

8 From the Eighth: Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE)

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Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE), Angela Lewis (10:47)

Small businesses form the backbone of our nation's economy and are at the heart of thriving communities. Behind every small business is a dedicated and passionate entrepreneur who has worked tirelessly to start and grow the company. Learn from Angela Lewis, City Manager for the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship, about how the organization is cultivating an entrepreneurial spirit among middle and high school students living in low- and moderate-income communities.

Transcript

Mike Eggleston: Welcome to Eight from the Eighth, the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis's community development podcast series. I'm Mike Eggleston with the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. An emerging strategy in the community development industry is to strengthen human capital by promoting entrepreneurship opportunities.

While many cities recognize the importance of jobs as a key factor in helping them move their citizens forward and boosting a region's overall economic outlook, the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship is striving to pursue this goal in a manner that emphasizes building entrepreneurship skills early on while young adults are in middle school and high school. Today I'm speaking with Angela Lewis, city director for the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship. Angela, thank you for joining me.

Angela Lewis: Mike, thank you so much for having me.

Mike Eggleston: To start, please tell us about the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship and how it got started.

Angela Lewis: The Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship offers programs that inspire young people from low-income areas to stay in school, to recognize business opportunity, and to plan for successful futures. We have in-class curriculum as well as BizCamps. Our in-class curriculum in St. Louis is only used at the high school level, and the curriculum is infused into core curriculum. It's a 65-hour curriculum, and currently we partner with McCluer, McCluer North, McCluer South-Berkeley, Jennings, and Clyde C. Miller Career Academy.

NFTE started over 27 years ago in the Bronx, New York, and it has expanded into 12 program offices and 11 licensed partnerships throughout the country. What makes NFTE unique is three key areas, our teacher training, our experiential learning activities, and our connection with volunteers. We have a train the trainer model where we train teachers to implement the curriculum. Experiential learning activities are essential, because as Steve Mariotti, our founder, noticed that when students are able to engage in their education, they're able to see how it connects to life. And then our volunteers are essential to our success, because they really provide that added support for schools and for students achieving their goals.

Mike Eggleston: So, certainly, a lot has changed over the last 28 years since the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship, otherwise known as NFTE, was founded. How has the organization evolved to meet the needs of future entrepreneurs who 28 years ago could not possibly have dreamed about the technology or infrastructure that now exists to help with starting a company?

Angela Lewis: Great question. We have an amazing learning and innovation team at our headquarters in New York, and they're always finding ways to engage students better and to make sure that we stay current. So we're actually working on the 12th edition of our core curriculum called *Owning your Future*. And in this curriculum, students are able to see profiles of

entrepreneurs.

We have a teacher portal. So we're really integrating technology a lot more to be able to support students' growth so that they can understand business. We also have some hybrid training for teachers, and so the teachers are able via conference call and via video conferencing to learn and to be able to have professional development. Another thing that NFTE does is we really integrate our corporate partners to be able to help students really understand business.

Mike Eggleston: It's clear that students benefit greatly from NFTE's various programs. Can you spend a minute to talk about how volunteers, schools, and communities benefit from NFTE as well?

Angela Lewis: Definitely. Students and the community and our volunteers benefit from exposure. Our students are exposed to business community, and the business community is exposed to education. There is an article by the *Harvard Business Review* that showed that there was a disconnect between schools and the business community. And NFTE really bridges that gap. In addition, our volunteers are able to select how they want to help. There are four major ways.

One is through coaching, actual business plan coaching. So our students aren't left to try to create a business on their own. We bring in professionals, whether entrepreneurs, business owners, and people who work in the corporate community to help kids learn about business. Volunteers are also able to come in as speakers to talk about their specific expertise in maybe finance and maybe marketing. Volunteers also are judges. And there are some volunteers that host field trips for students so that they can gain even greater exposure to all that our St. Louis community has to offer.

Mike Eggleston: A couple of the programs of NFTE that I find intriguing are the National Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge and BizCamp. Please, if you could, take a minute and describe these two programs.

