



## **Post Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) – History, Issues, Solutions**

(updated 10/05)

### **Introduction**

Post Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) is a program whereby Ohio's high school students may opt to take college courses to for both high school and college credit. PSEO is known in, many states, as dual enrollment. The program has been important option for Ohio's high ability students. In fact, the original intent of PSEO may have been to provide opportunities to high ability students. It is clear, however, from the work of recent Ohio high school task force that there are many reasons other than advanced coursework that make it desirable for students to access PSEO. Some students do not fit well into the high school environment. Some need to have a more flexible learning environment. Some students without this program would clearly drop out altogether. Research shows that it is highly desirable to expose high school students to college courses early so that they understand that college is much different environment than high school. It is much less restrictive, but it is also less forgiving. PSEO students learn that they must be highly responsible to do well. A national study of dual-credit programs released by the Pew Charitable Foundation found that the benefits of the program included:

- savings in both cost and time
- efficiency of learning (reduced repetition between grades 11-14)
- enhanced admission and retention rates in college
- improved transitions from high school to college, allowing students to "test the waters" of college learning and improving students' access to college

The study also found that by creating alternatives to traditional high school, dual credit programs provide additional points of entry into post-secondary schooling for students whose options would otherwise be much more limited. The study found that dual-credit programs can blur the line between high school and college by integrating the two systems and thereby create a continuum of learning high school to college.

Unfortunately, even though the research from other states supports expansion of the dual enrollment programs, there are some policymakers and school district personnel in Ohio who would like to see PSEO program sharply restricted or eliminated all together. At a time, when high school drop-out rates and college remediation costs are a major concern in Ohio, it makes no sense to limit a program that helps to address these issues.

PSEO has been one of the most effective forms of school choice in Ohio for over a decade. At a time when we are looking for more options to reach high school students, it is unwise to unduly limit one of the most successful school option programs ever. PSEO is not just about additional coursework for enrichment, it is about delivery of service in a way that resonates with students who need something different, something more, and something faster. While PSEO should ideally be a program jointly administered by Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio Board of Regents, the two agencies have not, in the past, worked closely together on this issue, and the program has largely escaped the kind of review and analysis that is necessary to improve any education initiative.

If PSEO reform is to be enacting, it is important include provisions to protect students such as:

- 1) Ensuring the high schools give appropriate credit for college course work taken.
- 2) Prohibiting restrictions on PSEO students to access high school extra-curricular activities.
- 3) Strengthening counseling provisions for the program.
- 4) Removing discriminatory post-secondary entrance requirements.
- 5) Allowing waivers to Carnegie unit seat time requirements for students who to need to accelerate.

### **PSEO Participation History**

Participation in Ohio's Post Secondary Enrollment Options has grown significantly over the years as evidenced in the following figures:

**FY98** State spending on PSEO totaled \$8.7 million

- 6,361 public students
- 425 non public students\*

**FY04** State spending on PSEO totaled \$17.1 million

- 9,781 public students
- 1144 non public students\*

\* Non public students are funded through an earmark in the non-public school auxiliary services line item.

### **History of "Attacks" on PSEO**

While parents and the general public continue to support the PSEO as a critical element in the school choice movement, the program has not been generally embraced by school districts and educators. Typical complaints have been that:

- the PSEO coursework isn't as rigorous as that offered in high schools (disproved by a course analysis conducted by ODE);
- college instructors aren't highly qualified teachers (but certainly it is difficult to argue that college instructor aren't content specialists);
- teachers risk losing their jobs if school lose students to PSEO, and, most critically,
- districts lose money when students opt to take PSEO courses.

HB484 (2004), introduced in the 125<sup>th</sup> General Assembly proposed to reform PSEO by

- requiring the passage of the OGT for entrance into the program;
- eliminating 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders access to the program unless superintendent's signed a waiver; and,
- limiting the purpose of the program to enrichment.

As testimony was presented to the committee on HB484, it was clear that the underlying concerns regarding PSEO were not addressed in the legislation, and with the exception of the out-of-state student prohibition, the bill would unduly penalize students who most needed access to the program. Ultimately, the bill died at the end of the 125<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. Unfortunately, restrictions to PSEO were included in the budget bill, HB66 in the House. These new restrictions were designed to:

- limit participation to enriched opportunities beyond those offered at the high school;
- require the student and parent pay for PSEO courses that the student failed;

- eliminate students from “08” schools (non-public, non-chartered) from participating in the PSEO program, and,
- prohibit students to access physical education classes through PSEO.

While the Senate stripped these restrictions from the budget bill, the first two restrictions were added back to the bill in conference committee. Ultimately, Governor Taft vetoed the limiting participation language, but the bill was signed with the new requirement that students who failed any PSEO course would be required to pay for the course. This provision greatly reduces the likelihood that students from financially less-able families will attempt to access this program.

