

Vanishing Graduates & Minnesota's Future Discussion Guide

SUMMER 2008

There are many ways for Minnesotans to help address the Vanishing Graduates challenge. An important contribution can be made by simply talking about it. Unfortunately, the future shortage in college-educated workers, teachers and other professionals and what that could mean for our state is not getting the attention these challenges merit.

Perhaps you are part of a social service organization that welcomes speakers. Maybe you are a local school board member, concerned human resources executive or involved parent. Whatever your background, job or community, you can help get people talking about this issue and why we need more students to succeed in school and move on to college — and deciding what they can do about it.

Consider how you can prompt discussion. Many groups or organizations — from a chamber of commerce to a church group to a Rotary Club to a book group to a PTA to a professional association — would find it worthwhile to talk about this. But they need someone like you to raise the topic.

Here are a few ways you could encourage a group or organization to talk about the issue.

- Play the 30-minute “Vanishing Graduates & Minnesota’s Future” program or some select clips, then discuss the issues using the discussion questions that follow as conversation starters.
- Use the Power Point presentation we have prepared that walks through the challenges step by step, with talking points prepared to ensure your comfort with the facts and figures.
- Include some of the information about these challenges in your own presentations.
- Spark an online conversation: Send out an e-mail to your network or a note on a blog about the issues, perhaps highlighting the clips of program. Ask others in your community how they are going to respond.

Online kit

We have an online kit available at www.learnmoremn.org/challenge/kit.php with more resources to help anyone feel comfortable speaking out about these issues. Along with the template presentation and the “Vanishing Graduates” program, kit components include resources about the latest statistics, headlines, quotes and hot topics. Use the site to order free DVDs of the program or ask for additional materials.

These materials should help you trigger more consideration of our Vanishing Graduates challenge. And to help you prompt discussion, consider using any of the questions that follow.

Feedback

Afterward, consider following-up at the LearnmoreMN Web site to share what your group discussed and what next steps you are considering. You can use the “Send us a note” link on the kit page to share your feedback. We are eager to hear what reactions and thinking this information has helped start — as well as what would make this information more useful.

POSSIBLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

General questions

- 1) What statistic or piece of information did you find most startling? Why?

- 2) How many of you think the challenges addressed in this presentation will or do affect your organization, business, or personal life?

- 3) What aspect is most relevant in our community/organization?

- 4) It may seem overwhelming to consider how we address these challenges, but each of us has the power to do something within our community, business, organization, or personal life to help. What ways can you imagine getting involved?

- 5) What about the challenges specific to first-generation college-bound youth (i.e., lack of experience regarding applying, paying, value of a college education, limited English proficiency in the home, etc.) How can we help with these barriers?

- 6) What kind of public policy solutions can we envision assisting with these challenges? What would help more students prepare? Where should more funding be targeted?

7) Do we think this is something that lawmakers are or should be talking about?

8) There is room to improve education success of all youth — from all racial groups, White, Asian, Native American, Black and Hispanic. What steps do you think could make sense in your community?

Questions to help audience members see this challenge as “their own”

For those unfamiliar with this challenge, it may not be obvious how this could/will affect their own life. Helping the audience realize that if the current trends continue they may have already and will eventually affect the quality of life in Minnesota, the economy, the competitiveness on both a macro and micro level could help stimulate discussion.

9) How many of you think the challenges addressed in this presentation will or do affect your organization, business, or personal life? *Select appropriate examples from your audience’s perspective to share.*

10) The presentation talks about diminishing college graduation rates and increasing numbers of retirees. How do you think these trends will affect your organization, business or community?

11) Are you already seeing evidence of this trend? In what ways? What are you doing about it?

Questions by audience:
Workforce audiences

12) How do you think employers can help address this challenge?

13) What are appropriate ways for employers (large and small) to make a difference?

14) As an employer would you consider any of the following actions to address this situation:

- Starting a scholarship fund for college bound youth in your service area?
- Mentoring or providing internships to high school or college students?
- Contacting elected officials?
- Other ideas?

Questions by audience:

Education-oriented audiences

15) In many families, the question regarding college is “if I go to college” rather than “where am I going to college.” How do we help families and students think about this differently?

16) What are the biggest challenges you see facing students, families when considering a college education? Who can help address these challenges and what should they do?

17) How do you assess the current efforts to address these challenges? What lessons learned can we take and build upon to achieve success?

18) What do you believe are the reasons behind the education gaps among students based on income and race / ethnicity? Based on these reasons, what do you think can be done to help address this gap?

19) We also see that many of the White students who make up the majority of the state’s student population are not finishing high school and then completing a college degree. Are there distinct factors or responses to address?

Questions by audience:

Elected officials / political groups

20) How do you rate the priority level of access to higher education in the realm of education issues?

21) What kinds of information do you need to learn more about to inform your position on this issue?

22) Do you think this is a top tier policy issue? Why do you think higher education is consistently discussed in political discourse, but we have yet to make the significant changes we need to address the issue?

23) What can communities, businesses and organizations do to address this challenge?

24) What public policy decisions do you think elected officials should consider addressing the coming shortfall in college graduates?

25) How can society address the education gaps (achievement, enrollment and completion) among students based on family income and ethnicity / race?
