Minnesota has done very well this year—for most of us. In fact, in 2012 business creation rose 18 percent, more than almost any year in our state’s history. Minnesota also has a pretty good business record on which it can stand. It is the birthplace of everything from Elmer’s Glue and Post-it notes to Target, the second largest retailer in the USA. Best Buy, Medtronic, General Mills, and United Health Group all originated in and are headquartered in Minnesota. The largest private company on the Forbes list, Cargill, is Minnesota-grown. In fact, Minnesota has more Fortune 500 companies per capita than all but one state. Tourism is a $7 billion business each year in Minnesota.

Minnesota has consistently been ranked at the top or near the top as the most livable, most caring, and healthiest state by Morgan Quitno Press and United Way of America. Minnesota is ranked “outstanding” in safety, education, economic and financial well-being, volunteerism, charity, civic engagement, natural environment and other factors.

What has made us so successful? Well, if you look into the many surveys that have been done, good schools, a prepared work force, and a generally high quality of life are most often mentioned.

Those factors are all closely connected to Minnesota’s public schools and the leaders of the 471 public school districts, 2,492 schools, nearly 824,000 public school students, and over 52,500 public school teachers. Together, they have made public education in Minnesota among the best in the world according to a compelling variety of test data.

Most recently, Minnesota participated in the *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)* as an independent entity in which it was compared to other independent entities (countries). Minnesota student scores ranked significantly higher than the United States and all but five participating countries, even though Minnesota includes more of its students in the study. Additionally:

- Average MN ACT\(^2\) score: 22.7 compared to national ACT score, 21.
- MN grade 4 average NAEP\(^3\) score in math: 249 (National average: 239)
• MN grade 4 average NAEP\(^3\) score in reading: 223 (National average: 220)
• MN grade 8 average NAEP\(^3\) score in reading: 270 (National average: 262)
• MN grade 8 average NAEP\(^3\) score in math: 294 (National average: 282)

Although Minnesota students score well when compared to other states and nations, the National Assessment of Educational Progress confirms that:
• Large and persistent gaps exist in test scores between Minnesota's white students and the state's students of color.
• A gap exists between low-income white students and low-income students of color, suggesting that perhaps the gap for students of color may not be solely explained by household income levels.
• If Minnesota's demographic mix matched that of the nation as a whole, the state's scores for 4th grade reading would be comparable to those of Alabama, Arkansas and South Carolina.

“Although white Minnesotans exceed their counterparts nationwide, the same does not hold true for Minnesotans of color. Because most of Minnesota’s students are white, their high scores drive Minnesota’s success with scores overall because white students do better on the standardized tests. Indeed, were Minnesota’s demographics to resemble the demographics of the nation, Minnesota would have a greater share of students of color and would no longer maintain its notable comparative advantage when it comes to test scores for educational achievement.”\(^4\)

Fortunately, there are a variety of ways we can continue to grow and improve. History has shown us the importance of public education to our past and our potential. We know that high quality early childhood programs, engaged parents, creative teachers, innovative school leaders and strong transitions to post-secondary education are keys to our continued success and potential.

Yes, Minnesota has done very well—for most of us. Most of us enjoy a high quality of life and look forward to participating in the prosperity educational achievement promotes. Let’s imagine and create together a Minnesota that does very well for all of us?

\(^1\)The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) provides reliable and timely data on the mathematics and science achievement of U.S. 4th- and 8th-grade students compared to that of students in other countries. TIMSS data have been collected in 1995, 1999, 2003, 2007, and 2011.
\(^2\)The ACT is a national college admissions examination that consists of subject area tests in English, mathematics, reading, and science.
\(^3\)The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America’s students know and can do in various subject areas.
\(^4\)Jose Pacas and Matt Kane, February 2011, Growth and Justice.