



Cook County Higher Education

March 2025

CCHE is a nonprofit organization incorporated in 1998, as an **alternative to building another brick-and-mortar MnSCU institution.**

Cook County is very rural located at the tip of the Arrowhead, Cook County is one of the most beautiful places in the world—but it is also remote. Cook County has no higher education institutions or facilities. The closest MnSCU institution (in Duluth) is a 2–3 hour drive. Cook County is **very large** yet has **less than 6,000 residents**. The county is **92% public land**—severely limiting the ability to fund services with property taxes. At the same time, Cook County welcomes **1.5 million visitors** every year, putting strain on local budgets.

Local Access and Support for College Education is provided by a full-time Student Support Specialist who works with students to apply and enroll in MnSCU courses and continues to support students throughout their education and job search. **CCHE is truly a one-stop shop.** Tuition generated at MnSCU schools from local students is well over CCHE's \$300,000 line item from the MnSCU budget. CCHE offers student research and advocacy, free tutoring for students from kindergarten through post-secondary education, and maintains a proctoring center that allows residents to take required educational or occupational tests locally instead of driving to Duluth or Minneapolis. CCHE also provides scholarships for local youth and adult learners, including for tech and trade education.

Workforce and Trades Training: CCHE supports workforce and trades education including Welding, Nursing Assistant, Emergency Medical Responder (EMR), Birth Doula, Chainsaw Safety, Naloxone, ServSafe, Small Business training, and Building Contractor CEUs. Since January 2021, CCHE has trained over 350 community members in CPR/First Aid/AED. **CCHE can quickly respond to individual and employer needs** by providing public events or customized training opportunities.

Commercial Driver's License Courses (A, B, and Bus): In April 2022, CCHE coordinated with the **Grand Portage Tribe, Minnesota North College Customized Training Solutions, IRRR, MnDOT, and Cook County** to bring Minnesota North's CDL training to Cook County. Four cohorts have offered 80+ residents the opportunity to attain a CDL endorsement with local training and testing. Cook County has a strong need for local CDL drivers, including local businesses and Cook County Public Schools (school bus drivers).

Educational Events Tailored to Local Resident Needs: CCHE offerings include in-person, hybrid, and recorded sessions. Recent events include: End of Life Planning, Artificial Intelligence, Community Safety, Parenting Support, Anishinaabemowin, Local Indigenous History, and Youth Tech Camp. CCHE provides additional support to the community through distributing low-cost refurbished laptops. Since March 2020, 566 laptops have been distributed to Cook County residents.

Strong Community Support: CCHE has strong and deep connections to their community, including with **Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Tribal Government**. **Local residents trust CCHE** to help them access all types of higher education and training. Local donors to CCHE range from **Cook County**, to the **Grand Marais Lion's Club**, to **North Shore Health Care Foundation** to **foundations serving Northeast Minnesota** (the Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation and the Northland Foundation, both located in Duluth).

Benefits to the State of Minnesota:

- CCHE students generate tuition revenue for MnSCU campuses that exceeds our \$300k state allocation.
- Expands the reach of statewide education providers to the North Shore of Minnesota.
- Cost-effective model to create an educated workforce in a remote region.
- Graduates fill living wage jobs in the region, addressing workforce shortfalls for skilled positions.
- Multi-generational and lifelong learning opportunities lead to a more well-rounded and adaptable workforce and a better quality of life for all.

For More Information Contact:

Karen Blackburn | (218) 387-3411 | Director@myCCHE.org

John Berns, lobbyist for Cook County Chamber | cell (612) 799-5599 | jberns@carnivalberns.com

Cook County Higher Education

GRAND MARAIS, MN

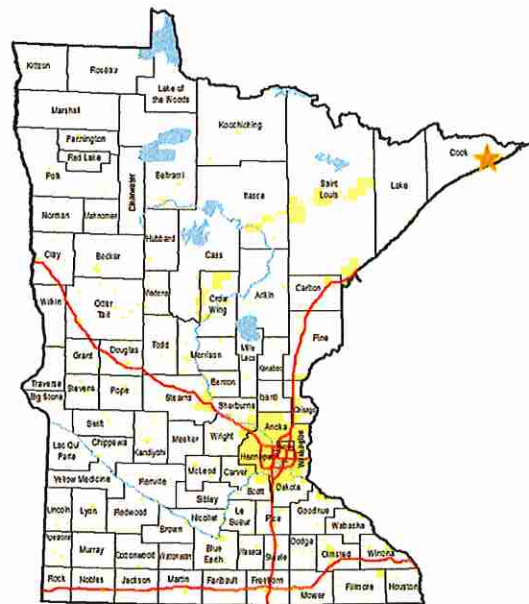
Karen Blackburn, Executive Director
Kelsey Rogers Kennedy, Associate Director
Rob Wells, Student



**COOK COUNTY
HIGHER EDUCATION**
EDUCATION WHERE YOU LIVE

LOCATED IN RURAL
NORTHEASTERN
MINNESOTA

* EDUCATION WHERE YOU LIVE *



HISTORY

In the early 1990s realized we needed local college education options.

In 1998, CCHE was officially founded to "promote and coordinate higher education opportunities in Cook County, Minnesota."



