population large enough to trigger public funds, such as state integration aid. TORCH has received grants through the Minnesota Office of Higher Education and the Minnesota Juvenile Justice Advisory Council, and funds from private and nonprofit

sources including the Northfield Area United Way, Women in Northfield Giving Support (WINGS) and the City of Northfield's Grace Whittier Fund. Crucial in-kind support has come from partner organizations that include Carleton and St. Olaf colleges, the Northfield Mentoring Coalition, Northfield Public Schools, the Northfield Middle School Youth Center and the Northfield Healthy Community Initiative.

TORCH provides individualized services to students including one-on-one mentoring, homework help and tutoring, college visits, assistance with college applications and financial aid documents, ACT test preparation, and after-school study help. Students are also encouraged to take advantage of Minnesota's Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) program which offers college credits at no cost to students, so kids are graduate from high school with college credits already earned (Hart, 2008).

## Rochester: Integrated Science Education Outreach (InSciEd Out)

Many of the models presented in this paper have certain common characteristics. But experts on civic engagement agree that the best efforts are custom-built for their communities, taking advantage of special assets and strengths in the local demography and economy.

Rochester has long been and continues to be one of the nation's most important regional centers in the fields of medicine, digital technology and biotechnology, owing in large part to Olmsted County's largest long-time employers, the Mayo Clinic and IBM.

While the area benefits from several school improvement efforts, few have gotten as much recognition and praise as the highly collaborative and successful Integrated Science Education Outreach (InSciEd Out) program.



The Mayo Clinic, Winona State University, and the Rochester Public Schools partnered with other community members in a shared vision of achieving excellence in science education. Currently, three public specific schools in Rochester have used the InSciEd Out program – Lincoln K-8 Choice School, Franklin Elementary School, and Kellogg Middle School.

Other community partners include the Rochester Public School Foundation, which has provided grant funds to buy webcams used for videoconferencing with Mayo scientists; private businesses which have donated aquariums and tanks for the schools' ongoing inquiry based on studies of the zebra fish; and nonprofits and foundations like Education Minnesota, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, and the National Science Teachers Association which have provided financial contributions.

The results have been impressive. Following a summer of teacher training at Mayo Clinic by the InSciEd Out program and then deployment of new curriculum and methods in the classroom during the subsequent school year, measures of student engagement and learning at Lincoln K-8 Choice School indicate substantial improvement in student science proficiency. The share of eighth-graders choosing an optional demanding science curriculum for their high school course increased from 40% to over 80%, and science fair participation for the middle school grades increased eight-fold over two years to more than 80%. And more than half of the 8th graders achieved "Exceeds Expectations" in state science standards, making Lincoln the only school in Minnesota where science excellence is now the norm (Pierret et al., 2011).

InSciEd Out has garnered attention on a national scale. The news website Huffington Post published an article detailing the experience of eight Rochester middle-schoolers who went to Washington, DC to participate in the American Association for the Advancement of Science annual meeting and ended up with a personal visit from President Obama at the White House (Fields, 2011). The National Science Teachers Association featured the program's success in a web news article that detailed its strategy for cross-disciplinary staff training to help sustain a culture of science excellence over many years. Lincoln science teacher Corey Dornack observed that "students start to realize ... that a scientist is not 'some geeky person that I could never be.' They start to see themselves as scientists ... Usually at least half the class wants to be scientists." (Shapiro, 2011).

## St. Cloud: District 742 Student Success Campaign



The 2010 census for St. Cloud, one of the fastest growing regional centers in Minnesota, verified perceptions of significant minority population growth. A language other than English is spoken in about six percent of city households, and from virtually 100% white just 30 years ago, now nearly 16 percent of St. Cloud's population is non-white. (U. S. Census Bureau, 2010).

In the St. Cloud Area School District these changes are more pronounced. In the last decade the minority student population nearly tripled to about 28%; students in poverty, as measured by free and reduced price lunch enrollment, grew from 25% to 49.5%; and English learners grew from 3% to 10.1% of the student population of about 9,600. About 40 languages other than English are spoken by the public school students. (P. Welter, personal communication, October 12, 2011).

A dark underside has attended this change. A series of highly publicized incidents, some involving expressions of incendiary racist sentiment, have exacerbated tensions and even provoked accusations that the city's essential character was racist. Meanwhile, in the public schools, the achievement gap between low-income and minority students and white, more affluent students has continued to grow. In 2009, frustrated and convinced that the community needed to move past both finger-pointing and hand-wringing, a group of St. Cloud civic and school leaders, in their role as members of the school board's Community Linkages Committee, sponsored a series of events focused on identifying and replicating those experiences and assets which support successful student achievement for students of color.

