



Joe Nathan, director, Center for School Change, Macalester College

Civic Caucus, 8301 Creekside Circle #920, Bloomington, MN 55437

November 9, 2011

Notes of the discussion

Present : Verne C. Johnson, chair; David Broden, Paul Gilje, Jim Hetland (phone), Dwight Johnson, Dan Loritz, and Wayne Popham (phone)

Summary : Nathan cites advantages of Minnesota's quarter-century of experience with dual enrollment, which allows high school students to enroll in college classes for credit, tuition free. Dual enrollment expands the number of college-bound students, he says. Perhaps surprisingly, studies reveal that low-income, low-achieving high school students often outperform their peers in college classes. Therefore, colleges should enroll low-income and low-achieving high school students, not only those who rank high in their classes, he said, and high schools should avoid discouraging dual enrollment.

A. Welcome and introduction —Verne and Paul welcomed and introduced **Joe Nathan**, PhD and Director, Center for School Change, Macalester College. Nathan has been an inner city public school aide, teacher and administrator. He has helped to write several major laws, including one establishing post-secondary options for high school students and the nation's first charter public school law. Nathan served as a local PTA president in St. Paul and as a member of the Minnesota State PTA board. He has written three books, two of which have been labeled "must read" by the American School Board Journal, and edited a fourth. He writes a weekly column carried regularly by about 15 Minnesota newspapers. Nathan earned a B.A. from Carleton, an MA and a PhD from the University of Minnesota. His wife of 37 years just retired after 33 years as a St. Paul Public School teacher. Their three children attended and graduated from St. Paul Public Schools.

B. Minnesota's Post-secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) law— The topic for today is PSEO, a 1985 law that gives 11th and 12th grade high school students in Minnesota the opportunity to take college courses on college campuses while still in high school. School districts are not permitted to block students from taking such courses. Students pay no tuition, book or lab fees for the PSEO college classes. They may receive either high school and college credit for such courses. If they later enter the institution where they earned credits, they automatically receive those credits on their record at that institution. It is the prerogative of other institutions to decide whether and how many PSEO course credits from other schools they will accept. Post-secondary institutions set their own rules for

accepting high school students. State aid for the courses taken by PSEO students that would have gone to local school districts is transferred to the accepting post-secondary institutions. A student may complete up to two years of college while still in high school under the law. The Minnesota Department of Education estimates that since 1985, about 114,000 students have taken courses on college campuses by virtue of the PSEO law. For more information: www.centerforschoolchange.org.

C. Comments and discussion -During Nathan's comments and in discussion with the Civic Caucus the following points were raised:

1. Special benefit for low-achievers observed —Contrary to what might be expected, males, low-income students and low-achieving high school students all appear to benefit from similar "Dual Credit" programs in New York and Florida more than peers who have more social, economic and educational advantages, Nathan said, quoting results from an October 2007 study by the National Research Center for Career and Technical Education, University of Minnesota. The study was based on PSEO participation in 1994-95.

Nathan cited the following specific quote from the 2007 report: "(There) are encouraging findings regarding the influence of dual enrollment on the types of students who tend to be less successful in college. Males, low-income students, 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. This indicates that dual enrollment may well be a strategy for encouraging postsecondary success among students not typically seen as college-bound. It also indicates that, contrary to the arguments of some critics of expanding dual enrollment programs, dual enrollment can benefit a range of students, not only those who achieve at very high levels in high school. Indeed, dual enrollment may be most beneficial to those students who are often excluded from participation."

A 1996 Legislative Auditor study reported that Minnesota PSEO participants generally received higher grades than regularly admitted post-secondary students during 1994-95, except at technical colleges, where they did somewhat worse. This study also noted that "94 percent of the students...said that getting a head start on college credits was 'important' or 'very important'...and 82 percent said that saving on postsecondary costs was 'important' or 'very important'."

2. Higher college graduation rates seen — Nathan cited another study of 1,393 students from the College of St. Scholastica, Duluth, between 1999 and 2006. That study, by Erin McQuillan, in *Undergraduate Economic Review*, revealed that PSEO students while shown not to have higher ACT (college entrance) scores than their peers, had a 25 percent higher college graduation rate, were more likely to graduate early, and were more likely to have a second major, Nathan said.

3. Post-secondary education needed for jobs — Nathan emphasized that a Georgetown University study found 70 percent of jobs will require some education beyond high school in coming years. That doesn't mean everyone will need a four-year degree. The key word is "some" education beyond high school, he said. There is much evidence even a two-year degree will give people a much greater chance that they will be better off economically as well as have more personal satisfaction in life, he said. The need for post-secondary education isn't just "valuable"; it's "critical", he said.

4. Great leadership required in gaining approval of PSEO —Nathan gave specific credit to a bi-partisan coalition that included DFL Gov. Rudy Perpich and Republicans Connie Levi and former Governor Al Quie for pushing PSEO through the Legislature in 1985, over opposition of almost all education groups. There also was a broad bi-partisan group of allies that helped, including the directors of "War on Poverty" agencies, Minnesota Business Partnership, Minnesota PTA and a new group of educators, parent and students called "People for Better Schools."

