



Talking Points

*For use by school leaders in presentations
about important issues related to public education*

Funding for the Future

Key Message: The potential of our people, our communities and our state depend heavily on our willingness to invest responsibly in the future.

The Problems:

- ▶ **Funding** has not kept pace with growing costs and demands.
 - State early-childhood through grade 12 funding has gradually declined since fiscal year 2003, falling by \$1,296 per student. After local levy increases, total school district operating revenue has still fallen by \$374 per pupil over the last six years.
 - By 2006, Minnesota's effort toward funding education was 9% below the national average.
 - *Education Week: Quality Counts 2010 – State Report Card* gives Minnesota a “D” in school spending.
- ▶ **Children** come from increasingly diverse backgrounds requiring greater innovation, individualization, and instructional investment.
 - The number of three-year-olds being provided special education services through the school districts due to Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) increased 225% from 2000 to 2007.
 - Minnesota educates over 63,000 limited-English proficiency (LEP) students.
 - 39,000 of our youngest children are being raised in poverty, and that number is climbing.
 - 43,000 (15% of children age three and younger) are at moderate or high risk for developmental, behavioral or social delay.
 - 16,800 children age two and younger have special health care needs.
- ▶ **School facilities** in Minnesota have aged, and many require renovation or replacement.
 - The average age of traditional public school buildings is 32 years old.
 - 113 public school buildings in Minnesota are over 50 years old.

Concepts like “more for less” and “the black hole” of education funding have tried to excuse our failure to meet our constitutional obligation to adequately fund schools. While schools have been chided for failing to “live within their budgets,” the record actually shows that

resources provided to schools have been both inadequate and unpredictable, making it impossible for school districts to plan with certainty. “No new tax” pledges, tax cuts for the wealthy, and stop-gap solutions like the current suspension of state aid payments to schools have persisted throughout the last decade, making matters worse. This school year alone, suspended payments to schools are expected to be nearly one-quarter of the total state education aid.

If we fail to make education a priority in these economically uncertain times, we threaten our ability to fully participate in economic recovery. According to a report to the Joint Economic Committee of the U.S. Congress, “There is a strong consensus among economists that formal education is an important determinant of individual earnings as well as economic growth.”

The Opportunities:

- ▶ **Invest** in our kids from early childhood through post secondary education. An effective and comprehensive system of public education has been projected to provide the greatest and most predictable return on our tax dollars.
- ▶ Begin to phase in the *New Minnesota Miracle* structure for more adequate and dependable funding of schools. The proposal begins a phased increase to school funding while reducing property taxes.
- ▶ Encourage **innovation** and provide **flexibility**.
 - Repeal costly and restrictive mandates that do not improve student development and/or achievement and may put public schools at a competitive disadvantage.
 - Provide a climate in Minnesota that supports and celebrates success regardless of partisan affiliations.
 - Share the successes and the challenges, and remediate the failures *together*.
 - Engage families and communities from birth to adulthood in academic and social success. According to the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, new evidence shows that early environmental relationships actually shape brain circuits and lay the foundation for later developmental outcomes, from academic performance and interpersonal skills to physical and mental health.

We have done it before and we can do it again. The New Minnesota Miracle.

“An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.” – Benjamin Franklin