

March 12, 2021
Chair Chamberlain
95 University Ave W
St. Paul, MN 55103

Re: Support for SF1554 Math Automatic Enrollment

Dear Chair Chamberlain and members of the Committee,

My name is Josh Pauly. I am a former Minneapolis Public School teacher and a current Minneapolis Public School Board member, and I am writing today in favor of Senate File 1554.

As you are aware, Minnesota's education opportunity gap is glaring and unacceptable. Too many students are denied the opportunity to show how successful they can be, with persistent gaps in access to advanced coursework like Advanced Placement, PSEO, and concurrent enrollment. We need to have high expectations for all students and an objective mechanism to allow for that to happen.

Automatic enrollment policies eliminate a layer of bias from the course selection process by defaulting students into the more rigorous course option if they meet state standards in a particular subject area, whether that be through the MCAs or by passing a course.

As a former MPS middle school teacher, I saw firsthand how families with social and cultural capital wielded that to hoard opportunities. I can think of a specific time where a student's parents wrote email after email to staff, in addition to requesting phone calls and meetings to get their child in an advanced math course. All of these actions were taken because of a desire to give their child a leg up. Not everyone can invest in the process like this.

When I was teaching, I also had students who would have excelled in advanced coursework but due to the subjective nature of how students were referred for advanced coursework—whether it be from teacher recommendation or parent advocacy— fell through the cracks. An automatic enrollment policy would simply add another, objective pathway to advanced coursework that would help to ensure that students who are academically prepared have access to these courses.

In my capacity as a MPS Board member, we are currently exploring creating our own automatic enrollment policy. With that said, Senate File 1554 would provide MPS with support to advance such a policy while also signaling to other districts in the state that automatic enrollment policies are important for advancing equity and access to advanced coursework and providing a framework for what such a policy should include.

I hope this committee will pass SF1554. If you have any questions or need any additional information, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,
Josh Pauly
Minneapolis Board of Education Director