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For Immediate Release

SRNS Awards Surpass \$1 Million in Mini Grants for Local STEM Education

AIKEN, S.C. – (May, 29 2025) – In an exciting step toward empowering educators and enriching student learning experiences, Savannah River Nuclear Solutions’ (SRNS) Education Outreach Programs ([EOP](#)) has surpassed a remarkable milestone, contributing over \$1 million to local educators through the [Innovative Teaching Mini Grants](#) since 2009.

SRNS generously supports innovative teaching methods in the Central Savannah River Area and Orangeburg County. Each year, thousands of dollars are awarded to educators from 4K through 12th grade across public, private and charter schools. This year, 110 educators received a total of \$75,000 at a celebration in Aiken, South Carolina.



During the Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS) Innovative Teaching Mini Grant reception held in Aiken, South Carolina, 110 educators from the Central Savannah River Area and Orangeburg County received their share of \$75,000.

“This year’s grant recipients are implementing a diverse range of bold ideas— from coding robots and drones to studying insect life cycles— and preparing the next generation of STEM [science, technology, engineering and math] leaders to support the Savannah River Site’s [SRS] growing missions in stockpile support and nonproliferation,” said Taylor Rice, SRNS Education Outreach Specialist. “These competitive grants are designed to support creative classroom projects that inspire, engage and challenge students.”

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The ceremony opened with a [video](#) celebrating SRS's 75-year legacy addressing nuclear, national security, and environmental challenges, highlighting the Site's unwavering commitment to the nation.

During his opening remarks, SRNS Senior Vice President National Nuclear Security Administration Tritium Operations and Programs JC Epting, who has 39 years of experience in nuclear operations, stated, "Local educators are continuing this legacy by training the next generation of scientists, mathematicians and engineers. We invest in you, and you invest in STEM programs to prepare students for future roles at SRS. By tapping into students' innovation and creativity, we develop the intellectual capital needed to tackle global challenges and support America's future success."



Aretha Tarver, Chukker Creek Elementary, and her guest pose for a photo booth picture, during a reception in Aiken, South Carolina.

Epting also shared a story about a past educator whose teachings instilled a deeper appreciation for his "why." He reflected, "In my role dedicated to making the world safer, I realize the profound impact of my past educators. Their lessons in integrity, service and excellence continue to guide me. I believe that one day, a student you are teaching now will stand up and express a similar appreciation for you, recognizing the enduring influence you've had on their lives."

Nearly 25,000 students across 74 schools will benefit from the Mini Grants, which provide \$500, \$750, or \$1,000 to purchase STEM equipment, materials and supplies to enhance classroom instruction. Winners are chosen based on their anonymously reviewed project proposals by a panel of 50 judges.

"Winning a Mini Grant for the third year in a row is a tremendous support for our science program," said Joseph Cordova, Richmond County Copeland Elementary Educator. "Last year, we used the funds to create a mobile science cart with essential science materials since we lack dedicated science classrooms. This year, the funds will support our fifth graders' Exhibition projects, bringing their prototypes to life with a 3D printer, which otherwise wouldn't be possible."

Sarah Moore, a sixth-grade science teacher at Columbia County Greenbrier Middle School, expressed gratitude for the opportunity to establish the 'Shark Tank of Science' in her classroom. "Just like the show, students receive prompts in Earth science, design solutions to solve related problems, and share the idea in front of a panel of judges. With this grant, I can purchase more materials, expanding their options and making our classroom shop more comprehensive. These grants save us from using our own

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funds and provide invaluable resources to spark students interest in potentially joining the SRS workforce and contributing to the nation.”

“Thanks to the grant, we conducted stellar nebula research last year, culminating in a hands-on astronomy unit where students applied chemistry and physics concepts to design and create their own nebulas,” said Lisa Chizmar, an eighth-grade science teacher at Columbia County Stallings Island Middle School and two-time grant winner. “This year, we’re excited to use mini microscopes to take our classes outside, keeping the joy of science alive for our students and allowing them to explore and experiment without fear.”

“We are integrating micro:bits, pocket-sized computer processors designed to teach coding, logical functions, and programming, into our science and math classes. It gives students a jump start, enabling them to explore these skills early,” said Amanda Waymer, a ninth and tenth grade educator at Aiken Scholars Academy, Aiken County. “These grants are more than just financial support—they show SRNS’ dedication to education in our local area. The partnership between schools and SRNS turns fun and educational activities into reality, showing students that science is everywhere.”



Stephanie Humphries, W.E. Parker Elementary wins a door prize during the SRNS Innovative Teaching Mini Grants Program reception. She will use the funds to purchase hands-on STEM learning kits for her classroom.



Roberta Robinson, A.R. Johnson Health Science and Engineering Magnet School wins a door prize during the reception. Robinson is introducing new technology initiatives to her classroom, using SRNS grant funds.

Click [here](#) to watch the SRNS Innovative Teaching Mini Grants overview video.

Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, a Fluor and HII partnership company, is responsible for the management and operations of the Department of Energy’s Savannah River Site, located near Aiken, South Carolina.

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