

Commissioner Approves Innovative SW MN FLY Application

By Shelly Maes, Manager of Member Services

On March 12, 2010, Minnesota Department of Education Commissioner Alice Seagren approved the flexible learning year application submitted by a consortium of 25 school districts in southwest Minnesota, which include Adrian, Brewster, Canby, Comfrey, Edgerton, Hendricks, Hills-Beaver Creek, Ivanhoe, JCC, Lakeview, Luverne, Lynd, Marshall, Milroy, Minneota, Mountain Lake, Redwood Area, Round Lake, RTR, Sleepy Eye, Springfield, Tracy Area, Westbrook-Walnut Grove, Windom and Worthington. The ultimate goal of the flexible learning year initiative is to improve student achievement. All activities and goals within the initiative are designed with that end goal in mind.

The Commissioner of Education and her staff have been supportive of this process. MDE's high expectations led to an innovative approach to increasing student achievement through improved instruction. A primary goal of the initiative is to provide job embedded staff development that will improve teacher effectiveness. Klint Willert, Superintendent at Marshall Public Schools commends the Commissioner, "By approving this application, Commissioner Seagren has shown her support for local school board decision making, her support for innovation and collaboration, and her commitment to 16,000 students and 1,380 licensed professionals. Commissioner Seagren and her staff should be commended for their vision and leadership."

School leaders and locally elected school boards are constantly being challenged by the Governor and Legislature to be more innovative in their approach and practice. When the Governor asked schools to do more sharing through the concept of shared services, a group of southwest Minnesota superintendents met in the Fall of 2008 to see what they could do to meet the challenge.

The outcome of those initial discussions was the "Improving Student Achievement" flexible learning year initiative. "This is a well thought out plan. We have developed this in a purposeful and intentional way by focusing on research-based best practices and effective collaboration; with an emphasis on student achievement gains for ALL students," said Dave Marlette, Superintendent at Tracy Area Schools.

"From my perspective, the biggest 'sell' is the collaboration between 25 school districts and school boards, and the increased possibilities of high quality staff development among districts," said Allen Hoffman, Superintendent at Comfrey Public Schools. Schools in southwest Minnesota have been sharing staff, technology, business office resources, and administrative services for more than 35 years. This initiative includes collaborating with regional colleges and universities to better align schedules and programs to meet the needs of students of both institutions, and supports the Governor's Seamless (K-16) Initiative.

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Executive Director Report

By Cliff Carmody, Executive Director

Partnership. Innovation. Leadership. Service. The tag-line of our agency includes these four adjectives – four words that define the effort put forth by a group of superintendents interested in doing something different! The effort we now call the FLY (flexible learning year) initiative is a focused, innovative, and collaborative approach by a group of schools intent on seeing if they can do something different to enhance student achievement.

Nearly two years ago, a group of innovative thinkers began discussions on how we could be more collaborative, create greater innovation, share more services and collectively improve the way instruction is delivered in southwest Minnesota. Those discussions led to the first flexible learning year application that was submitted to the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) in the spring of 2009. Thirteen schools, looking for an innovative approach, were denied the opportunity when the first application was turned down.

Frustration, anger and disappointment were met by a renewed enthusiasm when Commissioner Alice Seagren encouraged a representative group of superintendents to apply again! The Commissioner understood the frustration and anger, but also communicated her support for the concept and challenged the school leaders to re-think the application and find a way to submit a revised proposal for consideration.

With a renewed and rejuvenated spirit, 28 schools began the process of developing a new proposal for deliberation under the flexible learning year program. A laser like focus on improving student achievement, with a strong emphasis on high quality, relevant staff development, led to the second FLY application being delivered to Commissioner Seagren's desk this winter. Prior to the proposal being sent to MDE, local school boards met with their local communities to debate the merits of the new proposal. At the end of the day, 25 of the 28 school districts moved ahead with the proposal.

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Cliff Carmody

BOLD Students Visit Spanish Immersion School in Moorhead

Submitted by BOLD Schools

On Friday March 12th, Spanish 3 students from BOLD visited the Ellen Hopkins Spanish Immersion School in Moorhead, Minnesota. The High School juniors spent the day with immersion students in the 4th and 5th grade classroom of Sra. Buchholz. During the visit the students shared "libritos de Harry Potter" books they had made after reading the first Harry Potter book all in Spanish in the third year Spanish classroom at BOLD with their teacher Sra. Kuznia. The students arrived at 8 in the morning in time to witness all of the 4th and 5th grade students doing normal classroom activities like picking their lunch, ordering their milk for the day, in the target language of Spanish.

The High School students participated in teaching the reading and math classes, all in Spanish, to the immersion students. As the students have attended the immersion program for the past 3 or 4 years, the third year Spanish students were very impressed with fluency and comprehension at just 11 years of age.



