Manufacturing Skills for Connecticut
September 1, 2020 - August 31, 2022

Connecticut manufacturers have identified significant gaps in the state's workforce development system, most notably the dearth of comprehensive education, recruitment, and career pathways at the K-12 school level that fully support their needs. To meet these needs while diversifying the workforce, and to improve the manufacturing industry's overall competitiveness, CONNSTEP, CT's Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP), in partnership with Connecticut Business & Industry Association (CBIA); ReadyCT, a business informed education reform non-profit; and the Connecticut Manufacturers' Collaborative (CMC), a policy-focused collective comprised of nine major state manufacturing associations (seven state manufacturing associations plus CBIA and CONNSTEP) are joining forces to implement the **Manufacturing Skills for CT** project. This project will establish a menu of educational best-practices that MEPs, manufacturers, and school systems can use to identify and scale effective K-12 manufacturing career pathways. This grant was awarded to CONNSTEP through the US Department of Commerce, National Institute of Standards and Technology Manufacturing Extension Program Competitive Awards Program.

The overarching goals of this project are twofold: (1) to expand the availability and quality of K-12 programs aimed at preparing students for manufacturing careers at all skill levels, from entry level to engineering, in order to both increase and diversify the highly-qualified labor pool; and (2) to accelerate the growth of the manufacturing sector across CT, New England, and nationally through the MEP network. The final product will articulate best practices and recommend standards for K-12 manufacturing preparation programs as it builds a sustainable infrastructure for supporting program development and quality across the state. This will involve coordination with the CMC and representatives from the manufacturing industry, the state's Workforce Development Boards, education organizations and state agencies including the Department of Education, Governor's Workforce Council, and the Office of Workforce Strategy.

The project aims to better understand which programs and models are most effective, remove the silos in which promising programs are operating, and share best practices through the following activities:

Phase 1 - Work with lead partner organizations and other relevant stakeholders to complete a comprehensive inventory and analysis of manufacturing career pathway programs and initiatives across schools/districts and how they link to and align with manufacturer's workforce development needs. This study will cover pre-apprenticeship programs, standalone programs, and partnerships with post-secondary institutions, nonprofits, and manufacturers, and will incorporate a comprehensive review of program models nationally.

Phase 2 - Conduct an impact evaluation of a subset of programs (twelve of the most promising state models selected from the Phase 1 inventory and one Rhode Island program in partnership with Polaris, the Rhode Island MEP) in order to assess efficacy and define a state standard for high-impact career pathway models.

Phase 3 - Build a web-based repository of effective career pathway programs and key criteria for the creation of new programs. The website will house the inventory, act as a repository of effective career pathway programs and key criteria for the creation of new programs, and serve as the basis for a learning community accessible to school districts, business associations, and postsecondary institutions. In promoting best practices, this resource will support the scaling of models as driven by demand throughout CT.

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