"Our growing diversity has touched off regrettable incidents that have been hurtful and destructive, said Bruce Mohs, a school board member and retired science teacher who has been a leader in the committee work and subsequent task force that launched the Student Success Campaign. "We wanted to establish strongly that these children in our community are all our children. We will profit by, or pay for, what they become. Every child belongs to all of us in the community." A key influence on the task force's direction was input from meetings, led by Dr. Eddah Matua-Kombo and Dr. Les Green from St. Cloud State University, with parents and families from low-income and minority communities, learning what worked and how students were already succeeding despite the challenges.

The following questions were posed by the task force: What is student success and what are the indicators? What can or should the greater community do to support student success? Is it feasible and desirable to plan a community-wide campaign to support student success?"

The answer to the last question turned out to be a resounding yes. This excerpt from a document setting forth a mission and vision for the Student Success Campaign is instructive:

*While we recognize that there are other areas also impacting student success, our work has initially centered on building assets that are relevant to educational success including parental and family support and expectations, positive connections among children and adults and a general community environment which values success and supports, respects and empowers youth in many paths to success, educational achievement, career readiness and civic engagement. (ISD 742).*

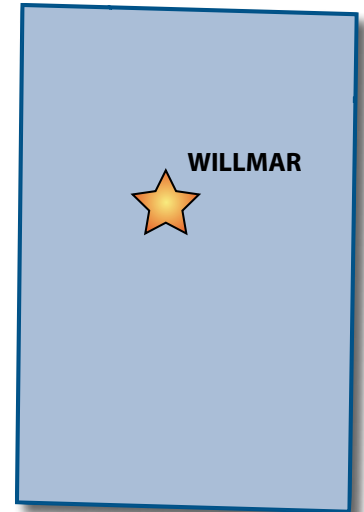
Based on the findings of the exploratory Student Success task force and with the approval of the St. Cloud School District Board of Education, district superintendent Bruce Watkins and other key task force members began implementation of the community-wide Student Success Campaign. Three action teams have been organized – around campaign development, youth development, and outreach – that encompass the diverse communities of color in the St. Cloud region. Participation in the campaign from across the community is growing steadily and now includes more than 75 representatives from the St. Cloud Area Chamber of Commerce, the African Women's Alliance, United Way of Central Minnesota, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Minnesota, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Central Minnesota, the local branch of the NAACP, Lutheran Social Services, Catholic Charities, the Somali, Sudanese and Chicano communities, St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud Technical & Community college, and community and individual foundations.

Organizers are considering the Strive model used successfully in Cincinnati, and the Promise Neighborhood model emerging in many urban areas, according to Patricia Welter, a retired school administrator and co-chair of the task force. All the players have “overwhelmingly affirmed the need to do this and the organizational commitments are coming together,” said Welter, “but we’re just getting started with infrastructure.” (Personal communication, October 12, 2011).

## Willmar: West Central Integration Collaborative

When the first large waves of Latino immigrants began arriving in larger numbers in and around Kandiyohi County some 20 years ago, their substandard living conditions were at first mostly ignored. Veteran community activist Charly Leuze recalls that affordable housing was limited or effectively denied. Schools found themselves ill-equipped to teach English as a second language, and racial tension and gang activity brought “civic pride in Willmar to an all-time low.” (C. Leuze, personal communication, July 26, 2011).

A ministerial association, business leaders, school officials and local leaders from nonprofits came together to produce a set of goals called Vision 2020 in which all the entities would come up with different strategies for integrating and harmonizing the community, through new thinking about how to provide parks and recreation, cultural and social programming, to economic development policies. (C. Leuze, personal communication, July 26, 2011). Education became a centerpiece and spawned the West Central Integration Collaborative (WCIC), and the organization, headed by Leuze, takes pride in contributing to some remarkable improvements in community relations and measurable improvements of student success.



Recent outcomes reported for Willmar High School are impressive: the Latino graduation rate has averaged 71 percent from 2006 through 2009, compared to 15.5 percent in 1995, and it reached an all-time high in 2011 (78 percent, 35 out of 45 students) in the history of Willmar High School. (Vanderwerf, 2011). In an internal school district document obtained for this report entitled “District 347 Objectives/Strategies,” measurable increases for the Willmar Public School District are shown for completion of more rigorous courses in math and writing, improved reading comprehension in higher grades, and the percentage of students taking the demanding specialty courses in Mandarin Chinese (imagine the economic value to employers in Minnesota’s increasingly global marketplace of students conversant in English, Spanish and Chinese). Measureable improvements from the WCIC efforts (and from the Worthington-area integration efforts outlined in the next section) are documented in a recent Practitioner Report delivered to the Minnesota Department of Education. (Johnson & Leuze, 2011).

