TEACHING TODAY MN™
MINNESOTA'S K–12 EDUCATION CONNECTION
Fall/Winter 2025

Labor and Industry Announces 2025 Youth Skills Training Grant Recipients

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRY

Seventeen partnerships across Minnesota will receive funding to develop and expand programs to offer meaningful career exposure and paid work experience for students 16 years of age and older.

The grants are part of the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry's (DLI) Youth Skills Training (YST) program that was signed into law in 2017 with bipartisan support to create and provide employment training for student learners ages 16 and older in high-growth, high-demand occupations.

"These grants empower local communities to build strong pipelines of skilled talent, ensuring that Minnesota students gain safe, valuable, real-world work experience while addressing critical workforce demands in high-growth sectors," said Nicole Blissenbach, DLI commissioner. "Youth Skills Training is an investment in Minnesota's future. Thank you to everyone who has supported this program."

YST grants will be awarded to the following 17 partnerships, which will receive and split $1.5 million in funding to be used for programs operating from July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2027. The partnerships will offer safe, meaningful work experience in advanced manufacturing, agriculture, automotive, health care and information technology.

* Alexandria Area High School
* Cass Lake-Bena High School
* createMPLS
* Dawson-Boyd Public Schools
* Edina Public Schools
* Faribault Public Schools
* Marshall Public Schools
* Minneapolis Public Schools — Career and Technical Education
* Monticello High School
* Princeton Public Schools
* Robbinsdale Area Schools
* Rochester Public Schools
* Roseau School District
* Shakopee High School
* TrekNorth Jr. and Sr. High School
* West Central Area School District
* West St. Paul, Mendota Heights, Eagan Area School District

Grants can be used to create programs, recruit students and employers, provide training, transport students and pay for industry-related student certifications. A ninth round of grant applications will open in winter 2025.

For more information about Youth Skills Training contact Jo Daggett, program manager, at 651-284-5354 or jo.daggett@state.mn.us; Nimo Samatar, program consultant, at 651-284-5184 or nimo.samatar@state.mn.us; or Faye Blough, program specialist, at 651-284-5341 or faye.blough@state.mn.us.

Courtesy of the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry

Brittney Steine named WEA Teacher of the Year

WINONA AREA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Welcoming All Learners

Brittney Steine, Winona Education Association Teacher of the Year, surrounded by family

Winona Area Public Schools

When Winona Middle School started an alternative learning program six years ago, it needed a teacher who was kind. A teacher who was welcoming. A teacher who saw the value, the heart and the potential of every student in their room.

It needed Brittney Steine.

Six years later the alternative learning program — called DEEDs (Discover, Explore, Engage, Develop) — is thriving thanks to Steine's guidance. Because of her ability to personally connect with her students, and also to provide opportunities for her students to connect with their school, Steine has been named the 2025 Winona Education Association Teacher of the Year.

"My goal in education is for every student to feel they have a place of value at Winona Area Public Schools," Steine said in her nomination questionnaire. "I want every student (and family) to feel connected to their school community and be a part of something greater than themselves."

Steine pours herself into her students and the DEEDs program. She arranges educational and confidence-building team trips, such as visits to Oxbow Park, the ropes courses at the local university and Eagle Bluff Learning Center, or a trip to Whitewater State Park to collect samples from the river. She helps her students learn soft skills, like practicing formally introducing themselves to school staff or making phone calls — yes, the teenage horror of making a phone call and not just texting — in preparation for future job interviews.

But perhaps, most importantly, she is a constant, steady presence for her students in

Continued on Page 25

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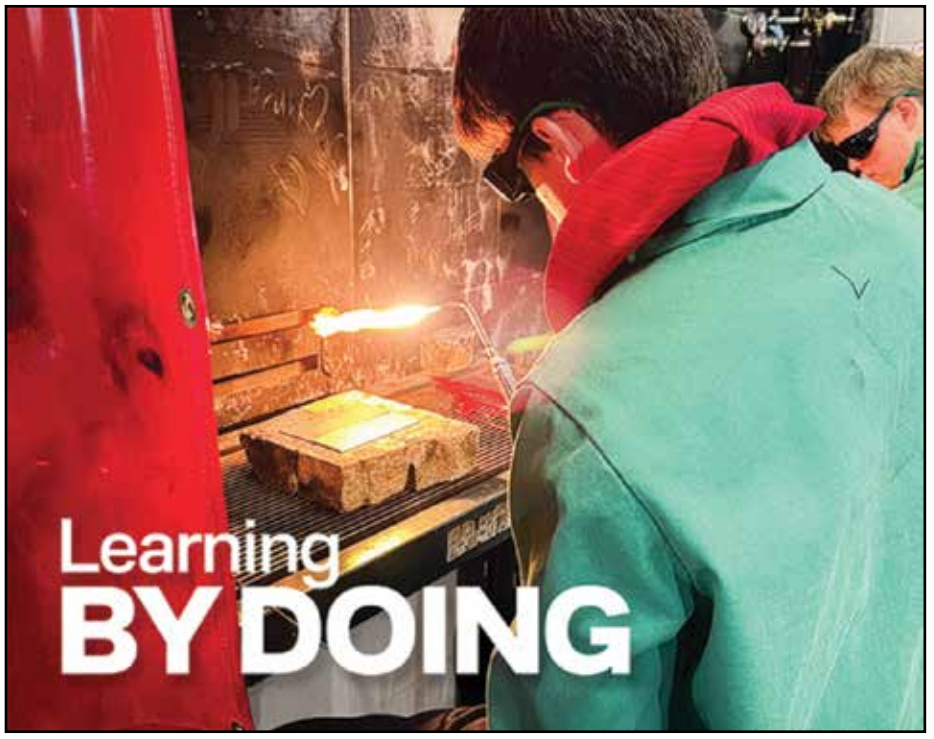

By Gretchen DeSutter

For many high school students, the path to deciding what's next after graduation can be difficult. To help juniors and seniors broaden their perspective and gain more visibility to manufacturing career opportunities, Minnesota school districts are partnering with businesses, chambers of commerce, and technical colleges to create early learning and immersive manufacturing experiences through Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs.

School districts work with the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry Youth Skills Training (YST) program to develop classroom instruction, offer safety training, certifications, and industry-recognized credentials, and paid work experience/internships in high-growth and high-demand occupations. Grants of up to $100,000 over a two-year period are available through application; however, grant funding is not mandatory to operate a YST program.

"YST is a framework that is adaptable to community, school, and business needs across the state," says Jo Daggett, YST program manager. "Through the YST program, our team works to support the development of partnerships between schools, industry employers, and communities in responsive and meaningful ways that create long-term stability and a positive impact."

Programs vary across the state based on area manufacturing businesses and student interest. Here are some examples of how the program helps students.

ISD 761: Owatonna

While the school district works with many businesses, their biggest programs are with two companies: a climate control business, which designs and manufactures air handling units and dehumidifiers, and an acoustics business, which provides innovative products for music and theater education and performing arts venues.

Left to right: Jo Daggett, YST Program Manager, Nimo Samatar, YST Program Consultant, and Faye Blough, YST Program Specialist.

Tom Peterson, owner of the climate control business, remembers having a work experience program when he was in high school and offered to get the ball going with their company, says Brian Coleman, a career navigator with the district. Today, the business maintains about 15 students annually.

YST businesses support the district by participating in high-school career fairs, job shadowing, and a unique signing day experience for students who decide to transition from an internship to full-time employee after graduation, explains Coleman. Students and their families tour the facility, then sign their first employment contract and receive a special welcome.

Coleman and Missy Koch, also a career navigator, see that students in the program are their best recruiters for the business, supporting other students to pursue work opportunities because they share what they are working on and why they enjoy it.

ISD 831: Forest Lake

By creating a flexible YST framework, many area manufacturing businesses can offer students in the Forest Lake Area Schools unique manufacturing career insight.

"Not all businesses participating in our [CTE/YST] programs are able to provide paid student internships and yet they still want to support students as they explore career opportunities, including manufacturing," says Molly Bonnett, a college and career coordinator with the district. "We created an a la carte framework, which might mean a business comes in and talks to the students at a career fair, hosts a field trip tour at their business, or provides a single day job shadowing opportunity."

Through a YST grant, Forest Lake expanded their CTE and offers career exploration courses and created a coordinator position that supports business relationships, lines up student internships, and supports students from resume writing and interviewing through on-the-job meetings with supervisors.

"I really enjoy seeing these students develop and find their paths through shadowing and internships," says Mike Miron, a career and technical education coordinator with the district. "We had a student graduate in 2023 who did a job shadow in the auto body business and realized it wasn't a good fit for him. He wasn't really an AP science/math guy, but through a CAD course he realized he enjoyed drafting and started to think engineering might be a career path. While completing his internship at a contract manufacturing and injection molding company, they placed him with the engineers and gave him some drafting work. He proved himself and found his path. He went on to complete a two-year track at a local college and was just offered a full-time position at the company as an engineer."

