Southeast Service Cooperative

Connections

October 2025

Project Momentum Update P6

SSC Hires New Regional STEM Specialist P9

CPC Update P19



Resources in Action



November 4
1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Gruvy Tuesday Webinar - Advanced AI Use + Support
This session explores advanced AI use cases for school leaders. You'll also learn how to support teachers in using AI effectively. Walk away with ready-to-share examples and tools!

Gruvy Education

November 20
11:30 AM - 1:30 PM

HR Lunch & Learn with CESO
Tap into the expertise at the Center for Effective School Operations (CESO) for a lunch and learn session on ESST and Paid Family Medical Leave. Come with your questions so that you are well prepared for the new requirements effective January 1.

December 9
9:00 AM - 2:00 PM

School Communications 101
This session will focus on the communications process, data and research, planning, and key messages. Follow up webinars are planned for 2/17, 4/14, and 6/16 to address tactics and timelines!

December 18
12:30 PM - 3:30 PM

The Art of De-Escalation: Turning Tension into Trust
Learn practical strategies to de-escalate tense situations fast, communication skills that shift chaos into clarity, confidence boosters and self-care tools, and a little humor too!

MindMaxED Institute

January 15
9:00 AM - 2:00 PM

Practical AI Implementation: New Year's Resolution
Join Christine Gregory to learn simple, actionable AI tips and tricks to make your work more streamlined, effective, and efficient. Discover uses for AI that you can implement NOW!

January 21
8:30 AM - 11:30 AM

Instructional Coaching: Facilitating Adult Learning
Learn and practice conversational and coaching strategies that will help establish strong systems that help your program thrive. This session is also available as a standalone workshop.

AGILE IDEAS AIL

January 22
9:00 AM - 2:00 PM

HR Lunch & Learn with CESO
Tap into the expertise at the Center for Effective School Operations (CESO) for a lunch and learn session on timely topics related to human resources, finance, and operations.

February 13
9:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Leadership At Every Level
Discover how to uncover true leadership potential, overcome any challenge, and position your business and your team for next level success, with an emphasis on the power of Inclusive Leadership to unlock the potential of a fully aligned and highly engaged team.

Think GREAT® Erik Therwanger

April 8
8:30 AM - 11:30 AM

Instructional Coaching: Building a Culture of Learning
Agile Ideas Leadership will focus on feedback systems that fit in your culture and climate, and activate the power of facilitative leadership and the partner approach to learning and growth.

Spring 2025

Fueling Financial Futures
Dive into Next Gen Personal Finance's free curriculum and resources to help meet personal finance graduation requirements!

ngpf

Professional Learning ... Customized for you



Christine Gregory
Artificial Intelligence, Data Analysis, Data Visualization, Curriculum Development



Dustin Dean, PMHNP-BC
Mental Health, Brain Fitness, Educator Resiliency and Morale, De-Escalation, Wellness Retreats



Nicole LaChapelle-Strumski & Hannah Gehrke-Keltgen
Worksite Wellness, Stress Reduction, Employee Health Promotion



Cheryl Wendt, EdD, LSW
Mental Health First Aid, Suicide Prevention, Trauma and Resilience, Digital Wellbeing



Angie Ellsworth, MS, LSW, LSC
Behavior Management, Mental Health, Cultural Competency, Coaching, Crisis Prevention, Trauma-Informed Practices

Call Christi

Christi Fosland
507-281-6684
cfosland@ssc.coop

SSC's trusted faculty consultants and presenters travel to the location of your choice to facilitate professional development designed to meet your specific needs. SSC takes care of all the logistical details so that you can focus on the learning!

AI for School Leaders

Southeast Service Cooperative

Gruvy Tuesdays: Webinar Series

AI for Operations and Human Resources
October 21 - 1:00-2:00 PM
Learn how to use AI for human resources, business services, and task delegation. You'll explore real examples of how leaders use AI to create school improvement plans, grant applications, proposals, and automate repeat tasks. ← 1

Advanced AI Use + Teacher Support
November 4 - 1:00-2:00 PM
This session explores advanced AI use cases for school leaders. You'll also learn how to support teachers in using AI effectively across grade levels and subjects. Walk away with ready-to-share examples and tools to drive schoolwide impact. ← 2

Gruvy Education

Per Only $35 Per Webinar!
www.ssc.coop/register

BONUS!
Your fee includes access to the Gruvy Training Portal, featuring recordings, tutorials, templates, resources, and more.



The Power Of Leading from the Middle

Southeast Service Cooperative

Registration Fee (includes lunch)
SSC Member $179
Non-Member $199

November 5, 2025
8:30 AM - 3:30 PM
210 Woodlake Drive SE, Rochester

This session is ideal for members of departmental teams and cross-functional groups seeking to drive transformative change, spark lasting engagement, and nurture a collaborative culture. This workshop equips middle leaders with the skills to influence decision makers, navigate informal power dynamics, create authentic buy-in, ensure that all team members feel heard, and handle delicate discussions with confidence.

www.ssc.coop/register



Shannon Helgeson
is a growth-focused coach and leader who builds teams and supports teachers in becoming learning facilitators who make real change in their schools and communities.



Ross Herdina
is a leadership development facilitator focused on building the skills of educators to be leaders in their buildings as a central practice to improving learning experiences.

AGILE IDEAS AIL LEADERSHIP

Exploring Regional Collaboration

Join Us in Rochester
Thursday, October 30
4:00 PM - 8:30 PM

Join Us in Red Wing
Thursday, November 6
8:30 AM - 2:30 PM

Registration Required
https://bit.ly/SEMNTconvenings

SE MN Together

SE MN Together partnered with the University of Minnesota Extension on a research-based exploration of structured regional hubs to help Region 10 better understand the potential opportunities for formal regional collaboration.

Join us to learn about the research findings and to provide input into potential next steps that may shape the future of regional development for the 11-counties of southeast Minnesota!

FREE Learning Pathway Opportunities From COMPASS

COMPASS (Collaborative Minnesota Partnerships to Advance Student Success) is excited to offer free Learning Pathway opportunities to all public, charter, and tribally controlled schools across Minnesota this school year. These supports are designed to meet districts where they are and help accelerate student success. Our expert leads are ready to partner with you in areas such as Culturally Responsive School Leadership, Math, MnMTSS, Literacy, Multilingual Learners, Culture and Climate, Attendance, Tier 1, Special Education, Early Childhood and Early Childhood Special Education, American Indian Education, and Continuous Improvement and more. Explore the full Pathways catalog on the **COMPASS webpage** - and let us connect with you to find the pathway that best supports your district's goals and vision for student success. To learn more about our Southeast COMPASS team—click **here**!





