



Students, nation can benefit from  
entrepreneurial education—new report

### **Lew Armistead**

A new report on entrepreneurship education calls for far greater attention to this curriculum just as the county is plunging deeper into economic challenges.

“This ‘disconnect’ between what employers want and what your youth bring to the table has major economic consequences,” reads the Youth Entrepreneurship Education in America: A Policymaker’s Action Guide, produced by the Aspen Institute Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy Group (YES). While recommendations are aimed at policymakers, public school principals are likely to hear about the proposals and may be asked to respond to them.

“If you ask America’s business and entrepreneurial leaders to comment on the quality of our current and future workforce, you hear a common refrain: Today’s young people are ‘not ready to work,’” the report indicates. “They lack necessary skills, especially in science and math, and, even worse, they often lack the ability to work in teams, think creatively, or to interact effectively with colleagues or potential customers.”

The goal of the group publishing the report is to “ensure that each graduate from a high school that serves in a low-income community has educational opportunities to explore his or her entrepreneurial potential.” It notes that entrepreneurial education programs are available in some school systems, but they don’t reach “most American youth.”

YES calls for far-ranging action at the local, state and Federal levels.

#### **Local policymakers should:**

- Introduce entrepreneurship training in all schools, with special emphasis on those with large populations of youth from low-income communities.
- Increase funding to support teacher training, curriculum and professional development, and to evaluate program design and outcomes.
- Develop strong partnerships between schools, business, and other community organizations, so that business leaders can serve as mentors and coaches and provide support to local programs.

### **State policymakers should:**

- Adopt statewide standards for youth entrepreneurship education.
- Create formal entrepreneurship educational partnerships between primary and secondary schools, community colleges, and four-year institutions.

### **Federal policymakers should:**

- Revise existing education statutes, such as the No Child Left Behind Act, the Higher Education Act, Carl D. Perkins Act, and Workforce Investment Act to include entrepreneurship skills as a desired competency in educational standards.
- Expand funding for youth entrepreneurship in key programs operated by the Department of Labor, the Small Business Administration, and other appropriate agencies.
- Create a Federal Office of Entrepreneurship Education and provide it with resources to share best practices in the field and also serve as a nationwide advocate for youth entrepreneurship.
- Consider adding entrepreneurial literacy to the President's Council on Financial Literacy.

### **What is entrepreneurship education?**

An entrepreneurial spirit is almost a tradition in the United States, according to the report, and it develops a mindset that includes a “critical mix of success-oriented attitudes of initiative, intelligent risk-taking, collaboration, and opportunity recognition.” But young people are not born with this spirit. It has to be nurtured by parents, schools and communities. Some young people may learn these skills by watching parents who operate their own businesses. But others who don't have this opportunity must rely on educators or community members to develop the skill. The report features a number of programs that are working.

“This skills crisis (the lack of entrepreneurial skills) is becoming more critical,” the report's authors write; “because the American economy is shifting. Not only will the traditional skills of reading, writing and math be needed to thrive in this economy, but also technological savvy and self-direction. With the pace of innovation, many of the jobs our children will hold don't even exist yet. More than ever we need to educate students to be continual learners.”

The report also points out that many of the contributing factors leading to students dropping out of school have to do with their belief that classroom lessons are not relevant to the adult world.

### **Engaging youth in entrepreneurialism**

A major focus of the report is creating greater engagement of students in their school work. A first step is introducing new curricula and teaching methods that show a connection between the classroom and work, the authors contend. This can be done through career and technical education programs, service learning, and problem-based learning. Through such approaches

students will use and develop their judgment, creativity, idea generation, goal setting and problem solving skills.

Secondly, there needs to be better support systems for students who are struggling, according to the report. Signs that students may be headed down the path toward dropping out can be seen as early as the sixth grade, but resources must be made available to provide those students with the assistance they need to return to the path toward graduation.

Thirdly, the school climate must reflect rigorous academics, effective relationships with the community, and relevancy throughout the curriculum. High expectations should be placed on students, and they must be held accountable for those expectations.

Entrepreneurship education leads to engaged students. Whether they end up being an entrepreneur themselves or working for others, graduates will leave school knowing how to invest in themselves and understand that they have options, according to the report.

Specifically, this approach to learning gives students—

- The ability to recognize opportunities in one's life.
- The ability to pursue such opportunities by generating new ideas and marshalling needed resources.
- The ability to create and operate a new venture.
- The ability to think in a creative and critical manner.

### **Getting started locally**

The report states that three components should exist in an ideal youth entrepreneurial initiative:

- All students at all local schools—especially schools with 40 percent or more of the students eligible for free and reduced meals—have access to entrepreneurship training.
- Available funds to support teacher training, curriculum and professional development, and to evaluate program design and outcomes.
- Strong partnerships between schools, businesses, and community organizations, so that business leaders can serve as mentors and coaches and provide other support to local programs.

### **Finding more information**

The complete report can be downloaded as a PDF document

<http://www.nfte.com/news/publicpolicy/documents/PolycymakersActionGuide2008.pdf>.

Additional information on entrepreneurial education can be found through the Consortium for Entrepreneurial Education, [www.entre-ed-org](http://www.entre-ed-org).

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**Lew Armistead**

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