

**Institute for Tomorrow's Workforce
Recommendations
October 14, 2009**

Introduction and Overview

In 2005, the Iowa Legislature created the Institute for Tomorrow's Workforce (ITW) with the charge that this nonpartisan, citizen-based non-profit organization identify bold approaches to education reform. The ITW produced two annual reports (January 2006 and January 2007) that contained a myriad of recommendations that are presented in the context of the vision developed by the ITW during this time period: **"Iowa's greatest imperative is that all learners are prepared for the 21st century"** with a fundamental principle that **"Education in Iowa must be performance-based."** The earlier ITW recommendations focused on improving **learner performance, teacher performance, and system performance.**

The ITW was reconstituted in 2008. The new ITW met and received input from a variety of stakeholders from April 2008 to the end of the calendar year before developing its own recommendations during the first half of 2009. These recommendations supplement and enhance the earlier ITW recommendations, which the current members of the ITW reaffirmed. The recommendations reflect the overall view of the ITW that the teacher is the most important factor in affecting student learning outcomes and that there is substantial untapped potential in the use of technology to improve learning, make the educational system more efficient, and address the opportunity-to-learn equity issue. The focus of many of these current recommendations is on providing the climate, capacity, and incentive for innovation.

The following recommendations will not be successful without a long-term, comprehensive, strategic vision for achieving excellence in education in Iowa and a master plan for transforming education. Leadership from all levels of education, business, and government is needed to develop a public will and commitment necessary to support development and implementation of such a plan.

RECOMMENDATION RELATED TO LEARNER PERFORMANCE

The current ITW reaffirms the recommendations in earlier ITW reports with respect to learner performance expectations and goals. The primary goal established in the 2007 ITW report for learner performance is: *All learners, pre-Kindergarten through postsecondary, will demonstrate proficiency in 21st century skills and knowledge* needed to succeed in work, school, and life. These include (1) core subjects; (2) 21st century content such as global awareness; financial, economic, business, entrepreneurial, and civic literacy; and health and wellness awareness; (3) learning and thinking skills including critical thinking and problem-solving skills, communications skills, creativity and innovation skills, and contextual learning skills; (4) information and communications technology skills; and (5) life skills including leadership, ethics, accountability, adaptability, personal productivity, personal responsibility, and social responsibility. In addition, the current ITW recommends that Iowa students and schools be measured against international benchmarks.

1. Support, assess, and enhance early childhood effort

The demand for early childhood care and education programs continues to increase for several reasons, including the growing demand for out-of-home child care and recognition of the importance of educational experiences during the early years. Research clearly demonstrates that high-quality, developmentally appropriate early childhood programs will have a positive impact on learner performance because of the short- and long-term positive effects on children's cognitive and social development. Iowa is near the top of the list of states with the highest percentages of both parents in the labor force. The State of Iowa responded to this need and evidence by enacting the statewide voluntary preschool program for four-year-old children in 2007. The program received funding the past three years, which has allowed the program to expand. It is projected that, during the 2009-2010 school year, a total of 13,483 four-year-old children, which is about 34 percent of all four-year-old children in the state, will be served by the preschool program at school districts across the state. The ITW strongly endorses this effort with its recommendations pertaining to the quality and sustainability of the services provided.

In particular, the following are recommended:

- Support existing and explore new assessment programs to determine the quality of the programs now being supported and whether the achievement gap for at-risk children is being addressed.
- Determine the short-term and long-term teaching needs for these programs both in terms of quality and quantity.
- Explore the impact of the teacher certification requirement on quality and the methods needed to retain quality teachers for these programs (career ladders, professional development opportunities).
- Estimate the cost of the program when all are being served with quality programs.
- Continue to push for full funding.

2. Enhance commitment to international and global learning

The focus of this recommendation is on global awareness, in particular, to enhance the commitment to international and global learning. Increasingly, society and commerce operate in a global community. Given Iowa's unique mix of business and industries that function in many foreign countries, the State of Iowa should take advantage of the opportunities to prepare students to compete and lead in the global economy. Historically, our education approach has been one dimensional—the instruction of foreign languages. Instruction must move beyond traditional foreign language instruction and into immersion opportunities for study of language, culture, and global commerce.

