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EDUCATION/SPECIAL REPORT

WHAT WE NEED TO FIX U.S. SCHOOLS

Our main problem, agreed the executives, educators, and politicians at FORTUNE's Education Summit, is translating into action the ideas that we know will work. ■ *by Nancy J. Perry*

In addition to more volunteers, the education reform movement could use better marketing. "Everything has to be sold in this world," says Dean Kamen, an entrepreneur and physicist whose alarm at Americans' lack of regard for math and science led him to create U.S. First (Foundation for the Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology). The intriguing notion he advanced at FORTUNE's summit was that the U.S. should spend less time worrying about improving the supply side of education and more time creating demand for it. "We don't sit in these meetings and worry that we won't have great football players, even though we are not putting a lot of extra money into schools anymore to coach them," says Kamen. "Kids go to school eager to learn how to play football."

Who better to make science as appealing as football than U.S. business? As Kamen observes, "Reebok invented a \$200 sneaker full of air bags and decided it needed to make all kids in the country feel they needed them—in six weeks, not eight years. Companies know how to create demand."

To introduce kids to some real, live corporate heroes, Kamen in February staged an event called the Maize Craze. Teams of high school students and scientists and en-

gineers from 21 companies, including IBM, Xerox, Boeing, and General Motors, as well as seven universities, among them Harvard and MIT, worked for six weeks to design robots from a kit filled with motors, levers, springs, and other goodies provided by U.S. First. These remote-controlled creations then squared off in a large box filled with tennis balls in a high school gym in Manchester, New Hampshire. The winner was the robot that got the most points collecting balls. (The victor: the Clinton, Massachusetts, High School, in conjunction with Nypro Inc.)

The event drew a respectable crowd: President Bush was at the kickoff party. Next year Kamen is hoping to persuade ESPN to broadcast the contest, provided he can attract two kinds of corporate support: teams of engineers to compete and sponsors to pick up some of the costs.