Highlight Your District at MSBA's School Excellence Showcase This January

Consider applying for your district to be featured at the School Excellence Showcase, which will be held during MSBA's Leadership Conference. The Leadership Conference, the largest annual gathering of school board members, superintendents, and education leaders in Minnesota, will be held January 15 and 16 at the Minneapolis Convention Center. The **School Excellence Showcase is a** chance to highlight outstanding programs, projects, or partnerships that are making a positive impact in Minnesota schools. The Showcase is scheduled for 11:00 AM to 2:30 PM Thursday, January 16. The application deadline is Friday, October 31.

Msba MINNESOTA SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

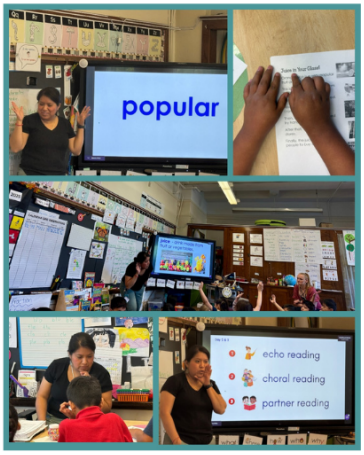
Click here to access the online School Excellence Showcase application form.

From Practice to Impact: Educator Voices and Classroom Moments

Every educator, every classroom, tells a story. At Project Momentum we are honored to be part of these stories by walking alongside teachers and school leaders as they grow their skills and expand opportunities for multilingual learners. Our team has been busy: conducting classroom observations for educators in our K-12 Licensure Program, supporting two cohorts of school administrators through the Multilingual Learner Leadership Micro-Crendential, welcoming a new K-12 ESL Licensure cohort this fall, supporting candidates through the License via Portfolio process, working with Colorado educators, and sharing practical resources for educators.

Each step, each educator, reflects a story of growth, of educators building skills and, leaders shaping more equitable systems.

INSIDE THE CLASSROOM!



More than half the candidates in the Winter 2025 cohort of the K-12 ESL Licensure Program have finished their practicum. We had the privilege of visiting several classrooms throughout the summer to observe their new skills in action!

IN THEIR WORDS

"I am growing so much with this program. I am a better person and teacher for learning this content! Thank you!"

"One hope I have for my students is that they feel welcomed in my classroom and know that I'm doing everything I can to help them be successful in the classroom."

"These are excellent asynchronous professional development courses. Not many programs or companies offer this high quality, relevant material with a solid research-base."

BY THE NUMBERS

- 38 educators in the Winter 2025 Cohort of the K-12 ESL Licensure program
- 24 educators in the Fall 2025 Cohort of the K-12 ESL Licensure program
- 40 school and district leaders were part of the initial cohort of the Multilingual Learner Leadership Micro-Credential.
- 40 more school and district leaders are part of the second cohort that starts in October

20 CEU free courses: +5,500 hours of cumulative completions | +2,700 unique course participants | 73 MN school districts | 23 states

PROJECT MOMENTUM

High-quality professional learning for educators to support multilingual learners.
projectmomentum.org

Events and Internships Available on Future*Forward*™

As we kick off another school year, we're excited to remind you that Future*Forward*™ is here to support your students' journeys into career exploration. The platform connects classrooms with real-world opportunities, helping students see the careers available right here in our region and beyond.

Be sure to explore the **Events Calendar** at futureforward.org/events for a wide range of career-connected learning experiences. From tours and hands-on career fairs to guest speakers and workshops, these events are designed to spark curiosity and connect students with professionals in high-demand fields.

In addition, keep an eye out for internship opportunities posted throughout the year that your students can apply for. These experiences provide valuable, hands-on exposure to the world of work and help students build the skills and confidence they'll need for their futures.

Whether you're looking to bring industry voices into your classroom, plan an engaging field experience, or connect students to internships, Future*Forward*™ is your go-to resource for career connections all year long at Southeast Service Cooperative.

FutureForward™
Events Calendar

2025 Outstanding Service Award



We're thrilled to share that Nicole LaChapelle-Strumski received the Minnesota Service Cooperatives Outstanding Service Award this summer. This award highlights individuals whose leadership and dedication strengthen the mission of service cooperatives across the state. Every day, Nicole demonstrates the heart of SSC's mission through her hard work and commitment.
Congratulations to Nicole on this well-deserved honor!

Congratulations, Nicole! Southeast Service Cooperative

SSC Talk is our quarterly video podcast featuring SSC staff. Each short episode introduces members to our program managers while sharing timely updates, resources, and insights from across the co-op. The fall edition marks the 10th installment in this series, highlighting stories, program updates, and valuable opportunities available through Southeast Service Cooperative. Click **here** to view this episode.



Forging a Brighter Future: Local Leaders Unite to Revolutionize Career-Connected Learning

By Sarah Ness

A new and powerful collaborative is taking shape in Southeast Minnesota, bringing together leaders from education, government, and business to build a more aligned and impactful system for career-connected learning. Over the past year, a workgroup of familiar and trusted local faces has been meeting to create a common mission and vision for supporting students and strengthening the region's economy.

This isn't just another committee. It's a strategic alliance of partners with access to diverse funding streams—federal, state, and local—as well as the full spectrum of the education and training network, from PK-12 to higher education and into the workforce. Their purpose is simple yet ambitious: to break down silos, share resources, and create a seamless, student-centered pathway from the classroom to a rewarding career.

The group has identified three key areas of focus to make an immediate impact:

1. Enhanced Job Shadows and Tours: The collaborative is building a more structured approach to job shadows, moving beyond simple tours to create meaningful, hands-on experiences for students. The goal is to develop a standard operating procedure to help prepare both employers and students, ensuring these experiences lead to the next steps, whether that's an internship, a credential, or a clearer career path.

2. Advancing the Welding Competition Model: What began as a regional competition is evolving into a year-round initiative packed with teacher professional development and student experiences. The workgroup is developing this model into a robust pipeline for trades, manufacturing, and engineering careers. They are working to double advisory committees and will soon poll teachers to identify what support students may need to participate in these kinds of events.

