




# Creating More Pathways for Entrepreneurship

Education institutions should teach students the skills to become business leaders. *Here's how certification can help.*




**You could say** entrepreneurship is part of Acquille Dunkley's DNA. His parents owned a merchandise company in Jamaica, and Acquille's mother also ran a daycare.

"My father would always tell me to be a leader, not a follower," says Dunkley.

But growing up with entrepreneurs and becoming one are two different things. The latter takes a lot of work and building skills that often aren't necessarily innate. That's why Dunkley, who graduated in June from the Atlanta branch of the Savannah College of Art and Design with a bachelor's degree in photography, decided to get additional training and become certified in his field.

Dunkley, who grew up in Jamaica and went to high school in Royal Palm Beach, Fla., took a certification course in high school to gain skills that have prepared him to launch his own digital media business. Though Dunkley's parents were both entrepreneurs, he says getting the training was important because it provided the necessary skills to position him for higher-paying work.



**About two-thirds of states haven't yet made entrepreneurship a core part of their curriculum. This lack of training may contribute to a dearth of skills that affect the success rates for new businesses — only about 20 percent survive past their first year.**

"I wanted to experiment even deeper, because it was almost like getting my feet wet," Dunkley says. "Certification is what opened my mind and that was the driver to learn more. It has helped because it shows proof [to clients] that I've taken that extra step."

Certification created a pathway for Dunkley to steadily expand his business — even while attending college and working part-time at an art gallery. Since 2014, he has built his clientele in the Atlanta area through networking, social media and word-of-mouth and has worked on a variety of design projects.

"I really enjoy what I'm doing and I just get lost in it. I'm never not busy," he says.

Entrepreneurialism in the U.S. is critical as small businesses are the country's economic engines. There are 28 million small businesses in America — which account for half of all sales and provide half of all jobs.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, new models of work are emerging that

are largely freelance or entrepreneurial in nature.<sup>2</sup> Because entrepreneurship can lead to more economic opportunity, it is critical that schools teach this subject and encourage it as a viable career path. Schools can offer a more well-rounded entrepreneurship education by leveraging certification programs such as Certiport's Entrepreneurship and Small Business (ESB) certification program.<sup>3</sup> ESB teaches students the skills they need to start and run their own business. This training, along with guidance from teachers, can encourage young people to forge their own paths as business owners who provide jobs and economic opportunities in their communities.

### ***The Current State of Entrepreneurship Education***

Since the end of the Great Recession, the number of small businesses that fail outnumber the number of small businesses being created.<sup>4</sup> If this trend continues, it could negatively impact economic growth.

However, states are only gradually increasing their focus on entrepreneurship education. From 2009 to 2015, the number of states that required entrepreneurship education courses in high school increased from five to 18. This means about two-thirds of states hadn't yet made entrepreneurship a core part of their curriculum. This lack of training may contribute to a dearth of skills that affect the success rates for new businesses — only about 20 percent survive past their first year.<sup>5</sup>

Creating a business is inherently challenging. Therefore, just like other careers, students need to be prepared for it. In states that do offer entrepreneurship education, the curriculum varies. Some incorporate entrepreneurship teachings into economic courses (Colorado),<sup>6</sup> some teach about the development of the American economic system and the role of the entrepreneur (California),<sup>7</sup> and others offer continuing education courses focused on entrepreneurship at the high school level (Georgia).<sup>8</sup>

The approach differs as well, with some courses largely theoretical in nature, teaching students about the subject of entrepreneurship. Others offer practical advice and provide students with the required skills to become entrepreneurs. Another option is a more hands-on approach that allows students to experience the entrepreneurial process firsthand or in a structured environment.<sup>9</sup>

Entrepreneurship education isn't just crucial for students who plan to be business owners. It can help them be more innovative and creative — skills that are valuable in the workforce regardless of whether a young person creates his or her own business. Even

traditional employers increasingly value creativity and entrepreneurial skills.

“There are a significant number of people who will go on to run their own business, but a lot more will just learn the skills that are asked for by companies who want someone who understands how business works,” says Nich Haber, Director, STEM & CTE at Certiport.

Haber adds that more schools need to incorporate entrepreneurship into their traditional curriculum.

“Our education system is organized to set people up for specific jobs. You tend to get on these tracks, where you look up what job descriptions are out there; you look at what companies are hiring; then you focus your education towards the jobs that are available,” Haber says. “A lot of education programs play by the book, but the book is missing a chapter in entrepreneurship. That’s why we’re seeing some gaps in this specific education area.”

But just how do you make someone more entrepreneurial — and how do create a future entrepreneur?

Haber says what’s not being taught in the classroom are basic business skills, but doing so can cultivate the nation’s future business leaders.

