

An Investment Worth Making



By Jim Langevin. Congressman Langevin (D-RI) was elected to the United States House of Representatives in 2000. Among other responsibilities, Langevin serves as co-chair of the Congressional Career and Technical Education Caucus.

The Skills Gap

As I travel around Rhode Island to speak with educators, businesses, and others in the community about how to strengthen our economy and create good jobs, one common theme continues to surface: Businesses can't fill existing vacancies because those looking for work don't have the skills needed to compete for the jobs of the 21st century. President Obama also raised the issue of the 'skills gap' in his recent State of the Union address.

But what exactly are we doing to close it?

Recent reports published by Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce and Harvard University's Pathways to Prosperity Project highlight our failure in the education system to engage

all of our students. They also propose solutions to better prepare students, which include a strong emphasis on Career Technical Education (CTE).

To engage and prepare our students, we must strengthen and fully fund our CTE system. I also believe all young Americans should be equipped with college

and career readiness skills. I do not

believe they are limited to a college OR career choice; rather, our skills gap requires that our students are ready to pursue both postsecondary AND career opportunities.

Linked Learning

The Education for Tomorrow's Jobs Act, which I sponsored with Representative G.T. Thompson, my fellow co-chair of the bipartisan Congressional Career and Technical Education

Caucus, addresses our nation's education and workforce challenges by combining rigorous college preparation with workplace experience for high school students. Known as

"The best investment we as a country can make is in our education system. Our students are the problem solvers, the innovators and the job creators of tomorrow."

"Linked Learning", this measure is another tool to ensure that our students are prepared for a wide range of high-growth, high-skilled and high-wage occupations, such as engineering, arts and media, cybersecurity, and health.

In order to strengthen the pipeline for these jobs, we need to unite all of our schools, businesses, universities and other invested partners in a common goal. Under this legislation, teachers and school administrators would collaborate on interdisciplinary education and pursue partnerships with local businesses and community organizations to identify workforce demands and internship opportunities. We should look to businesses like Toyota and IBM that are proactive in training students with needed skills that include problem solving, critical thinking, and teamwork.

The best investment we as a country can make is in our education system. Our students are the problem solvers, the innovators and the job creators of tomorrow. If we engage our students and make the coursework relevant to their future, we reduce dropout rates, increase graduation rates and prepare our students for postsecondary pursuits. Failing to do so hurts our country's innovative edge and leaves us unable to fill the jobs of the 21st Century. •

