10TH ANNUAL REPORT

IGNITING impact

2026

GREAT MN SCHOOLS

Dear community,

Over a decade ago, a coalition of Minneapolis leaders set out with a simple—but urgent—belief: every Minneapolis student deserves access to a high-quality school that prepares them to thrive in their lives, career, and community. Ten years ago, that belief found a home in Great MN Schools and today it's shared by an even wider network of leaders, families, and partners.

Our work is grounded in school and student data, national best practices, and a clear understanding of our local Minneapolis context. This year, one lesson anchored our priorities: *leadership is the difference maker.* Strong leadership shows up in:

Principals who use data and coaching to transform instruction in their buildings.

Teachers who hold high expectations for students.

Families who have always been their children's first advocates.

A community that shows up for its students even amid extraordinary disruption.

When Operation Metro Surge upended thousands of students' lives this year, schools, neighbors, and donors from across the country stepped up to keep students learning and supported through the crisis.

We've also seen—year after year—that our holistic school improvement model works. Schools that invest in strong leadership and evidence-based instruction see measurable results: 85% of schools we support outperform similar options, with low-income students achieving 1.5 times the proficiency levels in math and reading.

As we mark our 10th anniversary, we celebrate—and push to scale what works.

The opportunity is clear. With leaders—in our schools, our homes, and our city—we can ensure every Minneapolis student has the chance to thrive. We're grateful for everyone who has stood with us over the past 10 years. We need you to join us for the next decade.

In partnership,

Jennifer Stern
CEO

Stan Alleyne
Board Chair

10 YEARS OF IMPACT

Students
20,000+

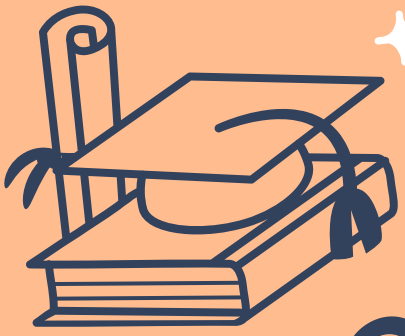
Educators
1,000+

Tools distributed
100,000+

Families mobilized
17,500

In 2016, only 3,092 students attended a high quality school.

Today, we have almost tripled the number to
8,902



SCHOOLS

69% low-income
•
66% BIPOC

6,443 students
are directly impacted by our comprehensive school improvement efforts

85% of GMS schools outperform
similar options in Minneapolis

Over 90%
of our schools delivered a year or more of growth. Half achieved gap-closing growth, helping students who started behind catch up.

83%
of students at our schools are attending school over 90% of the time, *compared to 67% overall in Minneapolis*

100%
of Literacy Leaders Cohort schools achieved gap-closing growth and double-digit gains in reading growth, with hundreds more students now proficient in decoding and fluency.

4,254 *additional* students reached
through our teacher and leader trainings including literacy support, Math Learning Series, Instructional Leader Professional Development, and Emergency Response Fund

FAMILIES

96% more deeply engage
in their child's education after using a grade-level guide

2/3 switch
to a better school

Engagements with family-facing tools 34,582

COMMUNITY

99 organizations
represented in the Minnesota Literacy Coalition

17 leaders
participated in Changemakers Twin Cities and are advocating for change

300+ people
mobilized for MN Literacy Day at the state Capitol

Leadership Fellows: The Leaders Schools Need

School leaders set the foundation of what makes a great school. Without sustainable, high-quality leadership, school improvement efforts cannot succeed or scale. We launched Leadership Fellows, a cohort program designed to strengthen the pipeline of effective principals across our network, to prepare emerging principals to navigate complex challenges with clarity and courage, while centering children.

By the end of the year, each Fellow had used what they learned to tackle a challenge at their school. Although the situations varied, they deployed several common approaches, as they:

Built structure where it was missing.
Formalizing good practices so they could be reliable and scalable.

Focused on centering evidence.
Whether it was student data, observation rubrics, or interim assessment scores, every project used some form of concrete evidence to ground decisions and measure impact.

Used coaching and feedback as the core lever.
The mechanism of change in nearly every project was a structured feedback loop: observe, reflect, debrief, adjust.

