

CULTIVATING STUDENT LEADERSHIP AND GROWTH



► WHAT IS MAAP STARS?

The **Minnesota Association of Alternative Programs (MAAP) STARS** program is a statewide, volunteer-run youth organization focused on leadership development for young adults in alternative education settings. MAAP STARS creates fun, interactive opportunities for students to unlock talents, develop skills, explore careers and professional opportunities to reach their full potential. MAAP STARS **encourages students to be high achievers and promotes personal growth** through skill development, social interaction and community involvement.

- S** SUCCESS
- T** TEAMWORK
- A** ACHIEVEMENT
- R** RECOGNITION
- S** SELF-ESTEEM

► HOW DOES IT WORK?

MAAP STARS is **available to all 213 schools and programs that make up the MAAP network**. With its flexible programming, member schools (or “chapters”) led by STARS Advisors incorporate activities in **whatever ways best serve their students**, be it as an elective class with earnable credits, an after-school club, or program blended into course curricula.



MAAP STARS students are exposed to positive experiences that cultivate a cooperative and competitive spirit, from individual and team activities to competitions, regional events and award opportunities. The program also hosts three marquee events each year – the Fall Leadership Conference, Legislative Day at the Capitol and the Spring Events Conference – all designed to **recognize student leadership and offer unique opportunities** students may not otherwise experience. Each MAAP region is encouraged to offer local STARS events to cultivate a larger community.

SERVING AS STUDENT LEADERS

MAAP STARS Officers are students who have been **elected by their peers to represent the MAAP STARS organization**. These leaders share student feedback and suggestions with STARS Advisors to continually improve programming and visit with government leaders during the annual MAAP Legislative Day at the Capitol.

► A MISSION BASED IN EQUAL ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY FOR SUCCESS

For more than 30 years, MAAP STARS has been a valuable resource to thousands of young adults, seamlessly aligning with MAAP’s core goal of **ensuring all students have access to diverse educational experiences** that meet their needs and set them up for success.

An ongoing appropriation of \$55,000 from the Minnesota Legislature will help MAAP continue to bridge financial gaps and make MAAP STARS accessible to more students across the state.



TO LEARN MORE:

 maapmn.org

 maapstarschair@gmail.com

DATE: April 3, 2025
TO: House Education Finance Committee Members
FROM: Alex Miller
White Bear Lake ALC

House Education Finance Committee Members,

My name is Alex Miller, I live in White Bear Lake and currently go to the White Bear Lake ALC. I joined the ALC the beginning of my sophomore year, I fell very behind during my freshman year and heard the ALC would be a good opportunity to regain that credit. The transition was great and everyone was very welcoming, everyone encouraged me to succeed. I had joined a program my sophomore year and this is now my third year in MAAP STARS. It has helped me with my leadership skills, communication skills, and confidence. I was elected as an Officer this last fall to be the voice for my school and advocate for other alternative schools around my region to make learning more meaningful. Every year we have the Spring Conference where students can put their skills to the test with different activities and projects increasing their teamwork skills, speaking skills, leadership skills and work life skills.

I believe MAAP STARS should be funded with this bill because without MAAP STARS I wouldn't have the courage to speak out and help my school or alternative schools around me. Traditional highschools have several publicly funded extracurricular activities, alternative schools could have the chance to have more than just the MAAP STARS program for their students. This funding could greatly help with our leadership training for MAAP STARS Officers and student leaders to help us make an even bigger and better difference in the alternative education around all regions of Minnesota. All of us Officers have also been having monthly meetings with adults from the MDE building brainstorming and acting on ways to better help alternative schools.

I greatly appreciate all of you for the funds that have been appropriated for MAAP STARS, and we ask for your continued support, thank you!

DATE: April 3, 2025
TO: Members of the House Education Finance Committee
FROM: Shana Rudowski
Takota Learning Center, Shakopee, MN

Dear Members of the House Education Finance Committee,

On behalf of all students, I would like to thank you for your service to the State of Minnesota. I am reaching out to you as a MAAP STARS State Officer, and I am respectfully requesting that you take time to hear House File 1966 (Berg). This bill would provide \$55,000 to MAAP STARS funding, which would greatly help the program, and support the continuation of MAAP STARS.

