



**Business Education**  
**NETWORK**  
Minnesota Chamber Foundation



SCAN ME

# Five years of transforming **TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE**











## Business Education

N E T W O R K

Minnesota Chamber Foundation

**T**he Center for Workforce Solutions is the first-of-its kind in Minnesota, a business-led initiative to ensure employers and employees possess the necessary tools for jobs of the future. One of three priority areas for the Minnesota Chamber Foundation, it is complimented by our leadership programs, and the Center for Economic Research, which issued its first major report, *Minnesota: 2030* in the spring of 2021. One of the major strategy recommendations of *Minnesota: 2030* is leveraging Minnesotans – stressing the foundational imperatives to grow our workforce and help individuals develop the skills they need to succeed in the 21st century economy.

The Center for Workforce Solutions builds on the success of the Business Education Network (BEN). In partnership with local chambers, these efforts are customized to the workforce needs of specific regions. Grassroots private sector efforts are met with the successful collaboration of K-12, higher education and community leaders to build sustainable, nimble pathways to local careers or higher education opportunities.

In addition to the local chamber partners highlighted in this summary, we know there are many other successful programs developed on the similar models across the state. We invite them to join with the Business Education Network to share their successes with others. We also know there are some communities just getting started. This summary provides a toolkit of resources to build an effective program.

Integrated into this work are efforts to ensure that employers statewide embrace all, and make inclusion a strength and priority. In addition, highlighting under resourced talent pools like veterans, workers of all abilities, retirees and others will compliment BEN efforts focused on the high school population.

The Minnesota Chamber Foundation is grateful for the generous investment by the Bush Foundation and the Carlson Family Foundation to help get us started. Funding from U.S. Bank and Xcel Energy Foundation have helped us sustain and grow the Business Education Network.

We congratulate our partners on their hard work and creativity, and especially their persistence and focus during the pandemic. Our state's workforce challenges will become more acute as we face growing labor shortages and higher demand for a skilled workforce. Our work is essential. It is imperative. We look forward to confronting this challenge in the years ahead. ■

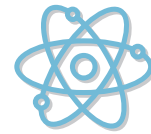


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### Innovation

A key aspect of the BEN programs is innovation and creativity to respond to local challenges. Every program is customized to the needs of the region and developed through the collaborative energy of business, community, academic and student leaders.



### Salute to our partners

These are not one-size-fits all solutions. These efforts are grassroots driven, and customized to the workforce needs of their community and region. They are led by the private sector in partnership with community and academic leaders, and partners in both K-12 and higher education. It's hard work and depends on local commitment and sustainable financial support. The Foundation salutes these efforts and are eager to amplify this success across Minnesota. Over the past five years, the Minnesota Chamber Foundation has provided financial investment through grants to support to these programs.



Lakeville CEO in the Classroom

# Key components across the Business Education Network

## CEO in the Classroom

Business owners talk with students, often about what jobs are like at their companies and the classes students should take in order to be ready for certain jobs. This interaction, whether personal or virtual, provides students a real life perspective of career options in a specific industry or company, while at the same, time, providing business leaders, typically many years removed from the classroom, the student perspective on the future of work.







## Teacher in the Workplace

High school teachers experience immersive training and exposure to specific industries by working at companies in those industries for a time during the summer. They take this experience back to their classroom in the fall, utilizing what they have learned to develop or revise curriculum to reflect the needs of the economy.



White Bear Lake Teacher in the Workplace



Dunwoody tour in Lakeville



Lakeville Teacher Tours



Waconia Teacher in the Workplace



## Career Expos, Not Career Fairs

Local employers host high school students in a tradeshow-like environment, allowing them to explore jobs and careers that are available in their communities. Thousands of students are exposed to an entire range of jobs in a region. Engagement is much more impactful when students are given the opportunity to “see, touch and do.” In some communities, students go to the business to experience work environments and see employees in action. And while perhaps not as robust an experience, some of these career exploration opportunities have gone virtual, providing greater accessibility.