Centered equity and the students.
The 'why' behind every project connected back to students.

Next year, the Leadership Fellows Cohort is expanding from eight to 24 participants across seven schools, continuing to build a pipeline of strong principals.

Eight Fellows
from five schools

100% of Fellows report feeling more ready
to be a successful principal

National Teacher Survey Index Score

Schools led by Leadership Fellows more than doubled their score on TNTP's Instructional Culture Insight Survey – a national measure of how teachers experience their school's culture of teaching and learning.

100% Fellow retention
with 4 Fellows promoted to principal



> **Having a thought partner outside of the school who still understands the work of a school leader gave me space to process, reflect, and think more clearly about challenges and decisions. The 360 feedback let me build on my strengths while being honest about where I need to grow. And my capstone gave me dedicated time to refine my ideas and build a clear vision with my coach.**
>
> *2026 Leadership Fellow*

Matthew Grove, *Hiawatha Academies*
Hailey Collins, *New Millennium Academy*
Bao Cha, *New Millennium Academy*
Chloe Davis, *New Millennium Academy*
Eric Friberg, *Prodeo Academy*
Anna Marschalk-Burns, *Prodeo Academy*
Tyler Aliperto, *Friendship Academy*
Alissa Abelson, *Northeast College Prep*

Simply Great Schools: A National Expert Invested in Minneapolis

Over 21 years, Doug McCurry, co-founder of Achievement First, used rigorous, proven practices to scale a single school into a network serving 10,000+ students with some of the strongest outcomes in urban education. Now he's co-founder of Simply Great Schools and partnering with Great MN Schools to bring that same approach to Minneapolis.

Simply Great Schools is providing schools in our network with best-in-class instructional guidance, academic leadership coaching, and leader and teacher professional development. After just one year of instructional coaching with Simply Great Schools, New Millennium Academy saw strong reading growth across nearly all grade levels. The impact was most significant in kindergarten readiness growth, *which went from 17% to 80% in one year.* The playbook exists for dramatic improvement—and expertise is here. School leaders don't have to build from scratch or figure it out alone. The results are already underway.

What stands out is their ability to translate a clear vision for excellence into practical, day-to-day practices that actually stick, balancing high expectations with authentic partnership and consistently pushing our team forward while building confidence, coherence, and a shared belief in what our students can achieve. This is the best work out there!

Thomas Thao, Executive Director at New Millennium Academy









Math Learning Series: Investing in Educator Mindset and Practice

The COVID years hit math achievement hard, and the data makes clear it hasn't bounced back on its own. Great MN Schools made a deliberate choice to respond, investing in the tools, training, and coaching schools need to make real gains in math.

This year's Math Summer Institute and Learning Series—hosted in partnership with TNTP, a national education organization—combined a self-paced online course and collaborative virtual sessions to build teacher knowledge and support the application of strong math content and instructional practices. Ninety-six percent of participants reported applying evidence-based strategies in daily instruction, resulting in student gains. Participating schools saw an average five-point increase in student growth data compared to last year.

Seventy percent of participants (up from 38.1%) reported a conviction that all students can succeed in grade-level math, a mindset shift that shows up in how teachers plan and respond to struggle, and how students experience themselves as learners. It's a powerful reminder that investing in educator mindset and practice can impact students within a single school year.

The most meaningful part of this series was learning practical strategies that I can immediately apply in my classroom, especially approaches that help all students engage deeply and build confidence in math.

Dalal Daghlees, 4th Grade Teacher at Global Academy

105 teachers across **11** schools



Lela Shriver

Featured Math Promising Practice Award winner

Leading the Way

Lela Shriver, Math Interventionist at Global Academy, used data from multiple assessments to identify exactly where her students were struggling. She pulled small groups for targeted lessons daily that combined hands-on learning with practice, connecting the intervention with the larger lesson plan. The result? Her group of 5th grade students went from struggling to independently solving problems and discussing math at grade level. These students now share their thinking with peers, learn from their mistakes, catch errors in others' work, and offer help. This focused, data-driven approach built both their confidence and their skills.

Math Promising Practice Awards

Throughout the year, we recognized teachers whose instruction demonstrated measurable impact, innovative approaches, and practices worthy of replication across our network.

