



Career Advancement Committee
Chair: Representative Sandra Peterson

Final Report and Recommendations

Advancing At-Risk Youth towards Further
Education and Employment

Section

1

Introduction to the Committee's Work

Purpose Statement: Continue to support the development and dissemination of high quality, user-friendly labor market and career and training information through iSeek Solutions and partnership with DEED LMI; and, review information on issues surrounding early childhood education and at-risk youth.

Focus Question: Where and how can we affect public policy to advance at-risk youth?

Focus Population: Youth, including youth with disabilities, who are at-risk of not being meaningfully employed in the future.

Committee Members: Tom Bakk, Roger Carlson, Cyndy Crist, Natalie Hare, Dixie Holen, Larry Litecky, Larry Mareck, David MacKenzie, Sandy Mosch, Sandra Peterson (Chair), Leah Schwachtgen, Dean Shawbold, and Terry Smith

Committee Staff: Nancy Jacobsen, Dan Smith, and Koryn Zewers

General Overview of the Committee's Work: The Governor's Workforce Development Council (GWDC) Career Advancement Committee began its work in April 2005 and concluded its work in May 2006. Much of the committee's work focused on at-risk youth and where and how the GWDC could affect public policy to advance at-risk youth. This included hosting a listening session in September 2005, asking a variety of stakeholders to present at committee meetings, and reviewing reports and studies on at-risk youth. Discussions on early childhood development and career information were tied into these conversations at various points throughout the duration of the committee's work.

The committee decided to focus its work on at-risk youth because of the impact youth have on both individuals' and Minnesota's future economic growth. One of the sources of this achievement gap is the divide that exists when students enter kindergarten. According to the National Association of State Boards of Education, almost half of the gap that exists when a student is in twelfth grade is associated with the students' knowledge at the beginning of first grade.¹ When students leave the K-12 system behind their peers, they have a higher risk of not being meaningfully employed in the future; they are more likely to not have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to succeed in either higher education or the workforce.

Another major issue impacting at-risk youth in Minnesota is the wide achievement gap that exists between Caucasian students and students of other races. Although not all students of color are at-risk youth, the gap portrays that some students are moving ahead more quickly than others. According to a study done by Education Trust, Inc., the gap between Minnesota's Caucasian students and African American students was the second widest in the nation; Wisconsin was the only state with a wider gap. Minnesota's eighth grade Caucasian students received an average score of 291 on the math section of the 2003 National Assessment for Educational Progress; Minnesota's Caucasian students led the nation. However, its African American students received an average score of 251, which is 22nd out of the 50 states.² According to a report from the U.S. Department of Education, Minnesota made impressive gains between 2002 and 2004 in closing the achievement gap.³ However, as noted above,

¹ National Association of the State Boards of Education. 2006 Study Group on Early Childhood: Creating High Quality Early Childhood Learning Environments. http://www.nasbe.org/projects/early_childhood_study_group.htm

² Pugmire, Tim. "A Troubling Disparity." Minnesota Public Radio.

³ U.S. Department of Education. No Child Left Behind. "NCLB Making a Difference in Minnesota."

Minnesota has a long way to go to close this gap. Data also show that the achievement gap widens during the summer months; some students advance while others fall behind.

Advancement of at-risk youth is important not only for the individuals themselves but also for the betterment of Minnesota's economy. According to the MN Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) Labor Market Information Office, labor shortages are likely to return starting between 2010 to 2011 if the US has an average economy over next five to six years. Educating at-risk youth and ensuring they have the skills needed to succeed in today's economy will assist Minnesota with meeting its upcoming needs. In addition, the achievement gap costs Minnesota over \$1.4 billion dollars annually in lost income.⁴ These costs will only continue to grow as the labor shortage approaches.

Section

2 At-Risk Youth

To help focus the Career Advancement Committee's work on at-risk youth, it reviewed definitions for "at-risk youth." The Committee found that definitions varied across state and federal agencies. Because there are many definitions for "at-risk," the committee asked, "At-risk for what?" The committee decided to define "at-risk youth" for its work as:

Youth, including youth with disabilities, who are at-risk of not being meaningfully employed in the future.

The committee decided to specifically highlight youth with disabilities as a part of its definition because many at-risk youth are youth with disabilities. According to the DEED, Office of Youth Development, in PY 2005 approximately 48% of the youth served under the WIA youth formula grant had a documented disability; and, approximately 54% of the youth served under the Minnesota Youth Program had a documented disability. Therefore, when considering recommendations for at-risk youth, the committee included youth with disabilities in its thinking.

The committee gathered its data by hosting a listening session in September 2005, asking a variety of stakeholders to present at committee meetings, and reviewing reports and studies on at-risk youth.

September Listening Session

The Career Advancement Committee used a listening session to gather input from a variety of key stakeholders on the following question: Where and how can we affect public policy to advance at-risk youth? These stakeholders included representatives from an alternative learning center (students and staff), Anoka-Hennepin STEP, Hubert H. Humphrey Job Corps Program, school counselors, alternative learning programs, youth workforce development programs, and Adult Basic Education. The committee used the information it gathered in this session to frame its work on the recommendations for the *2006 Investment Advisory* to Governor Pawlenty. Key comments from each of these discussions are highlighted below:

⁴ National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. [Measuring Up 2004: Minnesota Report Card](#).

