

# Education Agency Acted Appropriately On GEAR UP

BY JAMES NORD  
Associated Press

PIERRE — South Dakota Gov. Dennis Daugaard said Friday that the state Department of Education and its top official appropriately handled the termination of a federal college-readiness grant thrust into the spotlight because of a murder-suicide involving two employees of the Platte-based educational cooperative that administered it.

Daugaard first learned of problems with Mid-Central Educational Cooperative's management of the GEAR UP college-readiness grant in late August or early September, he told *The Associated Press*, saying the education agency offered the cooperative technical support for years and likely provided more oversight of the GEAR UP grant than others administered through the department.

Hours after the department informed Mid-Central that it was losing its GEAR

UP contract on Sept. 16, cooperative business manager Scott Westerhuis fatally shot his wife, Nicole, and four children before setting the family home ablaze and shooting himself. Nicole Westerhuis was the co-op's assistant business manager.

A state-federal investigation into the financial circumstances involving GEAR UP is ongoing, and Attorney General Marty Jackley has said financial issues appear to have been a contributing factor in the deaths. Few details about the inquiry have been made public.

Department of Education Secretary Melody Schopp has said the department worked with Mid-Central for several years to address financial concerns before it decided not to renew the contract. The department didn't find criminal concerns, but Schopp cited lack of fiscal controls, conflicts of interest and failure to follow proper accounting procedures in declining to renew the contract.

The GEAR UP grant has been focused on Native American students in South Dakota.

State Republican Rep. Lance Russell recently called for Schopp to resign over the state's oversight of the grant program. But Daugaard credited Schopp for cancelling the contract and said she has his full support.

The governor also pushed back against some Democrats' calls to establish a state ethics panel in the wake of the deaths. He said the issues that have surfaced are outside of his administration and that the Legislature recently strengthened state conflict-of-interest policy.

"I've seen those ethics boards in other states become more an arena for political combat, and (they) don't really serve to prevent or dissuade unethical behavior," Daugaard said. "I think we have good policies in place, and we have good employees."

# Caring For The Flag



COURTESY PHOTO

**Stewart students and staff are honoring Veterans with a large paper chain flag display. A request was sent home for the names of Veterans they wished to recognize. The response was overwhelming and the display continues to grow. Students have enjoyed finding the names of “their Veterans.” Stewart students also decorated placemats for the Veterans annual supper. The students used their creativity to thank Veterans for their service. Forty and Eight members Wes Rye and Steve Paulsen presented Mrs. Mueller’s and Mrs. Zimmerman’s 1st grade students with flags and gave a talk on flag etiquette. The students learned how to fold the flag and how to properly display a flag. The 40 & 8 is an organization honoring Veterans that was formed after WW1. Both men and horses were transported by train and the limit was 40 men or eight horses to a boxcar. Thank you Veterans for your service.**

# Playoffs

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split has worked well in its infancy and will remain in place, Carney said.

"We have great support for (what we are doing with) the top (18) schools," he said.

Yankton and Pierre have each won the Class 11AA crown, and on Friday they made their second championship appearances in the three-year existence of the new division, Carney noted.

"The 11AA has seen great competition and has been very successful," he said.

"But if Yankton and Pierre keep getting to the championship game, we're going to have to get another class of football," he added, tongue in cheek.

In addition, the 11AAA finals have been dominated by the Sioux Falls schools, Carney said.

The new playoff format has split the Eastern South Dakota (ESD) Conference membership when it comes to post-season action. Aberdeen Central, Watertown and Brandon Valley reside in Class 11AAA, while Yankton, Pierre, Huron, Mitchell, Brookings and Harrisburg are members of Class 11AA.

"Will Aberdeen and Watertown win (the title) in Class 11AAA? It could be difficult for them," Carney said. "But Brandon Valley has done well (with an appearance in the title game)."

The financial realities point to holding two championship games for the state's largest schools, Carney said. "The additional game means a great

deal of revenue (for the SDHSAA). The football revenue helps cover our non-revenue activities," he said.

Those non-revenue activities include fine arts and athletics, which are important for students' development, Carney said. In addition, the SDHSAA is considering the addition of other activities, he said.

On the other end of the enrollment spectrum, Carney looks for the playoff structure to continue with three classes of 9-man football until those numbers of schools dwindle.

However, a couple of factors have kept the number of 9-man teams fairly stable, he said. "We have schools continue to co-op (so they can offer football), and we have 11-man teams who have gone to 9-man football," he said.

**STAYING ON SCHEDULE**

The SDHSAA has tried not to pack the football championship games into too tight a schedule. As a result, the finals were expanded to three days.

In the past, up to four games were played in a day. And Saturday became dicey when the University of South Dakota played an afternoon home game in the DakotaDome followed by a two-game high school session starting at 5 p.m.

The move to a single Saturday night game was put on the fast track after one year's fiasco with general admission tickets, Carney said. During the two-game session, fans didn't leave after the first game, while fans arrived for the second game with tickets in hand but no seating.

