

16 Solutions that Deliver Equity and Excellence in Education

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In 2010, the Organizing Apprenticeship Project (OAP) launched a series of policy briefs to weigh in on Minnesota's most pressing policy issues. The series is a proactive response to a growing body of research that says the failure to address racial disparities in core infrastructure like education, economic development, and health care will undermine Minnesota's long-term economic growth and vitality.

OAP works collaboratively with racial and economic justice leaders to research and develop solutions to expand opportunity and reduce disparities. In this policy brief, OAP and its partners take a hard look at the disparities in student achievement and offer 16 solutions to deliver equity and excellence in education outcomes for the state.

OVERVIEW

Minnesota's education system is a national leader in providing opportunity to our white students. As a result, our white fourth and eighth grade students outperform other students on national math and reading assessments.

Meanwhile, Minnesota's education system is not a national leader for delivering opportunity to our American Indian students, students of color and immigrant students. The prevailing overall benchmarks do not reflect the same type of educational achievement for our students of color. For example:

- ♦ 2010 statewide eighth grade math assessments reveal that 64 percent of white students measured above the required level of proficiency, while for students of color, proficiency levels were reached by only 29 percent of American Indian, 35 percent of Latino, and 28 percent of Black students. Although Asian Pacific Islander students' rates (60 percent) were aligned with whites, this masks gaps among Minnesota's broadly diverse Asian population.¹
- ♦ Statewide 10th grade reading assessments reveal that 82 percent of white students measured above proficiency, contrasted to 60 percent of Asian Pacific Islanders, 55 percent of American Indians, 50 percent of Latinos and 45 percent of Blacks.²
- ♦ By 12th grade, students of color are more likely to be a couple of years behind their classmates. With each passing grade level, hope and faith disappears in the communities of students of color and their parents. Learners lose motivation, slide into meaninglessness

and no longer fully apply themselves. Today, we have thousands of children of color who walk around with an educational hunger that has not been fully nourished by Minnesota's education system.

The disparities in education outcomes are well-known and publicized in our state. What are less known are the causes that are contributing to the devastating educational gaps.

Some claim that poverty is the leading reason for the prevailing stark inequities. However, racial disparities in education hold regardless of economic standing.³ According to data from National Assessment of Educational Progress, between 2003 and 2009, Minnesota's poor white fourth graders were more likely to do better on standardized reading tests than Black students in the same grade who were not poor. Similarly, from 2007 to 2009, poor white fourth graders had matched or outperformed on reading tests Latino students in the same grade who were not poor.

Others might say it's about who is smarter. But that is simply not the case. The hard truth is that these inequities are deeply grounded in complex decisions and multiple systems. Our state's unequal opportunities in access to employment, wealth, health, child care, transportation and housing have ripple effects on disparities in education. As a result, many guardians and parents of color who may have to travel long distances to hold down low-wage jobs, or who may be learning a new culture or language, sometimes don't have what they need to support their children in school.

Education funding, policy decisions and institutional practices can have a large influence on shifting the achievement gaps. These decisions and institutional practices can harm students by driving a bigger wedge between students of color and access to resources, teachers, curriculums, and good schools. Or, alternatively, they can be designed to help students by closing gaps and creating the environments where kids get the resources they need to flourish in public schools.

To get there, though, we have to address not only the achievement gaps between students of color and white learners but the equity gaps as well. Students of color and many low-income students often face an education equity gap that significantly contributes to race-based gaps in achievement outcomes.

WATCH THE EQUITY GAPS

We can watch the equity gaps between institutional performances and learners by paying close attention to the gaps in opportunity and treatment driven by the state's budget, policy decisions, and institutional practices. Decisions may appear to affect everyone universally yet have unequal and profound impacts on students, particularly students of color. Here are some to consider:

- ✦ As the state's proportion of students of color increases, the state government's commitment to funding Minnesota's schools is decreasing. Between 2003 and 2011, students of color and immigrant students increased by 34 percent, from 159,892 to 214,915.⁴ Within that time, the total state aid to Minnesota's school districts dropped by 14.7 percent, or about \$1,400 per student.⁵

- ✦ That drop in state aid to schools has been coupled with an aggressive increase in local school property taxes. But the property tax increases have not been enough to replace the decline in state aid. Between fiscal years 2003 and 2011, school property taxes increased by 136 percent, or from \$663 per student to \$1,563.⁶
- ✦ Meanwhile, at the school levels, almost all white students in Minnesota are routinely taught by and see people in authority—in front of the classroom and in textbooks—who share their culture, language, and history.
- ✦ Nearly all students of color and American Indian students in our schools rarely have this experience or advantage in Minnesota’s educational institutions. However, if this situation were reversed, this would accelerate progress on turning around Minnesota’s achievement gap. The Review of Economics and Statistics finds that “on average, students of color score higher when taught by teachers of their race and ethnicity, scoring 4 percentile points higher on standardized tests in reading and math.”⁷
- ✦ Disparities in academic achievement, declines in state aid, over-representation in special education, and discrimination in school discipline are all elements that force students of color into the school-to-prison pipeline. For each out-of-school suspension per 100 students in Minnesota, 16.3 are Black, 8.7 are American Indian, 6.0 are Latino, 3.3 are Asian Pacific Islander and 2.5 are white, according to the Children’s Defense Fund.⁸ Inequity in school discipline is a key factor in the disproportionate number of students of color who are undereducated and over-incarcerated.