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**Nich Haber, Director, STEM & CTE, Certiport**

“What is the entrepreneurial mindset? There are ways to teach that,” he says. “What does it take to understand what a real opportunity is? How do you differentiate between ‘I’ve got this great idea’ and ‘How does that idea have value that can turn into a profitable company?’”

Haber adds: “There are things we can teach so that a student has confidence he or she can start a business and be successful.”

It’s important for educational institutions to teach 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills like creativity, critical thinking and problem solving, all of which are part of entrepreneurship.

Schools can seek public-private partnerships and additional opportunities to embed more entrepreneurship and innovation into their

curriculum through clubs, competitions, accelerator and incubator spaces, and by emphasizing experiential learning. Certification programs like ESB also can give students an educational foundation in entrepreneurship.

### ***Preparing and Inspiring Future Business Leaders: The ESB Program***

The Entrepreneurship and Small Business Certification (ESB) program is designed to teach students at the K-14 level — specifically high school and junior college students — the basic skills they need to start and run a business.<sup>10</sup>

The program was created after Certiport conducted research and interviews with more than 100 entrepreneurs and small business owners who have achieved success and experienced setbacks as entrepreneurs, Haber says. This due diligence helped identify the skills and knowledge necessary to give students a greater chance of entrepreneurial success and better shape the curriculum for teachers.

“One of the things we provide is a curriculum that is clear to the teacher. They can understand what they need to teach, even if they’re not an entrepreneur themselves,” Haber says. “By developing our main objectives for the ESB program, we feel we’ve given teachers a real, clear curriculum they can incorporate into their classroom.”

ESB is divided into six objective domains:

#### **1. The Entrepreneur**

Students must identify their strengths, weaknesses and risk tolerance.

#### **2. Opportunity Recognition**

Students identify the benefits and drawbacks of starting a new business, purchasing an existing business or buying a franchise. They also analyze the demand for goods, services and opportunities in a specific environment, and identify potential customers for a business.

#### **3. Starting a Business**

Students learn the value of a business plan and the legal structures for a business. They also gain knowledge about business licenses and regulations.

#### **4. Business Operations**

Students identify human capital needs, get information about required taxes and intellectual property issues, learn about standard operating procedures and more.

## 5. Marketing and Sales

Students develop customer communications, and media and advertising strategies. They identify the characteristics of a successful sale, analyze the costs and benefits of finding customers, and learn how to build relationships with customers.

## 6. Financial Management

Students learn how to interpret basic financial statements, determine factors that influence the price to the customer, analyze cash flow, create a budget and identify the break-even point for a business.

Each of these subject areas prepares students for the skills they need to start a business and gives them a realistic view of the challenges. The program is designed to complement teachings in secondary and vocational schools and community and technical colleges. At the end of the program, students take the ESB exam to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in entrepreneurial and small business principles.<sup>11</sup> While the program helps with career-readiness, it also aids in college-readiness, especially for students who plan to complete their post-secondary education before they start a business.

ESB, which has been piloted and endorsed by the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE), an international organization that provides entrepreneurship training, is being taught in high schools across the country.

Haber says training like what ESB provides is critical to show young people that entrepreneurship is a worthwhile career path.

“It’s important for us to let young people know what their options are going forward,” he says. “You want to plant

the seed in a young person’s head that he or she could be a business owner, but there are specific skills and knowledge you need to run your own business, and that these are learnable, teachable things.”

## *Forging a Path for Students to Transform into Entrepreneurs*

Entrepreneurship fuels our economy — job growth in small businesses has outpaced growth in the corporate business sector, accounting for 64 percent of all net new jobs created in the last two decades.<sup>12</sup>

These numbers wouldn’t exist without millions of people willing to take a calculated risk and start their own business. Entrepreneurship comes with several uncertainties, but that doesn’t mean someone can’t prepare for it in the same way he or she prepares for a full-time career. It’s a valuable skill that students can learn, but it’s up to educators and schools to teach it.

Certification programs can complement these efforts, empower teachers with the framework they need to successfully teach entrepreneurship and give students the skills — and most importantly, the confidence — necessary to forge their own path in today’s workforce.

“When I was born, Microsoft didn’t exist. Apple didn’t exist. And Google — nobody had any idea what Google was — and those are some of the biggest companies in the world right now,” Haber says. “They are dominating our economy, and that’s because of the entrepreneurial spirit of a few people who created those opportunities.”

*This paper was produced by the Center for Digital Education Content Studio, with input from Certiport.*

### Endnotes

1. [https://www.sba.gov/sites/default/files/FAQ\\_Sept\\_2012.pdf](https://www.sba.gov/sites/default/files/FAQ_Sept_2012.pdf)
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