Culture & Content Champions



Becca Walls
Prodeo Academy



Mackenzie Ouren
New City School

Student Ownership



Rob Ruginis,
Cristo Rey Jesuit High School



Magda Thulson,
New City School

Instructional Excellence



Rogelia Urrutia,
Risen Christ Catholic School



Brente Bruihler,
Risen Christ Catholic School

Introducing Thrive Schools

Our Good-to-Great model has taught us that while high-quality curriculum & instructional practices improve outcomes, you need disciplined execution and exceptional leadership to accelerate impact. To close that gap, Great MN Schools is seeding Thrive Schools MN. The Thrive Schools MN model is uniquely designed with respect for each school's distinct identities and deep community roots, while providing schools with a level of on-the-ground support and collaboration that is generally inaccessible for single-site charters.

In this pilot year, Thrive Schools MN will drive impact at four K-8 schools – Hennepin Schools, New Millennium Academy, Northeast College Prep, and Partnership Academy – through shared practices and unique opportunities to collaborate on core systems and structures like professional development, instructional coaching, data analysis, student recruitment and attendance.

The long-term vision is to formalize the collaborative with a sustainable model that also unlocks further efficiencies and benefits from shared services. Thrive Schools MN is led by Laura Lee McGovern, a Minnesota native and senior operations and strategy leader for almost two decades at Uncommon Schools, one of the top charter networks in the country.





Schools

Agamim Classical Academy
Ascension Catholic Academy
Community of Saints Regional Catholic School
Cristo Rey Jesuit High School*
Eagle Ridge Academy*
Exploration High School
Friendship Academy of the Arts
Global Academy*
Hall STEM Academy
Hennepin Schools*
Hiawatha Academies
Hmong International Academy
Hope Academy*
New City School*
New Millennium Academy*
Northeast College Prep*
Northrop Elementary School
Partnership Academy*
Prodeo Academy*
Sojourner Truth Academy
St. Pascal Regional Catholic School
St. Paul School of Northern Lights
Venture Academy

**Portfolio Schools*

Partners

AC Radical Consulting
Advancing Equity Coalition
African American Leadership Forum
Anwar Institute
Ayada Leads
Centro Tyrone Guzmán
E4E
EdAllies
Education Evolving
Empower schools
Good Trouble
Greenlight Fund Twin Cities
Lead the Way MN
Little Earth Residents Association
Minneapolis Public Schools
MN Zej Zog
Northside Achievement Zone
Phyllis Wheatley Community Center
Pillsbury United Communities
STAND UP MN
Urban Ventures
Voices for Racial Justice
Way to Grow
Your Vote, Our Future

Changemakers Twin Cities: Where Civic Leadership Meets Education Equity

Launched in 2025, Changemakers Twin Cities is a cross-sector leadership program that brings together civic, business, and community leaders with diverse perspectives to learn about K-12 education in the Twin Cities and how they can collaborate to advocate for change.





This year 17 leaders who are shaping our city's healthcare, business, government, and culture united to grapple with



education equity together. The cohort spent six months examining the most pressing challenges in K-12 education, hearing from local education leaders and traveling to Washington, D.C. to study schools that are getting it right.

Together, we're showing that education is a solvable issue and we have the power to co-create a system that works for all students.

17 leaders

100% of survey respondents said they intend to engage with K-12 advocacy in the next year

Changemakers challenged me to think beyond individual schools and consider the broader ecosystem that influences student success… I left with a stronger belief that meaningful change requires collaboration across sectors and that improving educational outcomes is a shared responsibility that extends well beyond the classroom.

2026 Changemaker



Nancy Alvarado-Hazelton
Inclusive Economic Dev. Strategist



Jordan Belton
Constellation Fund



Aarica L. Coleman
Land Bank, Twin Cities, Inc.



