OUR VIEW: Educating for the future

Friday, November 11, 2011 8:44 PM EST

New numbers show a growth in urban student enrollment at the four campuses of Connecticut State University, with Bristol and New Britain residents in the top 10 of cities across the state who are taking advantage of this great institution.

This is good news for many reasons but especially because the role of a state university is being fulfilled, in part by offering state employers an educated work force.

No stereotypes here. We recognize that not every resident of the state’s suburbs and small towns is affluent and that, here in the city, many enjoy a comfortable income. But we also know that many urban families are struggling, that a lot of city kids are the first in their families to go to college and that, by getting an education, they will earn hundreds of thousands of dollars more over a lifetime than they would have, tackling the job market with only a high school diploma.

That’s because their advanced — and often specialized — training makes them more valuable to employers, who are seeking workers with a background in science, mathematics, business, communication and other skills to contribute to their success.

But it’s not easy for most urban students to make the leap to college. Money’s tight and there’s not likely to be an established path, perhaps even any support within the family. That’s where state colleges come in. Community colleges are an effective, inexpensive and comfortable door opener. Then it’s CSU’s turn to help them continue their education. That’s why we applaud CSU’s own initiative.

“We must continue to reach out to our urban communities,” said Louise H. Feroe, acting chancellor at CSU, to “work with community colleges and strengthen our collaborative efforts with K-12 educators in our cities and across the state.”

One way our own Central campus is doing that is a program called Community Central, which aims to connect CCSU resources with New Britain youngsters and community groups. Created by a student, Eric Francis, the program, under an AmericCorp VISTA grant, brings CCSU-
enrolled tutors and mentors to the city’s elementary school children. And its goal is ambitious.

“We want to push students to think ahead to building their businesses in New Britain,” said Francis.

That is more likely to happen if these children go on to higher education right here in the state because, if they do, they are more likely to remain here after graduation, fulfilling Francis’ dream of building the next generation of productive citizens.

Preparing them is, indeed, the role of a great state university.