



Bits 'n Pieces Winter 2010

For use by School Leaders

Just the Facts

Values and Variables

- Parents believe that school culture -- not academics -- is the biggest problem facing America's high schools. (*Public Agenda*, September 21, 2009)

Public investment

- State and local governments take a smaller percent of Minnesotans' personal income than at any time in the past 15 years, according to State Economist Tom Stinson. (15.5 percent in 2008, down from 17.9 percent in 1993)
- More than 30 states, led by Republicans and Democrats, have raised taxes this year to maintain and/or improve services. (Nan Madden, director of the Minnesota Budget Project, *Our Battered State Budget: What's the CURE?* Star Tribune, December 6, 2009)
- An income tax increase for Minnesotans making more than \$250,000 a year would start to reverse the trends that have shifted responsibility for funding to low- and middle-income Minnesotans and would limit use of short term fixes that have made the problem worse. (Nan Madden, director of the Minnesota Budget Project, *Our Battered State Budget: What's the CURE?* Star Tribune, December 6, 2009)

Early Childhood

Taken from Wilder Research Random Sampler, *Babies in Minnesota—The well-being and vulnerabilities of our youngest children*, December 2009.

- Most of the 286,580 children age 3 and younger in Minnesota are healthy, but at least 15% to 20% are vulnerable, as evidenced by—to the extent that data are available—inequities in access to services and in well-being.
- 10 percent of children per year from birth to kindergarten participate in ECFE.
- 62 percent of children age 3 and younger are read to every day, compared to 59 percent in 2003.
- The most vulnerable children, particularly low-income children of color, make up a growing portion of Minnesota babies.
- Results from the 2007 National Survey of Children's Health indicate that 5 percent of Minnesota's children birth through age 3 live in "working poor" households, in which the parents are employed full-time with incomes less than 100 percent of the federal poverty level.
- The number of 3 year olds being provided special education services through the school districts due to Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) increased 225 percent from 2000-2007.
- 39,000 of our youngest children are being raised in poverty, and that number is climbing.
- 43,000 (15 percent of children age three and younger) have moderate or high risk for developmental, behavioral or social delay.
- 16,800 children age two and younger have special health care needs.
- 10 to 20 percent of children three and younger are cared for by mothers with depression.

- Nationally, an estimated 2 out of every 1,000 babies are born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), and 8 out of every 1,000 have alcohol related neurobehavioral disorder (ARND). In Minnesota, that is an estimated 700 babies born with FAS or ARND in 2007.

Charter schools -- Cause for Pause

The following is taken from *Charter Program is Out of Control*, StarTribune Sunday, November 29, 2009

- Charter schools' use of the state's lease aid programs has become one of the fastest growing expenses in the state.
- Millions of dollars of public money are used to build charter schools even though the properties remain in the hands of private nonprofit corporations.
- In the past decade, 18 charter schools have been built with \$178 million in junk bonds, with financing costs on some projects using up nearly 25 percent of the funds raised.
- Twelve additional charter schools have taken steps to buy or build facilities.
- The state projects annual spending on lease aid to reach \$54 million in 2013, up from just \$1.1 million in 1998.
- Minnesota has no limits on the size of the charter program or the level of state support. (26 other states have imposed caps on charter school expansion.)

In Contrast...

- 32 years is the average age of traditional public school buildings. (Building Age Reports 2008-09, November, 2009, Minnesota Department of Education)
- 113 public school buildings in Minnesota are over 50 years old.
- Since 2000 about 64 traditional public schools in the metro area have closed because of declining enrolment.
- "For major construction projects at district schools, elected school board members must win approval from voters for the money, but self-appointed charter school officials have been able to plan projects in relative privacy." (Star Tribune, November 29, 2009)

Red Flags

- Six percent fewer elementary schools and 17% fewer middle schools are teaching foreign languages than a decade ago, citing budget cuts, a shortage of teachers, and constraints from NCLB due to math and reading testing priorities. (Center for Applied Linguistics, preliminary National K-12 Foreign Language Survey, Kappan, January 2010)

Public Engagement

Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count (learn more at <http://www.publicagenda.org/publicengagement>)

1. **Frame issues** for public deliberation so everyone can enter the public dialogue and participate effectively. Learn more about Public Agenda's core approach to engaging the public.
2. Then, **work with communities** to engage citizens and leaders for democratic problem-solving and change.
3. Finally, **build local, civic capacity** for the long-term, beyond the lifespan of any project.

Quick Tips

During this period of severe economic stress on both workers and the workplace, **focus your communication initiatives on what is possible**—A Minnesota that that is the best place to live, go to school, raise a family or locate a business. Minnesota has been recognized over the past years as number one in academic achievement; the most caring state, and leaders in the nation in ACT composite scores. Imagine our future and the future of our economy if we invest in our state, bypass mediocre and pursue excellence.

To Do List

- Learn more about *Minnesota's Promise* at www.minnesotaspromise.org
- Learn more about *The Bridge to Higher Learning* at www.massp.org
- Learn more about the New Minnesota Miracle at www.parentsunited.org/NewMNMiracle
- Learn more about community assets for youth at www.search-institute.org
- Learn more about the impact of media on kids at www.mediafamily.org



Quotes and Quotables

Leadership

- “We need gutsy leaders willing to raise adequate taxes, do it fairly, and invest in Minnesota.” – Marcia Avner, public policy director, Minnesota Council of Nonprofits
- “Successful succession is about growing and connecting leadership throughout a system, not just finding the right fit for individual leaders.” – *Leadership Succession and Sustainable Improvement*, Andy Hargreaves, Brennan chair in education at Boston College, *The School Administrator*, December, 2009

Citizenship

- “When we quit thinking primarily about ourselves and our own self-preservation, we undergo a truly heroic transformation of consciousness.” – Joseph Campbell
- “Taxes are the fees we pay for a healthy economic state.” – Marcia Avner, public policy director, Minnesota Council of Nonprofits

Future

- “If nothing is done to address long-term fiscal challenges, Minnesota’s quality of life – strong education, sound transportation and public safety and vibrant communities – will be diminished for all.” – Joe Miller, executive director, League of Minnesota Cities

Progress

- “Luck is what you have left over after you give 100 percent.” Langston Coleman

Accountability

- “Although the child and the school are accountable to the state for test performance, the state is not accountable to the child or his school for providing adequate educational resources.” – Linda Darling-Hammond, *The Flat World and Education*, Teachers College Press, 2010 cited in Kappan January 2010.

Just for Fun Bonus Questions!

(Be the first to submit your answers to sprest@arkassoc.com and I will send you a copy of *Sparks: How Parents Can Ignite the Hidden Strengths of Teenagers* by Peter L. Benson)

1. A man builds a house in a rectangular shape. All sides have a southern exposure. A bear walks by. What color is the bear?
2. What was the president's name in 1950?
3. What is the most effective and/or unique public engagement activity in your school/district?

True Stories

"Is the tooth fairy real?" asked the second-grader.

"What do *you* think?" queried the savvy mother.

"I think you and Dad are the tooth fairy," the boy answered thoughtfully before inquiring further, "But which one of you wears the costume?"

These materials are provided by:
Minnesota Association of School Administrators
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To request more information contact one of the
above organizations or sprest@arkassoc.com