I have been a student of alternative education for a year and a half, and it has changed my life. I have been able to thrive because of a more personal learning experience, along with personal support for my academic journey. Before joining an alternative program, I was failing school and was not on track to graduate. I have become a straight A student that was able to make up the same amount of credits that you would make in two years.

As a MAAP STARS student leader, I have participated in this training program that has helped me build academic, social and professional development skills. Because of MAAP STARS, I have become more outspoken for myself and others, more confident in myself and my abilities. I have watched my fellow classmates who are a part of MAAP STARS flourish, as they have learned to trust themselves, be more confident, and have learned new skills critical to life. Program funding helps make this leadership opportunity more accessible to students, regardless of their financial situation. With state funding, MAAP STARS can help reduce transportation and conference costs in order to allow students to attend state-wide STARS events. State funding has also helped create a STARS advisory group that works alongside the Minnesota Department of Education, which has helped us give direct feedback about concerns and issues that students in alternative education may be facing. There are monthly meetings with MDE that I, along with my fellow state officers, go to, along with some in person meetings.

I am writing to you to ask you to vote for our bill, House File 1966 (Berg), in your committee so that MAAP STARS can continue reaching out to more students in alternative education. Thank you for your time and consideration of this email.

Sincerely,
Shana Rudowski, Tokata Learning Center, Shakopee, MN

DATE: April 1, 2025
TO: House Education Finance Committee Members
FROM: Angelo Fisherman (Waase Fisherman is my preferred Native Name)
Voyageurs Expeditionary School, Bemidji, MN

I am a MAAP STARS State Officer who represents the Northwest Region of Minnesota. I am 18 years old and live independently. I used to be a student at Red Lake High School in the Red Lake Indigenous Reservation before attending Voyageurs Expeditionary School.

I had many issues at Red Lake High School, such as bullying and a lack of support. At Voyageurs it has been very different. I am very glad that there was a choice and the option of an alternative education school. The school is small and there were many friendly faces and familiar people who attended the same public charter environment.

In 2023, I found out what MAAP STARS is and what benefits it offers. I immediately fell in love with the organization and the valuable lessons it gives to students. I've been in MAAP STARS for three years. The organization has provided me with a lot of information & skills to use in adulthood, such as parent decision making, teamwork decision making, workplace relationship building, and even public speaking! For instance, I've learned a lot of life skills such as how to properly communicate and advocate in stressful situations and how to cooperate & find solutions. Now I am a voice & advocate for students who are within Alternative Education.

The reason why I advocate and speak up for the importance of passing this funding bill for MAAP STARS is because the organization alone has empowered students in alternative education to expand their influence & unlock their potential at the conferences the organization hosts. The funding has also increased access to participation and improved the equity in MAAP STARS by reducing the cost. I have seen this in the last two years when MAAP STARS has been given its previous grant. The funding has also helped establish and improve the relationships between MAAP STARS and the Department of Education. It has also helped charter schools and other smaller organizations in MAAP attend these life-changing events & conferences. All of the students have been really grateful that STARS is able to provide them the tools they need to reach their true potential and find their place!

I personally thank you all for giving me the opportunity to be heard and thank you for your support in funding the organization. We only ask that you continue to show support to funding the organization as it has really made a difference for the students and teachers!

DATE: April 3, 2025
TO: House Education Finance Committee
FROM: Owen Litecky
Northwest Passage High School, Coon Rapids, MN

Hello, I am Owen and I live in Coon Rapids right next to my school Northwest Passage High School. My first experience with MAAP STARS started my freshman year because of teachers hyping it up as a great learning experience. I took the class and enjoyed all the aspects of it, and it helped me become a leader. The following year, they were looking for people to join the leadership team, and I sent off an email thinking not much of it and got in! This led me to find out and experience what MAAP STARS has to offer.

I love how, with MAAP STARS, I can now have experiences that will help me with my career with constructive feedback from judges. At the spring conference, you participate in events and are judged by adult professionals. I brought in a speech and got vital information about how I could make it better and talk. At that same event, they had mock job interviews that have now given me actual experience in how to act in them by judging my answers.

