



Minnesota State Board of Trustees Minnesota State System Office
Chair Jay Cowles
30 7th Street East, Suite 350,
St. Paul, MN 55101-7804

November 17, 2020

Chair Cowles and members of the Minnesota State Board of Trustees,

Minnesota's community and technical college students face a very bleak year ahead because of the spectre of state budget cuts to higher education, a pandemic that is spreading like wildfire, major racial and educational inequalities, and the prospect of a double dip recession. As you move forward with the biennial budget request, your support for making college affordable and addressing students basic needs will be critical to their academic success.

We appreciate that the Chancellor's proposed budget invests in key student support programs to address food insecurity and mental health. This is an important first step to addressing the challenges that real college students face. However, we would ask the Board of Trustees to press the Chancellor for greater details on how the system would plan to spend those resources. We are concerned that a vague request will not be taken seriously by policymakers in a challenging budget environment. We believe that it is critical that the Chancellor's office provide more details in the budget proposal and provide further consultation with students to set these proposals up for success.

College Affordability

Students continue to name college affordability as one of the most critical issues they face. Covid-19 has created significant economic strains on current college students and Minnesotans looking to pursue a college degree. While there are still unknown variables in determining what tuition will look like in the next fiscal year, college affordability needs to be a top priority for Minnesota State. We must not return to the days of the nearly 5% tuition increases of the last recession, or the 13% tuition increases following the 2001-2002 recession.

Given the precarious economic situation and challenges for many students with the past year of pandemic learning, large tuition increases will only exacerbate the enrollment declines in our colleges, leaving our communities, our economy, and our state with a loss that could take decades to overcome.

Basic Needs

As students have been saying loudly, a lack of basic needs create major barriers to their academic and co-curricular success. Like with other basic needs, Covid-19 has acted as an



accelerant and caused a substantial rise in the number of college students experiencing mental health challenges as a barrier to their success. In a survey conducted from March through May by the Healthy Minds Network and American College Health Association found that mental health was impairing the academic success of 30.5% of students, a 9% increase over the fall semester. They also found that 40.9% of students reported depression, a 5% increase over the fall semester. As the pandemic rages on we continue to see major impacts to student mental health and these issues will only continue to grow.

Unfortunately, the pandemic is also making it harder for students to access the help they need, with 60% of students reporting that the pandemic was making it more difficult to access healthcare. It is abundantly clear that students need more resources and support around mental health. Providing increased access to mental health resources, especially telemedicine mental health support will be critical in meeting the needs of students going forward. Not only are these challenges a painful struggle and a barrier to student success, for many they can also be a matter of life and death.

In conclusion, as you consider the biennial budget for Minnesota State please think about how this will impact students across the state. These students are not looking for a handout, they are looking for support in achieving their version of the American Dream.

Sincerely,

Priscilla Mayowa
President of LeadMN