

## Education Policy Report signals urgency for education reform in Minnesota

Written by

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*Minnesota education policies earn a "D", ranking drops from 26th to 34th in the nation*

National education group StudentsFirst has published its 2014 State Policy Report Card, and Minnesota received a grade of "D" for how well its education policies focus on meeting the needs of students. Rather than rank states based on current student achievement levels, the State Policy Report Card evaluates whether states have the right policy environments in place to best raise academic levels from where they are today.

The report clearly indicates that as other states are seeing encouraging progress to improve education, Minnesota is falling woefully behind its peers. Specifically, the report implores leaders to take bold steps that improve teacher quality and empower parents with meaningful school choice options and information.

"We can all agree it's a disservice to protect outdated policies that are failing both students and educators," said Kathy Saltzman, StudentsFirst Minnesota State Director. "Our state's achievement gap is startling, and we must take swift action to address this social injustice."

She continued, "This report provides a clear roadmap to improve education in Minnesota. We must have a sense of urgency and work quickly to ensure all of Minnesota's students receive a world-class education."

Most recently highlighted by the Nation's Report Card, flat student achievement results mirror those on the State Policy Report Card in Minnesota. Despite inaction from the state legislature, not everyone is willing to stand idly by as a student achievement gap persists.

"The disparities in our education system are putting one of our state's key competitive advantages – our world-class workforce – and the future prosperity of our state at risk," said David Olson, president of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce. "As this report highlights, we need to increase the sense of urgency for common-sense education reforms that have a proven track record in closing the achievement gap and accelerating success for all students. Inaction has no excuse, and our kids don't have time to wait."

Research clearly indicates that teacher quality is the number one in-school factor affecting student achievement, yet teacher effectiveness is not taken into account when important personnel decisions are made in Minnesota. The state earned an "F" for its continued decision to use seniority instead of teacher quality in making these decisions.

"For Minnesota's students to succeed in an increasingly global economy, we need to make sure they have the best teachers possible. Unfortunately, Minnesota is one of the only states that makes seniority a more important factor than a teacher's performance," said Charlie Weaver, Executive Director of the Minnesota Business Partnership. "StudentsFirst's report card also highlights the need to give parents and the public better information about how their students and schools are performing. The fact that Minnesota received an F for policies that empower parents is alarming."

Minnesota also earned an "F" for its efforts to empower parents with high quality school choice

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options and transparent information on school performance. Parents should be the number one decision makers in their child's education, but Minnesota leaves parents handcuffed without enough options or quality information.

"Regardless of their race, zip code, or income, every family deserves the opportunity to find the school that best meets their child's needs," said Minneapolis parent Latrice Barker. "Parents and guardians, not government officials, should be the number one decision makers in their child's education. This is a social justice issue for our generation that will help determine future success for the next generation of Minnesotans."

Local governance efforts, including how well Minnesota holds schools accountable, were also measured in the policy report.

"There is no single solution to closing the achievement gap which disproportionately impacts our kids of color in Minnesota," said Representative Rena Moran (DFL-St. Paul). "We can't afford these great disparities and must be open to engaging parents and communities when it comes to focusing our policy decisions on what's best for kids."

StudentsFirst published report cards for all 50 states and the District of Columbia in order to raise serious questions about whether states' education laws and practices are contributing to student success. Nationally, in 2014 nearly 90 percent of the states received a grade of "C" or lower on the State Policy Report Card, and no state earned a grade higher than "B-". For more information please visit <http://reportcard.studentsfirst.org/>.

### **About StudentsFirst:**

StudentsFirst is a bipartisan grassroots movement of more than 2 million citizens nationwide working to ensure educators are valued for the critical role they play in kids' lives, families have high-quality school choices and a real say in their children's education, and our tax dollars are spent wisely on what works for kids. Led by former Washington D.C. Public Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee, StudentsFirst is active in 18 states and has successfully helped pass more than 110 student-centered policies across the country. For more information visit [www.studentsfirst.org](http://www.studentsfirst.org)