



REIMAGINING MINNESOTA STATE

Open Letter to the Minnesota State Board of Trustees

As members of the Reimagining Minnesota State Forum Advisory Group, we believe that Minnesota State is the single most important investment Minnesota can make to redesign how we learn and work together to generate a strong and vibrant Minnesota. The last six months have been spent alongside members of the Minnesota State community learning about the anticipated disruptions in higher education and possible paths that Minnesota State might consider to remain vibrant and relevant to the educational needs of Minnesota.

Over the course of the Forum Sessions, we observed a few key facts about Minnesota State.

- *Scale:* One of the powerful features of Minnesota State is that it is a massive state system with the ability to be highly localized and customized to the needs of students and communities. The system can be big when bigger is better and small when smaller is better. This means students have access to specialized programs and faculty, technology tools that can only be leveraged by a system of this size, economies of scale to address cost containment, and partnerships that can impact education across the state. However, students have access to the resources of the system through highly localized campuses, especially in Greater Minnesota, where instruction is targeted to the specific needs of students and communities.
- *Diversity:* The diversity of Minnesota State's campuses and student body is an important aspect of its value proposition. Minnesota State is the single best tool the state has to help a rapidly diversifying population become more engaged citizens and a globally fluent workforce with skills targeted toward tomorrow's needs.
- *Community:* Minnesota State plays an important role in supporting communities throughout the state. Through their presence in our communities, Minnesota State's institutions serve as anchor organizations that contribute to the social, economic and cultural health of their regions and create a stronger Minnesota.

From our shared learning, we offer the following comments and advice as a companion to the *Report on Reimagining Minnesota State* for your consideration as you steer the future of the Minnesota State system.

Redesign and align Minnesota State to improve student outcomes

In times of change, progress is impeded by a cacophony of voices. Change is best accomplished by developing a primary, unifying voice. For Minnesota State, that voice should be of the student, recognizing that other stakeholders add to the richness of the results.

Through the primary decision criteria of student success, we encourage the Board of Trustees to:

1. Create common vision and a unifying culture of student success across the breadth and depth of Minnesota State, including governance, leadership, staff and faculty, and students.
2. Develop and adopt metrics for system-wide outcomes and support their attainment through human resource and other management tools.
3. Incentivize and reward achievement of system-wide outcomes.

4. Design high quality, evidence-based standardized student experiences driven by the needs and expectations of different student populations.
5. Determine which functions and programs hold potential for common implementation and those that require differentiation from either a programmatic or institutional perspective, recognizing that this may require investment and/or reprioritization of programs or institutions.

As the system considers efforts to improve outcomes, we highlight the following:

1. The consequence of the systemic underfunding of Minnesota State from the state legislature is significant. While the potential for impacting the success of first and future generations is enormous, it will be difficult for Minnesota State to develop into what it needs to become given these cuts over time.
2. Historically we have been unwilling to address root cause problems or we adopt societal narratives which do not propel us forward. The system must stay solution-focused on systemic and structural support with targeted interventions and away from perpetuating dominant societal narratives which reinforce negative stereotypes of immigrants, people of color, and low income students. The system should facilitate problem solving so that it revolves around systems, policies, and practices, and not “fixing” the students for whom Minnesota State should be benefitting.
3. Outcomes matter. While access and completion are important, success is tied to the opportunities that are made available to students and communities as a result of their interactions with Minnesota State.

Deliver high-quality learning and support while adapting to technological opportunities (high tech and high touch)

Continuing advances in technology provide opportunities to improve and personalize the learning and support experiences of Minnesota State students, but the application of technology should augment instruction and support and not replace it.

