Anne and I are pleased to welcome all of you to the President’s House this evening for a discussion of the importance of education to Atlanta, the issues and challenges facing Atlanta’s schools, and the ways that you, as Atlanta’s emerging leaders, can contribute to improving education in our community.

More than 150 years ago, the renowned American educator Horace Mann called education “the balance wheel of the social machinery.” I doubt that even he could foresee how prophetic his words would turn out to be. Getting a good education has always been the single most important thing an individual can do to improve his or her own life, but never before has education been so economically critical.

Today we are surrounded by a knowledge-based economy that rewards education – for individuals, for industries, and for communities. For individuals, education is the key to personal achievement. For industry, talented minds supply the innovation that drives success. The communities with healthy economies that both grow and attract new businesses are the ones with the best ideas, the largest supply of talent, and a quality of life that makes the talent want to stay.

Businesses and communities have a greater stake than ever before in our schools. And for their part, our schools are learning to pay more attention to the influences of the wider community on the development of children and to take advantage of the resources the wide community can bring to bear on the education of children.

That old African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child,” has been over-used to the point of being worn out, but when it comes to education, it is really true. A few years ago, Research Atlanta did a study that examined models of schools reform, and they found that one of the most common characteristics of successful education reform was networking between schools and outside organizations in the community to bring about change.

In the chemistry labs at Georgia Tech, they will tell you that if you are not part of the solution, you are a precipitate. And if you are a precipitate, that means you sink to the bottom and stay there. Each of you is here today because you want to be part of the solution, part of the mix that will create outstanding schools and make Atlanta a great place for its citizens to live and its corporations to do business.

Those of you who are participating in Leadership Atlanta are not educators by profession, but there are still many ways in which you can contribute to Atlanta’s schools. So this evening we are going to try to jump-start your thinking and ideas by telling you a little about the efforts of Georgia Tech, IBM, and BellSouth to improve Atlanta’s schools.

Georgia Tech doesn’t have a College of Education, but we are still keenly interested in K-12 education and involved with K-12 schools in many ways, because we know three things. First, we know that all students need a strong foundation in math, science, and computing to succeed in
this increasingly technological world, and those are subjects in which we have considerable expertise to offer. Second, we know that the most rapid job growth in the coming years will be in fields where we educate students – like science, engineering, and technology. And third, we know that preparing students to succeed at Georgia Tech and other colleges and universities begins long before they fill out their first college application. Students must have the benefit of strong academic programs and good study skills all along the way if they are to do well at the post-secondary level.

The bottom line is that we need K-12 schools to provide strong, challenging academic programs that prepare students for success in college and the workforce, and all of us have a vested interest in helping to develop those programs.

Georgia Tech has a wide range of programs to strengthen K-12 education. Many of them are under the direction of CEISMC – the Center for Education Integrating Science, Math and Computing. For example, CEISMC coordinates a program in which science and engineering students from Atlanta colleges and universities help elementary school teachers with science lessons, kits, and materials. At the middle and high school levels, CEISMC coordinates the GIFT program, which stands for Georgia Industrial Fellowships for Teachers. Under GIFT, teachers spend six to eight weeks in the summer at corporations, research universities, and science organizations being exposed to scientific inquiry and the applications of science, math, and technology.

CEISMC also runs SummerScape – a summer camp that not only offers hands-on enrichment activities in science and technology to Atlanta middle schoolers, but also trains teachers from the Atlanta Public Schools in teaching activities and strategies which they can take back to the classroom.

CEISMC is also a partner with the state Department of Education in Georgia Learning Connections, an Internet-based program that offers lesson plans, support materials, and assessment tools for the state’s core curriculum. CEISMC designed the website, edits the material, and maintains the computer infrastructure for this program.

In addition to CEISMC, Georgia Tech was one of the founders and is the present home of SECME – the Southeast Consortium of Science, Mathematics, and Engineering. SECME is a group of colleges and universities that has grown into the largest pre-college alliance in the country. It focuses on helping minority students anticipate and prepare for college, and helping teachers improve their skills and learn to use educational technology effectively.

Closer home, Georgia Tech has adopted three Atlanta schools: Centennial Place Elementary School, which is one block from our campus, and Inman Middle School and Grady High School, which are the subsequent schools that students from Centennial Place Elementary attend. We helped to design the science and math curriculum for Centennial Place, making it a special magnet school for math and science. We also provided computers, and each semester an Atlanta corporation sponsors a Georgia Tech co-op student who works at the school, maintaining the computers and helping students and teachers learn to use them.
Another very exciting program funded by the National Science Foundation places Georgia Tech graduate students with science and math teachers in Atlanta area high schools. These are students who are interested in teaching, and the experience enables them to “test-drive” the profession while at the same time providing a wonderful resource to Atlanta schools.

These are just a few of the many ways Georgia Tech is engaged with K-12 schools in Atlanta and beyond. Ann Cramer and Pat Willis have stories to tell about why education is important to Atlanta’s business community and how their corporations are involved with Atlanta’s schools. And after that, we are going to open the floor for discussion.