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**National Experts Warn Minnesota's Education Gap
Won't Change without Higher Expectations**

*Discussion at Minneapolis Foundation's "Minnesota Meeting"
highlights strategies for educating all students to achieve at higher levels*

MINNEAPOLIS (March 23, 2009) – The cold, hard – and alarming – facts about the state of Minnesota education were laid out to an audience of 600 at The Minneapolis Foundation's Minnesota Meeting on Friday, March 20. And a call was made for Minnesotans to radically shift their thinking about what it will take to change course.

Minnesota Meeting is a public affairs forum, sponsored by The Minneapolis Foundation, to stimulate dialogue and highlight solutions to some of our region's most pressing challenges. The event, the first in a three-part series on education titled *Raising Expectations*, was attended by elected officials, educators, corporate leaders, and others interested in improving education in Minnesota.

“On state assessments in reading, about 80 percent of your white fourth graders meet the state standards,” said speaker Kati Haycock, president of the Education Trust, a Washington, DC-based national think tank that measures academic achievement nationally and works to close the achievement gap. “For black fourth graders it's more like 44 percent, for Latinos about 33 percent and somewhere in the mid-50s for both Asian and Native American students.”

“When those same fourth graders take national exams, the results plummet. Only 42 percent of white fourth graders are proficient; the results for African American fourth graders are 12 percent, Latinos 16 percent and native Americans 20 percent,” she said.

Perhaps most alarming, Haycock said, is that for students entering the system behind grade level, the education system actually widens the gap, rather than closing it.

She warned Minnesotans not to put the blame for the growing gap on the students, noting that in some states low-income black fourth graders read up to two full grade levels better than their counterparts in Minnesota. Instead, she said, we need to raise our expectations of all students and provide the teaching to support it.

Raising expectations was one of three essential components of effective education identified by speaker Dr. Rudy Crew, who has led both the New York City and Miami/Dade public schools. Crew, who was named Superintendent of the Year in 2008, also identified the need for schools to cultivate a deep understanding of effective and varied teaching approaches. The third component, he said, is to demonstrate a “high degree of human caring,” which, he said should be evident at the board, the district, and the classroom level, as well as in how a community spends its dollars.

Both speakers agreed that the allocation – not necessarily the amount – of dollars is critical to closing the achievement gap. Poor students simply get less – “not less in terms of dollars but in terms of what a dollar buys,” said Haycock. Crew spoke bluntly: advocating for increased funding without demanding results deters change. He said many states, including Minnesota, have “put in more money to get the same results....Good leaders need you to push for results and back their efforts for reform.”

Both speakers identified a need for better board governance, better data, and above all, better support and more accountability. No one enters teaching without wanting to make a difference, said Crew. But with little, if any professional support, many beginning teachers don’t know “what an A looks like,” in teaching. He advocates introducing a master-teacher approach to allow for greater compensation for and knowledge sharing by effective teachers.

Haycock identified the need to evaluate teaching, based not on student achievement but on student growth. Teachers need to demonstrate their “value added” for students; standardized tests measure student performance as opposed to student progress.

How Minnesota recruits, trains, and retains teachers will become a critical issue, acknowledged moderator Peter Hutchinson. A former district superintendent and current president of the Bush Foundation, Hutchinson said due to a large number of Minnesota teachers retiring or leaving the profession, Minnesota will need to replace 25,000 teachers within the next 10 years, and said the question will be “who these teachers are and how prepared will they be.”

Hutchinson said, “We can’t compete in the global economy by falling behind in educational achievement. Over a third of our young people who go on to college are taking remedial courses when they get there – essentially taking high school over again.”

“It was especially gratifying to hear about strategies that are actually showing results in other parts of the country,” reflected Minneapolis Foundation president and CEO Sandra Vargas. “We need to learn from what works. Our task is urgent: our children’s future is not expendable.”

The next two events in Minnesota Meeting’s *Raising Expectations* series take place on April 22 with astronaut Mae Jemison and May 27 with Geoffrey Canada. For more information, visit www.minnesotameeting.com.

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Established in 1915, The Minneapolis Foundation is one of the nation’s oldest and largest community foundations. It manages more than \$500 million in assets, administers more than 1,000 charitable funds created by individuals, families, and businesses, and distributes more than \$35 million in grants each year. The Foundation also works with others to improve the quality of life in the region and serves as a catalyst for dialogue and action on critical issues, such as through the Minnesota Meeting public affairs program. For more information, visit www.MinneapolisFoundation.org.