ISD 31: Bemidji

The Bemidji school district has created many lasting community and business relationships for their students in a variety of career areas including manufacturing.

"The field trips and internships help our students understand there are in-demand and high-paying manufacturing jobs and career growth opportunities that will enable them to stay in this area, build a career, and have the lifestyle they enjoy outside of the Twin Cities," says Jenny Fraley, school counselor and Bemidji career academics coordinator. In addition to internships, Fraley values student interaction with non-parental adults who encourage them and share new perspectives. "It's a great way to boost their confidence and introduce them to life in the working world, with guidance," she says.

"Our kids sometimes fail to grasp how their classroom work relates to the real world," says Jason Stanoch, principal. "We had a student who just hadn't found his career path, and he shared with his internship mentor that he didn't think he would graduate. The mentor pulled out a job application and showed him the first question was about graduating from high school. That mentor and other co-workers encouraged the student to complete his degree, and he did."

ISD 11: Anoka-Hennepin

Anoka-Hennepin, Minnesota's largest school district, uses the YST program to explode old-school myths about careers in manufacturing.

"Our students quickly realize through our field trips that manufacturing businesses are unique, and there are high-growth and high-paying jobs in these businesses," says Carter Gerlach, Anoka-Hennepin's trade and industry internship coordinator.

Participating in shadowing days and internships also helps students find that at times the job just isn't what they thought it would be, or that this just isn't their passion. These opportunities offer growth and learning that are equally welcomed by the employer and the students.

Today's student can more fully experience real-life work environments that past child labor laws would have prohibited. To ensure students are working safely, OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) certifications are offered through many schools and employers and become another differentiator on their student-to-adult resume.

ISD 728: Elk River

The Youth Skills Training grants have helped ISD 728 pay salary costs associated with its work-based learning teacher position within its CTE internship program, which helps students earn high school credits, learn about labor laws, safety on the job, and how to navigate the world of work — such as getting along with co-workers, taking time off, being on time and prepared, and proper cell phone use. The YST program has the support of industry credentials from OSHA 10, DOT Inspection, and other courses. "I am grateful for the YST grants for helping our district implement stronger career pathways and the

Continued on Page 6

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A very profitable high school manufacturing program in St. Francis is likely to be a model for other schools to follow.

By Elizabeth Millard

The production floor at Saints Manufacturing is in line with other entrepreneurial, small manufacturers: Along one wall are multiple welding stations, with three CNC mills on the other side. In between you'll find numerous lathes, vertical mills, CNC plasma cutters, and other equipment. But this isn't a scrappy startup that's challenging larger manufacturers. In this workplace, the skilled operators scramble to grab their backpacks and books when the school bell rings.

That's because Saints Manufacturing is a class that's part of a workforce development program at St. Francis High School in St. Francis, Minn., a modest farm town with a population around 8,000 that sits 45 minutes north of Minneapolis. While the school offers traditional courses like welding and metal tech, the manufacturing program provides a breadth of skills that go far beyond how to use each machine properly.

"We learn how to run a manufacturing project from all angles, including how to talk to vendors about materials, what goes into an estimate, how to determine labor costs, and how to manage workflow with multiple orders," says Maggie Grutkoski, 17, a senior. "Juggling so many components of manufacturing a product from start to finish can be stressful, but that shows us what it's like to do this kind of job. I think that's really valuable, because we'll graduate knowing what to expect, not just if we go into manufacturing, but in whatever career we might choose. You learn to collaborate and be a problem solver."

Building the Program

Founded in 1914, St. Francis High School has had a metalworking shop for decades, similar to many high schools that teach welding, cutting, grinding, and other skills. It also had a chopper program that taught students how to disassemble and repair motorcycles, says Erik Trost, director of the manufacturing program at the school. But soon after he began teaching there in 2012, he felt there needed to be a major change.

"It didn't seem like the skills being taught were very transferable to what students might need after graduation," he says. "While some of it could be helpful for moving on to vocational and technical college afterward, it just seemed like a missed opportunity not to give these students more of a head start. They needed a comprehensive education that could open them up to more career paths."

The St. Francis staff significantly reconfigured the overall program in 2016. Entry-level courses consist of general metals, metal tech, and welding. For those wishing to move on to the next level, there's a machine tool class. Students who have completed all those classes can join Saints Manufacturing. About 300 students annually enroll in those entry-level courses and machine tooling, Trost says, but only about 17 to 24 students get to work for Saints each year.

The idea for such a high-level program came from the Eleva-Strum school district

Continued on Page 10

Learning by Doing Continued from Page 4

Forest Lake Area High School students at the University of Minnesota's 2024 Inspire Conference.

CTE internship program — students and the community will benefit!" says Amy Lord, a program coordinator.

"We truly support students as they explore diverse career paths, identify their strengths, and build essential employability and technical skills," continues Lord. "Internships are invaluable. They boost student confidence, foster valuable mentor relationships, and provide real-world experience that helps students determine the necessary certifications or education for their future success. While some students may discover that a particular internship isn't the right fit, others will find their niche. Some may not have even known these jobs existed in their communities prior to this program."

ISD 22: Detroit Lakes

In 2016, Detroit Lakes established an academy model to expose students to high-demand and high-paying jobs in the area. They have added a program in plant sciences and greenhouse management that supports a strong student interest to work at a leading horticultural company, one of the largest local manufacturers.

"This is the 15th year of our program, and it has taken some time to get it up and running," says Vern Schnathorst, teacher and school-to-work program coordinator. "Through the horticultural company and other local businesses, we are offering our high school students unmatched opportunities to grow a manufacturing-based career right here in the Detroit Lakes area."

ISD 882: Monticello

The Monticello school district has about 16 businesses that provide internships, but budget challenges have kept some companies from taking on paid interns.

The district also offers internships and a variety of career exploration opportunities through high school courses, as well as the Wright Technical Center, the last of its kind in the state of Minnesota. Their state grant enables Monticello to provide career opportunities in health care, teach CPR/first-aid certification courses, a CAN course, and a couple of CIS medial related courses. This has diversified their internship opportunities in health care, manufacturing, and other industries.

The Wright Technical Center provides career, technical, and alternative education for students across eight schools in Wright County. Located in Buffalo, the school offers experiential and individualized learning opportunities for students on a variety of career paths from health care to automotive and manufacturing.

"Prior to the CTE program, students couldn't work in many positions due to child labor laws. Now, high school juniors and seniors can experience hands-on opportunities with safety guards in place," says Rebecca Kounkel, Monticello High School career pathways coordinator/YST internship coordinator. "Through our CTE offerings, we are able to provide early career exposure in a variety of opportunities with support on every level from writing the resume, applying, interviewing, and safety certifications to learning how to speak to your boss, when to take breaks, and how to work with a difficult co-worker."

Pathways to the future

"Mainstreet in rural to urban communities is strengthened by manufacturing," says Bob Kill, president and CEO of Enterprise Minnesota. "In Minnesota, 11% of the workforce is in manufacturing, which drives 14-14.5% of the state's payroll. And we can all see that the economic strength of our communities and businesses is dependent on students' understanding that Minnesota manufacturing offers strong, diverse career opportunities in manufacturing and pathways to the future."

Today schools, technical colleges, chambers of commerce, and the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry are creating early and enticing opportunities for students to learn about a variety of high-paying, high-need, and high-growth career opportunities in manufacturing.

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Redesigned Westonka High School in Minnetrista, MN Will Feature New Machining and Manufacturing Program

Mark Femrite, Asst. Supt. of Teaching and Learning
Westonka Public Schools

With the passage of a $93.4 million bond referendum in 2023, Westonka Public Schools is taking a bold step into the future with a total redesign of Westonka High School. In addition to transforming the entire school's physical space, this project will significantly expand career-focused programs for students.

Expanding Career Pathways

A major focus of the high school redesign is the introduction of vocational programs designed to equip students with the skills needed for in-demand careers. Among the new and expanded offerings are courses in machining and manufacturing, construction trades, nursing, and emergency medical services, all of which will provide hands-on experience and prepare students for immediate entry into high-demand fields.

"These innovative improvements, like the addition of an ambulance bay at the high school, are going to be a real game-changer for Westonka students and educators," said Mark Femrite, assistant superintendent for teaching and learning. "Thanks to the community's support and industry partnerships, we're going to be able to provide hands-on, real-world experiences right on campus, allowing students to learn in an environment that mirrors the workplace and giving them the tools and confidence they need to succeed after high school."

"Additionally, almost all of the new vocational programs will lead to either a state or national certification, which represents the mastery of critical skills in these fields that employers are actively seeking," Femrite added.

Building Connections with Local Businesses, Community Partners

The district's new machining and manufacturing program - set to launch in fall 2026 - is being developed in collaboration with area manufacturing businesses and a local college. Nearby high schools, with well-established machining and manufacturing programs, have also provided input on the design of Westonka's new lab and student experiences.