RTR Participates in RtI Program

By Pam Bush, Principal, RTR High School

The RTR school district has recently become a part of a nationwide K-12 initiative designed to help all students reach their potential. This program is called RTI (response-to-intervention) and is an educational initiative that begins with school wide assessment to determine educational needs of all students specifically in areas of reading, writing and math. Once the data is collected, the RTI instructors are then able to determine the needs of each student and decide if an intervention is necessary as well as monitor their progress throughout the school year. The interventions can be academic or behavioral challenges.

RTI instructor's responsibilities also include:

- reinforcing the educational needs of all students
- working with students in a one-on-one environment
- providing staff with additional support

RTI is a growing initiative nationwide with 44% of school districts involved in 2007, 60% in 2008 and 71% in 2009. The RTR district currently has four RTI Instructors for the 2009-2010 school year: Patty Sas and Britney Latzig at the elementary school, Anna Bantari at the middle school, and Tim Ramler at the high school.



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WWG Preschool Teams up with Head Start

By Paul Olson, Principal, Westbrook/Walnut Grove Public Schools

Westbrook Walnut Grove and Western Community Action have teamed up over the past three years to create an outstanding preschool and Headstart program. The results from shared services have been beneficial on both sides.

We are in the second year of our all-day preschool/Headstart program here at WWG called "Little Chargers." Preschoolers ride to and from the school on our regular bus routes in the mornings and afternoons. With no more half days, we do not have to worry about transportation at noontime. All preschoolers eat breakfast and dinner at school in the family style eating/procedures set forth by the Headstart program.

Our preschool program follows the Headstart program's curriculum with supplements added that have been

agreed upon by both Western Community Action and the WWG School District.

Gail Goltz and Tracy Gundermann of Western Community Action and Kathy Filter of WWG have been very



instrumental in making this shared program work. Tracy works with Kathy at the Walnut Grove School on M/T/TH each week, which are our preschool/Headstart school days. We also have a W/F class for students who do not qualify for the Headstart program. Each day is filled with many activities and, yes, even the quick afternoon nap. The preschool/Headstart staff

works hard to make sure all of our students are ready each year to start Kindergarten. The WWG School Board is also a firm believer that money spent at an early age is money well spent.

WWG Family Days & Jump Rope for Heart

By Paul Olson, Principal, Westbrook/Walnut Grove Public Schools

Mrs. Joan Zieske is a Physical Education teacher at the Westbrook Walnut Grove Elementary School. She has always been a firm believer in staying fit. She promotes good health through eating right and staying active. She has also been very active in the Jump Rope for Heart program. Each year in February she creates quite a frenzy at the WWG school district. She gets our students to go out and raise money for the American Heart Association. What makes this program so interesting is how Mrs. Zieske gets everyone involved thru our Family Day program.

WWG divides ours K-6th grade students into "families:" one sixth grader, one fifth grader, one fourth, and on down through Kindergarten. Our sixth graders go around



the building gathering each grade member of their family. We then meet in the gym for further instructions.

Our Family Day activities usually rotate around our lunch periods so students are not missing classroom work. Mrs. Zieske has our "families" participate in three 25-minute periods. One period is used to promote community involvement, one to promote healthy living, and one is for lunch. This time our activities included tasting fruits and vegetables from around the world with trivia questions. The "families" also walk the hallways for a heart healthy activity, while others jumped rope.

The culminating activity included Mrs. Zieske announcing top fundraisers and the class that wins a sleepover.

Everyone who raised money, regardless of the amount, got a chance to come forward and pick a prize. Throughout the year Mrs. Zieske receives donations from businesses from all over southwestern Minnesota.

The Jump Rope for Heart program means even more to Mrs. Zieske and our faculty because just over a year ago Joan suffered a mild heart attack. With proper rest and time away from school, Mrs. Zieske is back promoting good health through proper nutrition and exercise.

Select Account-Faster, Easier & Paperless

By Dan Weir, Risk Management Consultant

Select Account is rolling out faster, easier and paperless Flex (FSA), VEBA, and HSA accounts to all school districts and employees. Select Account has been recommended as the carrier for the next three years with a guarantee in pricing for services through 2013. Competitive pricing includes base pricing and free stacking of FSA, VEBA and HSA with the most popular Premium Saver plan at a monthly cost of \$1.83 per participant per month. New options include pay the provider for an additional charge of \$.50 per participant per month if enrolled in automatic crossover and debit cards with no additional charge.

An important new change, all employees will be automatically enrolled in crossover at renewal July 1, 2010. Automatic crossover is an electronic claims reimbursement feature that speeds up the reimbursement process as BCBS submits medical claims directly to Select Account.

