

Bringing Direct Admissions to Every High School Senior: A Simple Intervention with a Significant Impact

No student should miss out on higher education based on the false belief that they “aren’t college material.” Across Minnesota, there are post-secondary programs aligned to numerous pathways and aspirations—and as a state, we owe it to our students to open as many doors as possible.

The Direct Admissions Program does just that. Launched in 2022-23, the program uses high school course data to automatically admit students to colleges across the state. Students receive a letter in the fall letting them know which of the 55+ technical schools, tribal colleges, community colleges, four-year public and private universities they have been accepted to—all they have to do is finalize the application.

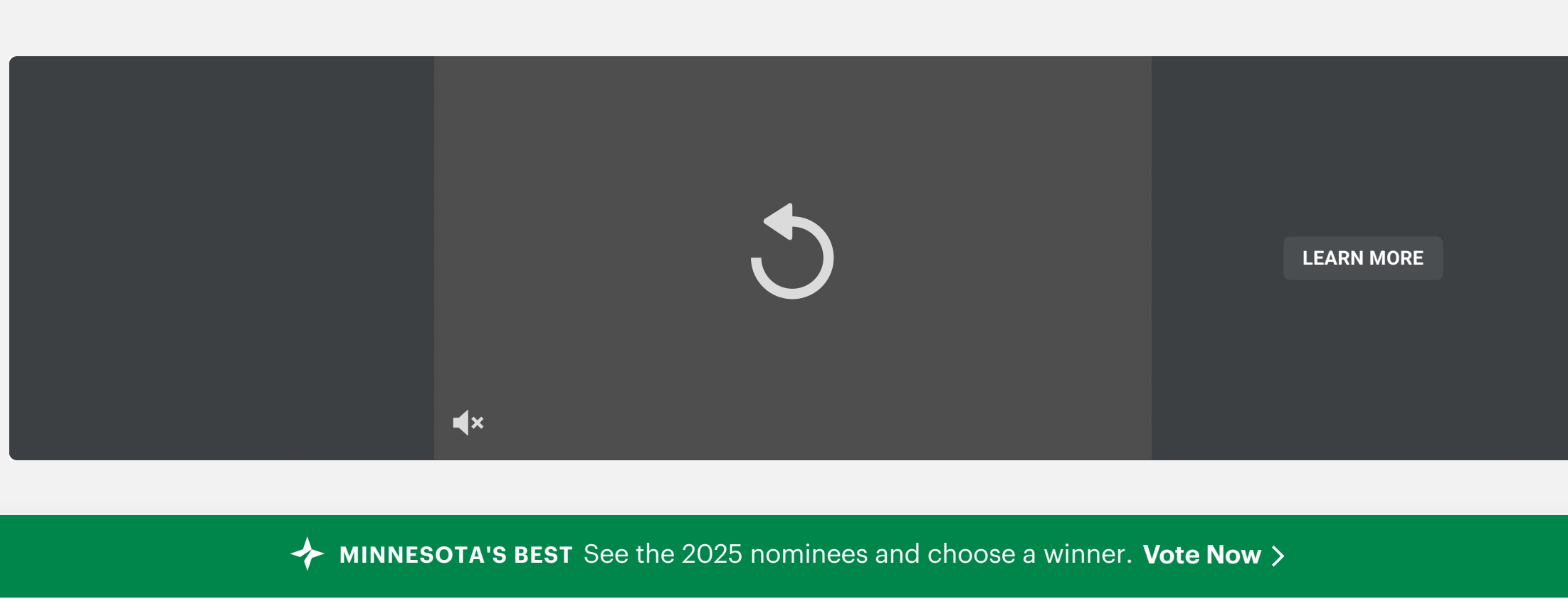
In the first two years of implementation, the program has shown success on many measures:

- **More students file the FAFSA**, connecting them to resources to pay for college. At participating high schools, 50% of students filed the FAFSA in the year before Direct Admissions, and 58% filed in the first year of Direct Admissions
- **More students enroll in a Minnesota college**. At participating high schools, 31% of recent graduates enrolled in a Minnesota college in the year before Direct Admissions, and 33% enrolled in the following year.
- **Improved outcomes held true across demographics**, including for low-income students and students of color.
- **Early adoption is going well!**
 - 57 colleges and universities are signed on to proactively admit students
 - 120 high schools are participating, with more in the pipeline
 - 59% of students at Direct Admissions high schools are in the 7-county metro and 41% are in Greater Minnesota

All Minnesota students should benefit from the Direct Admissions Program! The upfront investment to build out the program is a worthwhile effort that can bridge the gap between K-12 and college. It’s a program that benefits all students—but most importantly, helps ensure students on the fence about their college potential don’t fall through the cracks. This simple intervention makes a big difference for Minnesota kids and should be a universal practice across the state.

