

**POSTSECONDARY
ENROLLMENT OPTIONS PROGRAM
FINAL REPORT**

JANUARY 1987

Ruth E. Randall
Commissioner

Robert J. Wedl
Executive Director
ESV Computer Council

Jessie Montano
Project Director



Minnesota Department of Education

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) Act was enacted by the Minnesota Legislature in June 1985. The program, which enables 11th and 12th grade public school students to enroll either full-time or part-time in postsecondary courses, promotes rigorous educational pursuits and provides a wider variety of options for students.

The role of the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) with respect to the Act was twofold: to provide leadership in the implementation of the program and to evaluate the impact the program had on participating individuals and institutions. To aid in the implementation of this new program, the MDE initiated a number of activities aimed at providing information about the program to high schools, postsecondary institutions, students and parents. Such activities included the development and dissemination of guidelines explaining the program, dissemination of a brochure and the development of a booklet entitled "Choosing Wisely-Choosing Well" designed for students and parents and a series of regional workshops for high school and postsecondary counselors.

To aid in the evaluation of the program, Commissioner Ruth Randall appointed a task force to assist in the identification of issues to be evaluated. A preliminary report providing information regarding the initial implementation of the program was presented to the legislature in February 1986. As a result of this report and testimony given by students, parents and various education organizations, a number of amendments were made to further aid in the implementation of the program.

The services of Decision Resources Corporation, an independent consulting firm from Washington, D.C. were obtained to assist the MDE in the evaluation of the program. Decision Resources Corporation developed survey instruments for students, parents, high schools, and postsecondary institutions and assisted in the analysis of the data.

In November 1986, a telephone survey was conducted of 1,000 randomly selected student participants. Surveys were mailed to the parents/guardians of those students successfully contacted, as well as to all high schools and postsecondary institutions which participated in the program during the 1985-86 school year.

1985-86 Program Highlights

During the 1985-86 school year, 3,668 students from 330 high schools in 272 districts participated in the PSEO program. They attended 74 postsecondary institutions throughout Minnesota. More females than males participated, and more 12th graders than 11th graders participated. Participants tended to be children of well educated parents. Students indicated that while the major source of information about the program was the high school counselor, parents were the major source of encouragement.

The major reasons given for participation in the program were to get a head start on college and an interest in the educational opportunities provided by the program. A variety of reasons were given for why students chose a particular postsecondary institution; however, the most frequent reason was proximity--the postsecondary institution was close and transportation was easy. The highest rate of participation came from high schools in regions outside the metropolitan area. More students enrolled in courses at community colleges (49%) than at any other type of postsecondary institution.

The most typical PSEO participant enrolled in one single course at the postsecondary institution, and less than one percent of the participants enrolled in more than 15 courses throughout the school year. Thirty-seven percent of the courses taken were in humanities, which include social science, social studies, history and foreign languages. Communication, which includes English and literature courses, comprised the second most frequently taken group of courses. Overall, student participants performed well in postsecondary courses. A grade of A or B was received in over 50 percent of the courses. Students attending private institutions had the highest grade point average (3.18), while students attending the community colleges had the lowest grade point average (2.78). Students reported that in general, courses at postsecondary institutions were more difficult than similar courses at the high school level.

After one year of operation students, parents, high schools, and postsecondary institutions were generally pleased with the implementation of the program and its impact on participants. Ninety-five percent of the students were either very satisfied or satisfied with the program and only one percent of the students as dissatisfied. Ninety percent said that they learned more by participating in this program than if they had taken only high school courses.

Both high schools and postsecondary institutions were generally supportive of the program. The University of Minnesota, state universities, community colleges and private institutions felt that the program is geared towards students with high grade point averages. The area vocational technical institutes felt that the program is geared towards students with a particular vocational interest.

The problem most frequently identified by all the participants was coordinating class schedules between the secondary and postsecondary schools. Transportation was not considered to be a major problem by either students or parents. Both the high schools and postsecondary institutions felt that their respective counseling services could be improved.