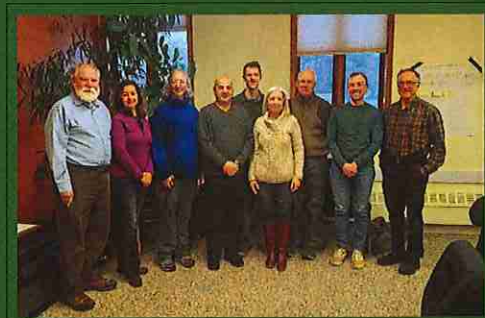
EXPERIENCED STAFF OF FOUR

Karen Blackburn, Executive Director (8 Years)

Kelsey Rogers Kennedy, Associate Director and Program Director (13 Years)

Lenna Stever Sobanja, Student Support Specialist (6 Years)

Adrea Beres, Website and Office Administrator (6 Years)



BOARD MEMBERS

10 Current Board Members

Volunteer Board - No Compensation

All Board Members Live in Cook County

THREE PRIMARY FUNCTIONS IN COOK COUNTY



**Long-Distance
College Education**



**Workforce and
Trades Training**



Lifelong Learning

LONG-DISTANCE COLLEGE EDUCATION

If you live in Cook County and you are looking for any type of education - you would walk in our doors.

Full-time Student Support Specialist Provides:

- Help with applying and enrolling in college courses - including completing FAFSA.
- Program research and student advocacy.
- Free tutoring services.
- Exam proctoring in CCHE Proctoring Center
- Tuition scholarship management (funded by grants and donations).

Tuition generated at MnSCU schools from local student enrollment is over CCHE's \$300,000 line item from the MnSCU budget.

CCHE is truly a One-Stop Shop.

STUDENT NUMBERS - AS REPORTED TO MNSCU - FY24

\$411,345**1,512**
Credits**514**
One-on-One
student meetings**MN College Enrollment**

CCHE facilitated 64 students enrolling in Minnesota Schools for **1,512 credits** totaling **\$411,345** in tuition payments.

Student Support

CCHE provided support for 167 degree/certificate students.

We spent 458 hours on research and advocacy and hosted **514 one-on-one in-person meetings**.

WORKFORCE AND TRADES TRAINING

CCHE supports workforce and trades education, and quickly responds to individual and employer needs by providing public events or customized training opportunities. In FY24:

- CCHE provided 245 workforce and professional development workshops.
- 3,159 community members attended.
- 172 CEUs were earned.



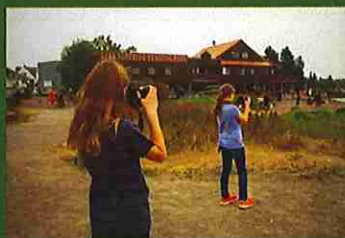
WORKFORCE AND TRADES TRAINING

- Commercial Driver's License Training - Class A, B, and Bus
- Welding
- Nursing Assistant
- Emergency Medical Responder (EMR)
- Birth Doula's
- Chainsaw Safety
- Naloxone
- ServSafe Food Manager
- Small Business training
- Building Contractor CEUs
- CPR/First Aid/AED

LIFELONG LEARNING - EDUCATIONAL EVENTS TAILORED TO LOCAL RESIDENT NEEDS

CCHE offerings include in-person, hybrid, and recorded sessions. Recent events include:

- Artificial Intelligence
- Community Safety
- Parenting Support
- Ojibwe Language
- Local Indigenous History
- Youth Tech Camp
- Aging Well Resources



CCHE REVENUE SOURCES

	FY22	FY23	FY24
Government Sources			
State of Minnesota - MnSCU	\$ 300,000	\$ 300,000	\$ 300,000
Cook County Minnesota	\$ 15,000	\$ 15,000	\$ 15,000
State of Minnesota - MnDOT for CDL	\$ 26,615	\$ 24,427	\$ 71,711
State of Minnesota - IRRR for CDL		\$ 7,410	\$ 21,545
Non Government Sources			
Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation - Duluth	\$ 60,000	\$ 60,163	\$ 140,000
North Shore Healthcare Foundation - Cook County	\$ 12,500	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,000
Empty Bowls - Cook County	\$ 1,460	\$ 1,200	\$ 1,500
Arrowhead Electric Coop - Cook County	\$ 2,500		
Floyd Pearson Memorial (Personal) Cook County		\$ 2,500	
WISE - Cook County		\$ 500	\$ 1,000
Northland Foundation - For CDL - Duluth		\$ 25,000	
North Shore Collaborative Board - Cook County		\$ 8,640	
Grand Marais Public Library		\$ 600	
Sawtooth Mountain Clinic - Cook County		\$ 1,347	\$ 326
Cook County Community Fund - Cook County			\$ 3,000
Anishinabe Fund - Duluth			\$ 1,789
Visit Cook County			\$ 1,000
Grand Marais Lions			\$ 3,000
Donations - Local Individuals and Businesses	\$ 103,168	\$ 70,126	\$ 96,232
Commercial Activity (Programs and Misc.)	\$ 27,327	\$ 47,592	\$ 43,336
Investments	\$ 6,979	\$ 9,060	\$ 11,924
Total Per 990	\$ 555,549	\$ 583,565	\$ 721,363

LETTERS OF SUPPORT

Local Government

- Cook County Board of Commissioners
- Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- Cook County Highway Department
- Cook County Public Health and Human Services

Health Care

- Sawtooth Mountain Clinic
- North Shore Health

Education

- Minnesota North College
- Cook County Schools

Non-Profits

- North House Folk School
- Care Partners of Cook County

Business

- Cook County Chamber of Commerce
- Visit Cook County
- Small Business Development Center
- Grand Marais Family Dentistry
- Java Moose Espresso Cafe
- Drury Lane Books
- Arrowhead Cooperative

"I did graduate last month. It is so awesome. Thank you for all you and CCHE did to help me along the way. I couldn't have done it without you, especially at the beginning. It had been 20 years since I went to school and felt super overwhelmed with everything. Thank you so much!"

-Bemidji State University Graduate

Thank you!



