EDITORIAL

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Earlier this spring I attended the 2006 Math and Science Summit, sponsored by the office of Governor Matt Blunt of Missouri. The Summit brought together representatives from higher education, business and industry, the state department of education, state government, and Missouri public schools. The primary discussion topic of the conference centered on enhancing Missouri's capacity to be a leader in producing a diverse and high quality workforce known for its knowledge and expertise in the areas of mathematics, engineering, technology, and science (METS).

Based on information gathered from several national reports as well as data found in the Missouri Data Book, four strategic issues were identified relative to the overall focus of the Summit. These strategic issues/priority areas were: (1) Improving the performance of all Preschool through Graduate (P-20) level students; (2) Expanding the pool of students motivated to pursue METS careers; (3) Expanding the pool of Missouri's P-12 METS teachers; and (4) Increasing public awareness of the importance of METS-related industries and jobs in enhancing Missouri's global competitiveness and innovation.

National trends/data that relate to the focus of this conference include American students earning proportionately fewer degrees in METS than students in many other nations, U.S. bachelor degree production in METS has dropped or remained relatively flat for the past two decades, American students relatively poor performance on international assessments such as the Third International Math and Science Study, and the U.S. is increasingly relying more of foreign-born professionals in scientific and technical fields.

In Missouri, similar trends/data exist and, as in many states, preservice METS teacher production does not meet the demand for additional teachers. Thus, many local districts have increasingly relied on less experienced teachers and on those teachers with temporary or alternative certification.

During the Summit, participants were divided into small breakout groups and asked to make recommendations related to the four strategic issues identified earlier. Among the recommendations made by the breakout groups were:

1. Consideration be given to providing more mathematics and science teacher "specialists" at the elementary school level.
2. Incentives should be provided for middle grade and secondary students who perform above the proficient level on the mathematics and science portion of the state's assessment tests.

3. Begin actively "recruiting" students into METS related college majors/careers as early as middle school.
4. Provide monetary incentives (reduced or free tuition) and internships for students choosing METS related majors in college.
5. Provide monetary incentives (reduced or free tuition) for students choosing to be mathematics/science teachers.
6. Make differential salaries available for K-12 mathematics/science teachers.
7. Provide K-12 mathematics/science teachers with a state wide, coordinated, on-going professional development program.
8. Begin a comprehensive "public relations" effort to educate the public on the importance/potential of METS related careers.

Governor Blunt appointed a task force, made up of some of the participants from the Summit, to begin developing plans for implementing some of the recommendations made by the breakout groups. Since many of the recommendations will require significant paradigm shifts and/or expenditures, it will be interesting to see what support will be generated from the various constituent groups represented at the conference.