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To Whom It May Concern:

Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe  
Crow Creek Sioux Tribe  
Flandreau-Santee Sioux Tribe  
Lower Brule Sioux Tribe  
Oglala Sioux Tribe  
Omaha Tribe of Nebraska  
Rosebud Sioux Tribe  
Santee Sioux Tribe of Nebraska  
Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota Nation  
Spirit Lake Nation  
Standing Rock Sioux Tribe  
Three Affiliated Tribes  
Turtle Mountain Band  
of Chippewa Indians  
Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska  
Yankton Sioux Tribe

I am the Teacher Supervisor/ Federal Programs Director of the Pierre Indian Learning Center (PILC), and have had the pleasure of working with Morningside Academy in a collaborative partnership since July of 2003. The PILC is an off-reservation boarding school for Native American children in grades one through eight, who come to us from fifteen different reservations in the three state area of North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska. The students at the PILC have come from very dysfunctional home settings, and arrive at our school with a tremendous amount of emotional baggage; many of our students have suffered various forms of abuse, neglect, and abandonment in their young lives. Nearly half of our student enrollment receives special education services, nearly twenty percent are Limited English Proficient, and a significant percentage of students receive counseling services from outside therapists. All of our students are considered to be at-risk and come from households existing below the poverty line.

It is my understanding that Morningside is seeking funding opportunities that will enable them to share their expertise with other schools and organizations; I wish to provide testimony as to the positive impact our partnership with Morningside has had on the overall quality of educational and instructional services provided at the PILC. Data analysis at the PILC has consistently revealed that schoolwide, fewer than thirty (30) percent of students fall into the proficient to advanced proficient categories of functioning in the subtests of reading vocabulary, synonyms, multiple meanings, reading comprehension, process strategies, interpretation, critical analysis, mathematical problem solving, computation, prewriting, editing, composing, spelling, mechanics, and usage. Our school is currently under Alert Status according to our state accountability plan, and teachers experience a high burn-out rate.

The PILC conducted a comprehensive, two-year long evaluation of current school reform efforts with the assistance of an external support specialist, and the endeavor echoed the hypotheses of PILC administration in terms of facilitating improvement in student achievement. The process additionally provided insight on some previously unidentified needs that required the generalized improvement of teaching and learning. Specifically, the PILC needed to:

1. Work to provide more consistent instructional leadership in classrooms with individual staff and teams to support school improvement goals
2. Develop action plans for administration that include professional development in areas such as instructional leadership, curriculum assessment, data-driven classroom instruction and learning practices, and outreach program development
3. Provide professional development opportunities for staff that are comprehensive, utilize data findings and data analysis to support performance outcomes
4. Support staff development efforts that encourage teachers to utilize various methodologies and instructional practices; diverse learning styles should be acknowledged in daily lesson presentation

The challenge facing the administration and staff at the PILC was incredibly daunting, and could not be adequately countered without outside assistance. Our teachers had received very little consistency in terms of professional development over the past seven years, instructional approaches had been varied and misaligned with student need, and instructional leadership from administration had not been sufficient to produce measurable results.

Along with support from top administration, the Indian Board of Education, and officials from the Office of Indian Education Programs, I began to search for professional development organizations that could be of assistance to the PILC in its efforts to improve teaching, learning, and achievement at our school. From an organizational perspective, one individual is responsible for instructional supervision of 48 teachers, curriculum development, professional development efforts, mandatory performance reporting requirements, and daily administrative tasks. It became evident that seeking assistance from an organization that could provide the PILC and its teachers with ongoing, sustained professional development based on research-based and proven strategies was essential. Consequently, a four-year partnership with Morningside Academy was formed after a great deal of discussion, a number of recommendations, and analysis of Morningside's proven track record.

The PILC has adopted the Morningside Model of Generative Instruction, and our instructional practices, curriculum, and data analysis have changed to become reflective of those advocated by Morningside. The most wonderful aspect of this partnership is that the plan of improvement at the PILC, while indicative of Morningside approaches, has been tailored to meet the needs of our students and staffing structure. Our reading program has been completely overhauled with direction and support from Morningside consultants, and the measurable gains demonstrated by students in all grades have been intense. Most notable is the change in attitude expressed by students and teachers alike; students have demonstrated a renewed interest in their own learning, and teachers have expressed excitement in the fact that they are receiving the instructional support necessary to improve their teaching practices, and ultimately improve student achievement.

The PILC/ Morningside Academy partnership requires that Morningside consultants spend nearly forty (40) days on our campus, modeling for teachers, providing coaching and feedback, assisting staff in analyzing data, and helping administration to make curriculum decisions. Teachers have reported benefiting from the consistency in terms of instructional approaches adopted, the professional relationships formed with Morningside consultants with whom they work, and in selecting goals for student achievement. Administratively, I must admit that our partnership with Morningside has allowed our teachers to be provided with at least ten times the instructional feedback they would ever receive from an administrator, complete with ongoing support and consultation, and objective evaluation based on instructor growth. I am able to be much more effective in my job, and I am thrilled to be able to provide our staff with the quality professional development and coaching they need in order to become more successful in meeting the learning needs of our students.

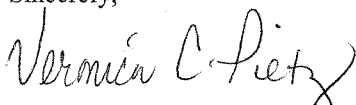
We are currently mid-way through the second year of our partnership with Morningside Academy, and the positive growth as measured by ongoing student data collection indicates that our students have made gains in one-half of a school year comparable to

gains that previously took them two entire school years to make. Morningside has taught our teachers and administration how to reliably track student performance based on continuous data collection, and to become more efficient in its methods of improving accountability. Teachers have been provided with training in the specific diagnostic and instructional skills needed to become more successful in remedying their students' deficiencies, and student time-on-task has increased more dramatically than we had ever dreamed possible.

Our students may be characterized as some of the most forgotten students; the educational and social injustices to which they have been exposed have taken a seemingly insurmountable toll on their academic performance. Morningside Academy has been a vital contributor in the efforts of the Pierre Indian Learning Center to comprehensively improve its academic programs. The professionalism of Morningside staff, demonstrated effectiveness of Morningside methods, and model of coaching and feedback have resulted in an incredible system of professional development and support at the PILC. Additionally, we have sent thirteen (13) of our staff to the Morningside Academy Summer Institute, which has saved us a tremendous amount of time in attempting to train new staff, and has allowed all staff to start implementing the adopted methods of instructional delivery and data collection at the beginning of a school year.

Many of my teachers have stated that their interaction with Morningside has impacted them professionally more than their entire undergraduate and graduate careers combined. It is without reservation that I wholeheartedly support the contributions and programs of the Morningside Academy. The expertise of this organization and its commitment to positively impacting educators around the world is to be celebrated. Should you require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at (605) 224-8661, extension 137.

Sincerely,



Veronica Connolly Pietz, M.Ed.  
Teacher Supervisor/ Federal Programs Director