



CENTER
FOR SCHOOL CHANGE

Progress and Problems with PSEO

By

Joe Nathan, Russell Pekala, Malik Bush and John Miller

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Executive Summary

This report replicates and expands *Families Need to Know about PSEO*, a Center for School Change report published in September, 2015. Both reports examine how a stratified random sample of 87 Minnesota school districts and charter schools, one per county, are complying with Post Secondary Enrollment requirements adopted in 2014 by the Minnesota Legislature. The Legislature mandated that school districts provide “up to date” information about PSEO on their websites, and in materials distributed to students, grades 8-11, and their families. The report also discusses several other emerging PSEO issues.

Major findings are as follows.

1. There has been major progress in compliance with the state law about providing up to date information on PSEO.
2. Fifteen percent mentioned the 10th grade PSEO option in August, 78 percent mentioned it in January, and 91 percent listed it by March 1.
3. One percent mentioned in August, 2015, 77 percent mentioned in January, and 90% mentioned by March 1 that transportation funds are available for students from low-income families who want to get to a post-secondary institution for one or more PSEO courses.
4. One percent in August, 2015, 77 percent mentioned in January, and 90 percent mentioned by March 1 the PSEO online opportunities.
5. Twenty-one percent mentioned in August, 2015, 77 percent mentioned in January, and 90 percent mentioned by March 1 that PSEO course tuition, books and required fees are paid with state funds.
6. Although the vast majority of websites contain the required information, it was difficult, sometimes extremely difficult to find on more than half (55 percent) of the websites we examined. Only 45 percent of the websites had a search function that brought the website user to information about PSEO.
7. In the course of doing this research, CSC heard from parents and educators about other emerging issues with PSEO.
8. We asked for but did not receive copies of information from many districts and charters that they distribute to students and families.
9. Colleges and universities vary widely in their PSEO acceptance.
10. Some districts discourage PSEO participation.

Based on this research, key recommendations include:

1. Districts and charters create a website search function that brings users to information about PSEO, and other dual credit opportunities.
2. Another study be done early in 2017 to examine websites and information being distributed to students and families.
3. The legislature examine MDE’s interpretation of the PSEO law which has led some charters to lose two types of state funding, unlike traditional districts
4. The state should research and share higher education acceptance policies toward dual credit.
5. Districts should give equal weight to various dual credit courses.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge:

- Commissioner Brenda Cassellius, Minnesota Department of Education, and Josh Collins, Public Information Director, Minnesota Department of Education. After reviewing our first report, the Commissioner and Mr. Collins arranged for information about the PSEO law to be included in both the Commissioner's weekly note to superintendents in August 13, 2015 and February 4, 2016. This note reminded the educators that 2014 revisions of the PSEO law requires "up to date information" be post on district websites, and distributed to 8-11th grade students and their parents.
- Fred Nolan, Executive Director of Minnesota Rural Education Association, Gary Amoroso , executive director, Minnesota Association of School Administrators and Eugene Piccolo, executive director, Minnesota Association of Charter Schools. These leaders reviewed the CSC's August 2015 report and agreed to encourage districts and charters to follow the state law.
- School districts and charter leaders are following the PSEO law's mandates regarding student and parent notification. We recognize that this required some work, and want to acknowledge their efforts.
- CSC appreciates support over the last two years, allowing us to help inform more families and students about PSEO and other forms of dual credit. This came from the Bremer, Bigelow, Carlson, St Paul, Securian and Travelers Foundations, as well as from Generation Next. This support, as well as a significant increase in funding from the Minnesota Legislature for College in the Schools/ Concurrent Enrollment, also helped more schools offer dual credit courses.

Introduction

Thirty-one years ago, in 1985, Minnesota adopted the Post-Secondary Options Act (PSEO). This law meant that Minnesota was the first state to allow its high school juniors and seniors to take all or part of their course-work at participating two and four year public and private colleges and universities, with state funds following paying all tuition, lab and book fees. Post Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) allows Minnesota high school students to take college courses for free. Courses can be taken on a college campus or online. As one of the original advocates for PSEO, the Center for School Change has tried to help improve, refine and expand PSEO opportunities over the last three decades. From the beginning, a key issue has been ensuring that information about this opportunity is shared widely with families and students.

This report has several major parts:

- Introduction, key details of PSEO legislation and its evolution since being adopted in 1985
- Summary of research about benefits of PSEO and other dual (high school/ college) credit programs
- Description of the study conducted June-July 2015 of district and school websites (n=87), to determine how well educators are following provisions of a law adopted in 2014 (Findings)
- Conclusions and Recommendations
- References cited
- Appendix

Although not right for every student, PSEO offers tremendous opportunities. It is available for MN high school students in grades 10 through 12. PSEO is one of several “dual credit” opportunities for Minnesota high school students to earn college credit. Other programs include Advanced Placement, concurrent enrollment, College in the Schools, Project Lead the Way and International Baccalaureate. CSC recognizes each of these programs is valuable. Additional details on dual credit programs, including student-produced videos in seven languages are available at <http://centerforschoolchange.org/dual-credit/>.

In 2014, the Minnesota legislature decided that by March 1 of each year, Minnesota public schools must provide “up to date information” on the district’s website and in materials distributed to parents and students in grades 8-11 about the PSEO program (MN Statute 124d.09).

This report describes how well a stratified random sample of 87 Minnesota district and charter high schools are responding to this requirement.

This report also describes the value of Minnesota’s pioneering, thirty year old Post Secondary Enrollment Options law. The report shows the significant challenge facing students, families, community members and educators who want to learn about key components of this law. While research shows many benefits for participating, the challenge is obtaining accurate information. This

challenge remains despite legislative efforts mandating that districts provide up-to-date information to students and families.

Key details of the Post Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) law

- High school students can take courses at public or private, two or four year colleges / universities
- 11th and 12th graders can do PSEO full or part time, if they are accepted at a college / university.
- The PSEO law does not set any entrance requirements for 11th / 12th grade PSEO students. It requires Minnesota's public postsecondary institutions to participate in the PSEO program, and permit private institutions to also participate
- 10th graders who have passed the state's eighth grade reading test or its equivalent can start by taking one career / technical education (CTE) course on a college campus. If 10th graders earn at least a C in their first CTE class, they can take additional courses.
- College admission requirements vary. Some institutions will give students, regardless of their grade point average or class rank, the opportunity to try one or two courses.
- Students may not take sectarian classes under PSEO.
- Students may not take remedial courses under PSEO unless they are enrolled in a state approved 'early college' program that includes such courses.
- Books, tuition and fees are free for PSEO students
- Transportation funds are available to help students from low-income families travel to campuses for PSEO.
- PSEO courses are also available online from some colleges and universities.