Highview Alternative Learning Center Students

Overall, students felt they get more out of the education they receive at the alternative learning center (ALC) than the education they were receiving at their respective high schools; once they graduate they believe they will have the skills necessary to further their education or get a job they enjoy.

Relevance

Many of the comments students made about the Highview ALC focused on the perceived relevance of their coursework at the ALC. Students discussed the importance of career education, hands-on learning, gaining life skills, and having a variety of classes to choose from. The students specifically mentioned that the ALC required them to explore careers and job shadow individuals, which allowed them to find careers they enjoyed. They also emphasized the importance of learning life skills as well as academic skills (e.g. managing money and understanding the stock market) because they cannot learn these skills from their parents; parents oftentimes have bad habits and students do not want to acquire those habits.

Rigor

Students also discussed the rigor of the ALC's curriculum. They commented that teachers at the ALC adjust the curriculum to meet the needs of each student rather than forcing students into a mold; students are allowed to go at their own pace because they may be at a different spot in their learning. Teachers also work with students continuously to make sure they learned what they were supposed to learn. This allows students to gain an understanding of what they are actually capable of doing. Students also emphasized that they get what businesses want in terms of skills. They receive a full academic curriculum, and they can take their elective credits at the technical college. If a student falls behind, teachers will work with that student until they understand the material; this is more productive than passing students through the educational system with limited or partial skill development.

Relationships

Relationships were also a key to students' success. They said the smaller class sizes at the ALC enhanced their ability to learn, and the smaller sized school, more generally, prevented them from being "just a number" in a large system. The students also mentioned they are on a first name basis with the teachers, and they are at the ALC because they want to be there.

Highview Alternative Learning Center Staff

Vocational education programs could be expanded if districts would take advantage of the current resources available.

Anoka-Hennepin STEP

STEP creates a pathway for students from secondary to post-secondary education and provides a head start in obtaining the college credits students need for a college degree or certificate. The program is hands on which assists kinesthetic learners because it connects the academic with the applied. In addition, the program utilizes career courses to bring meaning to the college prep curriculum. Many STEP students are "on the edge." They are on the edge academically because the students are hands on learners, low-income, facing language and cultural barriers, and/or have family issues. Some key learnings from Anoka-Hennepin STEP include:

- Personal relationships are a key to the program's success, and the class sizes are smaller to provide a safer learning community for students.
- High schools must work jointly with the post-secondary educational institutions in the area to make this model work; the K-12 system does not have the funds to run a STEP-like program.
- Institutions at the local level must have the opportunity to work with one another strategically to provide successful programs.
- In greater Minnesota implementing a program like STEP may be more difficult because of the distances students have to drive. At the same time the students have a passion for what they are learning, and oftentimes make this sacrifice. Iowa has a model that could be duplicated for programming in rural areas.
- One of the challenges is that the state does not place a value on applied learning, and there are no incentives for the higher education system to participate in a model such as this. The

issue that school districts must look at is how they can serve applied learners to meet their needs.

Hubert H. Humphrey Job Corps Program

This voluntary program is very structured and is a residential training facility. The program targets 16 to 24 year olds who fall below the federal poverty guidelines. The program itself is a job training program, and students leave the program with a GED or with job training experience. The students can also transfer credits from the program into the St. Paul school system. The program uses outcome based education, and classes are broken into small units. This helps to make the curriculum more learnable. On average students advance two levels in their learning within six months. There is a three to one student to staff ratio, so the program is expensive. Longitudinally for every dollar spent, two dollars are gained. Key learnings from the Job Corps Program include:

- Many parents do not teach their children the social skills they need to be successful in the workplace. In addition, many of children do not know what it is like to work because they have not seen their parents working.
- Fear and a lack of knowledge keep youth from succeeding. This program takes away the fear and uses leadership opportunities and classes to help youth develop a broader sense of knowledge.
- Applied learning and testing can be used to understand learning styles.
- Teachers do not teach using the traditional method. Instead they act more like coaches or tutors for students.

School Counselors

Counselors are supposed to work with academics, personal issues, social issues, and career planning. Counselors can also potentially develop a relationship with each student and provide the one on one contact discussed by ALC students. However, Minnesota has the second highest student to counselor ratio in the nation with some counselors having over 1,000 students to work with, which does not allow for the individual attention many students need. Counselors are licensed at the Masters level and are budgeted and paid for out of the general fund. Unlike states like Wisconsin, counselors are not mandated in the state of Minnesota. The Counseling Association is advocating for this to become part of Minnesota's state law to improve the student to counselor ratios. They also discussed that:

- Parental involvement has changed over the past few decades; counselors are not seeing parents' signatures on course registration forms anymore.
- Career development courses are no longer a requirement of students.
- Some high schools no longer offer on-the-job training, which is a decision that is made at the administrative level of a high school.
- Counselors must spend their time with the students who ask for help rather than all of the students who actually may need their help. The presenters stressed that counselor-parent relationships are just as important as counselor-student relationships.