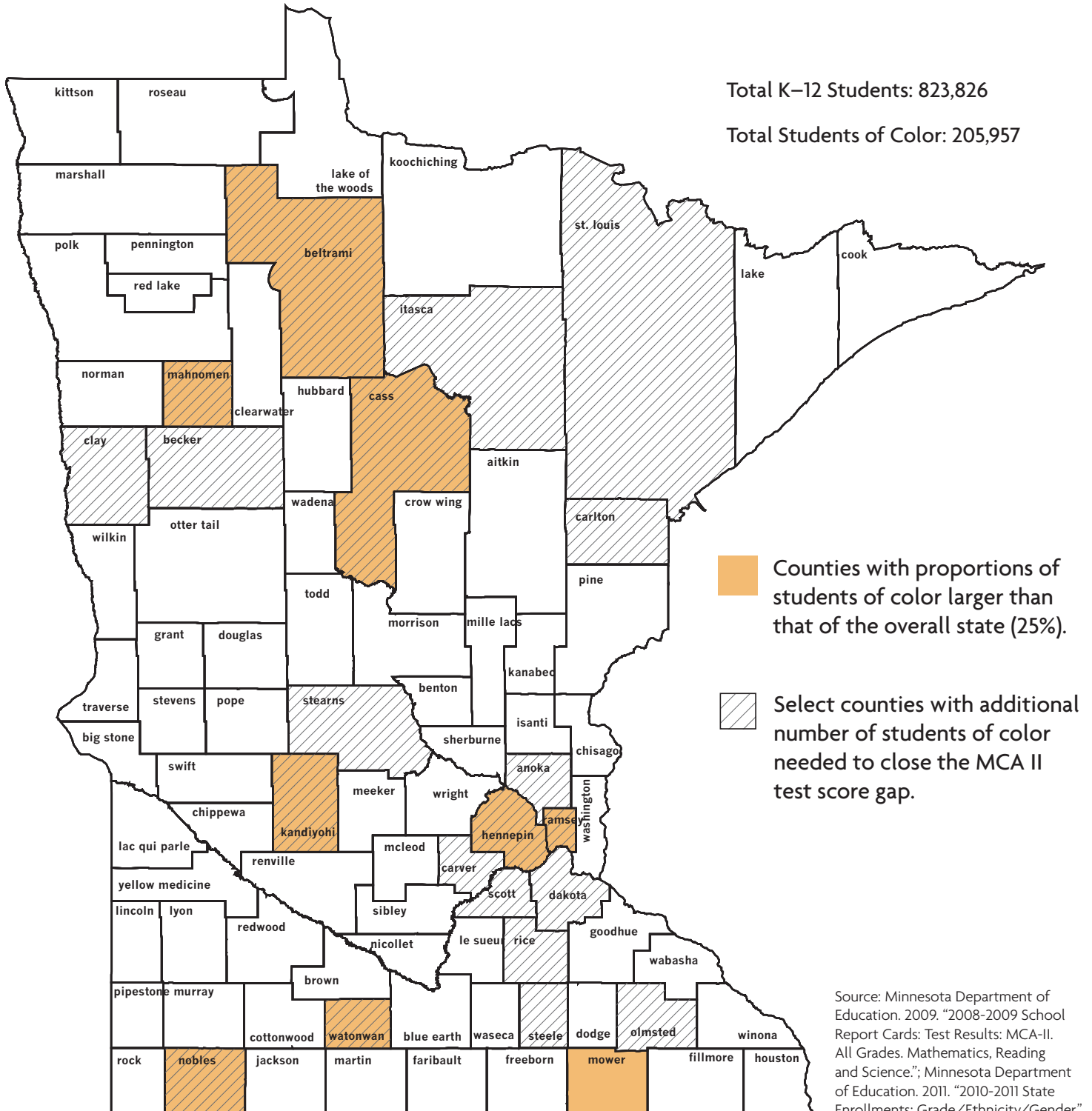
These are equity gaps built by policies or practices at the state, district or school level that impact the quality and effectiveness of educating students of color. Acknowledging, understanding and closing these gaps are critical if we ever hope to close the more publicly recognized achievement gaps.

THE PUBLIC WILL FOR EQUITY

One current roadblock to success is our collective perception of the achievement and equity gaps by the media, state legislature, community and civic leaders. The current public dialogue gives the perception that the gaps are restless, large, unruly—and frankly insurmountable.