Organizations that support statewide expansion of Direct Admissions





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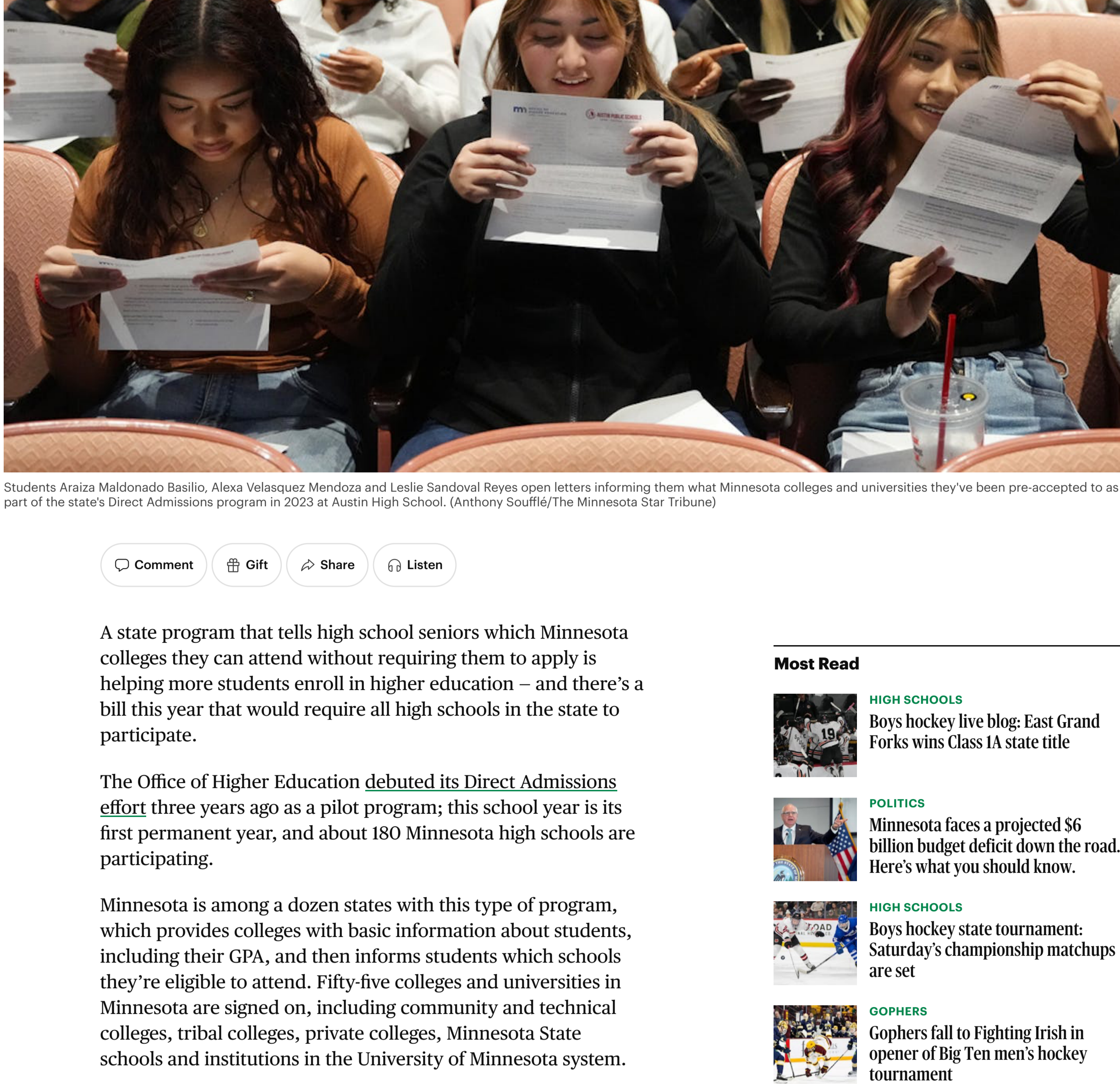
POLITICS

More high school seniors finding out which Minnesota colleges they're admitted to - before they apply

Lawmakers want to expand the Direct Admissions program, which tells seniors about their college options, encouraging them to go to college in-state.

By Erin Adler
The Minnesota Star Tribune

MARCH 8, 2025 AT 8:44AM



Students Ariza Maldonado Basilio, Alexa Velasquez Mendosa and Lailie Sandoval Reyes open letters informing them what Minnesota colleges and universities they've been pre-accepted to as part of the state's Direct Admissions program in 2023 at Austin High School. (Anthony Souffle/The Minnesota Star Tribune)

Comment, Gift, Share, Listen

A state program that tells high school seniors which Minnesota colleges they can attend without requiring them to apply is helping more students enroll in higher education - and there's a bill this year that would require all high schools in the state to participate.

The Office of Higher Education debuted its Direct Admissions effort three years ago as a pilot program; this year is its first permanent year, and about 180 Minnesota high schools are participating.

Minnesota is among a dozen states with this type of program, which provides colleges with basic information about students, including their GPA, and then informs students which schools they're eligible to attend. Fifty-five colleges and universities in Minnesota are signed on, including community and technical colleges, tribal colleges, private colleges, Minnesota State schools and institutions in the University of Minnesota system.

"It's just a great program to be able to give a kid a letter and say, 'If you were to apply, these are the schools that you would be accepted to,'" said Jennifer Ring, a high school counselor in the Minniewaska district in western Minnesota. "So it kind of takes that worry out of a student's mind [of], 'Am I going to get accepted?'"

State officials say the program is having its intended effects: increasing the percentage of students enrolling in college right after high school, getting them to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and keeping more Minnesota high school graduates here for college, rather than losing them to other states.

"So far our findings for all three of those are yes, yes, and yes," said Wendy Robinson, the Office of Higher Education's assistant commissioner for programs, policies and grants. "We're seeing, by and large, some really positive trends."

The state has an "aggressive goal" to have all 800-plus Minnesota high schools voluntarily implement the program in the coming years, said Aaron Salasek, the state's Direct Admissions program coordinator.

A bill introduced this session by Sen. Heather Gustafson, DFL-Vadnais Heights, would require all Minnesota high schools to participate by 2029-2030. That gives schools plenty of time, she said.

