

Flexible Learning Year Application

Improving Student Achievement—Narrative Addendum

February 19, 2010

Please accept this narrative addendum on behalf of the twenty-five school districts in Southwest Minnesota comprising the Consortium of Schools which recently submitted to you the Improving Student Achievement Initiative—Flexible Learning Year Application.

Pursuant to your request for additional information, the following responses are offered:

Requirement of Membership in the Consortium:

Superintendents representing the school boards of the twenty-five school districts making up the Consortium met at the SW/WC Service Cooperative in Marshall, Minnesota, on February 4, 2010, and agreed with eight requirements of Membership in the Consortium. Those eight requirements are shown below:

1. Districts agreed to a three (3) year commitment to be part of the Flexible Learning Year proposal, beginning in year one (1). The term of the Flexible Learning Year plan proposal will be for three (3) years to include 2010-11, 2011-12 and 2012-13.
2. Districts agreed the number of minutes of student contact time in the 2010-2011 school calendar (and succeeding two school years) must be equal to or greater than the number of minutes of student contact time in the 2009-2010 calendar. A **Statement of Assurance** to this effect was signed by each Superintendent and submitted to MDE with each district's original proposal. In addition, an excel worksheet detailing the specific breakdown of student contact time comparing 2009-2010 with the proposed calendar for 2010-2011 will be submitted to MDE staff member Sharon Peck by February 26, 2010. If the application is approved by the Commissioner, each school district will provide MDE with the actual 2010-2011 school calendar once it is formally adopted by each respective school board.
3. Districts agreed they have conducted three (3) public hearings/community meetings to explain the Flexible Learning Year Plan application and receive public input prior to respective school boards adopting the Resolution for Approval of the Plan. Information was included in each district's original application.
4. Districts agreed to the following common calendar dates for 2010-2011. If the application is approved by the Commissioner, each school district will provide MDE with the actual 2010-2011 school calendar once it is formally adopted by each respective school board.
 - a) First day of school for 2010-2011 will be Monday, August 23, 2010.
 - b) End of first semester will be December 22 or December 23, 2010.
 - c) First day of second semester will be January 3 or January 4, 2011.
 - d) Three (3) full Joint Staff Development dates will be scheduled for:
 - i. Wednesday, August 18, 2010, Monday, January 17, 2011, and Monday, March 14, 2011
 - e) Two (2) "early out" professional development days will be scheduled for:
 - i. Wednesday, October 20, 2010, and Friday, February 18, 2011
5. Districts agreed to reallocate a portion of staff development funds or district funds toward consortium professional development activities. Each district agreed to allocate \$10 per pupil, based upon October 1, 2008 child count, which would amount to \$161,530. The funds will be submitted to SW/WC Service

Cooperative which has agreed to serve as the consortium fiscal host with no charge to the districts. If the Flexible Learning Year Application is approved by MDE, each district will deposit (by July 10, 2010) the per pupil dollar amount shown in the following table. This allocation will be revisited each succeeding year to determine its appropriateness.

<u>School District Name</u>	<u>School District Number</u>	<u>Number of Students- 10-01-2008</u>	<u>Allocation of Staff Dev. Funds</u>
Adrian	#0511-01	617	\$ 6,170
Brewster	#0513-01	141	\$ 1,410
Canby	#0891-01	522	\$ 5,220
Comfrey	#0081-01	147	\$ 1,470
Edgerton	#0581-01	308	\$ 3,080
Hendricks	#0402-01	166	\$ 1,660
Hills-Beaver Creek	#0671-01	328	\$ 3,280
Ivanhoe	#0403-01	151	\$ 1,510
Jackson County Central	#2895-01	1,128	\$ 11,280
Lakeview	#2167-01	572	\$ 5,720
Luverne	#2184-01	1,200	\$ 12,000
Lynd	#0415-01	126	\$ 1,260
Marshall	#0413-01	2,170	\$ 21,700
Milroy	#0635-01	35	\$ 350
Minneota	#0414-01	447	\$ 4,470
Mountain Lake	#0173-01	472	\$ 4,720
Redwood Area	#2897-01	1,233	\$ 12,330
Round Lake	#0516-01	121	\$ 1,210
RTR	#2902-01	553	\$ 5,530
Sleepy Eye	#0084-01	611	\$ 6,110
Springfield	#0085-01	588	\$ 5,880
Tracy Area	#2904-01	758	\$ 7,580
Tracy Area (Balaton)		54	\$ 540
Westbrook-Walnut Grove	#2898-01	548	\$ 5,480
Windom	#0177-01	886	\$ 8,860
Worthington	#0518-01	<u>2,271</u>	<u>\$ 22,710</u>
	Totals	16,153	\$161,530

6. Each District identified a professional development contact person who will be authorized to represent the respective school district in sharing the responsibility of planning, scheduling and implementing professional development activities with other consortium schools. A steering committee of the group is planning to meet for the first time on February 25th, 2010, to begin planning.
7. Districts agreed to the development and implementation of Professional Learning Communities within each district and across consortium districts. These PLCs will be both inter-district and intra-district.
8. Districts agreed to prepare and share data, in the format required for reporting purposes, and to submit data to the Consortium and MDE as requested.