Actually, though, OAP has mapped the gaps in math, science, and reading, and found that at least one leading gap is represented by a comparatively small number of students. According to the OAP’s new analysis, the number of students of color needed to close the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment II test score gap with white students—the state’s basic standards test—is *only* 60,505 students across the entire state. In chart (page 4), it is easy to see where these students are, and where focused attention on students and equity opportunities in schools would make a huge difference. Surely, closing this gap is attainable. What we need is public will.

Students of color and American Indian students are widespread throughout Minnesota. The MCA II test score gap is statewide but considerably small. Expanding opportunity to just 41,399 students of color in 21 select counties will close the gap.



Source: Minnesota Department of Education. 2009. "2008-2009 School Report Cards: Test Results: MCA-II. All Grades. Mathematics, Reading and Science."; Minnesota Department of Education. 2011. "2010-2011 State Enrollments: Grade/Ethnicity/Gender."

MOVING FORWARD

Dismantling the current unequal outcomes in educational attainment and institutional treatment must become the state's top priority or the inequities will only grow in magnitude—right in the midst of school population shifts.

By 2025-2030, populations of color and the American Indian population will make up half of the estimated 169,000 increase in Minnesota's population.⁹ What this translates to is that Minnesota's students of color will become the face of education. Over the next 10 years, the number of high school graduates who are students of color and immigrants will increase by 98 percent, while white graduates will decrease by 17 percent, according to the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education.

Minnesota's leaders must drive institutional and policy change to deliver equity and excellence for all students. Investing in racial equity in education is essential to nourishing the soul of students of color, as well as contributing to Minnesota's long-term economic vitality.

Closing both the achievement and equity gaps is manageable and possible. There are local community leaders, schools, and districts making progress on closing the gaps, but they do so with little recognition or reward. A strong commitment to and public investment in racial equity in education from leadership within the state legislature, department of education and from the governor has some of the strongest potential to accomplish broader gains.

The state of Minnesota has a constitutional commitment to equitably educate all students. In order for this to happen, state leadership must make an explicit commitment to core equity practices that will ensure all students have a just opportunity to learn and achieve. This commitment begins not with simply managing disparities, but leading with the conviction that our state must be accountable for achieving equity in all facets of education.

There are programs, policies and practical ways to make equity outcomes part of the solution. OAP researched and compiled 16 initiatives that represent the best thinking of leading groups in education opportunity.

In this policy brief, we used a set of five filters to pick the initiatives. They included: (a) public leadership from the chief operators of institutions, (b) race equity consciousness at the point of decision-making, (c) inclusion of stakeholders most impacted by policy and budget decisions, (d) creation of equity standards and accountability measures, (e) best practices and documented solutions that have the capacity to achieve equity for all students.

16 SOLUTIONS

PUBLIC LEADERSHIP FROM THE TOP. CORE EDUCATION LEADERSHIP MUST COMMIT TO EQUITY AS A KEY EDUCATION STRATEGY. THIS COMMITMENT MUST BEGIN AT THE TOP AND FILTER DOWN THROUGHOUT EVERY LEVEL OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM.

1. Committing strong school leadership to equity. In order for schools and districts to be successful in making equity a priority, key leadership must create a school culture that raises equity practices and holds themselves accountable for progress towards equity. A key example of top leadership committing to equity at the center of their school reform is seen in the progress of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) in Maryland. Over the last 10 years, Superintendent Jerry Weast has focused attention on the inequitable phenomenon of low achievement in neighborhoods and schools with high poverty and high proportions of students of color.¹⁰ Years of hard work and district-wide strategies focusing on student success through intensive teacher development, targeting equitable outcomes for low-income students and students of color, and institutionalized standards led the district to benefit all students.¹¹ In particular, **between 2002 and 2009 the rates of Black kindergarteners who were proficient readers rose 39 percentage points and Latino students' proficiency rate rose 46 percentage points;**¹² **And, in 1999, only one-third of Black and Latino students were enrolled in at least one honors or advanced placement course. Nine years later this enrollment jumped to 59 percent of Black students and 56 percent of Latino students.**¹³ **But the institutional commitment to equitably educating students of color led the way for the groundbreaking progress seen in MCPS.** Champions for equity recognize there are specialized strategies being used throughout the country and in Minnesota that are expanding opportunity for students of color. Yet, until the state and top education leadership commit to achieving equity at all levels of education, Minnesota will only realize pockets of success. **In order for success to be widespread across the state, top leadership must make a commitment at the state level to increase racial and economic equity in Minnesota's public education system.**