Alternative Education Programs

Students must meet program requirements to participate in alternative learning programs, and the primary purpose of the programs is to overcome barriers. To provide quality programs the programs work with specialists in the district, and there are graduation incentive criteria for every ALC. In addition, the programs have a high level of accountability and use performance based education to reach their goals. ALCs address any issue that gets in the way of the students' education. They also try to connect their learners to their communities, so students have a broad appreciation for their communities and can become effective community members. The schools partner with multiple businesses and organizations to improve the program and make it more valuable for the students. In greater Minnesota, students sometimes have to drive a long distance to attend the programs. For example in Detroit Lakes, students drive up to 60 miles. The presenter discussed the following issues with the committee:

- Policymakers should address the issues that cause students to be at-risk rather than looking for who is at fault for the problems at-risk youth face. One way to begin addressing these

issues would be to encourage entities to share resources to help youth overcome their challenges.

- Barriers between home, school, work, etc. should be broken down in order to provide a safe learning environment for children.
- In regular high schools there are fewer opportunities for adults to establish relationships with their students.
- When schools acknowledge that students are capable, then the students step up to that level.
- Parents must also be acknowledged.

Youth Programs – Stearns-Benton Workforce Investment Board

Camp Challenge is funded by the Stearns-Benton Workforce Investment Board through the Minnesota Youth Program. The Camp Challenge focuses on contextual learning and youth development through a community service project. The program is held at Saint Cloud State, and Saint Cloud State University is a major partner for ensuring the program's success. The program focuses on career exploration, team building, safety, customer service, maturity skills, and journaling/reflection. Students work in teams of six to eight students per teacher. The model is centered on a chosen community social need: hunger. This helps to add to the students' community awareness. Students also make strides academically, and advance about one grade level during the 21 day camp. Key learnings include:

- During the 2005 Legislative Session, program providers were worried that the funding for the Minnesota Youth Program would be cut; this was in the Governor's budget proposal. The money was reinstated late in the session, but this made programming difficult.
- There are a wide variety of ways the Workforce Service Areas use their Minnesota Youth Program dollars, which leads to varying outcomes across the state. When the Legislature and Governor develop the budget for funding they do not evaluate each individual program and its results. Programs with positive results should continue.
- Another challenge is that federal and state program measures and expectations are at odds with one another. This makes it difficult to leverage resources effectively.

Adult Basic Education

ABE can do customized work for a company as well as serve the individual. It provides a small learning community where people can build relationships and be in a caring environment. Currently there are long waiting lists for the GED classes through ABE, and the ESL population has increased substantially. ABE also serves many young adults who were at-risk youth when they were younger and helps to break the cycle. ABE believes that by helping the parents, they can help their children succeed in school as well. The program has an 80 percent passing rate for the GED. The biggest challenge for the ABE program is funding.

Additional Stakeholder Input

The committee also asked additional stakeholders to provide the committee with information and input on a variety of topics associated with at-risk youth including youth programs, youth with disabilities, career and technical education, and dropouts. The following individuals presented information at the GWDC Career Advancement Committee meetings:

Erik Aamoth, Department of Employment and Economic Development

Erik provided the committee with information on the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act as well as the Governor's proposals for workforce development youth programs. Key points included: the Governor's core focus is on employment, thus the decision to eliminate funding or transfer certain youth programs; funding for the WIA youth program is projected to increase 17%; the WIA youth program focus is on out-of-school youth; there is some interest in MN to seek a waiver to allow a greater share of WIA youth program funding in Minnesota to focus on in-school at-risk youth since Minnesota has more opportunities than many states for youth to stay in school; and, more attention needs to be given to career information connections, including linkages among iSeek, MCIS, and DEED LMI.

Heather Britt, Department of Education

Heather discussed a new program to reconnect youth to training opportunities after they have dropped out of school. The federal government is focusing on youth who have dropped out of school. Minnesota received a dropout prevention grant totaling \$2.4 million over three years, targeted to a small number of districts among those with the state's highest dropout rates.

Rod Haworth, Other Members, and Staff, GWDC Creating Connections Committee

The Creating Connections committee provided input to the Career Advancement committee on two occasions. On the first occasion the Creating Connections committee encouraged the Career Advancement Committee to consider issues facing youth with disabilities when discussing at-risk youth, and the committees also discussed Project C3 as a means to further youth with disabilities. On the second occasion the Creating Connections committee suggested ways to incorporate youth with disabilities into the Career Advancement Committee recommendations more fully.

Wendie Palazzo, Minneapolis Public Schools

Wendie provided information on a data system that the Minneapolis School District has implemented showing the impact of career and technical education programming on youth in the Minneapolis schools, particularly youth otherwise at risk of dropping out of school. Minneapolis data show higher scores on Minnesota Basic Skills Tests by students who participate in career and technical education programs than by those who do not participate. Data also show significant support from business and industry for the Minneapolis career and technical education programs in terms of both volunteer time and equipment/supply donations.