"No one wanted to move. We had fans sitting in the end

zones," Carney said, adding the DakotaDome doors were locked to avoid the influx of more fans that could have created a fire hazard.

"We knew general admission wasn't going to work. We went with reserved tickets," he said. "And we try not to have games too close together."

The allotment of reserved tickets for DakotaDome championship games is sent to the hosts of the semifinal contests. The semifinal winners take the tickets home for local sale during the week prior to the title game. Unsold tickets are returned and placed back into the computer.

This year, the SDHSAA started offering online ticket sales for the football championship games through GoYotes.com. Fans could buy their tickets and print them at home.

South Dakota Public Broadcasting's (SDPB) televising and livestreaming of the championship games have provided great exposure and hasn't hurt attendance at the gate, Carney said.

"If your team is in the finals, you'll be there. You won't stay home and watch it on TV," he said. "That's the thing with high school sports. People (come) out to support their team. Yankton has the support there. You have Canistota on TV, and their fans will still come to Vermillion."

If anything, South Dakota football players are literally receiving worldwide coverage, Carney said. SDPB announcers reported Friday afternoon they had an online viewer watching the game in China even though it was 1:30 a.m. local time.

In addition, SDPB has agreed to show SDHSAA activities that may not be financially feasible for commercial stations, Carney said.

"SDPB has been wonderful," he said. "They do everything, all the sports and fine arts."

**FACING CHALLENGES**

However, the football playoff system's success doesn't mean South Dakota high schools don't face challenges on the gridiron, Carney said.

Part of the problem lies with South Dakota's geography, he said. In particular, he pointed to the long distances between schools on opposite ends of the state.

"We have tremendous scheduling issues that involve the Black Hills, Sioux Falls and the ESD schools, along with the smaller schools," he said.

The Black Hills schools, particularly the Rapid City schools, found themselves either short of games or traveling long distances out of state for contests, Carney said.

"We had Rapid City traveling 600 miles to play teams in Colorado," he said.

The largest schools were also seeing a growing enrollment disparity, Carney said. "We have Spearfish with 400 students going up against schools with 1,700 enrollment," he said.

Other scheduling issues arose, such as whether the ESD schools would play all of their conference members and whether Sioux Falls O'Gorman could play fellow Catholic school Sioux City Heelan, Carney said.

Another wild card is the rapidly changing enrollments around the state. Many rural areas are losing population

and either forming football co-ops or consolidating schools. At the other end of the spectrum, school districts such as Harrisburg are rapidly growing in enrollment.

"And it's not just about enrollment – you also have wide differences in facilities," he said.

In addition, the playoff structure plays a role in the desirability of playing – or not playing – certain schools, Carney said.

"Football is the biggest stumbling block we have (for scheduling)," he said. "We schedule out of our (SDHSAA) office. Otherwise, we would have no one who would play (certain) schools."

As a result, the football season has fluctuated in its number of games. In addition, some teams travel long distances for contests.

"Some would like to see (the SDHSAA) get out of the schedule business," he said. "When it comes to playoffs, that's where it hits the fan."

The SDHSAA has also faced controversial decisions when it comes to the approval or denial of football co-ops, Carney said.

This year, the SDHSAA board approved a co-op between Miller and Highmore-Harrold. Shortly afterward, the board rejected Freeman's request to co-op with Canistota or, alternatively, Menno-Marion.

Carney acknowledged the controversy surrounding both decisions. However, he said different factors came into play with each request.

"We (SDHSAA staff members) have our recommendations, but the board has the prerogative to waive the

rules," he said. "These aren't easy decisions."

Problems arise when schools seek to co-op without being reclassified into a higher division because of their combined enrollment, Carney said.

"We have problems where schools will say they will co-op if they can stay 9-man (football)," he said. "We say, if you stay 9-man, you're not eligible for the playoffs."

Schools with enrollments on the bubble may find themselves fluctuating between 11- and 9-man football, requiring adjustments for those programs, he said.

The SDHSAA must also deal with member schools playing out-of-state football teams, sometimes delaying the announcement of South Dakota's playoff seeds, he said.

Carney encouraged the public to provide input on school activities. The SDHSAA board meetings are open to the public and also streamed on the Internet, he said.

With South Dakota celebrating 35 years of football playoffs, Carney doesn't see any lessening of popularity for the autumn ritual.

Whether the playoffs remain in their present form remains to be seen, he added.

"I don't see the playoff set-up any differently than what it is now," he said. "It's up to the (SDHSAA) advisory board. They have the final say."

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## 140 Jobs To Be Lost With Plant Closing

SIDNEY, Neb. (AP) — About 140 jobs will be lost with the closing of a copper cable plant in the western Nebraska city of Sidney.

CommScope, which is based in Hickory, North Carolina, says it will close the plant in phases and move some of the work to a CommScope facility in Claremont, North Carolina.

CommScope gained the Sidney plant in August as part of its recent acquisition of the Broadband Network Solutions business from TE Connectivity.

A CommScope news release says the Sidney plant is being closed because of underutilization and available production capacity elsewhere.

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