3. Hands-on Career Fairs: The group is working to create a central hub of information on all career fairs in the region. By understanding who hosts these events and what makes them successful, the collaborative can identify best practices and help fill gaps, making it easier for both students and businesses to connect effectively and efficiently.

The vision is for Southeast Minnesota students to have the knowledge, skills, and experiences to successfully navigate their post-high school options, leading to long-term self-sufficiency and regional economic vitality. The work of this collaborative promises to make life easier for educators seeking meaningful business partnerships, for businesses looking to build a strong talent pipeline, and for students and parents navigating the exciting, and sometimes overwhelming, journey from education to career.

Members of the Work Group include:

- **Achieve Consulting:** Cheryl Gleaser
- **Bluff Country Collaborative:** MaryAnne Bedtke
- **Community and Economic Development Associates (CEDA):** Chris Hahn
- **Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development:** Amanda Blaschko
- **Riverland Perkins Consortia:** Ryan Stanley
- **Rochester Community and Technical College:** Ren Olive
- **Rochester Public Schools/ZED Perkins Consortium:** Dawn Lubahn, Heather Hogen, Jami Schwickerath
- **SE Perkins Consortia:** Brian Cashman
- **Southeast Service Cooperative:** Amy Grover, Jeannie Meidlinger, Gina Morken, Sarah Ness, Jami Schwickerath, Mike Schnell, Nick Wobig
- **Workforce Development Inc.:** Megan Horton

This is just the beginning. The group operates on principles of continuous improvement and intentional engagement, ensuring their work will adapt and grow to meet the evolving needs of the region.

If you are interested in learning more about this work or would like to join the conversation, please reach out to **Sarah Ness** at the Southeast Service Cooperative.

SSC Welcomes Vic Dreier as New Regional STEM Specialist

SSC has welcomed Vic Dreier as its new Regional STEM Specialist, a key move aimed at STEM education throughout the region. Dreier's journey into STEM education began in the classroom as a math, technology and engineering, CTE teacher, and robotics coach, driven by a passion for helping students connect their learning to real-world applications. His extensive experience includes leadership roles at Project Lead The Way and the Arkansas Tech University STEM Institute, where he focused on implementing transformative, hands-on programs and impacting policy. What continues to drive him is STEM's "incredible potential" to open doors for students, especially by creating inclusive and engaging pathways.



Dreier is particularly excited to support STEM Forward and career connection efforts in collaboration with the SSC's Career Connected Learning team, viewing his role as the perfect intersection of his experience and passion for direct, localized support.

A major focus for Dreier is bridging the gap between education and local workforce needs. He believes the biggest opportunity lies in building stronger connections between classroom learning and the region's diverse range of employers—from advanced manufacturing and healthcare to agriculture and renewable energy. By creating partnerships with local businesses, he aims to provide students with hands-on experiences, mentorship, and a clearer sense of the career pathways available right in their communities. However, the biggest challenge he identifies is ensuring equitable access to high-quality STEM education, especially in rural and underserved areas, and supporting and retaining existing STEM educators.

Dreier also serves as the contracted Executive Director for SciMathMN, a statewide nonprofit, creating a powerful synergy that connects statewide vision—ensuring every Minnesota student has access to high-quality STEM learning—with regional action.

In his first year, Dreier's top priority is listening to educators, partners, and stakeholders within the STEM Forward network to ensure collaboration is responsive to local needs. He plans to strengthen connections between schools and regional industries, expand high-quality STEM access, and create more professional development opportunities for educators. Ultimately, he sees STEM Forward as a "hub for connection, inspiration, and action". He encourages educators, city/county staff, and community partners to join the network or reach out directly to explore projects, believing that by working together and aligning efforts with local workforce needs, they can create a more vibrant and future-ready STEM ecosystem across southeast Minnesota.

Teacher Led Design Advancing Computer Science for Southeast Minnesota

By Vic Dreier

Last year, MDE awarded K-12 Computer Science Education Advancement Grants to a dozen schools and cooperatives throughout the state. Several schools in southeast Minnesota received this funding, which was approved by the governor and state legislature. The grants are designed to expand student access to computer science and better prepare them for a technology-driven workforce.

Among the grant recipients are several school districts in the southeast Minnesota area, including Goodhue Public School District, Kasson-Mantorville Public School District, and Rochester Public School District. Additionally, the Southeast Service Cooperative received funding to partner with Kingsland Public Schools, Wabasha-Kellogg Public School District, and Zumbrota-Mazeppa Public School District.

The professional development provided through the grant aims to alleviate the apprehension many teachers feel when introducing a new, technical subject like computer science. The program helps educators build high confidence by empowering them to create comprehensive, multi-year curriculum plans, integrate computational thinking across subjects, and become confident resources for their peers. This was largely accomplished through teacher-led working groups, which allowed educators to take ownership of their professional development and create a sustainable, peer-to-peer support system. In fact, 100% of participating teachers reported that the experience supported them in moving from little to no confidence to feeling very confident in their ability to teach computer science and assist other educators. This shared success has sparked a continued commitment, with the cohort eager to keep meeting and collaborating to create even more learning opportunities for teachers, students, and the broader communities of Southeast Minnesota.



This ensures that computer science becomes a core part of the educational experience, extending its reach and sustainability well beyond the initial grant funding.

Building on the foundation laid this past year, the cohort has set clear goals for the 2025-2026 school year. Their key objectives include:

- Vertically aligning K-8 computer science topics.
- Introducing AI concepts to students and promoting further engagement in computer science content and careers.
- Continuing to learn together and welcome new educators to the group
- Continuing to build teacher capacity and interest in incorporating CS concepts and standards across all subjects.

For more information on the SE Minnesota Computer Science Cohort and the work of these districts please contact, Vic Dreier, Regional STEM Specialist, vdreier@ssc.coop, (507) 910-9587.

STEM Forward Lending Library Launch

By Vic Dreier

Thanks to our generous partners, STEM Forward is excited to announce the launch of our new lending library, expanding our programming and bringing cutting-edge technology to students and teachers across the region. This lending library is specifically designed for our member districts, allowing them to check out these valuable technologies to use in their classrooms throughout the school year.