Request for School Calendar Information:

As stated in membership requirement #2, all twenty-five school districts have agreed the number of minutes of student contact time in the 2010-2011 school calendar (and succeeding two school years) **must be equal to or greater than** the number of minutes of student contact time in the 2009-2010 calendar.

A **Statement of Assurance** to this effect was signed by each Superintendent and submitted to MDE with each district's original proposal because MDE associate, Glory Kibbel, advised that would be sufficient in the early application stages of the proposal.

Glory Kibbel also advised that at some time prior to the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year, more detailed information would be necessary in order for MDE to confirm student minutes would be equal to or greater than the prior year.

To that end, and in an effort to work efficiently with Sharon Peck at MDE, David Marlette, Superintendent of Tracy Area Schools, prepared an excel worksheet which all districts are using to present the requested information in a common format. That information is currently being compiled by each school district. The consortium schools plan to submit the information to Sharon Peck by February 26, 2010.

The following documents from each district will be submitted so MDE can assure that there are an equal or greater number of student contact minutes in the 2010-2011 school calendar as compared with the 2009-2010 school calendar. Those documents are:

- The 2009-2010 school calendar as adopted by each respective school board.
- A proposed draft 2010-2011 school calendar that will assume the Commissioner approves the application. *(None of the schools boards are intending to adopt a calendar until the Commissioner approves or denies the application).*
- An excel worksheet used by all of the school districts detailing a breakdown of the student day in each school in each district in the consortium comparing 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school calendars.

Further, if the application is approved by the Commissioner of Education, each school district will provide MDE with the actual 2010-2011 school calendar once it is formally adopted by each of the respective school boards.

Finally, please advise your staff should MDE find a school district has planned fewer student contact minutes in 2010-2011 than it had in 2009-2010, MDE should consider it an error that the district will have to correct as no district is intending fewer instructional minutes than they have in the current year.

Request for Extended School Year Plans:

As indicated in the Flexible Learning Year application, consortium school leaders have discussed possibilities of extending the school year to target the needs of students who may benefit from remediation or enrichment activities. At this time, only the Mountain Lake and Worthington School Districts have developed some specific concepts in this area.

Mountain Lake School District has indicated an interest in creating a two week summer school from Monday May 23, 2011, to Friday, June 3, 2011, to provide additional instruction to elementary K-8 students who need additional help in areas of reading and mathematics. Should data be available for review from MDE, the district views this program as an opportunity to respond to students who are not proficient on the grade level assessments. Interest in extending this program to include a 9-12 credit

recovery effort is also something that is being explored. District-wide retention policies will be explored as an added incentive to support student participation in this program. Mountain Lake views these dates as an excellent opportunity to implement a summer school program. This program is dependent on the availability of funding.

The Worthington School District has provided an extended school year for a number of years through a variety of funding opportunities (targeted services, 21st Century grant) that create an environment for students with different needs. The District is looking at expending this programming by increasing the time from a four week program to a six week program that will include enrichment opportunities funded through various grants. The change in calendar allows this extended program to operate earlier in the summer to avoid conflicts as well as operate for a longer period of time. The program would address students that need additional assistance, credit recovery, retention, and remediation. Along with this potential additional programming, the district is investigating the possibility of a focus term between the first and second semester. This focus term would be used to address student retention, credit recovery and enrichment opportunities. This would be for considered implementation in the second year of the application and would be planned to meet the needs of all students in the district.

The other twenty-three schools in the consortium are interested in these possibilities but have not had time together to discuss or propose firm extended school year plans. Consequently, consortium leaders have identified extended school year planning as an emerging topic to be discussed as we begin working together during this three year process.

Further, the original proposal to reschedule seven to ten days currently scheduled “after” high stakes tests to days scheduled “prior” to high stakes tests does not add financial costs to current budgets--the current days are simply rescheduled. Extended time days will require additional funding that is difficult to afford immediately and as you have seen in the original proposal, the original application requests no additional funding.

Request for Disaggregated Data:

As stated in membership requirement #8, all twenty-five school districts have agreed to prepare and share data, in the format required for reporting purposes, and to submit data to the Consortium and MDE as requested.

Early on in developing the application, Darcy Josephson, Data Management and Professional Development Administrator in Redwood Falls, asked Margaret Biggerstaff, MDE staff, to guide the districts in establishing academic baselines in math, reading and writing. School districts established academic achievement goals using index rates to measure student academic growth over the next three years. Ms. Biggerstaff has been very helpful in guiding the consortium school districts to set realistic academic goals. These goals were submitted by each school district as part of the original application.

