MINNESOTA STATE

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Date: October 26, 2026

To: Leadership Council

From: Scott Olson, Chancellor

Subject: Updates on Strategic Initiatives

Strategic Realignment

It has been one month since I announced that we would embark on the Strategic Realignment of Minnesota State. I know that these few weeks have been challenging as students, employees, and members of the public contemplated what this would mean for themselves and for the colleges and universities in their communities. These are not easy conversations or decisions that we will engage in but tackling this now will provide us with the opportunity to do this work together.

Following our discussion at Leadership Council today, I wanted to codify the updates that I shared.

First milestone: January update

The January 2027 board meeting will be my first official update to the board. I want to reiterate what I shared at the October Board meeting; I will not be bringing in a list of campus closures or mergers. Doing so would negate the very process that has been discussed in the past several months. With advice from the Long-Term Strategies Taskforce, my intention is to bring in initial ideas, scenarios, and analysis of impact and opportunities. The board will engage in discussion and provide guidance on the ideas that are to be pursued and studied by the workgroups and the taskforce in more depth over the remainder of spring 2027. The goal is to bring the board recommendations for a future structure for Minnesota State in the Fall of 2027.

Workgroups and Taskforce

The first critical step in advancing this work is standing up the two workgroups and taskforce made up of students, faculty, staff, and campus leaders. I would like to thank the individuals who have agreed to serve on the Strategic Academic & Facilities Planning Workgroup, the Allocation Model Redesign Workgroup, and the Long-Term Strategies Taskforce. All three will play a critical role in the months ahead. The rosters are included with this communication. Note that there are a few spots still to be finalized. Final rosters will then be shared.

The timeline and charges for each group is below:

Long-Term Strategies Taskforce: The purpose of the Long-Term Strategies Taskforce is to provide strategic oversight, coordination, and decision-making for the work conducted by the two affiliated

workgroups. The Taskforce ensures alignment with organizational goals, resolves cross-workgroup issues, monitors progress, and advances recommendations for leadership consideration and approval. The Taskforce initial work will be to review the different scenarios under consideration and recommend evaluation criteria keeping the following in mind: student, academic, employee, and workforce and community impact; geographic coverage, and operational effectiveness. The Taskforce will begin meeting in November.

Strategic Academic and Facilities Planning Workgroup: This workgroup is charged with leading the comprehensive systemwide planning effort. It will evaluate the system's overall structure, academic programming, workforce, and physical footprint against long-term financial and enrollment realities, and develop recommendations that ensure Minnesota State can sustainably fulfill its mission across all campuses and leased spaces. The initial meeting of the workgroup will be in mid-late November with their work ramping up after the January board discussion.

Allocation Model Redesign Workgroup: This workgroup is charged with leading a review of the Allocation Model — evaluating the current model's components, weighting, and methodology, exploring alternative models/approaches, and developing recommendations for the Chancellor and Board of Trustees on how the model can better serve the system's institutions and students and the future Minnesota State structure. The workgroup will begin meeting in late November/early December, focusing first on current state and exploring alternative models. The group's work in the spring will focus on developing future state recommendations for how an allocation model redesign can support the new structure.

Realignment Leadership

It became apparent early on that if we are to truly take on this work, to meet the board's expectations, and to do so in a manner that works with stakeholders, we must have someone singularly focused on this work. I can think of no one with more experience or passion for Minnesota State than Bill Maki. Bill has dedicated his entire career to our colleges and universities with leadership experience in both sectors. He understands our organizational structures, our academic and financial approaches and models, and more importantly through his leadership he embodies the mission of Minnesota State and our focus on our students.

I intend to bring to the November board meeting my recommendation to appoint Bill Maki as the Executive Vice Chancellor for Strategic Realignment. This will be a two-year temporary position (November 2026-January 2029). In addition, he will lead Enterprise Shared Services and will continue to serve as an important part of the team advancing our legislative request this year. I am grateful to Bill for taking on this critical initiative at a critical time for the system. He has the heart, wisdom, and passion to lead this work for Minnesota State.

I intend to launch a search for an interim vice chancellor for finance and facilities. This will be a two-year temporary position with the goal of bringing forward my recommendation to the January board meeting.

As you know, Jaime announced her intention to depart after 10 years as the chief of staff. Jaime has been a critical component of Minnesota State and her leadership was to be missed. Therefore, I asked Jaime and she agreed to stay on to work with Bill on the realignment work. She too will be in a two-

year temporary position (November 2026 -January 2029). I am thankful that Jaime will continue to share her talents with Minnesota State.

Both positions will be funded through a combination of funds from the Enterprise Shared Services set-aside and Collaboration funding.

Communication

By early November, we intend to launch a public webpage where information can be found, including workgroups and taskforce rosters and a FAQ developed from the questions that were received during the virtual town hall. This will serve as a public repository of strategic alignment and related projects. We are reviewing feedback received during the virtual town hall and opportunities to continue to utilize this format to share information and to hear from our faculty and staff. We will work with LeadMN and Students United to identify the best format to engage with students and more importantly to respond to their questions.

