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### **Business, Education and Political Leaders Participate in STEM Roundtable** *Discussion focused on long-term needs to elevate STEM education*

**TAMPA, Fla. (March 16, 2015)** — Local business, education and political leaders participated today in a roundtable discussion about the benefits of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) educational efforts in the Tampa region, and the state of Florida. The roundtable followed presentations to students at T.R. Robinson High School entitled “Racing Accelerates Creative Education” (R.A.C.E), a national touring program from Mazda Motorsports that uses the science, technology and math of auto racing to inspire students to consider the many career options in the STEM disciplines.

The roundtable was hosted by Bob Rohrlack, President and CEO of the Tampa Chamber of Commerce, and Mark Wilson, President and CEO of the Florida Chamber of Commerce. More than a dozen regional leaders participated in the discussion, which focused upon the importance of STEM efforts and its benefits for the region.

“We have 60,000 open STEM jobs in Florida, with 13,000 of those jobs right here in the Tampa Bay region,” said Mark Wilson, president of the Florida Chamber of Commerce. “We have an opportunity to better match the skills our students are learning to the jobs that will be available to them. Companies are going to go where the talent is, so we need to ensure we have the talent here in the Tampa Bay area.”

The roundtable discussion generated ideas on driving improvements and change for STEM education and taking advantage of opportunities for Tampa area students. Consensus was clear amongst participants that the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce will play a leading role in driving STEM initiatives forward in the area, aligning the efforts that are already taking place while focusing on long-term progress to elevate STEM education.

“It’s clear from today’s discussion that there are already a lot of initiatives taking place across the board to elevate STEM education,” said Bob Rohrlack. “We need to continue that focus and align our efforts, so that the necessary steps are being taken today to empower tomorrow’s workforce in STEM-related jobs and careers.”

“We not only must provide our students with a strong foundation in STEM, we need to provide pathways for them to connect to the job opportunities that are out there,” said Jeff Eakins, acting superintendent, Hillsborough County Public Schools. “As the school district, we know our role is to be the driving force in talking with any company interested in coming into this area, so that they know we are providing the workforce they need to fill jobs.”

In addition to Robinson high school teachers and students, the following business, education and community leaders were also in attendance at today’s roundtable event:

- Rep. Kathy Castor, U.S. House of Representatives
- Larry Plank, director of STEM education, Hillsborough County Public Schools
- Susan Pareigis, president, The Florida Council of 100
- Ava Parker, chief operating officer, Florida Polytechnic University
- Ron Christaldi, Chairman, Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce
- Daniel James Scott, executive director, Tampa Bay Technology Forum
- Molly Demeulenaere, interim director, Museum of Science and Industry

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