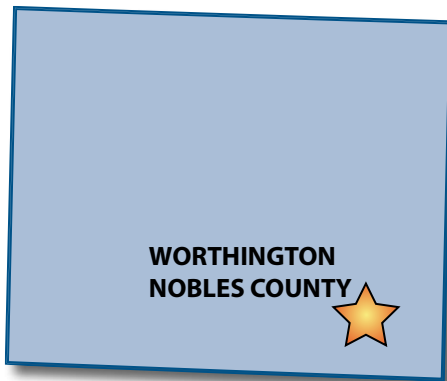
WCIC does much of its work in Willmar, but also in 13 other nearby cities, including Atwater, Clara City, Cosmos, Grove City, Kerkhoven, New London, Maynard, Murdock, Sacred Heart, Spicer, Sunberg, Raymond and Renville.

A major goal of WCIC is retention of students in school through high school graduation. WCIC works with eight School Success Coordinators working with each district who focus on keeping students in grades 7 through 12 in school. They connect students to tutoring and mentoring resources, help set up job shadowing opportunities and college visits, and link students to programs like Fast Forward and Upward Bound which help them explore college and career options.

Another goal WCIC works towards with the help of other community organizations is to ensure an inclusive and respectful environment for students and families in the school communities. The Willmar Soccer Association provides summer traveling soccer programs, DEMO inc., a community arts nonprofit in Willmar, offers interactive artwork sessions, and United Way of Kandiyohi County provides youth leadership opportunities for all students in the county.

The bylaws of the WCIC advisory committee demonstrate the deliberate intent for a truly integrated and representative group of community members to advise and guide the organization. They require that the advisory committee include superintendents from four area school districts, a city administrator from one of the participating cities, a public health official, a representative of the Jennie-O Turkey Store (a major employer in the region) and representatives of the Latino, East African, Native American and elderly populations.

## Worthington: Nobles County Integration Collaborative



The small agribusiness center in the southwestern corner of the state, which previously staked its claim to fame on an annual downtown turkey race and on its status as Turkey Capital of the World, is now becoming something of a national showcase for how to seize opportunity and make a diverse community a true asset.

The community's success at adapting and thriving during a two-decade transformation from an all-Caucasian town to one where white students are no longer in the majority has been well-documented in Education Week magazine, by the Associated Press and in the St. Paul Pioneer Press (Koumpilova, 2011).

The school district's four-year graduation rate for Latino students has climbed from 27 percent in 1996 to 38 percent in 2000 and then to 47 percent in 2010. The six-year Latino graduation rate currently stands at 58 percent, which is 8 percentage points higher than the statewide rate. That's still not good enough, community leaders agree, noting that graduation rates and test scores for Latino students still lag far behind those for white students. But it most definitely represents progress.

The Nobles County Integration Collaborative (NCIC) is comprised of six southwestern school districts and has a mission to promote student success and community acceptance of differences by providing opportunities for students, families and staff from diverse backgrounds to learn from and with one another. Accomplishing that mission is defined around a five-point agenda of cultural awareness, language learning, student achievement, parent involvement and professional development and training.

"An important part of our philosophy is to close the achievement gap by closing the engagement gap," said NCIC coordinator Sharon Johnson. "We are intentionally working, beginning in the 8th grade, on out-of-school activities to help our kids engage with their peers, caring adults and others in their community." Local business are conducting tours of their facilities with a much stronger educational component than the typical field trip. And children in families without internet connectivity are receiving laptops and other devices through a PCs for People program financed through a Blandin Foundation initiative.

### Blandin Foundation

An ongoing longitudinal and cost-benefit evaluation by Wilder Research is finding significant progress in kindergarten readiness for low-income children in Itasca County who have participated in the Invest Early initiative on early childhood care and education, an effort funded and organized by the Blandin Foundation.

The latest Wilder evaluation found that the percentage of children demonstrating overall proficiency or progress toward proficiency at the end of each program year is trending up and that two years of Invest Early narrows the proficiency gap for low-income students relative to their higher-income peers. (Chase & Valorose, 2009).

Few organizations have been as involved in stimulating community engagement for improving student success in rural communities, with a particular focus on early childhood, as the Blandin Foundation.

#### **Examples of efforts sponsored or supported by the Blandin Foundation include:**

- The Invest Early program, which offers comprehensive wrap-around services to children and families at five sites in Itasca County, and provides licensed early childhood instructors, individual learning plans and support services to parents including Adult Basic Education.
- The Itasca Area Schools Collaborative, a uniquely coordinated cooperative arrangement between seven school districts in the county which includes a strong Community Education dimension for adult and lifelong learning, and Step Ahead, a parent engagement program that works to support parents and families and to encourage parental involvement in their child's education.