In particular the following are recommended:

- Strengthen and change the Global Literacy skills and concepts component of the Iowa Core from voluntary to mandatory.
- Enhance the ongoing efforts of the Iowa Department of Education (DE) with respect to developing international educational relationships with a goal of attracting international teacher applicants.
- Task the DE to work with businesses and universities to build international study opportunities, meaningful international student relationships, and international teacher experience.
- Start foreign language instruction much earlier, either in early elementary school or pre-school. The ITW recommends that by the year 2020, all children in Iowa be competent in a foreign language and international culture and global commerce.

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO TEACHER PERFORMANCE

The ITW accepts the premise that the teacher is the most important variable in affecting outcomes in student performance. Thus, teacher quality and teacher performance are critically important areas for improvement. The ITW supports the earlier recommendations with respect to compensation and career ladders for teachers. The focus of the recommendations in the earlier ITW reports with respect to teacher performance was on compensation issues. The focus of these recommendations is on teacher recruitment and on-going development of existing teachers.

1. Expand and enhance the talent pool for teaching profession

Enhance teacher recruitment: Efforts to attract individuals to the teaching profession are largely nonexistent or modest at best. Those who choose to enter the profession do so largely of their own accord. Further, entrance requirements to most teacher education programs exhibit little selectivity. To improve the recruitment of quality candidates for the teaching profession, the following are recommended.

- Initiate early recruitment programs by establishing in each district a teaching candidate mentoring program that exposes promising young students to the teaching profession prior to entering college.
- Charge Iowa universities and community colleges with teacher preparation programs to develop plans to identify and recruit quality teacher candidates.
- Task the DE, teacher education programs, and business and education associations to develop strategies to elevate public value of the teaching profession.
- Continue to explore ways and methods to increase compensation for teacher professionals.

Expand alternative paths to the teaching profession: The current traditional path to certification is viewed as a barrier to many talented individuals interested in entering the teaching profession.

In particular the following are recommended:

- Expand the DE and the Regents' alternative licensure initiative into an academy that is more inclusive of private colleges and universities.
- Orient teacher preparation programs toward attainment of selected competency outcomes and less on course completion and time in program.
- Explore ways to identify and keep a database of former teachers who have transitioned to other areas of work for future reactivation potential.

2. Enhance support of existing teachers

Redesign support for new teachers: The early years of a new teacher are critical for an individual's development as a quality teacher and for determining the probability of retention. Many teachers, up to 25 percent of all teachers, leave the profession within the first five years of entering the profession.

In particular the following are recommended:

- Build on the foundation of the current Iowa Teacher Mentoring program to redesign teacher preparation and beginning assignments to include a new probationary period which incorporates a post-graduate teaching/learning period of two years within district teaching. Costs would be shared among the school district, the State of Iowa, and the teacher.
- Continue to implement and adequately fund programs that require teachers and school districts to work together to design and complete a professional development program (e.g., a professional development program on-site, an appropriate masters degree program, earning CEUs relevant to development) within five years for the teacher to retain the position.
- Challenge universities offering master's degrees in education to redesign advanced degree programs in terms of content and delivery systems to better meet the needs of the teacher and the school district.

Enhance delivery of continuous learning opportunities for teachers: Studies suggest that professional development opportunities are more productive and effective if done, at least in part, on-site. To facilitate expanded participation of existing teachers to have access to professional development, and in particular, graduate education, the teacher education programs must enrich and expand their graduate level course offerings with innovative delivery options, including electronic and "professor in residence" models.

In particular the following are recommended:

- Explore a statewide College of Advanced Educator Studies provided by a consortium of universities that have teacher education programs with innovative delivery systems.
- Enlist every Iowa teacher in a learning cadre that is focused on a culture of sharing best practices and innovation.
- Develop comprehensive database capabilities that would allow research on teacher/student performance as an indicator of the quality of teacher preparation programs using multiple data pieces.

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO SYSTEMS PERFORMANCE

The ITW in its earlier reports highlighted the importance of developing and adopting state-level operational efficiency and accountability standards and opportunity-to-learn standards to ensure system alignment and hold individual school districts accountable. The recommendations below pertain to school and district efficiency and accountability issues and to statewide efficiency and accountability issues. Creating an environment for innovation is also a factor in systems performance.