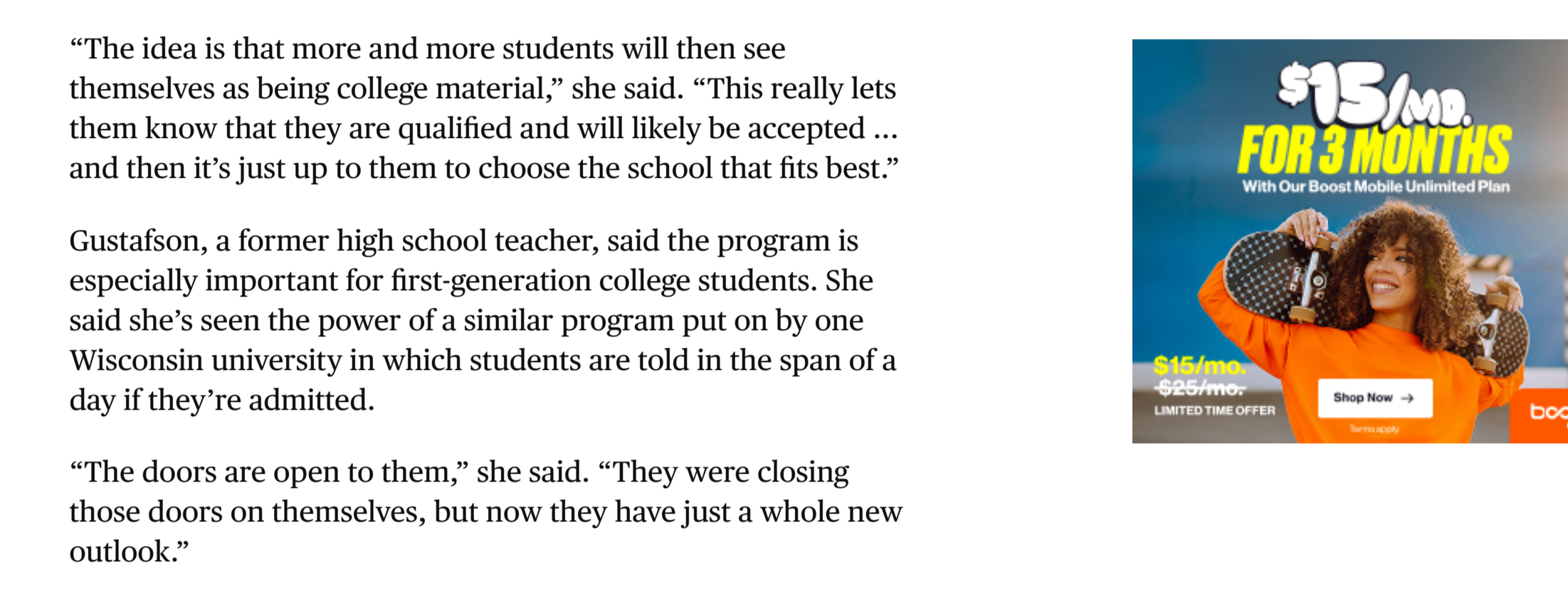
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"The idea is that more and more students will then see themselves as being college material," she said. "This really lets them know that they are qualified and will likely be accepted ... and then it's just up to them to choose the school that fits best."

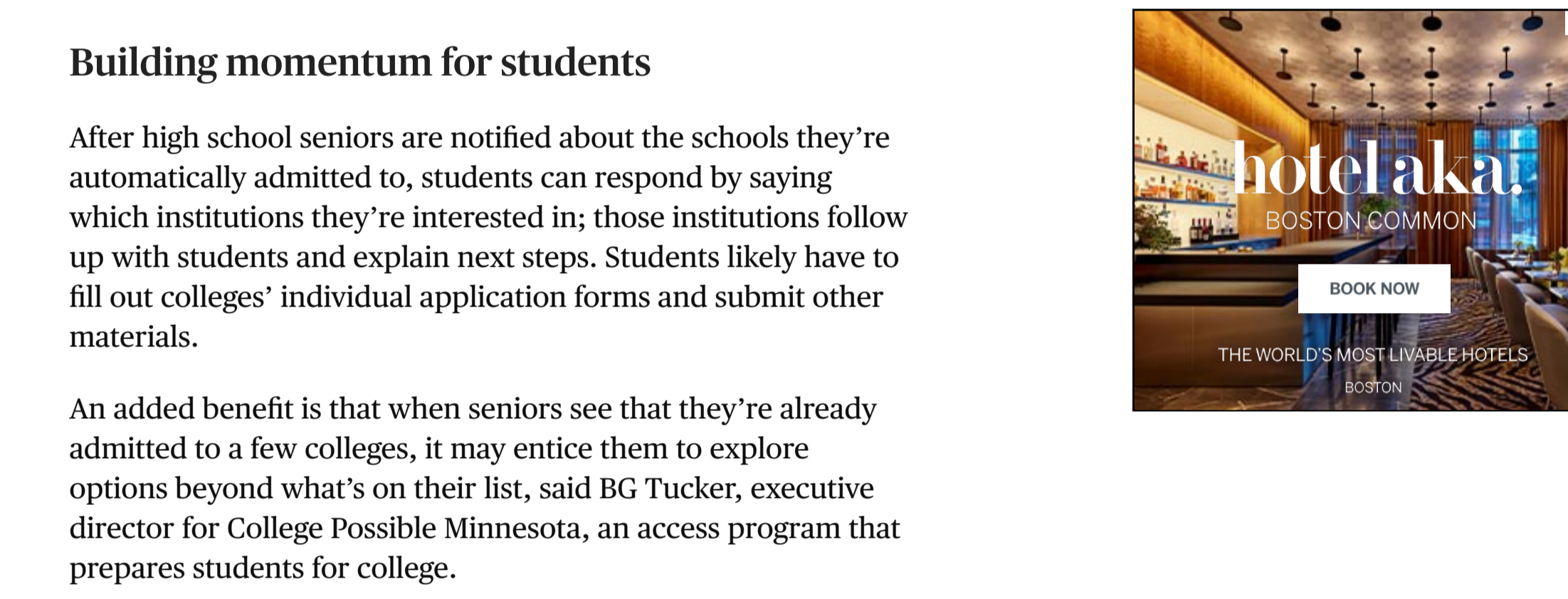
Gustafson, a former high school teacher, said the program is especially important for first-generation college students. She said she's seen the power of a similar program put on by one Wisconsin university in which students are told in the span of a day if they're admitted.

