
Postsecondary Enrollment Options Program Satisfies Participants and Needs Little Change

SUMMARY

According to a study released by the Legislative Auditor's Office, the 10 year-old Postsecondary Enrollment Options program has presented few problems and many benefits for the 11th and 12th graders who used it to take college classes at state expense. Ninety-seven percent of the students were satisfied with the program in 1994-95, as were most of their parents, postsecondary administrators, and directors of alternative secondary schools. However, high school administrators were much less satisfied and attributed numerous negative effects to the program.

The program was created to promote rigorous academic pursuits and provide a variety of options for students. The study showed that the main reasons for students' participation were (1) to get a head start on college credits and (2) to save money. Other reasons mentioned by at least half of the participants were to

Program Evaluation Report:

Postsecondary Enrollment Options Program

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Key Findings:

- Students, their parents, and postsecondary administrators generally were satisfied with the program, but not high school administrators.
- The main reasons for students' participation were to get a head start on college credits and save money, although distance from a postsecondary school was important outstate.
- Program participants generally met higher admission standards and earned higher grades than regular postsecondary students, except at technical colleges.
- The program reduced expenditures for K-12 education by about \$11.8 million during fiscal year 1994 but increased the state's postsecondary costs by about \$16.3 million.

Recommendations:

- Secondary and postsecondary schools should better coordinate their efforts and direct students to the most appropriate schools and courses.
- The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system should establish a general, uniform policy for admitting secondary students who enroll in technical colleges.
- The Legislature should consider allowing private colleges and for-profit vocational schools that are eligible for the State Grant program to take part in the Postsecondary Enrollment Options program.

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take challenging or otherwise unavailable courses, to be in less restrictive environments, to be with more mature classmates, and to help decide where to go to college.

Postsecondary schools' convenient location was also an important reason for participating. Outstate, the study showed that the distance between secondary and postsecondary schools was the only factor that clearly helped to explain students' rate of participation. Forty-eight outstate districts had no students participating. Overall, the Legislative Auditor concluded that some students have had unequal access to courses through the Postsecondary Enrollment Options program.

The study also found that program participants generally received higher grades than regularly-admitted postsecondary students, except at technical colleges. The technical colleges typically used

the same admission standards for all students in 1994-95, while other public and private postsecondary education systems imposed tougher admission requirements on secondary students.

Most of the postsecondary courses taken by program participants in 1994-95 were in core academic areas. Twenty-seven percent of the courses involved social sciences; 23 percent language arts; 8 percent, math; 7 percent, science; and 4 percent, world languages. Another 19 percent of the courses were vocational or technical, including health and business. Five percent of the courses were in arts/music and five percent were in physical education.

As a result of the program, one-third of the high school administrators said that their ability to budget resources was impaired and one-fourth, that their ability to plan and schedule classes was negatively affected. Additional problems, each mentioned by 10 to 20 percent of the high school administrators, included student-staff interaction, student participation in school activities, staff morale, appropriate staffing, and sup-

port services for participating or interested students.

The net cost of the program to the state was \$4.5 million in 1993-94 (most recent available data), and the net financial benefit to students and parents was \$9.6 million assuming that students would have paid for postsecondary courses in the absence of the program. While the program reduced state and local expenses for K-12 education by about \$11.8 million, it increased the state's postsecondary costs by an estimated \$16.3 million. At the school district level, the estimated median reduction in education aid was \$14,149.

Copies of the report, entitled *Postsecondary Enrollment Options Program*, may be obtained from the Office of the Legislative Auditor. The executive summary may be found on the World Wide Web at <http://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/pseo.htm>. For more information, call Marilyn Jackson-Beeck, Jo Vos, or Roger Brooks at 612/296-4708.



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