



Testimonial for Legislative Committee

January 27, 2025

Subject: Support for Proposed Bill to Expand Allowable Uses of Student Support Personnel Aid

Dear Members of the Legislative Committee,

On behalf of Southwest West Central Service Cooperative (SWWC), I am writing to express our enthusiastic support for the proposed legislation to expand the allowable uses of student support personnel aid under Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 124D.901, subdivision 4. As a service cooperative dedicated to providing essential resources and support to rural school districts, we see this bill as a crucial step toward addressing the diverse and growing needs of rural Minnesota.

This legislation recognizes the critical role of student support personnel—school counselors, psychologists, social workers, nurses, and chemical dependency counselors—in fostering a safe, inclusive, and nurturing learning environment. By expanding the scope of allowable uses for this funding, the bill ensures that cooperatives have the flexibility to respond effectively to pressing challenges, including mental health crises, academic disparities, student health needs and other barriers to student success. The language being proposed is truly transformative and necessary. Without these proposed changes, these funds remain bound by limitations that are near impossible for us to work around in a meaningful, student-success driven manner.

The proposed changes offer the following key benefits:

1. **Retention and Stability:** Allowing funding to maintain positions created with one-time federal resources addresses a pressing concern. Without this provision, we risk losing invaluable staff members whose expertise has proven indispensable in supporting students post-pandemic. In addition, it is critical for retention and recruitment to be able to provide necessary and needed professional development to continue to keep our student support providers up-to-date and current on best practices to support the mental health and physical health of our students.
2. **Increased Service Hours:** Permitting funds to increase the hours of part-time student support personnel ensures that more students have consistent access to critical services, especially in rural and underserved areas.
3. **Support for Cooperative Units:** By ensuring cooperatives and intermediate districts can access and deploy these resources, this bill reinforces the importance of shared services in optimizing efficiency and equity across regions. Beyond salary and benefits, cooperative units in rural areas experience significant expenditures regarding transportation costs due

to our support in a large geographical region. The use of funds to minimize the expenses of these critical student support positions allows cooperatives to continue to focus on our students and their needs, versus navigating how to handle additional expenses that cannot be funded through these means.

As a service cooperative, we work closely with member districts to meet their operational and educational needs. We have witnessed firsthand how limitations on funding flexibility can hinder our ability to provide comprehensive support services. This legislation empowers cooperatives to make strategic, localized decisions that best serve their students and communities.

The effective date of fiscal year 2026 is well-timed, as it allows cooperatives to plan thoughtfully and sustainably for these enhanced services.

In conclusion, this bill represents an investment in the well-being and academic success of Minnesota's students. By passing this legislation, you affirm the state's commitment to fostering equitable opportunities and ensuring that every student has access to the support they need to thrive.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration of this critical proposal. Southwest West Central Service Cooperative urges you to approve this bill and pave the way for a brighter future for Minnesota's children.

Sincerely,
Dr. Amber Bruns, BCBA, LBA-MN
Clinical Director of Behavioral Health Services
Southwest West Central Service Cooperative
amber.bruns@swwc.org; (507)337-2946