Fiscal Impact/Highlights

The Postsecondary Enrollment Options Program requires that state-allocated foundation revenues of local school districts be used to support students choosing to attend a postsecondary institution. In effect, state-allocated funds follow students if they choose to attend a postsecondary institution. The fiscal analysis was organized around two questions: 1) What is the absolute fiscal impact of the PSEO program on postsecondary institutions and local school districts; and 2) Does this impact on local school districts vary systematically with the characteristics of these school districts. In summary, it was found that the average revenue reduction as a percentage of total operating revenue was only slightly more than 1/10 of one percent and the average revenue reduction as a percentage of grade 11 and grade 12 foundation revenue was only about 8/10 of one percent. The Postsecondary Enrollment Options Program is small in size and the resulting fiscal impacts are consistent with the program's size.

1986-87 Program Information

In the fall of 1986, 2,182 students from 243 districts enrolled in 63 postsecondary institutions under the PSEO program. The number of female participants exceeds the number of male participants by a ratio of 59 percent to 41 percent. Only 27 percent of the 12th graders and six percent of the 11th graders are full-time students (enrolled in 12 or more credits). When these figures are compared to enrollment figures for the fall term of 1985, the only significant difference

was in the number of full-time 11th grade students. In spite of the fact that more students knew of the program, the increase in number of participants from fall 1985 to fall 1986 was insignificant (1,735 to 2,182 respectively). The predicted mass exodus of students from high schools did not occur. The Postsecondary Enrollment Options program appears to be meeting its purpose. The majority of students is part-time which indicates that they are taking advantage of particular courses of interest and still maintaining contact with the high school.

State Policy Issues

In addition to the program evaluation, which describes the experience students, parents, high schools, and postsecondary institutions had with the PSEO program, a number of educational policy issues is also reviewed in this report.

Admission Standards

In determining whether it is advisable to establish specific admission standards for high school students enrolling in postsecondary courses or programs, the admission standards used by each postsecondary system were reviewed. Each system (University of Minnesota, state universities, community colleges, private colleges and universities and area vocational technical institutes) had modified their standards to accommodate the special status of PSEO students. Based on the evaluation results, which indicate that PSEO students performed well in postsecondary courses, postsecondary institutions are encouraged to continue using the admission policies used during the 1985-86 school year. To ensure equal access to institutions within systems, it is recommended that systems with standardized admission policies across campuses for regular postsecondary students maintain the same consistency in their admission policies for PSEO students.

Advanced Placement

The Advanced Placement (AP) program, administered by The College Board, enables high school students to take college level courses while in high school. Upon successful passage of an examination, college credit can be obtained from

those postsecondary institutions which acknowledge AP courses. Minnesota's participation in AP is considerably lower than the rest of the country. Reasons most frequently given by high schools which do not offer AP were that too few students would enroll, parents and students have not requested AP, and high schools themselves have not looked into AP. Minnesota statute 135A.10 required all public colleges to develop policies regarding AP courses by January 1987. A review of AP policies in Minnesota postsecondary institutions revealed that prior to January 1987, policies varied considerably. Various states' models have been reviewed for alternative funding methods which could be used to establish statewide AP programs in Minnesota (Florida, South Carolina, Louisiana and Utah). Based on Minnesota's current AP and funding policies as well as on the models reviewed, three possible alternatives are provided for implementing AP programs in Minnesota: 1) Initiate an information system which would provide school districts with information on how to implement an AP program--no state funding would be provided; 2) Provide state funding on a per pupil basis to assist districts to initiate AP programs; 3) Mandate that all districts implement an AP program or a similar program. State funding for training of teachers, course materials and student examinations would be provided.

Postsecondary-High School Cooperation

Two models currently used in Minnesota to offer postsecondary courses at high schools are reviewed in this section: 1) Cooperative plans, which represent agreements between high schools and postsecondary institutions and 2) two-way televised instructional programs. The successful implementation of such programs is evidence that such alternatives are feasible and do provide postsecondary courses to students in areas where geographic location makes access to postsecondary institutions difficult. Cooperative plans such as the North Branch-Anoka/Ramsey Community College program do not place additional financial burdens on high schools and postsecondary institutions. The development and dissemination of guidelines to assist districts and postsecondary institutions in planning such projects is advisable. Two-way televised programs do require a substantial dollar commitment.

