



*Southern Plains  
Education Cooperative*

# Southern Plains Education Cooperative Facilities

*Efficiently Creating  
Effective Education*

## **Southern Plains Board:**

- Jesse Haugh, Blue Earth Area \*
- Julie Laue, Fairmont Area
- Bryan Nowicki, GHEC \*
- Wendi Russenberger, Martin County West \*
- Mike Pfeil, Truman
- Mike Schrader, United South Central

\* Indicates Facilities Committee Member

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**Purpose:** To provide information to Southern Plains member districts about the need for facilities and the proposed recommendation for facilities.

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**Facility Needs:** Southern Plains is in need of a long-term solution for a facility for the alternative education programs provided by Southern Plains. Students from all six of the member districts attend these programs based on referrals from the member districts. These programs include:

*Area Learning Center:* The Area Learning Center provides services to students in grades 9-12 at-risk of dropping out of high school.

*Positive Approach to Learning (PALS):* The PALS program is a program for special education students in grades K-12 that have autism or similar characteristics. The students need a highly structured environment with significant support for functioning within the school environment and within their home.

*Bridges:* The Bridges program is for special education students in grades K-12 with social and emotional deficits that significantly impact their learning or the learning of others. Students are taught skills through mental health professionals and specially trained staff in order to effectively manage their behavior in order to return to their enrolled district.

*Practical Assessment Exploration System (PAES):* The PAES lab is for special education students in grades 9-12 currently attending one of our member districts. Students come for a portion of a school day for one semester. The PAES lab is a simulated work place where students are exposed to a comprehensive array of tasks from five different areas of work employment:

- Business/Marketing
- Consumer/Service
- Construction/Industrial
- Processing/Production
- Computer/Technology

## History

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**Locations:** The Southern Plains programs were historically spread throughout any available space within school buildings across the member districts.

**Facilities Study:** In December of 2014 the Southern Plains Education Cooperative Board commissioned a study from Springsted, Inc. The study found that although the Southern Plains organization was a strong organization both from a personnel standpoint as well as a financial standpoint. However, significant concerns were found related to the current facilities:

- There was an immediate need for more space.
- They found that the programs had significant operational inefficiencies due to multiple sites.
- Physical safety was a concern for students and staff.
- Each site had significant deferred maintenance needs.
- Inadequate staff and student supervision.
- Buildings did not meet codes.
- Students were educated in conditions not conducive to their unique needs creating safety issues.

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“...its functionality is poor and does not meet today’s special learning program standards”

“little or no provisions for the clientele served”

“limited and crowded”

“spaces would be rated as adequate but with significant limitations”

*Comments from 2014 Springsted Study*

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**Move to Winnebago:** In the spring of 2015 all of the programs were moved into the Winnebago School Building which had recently been closed by the Blue Earth Area School District. At that time, it was very clear by all parties that this was a temporary solution. The Blue Earth Area District acknowledged that although the Winnebago building had been maintained to provide an adequate learning environment, there were significant deferred maintenance concerns.

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*As a result of being able to be in one site, I am able to work with staff and parents. I am able to build relationships with the parents and convey to them what is happening in the school environment, and the parents have a greater degree of trust that their child’s specialized needs are being met. I am also able to move staff around in order to best meet all student needs regardless of staff absences.*

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*- Stephanie Schmitz, Alternative Programs Administrator*

## Status at Winnebago

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**Immediate Concerns:** There are approximately \$5 million in deferred maintenance that will need to be addressed, but many of these need to be addressed in the very near future. At the present time the custodial staff are only able to put temporary fixes on issues. The following are the most immediate needs:

- **Heating and Ventilation:** The heating plant is outdated and needs significant refurbishing. The most effective method would be to install an entirely new ventilation system. One of the air handlers in the gymnasium has a coil that needs to be replaced. The only way to do this is a hole through the roof. The current heating system is unable to maintain steady heat throughout the building. There are days that the school building has been below 60 degrees. HVAC would be the most efficient way to address this. The cost is about \$3 million.