Minneapolis Talent Symposium



White Bear Lake Health and Human Services Expo





Trying a flight simulator in Brainerd

## Career Academies and Pathways

Career academies require a committed school district, paired with an equally committed local business community to drive success. Career academies combine a college-preparatory, career and technical curriculum with a career opportunities, targeted to high demand careers in the region. When students are more engaged in school, they are more likely to succeed academically and graduate. Studies have found that students enrolled in career academies have higher grade point averages, higher test scores and lower dropout rates than non-career academy students in the same schools. As importantly, this partnership with business allows for internships, part time jobs and full time career options after graduation. Or for some, entry into a higher education program that will lead to a future career. Not to mention, in many districts, students have the opportunity to earn higher education credits while in high school.



Winona Career Academy



## Winona

The Winona Chamber offers, and has innovated, many BEN Programs, including CEO in the Classroom, Teacher in the Workplace and a Student Career Exploration Expo which encompasses more than 1,600 students from 18 area schools. In addition, they have created *Life After High School* presentations to help 11<sup>th</sup> grade students prepare for resume writing and interview skills. The Hot Jobs Cool Companies publication provides the outlook for careers in the Winona area in manufacturing and technology and health and human services, along with the education path needed for specific jobs. Newly established is an Educator Resource Page, a virtual library of career exploration videos that teachers can use in lieu of in-person tours or job shadows,

Perhaps most notable in Winona is the REACH program. Beginning with students as juniors in high school, the program focuses on high-demand entry level jobs in manufacturing, building trades, agribusiness, health care and human services through three school districts. Recent data on REACH graduates show that 67% continued education in a related field and 58% are continuing to work at a partner business (some are doing both). Here's just one example of success. A REACH student was hired as an intern at Fastenal the summer before his senior year and continued in that role until he turned 18 and was offered part time employment around his school schedule. After graduation, he continued to work at Fastenal while attending Minnesota State College Southeast where he completed his CNC Certification. As a result of his scholarship from REACH and tuition assistance from Fastenal, he graduated debt free and continues to work with Fastenal.



## Brainerd

The Brainerd Lakes Chamber of Commerce has long been a leader on workforce development through the Bridges Career Academies and Workplace Connection. Last year, the program reached nearly 10,000 students in 28 school districts working with 160 educators and counselors. Their programs have consistently been recognized as a high quality, effective way to introduce students to careers in the region. The Bridges Career Depot offers teen job resources, including the only job search tool in the region exclusively for 14-18 year olds. Bridges is currently developing a virtual career exploration experience, TheGameofCareers.com. Careers at local businesses will be showcased through interactive online simulation, activities, videos and more in a free and secure setting. The Minnesota Chamber Foundation helped to start and expand ProStart. A two-year program sponsored by the National Restaurant Association. ProStart's industry-driven curriculum provides real-life experience opportunities and builds practical skills and a foundation that will last a lifetime. The hospitality industry is one of the top employers in the Brainerd Lakes Area. The region is teeming with resorts and restaurants looking for workers who understand what the service industry is all about and who are willing to learn new skills and discover new opportunities.





## White Bear Area

The White Bear Area Chamber also has a robust program and is a model of success. The BEN program works to develop future workforce by providing students with a deeper understanding of career pathways and aligns skills with the current workforce needs. The program offers job shadow opportunities for students, externships for teachers, lunch and learns and career exploration and job fairs. The Chamber is essential in helping develop career pathway programs at White Bear Lake High School and is assisting in the roll-out of the new Business Career Pathway that will include a very interactive “Chamber of Commerce Entrepreneurship Program.” How do they measure success? By growing student and post-graduate employment. Employers are hiring students right after graduation and even modifying their practices to accommodate students’ schedules. More businesses are engaging in the program, participating in activities, welcoming students into their businesses and addressing the classrooms. As an example, Wilbert Plastics hired 15 students to work part time in assembly positions that are the most challenging to fill. They received approval from the state for 16 year-olds to work on the shop floor and once the students turn 18, they have the opportunity to progress to machine operators.

