Primary goal of creating a Regional Academic Plan:

Creating a framework understood by the majority of college faculty, staff, and stakeholders that supports a sustainable future for our campuses in northeastern Minnesota.

Why do we need a Regional Academic Plan?

Decade-long trends in financial and student success indicators show that the current path we are on is not sustainable in the short or long-term. Enrollment across the five colleges has declined by approximately 1,200 FYE or 25% since 2010-2011. During that same period, our faculty, staff, and administration FTE has decreased by 88 FTE or 17%.

Our colleges are not able to cover annual inflationary increases with new revenue. The primary method has been to reduce faculty and staff, much of that through attrition. At the same time, external accountability in many areas has increased. Balancing the budget on an annual basis does not necessarily equate to assuring that we are minimally investing in areas we should be and makes it more difficult to invest in areas where we need to grow or expand to meet the demands of our students and regional employers.

Individual programs and faculty have had success in delivering programs and courses to multiple colleges. These successes have come from developing productive relationships. There are pending issues with many of our sharing relationships that need further discussion and clarification. Two of those issues are MSCF contractual issues and the burden we put on our students in navigating registration and financial aid issues. We need an overall framework that helps us decide how we move forward.

The Higher Learning Commission and other program specific accrediting entities have asked questions about our unique district structure. The Minnesota State system also requested a transition plan indicating how our colleges will have a structurally balanced budget by the end of fiscal year 2020. Over the past decade, individual plans have been created in many non-instructional areas, but we have not undergone a comprehensive planning process for academic programming. We do not want to be in a situation where an outside entity controls when and how we do planning.

What will be the outcomes of having a Regional Academic Plan?

A regional academic plan will help us move forward as a collection of five colleges by:

- Laying out a future vision with short-term and long-term goals and objectives
- Ensuring we are meeting the workforce and economic development of the NE region
- Having clearer direction on what internal district college collaborations will be pursued over the next five years
- Using it as the backbone for other master planning that needs to occur such as facilities and enrollment management planning
- Using it to drive any changes in institutional structure of the five colleges

Regionally-Oriented Strategic Academic Planning Principles
(Summarized and adapted from Minnesota State June 29, 2018 report from SW Regional Planning Workgroup)

1. Work from a strong foundation and acknowledgement of campus academic planning
2. Advance and sustain quality academic programs and campuses
3. Provide a consistent and strategic forum to address the key challenges within our region
4. Place a primary focus on student access, transitions, and success
5. Align with and place priority on regional needs

Process and Timeline

Phase 1 (August 2018 – October 2018):

- Shared governance will occur at each college that involves the NHED president to discuss regional academic planning
- Each college will have local discussions to determine their top three to five academic priorities and their top three to five academic needs over the next five years. Priorities and needs can be at the programmatic or discipline level. Rationale for bringing forward priorities and needs must be supported by data. This will provide consistent starting point for each college to launch the regional discussions
- By having each college determine its priorities and needs, it will help focus the regional discussions and ensure more input into the overall process
- A regional academic planning committee will be established that will begin work in November 2018. The committee membership (approximately 20) will include:
  - Five college provost/chief academic officers
  - Approximately ten faculty members (about two per college)
  - NHED director of institutional research
  - Two to three student success representatives
  - Regional student representative
  - Other content experts can be invited to the meetings as needed
- Discussion will occur with Higher Learning Commission leadership on our planning initiative
- Financial resources will be secured to assist with phase two and three of planning
- Outside facilitation and project management assistance will be secured
Phase 2 (November 2018 – February 2019)

- The regional academic planning committee will begin meeting
- Regional workgroups to assist with planning will be developed through review of individual college priorities and needs
- Internal and external benchmarking of other multi-college and multi-campus institutions occurs. This may include inviting others to our region or sending representatives to visit other institutions. The focus would be on rural institutions
- Review of regional demographic and workforce demand data
- Input from regional general program advisory committee and K-12 superintendents

Phase 3 (March 2019 – May 2019)

- Priorities and goals for the regional academic plan are recommended by the planning committee
- First draft of a regional academic plan is shared for input and feedback through our shared governance process and with our college communities
- The additional input and feedback is reviewed and taken into consideration
- Final draft of plan is distributed in the same manner as the first draft
- Regional academic plan is finalized for 2019-2024

Examples of potential next steps

- NHED structure of five individually accredited colleges will change to a new structure. One option is moving towards one accreditation. Other options might be two to four accreditations. Seems highly unlikely that we will keep current structure
- How we proceed with NACEP accreditation and potentially other program specific accreditations
- Roadmap for determining how we approach future program sharing and adjustments we might make to current arrangements