



Heart of America®



HEART OF AMERICA AND 3M OPEN FUTURE MAKERS LAB TO EXPAND ADVANCED MANUFACTURING AND CTE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ABERDEEN STUDENTS

Transformation at ATEC Academy creates flexible, industry-inspired learning environments for engineering, robotics, mechatronics and advanced manufacturing

ABERDEEN, S.D. (Oct. 5, 2026) [Heart of America](#) (HOA), a nonprofit organization dedicated to transforming learning spaces for underserved students since 1997, in a community partnership with global science and manufacturing leader 3M, today announces the opening of the Future Makers Lab by 3M at Aberdeen Public Schools' ATEC Academy. The transformation creates new opportunities for hands-on learning in mechatronics, engineering, robotics, advanced manufacturing, and skilled trades.

The transformation builds upon ATEC Academy's strong Career and Technical Education (CTE) programming by reimagining its networking, engineering and robotics classroom and lab, metals and CNC classroom, and surrounding hallways. New technology, flexible workstations, industry-inspired equipment and infrastructure will allow the spaces to support multiple CTE disciplines and evolve alongside emerging technologies and workforce needs.

The project is part of the second year of the Future Makers Lab by 3M initiative, a collaboration between 3M and Heart of America focused on creating workforce-aligned learning environments that connect students with hands-on experiences and future career opportunities.

"Career exploration becomes much more powerful when students have opportunities to learn by doing," said Jill Hardy Heath, President and CEO of Heart of America. "Through the Future Makers Lab by 3M, we're creating environments that give educators greater flexibility and give students room to experiment, build, solve problems and discover what interests them. This investment is about helping young people see what's possible for their futures and giving them the tools and experiences to begin pursuing it."

Serving 1,195 students, ATEC Academy is expanding its capabilities in mechatronics, robotics and advanced manufacturing. A new 3M investment in mechatronics equipment will complement the redesigned engineering and robotics spaces, which feature mobile and electrified workstations, technology, storage and infrastructure that can adapt to different courses and projects. The metals and CNC classroom has also been redesigned to better support CNC programming simulators and more closely resemble a modern manufacturing workspace.

"ATEC Academy has always led the way in career and technical education opportunities for students, and we're thrilled to expand those opportunities even further through this community partnership with 3M and Heart of America," said Dr. Becky Guffin, superintendent of Aberdeen Public Schools. "This project truly transforms our robotics lab with cutting-edge equipment that will help prepare our students for the demands of the workforce today and in the future."

New paint and graphics throughout the spaces and hallways showcase skilled trades, highlight student work and accomplishments, and create a more vibrant environment that reflects the innovation taking place at ATEC Academy.

"The future of manufacturing depends on giving young people opportunities to experience the technology, problem-solving and innovation that are shaping our industry," said Michael Stroik, Vice President of Community Impact at 3M. "Through the Future Makers Lab by 3M, students at ATEC Academy can build those skills through hands-on learning and explore the many pathways available to them in advanced manufacturing and other technical careers. We're proud to invest in Aberdeen's students and help strengthen the talent pipeline for the future."

As part of the project, local 3M employees volunteered alongside Heart of America to help prepare the space for students and educators.

The Aberdeen project continues a growing national collaboration between Heart of America and 3M to create future-ready learning environments that strengthen CTE and local workforce pipelines.

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About Heart of America

Heart of America is a 501c3 nonprofit that transforms learning spaces and helps bridge resource gaps. Our work focuses on the whole student, knowing that the physical spaces where young people learn are just as important as *what* they are learning. Since 1997, we've worked towards education equity by renovating nearly 1,400 spaces in classrooms, libraries, STEAM labs, college/career centers, school gymnasiums, and community centers, and more. We have provided current resources, including over 4.4 million books, and infused over \$14.3 million in technology.

<https://www.heartofamerica.org/>

About the Aberdeen Public School District

The Aberdeen Public School District provides a comprehensive educational program to approximately 4,200 students in grades K-12, with a mission of empowering all students to succeed in a changing world. Our students receive the knowledge and skills necessary to reach their potential in a global community through high expectations of academic achievement; diverse educational opportunities; and community involvement in a safe, supportive environment. Learn more at aberdeen.k12.sd.us.

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