The costs to do repairs at this point have come out of the Southern Plains fund balance; however, that fund balance has depleted. The future costs will need to be billed to the member districts. This will need to come from the general fund.

line. This is causing sewage backup in a classroom which requires close maintenance by custodial staff and regular visits by Jetter Clean. A new line is \$10,000.

- **Electrical:** There are some areas of the building blowing fuses regularly. This is due to increased technology requiring greater electrical needs. The fuses need to be replaced with breaker panels. The cost is \$16,000; although this does not address the larger fuse panels or the issues with lack of electrical outlets.

- **Tuck Pointing:** Although there are no immediate issues, the tuck pointing does need to be addressed or moisture will leak in and cause mold. \$100,000.

- **Windows:** The windows are in very poor condition. As a result, there are several windows that allow snow to enter the building. The windows are also not energy efficient. The cost is about \$150,000.

- **Sanitary System:** There is backup in a

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*“Every aspect of the building has issues.”*

*Al Gieser, Blue Earth Area Head Custodian*

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- Roofing: The roofs are 25-30 years old, which is the maximum life expectancy. The custodians are repairing to the best of their ability. New roofs would be about \$300,000.
- Doors: Many of the doors are deteriorating and not energy efficient. The minimal cost would be \$10,000 to address immediate needs.
- Lower Level Flooding: The lower level of the building has had flooding issues since the school districts consolidated due to being below grade. The city would need to tile the city owned ball diamond.

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- *Several days this year the classrooms were below 60 degrees*
  - *Staff often wear gloves and coats when completing paperwork to stay warm*
  - *Students wrap in blankets.*
  - *There is flooding in one hallway when there is heavy precipitation.*
  - *One parent complained why her son needed to be educated in an ice box.*
  - *Several staff and students have had injuries or surgeries that limited stair use. They had to climb up and down stairs on their back side.*
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- Safety: There are no video cameras within the building; the entrance has minimal security, the layout of the building is not conducive to monitoring students, and there is no elevator to access the second floor.

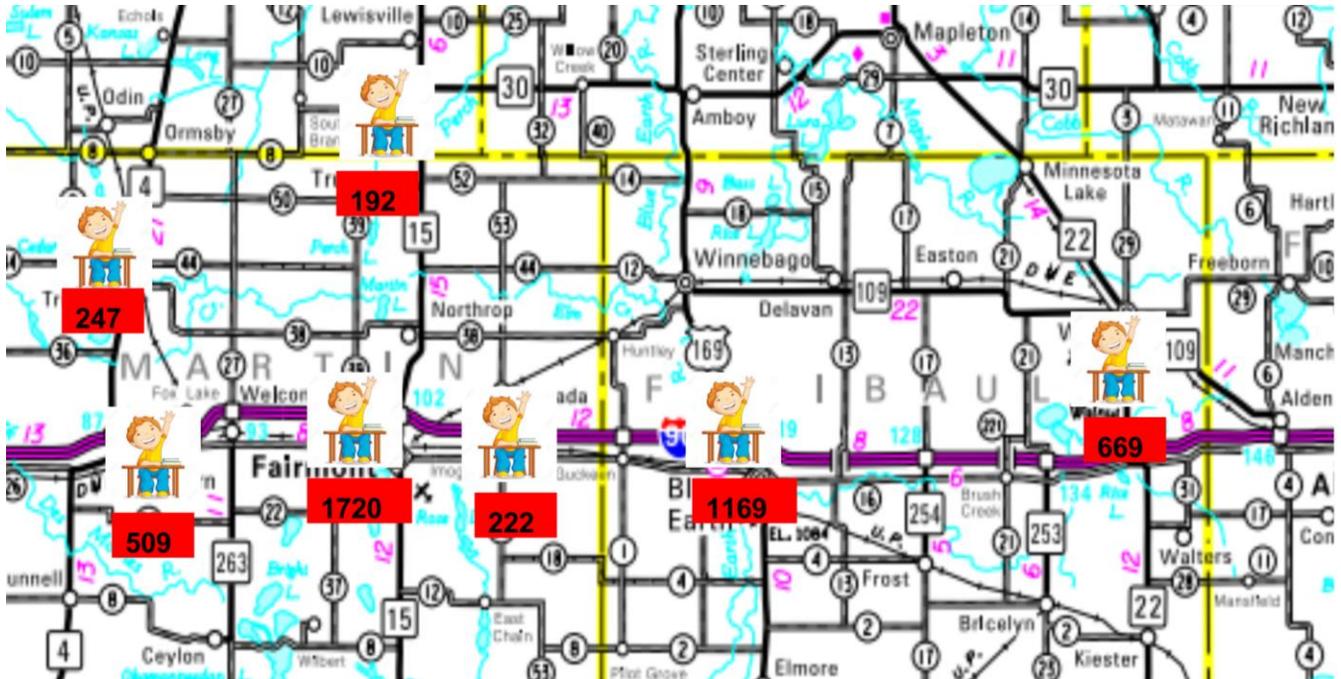
**Location concerns:** The Winnebago facility and location were acknowledged to be a short-term solution. However, there have been some concerns related to the location in Winnebago.