The Evolution of PSEO

Minnesota was the first state in the nation to allow high school students to dual enroll in public and private colleges / universities and high school at the same time, simultaneously earning high school credit and free college credit, with state funds following students, paying all tuition, book and required fees. In 1985, a diverse coalition helped to pass Minnesota's Postsecondary Enrollment Options program (PSEO). Initially, the law allowed participation only for high school juniors and seniors.

When proposed, PSEO was controversial, though it generated bi-partisan support led by DFL Governor Rudy Perpich, Minnesota House Majority Leader Connie Levi, Republican, and Senate Education Committee Chair Tom Nelson, DFL. Former Minnesota Governor Al Quie, a Republican, also became a strong, visible advocate (Mazzoni).

Several studies have described initial adoption of the PSEO law. (Mazzoni, 1986; Mazzoni, 1987; Boyd, Fitzpatrick and Nathan, 2002; Nathan, Accomando and Fitzpatrick, 2005).

When Postsecondary Enrollment Options passed, it was controversial. The associate director of the Minnesota School Board Association was quoted in the national publication *Education Week* as asserting that the new law was “the most devastating piece of legislation in the past 20 or 30 years” (Wehrwein, 1985). One of the state’s teachers’ union filed suit against PSEO, challenging its constitutionality. The Minnesota Court of Appeals ruled that the PSEO law is constitutional. (Court of Appeals, Minnesota, *Minnesota Federation of Teachers v. Mammenga*).

In 2012, the legislature and governor decided to expand PSEO to 10th graders. District and charter public high school students in 10th grade who have passed the state’s eighth grade reading test, and passed the appropriate entrance test at a public two year college now are allowed to take one career technical class at a public, two-year institution. If students earned a “C” or higher in the first career-technical class, they are allowed to take additional courses (MS 124D.09 Subd 5a).

In 2014, the PSEO law was modified to require that school districts provide “up to date” information about PSEO on their website and materials provided to students and families (S 124D.08, Subd 7). The law also was modified to permit colleges and universities to provide information about PSEO directly to students and families if the students attended a high school enrolling at least 700 students in grades 10-12.

In 2015, PSEO was revised again. The law now allows 10th grade students to participate in a career technical class if they pass the state’s eighth grade reading test, or “another reading assessment accepted by the enrolling postsecondary institution” (MS 124D.09, Subdivision 5A). The law also was modified to allow continued participation in PSEO by a student “If a school district determines a pupil is not on track to graduate” (MS 124D.09, Subdivision 8).

Why are PSEO & other dual credit programs important?

Considerable research shows that PSEO and other programs allowing high school students to earn college credit are important opportunities for Minnesota students. Dual credit helps to effectively address many of Minnesota’s most critical educational issues: gaps between student groups, high school graduation rates, college entrance rates, remediation rates, college completion rates, and college debt loads.

One of the most recent national statements about the value of dual credit/ dual enrollment comes from ACT, a national testing service. Their December 2015 policy brief was written in cooperation with organizations such as the National Governors Association, Council of Chief State School Officers, Education

Commission of the States, National Association for College Admission Counseling and other groups.

“Shortening the amount of time students spend working toward a postsecondary credential can reduce their total college costs, which is highly desirable to students, their parents, and policymakers. Equally important is finding convenient and effective ways to ease students’ transition to college coursework. Critically, both of these factors disproportionately affect students from low-income families and/or students who are the first in their families to attend postsecondary education.” (ACT, p. 1)

The ACT statement continues:

Dual enrollment programs have shown great promise in improving student success in postsecondary education and progress toward a postsecondary credential. ACT research shows that high school graduates who enter college with credits from dual enrollment are more likely to be successful in college, including completing a bachelor’s degree in less time, than are students who enter college without such credits....

Dual enrollment programs can also help advance a more rigorous high school curriculum, potentially reducing the gap between high school teachers’ perceptions of the college readiness of their high school graduates and college instructors’ perceptions of the readiness of their incoming first-year students for college-level coursework...

ACT also believes that there are benefits beyond improved academic preparation for students who participate in dual enrollment programs. While research supports the value of test scores in predicting postsecondary academic success, other factors are crucial determinants of both college and workplace success, including crosscutting capabilities such as critical thinking; collaborative problem solving; behavioral skills such as persistence and self-regulation; and education and career navigation skills.

Participation in dual enrollment programs exposes students to experiences that have the potential to strengthen their familiarity with these factors as well. (ACT, 2015, p. 5)

Dual Credit courses:

- Help students, especially potential first generation students, develop what some researchers call “academic momentum,” which is a much greater level of confidence that they can do college level work (Karp et. al)
- Help students and families save thousands, sometimes tens of thousands of dollars on college costs
- Increase the likelihood that students will graduate from high school, enter and graduate from some form of 1, 2 or 4 year postsecondary program (Struhl, et al)
- Help reduce the likelihood that a student will have to take remedial, non-credit-bearing courses upon entering colleges or universities (currently

almost 30% of Minnesota high school graduates take remedial courses)
(Fergus et al)

PSEO also is a valuable strategy for helping improve Minnesota's high schools. Research by the Minnesota State Auditor found that more than half of the high school principals surveyed felt PSEO increased collaboration between high schools and colleges (Minnesota State Auditor). Moreover, some school district leaders have acknowledged that PSEO has helped encourage their high school(s) to add additional dual credit courses, taught on the high school campus, that they hadn't offered previously (Nathan, et. al, 2005).