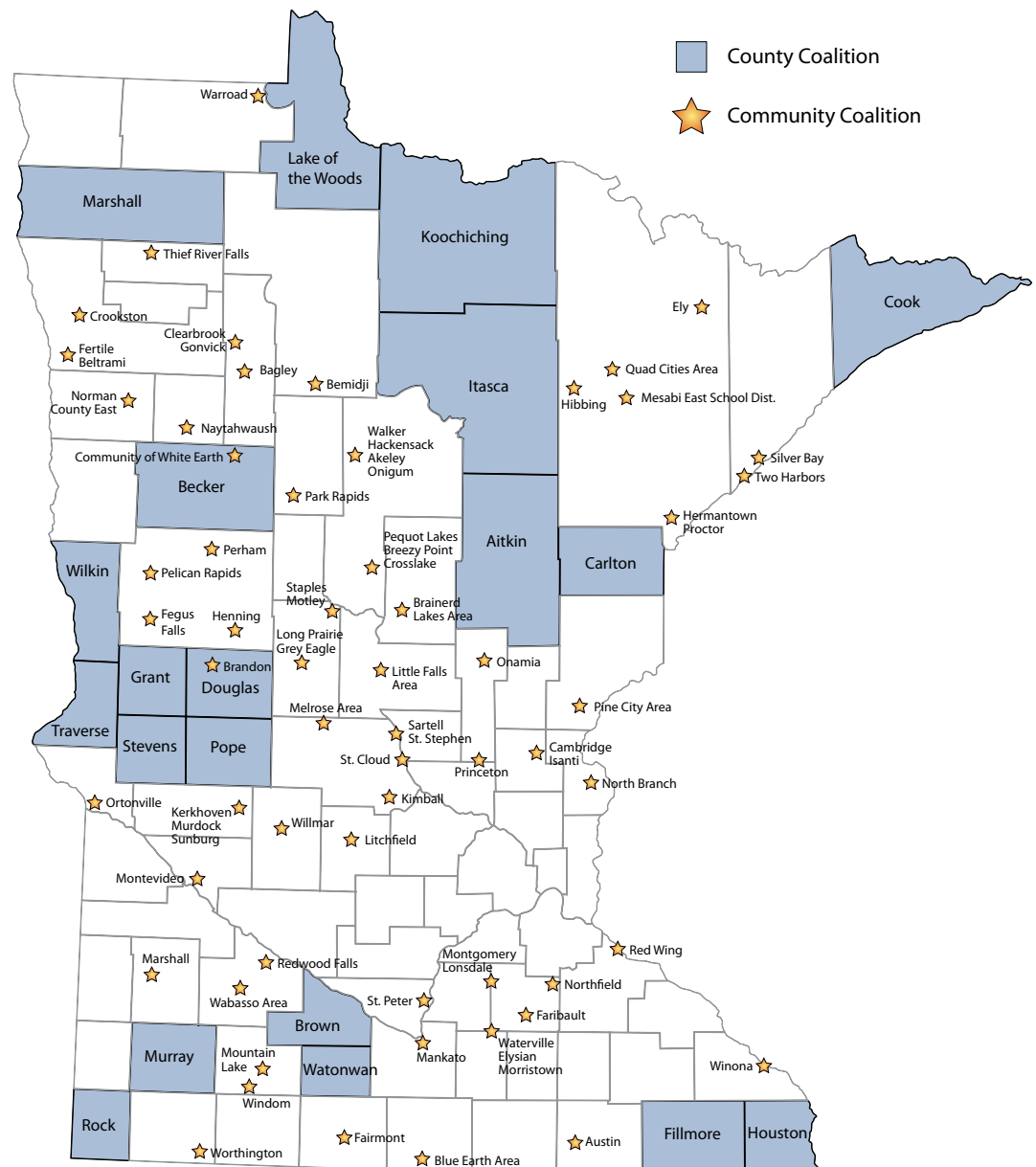
- Project Read, with multiple partners in the region supporting improvements in reading for youngsters. The partners include the Kiwanis Daybreakers chapter, Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce, Minnesota Reading Corps, Grand Rapids Area Library, area school districts, and Grand Itasca Clinic and Hospital.
- Baby Steps Boutique, a Grand Rapids shop that operates like a retail store – but no cash is accepted. Customers earn coupons by participating in any of more than 50 community programs that offer services to children and their families. The coupons can then be redeemed by qualifying families to purchase essential new items for children.

And since 1985, the Blandin Community Leadership Program (BCLP) has provided practical, hands-on leadership training to more than 5,900 leaders in over 420 Minnesota rural communities. They also conduct programs around specific topics, including poverty and leadership in ethnically diverse communities.