Your request for the districts to set goals for each subgroup was received on February 10, 2010. Since that time, Darcy Josephson, from Redwood Falls, has been consulting with Ms. Biggerstaff and will oversee this request for all twenty-five consortium districts. Ms. Biggerstaff is consulting with Tammy Timko, Worthington, and Holly Knudson, Marshall, to set their subgroup goals.

As you can see in the table shown on page 5, each District’s subgroups have been identified and those subgroups which had enough enrollment to count for AYP in 2009 have been identified with the word “Yes”. Ms. Biggerstaff has prepared this information for the Consortium. Each school district is currently going through its goal setting process to establish the subgroup goals for the next three years. This information will be submitted by March 15, 2010.

District Number	District Name	Districts need to set goals in these subgroups-These are subgroups with a great enough number to be counted for AYP.																		Total Goals Needed
		ALL		American Indian		Asian/Pacific Islander		Hispanic		Black		White		LEP		Special Education		FRP		
		R	M	R	M	R	M	R	M	R	M	R	M	R	M	R	M	R	M	
0511	ADRIAN	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	6
0513	BREWSTER	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	4
0891	CANBY	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	6
0081	COMFREY	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	4
0581	EDGERTON	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	6
0402	HENDRICKS	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	4
0671	HILLS-BEAVER CREEK	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	6
0403	IVANHOE	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	4
2895	JACKSON COUNTY CENTRAL	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	6
2167	LAKEVIEW	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	6
2184	LUVERNE	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	8
0415	LYND	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	8
0413	MARSHALL	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	14
0635	MILROY	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	2
0414	MINNEOTA	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	8
0173	MOUNTAIN LAKE	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	12
2897	REDWOOD AREA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	10
0516	ROUND LAKE	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	4
2902	RTR	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	6
0084	SLEEPY EYE	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	10
0085	SPRINGFIELD	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	6
2904	TRACY	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	10
2898	WESTBROOK-WALNUT GROVE	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	10
0177	WINDOM	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	10
0518	WORTHINGTON	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	14
		Completed																		

Request for Professional Development Plans:

One of the primary goals of consortium schools in this proposal is to combine our resources—human and financial—to provide high quality, job embedded professional development for educational staff to improve staff effectiveness and consequently student achievement. Consortium leaders have had significant dialogue about how to accomplish this goal and have determined that developing, implementing and deploying Professional Learning Communities as a common framework across consortium districts is the best way to accomplish that goal. All of the discussion has been around DuFour's model and as you can expect, the different districts are at different stages--ranging from having little awareness about PLC's, to doing book studies about best practice PLC's, to districts that have had PLC's established for up to three years.

On February 4, 2010, Darcy Josephson, Redwood Falls, was asked by Consortium Superintendents to convene designated representatives from seven consortium school districts (Lakeview, Luverne, Worthington, Marshall, Hills-Beaver Creek and Springfield) to serve as a steering committee to begin establishing the framework for planning professional development for the 2010-2011 school year. *(Because the first day of consortium professional development is August 18, 2010, for purposes of planning, the Consortium Superintendents commissioned the Professional Development Steering Committee to begin planning for that date immediately as the planning required is significant and time is running short. The steering committee is planning to meet for the first time on February 25th, 2010. Should the Commissioner decide to deny the application, the activities of the Professional Development Committee will be terminated.)*

Professional Learning Community development will be a primary focus of our professional development activities. Equally important to consortium districts is the development of a comprehensive Teacher Induction Program for each school district. In this regard, we intend to contact the Alexandria School District to determine if they are willing to work with consortium schools to share the model the Alexandria School District developed after receiving a MDE grant.

To accommodate immediate financial concerns of the Professional Development Committee, each of the consortium districts has agreed to contribute \$10 per pupil (see membership requirement #5) to be available to the professional development committee so they may offer first-class, highest quality professional development for consortium staff. None of the consortium schools can provide such high-quality professional development in isolation. The commitment of \$10 per pupil collectively creates a fund of \$161,530 to be used to move us forward with professional development as we approach working together should the Commissioner decide to approve the application.

To accommodate immediate planning concerns of the Professional Development Committee, each of the consortium districts has agreed to set aside five common professional development days so they may offer first-class, highest quality professional development for consortium staff. The framework for how and where schools will meet together has yet to be determined but the common calendars with predetermined professional development days make it possible.

As consortium leaders, to further define intentions in this area would be misleading as we really want this professional development to be based on our data and implemented by the professionals in Consortium districts. We will look for common threads in districts' school improvement plans, and will ensure the professional development is not just a "one-stop workshop". Many of these districts have experience through the Math and Science Teacher Partnership Grant with the SW/WC SC, which uses PLCs along with content training.

