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AS A NATIONAL INFLUENCE IN EDUCATION

Raymond J. Johnson

Recently, a group of educational representatives of state aeronautics agencies within the Great Lakes Region met to discuss the current state of aviation/space education and to identify the trends and issues of the 90s. The following views incorporate the conclusions of this group.

There is decidedly academic merit in aviation/space education. It generates student motivation and provides sound knowledge-based skills necessary for success in the work place of the 90s. These characteristics are verified by the many outstanding examples of classroom activities and all-school programs throughout our nation. It should be noted that these fine efforts tend to be quite localized rather than involving an entire school system or other large scale programs.

Many states have a formal council, committee, or teacher association to encourage and support these aviation/space education activities. Most of these organizations, even when under the auspices of state agencies, are largely dependent upon volunteer resources. They are struggling to promote the expansion of aviation/space education. This is not to negate the fact that many states, as well as federal agencies and industry, provide direct support for and assistance to interested teachers and schools.

The primary issue or concern at the state level is how to establish the legitimacy of aviation/space education as a proper inclusion in any school's curriculum, even if it is viewed as a special interest topic. The timely challenge clearly requires a shift from the existing pattern of individual successes to the larger arena of national acceptance.

The academic quality of the graduates of our education system is being generally criticized in many articles and in the media. The single most crucial focal point appears to be that a significant percentage of graduating high school students are failing to meet the emerging demands of business and industry in terms of adequate academic skills. A critical shortage of qualified workers is forecast for the decade of the 90s.

education leaders when responding to the serious societal issues facing our schools clearly reinforces the premise that aviation/space education does not have a high priority in their thinking.

It is believed that significant progress in expanding the scope of aviation/space education can be achieved if active communication and interaction with the leaders of the major professional education associations could be established. This interaction could greatly assist in bringing about the desired understanding of the potential contribution that aviation/space education could make to the school curriculum. This relationship could lead to national channels of communication that effectively reach most educators and perhaps provide some access to organizational resources not now available to our field.

These new relationships would also serve to create a more effective basis for direct dialogue with national and state leaders who are charged with the resolution of the major education issues.

One further step that appears feasible is to convene a national executive forum. The objective would be to merge the identified needs of education and those of the aerospace industry with the trends of society to develop specific goals and priorities for aviation/space education. Once this is accomplished, an implementing consortium could be formed. This group would be charged to develop strategies by which most schools and their adult communities could be effectively encouraged to become involved with aviation/space education.

Consideration of the widespread adoption of aviation/space education will also require a major commitment from the aerospace industry. Tangible support must be consistent with specific agreed upon goals.

Obviously, the burden of initiating these major moves must fall to those who have national leadership role. The mantle of responsibility also must include an active supporting role for the individuals and organizations now committed to the advancement of this field of education.

Aviation/space education can and should be a significant influence in our society as it becomes increasingly global.