"The doors are open to them," she said. "They were closing those doors on themselves, but now they have just a whole new outlook."

Gustafson said one criticism of the bill has been that it's another mandate on schools without funding. But the program only requires high schools to put in 40 hours of work to set it up, and that's spread over the first year, she said.

Of the dozen states with direct admission, Minnesota's is the most comprehensive model in terms of the variety of participating colleges and universities. Many other states have contacted Minnesota for details on how it works, Salasek said.

"Honestly, I think Minnesota is leading the way with this initiative. We are the model," Salasek said.

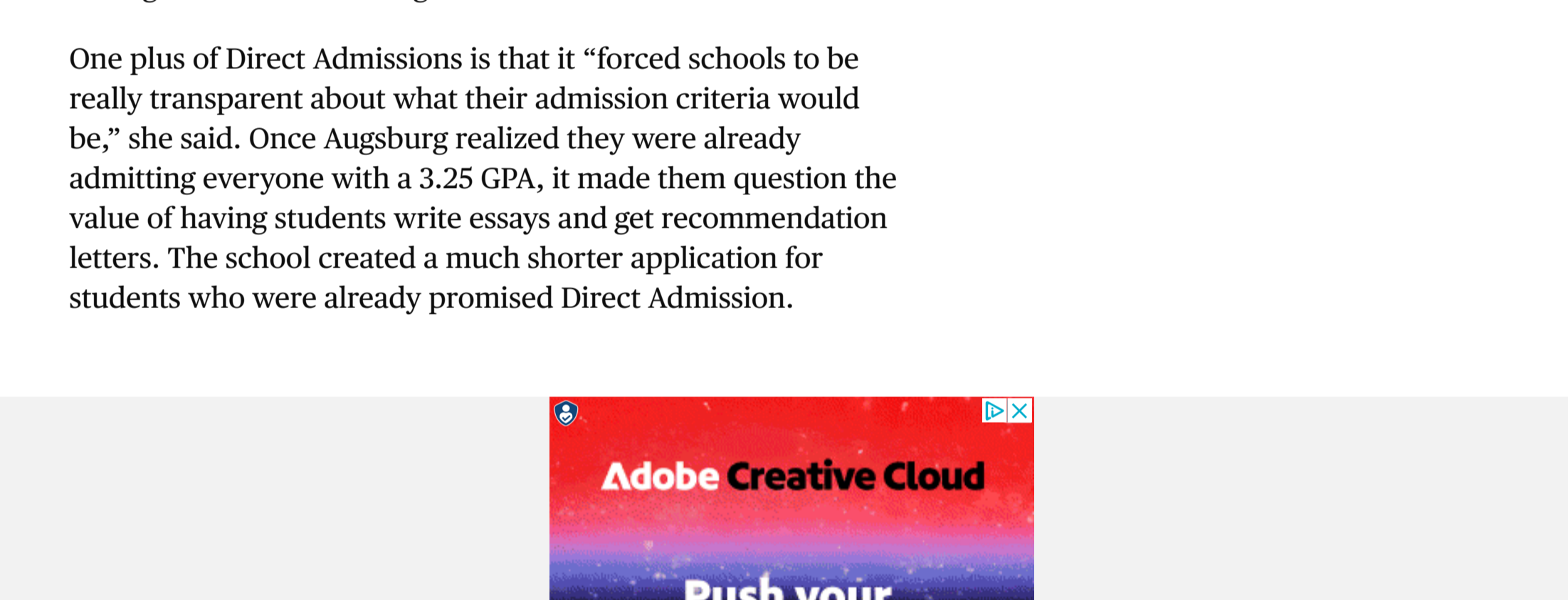


"I see it as a momentum builder for a student," she said. "So they might not end up at their Direct Admissions school, but honestly, it can be what ticks off their excitement and enthusiasm for the [application] process."

College Possible works with students from 50 Minnesota high schools; they also partner with the state to run Direct Admissions programs at any school that doesn't have the staff to do it themselves.

Augsburg University has taken part in Direct Admissions since 2022. Around the same time, the school was looking at simplifying their own admission process with a quicker turnaround time, said Stephanie Ruckel, Augsburg's director of strategic enrollment management.

One plus of Direct Admissions is that it "forced schools to be really transparent about what their admission criteria would be," she said. Once Augsburg realized they were already admitting everyone with a 3.25 GPA, it made them question the value of having students write essays and get recommendation letters. The school created a much shorter application for students who were already promised Direct Admission.



Ruckel said Augsburg has seen increased numbers of students applying from schools that do Direct Admissions, but it's hard to determine why a student ultimately chooses to enroll. Some students who received Direct Admissions letters still fill out the traditional application.

At Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD), Melissa Huybrecht, vice president of enrollment management, said she feels the program is successful, with about 3% of incoming students having a tie to Direct Admissions.

At the University of Minnesota's Rochester campus, about 19% of the school's total applications come from Direct Admissions, along with 13% of admitted students, said Terry Whitton, associate vice chancellor for enrollment management.

