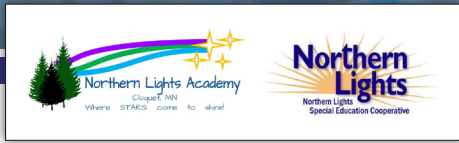


REIMAGINE THE POSSIBILITIES

A Comprehensive Facilities Proposal to Impact Special Education Students Served by Northern Lights Academy and Northern Lights Special Education Cooperative



WHAT IS NORTHERN LIGHTS ACADEMY (NLA)?

NLA is a cooperative public school district operated through a joint powers agreement between 12 member districts of Northern Lights Special Education Cooperative (NLSEC) that operates in two facilities – one in Cloquet and one in Carlton.

WHAT IS THE NORTHERN LIGHTS SPECIAL EDUCATION COOPERATIVE (NLSEC)?

The NLSEC has a total of 29 Special Education staff, including administrative, coordinators, low-incidence teachers, and therapists. These staff members provide various services that are too costly for member districts to provide on their own.

WHAT SERVICES DO WE PROVIDE?

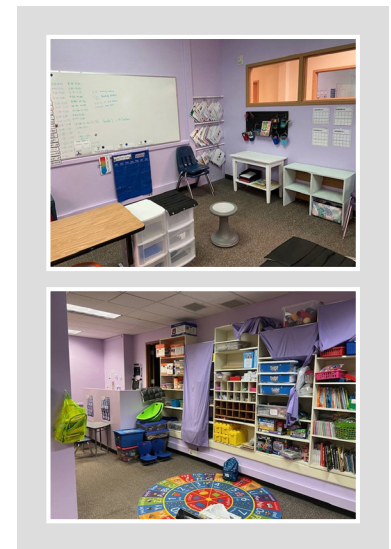
- **Setting 4:** Our two sites serve students in grades K-12 that require Setting 4 Special Education services. These students have severe-profound disability needs that are best served outside of a traditional K-12 school building. Students requiring these intensive services have exceeded their serving/resident district's capacity due to significant verbal or physical aggression and lagging skills. NLA's primary goal is to teach students the skills they need to successfully transition them back to their serving/resident district. The current capacity is approximately 50 students across both facilities.

WHAT SERVICES ARE STILL NEEDED?

- **Day Treatment:** Within our 12 districts, an additional option is needed for students who need Day Treatment services for those who require daily, intensive mental health services. Unfortunately, there is no space in either location to add these services.
- **Preschool**
- **Transition services for 18-22-year olds**

WHERE ARE WE PROVIDING THESE SERVICES?

- Approximately 4,300 square feet in the lower level of Cloquet Schools' Garfield Building provides two classrooms that serve students in grades K-5 with emotional and behavioral disorders and other disabilities.
- Approximately 4,200 square feet in Carlton High School provides two classrooms that serve students in grades 3-12 with emotional and behavioral disorders and two classrooms that serve students in grades 3-12 with autism.
- Approximately 5,400 square feet in the Esko Education Center Building provides offices and workspace for 29 NLSEC staff members.



**2,400
STUDENTS**

receive Special Education services across our member districts. NLA is available to any students who are unable to be successful in their serving/resident district. However, enrollment capacity is limited by our current facilities.

WHY IS THE NLA/NLSEC FACILITY PROJECT NECESSARY?

- NLA cannot offer Day Treatment services for our member districts due to a lack of space.
- In a typical school year, all grade levels are at maximum capacity and have an active wait list. There is not enough space to add classrooms to serve additional students.
- Providing these services in a single facility would be the most effective option to 1) increase collaboration among staff and 2) eliminate frequent travel between our current sites.
- Member districts express a desire for students to receive local assistance instead of traveling to other districts where most have wait lists up to one year.
- Member districts have other Setting 4 programming needs such as preschool, Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD), and transitional services for 18-22-year olds that cannot be provided due to a lack of space.
- Rural cooperative students with special needs deserve quality educational spaces. Beyond the classroom, there is a lack of greenspace, playgrounds, and additional spaces that best support students.
- Before NLA, the only learning option for students with needs was homeschool. Students are still learning at home due to a lack of space.

HOW HAS THE NLA REACHED THIS POINT?

Working cooperatively with our member districts to provide Special Education services is the most effective, efficient, and cost-effective way to provide quality programming.

Currently, the team is solutioning whether building a new facility or renovating an existing facility is the best option for NLA, NLSEC, and our member districts.

The NLA is working with an experienced project team to determine physical facility needs, identify potential funding options, and prioritize potential solutions to meet our most critical facility needs. Our team includes ICS (a K-12 planning and construction firm), Wold Architects and Engineers (a K-12 architecture and engineering firm), and Ehlers (a K-12 financial advisor).

In May 2021, the ICS team conducted listening sessions with all stakeholders to identify how our existing facility challenges impact education. Stakeholders included NLA students, parents, staff, administration, school board members, and the NLSEC staff.

OUR ASK: HELP FROM THE STATE

Our member school districts understand our need and are unified to turn our vision into a reality. However, there are very limited funding options to build cooperative facilities under current legislation.

HF 4282 and SF 3939 are asking for approximately \$6 million in state bonding assistance to pay for half of our project. This ultimately reduces the financial burden on our member districts.

We appreciate the state's consideration of our funding request that ultimately will positively impact students, staff, and our communities as a whole.



CONTACT INFORMATION

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Representatives and Senators for Northern Lights legislative funding:

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Sample message:

Representative _____//Senator _____:

My name is _____ and I live in _____. I want to thank you for supporting House File [4282](#) (or, if writing a Senator, Senate File 3933), providing capital investment funding for the Northern Lights Academy and the Special Education Cooperative.

Northern Lights is a cooperative public school district operated through a Joint Powers Agreement between 12 member school districts in northeast Minnesota, serving students in Aitkin, Carlton, Lake, Pine and St. Louis Counties who have the highest needs.

Northern Lights provides a Special Education Setting 4 program– special education services which intensively teach students the social, emotional and behavior skills they need in order for them to successfully transition back to their home districts.

Northern Lights Academy needs to provide day treatment services for students, but is unable to do so at this time because they do not have enough space to add more programming options. We have students on wait lists, sometimes for up to a year, for day treatment in Duluth. A Day Treatment program provides intensive mental health services delivered on a daily basis. Each school day is 3 hours of mental health treatment plus educational services in core subjects for the rest of the day. When this intensive service is delayed for a student needing it, the student often has deteriorating mental health and this can result in out of home placement.

Our rural cooperative students with extremely high special needs deserve the same quality educational spaces as students in the metro area of Minnesota with the same needs. We need the state's help to do this as our member district's cannot afford it on their own.

Right now, space is leased in two buildings 5 miles apart which is inefficient and still does not have enough classroom and breakout space in order to serve all the students needing this level of support. The students know they get second hand options for school despite the efforts of the staff to make it their own. They have no green space or playground of their own (both sites have to walk at least a block to get to playground space) and know they are learning inequitable facilities. One student said it "doesn't have stuff like other schools."

This program changes lives. Before Northern Lights, students with high behavior needs in our districts had to learn at home for safety. Due to space limitations, there are still students learning at home because there is no space to add more classrooms to serve them.

Your support of the bonding request from Northern Lights can help us change lives. Thank you for your support and please make sure this request is funded in the 2024 Bonding Bill.

Sincerely,