

SMART Friends and Colleagues – In spite of all of our best efforts, the legislation that would have allowed for continued MLRC funding did not pass. Although we had strong support from state leadership and our bill's sponsors, given the session's political climate and process for matching priorities to spending, the E-12 education dollars allocated were unfortunately just not enough to cover some quality programs such as SMART.

One immediate change I want you to be aware of (and also take advantage of) relates to the fees charged for Designated Learning Site staff attending our workshops. As you know, over the past eight years the state funding has underwritten a portion of DLS fees. Unfortunately, with the change in funding, we are no longer able to offer that special rate, at least in the immediate future. However, due to greatly increased workshop interest across the state, we have added a third SMART summer workshop to be held in Minneapolis and DLS staff can attend that workshop or ANY other SMART workshop this summer, for the special DLS rate of \$455 (vs. \$610) as long as registrations are submitted by June 29. (You can go online for continued workshop updates and registration forms at www.themlrc.org.)

As with any change, there IS a silver lining and that is the incredible outpouring of support for SMART shown by all of you across the state! Thank you so very much to our experienced sites for taking time throughout the session, especially during this busy month of May, to contact the offices of our legislative leaders and Governor. Also to those of you who came to the capitol, many on cold wintery days, to testify before committees, I hope you know we recognize how much planning and extra work that required on your part and that we so appreciate that effort.

And to those new SMART sites for school year 2007-08, we have been buoyed by your exceptional enthusiasm in energizing your staff and also in making calls on behalf of the MLRC. We have had unprecedented interest from new schools this year and intend to invite many of our legislative leaders to visit our school and agency in the months ahead to remind them of the good work the MLRC continues to do. The phone and email messages and letters sent over the months from all of you will serve as a reminder to them of the passion public school and Head Start educators across Minnesota feel for the MLRC's programs in getting *all* kids ready to learn.

Sunshine

I also want to take this opportunity to thank our MLRC mentors and office team, specifically Cheryl Smythe, Amy Deden and Cindy Harvey. Many of you know them well and all of you have benefited from their vast expertise as mentors, workshop presenters and overall care takers for getting your SMART programs launched and implemented in your schools. This team is incredibly hard working

and possess, as I am sure you have witnessed, a deep commitment to providing the best possible service to all of you. As I write this message to you, I am looking at a beautiful bunch of sunflowers they brought me and I wanted to share a little bit of that “sunniness” with you.

Attached is an article that appeared earlier this month in the Minneapolis Star Tribune about Jordan Elementary School’s SMART program. If you have time, please take a minute to read it. Included in it is information that would capture anyone’s attention.

“During the first year, (Principal, Stacy) DeCorsey said, teachers could already see a difference. Only 52 percent of third-graders were reading at grade level at the beginning of the year. After four months of the program, that jumped to 90 percent..... Teachers report that students can concentrate better and pay more attention to detail than they used to.”

Minneapolis Star Tribune, May 8, 2007

One of our mentors, Marion Bauman, reported back that when a Hopkins teacher called the capitol, the person answering the phone asked what was so special about the program as they had been getting "many" phone calls about it. She continued to ask questions about SMART and then said she would happily relay the information.

MLRC workshops have never been in higher demand and attendance for this summer is overflowing! We just added a third summer SMART workshop in Minneapolis (the first time ever) and already have only 40 of the available 75 slots still open.

Moving Forward Together

We are fully committed to maintaining our relationships with our Designated Learning Sites and look to you for suggestions on how we effectively sustain and grow our partnership. We’ve brainstormed and discussed several options to determine how we best do that. Some suggestions posed to date are:

Charging a fee for mentoring – This was a change we incorporated with our SMART schools at the national level once our USDE grant was completed. We have a recommended number of visits over the course of three years and work with each school to determine what is realistic.

Reducing some of our expenses – Many ideas have been suggested on this one. For example, while we have relied heavily on the collection of pre and post-measures to show effectiveness of the program, we currently have a storehouse of strongly supportive data. In the past we have invested annually in purchasing the measures, holding Regional Scoring Days, and

analysis and compilation of the data. One idea to reduce costs would be to not administer testing in the new year but to work with schools to include their CBM's and other internal measures. Again, your comments and feedback on testing and data analysis would be most appreciated!

Taking advantage of technology – You all received information earlier this month regarding a federal RUS grant that would allow for interactive technology between the MLRC and our schools. Ten SMART schools from around the state and nation have agreed to serve as pilot schools and we will be submitting a grant proposal next month. We see this technology as a way to increase the number of site “visits” offered to our sites, assist with more specific advice on individual children, provide reviews of SMART training sections and newly created mini-workshops, gather for SMART Team, regional and parent meetings, and, as a bonus, offer schools a series of virtual field trips. We will keep you posted and also let you know about our intentions to go forward on a broader scale after this year.

Once we have streamlined our budget and services plan, we will be in a position to pursue “bridge” funding for the next two years until we can return to the Legislature. **In the meantime, we are wide open for your further suggestions and welcome any and all ideas on lowering costs and maintaining our services.**

We hope to hear from you with your suggestions and we promise to stay in touch as we progress with plans. We very much look forward to our continued work with you in the months and years ahead. Thank you again for your support!

Nancy