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Minnesota 2020 Releases Report: *Valuing the Whole Child: Education Beyond Test Scores* Finds School Testing Focus Comes with a Cost

St. Paul, MN (August 27, 2014) Standardized test scores are making headlines this week as students head back to the classroom across the state. Results of the 2014 Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments were released, prompting a narrowly focused conversation assessing schools on numeric scores in a few subject areas. Minnesota 2020's new report, *Valuing the Whole Child: Education Beyond Test Scores* is a timely look at how the emphasis on school testing adversely affects quality education.

The new Minnesota 2020 report, *Valuing the Whole Child: Education Beyond Test Scores*, examined school finance data for years 2003-04 through 2012-13 and found that the combination of Pawlenty-era education cuts, the recession, and an increased focus on testing forced school districts to make tough choices. Predictably, spending in tested subjects increased, while spending in enriching subjects like art and computer science were cut. Districts also found room in their budgets to focus on testing by reducing support staff like counselors and nurses. The education report offers statewide data as well as case studies in the St. Paul, Anoka-Hennepin, Rochester, Duluth, and Bemidji school districts to see how they weathered tighter state budgets and the Great Recession. By detailing the areas in which spending was increased and decreased, the report gives Minnesotans new tools to determine whether trends in education spending reflect their values.

Minnesota 2020 Key Findings:

- Enriching curriculum beyond English, math, science, and social studies lost 10 percent of funding statewide
- Support services also weathered cuts, with some districts seeing particularly large drops in service. Duluth, for example, cut over 60 percent of its student support spending.
- Categorical funding such as special education, and English Language Learners allowed both categories to keep up with growing enrollment
- While extracurricular expenditures in aggregate remained flat, districts made very different decisions. For example, Anoka-Hennepin increased extracurricular spending while Saint Paul cut it.
- Early childhood education received an increase in investments, possibly reflecting growing prominence in policy debates.

((More))

Recommendations:

- Increase overall investment in public education for the state
- Widen the definition of “a good school” to consider learning opportunities beyond test scores.
- Include families, students, teachers, and community members in financial decision-making
- Invest in the whole child

“When Minnesota parents are considering whether their child is succeeding in school, they look at a whole variety of factors that reflect their child’s health and development,” said Education Policy Fellow Michael Diedrich. “Standardized tests are meant to provide a narrow snapshot of student achievement. They shouldn’t be driving instructional priorities and spending priorities. All students of every race and economic background deserve access to a broad curriculum that includes art, language, technology, and more. Cutting back on those areas while hoping for short-term gains on test scores will hurt our children and our state in the long run.”

ABOUT:

MN 2020 is a nonpartisan, progressive think tank that focuses on the issues that really matter: education, health care, transportation and economic development. New content and analysis can be found daily at www.MN2020.org.

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