## Minnesota Initiative Foundations: Early Childhood Coalitions

For a quarter-century Greater Minnesota has been well served by six regional Minnesota Initiative Foundations (MIFs), designed to make Minnesota’s rural communities stronger and more prosperous. Created as a response to the rural crisis of the 1980s, these six nationally recognized foundations work to strengthen the communities and economies of Greater Minnesota. Each foundation is independent and serves its region with unique grants, business loans, leadership programs and donor services, and each foundation’s priorities are determined by local leaders.

To date, nearly \$240 million has been invested in the MIFs by the McKnight Foundation, the original creator of the MIFs. Among the countless ways these foundations have enriched the physical and human capital in their regions, perhaps their biggest contribution to student success has been the development since 2003 of the Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative. The foundations worked together to facilitate strong, local community coalitions supporting and improving early childhood care and education. The latest count shows 80 early childhood coalitions up and functioning.



Source: Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative

Growth & Justice’s foundational report on evidence-tested interventions and investments for improving student success showed that early childhood care and education investment is not only crucial but cost-effective (Growth & Justice, 2008). Many of the other activities taking place in the MIF regions echo those and other recommended interventions. Among them, a Fatherhood Involvement Team in the Brainerd Lakes Area that promotes a Fathers Read Every Day program and offers a “boot camp” for new dads. In Faribault kindergartners attend a summer mini boot camp where they learn about kindergarten class structure, listening, following directions and working on early math and literacy skills. In Duluth and other areas served by the Northland Foundation, special emphasis is placed on mental health in early childhood; new parents receive Infant and Toddler Tip Cards with simple facts and helpful hints about the early years and brain development; and a program that connects senior citizens with youth in their community via the Age to Age initiative (Northland Foundation).

## **Minnesota Campus Compact: Colleges and Students as Civic Partners**

While college degrees and other post-secondary credentials form the goal line for student success initiatives, a symbiotic relationship in which colleges and their students also nourish the cradle-to-career continuum is functioning in Greater Minnesota. Minnesota Campus Compact (MCC) is a nonprofit organization that leverages the collective assets of dozens of higher-education campuses, most of them outside the Twin Cities metro area. MCC encourages its member campuses – including University of Minnesota campuses, colleges in the MnSCU system, and private colleges and universities – to mobilize a wide variety of human, material, and financial resources in reciprocal, ongoing partnerships with local communities and organizations.

While each member campus will have different partnerships and priorities based on the cultures and assets of the communities in which they operate, MCC outlines several common goals: promoting the success of Minnesota’s increasingly diverse student population; advancing the kinds of community-engaged learning that employers value; and developing innovative collaborations that advance educational and economic opportunity, environmental sustainability, public health, and other social goods.

MCC is affiliated with the national Campus Compact network, which includes more than 1,100 campuses in all 50 states. A key part of the Campus Compact work is connecting college students to tutoring and youth mentoring in the communities where they are enrolled and encouraging civic engagement in other ways. When communities assemble student success partnerships, MCC should be a logical resource for enlistment and support.

## **Rural Coalitions and Other Resources for Diversity, Integration and Inclusivity**

The integration collaboratives in Willmar and Worthington are among more than 20 diversity coalitions identified in a 2007 report by Tamara Downs Schwei and Katherine Fennelly, which opens with the eye-catching statistic that between 1990 and 2000, Minnesota’s immigrant population increased by 138 percent, more than twice the national rate of 57 percent. After a thorough review of the origins, characteristics, financing mechanisms, and goals and activities of the groups, the authors concluded that meaningful integration requires a true commitment to multiculturalism, that challenges due to animosity by some native-born residents are significant, but that some rural communities have made notable advancements. Needed is more funding for such efforts, coupled with better self-evaluation and measurement of outcomes by the programs. Improving cross-cultural relations in rural areas can be challenging when compared to urban areas, which are more diverse and have greater resources. This makes it even more important to create and sustain strong networks and coalitions, working with broad representation from business, labor, church groups, nonprofits and immigrant advocacy organizations (Schwei & Fennelly, 2007).