Employees may want to opt out of crossover if they:

- Have dual coverage or coverage with their spouse
- Are savers and want funds to accumulate without having claims deducted from their accounts

Account holders who are not on crossover may request a debit card to pay their medical expenses at no additional charge. Employees who have already opted out of crossover will not need to opt out again and verification forms will be sent to employees to show their status.

Select Account provides a number of online capabilities. They include: checking account balances, reviewing claims and contribution history, making profile changes for crossover or direct deposit and accessing forms and tools for eligible expense lists and claims.

Please contact your group leader; your BCBS account manager, local agent, or Select Account at 1-800-859-2144, www.selectaccount.com for more information.

The SW/WC SC Insurance Pool Advantage

By Doug Deragisch, Director of Risk Management

15 Core Benefits For Members

1. Low fixed-fee administrative costs (5 to 6% versus 8 to 11%)
2. Competitive stop-loss reinsurance rates (20% below commercial rates)
3. Highly-competitive Flex, HSA and VEBA account administration fees (nearly 50% below commercial rates)
4. Traditional, consumer-directed and tiered network plan options, including innovative plan designs and group "best practices"
5. Extensive local and national provider networks and Centers of Excellence
6. Regional pooling of high cases to help smooth rate volatility
7. Pool reserves, including RSR (Rate Stabilization Reserves) and IBNR (Incurred but not Reported)
8. Incentives for CDHPs and worksite wellness activities (Consumer Directed Health Plan)
9. Interactive Client Reporting (online utilization data for group leaders)
10. Compliance with State of Minnesota RFP requirements
11. Independent actuarial and audit review, regional and statewide
12. Membership elected regional advisory committee
13. Joint Powers Authority and a dedicated insurance pool enterprise fund to help ensure accountability
14. Voluntary participation with no long-term risks or obligations beyond premiums paid
15. Local control...Regional efficiencies...Statewide purchasing power

Where Do I Start With My Student Who Has Low Vision?

By Betty Jean Kauffman, Regional Vision Consultant

When a school nurse decided to test the acuity of my daughter's prosthetic eye "just in case," my own eyes were opened. There is not much understanding among school staff about blindness and low vision. The current National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairment is a document which cuts through the fog and lays out the standards by which these students must receive their Fair and Appropriate Public Education. The following is a quick vocabulary lesson about essential skills which every IEP needs to address:

Core Curriculum: the basic reading, 'riting, 'rithmetic, etc., required of every student.

Expanded Curriculum: the knowledge and skills needed by students who are vision impaired to give them equal and independent access to a total education. Under this umbrella are the following categories.

Compensatory Skills: How is she going to learn biology if she can't see the print or diagrams?

Orientation and Mobility: How can he find his way to the locker room, let alone the bus?

Social Skills: Why doesn't she use posture and facial expressions that look normal?

FLY Application *(Continued from page 1)*

Opponents of the flexible learning year cite issues with the initiative; including, taking away from late August tourism, State Fair participation, and a shortened summer for their student workforce.

While school leaders understand these concerns, they believe student achievement should be the highest priority for local school communities. "We challenge and encourage the Minnesota State Legislature to acknowledge student achievement as the number one priority in the same way that our local school boards have recognized this commitment," comments Bill Strom, Superintendent of Mountain Lake Public Schools.

The core values supporting this initiative are collaboration, innovation and leadership. "We believe that schools who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they need to be quicker and more effectively because they are traveling on the strength of one another," concludes Rick Ellingworth, Superintendent of Redwood Area Schools.

Independent Living Skills: How can he know how much to pour into his glass without sticking a finger in to test it?

Recreation and Leisure Skills: Playing cards? Balls? Making music?

Career Education: How will she be able to support her parents in their old age?!

Assistive Technology: How can she enjoy email or do an internet research project?

Visual Efficiency Skills: Can a monocular make the white board accessible?

One of the many websites that address these issues for teachers and parents is www.tsbvi.edu - Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Nominate Your CAE-Academic All Star

By Joyce Swenson, Center for Academic Excellence

It is time to nominate your students as Academic-All Stars! All Minnesota K-12 teachers, principals and academic challenge coordinators are invited to designate students as "Academic All-Stars," to be eligible to attend the 2010 Gathering of Champions.

Visit www.mncae.org-click on Gathering of Champions to nominate your students! The nomination deadline is June 30.

We recommend you consider the top 2-5% of your students from the following three categories. Students who:

- are consistent top academic performers
- have shown significant improvement in achievement or have overcome barriers to academic achievement
- are local, regional or state champions in a MN Academic League Council endorsed event. The names of endorsed programs are found in the Reach for the Stars catalogue, which is available online at www.mncae.org - click on "Reach for the Stars."