Dan Smith, Department of Education

Dan gave an update on the Governor's High School initiatives, including support for use of the ACT Educational Planning and Assessment System, use of the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) test to promote credit transfer from high schools to colleges, expansion of the Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate program, and modifications to the career & technical education levy and associated grants to support innovations in middle school technology programming. Dan noted that the federal Perkins Vocational Education Act is slated for reauthorization this year and that, even though proposed for elimination in the president's budget, was expected to pass through Congress in something similar to its current form. It is anticipated that work will begin this summer on development of a new State Plan for Career and Technical Education under the Perkins Act, and that it is hoped the Career Advancement Committee will be a willing sounding-board in that development process. Dan also updated committee members on two WIA Incentive Grant projects undertaken in Minnesota.

Additional Discussion and Research on At-Risk Youth

The Career Advancement committee has a well diversified committee membership roster. Therefore, members contributed to the committee's work based on their individual expertise. Higher education, K-12 education, labor, community based organizations, the State Legislature, local workforce councils, and WorkForce Centers all had representation on the committee. The mixture of perspectives led to rich committee discussions, which helped to shape the committee's work. Some of the topics the committee discussed extensively include: career and technical education; the importance of incorporating rigor, relevance, and relationships into curriculum; the Valencia Community College (Orlando, Florida) LifeMap Model for career exploration, which is being implemented at Century College; the parallel of manufacturing an automobile to MN's K-12 school system; teacher certification and training; disappearance of high school vocational education classes; importance of reading education at all levels of the K-12 system; and, changes in per pupil spending. Many of the most substantive discussion points from these conversations are included as bullet points associated with each of the committee's recommendations.

The committee also specifically reviewed the following materials as a part of its work:

- Minnesota P-16 Education Partnership. *Report of the MN P-16 Education Partnership Working Group on College and Work Readiness*. March 13, 2006.
- Dynarski, Mark and Gleason, Philip. *Do we Know Whom to Serve? Issues in Using Risk Factors to Identify Dropouts*.
- Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. *Getting Prepared*. June 2002.
- Association for Career and Technical Education. *Reinventing the American High School for the 21st Century*. January 2006.

Additional materials were referenced throughout the committee discussions as well but were not discussed in detail.

Section 3 Labor Market and Career Training Information

Much of the committee's analysis on how to support the development and dissemination of high quality, user-friendly labor market and career and training information came up during the committee's discussion on at-risk youth. The committee found that Minnesota is currently ranked 49th out of 50 in terms of its ratio of students to counselors, with only California's 971:1 exceeding Minnesota's 806:1 according to the American School Counselor Association.⁵ Minnesota statutes do not require school districts to provide career education or counseling to students. Labor market and career training information is a necessity for all youth because relevance is a key component to student success, especially at-risk student success, at the high school level. In addition, students should have an idea of the goal they are working towards educationally. Counselors can provide a critical link between the classes students are taking at the high school level and the range of educational and career opportunities available after high school. On-line assessments, such as the assessments provided through ISEEK, the Minnesota Career Information System and MN Careers, can help expand career exploration opportunities. However, these assessments should be coupled with adequate career counseling.

There are also means beyond counselors to provide information to students. Teachers can play a strong role in making their subject areas relevant by discussing potential careers within their subjects. This is also an area where many high schools may accept partnering. An incentive for partnering would promote the establishment of appropriate relationships to provide career information/career counseling. It is essential that this partnering effort for career guidance/career counseling is coordinated among school counselors, workforce center counselors, and higher education staff. Currently, WIA funds are not appropriately used for this activity. Staffing shortages in the WorkForce Center system means they may not have resources to fully support this effort.

Another means for getting this information to youth is by encouraging them to use their own skills. Youth are tech-savvy. It is incumbent upon the state to capitalize on those abilities and use technology to provide information in a more efficient means than through staff-intensive activities. However, the state must also recognize that some activities require a human-element and should fund those activities accordingly.

⁵ Source: U.S. Department of Education, national Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education," 2001-2002. Compiled by the American School Counselor Association, February 2004.

Nancy Jacobsen, iSeek Solutions

Nancy provided an overview of iSeek Solutions and its committee structure, which includes working groups on the education and workforce sides. She also informed the committee that the Learning Innovations Council is providing direction on the Course Applicability System to assist companies and individuals to link to appropriate training opportunities, and the Speede system of electronic transcription at the postsecondary level. She also said the iSeek Career and Workforce Innovations Council is looking at linkages to the GWDC, and has been connecting to training opportunities with CVS Pharmacy and the Pharmacies of Promise initiative (linked to America's Promise, a federal initiative promoted by Colin Powell).

Anne Erickson, Mahtomedi Schools

Anne provided input to the committee via the September Listening Session. A summary of her comments are included above.