Shortly after the law was passed, a legislator opposed to the law scheduled a 6 a.m. hearing for purposes of seeking repeal. But on very short notice more than 100 high school students showed up to support the law, and it has been on the books since. The state's innovative work in this area inspired the education community nationally. About 36 states now allow some form of opportunity for high school students to take college courses, he said.

5. Other approaches prompted by PSEO —Nathan cited Minnesota Department of Education figures that more than 20,000 Minnesota high school students per year are involved one way or another in some form of dual high school/college credit programs. About 5,000 of them are formally enrolled in PSEO. But PSEO has helped stimulate other similar programs to emerge, such as Advanced Placement, College in the Schools, and International Baccalaureate, which cumulatively are involving 15-20,000 high school students.

Nathan noted that many high schools allow 10th graders to take dual credit courses on the high school campus in 10th grade, and some allow 9th graders to take such courses.

It is not clear how many Minnesota students participate in more than one dual high school/college credit program. "We know, anecdotally, that many students do participate in more than one dual high school/college credit course," Nathan remarked. For a comparison of the programs, please see: <http://bit.ly/vzrD4m> .

6. Support for PSEO in post-secondary schools varies —Northwestern College, Roseville; Concordia University, St. Paul, St. Cloud State and the University of Minnesota Twin Cities and Morris are among post-secondary schools that are most welcoming of PSEO, Nathan said. Northwestern offers its PSEO classes online. Morris also makes extensive use of online classes for PSEO students. Nathan said that colleges sometimes limit PSEO enrollment to those classes where more students can be added without having to add another section, with another teacher, which would increase expenses for the post-secondary school. Each college and university makes its own decision on whether credits earned by PSEO students will count toward a degree.

7. Strong student and family support evident —Nathan cited surveys done by the Center for School Change revealing that 82 percent of participant families and 97 percent of high school students in PSEO are highly supportive of the program. One area of concern has been noted, however: more clarity on transferability of college credits to other post-secondary schools is needed, he said.

With assistance from the Minnesota Department of Education, the Center for School Change helped create several "you tube" interviews with satisfied PSEO students are available at the Center for School Change website. This includes one in Spanish with English subtitles. See: <http://bit.ly/uOxz4z> .

8. Restrictions in participation imposed —Regrettably, he said, greater restrictions have been imposed since 1985. At first anyone could participate. The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities now limits PSEO participation to students who are generally in the top 10 percent of their classes, he said. He hopes the new president of the U of M will re-examine such restrictions. Among schools in the MNSCU system (state universities, community colleges, and technical colleges), PSEO students must be in the top one-third of their class if juniors and top one-half if seniors or have a certain minimum score on a college entrance test. It's unfortunate, he said, that more credence isn't given to research that reveals the greatest benefit of PSEO might be to lower achievers in high school.

9. Line blurred between high school and college -Nathan was asked whether PSEO might lead to some structural change in the relationship between high schools and colleges, so that more students might finish high school and college in fewer years. He replied that informally dual-enrollment approaches are accomplishing change in actual practice without an official change in structure.

10. PSEO enrollment trends mixed —In recent years there has been a slight decline in number of high school students enrolled in the official PSEO program, although total number involved in some form of post-secondary connection has grown slightly. The proportion of students of color participating has increased slightly, he said. There have been major increases in numbers of students taking College in the Schools, Advance Placement, International Baccalaureate or Project Lead the Way courses. There also have been significant increases in students from low-income families and students of color participating in these courses. The Center for School Change will issue a report describing details of this, later in the fall.

11. School district support varies — The South Washington County school district is a model of getting information out to students to consider post-secondary options, Nathan said, largely because of the leadership of (former) Supt. Tom Nelson. Some charter, alternative and district public schools strongly encourage students to participate in PSEO.

However, some school districts, fearful of losing state aid if many students choose PSEO, limit the rights of such students to engage in extra-curricular activity, Nathan said. Or, in calculating official grade point averages, school districts have lowered the grade point for PSEO classes at less than that of dual credit courses taken in the high school.

12. Job preparation trumps cost savings —While PSEO can significantly reduce the expenses of high school and college combined, its main objective is not to save money, Nathan said. The objective is to help more students enroll in post-secondary education. This will help students be more prepared for some form of higher education, help increase the likelihood that students will actually graduate. Nathan also cited the urgent need for such education for jobs in the future.

However, cost savings are apparent. PSEO has a positive effect on holding down the number of years required for education, he said. PSEO enrollees are much more likely to finish college in not more than four years than are those who did not take PSEO classes. PSEO also reduces the need for remedial courses in reading, writing and math, which many colleges need to offer for incoming first-year students. Nathan said the latest U. of M./MNSCU research shows that 38% of Minnesota high school grads who entered Minnesota public colleges within a year of high school graduation must take remedial courses when they enter college or university.

13. Implications of PSEO for the state's economy —Listeners at today's session discussed briefly the impact of PSEO on the state's economy. They wondered whether greater coordination between high schools and technical colleges would be helpful in getting more high-school graduates into some appropriate post-secondary training. They also considered whether post-secondary schools should be more welcoming of under-achieving high school students and speculated whether such changes might improve the work-readiness of a segment of the state's work force that is chronically difficult to employ.

14. Thanks —On behalf of the Civic Caucus, Verne thanked Nathan for meeting with us today.