2. School board and civic leaders partnering to implement new strategies for high student achievement. In September 2008, Rochester Public Schools (RPS) teamed up with the Rochester Diversity Council to implement a SmartKids program as a strategy to target the achievement gap. This school board initiative is a key element of RPS' strategic plan. The SmartKids program is a parent engagement program modeled after the Efficacy Institute's parent trainings. These trainings are a district-wide effort focused on "promoting the academic and social development of children by helping educators, parents and human service providers **operate from a simple belief: All children can learn at high levels if the process of education is effectively organized.**" The SmartKids training empowers parents to feel like an important part of their children's academic development, helping parents to be more connected and willing to participate in various school-related activities." SmartKids also collaborates with the English as a Second Language program of RPS to promote trainings for the non-English

speaking population. This has led to an increase in parent understanding and participation from the Cambodian, Somali and Latino communities. **By June 2011, Rochester's SmartKids program will have trained 2,057 parents who reflect the demographic student make-up of the RSD. In addition, between 2009 and 2011, Rochester schools have seen an overall increase in proficiency in math of 4.6 percentage points and 3.3 percentage points in reading. In this time period, Black students increased proficiency by 10 percentage points in math and 9 percentage points in reading. Latino students saw an increase of 5 and 13 percentage points in reading and math, respectively. Key leaders must make a commitment to systematically changing the methods used to educate students. The belief that all students can achieve at high levels must be a dominating principle in school district reforms.**

3. Institutional practices that teach English language learning through content. Trends in research and student population led the English Language Learner Department of the St. Paul School District (SPPS) to use the Collaborative Model (CM).¹⁴ Research indicates that the most-effective programs for English language learners is to learn collaboratively with their English-speaking peers and create a genuine collaboration among ELL and mainstream teachers. Collaborating is about setting institutional practices in place that drive success over the long term. The evolving process has taken the SPPS district nearly a decade to reach excellence. **Indicators: the gaps between ELL and non-ELL students in SPPS are closing in Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment tests. During the 2005 school year, 68 percent of ELL students were showing proficiency in reading, compared to 74 percent of non-ELL students. At the same time, the gaps were closing more strongly in math. Nearly 73 percent of ELL students were showing proficiency in math, compared to 76 percent of non-ELL students.**¹⁵ SPPS' equitable outcomes were highlighted in the Council of the Great City Schools "Beating the Odds VI" (2006) report, as hosting the nation's best gains of large districts in closing the equity gaps between ELL and non-ELL students. Experts studying the issue, and St. Paul's outcomes themselves, show that it takes at least seven years for English language learners to become proficient "English users." However, in 2004, the state legislature arbitrarily cut funding for ELL students down to five years from a maximum of seven years, regardless of student needs.¹⁶ **Standards reset by the state legislature must not undermine local best practices such as those in SPPS. The formula set by state policymakers has to be readjusted to reflect how long it takes for institutional practices to drive equitable outcomes in Minnesota's rapidly diversifying school districts.**

RACE EQUITY CONSCIOUSNESS AT THE POINT OF DECISION MAKING. WHEN LEADING WITH EQUITY, DECISION-MAKERS MUST ENSURE THAT DECISIONS REFLECT AN ANALYSIS OF RACIAL, CULTURAL, AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS BEFORE IMPLEMENTATION.

4. Changing school budget options to prevent disparities. In 2009, the Education Equity Organizing Collaborative (EEOC), then a partnership of Migizi Communications, Somali Action Alliance, ISIAAH, the Coalition of Black Churches and the Organizing Apprenticeship Project, negotiated with the board of Minneapolis Public Schools to have an equity impact

assessment on Changing School Options. This was the district's major planning proposal to change pathways from elementary to secondary schools, and transportation routes. Although the district's four proposals were clear on racial and economic disparities, they were not clear on how the solutions would shift those disparities. This was troubling because children of color and American Indian kids made up over three-quarters (77 percent) of the school's population, and poor kids made up 63 percent of student enrollment. **The EEOC pushed the school board and Research Department to revise their recommendations to reveal the race and economic equity dynamics of options *before* they adopted an option. Based on analysis, the district picked the one option that would have the least negative impact to students, but held a slightly higher cost. This plan cost \$9 million to implement, and would disrupt learning for only 4,900 students (36 percent were students of color, one-quarter were white students, 22 percent were poor).**¹⁷ Still, the final analysis revealed that two groups would be hardest hit. The EEOC helped the Somali community save Pratt Elementary School, which was a major pathway to Sanford middle school; and, American Indian students and their families are being consulted on where they want to attend schools instead of being transported across school boundaries. To date, they are the nation's first school district to use this equity assessment. **Adopt racial and economic equity impact assessments as a way for decisions-makers and community stakeholders to be conscious of impacts and prevent the reinforcement of racial and economic disparities in education.**

AUTHENTIC INCLUSION OF STAKEHOLDERS.