### **Issues Not Addressed in Recent Attempts to Reform/Restrict PSEO**

While most recent PSEO reform efforts have mostly been attempts to restrict the program, there are areas that do require attention. These underlying issues need to be fully addressed to ensure equitable access to the program. So what are the underlying issues concerning PSEO? And, how can they best be resolved?

- Poor PSEO Counseling:** Some districts and colleges do a very poor job counseling PSEO students. Some basic information about the benefits and risks of the program could very well decrease the number of courses taken that some districts consider to be inappropriate. Parents and students need to be aware that not all college courses will be accepted by four year universities, that a student’s PSEO college record could affect their entrance to four year colleges, that some exclusive colleges will accept AP credit but not college level credit and vice versa, that taking courses at college may not specifically prepare students for the OGT. *ODE/OBR or the new PCL should develop specific guidelines to better prepare PSEO students and parents to make better informed decisions about participation.*
- Overly Restrictive Credit Requirements:** ODE has set rules for the amount of PSEO participation -- roughly 1 college semester course or 2 college quarter courses is equivalent to 1 year of high school credit. Some districts in an effort to discourage participation in PSEO require 1 full year (2 semesters or 3 quarters) of college credit to receive a full year of high school credit. Some districts refuse to accept specific similar coursework taken through PSEO to count for high school subject credit. *ODE/OBR or the new PCL commission should develop specific rules that allow for fair acceptance of credit for PSEO coursework taken by a student. Procedures for complaints or waivers for both students and districts should be developed as well.*
- Unequal entrance requirements for PSEO students in colleges:** There are some post secondary institutions that require substantially higher level test scores and GPA for PSEO students than for admitted freshman. For example, Wright State University requires that ninth graders wishing to participate in PSEO have a 3.75 GPA and a composite score of 26 on the ACT or 1190 on the SAT. The average Incoming freshman to the main campus of Wright State has a mean GPA of 2.99 and a composite score of 20.9 on the ACT or 1005 on the SAT. This is blatant age discrimination. *Entrance requirements should be no more rigorous for PSEO students than for incoming freshmen.*
- Discrimination Against PSEO Students:** Some districts, in an effort to discourage PSEO have developed restrictive policies for students which make it difficult or impossible for these students to participate in extra-curricular functions such as sports or clubs. *District policies discriminating against PSEO should be prohibited.*
- Lack of ODE/OBR data gathering/oversight:** While ODE gathers financial data on PSEO and some coursework information, very little information that is helpful to policy makers is collected to assist oversight. *Many states have done extensive studies on the use of PSEO.*

*Ohio should do likewise.* Otherwise, state policy will be continued to be crafted on this issue on the basis of anecdotal evidence. ODE/OBR need to begin gathering data to answer policymakers questions about this program:

- i. What types of students are take advantage of PSEO? What are the reasons students are attracted to this option. How well are they doing relative to similar students in their districts not involved in the programs?
- ii. How do PSEO students fare in college? Are they more easily admitted to more exclusive universities? Are they better prepared to make the transition from high school based on their PSEO experience?
- iii. What are the differences in PSEO entrance requirements from different colleges? Are there formal orientation sessions? Are some colleges abusing PSEO? If so, how?
- iv. What is the overall financial impact of PSEO? Is there a better way to fund the program?
- v. How do other states monitor PSEO? Who oversees the program?

Once these questions and others are answered, policymakers can determine what, if any, changes to PSEO need to be implemented.

- f. **“Seat-time” restrictions of Carnegie units make PSEO an attractive option:** Many students who should be able to accelerate through course work using curriculum compacting techniques are unable to do so because of a seat time requirement. These students are often attracted to PSEO even when their high school offers comparable coursework because PSEO allows them to accelerate the experience at a more appropriate pace. ODE should determine a method for waiving the seat time requirement for credit in appropriate situations. ODE should also allow credit by examination for high school courses taken by students below the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Only students who are taught high school courses by secondary licensed teachers are currently allowed to receive course credit and that is at the discretion of the district. *For those students not taught by secondary licensed teachers, a credit by exam option should be developed by ODE. High school credit for high school work taken below the 9<sup>th</sup> grade should be at the option of the student and the parent, not the school district.*

In addition to the above issues, the introduction of the new early college pilot programs give rise to an additional concern of disparate requirements for access to postsecondary opportunities. *ODE/OBR or the new Partnership for Continued Learning Commission should ensure that requirements for access to PSEO do not exceed those of the early college program.*

For more information on PSEO and other issues affecting gifted and high achieving, please visit [www.oagc.com](http://www.oagc.com).