

## LEARNING MATTERS

February 25, 2014

### Agency News

#### **Graduation Rates Highest in a Decade**

Minnesota Education Commissioner Brenda Cassellius was joined by Office of Higher Education Commissioner Larry Pogemiller and Department of Employment and Economic Development Commissioner Katie Clark Sieben to release the 2013 graduation rates.

With data showing the highest graduation rates in more than a decade, Cassellius, Pogemiller and Sieben highlighted the investments and reforms that are having a positive impact on increasing student achievement and what higher graduation rates mean for the future of Minnesota's economy. [Read press release.](#)

#### **Minnesota Schools Post Strong Progress Toward Closing Achievement Gaps for Students**

New data from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) show that districts and charter schools across the state are largely on track to meet an aggressive statewide goal of closing gaps by 50 percent by 2017. The data have been provided to all districts and charter schools and offer school officials a concrete measure of their progress in closing the gaps between students of color and white students within the timeline.

"For the first time, we have concrete goals around gaps and are letting our school leaders know exactly how far they need to go to be fully on track to close these gaps," said Education Commissioner Brenda Cassellius. [Read press release.](#)

#### **Participation in Advanced Placement Courses Nearly Doubles!**

More Minnesota high school students are taking rigorous Advanced Placement (AP) courses than ever before, and those course offerings are paying off—both academically and financially. A new report released February 11 by the College Board showed that Minnesota high school students posted passing scores on 42,031 AP exams in 2013 -- earning 126,093 college credits free of charge.

Said Education Commissioner Brenda Cassellius. "Our students are not only challenging themselves and proving that they are ready for college and career, they are also earning college credit—which means substantial cost savings as they make the transition to postsecondary education." [Read press release.](#)

## Expanding Meal Opportunities for Minnesota Kids in Need!

The percentage of Minnesota children living in poverty increased from 8.4 percent to 13.7 percent over the past 10 years. Hunger and food insecurity affect children and youth in nearly every community and impact the ability of students to be successful in school. In addition to the school meals program, please consider participating in other USDA programs, such as Summer Food Service and At-Risk Afterschool Meals. Both programs provide meals when school is not in session and newly streamlined application processes make it easier than ever to participate! Call 651-582-8526, 800-366-8922 or email [mde.fns@state.mn.us](mailto:mde.fns@state.mn.us).

### By the Numbers

- **\$485 Million** - historic investment by 2013 Legislature to address equity and accelerate efforts that are proven to reduce gaps and improve student achievement.
- **74 percent** - of all jobs in Minnesota that will require some form of postsecondary education beyond high school.
- **100 percent** - of Minnesota students deserve the opportunity to succeed!

### Education in the News

#### Minneapolis Public Schools Takes Decisive Action on the Achievement Gap

A new Office of Student Achievement will adopt ways of serving African American students that have worked, both inside and outside of MPS. And it will be helmed by a member of the executive team tasked with keeping the pressure on to make sure that black boys are singled out — for resources. “We have to have someone in charge of this issue and really focused on this disparity that has endured for years and years and years,” said district CEO Michael Goar. “If we can talk about it, we can begin to tackle these things.” [Read full MinnPost article.](#)

#### Minnesota Posts Highest Graduation Rate in a Decade

More than 79.5 percent of Minnesota high school seniors graduated in 2013. That's a nearly two percent jump from the 77.6 percent registered in 2012. Good news, like the numbers released Wednesday, are something to celebrate. [Read KARE 11 report.](#)

#### Minnesota's Education Achievement Gap May Be Closing, New Data Suggest

A majority of the state's school districts are on track to cut the achievement gap between white students and students of color in half by 2017, according to new data... [Read full story at MPRnews.](#)

#### No Money Could Mean No Meal for Low-income Students in Some Minnesota Schools

A report released by Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid this week shows that many schools deny students a hot lunch when their account has a negative balance. Gov. Mark Dayton this week proposed providing additional funding to schools in the upcoming legislative session because of the report. [Read Duluth News Tribune story.](#)

## Recent BloggED posts

### Origins of Black History Month

Black History Month is a month set aside every year to learn, honor and celebrate the contributions that black men and women have made throughout history. Every year the United States president declares the month of February as Black History Month. [Learn more.](#)

### Meet Amanda Varley

Amanda is an Early Childhood Education Specialist at the Minnesota Department of Education and was recently recognized by Hamline University with a 2013 Rising Star Award. [Read full story.](#)

## Upcoming Events

### 2014 Schoolyard Garden Conference

Join Minnesota Commissioner of Education Brenda Cassellius and Minnesota Commissioner of Agriculture Dave Frederickson on Friday, February 28, 2014, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum to learn about a hands-on opportunity for students to meet state learning standards, engage with communities, partner with businesses, learn about healthy eating and (re-)connect with the land. Whether you already have a schoolyard garden, are thinking of building one, or want to bring one back to life, join us to learn how to create a school-yard garden that works at every level in your community.

[Register online.](#)

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