CSC has been able to help six St. Paul high schools, four district and two charter, serving mostly low-income students triple enrollment in courses that allow them to earn college credit in high school. As the students explain, these programs help youngsters change their view of themselves, seeing themselves as able to accomplish far more than they thought possible (Hawkins, 2015, Lonetree, 2015). Here is a link to three 90-second videos with three of those students: Khaliq, Antonia and Jennifer: <http://bit.ly/1l022cy> .<http://bit.ly/1l022cy>
<http://bit.ly/1l022cy>

A 2014 publication of the Education Commission of the States concluded that "Research shows that students who participate in dual enrollment are more likely than their peers to finish high school, enter college and complete a degree" (Zinth).

In one statewide study of students from low-income families conducted in Texas, researchers found that "dual enrollment participants were 2.2 times more likely to enroll in a 2 or 4 year college, 2.0 times more likely to return for a second year, and 1.7 times more likely to complete a college degree" (Struhl et. al).

A 2014 in Colorado, "The Effects of Concurrent Enrollment on the College-Going and Remedial Education Rates of Colorado's High School Students," finds that dual credit enrollment correlates with (a) "a 22.9 percent increase in the likelihood of enrolling in college immediately after high school graduation," and (b) "a 9.0 percent decrease in the likelihood of needing remedial education in college." (Colorado Department of Higher Education.)

A California study concluded: "' . . . career-focused dual enrollment programs—in which high school students take college courses for credit—can benefit underachieving students and those underrepresented in higher education.'" (Hughes, Rodriguez, Edwards, and Belfield, 2012)

Carrie Billy, director of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, described the value of dual credit for American Indian students. Speaking at a national conference, she explained that tribal colleges and universities, "often without any compensation whatsoever – offer this service at their expense because they know it is one very effective way to help save our American Indian children. It keeps them on a path to a better future and a world of opportunity" (Billy 2014).

Dual credit courses help close gaps. A major University of Minnesota study examined records of more than 31,000 students who entered the University as freshman, 2005-2008. Preliminary results of this study found that “students from low SES households who took advanced courses did just as well in first term and first year GPAs as students from high SES households who did not take advanced courses.” (Maruyama et. al)

This study concluded:

Advanced course enrollment has statistically significant effects on students’ college academic outcomes. Specifically, students successfully completing advanced courses during their high school years are doing better in college than their peers who do not take advanced courses: .15 points higher in first term and first year GPAs; 1.4 and 1.9 credits higher in first term and first year credit completion, respectively. In addition, they are graduating at a 2.7 percent faster rate. (Maruyama et. al)

A Minnesota Department of Education/Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System study showed that students from low income families and students of color who participated in even one PSEO or concurrent enrollment course had high school graduation rates up to 39 percentage points higher than students who had not done so. A chart with these figures is provided below.

Student group	4-year HS grad rate (2012-2013)	4-year HS grad rate when student took at least one concurrent enrollment or PSEO course (2012-2013)	Increase (In percentage points)
American Indian	49%	88%	+ 39
Latino	59%	93%	+ 34
African American	58%	88%	+ 30
English language learners	59%	89%	+ 30
Low-income	64%	93%	+ 29
Asian American	78%	96%	+ 18
White	85%	98%	+ 13

Source: Minnesota Department of Education; MDE Report Card and NCLB Grad Rate Carl Perkins Core Indicator

A 2008 report from the Teachers College at Columbia University found that

Males, low-income, and low-achieving high school students all appear to benefit from participation in dual enrollment to a greater extent than their dual enrollment peers who enter college courses with more social, economic, and educational advantages. These findings indicate that dual enrollment can benefit a range of students, and may have the greatest positive impact on those students who are often excluded from participation.

(Karp, et. al)

Students with special needs also participate and can be successful in PSEO. One study found that “Eight percent of the reported participants were students with disabilities or special needs. Of the eight percent, the majority of students were those with learning disabilities. However, all disability and special needs groups were represented” (Lange, et. al).

Minnesota ranks fifth in the nation in average college debt accumulated by graduates. The average 4-year (public and nonprofit) college debt is \$31,579 (Institute for College Access and Success).

PSEO and other dual credit courses can help save individual students and families literally thousands of dollars and save Minnesota students statewide millions of dollars. A 2015 Minnesota Department of Education report found that in the school year 2013-14, Minnesota students earned 154,650 college credits via PSEO (MDE, 2015). The University of Minnesota cited an average cost per credit for that school year of \$463.85 (Williams). Recognizing that all PSEO courses were not taken at the University of Minnesota, but using their course costs as an average, that would amount to more than \$71,700,000 (\$71.7 million) in savings for Minnesota students and their families.

Some research shows the value of high school students taking college level courses specifically on college campuses. For example, research cited by Columbia University Teachers College asserts: “Where Students Take Their College Courses Makes a Significant Difference...A statewide study of dual enrollment students in Florida found that students who took dual enrollment on college campuses had higher rates of college enrollment and degree attainment. Students who took dual enrollment courses on high school campuses showed no significant improvement in college outcomes. (Community College Research Center, 2008)

The University of Minnesota research cited earlier noted that while there were benefits from participating in all kinds of dual credit, “PSEO students tend to graduate at faster rates than students from other programs” (Maruyama, et al.).

Information Sharing is a Key Issue

Since the adoption of PSEO in 1985, information sharing about this program has been a fundamental issue in Minnesota. The opportunity that PSEO provides is for any Minnesota high school student, but they can only take advantage if they

know about it. In addition, there is a lot of evidence to suggest that the most underserved students reap some of the greatest benefits.

Researchers at the Teachers College of Columbia University noted that students from low-income families, and those who traditionally have not participated in higher education, could gain substantially from participation in dual credit programs. However, these researchers have found:

Because underrepresented students may not have the same opportunities to learn about dual enrollment opportunities as their peers or may be less inclined to take advantage of such opportunities, it is important to ensure that states and programs pay particular attention to the recruitment of such students. States can encourage the participation of disadvantaged groups in dual enrollment by requiring notification of all students of the availability of dual enrollment, providing funds to create outreach programs for underrepresented groups, or creating their own outreach programs for such groups.”

(Karp et. al p. 69)

A 2015 Minnesota Department of Education report also affirmed the continuing need to provide information about the PSEO program via websites, “family engagement events, statewide conferences, and workshops” MDE also urged that steps be taken to “ Provide timely and clear information to all students and their parents about the availability of dual credit opportunities as well as the impact they may have on future opportunities, especially targeting low-income, first generation and families of color.” (MDE, 2015).

