

Teacher training

By Andrew J. Manuse / Daily News Staff

Wednesday, October 26, 2005

The Metro South/West Regional Employment Board is scaling up a pilot program that invites innovative high-tech companies to train middle school and high school teachers.

The Framingham-based board created the program, called Leadership Initiatives for Teaching and Technology, as a way to increase the number of students pursuing careers in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields by training their teachers, according to the program's director, Dave Cedrone.

During a meeting yesterday at Bose Corp. in Framingham sponsored by the 495/MetroWest Corridor Partnership, Cedrone told government and business leaders that Massachusetts companies face a projected shortage of 24,000 STEM workers by 2009 due to a number of demographic factors, such as the coming exodus of baby boomers from the work force.

"Clearly, the theme we're reinforcing (with this program) is raising student awareness, interest and motivation in STEM fields of study to prepare them for careers in Massachusetts growth industries," said Cedrone. "Through the experience teachers gain through (summertime positions at MetroWest companies), they will be able to influence significant numbers of students."

The pilot program, which had its beginnings in 2002, paid about 20 teachers \$800 for five- to eight-week summer "externships" and covered graduate courses and laptop computers.

To expand the program, the employment board is asking local companies to contribute mentors and money for about 60 teachers this summer and 100 teachers the next summer, Cedrone said.

Bill Richardson, East Coast education manager for Intel Corp., whose Hudson chip-making plant participated in the pilot program, said "teachers really get a lot out of working in a professional business atmosphere."

Not only did these "seasoned workers" contribute to the company's projects, they learned how industry professionals work in teams and how the STEM subjects they teach are used in the real world, Richardson said. It is that knowledge they can bring back into the classroom after their summer experience, he said.

John Strickland, an executive at Bose and co-chairman of the corridor partnership's board, said the audio giant is looking into a way to incorporate teachers into its college internship program.

"Our success as a company is dependent on being able to attract a highly educated work force," Strickland said during yesterday's meeting. "Our purpose today is to inform, enlighten and inspire action in support of keeping our region vibrant and in the forefront of innovation."

In an external evaluation of the program, research firm Sun Associates said the pilot leadership initiative program has been "successful" and "should be replicated."

Nancy Gustafson, of Littleton Public Schools, said teachers who participated in the program have come back to class with "21st century skills."

In the same way that companies want to retain STEM-trained employees in the corporate world, schools will want to keep teachers who can come back from an externship and encourage students to pursue chemistry or similar STEM-related paths, she said.

State Rep. Daniel Bosley, D-North Adams, attended the meeting yesterday to explain how the House version of the economic stimulus bill would dedicate resources to strengthening the state's "innovation economy." The House bill would include funds for programs like the leadership initiative.

State Sen. Karen Spilka, D-Ashland, said she was trying to work a section into the Senate's version of the stimulus bill that would directly contribute to the leadership initiative.

"Businesses will be putting money into (this program) for externships," Spilka said. "The state and, hopefully, federal government should also be players providing financing and structure."

Spilka said the regional employment board, the 495/MetroWest Corridor Partnership and the state were on the verge of forming a more formal collaboration so the leadership initiative can eventually expanded statewide.

"Massachusetts will eventually be a model for the rest of the country to get this going," she said.

(Andrew J. Manuse can be reached at amanuse@cnc.com or 508-626-3964.)