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Byron and Wabasha-Kellogg schools win $10,000 each in inaugural pitch contest

The inaugural pitch-style competition was hosted by the Southeast Service Cooperative, which granted a total of $20,000 to the two schools making the best presentation about their proposed ideas.



Byron Public Schools' Ryan Radke, left, and Isaac Jestus present during the live FutureForwardTM Pitch Competition portion of the STEM Forward Educator Forum: AI Unleashed event on Wednesday, Feb. 11, 2026, at Wood Lake Meeting Center in Rochester. The pitch competition featured presentations from five school districts focusing on ideas for career-centered learning. The winners of the competition will win $20,000 in funding to support their ideas. Maya Giron / Post Bulletin



By Jordan Shearer

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ROCHESTER — The chopping block at Byron High School impressed the judges.

Because of that, the school received $10,000 Wednesday night to invest into its butchering class and business, known as B-Town Meats.

The inaugural pitch-style competition was hosted by the Southeast Service Cooperative, which granted a total of $20,000 to the two schools making the best presentation about their proposed ideas.

"It really gives educators this chance to think outside the box," said Vic Dreier, regional STEM specialist at Southeast Service Cooperative. "Think big. Do something you're not going to get funding for through normal circumstances."

For Byron High School, that big idea was one they're already doing. B-Town Meats is a farm-to-table class and business that teaches butchering during the hunting season for white-tail deer.

Byron family consumer science teacher Isaac Jestus said the funding will allow them to scale it up by purchasing more equipment, including commercial-level smokers and a grinder.

"We've turned away a lot of business just because we haven't been able to upscale appropriately due to funding," he said. "We're a licensed butcher shop through the state."

This is the second year the school has had the class, which Jestus started with just $500 worth of funding from the school.

Byron was one of the top two presentations that each received $10,000 to invest in their ideas. Byron High School came in second. The first place win went to Wabasha-Kellogg Public Schools, which will be using its $10,000 to start a student-run business making custom orders for a variety of products, ranging from banners and large-format printing to custom engraving.

Wabasha-Kellogg teacher Tyler Heimermann said the school would be using the start-up funds to purchase equipment, like a laser cutter and engraver.

"This is a resume-ready experience," Heimermann said. "They also just get that entrepreneurship experience; they get to see all the parts of a business."

There were five districts who made presentations about their proposed ideas at the event. Those five had been selected to give

their presentations from a wider pool of schools that submitted written applications.

In addition to Byron and Wabasha-Kellogg, there were presentations from the school districts of Rochester, Red Wing, and Austin.

After the presentations, those in attendance were able to vote on the ideas they thought were the most deserving.

"The biggest thing we have them look at is the innovation ... sustainability ... and then their partnerships," Dreier said about how they wanted voters to evaluate the presentations.

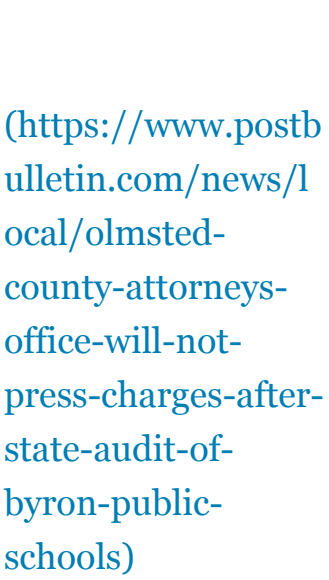
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"Recently gathered feedback from staff, students, parents and caregivers regarding the potential facility and program changes was productive and helped inform our next steps," the district said.

(https://www.postbulletin.com/news/local/rochester-public-schools-announces-it-will-not-move-sunset-terrace-out-of-its-

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Olmsted County Attorney's Office will not press charges after state audit of Byron Public Schools (https://www.postbulletin.com/news/local/olmsted-county-attorneys-office-will-not-press-charges-after-state-audit-of-byron-public-schools)

State Auditor Julie Blaha announced her findings in a letter to the district's school board last year.


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Stewartville Public Schools approves contract with incoming superintendent Guy Johnson(https://www.postbulletin.com/news/local/stewartville-public-schools-approves-contract-with-incoming-superintendent-guy-johnson)

Guy Johnson has been working in education either as a teacher or administrator since 1996. This will be his first position in Minnesota.

with-incoming-superintendent-guy-johnson)

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Jordan Shearer covers K-12 education for the Post Bulletin. A Rochester native, he graduated from Bemidji State University in 2013 before heading out to write for a small newsroom in the boonies of western Nebraska. Bringing things full circle, he returned to Rochester in 2020 just shy of a decade after leaving. Readers can reach Jordan at 507-285-7710 or jshearer@postbulletin.com.

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