



## 2026 Teacher Testimonials

“I recently had the privilege of participating in the South Jersey Chamber of Commerce Summer Teacher Institute, and it was one of the most valuable professional development experiences of my career. Over the course of three weeks, our cohort had the unique opportunity to visit a wide variety of businesses and industries throughout South Jersey. We gained firsthand insight into the many career pathways available to students immediately after high school, including opportunities that do not necessarily require a traditional four-year college degree. Seeing these workplaces in action and learning directly from industry leaders gave me a much deeper understanding of the skills employer’s value and the workforce need of our region. What made this experience truly exceptional were the people we met along the way. Every presenter welcomed us with enthusiasm and authenticity. Their stories were inspiring, their discussions engaging, and their willingness to share both their successes and challenges made each visit meaningful. They challenged us to think differently about career readiness and reinforced the importance of helping students develop not only academic knowledge, but also the communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and professionalism needed to succeed in today’s workforce. As an educator, I left the institute with fresh ideas, valuable industry connections, and a renewed sense of purpose. I am excited to bring these real-world experiences back to my classroom by helping students better understand the diverse career opportunities available to them and by preparing them with the skills they will need to thrive, regardless of the path they choose after graduation.”

***Carmen Carrion***  
***Veterans Memorial Family School***

“The SJSI program opened up my eyes to the South Jersey businesses within this region. When entering the program, I was expecting to learn about career readiness skills that are needed for the workforce and learning about the industries and businesses in South Jersey. However, I am leaving this program with that knowledge, along with the connections I’ve made, colleagues that turned into lifelong friends, and a surplus of knowledge to better myself as a leader as well as teaching my students and colleagues. I cannot thank South Jersey Institute enough for their hard work, kindness, and the opportunity to partake in this program.”

***Megan Danial***  
***The Bancroft School***

“The Summer Institute is a remarkable experience that connected me to a fun group of exceptional educators, company leaders and employees. The tours, panel discussions, and guest speakers exceeded my expectations. I appreciated how enthusiastic everyone was to share their careers, the company values and the career opportunities for us to take back to our classrooms. This experience was the highlight of my summer, and I only wish I could do it again!”

***Jeanine Delaney***  
***Kingsway Regional High School***

“The South Jersey Summer Institute was an amazing opportunity and the best decision I made this summer. It offered a rare space to dive deep into the subject that I love while seeing the opportunities my students have and what skills they will need to be successful. A plus is making lifelong friends along the way. A wonderful experience from start to finish.”

***Shannon Farley***  
***Dwight D Eisenhower Middle School***

“The Summer Institute was a career altering experience. The lessons we learned, hands on experiences we had, and connections we made will have a huge impact on my students. I am now equipped to return to my classroom and inform my students about all of the opportunities they have right here in South Jersey. Whether my students are college bound or wanting to enter a trade there are opportunities for them to have successful careers in South Jersey.”

***James Ferguson***  
***Myron L. Powell School***

“This summer institute was more than a professional development experience; it was an opportunity to gain a firsthand look at the skills our local industry partners value in today’s workforce right in our own backyards. Visiting each of these businesses was an eye-opening and provided valuable insight into how we can all better prepare our students for their future career paths. As a teacher of Future Educators, I especially appreciated seeing that these local businesses valued educators and see the importance of what we do every day. While my own students may not pursue careers in these exact fields or industries, the qualities that every employer and speaker shared with us were consistent and could be applied to any career path. A willingness to learn, strong communication, adaptability, empathy, professionalism, and a growth mindset- all skills that help teachers thrive and something I hope my students will inspire in their future students one day. Just as meaningful as the connections, we’ve made with industry partners and the ideas that I can personally bring back to infuse into my curriculum, spending the week alongside passionate, dedicated educators from across South Jersey may have just been the cherry on top of this experience. I was reminded daily of the power of collaboration and having a shared purpose. We started this as a group of strangers at a welcome dinner in June and are leaving today as friends and valued colleagues. I’m forever grateful for the conversations, ideas, laughter, and inspiration we shared. I’ve gotten my spark back thanks to them all and am excited to bring everything I’ve learned back to my students and school and hopefully have A LOT of guest speakers this year from not only valued presenters and industry partners, but the most amazing group of educators I’ve had the privilege to work beside!”