Administrative Hiring

For the remainder of the fiscal year, when administrative vacancies or transitions present themselves, I am asking you to evaluate the position and consider options or alternatives. Before posting an administrator position, I am asking you to share with the appropriate vice chancellor and the chief of staff. System office vacancies will be brought to me and discussed with executive cabinet. This is to help us to be thoughtful and aware of administrator hiring across the system. We will re-evaluate this at the end of the fiscal year.

New Academic Program Approvals

As we advance the strategic realignment initiative, it is important that we thoughtfully evaluate how future academic programming supports student success, workforce needs, operational sustainability, and the long-term vitality of our colleges and universities.

For the remainder of the academic year, approval of new academic programs will be paused. We will re-evaluate this at the end of the academic year. We recognize that there are programs currently in development, so exceptions include:

- Programs that completed the Notice of Intent process within the past year and require minimal investment
- Programs required to meet accreditation, legislative, grant, or regulatory obligations
- Accelerated BAS proposals included within approved pilot initiatives
- Workforce-focused credentials like micro-credentials and Workforce Pell-aligned initiatives

Campuses should continue to submit requests related to existing academic awards, including:

- Curriculum revisions and updates
- Changes to program attributes
- Credit-length waiver requests
- Program modifications necessary for accreditation, licensure, transferability (transfer pathways), or workforce responsiveness
- Other routine academic program maintenance activities

If you have questions about this, please discuss with Sr. Vice Chancellor Green-Stephen.

NextGen Leadership

As NextGen continues to advance, Minnesota State is taking a deliberate step to strengthen executive leadership, accountability, and oversight for NextGen and the Workday Student project. Steve Reed will serve as the executive leader and sponsor for both initiatives. I am confident that with Steve's extensive leadership experience in Minnesota State, having served in multiple campus leadership roles including IT, Academic Affairs, and Finance along with his commitment to strengthening the connections between our institutions and the NextGen effort that he will ensure our system's largest digital transformation initiative will be successful.

This decision incorporates feedback received through multiple channels, including the Project Risk Review provided to the Board of Trustees, and reflects Minnesota State's commitment to responding proactively to identified opportunities for improvement.

This approach does not change the involvement and leadership by the ASA team nor the involvement of the many campus and student affairs leaders working on NextGen. This leadership approach builds on the substantial work, expertise, and commitment already demonstrated across Minnesota State while providing focused executive leadership, governance, and accountability necessary to move NextGen forward with discipline, transparency, and a continued focus on successful outcomes.

Artificial Intelligence Readiness

As AI rapidly reshapes how students learn, how employees work, and how employers define workforce needs, Minnesota State must take a coordinated, system-level approach to AI readiness. There is a growing importance of integrating AI readiness into the system's core academic and student success priorities, ensuring that our colleges and universities are prepared to responsibly leverage emerging technologies to advance teaching, learning, workforce development, and operational effectiveness. Therefore, I have asked Dr. Satasha Green-Stephen to lead this work as the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs and Chief AI Officer for the system. This change recognizes that AI is not simply a technology initiative, but a transformational force shaping teaching, learning, student success, and workforce preparation.

Working in partnership with the Interim Vice Chancellor for Information Technology, this effort will focus on advancing AI readiness across the system through strategic leadership, governance, policy, and capacity building.

Importantly, this work is intended to complement, not duplicate, the innovative AI leadership already underway at Minnesota State University Moorhead and across our colleges and universities. The system-level focus is on creating shared frameworks, alignment, and support that enable all institutions to benefit while preserving and leveraging local expertise and innovation.

Chief of Staff announcement

This summer, I launched a search for chief of staff to identify Jaime's successor. I am pleased to share that Jessica Medearis will be joining the system office on November 12! Jessica will dive right in participating in the November joint Leadership Council and Board of Trustees meeting.

Jessica joins the Chancellor's Office with 20 years of strategic and operational experience in public higher education, leading across administration, student affairs, and public policy in the college, university, and non-profit sectors. Since 2019, she has served as chief of staff to President Kent Hanson at Anoka-Ramsey Community College and Anoka Technical College, where she provided strategic guidance and managed projects across college portfolios.

Prior to her time at Anoka-Ramsey and Anoka Tech, she directed strategic initiatives across undergraduate education as the assistant to the associate dean in the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Minnesota. Jessica also served as associate director for the Minnesota State College Student Association (MSCSA, now LeadMN), where she led advocacy, student leadership development, and operations for nearly a decade.

Jessica holds a J.D. from William Mitchell College of Law (Now Mitchell Hamline), and a B.A. in journalism from the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities.

Jaime will help Jessica with her transition into the office over the next several weeks. Jaime will continue to lead executive searches for the year.

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