When the first machining and manufacturing course debuts this fall, students will gain experience with metals, welding, CAD software and a manual mill. A second course will teach students how to develop CAM programs and operate an industry-level CNC mill. District leaders say the new lab will simulate a modern manufacturing environment and help prepare graduates for machining and manufacturing careers or post-secondary pathways.

As part of the expansion of vocational programs, Westonka is forging valuable partnerships with local organizations to ensure that students have access to top-tier training and authentic experiences. Growing relationships these organizations will not only support students but also help local businesses by providing a steady pipeline of skilled, trained workers. It's a win-win for both the students and the community.

Looking Ahead

The new machining and manufacturing program along with the other vocational options are just one part of the exciting changes underway at Westonka High School. The redesign is focused on creating spaces that foster innovation, collaboration, and hands-on learning. With continued support from the community and local industry partners, Westonka Public Schools is laying the foundation for a future where students are empowered to explore diverse career paths and make meaningful contributions to society.

westonka.k12.mn.us

Investing in Hands-On Learning to Build Tomorrow's Workforce

Becker Public Schools has expanded its Career and Technical Education (CTE) offerings with the support of a CTE Equipment Mini-Grant from Resource Training & Solutions. Thanks to this funding, students now have access to new equipment that enhances hands-on learning in sheet metal fabrication, preparing them for future careers in manufacturing and skilled trades.

Enhancing Hands-On Learning in Sheet Metal Fabrication

Alex Jurek, Industrial Technology Educator at Becker High School, developed a new course focused on sheet metal fabrication for students in grades 10–12. The course goes beyond basic metalworking, incorporating forming, fastening, and welding techniques that mirror industry practices.

"I want to introduce students to the processes involved in cutting, bending, forming, and fastening sheet metal," Jurek explained. "The goal is to connect students to real-life skills and potential career paths, especially in industries like HVAC that are actively seeking workers with these capabilities."

Expanding Career Connections

By the end of the 2024–25 school year, this new program was expected to benefit approximately 100 students, equipping them with foundational skills that align with workforce demands. The school is also building connections with local industry partners to provide students with exposure to real-world applications and career opportunities.

Transforming the Fabrication Lab

With the grant funding, Becker High School invested in a new cutting station for its Fabrication Lab, significantly improving the efficiency and precision of metalworking processes. "We now have precise ways to cut our material, whether steel or aluminum, in a more efficient manner with less post-process cleanup," Jurek said.

For many students, this is their first experience working with professional-grade metal fabrication equipment. The cutting station allows them to develop hands-on skills that are directly applicable to industry jobs, making them more competitive as they enter the workforce or pursue further education in technical fields.

Building Workforce-Ready Skills

The upgraded equipment enhances learning in Becker High School's metals and engineering design courses, providing students with valuable experience in manufacturing processes. By focusing on the skills required for careers in sheet metal work, the program introduces students to trade pathways that align with regional workforce needs.

"We want students to understand that these skills are not just useful in class—they can lead to real job opportunities," Jurek emphasized. "By partnering with local companies, we're helping students see the relevance and value of what they're learning."

A Lasting Impact

Thanks to the CTE Equipment Mini-Grant, Becker Public Schools has created a hands-on learning environment that bridges the gap between education and industry. This investment ensures that students have the tools and training needed to succeed in high-demand technical careers, strengthening both their futures and the regional workforce.

Courtesy of Resource Training & Solutions and the Minnesota Department of Education

www.becker.k12.mn.us

2026 Minnesota Manufactured™ Student Video Contest

The Minnesota Manufactured™ Student Video Contest is an excellent opportunity for students to learn about the exciting careers in the manufacturing industry, share their creativity, and win big with cash prizes! Students can win up to $750 in cash prizes for themselves or their schools, have their videos shared statewide and be featured at the Minnesota Manufactured™ Awards Banquet. Participating in the video contest also helps to raise visibility and awareness of all manufacturing careers throughout the state.

Prizes

- 1st place = $750
- 2nd place = $500
- 3rd place = $250

How to Create Your Video

- Choose a topic related to manufacturing. Here are some ideas:
  - Why should someone consider a career in manufacturing?
  - What positions are available in the industry?
  - How can you make a difference working in manufacturing?
  - Showcase positive work environments and happy employees?
  - What is so cool about working in the manufacturing industry?
  - What exciting technologies are used in today's manufacturing?
  - What manufacturing careers are you interested in?
  - What does it mean to you to be a Minnesota manufacturer?
  - How can we encourage more students to pursue manufacturing careers?
  - What does a career path look like from high school to a career in manufacturing?
  - How can a career in manufacturing impact the world?
- **Write a script for your video**. This will help you to stay on track and make sure that your video has a clear message.
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Examples of last year's video contest finalists:

- **North East Range Video:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MxzOb2_YmkU
- Rocori VEX Robotics Video — **Rocori Middle School:** https://vimeo.com/921648591
- **Mason Goebel:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cEMPoi5cA2Y

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Additional Information: https://www.mnmfg.org/videocontest2026

Saints Comes Marching In Continued from Page 6

in Strum, Wisconsin., which founded Cardinal Manufacturing in 2008. Operating as a company within a school, it offers custom manufacturing, machining, design, and repair. Cardinal runs workshops for other school districts to encourage the development of similar programs, and after Trost attended, he was immediately sold on the concept. The next year, students signed up for the chopper program were transferred to Saints, as the chopper course was shuttered.

"I knew we should jump in with both feet. I had a feeling the students would appreciate being able to make real products that were used in the community," Trost says. The program kicked off with creating fire rings and custom signs that anyone in the area could order. But it wasn't long before a casual conversation at a family gathering really fired up the production line.

On the Growth Track

Two years after Saints launched, Trost was grilling next to his brother-in-law, who had just started working for the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), and they began discussing manufacturing.

At the time, MnDOT was in crisis mode because it had been sourcing manufacturing projects related to its vehicles to the Minnesota Correctional Facility-Stillwater in Bayport. Then a corrections officer was killed in the metal shop by an inmate who used one of the shop's tools for the assault, leading to closure of the corrections manufacturing program. That left MnDOT so desperate for a replacement workforce that it asked new employees, such as Trost's brother, for referrals to any programs that seemed suitable.

That's how Trost got connected to Brian McDonald, MnDOT's transportation materials supervisor, who appreciated the idea that this was a chance not just to get manufacturing services but also to contribute to training the next generation of manufacturing professionals.

"Unfortunately, we've seen many metal fabrication classes and woodshop classes taken out of a lot of high schools," McDonald says. "That's contributed to fewer students being interested in pursuing skilled trades. Saints Manufacturing is meeting that need — and that's huge. We desperately need machinists, welders, and fabricators, and Saints is giving these students a chance to understand what those jobs are like."

Over the past seven years, MnDOT and Saints have grown their relationship, and at this point, Trost says about 95% of Saints' production is done for MnDOT in the form of parts for plow trucks, shop carts, push pulls, and more. For the 2023-24 school year, Saints did about $241,000 in business with MnDOT, and the next year was $181,000. Profits enable the program to acquire the most up-to-date machinery available, so students won't be stepping into a career knowing only how to operate older equipment, Trost says.

"This program has definitely pushed me out of my comfort zone as an instructor," he adds. "I never in my life thought I'd be looking at three CNC mills and watching students use them so well."

More Than Manufacturing

Learning to weld, run machines, and program a CNC mill all positions students for manufacturing and machinist careers after they graduate — or give them foundational knowledge for transitioning into a vocational college program — but it's not just the hands-on skills that students appreciate.

"We learn to approach a job in a professional way," says Dean Glissmeyer. "We do quality inspections, pricing, and workflow. It's an incredible feeling to know that a part I made isn't just affecting my grade, it's being used on a truck by MnDOT."

