

Post-secondary options a marvelous but underused gift

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People like Cassandra Sheppard, Steven Clift, Lindsay Anderson, Bondo Nyembwe, Stephanie Rupp and Gregg Allen show why, twenty years ago Minnesota legislators gave families and students a wonderful gift: the Post-Secondary Enrollment Options Act. A new report shows that this is a terrific, but underused present.

The "Stretching Minds and Resources," report found:

- Since 1985, more than 100,000 students have used this law, which allows high school juniors and seniors to take all or part of their courses at colleges and universities, with state funds following them, paying all tuition and book fees.
- More than 90% say that taking college courses allows them to learn more than if they took high school classes.
- Ninety-seven percent of participants reported themselves ζ satisfied or very satisfied ζ with PSEO.
- Eight-six percent of participants would definitely do it again
- Statewide, 82% of Minnesotans support PSEO.
- The law has saved families and taxpayers millions of dollars.
- Participating students ζ most frequent recommendation was: get more information to students and families. It ζ s underused because it ζ s widely unknown.

The Center for School Change, where I work, produced this report. We found Minnesotans like Stephanie Rupp. Raised on a farm near Crookston in a family where ζ Money was not in abundance, ζ Stephanie took PSEO courses at the University of Minnesota Crookston. She now is a Rochester public school teacher.

Steven Clift has only good things to say about Winona Senior High School in 1986. He used PSEO to complement high school, taking Asian History, Latin American Politics and French. My father, a recent former Winona school board member, (was) proud. He was dying of cancer, but could see his kids taking on the world.

Lindsay Anderson recalls PSEO offering the challenging environment I was lacking in high school. Despite flack from her rural high school officials, PSEO made her a stronger, more determined person.

Like Anderson, Cassandra Sheppard had difficulty getting information from her high school. But PSEO gave me an unquenchable desire to go to college after graduation.

A teacher inaccurately told Bondo Nyembwe he did not qualify. Minnesota State Colleges and universities accept high school juniors in the top third of their class, and seniors in the top half. MnSCU officials also will look at test scores if students overall record is not above average, to see if they deserve a chance to try one or two PSEO courses.

Bondo was qualified, and graduated from the University of Minnesota in 3 years. He now directs a Minneapolis school for recent immigrants.

What of Gregg Allen? Formerly superintendent in Nicollet, and now in Osakis, Allen represents many district superintendents who respond constructively to PSEO not by discouraging participation, but by expanding the number of Advanced Placement or College in the Schools courses. PSEO has grown to more than 7000 students since 1985, but more than 14,000 participate in College in the Schools courses. (the report is at www.centerforschoolchange.org)

In this season of giving, we can thank Minnesota legislators who created and retained PSEO: a truly great gift.