Cerenity Senior Living continues to hire Century College students and high school students to work flexible hours at their facility as CNAs and Food Service Workers. Another success story is a student that graduated from the Certified Nursing Assistant pathway in high school. Cerenity Senior Care hosted the student as she navigated her way through the CNA Training and clinical skills. When she graduated, she was able to secure a full-time position as a CNA at a local company. Not only has the graduate been able to move out on her own and support her daughter, she is also working full time on the frontlines during the pandemic and recently started the nursing program at Rasmussen College.



## Owatonna

SteeleCoWorks is a collaborative effort that leverages the strengths of the Owatonna Area Chamber of Commerce, United Way of Steele County, Workforce Development, Inc. and the Owatonna Public Schools.

The workforce coordinator works with high school students in four area schools to connect them with job and career opportunities. Businesses support the program by offering tours, job shadow experiences, internships and work experience.

Made in Owatonna Days focuses on career opportunities in the region. Nearly 200 high school students experience firsthand the opportunities for not only a job, but a career during the school year through Made in Owatonna Day. Student interest in pursuing internships grew from 18.5% before the tours to 32% after the tours last year. This effort is paired with the SteeleCo.Works Hot Jobs, Cool Companies Magazine, a publication designed to feature local job opportunities, education requirements and approximate wages associated with careers.





## Waconia

The Waconia Chamber of Commerce became an active BEN Partner in 2017, building a strong and cohesive relationship between the business community and the high school. One of its greatest successes is its Teacher in the Workplace program. Providing teachers the opportunity to have a job shadow experience with local businesses helps them understand how what is taught in the classroom is applied on the job. Teacher externships have focused on manufacturing, health care and skilled trades. Business and school leaders gather monthly to further expand their efforts.

In addition, the Chamber partners with the Waconia High School on “Start Your Own Business.” The classroom experience is matched with six local business partners, and is intended to provide an authentic business experience and build entrepreneurial knowledge and spirit within students. Finally, business tours help students understand available, high-demand careers in the region.

## Faribault

The Faribault Chamber’s Vision Task Force (VTF) built a set of priorities from the Community Vision 2040 results. The process included Board input and several sessions of deliberation as to which topics would have the most impact. First on the list, excellence in education.

VTF and Chamber staff took a leadership role on that priority and established strategies around school safety, facility upgrades and paths to success for all students. The *pathways* have become a rallying call for the Chamber, industry, public schools and South Central College. Representatives from all partners led the effort to create a career guidance position in the district and most importantly to implement a seventh period in grades 9-12 allowing time for pathways and career exploration.

The efforts have resulted in newly implemented pathways in health care with industrial manufacturing pathways next inline. They created a seamless program for students to acquire the academic, technical, and workplace skills that employers need. They are committed to ensure students from all backgrounds are intentionally engaged with culturally and intellectually appropriate resources. Through their efforts, students can earn a high school diploma, an industry-recognized associate degree and gain relevant work experience in a growing field. The biggest upside – lifting Faribault families from poverty through focused education and industry participation.

## Willmar

The Willmar Lakes Area has a diverse population which is reflected in the schools. More than half of the students are students of color and more than 60% of the students participate in free and reduced lunch. The Chamber is currently in discussions with Hussein Farrah and the New Vision Foundation to bring coding classes to Willmar. The New Vision Foundation’s mission is to create pathways to success by motivating disadvantaged youth through coding and digital literacy. This would be the first effort outside the Twin Cities.

The Willmar Lakes Area Chamber has long helped lead and support the KCEO program, Kandiyohi Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities. A class of about 20 students is selected annually. Instead of students learning about entrepreneurship in a classroom setting, students visit twenty to thirty local businesses throughout the year and have fifty to sixty guest speakers. Students also create their own businesses and present them to local banking investors and entrepreneurs via private meetings and an annual trade show.







## Burnsville

A unique aspect of the Burnsville Chamber's program is the Parent Forum and Resource Fair. This event is designed to provide information and resources to parents about current workforce trends and the wide variety of opportunities for their students upon high school graduation (from employment or military service to certificates, technical education and four-year degrees). Parents are often one of the most significant influencers on student's education and career paths.

