Edu Yankee Clipper

HARTFORD BUSINESS JOURNAL

8/4/08

MANUFACTURING & TECHNOLOGY

Teachers Get Hands-On Training In Engineering

By Jason Millman
jmillman@HartfordBusiness.com

Ray Milo knows most of his students don't want to go into engineering, even though that's what they are studying at the Academy of Information Technology and Engineering, a technical high school in Stamford. For an industry facing a shortage in the state, that's a big problem, he says.

To help fix this, he went back to class this summer.

Last month, Milo joined other Connecticut teachers gaining hands-on experience in manufacturing and engineering settings as educators search for a way to bring the real world to the classroom.

Stethoscope Design

About 20 teachers, including Milo, participated in the Engineering Challenge for the 21st Century at Tunxis Community College in a week-long session that had the teachers working together on designing a product. The challenge was to design a stethoscope similar to the ones currently being tested to listen to bowel sounds of premature infants.

"We want to make the students realize that sciences and technologies and engineering are fun," said John Birch, who ran the program funded by the National Science Foundation. "They have actual applications. They can be used for the real world."

Birch has run the program for the past seven years, but in the past, it was always for students. This was the first time teachers took part. The idea, he said, was for teachers to bring back what they learned to the classroom so they can influence more students.

The number of engineering graduates in Connecticut is up almost 30 percent in the past five years, but more and more are taking jobs outside the state after college. Birch said he hopes to help reinvigorate an interest in engineering in Connecticut. He said the stethoscope project could easily be brought into a classroom setting.

Job Losses

In another program, 11 teachers from community colleges and high schools are working at manufacturing jobs through the Connecticut Business & Industry Association.

Just like the engineering program, the idea is for teachers to better understand manufacturing jobs so they can pass along that knowledge to students, said Judith Resnick, CBIA director of work force development.

The state lost 3,036 industrial jobs between May 2007 and May 2008—a 1.3 percent drop—according to the 2009 Connecticut Manufacturers Register. Often, students don't understand what manufacturing jobs entail, Resnick said.

"What helps the students get more excited about this field is getting to know how technology translates in the real world," she said. ■