

Open House Held at Cosmos Elementary School

Nearly 100 people attended an open house held at the Cosmos Elementary School on June 18. The open house was hosted by ACGC Public Schools and SWWC Service Cooperative, and focused on how the partnership and collaboration between ACGC, SWWC and Representative Dean Urdahl resulted in \$5 million in the bonding bill to re-purpose the building.

Cliff Carmody, Executive Director at SWWC, welcomed the audience and thanked them for attending and their interest in the Cosmos school. The former elementary school is leased by SWWC for the Cosmos Learning Center, which is a Setting IV educational program serving students with autism, emotional and behavioral disorders, and other severe disabilities.

Nels Onstad, Superintendent at ACGC Schools, spoke about the importance of the Cosmos Learning Center not only for ACGC students, but also for students throughout the region. The partnership and collaboration needed to provide a facility for the program is something the district is proud of because it is virtually impossible for small districts to provide this level of service to students with unique needs.

Daron Korte from the Minnesota Department of Education stressed the importance and the value of having regional Setting IV programs to serve students with unique needs. Programs like the Cosmos Learning Center provide an option for districts and is a real asset to the region. He spoke of how competitive it is to get projects included in the bonding bill, and how few K-12 education programs get included. He said the work Representative Urdahl did was quite the accomplishment.

Bailey Rettmann from SWWC spoke briefly about how the Cosmos Learning Center began in the elementary school using only a couple classrooms alongside the ACGC elementary classes. Once the elementary moved out of the building, the program slowly took over all the rooms in the school and could now actually use more space. The staff are very excited about how this funding will help make the school a more appropriate and safe environment for students.

With that, he introduced Robyn Klinker, a parent whose son attends the Cosmos Learning Center. She talked about how their resident district worked hard to meet his needs, but the regular school setting was not the best environment for him. Knowing he needed a specialized learning environment, they toured the Cosmos Learning Center and learned about the services that could be provided for him. They were immediately impressed with the program and knew this was the best place for him. Three years later, they have seen many baby steps and celebrate all of them. She spoke about the communication and problem solving by the staff, and how they work to create a family environment within the school. She spoke on behalf of all parents and thanked Representative Urdahl for working hard to get this needed funding in place for the school.

The highlight of the open house was taking time to thank Representative Dean Urdahl for his role in getting the funding in place for the school. Urdahl was presented with a special thank you created by the students at the Cosmos Learning Center, as well as a signed photograph from the staff. In his comments, Urdahl spoke about how his vision as chair of the Capital Investment Committee focused on asset preservation across the state, i.e. buildings, water projects, and colleges and universities. After meeting with Carmody and Onstad about the re-purposing of a building located in his district, he knew he had to figure out a way to get it included in the bonding bill. State government needs to address the education needs of the people it serves - and he feels this is a very good example of how we can get that done.