A Minnesota Public Radio report noted that colleges and universities vary in their acceptance policies of dual credit. Their report highlighted the importance of students understanding these higher education policies before deciding which dual credit courses to enroll in (Friedrich 2013).

Center for School Change studied materials on 87 Minnesota school district websites in January 2014, including registration booklets that have been given to students. These booklets describe various programs and courses available to high school students. Although the 2012 Minnesota Legislature adopted the 10th grade portion of PSEO, Center for School Change research in January 2014 showed that less than 10 percent of the more than 90 high school websites examined throughout the state had accurate, complete information on PSEO. Ninety percent did not include information about the 10th grade career/tech PSEO option, that PSEO courses can be taken online, or that funds are available to help low-income students get to college campuses for PSEO courses (CSC 2015).

CSC recognizes that many districts and schools provide information to students that is not available on their website. CSC is not able to determine the accuracy of information distributed in other ways, such as through presentations to families. However some families have contacted CSC to determine whether information shared with them was accurate (and in some instances, it was not correct).

Moreover, some families have contacted CSC to ask if the 10th grade PSEO option exists, or if transportation funds are available for students from low-income families. These individuals reported that educators making these presentations did not mention 10th grade PSEO and transportation funds.

As the next section explains, the 2014 Minnesota state legislature mandated placement of “up to date” information about PSEO on a district’s website, due to concerns raised by various individuals and groups.

Changes in 2014 Legislation

Legislators in 2014 listened carefully to testimony from CSC and several groups with concerns about information sharing. Some high schools and colleges are not providing accurate information about PSEO to students and families. Minnesota legislators decided to make two key changes to increase community knowledge of these opportunities:

- 1) As of 2014 Minnesota law now explicitly requires that school districts provide “up-to-date” PSEO information to all 8th-11th-grade students and their families. Specifically, Subdivision 7 of the law states: “By March 1 of each year, a district must provide up-to-date information on the district’s Web site and in materials that are distributed to parents and students about the program, including information about enrollment requirements and the ability to earn postsecondary credit to all pupils in grades 8, 9, 10, and 11” (Minnesota Statute 124d.09, Subdivision 7).
- 2) The 2014 legislature also modified the ‘gag rule’ on colleges. Colleges and universities can now tell students and families (in districts with more than 700 pupils in 10th through 12th grades) that they can save money on college costs through PSEO. Previously, postsecondary institutions were forbidden to tell students they could save money by taking PSEO courses.

A bipartisan group of legislators led this effort, including: Sen. Carla Nelson, R-Rochester; Sen. Patricia Torres Ray, DFL-Minneapolis; Rep. Linda Slocum, DFL-Richfield; Rep. Carlos Mariani, DFL-St. Paul; and Sen. Terri Bonoff, DFL-Minnetonka.

Legislators worked with a diverse coalition to achieve this, including the Minnesota State College Student Association, Chicano Latino Affairs Council, Growth & Justice, Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, Minnesota Association of Alternative Programs, Minnesota Business Partnership, MinnCAN, Parents United, Education | Evolving, MIGIZI Communications, StudentsFirst, Voices for Justice, Migizi Communications, current and former PSEO students and parents, and the Center for School Change.

Some of 2014’s progress was limited to permitting colleges and universities to share information with student and families in schools that have more than 700

students in grades 10-12. Thus, there is a continuing need to keep working so that ALL families have accurate information about their students' education.

Here's what two PSEO students told legislators in 2014:

As a graduate of the PSEO Program I can honestly say that participating is one of the smartest decisions I've ever made. I would encourage every student to participate in this program, as the rewards are immeasurable.

Former PSEO student Aaliyah Hodge

Due to the loss in funding, some MN high schools are very reluctant to let students know about PSEO and are withholding information. In my own experience, PSEO has also been a wonderful opportunity. As a high school junior and senior, I enrolled as a full time PSEO student at St. Cloud State University, taking all of my courses on campus. This May, I graduated with my Associate of Arts degree in Liberal Arts and Sciences, participating in my University Commencement before high school. Roughly, the financial savings was \$16,000.

Former PSEO student Jack Raisanen

Summary of 2015 Report, Parents Need to Know about PSEO

CSC studied one district/charter website in each of Minnesota's 87 counties to help show compliance with the 2014 amendments to the PSEO law. CSC used a "random number generator" to identify one district or charter public school in each of Minnesota's 87 counties.

Our earlier report studied whether these 87 websites were providing up to date information five key areas. Those five areas are 1. Existence of opportunities for 10th graders to take PSEO courses in the career/technical field on college campuses, 2. Opportunities for students to take PSEO courses on-line, 3. Transportation funding for students from low-income families, making it easier for them to get to college/university campuses for PSEO courses, 4. The fact that PSEO course tuition, books and required fees are paid by state funds, so that the courses are free to high school students. 5. Whether the district provided accurate information about when students are required to notify their school that they would be participating in one or more PSEO courses in the following school year (May 30)

Through this research on 87 websites, CSC found:

* 80% did not explicitly explain that tuition, books and required lab fees are covered for PSEO students

● 85% did not provide up to date information about the 10th grade PSEO option

* 91% did not provide the accurate date for a student to notify their intent to enroll

● 99% did not provide information on the availability of online PSEO courses

● 99% did not provide information on transportation assistance for PSEO students from low-income families

CSC recommendations included:

- MDE should notify each district and charter high school about the legislative mandate on providing up-to-date information about PSEO, and encourage each to follow through this fall.
- MDE should modify its website to include revisions the 2015 legislature made in PSEO
- All MN public high schools should review the information on their websites and in materials given to students and families to determine if they are in compliance with the law. If not, up-to-date information should be provided.
- Each district and school website should include a search function yielding up to date, accurate information about PSEO and other dual credit programs.
- MDE should consider sharing information about PSEO and other dual credit programs directly with families and community groups, in various languages.
- A follow-up study should be done in December 2015 to determine progress.