Mindy Deardurff
Best Buy



Erick Garcia Luna
Federal Reserve Bank



Ethelind B. Kaba
Ann Bancroft Foundation



Whitney-Lehr Koening
Minneapolis / St. Paul Business Journal



Alix Lincoln
Atlassian



Melisa López Franzen
Former State Senator



Maggie McCracken
The Minneapolis Foundation



Shayla Owodunni
The Plant Penthouse



Elvis Rivera
Independent Financial Consultant



Chris Taylor
M Health Fairview



Minn Wang
General Mills



ThaoMee Xiong
Coalition of Asian American Leaders



Craig Warren
Washburn Center for Children



Adam Winer
Spotify



Family Tools & Resources: Information to Action



34,582
Engagements
with our family tools

2/3
of Families
switch to a better school after using the Minneapolis School Finder

New Tool: Special Education Guide

The Special Education Guide contains information on key terms, timelines, and action steps so families know what to expect and how to best support their children as they navigate the special education process in Minneapolis. It's a tool built alongside family advocates, school leaders and subject matter experts. More than 500 guides have already been distributed, and early feedback shows that 85% of families feel more confident advocating for their child's educational needs because of this guide.

A Light in Uncertain Times: 2026 School Fair

Great MN Schools partnered with Minneapolis Public Schools to host the 4th Annual Minneapolis School Finder Fair, bringing together families, schools, and community organizations to help caregivers find a best fit school that meets their child's needs. Held at the onset of Operation Metro Surge and heightened ICE enforcement activity across the Twin Cities, the fair took on added meaning as a gathering place for families determined to secure a strong future for their children despite fear and uncertainty.

More than 300 families attended, connecting with representatives from approximately 50 schools and community organizations who showed up with care and dedication to provide the guidance and resources families need to make informed school choices. *The turnout was a powerful reminder of the resilience of Minneapolis families and of what becomes possible when schools, families, and organizations stand together.*



Minneapolis: Setting the Gold Standard for Family Guides



Testimonial from Elizabeth Chu
Executive Director, Center for Public Research and Leadership, Columbia University

When we set out to create grade guides for NYC families, we started with a landscape analysis of national examples. In our scan, we assessed materials based on their accessibility, comprehensiveness, use of evidence, ease of navigation, action orientation, and cultural responsiveness.

> **We kept coming back to GMS' guides as the gold standard—particularly in terms of content and overall structure. The guides used plain language to explain technical standards, pair high-leverage skills with simple activities to try at home, and provide clear examples of student work at each grade level. As a cherry on top, GMS' guides stand out for their design (especially the warm, family-friendly illustrations) and asset-based framing.**

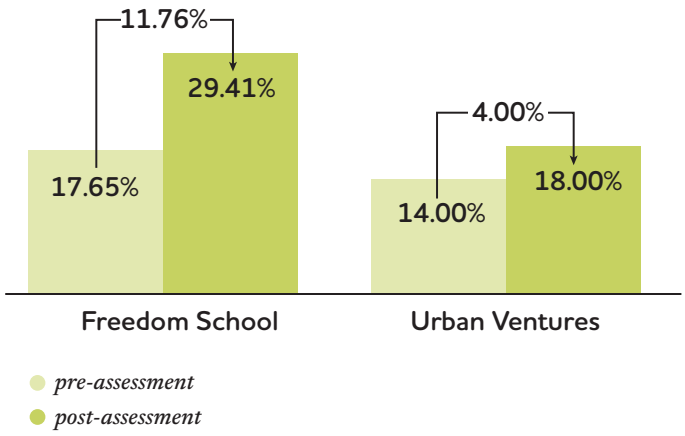
We're thrilled to use these guides as a foundation for our work supporting families and students in NYC, and we're grateful for GMS' partnership.

Scaling Summer Learning That Works

In summer 2025, the Minnesota Literacy Coalition partnered with Minneapolis Public Schools and Urban Ventures to pilot an evidence-based summer school model through the Lavinia RISE program. This five-week, full-day learning experience combines standards-aligned English Language Arts and math curriculum, intensive teacher training, and ongoing coaching, all delivered in a joyful, structured environment.

The results were striking. At Freedom School, the Minneapolis Public Schools pilot site serving Indigenous students, students gained nearly 12 percentage points in literacy proficiency, with close to 30% reaching grade level by the end of the program.

Proficiency Growth in Percentage Points



Those results are driving expansion. In 2026, we're scaling from roughly 100 students to more than 600, partnering with both Minneapolis Public Schools and Fridley Public Schools, districts that saw significant disruption this year from federal immigration enforcement through Operation Metro Surge.