- After you submit your nomination, you will see a link for a "letter of notification." Please print this letter of notification and distribute it to the students you have nominated. This is the student's invitation to the Gathering of Champions, and provides details about the event. CAE will not be contacting the nominees. This letter is your opportunity to recognize your students. They must register themselves to attend the ceremony of their choice. For more information contact the CAE Office at: cae@mncae.org or 507-389-2461.

New Tech Tools Are Not Distractions, But Great Resources at BBE

By Janelle Field, 5th Grade Teacher, Belgrade-Brooten-Elrosa Elementary School

This year, in my 5th grade classroom we have added 2 new technology tools. We all are excited to be integrating the Smart Response System and the DC265 document imaging camera!

We have found the Smart Response Systems to be a great way to take surveys and to also get immediate responses! I have found these systems to be a wonderful assessment tool to find out immediately how the students are doing on the material that is being covered. It has been a wonderful extra "tool" to know whether to move forward on specific objectives or if review is needed. By just a click of a button, I can determine immediately how each learner is doing.

In addition, the Lumens "Ladibug" DC265 document imaging camera has been a wonderful addition to our classroom as another way to take lessons to the next level to engage all learners. The DC265 imaging camera has a vast amount of capabilities by being able to share crisp images and text with the use of the camera. It has been a great benefit to have during the use of science lessons, when live specimens are too small to see with the naked eye, or when modeling an experiment to the entire classroom. I have also found that every book now can become a big book. Students can easily view text and pictures from books and now can even read along as it is displayed up on the Smart Board! This camera is also used often for scanning and capturing a variety of resources and is used to display 3-d objects and a variety of math manipulatives. Anything that can be put under the camera can now become an interactive teaching tool. The students in my classroom along with myself are working with the camera to be able to record in a variety of subject areas! The students love to see themselves actively learning and teaching their classmates too.



The integration of these two technology tools has been a wonderful experience to reach the 21st century learners! These are amazing tools for students to work in a more interactive classroom.



"Word of the Day" Boosts Vocabulary in Comfrey

By Michelle Kastner, Comfrey Public Schools

In order to add fun to our winter days, as well as to help develop student vocabulary, we have instituted a "Word of the Day" at Comfrey Public High School. Participating teachers give a small reward to students that use this word correctly in every day classroom conversation. Anything from a tootsie roll to an extra credit point could be awarded. For example, the word hiatus was posted after several missed and shortened school days, and one student said, "I can't believe I'm saying this, but I hope we don't have another unscheduled hiatus this week!" The print out of the word, a short definition, and a sample sentence is posted around the school on various announcement bulletin boards. Most students walk past these bulletin boards each day on their way to the cafeteria, and office, so they usually stop to take a look. The sample sentences are sometimes mildly humorous. While we have only been doing this for one quarter, we are hoping it will help students that are studying for their ACT and SAT tests. We anticipate adding more science and social studies related terms in the near future.

Round Lake Student Tessellation Wins 3rd Place

Submitted by Becky Strandberg, Round Lake/Brewster School District

This past year, Round Lake/Brewster students in Mary Miller's math class created tessellation posters. A "tessellation" is created when a shape is repeated over and over without any gaps or overlaps. Mathematics comes into play when students study different forms of translations that can be used to make the tessellation...rotations, reflections, transformations...or combinations of these. There are only three types of regular polygons that will tessellate...squares, triangles and hexagons...however tessellations can be made of irregular shapes as long as the shapes fit together like puzzle pieces.



Students all started with a rectangular index card. In order to make their shapes, they would cut parts of the card away from one side and then re-tape them to the opposite side. By doing this they were creating a shape that would tessellate. From this point students used their creativity to decide how to make this shape look like "something".

M. C. Escher is an artist best known for his artwork using tessellations. A website devoted to his work (www.worldofescher.com) sponsors an online contest for student tessellation artwork. The posters made by RL-B students were entered into this contest...along with artwork from students worldwide. Out of the hundreds of posters submitted, Jasmine Radke and Emma Roos had their work chosen as finalists. From these finalists, Jasmine's poster of "Scooby Doo" was awarded third place.

\$100,000 Grant Funds Round Lake School Fitness Center

Submitted by Becky Strandberg, Round Lake/Brewster School District

A \$100,000 grant from Worthington Regional Health Care Foundation Inc. made possible the Round Lake Fitness Center without any outlay of funds from the school district.

Our Round Lake-Brewster Fitness Center held its open house on Monday, January 11th, and is now available for your fitness needs. Janet Haren, the Fitness Coordinator, encourages all of us to test out the new center. Mrs. Haren has a Health-Physical Education; Recreation and Sport degree, with an emphasis in Athletic Training. She is Certified as a Personal Trainer and a Strength and Conditioning Coach. Mrs. Haren also holds a Minnesota Education license.

