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**Ohio Business and Military Leaders Warn of STEM Workforce Skills Gap, Urge Greater Access to Pre-K**  
*New report shows importance of high-quality pre-K for building a better-skilled STEM workforce*

**Dayton, OH (August 17, 2017)** – Ohio business and military leaders released a new report today at the Boonshoft Museum of Discovery detailing how high-quality pre-K is important to developing STEM skills—those essential capabilities in science, technology, engineering, and math demanded in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce.

The ReadyNation / Mission: Readiness report, entitled *STEM and Early Childhood—When Skills Take Root*, also cites projections for STEM workforce growth, as well as the challenges business and the military face in securing the necessary skilled workforce.

“I can tell you firsthand that careers in STEM will continue to be a major driving force in our economy,” said Chris Burns, Marketing and Education Manager at Encore Technologies and a ReadyNation member. “A big part of my job is to understand how education can help our students get the skills they need to work at a company like ours. And to cultivate that skilled workforce of the future, we have to start early.”

According to data cited in the report, Ohio faces a shortfall of over 190,000 positions during the current decade for which there won’t be qualified applicants. In addition, a recent survey found that 38 percent of Ohio’s small- and middle-market business owners say that it’s getting more difficult to find qualified employees.

This “skills gap” is also a problem for the military. Retired U.S. Army Major General Deborah Ashenhurst, who is a former Adjutant General of the Ohio National Guard and a Mission: Readiness member, expressed concern about recruiting the talent needed to ensure a strong national defense.

“Just like private industry, military service in the 21st century is increasingly reliant on sophisticated technology requiring an increasingly STEM-trained workforce,” said General Ashenhurst. “That’s why I am very concerned that inadequate education is one of the major reasons why 72 percent of Ohio’s 17- to 24-year-olds are not qualified to serve in the military. We must also keep in mind that the young people we will seek to recruit for the military, postsecondary education, and private sector jobs in less than 15 years should be entering pre-K today.”

The workforce “skills gap” reflects a similar gap within Ohio classrooms. Nearly two-thirds of Ohio eighth-graders are not proficient in math and science. In addition, nearly one in three students entering state public colleges or universities is enrolled in remedial courses.

“Ohio’s workforce ‘skills gap,’ whether STEM-related or otherwise, is something that chambers of commerce take very seriously,” said Linda Ashworth, Vice-President of the Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce. “Thankfully, we have the ability to create a skilled, home-grown workforce through investments in quality early childhood education.”

The ReadyNation / Mission: Readiness report details how STEM skills take root in early childhood:

- In the first three to five years of life, young children’s brains develop one million synapses—the neural connections that support learning and skills—every second. Disadvantaged children can already be 18 months behind their peers in math and literacy skills when they enter kindergarten, and the gap keeps growing.
- High-quality early education directs children into fun, play-based activities that teach real math and science, preparing children to absorb more complex concepts as they grow.
- An understanding of early math is linked to later academic abilities.
- Proper brain development in young children also supports such valued workplace characteristics as focus, perseverance, and teamwork.

The Ohio Early Childhood Education program (ECE) serves four-year-olds whose families have incomes up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level. In Ohio, 43 percent of children are in families that are below that level of income. Yet, in 2016, ECE provided pre-K for just eight percent of four-year-olds in Ohio. Even including children served by Head Start, only a combined 20 percent of these children were served.

The business and military leaders called for a greater investment in pre-K, which will have a lasting impact for children, for Ohio, and for the nation.

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*ReadyNation is the nonprofit, nonpartisan organization of nearly 2,000 business executives building a skilled workforce by promoting solutions that prepare children to succeed in education, work, and life.*

*Mission: Readiness is the nonprofit, nonpartisan organization of more than 700 retired admirals and generals strengthening national security by ensuring kids stay in school, stay fit, and stay out of trouble.*