Summer School

The current PSEO Act does not offer program opportunities for students who wish to participate in summer school programs or courses. Taking into consideration that not all districts levy for or offer summer school, and that existing funds are limited and undependable, expanding the program to include summer school involves support for one of the following (or a similar) alternative: 1) Allow students to enroll at their own expense; 2) Provide summer scholarship grants for students in need of financial assistance; 3) Appropriate additional funds to cover the entire cost of summer school; or 4) Allow summer school to be substituted for one of the eligible quarter/semesters. The last two alternatives would result in year around funding for some students.

Nonpublic School Participants

Under Minnesota law, public elementary or secondary schools may make their programs available to nonpublic students through shared time arrangements. The PSEO program is not currently a shared time program; therefore, nonpublic 11th and 12th graders cannot participate in it.

A number of factors need to be considered in determining the feasibility of including nonpublic students, including the fact that school district participation in shared time programs is voluntary. Currently only 84 of 433 districts provide programs under shared time for secondary students. Expanding the PSEO program to include nonpublic students would require additional funding and an amendment mandating that all school districts participate in shared time.

Comparability of High School and Postsecondary Courses

Course comparability between districts, among high schools within the same district, and even between classes in the same building vary significantly. Course comparability can only be resolved when such factors as subject matter, course content and magnitude, course material and instructor qualifications and ability are evaluated. Such an undertaking was outside the scope of this evaluation.

Survey results of students and parents indicated that 98 percent of the parents were satisfied with the academic challenge of postsecondary courses. Eighty-six percent reported that their children spent more time studying. In all but one area, physical education/health, students reported that the postsecondary course was more challenging when compared to a high school course. Seventy percent of the students said they spent more time studying.

The report on high school and college level skills released in January 1986 by the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) addresses some of the issues regarding course comparability. It is recommended that the HECB continue to pursue the identification of college and high school level skills in additional areas.

Counseling Services

Throughout the evaluation, counselors are identified as a key component in the implementation of the PSEO program. The need for counseling was identified early in the program. In order to ensure that information and counseling services are provided to parents and students, amendments were made to the law effective March 1, 1987. Consequently, responses to the surveys do not reflect the amendments. Among the highlights from the surveys are the fact that students rated the high school counselor as providing the most helpful information for making a decision, that 63 percent of the students said that the high school counselor encouraged participation while 49 percent said the postsecondary counselor encouraged participation, and that 90 percent of the high school and 91 percent of the postsecondary counselors felt adequately prepared to administer the program.

Credit Appeals

Questions to the State Board of Education regarding the transfer of credit fell into three main areas: amount of high school credit to be awarded for postsecondary work, judgment of comparability of postsecondary courses to high school courses already taken, and compliance with high school graduation requirements.

Four appeals were received by the Board. Two appeals questioned the amount of credit students received for postsecondary work, and the other two concerned the comparability of a postsecondary course to that of a high school course. The former two were resolved in a formal hearing, the latter two were not pursued beyond inquiry.

Compulsory Attendance

Minnesota's compulsory attendance law requires every child between the ages of seven and 16 to attend a public or private school. If the goal for increasing the compulsory age is to reduce the dropout rate and increase the level of education, simply extending the age limit and requiring students to remain in a traditional setting is not a means to this end. Methods other than traditional schools need to be developed to address the needs of unsuccessful students.

The PSEO program has been such an alternative. Six percent of the participants indicated that they were high school dropouts. Minnesota also has 79 alternative high school programs which have been successful in bringing dropout students back to school. These and other alternative programs are necessary to provide incentives for students whose needs are not met in traditional academic settings to remain in school until graduation.

In summary, for a program in operation only a year, the PSEO program is seen as beneficial by both parents and students, problems reported by postsecondary institutions and high schools were generally few and minor, and finally the program had little impact on the nature and scope of courses offered by high schools and postsecondary institutions.