The Fitness Center will be open year round for public use. It features brand new Life Fitness equipment. The main fitness center has a variety of weight and cardio machines, and a spinning bike room is located by the gymnasium. The Fitness Center features affordable membership rates, community locker rooms, a variety of fitness classes, and will be supervised at all times.



The POHI* Guy Column

By Darwin Dyce, P/HD & TBI Specialist

*POHI (an older acronym). The recent is P/HD which has reason but no rhyme.

Dear POHI Guy,

When I was a child my bachelor Uncle Lars would always come to our house and show slide pictures from his vacation. All of us kids would roll our eyes and try to find somewhere else to be, but no... mom and dad insisted we be polite and watch the latest "show." I am now about the same age Uncle Lars was during his slide show phase and find myself wanting to do the same thing, but using video instead. What is happening to me?

Lars's Legacy

Dear Legacy,

Trust me this film thing is a very natural and healthy past time, although, you should be careful not to force family to watch anymore than three times per year.



Since you brought up the topic of film, did you know many educators have found film to be a very useful teaching tool? Last year I came across an easy to use video camera called the Flip Camera. This pocket sized camera comes with a USB connection to load directly into your computer (MAC or PC). Students and even we teachers, are quick to learn simple editing techniques using the video editing program that is on your computer or the FlipShare software that comes with the camera.

As a consultant this tool has been very useful. Recently a student and member of his motor team, demonstrated proper transfer techniques in and out of a wheelchair. Not only was it motivating for the student, it helped everyone involved use the same techniques. I've also seen examples of students making short "how to" movies to demonstrate a skill they have learned (ex. cooking demonstrations, building projects, interviews). There are many ways to enhance learning once a little creativity "flips out" of the box.

The POHI Guy

This column was submitted by Darwin Dyce, Physical and Health Disability Consultant. To contact Darwin call 507-537-2287 or e-mail: Darwin.Dyce@swsc.org



Above, Greg of Ivanhoe Middle School is editing his cooking video.



Above, Robert of Minneota High School is demonstrating his transfer technique.

Executive Report *(Continued from page 2)*

Well, the Commissioner and her staff have approved the flexible learning year proposal! This is exciting news for education in our region. We now have an opportunity to partner, collaborate, innovate, and demonstrate a "sharing" of services like none other!

Our agency has been fortunate to be a part of this outstanding leadership process. We can be proud of our efforts, including the efforts of Shelly Maes who was an instrumental part of the leadership to make this happen! This initiative defines "shared services," allows for significant job-embedded staff development and continues the partnership we have with our school district members. I look forward to the challenge of implementing the concepts defined in this project.

From the Desk of the Director of Teaching & Learning Services

By Bob Braun, Director of Teaching and Learning Services

MN Department of Education PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions and Support) Project has accepted district applications for the 2010-2011 school year Cohort 6.

In the 2009-2010 school year, the MN Department of Education expanded its PBIS initiative to have a more regional focus. Three regional grants were funded to cover the southern regional implementation area, the metro regional implementation area and the northern regional implementation area. The goal of the initiative is to build regional capacity to serve more districts implementing PBIS. Applications were due to the MN Department of Education on March 15, 2010. This year 97 applications were submitted. That is approximately a 50% increase over 2009-2010. Applications were reviewed on March 17th and districts whose applications were approved were notified soon after that.

In order for a district to have its application approved, three components must have been identified:

1. 80% buy in from district staff
2. A behavioral data system in place that tracks average referrals per month, infraction/description of behavior, location, time and student
3. Active participation by administrators on the district PBIS leadership team

PBIS is a research based system that will assist districts in school accountability, safe schools, and student achievement. PBIS is a school wide system to improve school climate and positive behavior intervention and supports. PBIS has been shown to create a school climate which is conducive to student learning and student achievement.

If you have any questions, please contact Bob Braun at 507-537-2252 or bob.braun@swsc.org.

Lester Prairie High School Awarded 3M Grant

By Amy Smith, Math Teacher, Lester Prairie Public School

Recently, Mrs. Amy Smith, math teacher at Lester Prairie High School was awarded a \$4500 grant from 3M Corporation. This money was requested to purchase 31 graphing calculators to use in math classes at the high school.

The calculators will be used mainly in the Algebra 1 classes to develop students understanding of linear equations and characteristics of their graphs. After the student learns how to graph equations using a pencil and graph paper, they will be able to use the calculators during various graphing activities. The calculator allows them to visually see the graphs and their characteristics like shape, intersecting points, minimums, and maximums, etc. and then quickly see how changes to the equations affect the characteristics.

