

Connecticut state universities to hold town meetings on educational future

By SCOTT WHIPPLE, Herald staff

A coalition of state universities will host an unprecedented series of four participatory town meetings during a two-week period. The series, "Education Now. Prosperity Tomorrow. Growing Connecticut's Future," will address the question: "Why is education important to Connecticut's future?"

Former TV anchor Ann Baldwin will moderate the series. She said the Connecticut State University System believes education is everybody's business, and that education is critical to the state's economy and quality of life.

"We want to focus public attention on this issue," she told The Herald.

A panel of experts will discuss Connecticut's long-term strength in terms of changes in demographics, the advance of technology and the unprecedented demands of global competition. If no action is taken to ensure the quality of education for Connecticut residents, the caliber of graduates entering the state's economy may suffer.

The town meetings to be held at Central, Eastern, Southern, and Western Connecticut State Universities and are free and open to the public. They are designed to stimulate discussion, while exploring connections between effective education, a sound economy and a vibrant state.

To highlight these connections, the meetings will open with a brief video featuring striking statistics framing the conversation and offering perspectives of Gov. M. Jodi Rell, Senate President Donald Williams, House Speaker James Amann, Aetna CEO Ronald Williams, Susan Rottner, president of Bank of America Connecticut, and Lena Rodriquez, president of the Community Renewal Team.

The meetings will be held from 6:45 to 8:15 p.m. and feature a different panel of business, education and community leaders at each location.

"Audience participation is critical," said Baldwin, who wants to engage the audience and panel in these vital discussions. "There is a need for this kind of dialogue. I hope people will be inspired to take action." Baldwin said the Connecticut Boards of Education put her name in the hat as moderator. "Because of my work with them this opportunity was presented to me," she said.

On Tuesday, CCSU will host a town meeting featuring a panel of experts in Vance Academic Center, Room 105. Following an introduction by Oz Griebel, CEO of Metro Hartford Alliance, Michael Meotti, commissioner of the state Department of Higher Education, will lead the discussion. Other panelists include Fernando Betancourt, executive director of the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission, David Fink, policy communications director of the Partnership for Strong Communities, Linda Kelly, president of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, and John Rathgeber, president and CEO of the Connecticut Business and Industry Association.