5. **Engaging community organizers and civic leaders in education solutions.** The inclusion of stakeholders frequently happens through community organizing efforts. Community organizing is a strategy that “leverages the collective power of parents, youth, community residents to alter existing power relationships and policies, and create more equitable and high-quality schools for all students.”¹⁸ Studies by Brown University's Annenberg Institute for School Reform have shown where efforts have yielded results. The Grow Your Own (GYO) campaign in Illinois was initiated to recruit and retain quality teachers of color in low-income neighborhoods. Assessments of the program found that the GYO campaign “enhanced equity in the school system, developed a teacher preparation program that took a **new approach to addressing the shortage of qualified teachers in low-income communities, and established new roles for parents and community constituencies in improving schools.**”¹⁹ As of 2007, **545 prospective teachers were participating in the GYO initiative and 1,000 are projected to complete the program by 2016.**²⁰ Another victory was won by Miami's People Acting for Community Together (PACT) in which their community influenced district policies and resource allocation to benefit the lowest-performing students in the poorest neighborhoods and increased accountability to the community.²¹ In addition, schools involved in the PACT movement showed steady improvement for third and fourth graders on Florida's state exam between 2001 and 2005.²² **A key element of creating lasting education reform calls for Minnesota to commit to authentically partnering with stakeholders, including those most impacted by the challenge, and communities of color, in order to create the change most needed in our schools.**

CREATION OF EQUITY STANDARDS AND ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES AT THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL.

6. Adopting innovative standards that improve institutional accountability on shifting achievement and equity gaps. OAP's analysis shows the achievement gap sits inside a larger context than merely standardized assessment scores, and students of color and American Indian students will achieve when given the tools, resources, and quality education. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) measures and rewards aspects of our education system, but left unmeasured are equity practices. The impact of only looking at assessments is that students of color are often viewed as unable to achieve. This is not the case. And, MDE misses opportunities to track larger institutional factors that contribute to gaps. The needed standards must measure, reward, and hold schools accountable for equitably educating our students of color and low-income students who are too often marginalized in our education system. **Emerging equity standards include but are not limited to: equitable treatment and access for all students; parent and community involvement from all cultures, races and linguistic backgrounds; proportional graduation and drop-out rates; equal representation of all cultures throughout curriculums; the absence of tracking and unequal discipline rates; and clear pathways to post-secondary education for all students.** The 11 partners of the EEOC have already begun taking steps towards the creation and implementation of such equity standards. The EEOC is currently working with community leaders to define equity standards and will be reaching out to partner with the Governor and the Minnesota Department of Education around placing the prevailing equity standards at the center of excellence in the state of Minnesota. **Adopt equity standards that help create, prioritize, and reward an overall school culture that supports, honors, and sees achievement for students from all communities, including students of color and American Indian students.**

BEST PRACTICES AND DOCUMENTED SOLUTIONS THAT HAVE THE CAPACITY TO ACHIEVE EQUITY. SCHOOLS MUST CONTINUE TO IMPLEMENT NEW IDEAS, BUT COMMIT TO FREQUENTLY EVALUATING THOSE STRATEGIES TO MAKE CERTAIN THEY ARE REALIZING POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR ALL MINNESOTA STUDENTS.

7. Preserve and realign Minnesota's commitment to integration to boost economic well-being and foster multicultural learning. Students of color and low-income students were ushered into their district's classrooms of Minneapolis, St. Paul and Duluth through housing policies and real estate practices that promoted segregated cities. Financial institutions, developers and realtors promoted racially segregated housing patterns.²³ **To correct this, the state legislature adopted an integration rule which allowed districts and schools to voluntarily create desegregation plans, allowing for students' race in their placement decisions to be acknowledged.** Aligning with this rule, the state legislature provided funding support to districts and schools.²⁴ However, a 2005 report by the Office of the Legislative Auditor (OLA) found that the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) had not provided

consistent or required oversight. **The OLA offered recommendations for improving the Integration Revenue program. Nowhere in OLA's recommendation did they indicate the program should be dismantled.** Yet, during the 2011 legislative session, some lawmakers have proposed a dismantling of the entire program. This would undermine the closing of equity gaps. A new study published by the National Bureau of Economic Research, that included Minnesota, found that “for Blacks, one year of school desegregation increased the likelihood of graduating high school by 2.9 percentage points, increased annual adult earnings by five percent, reduced the probability of incarceration by 14.7 percentage points.”²⁵ **The program still serves important principles of choice and a fight against the legacy of institutional racism that fed segregated educational opportunity. We must preserve this tool while realigning it to focus on boosting educational attainment between students of color and white students.**

8. Recommitting to adequately funding special education. When the state government votes to cut funding for special education, they must consider the impact it will have on our young Minnesotans. In 2007, the OAP's research tracked the funding of special education. Federal and state government underfunding of special education places a heavy financial burden on local school districts. When considering the racial implications of this underfunding, the situation becomes even worse. Black, American Indian and limited-English-proficiency Latino students are over-identified and represented in special education.²⁶ In the current legislative session, the House and Senate have passed education omnibus bills that could freeze or deeply cut special education funding, while keeping all mandates intact. This proposed, and dangerous, step in legislation could eliminate schools' ability to address forecasted increases in special education by over \$260 million and would instead repurpose them for the basic funding formula.²⁷ This would exacerbate an unfunded mandate for special education and could result in an increase in cross-subsidies that could lead to higher property taxes due to schools being forced to get money from levees. This will ultimately limit the ability of districts to equitably fund and provide quality education for both general education and special education students. As the state legislature looks at cutting funding that could influence special education, it must consider the injustice it is doing to our students and students of color. **Regardless of the Minnesota's legislative body, it remains clear that funding special education has to be a top priority for creating equity for Minnesota students. Cutting funding for special populations will ultimately impact each and every student in our state.**

