

SFY 2025 PROCTOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS, ISD 704

Final Report

10/20/2026

Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
Employment and Training Programs Division

Kay Tracy, Director
Office of Youth Development
(Phone) 651-259-7555
Kay.Tracy@state.mn.us

mn.gov/deed

Upon request, this material will be made available in an alternative format such as large print, Braille or audio recording. Printed on recycled paper.

Contents

Introduction....4

Summary of Goals and Objectives Presented in the Work Plan....4

Expenditure Data....4

Planning Accomplishments....4

New Grant Funds....7

Introduction

Independent School District (ISD) No.704, Proctor, was granted state funding to plan for the establishment of a career and technical education program, the Northern Connections Center. The center plans to serve ISD No. 704, Independent School District No.700, Hermantown, and Independent School District No.99, Esko.

Funds for this project were appropriated in Minnesota Session Lawa – 2024, Chapter 120, S.F. 5289, Article 1, Section 2, Subdivision 3(t). The one-time appropriation of $171,000.00 was available to the Proctor Public Schools ISD 704 in SFY 2025. The Minnesota Department of Employment & Economic Development was permitted to retain up to 5% of the appropriation for administration and monitoring of the grant.

Summary of Goals and Objectives Presented in the Work Plan

The purpose of this grant was to develop a plan to streamline career and technical education (CTE) program delivery, consolidate resources, and expand career and technical education (CTE) opportunities for students across the three school districts of Proctor, Hermantown, and Esko.

Over the grant period, the initiative developed plans and strategies to create a centralized, enhanced career and technical education hub, offering a range of specialized and newly designed CTE programs for students in the three districts. Through this initiative, the three districts aim to better prepare students for careers in a rapidly evolving job market through enhanced educational outcomes and workforce readiness.

Expenditure Data

Expenditures from August 10, 2024 through June 30, 2026 for grants 5PPS6300:

SFY 2025 Budget Category	SFY 2025 Budget	SFY 2025 Expenditure
Administration	$0.00	$0.00
Direct Services	$122,450.00	$132,450.00
Contracted Services	$40,000.00	$30,000.00
Total	**$162,450.00**	**$162,450.00**

Planning Accomplishments

During the grant period, the Superintendents and staff from Proctor, Hermantown, and Esko School Districts met with the goal of “developing a comprehensive plan that would encourage, promote, and engage students in the area of Career and Technical Education (CTE) offerings using a collaborative model between the school, labor organizations, and businesses”. Regular meetings took place to discuss progress in each strategy category, including developing the new CTE center and CTE programming, and to create an actionable plan of items to meet their goal.

A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis was completed on the project. Result showed that the primary strengths (improved CTE offerings and strong partnerships) and opportunities (future partnerships and a skilled youth population) outstripped weaknesses (lack of funding) and threats (uncertain future funding).

It is expected that the Northern Connections Center (NCC) programming will serve an estimated 150 to 300 students annually, along with at least 3,000 adults from the northeastern Minnesota Arrowhead region.

The City of Proctor administrative offices will operate the Northern Connections Center. Proctor Public Schools will maintain a long-term lease for the facility through January 1, 2032, and will plan to raise funds to purchase the facility thereafter. Partners include City of Proctor, owner of the current Proctor Area Community Center Facility (PACC); WOLD Architects and Engineers, and ICS Construction Company of Duluth, which have provided guidance and cost estimates and analysis of Proctor Area Community Center existing space. Lake Superior College and Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College will offer dual credit for students enrolled in CTE programs. Staff have also met with Northeast Minnesota Office of Job Training (JET) staff to discuss possible delivery of Commercial Driver's License at NCC through the Teamsters. Other potential regional training partners include Moline Bakery for CNC, Culinary, and Welding, ACME Tools, Amsoil (automotive services), Aerostich, and Duluth Pack (manufacturers of motorcycle gear and canvas packs).

Early in the planning phase, the Project Director and team leaders visited Wright Technical Center in Buffalo and the Career Impact Academy in Grand Forks, ND to view their respective Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs.

