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This year marks the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Parkersburg Community Foundation. I look at anniversaries as those junctures where we reflect on the past, take stock of the present, and plan for the future.

When I think about where we were 45 years ago, I recall the Cold War with the Soviet Union. Five years earlier, the Russians launched Sputnik and America came to the rude awakening that we were not the world leaders in science. This prompted President Kennedy to call for the U.S. to land a man on the moon in 10 years, and the space race was on. What ensued in the educational system was a great surge to prepare more and better qualified scientists and engineers. We became the world leader in technology.

Somehow, in the following decades, we lost our place and other countries moved ahead. The rankings are sobering:

- In 2005, U.S. 8<sup>th</sup> graders scored 12<sup>th</sup> in the International Math and Science Study, behind countries including Singapore, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and Hong Kong.
- The U.S. ranked 24<sup>th</sup> out of 40 countries whose 15-year olds participated in a 2003 Program for International Student Assessment exam, which evaluates students' ability to apply math concepts to real-world problems.
- In South Korea, 38% of all undergraduates receive their degrees in natural science or engineering. In France, its 47%; in China 50%; in Singapore, 67%. In the U.S., the number is 15%.
- In 2000, 93% of students in grades 5 –9 were taught physical science by a teacher lacking a major or certification in the physical sciences (chemistry, geology, general science, or physics).
- The U.S. is today a net importer of high-technology products. Its trade balance in high-tech manufactured goods shifted from plus \$54 billion in 1990 to negative \$50 billion in 2001.

Last year, the National Academies released *Rising Above the Gathering Storm*, which made it clear that America's position in the global economy is threatened by the failure of our education system. This report, along with such prominent publications as Tom Friedman's *The World is Flat*, has challenged educators to improve in math, science, technology and engineering.

I see very progressive steps in response to this challenge here in West Virginia, and particularly here in Wood County.

West Virginia became the second state in the country to join the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills. This national effort was created by a consortium on national technology companies, such as Microsoft, Cisco, and Adobe. These companies identified a set of skills that students will need in today's workplace. In addition to content knowledge in core subjects, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills include: critical thinking, communications, creativity, contextual learning, and technology literacy. The West Virginia Department of Education has incorporated these skills into a rigorous set of standards that the teachers of this State must address. This is a daunting task, but it is necessary. I applaud Superintendent Steve Paine and the West Virginia Board of Education for taking this bold step.

But I also want to comment on what I see right here in Parkersburg. After all, local communities are best suited to address local needs, and what happens every day in the classroom determines the quality of education.

There is a national certification of K-12 teachers sponsored by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. It is the gold standard of recognized quality teaching. It takes several years for teachers to work on National Board Certification, and most do not complete the process. Wood County Schools has 1/3 of the State's National Board Certified teachers. That is a powerful statistic and reflects the seriousness with which this community takes the education of its young people.

There is another noteworthy local example of progressive education; one that reflects the collaboration of Wood County Schools and West Virginia University-Parkersburg. It is the Caperton Center. This facility serves as a shared secondary-level career & technology program and a community college. This collocation is critical for a very basic reason: The high school diploma can no longer be considered a terminal degree. Most of the jobs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will require some form of post-secondary certification, associate's degree or bachelor's degree. For too long, career and technical schools were seen as places for students who were not going to college. That is a luxury today's workplace will no longer provide. The Caperton Center is a model of the seamless education of high school career education that prepares and moves students into post-secondary learning. In my mind, it is a model for the future of career and technical education.

These programs demonstrate the commitment and leadership of the educational community, and I applaud your hard work, but preparing our young people to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy is everyone's responsibility:

- Parents must value education. What was adequate for us is no longer adequate for our children. We must understand the importance of rigor in education, encourage our children to apply themselves in school, and we must demand high standards from our public schools.
- Businesses must show young people the opportunities before them. New careers are emerging all the time, and young people don't fully understand the choices they have. Local businesses can demonstrate career opportunities and provide incentives for young people to strive in school. After all, employers have a stake in the preparation of their future employees.
- School boards must get behind rigor. They are the citizens with the authority to ensure high standards of education. As I mentioned before, the West Virginia Department of Education's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills initiative is bold. It is demanding and not without its critics. I urge local school boards to provide the resources necessary to see this plan succeed. Anything less will only hurt our students.

In closing, I would like to reiterate the opportunity for reflection and future visioning that an anniversary such as this affords. I compliment you on the fine work you have done to provide a quality education to the next generation. I challenge you to stay diligent.