9. Creating alternative licensure pathways for educators of color to teach a changing demographic. Minnesota recently passed legislation allowing for the creation of alternative pathways to teaching in order to address the growing teacher shortage, increase the number of teachers of color in its teaching force, and close the achievement gaps among students. While this is an endeavor we applaud, the state must not lose sight of the importance of maintaining quality in its quest to diversify the teaching force. Our communities and students will not settle for merely having teachers of color in front of them. These students must have access to superior educators of color who will promote students' excellence. Illinois' Grow Your Own (GYO) program is a prime example of a teacher-preparation program that has been successful

in creating an alternative pathway to teaching for adults of color. In first year analysis of the program, principals in schools where GYO teachers taught state that “GYO beginning teachers are performing as well as—and in some cases better than—other beginning teachers.”²⁸ Four distinct characteristics of GYO participants positively affect their success as beginning teachers: shared race, ethnicity, culture; entering the teaching field as a second career or several years after high school graduation; being a parent; and being involved in the community.²⁹ **While alternative teacher licensure is not a silver bullet to ensuring quality teachers, by passing this measure, Minnesota has taken a step in the right direction as long as they commit to placing quality teachers of color in our classrooms.**

10. Updating textbooks to echo large shifts in student populations. As the demographics in our state continue to shift, educational institutions must take steps to ensure school curriculums and textbooks keep up. It is proven that students learn best when presented with material with which they can connect and in which they can see themselves. Unfortunately, critical pieces of history and culture are left out of students’ learning from textbooks. The Hmong Organizing Program (HOP) of TakeAction Minnesota has taken steps to incorporate the history and lessons of diverse people into their curriculums to benefit all students. Minnesota is host to the second largest Hmong population in the United States. According to data collected by St. Paul Public Schools, Hmong-speaking students currently account for one-quarter (23 percent) of total enrollment in the district.³⁰ Building on legislation passed in California that required schools across the state to teach Hmong history, the HOP began a similar process. For nearly two years, the program has been working in collaboration with St. Paul Public Schools to anchor a Hmong curriculum in schools. After a hard-fought battle, the stories and histories of the Hmong people formerly absent from the majority of curriculums and textbooks will now be sitting alongside district-wide history courses beginning May 2011. The Hmong social studies curriculum offers interactive lessons on Hmong engagement in the Secret War, causes and effects of migration, and a bridge lesson highlighting Hmong immigration in the United States. **Our schools must commit to valuing and incorporating the cultural contributions of every Minnesotan into their curriculums and textbooks.**

11. Promoting economic growth through funding early childhood education. Investing in quality early-childhood education not only benefits our children, but also stimulates our economy. However, studies show that low-income children and students of color have fallen behind white and non-poor children before they even enter kindergarten.³¹ To attack this early gap, prekindergarten through third grade programs have been elevated to advance student readiness at a younger age. These PK-3 programs include three components: high-quality education, all-day kindergarten, and primary grades “with aligned standards and curriculum in a coherent PK-3 education program.”³² Research shows that this approach can “improve student achievement, reduce the need for costly special education services, and produce a more educated, skilled, and competitive workforce.”³³ **Minnesota currently invests only one percent of the state’s budget on early childhood care and education services. Reaching an additional 18,000 children of color and low-income children (ages 0-5) with high quality early-learning opportunities would double that investment to two percent of the state’s**

budget and build on existing infrastructure.³⁴ Multiple longitudinal evaluations demonstrate “the return on early-childhood-development programs that focus on students of color and low-income students far exceeds the return on other projects that are funded under economic development. **Cost-benefit analyses of the Perry Preschool Program, the Abecedarian Project, the Chicago Child-Parent Centers, and the Elmira Prenatal/Early Infancy Project showed for every one dollar invested, the returns range from \$3 to \$17.**³⁵ **Broadening investment in early-childhood education has to become part of not only ensuring quality education for students, but also is a solid economic investment for Minnesota.**