COOK COUNTY HIGHER EDUCATION

EDUCATION WHERE YOU LIVE

Cook County Higher Education Revenue Sources

	FY22	FY23	FY24
Government Sources			
State of Minnesota - MnSCU	\$ 300,000	\$ 300,000	\$ 300,000
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Commercial Activity (Programs and Misc.)	\$ 27,327	\$ 47,592	\$ 43,336
Investments	\$ 6,979	\$ 9,060	\$ 11,924
Total Per 990 (Doesn't include Unrealized Gain/Loss)	\$ 555,549	\$ 583,565	\$ 721,363

House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee
Chair Representative Marion Rarick

Dear Members of the House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee,

Minnesota North College – Customized Training Solutions (CTS) has partnered with Cook County Higher Education (CCHE) to deliver CDL training to the community members for several years. Together, we have licensed over 80 new drivers with Class A, B, Passenger training and additional endorsements- which has had a direct impact on both the local and the regional economy.

CDL is a short-term training that yields lucrative workforce opportunities. CTS has had the capability of bringing the training to the students, with the help of CCHE. They assist students in the enrollment process, provide IT support, and offer one-on-one coaching throughout the training program. This relationship enables us to grow our bench strength, enroll and graduate more students, and create a more sustainable workforce, which we all benefit from.

CCHE has been the most consistent outreach partner that we've worked with. CCHE has a very high program completion rate due to the extra support they put into helping their students and community members to be successful. Successful outcomes strengthen our programs, and keeps the wheels of our economy rolling.

Business and Industry look to the College to be the provider of Workforce Development across the region. In rural communities, the opportunities are more limited. CCHE has removed many barriers to open the doors for education and training in their underserved area.

We are proud to partner with such a resourceful and dedicated agency, such as CCHE.

Sincerely,



Gail Anderson
Operations Manager – Customized Training Solutions
Minnesota North College
218.293.6921
gail.anderson@minnesotanorth.edu



116 West Highway 61
PO Box 805
Grand Marais, MN 55604
218-264-0713
Cookcountychamber.org

February 25th, 2025

Dear Chair Rarick and Members of the House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee,

On behalf of the Cook County Chamber of Commerce, I am writing to express our strong support for Cook County Higher Education (CCHE) and its continued vital role in our community.

We have had the privilege of working closely with Cook County Higher Education on numerous occasions, collaborating to provide valuable educational opportunities for our Chamber members. CCHE has generously sponsored several of our Chamber Exchanges, which are essential educational seminars that empower our members with the knowledge and skills necessary for professional growth.

Cook County Higher Education plays a crucial role in enabling our community members to enhance their professional skillsets. Their programs provide accessible and relevant education, fostering a culture of continuous learning and development. Furthermore, we are proud to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of CCHE's Executive Director, Karen Blackburn, who serves as a dedicated and highly respected member of our Chamber Board. Her insights and leadership are instrumental in strengthening our business community. Our organization has directly benefited from the educational offerings of CCHE. We have taken essential classes, including First Aid & CPR Certification and AED training, which have equipped our staff with life-saving skills. This demonstrates the practical and impactful nature of CCHE's programs. In addition, Cook County Higher Education's commitment to digital equity is commendable. Their provision of affordable computers ensures that our community has crucial access to the internet, whether for educational pursuits or professional endeavors. This initiative is vital for bridging the digital divide and fostering economic opportunity.

The Cook County Chamber of Commerce recognizes the significant contributions of Cook County Higher Education to our community's economic vitality and overall well-being.

We urge the House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee to recognize the value of Cook County Higher Education and provide the necessary support to enable them to continue their essential work.

Sincerely,

Linda Jurek Executive Director, Cook County Chamber of Commerce

Chris Homyak Board Chair, Cook County Chamber of Commerce



Sawtooth Mountain Clinic

Together Through Life • A 501(c)(3) Nonprofit

February 25, 2025

House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee
Chair Representative Marion Rarick

Dear Members of the House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee,

I am the CEO of Sawtooth Mountain Clinic (SMC) and I am writing in support of Cook County Higher Education (CCHE) and the funding they receive from the State's Higher Education budget. CCHE provides a vital service to the communities of Cook County and the Grand Portage Reservation. Without CCHE, SMC would not be able to provide the same level of high-quality health care.

SMC is a Federally Qualified Community Health Center serving everyone in the Cook County/Grand Portage area, regardless of ability to pay. A significant portion of the clinical staff at SMC have benefitted from CCHE's programs, including: basic life support classes, Naloxone training, test proctoring, and support for continuing education. Several of SMC's nursing staff achieved LPN or RN degrees with the support of CCHE – despite the nearest nursing school being located 2-3 hours away.

I have personally reaped the benefits of CCHE's programs. In 2009, as a mother with 3 young children, I walked into the CCHE facility to discuss nursing school. With guidance and support from CCHE staff, I realized it was possible to become a nurse without moving away from my home. CCHE offered pre-requisite classes, space for hands-on clinical practice, ITV feeds to lectures, test proctoring, and quiet study space. My nursing degree would not have been possible without CCHE.

CCHE has a long history of success in supporting the education needs of our rural community. SMC relies on CCHE and we look forward to continued collaboration with CCHE well into the future.

Sincerely,



Kate Surbaugh, BSN, RN, PHN

Chief Executive Officer
Sawtooth Mountain Clinic
513 5th Ave. W.
Grand Marais, MN 55604
218-387-2330



Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa

RESERVATION TRIBAL COUNCIL

83 Stevens Road, PO Box 428
Grand Portage, Minnesota 55605
Tel. (218) 475-2277 • Fax (218) 475-2284

February 26, 2025

Minnesota House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee
Chair Representative Mario Rarick:

I write this letter as Tribal Chairman of the Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa to support the work of Cook County Higher Education and highlight ways in which CCHE increases educational access and professional opportunity for Grand Portage residents and its workforce.

