

October 19, 2005

The Honorable Phil Bredesen
State Capitol Building
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Governor Bredesen:

On behalf of The Tennessee Business Roundtable and the other business organizations who helped sponsor the CEO Summit on Math and Science Education, we would like to thank you for your support and being our keynote speaker. From all indicators, this conference was highly successful with 96% of the attendees indicating that they will encourage their business organizations to become more involved in the education challenges facing Tennessee.

The Education Summit focused on the belief of the business community that much can be done to improve Tennessee's college graduation rate of math and science professionals. More importantly, what can the business community do to help solve the problems?

During our audience participation session, we collected the opinions of our attendees on a wide variety of educational issues and these are the major points that we uncovered.

- A) 42% had a negative impression of Tennessee's public education system.
- B) 79% believe that K-12 is inadequately funded.
- C) 72% believe that state funding of higher education is inadequate.
- D) 86% support the need for a universal Pre-K Program.
- E) 96% believe that business has a major role to play in educating our K-12 students.

Respondents stated that the major barriers to improving schools in our state were inadequate funding, low standards/expectations for our

students and schools and lack of parental involvement. Following closely behind were the "lack of qualified teachers."

With respect to the math and science crisis in Tennessee:

- A) 96% believe that math & science fuel the state's economic engine.
- B) 91% believe Tennessee's high school graduates have insufficient math & science skills.
- C) 95% believe that math and science requirements should be increased.

When we asked our attendees how we can find ways to increase math and science students in Tennessee, they responded that more scholarships should be made available, teacher's salaries should be increased, signing bonuses could be provided and math and science professionals should be encouraged to enter the field.

The Tennessee Business Roundtable understands that the business community wants to play a role and is looking for leadership to face these challenges. It is time for business to become involved. The majority of our attendees are willing to fund additional scholarships or programs to attract teachers and provide support, financial and otherwise, for professional development programs.

A firm commitment to take action was announced at the conference by several companies. UT Battelle announced the establishment of \$250,000 to be made available to local school districts to attract math and science teachers. The Niswonger Foundation, along with several other businesses, registered and coordinated six additional teams which attended the 2005 School Improvement Conference in Washington DC in October.

The Tennessee Business Roundtable strongly believes that the State needs to take bold steps to accelerate progress to improve our public education systems and address the lack of a workforce with adequate math and science skills. We believe the future of Tennessee's economy

is directly tied to the health and performance of our public education systems. Without a better-educated workforce, we cannot expect to attract the high tech industries of tomorrow.

Governor Bredesen, we would like to work with your administration to:

- A) Significantly increase the state's college graduation rates, with a particular emphasis on math and science.
- B) Increase the education expectations and requirements for our students and schools.
- C) Increase the professional stature and effectiveness of all teachers.

The Tennessee Business Roundtable has formulated a draft "Call To Action" plan setting forth a suggested road map for making this happen. This is a bold and aggressive plan and not simple to implement. There are no easy solutions and we will need the support of the business community, education leaders and policy makers.

We suggest that this draft be used to focus attention on education and to build partnerships to move forward with a highly visible initiative that will better prepare our students to meet the challenges of the world global economy.

We would be happy to discuss this proposal with you and your staff. We look forward to a continuing dialogue and working with you regarding the business community becoming more engaged in improving education in Tennessee.

Very Truly Yours,

William A. (Tinker) Kelly,
TBR President