Section 4 Early Childhood Development

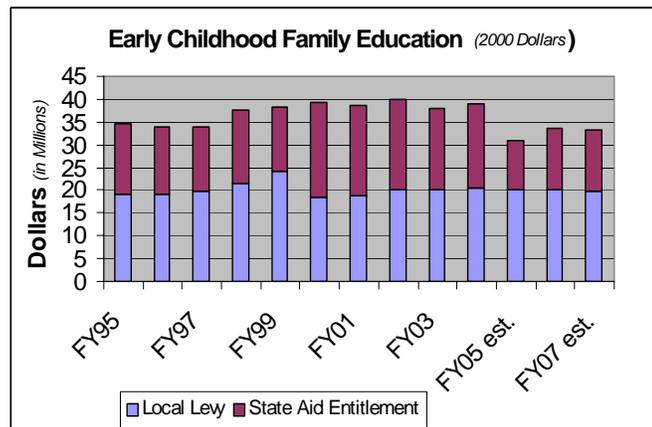
The committee recognized the importance of early childhood development and its impact on whether a youth would be at-risk. However, the committee did not spend a great deal of time discussing early childhood development because early childhood development programs are not workforce development programs per se. Instead, these programs are one of the first steps in a child's educational development process. At the same time, as discussed earlier in this report, early childhood development has a significant impact on student achievement and whether or not the student is at-risk of not being meaningfully employed in the future. Below is a brief discussion of the committee's research.

Analysis: Minnesota's Early Childhood Education Initiatives

The committee reviewed the funding for the following programs: Early Childhood Family Education, School Readiness, Head Start, and Pre-School Screening. The amount of funding for early childhood development programs varies based on the program. Trending funding across early childhood education initiatives is difficult because most K-12 education programs are funded by a combination of state aid and local levy. In many cases this is done on an equalized basis, so districts with low property values are not penalized. The Governor has promoted some shifts from state aid to local levy, often keeping the total revenue fairly constant. Many of the figures highlighted below reference state aid only.

Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE)

Early Childhood Family Education is a program for Minnesota families with children between the ages of birth to kindergarten and is offered through Minnesota's public schools. ECFE was founded based on the concept that parents and family provide a child's first learning experience. ECFE's goal is to enhance the ability of parents to provide the best

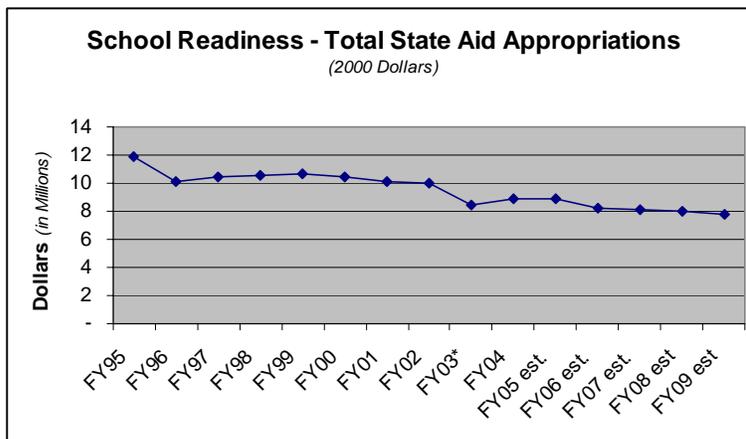


possible environment for their child's learning and growth.

Total funding for ECFE reached its peak in FY2002 at a little over 41.1 million dollars (2000 dollars)⁶. Since that time, funding for ECFE has been decreasing. Based on the estimated funding amounts for 2007, the committee expects almost a seven million dollar decrease in funding for ECFE from 2002 to 2007. Funding levels for ECFE programs are expected to be lower today, than in any year since the mid-1990s.⁷ It is also important to note that except for FY2000 and FY2001, local levies have provided more funds for ECFE than State Aid Entitlement.

School Readiness

School Readiness is a public school program open to Minnesota children age 3 ½ to 4 years and their families. Usually, children are identified to participate in the program through Early Childhood Screening. School districts offer programs and services unique to the needs of children and the resources in their communities. The goal of School Readiness is to help preschoolers enter school with the skills and behaviors necessary to be successful in future learning.⁸



It is a priority of School Readiness to involve parents in their child's learning and education. Research has shown that early childhood programs that involve parents and children working together are more effective than programs that only focus on the child. Involving families early encourages parents to play a more active role throughout their child's education.⁹

School district plans for School Readiness are reviewed by two state agencies every other year before state funds are made available for local implementation. Local and Federal funds are tapped as in-kind contributions to enhance the state dollars providing School Readiness.¹⁰ Funding for School Readiness Programs is also generated based on a sliding fee schedule that figures in the income level of the child's parents.¹¹ As shown in the graph above, state funding for School Readiness has been steadily decreasing since FY1995. In FY1995, 11.9 million dollars of state aid was appropriated for this program. However, by FY2009, it is estimated that funding will have dropped to 7.8 million dollars.

Head Start

Head Start, another early childhood development program funded by the state, is probably one of the most widely known early childhood development programs because of the size of the program and the amount of federal funding allocated for Head Start. Head Start is a full-service program for preschool children and their families and primarily serves three and four year olds from low-income

⁶ All funds reference in this section of the report are in 2000 dollars.

