Schools Aren’t What They Used to Be
That’s Minnesota!

Key Message:
Education is changing every day as the world around it changes. Schools are not like they were yesterday or like they’ll be tomorrow but together we can make sure they become better yet.

We have heard it so many times: “Schools are just like they were fifty years ago.” Maybe we have heard phrases like that so often that we assume them to be true. Maybe we even wonder, “Why not? If it was good enough for us, it’s good enough for our kids.”

The reality, however, is that schools have changed and will continue to change to meet evolving needs of learners and the expanded expectations of the workplace. Educators have needed to be even more innovative, insightful and creative than in the past. School leaders are challenged daily to engage children as learners very early in their educational careers and to keep them engaged into post-secondary education. Here are some examples of innovative schools reaching out to learners of all ages:

KinderPrep
Following is a snapshot of a program reaching out to early learners at Washburn Elementary School in Bloomington as told through the eyes of Principal Jon Millerhagen: “Oh, yes! My chef hat fits perfectly. The pancakes are mixed and ready to go. It smells wonderful in this room. This is the week I get to make pancakes and read ‘Pancakes for Breakfast’ to our four-year-old KinderPrep classrooms. I thought it was a good idea to bring early learners into my school four years ago, but now I think it is genius. What a great way to help ELL and poverty students get prepared for kindergarten. I can’t wait to see how our alignment activities pay off when these children are in third, fourth and fifth grade. You know, it would be fun to tell other principals about our success with KinderPrep.”

Partners for Success
Farmington Public Schools house trained family support workers from a non-profit social service organization (360 Communities) as a resource for students and their families. Farmington superintendent Jay Haugen shares the rationale behind the Partners for Success program: “It is our mission as school districts to find success in every child, to help them achieve their highest aspirations. And while we strive hard for this, using every tool in our ever-expanding educational tool box, we also recognize that many of the learning hurdles children face begin outside of the classroom. From birth to graduation, 90% of a child's time is spent outside of school, and unless we can impact this in substantial ways, we will continue to have far too many children not reach their full potential. That is where programs and partners such as family support workers and 360 Communities come into the picture. They provide that connection to the wider community at a much deeper level than schools can do alone, helping us achieve success for all.”

Project Ed.21
Project Ed.21 is the embedding of 21st Century Skills into the Sibley East academic environment. According to Stephen Jones, superintendent of Sibley-East Schools, “In preparation for August’s launch of Project Ed.21—Sibley East’s K-12 initiative to have one iPad for each student in grades 5-12—the district is pointedly focusing on defining and disseminating twenty-first century skills to students, staff, and community. [In accordance with Dr. Ruben R. Puantedura’s ‘Technology Adoption Life Cycle’] the boundless potential for sustained academic vibrancy invigorates the Sibley East community. The energy created within the district by Project Ed.21 is palpable, and Sibley East students will benefit through
twenty-first century skill development aimed at success in the ever-competitive global society.” This school district has already done significant work to close the achievement gap among learners and raise test scores for all. For example, Sibley-East sixth-graders were twice as likely to be proficient readers than the average student statewide.

**Stars of Innovation**
Educational leaders like Kevin Bennett, the principal of FAIR schools in Minneapolis, recognize the evolving role of education in our society: “As educators of twenty-first century learners, schools must be innovative in programming and funding. At FAIR School, we developed FAIR +, a partnership program with business, arts, and academic organizations. Our recently-created director of partnerships position facilitates 25 partnerships, including Target, Minneapolis College of Art & Design, The BrandLab, The Loft Literary Center, Lynx/Timberwolves, and the University of St. Thomas. Collaboration provides valued individualized opportunities for students and pools resources. Partnerships create career and collegiate pathways that align with students’ needs, interests, and aspirations. This innovative approach helped us earn the Star of Innovation Award, Hennepin Division, by the MASSP.”

**The Flipped Classroom**
Jason Just teaches the sciences, including chemistry, AP chemistry and the physics of sports. He has been an innovator in Lakeville schools not only through strategically flipping students’ use of time to be more efficient and effective, but also through a Spectacular Science Show that students present for the public and learn from each December. “In the flipped classroom, teachers are using technology to video-record traditional lectures and provide direct instruction outside the walls of the classroom. Students watch and take notes during the recorded lectures as their homework. Teachers then use the face-to-face classroom time to have students solve problems and personalize higher-order thinking skills as they practice problem solving and engage in their own personal learning with a teacher available.”

**Moodling through Disaster**
The Wadena-Deer Creek (W-DC) school building was taken down by a tornado in 2010. The rebuilt school will open its doors to students this fall. Superintendent Virginia Dahlstrom has led the district in turning the disaster into an opportunity. “Digital hardware and software have already replaced some textbooks—a change from past teaching methods. Teachers are using Moodle as a tool to align curriculum and as a resource delivery strategy to check on assignments, take tests online, upload assignments, and for grading student work electronically by the instructor.”

When the new school opens it will be considered a “high performance” school specifically built to improve the learning environment while saving energy, resources and money. In the new facility, major changes like long distance learning, video conferencing, digital textbooks, iPads, and more will be used for instruction.

Schools really aren’t what they used to be. They are better. That’s Minnesota.