



NFTE Connecticut: A Smart Investment in Urban Youth

Connecticut's future depends on the vitality of its cities. And the future of Connecticut's cities is inextricably linked to the future of the young people who live there.

But, like urban youth everywhere, Connecticut's young inner-city residents are at risk. Born into poverty and believing their opportunities limited, they may drop out of school, bear children or turn to drugs and crime—never achieving their academic, social or economic potential.

Connecticut has taken a critical step toward breaking this cycle—and revitalizing its cities—by implementing the NFTE (National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship) curriculum at urban high schools across the state. NFTE (pronounced, “nifty”) is a nationally recognized, powerful program that engages, educates and motivates at-risk students through a multi-disciplinary curriculum designed to help them start and operate their own small businesses.

The implementation of NFTE in Connecticut grew out of Connecticut's Inner City Business Strategy Initiative. Since NFTE Connecticut was launched last year, more than 420 students have participated, and scores of teachers have been trained. This fall, another 700 students are enrolled in the program, which carries credits toward graduation.

While the NFTE concept seems simple, it is a sophisticated way to excite students about new possibilities while teaching them a host of skills essential to success in school and in life.

Students learn mathematics by working out return on investment, gross profit, net profit, unit cost and more, and by selecting and following stocks. They hone reading skills by using the program's 50-chapter textbook and workbook, and by reading the Wall Street Journal and other publications. They improve written and oral communications skills by preparing a business plan, composing letters and memos, developing advertising materials and PowerPoint presentations, and making formal presentations about their businesses. They use technology in a number of ways, including completing BizTech, an online component of the NFTE program developed by Microsoft.

Students also gain an understanding of economic concepts such as supply and demand, and business issues, such as marketing, choosing a legal entity and registering a business. They open and manage bank accounts for the “working capital” they receive in the form of stipends. The program includes field trips to exchanges and wholesalers, as well as guest lecturers from the business community.

NFTE Connecticut students stay excited about school because they have a sense of purpose—building a successful business—and because they make the connection between learning and the real world. And they're more likely to stay in school, because they develop a more positive vision of their own future.

By helping the next generation of inner-city residents gain critical skills, complete their education and build more productive lives, NFTE Connecticut is making a vital contribution to the revitalization of Connecticut's cities. It is one of the best investments Connecticut can make in its own future.

Clusters Find Common Need: Lean Manufacturing

Anticipate productivity increases of up to 25 percent

Productivity is key to competitiveness, and “lean” manufacturing is key to increased productivity. That’s why, from the beginning, Connecticut’s manufacturing-based clusters have focused much of their effort on adopting progressive, lean manufacturing practices. Now they’ve recognized that going lean is a goal they all share, and they’re exploring opportunities for working together to achieve that goal.

Leaders of companies in key manufacturing clusters, including Aerospace Components, Plastics and Metals, believe there are opportunities for them to cooperate on lean activities to enhance the productivity and competitiveness of all.

Lean manufacturing techniques reduce duplication and waste, shorten turnaround time, cut costs and improve quality by continuously improving the processes by which work is done. Being able to produce higher-quality products at a lower cost gives Connecticut manufacturers a substantial competitive edge in the global marketplace.

The Aerospace Components Manufacturers (ACM), a formal industry cluster, has achieved notable gains already through adoption of lean practices. Working with the Shingijutsu Group of Japan, the Center for Lean Business Manufacturing at Rensselaer and others, ACM has held more than 150 lean manufacturing events involving 1,500 employees and achieved productivity gains of approximately 25 percent.

The Metals Manufacturing cluster is working on a number of lean initiatives, as are numerous companies in the Plastics cluster. All recognize the value of lean manufacturing and are committed to integrating its principles into their operations.

Lean manufacturing is just one of the areas in which the interests of Connecticut’s industry clusters intersect. By supporting the companies’ collaboration in this critical area, the state will improve Connecticut’s overall competitiveness and establish a model for future cooperation.

State Funds Employer-Driven Training

More than 1,000 incumbent workers will upgrade skills

Highly skilled workers are critical to a company’s competitiveness. And the best way to build a skilled workforce is through regular, high-quality employee training. Connecticut business leaders have said that employers know best the type of training needed, and have advocated that the state direct its worker-training funds to demand-driven programs.

Now the state has emphatically demonstrated its support for this improved workforce-development model by awarding the bulk of funding from a new worker-training program to industry clusters, Business Training Networks and cluster-member companies for demand-driven incumbent-worker training.

The Governor’s Workforce Competitiveness Strategy Program was created to fund pilot, employer-based, incumbent-worker-training programs. The program targeted small companies (50 employees or fewer) and networks of small to mid-sized firms.

Clusters receiving funds were Aerospace Components Manufacturers (ACM), the Connecticut Plastics Council and the Maritime Cluster. Business Training Networks funded were the Upper Albany Merchants Association and Housatonic Education for Advanced Technology (HEAT). A number of cluster-member companies received funding directly.

The clusters and networks leveraged the state’s investment of approximately \$345,000 with nearly \$376,000 of their own funds and resources—making the state’s investment go even further. And, because the training will be delivered efficiently, more than 1,000 Connecticut workers will be able to participate in training and acquire the advanced skills they need for maximum performance on the job.

Clearly, employer-driven training is a win-win proposition for employers, employees and the state and a new model for ensuring that Connecticut companies remain at the forefront of the global economy.

