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Recently I attended a Prior Lake Chamber business luncheon along with several students who participate in Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools' MNCAPS program. This event was a terrific way for students to connect their learning to the real world, observe professionals in action, gain networking skills and, in turn, help educate the business community about MNCAPS.

Now in its fourth year, the Minnesota Center for Advanced Professional Studies (MNCAPS) is our profession-based immersion program. Juniors and seniors from Prior Lake High School and Farmington High School attend their home school for part of the day and MNCAPS in Lakeville for part of their day. Students earn high school credit for each of the courses taken at MNCAPS and can even earn college credit.

Students are offered multiple pathways to pursue potential career interests including design and marketing, foundations of business, marketing analytics, professional selling, education, global sustainability, and medicine and healthcare.

These pathways prepare students for careers by teaching academic content through the lens of a specific professional field. Students are immersed in experiential learning, solving authentic problems through project-based assessments and personalized learning.

We are always looking to add pathways that will help students be college or career ready. Recently a team of administrators hosted industry experts to learn what is needed to build a trades pathway for our students. We are hopeful that we will be able to add this pathway to MNCAPS in the 2021-2022 school year.

Community partnerships are key to the success of the program. MNCAPS students learn from guest instructors who teach lessons about a specific topic they have experience in related to a curriculum. Some partners serve as mentors and meet monthly with a student to provide them with advice and support as they grow professionally, and site visits provide an opportunity to expose students to various companies and organizations.

Some partners provide students with a group project to complete. To date students have worked on dozens of assignments from helping a global investment firm with a project for a client, to working one-on-one with the residents of a local assisted living facility.

Thinking back to the recent Prior Lake Chamber luncheon, students were engaged in conversations, learning about the wide variety of businesses in our community and speaking confidently about our innovative MNCAPS program. All of these are skills needed as we develop innovative leaders for the global economy.

To learn more about MNCAPS or to become a partner, visit MNCAPS.org or contact our MNCAPS Coordinator, Erik Sill, at 952-435-0120.