

Rock Ridge High School Career Academy & Pathway Development Initiative

Grant Request: \$100,000 - Phase 1

Funding Purpose: To introduce, support, and elevate Career Academy and Pathway programming that aligns students with local industry needs while strengthening regional workforce readiness.

Project Narrative

Overview

Rock Ridge High School proposes a transformative plan to launch and grow a comprehensive **Career Academy & Pathway system**. This initiative will connect students directly to high-demand local industries through integrated curriculum, hands-on training, and industry-recognized credentials. The goal is to build a sustainable talent pipeline that supports economic growth, strengthens regional industries, and ensures every student graduates prepared for college, careers, or both. To effectively integrate career teaching into our high school courses, we plan to leverage various strategies that connect classroom learning to real-world applications and future opportunities.

1. Curriculum Integration

- **Connect Coursework to Career Competencies:** Explicitly articulate how the skills and knowledge gained in your courses relate to essential career readiness competencies, such as critical thinking, communication, problem-solving, and teamwork.
- **Design Career-Themed Assignments:** Incorporate assignments that mirror real-world tasks within various career fields. For example, students could write a cover letter tailored to a specific job posting, prepare a resume showcasing their accomplishments, or participate in mock interviews.
- **Project-Based Learning (PBL) with Career Connections:** Create projects that require students to solve real-world problems and connect their learning to specific career fields. For instance, a science class could design an app for community use.

2. Experiential Learning and Industry Partnerships

- **Guest Speakers & Informational Interviews:** Invite professionals from various industries to share their career paths, insights, and experiences with students. You can also assign informational interviews as a way for students to network and learn directly from professionals.
- **Job Shadowing & Internships:** Partner with local businesses to offer job shadowing opportunities, where students can observe professionals at work, or explore the possibility of creating internship programs to provide more in-depth experiences.
- **Field Trips & Site Visits:** Organize trips to local businesses, industries, or colleges to expose students to different work environments and career opportunities.
- **Virtual Reality (VR) for Career Exploration:** Utilize VR technology to provide immersive experiences for students, allowing them to explore various careers and industries virtually, especially when in-person opportunities are limited.

- Work-Based Learning opportunities: The set-up, organization, and follow through of a work-based learning program.

3. Career Exploration and Self-Reflection

- Career Assessments & Inventories: Encourage students to complete career interest inventories and assessments, like Pathful(RRHS), the Holland Code or Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), to identify their interests, strengths, and values as a starting point for career exploration.
- Research Projects on Careers: Assign students research projects to explore specific careers in detail, using resources like the Bureau of Labor Statistics (.gov) Occupational Outlook Handbook. They can present their findings in a variety of formats.
- Utilize Online Career Resources: Introduce students to career planning websites such as Naviance, CareerOneStop, BigFuture by College Board, and YouScience, which offer tools for college and career research, assessments, and job searching.
- Self-Reflection Activities: Encourage students to reflect on their skills, interests, and experiences and connect them to potential career paths. This can involve writing reflections, creating presentations, or participating in class discussions.

4. Building Essential Skills

- Soft Skills Development: Design activities and assignments that foster essential soft skills, like communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and critical thinking, which are highly valued in the workplace.
- Resume and Interview Skills Training: Teach students the basics of resume writing and interview techniques, including practicing mock interviews and learning how to articulate their skills and experiences effectively.
- Networking and Mentorship: Encourage students to build professional connections through informational interviews, networking events, or mentorship programs.

The goal is to make career education an integral and engaging part of the high school experience, providing students with the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to make informed decisions about their future paths. Collaboration with school counselors, administrators, and community partners can significantly enhance these efforts.

Our program is built on three pillars:

1. **Employer & Industry Training Partnerships** — Students gain access to industry-recognized certifications, mentorships, and applied learning experiences.
2. **Career Awareness & Exploration** — Exposure to diverse career pathways starting in 9th grade, leading to informed postsecondary decisions.
3. **Equity & Access** — Removing barriers so that economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, Tribal Nation students, and underrepresented populations can fully participate and succeed.

