

**State Chamber Legislative Committee
Bismarck, North Dakota
February 28, 2008**

The 2006 P-16 Education Task Force, comprised of 38 individuals representing ND Education, Business, Industry and Labor leaders from across the state, conducted significant research and study to determine whether the State of ND is poised to respond to critical workforce needs now and in the future. Eight of the individuals were appointed by the state chamber to represent the private sector, one from each of the 8 chamber regions. I am happy to note that a number of those individuals are participating in person or on the phone.

Many of the recommendations made by the ETF to the ND Joint Boards of Education in the fall of 2006 are addressed in my remarks. I am also providing you with a document “A Call for Leadership and Action,” a publication developed by my staff in January of 2007 highlighting educational strengths and weaknesses in North Dakota.

(Point to significant findings in the document) (pages 2 & 4 indicates student well being)

We know that ND students receive a quality education – we’re in the top 15 percentile in the entire country for high school graduation – we rate in the top 3 states in the number of students entering college – and our students continue to test above the national average in ACT

scores, but there is still work to be done. We are faced with demographic challenges and opportunities, teacher shortages, and lack of college preparedness. It is imperative that all ND education partners, including the private sector, work together to provide high-quality education that helps business and policy makers respond to current and future workforce needs. Employers expect high school graduates to be proficient in communications, to be able to demonstrate writing skills, interpersonal skills, analysis, problem solving, teamwork, critical thinking and decision-making.

Although our state currently boasts a low unemployment rate, rapid economic growth has caused a labor pinch. Representatives from all facets of the economy express concerns about workforce shortages due to the impending high number of baby boomer retirements. To be prepared for 21st Century jobs, ALL of our students – whether entering post-secondary or work force bound – must master skills in reading, writing, math and technology.

A lowered birthrate and out-migration, as well as a rural to urban population shift, are all driving ND to a crisis point. Economic prosperity is defined by demographics. If we are to position ourselves to

meet critical work force needs, our students must graduate from high school ready to do college work or enter the workforce. And by the way, the P-16 Education Task Force concluded that preparation for work in high school is no different than preparation for college –today’s workplace requires the same knowledge, skills and abilities as preparation for college. Because of the urgent need for workers, we need to ensure that all of our students are productive members of society. Non-graduates represent a tremendous waste of human potential and productivity. We must make sure that all students have classes that are interesting and relevant. Many of the better paying, entry level jobs in ND industries do not require a four-year degree. We need welders, electricians, plant operators, computer technicians, miners – and so on. Not all of these jobs require four year or advanced degrees. We need to do a better job of informing our students and their parents.

States with an educated populace are better positioned to attract new business investment. Graduates themselves, on average, earn higher wages and enjoy more comfortable and secure lifestyles.

Lower wages result in more cost to the state for social programs and the loss of potential tax revenue.

Along with all the other concerns, we are being faced with a continued teacher shortage. Our teachers, who we often say are the most important people – next to their parents - in the lives of our children, receive salaries that rank 50th in the nation. Funding for all job sectors must be at the top of our agenda. We have made some progress, but we can do better – especially considering our positive economic outlook.

We must plan for a quality education that is adequately funded. It must be available to all, and must address the need to be competitive in the global marketplace. Funding priorities for this upcoming legislative session should include provisions for academic and career counseling to help students:

***Advance their academic achievement by linking classroom studies to future choices**

***Achieve skills they will need to transition successfully to post-secondary education and work**

***Develop skills needed to make informed decisions
throughout life**

***We must form a P-16 Education Roundtable, much like the State of Indiana did to develop and implement a more meaningful high school diploma to effectively transition students into the workforce and higher education. Indiana’s 1999 bill identified the membership of the Roundtable as follows: “A number of members appointed jointly by the governor and the superintendent of public instruction. These members must be representatives of:**

(A) business and community leaders

**(B) elementary and secondary education, including special
education; and**

(C) higher education.

The number of members appointed under clause (A) must be equal to the number of members appointed under clauses (B and (C) ...”

The Roundtable’s mission would further assure a full continuum of educational services, including the alignment of all education (P-16) systems, study the adequacy of high school curricula, establish uniform

minimum higher education entrance requirements, and contribute to developing and attracting the human capital needed to meet ND's economic and workforce needs.

