



NEWS

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THE GOVERNOR'S PREVENTION PARTNERSHIP SPEARHEADS EFFORT TO LINK MORE BUSINESSES WITH STUDENTS

Career Mentoring Initiative Announced at Annual Mentoring Conference

WATERBURY — The Governor's Prevention Partnership is spearheading the development of a detailed plan for expanding career mentoring throughout Connecticut.

The plan will serve as a roadmap for the state and communities to increase the availability of career mentoring opportunities throughout the state. It will be led by an advisory committee that The Partnership is creating to be comprised of state and business leaders, school officials and mentoring experts. The committee will share its recommendations with legislators and the state Department of Labor.

The Partnership announced the formation of the committee Monday at its annual statewide conference on mentoring, held at the Connecticut Grand Hotel. The career mentoring initiative springs from a study on the status of career mentoring in the state that it is conducting with funding from the state Office of Workplace Competitiveness. The Partnership's forthcoming report will identify the programs and gaps that currently exist.

"The Governor's Prevention Partnership is committed is leading this effort to link businesses to students," said Acting President Jill Spinetti. "Broader mentoring opportunities for our youth can further our common goals of raising student achievement and sustaining Connecticut's business competitiveness."

"Past, present and future, Connecticut's highly educated workforce is key to our economic vitality," Spinetti added. "By tapping the reservoir of adult professionals concerned about the next generation, we can help more students focus on academic success and developing the skills and the knowledge their future will demand. There is a long history of career mentoring in the state, the problem is there isn't enough of it."

Monday's announcement of The Partnership's career-mentoring initiative dovetailed with the theme of this year's Mentoring Showcase, which focused on the role mentoring plays in preparing Connecticut's youth for the jobs of tomorrow. More than 90 mentors and coordinators of school and community-based programs attended the conference.

The event was co-sponsored by Webster Bank, which runs one of the largest corporate-supported mentoring programs in the state. More than 90 of its employees volunteer in local schools. Laurance Selnick, a senior vice president for Webster Bank who is himself a mentor, said that the value of mentoring is reciprocal. Beyond giving back to the communities where they operate, businesses that

support mentoring through employee release time are rewarded through higher productivity and decreased sick time. Employees who mentor report greater satisfaction with their jobs and lives.

For Connecticut companies as well as the state, shortages of skilled workers - particularly in science, math and technology - and replacing the soon-to-retire baby boomers continue to be major concerns.

Connecticut has lost a higher percentage of 25-to-34 year olds since 2000 than any state, according to a report by the University of New Hampshire's Carsey Institute. The Carsey Institute also found that between 1989 and 2004, New England experienced the largest increase in income inequality in the nation. And while Connecticut's achievement gap ranks among the widest in the nation, numerous census and economic reports have shown that the state's workforce will become increasingly diverse.

By 2014, the state labor department forecasts that 150,000 new jobs will be added compared to the 420,000 jobs opening through retirements. Many of those will require advanced knowledge of math and science. More than half will require higher education and professional degrees.

During a panel discussion on "Establishing a Seamless Mentoring System for Developing Our Future Workforce", Labor Commissioner Patricia H. Mayfield said that Gov. M. Jodi Rell has identified the expansion of career mentoring as a top priority for state economic and education agencies, including her department. Mayfield said that mentoring is an important way that businesses can help build the pipeline of future workers, starting as early as grade school.

"A large number of high school students are not college bound," Mayfield said. "This is an issue that we need to address immediately.

Dayl Walker, program director for the Connecticut Business & Industry Association's school-based programs, stated that students need to be better prepared than ever before, and much of the preparation must come from outside the classroom. Speaking directly to the mentors in the audience, Walker said they can make a tremendous impact by exposing youth with limited opportunities to the broader world of life, education and work.

"They will listen to you before they will listen to their parents," she said.

In economic terms, Elizabeth Brown, legislative director for the Connecticut Commission on Children, called mentoring as "a key investment that pays off in helping youth succeed." Brown based her remarks on a recent report prepared by the commission and House Speaker James Amann that identified mentoring among the "best buys" of state expenditures on children's health and prevention programs.

"I hope you consider yourself change agents," Brown said.

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