

March 29, 2023

The Honorable Jay Xiong  
557 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Xiong and Members of the Committee,

By way of introduction, I am Ben Rengstorf, the Culinary Arts Teacher at Roosevelt High School. With help from ProStart and Hospitality Minnesota Education Foundation, I started the program five years ago while I was still a language teacher. After getting a culinary arts degree from Saint Paul College, I started one pilot ESL Foods class. Since then, the ProStart classes at Roosevelt have grown to four sections spanning three different levels, with a waiting list of hundreds of students. Each class is a cross-section of the school, including students from grades 9-12, ESL, and Special Education. I feel so fortunate to get to witness the way ProStart transforms both learning and community in meaningful ways.

Today, I wanted to share some of the impacts the ProStart program has had in our school:

**Building within the Community: Preparing Young Individuals for Life After High School**

Whether going into the food industry or not, I've witnessed the myriad ways that ProStart's curriculum prepares students for life beyond secondary education. Nowhere is this more evident than in the learning related to teamwork. Almost every working environment demands some level of teamwork, and the kitchen is a natural space to refine those skills. Each semester I see how students evolve into roles of leadership, or conversely are able to give up some control for the good of the team. They also learn to pay attention in tune with how and when to help with whatever needs to be done. When students reflect on their learning at the end of each semester in ProStart, teamwork is most often mentioned as their biggest lesson.

Students also mention lessons such as being able to pay attention and focus for extended periods of time on a single task without being distracted by their cell phones. Another lesson that students often point to is building self-confidence. I can see the pride and sense of accomplishment they feel when they work together to create delicious food that is often technically complicated.

In addition to teaching universal job readiness skills, ProStart also offers students a viable job pathway, both short-term and long-term. Many of my students find good jobs in the food industry that helps support them through high school and while they are college. For other students, food becomes their passion. I have former students excelling in high level restaurant jobs and studying at Saint Paul College's culinary arts program.

**Student Experience**

To illustrate the points above, here are just a few of the student reflections on their learning through the ProStart curriculum:

*I learned that teamwork is an important thing once it comes to cooking. An example of this is being able to learn different things from different people that come from other backgrounds and you get to enjoy it more. It's also important because it can cut down time and you can cook faster by having one person preparing a different thing while you work on something else. – Michelle*

*I learned how to properly hold a knife when chopping or slicing ingredients. I also learned the different types of cuts for example, dicing, mincing, cube, julienne. I learned the science behind cooking and at what temperature food cooks or water boils. It is an important life skill and everyone should learn to cook for themselves. – Brandon*

*Teamwork is a thing that you work together on something like cooking and culinary. I have learned to work together with your teammates to get your job done faster and good because if you are by yourself, sometimes the food doesn't turn out well. Bu if you work together you will achieve your goal - Mariah*

### **ProStart Grants Remove Financial Barriers for Program Participation**

Providing these meaningful learning opportunities does come at a cost. I spend about \$4 on ingredients per student each week, which adds up to over \$20,000 in groceries per year. We also have equipment to update and maintain, and the cost for any sort of field trip opportunities.

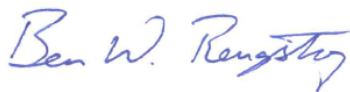
In a perfect world, I would have a budget through the district. Unfortunately, I get no financial assistance and have to create my entire budget. And I know I'm not alone in this situation around the state.

The financial help from HMEF and ProStart is fundamental to our long-term viability. I was able to purchase all of our textbooks through a HMEF grant. Grants for equipment and ingredients have been instrumental in keeping our kitchen running.

I hope my comments have helped provide you with new insights into the impact and importance ProStart is for my program at Roosevelt and for other high schools around our state. Continued funding support is critical in helping educators like me create a meaningful learning experience that will last a lifetime with our students.

Please do not hesitate to reach me at [ben.rengstorf@mpls.k12.mn.us](mailto:ben.rengstorf@mpls.k12.mn.us) or 612-430-3447, should you have any additional questions, or if you would like to come visit our classroom.

Sincerely,



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