NEW Manufacturing Alliance
K-12/STEM taskforce meeting
November 5, 2026
Teams
8:30 a.m.
Minutes

ATTENDEES: **Ann Franz,** NEWMA; **Nick Rolf,** SolutionsX; **Sarah Putbress**, NEWMA; **Brooke Holbrook**, CESA 8; **Amber Smetek**, Green Bay Packaging; **John Katers**, UW-Green Bay and Make48; **Christi Lemery**, Appleton Area School District; **Anne Troka**, Sargento; **Brian Conrad**, Great Northern Corp.; **Kurtis Butrymowicz,** HART Design & MFG; **Melissa Schultz,** SPVG Marinette; **Emily Morris**, RGL Logistics; **Christina Stelter**, Alliance Laundry; **Cindy Bailey**, NWTC

Topic 1: October Plant Tours

- Student bussing funded for plant tours across the region:
  - Schools from Gillett, New London, Kohler, Clintonville, and more.
  - Some of the companies included TTX, Cruiser Yachts, Wisconsin Aluminum Foundry, Sargento, Belmark, and Marion Body Works.
- Marinette Area Business and Industry Event co-funded with NEWMA:
  - New business and industry partners attended for the first time.
  - Includes afternoon tours for educators to explore and bring back insights to students.

Topic 2: Connect to Future Talent ACP Roundtable

- 71 registered attendees; the student panel was a highlight.
  - Student perspectives are seen as essential for promoting manufacturing careers.
  - CESAs and GPS Education Partners were thanked for identifying student panelists.
- Networking was well-received: planned 3-5pm block encouraged people to stay and chat.
- **Task for next year**: come up with more activities to amplify student voices.
  - Virtual YA event to reach students region-wide without travel burden.
    - CESA8 students noted as hard to get to Green Bay; virtual options remove that barrier.
  - Feature students who were YAs and got hired full-time; they are able to reflect back on the experience.
  - Explore doing the virtual event during working hours, with companies releasing employees to participate.

Topic 3: Excellence Awards

- Good attendance: 189 this year vs. 218 last year, with no All Stars category this year.
- Netted $16,000 for the college scholarship fund.
- The venue was the right size for the number of attendees.
  - It is also less expensive; we will continue hosting there.
- Expanded nominees beyond the usual participating companies this year.

Topic 4: Manufacturing First Student Portion

- 151 students attended from Luxembourg-Casco, North Appleton, NEW School of Innovation, Wrightstown, GPS Education Partners, homeschool and African Heritage Institute.
  - Opportunity identified to recruit more homeschool students next year.

    - Large homeschool co-ops in Calumet County, Manitowoc, Sheboygan, and Fond du Lac are worth targeting.
- Some students have set up follow-up meetings with companies (Meyer Construction, Sargento).
- Assigned rotations worked well; free networking time too short at roughly 15-20 minutes.
    - **Proposal**: extend free networking to a full 30 minutes.
    - Lunch timing noted as a constraint, but educators confirmed flexibility on this.
- Students need prompting to initiate conversations; ideas to help:
    - Booth signs with "Ask me about X" prompts, similar to Power Hour.
    - Bingo card or scavenger hunt activity with conversation starters to incentivize students.
        - Company sign-offs on completed cards entered into a prize drawing (e.g., $50 Amazon gift card).
    - Identify companies that specifically want student engagement and flag them visually.

Topic 5: Sub Committee Manufacturing K-12 Outreach Toolkit

- First meeting was held in October; the next meeting will be in December.
- Hoping to have something to share by mid-spring.

Topic 6: Pentagon Grant

- Secured a contract/grant with the federal government to expand robotic toolkits.
- **Current program**: SeaPerch, a middle school underwater robotics competition running for 10+ years.
- Majority of funding will go toward a new high school-level underwater robotics competition.
    - Fills a gap: no continuation program existed after middle school SeaPerch.
    - Kits range from $1,500 to $23,000; exploring which to facilitate.
    - Schools and students will not need to fundraise.
- Will not start until fall 2027; outreach to educators coming.

Next Meeting: January 13 at 8:30 a.m. via Teams

- **Quarterly membership meeting: December 15** at Fox Valley Tech, 8:30-10:00am.
    - Announcing the Northeast Wisconsin Manufacturing Vitality Study Index:
    - Keynote: Leading in Times of Change
    - Announcing additional grant opportunities at the meeting.