Response to 2015 Report

The Minnesota Department of Education responded immediately and constructively to this report. As the report suggested, MDE immediately revised its website to include all 2015 revisions. In addition, Brenda Cassellius, Minnesota Commissioner of Education, included information about the report and the PSEO law's mandates about providing "up to date information" in an August 13, 2015 email sent to all district superintendents and charter public school directors. (Cassellius, 2015)

The text of that message was as follows:

"2015 PSEO and Concurrent Enrollment Legislative Changes

In an effort to provide clear and helpful guidance, below is a paragraph that can be used on district websites to satisfy the obligation to notify parents and students about PSEO. Please note that by March 1 of each year, a district must provide up-to-date information on the district's website and in materials that are distributed to all pupils and their parents in grades eight through grade 11 about the program, including information about enrollment requirements and the ability to earn postsecondary credit. To assist the district in planning, a pupil shall inform the district by May 30 of each year of their intent to enroll in postsecondary courses during the following school year. A pupil is bound by notifying or not notifying the district by May 30.

This text is suggested as a minimum, and may be copied and pasted to your site: Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) is a program that allows 10th-, 11th- and 12th-grade students to earn both high school and college credit while still in high school, through enrollment in and successful completion of college-level, nonsectarian courses at eligible participating postsecondary institutions. Most PSEO courses are offered on the campus of the postsecondary institution; some courses are offered online. Each participating college or university sets its own requirements for enrollment into the PSEO courses. Eleventh and 12th-grade students may take PSEO courses on a full- or part-time basis; 10th graders may

take one career/technical PSEO course. If they earn at least a grade C in that class, they may take additional career/technical PSEO courses. There is no charge to PSEO students for tuition, books or fees for items that are required to participate in a course. Students must meet the PSEO residency and eligibility requirements and abide by participation limits specified in Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.09. Funds are available to help pay transportation expenses for qualifying students to participate in PSEO courses on college campuses. Schools must provide information to all students in grades 8-11 and their families by March 1, every year. Students must notify their school by May 30 if they want to participate in PSEO for the following school year. For current information about the PSEO program, [visit the Minnesota Department of Education's Postsecondary Enrollment Options \(PSEO\) webpage.](#) “

The Commissioner followed up with the following reminder, distributed on February 4, 2016.
<http://bit.ly/1RIE4e8>

Reminder of Statutory Deadline for Dissemination of Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) Information

By March 1 of each year, a district must provide up-to-date information on the district's website, and in materials that are distributed to parents and students, about PSEO programs—including information about enrollment requirements and the opportunity to earn postsecondary credit—to all pupils in grades 8, 9, 10, and 11 (Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.09, subdivision 7). In an effort to provide consistent and helpful guidance about PSEO, suggested language is available on the [department website](#) that may be used to satisfy the statutory obligation to notify parents and students. At a minimum, this language should be available on district websites and materials distributed to families. In addition, the PSEO Reference Guide is a tool for educators and families, and is available on the [PSEO Program Web page](#).

If you have any questions, [contact Beth Barsness](#) (651-582-8845).

The Minnesota Association of School Administrators, Minnesota Rural Education Association and Minnesota Association of Charter Schools also had constructive responses to the report. These three organizations contacted their members, reminded them of the law's requirements and urged them to comply.

Moreover, news media throughout the state also provided readers/listeners with information about the report and about PSEO. CSC believes the news media interest, the MDE emails, and the constructive response from MREA, MASA and MACS helped produce progress reported later in this paper.”

Methodology for this Report

This report replicates and expands research that CSC carried out June – August, 2015. In January, 2016, CSC re-examined websites of the same 87 districts/charter websites that we reviewed in June-July, 2015. CSC researchers examined whether the website had accurate information about 4 key issues, explained below. CSC also kept track of whether the website had a search function. If so, we checked to see whether use of the search function brought us to information about PSEO.

When CSC researchers were not able to find up to date information about PSEO on a website, we contacted the relevant district superintendent or charter school director via email. In many but not all cases, these educators responded. CSC staff explained that we would monitor the website up to March 1, when the state law requires that information be posted.

This report also includes preliminary research that CSC staff to examine PSEO and other dual credit acceptance policies of Minnesota colleges and universities. We contacted 11 Minnesota colleges and universities to ask how much credit toward a degree they would offer for PSEO and other forms of dual credit.

The colleges interviewed included

- Three University of Minnesota campuses
- Two four-year Minnesota College and University universities
- Two , two year public community colleges and
- Four, four-year private colleges or universities.

We asked about how many credits from PSEO and other dual credit courses these institutions accepted toward a degree that they offered.

Finally, we listened to and below report on concerns raised by families and educators throughout the state about how implementation of PSEO.

Findings

In this section of the report, CSC reviews five issues. We believe they represent progress that is worth noting. We also identify several problems that we believe deserve further consideration.

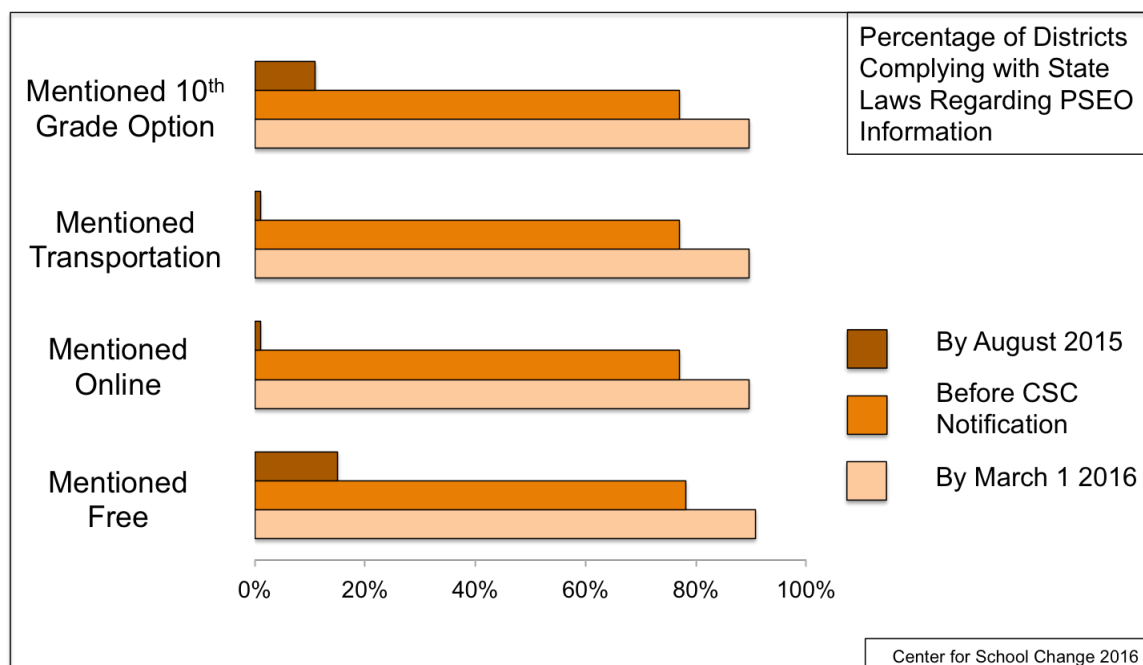
The issues are first, the website review, where they appears to be considerable progress. However, we also discuss the “search function” feature of websites, which needs attention.