I am one of the two regional representatives of MAAP STARS who work right with the officers. We all work together to make sure MAAP STARS is a great way to learn and develop leadership skills for anyone. All of us being in Alternative Ed has given us a different perspective of school, which makes MAAP STARS unquestionably unique. Things like this are why alternative education is the way of the future for education and needs to stay in the cards. Having open hours for the school day for you to research, draft, and make instead of just reading a textbook is such a great opportunity to give students that bit of happiness in their work to make them want to succeed. I know if I was stuck in a traditional high school, I would not be as outgoing, experimental, happy, and a leader.

Being in a traditional high school gives you access to endless opportunities to pursue things you are interested in with the school's budget. Alternative Ed schools can't go around and spend too much money on just one thing, when the opposite is true for traditional schools. That's why this bill could change so much by allowing alternative Ed schools to not have to worry about money for events and just sign up for MAAP STARS.

MAAP STARS gives students enrolled in alternative education programs a great opportunity to develop leadership skills and become confident in their work, which will help them for all of their lives. This bill would make MAAP STARS have even more reach to students and help them all achieve their goals, improve their leadership skills, and become true leaders. MAAP STARS has changed the trajectory of my life for the better, and I want more students to experience the wonders of MAAP STARS. Please consider this bill, for it will make a difference for all students enrolled in alternative education programs and give more students opportunities they will never get the chance to do in high school.

Testimony on HF 1966 – Joe Nathan, PhD, and 50 year Mn parent & educator.

To Members of the Minnesota House Education Finance Committee: This is a request that you support **HF 1966** - \$55,000 request. This request from Mn Association of Alt Programs – which will make it possible for many low income and youngsters with considerable challenge – to attend and share their experience at the annual MAAP conference. They will learn how they can help others and themselves - the opposite of victimhood.

These young people have faced some of the most difficult circumstances imaginable. Yet they attend school. They work hard. Many graduate and become productive citizens and workers. Below is a newspaper column I wrote after hearing some of these courageous students.

Sincerely

Joe Nathan, parent, grandparent and educator

This column originally was published by ECM Publications during April 2016.

Courageous, award-winning student speeches

By [Joe Nathan](#) on April 27, 2016 at 3:55 pm

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The student's essay begins: "You're not going to amount to anything. You're nothing but a half-breed bitch.' These are the things that are said in a place I'm supposed to call home. Home is a place where I'm supposed to feel accepted, safe. But to me, home is appropriately called hell, for many reasons."

The award-winning essay from the student who was assaulted concludes with her rejecting advice that "forgiveness is the key to moving on from something like this."

Instead, she's concluded: "Moving on from something like this is to succeed. And that's exactly what I'm going to do. I'm going to graduate in June and go to college to be a neurosurgeon. I'm going to move out and never look back on this life. And I promise myself that I will never let myself fall into this type of relationship, because a true man will never put his hands on a woman."

This northwest suburban student's essay won first place and a standing ovation from the more than 200 students who participated in a recent statewide conference and competition sponsored by the Minnesota Association of Alternative Programs, aka MAAP.

Another finalist, a youngster who immigrated to the U.S., wrote that her mother "spent her entire life savings to send me here." But high school has been a struggle: "I was constantly bullied because of my English and clothing. My accent was an ... amusement for classmates. ... However, I couldn't let myself sink. ... I am



finishing high school this summer and am proud to call my mom now and say “I did it.”

Those were judged two of the best presentations at the 16th annual MAAP STARS spring conference April 14-15, where 237 students from 30 Minnesota alternative schools and programs made public presentations, conducted mock interviews, shared their community service projects and videos, and displayed their art.)

Along with courage, several presentations displayed insight and compassion.

Public presentations finalist Sammi Ryding from Northwest Passage High School in Coon Rapids wrote: “I’m passionate about teen homelessness because I have seen many faces of homelessness. Even in one of my closest friend(s). She has personally experienced being homeless as a teen. She wasn’t accepted by her family and friends ... and she soon believed then felt she had no other option other than to run away ... so that’s what she did. ... I wonder when people will realize we take things for granted when there are those that are praying for even a glimmer of what we have



Sammi Ryding

Sammi’s speech concludes: “I’m asking you to open your eyes and pay attention to homeless teens. My hope is just that you and I together can make a difference.”

Joe Nathan, formerly a Minnesota public school teacher, administrator and PTA president, founder and is former director of Center for School Change

<https://centerforschoolchange.org/2017/01/courageous-award-winning-student-speeches/>