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A Shared Responsibility

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A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

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Last summer several leaders in business, government and education recognized the importance of quality science and mathematics for Iowans. Further they recognized that, to quote Ernest Boyer, "In many high schools in America, mediocrity and excellence walk hand in hand." They felt confident that Boyer's observation also was true for K-12 science and mathematics in Iowa.

The planning committee for the Iowa Alliance for Science began its work with two thoughts in mind: (1) the importance of science and mathematics and (2) the recognition of excellence presently in our schools. Borrowing the 4-H club motto, "To make the best better," it determined to make our state a mecca for educational excellence.

Governor Branstad and his office have been involved in the Iowa Alliance for Science project since its inception in February 1986. Leadership was provided by senior staff members from three leading Iowa industries, Midwest Energy Company, Rockwell International and Pioneer Hi-Bred International, and faculty from the Des Moines Independent Community School District and Iowa State University.

The planning committee consulted literature and national experts before concluding that an alliance would most efficiently utilize available Iowa talent. Such an alliance is a consortium of organizations and individuals representing businesses, industries, schools, institutions of higher education, professional societies, government agencies, research laboratories, community groups and individuals, committed to improving the quality and quantity of instruction in science, technology, mathematics and related fields from K-12.

To determine if the creation of an Iowa Alliance for Science was acceptable, Iowa leaders representing businesses and industries, professional associations, colleges and universities, teachers, administrators and supervisors, government agencies and community groups were invited to participate in the February 27, 1987, Governor's Conference for Science, Mathematics and Technology Education. Over 150 leaders in these seven categories attended and provided input for the creation of an Iowa Alliance for Science.

Debate was conducted in groups of 10 or 11 individuals, with each group being a microcosm of the conference population. Leaders for the 13 discussion groups represented private colleges, public universities, professional societies, schools, area education agencies, businesses and government agencies. Small group data were collected and interpreted by this broad-based group of leaders.

The following recommendations were made by those present.

- An Iowa Alliance for Science, independent of any other organization, should be created to focus broad community interest and support on the improvement of science, mathematics and technology education.

- The Iowa Alliance for Science should be built upon grass roots input at the council level with interaction among councils at the steering committee level. Councils and the steering committee must maintain diverse membership.
- Local alliances should be the focal point of activity with the Iowa Alliance for Science providing support through models and local leadership development activities.
- Funding for local alliance and Iowa Alliance for Science activities should be from business, industry, local and state government, foundations and grants.
- The Iowa Alliance for Science should support the many good aspects of our educational system as well as assist in the improvement of other aspects.
- The Iowa Alliance for Science should focus on determining the needs and expectations of its constituency groups and in seeking consensus of expectations.
- The Iowa Alliance for Science should help to form a state-wide data base of available resources in science, mathematics and technology education.

One anticipated result of this conference is the encouragement of activities by partnerships between businesses, industries, school systems, area education agencies, colleges, universities and government agencies to demonstrate ways in which community concerns can be translated into positive action to improve the quality of science, mathematics, and technology education in our elementary and secondary schools.

Since the April 26, 1983, report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, Iowa has advanced with caution. The time to take a big step forward is now. This conference is a public statement that Iowa plans to make significant progress in K-12 mathematics and science education in the years ahead.