The calculators have many other uses for higher-level math classes like Algebra 2 and Pre-Calculus. The calculator knowledge students gain in Algebra 1 will help them in future math classes. Mrs. Smith will also introduce the calculators in the PreAlgebra classes so student will be better prepared and comfortable using them when they start Algebra 1 topics.

Having enough calculators for all students makes doing

the classroom activities possible. Mrs. Smith will be able to display her keystrokes on the screen, through emulator software, so that students can follow along with the activities.

A special thanks goes out to 3M Corporation for the grant and Jan Johnson of 3M Hutchinson for coordinating the grant process locally.



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Pipestone Arrows Yellow Ribbon Team

By Tricia Warner, School Social Worker

There are 39 students on the yellow ribbon team who meet weekly to organize and plan team activities. They have done some fun activities this year, including a puppet show called **Playing TO-GETHER is MORE Fun!** for preschool children. Everyone had a great time, and the preschoolers had a chance to meet the puppets and actors afterwards. The play was about puppet animals who were not getting along. They realized that it would be more fun to play together, but did not know what to do to accomplish this. With the help of Elmo, they realized they should say "sorry" to each other. Then, they had a lot more fun together.

Other team activities include providing support to students who have lost someone to suicide or who are considering it themselves, and working with students who have been bullies to become buddies and heroes instead (incentives were provided and staff were consulted on student behaviors). The Yellow Ribbon Team is open to all students who want to help others know that, "It's OK to Ask for Help." They also provide educational materials to staff, parents and students as needed. The Yellow Ribbon Team has raised over \$2,000 this year on fundraisers.



Cast and members of the yellow ribbon team.



Worthington Students Use I-Touch for Music

By Paul Besel, Principal, Prairie Elementary

Students in Mrs. Jeanette Jensen's music classes at Prairie Elementary School in Worthington, MN are getting the chance to learn what it is like to compose and learn music techniques using Apple I-Touches. Mrs. Jensen has downloaded many different applications for her students to use ranging from digital instruments to music applications. However, the newest concept she is excited to incorporate is the use of push-pin microphones and the I-Touches. Mrs. Jensen is working on having the student record themselves when they sing and then have the students listen to themselves using the ear buds. This will give the students the ability to hear how they sound and adjust their voices to sing in tune more of the time. This use of technology in small groups and at the individual level will help students feel more confident and become better singers.

I-Touches are also being piloted at the Kindergarten level and the 4th grade level. Teachers are uploading applications which reinforce and introduce new concepts to the students on an individual and small group basis.



Sustainability

By Dennis Drummond, Energy Service Group

Preparing for a Shifting Environmental Landscape

Environmental challenges such as rising greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions have become a growing concern for many in the United States, including lawmakers. Based on ongoing studies, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) last year, deemed GHG emissions to be a public health hazard and threat to the welfare of our country. In January, the EPA began requiring roughly 10,000 industrial and commercial facilities that emit more than 25,000 metric tons of GHG emissions per year to catalog and report emissions annually. And in addition to GHG emissions, the EPA also recently expanded the list of pollutants they actively monitor to include airborne lead and other compounds.

These actions are closely tied to current “cap & trade” legislation in Congress, which may lead to an open market system that enables organizations above a specific GHG emissions threshold to offset their environmental impact by purchasing carbon credits from organizations under the limit.

While these environmental regulations likely won’t impact school districts today, emissions guidelines could evolve to become more inclusive, requiring extensive benchmarking and annual reporting for a wider number of organizations. School districts might also eventually have opportunity as part of a cap & trade system, to sell carbon credits to large manufacturers and other organizations above the GHG emissions threshold — creating a new source of revenue.

With this shifting landscape, energy and environmental management steps taken today could mean good business sense for districts down the road. There are several things districts can do to prepare for these opportunities, while also positively impacting the bottom line right now.

Catalog emissions

Many districts express the commitment to change their energy policies and practices, but they’re not sure where to start. A key part of any environmental sustainability initiative is an inventory to establish your baseline carbon equivalent (ie. CO₂) footprint. With this data in hand, districts have the information to make educated, strategic decisions about reducing their environmental impact. It also creates

an accurate baseline for measuring the success of sustainability programs and identifying opportunities for greater energy efficiency.

Drive energy education and awareness

Many districts have launched energy education programs to help drive energy awareness and gain a better understanding of their energy use. These programs can help change behavior that will positively impact energy use, and often include implementing sustainability information systems that deliver access to real-time data, enable environmental program management, and provide interactive education for students and faculty. As a result, districts are better equipped to build awareness among key stakeholders and surrounding communities, and keep these audiences abreast of goals, progress and overall climate impact.

