

Asnuntuck To Receive \$2.2 Million For Manufacturing Technology Center

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ENFIELD —

Asnuntuck Community College will receive \$2.2 million for its Manufacturing Technology Center as part of the \$626 million jobs bill passed by the state legislature Wednesday.

The center is planning to use the funds to fuel an ambitious growth plan, nearly doubling the number of students in the program, increasing from 200 to 350 full-time students and 325 to 450 incumbent workers, according to the center's director Frank Gulluni. The funds will be distributed over a period of two years.

The Asnuntuck program is renowned for its high placement rate — Gulluni has said that all graduates find jobs — training both workers entering the job market for the first time and dislocated workers revamping their skill sets.

"Asnuntuck's program has been very successful because of the very close relationship they've developed with manufacturers in north central Connecticut and the Enfield area," said Mary Anne Cox, assistant chancellor of the Connecticut Community College system.

Also included in the jobs bill is \$17.8 million in funding to clone Asnuntuck's precision manufacturing program, which has been praised as a role model, at three yet-to-be-determined community colleges.

"They've been very responsive to the needs of businesses in that area," Cox said. "We're very much looking forward to an initiative that will continue the role of Connecticut community colleges in building the state's economy by building its workforce."

State Sen. John Kissel, who pushed for the inclusion of the Asnuntuck funding, said that he wanted to make sure Asnuntuck received more than just accolades in the jobs bill.

"We really need to reward programs and schools that set the standard," said Kissel. "There's still a crying need in manufacturing for people with these specialized skills."

He added that while building new programs modeled on Asnuntuck's success is a great move for the state, the manufacturing technology center can train workers for jobs that exist now.

Gulluni said that besides increasing the number of students, the center plans to use the funds to physically expand and purchase new equipment, replacing older equipment like a computer measuring machine from 2000 and purchasing other up-to-date items.

"In this business you get behind fairly quickly," said Gulluni. "We need to upgrade to make sure students have access to the equipment that's going to be used out there."

Gulluni said that the center needs to be innovative to bring young people in and the funds will give it the opportunity to do so.

"There is still that distaste for manufacturing — people think that it's gone, or that it's low-tech, when it's just the opposite," he said. "We need to do everything we can to get talented young people into the program."