

Minnesota's Regional Centers of Excellence recently have been recognized as a Top 25 program in this year's Innovations in American Government Awards competition by The Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. This award causes excitement for the Southwest Prairie Regional Center of Excellence that is hosted by the SW/WC Service Cooperative in Marshall. Pending funding from the MN Legislature, the work this award represents - "empower[ing] schools to lead their own turnaround efforts by working with teachers and principals to implement comprehensive school improvement plans...to help teachers and schools narrow achievement gaps, increase students' progress toward career and college readiness, and increase student graduation rates" – can be expanded to more schools in the state and in our region.



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## **Minnesota's *Regional Centers of Excellence* Recognized as Harvard Ash Center's 2015 Top 25 Innovations in Government**

ROSEVILLE – The Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, recognized today Minnesota's Regional Centers of Excellence as a Top 25 program in this year's Innovations in American Government Awards competition. The selected initiatives represent the dedicated efforts of city, state and federal governments, and address such policy issues as economic development, environmental and community revitalization, public health, equal access to education, emergency preparedness and health care. These programs were selected by a cohort of policy experts, researchers, and practitioners. [View a full list of the Top 25 programs.](#)

**"Minnesota's Regional Centers of Excellence have already improved the educations, and lives, of Minnesota students,"** said Governor Mark Dayton. **"The award is a testament to Commissioner Cassellius's strong vision and the**

**tremendous efforts of our hardworking educators at each of our state's six regional centers."**

The Regional Centers of Excellence are a key part of the state's strategy to support struggling schools. Schools identified as Priority schools represent the lowest 5 percent of schools according to the state's Multiple Measurements Rating, while Focus schools are the 10 percent of schools across the state with the largest achievement gaps.

The innovative support model involves partnership between regional cooperatives and schools. The centers empower schools to lead their own turnaround efforts by working with teachers and principals to implement comprehensive school improvement plans. Through a combination of professional development, on-site technical assistance, and ongoing support, the centers use student data to help teachers and schools narrow achievement gaps, increase students' progress toward career and college readiness, and increase student graduation rates.

But, most importantly, as this award shows, the model is working:

- Seventy-four percent of Priority schools that worked closely with the Regional Centers of Excellence demonstrated better student growth in 2014 than in 2011.
- Eighty-three percent of Priority schools that worked closely with the centers are doing a better job today of closing achievement gaps than they were in 2011.
- Focus schools working with the centers are also making strides in closing gaps—about 54 percent have better achievement gap closure now than in 2011.
- In just one year, between 2013 and 2014, almost 20 percent of schools across the state improved their Multiple Measurements Rating score by more than 10 points, and 7 percent improved by more than 20 points.
- Since being designated as Priority or Focus schools in 2012, nearly 20 percent of schools working with the state improved so much that they are now being recognized for strong performance by receiving the Celebration Eligible or Reward designation.
- Forty-three percent of all schools initially designated as Priority or Focus improved to the point where they are no longer designated as low-performing.

**“Our teams of expert teachers work side-by-side with educators at struggling schools, creating continuous improvement plans that have resulted in significant gains in student achievement,”** said Education Commissioner Brenda Cassellius. **“Teachers learn best from other great teachers. When we give them the time and resources needed to improve, we see faster student growth and reduced achievement gaps.”**

The success of the Regional Centers of Excellence led Governor Dayton to include expansion of the initiative in his 2015 budget proposal. Under his proposal, Minnesota would invest \$12 million to hire more specialists and expand the regional centers' ability to serve more schools.

**About Harvard's Innovations in Government Awards**

The Innovations in American Government Awards is the nation's preeminent program devoted to recognizing and promoting excellence and creativity in the public sector. The program highlights exemplary models of government innovation and advances efforts to address the nation's most pressing public concerns. Since its inception in 1985, the program has received over 27,000 applications and recognized nearly 500 government initiatives since it was established in 1985 with funding from the Ford Foundation.

In 2010, the Innovations in American Government Awards Program launched Bright Ideas. This new initiative is designed to further recognize and promote creative government initiatives and partnerships and create an online community where innovative ideas can be proposed, shared, and disseminated. For more information, visit [www.ash.harvard.edu](http://www.ash.harvard.edu).