Make the right renewable technology choice

Finding the right green technology to cut emissions and help ease economic strains can be extremely difficult, especially when it comes to renewable energy. Each energy option — whether it’s solar, wind or biomass — can require extensive research to ensure long-term energy goals are achieved. Locating the technology with the most significant economic drivers often includes an analysis of location-specific variables such as fuel availability, energy prices, heating and cooling degree days, financial incentives and offsets, and financing structure.

For help navigating the road to energy efficiency and sustainability, please contact retired Superintendent, Dennis Drummond at ESG via phone at, 218-234-1646 or via e-mail @ dennis.drummond@1esg.com.



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2010 Day of Excellence

By Deecy Jesse, Administrative Assistant for Teaching and Learning Services

We’d like to express our appreciation to all who attended the 26th Annual Special Education “Day of Excellence” Conference – March 8, 2010. The Keynote Presentation: Handling Difficult People & Situations by Kit R. Welchlin from Welchlin Communication Strategies

Participant responses to “How will this assist you?”:

“In working more effectively in teams”

“The Tips & Tricks will help me lighten up when stressed”

“To help build relationships with difficult people”

“He gave practical ways to deal with all types of people & situations”

Congratulations To Bronze Medal Schools

By Cliff Carmody, Executive Director

Once again, I am reminded about the high quality education provided in southwest and west central Minnesota. U.S. News & World Report recently released its ‘Best High Schools’ report. This report analyzed academic and college-readiness performance data from more than 21,000 public high schools across the country to find the very best—and ranked them gold, silver and bronze.

We had six schools in our region on the bronze medal list:

-  Adrian Public School
-  Eden Valley/Watkins Public School
-  Lakeview Public Schools
-  Minneota Public Schools
-  Pipestone Area Public Schools
-  Tracy Area Public Schools



Our region is also home to a silver medal winner:

-  Red Rock Central Public Schools

Congratulations to the School Boards, Superintendents, and staff of these districts on achieving this honor!

The conference ended with a combination of 32 presenters, 10 vendors and service agencies; 35 breakout sessions; and over 150 participants. There were many wonderful comments concerning the Day of Excellence and the experiences that the attendees feel they received.

It was an excellent conference, with a fantastic attendance and lots of excitement.

We look forward to seeing each of you next year, tentatively scheduled for March 7, 2011.



2009 Finance Awards

By Shelly Maes, Manager of Member Services

Nine schools in southwest and west central Minnesota were recipients of a School Finance Award from the Minnesota Department of Education. The intent of the award is to continue to highlight the importance of compliance with the law as well as provide a method to motivate reporting units to strive to greater levels of compliance, sound accounting and training. It was simply a way to recognize good work and “post the model.”

-  ACGC Public Schools
-  Benson Public Schools
-  Cedar Mountain Public Schools
-  E.C.H.O. Charter School
-  Hutchinson Public Schools
-  Marshall Public Schools
-  Pipestone Public Schools
-  Willmar Public Schools
-  Windom Area Public Schools

The names of all 126 winning units are posted to the MDE website each year, and schools are given recognition at several events including those hosted by the Minnesota School Boards Association, the Minnesota Association of School Administrators, the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools and the Minnesota Association of School Business Officials.

Congratulations!

SW/WC SC's 4th Annual Technology Conference

By Josh Sumption, Manager of Information Technology

The staff of SW/WC Service Cooperative's Information Technology Department are just winding down from what turned out to be our most successful event yet! This year brought a number of changes to the format, but most importantly the location of the conference moving to The Centers at Southwest Minnesota State University. The change in location allowed us to stretch out a little bit and add more breakout sessions,



vendors, as well as a real dining area. Not only did the new location bring more room but it also enhanced the overall atmosphere of the conference.

With all of these changes we proudly hosted 50 concurrent breakout sessions this year covering everything from Technology Integration tactics, data management systems, technology leadership building, to legal aspects of technology. Teachers, School Administrators, Media Center Staff and Technology Coordinators and Directors alike found sessions of interest for them to attend. Attendance continues to grow for our conference with well over 200 attending the conference this year, including participants from all across

Minnesota as well as eastern South Dakota. Representatives from 27 companies filled the exhibit hall this year with new and innovative solutions on display for attendees and offered a plethora of exciting door prizes for conference attendees to register for.

Our Pre-Conference Workshops were also a great hit this year with over 40 partici-



pants taking an in-depth look at the topics that mean the most in technology today! Attorney Amice Bissionette led a room of participants through an extremely interactive discussion around the use of social networking tools in our schools and what we need to know in order to keep not only the students, but also our schools safe from the legal issues that can be a result of their use. All of this took place while across the hall a group of educational leaders learned how to use the power of data driven decision making tools available to their districts through our Cognos and Personalized Learning Plan offerings.