CCHE supports students of all ages in all aspects of pursuing higher education including, assisting with financial aid paperwork, and researching education programs and schools. Scholarships are provided to residents who want to stay in Cook County and complete their education long-distance. CCHE's collaboration with the Grand Portage Education Department helps keep students connected to additional community resources and provides youth support in exploring education options and enacting the steps needed to prepare for college, trade school, or certification programs.

CCHE plays a key role in workforce development. Holding certification programs like Nursing Assistant Training, and short-term training in Cook County has increased the workforce in critical areas and expanded the skills of local workers. Local training opportunities, and short-term training scholarships are accessible to our community. Band employees have utilized local training courses including Better Buildings, Better Business; ServSafe Food Manager Renewal or Certification; Chainsaw Safety & Tree Felling; and Mental Health First Aid to name a few. Training opportunities provided in Grand Portage have been critical. Some examples include CPR/AED/First Aid; American Heart Association Basic Life Support and EMR refresher, and Office 365 training. The Band has been very supportive in CCHE's work to train over 80 community members in Commercial Driver's Licenses (CDL A, CDL B, and CDL B-Bus). The Band is currently partnering with CCHE, local tradespeople, Cook County, IRRR, Minnesota North, ISD 166, and other valued partners to expand trades education opportunities in our communities. These workforce development opportunities not only create local employment pathways but also empower community members to build fulfilling and impactful careers.

CCHE provides effective and relevant services and is intentional about collaborating to meet the specific needs of students and the local workforce and I strongly support continued funding for this critical community organization.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Deschampe".

Robert Deschampe, Tribal Chairman
Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa



GICHI ONIGAMIING – GREAT CARRYING PLACE



HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

609 E 4th Ave
Grand Marais, MN 55604
Phone 218-387-3014
Fax 218-387-3012
www.co.cook.mn.us

02/25/2025

House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee
Chair Representative Marion Rarick

Subj: Cook County Highway Department Letter of Support

Dear Members of the House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee,

The Cook County Highway Department is pleased to provide this letter of support for Cook County Higher Education (CCHE). As a vital resource in our rural community, CCHE has consistently demonstrated a commitment to providing high-quality, accessible education that directly benefits local businesses, organizations, and residents.

Our department has worked closely with CCHE to address the educational and training needs of our workforce. CCHE is both flexible and responsive to our specific requirements, ensuring that our team receives the necessary training to perform at the highest level. We have built a strong relationship with their staff, and we appreciate the ability to reach out to them directly when we need assistance in developing and delivering training solutions. Their willingness to collaborate allows us to address challenges efficiently and effectively.

One of the most significant examples of this partnership is the development of the Commercial Driver's License (CDL) training program. CCHE has provided a local solution to a critical workforce need, eliminating the necessity of traveling to Duluth or Minneapolis for training and providing funding opportunities to make it affordable to Cook County residents. This initiative has had a tangible impact on our department, leading directly to the hiring of two qualified employees. In addition to the CDL program, CCHE has also been instrumental in coordinating OSHA training, ensuring that our employees receive mandated safety education.

By offering locally accessible, high-quality education and training, CCHE plays a crucial role in strengthening our workforce and enhancing the efficiency of operations within the Cook County Highway Department. Their dedication to meeting the needs of our community is invaluable, and we wholeheartedly support their continued efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "R. Kimmel-Hass".

Robert J. Kimmel-Hass, P.E.
Highway Department Director/County Engineer



**Minnesota
North College**
A Member of Minnesota State

Minnesota North College
1515 E 25th Street
Hibbing, MN 55746
218.312.1512

House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee
Attn: Chair Representative Marion Rarick

February 26, 2025

Dear Members of the House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee,

Over the years, Minnesota North has closely partnered with CCHE to support the Cook County community. CCHE is deeply committed to serving the community through education and training, proactively addressing needs and ensuring their programs align with local demands. The team is flexible, responsive, and accessible, often collaborating with Minnesota North Customized Training to bring solutions to the community.

Thanks to CCHE, local training solutions are available that would otherwise require travel to Duluth, Minneapolis, or the Iron Range. They have facilitated remote training options and promoted opportunities at Minnesota North locations, even providing scholarships to ease financial burdens.

CCHE plays a crucial role in supporting post-secondary education in Cook County, assisting students with school research, financial aid, and scholarships, and offering tuition scholarships for distance education programs at Minnesota North. Their collaboration on LPN training and the Cook County PSEO Nursing Assistant Training has been instrumental in launching healthcare careers locally.

CCHE's unwavering commitment to local needs and their partnerships have significantly shaped the educational and workforce landscape in Cook County. We have greatly enjoyed partnering with them.

Sincerely,

Michael Raich, President
Minnesota North College
218-403-9221
michael.raich@minnesotanorth.edu



COOK COUNTY SCHOOLS

INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT 166



February 2025

House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee
Chair Representative Marion Rarick

Dear Members of the House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee;

Please accept this strong letter of support for the important and impactful work provided by Cook County Higher Education (CCHE) throughout the Cook County community. Their programs and efforts are vital for students and staff in Cook County Schools as well as for local businesses, organizations, and community members.

Students in Cook County Schools directly benefit from CCHE programs including tutoring, providing laptops, post-secondary tuition assistance, partnering with the Cook County Prevention Coalition, and providing some concurrent enrollment class opportunities. The school district benefits from CCHE programs including CDL training for bus drivers, ServSafe Food Manager Training, naloxone training, post-secondary tuition help for teachers, and ongoing training opportunities for both licensed and non-licensed staff. Local businesses, organizations, and municipalities also benefit from many other job specific training opportunities that CCHE provides. Their willingness to scale up specific training opportunities for local entities is incredibly important to the economy of this community due to our significant distance to other higher education programs in places like Duluth, Virginia or Ely.