Glissmeyer is also an example of the program's reach in the community. The 17-year-old isn't a regular student at St. Francis; he's homeschooled and is able to take the program as an elective — it's actually the only class he attends at the school. Two of his siblings also took the program and are now working in manufacturing. Glissmeyer is gearing up to become an underwater welder and has already become a certified SCUBA diver in addition to taking three years of manufacturing classes at St. Francis. "Based on

Continued on Page 12

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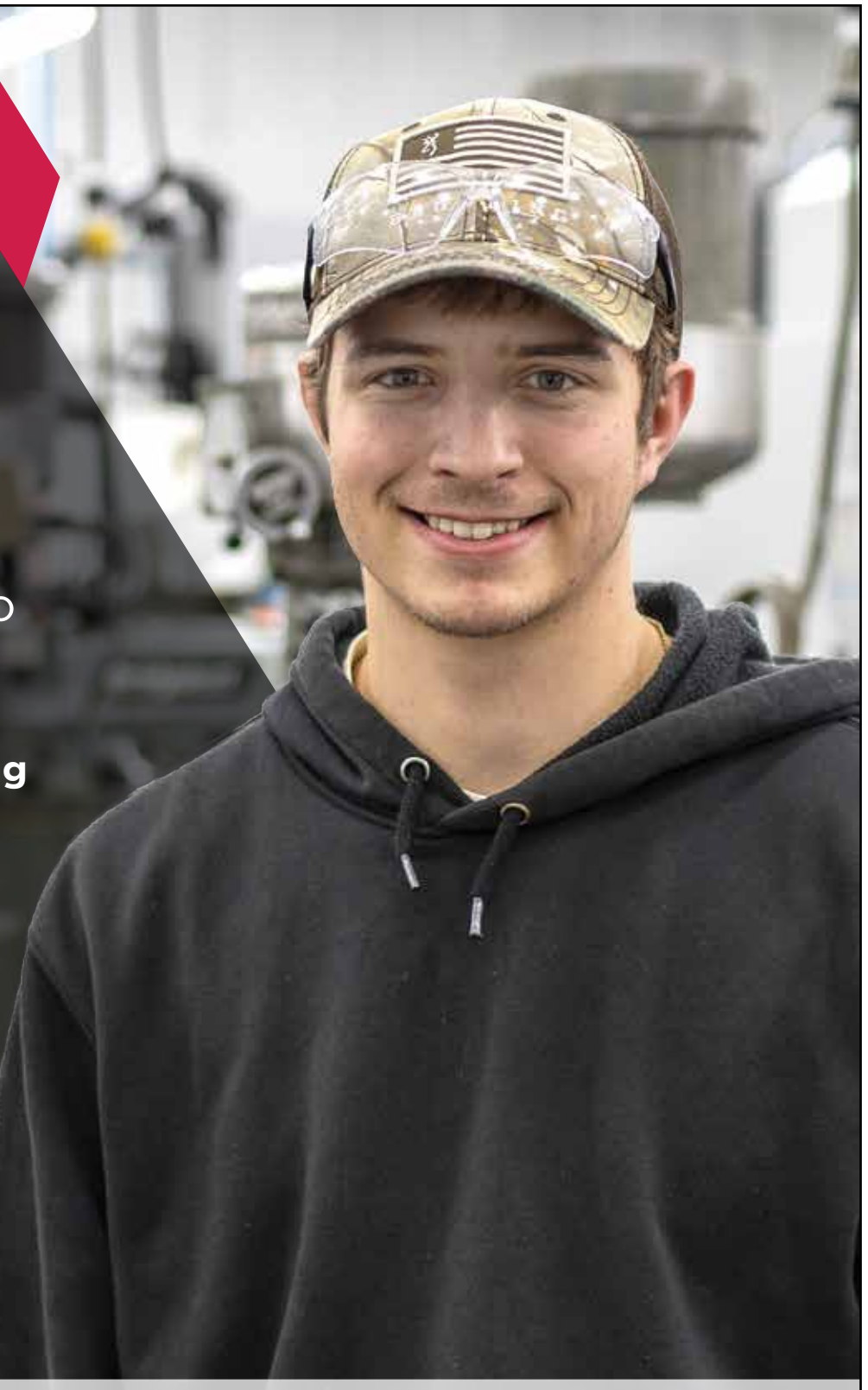

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Bluejacket AMP: A Pathway to Advanced Manufacturing Careers

Cambridge-Isanti Schools

As part of our commitment to expanding Career and Technical Education (CTE) programming, Cambridge-Isanti High School (CIHS) is excited to announce the launch of the Bluejacket Advanced Manufacturing Program (AMP) in the 2025-26 school year. This innovative initiative directly aligns with our strategic plan to equip students with the skills and experience necessary to thrive in the high-demand field of advanced manufacturing.

Thanks to a generous grant from the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry's Youth Skills Training (YST) Program, the Bluejacket AMP will equip students with marketable skills, industry-recognized certifications, and real-world work experience through collaborations with local manufacturing employers.

Preparing Students for the Future of Work

In line with our Strategic Priority of Ensuring student academic growth and success, Bluejacket AMP is designed to prepare students for in-demand careers by offering:

- Industry Tours: Students will visit local manufacturing businesses to see advanced technology and processes in action.
- Career Spotlight Events: Employers will share insights about their work and the opportunities available in their industries.
- Paid Internships: Students will gain valuable hands-on experience working with approved manufacturing employers.
- Certifications: Students will complete the OSHA 10 Certification, ensuring they are trained in workplace safety.
- Seminar Classes: Weekly classes will connect classroom learning to real-world applications.

At the core of Bluejacket AMP is a commitment to strong partnerships between Cambridge-Isanti High School and local manufacturing businesses. These partnerships ensure students gain practical experience, industry-specific skills, and exposure to a wide range of career opportunities.

These partnerships are vital to building the next generation of skilled professionals and ensuring the long-term success of the program. We are actively seeking additional manufacturers to join us in shaping the future workforce. As a partner in Bluejacket AMP, your business will:

- Help students develop industry-specific and professional skills.
- Build a pipeline of talented, motivated future employees.
- Receive guidance and support from The Repurposed Educators, ensuring impactful mentorship and supervision.

www.c-ischools.org

Saints Comes Marching In Continued from Page 10

what I've learned here, I feel confident going into that work," he says.

Another student, 16-year-old Jesse Deschenes, is also following in his siblings' path with Saints Manufacturing. All four of his older brothers have been in the program and the oldest is now a machinist, he says.

"I heard about this program for years before I was able to take it, so I needed to try it out for myself to see if it was as enjoyable as others made it sound," he says. "It wasn't long into my first year that I knew I wanted to come back; there's so much to learn. There's a reason kids talk about it the way they do."

What both students appreciate most is similar to what Grutkoski praised: a well-rounded strategy that makes all aspects of manufacturing transparent. A whiteboard in the main classroom area displays the dollar amount of their current purchase orders — in early September, that was $163,978 — and they know every penny will go back into the program to buy more equipment to keep Saints Manufacturing going strong.

When they graduate, they'll know how to operate every machine, but they'll also have insight into being a foreman, as well as estimating, deadlines, common production problems, labor costs, and delivery.

"This is project-based learning, and the beautiful thing is that we never know what's coming next, so it feels real in terms of work experience," Trost says. "The students don't know what to expect. Every project has its own needs, timeline, materials, and workflow. Because of that, they need to learn how to handle as much of that as possible, and that's what we provide."

A unique aspect of production is that they don't have contracts with MnDOT, he adds, they have purchase orders. That's an important distinction because a contract usually stipulates a deadline. While Saints does deliver work promptly, imposing a timeframe wouldn't be in keeping with the instructional nature of the program.

"If something unexpected happens, we stop the class and talk about it so the students can understand and work through the issue," Trost says. "At the end of the day, this is a class and these are students, and their education is the most important priority."

Next Steps

In the same way that Trost envisioned a larger and more comprehensive manufacturing program at a high school, he also hopes the legislature will change laws to allow schools to award scholarships or grants to students from the money the program generates.

"Right now, in Minnesota, you can't pay a student for the type of work we're doing because the revenue is coming in through the district," he says. "My goal since day one is to get students paid in the form of a scholarship or grant, but that will require getting the laws changed." Trost made some headway last year by meeting with some state representatives, but the legislative session ended before that proposal could get enough traction.

He's still hopeful to continue those conversations and get a new law passed this year, because he believes the ability to tie a scholarship or grant to a manufacturing program like this will continue to spur interest not just in the program itself but also in manufacturing and skilled trades. Also, it will provide a reward for students who are already putting in the work and go beyond just academic credit.

"My focus is to get kids into this program and create other programs," he says. "When they hear about the potential of a grant or scholarship, maybe they'll see that this is worth looking at. At the very least, it might lead someone to consider machining and manufacturing who may not have thought about it before."

Another step might be for Trost to offer workshops similar to the one he attended at Cardinal Manufacturing — bringing in other schools in Minnesota that might benefit from starting a similar program. That would provide more opportunities for getting young people into the skilled trades and help with workforce development, says McDonald.

"Saints Manufacturing is a model that should be followed by more schools because the skills these students learn aren't just applicable to one type of job," he adds. "These students are learning problem solving, project management, collaboration, and communication. They're seeing that it pays to be detail oriented and aware of budgets."

A 2023 report called "Minnesota's Vanishing Workforce" by analytics firm Lightcast, in partnership with the Minnesota Business Partnership, concluded that the state is experiencing profound demographic changes that will alter the composition of its workforce in the years ahead. Most notably, Minnesota's population will age more rapidly between 2020 and 2030 than during any other period, emphasizing the need for younger, skilled workers to come in as they retire.

The report suggests that increasing the opportunities to learn new skills will be crucial, and Saints Manufacturing is showing what that looks like, one graduating class at a time.

"This program is as much about fostering employability as it is about fundamentals in machining or welding," Trost says. "We're proud and excited to keep this going because it represents the next generation of skilled professionals."

Courtesy of Enterprise Minnesota. Reprinted with permission.