We discuss four other issues in this section. The report describes preliminary research on high school/college acceptance of PSEO and other dual credit courses. Next, we briefly discuss materials that are being distributed to students and families. Next the report describes preliminary research on high school/college acceptance of PSEO and other dual credit courses. We also briefly describe what appears to be an inequity between district and charter public schools in the way funds are reduced to reflect students’ PSEO participation. Finally, the report cites the issue of how PSEO courses are “weighted” on high school grade point averages.

1. Review of 87 district and charter websites.

Research on the stratified random sample of 87 public high schools by county across Minnesota found the following percentages of schools compliant with the “up to date” information portion of the PSEO law, in various ways.

The chart below summarizes some of our findings. We explain them more fully



below.

The chart above focuses on four aspects of what the Minnesota Department of Education believes are part of “up to date” information about PSEO. The chart shows what percentage of the 87 district and charter schools mentioned each fact on their website in August, 2015, in January, 2016, before being contacted by CSC, and by March 1, 2016, when districts are required by state law to post “up to date” information on their website.

- Fifteen percent mentioned the 10th grade PSEO option in August, 2015, 78 percent mentioned it in January, 2016, and 91 percent mentioned it by March 1, 2016.
- One percent mentioned in August, 2015, 77 percent mentioned in January, 2016, and 90 percent mentioned by March 1, 2016 that transportation funds are available for students from low-income families who want to get to a post-secondary institution for one or more PSEO courses.
- One percent mentioned in August, 2015, 77 percent mentioned in January, 2016, and 90 percent explained by March 1, 2016 that PSEO courses could be taken on-line
- Twenty-one percent explained in August, 2015, 77 percent in January, 2016 and 90 percent mentioned by March 1, 2016 that PSEO course tuition, books and required fees are paid with state funds.

These findings represent considerable progress. Although there still were a few districts and charters that had not posted accurate information, the vast majority have responded positively to the state law and the requests from the Commissioner of Education.

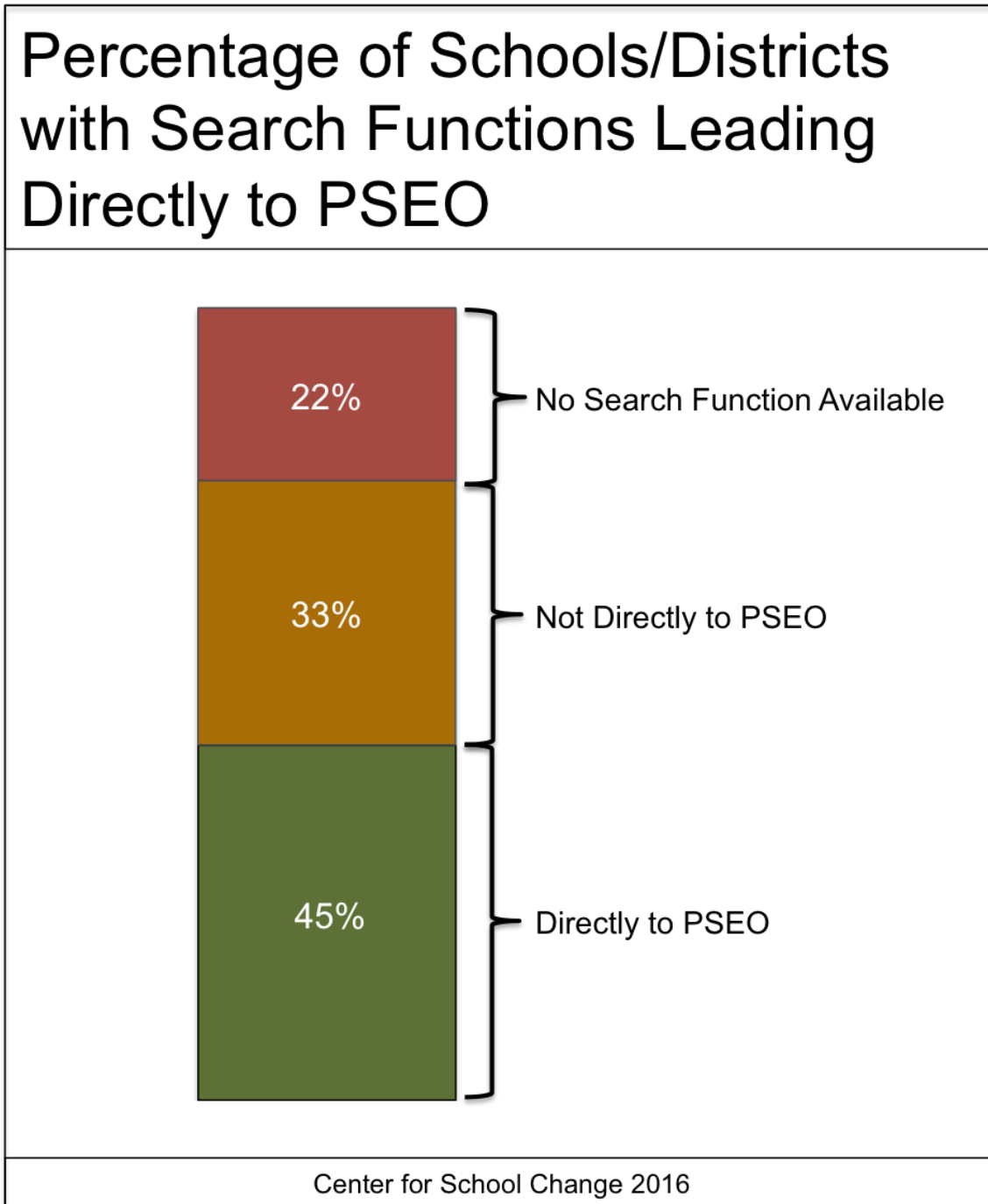
At the same time, the fact that about 25 percent of the districts/ charters in the sample had not provided update information by late January, 2016 is a matter of concern. The law went into effect in fall, 2014. The district superintendents and charter school directors had received a reminder in September, 2015 from Commissioner Cassellius reminding them of the state PSEO law’s requirements re providing “up to date” information and urging that they follow its provisions.