Angela Lewis: Sure. These are two of our absolutely amazing programs. The National Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge is the culminating event of the NFTE programs. So we have students—and we have a core curriculum, and students will learn the core curriculum. They will have experiential learning activities. Their business plan coaches will come to class as volunteers. Teachers will be trained. And students write a business plan.

At the end of the class, the students will give a presentation in front of judges at the classroom competition level. And the students are able to win seed money for their businesses. The winners win money. Well, those students who win at the classroom level will then go on to the regional competition. And our regional competition happens locally, and there are students from each school who will present their business plans. And two winners from the regional competition will then go on to the national competition.

In St. Louis our regional competition is going to be May 15, and the national competition will be in October in New York. And we'll have students who will go to New York who will present. Last year the regional—I'm sorry, the national competition was in Silicon Valley. There are two students that went to Silicon Valley, presented their ideas, and had an absolutely amazing time.

Our BizCamps are actually the same curriculum that we have in schools in a two-week intense course where students learn about business principles. They actually write a business plan. They go on field trips. They hear speakers who talk about business. And they also have a competition at the end as well. And we'll have a student go on to the national competition.

This year in St. Louis we'll have two—we'll have three BizCamps. Two of them are sponsored by MasterCard. The other is sponsored by Citi. And we're excited because BizCamps are a little different this year. One of our BizCamps is a tech camp, and it's coed. But we've put a special emphasis this summer on a girls' tech camp and then a coed general business camp, the one that's sponsored by Citi in late July.

Mike Eggleston: An enduring challenge in our line of work is understanding, how do we best measure impact? And I'm curious, what strategies do you use to measure the impact of NFTE?

Angela Lewis: Oh, great question. Measuring impact is always a challenge, because some of what happens is that the students get it five, ten years from now, and it clicks for them. But we have pre-tests and post-tests with our curriculum in our classes. And we're really measuring the entrepreneurial mindset in addition to content knowledge.

So, yes, we want to know, are kids aware of what marketing research is? Or do they know what a business plan is? Do they understand price per unit? That's really important. But what we're really aiming to get are these ten domains around entrepreneurial mindset, such as critical thinking, overcoming adversity, what's the student's goal orientation. Those are the items that really—that we are able to see a shift in students from the beginning of their course with NFTE in the end.

Mike Eggleston: So, keeping with this theme, let's talk for a moment about outcomes. What client outcomes have emerged since NFTE began nearly 28 years ago?

Angela Lewis: Oh, great question. A couple of years ago we conducted an alumni survey. And what we found is that 22% of our alumni had actually started businesses, and on average they employed four people. So we see that there is growth. And we see that there is economic development. Our students are—have higher graduation rates.

About 90% of students who've gone through the NFTE course have higher graduation rates than the average student in the US. Then we also see that students who have participated in NFTE absolutely seek higher education opportunities. And more students have graduated from college as well.

Mike Eggleston: So how do you identify communities and schools that would be a good fit for NFTE? And what do they need to do to prepare for including NFTE in their curriculum?

Angela Lewis: We identify students in schools and community-based organizations that work in communities that are low-income. And then we determine low income by schools that have 50% or more free or reduced lunch. And those are the schools that we target. Typically, those are the most urban areas and the areas that benefit from the greatest supports.

Mike Eggleston: And finally, if you could, spend a couple of minutes talking about what's next for NFTE. How do you see the organization evolving and growing in the future?

Angela Lewis: NFTE is always working on ways to get better. Our research team works extremely hard to make sure that the data that we get from students informs our decision-making. And so what we've found is that we really are looking to grow and really help students better understand entrepreneurship and integrate technology more.

In St. Louis, we currently work with five schools. And our goal for the 2015-2016 school year is to expand to five more schools so we're able to double our reach. In addition, we are really excited about additional partnerships. And you can always, always find more information about NFTE at www.nfte.com.

Mike Eggleston: We've been speaking with Angela Lewis, city director for Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship. For more information about the Eight from the Eighth podcast series of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, please visit stlouisfed.org. Thank you for listening.