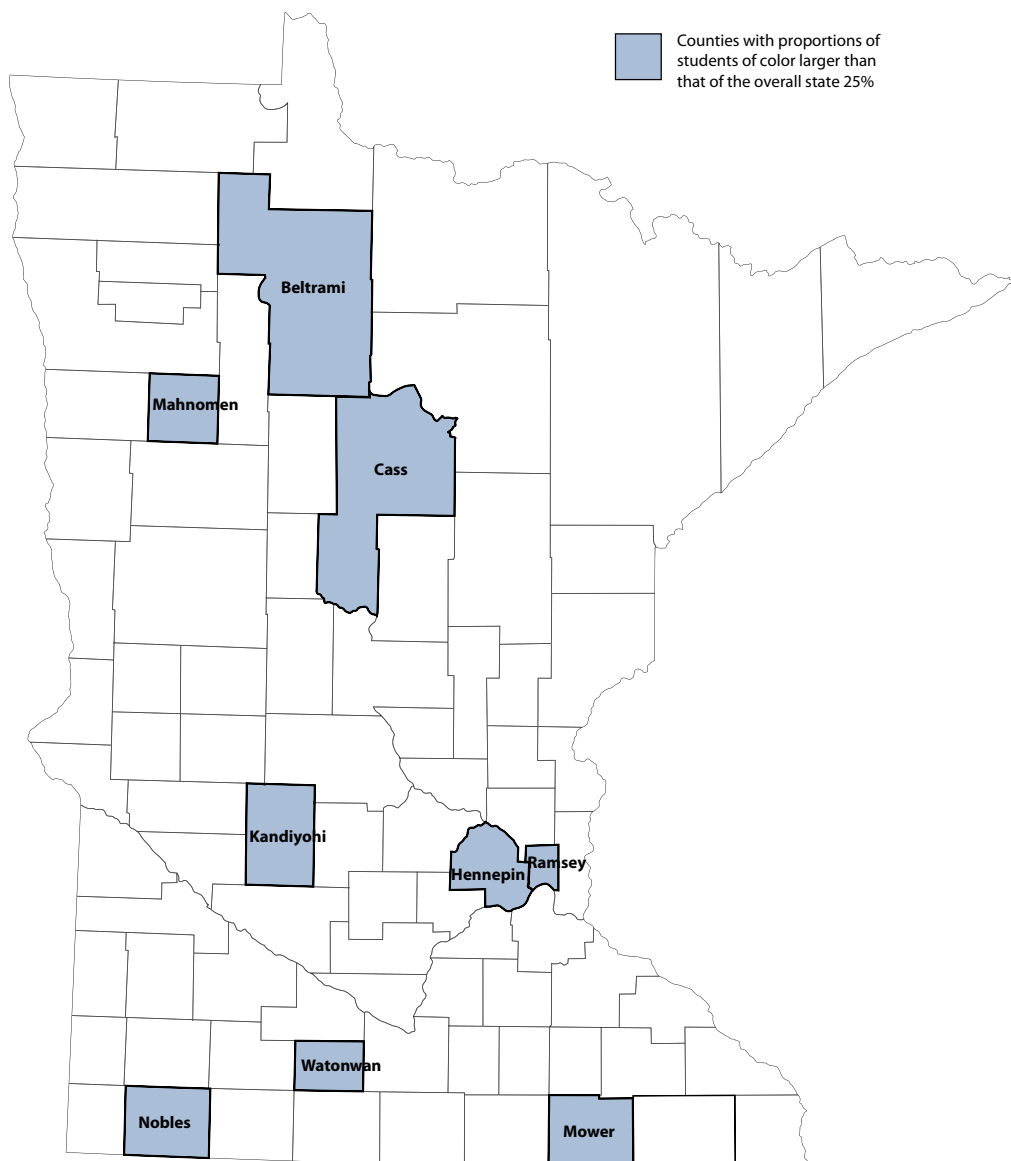
The Minnesota School Integration Council (MSIC) is a statewide organization committed to equity and excellence for all students, advocating for educational equity and integration-related issues. In 2010, MSIC convened a statewide task force to review school integration policies, including the use of state integration funds, and to address the achievement gap. Task force members hosted listening sessions around the state, including in Willmar and Rochester, taking input and perspective from community members. The final report of the task force, “Every Child, Every Day,” concluded with 19 recommendations in five key areas which address effective practices tied to results, partnerships and collaboration within communities, and distributing resources to meet outcomes (Minnesota School Integration Council, 2011).



The League of Minnesota Cities has been active in studying and offering guidance on the evolving demographic makeup of cities in Minnesota. They created a cultural diversity task force in 2003 which ultimately developed resources for city officials to help build inclusive communities that benefit from cultural diversity. The task force was led by Willmar Mayor Les Heitke and included representatives from Worthington, Mankato, Long Prairie, and Paynesville, as well as members of several state diversity councils. Their culminating report serves as an action guide for city leaders, with chapters on cultural competence; bridging language gaps; working against racism and prejudice; bringing city resources to bear on public safety, housing needs and economic development; and leading and fostering leadership in others (League of Minnesota Cities, 2003).

Finally, the One Voice Minnesota network, a project of the national group The Advocates for Human Rights, promotes linkages and community partnerships around the concept of building welcoming communities. The network provides tools and resources organizations and educators aimed at helping communities thrive as they diversify. They offer a curriculum on immigration and a teacher’s guide for K-12 educators who want to teach about immigration in their classroom: “Energy of a Nation: Immigrants in America.”

