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## Learning executives feeling more confident in survey

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Confidence among learning executives in a first-quarter survey reached its highest level on record, according to the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD).

ASTD's confidence index for learning executives reached 61 in the first quarter of 2010, its highest level since the group launched the index in August 2008. ASTD is a professional organization for the training and development field.

The confidence index rose 0.8 points from the fourth quarter of 2009, and is up from 55.2 in the first quarter of 2009.

A score of 61 means learning executives in the survey believe learning functions at their organizations will improve slightly over the next six months, according to ASTD. The index was based on responses from 325 learning executives to an online, invitation-only survey.

The society's next confidence survey is due out in July.

As far as spending on learning goes, about half the executives said they expected expenditures on learning in their organizations to stay the same in the next six months. More than 23 percent predicted an increase in funding while 27 percent expected decreases.

Locally, Skaneateles Falls-based Welch Allyn is among those companies that have continued to invest in learn-

ing even in the recession, says Laura Georgianna, director for organization capability and development at the company. Welch Allyn, a manufacturer of medical devices, employs about 2,500 people, including 1,200 locally.

"We did have discussions with the leadership team about what should and shouldn't be on the table," Georgianna says. "The message was very clear that learning and development is critical to the future."

It's always easier to maintain learning initiatives when the organization is stable, she adds.

"We were not feeling as though we were hanging on by a thread," she says. "I'm sure if we had been in a different situation, we might have had to make a tougher call on some of those things."

Once a learning program ends, it can often be hard to start it back up again, Georgianna says. Reimbursements for degree programs are a great example.

Employees who decide to take advantage of those reimbursements often have to make major changes in their lives and schedules to squeeze in college classes. A pause in those tuition programs would get workers out of those habits and make it more likely that some of them would never finish their degrees, Georgianna says.

Learning initiatives also continued at Time Warner Cable (NYSE: TWC) during the recession, says Denise McGraw,

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senior director of learning and development for Time Warner Cable's Central New York operations.

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Three years ago, the company hired a chief learning officer, a move that helped create a strong focus on learning across the organization, McGraw says.

During the recession, the company has been developing more of its own training internally, rather than relying on outside partnerships. That has allowed the company to create the exact content it needs for employees, McGraw says.

At Time Warner the learning is heavily geared toward giving customers the best service possible. But McGraw adds it's also an important factor in employee retention.

"Employees want to develop and want to learn throughout their careers," she says. □

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