***Erika Fine***  
***Burlington County Institute of Technology-Westampton***

“This three-week experience is one of the most fulfilling periods of my professional career. I have been searching for years for a meaningful and useful professional development experience that I could use for years. The combination of personal soft skills emphasis and hands-on tours of local businesses was a perfect balance. I will be able to bring a great blend of classroom lessons/skill development and practical information about local businesses to my district. It is easy to get comfortable and enclosed in solely the environment of my school district. This experience opened my eyes to all 7 South Jersey counties and has equipped me with the potential to enrich the lives of more students. This program has refreshed and invigorated me. I was already passionate about college and career development; I now have the knowledge and tools needed to make use of my passion and impact on more students as they embark on their career journeys.”

**Matthew Friedman**  
**Cherry Hill High School-West**

“Attending the Summer Institute was a truly transformative experience. The program provided a perfect blend of rigorous learning, hands on practice, and invaluable mentorship. Beyond the skills I gained and the relationships I forged and built with my peers were the pinnacle of my experience. I left feeling inspired, confident, and well-prepared to start my new school year with a plethora of material and ideas. Thank you so much for the incredible experience. This has really helped me to create a different mindset going into the new year and beyond. Hillary and Nicole, you have been amazing. I am super-duper impressed with your organization, collaboration and family vibe that I felt. May the program continue to improve and be a beacon of light, a source of improved intellectual information and inspiration of other educators.”

**Verna Karim**  
**Timber Creek Regional High School**

“The summer institute reenergized me. There are so many positives from this program that it is hard to figure out where to start. All the sponsors were amazing and very informative. I have learned so much about what is out there and what companies are looking for. Also learning their values and how they treat everyone in their company. There are so many levels that are never even thought of. I can bring so much back to my students and my district. I see many opportunities for my students that I have never thought of before. Second...the connections made with my group is more like a family. I know they will have my back when I stumble, and I need help. There is so much diverse knowledge that I am confident I will always find the help I need. And lastly....to the Chamber of commerce. Thank you for putting together this well-oiled machine of a program. This was the most smooth, cohesive event I have ever been a part of. They never missed a beat. They were always on and ALWAYS so positive. I have loved every moment of this program.”

**Carey Kessler**  
**Florence Township Memorial High School**

“This experience has been so monumental to the furthering of my teaching career and my aspirations as a business owner. My entire goal and purpose for coming into teaching is to create an ecosystem between my school, the students and my business. This experience opened my eyes to how vast that ecosystem can be and gave me access and in-depth connections with such a broadened avenue directly to all of the pieces. I'm deeply inspired and feel the most equipped I'll ever be to go into a new school year with quality changes, opportunities and tools to change and inspire lives.”

***Daison Long***  
***Camden County Technical Schools-Pennsauken***

“After 23 years of teaching in 6 different states, the experience with the South Jersey Summer Institute Economics, Industry and Education program has inspired me to a new level. I feel energized to get back to my classroom and give my students insights into industries and career paths that I know they are not aware of. I had no idea that industry in south New Jersey were so vested in the populus and future work force. I am impressed with each and every business and business member that we met. This was an amazing, rejuvenating and positive experience and I am grateful to have had this opportunity.

***Jennifer Rader***  
***Indian Avenue School***

“The Summer Institute program was an empowering and enlightening experience. As a lifelong educator, I was unaware of how impactful soft skills were in getting a job or making a career in many of the businesses in Southern New Jersey. My biggest take away from the program would be to tell students and colleagues continue to be curious and flexible as you work to better yourself as a lifelong learner and positive community member in our area.”

***Brittany Santoleri***  
***Samule Mickle School***

“The Summer Institute has been a wonderful experience. Not only does it connect educators with others from around South Jersey but gives us the opportunity to learn about businesses from this area as well. Many of the businesses we visited I had never heard of before and was fascinated to learn about all the different job opportunities within their business alone. All of these businesses were welcoming and open in their panels and were able to give us a lot of feedback to take back to our classrooms to help our students better prepare for their careers. This is such a great opportunity for any educator, and I wish I could attend again.”

***Kimberly Yakabi Yob***  
***Folsom Elementary School***

“This experience was something that I will never forget. When you talk about pivotal moments in your career I feel like this opportunity alone gave a majority of us the wind back beneath our wings! I feel inspired and, in all honesty, I feel like I have a better idea of my individual worth and value in my position. Imposter syndrome is real in educators and the majority of us don't care about the accolades, we care about the impact. If my students are doing well, then so am I. While at the time looking to see what else we can do! This program gave us opportunities to see and dissect information that we had no ideas had tens or hundreds of people behind the details! I feel ready to engage in conversations and challenge the generalized thought process of what business, healthcare, trades, and more truly represent! THANK YOU for this opportunity and for the unforgettable cohort!”

***Lauren Zimmerman***  
***Woodstown Middle School***