1. Develop an enhanced learning community in the building: Research has found that leadership critically matters in achieving success. Building principals provide a very important role in creating a learning culture, yet much of their time is not devoted to improving instruction and learning. Furthermore, rigorous principal development is mostly voluntary, self-guided, or non-existent. Various evaluation mechanisms with robust applications and, more importantly, learning opportunities, should be developed to enhance the leadership of principals in supporting and helping teachers focus on student achievement. A number of entities should be involved with the creation of an innovative, focused principal leadership development program including higher education institutions now offering graduate work for principals, Area Education Agencies (AEAs), and the School Administrators of Iowa (SAI).

In particular the following are recommended:

- Expand and mandate the “Intentional Leadership” Principal Academies that enhance skills of building principals through a rigorous experience leading toward a Master Instructional Leader designation. The leadership programs developed and operated by SAI in collaboration with the Wallace Foundation provide the State of Iowa an opportunity to establish national and international leadership in this area.
- Charge the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB) and SAI with development of a model administrator evaluation that holds principals accountable for meeting learning thresholds and time in classroom standards.

2. Develop a system of incentives and a culture for innovation

A number of actions can be taken to enhance innovation and positive change by developing a culture and capacity for change. Certain actions, such as directing the DE to review all policies and practices, including Dillion's Rule, in consultation with SAI, ISEA and IASB, to determine how they might negatively affect innovation and change should be undertaken. Other recommendations address creating a more favorable climate for innovation, including the following recommendations.

Increase the number of "Schools of Innovation": Current law allows for few schools that feature "break-the-mold" efforts at school reform. Some current charter schools have put in place solid examples of what is possible if the community and the school work together toward a common purpose. The establishment of more "Schools of Innovation" should be explored to fully exploit the innovations, efficiencies, and best practices that might be achieved to increase student performance.

In particular the following are recommended:

- Create legislation to permit a significant increase in the number (e.g., 50) of districts that receive a financial incentive and the ability for exemption from certain state rules according to an approved plan.
- Hold those chosen districts accountable for student achievement progress, high school success indicators, showcasing and sharing best practices, and documenting public satisfaction.

Reconfigure school finance to promote innovation, excellence, and equity. The current finance formulas have served the state well, but have not provided students with equal opportunities under the system. If properly designed, school finance is critically important to driving needed change for many of the target areas. A new finance model is needed that provides reliable funding commitments.

In particular the following are recommended:

- The Iowa General Assembly's Interim Study Committee on School Finance should develop ways of changing school finance in order to promote innovation, excellence, and equity for students.
- This committee should be required to thoroughly explore moving the funding to a competency model. This would allow school districts to eliminate all class day by grade requirements which would allow school districts to choose, for example, to allow 200 days for pre-K-2nd grade and less time at the traditional high school. This financial system would be complemented by having statewide indicators of achievement, which would allow a student to graduate on competency and not on Carnegie units.

Develop an Iowa virtual school: While Iowa has electronic learning capabilities and opportunities at the present time (Iowa Learning Online), other states appear to be delivering on equity promises by allowing individualized learning via virtual schools. This allows the equity focus, in terms of equal opportunities to learn, to be focused on the student. Taking courses from a virtual school would allow students in school systems with limited advanced placement courses, or courses in general, to have the same opportunity to learn as students in districts with a larger set of course offerings. Such learning enables the home to be used as a classroom and accommodates economic issues and time shifts required by life situations.

In particular the following are recommended:

- Enlarge, enhance, and redirect Iowa’s online learning model toward a stand-alone, for-credit entity that allows students to open enroll a substantial part of their academic instruction. In designing this virtual school, a review of best practices should be undertaken (e.g., see existing models in Florida and Ohio).
- Assess for the long term, whether the DE should remain the Iowa Virtual School provider. Other options should be explored including creation of a virtual school by the Regent universities and community colleges, or by the private sector. In addition, open enrollment could be explored with other states’ virtual schools.
- Create a funding model that allows state funding to follow where instruction is delivered, similar to the open enrollment funding model.
- Encourage virtual school models for summer, emergency, or other non-traditional time periods for continued instruction for both remediation and enhancement.

