

The Minneapolis Foundation's new strategic plan\* focuses our unrestricted resources (over and above donor-directed grantmaking) on social, economic, and racial equity. One of the key ways in which the Foundation will target resources to help achieve equity is through grantmaking, partnership, and leadership activities that help transform education. The 2009 season of The Minneapolis Foundation's Minnesota Meeting public affairs forum focused on equity in education. Dozens of corporate and foundation sponsors helped us convene three events to foster constructive dialogue on different aspects of this issue.

So what does inequity in education look like?

Speaker Geoffrey Canada, director of the Harlem Children's Zone and a nationally known education reform pioneer, explained it this way: *if two trains head westward from Minneapolis at the same speed, one leaving at 9am and the other at noon, when will the two trains meet?* It's obvious they never will, yet he says our educational system is built upon that impossibility. We have students beginning years behind grade-level and we expect them to catch up getting one year's worth of instruction each year. Not to mention the instruction, enrichment opportunities, and environments these children are exposed to vary significantly in terms of quality, variety, and stability, respectively.

Kati Haycock of the National Education Trust pointed out that for most students entering behind, the education system actually *widens* the gap. The system is organized in a way, says Haycock, to give students who already come in with less, less of everything that research and experience tells us makes a difference in educational outcomes.

We know that by age three, children in low-income households have 1,000 fewer words in their vocabulary than middle-income children. We know that Minnesota's students of color graduate high school at about half the rate of white students. So what are we going to do within and across our education systems in Minnesota, from early childhood through postsecondary, to change this picture? As Geoffrey Canada told the audience of 1,000 educators, policymakers, corporate and civic leaders, "No one is coming in to rescue Minnesota's children. If you don't do it, it will not get done."

Throughout the 2009 Minnesota Meeting series, *Raising Expectations*, we heard common themes and recommendations from national speakers, local practitioners, and even students themselves. They addressed what schools and districts, communities, and families can do to improve educational achievement for all children. Among them\*\*:

**Demand Results from Teachers.** Teachers need to be held accountable for producing results. They should be evaluated on progress, as well as proficiency. That is, they need to demonstrate student growth over the course of a year, not simply whether or not their students know the material at a single point in time. Districts should also place the best performing teachers in the most challenging schools.

**Respect and Provide Teachers with Support.** If we're going to expect teachers to do whatever it takes to ensure all children make a year or more of progress in their classroom, we need to treat teachers like professionals. We need to pay them accordingly, and provide opportunities for training, mentorship, and other professional support.

Teachers also need help developing a "repertoire" of teaching strategies to reach students with different learning styles and life experiences. Rudy Crew, a former "superintendent of the year," described a teacher who instructed students in both math and industrial arts. The same concepts were taught in both classes, but some students grasped them abstractly in math class, while others

needed the practical application of industrial arts. Speaker Mae Jemison, an engineer, medical doctor, and the first woman of color to travel into space, also promoted an integrated curriculum of arts and sciences.

**Start Early and Go the Distance** – Closing a one-year gap is easier than closing a 3- or 8-year gap. Trying to catch up a high school student who reads at a third-grade level is working against the odds. Both a longer school day and a longer school year will help, but, effective early intervention reduces the need for later remediation.. The Harlem Children’s Zone’s Baby College helps expectant and new parents understand child brain development and what they can do from the outset to help their children reach their full potential. They clearly know what they’re doing: at the Harlem Children’s Zone, 97-100% of HCZ Promise Academy third-graders scored at or above grade level in statewide math tests. The gap is essentially closed at that point. But a program is only as good as it lasts, Canada warned. He said we need to keep providing students with high-quality programs until they make it to – and through – college.

**Cultivate Community Assets and Strengthen Partnerships** - As Dr. Eric Jolly of the Science Museum of MN, Dr. Mae Jemison, and the student panellists highlighted, MN is rich in community resources that can extend learning beyond the school day and spark engagement in different ways. In addition, great wisdom exists in our communities, insights into how to better meet students’ needs, and a demand for excellence for which they are willing to help the systems be accountable. Schools must start with the premise that every parent wants what’s best for his / her child, and work more effectively with parents and communities to ensure all students have access to quality opportunities both inside and outside the classroom.

*\*\*Note that we will share more of the ideas and recommendations generated at Minnesota Meeting through our Catalyst newsletter and through other means. Please contact us for more information at (612) 672-3878 or visit [www.MinnesotaMeeting.com](http://www.MinnesotaMeeting.com) or [www.MinneapolisFoundation.org](http://www.MinneapolisFoundation.org).*

You can replay all three events, download fact sheets, and read event summaries and participants’ recommendations, at Minnesota Meeting.com. What we do with this information is up to us. What do *you* think the next steps should be? Where are the greatest opportunities? How will Minnesotans embrace the charge to do “whatever it takes” to ensure the success of all of our children – and thereby our future economy?

\*To learn more about The Minneapolis Foundation’s strategic plan, in particular the focus on transforming education, visit [www.MinneapolisFoundation.org](http://www.MinneapolisFoundation.org).