⁷ This information was taken from the Minnesota Department of Education website: http://education.state.mn.us/html/intro_els_programs.htm. June 20, 2005.

⁸ This information was taken directly from the Minnesota Department of Education website: http://education.state.mn.us/html/intro_els_programs.htm. June 20, 2005.

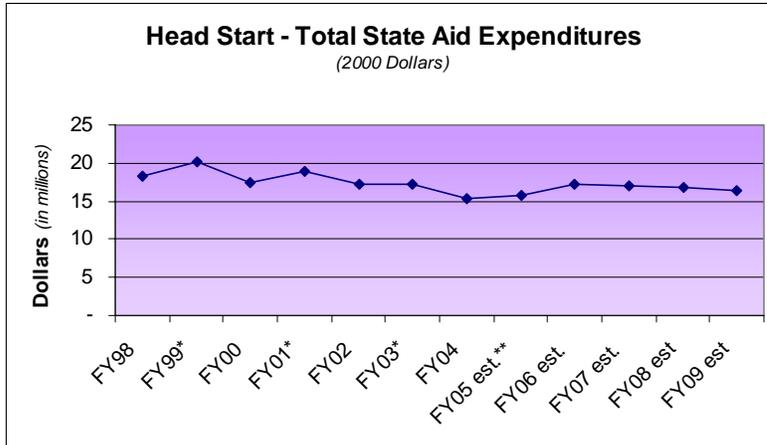
⁹ This information was taken directly from the Minnesota Department of Education website: http://education.state.mn.us/html/intro_els_programs.htm. June 20, 2005.

¹⁰ This information was taken directly from the Minnesota Department of Education website: <http://education.state.mn.us/html/009139.htm>; June 20, 2005.

¹¹ <http://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/stats/124D/15.html>: June 20, 2005.

families. Some agencies also provide a program for infants, toddlers and pregnant mothers. All local Head Start programs must reserve space (at least 10%) for children with disabilities.

The overall goal of Head Start is to help young children be ready for school, and many people claim the research has shown the lasting benefits of Head Start. Head Start works to strengthen all the influences on the child's development and uses planned activities to do so. Head Start services include education, health, nutrition, mental health and social services. Another goal of Head Start is to help families become self-sufficient through programs such as Adult Basic Education, family literacy and job training. Parents also learn how to use available resources to meet family needs. Parents are involved in all aspects of Head Start. This includes the opportunity to make decisions about program plans and policies.



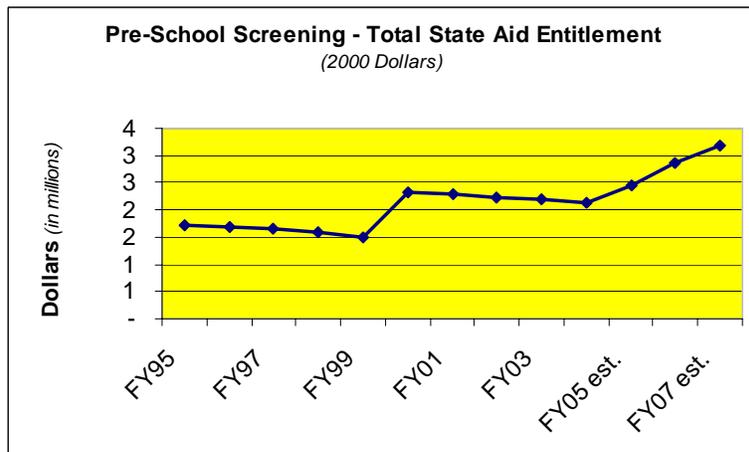
Although Head Start has not seen continued dramatic decreases in funding as the School Readiness program, Total State Aid Expenditures on Head Start have continually decreased since FY1998. Total state aid expenditures on Head Start reached 20.1 million dollars in FY1999 and are expected to decrease to 16.4 million dollars by FY2009. Some of the variability between 1998

and 2001 was due to the ability of local entities to carry forward unexpended funds from the first year's appropriation to the second year of the biennium. The legislature eliminated the carry forward authority of the Head Start program in FY2002.¹²

Pre-School Screening

The early childhood years from birth to the start of kindergarten are an important time of rapid learning and growth. Early Childhood Screening is a quick and simple check of how children are doing at approximately 3 ½ or 4 years of age. It identifies, at an early stage, possible learning or health concerns, so children can get needed help before starting school. Early Childhood Screening is required for entrance in Minnesota's public schools and is offered throughout the year by local districts.

As funding for the programs discussed above has decreased, funding for Pre-School Screening programs has increased steadily since the mid-1990s. In FY1995 total state aid entitlement for Pre-School Screening was approximately 1.7 million dollars and by FY1999 it had decreased to 1.5 million dollars. However, by FY2007 the Program Finance Division at the Minnesota Department of Education estimates funding



¹² *FY1999, FY2001, and FY2003 are impacted by the carry forward option. **Expenditures reported for FY2005 are based on expenditures and encumbrances as of August 18, 2005.

will increase to 3.2 million dollars. This is over a 100 percent increase from FY1999. In addition, the state recently created policy changes that provide incentives for screening children at an early age by instituting variable rates. In FY2006 and FY2007, the rates will be \$50 per child screened at age 3, \$40 at age 4, and \$30 at age 5 or kindergarten.