Request for Plans for College Collaboration and PSEO Enrollment:

The basic premise for aligning post-secondary and K-12 calendars was identified in the application. Succinctly, we believe aligning the calendars makes sense and provides better opportunities to work together. It provides common start dates for students participating in PSEO programs instead of the staggered system that exists today. Aligned calendars provide more seamless opportunities for college students to participate in consortium schools for pre-student teaching and student teaching experiences. One benefit not obvious to many includes that grades for academic achievement could better be addressed. Likewise, timely grade reporting between high schools and colleges could occur which in turn would assist in counseling students in both institutions. Another positive is the access to the college in the first summer term in which many students are unable to take advantage. A huge opportunity for similar start date is the common district delivery between the institutions. For example Minnesota West offers Psych and Sociology on ITV to the schools and the current schedules do not align for the offerings over the entire year. In addition another benefit is for students to have the online experience while having access to the guidance and support of the High School and Colleges. Once again the extra support helps keep everything on the right track and can avoid potential issues. Lastly, many of our students who are PSEO need library services to complete course work which may also not be available at the time due to different schedules. These are just a few examples of benefits for a change in the calendar schedule that could create opportunities of success for students.

Another advantage of aligned calendars is that we set the stage for consortium schools to invite and partner with post-secondary institution staff for professional development trainings and professional learning community engagement. When post-secondary starts their school year during our traditional fall teacher workshop time, it is difficult to invite and partner with those higher ed faculty as they are busy teaching courses and offering office hours/advising time to their students.

College collaboration is part of a relationship that many districts have built over a number of years. Currently they have served almost 850 PSEO students from southwest Minnesota this year alone and of those 850 students nearly 300 have successfully completed their coursework online. We hope that between SMSU and MnWest, we can serve all of the students in the high schools of southwest Minnesota. These relationships are being developed to continue to offer further opportunities in all districts either through additional online courses, concurrent enrollment options or technical skills opportunities (i.e. auto tech courses) that will increase, expand or build a solid work force for the southwest region.

One potential misunderstanding needs to be cleared up regarding collaboration with area colleges and universities. In the 2009 flexible learning year application, the consortium viewed the common K-12 and post secondary start dates as a deliberate way to increase student participation/enrollment in post secondary studies. To that end, the 2009 application created enrollment and program data that showed how the number of PSEO students and programs would grow over the three years of the application.

We would like to clarify that the current application does not deliberately seek to increase PSEO enrollment. We will, however, remain accommodating to the needs and interests of students who wish participate in these programs and seek to find ways to meet the needs of PSEO students by adding post high school programs to our existing structures. Many of our schools have already done this and will continue to do so, with, or without, this application.

Overall, you can see that specific collaboration is not significantly developed at this stage but Southwest Minnesota State University—Marshall, Minnesota State University—Mankato, and the Minnesota West Community Colleges have all indicated interest in discussing opportunities to create connections that will benefit students and professional staff. This is an area that we believe will emerge after we begin conversing about possibilities.

Request for District Intentions in Addressing Concerns of Students Involved in 4-H, County and State Fairs and Late Summer Family Vacations:

Each of the twenty-five school boards discussed three primary concerns that were identified at the community hearings. Board members throughout the Consortium recognized how important those concerns are to those students and families directly impacted if the application is approved.

Those primary concerns were generated by families who may take late August vacations, have participants in 4-H programs and activities, and who participate in some way in County and State Fairs. All twenty-five Superintendents and their school boards believe each of these activities are very important educational opportunities, provide unique learning opportunities, and are valued by all.

The school board members who voted to authorize the Flexible Learning Year application weighed those concerns against what they thought was in the best interest of the preponderance of students attending our schools. In consideration for those impacted by the change, the school boards have directed the superintendents in each of the consortium school districts to work with those families and participants who are impacted--because of their involvement in 4-H, in county and state fairs, and who vacation in late August--to mitigate their concerns just as they have worked with other students and families throughout the years who have conflicts with the current school calendar.

Summary:

We hope this additional information provides you with more content to help address your questions and upon which to base your decision. Should additional information be requested, we look forward to working with you and your staff.

The Flexible Learning Year Application is unique because it is purely intended to improve student achievement and staff effectiveness. It provides no monetary incentive or benefit for any adults. It requires no additional funding in the form it was submitted. It generates unprecedented collaboration on behalf of twenty-five districts of significantly different sizes all focusing on improving student achievement.

This application is submitted because twenty-five school leaders in Southwest Minnesota, directed by approximately 150 school board members, believe it is innovative and about increasing student achievement. As you realize, we are firmly committed to this proposal and believe it is worthy of your approval.