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OPINION: Brooklyn presidential visit showcases technology growth

President Barack Obama tries an "Earthquake Tower Challenge" as he visits a classroom at Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) in Brooklyn. AP photo

By Mark Seruya

For Brooklyn Daily Eagle

President Obama's recent visit to P-TECH, a groundbreaking technical high school/college program in Brooklyn, clearly illustrates an expanding hi-tech curriculum for America's students and confidence in the continuing growth of the hi-tech industry.

The nationwide shortage of skilled hi-tech workers has forward-looking corporate executives and government officials alike working to create technology-oriented programs, signaling the growth potential for investing in hi-tech industries.

Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH), launched in 2011, provides a six-year program, spanning grades 9 to 14, culminating with an Associate in Applied Science degree and skills to enter the Information Technology industry. P-TECH is one of the first schools in the U.S. to directly connect high school, college and career.

Hi-tech skills translate to hi-tech jobs, meaning future workers are likely to have money to spend and invest; as today's students merge into a workforce that supports the nation's economy, they will also have to manage career path and finance. The same corporations that provide today's jobs may translate to long-term investments.

There are myriad signs that joint government/industry efforts are underway to prepare the next generation of skilled workers. Besides P-TECH, Gov. Cuomo has initiated a promising wide-scale nanotechnology program in the upstate hi-tech corridor surrounding the Capital District.

In November, 60 Capital Region academic leaders participated in an educational forum at the SUNY College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering (CNSE) to demonstrate the growing impact of nanotechnology on society. CNSE is the first college in the world dedicated to education, research, and development in the emerging disciplines of nanoscience, nanoengineering, nanobioscience, and nanoeconomics, commercialization of nanoelectronics and nanotechnology innovations.

Researchers maintain that computers, Internet and other hi-tech applications will continue to dramatically expand in raw numbers and in functionality. The influence of technology will exceed new equipment and faster communications; soon, work and skills will be redefined and reorganized.

Illustrative of the new joint efforts is President Obama's 2014 budget request: a $300 million investment called High School Redesign, replacing traditional education approaches with learning models that are "rigorous, relevant, and better focused on real-world experiences," minimizing "seat time" and enhancing knowledge and skills needed to successfully transition from school to career.

These changes to education require collaboration from public and private sectors – institutions of higher education, non-profit organizations, business and industry.

This also provides a mode for technology students – like those at P-TECH – to graduate from high school with college credit and job experience.

If successful, the combined efforts to improve the hi-tech skills of America's workforce will provide not only the workers who support the economy, but also the investment capital to keep companies that employ this workforce surviving and thriving. This cooperative emphasis bodes well for individual investors and firms competing to hire the next skilled and well-paid workforce.

--Mark Seruya

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