The CCHE team is flexible, approachable, responsive, and interwoven with all aspects of the Cook County and Grand Portage communities. Their leadership in the community and support of community organizations is absolutely critical to the economy and culture of Cook County, MN. Please reach out if I can be of assistance in any way to support Cook County Higher Education.

Sincerely,

Chris Lindholm
Superintendent

Success for Each, Respect for All

101 West 5th Street, Grand Marais, MN 55604

Phone: (218) 387-2271

www.cookcountyschool.org



ARROWHEAD COOPERATIVE

02/24/2025

House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee
Chair Representative Marion Rarick
Minnesota House of Representatives
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Members of the House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for Cook County Higher Education (CCHE) and to highlight the invaluable contributions it has made to our organization and the local community. As an organization that has partnered with CCHE on numerous occasions, we have witnessed firsthand the positive impact this institution has on workforce development, education, and community-building. Our collaboration with CCHE has been essential in meeting our staff training needs. We have relied on CCHE to bring in expert trainers for critical certifications such as First Aid and CPR for our entire staff. Additionally, CCHE has been instrumental in providing specialized training for our line workers and right-of-way crews, including chainsaw training. The proximity of CCHE to our operations is invaluable, as it allows us to avoid the logistical and financial challenges of coordinating training from institutions located in Duluth, which is 90 miles away, or even farther. Without CCHE, the cost and complexity of these trainings would increase, placing a significant strain on our resources.

One of the most significant impacts of CCHE's services has been the opportunity it has provided to local individuals to obtain their Commercial Driver's License (CDL). This credential is essential for many of the positions within our Cooperative, and CCHE has worked with us to help local residents gain access to the training necessary to secure these roles. By offering CDL training locally, CCHE has made it possible for people in our community to acquire valuable skills without having to leave the area or incur the additional costs of traveling long distances.

Beyond providing these essential training services, CCHE has proven to be a responsive and flexible partner. One of the standout features of working with CCHE is their ability to adapt to our schedule and offer training sessions during work hours. This flexibility is critical for our organization, as it allows us to ensure our staff receives the necessary certifications and training without disrupting our operations.

The staff at CCHE is another key asset. We are fortunate to have established strong relationships with the team there, and we know that when we have a training need or challenge, we can count on them to provide a solution. The reliability and responsiveness of the CCHE staff have made it easy for us to collaborate effectively, and we consistently enjoy working with them to address our needs.

CCHE is an essential part of our community. Its ability to provide local solutions to training, education, and workforce development needs has made it an indispensable resource for our organization and many others in the region. We are grateful for the partnership we have with CCHE and wholeheartedly support its continued efforts to serve the Cook County community.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Jenny Kartes
Director of Finance & Administration



Board of Commissioners

COOK COUNTY COURTHOUSE
411 W 2ND STREET
GRAND MARAIS, MN 55604

WWW.CO.COOK.MN.US

February 25, 2025

Chair Representative Marion Rarick,

Please share this letter with the House Higher Education Finance Policy Committee, as we desire to express our support and appreciation for the work of Cook County Higher Education, as we have partnered with them for years. This organization has provided great benefit to our organization and the residents of Cook County.

The Cook County Board of Commissioners wants to acknowledge the incredible work of Cook County Higher Education, which has been both flexible and responsive to meeting the needs of Cook County. They have provided training to support our Highway Department (CDL and OSHA Training), Public Health and Humans Services (Excel training), and safety training (CPR and First Aid) for all our employees.

In addition, Cook County Higher Education has regularly provided support for tuition scholarships and student support for Cook County staff to attend long-distance post-secondary education. They have also had events for Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners, and others engaged and involved with the University of Minnesota Extension program here.

Cook County Higher Ed also regularly provides meeting space for county, community and other local events. They have made computers available to people in need and have helped connect residents to resources and opportunities only accessible via the internet.

We want to highlight the benefits they provide for our organization and the broader community. Regular speakers, event space, technical support, and presentations are made available to people attending in person and through on-line opportunities. In a remote community such as ours, we would be negatively impacted without the resources, creativity and support of Cook County Higher Education. Continued financial support of this organization is of vital importance to our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ginny Storlie".

Ginny Storlie
Board Chair
District 5 Commissioner



February 24, 2025

House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee
Chair Representative Marion Rarick

Dear Members of the House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee,

We live at the end of the road, 35 miles from the Canadian border and two hours from Duluth. Nature abounds; however, options for continuing education and lifelong learning do not! County Higher Education (CCE) fills this void.

CCE supports me, my clients, and my friends and neighbors in many ways:

- My success as a small business consultant is directly linked to the support that CCE provides to entrepreneurs in our community. Our partnership offers various classes each fall and winter, covering topics such as starting a business, effective succession planning, and all the details a business encounters in between. I have attached my annual report; many small businesses operating today learned about SBDC services through a CCE class.
- CCE services also include providing affordable computers for clients with low incomes, offering new entrepreneurs classes in finance and marketing, and hosting cohorts of business leaders to ensure that learning is effectively applied.
- Each month, CCE hosts enrichment classes that appeal to children as young as 10 and seniors nearing 100. Most classes are held in person and recorded and are available on demand, allowing citizens to learn at their own pace. Want to learn about Earth Day or get tips on using your Chromebook? There's a class for that. Wonder what a Death Doula does? There's a session for that as well.
- CCE also serves as a critical bridge to the Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, offering multiple opportunities for us to partner and learn from each other.
- CCE also provides post-secondary education guidance, tuition assistance, and tutoring services to those looking for their next career opportunity.

After growing up and living in the Twin Cities for most of my adult life, I took for granted the many opportunities a metropolitan area offers. Moving to a rural community generally means giving up many of these services or driving hours to access courses; however, thanks to the robust learning opportunities available at CCHE, I can learn here at home.