We've received some amazing donations, including **20 Meta Quest 2 headsets** from Medtronic, which will form a new **VR Lending Library** for teachers. Educators can use these VR headsets to take students on virtual field trips, from exploring the human circulatory system to visiting historical landmarks around the world, making lessons more engaging and immersive. In addition, we're making **30 Solar Suitcases** available, supported by Xcel Energy, complete with professional development for teachers. These kits allow students to build a stand-alone solar power system, providing a hands-on learning experience that connects classroom lessons to real-world applications of renewable energy. Lastly, Medtronic has provided **500 mini CPU boards** to support schools prioritizing computer science and robotics.

These valuable resources have already been delivered to four districts: Rochester, Kingsland, Wabasha-Kellogg, and Zumbrota-Mazeppa Public Schools. We can't wait to see what these students and teachers create!

If you would like to learn more about the STEM Forward Lending Library and professional development to help use these technologies, reach out to Vic Dreier, Regional STEM Specialist, vdreier@ssc.coop, (507) 910-9587.

STEM Forward Lending Library

Thanks to the generosity of our partners, we've received valuable donations that will expand our programming capabilities:

- **20 Meta Quest 2 headsets** from Medtronic that will become a VR Lending Library for teachers
- **30 Solar Suitcases** supported by Xcel Energy along with teacher professional development.
- **500 mini CPU boards** Medtronic donated to schools prioritizing computer science and robotics
- Four districts have already received these valuable resources: **Rochester, Kingsland, Wabasha-Kellogg, and Zumbrota-Mazeppa Public Schools**



Medtronic

Xcel Energy

STEM Forward 2024-2025 Annual Report: A Year of Unprecedented Growth and Impact

Both Articles by Vic Dreier

In 2024–2025, STEM Forward emerged as a driving force in Southeast Minnesota's educational landscape, officially recognized as the regional hub for the MN STEM Ecosystem. This designation empowered the organization to coordinate regional priorities, advocate for rural communities, and attract vital resources. Legislative support further amplified its role, positioning STEM Forward as a strategic leader in shaping the future of STEM education across the state.

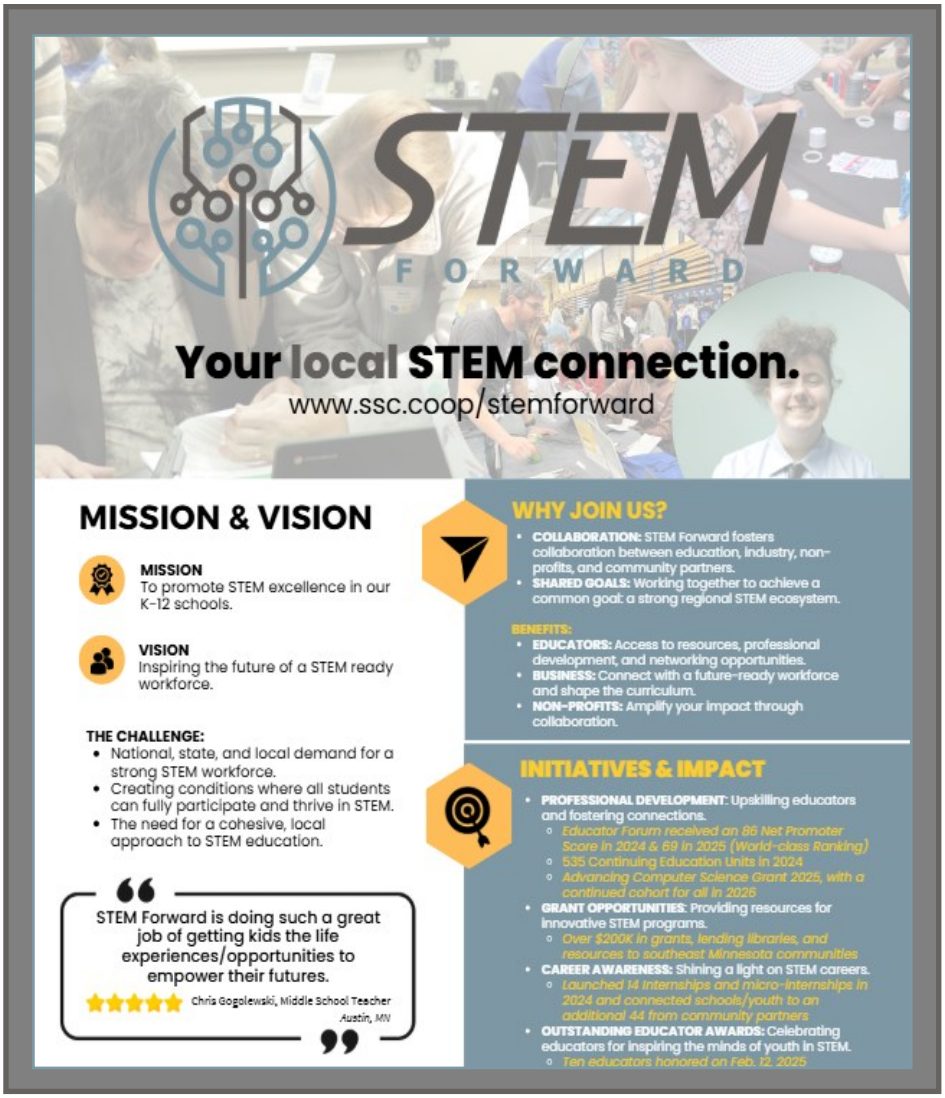
Educator empowerment was a central focus this year, with the Advancing Computer Science Grant dramatically improving teacher confidence in CS instruction across three rural districts. The AI Unleashed Educator Forum drew record attendance and rave reviews, offering hands-on sessions in AI, robotics, and STEM integration. Meanwhile, partnerships with The Bakken Museum and the Solar Suitcase Lending Library brought high-quality STEM experiences to over 1,800 students, expanding access and sparking curiosity in classrooms and communities.

STEM Forward also made significant strides in workforce development through its expanded internship program. With 100% of student participants reporting increased interest in STEM careers, and new collaborations with Mayo Clinic and Hormel Institute, the initiative opened doors to real-world experiences for dozens of youth. Generous donations from partners Medtronic and Xcel Energy—including VR headsets, solar suitcase kits, and CPU boards—further enriched learning environments, ensuring that students and educators alike are equipped to thrive in a rapidly evolving STEM landscape. Take look at the full report **here**.