3. Enhance efficiency and effectiveness of school districts and state system

Continue to improve AEA structure: Substantial progress has been made by AEAs in their organizational efficiency and effectiveness as a result of the voluntary reorganizations in recent years. AEA leaders should continue their “example” with further continuous improvement efforts. These efforts should improve and expand the necessary educational service support structure for local school districts—a structure critical to the improvement of student achievement. In the years ahead, it will not be possible or necessary for each AEA to provide a full range of services to its region’s public and private schools.

In particular the following are recommended:

- With the support of all Iowa education stakeholders, AEA leaders should grow/expand the purchasing capabilities of the Iowa Educators Consortium (IEC). Additional school districts and educational organizations of all sizes and types should take advantage of the IEC. The menu of purchasing items should be expanded as well.
- Media and technology support services should be consolidated into fewer or a single AEA given the on-line capabilities now present in AEAs/schools.
- AEAs should continue to share programs and services across AEA boundary lines. This will result in “Centers of Excellence” where one or more AEAs might serve a multiple AEA region, if not the entire state, for certain services.

- The AEAs should create one or more technology support organizations to serve Iowa educators. These entities should feature a host of services, including technology planning, hardware/software/Website scrutiny, and implementation resources such as help desks.
- Policy makers in Iowa should approve code/rule changes that would allow AEAs to also provide services to other governmental agencies and educational institutions.

Increase the funding and planning for the use of technology: Technology is an important tool for educators in the State of Iowa. Iowa's in-school and school supported technology is inadequate both in terms of its ability to support enhanced learning and to achieve efficiencies. The problem reflects sporadic funding, individual and inefficient purchasing decisions, inadequate support to maintain and enhance the use of the technology, and limited vision for distance learning.

In particular the following are recommended:

- Establish a strategic technology plan for the state, including a statewide technology platform, with the assistance from the General Assembly, AEAs, DE, SAI, IASB, business technology experts, K-12 teachers, parents, students, and faculty in higher education specializing in using technology in education.
- Establish and maintain a continuous technology funding stream.
- Task teacher education programs to develop curricula and learning opportunities using the latest technology to ensure new teachers have the ability to understand and use technology to improve student learning.
- Stimulate professional development program for teachers and administrators in use of technology to improve instruction.

Apply management and organizational change best practices: A number of best practice management strategies should be explored and applied as appropriate, ranging from aggressive application of lean management to creative reorganizations of school districts.

In particular the following are recommended:

- Seek assistance and best practices from the private sector and task and resource the State Office of Lean Enterprise to focus on school efficiency efforts that produce cost savings, which allows resource redeployment opportunities.
- Require every school district to undertake a planning effort identifying potential partners, possible efficiencies through collaboration or sharing, and new or enhanced academic opportunities.
- Revamp state accreditation processes to focus on academic achievement, offerings, and efficiencies.

Final Observations

Iowa schools have a rich history of changing to meet the needs of the state. Given the proper vision, alignments, and resources, schools will continue to change into new models of education that will support Iowa's future and can lead our nation. In order to achieve this goal, a statewide

vision of excellence needs to be forcefully put forward against which the current model will need to be challenged and appropriately changed.

Currently, many pockets of excellence and innovation are serving student learners well in a variety of settings. However, the capability does not exist to transfer improvements easily to other places and applications. Unfortunately, these areas of excellence are our best kept secrets. Each classroom, building, and district must redouble its efforts at continuous improvement, innovation, and sharing.

Iowa educators on the whole do an outstanding job of educating young people. In many cases their best efforts are constrained by inconsistent advocacy, misaligned systems, inappropriate resources, and tired models. If we are to make our best effort at our core mission of enabling world-class learners, we must embrace new methods and tools at all levels of education.

Finally, the ITW believes there is a need for an independent, community-based voice to help provide the necessary challenge for change and to honor significant milestones along the way. At its September 2009 meeting, the Iowa Business Council agreed to convene a group of business and education leaders to determine a common strategy toward educational transformation.