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Mackenzie McNabb
Savannah River Nuclear Solutions
839-746-1214, mackenzie.mcnabb@srs.gov

For Immediate Release

Coding, creating & competing: SRNS Mini Grants power up classrooms

AIKEN, S.C. – (May 5, 2026) – Since 2009, Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS) has supported teaching across the region through its Innovative Teaching Mini Grants Program. These grants provide educators with hands-on, STEM-focused tools and resources that spark creativity, strengthen critical thinking and bring learning to life for students.

“Since the program’s inception, we have funded over $1 million in grants to educators,” said Taylor Rice, SRNS Education Outreach Lead. “Every spark of curiosity, hands-on experiment and opportunity teachers create can ignite a passion that fuels our future workforce at SRNS and beyond.”

Exavier, a seventh-grade student at A.R. Johnson observes one of the new classroom robots purchased with SRNS Innovative Teaching Mini Grant funding.

The demand for a highly skilled workforce continues to grow as SRNS constructs the Savannah River Plutonium Processing Facility; expands National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) missions; adds new nuclear material processing responsibilities; and advances ongoing environmental stewardship. To support these missions, SRNS anticipates hiring an additional 2,000 employees over the next five years, making investments in local STEM education more important than ever.

To highlight the real-world impact of Mini Grants, SRNS recently visited two 2025 grant recipients whose projects are transforming classrooms.

With her Mini Grant, educator Ashley Exantus purchased two new 3D printers and filament to support design engineering learning across three classes at A.R. Johnson Health Science and Engineering Magnet School.

“My students have completed several hands-on design projects, such as creating ornaments for a Christmas tree, making personalized backpack tags and designing a toy used in occupational therapy,” she said.

Exantus also secured a second grant to launch the school’s first robotics initiative. Beginning with a small after-school group, students learned to build and code robots using durable tools and

components that can be reused for years to come. This initiative helps students think creatively, troubleshoot, collaborate and begin exploring pathways toward STEM careers.

“With plans to expand robotics capabilities next year, this year I’m working with 16 students through our after-school robotics program,” she said. “Our team competes throughout the school year in Macon, Georgia, and this funding has been instrumental in supporting our work. Robotics and 3D printing help students understand key concepts through exploration while opening their eyes to future career options.”

A.R. Johnson Educator Ashley Exantus shows her class how to add new filament to one of two 3D printers purchased using SRNS Innovative Teaching Mini Grant funding.

Amanda Waymer, teacher at Aiken Scholars Academy, acquired 20 Micro:bit processors, which are compact devices that allow students to learn coding using JavaScript, Python, or block coding. With sensor kits, students can program each device to respond to radio, light, temperature, and other inputs, turning abstract concepts into interactive learning experiences.

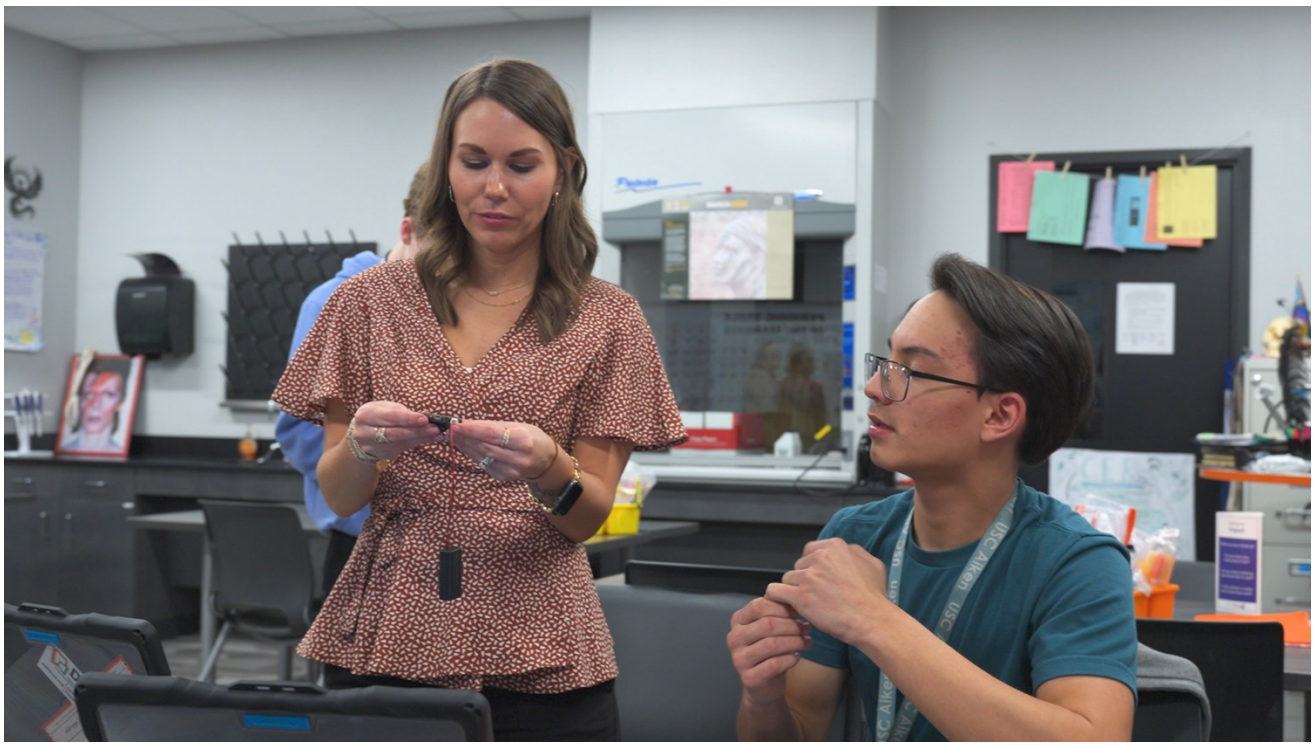
“Micro:bits give students an accessible, exciting introduction to coding and cyber,” said Waymer. “They can write code, test it, troubleshoot it, and watch their work come to life. It also helps them build communication and teamwork skills as they plan, solve problems and execute their projects together.”

The equipment also strengthened the school’s Cyber Patriots program, giving students tools to practice debugging, security configurations, and policy changes in a fun, approachable way.

Rice added, “As SRNS continues its missions of national importance, it depends on strong schools, empowered teachers, and thriving communities, proudly investing in educators whose work reaches far beyond the walls of their classrooms.”

On May 21, 2026, SRNS will once again celebrate the accomplishments of local teachers selected for Mini Grant awards. This year, SRNS received more than 329 applications and will award grants to educators representing 79 schools— impacting an estimated 17,389 students and 109 teachers across the region.

Click here to watch a testimonial video on how SRNS Mini Grants are transforming STEM learning in the classroom.



Rebekah Trull, SRNS Education Outreach Specialist, assists a student with micro:bits at Aiken Scholars Academy.

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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