We are also happy to announce the dates for our 2011 Technology Conference. Mark your calendars for Thursday and Friday, March 10 and 11, 2011 for our 5th Annual Technology Conference. Plans are to stay at Southwest Minnesota State University and the scheming for next year's format and areas of focus are under way.

We hope to see you at our 5th Annual Technology Conference on March 10 and 11, 2011!



27th Annual School Business Staff Conference

By Darin Jensen, Director of Administrative Services

The 27th Annual School Business Staff Conference was held on Wednesday, March 10, 2010 at Southwest Minnesota State University. There were 140 school district business managers, bookkeepers, secretaries and superintendents in attendance. Breakout sessions were scheduled throughout the day covering a wide range of topics from



TRA, PERA, to SERVUS, MARSS, Cash Flow Management, GASB 45, UFARS and Tuition Updates. We had staff from the MN Department of Education, TRA, PERA as well as Springsted, JMC, TIES and PMA presenting the sessions. This was a great opportunity for the school staff to be able to visit with the presenters and ask questions about the many many requirements and reporting procedures they work with

everyday.

The day also included 12 vendor booths—this was another great opportunity for participants to visit with office supply/technology businesses as well as financial institutions.

Overall, those in attendance felt it was a great day and very informative.



SEPS Curriculum Process

By Mary Overlie, School Improvement Specialist

Sleepy Eye teachers are half way through their first year of rewriting their curriculum, K-12, from the bottom up. Using a version of the Backwards Design curriculum writing process, teachers have been in deep thought and practice, evaluating what their students need to know, how they want to go about finding out if they know it and documenting this framework for their classroom curriculum on a wiki. By the end of this year, this process will be complete for Math, Spanish, and music. These sections of the curriculum wiki will be unveiled for parents and the community. The process was recently reviewed in the Mankato Free Press, which highlighted the fact that Sleepy Eye is undertaking an intensely rigorous process with regard to overhauling the curriculum compared to schools in the region.

A cornerstone of this process is that the entire staff reached a working consensus that they want to collectively move toward using assessments that are active applications of what students have learned in a hands-on manner, collaborative, self-reflective, based on a differentiated types of assessments, relevant to student lives, and employ high-rigor. For example, in health class now, instead of taking a quiz about the 3 elements of health (physical, mental, social), students have to construct a personal hanging mobile that shows how they balance those aspects in their lives. In music, instead of taking a quiz to show they understand the notes on the staff, they might now be expected to write their own melodies to show what they know.

Upcoming Professional Development

To register for any of these workshops, please visit our website at www.swsc.org, click on Workshops, find the workshop you are interested in, and complete the registration information. If you have any questions about the registration process, please contact Dawn Christensen at dawn.christensen@swsc.org or 507-537-2278.

May 2010

5/3	AIMSweb Webinar, Marshall
5/4	Moodle 101, Marshall
5/5	Minnesota Rural Integration Association Meeting, Worthington
5/18	SMART Board Level 1 Training, Marshall

July 2010

7/13	SMART Board Level 1 Training, Marshall
7/20	SMART Board Level 2 Training, Marshall
7/28-8/9	Online (15 hours) Advanced Moodle

June 2010

6/1	SMART Board Level 1 Training, Marshall
6/10	Section 504 Training, Marshall
6/14	Learn 360, Marshall
6/15	PALS, Redwood Falls
6/16	PALS, Redwood Falls
6/17	SMART Board Level 2 Training, Marshall
6/21	Google Tools for Educators, Marshall
6/21-23	Summer Superintendent's Conference, Alexandria
6/22	Digital Storytelling, Marshall
6/23	CRIC Intercultural LEarning Intensive, Cedar Mountain, GFW, New Ulm, Sleepy Eye, Springfield, St. James,
6/24	Podcasting/Vodcasting, Marshall
6/28	Exploring the iPod Touch, Marshall
6/29	Using the iPod Touch to Improve Literacy, Marshall
6/30	The iPod Touch in the Elementary Classroom, Marshall

August 2010

8/2-3	Moodle 101, Marshall
8/2-3	LIPS Training, Marshall
8/4	Seeing Stars Training, Marshall
8/5	SMART Response System (Senteo) Training, Marshall
8/10	Paraprofessional Conference, Willmar
8/10	Learn 360, Marshall
8/11	Paraprofessional Conference, Pipestone
8/11	SMART Board Level 1 Training, Marshall
8/12	Exploring the iPod Touch, Marshall
8/17	Using the iPod Touch to Improve Literacy, Marshall
8/19	The iPod Touch in the Elementary Classroom, Marshall
8/23	Google Tools for Educators, Marshall
8/30	Podcasting/Vodcasting, Marshall
8/31	SMART Board Level 1 Training, Marshall