Key takeaways of the Wright Technical Center visit consisted of:

- Strong regional collaboration model with shared funding responsibilities
- Emphasis on supplementing district-level programming rather than centralizing all CTE
- Limited diversification of funding (no corporate partnerships)

Key takeaways of Career Impact Academy visit consisted of:

- Highly integrated regional model aligned with state funding incentives
- Clear distinction between foundational (district) and advanced (centralized) programming
- Strong reliance on public-private partnerships to achieve capital funding success
- State-backed funding structure significantly reduces long-term operational risk

Subsequent meetings developed goals and objectives in the planning phase and the Northern Connections Center's mission and vision. These included:

- Career and technical education project goals
- A summary of the Wright Technical Center visit
- Develop educational secondary partners
- Identify a Northern Connections Center facility location
- Project anticipated costs of the center and sources of state and federal funding

Northern Connections Center's Mission:

> Utilizing education and industry partnerships to engage students in developing purposeful skills in preparation for success in post-secondary education and meaningful careers.

Northern Connections Center's Vision:

> Provide in-demand career and technical programs and other educational opportunities in collaboration with educational and industry partnerships.

Discussions identified a possible facility of interest, the Proctor Area Community Center (PACC), located near Interstate 35 in Proctor, as a center location that allowed convenient access for local school districts and students. Once site financing is secured, the next focus will be in establishing industry partnerships. To ensure long-term financial viability, industry partners are expected to assist in the operating costs through sponsors and provide master trainers to work with licensed teachers to ensure training meets industry standards and leads to certification, licensure, and articulated college credits for students. In addition, a local high school, Northern Lights Academy, is planning to collaborate with regional industry partners to offer high school students state-of-the-art hands-on training in a renovated facility. Additional meetings were held to discuss the area's industry workforce needs, share data resources, keep partners informed and encourage their financial support, and pursue local, regional, state, and federal grant opportunities.

To provide an objective assessment of existing capacity, BNDRY Studio was commissioned to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of current CTE facilities within the three districts and Duluth Public Schools in order to establish a comprehensive baseline of infrastructure and identify opportunities to strengthen program delivery and student access. The assessment serves as a strategic planning resource that will inform future discussions regarding regional collaboration, program alignment, facility modernization, capital investment, and the long-term expansion of Career and Technical Education throughout Northeastern Minnesota. The completed assessment provided district-specific evaluations and a regional analysis of current CTE facilities, instructional programs and spaces, equipment, safety, functionality, adaptability, and learning environments.

A total of 528 students in grades 8–11 from Proctor, Esko, Duluth Denfeld, and Duluth East participated in the Career and Technical Education student interest survey. The survey identified career interests by gender with nearly two-thirds of female students expressing interest in Health Science and medical careers and 47% indicated interest in Family and Consumer Sciences. Among male students, 40% or more expressed interest in Business, Manufacturing, Construction, Welding, and Automotive Technology. In addition, the survey found that, upon graduation, 32% of students expected to directly enter the workforce, military, or remain uncertain about their post-high school plans; about half still expressed interest in eventually attending a four-year college, 24% were interested in a two-year college or technical school, and 20% also expressed interest in on-the-job training or apprenticeship opportunities. Course selection surveys listed family or friend recommendations, social media, employment options, and where they expect to live as influencing their course selections. Overall, the survey demonstrated student interest across multiple CTE career pathways, expanded awareness of nontraditional career fields, and the importance of providing multiple educational pathways—including technical education, apprenticeships, military service, and postsecondary options—to meet the diverse aspirations of students across the region.

In the long term, the Northern Connections Center is expected to improve work, education, and health monitoring of the districts' youth and surrounding communities. It will serve as a public career resource and internet connectivity hub, providing educational programming, career exploration, and skill development in high demand fields such as healthcare, technology, manufacturing, and construction. The NCC plans to offer educational programming that focuses on more advanced skill development, certifications, workforce readiness,

and employment outlook research. The facility is also expected to provide space for GED programming and literacy resources, industry partner onboarding (including equipment), Level 4 learners with special needs (for easy access to CTE programming), and mental health services. Finally, the NCC initiative intends to engage students from protected populations in education and community education programming to connect them to better future employment outcomes and offer culturally significant activities such as Ojibwe crafts and language.

Funding opportunities are being investigated with a possible federal CTE grant being discussed. In late 2024, an MDE Multi-Purpose Community Facility grant application was submitted for this initiative but not chosen.

New Grant Funds

As of June 30, 2026, state grant funds for the SFY 2025 were 100% expended. No new direct appropriation state funds have been granted to Proctor Public Schools for the SFY26-27 biennium.