

Iowa State Board of Education

Position Statement on Education Transformation

August 16, 2011

Iowa has a deep-rooted and proud history of educational excellence, and many innovative practices are taking place in classrooms across the state. While the quality of our schools hasn't declined, Iowa's results have stagnated as other states and other nations have made dramatic improvements that have increased student learning. Average is not acceptable to Iowans. Transformational change will restore Iowa's standing as a leader in education and will ensure Iowa students are prepared for college and careers in a globally competitive economy. All students deserve a world-class education.

TEACHER PREPARATION

We know that a highly effective teacher is the most important factor in student learning, and Iowa educators are very dedicated. Still, Iowa must raise the bar to recruit the best students to educator preparation programs and to provide rigorous training at our colleges and universities. Once teachers reach the classroom, they need continuous support from effective principals and targeted, useful professional development. Teachers also need adequate time to plan and learn. Rigorous teacher preparation, meaningful professional development opportunities and extra help for struggling students are critical components of a world-class education. To get there, the teaching profession must be elevated, respected and compensated fairly. The quality of an education system hinges largely on the quality of its teachers; however, the quality of teaching also hinges on systems in place to recruit, train, develop and advance teachers.

EXPECTATIONS AND STANDARDS

Accountability is a key ingredient of a high-performing education system. In Iowa, the momentum behind high student expectations and fair measures must continue. This is especially critical given the large gaps in achievement for minority and poor students, students with disabilities, and English language learners. The Iowa Core, a set of essential concepts and skills adopted in 2008, was a good start because it provides consistency for schools and raises expectations for what students should learn. Iowa built on that foundation with the adoption of the Common Core standards for English/language arts and mathematics in July 2010. We must continue on our path to improvement by reviewing new Common Core standards in science and social studies under development at the national level. Just as high academic standards and expectations are critical to a high-performing education system, so are fair measures of those expectations. A comprehensive assessment system will support instruction and

measure growth in student learning. Assessments must be rigorous and must measure content, communications and critical, creative thinking.

INNOVATION

It is critical that Iowa's education system builds on its innovative spirit. While there are pockets of innovation in Iowa schools, the entire system must be willing to take on new approaches, learn from them and continue to improve. Competency-based education, which focuses on mastery of specific competencies and skills instead of seat time, is one such approach. Technology is a key tool for educational innovation, and teachers must be trained to weave technology and online learning into the classroom. The State Board of Education will continue to work with Iowa Department of Education staff to study methods for delivering innovative, high-quality instruction to students using various models for online learning, such as state-led supplemental online programs and full-time virtual schools.

HIGH-QUALITY VOLUNTARY PRESCHOOL

Ensuring that every Iowa child has free access to high-quality preschool has been a priority of the State Board. More than 21,000 Iowa children benefited from the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program in the 2010-11 school year. This ongoing initiative will help ensure that every child starts school ready to learn.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Just as we must set high expectations for students, teachers and school districts, we must set high expectations for parents. The learning process doesn't stop at home. Parents must be willing to dedicate the time to stay engaged in the education of their children. They must be willing to form a partnership with teachers and school administrators.

The sense of urgency to improve Iowa schools is growing. We must build on this foundation with great leadership and efforts to build consensus around education reform. We must be clear about what we value in our education system and invest the resources to support those priorities. We must enlist the help of teachers, school administrators, educational leaders, parents and communities in a shared effort to raise expectations, accountability and excellence so that Iowa students are ready to meet the demands of an increasingly competitive world.