- Hiring has been very difficult;
- It is difficult to transition students back to their enrolled district;
- Transportation has been difficult and resulted in increased costs;
- There is a lack of opportunities to incorporate students in the community;
- It is a greater distance to emergency support;
- It is difficult to have other agencies involved in education programs for students; and
- There is limited to no access to Career and Technical Education courses.

Although Blue Earth is generally centrally located for the cooperative, Fairmont is centrally located to where students are serviced throughout the cooperative.

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Recently local media reported that it would cost \$5 million to renovate the Winnebago building. This appears to be data provided when Blue Earth Area closed the building 3 years ago. That was data gathered more than 5 years ago and only addressed immediate deferred maintenance issues in Winnebago. It did not address any of the unique needs of Southern Plains Alternative Programs.



## Options Considered

**Facilities Study:** Springsted, Inc. completed a facilities study of the Southern Plains programs. They made several recommendations including finding one site for all programs that met the needs of the setting 4 students. The study found that we needed to address the deferred maintenance issues. A key recommendation was that the facilities should be located in a centrally located, population center within the cooperative.

During the study, a representative from Kraus-Anderson visited all of the Southern Plains programs and interviewed staff from member districts as well as staff within the programs. He also examined several buildings that were available to determine feasibility of each site.

**Available Options Considered:** Over the past five (5) years Director Mittelstadt looked at multiple locations. She thoroughly examined possibilities for twelve different buildings throughout the cooperative and the near vicinity. All possibilities that were brought forward were considered.

**Three Final Options:** After examining all options, only three feasible options were considered.

1. Renovating Lincoln without additions: However, the costs would be higher due to not getting all programs in one building.
2. Renovating Lincoln with additions: The most economical.
3. Building a New Building: Eliminated due to higher costs

## Recommendation

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**Facilities Committee:** A committee of board members examined possibilities. The most economical option that met the needs of all of the students serviced within the Southern Plains Alternative Programs is to purchase the Lincoln Building in Fairmont, Minnesota, renovate, and add onto the building.



**Renovation:** What kind of renovation is needed in the building?

- Site: Repair of parking lot
- Exterior Envelope; Repair of roof; masonry repair/tuck-pointing; and updating windows and doors that need repair
- Accessibility & ADA: elevator; stairs and ramps; accessible bathrooms
- Life Safety: fire sprinkler; fire alarm; entrance security
- Heating/Ventilation: ventilation to meet code; efficient heating plant
- Electrical: adequate power and technology/data access; efficient lighting
- Program Space Needs: remodel to accommodate program needs
- Surface: Repairs to tile, walls, etc. and “freshening up”

**Addition:** What needs to be added?

- Approximately four classrooms
- Additional space for the Southern Plains offices, itinerant staff, and the audiology booth.

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Students within the Alternative Programs need additional space to manage behaviors. Research indicates:

- *When territory around students increases, the students seem to feel less threatened.*
- *Creating personal space can be a means to reduce classroom anxiety.*

*Hood-Smith, N.E. & Luffingwell, R.J. (1983)*

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## Space Needs

There are approximately 80 full-time students. However, there are many unique needs between these students. As a result, there are greater needs than a traditional setting.

