



2025 IRWECA

AUTUMN INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE

PROGRAM EVALUATION

A workforce development and professional learning opportunity specially designed for CTE educators throughout Connecticut

Fall 2025

Prepared by the Southern Connecticut State University Innovation Hub

About

The Institute for Real-World Education and Career Advancement (IRWECA) Autumn Industry Experience provided over 40 Connecticut educators with several unique opportunities to engage directly with representatives from leading companies in biopharma, real estate, food processing, chemical industries, and aerospace manufacturing (to name a few). Through site visits, guided tours, and employer presentations, participants observed real-world applications of many of the concepts taught in schools. They also gained valuable perspectives and insights into how students might apply the knowledge and skills in their future careers.

The IRWECA program brings together CTE, STEM, business, academic content educators, school support staff, and administrators from across the state, to engage in meaningful in-person experiences with industry partners at their shops and facilities. During each visit, educators explore workplace environments, learn about the qualifications and preparation necessary for various roles at various levels, and reflect on how these experiences can inform career-readiness curricula in their classrooms. The IRWECA team culls the shared dialogue and then fosters the development of instructional modules aligned with current industry needs. Together, we serve to broaden educators' understanding of the diverse skill sets needed for future employees of companies across CT.

Question and answer sessions with the industry and lead educators enabled participants to synthesize their observations, share perspectives, and identify actionable strategies to enhance their teaching and learning – translating industry exposure into meaningful classroom practices.

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40+
Educators



3
Company
Site Visits

20+
companies participated
in the Emerging
Technologies Forum

Behind the Scenes Visits

Culture Fresh Foods

September 17, 2025

Culture Fresh Foods works with a variety of suppliers from local to global levels to produce foods that appeal to a wide consumer audience. Whether they are producing their own brand, co-packaging for a number of nationally recognized brands, or producing private label products for some of the nation's largest retailers, the staff is constantly adapting recipes and ingredients to create the perfect bite.

Takeaways:

- Problem-solving is necessary regardless of your field; be adaptable.
- Basic math is integral to every position.
- Prioritize creativity, critical thinking, and executive function.

ACMT

November 5, 2025

Advanced Composites and Metal-forming Technologies (ACMT) offers solutions for commercial and military gas-turbine manufacturers, as well as airframe structures and rotorcraft. ACMT manufactures medium to complex components and assemblies, as well as specializing in the overhaul, repair, modification, and inspection of gas turbine components and accessories.

Takeaways:

- Attention to detail is key to standing out in work and life.
- Working as a team towards one goal is integral to a company's growth.
- A safety-first mindset is a requirement for collaboration and respect.

American Green Fuels

October 7, 2025

American Green Fuels is New England's largest biodiesel producer. Their process creates premium biodiesel from plant oils and recycled waste materials. Producing approximately 40 million gallons of biodiesel annually, the plant employs 30+ people since becoming operational in 2013.

Takeaways:

- When things don't go as planned, continue innovating, developing, and testing new ideas.
- Being motivated to learn new things can open previously unknown doors.
- It's important to understand and be able to manipulate data.
- Forward-thinking and adaptability are essential skills.



Emerging Technologies Forum

November 14, 2025

The Emerging Technologies Forum was attended by over 175 business leaders, educators, and students with the goals of fostering engagement among students, educators, community stakeholders, and industry professionals around educational and career pathways in emerging technologies in Connecticut and supporting understanding around emerging technologies to facilitate collaborative workforce development.

This full day of insight began with Colleen Bielitz, Associated Vice President of Strategic Initiatives & Outreach at SCSU, leading a moderated conversation on the topic of “Unlocking Future Pathways in Quantum, AI, and Education.” The conversation panelists included Jodie Gillon, President & CEO at BioCT; Vincent Pieribone, Co-CEO at OceanX and Senior Research Scientist at SCSU; Amit Savkar, Associate Professor-in-Residence of Mathematics & Director of the Quantitative Learning Center at UConn; and Shiang-Kwei Wang, Campus President of CSCU Gateway. **The educators all agreed that they learned more about how companies are using emerging technologies.**



Educators and business leaders were then invited into the second session where tables of 10 people engaged in conversations, hoping to bridge the gap between what businesses need from their employees and what educators are teaching students to prepare them for the workforce. **The educators all agreed that they will utilize the information discussed by during the breakout session in their personal or professional lives.** Six major themes arose organically from the guided and free-flowing conversations including emerging technologies and AI integration, skills for the future workforce, teaching and learning mindsets, teacher development and school capacity, partnerships and community engagement, and equity and access.