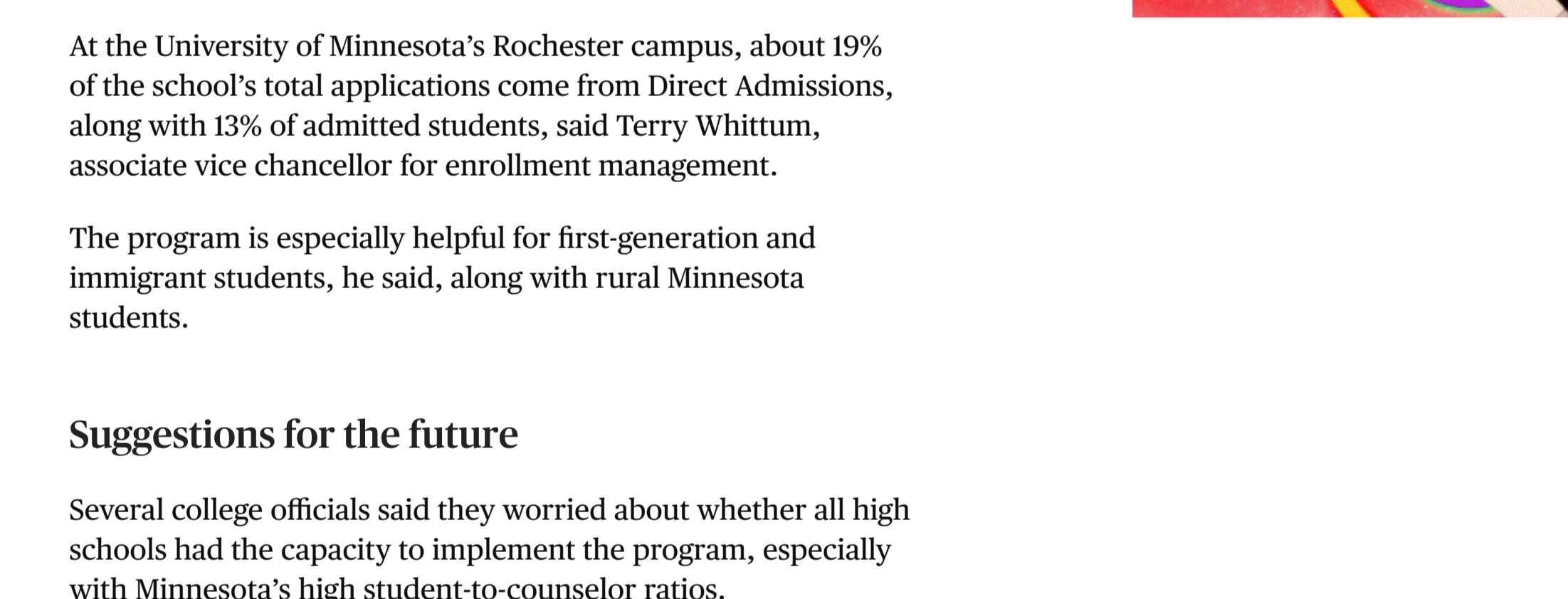
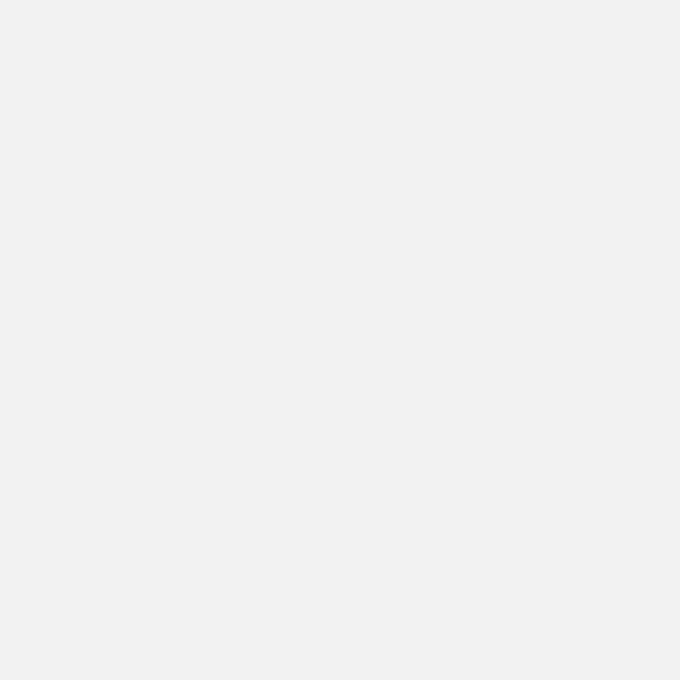
The program is especially helpful for first-generation and immigrant students, he said, along with rural Minnesota students.