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Mechatronics: Students Explore How Machines Work

Spring Lake Park Schools

In the Intro to Mechatronics (How Machines Work) course at Spring Lake Park High School, curiosity meets creativity as students explore how robotics and machines come together. Through hands-on projects, they discover how mechanical, electrical and digital systems work in harmony to make machines move, think and perform.

Part of the Technology, Engineering and Design (TED) Pathway, this course introduces students to the foundations of mechatronics - a field that fuses mechanics, electronics and computing. It's a space where students are challenged to think critically and gain authentic, practical experience while experimenting, tinkering and creating in a cutting-edge lab.

"This course is kind of the introduction into smart factory work," says Zac Humphrey, TED Pathways Instructor. "The skills students learn in the course apply across many industries such as automotive, diesel, technology, maintenance and engineering. They're learning about systems that control all other systems."

Throughout the trimester, students explore seven skill areas of modern manufacturing. They include: measurements and fasteners, engine theory and pneumatics, electronics, hydraulics, robot operations, machine programming and logic systems.

One day, students might be measuring bolts with micrometers and calipers. The next, they're working together to program a robotic arm or using math to calculate voltage in a circuit.

Learning in action

As part of the measurement and fasteners unit, students practice tapping and threading medal – a skill that's fundamental across many fields.

"We cut metal into chunks, drilled holes and then tapped them so we could screw in bolts," explains senior Lincoln Sheck. "It's the kind of thing you'd need to know how to do in a lot of jobs, so it's a great experience to have."

Lincoln says what he enjoys most about the course is seeing work come to life.

"We recently got to program a robot arm to move blocks – it was really cool to see the how our programming led to the robot actually working," he says.

For freshman Bennett Planting, the course is a perfect fit for his lifelong hobby of building and creating.

"I've always been into engineering and mechanics," says Bennett. "When I was younger, I built things out of cardboard and paper, now I have my own 3D printer where I design and print my own projects. This class lets me do it all – engineering, mechanics, building, creating. I just love to create stuff."

So far, Bennett has learned about electric currents, voltage, fastening and how to safely use heavy tools.

"Soldering a wire together has been a favorite project so far," he says. "It wasn't as hard as I thought, and it was really cool to see it work."

Each topic and activity helps students understand how machines operate and interact.

"Students are getting an introduction to many areas and are learning necessary skills," says Zac. "They get to see what interests them – or doesn't – where they have natural abilities and how it all connects to what they're learning in other classes."

> ***"When I met with my counselor, they helped me confirm that engineering is a good path for me to pursue so I definitely want to keep taking courses like this. It's a passion of mine so it just makes sense to keep going with it, keep learning, and hopefully be an engineer one day."***
>
> **—Bennett Planting, freshman**

Beyond the classroom

As part of the course, students hear directly from industry experts and take immersive site visits.

"I like going out in the industry for visits because kids can see what a job is like," says Zac. "They can talk to people who have experience, can get advice, see what skills are needed to be successful in that field — so they're not walking into a career blind."

Students taking Mechatronics also have the chance to earn certifications through the course, credentials that can lead to jobs with companies like Bühler, RMS or International Paper.

"It puts kids a step ahead to leave this course and already be certified to work on equipment and maintain equipment in the industry," says Zac.

Gearing up for the future

All aspects of the course - from learning the skills, gaining hands-on experience and hearing from the experts - help students make informed decisions for their futures. Zac says this course is meant to help students test-drive their interests and see how classroom learning connects to potential careers.

"I always say my job isn't to teach a student the actual trade, although they're going to learn trade tendencies, but to see how the rest of their schooling applies to that trade and if there is an area in the trades they'd like to pursue in their futures," says Zac. "I like to think of it as a dip in the shallow end."

For Lincoln and Bennett, the future is already coming into focus.

Lincoln plans to study mechanical engineering and computer science next year. In addition to this course, he has also taken the How to Make Almost Anything course.

"The skills we learn in these classes will prepare me for college courses and my career," says Lincoln. "I think I can even be a step ahead of others who don't get the chance to take these types of courses where we learn a lot of skills needed for our jobs someday. And its skills that go beyond technical, it's the problem solving and teamwork skills that matter, too."

Bennett plans to continue through the TED Pathways and hopes to pursue engineering after high school.

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Hatching a New Course: Students Learn About Agricultural and Natural Resources at EPHS

Eden Prairie Schools

Across an otherwise quiet first-floor hallway in Eden Prairie High School, a soft peeping sound drifted through an open door. It was an early Tuesday morning, and students in Jack Roessler's new Intro to Animal Care & Nutrition class were getting ready to start their observations of the week-old chicks they'd incubated and hatched. The goal: try to increase the time the chicks spent eating by introducing different factors into their environment, such as more food or attractively colored paper. Roessler gave instructions as students migrated to the sink to wash their hands before scooping up a few chicks and transferring them to smaller boxes for the 10-minute observation. "It's novel," he said, explaining why so many Eagles had signed up for his new course. There was an air of excitement as students moved to the enclosure to carefully corral the tiny birds.

"It's a little intimidating to grab a chicken for the first time," Roessler chuckled. But he hoped little else about his class was intimidating. The new agriculture course, part of the Natural & Applied Sciences Pathway at EPHS, was designed to teach students about basic animal science, anatomy, biology, genetics, nutritional needs and behavior. There were so many career opportunities in these fields, Roessler explained, and the class provided insight into those possibilities, from the Department of Natural Resources to forestry work and more. Plus, "a lot of students have an interest in veterinary sciences," he said. Earlier in the term, students had built animal skeletons from pasta as part of an anatomy unit. Making the class hands-on and project-based was a priority for Roessler, as it made the environment welcoming and the material accessible to all students.

Across the classroom, students began their observations. At times, they needed to build up the walls of their boxes because the chicks were getting old enough to hop quite high. The once-quiet room filled with conversations about what students were seeing, mixed with laughter and questions for Roessler. A popular one was, "Can I hold a chick?" after students had finished their assignment.

At a table in the middle of the room, ninth grader Maya Singleton stood holding a calm, black-feathered chick. She smiled. In the class, "we get to explore and learn about different animals and how some bodies are different than others," she said. Maya had heard the course was an opportunity to work with animals, and she wanted to give it a try. The research-based structure of the course gave her opportunities to build her collaboration skills and was a good way to learn, she said. Those hands-on experiences were something students would remember,

Continued on Page 18

Learning That Leads Somewhere: Career Pathways at NCTA

If you love animals, enjoy science, or want a career where you can make a difference every day, the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture (NCTA) in Curtis is a two-year technical college offering one of the most hands-on Veterinary Technology programs in the country. With a traditional on-campus option and a new online pathway launched in Fall 2025, NCTA is expanding opportunities for students everywhere who feel called to animal care.

For decades, NCTA has trained veterinary technicians who are comfortable in clinics, barns, laboratories, zoos, or livestock facilities. Students learn by working directly with cattle, horses, dogs, cats, small mammals, birds, reptiles, and even exotic species. Campus teaching facilities for large-animal handling, innovative equine health devices, a surgical suite, x-ray, ultrasound, and laboratories create real experiences for students. These settings help learners practice clinical skills and build confidence from day one.

That hands-on foundation is strengthened by faculty who are deeply invested in student success. Students often describe their instructors as approachable, patient, and clear educators. They set high expectations while creating an environment where it's safe to ask questions, make mistakes, and try again. Many learners say this supportive teaching style is what makes the program truly transformative.

Expanding Access Through Online Learning

To broaden access to veterinary careers, NCTA launched its Online Veterinary Technology program in Fall 2025. The response was immediate and enthusiastic. More than 30 students enrolled in the first cohort, and another group begins in January 2026.

Designed for learners balancing work, family responsibilities, or geographic distance, the online pathway delivers the same accredited curriculum and faculty expertise as the on-campus program. Students complete coursework virtually while gaining hands-on experience through approved veterinary practices near their home communities.

Applied Learning Across Campus

Beyond veterinary studies, NCTA engages students across a full slate of agricultural pathways as part of the University of Nebraska system. In agronomy, students test their knowledge against peers nationwide through competitive crops judging. They apply classroom concepts to real soils, plants, and precision-ag technologies. These experiences sharpen problem-solving skills and prepare students for careers tied directly to food production and land stewardship.

Animal Science and Equine students find their classrooms both indoors and out. Through intensive horsemanship training and ranch-horse competition, equine students develop valuable technical and leadership skills. The campus cattle herd gives students experience in calving, artificial insemination, and all aspects of livestock health and production.

Meanwhile, students drawn to agribusiness, ag mechanics, irrigation technology, welding, or to the vital role of teaching agriculture and advising FFA are equally well served. Each program provides hands-on, industry-connected learning that mirrors the demands of Nebraska's agricultural workforce.

Affordable by Design, Career-Focused by Nature

What unites these experiences is NCTA's commitment to affordability and access. With a one-rate tuition of $156 per credit hour for all students—both in-state and out-of-state—NCTA offers an education significantly lower in cost than the national average for similar programs. This allows students to focus on learning, not overwhelming debt, as they prepare for careers that matter in agriculture, animal health, and rural communities.