Even after a second reminder from the Commissioner and contact from CSC in late January /early February, 2015, some districts / charters are not complying.

So, it appears that some further steps need to be taken so that there is 100 percent compliance. We discuss this in the recommendations section of the report, below.

The next chart illustrates a problem that still needs attention. It involves the issue of whether information about PSEO is easy to find on a district’s website. “Ease of access” is not a state requirement. But CSC believes that the spirit, if not

the letter of the law is met only if information about PSEO posted on a school or district website is easy to find.



It was difficult, sometimes extremely difficult, to find information about PSEO on the majority of the 87 websites we reviewed. This was especially true on many of the 55 percent of websites that either did not have a search function, or had a search function that did not bring the user to information about PSEO.

Seventy-eight percent, the vast majority of the districts and charters in the statewide sample, have what's called a "search function." That means a person can type in a term, such as PSEO, hit a button and be taken instantly to information on the website about that term. Only 22 percent of the websites we examined do not have a search function.

Given emerging developments in technology, CSC believes that the number of districts and charter websites with this feature will increase.

However, more than half, 55 percent, of the websites CSC examined either did not have a search function (22 percent), or had a search function that did not bring the website user to information about PSEO, when that term, or Post-Secondary Options" was typed in (33 percent).

No Search function: Alberta, Alden-Conger, Arcadia Charter, Browerville, Carlton, Chokio, Dawson-Boyd, Fisher, Glencoe-Silver Lake, Harbor City, Hill City, Litchfield, Luverne, Minnewaska, New Heights Charter, Norman County East, Pequot Lakes, Sage Charter, and Tri County. (19 websites – 22 percent of the 87 reviewed)

Search Function but search does not lead to information: Adrian, Austin, Benson, Braham, Buffalo-Lake, Caledonia, Cook, Hector, Echo, Fulda, Greenway, Hawley, Henning, Jordan, Laporte, LeSeuer-Henderson, MACCRAY, Madelia, Melrose, New Ulm, Nicollet, Plainview, Ogilvie, Red Lake, Riverway, Sibley East, Thief River, Wauben-Ogema, and Windom. (29 websites - 33 percent of the 87 reviewed)

Search Function that Does lead to information about PSEO: Alexandria, Big Lake, Burnsville, Chatfield, Clinton-Graceville, Clearbrook, Foley, Frazee-Vargas, Goodhue, Granada-East Chain-Huntley, Greenbush, Hinckley-Finlayson, Heron Lake, Howard Lake-Waverly, Janesville-Waldorf, Lake of the Woods, Lake Superior, Lakeview, Little Fork, Maple River, Marshall County, Menahga, Milaca, Mounds View, New London-Spicer, North Branch, Northland, Owatonna, Paladin, Pierz, Pipestone, Redwood, Rothsay, Rushford-Peterson, Russell-Tyler-Ruthton, Triton, United South Central, Watertown, and Wheaton (39 websites - 45 percent of the 87 reviewed)

2. Acceptance policy of PSEO and other dual credit programs by Minnesota College and Universities

Since the PSEO law was adopted in 1985, thousands of students have used it. But CSC staff have heard from some students and families that acceptance of PSEO varies. We found this to be true. Specifically:

- It is possible to earn a two-year, associate arts degree via PSEO or concurrent enrollment from Minnesota's two-year public colleges, such as Itasca Community College and North Hennepin Community College. So 100 percent of the PSEO or CE credits are accepted toward a degree.

- * The University of Minnesota will accept up to a full two years of PSEO and College in the Schools credits, toward a degree. Details vary from department to department.
- Acceptance of PSEO and other dual credit courses varies widely among Minnesota private colleges and universities. For example, Hamline accepts up to 50 percent of the credits needed for a four year degree via PSEO. Gustavus Adolphus accepts 25 percent, Macalester 19 percent, and St. Olaf 17 percent of the credits needed for a four-year degree from credits earned via PSEO.

The Minnesota Private College Council has compiled dual credit course acceptance from its members. That overview is found here: <http://bit.ly/1LRvxiX> However, the MPCC overview does not describe the percentage of credits accepted toward a degree.

Another example is the difference in acceptance of the CLEP (College Level Exam Program). Some universities accept passage of this test, others do not. Moreover, among colleges/universities that accept CLEP, the acceptable score varies.

A third example is acceptance of International Baccalaureate tests. Some institutions accept tests taken after both “standard” and higher level IB courses. Many colleges/universities accept only tests related to the “higher level” courses.

Based on numerous questions from families, students and educators, we believe it would be valuable for the state of Minnesota to compile all acceptance policies in one place. A bill requesting that this be done has been introduced with bi-partisan support and currently is being considered by the Minnesota legislature.

3. Materials about PSEO being distributed to students and families: The PSEO law requires that “By March 1 of each year, a district must provide up-to-date information on the district's Web site and in materials that are distributed to parents and students about the program, including information about enrollment requirements and the ability to earn postsecondary credit to all pupils in grades 8, 9, 10, and 11.” (Minnesota Statute 124d.09, Subd 7)

The research in CSC’s 2015 report, and in this report focused on information about PSEO that is available on a district’s website. However, as CSC examined websites and contacted school districts and charter schools, we found that the method and content of information actually distributed to students varied widely. Some of it is shared via registration guides. Some is shared in one page summaries distributed to students. Some districts and charters hold family information nights, and provide power-point presentations.