Suggestions for the future

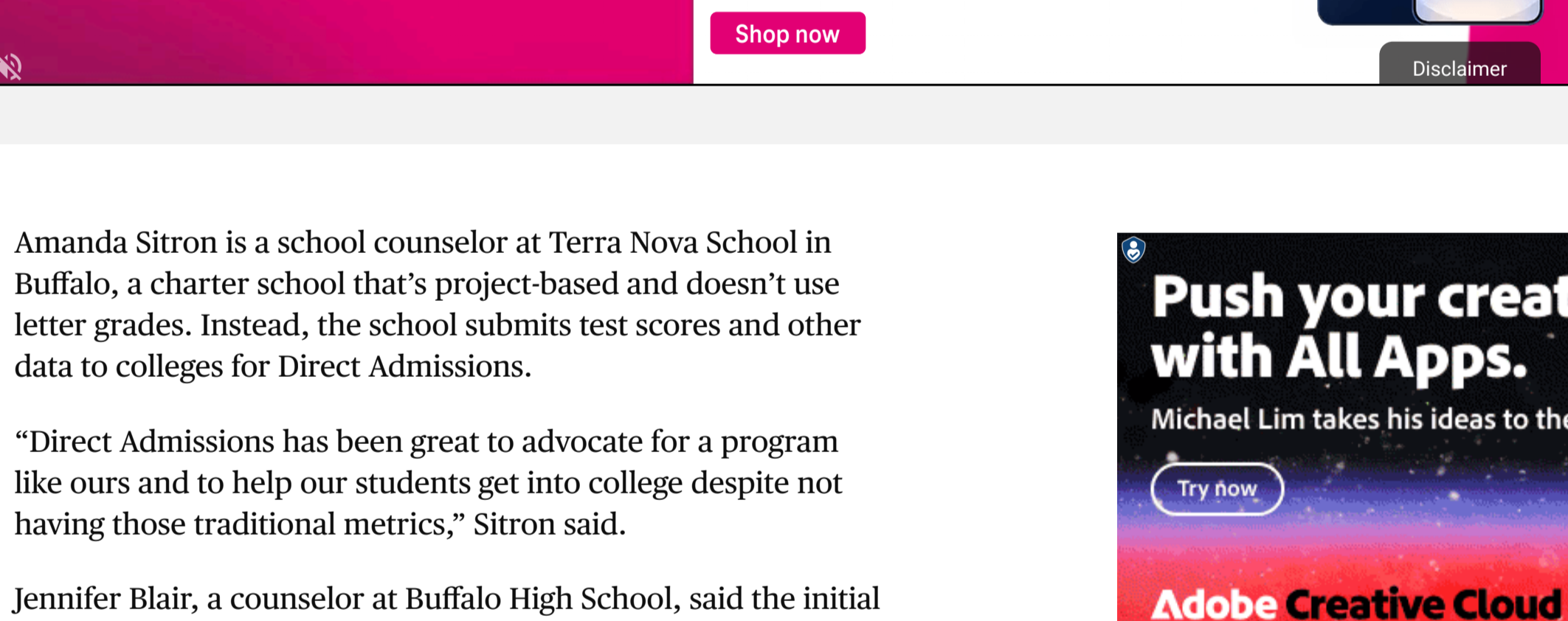
Several college officials said they worried about whether all high schools had the capacity to implement the program, especially with Minnesota's high student-to-counselor ratios.

Though the program is free and the state provides some funding to schools, Salasek said schools may still have trouble fulfilling its technology or staffing requirements.



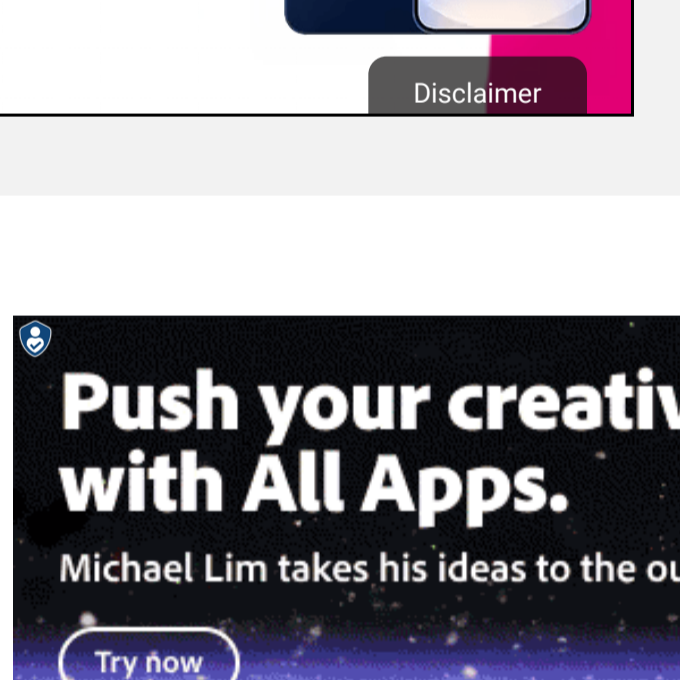
Some school leaders said they'd like to see financial aid information included when students get their Direct Admissions letter.

"I think if we can tie these together," Ruckel said, "it can be a really, really powerful tool to say 'you are admitted and there's a pathway forward for you to actually be able to afford to go to school, too.'"



Several counselors and admissions staffers said they had ideas for how to make the program better.

Blair wants the program to create a universal application so once students indicate which schools they're interested in, they only have to fill out one more form. Now, there are several additional steps.