The culled ideas and suggestions emphasize the urgent need for an education system that prepares students for an AI-driven future through foundational academic skills, strong soft skills, and tech fluency. Hence, it requires equitable access to technology, updated equipment, stackable credentials, and hands-on learning experiences such as internships and capstone projects. Teachers must be supported in adopting emerging technologies, especially AI, while schools build partnerships with industries and scientific communities.

District Collaboration

Cheshire High School

Support continues for Tom Lewoc, Tech Ed Coordinator at the HS, from Steve Orlowski, of Emmet O'Brien H.S. Steve, a master teacher, has given tremendous support to Tom from last spring 2025 to the present. Steve continues to assist in sharing manufacturing class management and the

use of manufacturing CNC equipment, such as the Lathe and Mill. The training on the ProtoTrak K3 for milling has been the main focus of this term. We will continue training into the spring, including a visit to Emmet O'Brien to see a well-established educational model.

New Haven Public Schools

Support is being provided to Cari Strand, the newly designated CTE Lead Teacher for NHPS, who is an alumnus of our IRWECA Summer Industry Experience. Marjorie Drucker, Peter Dimoulas, and Dr. Christine Broadbridge have met with Cari several times this term, providing resources and opportunities to network with Junior Achievement (JA) and other possible partnerships that would be beneficial to her teacher cohort.

Future work together will consist of periodic meetings after the establishment of a CTE team in the district. From that time, The team will support Cari into Spring 2026 and will assist with providing resources to Cari's teachers in the area of Soft Skills Development. The team has also been included in a district wide meeting with JA and NHPS staff that support student preparation for the workforce needs of CT.

Thomaston High School

The Thomaston lead teachers, Eileen Stowe and James Newton, are alumni of our IRWECA summer training session. We began work in the early Fall 2025 to determine a direction for their school. They have decided to work to develop an environmental/agricultural program for their school as a means of engaging their student body.

Marjorie was the Magnet School Coordinator for an environmental studies-themed school in NHPS, with ample resources and practical advice to share. They recently visited Common Ground HS and are ready to develop a plan of action. Joel Tolman, Director of Community Engagement, agreed to work with the team on setting goals and creating a blueprint for them. The program will help students pursue work in green careers. Marjorie will continue to work with the team in Spring 2026.

Evaluation & Feedback

"(I) intend to use my visit to support the importance of uniform, safety, sanitation and hygiene in our school kitchens. Additionally I intend to stress the importance of arriving on time and consistently with a positive attitude and willingness to learn and follow procedures."



"It was fantastic to see science in action especially the biology and chemistry. Overall, it was a wonderful experience."

"I enjoyed the workshop it was a nice mix of information and demonstration."

"I plan on utilizing what I've learned from all of the IRWECA visits with small group of students during a career exploration lesson."

Evaluation & Feedback

Analysis of the post-program feedback survey reveals that 85% of participants believed that their experience would yield direct benefits for their students.



The following qualitative feedback was coded for the keywords and themes, suggesting consistent, positive takeaways to impact classroom curricula.

This workshop impacted educators knowledge and ability to implement industry driven lessons in their calssrooms and/or schools by:

- Providing Real World Relevance and Application
- Increasing Understanding of Soft Skill Importance
- Improving Knowledge of Industry Trends and Tech
- Understanding Authentic Examples/Visuals
- Increasing Confidence and Inspiration

Thank You

The SCSU Innovation Hub is a unique team at Southern Connecticut State University serving students, faculty, and community members throughout Connecticut. Our mission is to advance awareness of, experiences and skill development for, and access to jobs and internships with STEM companies. IRWECA achieves this by helping to build capacity among the teaching corps, especially CTE educators.

IRWECA is made possible by a partnership with the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) through the federal Perkins program. Thanks to CSDE, we are pleased to bring knowledge of industry needs and our partnerships to bare in terms of helping educators through Connecticut make teaching and learning more applicable and more aligned with the needs of companies in Connecticut.

Thanks to our industry partners Culture Fresh Foods, American Green Fuels, and ACMT for hosting and engaging teachers regarding what they do and what they need among graduates. We are also very grateful for the many dedicated company representatives that participated in the Emerging Technologies Forum.

The SCSU Innovation Hub and the IRWECA team that makes these engagements come to life for teachers includes (pictured below, left to right) our curriculum facilitators, Marjorie Drucker and Dr. Jeffrey Levinson, Derek Faulkner, Peter Dimoulas, Dana Cote, and Nina Musco.

Thank you again to Connecticut State Department of Education for their continued partnership as we endeavor to amplify what we have accomplished by continuing to help more educators impart industry-aligned skills and knowledge for their students. When educators are more supported, capable and prepared, student outcomes improve, with the additional benefit of positively impacting companies and communities throughout Connecticut.

