



Minnesota Department of Education Grants Oversight

Topic Selection Background Information

March 2022

Program Overview	The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) administers numerous programs that provide grants, aids, and subsidies to school districts, nonprofit organizations, and other entities. Legislators have recently raised concerns about MDE’s oversight of one aid recipient—Feeding Our Future—that is currently the subject of criminal investigations.
Original Evaluation Questions	Does MDE have an appropriate process for making grants? To what extent has the department adequately monitored the grants it makes?
Revised Questions	
State Resources <i>Medium</i>	MDE made about \$63 million available for Fiscal Year 2021 competitive grants. Only a small percentage of that amount was state-funded, but, MDE also administers numerous noncompetitive grant programs. For example, in Fiscal Year 2021, the Legislature named one recipient in law for a \$200,000 grant to operate the Minnesota Principals Academy.
State Control <i>Medium</i>	Although MDE must follow federal requirements for administering federally funded grants, the state has substantial control over state-funded grant programs.
Impact <i>Medium-High</i>	The grant programs MDE administers have the potential to reach hundreds of thousands of children and adults across the state.
Timeliness <i>High</i>	An evaluation with a focus on MDE’s grants management practices may address timely questions about how well the agency selects and monitors grantees.
Feasibility <i>High</i>	OLA could use standard evaluation techniques to conduct this evaluation, such as interviews and file reviews. Based on the large number of grant programs MDE oversees, OLA would need to focus on a subset of programs for in-depth review.
Balance <i>Medium</i>	In 2022, OLA released the <i>Minnesota Department of Education’s Role in Addressing the Achievement Gap</i> evaluation report, but there are no other education topics under consideration for evaluation this year. OLA last evaluated MDE’s general grant management policies in 2007; two other grants-related topics are being considered for evaluation this year.
Discussion <i>Important topic with timely concerns</i>	An evaluation of MDE’s grant oversight could provide useful information that may address recent concerns about the agency’s grant administration practices.