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### Commissioner's Comment

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# COMMISSIONER'S COMMENT

Lee Droegemueller

Commissioner of Education, Kansas Department of Education

This issue of *Educational Considerations* is devoted to the topic of Partnerships in Public Schools. While the bulk of the articles address a critical and expanding area of importance through public school/university collaboration, there is another area in partnerships with business organizations which should be noted in the multiplicity of opportunities for productive school alliances.

American business has a long tradition of involvement in the public schools. However, much of that involvement has been on a specific case or project basis, such as business leaders serving on school boards, businesses participating in cooperative education programs, and businesses providing student internships. In recent years, the business world has realized a more definitive role in helping schools support and maintain quality education through business-education partnerships.

According to the Research and Policy Committee for Economic Development, business-education partnerships are difficult to establish and maintain due to the required relationships between dissimilar organizations and the identification of shared and agreed-upon goals. Because schools and businesses greatly differ in the way in which people work and how work gets done, collaborative efforts must take these differences into account to avoid a collision between the school and business culture. Both the school system and the business should enter into their collaboration only after a careful process of identifying goals and strategies, the ways in which these could be carried out, and expected results.

However, the Committee for Economic Development forewarns that compatible goals and strategies are often not enough. To ensure proper communications and exchange, a linking structure may be needed. Intermediary or linking institutions, such as business-related organizations or colleges and universities, can assist in forming partnerships that would not be possible for individual businesses acting independently. For example, a commitment made to guarantee a specified number of jobs for graduating students who meet agreed-upon academic standards would probably not be made by a small business acting alone.

Although the use of an intermediary organization facilitates communication, exchange, and feedback, the role of individuals in forming partnerships should not be forgotten. Partnerships are for people, not institutions. The commitment and perseverance of the individuals involved in the partnership are the main ingredients for success.

In reviewing the successful partnerships included in this issue of *Educational Considerations*, different partnerships with different objectives appear to have basic characteristics. These are similar to the partnership characteristics included in the Committee for Economic Development and Research report *Investing in Our Children: Business and the Public Schools*, and Larry and Virginia Decker's *Home/School/Community Involvement*.

- + Specific, mutually agreed-upon goals and objectives. Each partner knows what the other has to offer and has a realistic view of what might be accomplished.
- + One or more of the following specific objectives: employability, curriculum and skill development, and management and leadership.
- + Leverage of both financial and human resources.

Partnerships represent a leading edge of the future. Partnerships between schools, universities, and business offer myriad opportunities for success. Additionally business has much to gain from its partnerships with education. The schools are the central institution for developing human resources needed in the work place. On the other hand, a firm commitment to education from business can strengthen the schools' performance and accountability. The challenge for members in partnership efforts is to move forward together in pursuit of their shared goals and common interest in the future.