

Minnesota Educator Externship Cohort Launches in St. Cloud with Industry and Workforce Focus

This summer, the Minnesota State Centers of Excellence for Agriculture, Energy, and Engineering & Applied Manufacturing welcomed a statewide cohort of 12 educators to St. Cloud to launch the Educator Externship Program—an initiative designed to strengthen connections between classrooms, careers, and Minnesota industry.

The cohort represents schools and colleges from across Minnesota, with educators teaching agriculture, manufacturing, engineering, computer science, and other career-connected fields spanning grade levels from sixth grade through college. Over two days in St. Cloud, participants engaged in professional development focused on experiential learning, reflection, and strategies for building meaningful connections between education and industry. The kickoff also provided time for the cohort to build relationships with one another, exchange ideas across disciplines, and begin considering how industry experiences can translate into stronger classroom instruction and student career awareness.

A key highlight of the St. Cloud experience was a visit to New Flyer, where educators received an immersive look at modern manufacturing and sustainable transportation production. Beyond the tour itself, the group had the opportunity to engage in candid conversations with employees about their roles, career pathways, and the skills needed in today's workforce.

"Strong workforce pipelines begin with awareness, and educators play a critical role in helping students discover future opportunities," said Jason Bruns, Director of the Minnesota State Engineering and Applied Manufacturing Center of Excellence. "Through the Educator Externship Program, teachers gain firsthand exposure to modern industry, allowing them to bring relevant career connections, real-world applications, and local workforce opportunities into their classrooms."

Ryan Strong, Talent Acquisition & Workforce Development Specialist with NFI Group Inc., shared, "It was great to welcome educators from across Minnesota to New Flyer and give them a behind-the-scenes look at how we manufacture sustainable transportation solutions. We trust the visit provided real examples that they can bring back to their classrooms and use to spark interest in engineering, manufacturing, and the skilled trades. We value these partnerships and are proud to play a part in building the future workforce."

The St. Cloud gathering marks just the beginning of the externship journey. Next, each educator will complete a 40-hour immersive externship with an industry partner in their local community. In August, the cohort will reconvene for two days of curriculum workshopping and continue meeting monthly throughout the academic year as they transform their experiences into classroom learning, career exploration, and stronger pathways for students across Minnesota.

This Educator Externship Program is supported in part through the Minnesota STEM Ecosystem Partnership Grant, a State of Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) funded workforce development initiative.