Intensive, well-supported summer learning works—especially for those that need it most. *The students who arrived with the greatest need left with the greatest growth.* With the right partners, the right model, and the resources to scale, we'll continue to ensure more students have access to strong summer learning.

Growing Readers at Home

Research shows that family engagement doubles the likelihood of a child reading at grade level. To support this goal, in partnership with TNTP and New City School we launched Growing Readers at Home. It's a caregiver literacy workshop series that blends the science of reading with hands-on strategies families can use right away, including support for multilingual learners and children with dyslexia. Demand far exceeded expectations: originally designed for 10 caregivers, the first cohort enrolled 28. Two community organizations, Hmong Early Childhood Coalition and Raíces Latinas, joined so they could bring the curriculum back to their own networks, extending the reach even further.

> **In year two, we're expanding from one school site to three community-based locations, adding content designed for families of students in third grade and beyond, and deepening resources for multilingual families.**

100% — of — **participants** increased their understanding of the science of reading

97% **learned** at least one concrete practice that they plan to do with their child at home to support *literacy development*

98% **feel** more confident in supporting their child to become a stronger reader and writer



From Policy to Practice: Implementing the READ Act in Minneapolis Classrooms

Minnesota's READ Act set a clear expectation: every student deserves high-quality, science-backed literacy instruction. But a strong law is only as powerful as its implementation. This year, the Minnesota Literacy Coalition worked alongside schools and districts to make that promise real, helping educators not just adopt new curriculum, but teach it well.



This is the best instructional initiative I have ever done... I have more power and influence on the instructional practices in this building than I realized."

Andrew Uhler, Principal, Northrop School
Minneapolis Public Schools



Through a partnership with The Achievement Network (ANet), the Minnesota Literacy Coalition provided coaching and high-quality curriculum implementation support to one public charter school and three Minneapolis Public Schools implementing UFLI, a research-backed foundational literacy curriculum. The results speak for themselves: *partner and portfolio schools saw an average of 14% more growth this year than last, and classroom instruction has become more consistently aligned to grade-level expectations.*

When teachers deliver complete, accurate, and on-pace lessons with strong student engagement, students grow more.

At Northrop School, classrooms receiving support saw student growth at more than three times the rate of those who weren't.

Behind those numbers is a model of school leadership that made the difference, where principals observe lessons and follow up with teachers after each observation to provide feedback and support. Northrop School Principal Andrew Uhler reflected that he had always known he had influence over instruction in his building, but the partnership helped him put that knowledge into practice.



Our people are the power behind our work





Our Staff

Jennifer Stern, *Chief Executive Officer*
Javaris Bradford, *Senior Manager of Community Engagement*
Morgan Brown, *Portfolio Director*
Karn Engelsgjerd, *Senior Director of External Affairs*
Bjorn Grina-Shay, *Development Manager*
Jacob Guthmiller, *Senior Manager of Finance and Operations*
Hamdi Husein, *Manager of Literacy*
Bailey Johnson, *Senior Manager of Communications*
Sheilah Kaveney, *Senior Director of Operations and School Support*
George Lefkowicz, *Communications and Engagement Fellow*
La Lee Lo, *Senior Manager of Data and Community Tools*
Melissa Long, *Director of Literacy*
Joe Loye, *Operations Coordinator*
Zuli Morales, *Community Engagement Manager*
Kyle Parsons, *Vice President of Community Engagement*
Heidi Reed, *Portfolio Director*
Carrie Roby, *Portfolio Director*
Rochelle Van Dijk, *Vice President of Schools*

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Daniel Sellers
Margie Soran
Chris Smith
DeSeandrea Sheppheard

Our Board

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Ben Whitney*
Jose Pacas+
Jose Perez+
Michael O'Connell*
Sarah Clyne+

**Investment Committee*
+Community Engagement Committee

Emergency Student Connectivity Fund to Keep Kids Learning: When crisis hit, Great MN Schools moved fast to keep students connected

When 3,000 immigration agents descended on Minneapolis during Metro Surge, thousands of students stopped coming to school. At the peak, close to 10,000 Minneapolis students were absent or learning remotely. Thanks to donors from across the country, our Emergency Student Connectivity Fund raised $421,000 in a matter of weeks to help schools maintain student learning and wellbeing during an extraordinarily difficult period of time.

