

into an economic problem for countries. This is critical since at the core of country competitiveness is the quality of the human resources of a nation. This is greatly influenced by the quality and standard of skills training and the education system.

It is therefore important that Saint Lucia invests in proper education and training of the workforce to prepare students for the relevant jobs in industries where the country has a competitive advantage. Training should also prepare the workforce for jobs in the global market. This means that skilled persons can export their services overseas or investors can outsource services to the country because of the availability of specialized skills. This is particularly important in alleviating Saint Lucia's high rate of unemployment.

“Business leaders today are engaged in education in ways that are generous, well-intended, effective at alleviating the symptoms of a weak education system, and thoroughly inadequate to help strengthen the system,” says Harvard Business School Professor Jan W. Rivkin.

The current generation of private sector innovators is now inclined to challenge traditional ways of doing things in schools. They see the traditional school system as failing to equip the future labor force with the skills to compete in a global age. They believe passionately that innovative products and approaches could help students perform better. This determination to shake things up within schools has motivated business leaders to invest in schools.

Rivkin pointed out the new developments in education that has been implemented as a result of the private sector getting involved in the education system. He noted developments such as improved teaching and leadership talent, the use of technology in personalized learning and a dramatic upgrade in the quality and use of data analytics to determine what is working in education and which measures are not effective.

So what can business leaders do, to make sure the workforce of the future is getting what they need? It is a matter of acknowledging the problem, realizing what this means for businesses and actually doing something about it. The following are three areas that capitalize on business's strengths which can result in the greatest returns within the education sector:

- **Influencing policy-**In order to promote innovation in education, this process has to start with policy formulation. Business leaders can exercise a great deal of influence in policy within our local schools. In the US, in Denver, Colorado, businessmen partnered with educators to lobby for an increase in taxes to support education.
- **Building on proven innovation-** Business leaders are usually skillful at using innovations that work within their respective businesses. Therefore the educators need to leverage this expertise to help build better schools. ExxonMobil, a founding sponsor of the National Math and Science Initiative, helped to scale two projects: one focusing on improved training for science, technology, and math teachers, the other on improving advanced placement test results in the same areas.
- **Reinventing the local education system.** Employers need to get involved and help teachers build curriculums that encourage creative thinking. Business leaders are now participating in standards validation committees to ensure that learning requirements are up to date. By doing this, they actually create material that actually teaches what their best employee needs to know. They are now investing their time to make sure that experience and innovation become instilled in graduates. This ensures that school leavers get hired!

It is therefore important that private sector leaders not simply wait for the education system to change on its own. Local businesses have the expertise, experiences and resources to make a shift. As such, something has to be done than to sit and just complain about employees having no skills.

This shift can start before students graduate. In light of this small acts go a long way, whether it is hiring apprentices for projects in the office. Allow them to use real tools instead of having them run errands. Nowadays, nearly every office has some database that needs to be reviewed. Therefore the intern can start there. It may be considered as boring work, but is essential in gaining familiarity with technology and working with data. Alternatively, students can be giving the space to exercise their creativity in coming up with solutions to a work problem.

Successful local leaders need to become part of the solution. They are the teachers that our students truly need. Whether you are a company leader, hiring manager, expert or a job candidate, you have a stake in addressing this issue. The education revolution is upon us and business leaders have the power to effect a positive change which can lead to a more effective and competitive workforce.

About the National Competitiveness and Productivity Council (NCPC)

Established in October 2013, The National Competitiveness and Productivity Council (NCPC) is responsible for the identification of key issues related to competitiveness and productivity in Saint Lucia.

The NCPC and its Technical Secretariat is committed to providing the necessary advocacy and research to produce timely and effective recommendations to policymakers on issues that affect both competitiveness and productivity on island. For more information about productivity or on the NCPC, visit www.stluciancpc.org; www.facebook.com/stluciancpc, call 468-5571/5576 or send an e-mail to stluciancpc@gmail.com