Based on the figures provided above by the Program Finance Division at the Minnesota Department of Education, one cannot claim that all early childhood development programs have seen decreased funding since the mid-1990s. However, many programs, including Early Childhood Family Education, School Readiness, and Head Start, have seen decreases in state aid. It is clear that overall state funding has decreased across these four programs; however, some of these decreases may have been equalized by local funds.

Section

5 Recommendations

The Career Advancement Committee developed two sets of recommendations. The first set of recommendations is directed to the Governor for inclusion in the 2006 Investment Advisory, and the second set of recommendations is directed to the GWDC for future work and discussion.

Recommendations for 2006 Advisory to the Governor

Minnesota's K-12 education system is transitioning to a one-size-fits-all model for educating its students. This model focuses solely on increasing the rigor of the curriculum through standard, academic-style delivery methods. It provides little emphasis on increasing the relevance of the curriculum and improving the relationships needed for success. Although rigor is important for all students, rigor without relevance and relationships is not an effective method for educating most students, especially at-risk youth.

Career and technical education is an exemplary model for increasing rigor, relevance, and relationships within the K-12 system. However, the amount of career and technical education provided in Minnesota schools has decreased with the drive to fit all students into the same formula for success. Rigor is important for all students, but the delivery method helps to determine whether some students will succeed and others will not. Adding standardized class requirements for students (e.g. Chemistry 101) will not lead to an increase in the success of Minnesota's students; providing a variety of methods for delivering the information, which incorporates rigor, relevance and relationships, will yield additional success. To promote a greater variety of methods to deliver learning in Minnesota, Governor Pawlenty will:

- 1) **Emphasize career counseling and career education at the high school level for all students.**
 - Students should have an idea of the goals they are working towards educationally.
 - Counselors provide a critical link between the classes students take at the high school level and the range of educational and career opportunities available after high school.
 - Minnesota is ranked 49th out of 50 in terms of its ratio of students to counselors, and Minnesota is continuing this downward trend by not requiring school districts to provide career education or counseling to students.
 - Relevance is a key component to student success, especially at-risk student success, at the high school level. Teachers can play a strong role in making their subject areas relevant by discussing potential careers.
 - Youth are tech-savvy. It is incumbent upon the state to capitalize on those abilities and use technology to provide information in a more efficient means than through staff-intensive

activities. However, the state must also recognize the activities that require a human-element and fund those activities accordingly.

- On-line assessments, such as the assessments provided through MCIS, ISEEK and MN Careers, can help make career counseling efficient. However, these assessments must be coupled with adequate career counseling; the assessments cannot stand alone.
- This is an area where high schools will accept partnering. An incentive for partnering would promote the establishment of appropriate relationships to provide career information/career counseling. It is essential that this partnering effort for career guidance/career counseling is coordinated among school counselors, workforce center counselors, and higher education staff.
- WIA funds are not appropriately used for this activity. Staffing shortages in the WorkForce Center system mean that they may not be the appropriate avenue to pick up the load without additional resources.

2) Expand and forward-fund summer and after-school youth programs that support development of workforce knowledge and skills for in-school and out-of-school youth.

- Cuts in funding for these programs have especially hurt youth with disabilities because a disproportionate number of the youth who participate in these programs are youth with disabilities. In PY2005 approximately 48% of the youth served under the WIA youth formula grant had a documented disability; approximately 54% of the youth served under MYP had a documented disability. Youth with disabilities oftentimes have limited opportunities for summer work experiences, and summer and after school youth programs often help to provide youth with disabilities with the experience they need for future success.
- Oftentimes state budgets are not determined until late June, and discussions on local programming need to begin before that time to create effective summer programs. Forward funding will allow local leaders to begin planning programs one year in advance. This would increase both the efficiency and effectiveness of programming, and would be a pilot to determine if forward funding is feasible for other summer youth programs.
- Data show that the achievement gap widens during the summer months. Some students advance while others fall behind. Much of this can be tied to youths' socioeconomic background.
- State funds provide consistency in programming. Federal funds readily increase or decrease. Concern has also been expressed that federal performance standards are allowing or encouraging the exclusion of students who would be best served but that such exclusion has not occurred under the state-funded program.
- Best practices in Minnesota include career and technical education, work-based learning programs, and programs (especially for youth with disabilities) that focus on work skills development taught in the context of career preparation.
- Programs should be managed by the local Youth Councils of the Workforce Investment Boards, who must work with the local educational institutions to provide these programs.
- Programs should be funded based on their results (number of grade levels advanced, etc.), how the local areas leverage funds, and how they utilize community partnerships. Continuous evaluation processes for these programs should also be funded.
- Processes should be established to allow the co-funding of these programs by both the workforce center system and area learning centers/alternative programs.