<b>Traditional Schools</b>	<b>Setting IV Programs</b>
Serve class sizes of 20-24	Maximum of 8 students per teacher. The law indicates we must adjust downward for increased variety of student needs, ages, and severity of disabilities.
Served 2 grades	Serves 13 grades
One teacher and potentially one paraprofessional per room.	All classrooms have multiple service providers
Some students need specialized services.	Nearly all of our students need specialized services.
Students may need a small amount of sensory regulation such as fidgets and occasional breaks.	Students need significant sensory including climbing, swings, balls, trampolines, special lighting, weights, enclosed spaces, etc.
Students fit within a traditional space	Students need space due to heightened anxiety and relational issues. Smaller spaces lead to safety issues.

The square footage is similar to other projects that have recently been completed by other Cooperatives/Ed Districts/Intermediates around the State of MN.

- Austin & Albert Lea recently “gutted” a building and built all new walls in a 21,023 square foot space for 40 students. This is 526 square feet per student.
- Goodhue County Ed District recently built a new building that is 68,000 square feet for 120 students at 566 square feet per student.
- Karner Blue was recently built at 72,115 square feet for 115 students at 627 square feet per student.
- We are proposing approximately 46,000 square feet for 80 students at 575 square feet per



student. The additional square footage is for Southern Plains offices, itinerant staff, audiology booth, and the PAES lab. Note that not all of the space within the Lincoln building is usable. The buildings above were specifically built for these programs or completely gutted. In the Lincoln building there are some features that have to be used “as is” which creates a greater need for space.

*“I often thought, they wouldn’t think of putting a classroom for physically challenged on the top floor of a building with no elevator. Why would they place a class for students with emotional problems without adequate crisis support rooms?”*

## Future Needs

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The following shows the trends in enrollment which demonstrates an ongoing and increased need for programs:

	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012
<b>ALC</b>	42	35	38	33	36	45	48
<b>Bridges</b>	38	42	21	20	13	13	10
<b>PALS</b>	5	6	7	9	9	9	9
<b>Pathways</b>	0	0	4	2	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>67</b>

An analysis was done of the early childhood students (ages birth-5) currently receiving services. It appears as though needs will continue to rise based on these numbers. 11 students were identified as strong potential referrals for referral by the third grade. These only include potential referrals to the Bridges and PALS programs. Approximately half of the students in the Bridges program actually received services in Early Childhood; the other students were later identified or moved into the area.

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## Cost of the Project

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The construction costs will be approximately \$10,526,390. These estimates were provided by Kraus-Anderson who completed the facilities study, visited all of the alternative programs, interviewed many stakeholders, and toured the Lincoln facility several times.

The Southern Plains offices will also move into the building reducing costs by \$41,000 per year.



Minnesota has laws that govern class sizes for these programs. Most of these classrooms have a limit of 8 students (some have a limit of 6) with requirements to adjust downward for needs.

MN Rule 3525.2340

## Funding the Project

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All of the member districts would be responsible to help fund the project. The costs would be allocated based on total student enrollment as well as how much each district uses the programs.

Districts are able to levy for this using lease levy dollars up to \$212 per pupil. Districts can also choose to pay for this from their general fund.

Estimated amounts per year are in this chart. The tax impact for residents is available from Sarah Mittelstadt at Southern Plains (see contact information on page 1).

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Blue Earth Area: \$189,554  
Fairmont Area: \$260,506  
GHEC: \$56,851  
Martin County West: \$94,061  
Truman: \$37,172  
United South Central: \$113,777

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The formula used to determine costs per district is: 70% based on enrollment in the district and 30% on usage of the facilities.

## Next Steps

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**February and March:** Information sharing with member district boards

**March:** Southern Plains Board of Directors will decide whether or not to make a resolution to approve going forward with this plan.

**April:** Member District Boards will approve the resolution.

**May and Forward:**

- Develop an agreement with a construction manager
- Go through the design process with stakeholder involvement
- Design documents for bidding
- Bids
- Contractor procurement
- If all goes in an “ideal” manner – the building would open in the fall of 2019.