If you want to learn more about STEM Forward or any of the programs mentioned above reach out to Vic Dreier.

Why Join STEM Forward: Building a Future-Ready STEM Ecosystem

STEM Forward is a vibrant regional initiative dedicated to promoting STEM excellence in K–12 education across SE Minnesota. With a mission to inspire a future-ready workforce, STEM Forward connects educators, businesses, nonprofits, and community partners to build a cohesive and inclusive STEM ecosystem. Through shared goals and collaborative efforts, the initiative addresses the growing demand for STEM talent and ensures that all students have the opportunity to thrive in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.



Members of STEM Forward benefit from a wide range of impactful programs and resources. Educators gain access to professional development opportunities, including the highly-evaluated educator forums and continuing education units, while students are introduced to real-world STEM careers through internships and micro-internships. Businesses can engage with future talent and help shape curriculum, and nonprofits amplify their reach through strategic partnerships. The initiative also offers over $200K in grants, the STEM Forward Lending Library, and celebrates excellence through its Outstanding Educator Awards.

STEM Forward's influence extends beyond the classroom. Events like STEM Day at the Olmsted County and Minnesota State Fairs provide hands-on learning experiences for families, sparking curiosity and encouraging lifelong engagement with STEM. Advisory meetings and educator forums foster peer-to-peer learning and innovation, while new partnerships continue to expand the network's reach.

By joining STEM Forward, individuals and organizations become part of a movement that empowers students, supports educators, and shapes the future of STEM in the region.

The Power of Place-Based Partnerships: How Our New Role as a STEM Hub Directly Benefits You

By Sarah Ness

The Minnesota STEM Ecosystem is charting a new course for STEM learning and workforce development across the state, and the Southeast Service Cooperative (SSC) STEM Forward network is proud to be at the forefront of this effort. Following the recent legislative session, which dedicated significant funding to the MN STEM Ecosystem, the STEM Forward network has been designated as the inaugural STEM hub for the state. This is a testament to our long-standing commitment to building strong, collaborative partnerships.

This new "hub" model is designed to create regional networks that bring together educators, businesses, and community organizations to address unique local needs, while also serving as a vehicle for resources and partnerships from outside of southeast Minnesota to be available locally. We understand that by working together, we can amplify our impact and create a more robust and equitable STEM opportunity pipeline for all Minnesotans

As the first official STEM hub, we will serve as a model for the future. Over the next two years, the MN STEM Ecosystem will look to establish additional networks in the northwest and northeast corners of the state, with potential future expansion into the southwest. This strategic, phased approach ensures that we are building a scalable framework that maintains local relevance.

New Opportunities Through the STEM Forward Network

By Sarah Ness

New legislative funding has enabled a call for letters of interest for five targeted partnership grant areas that will strengthen the STEM opportunity pipeline for the state, providing direct, tangible benefits for our members and partners. While the selection committee is reviewing letters of interest this fall, they will invite groups to apply for the grant funding, which may lead to opportunities for network partners.

- **For educators and schools**, grants are available to provide high-quality professional development for integrating AI into the classroom and to support short-term, paid teacher externship placements for educators in STEM-based businesses to align their curriculum with current industry standards.
- **For students**, the network will support paid internships in high-demand and emerging technology fields, as well as the creation or expansion of robotics teams and drone programs.
- **For community partners and non-profits**, grants are available to support hands-on, experiential career awareness opportunities for youth. This includes creating or expanding virtual reality (VR) and other emerging technology learning programs.

The hub model allows us to act as a "translation and matching engine," making expertise accessible and usable for all our partners. By leveraging these new opportunities, we can ensure our region continues to lead the way in STEM innovation and workforce development.

Get Connected

We invite you to join us in shaping the future of STEM in Minnesota. If your school has not yet engaged with the **STEM Forward** network, please reach out to Vic Dreier (vdreier@ssc.coop) to learn how you can benefit from these new opportunities and become part of this powerful collaboration.

Welcome to SSC!



Vic Dreier

Regional STEM Specialist

Vic is a seasoned STEM and CTE leader with over 20 years of experience driving innovation and equity in education. His work spans classroom teaching, district-level leadership, and nonprofit collaboration, supporting educators and students across 26 states. With 16 years spent in the classroom and as a CTE administrator, Vic brings a deep understanding of instructional practice, program development, and workforce alignment. Vic contributes to the collective work of the Minnesota STEM Ecosystem. In this role, he supports regional STEM education and partnerships through STEM Forward, and at the state level with SciMathMN to create meaningful opportunities for teachers and students in STEM. Throughout his career, Vic has led nonprofit efforts to expand access to high-quality STEM and CTE learning, built and sustained public-private partnerships, and secured funding through extensive grant writing and support. His expertise includes curriculum design, professional development, and strategic planning to help schools and districts implement impactful, future-ready programs. Outside of work, Vic and his wife stay busy raising four boys who are actively exploring their own STEM journeys—whether through robotics, coding, engineering challenges, or science fairs. Their family's commitment to lifelong learning and curiosity reflects Vic's passion for inspiring the next generation of innovators.



Allison Schmidt

COMPASS Regional Literacy Network Coach

Allison Schmidt has served in a variety of roles in public education throughout her career. She was an elementary teacher in Odessa, Texas and Worthington, Minnesota. The next step in her journey was becoming a principal and superintendent in southern Minnesota, positions which she held for over 15 years. Following her time in administration, Allison became the director of curriculum and instruction in Blue Earth Area Schools for four years. This role allowed her the opportunity to receive extensive training in structured literacy and work closely with district literacy leads for districts in south-central Minnesota. Allison is excited to support districts in our region in their work to improve literacy in our schools to help students become more proficient readers. In her free time Allison enjoys walking at parks with her husband and two small dogs, travelling, and baking.