1. Timely and effective data-driven solutions that provide evidence of learning and mastery of knowledge is required in order for Minnesota State to turn into a powerful engine for current workforce shortages, and so that Minnesota can stay competitive as a great place to live and prosper. Only through feedback and results-oriented systems can we intervene to improve student success.
2. Geography should not restrict growth or opportunity since technology has enabled content to be delivered beyond geographical boundaries. Learning campuses without walls where people of all ages can come to Minnesota State to learn and enhance their knowledge are needed.
3. Minnesota State is complex so a transparent and easy-to-use navigation system for students should be created that simplifies entry points and supports the student through a lifetime of learning.
4. Continuous adoption of technology-aided education and continuous improvement will be key, including standardization of platforms so learning is not dependent on physical location or structure of content delivery.
5. We cannot underestimate the value of personal relationships in the educational experience of students. Personalized learning and longitudinal student engagement will be necessary to support each student across a lifetime. Minnesota State should support ongoing connections between students and their faculty and mentors to support ongoing success.

Build bridges with industry, social sectors, and other educational institutions

At the outset we commented on the need to focus on the student. We cannot forget that the successful outcome for students is participation in the workforce and the social, cultural and civic environments of our state. In order to support the successful transition of graduates, Minnesota State must:

1. Ensure that the educational opportunities and experiences that it provides is in tune with the needs of external stakeholders.
2. Create partnerships and clear pathways to ensure successful student transition into gainful employment.
3. Balance centralized governance processes with local engagement, including expanding statewide and local advisory capacities.
4. Create the capacity to continuously monitor the changing expectations of stakeholders and ensure that Minnesota State remains in sync with these changes.
5. Recognize and support the unique role that applied research and the expertise of faculty and students play in partnering to solve Minnesota's challenges of today and tomorrow.

By succeeding in these endeavors, it also will be possible to grow and identify non-traditional revenue opportunities (joint ventures, partnerships), and support traditional funding opportunities (foundation, sponsored research, and grants).

Make visible and support pathways for innovation and operational excellence within the system, institutions, and communities and build a shared culture within Minnesota State

1. Courageous leadership, risk taking, and incentive systems based on scalable and effective change is needed. To do this, we suggest focusing on the following:
 - a. Change the rules, conditions, and practices most harmful to building a system-wide culture of student success
 - b. Engage in an system-wide conversation about the role of each employee in developing a shared culture across Minnesota State that delivers on the shared outcomes
 - c. Tailor a performance management system that aligns to the shared culture and provides incentives for achievement of system-wide outcomes. For example:
 - i. Reorient every employee to the new way of working
 - ii. Reward early adopters and appoint them as leaders
 - iii. Visibly reward failure and risk-taking when insights are generated
 - iv. Set up a growth and innovation fund to reward institutions, faculty, and staff
 - d. Identify and eliminate duplicative processes, structures, and conditional barriers that prevent achieving system-wide outcomes
2. Develop an approach to change management that looks different from the past. Possible powerful roles include:
 - a. As aggregator of innovative practices that can be shared across the entire system (map and define the ecosystem –what is present, missing, and needed)
 - b. A strategic function that can work to implement collective, shared, and measurable impact across the 37 institutions along with the infrastructure required to do it
 - c. Collaborative agent and facilitative leader of the culture and organizational changes necessary to position Minnesota State as one organization – not 37
 - d. A visible champion of redesigning Minnesota State to put student success as the top priority for lawmakers

3. As a public system, invest in leadership training across Minnesota State to equip those in authority positions to sharpen their leadership and change management skills with the tools required to affect systems change. This goes beyond performance management to adopting leadership capacities for trust building, influencing, community organizing, and managing competing public interests and conflict
4. Devise a strategic communications plan with simple messages and a vision that compels its stakeholders and constituents to act in favor of a student population that is changing rapidly and no longer has the characteristics of past generations of learners

Thank you for the opportunity to be part of the Reimagining Minnesota State process and to craft this commentary. Our comments are based on active listening, contemporaneous evaluation, and a robust conversation about tomorrow. Each member of our Forum Advisory Group comes from a different background. However the document reflects a unanimous consensus on the challenges and opportunities facing Minnesota State and the next steps we believe are necessary for a successful future. As the Board of Trustees, you have significant responsibilities for the future of the system, and we believe it is imperative that you provide bold leadership for this work. As this document is surveyed, parsed, criticized and/or supported, we would remind you of where we started. Significant change is messy and is best accomplished by developing a primary, unifying voice. For Minnesota State, that voice should be of the student. Their success should be the frame that drives your collective work.

Respectfully submitted,

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