

NEWS

Connecticut Department of Education



Dr. Mark K. McQuillan
Commissioner

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Connecticut Expands Statewide Robotics Education Program

(HARTFORD, CT May 12, 2008)– Because of their high impact on a wide variety of students of all ages, after-school robotics programs will be expanded statewide as part of a new State of Connecticut technology education initiative. The Connecticut State Department of Education is partnering with Innovation First, Inc. to make these popular programs available state-wide next year.

In this highly engaging after-school program, students collaborate with their teachers and industry mentors, using their skills and knowledge in science, math, engineering, and technology to configure high-tech robotics to meet a preset series of tasks. Next year's expanded program will culminate in the First Annual Connecticut State Vex Robotics Championship Event to be held at the Central Connecticut State University Detrick Gymnasium in New Britain on April 4, 2009.

“Project Lead The Way, Engineering by Design,’ and the Department of Education are pleased to announce that the Vex Program will not only continue, but will also be transformed into something bigger than ever in Connecticut” said Greg Kane, the program’s organizer and State Consultant for Technology Education, Engineering and Agricultural Sciences.

"Kids love this program. Their excitement and passion for learning is evident throughout the process. They literally devote hours to their projects, and they get real-world experience by working with their peers, teachers and industry experts to build and operate these high-tech machines," said State Education Commissioner Mark K. McQuillan.

Gov. M. Jodi Rell said of the initiative, "This is the type of program that builds interest from the ground up. Students acquire a 'can do spirit' and they get an opportunity to learn from working engineers and other technology leaders in ways that build confidence and pride in their accomplishments. I am very supportive."

The expanded program will be made available to all high school students in the state for the 2008-2009 school year. The Vex Robotics Program will be highlighted at two highly attended conferences for Connecticut educators, the Innovations Convention and the Tech-Ed Teacher Conference, both being held in early May, 2008.

With the increasing number of technology fields and the decreasing numbers of students studying Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM), the program will provide yet one more way to help to reverse the downward trend. "The state is facilitating a low-cost, high impact robotics program that will encourage more Connecticut students to continue their education beyond high school and ultimately to choose science-, technology-, engineering-, and mathematics-related careers," says Brad Lauer, Senior Manager, Education Channel Development at Innovation First, Inc.

"The most extraordinary part of the new program is that the Department of Education has invited every high school in the State to get involved and field a Vex Robotics competition team and because of the high-accessibility and low-cost of Vex, someday soon that vision will be a reality." According to Mr. Lauer, the Connecticut Vex Robotics League will be used as a model that other states will soon be implementing.

During the first year of the program, it is expected that at least sixty high schools will participate with the aim of growing that number to 180 schools in future years. According to Kane, "There are many schools that have already purchased the Vex Robotics Design System for previously held competitions and classroom use and we expect most of those schools to compete in the upcoming year, in addition to many new schools and teams from all across Connecticut."

Note: Reporters may visit and interview teachers and students involved in the robotics program by contacting: Al Mothersele, Technology Education Department Head, South Windsor High School, amothersele@swindsor.k12.ct.us 860-648-5000.