## Students of Color and American Indian Student Populations are Growing Throughout Minnesota



Source: Organizing Apprenticeship Project



## Conclusions and recommendation: Constructive civic engagement is helpful, but a bold and broad cradle-to-career strategy is most promising

Since 2007, Growth & Justice has been advocating for a strategic framework aimed at finding the best evidence-tested and cost-effective interventions that would push Minnesota toward a 75 percent overall higher-education attainment rate by the year 2020. *Smart Investments in Minnesota Students: A Research-Based Investment Proposal* advanced the important principle of compounding success, or the “scaffold” approach that builds upon each prior success from prenatal care to higher education. From that report: “Any plan to improve post-secondary attainment, then, must consider the entire education continuum and work to ensure that students are ready to succeed at key points along the way.” (Growth & Justice, 2008, p. 9). The report identified about a dozen interventions or programs that had been shown, through rigorous evaluation methods and cost-benefit analyses, to be cost-effective in improving student achievement. These proven interventions included nurse home visiting programs for prenatal care and parent education, Success for All intensive reading curriculum for the elementary years, and the Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success (ALAS) program. Beyond highlighting specific proven programs, the prevailing theme in the report was the admonition that the entire education pipeline from birth to higher education readiness must be tended with cost-effective investment and out-of-school, family and community support. A corollary is that education policymakers need to resist the simplistic panaceas and “silver bullet” solutions aimed at just one part of the continuum, such as high-stakes testing, merit pay for teachers, or universal all-day kindergarten.

A number of national efforts supporting the total pipeline birth-to-career model are gathering steam. One example is the Broader, Bolder Approach to Education (BBA) campaign, a coalition that includes the American Association of School Administrators, the Nurse Family Partnership, the Economic Policy Institute, and the National Council of Churches and many other organizations and associations who support the idea that only a comprehensive system of birth-to-college strategies will enable all children to thrive and to achieve their full potential. The BBA mission is based on the premise that more than fifty years of research from around the world has shown a powerful association between social and economic disadvantage and low student achievement. BBA promotes comprehensive strategies that promote an expanded concept of education, including health and nutrition supports which ensure that children come to school immunized, well fed, and without distractions that prevent them from focusing on learning. The comprehensive strategies also cover after school and summer school enrichment homework help, adult support and mentoring, and “the academic, cultural and recreational activities that are needed to develop creative thinkers, informed voters, and civic leaders.” (boldapproach.org).

Our research and inquiry in this report, informed by previous work by Growth & Justice, leads us to the conclusion that perhaps the best model, in both theory and practice for total community, cradle-to-career student success, is the one used by the Strive Partnership in Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky.

Founded in 2006 as an affiliate of the KnowledgeWorks Foundation, Strive helped bring together Cincinnati Public Schools and other area school districts together with a vast network of colleges and universities, education-focused nonprofits and advocacy groups, local government officials, and businesses in Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky for mutually reinforcing initiatives. Strive takes a three-pronged approach to ensuring an excellent education for all of Cincinnati’s children – data driven decision-making, sustained and coordinated action, and the alignment of funding around what works. Former president of The University of Cincinnati Nancy Zimpher was a key shaper of the Strive philosophy and strategy, and she and Jeff Edmondson, head of the new national Strive network, are among its strongest public proponents. Prior to Strive’s official formation, much hard work had already taken place, under the same principles. Those earlier successful efforts to improve student performance in the Cincinnati school district were helped in part by Minnesota education reformer Joe Nathan, now director of the Center for School Change at Macalester College. The Strive Partnership was built to help support and maintain those student gains and has blossomed to include the larger metropolitan area of Cincinnati and northern Kentucky. Strive’s 2010 Report Card cites improvement on 40 of 54 statistical indicators of student success, from kindergarten readiness to 4<sup>th</sup> grade math scores to retention rates at local community colleges. (Strive, 2010).

### Three features of the Strive model are key and are relevant for rural and non-metro Minnesota.

First is the concept of having all community sectors on board. Strive partners in Cincinnati include parents' groups, minority community advocates, large private-sector employers from US Bank to Procter & Gamble, school districts in Ohio and Kentucky, key philanthropic foundations and the United Way, universities and workforce training entities, the local archdiocese and Catholic schools, and smaller businesses through regional chambers of commerce. Participants in a nascent Strive Twin Cities working group included a similarly broad range, including the United Way and corporate citizens that included Target and General Mills.

