

March 7, 2010

Fellow Ames citizens and Board members of the Ames Community School District,

I am the coordinator of the Educational Administration program at Iowa State University and the director of the nation's only center focused on preparing technology-savvy school leaders. I also am a parent with three children in the school district. With the pending departure of Dr. Beyea and Mr. McGrory, you have the chance to hire both a superintendent and a high school principal that share a new vision for P-12 schooling. I sincerely hope that you will avail yourself of this unique opportunity.

The economic imperative

We currently are living in times of exponential change. Not only have digital technologies radically transformed how we conduct our professional and personal lives, they also are destroying entire segments of our society. Non-location-dependent manual labor jobs are increasingly *offshored* to the developing world, coordinated through technology-suffused global supply chains. Many service jobs also are increasingly *fungible*, able to be located anywhere in the world that has an Internet connection. The next two decades will see many complex service jobs broken up into component parts, much as we did in previous decades for manufacturing work. Once these tasks are disaggregated, they will be done by lower-skilled workers who can do these discrete components of the overall work, facilitated by software. In other words, many high-paying service jobs will turn into *globalized piece work*. Since the service professions represent 60% of our nation's economy, the impacts of this are going to be quite significant. Our school system must prepare graduates for our new economic reality.

The educational imperative

We are creating a new information landscape for ourselves, something that we have not done as a society in centuries. The printing press removed third-party intermediaries (the king's messenger, the priest) between average citizens and *access* to information. This new revolution is disintermediating the *creation* of information, allowing us all to be content creators, not just recipients.

We no longer live in an information push-out world where we passively receive information that is broadcast out to us by large entities. We all now can have a voice. We all now can be publishers. We all now can find each other's thoughts and ideas and share, cooperate, collaborate, and take collective action. Time and geography are no longer barriers to working together. This too is destroying entire segments of our society.

Long-existing barriers to *learning* also are disappearing. We now have the ability to learn anything from anyone, at any time, anywhere. Our informal learning is exploding. Formal learning institutions are scrambling to reinvent themselves for the new digital paradigm. Our school system must prepare graduates who are masters of our new information landscape.

The status quo no longer suffices

We are blessed to live in a community whose families possess a tremendous amount of intellectual and social capital. We have a community that understands science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) issues like no other in the state. Our community is not just globally-aware but globally-savvy, with international experience and understanding rarely found outside of large cities. We have a community that deeply cares about its children's education. These are powerful assets, but we cannot afford to be complacent. *The status quo no longer suffices.*

The technological and information revolutions that now are occurring are upending *everything*. Our society is being reshaped in significant ways, and the process is just getting started as digital tools and environments continue to advance at a rapid pace. Every information-oriented societal sector - journalism, banking, medicine, politics, travel agencies, music, higher education, television, and real estate, just to name a few - are finding that transformative reinvention is the cost of survival in our current climate. Schools shouldn't expect that they somehow will be immune from the same changes that are radically altering other information-oriented societal sectors. We can't continue to pretend that these revolutions aren't going to affect us too, in compelling and as-yet-unknown ways.

Dr. Tony Wagner, Harvard University, notes that there are two achievement gaps in this country. The first is the gap between the educational experiences of middle-class children and those of most poor and minority children. The second gap is that between *what even our very best schools are teaching and testing* versus what all students will need to be successful in today's globally-interconnected, technology-suffused, information economy. The new educational paradigm requires an emphasis on critical thinking, collaborative problem-solving, creativity and innovation, information fluency and media literacy, data synthesis and analysis, and the applied use of many other higher-level cognitive skills, *much more frequently* than we currently are doing in our classrooms.

Our students and schools have a tremendous track record of academic success here in Ames. We have many things of which to be rightfully proud. But the second *global achievement gap* that Dr. Wagner so aptly describes will increasingly be an issue for our schools and our community if we do not transition from a system in which student success is judged by mastery

of lower-level cognitive work to one that emphasizes to a much greater degree the skills of higher-level thinking and real-world application.

Future-oriented leadership

The Board has an opportunity this year to fill two critical positions with educators who understand the new landscape that I have described above, who may even have a track record of success at preparing students for the demands of the next half century. The Ames Community Schools already are an exemplar for many of the state's school districts. Given the tremendous assets that we have in this community, with the right leadership we not only could do what's right by our kids but also be an exemplar for the nation and the world. I am hopeful that you will see this hiring opportunity for what it is and act accordingly.

If you are interested, you may view my presentation to the National Education Association Board of Directors on this topic at www.3dwriting.com/mcleod. My presentation to the Dubuque School Board is available at <http://bit.ly/c3NnNt>. I also would be happy to talk further with the Board about this at any time.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Scott McLeod". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font. The "S" is large and loops around the "c" in "Scott". The "McLeod" part is written in a similar cursive style.

Scott McLeod, J.D., Ph.D.

dangerouslyirrelevant.org/bio.html

dangerouslyirrelevant.org/contact.html