

# 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)?

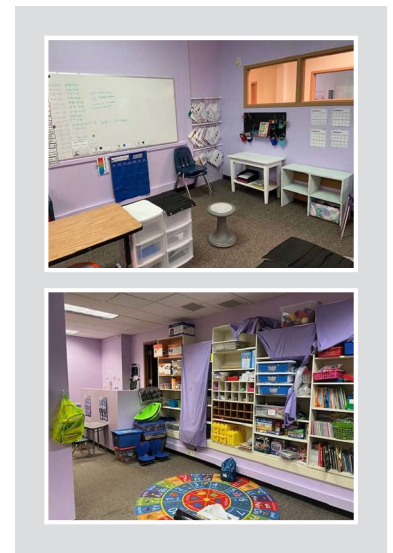
The NLSEC has a total of 29 Special Education staff, including administrative, coordinators, low-incidence teachers, and therapists. These staff members provide various services that are too costly for member districts to provide on their own.

## 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 568 and SF 113** 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

**Billie Jo Steen**

Executive Director

[bsteen@nlsec.org](mailto:bsteen@nlsec.org)

218.655.5018 Ext. 7006

**Barb Mackey**

Assistant Special Education Director

[bmackey@nlcoop.org](mailto:bmackey@nlcoop.org)

218.878.3064