

**The 2013 Innovative Initiative Award Recipient**  
University of St. Francis, Lewis University, Joliet Junior College,  
Rasmussen College, DeVry University,  
the Joliet Region Chamber of Commerce and Industry,  
the Will County Regional Superintendent's Office

for program entitled

**The Entrepreneurship Club**

*Write an abstract of the initiative describing its format, history, clientele, and purpose.*

In 2011, several university partners and the Business Education Committee of the Joliet Region Chamber of Commerce and Industry began looking at ideas to engage young students in entrepreneurial vision. The idea was born to invite middle school students to join a “club” where the students could contribute to their community and become inspired by entrepreneurial thought.

The Entrepreneurship Club is a non-credit program open to middle school children grades 6-8 and their teacher sponsor. It is supported by numerous community partners including: Lewis University, University of St. Francis, Joliet Junior College, Rasmussen College, DeVry University, the Joliet Region Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Will County Regional Superintendent's Office and public and private grade/middle school districts in the area. Regional businesses and business people also support the Entrepreneurship Club with donations of time and funding.

The Entrepreneurship Club consists of a teacher training program utilizing a curriculum co-written by an elementary school teacher and a business professional with entrepreneurial roots. Following the teacher training, the schools host the club for several months based on a guideline sheet of rules to keep all clubs within the same project scope. The club culminates in a community expo, similar to a science fair style event, where the students display their business ideas for parents, teachers, business members and community sponsors. “Real-world” young entrepreneurs are invited to speak at the expo to show the students that inspiring ideas are often born in middle school.

In its inaugural year, 2011-2012, 61 students participated in the club, representing 7 middle schools. For the 2012-2013 school year, the club has grown to include 9 schools. The program contributes to the community through educational collaboration, community connectivity and shared vision for the benefit of the children. For the educational partners, the program has brought together business faculty and administrators from each school in engaging cooperative conversation.

*Explain how the initiative is innovative, unique, and contributes to the purpose of ICCHE*

The program is unique because of the cross section of collaborative partners including a junior college and non-profit and for-profit universities working collaboratively with community partners. In addition, the unique business and education partnership provides the opportunity to promote and fund the program through innovative means.

*Describe how the initiative was evaluated for its effectiveness, and explain/illustrate the ease of replication for use by other institutions.*

The assessment process is conducted through evaluation forms gathered from teachers, students, parents and business sponsors. The student evaluations provide direct feedback about the students' reaction to the club's course material. The teacher evaluations help gauge the effectiveness of the learning outcomes and provide insight into changes needed in the curriculum and the delivery of the curriculum. The parent evaluations provide information on the transfer of learning from school to home. The business sponsor evaluations help gauge the effectiveness of the program's connection to the real-world. An example of a specific outcome that came from the first year assessment process was that the teachers requested more hands-on activity during the training session. This change has been incorporated into the training session.

Replication: University professors can create the curriculum (i.e. education professor collaborating with a business professor). Alternatively, curriculums can be purchased inexpensively from a variety of sources (i.e. junior achievement).

*Describe the human and financial resources available for this initiative.*

The program is free to the participating middle school students and middle school teachers. The elementary schools provide substitutes for the teachers to attend the training. Facility space for the teacher training and community expo is provided by an educational partner. Faculty members presenting at the teacher training donate their time. The clubs occur in different formats at the school level. The school can decide whether to incorporate the club into the regular school day or as a before or after-school activity.

The budget for the program is approximately \$2,000 to fund: lunch and craft supplies at the teacher training, a display board for each teacher and snacks at the expo. For replication, additional funding may be required if a curriculum needs to be purchased.

The Joliet Region Chamber of Commerce Business Education Committee meets monthly. The meetings are open, and an interested school would be welcome to attend to learn more about the program. Funding may be available through regional chambers of commerce, business sponsors or local foundations.

*Explain the outcomes of the initiative, including its significant impacts on participants, the institution, and the community.*

The students each build a unique business plan related to their entrepreneurial idea. This inspires them to think creatively and recognize the fundamental practices related to building a small business. It also contributes to their ability to think critically. The business-education partnership between the Chamber and the educational institutions broadens the scope of inter-community collaboration.