

Dear Chairs Youakim, Pelowski, and fellow Members of the K-12 Education Finance, and Higher Education Committee:

My name is Samara Pearson, and I'm the Policy Director at People for PSEO. Along with being involved in youth advocacy, I'm a full-time PSEO student at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. My experience in PSEO, I've witnessed the effects firsthand of ever-present disparities in higher education. I've seen PSEO and traditional undergrad students alike struggle with the decision to eat because they cannot afford the costs of commuting, food, basic necessities, on a fixed income, or unprecedented mental health or familial struggles that leaves them in a dire financial situation. Despite these challenges, I've also seen these students succeed and persevere because they see the intrinsic value and extended benefits that higher education provides.

I think better implementing the PSEO program, so that it extends funding to increase access to students that cannot afford higher education otherwise, would help decrease disparities in the accessibility of higher education because increasing equity to higher education is vital for students in the state of Minnesota. In-state tuition costs are rising, leaving college to become increasingly unaffordable for students across the state regardless of their income level. For the families that do participate in PSEO, it gives them a head start on life and paves the way for steps towards financial stability and alleviates the without the burden of student loan. I recognize that PSEO may not be the all end all solution for many students and families, but I believe that pathway should be open for those that choose PSEO.

Overall, I think allowing students the opportunity to finish secondary education right the first time and set them up for opportunities that they may encounter within their lifetime should be priority. A disservice to our current students, will extend well beyond your or my lifetime. Due to this, I ask that we fix our system and mindsets, for the benefit of the children in Minnesota.

Sincerely,

Samara Pearson