At NCTA, education isn't abstract. It's applied, personal, and purposefully designed to help students discover where they fit and how far they can go. From the classroom to the arena, from the clinic to the field, students graduate with real skills, real confidence, and a clear direction for the future.

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LEARN. GROW. DO.

2025 Outstanding Teacher, Nathan Lund

Glacial Hills Elementary teacher earns top honors from Minnesota Ag in the Classroom

Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom (MAITC) is proud to announce Nathan Lund of Glacial Hills Elementary in Starbuck, MN as the recipient of the 2025 Outstanding Teacher of the Year Award. This honor recognizes K-12 educators in Minnesota who creatively integrate agriculture concepts into their classrooms.

Lund has taught 5th and 6th grade at Glacial Hills Elementary since 2021. With his support, students in his class have gained a deeper appreciation for agriculture and the environment through hands-on learning experiences. These include starting and maintaining a schoolyard garden, incorporating hydroponic systems in the classroom, restoring native habitats around the school grounds, canning tomatoes from the garden, and hosting food-making contests. In addition, Lund launched a school-wide composting initiative with his students actively leading the effort each year.

"We were so impressed by the many ways Mr. Lund and his students are working with their community—whether it's building outdoor learning spaces or participating in local environmental initiatives," said Sue Knott, Education Specialist with MAITC, a program of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA). "It's clear he is creating a lasting impact in both the classroom and throughout the broader community."

Reflecting on his work, Lund shared "Witnessing students' transformation into proactive environmental stewards over the past four years has been incredibly rewarding. It has reinforced my belief in the power of experiential learning to inspire real-world change and has motivated me to continue integrating environmental education and agriculture into our curriculum."

Lund credits programs like Ag in the Classroom, Lettuce Grow, Action for Healthy Kids, and Farm to School with helping him to bring authentic agriculture experiences into the classroom. "Through all of these different experiences, it is my goal to give students many opportunities to build life skills and a love of life-long learning and growing," says Lund.

All licensed Minnesota K-12 educators who creatively integrate agricultural into non-agricultural subjects are eligible for the MAITC Outstanding Teacher of the Year Award. As this year's winner, Lund will receive $500 plus support to attend the National Ag in the Classroom Conference taking place in Minneapolis, MN, June 23-26.

MAITC is a partnership between the MDA and the MAITC Foundation that seeks to increase agricultural literacy through K-12 education. For free educational resources and to learn more about the Outstanding Teacher of the Year Award, visit the MAITC website.

Hatching a New Course Continued from Page 16

Roessler explained, even if they didn't end up choosing careers in the field.

But he hoped they might! Roessler recently started an FFA (Future Farmers of America) chapter at EPHS, and students are welcome to join the national career- and leadership-focused organization so long as they take part in an Agriculture and Natural Resources class. This November, at the club's first Region IV FFA Leadership Development competition, ninth grader Najma Gure placed first out of 15 students in the Creed Speaking event and 12th grader Avery Jensen placed first out of 21 students in Employment Skills. Both students will compete at the state level in December, and if either place first again, they'll represent Eden Prairie High School at the national level next fall. "This was a huge success for our first competitions," Roessler said.

Though the first group of chicks have since gone to new homes in the area, there are still opportunities for students to take Agricultural and Natural Resources classes this year. As Roessler looks ahead to the future, he recognizes what high student interest has already proven: The department has "a lot of potential."

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Blooming Heights Edible Schoolyard and Outdoor Classroom

High school volunteers making flower bouquets and harvesting ginger (below).

Columbia Heights Public Schools

Since its inception, the Blooming Heights Edible Schoolyard & Outdoor Classroom has offered unique programming within Columbia Heights Public Schools.

The intentionality of the Blooming Heights mission and guiding principles have allowed the program to refine its assessments to align with these values and to measure program outcomes more deliberately. Blooming Heights stands out as an example of the kind of innovative programming made possible with the support of administrators, teachers, families, students and School Board members.

Mission

Blooming Heights is a Columbia Heights Public Schools program that uses school garden and nutrition programming to facilitate equitable experiences that engage all the senses, while building the skills and knowledge necessary for cultivating a healthy life and planet.

Guiding Principles

- We are committed to hands-on teaching and learning that highlights beauty, wonder and joy, and encourages positive risk taking.
- We facilitate interactions with the natural world that value both individuality and mutuality.
- We provide professional development and support to educators involved in experiential education.
- We conduct practice-based nutrition curriculum built on the belief that healthy food should taste good and connect eaters to the earth.
- We teach garden skills and knowledge as a lifelong means for self-advocacy and independence.
- We seek to center marginalized voices and to elevate leadership from all members of our community.
- We provide opportunities for personal and cultural connection with the land.
- We believe learning should feel relevant and urgent, inspiring questioning and curiosity.
- We offer multi-age and multi-discipline learning experiences that utilize techniques such as Social Emotional Learning and mindfulness as well as academic content.

About the Garden

Blooming Heights Edible Schoolyard is located behind the Columbia Heights District Center, between the High School and the Family Center, 1440 49th Ave. NE, Columbia Heights. Blooming Heights is within short walking distance from Highland and Valley View elementary schools and Columbia Academy.

What do we grow?

We have both ground level garden beds and a number of raised beds for vegetables, fruits, flowers and herbs. In addition to the wide variety of annual vegetables we also grow many perennial fruits: raspberries, strawberries, hardy kiwi, juneberries, honeyberries, gooseberries and currants. There is a small orchard with apple, pear, cherry and plum trees, as well as a pergola with hardy grapevines. We also maintain a pollinator garden filled with native wildflowers and tend a small rain garden.

Who uses the garden?

Programming at Blooming Heights includes learners from all ages from the Early Childhood Family Education program to students in grades K-12 and extending into adult enrichment classes. Students in our district start seeds in early spring using grow labs in their classrooms and transplant the seedlings outdoors before the end of the school year.

Student involvement is integral to the upkeep of the garden and they help with planting, weeding, watering, and harvesting. During the summer, our High School Summer Assistants take most of the responsibility for tending the garden. In addition to planting, watering and weeding, and they harvest fruits and vegetables for weekly cooking lessons. Any produce that is not used for cooking is preserved for use by the Family and Consumer Science (FACS) classes during the school year or donated to the local food shelf.

This summer, our Adventure Club and Mini Adventures programs spent some time with Erin Rupp from Pollinate MN to learn all about bees! Students checked out a hive, learned how to find the queen bee, got to put on a bee keeper outfit and tried some honey!

Check out our Facebook page www.facebook.com/pages/Blooming-Heights-Edible-School-Yard/255854018156378

colheights.k12.mn.us

$250,000 in Grant Funding Available to Boost Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources Education in Minnesota

The Minnesota Agricultural Education Leadership Council (MAELC) is now accepting grant applications for projects that support programming for agriculture, food and natural resources education (AFNR) education at the K–12 and post-secondary levels.

The second round of applications are due April 15, 2026. Applicants may request between $1,500–$25,000 per project. The average award amount for the past three years is $8,900. Priority will be given to school-based agricultural education and post-secondary programs, or for projects connected to school districts or colleges/universities.

Projects should address at least one of the strategies within the following MAELC goal areas:

MAELC Goal # 1: Increase STUDENT access, awareness, and participation

- Implement new or expand current AFNR education programs that attract new and/or underserved groups
- Provide experiences that improve student engagement and broaden opportunities for applied learning in AFNR content, including middle school grades (5-8)
- Promote and offer AFNR career exploration programs that recruit and retain students for the future workforce

MAELC Goal # 2: Improve PROGRAMMING content, meeting facilities and equipment needs, and provide the best method of instruction to meet the needs of the AFNR industry

- Develop AFNR courses that provide opportunities for credit equivalency for high school graduation credit or concurrent enrollment for post-secondary credit
- Provide equipment and improve facilities to enhance student experience and instruction
- Develop and/or enhance AFNR curriculum and course delivery methods to provide students with opportunities to acquire leadership, career readiness and technical skills

MAELC Goal # 3: Recruit, retain, and support highly qualified INSTRUCTORS

- Implement recruitment strategies to encourage individuals to join the AFNR education profession
- Support career lifecycles of agricultural educators (e.g., pre-service, early, mid or late career), which can include programming for professional development, mentorship, and cohort opportunities
- Provide programming that retains and transitions instructors at the secondary, post-secondary and farm business management levels

Contact information: Sarah Dornink, Executive Director, Minnesota Agricultural Education Leadership Council tesm0010@umn.edu / (612) 624-6249

CNA Course at Marshall Public Schools

Health care careers are in high demand and are also high paying jobs. The more opportunities available to equip students with the skills and knowledge of the health care field, the stronger future employees they will be. Currently, Home Health and Personal Care Aides are ranked #1in demand job.