Katie Wohlfiel

COMPASS Regional Literacy Network Coach

Education has always been a driving force in Katie's life, leading her to earn both her bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Minnesota. She began her teaching career in 5th grade English at Kasson-Mantorville, where she quickly realized that many students weren't experiencing the reading growth they deserved. That challenge pushed her to take a deep dive into the Science of Reading, which sparked a deep passion for literacy instruction. Since then, Katie earned her K–12 administrative license and completed both LETRS and OL&LA training. During her time at Kasson-Mantorville, Katie taught both 5th and 6th grade English and served as a PLC leader for six years. In that role, she helped create a scope and sequence aligned with the new Minnesota state standards, led a school-wide writing initiative, and developed a writing progression that built skills year over year. Katie also served as the OL&LA facilitator for secondary teachers, supporting the implementation of evidence-based literacy practices. Additionally, she led the rollout of multiple reading curriculums to better meet the needs of the students, ensuring instruction was rooted in best practices and responsive to learners. Katie and her husband live in Kasson with their three very active, red-headed boys. In the summer, they spend nearly every weekend camping in their renovated camper or relaxing at the family cabin. They also love biking, swimming, and playing just about every sport you can think of in the backyard.

omada

Webinar

Eat better for a healthy heart

An Omada® webinar on how to keep your heart happy and healthy

11.12.25 11:30 a.m. Central

Minnesota Healthcare Consortium
Participating Minnesota Service Cooperatives



Click here to sign-up.
(Register even if you can't attend live, as you'll receive the link to the recording.)

Miss our latest SSC/SCSC wellness newsletter? Click here to access it.



Just in Time Communications: Practical Tactics for you to Achieve Your Operational Goals - December 9

Professional development for superintendents and staff with communications responsibilities

⇒ An in-person half-day workshop (with lunch included)
⇒ Plus 3 virtual lunch-and-learn sessions
⇒ 3 hours of 1:1 strategic communications counsel (with workshop and 3 sessions)

Leave each session with a communications product to send to your stakeholders; including:

- Key Messages
- Communications Calendar
- District Fact Sheet
- Student Stories
- Community Engagement Plan
- BONUS - 2026-27 Communications Plan



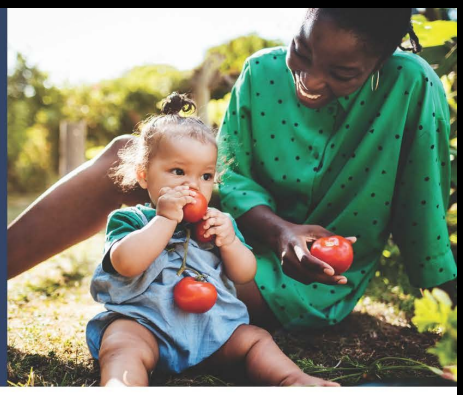




Each presenter has more than 25 years experience in school leadership and communications. Join Jeff Dehler, APR; Sara Thompson, APR; and Ron Wilke, former superintendent.

Click here for more information or to register.

My Health Rewards by Medica®



Your healthier future starts now

The My Health Rewards online tool and app lets you log healthy habits, track activity through a fitness tracker, and complete other healthy activities to earn rewards. Rewards can be redeemed for e-gift cards and health and fitness products. You can also choose to donate your rewards to a charitable cause.

Sign up today

Follow these easy steps to create an account once your plan year starts. Already have an account? Sign in on the Personify Health app (formerly Virgin Pulse) or at **Medica.com/MHC**.

Contract Holders:

1. Download the free Personify Health app (formerly Virgin Pulse) from the App Store or Google Play.
2. Open the app and click on "Create Account" under the "Sign In" button.
3. Search for and choose **Minnesota Healthcare Consortium** on the sponsor organization list.
4. Follow the steps to sign up. Enter your name exactly as it appears on your Medica ID card.

Prefer to sign up online? Go to **Medica.com/MHC** to create your account.

Spouses and dependents ages 18+:

1. Download the free Personify Health app (formerly Virgin Pulse) from the App Store or Google Play.
2. Open the app and click on "Create Account" under the "Sign In" button.
3. Search for and choose **Medica My Health Rewards** on the sponsor organization list.
4. Follow the steps to sign up. Enter your name exactly as it appears on your Medica ID card.

Prefer to sign up online?
Go to **Medica.com/MHC** to create your account.

Assess your health

Keeping up with preventive care keeps you feeling your best. First, go to the "Health" tab to complete your health assessment. Then, "My Care Checklist" gives you personalized, friendly reminders that let you know when you're due to see your health care provider. Earn points by tracking your preventive care screenings and visits. You'll even earn a bonus $5 reward each year when you complete your annual health checkup (just enter the date in "My Care Checklist").

Connect your fitness tracker

Earn points by connecting your fitness tracker and apps to track your activity, sleep, calories, and more. For a full list of compatible trackers, go to "Devices & Apps" in the "More" section. To connect a fitness tracker:

1. Go to "Devices & Apps" in the "More" section
2. Choose the device or app you'd like to connect
3. Follow the on-screen instructions

Personalize your health journey

Go to "Topics of Interest" under the "More" section to choose topics you're interested in: eating healthy, sleeping well, reducing stress, and more. You'll get daily learning cards with helpful tips. Do some of them, and you'll earn points toward rewards!

Have your insurance through MHC/ Medica? Feel better, have more energy, and earn reward dollars!

Medica. | Minnesota Healthcare Consortium
Participating Minnesota Service Cooperatives

Mental Health Community of Practice

Southeast Service Cooperative



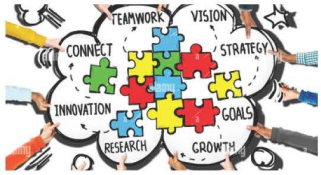
Our Purpose

We are excited to once again offer an opportunity to virtually gather as job-alike professionals in southeast MN schools to collaborate, share information, improve our skills, advocate for our needs, and celebrate our work!

25-26 Dates

Thursday, November 13	Thursday, February 12	Thursday, April 16
2:00-3:00 PM	2:00-3:00 PM	2:00-3:00 PM
Virtual	Virtual	Virtual

Questions?
Contact
Nicole LaChapelle-Strumski
nlachapelle@ssc.coop
507-696-9476





Unity is strength...when there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved.
Mattie Stepanek

We mobilize *resources*, add *value*, and promote continuous improvement through member-focused *solutions*.

Southeast Minnesota School Crisis Response Team - Help is Available

The SE Minnesota School Crisis Response Team is a group of specially trained professionals that are ready to assist districts and schools when they experience an event such as a student or staff death. The team recognizes that each district has a crisis emergency plan in place. The school crisis response team functions in a different capacity, as they are unattached to the district and do not have strong emotional ties to the students or staff. There are currently 15 professionals (school social workers, counselors,) who serve on the team.

