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Equip students with tools, knowledge to parlay skills into business

Ask a class full of high school students if they would like to own their own businesses one day and you are likely to see lots of hands shoot up. But if your next question is whether they know how to get started, the show of hands will probably plummet.

That's because research reveals that students have the desire — but not the training — to make their entrepreneurial dreams a reality. But that doesn't have to be the case for your students. National Entrepreneurship Week, which falls at the end of CTE Month (February), is the perfect time to start bringing entrepreneurship into your CTE classroom.

Why CTE?

Entrepreneurship education has a logical place in career tech training because every industry has entrepreneurs, said Cathy Ashmore, executive director of the Consortium for Entrepreneurship Education.

These individuals often bring innovation and efficiency to their fields, because they embrace a kind of breakthrough thinking that moves them away from dependence on an employer and the limited pool of jobs available in a community. Instead, entrepreneurs are self-reliant, creating their own opportunities to thrive, Ashmore said.

Making it work

Bringing entrepreneurship education into your CTE program isn't difficult. It is often only a matter of tweaking assignments and discussions to give students a more comprehensive knowledge of how to launch and run a successful business. To get started, keep these tips from Ashmore in mind:

Key points

- National Entrepreneurship Education Week is Feb. 23 to March 1.
- Every CTE field has entrepreneurs.
- Cultivating an entrepreneurial mind-set sparks innovation, problem-solving. ■

Entrepreneurship Education Week

See how others are celebrating entrepreneurship education and how you can bring it into your own classroom. Find out more about the event at www.nationaleweek.com. ■

■ **Start with an overview.** The National Content Standards for Entrepreneurship Education, available at www.entre-ed.org/Standards_Toolkit, provide a road map for identifying and cultivating entrepreneurial skills in your students. The standards were created based on the skills that real entrepreneurs reported as critical to their success.

■ **Find opportunities in fundraising.** Most CTE departments must raise money occasionally, and the teacher is often the one who brings forth the idea and sets the foundation for making it work. You can involve students in the experience by letting them act as entrepreneurs, Ashmore said. Challenge them to create a product to sell and a plan for doing so. Classmates can then vote on the best product and help the winning student implement a fundraising business plan.

■ **Weave entrepreneurship into technical skill lessons.** Entrepreneurship education need not take time away from technical content. Instead, give students an assignment premise that simply reflects an entrepreneurship situation.

For example, instead of having students write a generic letter to a customer, ask them to take on the role of business owner and write a polite letter to a customer who owes the business money. This approach increases students' opportunities for problem-solving.

■ **Use problem-based learning.** All future workers can benefit from assignments that boost their critical-thinking skills. You can prepare your students for the workplace by giving them problems to solve that reflect true obstacles in the field, Ashmore said. You can have a business representative from a local company come in to give an introduction to the class, or you can introduce the problem yourself.

■ **Present assignments that have an element of risk.** Entrepreneurs must face the scary reality that sometimes a new business works, and sometimes it doesn't. It's important to discuss this with students and let them know that setting out on your own requires financial, personal and professional risk, Ashmore said. For example, the assignment may have only one winner, to be decided by the class. This situation gives the teacher a chance to talk about the consequences of failing the first time out and how those experiences can shape future efforts.

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