



October 20, 2020

Chair Cowles, Chancellor Malhotra, Members of the Board of Trustees,

With the election less than two weeks away, our attention will quickly turn to the upcoming legislative session and how that will impact students access to quality affordable education in Minnesota. This conversation comes at a time when students are facing unprecedented challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We ask that the Board of Trustees makes decisions with a sense of empathy and urgency.

Students are calling on the Board of Trustees, the Chancellor, and College Presidents to join us in supporting students' basic needs. Last Friday, members of the Board attended a listening session on basic needs with community and technical college students held by LeadMN. I would like to express my gratitude to Trustee Cirillo, Trustee Tefer, and Dr. Paul Shepherd for attending and hearing from students about these critical issues. The stories that students shared highlight the range of issues that are impacting them, and the weight of the impact that basic need can have on students' success in college.

A student who one day knew feeling the joy that comes with being pregnant, and only short time later the incredible sadness and grief of a miscarriage. The mental health burden of this experience impacted her academic success, and when she sought help from her college to overcome issues with her academic progress, she was put through a process that required her to prove she wasn't lying, to relive the experience as she tried to document it for the college.

An international student who lacked access to transportation and relied on a campus food shelf for food. He often found that it was chronically under-stocked and it wasn't meeting his needs. As the Minnesota winter was in full swing, subzero temperatures made it extremely difficult to go off campus for food, and when he did, he found nothing but empty shelves at the local stores due to the buying panic created by the pandemic.

A student who while just entering college learned his mom was diagnosed with brain cancer. She soon passed away and he found himself taking classes again a month after her death, with his mental and physical health deteriorating, and his academic success along with them. An overworked school counselor could only provide minimal support. After a suicide attempt he submitted himself to a hospital and focused on improving his health, and later restoring his damaged GPA.



I know each and every one of these students. These are the student leaders fighting to make a difference in our system. These are student leaders who have experienced firsthand the inadequacies of our higher education system in helping students in the 21st century. These are the student leaders working to make sure that their peers and future students that they will never meet, don't have the same basic needs barriers to achieving a college degree that they did.

One common thing that would help all of these students, and one that is too often missing, is compassion. While compassion is often easily found among the student affairs staff or faculty who work directly with students, it is all too often absent from the policies and funding requests that are prioritized. As you deliberate over the biennial budget request and hear from stakeholders over the next few weeks, I urge you to prioritize not just affordability, equity, and student success, I urge you to prioritize compassion for our students.

Thank you.

Priscilla Mayowa
President of LeadMN