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Economics education in classrooms pays off

Testing shows 79% of high school seniors have a basic level or higher knowledge of economics

St. Paul, Minn. Economics a success in the classroom? The results are impressive. “The Nation’s Report Card: Economics 2006: National Assessment of Educational Progress at Grade 12” shows high school seniors score better than expected in economics. Dr. Agapitos Papagapitos, professor of economics at the University of St. Thomas, says that may not be a surprise as Minnesota has a strong network of economics teachers.

The Minnesota Council on Economic Education is a network of centers located at the University of St. Thomas, Minnesota State University Mankato, Minnesota State University Moorhead, University of Minnesota Duluth, St. Cloud State University, and the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. These centers and the Council help K-12 teachers increase their knowledge of economics so they can integrate economics into their curriculum.

Claudia Parliament, executive director of the Council and professor of applied economics at the University of Minnesota, explained, “We offer first-rate professional development workshops and courses to K-12 teachers interested in teaching economics. In this era of globalization and international competitiveness, it’s very important that teachers have access to the tools they need to teach economics. Because the network of centers is located across Minnesota, we can offer local support for economics education.”

One of the best examples of that support is the *Economics Challenge* held each year in Minnesota and other states across the U.S. High school teachers coach teams of students to participate in *Economics Challenge* – a quiz bowl-like competition. Each university based center hosts an *Economics Challenge* for high schools in their area. Papagapitos

says “It’s a great way for us to connect with high school teachers in our area and for students to see the campus. *Economics Challenge* is a good way for students to take a look at us for their collegiate work.” Winners of the center based challenges advance to a state competition, the winners of the state competition advance to a multi-state competition with the regional winners competing in the national *Economics Challenge*.

Parliament pointed out that Minnesota has done very well in the annual national competitions. Last year Melrose High School lead by teacher Rob Bahr placed second at the national level. And the year before, Hibbing High School lead by teacher Scott Wolla took first place nationally. Previous national winners from Minnesota include teams representing Moorhead, Fairmont, Brainerd, and Edina. More Minnesota high schools have placed at the national level than any other state. “We are pleased that Minnesota schools do so well” said Parliament. “We see the results when teachers become comfortable teaching economics. They make economics come alive for students and the students find it interesting and relevant to their daily lives.”

The Minnesota Council on Economics Education has been in operation for 46 years and relies primarily on individual, corporate and foundation contributions to support professional development offerings for K-12 teachers.

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