Burnsville also offers a Workplace Skills Certificate Program for high school students based on a curriculum called "Bring your A Game to Work." In addition, a Student Job Search Workshop helps students learn how to search, apply and interview for jobs while a student job fair allows local businesses the opportunity to recruit students for summer, full or part time jobs. They also offer Teacher and Counselor Externships for teachers and counselors to experience real world workforce opportunities inside local businesses to bring back to their students.



## St. Cloud

The St. Cloud Area Chamber of Commerce has a growing program offering Teachers in the Workplace, and in the reverse, Employers in the Lunchroom which allows students to explore opportunities directly with employers over the lunch hour during the school day. They partner with E.P.I.C. (Exploring Potential Interests and Careers), which offers a one-day career exploration event for several thousand students across Central Minnesota. Local careers videos have also been developed that highlight local careers and industries and give students an idea of education needed; job advancement options and pay scale. The St. Cloud Area Chamber's Student Summer Internships are historically targeted to underserved students and provide a paid opportunity. These internships are particularly valuable. For example, as the result of the internship, one student changed her college major. For another, it confirmed her interest in a career and that she was on the correct path. She also was offered a part-time job at her internship company during the school year.



## East Grand Forks/Grand Forks

This regional organization has the benefit of crossing two states with a strong partnership with higher education institutions. The collaborative effort, in which the Chamber is a key partner, is aimed at both high school and college students. The career expo brings together sophomores from 32 high schools. The daylong event, with more than 75 local and regional businesses, is held at the Alerus Center. Area college students have the opportunity to meet with local employers through "Career Conversations." Employers offer a one hour visit, and more than 250 college students participate annually. Internships are also aggressively promoted throughout the region. For example Northrup Grumman has 16 interns working with them at a time, many turn into permanent hires. With a very low unemployment rate in the area, the Chamber is continually working to retain college graduates as well as creating local connections with high school graduates. The Grand Forks "Way Cooler Than You Think" marketing initiative is wrapped around these efforts to build loyalty to the region.





## Minneapolis

As a result of consolidation of the Minneapolis Regional and TwinWest Chambers, the Minneapolis Chamber Foundation now leads the Elevate Futures Initiative. The partnership with the local career and technical education consortium in the western Twin Cities suburbs creates a multi-faceted approach to connect community stakeholders, facilitate opportunities to co-create solutions, and to ensure equitable access to opportunities that accelerate career awareness and readiness.

Key components of the initiative include a regional advisory board, an Annual Talent Symposium, a Teacher Externship Program, and Virtual Career Expos. These programmatic elements are supported and enhanced by the Elevate Futures digital platform, which serves as the tool to connect community stakeholders to these programs through training, employment, career exploration and volunteerism opportunities.



## Lakeville

The Lakeville Works program was launched by the Lakeville Area Chamber of Commerce the summer of 2018, with the help of 12 founding donors and through the collaboration with Lakeville Area Schools and the City of Lakeville to ensure Lakeville families know about post-secondary paths in the skilled trades for their students. The program has provided financial support in excess of \$25,000 to both the high schools to enhance equipment and technology in their labs. It has supported Lakeville Robotics and also provided \$5,000 in scholarship funds to the Chamber Foundation for students pursuing STEM education post high school. Lakeville works has a robust marketing effort, including a dedicated website and the creation of four professional quality videos that highlight the benefits of careers in skilled trades.

Their efforts have also resulted in the creation of the Career Pathways Coordinator position at Lakeville Area Schools, and many of the other successful tools to connect students with future education and career path opportunities. Most recently, Lakeville Works was awarded a \$90,000 grant from the Minnesota Department of Labor to create on-the-job learning experiences, paired with in-classroom instruction, for Lakeville Area high school students. BTD Manufacturing and Schmitt & Sons will be piloting the program. Additionally, a \$54,900 anonymous grant will help implement the Summer Scholars Career Exploration (SSCE) program. This program is a partnership with several entities, including but not limited to, Lakeville Area Schools, Dakota County Technical College, Lakeville Works and the Dakota-Scott Workforce Board.

