

# Bridges Career Academies and Workplace Connection

A public-private partnership and communication link between K-12 and higher education institutions, business owners, and communities so that the next generation of workforce is prepared to meet the demands of area employers.

The purpose of Bridges Career Academies & Workplace Connection is to increase career education for students, expand education and training beyond the classroom, educate parents and the community about career opportunities, and give students opportunities to earn college credit while in high school for high-demand occupations in our region.

Bridges began with the Brainerd Lakes Chamber's Workforce Committee, whose members include business leaders in the areas of manufacturing, healthcare, building and construction trades, engineering, business, the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) and representatives from five school districts (Brainerd, Staples, Pillager, Crosby and Pequot Lakes).

State Representative John Ward (DFL 12A) proposed and advocated for the legislative policy change needed to establish the Bridges project that began in the 2007-08 school year. This fall, the program expanded to include 22 school districts.

"There was a lot of excitement when we presented this bill in committee," said Ward. "Many people loved the idea of high schools, colleges and businesses working together to help students find good paying jobs in Greater Minnesota."

The Academies are a sequence of career pathway courses offered to high school students that dually-enroll in a community or technical college or a state university. Curricula were developed by a collaboration of both college and high school instructors and industry representatives. There are five Bridges Academies: Business & Administration; Manufacturing; Applied Engineering, Nursing; and Health Sciences.

The Workplace Connection is the intermediary between schools and businesses to integrate work-based learning by means of job shadowing, student internships and a Career Exploration Day. Research confirms that a workplace connection creates relevance, guides career and educational goals, and connects regional employers with graduates. The Bridges Workplace Connection:

- Increases career education for student
- Expands education and training beyond the classroom
- Educates parents and the community about career opportunities in their area

Their website, [www.BridgesConnections.org](http://www.BridgesConnections.org), gives students and parents more information about career occupations including video clips of welders, mold casters, punch press operators and machinists at work.

Bridges Career Academies and Workplace Connection successes for its first academic school year were recently presented to the Governor's Rural Economic Development team. Accomplishments included:

- 1,415 college credits were earned by students in five school districts, equating to more than \$200,000 in college tuition savings
- 227 student job shadow placements in high-pay, high-demand areas of engineering, business, healthcare, manufacturing, small engine, trades, and law enforcement
- Career Exploration day that served 762 students from six school districts benefiting from 57 career exhibits and 12 college course exhibitors.

In November, Cragun's Resort hosted the most recent—and much-expanded— Career Fair. More than 1,500 students in grades 10-12 streamed among 83 exhibitors representing more than 130 career occupations. Regional wage, job outlook, and education and training requirement information on those and other careers available in the region but not exhibited was given in the form of handouts students could take home.

"The long-term economic viability of our region depends on a well-trained and educated workforce," said Ward. "This project has the added benefit of opening these job opportunities up to local students."



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