As we reviewed these materials, CSC found three things that we believe need further attention. First, not all of the information being distributed is accurate. Because we did not do a systematic study of this, we can not offer percentages. But some of the information that districts told us they were distributing did not reflect the “up to date” mandate of the state law.

Second, some places did not meet the March 1 distribution requirement. Again, CSC is not prepared to offer percentages. This was not a focus on the research we report here. But we know of some instances in which this requirement was not met. This is important because schools ask students to register in the spring.

Finally, although it’s not a state mandate, we noted that a few districts provide materials in a second and in a few cases, third language. We commend those educators who recognize that not all families speak or read English.

CSC believes that these information distribution deserve further attention. We intend to examine them in future research.

4. Inequitable reduction in state funding for district and charter public schools

Toward the end of our research, a charter brought another PSEO related issue to CSC. (Rossi) This issue has been confirmed via email by a state department of education official. (Melcher)

Beginning in the first year of PSEO (1985), the financial arrangements for PSEO involved some reduction in “general fund” dollars to district and charter public schools whose student participate in PSEO. This leads some districts to discourage students from participating in PSEO. However, the rules for reduction of “general fund” dollars apply equally to district and chartered public schools.

What this charter discovered was that at least in some cases, charters were losing not only “general fund” but also “lease aid” dollars because of student participation in PSEO. “Lease aid” funds are provided by the legislature to charters to help pay for building costs. That’s because charters, unlike district schools, are not permitted to levy taxes to cover building costs.

In a March 15, 2016 email, the charter director asked: “Is it accurate to say then, that according to these formulas, PSEO costs deducted from a charter school for a given PSEO student would be higher than the PSEO costs deducted from a regular mainstream district for an identical PSEO student scenario?”

The MDE official responded: “Yes if the charter school is at the per pupil cap on lease aid. The bulk of facilities costs for school districts are funded with bond issues, which are not subject to a per pupil cap. There is a per pupil cap on building lease levies for school districts, but very few districts are at the cap.”

CSC believes the intent of legislators adopting PSEO legislation was to treat district and charter public school student participation in the same way. We discuss possible next steps in the following, “Recommendations” section.

5. Weighting of PSEO versus other dual credit courses in high school class rank

Over the years, CSC has heard from many families concerned that districts are using various methods to discourage students from participating in PSEO. One of them involves “weighting” dual credit courses taken in high school toward class rank, but not giving the same “weight” to PSEO courses. The email cited below is one of many expressing concerns about this:

“My daughter was greatly discouraged from taking a PSEO class as a junior last year. Fortunately a friend had told her to be persistent and insist that is what she wanted to do. It took several visits to her advisor and finally a call from me (last resort!) She had a great experience and is now in full-time PSEO as a senior (really had to push her advisor to allow that!). She has learned so much, was hired as a tutor for the classes she has taken, has become experienced and efficient with organizing her time and classes, and has been so happy and rested and has been able to really devote time to athletics as well.

Here’s a second example:

“X high school has started weighted grades, but has decided to not count PSEO as weighted. I have been told it was because they “have no control” of classes outside of the building. That seems to me to indicate they think they know more than the colleges they have approved for PSEO? I can’t say that all AP and CIS classes my kids have taken at the school are of the highest quality.

I think it is really another way to discourage PSEO, as it will influence students when they realize their class rank will drop and GPA will not look good in a “weighted” system. I know many colleges use class rank and GPA to determine scholarships.

This parent wrote, “The x charter school principal and E.D. said that the policy will have to be changed by the Board. Currently they will only weigh AP and CIS classes taken at the high school and not PSEO classes including those taken at the UMTC. They claimed that it is the practice of most high schools and they cannot control the quality of curriculum and instruction. They also said that my student will not be at a disadvantage because colleges will look at un-weighted GPA’s.

I am considering bringing up this issue to the Board. I am wondering if you might have some information other than the article you wrote online that I can bring to the Board? “

In a 2014 survey of 34 metro area high schools, CSC found that 21 either do not weight courses, or give all dual credit courses the same weight when figuring high school grade point averages. The other 13 weigh dual credit courses taught in their high school as somewhat higher than PSEO. (Nathan, 2014)

Recommendations

CSC recommends:

For districts and schools:

- Creating a search function on websites
- Insuring that the web-sites search function will bring users to information about PSEO.
- Insuring that up to date information also is provided in materials distributed to families and students in grades 8-11
- Providing equal weight in figuring grade point averages to all dual credit courses, whether taught by high school or college faculty

For the Minnesota Department of Education

- Continued reminder to districts and charters about the information mandate in the PSEO law.
- Convening district and charter high schools to discuss “best practices” in offering dual credit courses.

For the Minnesota Legislature

- Adopting legislation currently under discussion that would require the Minnesota Office of Higher Education to gather and provide information to students, families and the broader public about college / university acceptance policies toward various forms of dual credit. The legislation would require gathering this information from Minnesota, North and South Dakota and Wisconsin Colleges and Universities
- Review PSEO legislation with a goal of making PSEO have the same fiscal impact on district and charter public schools
- Continue to require updates via the Rigorous Course Report.

For ourselves:

- CSC should consider three kinds of future research. First, it could be valuable to look at a new stratified random sample of 87 district and charter websites, to determine if they are following the patterns described here. Second CSC should consider asking these schools to share the information that is being distributed to families and students, to determine whether it also meets the “up to date” standard. Third, CSC could examine the “weighting” of various forms of dual credit courses by Minnesota’s district and charter public schools

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About the Authors:

Malik Bush is co-director of the Center for School Change. He has served in a variety of roles in public, public charter and private schools from Higher Education to Pre-K. His passion for serving Young People has driven him in many directions including most recently, serving on the Advisory Board of the MN Urban Debate League and on the Education Committee of the Minneapolis NAACP.

John Miller is co-director of the Center for School Change. He has over a quarter century of educational experience as a teacher, administrator, and board member and has worked at the elementary, middle and high school levels. He has also instructed at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Joe Nathan, PhD is the founder and former director of the Center for School Change. He transitioned in January 2016 to serving as CSC's Senior Fellow. Parents, student, educator and community groups have given him awards for his work.

Russell Pekala is a freshman at Harvard University. He is a graduate of Southwest High School in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Russell participated in the PSEO program during his junior and senior year.