12. Strengthening opportunity for boys, particularly Black boys. Reading proficiency rates for both Minnesota’s Black and white males have dropped dramatically between third grade and 10th grade. However, the indicators of well-being for Black males are starker: unemployment rate is nearly twice as high as it is for whites, and college graduation rates are 40 percentage points behind white males. Currently, in Minnesota’s schools, there are 40,297 Black male learners. **If state policymakers and school districts continue business as usual, the Black male on-time graduation rate will remain at a dismally low 38 percent. Solutions exist.** The current graduation standard has been set by New Jersey. During the 2003–2004 school year, New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) embarked on an unprecedented state level effort to systematically close the equity gaps by economic class and race, particularly for Black male learners.³⁶ NJDOE used ammunition from concerned parents and a court decision to broaden **investment in early education and getting high quality teachers in areas with the widest equity gaps for students.** As a result, **between 2003 and 2008, New Jersey’s Black male graduating rate rose from just 48 percent to 69 percent.** Recently, the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership released a three-legged conceptual framework to drive equity and quality in education for Black males. (A) Allow for data-driven decisions to turn into better practices at critical periods of achievement. Data that is untangled by race/ethnicity will allow policies and practices to be more accurate in closing gaps. (B) Adopt innovative and tailored initiatives and programs such as those identified by Minnesota’s local practitioners and the state of New Jersey. (C) Strengthen measures, invest in, and support programs that drive sustainable outcomes over time. **Minnesota’s state and local decision makers must adopt this concept in order to create and support focused strategies to arrive at equity in outcomes for our male learners, particularly Black males.**

13. Implementing tuition equity practices in higher education institutions. Inequitable access to higher education poses a major threat to the overall vitality of our state. It is increasingly necessary, as Minnesota becomes more diverse, for the state to provide equitable access to college for Minnesota’s students of color who will soon make up over one-quarter of adults in the workforce. A major step towards increasing access lies in the implementation of tuition equity practices in higher institutions. Due to the fact that many states charge out of state tuition for undocumented students, far too many of these students are denied the opportunity for a higher education. The extremely high costs of out of state tuition are a major barrier for undocumented immigrants who have lived in the United States for the majority of their lives and who aspire to become college graduates. In 2007, Minnesota took a

step towards higher education equity by passing state legislation that implemented a flat-rate tuition policy at 22 Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MNSCU). **Data from the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership states that evidence from eleven MNSCU colleges shows a 95 percent increase in the number of students who benefitted from this flat rate tuition policy.³⁷ While this data does not exclusively indentify undocumented students as the sole recipients of this progress, the policy of standard tuition for all students is a key opportunity that is sought out by many undocumented students who desire a quality college education.** Nationally, since 2001, 12 states have advanced higher-education opportunities by offering in-state tuition to undocumented youth who have attended a prescribed number of years of high school in their respective state. Since Washington passed its in-state tuition policy, 287 students have enrolled in the state's public institutions between 2003 and 2007.³⁸ Texas and New Mexico have gone much further by providing equitable access to state financial aid to their undocumented populations as well. As the equitable impacts of this practice become more apparent, more states are joining the charge to educate our undocumented students. **As demographics shift and change the face of Minnesota, we must continue this equitable practice and establish greater access to higher education for students of color, first generation students, and immigrant students.**

14. Harvesting the seeds of the urban American Indian community and Minneapolis Public Schools Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). The Minneapolis Public Schools have a dismal track record with regard to the education of their American Indian students.³⁹ The failure of the system to educate American Indian learners dates to the post-World War II era when large numbers of American Indians began settling in the Twin Cities.⁴⁰ Today, the performance of American Indian students in Minneapolis Schools continues to stand below district and statewide averages. One approach that the American Indian community identified to correct practices and policies that perpetuate cultural inequity was through developing a MOA. This historic agreement was signed between the Metropolitan Urban Indian Directors (MUID) and Minneapolis Public Schools in October 2006. The first of its kind in the state of Minnesota, the agreement has the following goals: (a) cultivate a partnership with the district to transform education for American Indian students; (b) provide guidance for assessing current policies, practices, as well as environments that shape learning opportunities; (c) provide institutions, students, communities, and families with a culturally relevant guide to ensure the well-being and academic success of American Indian children. To satisfy these goals, the agreement is anchored in guiding principles of cultural identity, sense of self, Indian cultural lens, sense of connection, and 16 measures that define academic success. These principles will provide a means by which the American Indian Community and the Minneapolis Schools will evaluate progress. The American Indian Students Success Work Group (AISSW), consisting of community, school, parent, student, local government, and other representatives will be responsible for implementing the agreement and evaluating the Student Success Guide in improving educational performance for American Indian students. **The impact of these strategies has yielded much success. The MUID and Minneapolis Schools have signed an unprecedented agreement and commitment around the education of our American Indian learners. The community has heavily invested in Minneapolis Schools. For example, the**

Division of Indian Works has invested \$3 million, including \$200,000 each to South High School and Anishinabe Academy.⁴¹ Meanwhile, Anishinabe Academy kindergarteners scored the highest for growth in the recent assessment on letter sounds, overall ranking second in Minneapolis Schools.⁴² Elders, youth and various elements of the American Indian community have come together to plant seeds for sustained growth and academic achievement. As state and local school decision makers, we have to continue a strong commitment to the MOA; which would then support practices that lead to even stronger progress in urban American Indian education.

