

October 29, 2002

The Honorable Phillip J. Bond
Undersecretary of Commerce for Technology and
Chief of Staff to Commerce Secretary Don Evans
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Undersecretary Bond:

On behalf of the Software & Information Industry Association (SIIA), thank you for convening and inviting our participation in the Commerce Department's recent Summit on the Use of Advanced Technologies in Education and Training. We appreciate the opportunity to work with you and your staff to further explore how the federal government can support the basic research necessary to accelerate the ongoing development of technologies that enhance teaching and learning for all Americans. The Technology Administration is well positioned to help facilitate further collaboration among education, industry, research and government stakeholders toward this critical but challenging goal of educational technology innovation.

As you know, many SIIA member software and content publishers provide educational software tools and digital curriculum to the K12, higher education and corporate training markets. All of our members depend on the nation's schools for a skilled high-tech workforce. On both fronts, SIIA and our member companies believe technology is critical to meeting the nation's education and training goals.

We appreciate the Summit's focus on educational technology, especially in the context of the Bush Administration's strong education vision and leadership. For example, the recently enacted federal No Child Left Behind Act supports a climate of high expectations and high quality, including through the integration of technology. In assembling Visions 2020: Transforming Education and Training through Advanced Technologies, the Administration once again demonstrates these qualities and makes a compelling case for technology's potential to transform teaching and learning for students of all ages and needs. As a result, there can be little doubt that the skillful use of technologies is an important, if not essential, feature of the President's long-term efforts to ensure a well-educated citizenry and workforce.

Educators, publishers and other parties have long-engaged in partnerships to help meet these goals, including identifying and assessing how best to meet educational technology needs and opportunities. The Summit effectively demonstrated these efforts and the remaining significant challenges that must be overcome to translate the vision of advanced instructional technologies into reality. In addition to scientific and technical challenges, it is clear that educator training, educational culture and tradition, legislative and regulatory barriers, market pressures and limited "customer" resources stand as major tests to the further development and adoption of technology tools in the nation's education and training efforts. Progress is being made toward removing many of these barriers through initiatives that target federal resources to educator training and technology integration. Likewise, publishers and providers of e-learning products and services continue to make major investments in understanding their customer's needs, conduct R&D to

better meet these needs and train users to effectively take advantage of these solutions. In addition, policymakers at all levels are taking incremental steps to eliminate bias in laws and rules and provide the flexibility needed for educators and students to address their needs through technology when it provides the best available means. Finally, institutions and employers are similarly working to adopt more flexible policies and practices that allow the use of technology for learning and training.

As you move forward to examine how best the Administration, and particularly the Department of Commerce, can leverage federal policies and resources to further address these important needs and goals, we encourage you to recognize the context of such efforts. In this time of challenged public budgets, it is critical to effectively target limited education and educational technology resources.

First and foremost, educators and students of all ages need increased assistance in securing resources to access technology tools and technology-enabled instruction. Targeting investment to empower the market must remain the primary public policy for enhancing the degree to which technology is employed to improve education and training.

Second, further work needs to take place to assess how best to frame the government's investment in R&D in this area so that it is directed to broad-based, pre-competitive areas and avoids funding areas that potentially intrude on product-specific applications that are most appropriately led by the private sector. Efforts are also needed to ensure effective public-private partnerships so that R&D findings are most effectively and efficiently delivered to meet user demand through integration into private sector offerings.

Third, the R&D strategy should take into account the unique nature of the education industry and each of its varied sectors from primary schools to universities to lifelong training. As you well know, each industry sector roadmap must reflect the particular characteristics of that field. In Karen Billings' Summit presentation, SIIA emphasized that the education and training market is influenced by a complex and quickly evolving policy environment. That environment takes into account very decentralized customer demands, ever increasing centralized funding decisions and national priorities. Without taking into account this policy environment, R&D investment - whether by the government, industry or in partnership - will not be fruitful.

At the same time, great opportunities exist to leverage public and private efforts and facilitate collaboration among education, industry, research and government stakeholders to fill any long-term gaps in the conduct of pre-competitive, basic research necessary to meet our vision for the deployment of more advanced learning tools. Expansion of this well-established federal R&D role to educational technology does appear worthy in light of the challenges brought by existing economic and market pressures. It would seem critical for such new efforts to identify new, supplemental resources so as not to detract from existing, under-funded national efforts to empower users (e.g., educators, employers, students, etc.) with resources targeted for training, acquisition, integration and other preconditions ultimately necessary for the effective use of technologies in teaching and learning.

We thank you again for your leadership in advancing the use of technologies to help address the nation's goals for a well-educated and highly-skilled citizenry and workforce. We look forward to

working with you to build on the work of the Summit and the various other related and ongoing efforts to develop an agenda, including the identification of a specific long-term, basic R&D agenda as well as the supplemental resources and partnership models necessary to enact and achieve this agenda. Please do not hesitate to contact me or Mark Bohannon, SIIA's General Counsel and Senior Vice President for Public Policy, at 202-289-7442.

Sincerely,

Kenneth A. Wasch
President