Students who have a chance to take our CNA course will obtain training and skills to support this needed work. Nursing Assistants rank #6 in demand for the Southwest Minnesota Region and Registered Nurses are ranked 7th in demand and Licensed Practical Nurses are ranked 15th in demand. Our courses would provide foundational work and training for these students and would help potential employers in our communities and region.

We know students are interested in these types of careers and classes. We have held multiple sections of CNA for the past 6 years and each year we have had enough students to run four sections. During these courses students continue to ask and inquire about other opportunities in the health care field. Students in our Career Internship classes are requested to work with medical field supervisors to learn more.

We will continue to recruit students to our classes in the Medical Institute through work with counselors and teachers. In our Ramp Up and Advisory programs through Marshall High School and Marshall ALC, we will learn about the interests of our students and their future career plans. Students indicated interested in the health care field will be provided opportunities to enroll in the course. We will also share about the classes with all students and families and provide information at registration for students about the classes.

Students will have the opportunity to complete a Certified Nursing Assistant test to get their CNA license. There is a potential college credit through articulation. As we branch out into more classes, we will look for ways to include certification options for our students.

We have great partnerships in place with local business partners who have continued to support our work and goals to provide more education to students interested in the medical field. These partners currently hold a spot on our Medical Institute Advisory Board. They provide feedback and guidance on what they are seeing and needing in the career field in our community. Their first-hand knowledge of the skills and needs in their work environments is vital for us to help prepare students to become employed by them.

All of these business partners have supported our work through speakers coming to visit with students and providing opportunities for tours and job shadows for students. These would continue as they are a very important part of the hands-on, real-life learning experiences for our students. All the partners are committed to the work we are doing as a school and in the community.

Courtesy of SWWC Service Cooperative

marshall.k12.mn.us

Emergency Care: Service and Skills in Action

Spring Lake Park Schools

After a summer of service and skill building, students in Opportunities in Emergency Care (OEC) — part of the Health and Human Services pathway at Spring Lake Park High School, are back on the sidelines of fall athletics. You are likely to see them polishing skills and gaining experience through volunteer service in our community.

After 38 years teaching in the Opportunities in Emergency Care program, Bill Neiss admits, “Fall is like being shot out of a cannon.”

From early September to mid-October, OEC students volunteered at more than 30 athletic events. Football games, hockey tryouts, state soccer games, softball games, a marathon – through supporting these events, students learn on the job.

One certified Emergency Medical Technician is responsible at each event – for the care of any patients and mentoring students. Newer students are just learning - watching and seeing what it's like to be part of the team. They get tips on how to talk to patients, do assessments and provide simple care. Each student in Emergency Medical Technician and Emergency Medical Responder courses is required to volunteer 10 hours each trimester. These hours are critical for improving skills through practice.

Bill and John Lindstrom, who teaches firefighter courses in the OEC program, split up the events to provide oversight, often after teaching five classes over the course of the day.

"It's just what we do," says Bill.

He knows how important the real-life practice is and also what it means to serve the community. His email signature sums up what he tries to instill in the program experience, "Don't strive to be a person of success, instead, strive to be a person of value."

Summer of service and skills

Practicing skills through hours of service doesn’t just happen during the school year. OEC students are racking up the practice in volunteer gigs throughout the summer, too.

The 2025 Target USA CUP, hosted at the National Sports Center in Blaine, was the largest in the 40-year history. Bill served as the field medical coordinator and 75 percent of the volunteers came from the OEC program at Spring Lake Park High School. Bill put in 116 hours during the week of competition.

“We had 127 volunteers on the medical team who completed 832 calls,” says Bill. “There were 290 injuries that got transported to the clinic, and five ambulance transports.”

Bill noted the “wild weather.” The first day was hot and humid, and the next day the team was running to the school for blankets.

The adventures continued as 22 people with ties to the OEC program traveled to the Dominican Republic on a medical mission trip. Seven were Class of 2025 grads from Spring Lake Park High School – all certified EMTs. During the trip, they saw 480 patients and participated in training 25 doctors and nurses in pediatrics, intubation, ultrasound, CPR and EKG interpretation.

“When we go there, we are stationed in San Juan,” says Bill. “Then we do four days of mobile medical clinics in barrios.”

The crew reported on remarkable blood pressure numbers, high blood sugar and the need for vitamins. Practicing their skills away from home, they gained another level of new insight.

A new year

All of the volunteer hours throughout the year prepares students for their credentialing exams and for future jobs. Last year, 30 students achieved their EMT certifications and 29 achieved their EMR. Over the past two years, 57 students have attained their EMT certification. That’s a new high.

“Right now, the passing rate on the test is 100 percent,” says Bill. “National pass rate is something like 70 percent.”

As the new year begins, class enrollments for Nursing Assistant, Emergency Medical Technician and Emergency Medical Responder are maxed out. It is the first year there will be two nursing assistant sections all year. These are double block classes, taking up two hours per day, which is a big commitment in addition to the volunteer hours.

“Grads come in and help out,” says Bill, “hundreds of them throughout the year. We couldn’t do this without them. We get them from all over the map - some who graduated last year to some who graduated 40 years ago.”

They come back because the experience, for those that continue on in a medical field, is invaluable.

Sophia Park, a graduate from 2019, recently contacted Bill with some reflections on her high school experience. She’s now in medical school.

> ***“I knew I was going the medical school track very early on, but the advice I heard from online, social media, and advisors was to prioritize Advanced Placement classes over courses like Opportunities in Emergency Care. Looking back, I think having the experience from OEC would have been a game changer, in med school applications, classes, and clinical years.”***
>
> —Sophia Park, 2019 grad

She’s noted the advantage students with hands on experience have in medical school.

“Some of the ‘ABCs’ of emergency medicine that I am learning for the first time in medical school are already second nature to some of the students who went through OEC courses in high school. Even though I’m not going into the emergency medicine field, the principles taught in OEC are still foundational to the assessment and management of every patient I see,” says Sophia.

Another more recent graduate, Philip Apel, Class of 2025, texted Bill in the last weeks of August. Philip is in school at a major clinic to become a Physician’s Assistant.

“Much of the EMT foundation knowledge has been useful, and especially the clinical reasoning skills that we learn as a part of scenarios and decision making,” he shared. “I have no doubt they will continue to become even more useful as clinicals start. I am grateful I got to be a part of the program, and I still miss it sometimes. Hoping I will be able to make it back to volunteer in the winter.”

springlakeparkschools.org

CNA Program at Willmar Public Schools

The Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) Program at Willmar Senior High School expanded access to healthcare education and workforce preparation for high school students. In partnership with a local college, the school offered an on-site CNA class led by a licensed nurse instructor, allowing students to earn their CNA certification while still in high school.

The initiative addressed a critical shortage of qualified nursing assistants in the Willmar region by equipping students with the skills, training, and credentials needed to enter healthcare careers immediately after graduation. Through the program, students learned essential patient care skills, gained clinical experience, and were prepared to take and pass the state CNA exam.

The project, supported by a $18,661 LYFT Career Pathways Impact Grant, funded instructional supplies and staffing necessary to relaunch the course. Students benefited from hands-on training using industry-standard tools provided through Ridgewater College, ensuring alignment with current healthcare expectations and post-secondary pathways.

Interest in the program grew through Willmar's new HOSA chapter (Future Health Professionals) and the school's health sciences course offerings, which drew students aspiring to careers in nursing, therapy, or other medical fields. The course not only prepared students for immediate employment but also served as a steppingstone toward advanced healthcare degrees.

The CNA program continues to strengthen the bridge between secondary and postsecondary education while meeting local workforce needs, empowering students to begin meaningful, in-demand healthcare careers and serve their own community.

Courtesy of SWWC Service Cooperative

willmar.k12.mn.us

Hopkins' Career and Technical Education Adds Two New Healthcare Courses

Hopkins Public Schools

Hopkins CTE courses cover four subject areas: Technology Education, Family and Consumer Sciences, Healthcare, and Business Education.

Through a diversity of topics our scholars find classes that align with their interests and passions and may help identify a future career path. These courses offer Hopkins scholars hands-on learning experiences, allowing them to apply what they've learned in a practical setting.

New for 2025–26!

Medical Terminology Course — This is a course for all students interested in health professions to become familiar with, and knowledgeable in, the workings of the human body. This class will be offered as concurrent enrollment through the local community college.