Funds were distributed to the highest need schools and used for transportation, hotspots, workbooks, mental health support, and staffing. The approach varied by community. Hennepin Schools provided door-to-door transportation for students. Global Academy sent every one of its 471 students home with grade-level workbooks. Risen Christ students, many of whom spent weeks at home, still significantly exceeded their academic achievement goals in both math and reading by year's end. Different needs, one constant: schools that did whatever they could to keep their students safe and learning.

$421k raised | **10k+** students | **19** schools









ICE Raids that were in our neighborhoods impacted all of us. The thought of ICE in our cities kept us up at night but we never lost hope. We moved to hybrid learning and carrying our passports, but we didn't let this change affect our education, because no matter the distance, we were together as a community.

Student at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School

Thank you *to all of the incredible people and foundations who contributed to this fund!*

Emergency Student Connectivity Fund Supporters

Abigail Anderson
Adam Winer
Al Fan
Alyssa Postman Putzel
Alyssa Whitehead-Bust
Amanda Von Moos
Amy Kottler
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The Bergsland Rose Family Fund
The Fajgenbaum Family Fund
The Nealon-Balachandran Impact Fund
The Nikki Sorum & Simon Foster Fund
Virginia Grant
Wes & Kim McDonald

Support for Great MN Schools is not an investment in one organization. It is an investment in a holistic strategy to create a stronger education system for the Minneapolis students

Phil Soran, Great MN Schools Board Member

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Stan Alleyne
Stephanie Simon & Craig Bentdahl
Susan Dunn
Tad & Cindy Piper Fund of the Minneapolis Foundation
The Julie and Doug Baker Jr. Foundation
Trinh Nguyen
U.S. Bank

Featured Funder **Tad Piper**



More than a Decade of Belief in the Long Game

Tad's commitment to Minneapolis education began over a decade ago, when he joined a corporate group conducting an intensive, three-month study of Minneapolis Public Schools. What started as a professional exercise became a personal, unshakable conviction that strong school systems are foundational to a healthy community.

That conviction has never wavered. "There's no magic bullet to solving our issues of homelessness or poverty," Tad says, "but education is about as close as you get to a long-term solution to some of society's most difficult problems." For Tad, that's reason enough to play the long game.

Ten years into his work with Great MN Schools, he sees the proof: rising test scores, stronger school cultures, and more effective teachers and principals. He credits the people behind that progress. "Almost all philanthropic investments revolve around the quality of the people doing the implementation," he notes, pointing to Great MN Schools' team and their ability to build strong, trusting relationships as reason for his continued involvement.

But what keeps Tad optimistic isn't just data, it's the next generation of leaders carrying the work forward. "That continues to be a real energizing thing for me," he says, "and I'm quite optimistic that we're going to get this right. We just have to stay at it."

The story in numbers

Total FY26 Expenses
$6.4M

84%
goes directly to programs

$2.4M
School Investments

$422K
Emergency Student Connectivity Fund Grants

$758K
Non-program Staffing

$725K
Community Engagement

$314K
General/Administrative

$1.6M
Program Staffing

$595K
Literacy

Thank —you—
for making change possible







IGNITING OPPORTUNITY *for every child*

We know what works. Now let's scale it.

- Strong, empowered school leaders
- Students held to high expectations, given grade-level work, in classrooms with the support they need
- Families equipped to advocate and make informed decisions
- Real systems of data transparency, accountability, and choice

When these conditions exist, schools deliver on their promise and more Minneapolis kids grow up ready to contribute, lead, and thrive.

Today our work reaches over 6,400 Minneapolis students every year and we are poised to scale.

We need more people to take action for Minneapolis kids and schools:

Advocate
Vote, make education a priority, consider running for school board

Get Involved
Join Changemakers, our funder advisory council or one of the many action teams we convene

Invest
Donate, or align your organization's funding and resources with ours

The next *Spark* starts here.
Can we count on you to join us?

SCAN THE CODE TO DONATE