



## FEDERAL RESERVE BANK OF MINNEAPOLIS

*Pursuing an economy that works for all of us*

**Neel Kashkari**  
PRESIDENT

March 2, 2020

Minnesota Rural Education Association  
P.O. Box 187  
St. Cloud, MN 56302

Dear Dr. Nolan and MREA Members,

Thank you for meeting with us about Minnesota's statewide achievement gaps and our proposal to amend the state constitution to help close these gaps. We also appreciate the thoughtful questions you posed in your February 6 memo.

It is important to keep our shared, primary objective in sight: We all want all of our children to achieve success academically and to become contributing members of our democracy, economy and society. Unfortunately, the data is clear that, despite good intentions, Minnesota has made virtually no progress closing our achievement gaps, which are among the largest in the nation. These gaps affect your students, member schools and districts—they are statewide and persistent across Greater Minnesota.

These gaps represent a failure, not of our teachers, students or schools, but of our political system. Other states have reached political consensus to make big changes, such as increasing funding, reducing class sizes, investing in teacher training and investing in high quality early education. Collectively, those policies, among many others, have led to improved outcomes for students and reduced gaps.

The proposed constitutional amendment creates a fundamental right for Minnesota's children that guarantees each child a quality public education. This approach can break through the political logjam by truly putting outcomes for all children first.

History is replete with skeptics of bold, transformational ideas. For example, when our nation extended the right to vote to freed slaves, people of color and eventually women, doubters asked whether they were educated enough to exercise that right effectively. Civil rights have led to positive transformation of our society over time.

This proposal would shift the power from systems to children and their families. For those who control the current system, such change and giving up power might be uncomfortable. But, if we really believe in putting children first, the adults who work within these systems must be willing to be a bit uncomfortable. Reframing the paradigm around Minnesota's children, rather than continuing to focus on systems and political ideology, will drive better outcomes for children.

We discussed many of your questions in our meeting and we have enclosed a comprehensive FAQ document which is responsive to some of your other questions. We update the FAQ as we hear new questions, and you can find it on our website [<https://www.minneapolisfed.org/policy/education-achievement-gaps/answering-the-tough-questions-about-the-amendment>].

In addition, we want to address at a high level a few points you raise:

- While there's always an argument for waiting and studying these issues further, not passing the constitutional amendment this year only maintains the status quo. While we have been nipping at the edges of these achievement gaps, none of the efforts or proposals over the last 20 years have worked. If they had, we would not be having this conversation today. There is nothing in our proposal to prevent you from pursuing other, possibly more timely, interventions to close our achievement gaps. The amendment will create a lasting framework to ensure the focus on children is maintained even when political winds shift.
- While it is true that factors beyond the control of schools may contribute to our achievement gaps, that is not a sufficient reason for maintaining the status quo. Progress can and should begin today in all of these areas. It is not the case that we must fix all of the problems before fixing any of the problems. That is a recipe for doing nothing. Other states are making remarkable progress in closing their education gaps, yet they still have poverty too.
- We discussed many of your specific questions related to why we should make a change, who will set the standards, lawsuits, etc. but let us again restate: what is different about this proposal is that it makes a quality public education a fundamental right and a paramount duty of the state. That is significantly stronger language than exists today. The proposal also holds the state accountable for meeting the standards. It both includes accountability that does not exist today, and extends that accountability from the legislature to "the state," which includes the executive and judicial branches—all have a role to play in ensuring accountability. Yes, this amendment also gives children and families a path for recourse if the standards are not met. We have seen that even one civil rights case, such as *Brown v. the Board of Education*, can change a nation.

It is impossible to predict the exact outcomes of a new civil right. *Brown* led to outcomes and an expansion of equity that no one could have predicted in advance—just like extending the right to vote has. While we know that the changes occurred over time, we are all better off because of these civil rights. Similarly, making quality public education a civil right for all children in Minnesota is likely to lead to changes that we cannot imagine today. We believe those changes are to be embraced—not feared. Our children, our workforce and our economy can no longer afford the unconscionable achievement gaps that have existed for decades.

The constitution creates a framework for policymakers and ours hasn't changed in over 150 years. While we cannot predict the future, we are confident that by putting children first, this amendment can lead to better outcomes for all children. Constitutional changes in other states have motivated policymakers to follow with bold action. That bold action has been missing from Minnesota.

Thank you again for your interest and leadership to advance our children's education. We welcome the opportunity to continue to work with you, to be a resource and to answer any additional questions you or your members have.

Sincerely,



Neel Kashkari