

LEARNING MATTERS

April 28, 2014

Agency News

Video Series Features Minnesota Youth and Families

The Minnesota Department of Education unveiled a series of online videos featuring Minnesota youth and families discussing the importance of attending college. The series—“Shaping Your Future: Why Minnesota Families Choose College”—was produced by Twin Cities Public Television’s Minnesota Productions & Partnerships (tpt MN).

“We know that a postsecondary education opens doors to more career opportunities and better paying jobs,” said Education Commissioner Brenda Cassellius. “I hope these videos will inspire the next generation of Minnesotans to see college as not only a possibility, but an important step in pursuing their dreams.” [Read news release.](#)

Shhh... School Improvement in Progress

Possibly, the agency’s best kept secret, the Minnesota Regional Centers of Excellence (RCEs) were established in February of 2012. Located in Thief River Falls, St. Cloud, and Rochester, the centers provide statewide support to all Focus and Priority schools in Minnesota. (With the exception of St. Paul and Minneapolis Public School Districts, who provide their own system of support to their Focus and Priority Schools).

The centers are led by a center director and staffed by specialists in the areas of reading, math, special education, English language development (ELD), implementation and data analysis. A specialist in assessment and specialist in working with charter schools are also part of the team. [Read more on the MDE website.](#)

Plain Language Initiative

As part of the Unsession, Governor Dayton directed state agencies to implement a plain language policy to make state government easier to understand. At the Minnesota Department of Education, the communications office is conducting plain language training with all employees so we can become better communicators—by email, on our website, on the phone, and in person.

For example, our educator licensing staff receives thousands of phone calls every year; we are hoping to cut that down by half by revising our website text and updating old and confusing instructional documents. We hope to provide better government services that the people of Minnesota will value. [Visit the Governor’s Unsession Web page to learn more about the Plain Language Initiative.](#)

Earth Day: Minnesota Green Ribbon Schools Awards Announced

Acting Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality Mike Boots and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced the 2014 U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools award honorees. Forty-eight schools and nine districts across the nation were honored, including Five Hawks Elementary School in Prior Lake, Chisago Lakes Middle School in Lindstrom and the Waconia Independent School District.

"These schools are teaching our youth the importance of preserving the earth's precious resources, maintaining healthy ecosystems, enhancing health and wellness and saving energy costs. [Read entire statement by Commissioner Cassellius.](#)

Kudos

Minnesota Educators Among Those Nominated for 2014 NEA Foundation's Awards for Teaching Excellence

Kathleen Sims, of Foley Elementary School in Foley receives Horace Mann award for teaching excellence for engaging students in dramatic play and learning through reading.

Alyssa Bartosh and Michael O'Keefe, of Parkview Elementary School in Rosemount, received a \$5,000 Student Achievement Grant to allow students to engage in a two-month performing arts program.

William Edwards and Laurie Abraham, of Poplar Bridge Elementary School in Bloomington, received a \$2,000 Student Achievement Grant to train students with emotional and behavioral disabilities in puppetry and performing arts techniques.

Kelly Oltman and Debra Andries, of Seward Montessori School in Minneapolis, received a \$5,000 Student Achievement Grant to introduce the Fountas & Pinnell Leveled Literacy Intervention System (LLI) to assist with reading fluency, decoding, and comprehension.

Brad Ollmann of Saint Anthony Park Elementary School in Saint Paul, received a \$2,000 Learning & Leadership Grant to spend eleven weeks in central Mexico conducting choirs, studying Spanish, learning Mexican folk dances, and observing elementary music classes.

[Visit NEA Foundation website for complete list of awardees.](#)

Education in the News

Minnesota Changes the Way it Helps Struggling Schools

Instead of imposing top-down rules, teams of specialists work to help schools find their own solutions. [Read more at Star Tribune.](#)

Senator Klobuchar Tours Albert Lea Manufacturer

Klobuchar visited Lou-Rich, Inc. in Albert Lea to highlight programs that connect high schoolers and college students to local manufacturers. The Minnesota Youth Apprenticeship Program in Albert Lea provides on-site job training and mentorships. [Read more on the KTTC website.](#)

Lawmakers, Schools Aim to Help English-Language Learners

Minnesota's efforts to improve English-language instruction for the 65,000 students who speak another language at home could change. [Read more at MPR.](#)

Minneapolis Schools Lauded for Equity Impact Assessments

Last fall, the Minneapolis School Board took the landmark step of voting to require an equity impact assessment be performed on every program and policy created in the district. [Read full MinnPost story.](#)

Recent BloggED posts

Teen Poets Use their Words to Celebrate National Poetry Month

National Poetry Month is recognized each year throughout the month of April as a time to celebrate poets and their craft. Last year, with support from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, Southeastern Libraries Cooperating (SELCO) began an annual poetry contest for teens called Word Flow. [Visit BloggED for more.](#)

Making Progress on the Achievement Gap – A Four-Part Series

On Friday, March 21, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) engaged over 200 educators around the state in a conversation about the achievement gap in Minnesota. Beginning April 14, BloggED offered a series of guest posts from four school districts around the state who are making significant progress on closing the achievement gap between student groups. Visit BloggED for the series: [Part 1 - Brooklyn Center](#), [Part 2 - Moorhead](#), [Part 3 - Bloomington](#) and [Part 4 - TrekNorth](#).

Upcoming Events

Mapping Workshops for K-12 Teachers – Summer 2014

Learn how your students can use map-based data to investigate questions in social studies, science and other content areas. The Minnesota Department of Education is partnering with GIS professionals around the state to host free ArcGIS workshops designed to help teachers develop Geographic Information Systems (GIS) skills to use in their classrooms. The workshops will be offered at various locations and dates in June and July 2014. CEUs will be available. [Visit the GIS web page for schedule and registration information.](#)

June 9-12 Gifted and Talented Education Symposium

Don't miss the sixth annual Hormel Foundation Gifted and Talented Education Symposium, a collaboration of the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), the Hormel Foundation and the Austin School District. Network with peers at the pre-conference events (one for parents and one for educators) on June 8. Connect, learn and engage via a wide array of daily sessions with expert presenters who'll share best practices in areas from the assessment of students for services, engaging under-represented populations and integrating STEM and technology into classroom lessons. [Space is limited so register now.](#)

Minnesota eLearning Summit: July 30-31

Join us at the premier gathering place for K-12 and college/university educators and innovators committed to effective learning and use of technology in the Upper Midwest! The 2014 Theme is: Open, Online, and Opportunity. Hear presentations from keynote speakers Dr. Cable Green, Creative Commons and OER guru, along with Dr. Robbie Melton, WCET app maven. The summit is a collaborative effort with the MN Learning Commons (University of

Minnesota, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, Minnesota Department of Education) in partnership with myeFolio, TIES, Minitex and the University of Northwestern-St. Paul. Early bird discounts through April 30. [Learn more on the summit website.](#)

Thank You for reading Learning Matters. [Send questions or comments to L Hildebrant.](#)