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## IOWA NEEDS VISIONARY LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION

*By Elliott Smith - Executive Director, Iowa Business Council*

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., Aristotle said, “The fate of empires depends on the education of youth.” Today, more than ever, education is the key determinant of who will best succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when technology dominates as never before.

The State of Iowa is seeking new leadership for the Department of Education (DoE), following the recent announcement by current director Judy Jeffrey of her retirement.

It is difficult to discuss the concept of economic development without recognizing its critical dependence on a rigorous education system. The new “typical worker” will be asked to competently apply basic math, reading, and science skills in ever-more creative and innovative business environments. The proficiency of educators to stimulate and engage the interest of students in these areas will determine the extent to which Iowa’s economy continues to grow and compete in the world marketplace.

During Ms. Jeffrey’s tenure, the DoE has engaged leaders in business, government, education, and communities around Iowa to encourage and promote the implementation of an innovative core curriculum. The Iowa Business Council (IBC) has collaborated with the Department and other State agencies to identify methods of outreach and secure sustainable resources for motivating students to participate in broadly-based courses of study, ones that evidence exceptional promise for children in Iowa’s education system as well as the long-term vitality of business in the state.

The Iowa Business Council urges Governor Culver to appoint a new director for DoE who possesses a visionary strategy that promises bold strokes, one that is not wed to the norms of the past. IBC believes:

— **Our children and young adults must be prepared for the demands of today’s global society**, engaged with an innovative and vibrant preK-16 education system that:

- spurs student achievement in key subject areas like math, science, reading, problem solving, creative thinking, team building, cultural awareness, foreign languages, financial literacy, physical and nutrition education, and the arts;
- incorporates the latest best practices and current technologies;
- drives administrative efficiency throughout the system;

*-more-*

- promotes excellence and ethics in all aspects of performance and moral character, such as health and wellness, effort, diligence, work ethic, positive attitude, self-discipline, honesty, respect, dependability, and integrity;

- encourages and facilitates professional development for teachers and merit-based assessment of their performance; and,
- enhances a meaningful lifelong learning experience for all Iowans.

— **To be most effective, the academic opportunities for the flow of students between Iowa's secondary and post-secondary school systems need to be as seamless as possible.** It is essential to have healthy, aggressive, and accessible post-secondary institutions that offer advanced learning opportunities to high schools.

— **Sustainable funding resources for other value-added areas are needed,** such as increasing teacher compensation, managing student tuition costs, and making certified early childhood education available for all children.

While statistics might indicate varying degrees of progress related to education reform, too often we tenaciously cling to yesterday's political and social structures at the expense of pursuing strategies that promote needed fundamental change.

This state owes much of its current stature to the investment of human and financial resources made by past generations. Going forward, our obligation is to renew those commitments in education, research, and innovation. This will ensure that Iowans continue to benefit from the remarkable opportunities offered by the global economy and its considerable underpinning in technology.

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