Southeast Minnesota School Crisis Response Team
Proudly Coordinated by Southeast Service Cooperative

View this brief video to learn more.

Contact Nicole LaChapelle-Strumski to learn more or in the event of a crisis at your district.

ISG

SOUTHEAST MINNESOTA'S PARTNER OF CHOICE For Referendum Success



KEVIN BILLS, AIA
Education Business Unit Leader

THAD DAHLING
Facility Management + Planning Strategist

SUE PETERSON
Education Planning Specialist

MORGAN ANDERSON
Education Planning Specialist

CHARLOTTE NIENHAUS, AIA, NCARB
Senior Architect

JOHN KRETCHMER, AIA
Architect

"ISG made all the difference in conducting a successful referendum in our District. Their leadership through the facility study and community engagement eliminated the guess work. We knew we were focusing on the projects that our community prioritized and valued. As a result, we were successful at the polls."

RACHEL UDSTUEN,
Superintendent, Spring Grove Public Schools

Architecture + Engineering + Environmental + Planning | ISGInc.com

CPC has awarded a contract to United Bus Sales!

United Bus Sales is a third-generation, family-owned dealership that sells used and new vans and buses, parts for all van and bus brands, and a full line of repair services out of their three service locations. United sells vehicles for schools and for municipal use.



Member Benefits

- $1,500 off all units priced over $50,000 and $700 off all units priced under $50,000.
- Free fleet assessments - providing you with a plan for your transportation needs.
- Free on-site demos - we will bring a bus to your location.
- Free transportation for warranty claims - should your bus need warranty repair we will come get it - fix it and return it.

CPC
COOPERATIVE PURCHASING CONNECTION

Learn more about CPC's contract with United Bus Sales ->

Redefining Ready: Join the Movement

The Redefining Ready initiative is expanding in southeast Minnesota! After three successful years of piloting, all SSC member districts are now invited to join this movement that looks beyond standardized tests to a broader, more meaningful definition of student success. Learn how your district can get involved and help shape the future of readiness in our region. For more information, **contact** Jeannie Meidlinger, Career-Connected Learning Specialist.

CAREER READY - LIFE READY - COLLEGE READY
REDEFINING READY
Southeast Minnesota

Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) Management Strategies

By Chris Berry
Senior Environmental Technician, IEA, Inc.

Schools face unique IAQ challenges: high occupancy, aging HVAC systems, moisture issues, and airborne pollutants like dust, pollen, or chemicals. Facility teams are essential in managing these risks.

What Schools Can Do to Maintain Healthy IAQ

- **Review your IAQ management plan –** Ensure procedures for handling concerns and remediation are up to date.
- **Schedule regular walkthroughs –** Assess HVAC performance and inspect for moisture, mold, or other potential issues.
- **Monitor ventilation and airflow –** Confirm that systems are operating efficiently to maintain consistent air quality.
- **Empower staff –** Encourage custodial and facilities teams to promptly report water leaks, damage, or unusual conditions.
- **Address issues quickly –** Early intervention helps prevent larger problems and keeps students and staff safe.

How can IEA assist?

Proactive IAQ Walkthrough Service

Our comprehensive walkthrough service helps schools identify potential air quality risks before they become problems. The service includes:

- **HVAC system performance assessment to ensure proper ventilation and airflow.**
- Detailed visual inspections for signs of:
  - Moisture intrusion, such as bubbling or peeling paint, water stains, or visible mold.
  - Efflorescence and other indicators of potential IAQ issues,
- Identification of additional IAQ concerns to support proactive maintenance and a healthier learning environment.



For inquires, call Angie Radel at the Institute for Environmental Assessment at 507-281-6682, or e-mail angie.radel@ieasafety.com.



School Indoor Air Quality Training From MDE

This training will discuss the state's best practices for school IAQ management plans.

Who should attend:

- School officials, (including non-public schools), service providers, health professionals, and others that want to learn more about indoor air quality, regulations, guidance, and resources.
- Public schools that need an IAQ Coordinator (expect to lose their current person or want a second person trained).

Free Webinar: December 2
1:00 – 4:00 PM

Register through Webex.

A registration confirmation email, with your link to attend, will be sent from Webex.

SSC Board Actions and Information

In addition to routine fiscal and business actions, the Board took the following actions in recent meetings. Complete SSC Board of Directors meeting minutes are available on the SSC website at www.ssc.coop.

May

- Accepted $2,500 from Luther Automotive Group and $500 from S.T. Mobile LLC for Career-Connected Learning Nitro X Events.
- Accepted a $10,000 grant from Xcel Energy to support the STEM Forward Solar Suitcase Expansion initiative.
- Increased the dental insurance premiums by $5 per month for the employee plus spouse and employee plus child plans, and by $10 per month for the family plan.
- Approved the final CESO Classification and Compensation Study as recommended by the Personnel Committee.
- Approved the hiring of Cindy Mullins as Continuous Improvement Regional Lead.
- Approved the hiring of Sarah Mikkelson Ziegler as Continuous Improvement Regional Coach.
- Approved a change in employment status for Isa Anderson-Eggen from 205 days to 260 days.
- Accepted the resignation of Lynn Gorski from the SSC Board, effective July 1, 2025.
- Approved the FY 26 insurance Contract.

June

- Approved the 2025-206 SSC Handbook.
- Approve all donations. This included:
- $100 from the Carpenter's Union for Middle School Camp, CCL.
- $500 from Ford of Hibbing for Nitro X camps.
- $500 from North Country GM for Nitro X camps.
- $2,500 from Buerkl Honda for Nitro X camps.
- $2,500 from Think Bank for STEM Forward and Career Connected Learning (2025–2026).
- $5,000 from Carl & Verna Schmidt Foundation for Student Academics.
- Approved the hiring of Katie Wohlfiel as a 205-day Literacy Network Coach.
- Approved the hiring of Allison Schmidt as a 205-day Literacy Network Coach.
- Opened and posted a new full-time position for a STEM Specialist.
- Approved 110% of the hourly rate for 205-day staff for specific contractual literacy support for SE MN schools that exceeds the 205-day contract.
- Appointed Jason Marqardt to serve as SSC's MHC Board Representative to fill the vacancy left by Lynn Gorski.
- Approved the 2025-2026 budget.
- Approved an increase in asset capitalization threshold from $5,000 to $10,000 as reviewed and recommended by the Finance Committee.
- Approved WLMC audio-visual upgrades at a cost estimated by vendor Bluum to $110,000.
- Approved membership for Field Crest Care Center.