I strongly support CCHE, a learning space for ALL. Please visit us and see for yourself.

Sincerely Yours,

Pat Campanaro

Pat Campanaro
SBDC Consultant / Northland SBDC
Grand Marais Cook County EDA
A Better Deat LLC

pcampanaro@gmail.com
651-336-2964

cc: 2024 SBDC Annual Report

2024 Cook County Annual Report



2024 Cook County by the numbers

Counseling Sessions	Unique Clients	Counseling Hours	Capital Funding	Businesses Created
715	137	632	\$12,989,492	13

Cumulative YTD Cook County by the numbers

Counseling Sessions	Unique Clients	Counseling Hours	Capital Funding	Businesses Created
6,923	620	7,551	\$46,672,514	105

As The End Draws Near

I started this job on June 20, 2013!

Wow time flies!!

Thanks to the EDA for your support during the past 11 years. Small business is the heartbeat of America and this is definitely true here in Cook County.

It's been my privilege to serve as the SBDC consultant.

I love my job, and my role as a developer here has been a joy! I am proud of my results and point out that they represent only the clients that were kind enough to fill out a form saying I helped!

This role is critical and I urge the EDA to expand it's reach in the future.

Northland SBDC

2024 Results

The Northland Small Business Development Center program serves the Northeast Minnesota counties of Aitkin, Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake, and St. Louis. Our consultants work throughout this region to help anyone seeking assistance to start, manage, or grow a business, and our services are offered at no-cost to clients. No cost marketing, QuickBooks and human resources consulting services are also offered to clients through contracted subject matter experts.

- In 2024 The Northland SBDC organization: Conducted 4,025 counseling sessions
- Logged 30,064 counseling hours
- Saw 5,061 unique clients
- Collected \$205,873 in capital funding
- Created 316 new businesses

February 23, 2025

House Higher Education Finance and policy Committee

Chair Representative Marion Rarick

Dear Members of the House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee,

My name is Sarah Jorgenson-Hallberg and I am writing to you in support of Cook County Higher Education. My family and I own the Java Moose, an espresso café here in Grand Marais. As we serve food and beverages to the public, by state law, we must be Serve Safe Certified. The Serve Safe class is an eight-hour class taught by a certified instructor, in which we learn how to safely receive, hold and serve food and beverages. CCHE has been able to facilitate necessary training right here in Cook County for all of our staff year after year. Without local training and certification options, we would be unable to put the majority of our staff through the required training. We would have to close our shop for a day or more, and drive to Duluth, Minneapolis or the Iron Range. Many of our employees are high school and college students and would be unable to miss school to attend the training. We are incredibly grateful to Cook County Higher Education for their flexibility, availability and accessibility and look forward to many more years of partnership. Thank you for your time,

Sarah Jorgenson-Hallberg

Java Moose

Grand Marais, Minnesota



PUBLIC HEALTH &
HUMAN SERVICES

COOK COUNTY COURTHOUSE
411 W 2ND STREET
GRAND MARAIS, MN 55604
PH: 218.387.3620
FAX: 218.387.3020
TOLL FREE: 1.800.663.6771
WWW.CO.COOK.MN.US

February 27, 2025

House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee
Chair Representative Marion Rarick

RE: Letter of Support for Cook County Higher Education

Dear Members of the House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee,

On behalf of Cook County Public Health and Human Services, I am writing to express our empathic support for Cook County Higher Education (CCHE) as a critical community resource and partner in our mission to support the health, safety, and wellbeing of Cook County.

Cook County Public Health and Human Services and CCHE have a long-standing partnership aimed at serving the residents of our county. We collaborate closely and regularly with CCHE staff as part of coalitions and advisory councils, all working towards the common goal of addressing the diverse needs of our community in this remote area of the state. CCHE has played a vital role in developing the [Cook County Community Health Assessment](#) and continues to support the implementation of our shared priorities for enhancing the health of our community.

CCHE serves as a host site for our Substance Misuse and Suicide Prevention Coalition, providing remote technology and a welcoming meeting space for community members to meet. They have also worked with our department to provide training opportunities, including Mental Health First Aid, labor doula training and certification, first aid/CPR, and community-based opioid overdose prevention. They have also worked to bring local training for in-demand healthcare professions—breaking down barriers for local people to gain skills and economic stability for themselves and their families while also bolstering our local health systems and increasing access to care for everyone who lives and works here.

Thank you for the opportunity to support Cook County Higher Education in its mission to provide education, training, access, and support in our remote county.

Don't hesitate to contact me with any questions or requests for additional information.

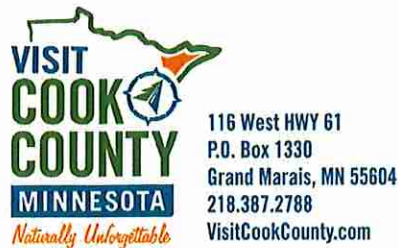
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alison McIntyre".

Alison McIntyre
Director, Cook County Public Health and Human Services
218-387-3623 | alison.mcintyre@co.cook.mn.us

"...supporting the health, safety, and well-being of our community."

www.cookcountypphs.org
This institution is an equal opportunity provider.



February 25th, 2025

Dear Chair Rarick and Members of the House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee,

On behalf of Visit Cook County, I am writing to express our support for Cook County Higher Education (CCHE) and its significant contribution to our tourism industry.

