

HIGH TECH. NEWS

A PUBLICATION OF THE NEW HAMPSHIRE HIGH TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL VOL. 19 NO. 3

May/June 2008



Fred Kocher
NHHTC President

HOUSTON, WE'VE GOT A PROBLEM... IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

HIGH TECH. It's education. It will be business. Let's check the numbers.

By 2012, 88% of New Hampshire's fastest growing jobs will require some college or training beyond high school, including a projected 12,500 jobs related to computer technology.

As of 2005, among the top states (i.e.: Indiana, Maryland, North Carolina, Colorado, etc.), 85% of high school freshmen graduate from high school in 4 years. In NH, 79% graduate in 4 years. Among 8th graders in the top states, 43% are proficient in math. In NH, 35% are proficient in math. Among 8th graders in the top states, 56% are taking algebra. In NH, 32% are taking algebra. One bright spot: Among 8th graders in the top states, 30% are proficient in reading. In NH, 38% are proficient in reading. (Source: Archive Inc.)

Among 11th and 12th graders in the top states, 18% are taking advanced placement exams. In NH, 9% are taking advanced placement exams. Based on research at the UNH Whittemore School of Business and Economics, the average 60 year-old in NH has more education than the average 30 year old. Based on NH education trends reported in 2007 by the NH Forum on the Future, there have been fewer students enrolling in science and engineering courses at NH colleges. And, we need to remind ourselves again that NH ranks dead last in state funding for higher education operating costs. It would reportedly take a 40% increase to override the next lowest state. We also need to remind ourselves that there are dedicated and professional educators in NH working hard to make a difference. But they need our help.

It's clear what this dilemma means for NH technology companies in the years ahead. They won't have access to enough NH workers who are prepared for the 21st century economy. Already, in NH and across the US, an increasing number of high school graduates take at least one remedial math or reading course in their freshmen year in college. Nationally, the number is 50%. That suggests a looming workforce without adequate tools to work in a digital and information economy.

What do we do?

It's summed up in two words: "rigor" and "relevance." These two words were the dual themes at a recent national summit on education where I had the privilege of leading a NH delegation of educators to the summit in Boston. They represented the NH Department of Education, the NH College and

University Council and Campus Compact. The proposition to those at the summit was that if students are challenged with more rigorous and relevant courses, most will rise to expectations and perform. We came back with a number of conclusions, but among them were these:

- 1) All students need to acquire the knowledge and skills that prepare them for both college and life.
- 2) Teachers need to be given the opportunities to improve their skills and to receive fair pay for their performance.
- 3) Business and education need to collaborate in helping to lift the entire education system of our state to a new level of excellence. That means business leaders and their employees spending time in the schools helping to mentor students and inviting students into their businesses for internships and apprenticeships.

It's clear from initiatives in the top education states in the US that just throwing money at education is not going to change things, although it doesn't help when there isn't enough. What will bring about change is a realization by business leaders that unless they get involved in education, they will see a smaller workforce prepared to work with the resulting loss of competitive edge in a global economy. It's already started to happen in technology-based manufacturing.

The NHHTC has made education its number one priority for the foreseeable future. Members of the board are involved or becoming involved with both high schools and colleges in the state. It's not only in their interest, it's in our interest. The main consumers of high school educated students are colleges and businesses. What kind of employees do you expect in your business? Should they be able to read and write the English language? Should they be able to use math? Of course your answers are yes. So, you and I need to visit our local schools and talk to the students. They need to know you expect them to be ready when they cross your threshold. ■