



## Engaging industry.



As employees become harder to find, employers that engage college students during the course of their studies — and promote curriculum that will make employees more productive on day one — will have a distinct advantage.

The Minnesota State Centers of Excellence offer a wide variety of meaningful ways to connect with those students and the educators who are preparing them for life and career. Those opportunities include:

- Serving on the leadership council for the center focused on your industry
- Welcoming STEM and Career Camp attendees to your facilities
- Providing input about, and helping develop, curriculum and certifications to better educate future employees
- Offering apprenticeship, internship and work study programs

[For more information](#), contact the Minnesota State Centers of Excellence main office or the Minnesota State Energy Center of Excellence.



## MINNESOTA STATE

Energy Center of Excellence



## A Unique Industry/Education Collaboration

It began by Xcel Energy initiating efforts to increase diversity in its workforce, especially in field positions. In 2015, Tom Cascalenda, Xcel Director for Design and Construction began to get involved.

“Tom joined the Minnesota Energy Consortium saying that workforce diversity was a priority for Xcel Energy just as it is for many other utility companies,” says Bruce Peterson, executive director of the Minnesota State Energy Center of Excellence. “He basically said if we couldn’t make a difference, he’d go somewhere else.”

Peterson had sat on a number of national panels with Deon Clark, whose Legacy i3 Program in Arizona was showing demonstrable results by providing inner city students with wrap around services ranging from character development and job interviewing preparation to academic coaching and social services.

The students also received OSHA training and Energy Industry Fundamentals certifications and exposure to careers in the energy industry. The Arizona program had demonstrated its ability to improve grades and attendance during high school; increase admission to, and completion of, post-secondary programs; and success at landing jobs.

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Over the next six months, Peterson, members of the Minnesota Energy Consortium, and educational partners including Minneapolis and St. Paul Public Schools, made three trips to Arizona to introduce team members to Deon Clark and the Legacy program.

As a result, Xcel Energy along with other partners like the Minnesota Energy Center, provided support and worked with Deon Clark to bring the program to Minnesota. He was also impressed by Minnesota's K-12 and post-secondary infrastructure and knew he could rely on Peterson to help him navigate the systems.

### **It doesn't take a nuclear scientist — but it helps!**

Clark had an advantage with potential K-12, post-secondary, community and C-Suite partners in that he himself had come from a disadvantaged background but had gone on to work at a senior level at a nuclear plant.

"I know there are people who'd like to think I was a 'token' but there is no circumstance where you'll get a senior nuclear reactor operator license without having proven your merit," says Clark.

"It certainly made advocating for this program easier when the person who formed and leads Legacy was so familiar with the energy industry," notes Cascalenda.

### **First steps and course correction**

In 2016, Cascalenda, Peterson and Clark recruited 38 students from Patrick Henry and Roosevelt High Schools in Minneapolis and Harding Senior High School in St. Paul willing to commit the 200 unpaid hours required to participate in the Legacy Program.

Of those 38 students, 32 completed their Legacy training, 22 enrolled in college and 10 found employment at jobs where college wasn't a requirement. The first Legacy students who enrolled in the DCTC line worker program almost immediately transferred to another major — primarily because of the physical nature of the work.

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“What we learned from that experience was to provide a “power line primer” early in the program where kids interested in being line workers get a chance to learn about the necessary safety gear, go out and climb poles,” says Clark. If they don’t like heights, we help them find another career path supported by the program.

While Legacy has proven its ability to prepare students for success in programs where they may be in the minority, Peterson brought in Tony Byers, former vice president of inclusion at Starbucks to conduct diversity workshops for students and faculty at Dakota County. “We wanted to address potential issues before they happened,” says Peterson.

### A different sort of energy pipeline

There’s now a pipeline of high school students participating in the Legacy program at Twin Cities high schools, and recent graduates already registered at DCTC for the Electrical Lineworker program that starts in July.

In 2016, Xcel Energy had just eight people of color employed as line workers in Minnesota— at a time when residents of color composed 25% of the Twin Cities Metro population.<sup>1</sup> Xcel Energy has had five Legacy interns each of the past two years with interests in everything from nuclear chemistry to HR.

“The Legacy program doesn’t just encourage students to attain the minimum requirements,” says MJ Horner, senior director, talent strategy and transformation for Xcel Energy. “They make them the best candidates for the position through additional training and certifications. They obtain more than just the minimum requirements — like OSHA certifications, Energy Industry Fundamentals certifications and Commercial Drivers Licenses for students in the Line Worker program.”

She also credits Bruce Peterson for his contributions. “Without Bruce and Center for Energy Workforce Development board, this would never have happened,” says Horner. “He helped us navigate the educational system in ways we never would have known or been able to do.”

<sup>1</sup><https://censusreporter.org/profiles/31000US33460-minneapolis-st-paul-bloomington-mn-wi-metro-area/>