In Cook County, we understand that tourism is about more than just scenic views; it's about creating enriching experiences. Cook County Higher Education provides invaluable opportunities for our visitors to deepen their connection with our unique environment and culture. By offering a diverse range of educational programs, CCHE enhances the visitor experience, adding a layer of depth and engagement that sets Cook County apart. We recognize the importance of providing our tourists with opportunities to learn while they explore. CCHE's programs, from nature-based workshops to cultural heritage courses, allow visitors to gain a deeper understanding of our region's natural wonders and rich history. This not only boosts their satisfaction but also encourages repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth marketing.

CCHE's role in providing valuable skills training also indirectly strengthens the tourism industry. By providing First Aid & CPR Certification, and AED training, our communities become safer for our visitors. Also, by providing affordable computer access, they increase the digital access of our community, which is necessary for many tourism related jobs. Furthermore, we are particularly impressed with CCHE's ability to offer accessible and affordable educational opportunities. This ensures that a wide range of visitors, regardless of their background or budget, can benefit from their programs.

We contend that CCHE's curriculum, encompassing natural history, cultural studies, and practical skills development, serves as a significant differentiator for our destination. These programs provide tourists with opportunities for intellectual enrichment, thereby elevating the overall quality of their visit and cultivating a more profound appreciation for our region's assets.

We urge the House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee to recognize the vital role that Cook County Higher Education plays in supporting our tourism industry and to provide the necessary funding to ensure its continued success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Linda Jurek".

Executive Director, Visit Cook County



House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee
Chair Representative Marion Rarick

Dear Members of the House of Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for Cook County Higher Education (CCHE) and to share how their partnership with Grand Marais Family Dentistry (GMFD) has significantly benefitted our organization and the broader Cook County community. For us, CCHE's role in supporting education, staff development, and community growth is invaluable, and I encourage the Committee to continue recognizing and supporting their efforts.

I have worked with the staff at CCHE over the last 20 years in different facets, from staff development and skills, to options for CPR training, along with my own enjoyment of different classes for personal learning and growth. CCHE is an environment that connects our community and furthers learning in many different and unique ways.

Most recently, CCHE has played a pivotal role in supporting efforts to collaborate with Grand Portage Health Services to develop a new position aimed at serving the Grand Portage community. Through their help, we've been able to develop a framework for hiring and training a new employee. Kelsey and Karen have been supportive in meetings as we brainstorm what both stakeholders want and need.

CCHE's dedication to reducing barriers to education and supporting workforce development is incredibly important to Cook County. From high school tutoring to advanced staff training, CCHE helps make learning more accessible to everyone, regardless of background. In our isolated community, they play a crucial role in making education more attainable and less intimidating, especially for individuals who may otherwise struggle with navigating larger systems. They also assist with scholarships, ensuring that financial barriers do not stand in the way of someone's education and personal growth.

I have found the staff at CCHE to be responsive and inventive to our different needs, and they have been an excellent resource in helping me as a business owner in Cook County. As my business faces challenges or requires assistance, we know that CCHE is a resource we can rely on. Whether it's offering unique solutions, guiding us through new educational pathways, or supporting us in navigating new training programs, their team is always there with a solution. Their staff is consistently accessible and willing to engage with us, providing the support we need to ensure that our staff and the broader community have access to the best possible resources.

ALYSSA A. HEDSTROM, D.D.S.

303 EAST 3RD STREET P.O. BOX 670 GRAND MARAIS MINNESOTA 55604 (218) 387.2774 (218) 387.1393
INFO@GRANDMARAISFAMILYDENTISTRY.COM OFFICE HOURS: BY APPOINTMENT



In conclusion, CCHE has become an indispensable resource for GMFD and many other organizations in Cook County. Their work empowers our community and creates opportunities for individuals to better their lives through education. I am deeply grateful for their partnership and look forward to continuing to work together. Please know that as a valued partner, CCHE deserves your full support, as they are truly making a positive and lasting impact in Cook County.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Alyssa Hedstrom DDS

Grand Marais Family Dentistry

ALYSSA A. HEDSTROM, D.D.S.

303 EAST 3RD STREET P.O. BOX 670 GRAND MARAIS MINNESOTA 55604 (218) 387.2774 (218) 387.1393
INFO@GRANDMARAISFAMILYDENTISTRY.COM OFFICE HOURS: BY APPOINTMENT

House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee

Chair Representative Marion Rarick

Dear Members of the House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee,

I am writing today in support of Cook County Higher Education (CCHE). As an independent bookstore in Grand Marais, we have partnered with CCHE many times to offer community-wide reads, book discussions, focused book groups, and author events. CCHE is always able to offer this programming for free to all community members, often including free books, which they purchase from our local store to keep dollars within the community. Their facility is welcoming and able to offer virtual options. By partnering with them, books and thoughtful discussion can reach farther and wider audiences.

The staff at CCHE responds to community needs, and have said yes to hosting many specific book groups and community requests. The staff is engaged with the business community, and is always asking what needs we have. I have been able to set up necessary training for our staff through CCHE, and they bring in quality instructors. Given our remote location, professional development opportunities are often hours of driving away in Duluth or the Twin Cities. CCHE can work with multiple businesses to gauge the need for trainings, and then bring opportunities to us. They also offer adult education opportunities that are interesting, useful, and enrich the quality of life in this small town.

CCHE offers post-secondary education opportunities, guidance, and tuition help. This allows young people to continue living in Grand Marais while pursuing education, and keeps their skills in our small community. I know that if I was considering a career change, I would go to CCHE for guidance first!

Thank you for your time and consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Gwen Danfelt". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end.