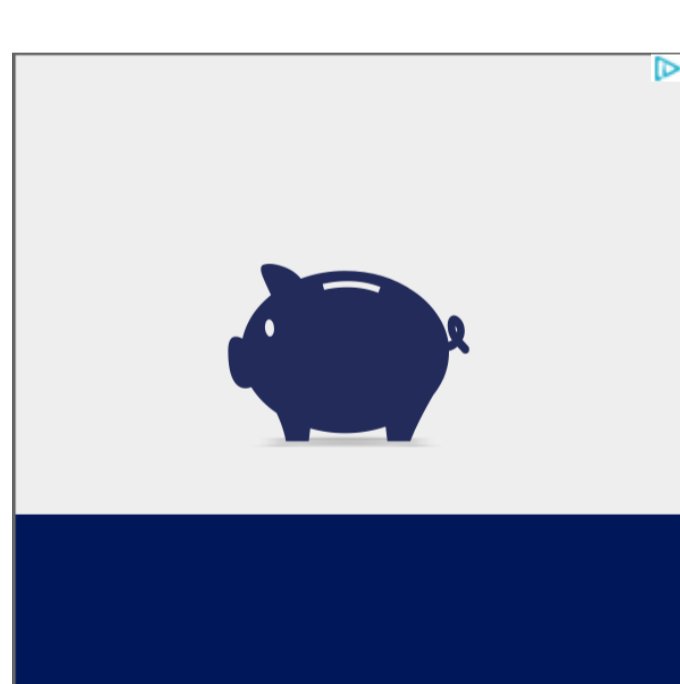
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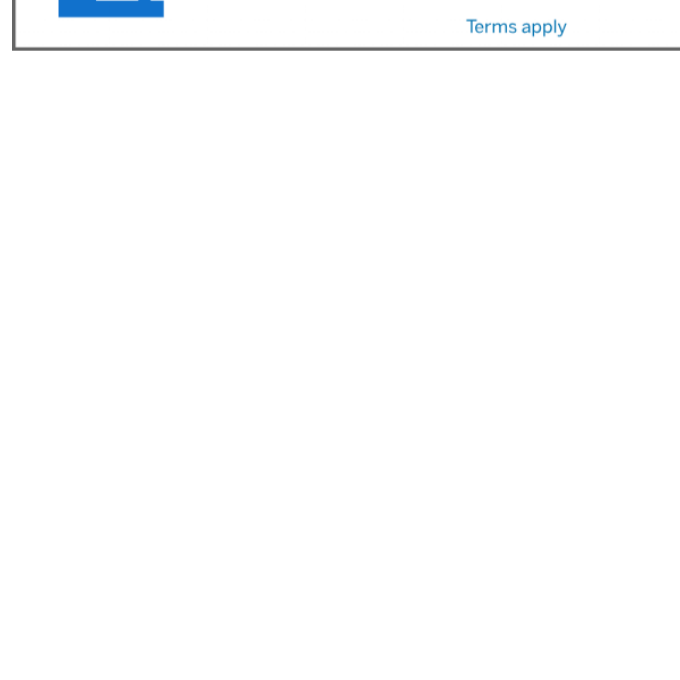
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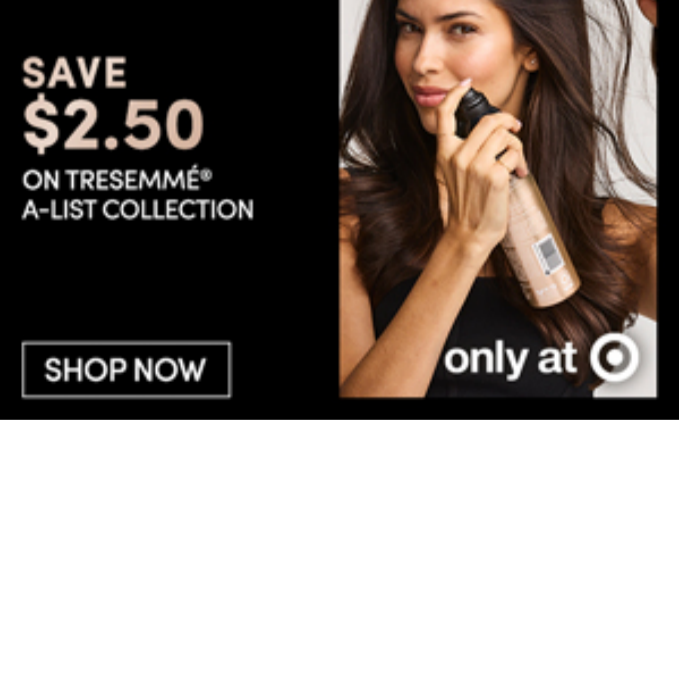
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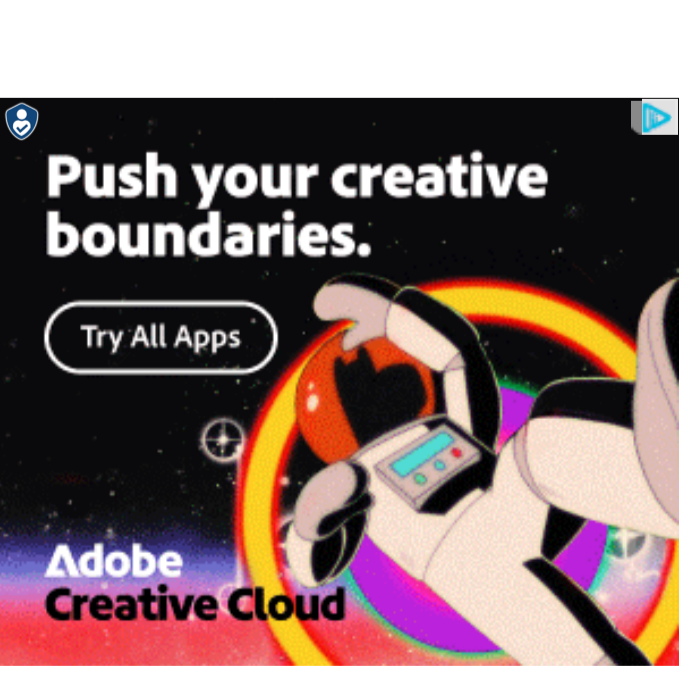
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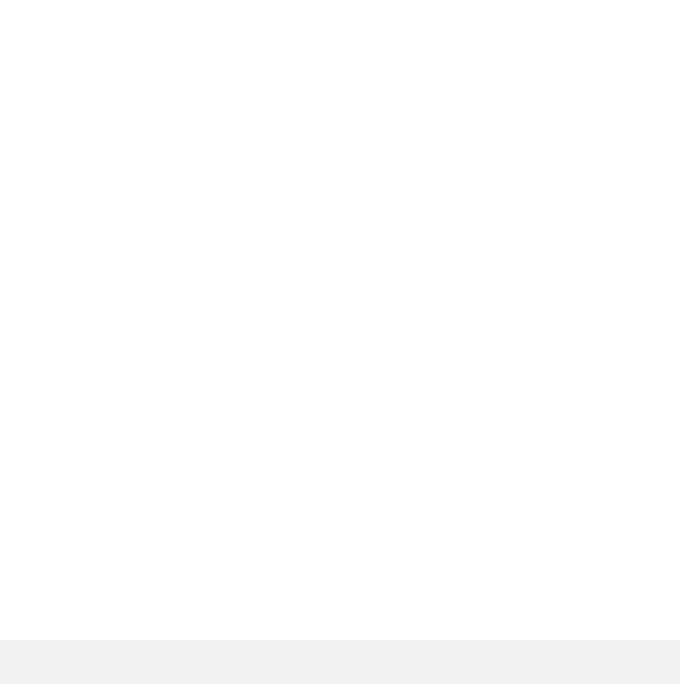