***The legislature charged ITD to study the creation of a statewide student data warehouse and to present their recommendation to the next legislative assembly. Stakeholders, including the Department, are currently studying the feasibility of such a project and we support the establishment of a data warehouse.**

***We need to support funding for a uniform state student focused electronic transcript initiative. We agree with Higher Ed that it should be funded by the Bank of North Dakota and put in place prior to the next legislative session – or several different systems may be initiated by various universities.**

***We need to increase funding for our ND Regional Education Agencies. REAs were born as the result of a grass root's effort of many school districts and could play an important part in the delivery of educational services to rural ND communities. Currently there are 9 Regional Education Agencies in place. They, with guidance from local school boards, have defined their own mission.**

Matching education with workforce needs is the key if we are to generate the pipeline of workers for future growth in target industries - education, agricultural science, business, communications, computer sciences and health. ND's energy and value-added agriculture industries are especially well positioned for future growth due to the number of highly skilled scientific and technical fields within agriculture. Current ACT (2007) scores indicate that ND students are not sufficiently prepared in math and science to adequately respond to critical shortages projected in the fields of health care and information technology.

ND's education partners are working together to align state systems and policies to ensure individual and statewide prosperity.

***We are committed to strengthening postsecondary community and technical college programs to help more adult students and low-wage, low-skill workers access academic and non-credit workforce training programs that support occupational programs and increase the supply of workers needed to meet workforce needs.**

***We are working collaboratively to improve our response to the state workforce needs by better identifying and communicating labor market opportunities to parents and students.**

***We are developing informational documents to help meet one of the biggest challenges identified by the P-16 ETF – notifying the public of educational concerns. They do not recognize the need.**

***Higher Ed is studying ways for their faculty to interact with students to help influence career choices.**

***The Federal government is financing scholarship initiatives and academic competitiveness grants in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics based on increased rigor.**

Finally, recruitment and retention of workers is critical if we are to attract and keep young people in our state. North Dakota wages, at every level of business/financial operations and computer/mathematical occupations are significantly below national levels. Minnesota offers high-wage opportunities with annual earnings in excess of \$10,000 over ND's average earnings.

YOU – and your statewide chamber network are an integral part of this equation. You MUST be a part of the solution.

Before I close, I would like to share with you progress towards the top 8 of the 26 recommendations made by the P-16 Education Task Force to the Governor's Education Commission.

Linking ETF Strategies with Legislative Action

(Top 8 recommendations in order of priority)

1. Graduation/Admission Requirements

2309 – Increase Graduation Requirements to 22 by 2009-10 school year.
Increase Graduation Requirements to 24 by 2011-12 school year.

2. Ensuring Proficiency – creative and innovative solutions

2013 – DPI Budget: \$1,000,000 to districts participating in educational associations
1019 – Career and Ed Tech – fund 2 new centers for career and technology to be governed by joint powers; increase cost sharing incentives for cooperative delivery efforts
2030 – Establishment of educational associations with JPA agreements

3. Data and Evaluation

1021 –(3) ITD provides for a statewide student longitudinal data system and appoints a state committee – *this is needed so the system can communicate and track individuals*

4. Alignment Commission

2030 proposes a study of HS curricula with respect to preparing students for higher education and work. *The study was adopted by legislative council.*
2200 Provides for a commission on education improvement to address education adequacy and school financing; *The commission needs to have private sector representation*

5. Full Day Kindergarten at Age 6

2200 – Defines a full day of instruction for K-12 Students
2030 – School Board may establish a pre-kindergarten program and receive and expend funds specifically appropriated for that purpose – *cannot expend general funds for this purpose – we are working to change this.*

6. Core Areas

2354 – defines requirements for ½ credit of physical education
1172 – requires schools to offer instruction in ND studies in grades 4 and 8

7. Increased student-teacher Contact Days – NO ACTION

We are willing to listen on how to increase time – either through longer days, more days, less holidays, etc.

8. Additional Units

2309 – Beginning with 2008-09 school year, units required for graduation include:
4 Units, English Language Arts
2 Units Math
2 Units Science
3 Units Social Studies (may include ½ unit ND studies & ½ multi-cultural
1 Unit physical education may include up to ½ health
1 Unit foreign language, fine arts or career & tech ed

This is a good starting point as it is now in state policy – a huge step forward!

The legislature also provided for teacher mentoring programs and professional development, and funding to study education adequacy. Many of the other recommendations were not addressed legislatively .