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## Guest Editorial

# Industry Must Help Students Envision the Future



**A**s a professional in the chemical industry, you've probably never considered the impact this sector can have on the educational success of students in this country. And you may not have considered that even though the chemical industry's output will grow over the course of the next decade, a recent U.S. Dept. of Labor report offers a glimpse at a radically different job market for future chemical workers. Overall, employment in the chemical and allied products industry is expected to drop nearly 4% by 2010, and at the same time, job growth for all industries combined is projected to increase by more than 15%. According to the Labor Dept.'s estimates, plastics materials and synthetics are expected to be the hardest hit, losing some 24,000 jobs, while the industrial chemicals segment is facing a projected loss of more than 16,000 jobs.

As evident from the figures and statistics above, it goes without saying that our industry is facing serious shifts in employment. Although improvements in production technology have reduced the need for unskilled laborers, the industry will find itself increasingly in need of workers with high-level computer skills, capable of overseeing new, more sophisticated production systems. Rising interest in specialty chemicals and growing concerns about environmentally safe products are also expected to spur research and development employment, with chemists, chemical engineers and technicians in high demand.

And to top it all off, a recent study by the U.S. Dept. of Education, shows that 7 out of 10 students nationally are graduating from high school without completing the courses needed to succeed in college or in the workplace. Of those students who go on to college, 49% require remedial courses. By the end of this decade, the Labor Dept. estimates that we as a nation will face a shortage of 12 million qualified workers for the faster-growing sectors of the job market. And while our industry may not need as many workers as previously, it is clear that we will be competing strenuously for the cream of the crop.

So you may be wondering, what's the solution and how do we fix this problem. It all comes down to that we, as business people, must demand more of our students. Research strongly indicates that students who have completed rigorous coursework in high school are better equipped to advance to higher education. The State Scholars Initiative, introduced by President Bush and U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige in 2002, is challenging high school students to master a set of academically rigorous courses (*i.e.*, math, lab sciences, English, social studies and foreign languages) that will better prepare them to succeed in college, the workplace, and in life. Research shows that the key to that success is business taking a lead role in drawing a clear picture of the opportunities that await young people who work hard in high school.

My company is playing a significant role in the Scholars Initiative because it is incumbent on us to foster a culture of achievement among today's students. Doing so not only will help businesses to more readily find the kinds of workers who can help them to remain competitive, but will better prepare students for success in the future. The investment we make today insuring our students gain a solid academic foundation will benefit us all in the long run.

**Brian Ferguson**

Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Eastman Chemical Co.  
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www.centerforstatescholars.org