



The Missouri Chamber engages in effort to improve student achievement in math, engineering, technology, and science

At the 2006 Math and Science Summit, called by Gov. Matt Blunt, hundreds of business representatives, educators and education stakeholders came together to discuss one of the most pressing challenges facing our state - our children's education. The summit focused on a recent Missouri study that indicates that students, specifically in middle school and high school, are under-performing in the areas of math, engineering, technology and science (METS) compared with their peers in a variety of developed countries around the world.

"We are facing a challenge in education, and it is only through a collaborative effort among all integral partners that will achieve the results our children deserve," said Gov. Blunt. "Today we are giving shape to new ways to approach METS education in our state."

During the summit, Blunt tapped state and local government leaders, public and private schools, higher education institutions and Missouri businesses to work together toward improving student achievement. During a round table discussion with 20 business and education leaders, Blunt heard first hand how important this initiative is to Missouri employers.

"Our average employee age is 49 years old. We have 6,000 engineers in St. Louis and 25 percent could retire tomorrow. That is the kind of need we have," said Jim Young, representing The Boeing Company, St. Louis. "It is really a very serious situation and we are committed to helping develop that engineer or scientist of the future, not just for the Boeing Company, but for the entire state of Missouri."

It is not just a problem facing corporations in technical industries. Employers said that the problem impacts all spectrums of the workforce. Other employers cited difficulty finding entry-level workers that could pass a simple test involving use of fractions or the metric system.

"It's important not just for future mathematicians and future scientists," said Debra Patterson, representing Monsanto, St. Louis. "It is important if our children are going to be able to hold a good job and make a good living."

According to Greg Steinhoff, Director of the Missouri Department of Economic Development, this is the leading challenge facing economic development in Missouri. "Technology enables other countries to speed up the rate of change. They have made major commitments to advancing technology. They have made major commitments to fostering economic growth, entrepreneurship and innovation. It's time for us to wake up. It's time to challenge our citizenry and our students who are going to have to compete in a totally new economy."

A data book released at the summit demonstrates the importance of METS education. The data presented shows, among other things, that in Missouri:

- The strongest potential economic sectors are at the cutting edge of science and technology;
- Math skills matter in half of all occupations and science skills are important in a quarter of all occupations;
- The percentage of Missouri students rated proficient in math and science declines dramatically beyond the fourth grade;
- Although Missouri students score above the national average, less than half meet pre-college ACT benchmarks in algebra and biology;
- The supply of certified pre-service math and science teachers is widely dispersed and does not meet demand; and
- The commercialization of university research lags the state's economic development needs.

The governor's Math and Science Summit will be the starting point for the state's response to data demonstrating the potential to implement new ideas to position Missouri as a leader in our global economy.

For more information, or to receive a copy of the Making Missouri a National Leader in Mathematics, Engineering, Technology and Science - a Data Book for Gov. Blunt's Summit, contact Karen Buschmann, Missouri Chamber vice president of communications, at kbuschmann@mochamber.com, or by phone at 573.634.3511.