August

- Approved the second reading of Policy 722- Public Data Requests.
- Approved the second reading of Bylaws Article 11, Section 6: Withdrawal from SSC Membership.
- Approved a $1,000 sponsorship from Mayo for SE MN Together.
- Multilingual Education Curriculum Specialist position, effective August 31, 2025.
- Approved the hiring of Vic Dreier as Regional STEM Specialist.
- Added Al Roder to the SSC Board Finance Committee.

September

- Accepted $75,000 from the Otto Bremer Trust.
- Accepted $1,425,000 for MN STEM Ecosystem for the period from July 5, 2025-June 30, 2027.
- Accepted $500 from the Coalition for Rochester Area Housing.
- Accepted $1,000 from Zumbro Aerie Eagles #2228 for student academics.
- Changed the employee health insurance plan to increase the deductible from $3,500 to $4,000 and increase employer contribution to HSA/VEBA by $100 to Single and $200 to Family.
- Approved re-engaging with the Healthiest You benefit for employees who elect the SSC health insurance benefit.
- Implemented a 50/50 share of MN Paid Leave costs between employee and employer.
- Named the Director of Finance and Operations as the MN Paid Leave Administrator.
- Approved the option for employees to add time-off benefits to MN Paid Leave benefits, not to exceed 100% of salary.
- Approved the contract with Marco for technology services for July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2029.

Please **visit our website** for more information.

The information listed here is only a summary.

The full text is available for public inspection at SSC's administrative offices.

SSC Service Consultants



Brittani Locke
Health Insurance Coordinator
blocke@mnhc.gov



Colleen Schumann
MHC Account Manager
cschumann@resourcecoop-mn.gov



Angie Radel
Regional Manager, IEA
angie.radel@ieasafety.com



Sue Peterson
ISG Strategy Specialist
Sue.Peterson@ISGInc.com

Connections is a publication of the Southeast Service Cooperative, published three times per year for members, associates, and the general public.
Editor: Nicole LaChapelle-Strumski, nlachapelle@ssc.coop

Southeast Service Cooperative
210 Wood Lake Drive SE
Rochester, MN 55904
Phone (507) 288-1282
Fax (507) 288-7663

Office Hours:
Monday - Friday
8:00 AM - 4:30 PM
www.ssc.coop

Shaping the Future
for communities of leaders and learners

About Southeast Service Cooperative

Southeast Service Cooperative Staff



Steve Sallee
Executive Director
ssallee@ssc.coop



Isabella Anderson Eggen
COMPASS Equitable Access Specialist (Multilingual Learners)
ieggen@ssc.coop



Alicia Bredesen
Meeting Center Coordinator
abredesen@ssc.coop



Jessica Denter
COMPASS Regional MnMTSS Lead
jdenter@ssc.coop



Vic Dreier
Regional STEM Specialist
vdreier@ssc.coop



Erik Durand
COMPASS Regional Math Lead
edurand@ssc.coop



Christi Fosland
Educational Support Coordinator
cfosland@ssc.coop



Amy Grover
Associate Director
agrover@ssc.coop



Chris Hancock
Manager of Accounting and Payroll
chancock@ssc.coop



Katie Hartman
Manager of Student Programs
khartman@ssc.coop



Katie Hendrickson
Creative Media Solutions Coordinator
khendrickson@ssc.coop



Joe Jezierski
COMPASS Climate and Culture Lead
jjezierski@ssc.coop



Ashley Karlsson
Project Momentum Director
akarlsson@ssc.coop



Kendra Katnik
Project Momentum Implementation and Instructional Lead
kkatnik@ssc.coop



Kari Kubicek
Regional Funding Manager
kkubicek@ssc.coop



Nicole LaChapelle-Strumski
Manager of Wellness and Outreach
nlachapelle@ssc.coop



Melanie Lawrence
COMPASS Culturally Responsive Instructional Leadership Lead
mlawrence@ssc.coop



Jeannie Meidlinger
Career-Connected Learning Specialist
jmeidlinger@ssc.coop



Christine Meshak
COMPASS Regional Literacy Network Coach
cmeshak@ssc.coop



Sarah Mikkelson Zeigler
COMPASS Continuous Improvement Coach
szeigler@ssc.coop



Gina Morken
COMPASS Regional Supervisor
gmorken@ssc.coop



Cindy Mullins
COMPASS Continuous Improvement Lead
cmullins@ssc.coop



Sarah Ness
Manager of Strategic Partnerships
sness@ssc.coop



Merissa Russie
Project Momentum Licensure Pathways Specialist
mrussise@ssc.coop



Emily Saed
MN STEM Ecosystem Director
esaed@ssc.coop



Allison Schmidt
COMPASS Regional Literacy Network Coach
aschmidt@ssc.coop



Mike Schnell Career-Connected Learning Specialist
mschnell@ssc.coop



Jami Schwickerath
Perkins Coordinator; Career-Connected Learning Specialist
jschwickerath@ssc.coop



Carol Swanson
COMPASS Regional Literacy Lead
cswanson@ssc.coop



Kim Swanson
Accounting Assistant
kswanson@ssc.coop



Claudia Tabini
Project Momentum Community Engagement Coordinator
ctabini@ssc.coop



Dale Walston
Director of Finance and Operations
dwalston@ssc.coop



Nick Wobig
Career-Connected Learning Specialist
nwobig@ssc.coop



Katie Wohlfiel
COMPASS Regional Literacy Network Coach
kwohlfiel@ssc.coop

SSC Board of Directors

Brein Maki, Chair
Lewiston-Altura Public Schools

Jean Roth, Vice-Chair
Zumbrota-Mazeppa Public Schools

Jason Marquardt, Treasurer
Mabel-Canton Public Schools

Monica Sveen-Ziebell, Clerk
Plainview-Elgin-Millville Public Schools

Theressa Arrick-Kruger
Retired Houston County

Brian Grudem
City of Zumbrota

Don Leathers
Austin Public Schools

Al Roder
City of Byron