15. Revitalizing Minnesota’s American Indian languages. In an effort to assimilate Minnesota’s American Indian population into “mainstream” culture, policies were created that essentially destroyed Indian cultural traditions. This forced assimilation resulted in a loss of native languages such as Ojibwe and Dakota. Language revitalization is a key strategy for the resurrection of native languages and has been a critical issue in Minnesota for the last several years. Innovative efforts have supported Dakota and Ojibwe language revitalization through programs from kindergarten to higher education levels. Between the 2008 and 2009 legislative sessions former Governor Pawlenty signed a bill allowing for a working group that will inventory language revitalization efforts and recommend how to continue to preserve indigenous languages—through identifying gaps in curriculum to train educators to teach indigenous languages, determining levels of technical assistance, and identifying federal and state policies that could be reformed to build on the success of Dakota and Ojibwe language immersion programs.⁴³ In order to help preserve Indian languages, \$150,000 was made available in fiscal year 2010 from the arts and cultural heritage fund to the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council for the working group on Dakota and Ojibwe Language Revitalization. On top of this, \$550,000 in 2010 and \$700,000 in 2011 are available to the Indian Council to provide grants to boost Minnesota’s educational programs that seek to preserve Indian languages.⁴⁴ Preserving the cultural languages of diverse populations is vital to the overall social and economic fabric of our state. **Continue to create and support focused strategies and investments that revitalize American Indian students through resurrecting Minnesota’s first languages.**

16. Dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline. In response to the over-emphasis on punitive measures seen in the wake of zero-tolerance policies, schools and districts must put to rest the overuse of disruptive and debilitating punishments. The expansive use of these punishments drives a wedge in the ability of districts to adequately educate their children and is linked to the existence of the juvenile justice pipeline. Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a comprehensive intervention strategy that focuses on data analysis, proactive and preventative discipline, consistent behavior expectations, and family and community involvement. In the past 12 years “consistent outcomes by the Illinois PBIS network have demonstrated that schools implementing school-wide PBIS with integrity experience reductions in the number of discipline problems, increases in test scores, higher measures of school safety, and improved school climate.”⁴⁵ The successful implementation of PBIS systems has been cited by the Southern Poverty Law Center as a “critical first step in addressing the

over-representation of ethnic minority students in school exclusionary practices.”⁴⁶ In order for this recommendation to come to fruition, schools implementing PBIS must look at issues of race when carrying out this intervention strategy. The schools highlighted by the Illinois PBIS network, an initiative funded by the State Board of Education, that saw a reduction in the number of students receiving disciplinary measures demonstrate a commitment to having uncomfortable conversations about race, collecting racially disaggregated discipline data, and including family and community members in school efforts. **At these schools out of school suspension reductions ranged from 11-22 percentage points and office referral rates were reduced by 13-76 percentage points, with the most significant improvements seen for Black students.**⁴⁷ Currently, Minnesota is implementing its own state-initiated PBIS system in 229 schools around the state.⁴⁸ Our hope is that these schools follow the steps of data analysis, proactive and preventative discipline, consistent behavior expectations and family and community involvement to address the disproportionality students of color see in discipline measures. **Reclaim our youth from the school-to-prison pipeline. Support strategies that enable our students to stay in school-based learning opportunities, particularly our students of color.**

ENDNOTES

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- 8 Children’s Defense Fund. 2007, October. “America’s Cradle to Prison Pipeline.” Washington, DC: CDF.
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- 14 In SPPS, the number of English Language Learners (ELL) has grown that it has made more sense to use the Collaboration Model, which is an alignment between ELL programming and mainstream programming.
- 15 What is more, on the then Basic Standards Test for the eighth graders, in 2004-05 SPPS nearly eroded the gap between ELL and non-ELL students. Forty seven percent of ELL students earned passing scores on math, compared to 49 percent of non-ELL students. And for reading, it was 64 percent to 66 percent, respectively.
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- 17 Minneapolis Public Schools. 2009, July 10. "Changing School Options: Revised Plan and Variations." Minneapolis: MPS. Worth noting is that while competing plans would have cost less, they would have doubled the number of students negatively impacted.
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- 32 Waltz, Megan. "High Quality Pre-K or All-Day K?" St. Paul, Minnesota: Ready4K. The Chicago Child-Parent Centers, the Abecedarian Project, and the Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Project use similar programs to the PK-3 model.
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- 41 Minneapolis Public Schools Area B Parent Advisory Council Meeting Minutes, The Minneapolis American Indian Center, March 20, 2008.
- 42 Minneapolis Public Schools Area B Parent Advisory Council Meeting Minutes, The Minneapolis American Indian Center, March 20, 2008; It should be noted, however, that progress has been interrupted by larger teacher layoff policy. The teacher preparation and instruction that is grounded in American Indian contributions at three demonstration sites for learners has been excellent. But the progress around teacher goals has been tangled up in the larger teacher layoff policy context of the district. In the latest round of teacher layoffs, two new exceptional teachers that were committed to teaching American Indian contributions and content were relieved.
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