

## College Accessibility & The Curse of the Rural Zip Code

Access to college opportunities should not be determined by zip code. Access to college opportunities should not be stifled to combat declining post-secondary enrollment. Students from rural communities are already at a disadvantage in terms of college credit acquisition. Each year, colleges and universities tear them away from the communities they love and that need them to remain viable. Concurrent enrollment courses provide opportunities to sustain family connectedness and keep vibrant young adults in struggling communities.

Introducing the requirement for concurrent teachers to hold a masters degree in their content area doesn't result in stronger academics. Instead it pulls the students seeking college credit out of public schools and straight into a PSEO model. Is this really what is best when considering educating the whole child? Have you considered the negative ramifications on students and high schools throughout Minnesota?

### Concurrent enrollment benefits are priceless, or are they?.

- Many families in our rural community fall into the stereotypical middle class: the families make too much money to garner grants to support college funding yet don't make enough to help students pay for the opportunity. Until the rise of concurrent enrollment opportunities, college seemed a far fetched dream to many students.

In a typical year, concurrent enrollment saves our struggling families nearly \$200,000 or more! This number is based on community college tuition rates. This is exponentially higher for students seeking four year degrees.

- High achieving students and often those from educated and higher income families expect their children to go to college. It isn't a matter of if, but rather a matter of where. Rural communities such as ours boast high community college completion rates, but four year degrees are less than the state average. Much less. It is often a self esteem issue. Concurrent enrollment courses show students and families that college is attainable.

### Have you considered?

- Provide solutions rather than roadblocks.  
Should accessibility be determined by a teachers degree or a students ability? Rather than shutting out opportunities, have you considered requiring the high schools to use the same assessments as the college instructor and mastery equals mastery?
- Trust educators to provide rigorous coursework.  
Do we really believe that a degree determines ability? Do we really believe that experiences can't provide the knowledge necessary to provide rigorous classrooms? I'd argue that high school teachers are asked to teach in difficult situations with difficult students far more often than college professors and these experiences broaden their toolbox. No longer is a lecture model of instruction effective for the students of the 21st century. Are you sure that a college degree ensure that students are getting what they need?
- Understand small school challenges.  
I can't speak definitively about the degrees in larger schools, but I can speak for our school. Our concurrent enrollment teachers are highly successful educators that strive to provide rigorous yet supportive learning environments. Most hold a masters degree or higher in

“education” but not in their content field. There is no incentive for them to earn another degree just to teach concurrent enrollment. I suspect it will be difficult to find a high school educator that holds a Master’s Degree in World Languages amongst all other subjects. I wonder why they need to do so?

- Encourage support.  
Students gain access to college level rigor in the comforts of home, community, and school. In rural communities, students must travel quite a distance for access to universities. Through concurrent enrollment, they have a strong support system available and moving on to finish a 4-year degree after high school becomes a reality they believe can happen. Don’t punish students because they have a support system.

Students also have access to academic support as necessary. Some may argue that students receiving college credit shouldn’t be coddled. I agree; however, a familiar face to help with difficult course content is what we all dream we could provide to every student regardless if they are in high school or a non-traditional student returning to college after decades away. Don’t punish students because they have a support system.

**I am disappointed to see that the fix to declining enrollment within MNSCU may result in missed opportunities for students. The world of education is broader than that. Minnesota’s education is better than that. Rural students and all students of Minnesota deserve more!**

Sincerely,

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