

Date: February 5th, 2017

From: Elizabeth Balch-Crystal and Charles Williamson

The Honorable Leanne Krueger-Braneky
Pennsylvania State Capitol
115-B East Wing
P.O. Box 202161
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Representative Krueger-Braneky,

We write to you today as concerned citizens of Delaware County, asking for your sponsorship of a bill allocating state funding to enable students enrolled at rural Pennsylvania high schools to participate in online college courses for dual credit free of charge. Growing up in towns in Alabama and Arkansas, respectively, we have witnessed firsthand the limited educational opportunities that often accompany living in a rural area. Although we were fortunate enough to be able to attend Swarthmore College, we recognize that many students in rural Pennsylvania do not have as many class options and school resources as their urban and suburban counterparts, which leads to lower levels of post-secondary education enrollment.¹

Many urban and suburban school districts in Pennsylvania currently sponsor physical dual-enrollment programs, which allow students to travel to a nearby college or technical school to take courses.¹ These programs offer students the benefit of taking higher-level and college-g geared courses that they may not have access to otherwise. However, rural schools are not privy to this resource. Because of the inherent geographic isolation of rural districts, many schools are not close enough in proximity to college campuses to allow students to take physical classes there. This opportunity, or lack thereof, translates into quantifiable differences in college enrollment. In 2014, a study conducted by the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE) revealed that in Pennsylvania, only 53.1 percent of students in rural public high schools go on to attend college, compared to 64.7 percent in non-rural areas.² To bridge this gap, we propose introducing free online classes, sponsored by public Pennsylvania universities, in rural public high schools across the state.

1 "Penn State Enrollment for High School Students." Penn State Enrollment for High School Students - Undergraduate Admissions. Accessed February 02, 2017. <http://admissions.psu.edu/apply/requirements/options/>.

2 Chenoweth, E., & Galliher, R. V. (2004, October 15). Factors influencing college aspirations of rural West Virginia high school students. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 19(2). Retrieved February 2, 2017] from <http://jrre.psu.edu/articles/19-2.pdf>

3 Howley, C., Johnson, J., Passa, A., & Uekawa, K. (2014). *College enrollment and persistence in rural Pennsylvania schools*. (REL 2015–053). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Mid-Atlantic. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

4 "Common Core of Data (CCD) - Identification of Rural Locales." National Center for Education Statistics. Accessed February 02, 2017. https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/rural_locales.asp.

We believe that giving students in rural areas college-focused educational resources will increase the number of students in these areas who choose to pursue post-secondary education, and put them on more even-footing with students attending urban and suburban public schools. To achieve this, we ask that schools classified as rural receive state-funded access to online courses in STEM fields, sponsored by the public state university geographically closest to the high school.³ Students would receive both high school diploma and college credit for coursework completed.

The funding of online STEM college courses in rural school districts presents significant social and economic benefits to the state of Pennsylvania that we feel warrant its implementation. First, while students may currently take online courses at many Pennsylvania state universities for an enrollment fee, many students who are unable to afford the cost of taking an online class are excluded from this opportunity.⁴ Furthermore, by awarding students college credit for coursework affiliated with public Pennsylvania universities, students would be encouraged to attend these institutions to complete their degree, and continue to achieve within the Pennsylvania public education system. Finally, for many of the students that this policy would affect, a quality education is not only a chance to explore, but a gateway to further opportunities, as both of us know quite well.

We hope you consider our proposal carefully, and we would be happy to meet with you or a member of your office to discuss it further.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Balch-Crystal and Charles Williamson

5 "Penn State Enrollment for High School Students." Penn State Enrollment for High School Students - Undergraduate Admissions. Accessed February 02, 2017. <http://admissions.psu.edu/apply/requirements/options/>.

Project Proposal

Action: Our project proposal is a multipronged approach designed to give our proposed policy the best chance at implementation. The first aspect of our proposal is to meet with various stakeholders from rural schools across Pennsylvania to gain useful insights and essential stakeholder support. The second element of our proposal is to travel to the state capitol, Harrisburg, so that we can lobby state representatives from primarily rural districts.

Meeting with Stakeholders: We would visit multiple rural Pennsylvanian high schools to gather information to learn how to best advocate for our policy. Since we cannot meet with all stakeholders, we will visit five different schools located in different rural areas that are as representative as possible. We believe that meeting with stakeholders is essential to ensure that this policy will have bottom up support. Our goal of meeting with stakeholders is to ensure that this will be a meaningful and helpful policy that students and administrators alike will be excited about. The hope is that each visit would allow us to gain support from those that would be most impacted by this policy and to learn more about any problems that administrators foresee.

Lobbying Legislators: The second part of our project proposal is to travel to Harrisburg where we could meet with state legislators from primarily rural areas in order to garner support for our policy. This is an essential part of our proposed project because our policy is only meaningful if it is implemented. This is the most critical step of our proposed action plan because it would allow us to see our policy realized in a way that would benefit high school students from rural areas across Pennsylvania.

Expense	Cost
Hotel for one night in Harrisburg	\$100
Roundtrip train tickets to Harrisburg	\$120
Food during trips	\$60
Transportation to five rural high schools (Zipcar rental for 3 days)	\$190
Total:	\$470