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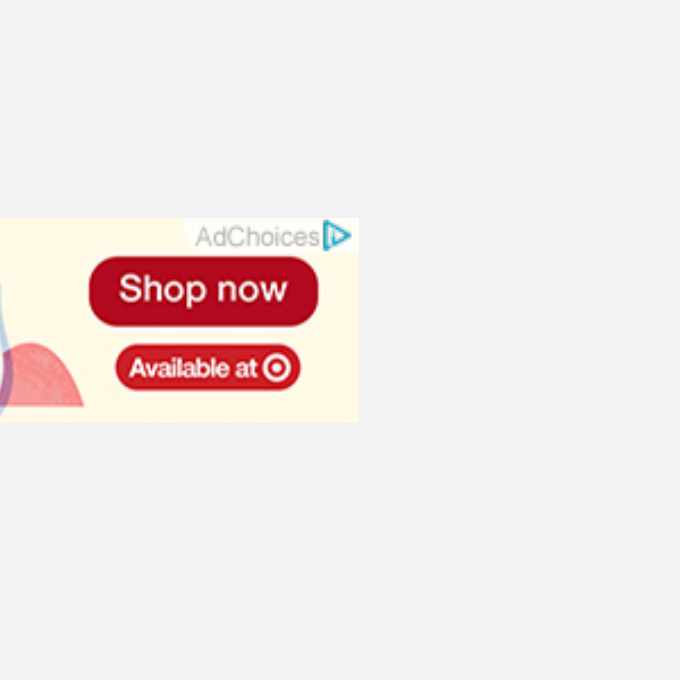
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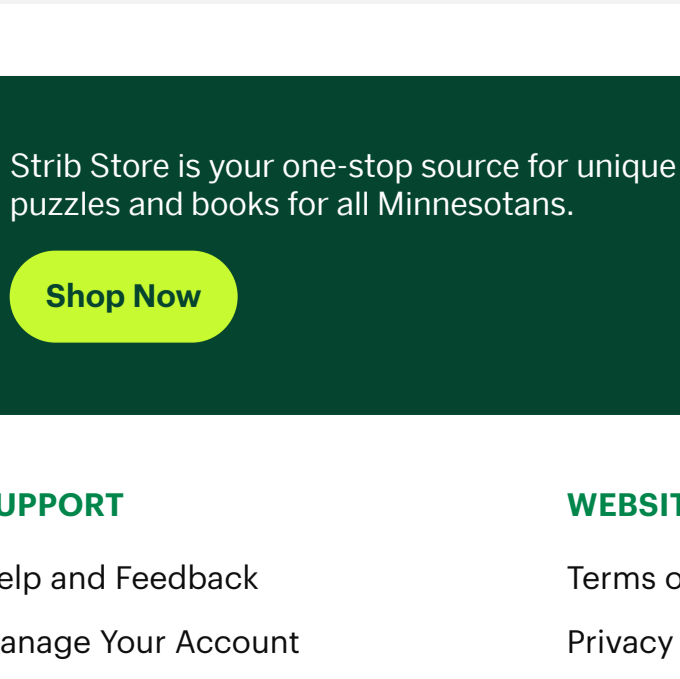
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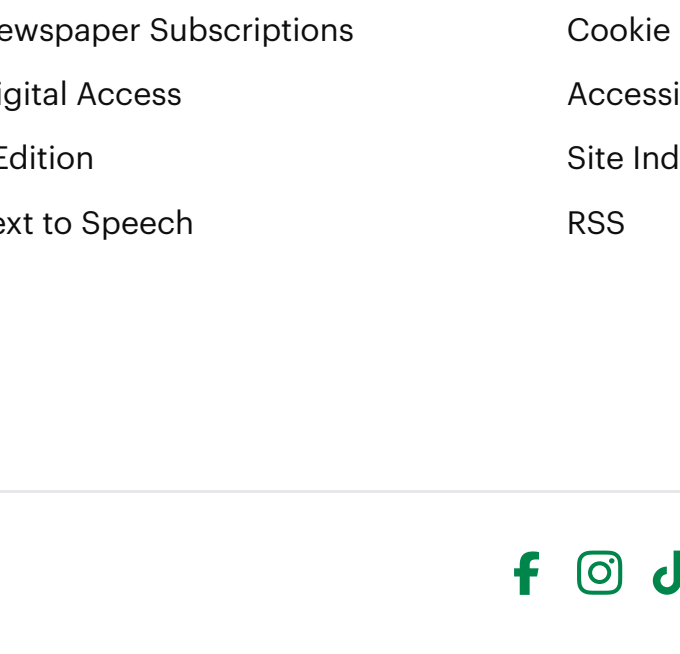
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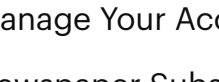
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