Gwen Danfelt
Manager, Drury Lane Books

February 25, 2025



*Supporting community members
on the journey of aging and end-of-life.*

Staff

Julie Wilson
Executive Director

Maggie Anderson
Care Coordinator /
Caregiver Consultant

Suzanne Sherman
Care Coordinator /
Caregiver Consultant

Marnie Hovland, RN
Care Coordinator /
Caregiver Consultant

Christie John
Programs Administrator

Minda Andrus
Programs Coordinator

Jenny Delfs, MD
Medical Director

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Collette Pederson
Milan Schmidt
Tom Leddy

Programs

Care Coordination
Volunteer Visits
Advanced Care Planning
Caregiver Coaching
Senior Rides
Chores
Short Volunteer Respite
Education & Advocacy

Care Partners of Cook County
PO Box 282
Grand Marais, MN 55604
218-387-3788
carepartners@boreal.org

February 26, 2025

House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee
Chair Representative Marion Rarick

Re: Cook County Higher Education (CCHE)

Dear Members of the House Higher Education Finance & Policy Committee:

Care Partners is pleased to offer this letter of support for Cook County Higher Education (CCHE) serving the residents of Cook County, Minnesota and the Grand Portage Reservation.

Care Partners collaborates closely with Cook County Higher Education to provide meaningful education opportunities around aging and end of life in Cook County. CCHE is a choice venue and partner for us as their accommodations are essential for our remote community. As we aim to reach people across the frontier communities that make up Cook County, the technology and expertise that CCHE provides is essential for successful hybrid options for obtaining this education.

Not only do they provide a positive and professional zoom experience for participants unable to be in person, they also have the staff expertise to manage that experience in all capacities and encourage equal participation for those taking advantage of this option.

CCHE is responsive, knowledgeable to the needs and strengths of our community. We have collaborated on many occasions with the staff, our education partners, at CCHE to provide meaningful, relevant, community specific educational opportunities.

Our aging population relies on housing, workforce and education development and CCHE is a key partner with local government, businesses and area non-profits to best meet the needs of our unique frontier county. They have been responsive and adapted to the ever-changing and growing needs of our county.

We look forward to continued collaborations with CCHE well into the future.

Sincerely,

Julie Wilson
Executive Director



North Shore
HEALTH

COOK COUNTY HOSPITAL

515 W 5TH AVE
GRAND MARAIS, MN 55604-3017
(218) 387-3040

February 25, 2025

Minnesota House of Representatives
Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee
Representative Marion Rarick, Chair


Greetings Members of the House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee:

On behalf of North Shore Health, I am pleased to be able to offer our organization's continuing and wholehearted support for Cook County Higher Education (CCHE). North Shore Health is a 16-bed Critical Access Hospital, a 37-bed Skilled Nursing Facility, a Home Health Agency and an Ambulance Service, all located in Grand Marais, MN. The next closest hospital, also a Critical Access Hospital, is over 80 miles away. We employ approximately 130 employees equating to 97 FTEs. As is being experienced in health care organizations throughout Minnesota, North Shore Health is experiencing a workforce shortage. We have used a number of temporary agency staff and are now actively involved in recruitment from other countries using a variety of immigration options.

Throughout their existence, CCHE has been an outstanding partnership. CCHE has offered many certificate and degree programs for individuals interested in health careers. These students have had the opportunity to receive clinical training at North Shore Health. In an effort to develop our workforce, North Shore Health has developed programs to "grow our own" and CCHE has participated in these educational programs. We have numerous examples of Registered Nurses, Licensed Practical Nurses, Trained Medication Assistants, Nursing Assistants and other employees who are employed in our organization after working with CCHE to receive their certificate or degree. For programs that North Shore Health has coordinated, such as the Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) training, CCHE provided support so the written portion of the National Registry can be completed in their facility, sparing students the need to travel to Duluth. As an EMT, I personally benefited from CCHE support. All I needed to do was to call and ask the Team at CCHE to serve as a testing site. They are flexible and always willing to consider how they can best support our community by developing/coordinating/managing educational programs to support business and employees.

North Shore Health is proud to support the work of CCHE. We plan to continue collaborative arrangements with CCHE so that we can provide the critical services needed by our community citizens and visitors. Thank you for this opportunity to express our support of Cook County Higher Education and the importance they serve to our community.

Sincerely,



Kimber L. Wraalstad, FACHE
CEO/Administrator





North House Folk School

To: House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee

Chair Representative Marion Rarick

From: North House Folk School, Grand Marais, MN

Date: Feb 26, 2025

Dear Members of the House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee,

It is my honor to write this letter of support for Cook County Higher Education (CCHE), a leading institution and critical community asset for Cook County and Grand Marais, Minnesota.

Grand Marais and Cook County are located "on the edge of forever" (my own words), with Lake Superior's distant horizon on one side and the boreal forest of the Boundary Water Canoe Area Wilderness on the other. Every day, we live both the joy and the reality of a small and remote rural community, with many blessings and many challenges.

Without question, CCHE presence in our community is one of our many blessings. And importantly, one of our many blessings that actively engages our many challenges. Having an organization in our community committed to training and professional development is an incredible benefit for our community. Rather than travelling to Duluth (2 hours) or even the Twin Cities (5 hours), community members are able to build their skills and pursue their dreams.

North House regularly collaborates with CCHE both through participation in trainings offered by CCHE and through custom designed opportunities created for North House. First aid/safety workshops to fundraising trainings to forklift certification - these opportunities position our staff members to expand their skills and enhance their impact while efficiently using their time.

CCHE is a true partner. Creative, flexible, responsive, communicative, efficient and forward thinking. And their presence reaches far beyond simply working with local businesses and nonprofits. They provide post-secondary education guidance, scholarships for learning & learning resources (i.e laptop computers), life-long learning opportunities for community members, and a sense of connection that keeps our community strong.

Investing in Cook County Higher Education is an investment in the vitality of rural NE Minnesota. We offer our whole-hearted affirmation of the essential needs they address.

Respectfully submitted,



Greg Wright, Executive Director
North House Folk School

PO Box 759, Grand Marais, MN 55604

218-387-9762