Certified Nursing Assistant Course Offered as Concurrent Enrollment — The Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program provides classroom and clinical training for individuals interested in pursuing direct patient care in hospitals, nursing homes, or home health care settings. This course is a prerequisite to most LPN or RN programs in Minnesota

and is valuable to anyone interested in direct patient care. In the 2025–26 school year, this course will be offered as concurrent enrollment through the local technical college.

www.hopkinsschools.org

MASSP High School Principals of the Year

Capitol Division
Rob Reetz
Mounds View High School

Central Division
Aaron Nelson
Pequot Lakes High School

Hennepin Division
Rob Ware
Robbinsdale Academy – Highview

Northeast Division
Tom Tusken
Denfeld High School

Northern Division
Ben Miska
Warren-Alvarado-Oslo High School

Southeast Division
Trent Langemo
Kasson Mantorville High School

Southwest Division
Brian Gilbertson
Edgerton High School

Western Division
Nate Meissner
Minnewaska Area High School

MASSP Middle Level Principals of the Year

Capitol Division
Oulia Yang
Battle Creek Middle School

Central Division
Heidi Critchley
St. Francis Middle School

Hennepin Division
Mai Chang Vue
Anthony Middle School

Northeast Division
Brian Kazmierczak
Lincoln Park Middle School

Northern Division
Mary Merchant
Lake of the Woods School

Southeast Division
Richard Swanson
Byron Middle School

Southwest Division
Jason Phelps
Luverne Middle School

Western Division
Amie Westberg
Sebeka High School

MASSP Middle Level Assistant Principals of the Year

Capitol Division
Mike Sodomka
Farnsworth Aerospace Upper Campus

Central Division
Rachel Sandquist
Monticello Middle School

Hennepin Division
Chris Nelson
Anoka Middle School of the Arts

Northeast Division
Eric Stang
Ordean East Middle School

Northern Division
Beth Vetter
East Grand Forks Central Middle School

Southeast Division
Bobbi Seleski
Twin Bluff Middle School

Brittney Steine named WEA Teacher of the Year Continued from Page 1

a world that has often been far too harsh and judgmental.

"Brittney does an amazing job forging relationships with students who have struggled in the typical classroom environment," WMS science teacher Amblyn Reisetter said. "She creates a safe, welcoming, and engaging environment for her students and provides the resources they need to learn and grow."

Did someone say grow? Because Steine recently secured a $5,000 "Dare to Dream" Grant from the Foundation for Winona Area Public Schools to collaborate with a woodworking class at the high school to build a greenhouse that DEEDs students will use to produce plants to be sold in a student-run store. This type of project-based learning is the foundation of alternative learning, and a great example of the vision Steine has in the promise and potential of her students.

"Each student can contribute in meaningful ways," Steine said. "Graduates feel truly Winhawk Proud."

Steine started teaching at WMS in 2018. Before settling in the DEEDs program, she taught a number of different subjects, including phy ed, math, science, robotics and tech design.

She's involved in the PTA at Washington-Kosciusko Elementary and Winona Middle School and is the varsity gymnastics head coach, winning the section coach of the year award three times.

And she is fiercely proud to be a Winhawk.

"I personally have been so blessed to work with talented teachers who have taught me so much and helped me better serve my students," she said. "I am really impressed with how everyone works together to put students first.

"The people of Winona Area Public Schools are truly amazing people."

www.winonaschools.org

Erin Mulvany-Mankowski and Hilary Moorlach Named 2025 EML Educators of Excellence

Lakeville Area Schools

Lakeville Area Schools is excited to announce this year's Education Minnesota Lakeville (EML) Educators of Excellence–Erin Mulvany-Mankowski and Hilary Moorlach. Mulvany-Mankowski and Moorlach are now eligible candidates for the 2026 Minnesota Teacher of the Year award among candidates from across the state who were nominated by their colleagues and named by Education Minnesota.

Erin Mulvany-Mankowski

Hillary Moorlach

Mulvany-Mankowski teaches English at Lakeville Pathways Academy and Moorlach is a Digital Media Specialist at Cherry View Elementary and serves as the District Digital Media Specialist Lead.

Mulvany-Mankowski's colleagues say, "Erin is excellent at building electives and interactions with students to ensure academic success. She works diligently to create a dynamic learning environment, always researching and experimenting with new ways to present content. She takes the time to understand all her students' unique strengths and differentiate instruction."

Moorlach's colleagues say, "Hilary's passion for teaching and willingness to explore new technology inspires both students and colleagues. She uses technology not just as a tool, but as a way to open doors for students, sparking curiosity, creativity and confidence. She is always learning, always sharing, and always putting kids first."

"We are grateful to have educators like Erin and Hilary in our schools, inspiring their students and colleagues to unlock their potential every day," said Superintendent Michael Baumann. "Achievements such as this highlight the profound impact educators have on the academic, social, civic and personal readiness of every student."

The annual EML Educator of Excellence Awards celebrates excellence in teaching in Lakeville Area Schools. The annual Teacher of the Year program celebrates the tradition of excellence in teaching across Minnesota. The Minnesota Teacher of the Year will be named at a banquet in the spring.

www.isd194.org

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Burnsville · Eagan · Savage

Hussein Receives Doctoral Outstanding Contribution in the Field Award from Hamline

Burnsville-Eagan-Savage School District 191

Gideon Pond Elementary Principal Dr. Salma Hussein recently received the Doctoral Outstanding Contribution in the Field award from Hamline University's School of Education and Leadership.

Every year, Hamline University selects one student from its Doctorate of Education (EdD) cohort to recognize for their outstanding contributions in the field of education. Hussein became the first female Somali principal in Minnesota while finishing her doctoral work, which included a dissertation that examined the challenges and successes of implementing restorative practices, and studied efforts to reduce racial disparities in disciplinary data.

"[Hussein] continues to share this work with other colleagues and elementary principals to improve K-12 education in Minnesota. We are honored that she is a Hamline graduate," Hamline University EdD Program Director Trish Harvey said.

Hussein is in her fourth year as principal at Gideon Pond Elementary.

"Winning this award is meaningful to me. It reflects the hard work and dedication of my parents, who instilled in me a passion for learning and a love for community," Hussein said. "To me, community means leading with and for students, staff, and families — listening, supporting one another, and creating spaces where everyone can thrive. I'm excited to continue this important work in District 191."

www.isd191.org

Obama Middle School's Rebekah Orensten Wins State Library Award

Saint Paul Public Schools, District 625

When Obama Middle School opened its doors for the first time this August, library media specialist Rebekah Orensten got to do what most librarians can only dream of: Create her own library from the ground up, not only deciding what books and resources to order, but how to arrange the bookshelves, chairs and tables themselves. The new library, which is shared with the adjoining Obama Montessori, has quickly become a hub in the newly renovated building, where students of all ages can discover their new favorite book on every visit.

Two months into the new school year, Orensten got more good news when she was named the School Media Innovator of the Year at the 2025 Minnesota Library Association Conference. This award honors a licensed school librarian, or technology integrationist who has made innovation and the development of new ideas and teaching philosophy using school library, maker, or technological practices and ideas. In her previous role at Battle Creek Middle School, Orensten mentored her school's genius squad and continually pursued grants and donations to provide her students with a makerspace, robots, art supplies, a Cricut machine and more.

"The library is a special place that gives students opportunities that they might not otherwise have. I was bound and determined that my students would have every opportunity that schools with more funding would have," she said. "I want all my students to know that the library is for them and that they are welcome in the space."

As one of the people who nominated her for the award said: "Rebekah exemplifies what it means to be a 21st-century library media specialist: student-centered, tech-savvy, and deeply dedicated to empowering young minds."

www.spps.org

Julie Biersack Receives 2025 Distinguished School Library Supporter Award

Independent School District 196
Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan

Julie Biersack, assistant administrator at Emerald Trail Elementary School and former learning and technology specialist for District 196, has been honored with the 2025 Distinguished School Library Supporter Award for her advocacy and unwavering support of school library media specialists.

The award is presented by the Minnesota Library Association (MLA) to recognize individuals who have significantly supported school library operations and advanced the role of school libraries in education.

Throughout her tenure at District 196, Biersack has served as a liaison between the district's library media specialists and administration. While not a library media specialist by training, she became a strong advocate for those she worked with, doing everything in her power to support them and learn about the valuable work they do.

"When she didn't initially understand the 'why' behind a request from the library team, she would listen to their concerns, ask clarifying questions, and help solidify their requests to ensure the best possible outcome for their needs," said colleagues. "

Biersack's most significant advocacy came during the 2024-2025 school year, when several buildings faced retirements of library media specialists, and the hiring of replacements was in question. Biersack advocated for maintaining full-time library media specialists and presented a strong educational and literacy rationale for doing so.

"She knows the value of library media specialists and how students succeed when they have a library champion to instill a love of reading for pleasure and get the right books into each student's hand," noted the nomination. "Julie is a true supporter of school libraries and works to make them better each day in District 196."

Her commitment to professional development, understanding library operations, and dedication to ensuring every student has access to a qualified library media specialist have made a lasting impact on District 196.

The award was presented at the 2025 Minnesota Library Association Annual Conference in October.

www.district196.org

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- Certificates in 10 areas including: ABE, ASD, climate literacy, and nature-based early learning

Hamline School of Education and Leadership students are consistently on the list of nominees for the MN Teacher of the Year Award and have won four out of the past nine years.

Join the Hamline educators community today.

Hamline.edu/EducationLeaders

For questions, please email **gradprog@hamline.edu**