



2025 Delegate Assembly Proposed Legislative Resolution

TITLE OF RESOLUTION: District Authority on Eligibility for Supplemental Online Courses

SUBMITTED BY:

Hermantown Community Schools, ISD 700

Ashley McFarland, Board Member, Hermantown Community Schools Board of Education

RECOMMENDATION: Passage

BE IT RESOLVED, THAT MSBA URGES THE LEGISLATURE TO:

Grant school districts the authority to determine student eligibility for supplemental online school course enrollment with an established set of criteria determined by the district. This affords the district the ability to prioritize enrollment in-district when comparable coursework is already offered. This promotes student access to rigorous coursework taught by in-district teachers who know and care for them, while also strengthening peer connections and keeping support systems in place for academic success. This only applies to students seeking supplemental courses available through approved online schools offered by districts other than their home district.

DESCRIBE THE PROBLEM:

Online learning options offered to high school students in Minnesota may play an important role in their educational pathways. Coursework through MDE approved online schools provides the opportunity for diverse educational experiences that may not be offered in-district. However, there has been a significant erosion of purpose and intent for which online schools were built upon. Instead of leveraging this program to seek additional subject content, students are often opting into online coursework for ease of academic rigor; pursuing classes already offered in-district. With no ability to manage this practice, the value of in-district education, and the educators that provide it, are being undermined and devalued. Furthermore, this puts a significant strain on district finances and their ability to appropriately plan and staff to meet the needs of the communities they serve.

EXPLAIN WHY THIS IS A PROBLEM:

The Minnesota Department of Education's website states: "Supplemental online course providers deliver individual courses for students who are looking for additional opportunities beyond what their current public school offers or need the flexibility of schedule afforded by taking some of their courses online." Instead of being used to enrich the educational experience, online schools have allowed students to "opt out" of challenging courses in search of an "easy A" and opportunities to do so have increased significantly since 2020, effectively providing a plethora of options to pick and choose the path of least resistance. There are several issues associated with unchecked online school participation that are placing a significant strain on public school districts.

Devaluing educators



Online Schools have created a highly competitive environment, essentially treating our students as commodities. Our secondary education professionals have had to adjust their content, delivery, and rigor just to keep students in their classrooms. In the attempt to retain students, some districts are providing hybrid course schedules to stay attractive against highly flexible online school schedules, even if the student is not mature enough to manage that learning format. Teacher recruitment and retention is heavily reliant on a high level of trust and morale that is being eroded by these unchecked online school practices. This environment further complicates efforts to bolster positive concurrent enrollment options, like College in the Schools that uplifts, not degrades, our existing educators. The incentive for educators to offer advanced and rigorous coursework is diminished when students are likely to opt into less rigorous work through online schools.

Advising students

Beyond Minnesota residence, any student is currently eligible to take coursework from a supplemental online course provider. Furthermore, under current law, a school district has no recourse to counsel a student if they do not feel they will be successful in receiving education through that format. Without the appropriate guidance from district counselors, students seeking less rigorous coursework may not be prepared for the next step in their educational or career journeys.

Financial strain and staffing

When a student chooses to take a course through an online school, despite it being offered in-district, funding is taken away from the school that is bound to provide education for all students, including those not enrolled in online learning. If our belief in Minnesota is “Every child, no matter their race or zip code, deserves a world-class education, with caring and qualified teachers, in a safe and nurturing environment,” (MDE Strategic Plan) then we must support our school districts to do so and retain the funding entrusted to them for this mission. If we continue to allow students to take a junior-level English or senior-level math course through another district online for either ease or convenience, the funding eventually will not be there to retain an educator to continue to provide that same class to all learners. Equity disparities will continue to widen.

To be clear, this proposed resolution is not intended to restrict online learning for students. It is intended to frame reasonable sidebars around how online schools should and should not be leveraged to further student education opportunities. In-district coursework should always be prioritized in order to support our educators and the students they serve while being good stewards of district finances. Online learning should be used to enrich, not replace, in-district education. This resolution supports district development of a decision tree approach that aids in counseling student choice while supporting in-district education.

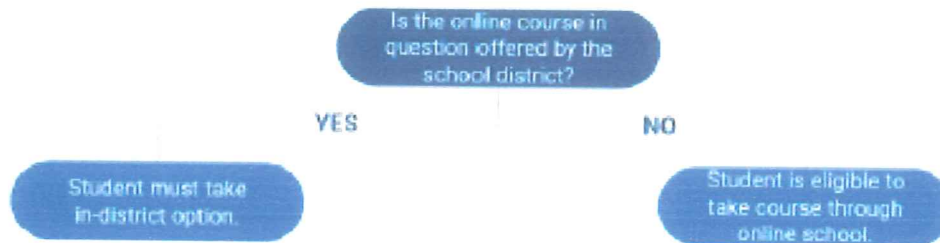
BACKGROUND PROVIDED BY SCHOOL DISTRICT:

Financial burden to Hermantown Community Schools from the 2024-25 school year based on enrollment at Duluth Academic Excellence Online

- In the first semester, 69 students (10.4%) took 103 semester sections
- In the second semester, 119 students (17.9%) took 175 semester sections
- Based on Hermantown's per pupil funding amount (\$10,523.41) and the 1/14 cost for a semester section, each semester section = \$751.67 or \$208,964
- For example, 41 of 163 sophomores took biology through an online school
- Last year, students realized a 6% failure rate

Example "decision tree" to determine online school eligibility

If a supplemental online course is being pursued, then:



CURRENT POSITION:

CURRENT LAW:

BACKGROUND PROVIDED BY MSBA:

RATIONALE:

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATION: