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**PRESS RELEASE  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **25 Flexible Learning Year Schools Report Impact on State Fair, Vacations**

Twenty-five school districts in Southwest Minnesota started school on August 23, 2010. The flexible learning year application, approved by Minnesota Department of Education Commissioner Alice Seagren, is a groundbreaking cooperative effort to increase student achievement, teacher effectiveness, and share services for professional development.

When the plan was initially proposed, skeptics noted family vacations and state fair attendance concerns. From the outset of this initiative, school officials made it clear that state fair absences would be excused and students with state fair trips would be encouraged to take part in that educational event. Family vacations in August would be treated the same as family vacations during other times of the school year.

Data compiled from these 25 school districts and county 4-H Coordinators identified an increase in state fair 4-H exhibitors. While all schools in the 10 counties where the 25 school districts lie are not part of the consortium, state fair data was gathered for all 4-Hers in those 10 counties. Individually, seven of the ten counties actually saw an increase in state fair exhibitors. Overall, there were 676 exhibitors in 2010—compared to 635 in 2009, a net gain of 41 or approximately 6%. In a Kare11.com article posted August 27, 2010, a state fair official cited “...early registrations show fewer 4-H members from the 25 schools are exhibiting at the fair this year....”

Overall school attendance data from all districts was gathered to note how school districts handled state fair absences. All student absences across the 25 school districts related to state fair trips were designated as excused absences. Students received assignments ahead of time and were provided reasonable time to make up the missing work. School officials confirmed that state fair trips would be excused. Similarly, all families who had late August family vacations were excused. School officials note they receive requests to excuse student absences for family vacations throughout the course of the entire school year, so these requests were not treated differently.

For more information about the flexible learning year initiative, visit [www.swsc.org/fly](http://www.swsc.org/fly).

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