

Business Teams With Local Schools To Bolster Classroom Performance

(NAPSA)—Some companies are making it their business to improve classroom performance.

The inspiration for this effort started 20 years ago when a federal government task force startled Americans with a report that uncovered “a rising tide of mediocrity” spreading through schools.

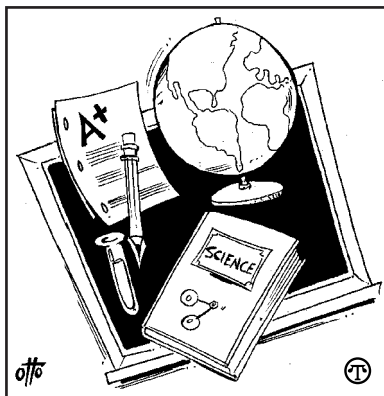
In the two decades since the report was released, concerns have grown. According to the U.S. Department of Education, performance has not improved and recent performances by secondary school students in math and science exams have been poor.

One response to this alarming trend is a growing involvement of corporate America.

“One thing we learned from the technology boom of the '90s is that the job market of the future will demand highly skilled workers with a strong foundation in math and science,” says Dr. Carl Van Horn, director of the John Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University.

Companies that depend on research and development—the pharmaceutical and biotechnology sectors, the aerospace and defense industry, software and telecommunications companies—all rely on highly educated scientists and well-trained technology workers.

“Where will we be in 10 or 20 year if the pool of scientists is shrinking?” asks Van Horn. “Scientists and technology-driven companies and institutions need to draw upon a vast pool of highly trained people if they are going to



School performance has been improved, thanks to professional development programs for teachers.

be able to continue developing new products like medicines to treat illnesses such as cancer, AIDS and Alzheimer's disease.”

Some companies have embarked on partnerships with local school districts and educational reform initiatives to help make science education a priority.

Merck & Co., Inc., a leading pharmaceutical company that invests nearly \$3 billion annually in the search for new cures, took the lead nearly 10 years ago.

Beginning in 1993, Merck established the Merck Institute for Science Education (MISE) with a 10 year commitment and a \$20 million grant.

Throughout the past decade, MISE partnered with school districts in communities surrounding some of Merck's largest facilities. The goal has been to improve participation and performance in sci-

ence for students in kindergarten through the eighth grade.

“We wanted to create a classroom environment where students learn about science in much the same way scientists learn about the natural world—through inquiry and experimentation,” said MISE director Dr. Carlo Parravano.

Realizing that creative and enthusiastic teachers are the key to improving classrooms, MISE created a program that offered professional development to all teachers in its partner districts.

To date, about 2000 teachers have benefited from the MISE program and it has positively affected student performance.

“I'm pleased that we've been able to show results,” said Parravano. “An analysis of student performance on standardized tests revealed that when teachers participate in professional development through MISE, their students outperform those whose teachers had not had the opportunity to participate in MISE professional development programs.”

Bolstered by the results, companies such as Merck are not pulling back on their commitment to education—even in uncertain economic times.

“With 10 years of experience under our belt and having made a difference in school performance, we're not looking to pack up and go home—we're expanding MISE, so that we can reach more children in more grade levels—up to high school now—and through a greater number of school districts,” said Parravano.