

1) Share a highlight, memory, or success with one of our educational partners in Greater St. Cloud

Theme 1: Strong Employer-Education Collaborations are Driving Workforce Success

- Many local businesses have had significant success recruiting from institutions like CSB/SJU and SCSU, particularly in fields like accounting, healthcare, and trades.
- Partnerships such as city staff working with students on real-world research, employer involvement in curriculum development, and hands-on projects (e.g., ColdSpring's collaboration with SCTCC students) are providing practical experience.
- Internship programs, mentorship opportunities, and experiential learning models are showing strong results in retaining talent locally.

Theme 2: Community Engagement Initiatives Foster Student Success

- Programs like student ambassador networks, community volunteer projects, and participation in local boards (e.g., Boys and Girls Club, Downtown Alliance) help students build connections beyond campus.
- Neighborhood revitalization projects, such as SCSU-led community engagement efforts, create a stronger town-gown relationship and support student integration.
- Positive storytelling about student contributions and the economic impact of higher education is essential in fostering community support.

Theme 3: Higher Education Institutions as Key Talent Pipelines

- Local businesses rely on area colleges for workforce development, with a high percentage of professionals in accounting, healthcare, and technical trades coming from these institutions.
- Initiatives like the EPIC program (introducing students to career pathways) and hands-on partnerships with technical colleges have helped bridge education and industry needs.
- Medical schools and technical training programs are producing strong talent pipelines, with a noted success in students advancing to high-level careers locally.

2) How can we increase the number of interaction opportunities for students with employers/community experts?

Theme 4: Expand Hands-on Learning and Early Career Exposure

- More paid and unpaid internships, apprenticeships, and experiential learning opportunities are needed to help students transition from education to the workforce.
- Employers should be more proactive in engaging students directly in classrooms, attending career fairs, and offering company visits.

- Encouraging high school and even middle school students to explore local industries early on will build stronger workforce pipelines.

Theme 5: Overcome Barriers to Access and Engagement

- Limited transportation options, especially for CSB/SJU students, make it difficult to access off-campus jobs, internships, and volunteer opportunities. Expanding public transit routes and employer-sponsored transportation solutions is essential.
- First-generation and international students may face additional barriers, such as lack of awareness of job opportunities or discomfort with networking—mentorship programs and targeted outreach can help bridge these gaps.
- Employers should better articulate job opportunities and career paths available in the region to help students understand the local job market.

Theme 6: Foster More Direct Business-School Partnerships

- Business leaders should collaborate with faculty to integrate real-world projects and case studies into coursework.
- Hosting networking events, industry panels, and open houses can create more organic interaction points between students and employers.
- Incorporating soft skills development into more courses will help students become workplace-ready and better prepared for employer expectations.

3) How can we support our education institutions?

Theme 7: Strengthen Financial and Resource Support for Schools

- Businesses can support institutions by investing in scholarships, equipment, and program funding—similar to how companies have sponsored technical training programs.
- Philanthropic partnerships, such as funding for food insecurity programs at SCTCC, can help remove barriers to student success.
- Creating community boards within institutions to facilitate continuous employer engagement can strengthen long-term partnerships.

Theme 8: Address Student Wellbeing and Retention Challenges

- Housing and food insecurity are significant issues for many students, particularly first-generation students. Businesses and the broader community can help provide solutions.
- Increasing the number of teachers of color in local schools can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.
- Expanding mentorship programs, particularly for underrepresented students, can help increase student confidence and long-term success.

Theme 9: Promote Awareness and Positive Perceptions of Higher Education

- Employers and community leaders need to help dispel myths about higher education, such as misconceptions about safety or career prospects.
- Showcasing student success stories and positive impacts on the local economy can improve public perception of universities and colleges.
- Regional outreach efforts to inform prospective students, families, and businesses about local higher education opportunities can help attract and retain talent.
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