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Elevating education

E3 Summit aims to bolster Colorado's economy by improving schooling through business partnerships

By Jerry Wartgow and Monica Pleiman

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The recent decision by Toyota Motor Corp. to locate a new auto plant in Ontario, Canada, highlights a critical link between education and the economy. While undoubtedly many factors influenced Toyota's location decision, *The New York Times* reported that Toyota's No. 1 reason was "the quality of Ontario's work force." This is especially noteworthy given that Toyota was heavily courted by several U.S. cities.

Survey after survey highlights the fact that business decisions about where to locate often hinge on the quality and availability of skilled workers. A recent report prepared by legislative staff for the Colorado General Assembly's Interim Committee on Economic Development cited highly skilled labor as the top factor for company relocation decisions.

A soon-to-be-released survey finds overwhelming agreement that "a quality public education system is critical to Colorado's future economic growth." The survey was funded by the Donnell-Kay and Rose Community foundations and conducted by the bipartisan research team of Talmey-Drake Research & Strategy and Public Opinion Strategies. It also revealed the public's belief that one of the most important ways to improve the long-term health of the economy is to strengthen the quality of education from preschool through college.

As Toyota's plant location decision highlights, businesses increasingly demand an educated work force in this global economy. That is why it is time for Colorado businesses to take a lead role in guiding and supporting the state's education system to bolster Colorado's economy.

Not only does it make business sense, but it's common sense. A highly educated population increases earnings, lowers poverty, unemployment and crime rates, and improves the quality of life for everyone.

On Sept. 19, Colorado business, education and community leaders will gather in Denver to participate in the Education to Elevate Colorado's Economy Summit. Although education has many purposes, the E3 Summit will focus on ways to prepare today's students to thrive in the jobs of tomorrow. The E3 Summit's goals include:

- Deepening the understanding of the link between education and the economy.

- Identifying shared goals and priorities for advancing education (early childhood through higher education).
- Creating a business-led partnership to make a positive impact on Colorado's education policies and practices.

Co-chairing the summit are top leaders representing many of Colorado's largest employers and most innovative businesses: Amgen, Ball Aerospace, First Data Corp., Frontier Airlines, Level 3, Lockheed Martin, Optimum Management Systems and Raytheon.

Pulling together business leaders with this level of experience, ingenuity and brainpower will generate new ideas and collaborative action to move our schools forward. By participating, these companies have reaffirmed their commitment to Colorado and its children.

Leadership and insight about the importance of this effort will be shared by the E3 Summit's featured guests, former U.S. Sen. Hank Brown (now president of the University of Colorado), Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper and U.S. Rep. Mark Udall. Together, they demonstrate that this effort rises above partisanship.

The summit will be the launching point for a new business-led initiative with education and community leaders to make an impact on Colorado's education policies and practices.

The goals and ideas generated at the summit will serve as a road map for this initiative.

We cannot allow Colorado to fall behind North Carolina, Georgia, California and other states that have been highly successful in their efforts to engage corporate leaders in the "business" of delivering a top-notch education. With our state's unique resources, diverse array of business expertise, and deep talent pool, Colorado should be leading this effort. And with this commitment from business leaders across the state, we soon can be.

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