Second, roadmaps and a set of specific measurements of success are paramount. The improvement on 40 out of 54 indicators as shown in the 2010 Report Card is a top selling point for the Strive model, but implicit in that claim is vigilance and record-keeping on many critical steps along the cradle-to-career continuum. Benchmarks and a unified data system lie at the heart of the Strive process, and that data is available for rural communities and students, from national, state and local education agency record-keeping.

And finally, Strive mobilizes improvement networks to achieve the goals on the roadmaps. The crucial getting-it-done part of the Strive enterprise involves well-organized, task-oriented teams that implement programs and policies that deliver the desired results, from ensuring that the community's youngest children are read to 20 minutes a day, to overcoming financial hurdles to post-high school enrollment and retention. The roadmap and the networks in Cincinnati are focused on five cradle-to-career strategic goals: every child prepared for school; every child supported "in and out of school"; every child succeeding academically; every child enrolled in college or career training; and every child graduating with post-secondary credentials. A multi-sector support network, with Strive as the catalyst, is essential to achieving these goals.

The Strive model has won praise from Minnesota's African-American Leadership Forum (AALF), a volunteer organization comprised of leaders from the private, public, and nonprofit sectors. In a recent report by the Education and Life-Long Learning Work Group of the AALF, five kinds of gaps underlie the education achievement gap: an early childhood preparation gap; a "belief" gap and low expectations; a time-in-school gap; a teacher quality gap; and a leadership gap. As a response to the leadership gap, the AALF report concludes:

*Efforts that have proven the most successful in closing the achievement gap and taking it to scale have used [a] "One Table" approach. The One Table approach brings together leaders in each of these sectors [education, business, government, philanthropy and the community] and connects the entire educational continuum from "cradle to career." ... The acclaimed Harlem Children's Zone is one such model, albeit confined to a limited geographic area. Another successful model of this approach is Strive Together in the greater Cincinnati area ... We must adopt a Strive-like "One Table" approach to solving the gap. (Hassan & Mahmoud, 2011).*

The Stanford Social Innovation Review recently published an article praising Strive and making the case that large-scale social change requires broad cross-sector coordination. The authors, John Kania and Mark Kramer, are both international experts on delivering social impact and Kramer is the co-founder and first board chair of the Center for Effective Philanthropy. Their analysis of **why** Strive has found success when so many other efforts have failed is both positive and instructive:

*It is because a core group of community leaders decided to abandon their individual agendas in favor of a collective approach to improving student achievement. ... These leaders realized that fixing one point on the educational continuum – such as better after-school programs – wouldn't make much difference unless all parts of the continuum improved at the same time. No single organization, however innovative or powerful, could accomplish this alone. Instead, their ambitious mission became to coordinate improvements at every stage of a young person's life, from "cradle to career." (Kania & Kramer, 2011).*

The authors elaborated on the key components of collective impact, which they summarized as "a centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff, and a structured process that leads to a common agenda, shared measurement, continuous communication and mutually reinforcing activities among all participants." (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

Applause is due to any and all constructive efforts to empower and enthuse more people in the community to help students succeed. In some cases, it can be argued that only parts of the continuum really serious reinforcement, such as early childhood education, or, in the case of Cook County, addressing geographical limits on access to post-secondary credentials. Many smaller rural communities and school districts may lack the capacity to launch a full-blown Strive model for student success. But as the Itasca Student Success initiative is showing, groups of school districts, local chambers of commerce, city and county governments and local higher education institutions and nonprofits – all working together from the same road map and with a Strive-like strategy – may be the best hope for educational equity and continued economic vitality in rural Minnesota.

Education expert and author Diane Ravitch, a veteran of the Bush administration’s No Child Left Behind (NCLB) initiative, concluded her best-selling book *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* with a ringing declaration that the punitive high-stakes testing strategy of NCLB had fallen short of its goals, and that a far more holistic cradle-to-career approach offered the best promise:

*Our schools cannot be improved if we ignore the disadvantages associated with poverty that affect children’s ability to learn. Children who have grown up in poverty need extra resources, including preschool and medical care. They need small classes, where they will get extra teacher time, and they need extra learning time. Their families need additional supports, such as coordinated social services that help them to improve their education, to acquire necessary social skills and job skills and to obtain jobs and housing. While the school itself cannot do these things, it should be part of **a web of public and private agencies** [emphasis added] that buttress families. (Ravitch, 2010).*

Finally, citing the work of testing experts Ina V.S. Mullis and Michael O. Martin of Boston College, Ravitch concludes, saving perhaps the best and strongest ingredient for last mention, that the way forward for student success lies in “a strong curriculum; experienced teachers; effective instruction; willing students; adequate resources; and a community that values education.” (Ravitch, 2010).

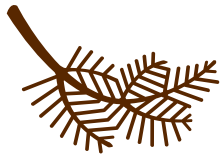


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