3) Create a grant program to pilot structural changes for grades 11-14 that promote career, vocational, and skills education.

- Research shows that the size of high schools, relevance of the curriculum, etc. matter when it comes to students' success.
- This program would allow the state to reexamine how the state educates its young adults who are in their last two years of high school and first two years of postsecondary education.
- There are structural barriers that make the education system inefficient in serving today's young adults. Currently the system is focused on a students' age rather than a student's ability. Systems need to be adjusted to address this problem. For example, the current

situation forces an at-risk student to stay in a failing situation or drop out of the regular school system.

- An example of what this could look like includes the Anoka-Hennepin STEP.
- Pilot projects should be designed conceptually at the state level and developed locally to allow for flexibility at the local level.
- Pilot projects could be administered under the auspices of the Perkins (career and technical education) program, which is managed both in the Department of Education and at MnSCU.
- High school to college relationships must be examined straight-up. At this point, all partners in the postsecondary enrollment options program (PSEO) think they are losing out financially. It may be time for a new study of PSEO, especially with the growth of concurrent enrollment programs that place collegiate coursework into high schools rather than rely on students to participate in programs on college campuses.

4) Link high school alternative learning programs and youth workforce development programs.

- Concern is expressed that the public schools, while rightly concerned about the academic proficiency of students, have valued academic preparation at the expense of workforce preparation.
- State policy should re-establish a career development focus in area learning center and other alternative high school programs, and require that such programs partner with workforce centers and other nearby workforce development programs.
- Alternative learning centers, other learning alternatives (e.g. Job Corps, Opportunities Industrialization Centers, transition programs, etc.) and the youth workforce development programs work with similar populations.
- The per pupil cap on spending for alternative learning center programs was decreased in 2003 by legislative action from 1.5 to 1.2 times the general education formula. The Governor is encouraged to consider the impact of this change on extended day and extended year recovery programs, and to consider methods other than general funding caps to address abuses.
- Funding for youth programs also decreased.
- Because the funding cuts specifically affect at-risk youth, there is an even greater need to address programming that will ensure students do not fall through the cracks.
- Current best practices include programs leading to recognized industry certifications, such as Automotive Youth Educational Systems (A-YES) and Project Lead The Way (PLTW); Quebecor and other industry models; and other programs that focus on the development of entry-level workforce (soft) skills.
- Additional revenue sources should be explored to support youth workforce development, particularly the support of business and industry.

Recommendations for the GWDC

The committee also identified specific recommendations for the GWDC, which should be incorporated into the GWDC committee work over the next year. These recommendations include:

- 1) The GWDC should establish a partnership with the P-16 Education Partnership to ensure the GWDC Education Action Committee and P-16 Education Partnership are aware of each others' work. In addition, these two entities should support each others' work when appropriate.
- 2) The GWDC should work with the MN Department of Education and MN Department of Labor and Industry to increase communication, coordination, and collaboration between the Youth Apprenticeship Programs and Adult Apprenticeship Programs. These programs operate independently at this time and should be complementary programs.

The new global economy is changing the nature of work and kinds of jobs our students will enter. New jobs are requiring more knowledge and skills. Today, roughly two-thirds of all new jobs require some form of postsecondary education. Current research shows quite clearly that the reading and math skills needed for success in the workplace are comparable to those needed for success in the first year of college. Based on this information regarding these higher expectations for all students, the Career Advancement Committee took on the task of identifying public policy issues to advance at-risk youth towards further education and employment.

Our committee represented a variety of constituencies and was very diligent in meeting during the past year to address this issue. We listened to presentations from a variety of providers who shared current research, data, activities, best practices and notable results in urban and rural settings. It became very clear that the three R's...**Rigor, Relevance and Relationships**...are necessary components in any successful program for at-risk students.

Our policy recommendations address the obvious needs that are evident in our high schools. But we know that if we are to be successful, an alignment of curriculum must begin with Early Childhood Education and then continue through the middle schools years and into high school. In Minnesota, the P-16 Council is defining these expectations, and we should continue to interact with that entity.

Another issue that we did not have time to adequately address is the issue of drop-out prevention. Because of the rapidly changing American economy and new commitment on the part of state leaders to raise graduation standards, solving the drop-out problem has become more important than ever before. Although our committee recommendations will solve many of the existing problems, we still have more work to do in early identification.

Knowing which students are at greatest risk for dropping out is the first step to reducing the dropout rates. If policymakers heed the most current research, avoid the mistakes of the past, and invest sufficient up-front "research and development" dollars, they can build data systems to identify a good many students on the path to dropping out early enough to make a difference. These students will then need individualized interventions and programs that match their needs, goals and interests. Researchers are already identifying best practices, programs and curriculum that encourage these at-risk students to remain in school.

It has been an exciting endeavor to pursue how we build on current programs to address the existing achievement gap and help all our students to enter the workforce or college prepared. I would like to thank the dedicated members of my committee who accepted the challenge to define recommendations that will move Minnesota's workforce into the future.