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For Immediate Release

Collaborative Partnerships Result in Opportunities for Education

(Worthington, MN) A partnership between Minnesota West Community and Technical College, Southwest Minnesota State University, and Worthington District #518 was recently awarded two planning grants: one from the McKnight Foundation (\$75,000 planning grant) and one from the Southwest Initiative Foundation (\$15,000 gap grant) to develop opportunities for teacher education in the Worthington area. The goal is to assist current high school juniors and seniors by providing them with opportunities to prepare for and successfully complete college-level Education courses. The project target students in Worthington District #518, many of whom would be first generation college students.

The project is intended to meet the changing, challenging educational needs of the southwest Minnesota region, which has had a large influx of immigrants in the past 20 years. The children of these immigrants are now in the K-12 school system and ready to begin their post-secondary experiences, whether in the work place or at a college or university. Our goal is to successfully prepare more of these students to enter post-secondary education, and specifically, teacher preparation pathways. Many of these students want to pursue careers in education but feel limited by opportunity, finances, and geography. The intention of the project is to help remove those barriers and generate pathways to access.

The wide variety of cultures, ethnicities, and nationalities that will be served by this project are what make it innovative. The diversity in ethnicity and nationality dramatically increased in the region due to the influx of immigrants and refugees who sought job opportunities and to re-establish familial connections. This demographic shift is exceptionally prominent within Worthington Public School District 518; over 68% of the high school students are from one of over 40 cultures in the area, and over 78% in the elementary schools are students of color. Because the students of Worthington are very diverse, it is important that the teaching ranks of the district also become more diverse.

“Teaching is very rewarding: you have the opportunity to positively impact hundreds of young people throughout your career. Sharing more about what it means to be a teacher and how to pursue a career in education can help dispel myths and encourage those who are interested in teaching as a profession,” stated Dr. Kayla Westra, Dean of Institutional Effectiveness and Liberal Arts at Minnesota West. “We are excited to be a part of this partnership with Worthington District #518, Southwest Minnesota State University, the Southwest Initiative Foundation, and the McKnight Foundation. Projects like these are impossible to undertake without collaboration and vision for the region and the people who live here.”

Worthington High School Principal, Josh Noble remarks, “We are very honored to be a part of this opportunity. It is clear this partnership is serious about addressing the teacher shortage in our region. We are committed to creating a grow your own pathway for the next generation of educators. Cultivating an excitement around this profession, diversifying our teacher candidates, and building collaborative partnerships like this will have a far reaching positive impact on our region for years to come.”

“We have a critical shortage of teachers,” said SMSU Provost Dr. Dwight Watson. “We have an emerging immigrant and refugee population within the region, and this will bring opportunities to those students who may want to pursue education as a career goal. This program will also be more representative of teacher candidates that will look like the students in the Worthington classrooms.”