## Marshall



At the annual State of Agriculture event last year, the conversation turned to the need for workers in the agriculture industry, blending the skills learned in farming with the technical and science background offered through a formal education program, like those in the two-year and four-year degree programs at Minnesota West and Southwest Minnesota State.

Separately, the Marshall Chamber and Marshall Public Schools began organizing key leaders, and continued conversations led to the commitment to expand Career and Technical Education, and invest in hiring a leader to lead the effort. The effort is gaining momentum and is very promising.



## Eden Prairie

The Eden Prairie Chamber's "Inspiring and Hiring" program is targeted to high school students. Annually, 20 high school students have the opportunity to engage with the Chamber, providing interaction with employers, access to Chamber programs, and mentorship opportunities. This effort not only exposes students to business, and potential careers, but allows employers access to future employees. The Chamber also sponsors career expos and job fairs to help grow and retain talent in the region.



## Metro North

During the last year, with students in distance learning, the Chamber created a way for businesses to connect with students through a video library. The Chamber set up a short zoom meeting or pre-recorded video for students to view pertaining to a certain industry or career path. Videos will be housed on a dedicated website so students and teachers can utilize them at their convenience. This format will continue to be valuable, whether students and businesses connect personally or virtually. The Chamber has training to help students become "work ready," provides talent tours of area businesses, and promotes opportunities for businesses to speak in classrooms about career opportunities. Metro North has also created a virtual career fair. Attracting more than 400 students, businesses host virtual booths for students to visit and 'speak' with employers on various career opportunities in those respective industries. Internships and apprenticeship information is also highlighted. Educational partners are also invited to participate and provide information on relevant training and programs to prepare for the showcased industries.



## New Ulm

New Ulm also offers Teacher in the Workplace providing an opportunity for high school teachers in the New Ulm area to take part in a summer immersion experience with area businesses. During the one week immersion experience, teachers are given or directly exposed to a work assignment that provides a meaningful workplace experience based on the teacher's area of expertise and/or interest. The program is focused on high demand career opportunities in the region, most notably manufacturing.



# Thank You

**M**innesota's exceptional workforce has been one of our state's greatest assets. Talented, reliable and competent across a breadth of skills and industries, Minnesota employees have helped power our economic success for generations. This advantage is in jeopardy as employers struggle to find workers with skills that match current and evolving workforce needs even during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, over the past year, Minnesota has seen many displaced workers as a result of the economic downturn, and a somewhat different economy will emerge as a result of our experience of the last year. While some high demand jobs will continue to remain so, new opportunities and new skill requirements have emerged across many career paths.

The state must rethink how it prepares young people for meaningful careers and help adults in the workforce continually develop new skills as their professions are reshaped by changing technologies and markets. This is more critical now than ever given the large scale impact on workers from the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting downturn. The days of performing a job in the same way for most of one's career are over. Minnesota can lead the nation in rethinking how public and private sector actors provide the tools necessary for workers to thrive in a changing economy. This will partly mean ensuring that all Minnesotans receive at least the basic training and education they need to succeed in the workforce. But it will also mean aligning curriculum and training to the skills that are demanded in a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy, providing young people, parents, and adult workers data-driven information on the opportunities and career paths that await them. And that is the mission of the Minnesota Chamber Foundation's Center for Workforce Solutions and the Business Education Network (BEN).

We are now approaching 20 BEN partners, with only growth opportunities ahead. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, our BEN partners have persevered over the last year to ensure that these critical opportunities evolve and grow to meet local workforce needs while at the same time, ensuring the very survival of many of their members and the viability of their own organizations. The next phase of our work will be focused on expanding our efforts statewide and innovating to meet the workforce demands in the decades ahead. ■





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The Minnesota Chamber Foundation has helped member organizations and state leaders understand and grow Minnesota's economy since 1983. It renewed its commitment to understanding the state's economy in 2019, through in-depth research, workforce and leadership programs. The Foundation is the only statewide, private-sector foundation focused on the future of the state's economy across all industry sectors and geographic regions.

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