Employer or Industry Training Initiative

1. Workforce Impact (55 points)

- **Curriculum Alignment:** Pathways will be built in direct collaboration with regional employers in sectors such as healthcare, advanced manufacturing, construction trades, information technology, and education. Curriculum will be aligned to state and national standards and mapped to in-demand occupational needs.
- **Certifications & Diplomas:** Students will earn **industry-recognized credentials** such as OSHA-10, Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), ServSafe certification, Microsoft Office Specialist, and AWS Welding Certification.
- **Retention & Expansion of Industries:** By developing local talent pipelines, the program addresses workforce shortages, supports business retention, and fosters industry expansion in the Iron Range region.
- **Participants:** Anticipated annual participation will grow from **100 students in Year 1**.
- **Measurable Outcomes:**
 - 20% - 40% of pathway seniors may graduate with at least one industry certification.
 - 90% - 100% of 9th grade students complete a career portfolio and mock interviews.
 - 30% of juniors and seniors will participate in at least one Job Shadow Experience.
- **Standards Alignment:** All pathways may be mapped to Minnesota Department of Education's Career Fields, Clusters & Pathways framework, as well as national frameworks such as the National Career Clusters Framework and the Pathful Career Readiness and Development Company.

2. Regional Benefits & Partnerships (15 points)

- **Industry Partnerships:** Active agreements with regional employers including, but not limited to, Essentia Health, Cleveland-Cliffs, U. S. Steel, Minnesota North College, and local trade programs.
- **Recruitment Strategies:** Marketing campaigns, career fairs, and "Pathway Preview Nights" will target students, parents, and community members. Employers will co-host events and offer job-shadowing slots.

3. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility (10 points)

- **Population Served:** The project will engage economically distressed communities, Tribal Nations, and students from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds.
- **Accessibility Efforts:** Universal Design for Learning principles will ensure usability for students with disabilities; all equipment purchases will meet ADA compliance.

- **Equity Strategies:** Transportation assistance, stipends for low-income students to offset costs of certifications & experiences, and partnerships with women-owned and Tribal-owned vendors for materials and consulting.
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4. Job Impact (10 points)

- **Jobs Created/Retained:** The program anticipates directly supporting **2 - 4 new instructor/industry liaison roles** in year one, while indirectly sustaining dozens of skilled trade and technical jobs by building local talent pipelines.
 - **Workforce Expansion:** By Year 1, we expect to contribute at least/up to **20 certified, job-ready graduates annually** into the regional workforce.
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Career Awareness Initiative

1. Significance & Impact (30 points)

The Career Awareness component will provide required **structured career exploration starting in 9th grade**, culminating in pathway-specific training in upper grades. Lasting impacts include:

- Sustained industry partnerships beyond the grant term.
 - Increased postsecondary enrollment in high-demand fields.
 - A replicable model for other Iron Range schools.
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2. Project Overview (20 points)

Rock Ridge will:

- **Phase 1:** Establish three initial Career Academies (Health Science & Human Services, Business - IT - Communication & Arts, Natural Resources - Engineering - Manufacturing - Architecture & Construction).
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3. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility (15 points)

- **Population Served:** The project will engage economically distressed communities, Tribal Nations, and students from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds.

- **Accessibility Efforts:** Universal Design for Learning principles will ensure usability for students with disabilities; all equipment purchases will meet ADA compliance.
- **Equity Strategies:** Transportation assistance, stipends for low-income students to offset costs of certifications & experiences, and partnerships with women-owned and Tribal-owned vendors for materials and consulting.

4. Regional Benefits & Partnerships (15 points)

- **Communities Served:** Virginia, Eveleth, Gilbert, Mountain Iron, and surrounding Iron Range communities. Collaboration with Mountain-Buhl and St. Louis County school districts.
- **Partner Roles:** Employers provide curriculum input, site tours, mentors, job shadows and internships; Minnesota North College offers dual-credit courses. School districts will provide students with these opportunities.

5. Job Impact (10 points)

The Career Awareness program supports **future workforce readiness** by connecting students to in-demand regional industries, ensuring a talent pipeline that meets employer needs.

6. Project Readiness & Timeliness (10 points)

- Administrative teams and community partners are in place.
- Local funds from district and foundation sources will match portions of the budget.
 - Rock Ridge is committing to matching funds through the salaries of Willie Spelts, RRHS Teachers, RRPS Business Office Staff, and Custodial & Event Preparation Staff.
- Implementation can begin within 90 days of funding.

Phase One Budget Plan (\$100,000 total)

Category	Phase 1
Training, Materials, & Supplies	\$15,000
Staff Time/Curriculum Development & Training Personnel	\$25,000
Training Materials & Supplies	\$30,000
Travel/Career Awareness	\$10,000

Non-Training Personnel - Coordination, Recruiting, etc.	\$5,000
Non-Training Personnel & Training Materials & Supplies	\$5,000
Non-Training Personnel - Assessment	\$10,000
Totals	\$100,000

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