



Iowa Department of Education

Iowa Core Annual Report

Iowa Department of Education

Grimes State Office Building
Des Moines, IA 50319

January, 2012

State of Iowa
Department of Education
Grimes State Office Building
400 E 14th St
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Introduction. The Iowa Core (formerly Iowa Core Curriculum and Model Core Curriculum) is about helping all students, from pre-kindergartners to high school seniors, improve their academic achievement in the classroom. But it also goes beyond that – it’s about helping prepare every student to live, learn, work, and succeed in the 21st century.

The Iowa Core is an innovative, comprehensive student-based approach to education that supports high expectations for all students. It engages them in more relevant learning experiences and helps them attain deeper knowledge through problem-solving and inquiry. With the Iowa Core, instruction focuses on challenging students and providing assessments that give teachers, students and parents’ feedback to tailor instruction that will maximize the potential of each and every learner.

The impact of the Iowa Core goes beyond the classroom. When fully implemented, communities and schools will be working together. The Iowa Core will improve teaching and learning by bringing together educators, parents, and community members to strive toward a common goal of increasing student achievement.

The Iowa Core identifies standards in literacy and mathematics and essential concepts and skills in science, social studies, and 21st century learning skills (civic literacy, financial literacy, technology literacy, health literacy, and employability skills) that all students must know by the time they graduate from high school.

Based upon the findings of an alignment study and extensive discussion with Iowa experts in literacy and mathematics, the essential concepts and skills of the Iowa Core in literacy and mathematics were replaced with the Common Core National Standards in those content areas with some additional Iowa-specific content. These new standards adopted by the State Board of Education in July 2010, and the additional Iowa specific content were added in December 2010.

To help teachers implement the Iowa Core, the Iowa Department of Education (DE) and Iowa’s area education agencies (AEAs) are working together to offer assistance to school districts. This assistance is required because effective implementation of the Iowa Core is not a simple check list; it fundamentally addresses the content taught, the instruction of the content, and types of assessment.

Therefore, the Iowa Core not only describes what students must master, but it helps teachers determine effective instruction through statewide and AEA-level professional development opportunities.

The vision of the Iowa Core is to ensure the success of each and every student by providing a world-class curriculum. It is designed to improve achievement of all students, preparing them for the world of work and citizenship.

Legislative Foundation. Senate File 245 (May 2005) and Senate File 588 (May 2007) established the voluntary Model Core Curriculum in kindergarten through grade 12 in the areas of literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, and 21st century skills. The 2008 legislature proposed that the Iowa Core Curriculum be fully implemented by all Iowa schools — public and accredited nonpublic. The Governor signed Senate File 2216 into law May 1, 2008, which requires the full implementation of the Iowa Core — in high schools by 2012-2013 and in K-8 by 2014-2015. Implementation plans were required for high schools by July 1, 2010, and by K-8 schools by July 1, 2012.

Current Status. The DE is currently working with all AEAs to support the roll-out of the Iowa Core with local schools districts and accredited nonpublic schools. Funds provided by the legislature in 2011 have maintained the Iowa Core Network, which consists of teams from each AEA that provide ongoing support and professional development to schools.

Implementation was the focus of much of the effort during the past year. The Iowa Core Network assisted local education agencies (LEAs) in initiating and sustaining efforts to address the six outcomes of the Iowa Core:

1. School leaders build and sustain system capacity to implement the Iowa Core;
2. Community members and other supporting agencies work together to support the implementation of the Iowa Core;
3. A continuous improvement process to improve teaching and learning is used at the district and school level;
4. District leaders and other educators monitor and use data to increase the degree of alignment of each and every student's enacted curriculum and other relevant educational opportunities to the Iowa Core;
5. Educators engage in professional development focused on implementing Characteristics of Effective Instruction and demonstrate understanding of Essential Concepts and Skill Sets; and
6. Educators implement effective instructional practices to ensure high levels of learning for each and every student.

Professional Development. The Iowa Core Network has continued to meet monthly to develop resources to support districts in professional development to fully implement the Iowa Core. Their efforts have focused on improving the alignment of local curriculum to the essential concepts and skills of the Iowa Core and providing support for professional development to improve teaching based on the five characteristics of effective instruction: teaching for understanding, rigor and relevance, assessment for learning, teaching for learner differences, and student-centered classrooms.

An Iowa Core Statewide Resources moodle site, developed by the Iowa Core Network, serves as a repository of resources for all Iowa educators to use in successfully implementing the Iowa Core. Included on the site are research briefs and literature reviews, professional development protocols, video segments, discussion guides, and organized learning sequences. Information and resources including podcast, video tutorials, online modules, and additional collaborative learning team professional development learning sequences and agendas will continue to added to the site as they are developed. Many of these resources were developed with the support of the National Staff Development Council, Iowa Public Television, and numerous Iowa K-16 administrators and teachers.

District-based collaborative learning teams consisting of teachers and administrators are using these materials to deepen their understanding of their Iowa Core and to identify ways to improve instruction.

Alignment. An online database, known as the Iowa Curriculum Alignment Toolkit (I-CAT), has been used to help teachers and administrators reflect on what their students have an opportunity to learn from the Iowa Core over the course of a school year. To date, more than 8,000 teachers have used I-CAT to determine the degree of alignment between what they teach and the content of the Iowa Core.

Training in the use of this tool continues through the Iowa Core Network. All Network members receive ongoing training in using I-CAT and interpreting the results to ensure that each district's locally developed curriculum features the required content of the Iowa Core for all students.

Content Leadership Teams: The Department is also collaborating with the AEAs in developing a series of professional development opportunities called "Investigating the Iowa Core: Mathematics and Literacy. The purpose for the Investigations is to teach administrators and teachers how to navigate the standards documents, learning the structure and content. Training of these professional development modules has been delivered to the Iowa Content Leadership Teams which comprises invited representatives of higher education, each AEA in the state, and the Iowa Urban Eight school districts.

The Content Leadership Team workgroups are developing the materials and timeline on how these sessions will be delivered to LEAs throughout the state beginning 2nd semester. The materials will provide consistent professional learning opportunities for Iowa classroom teachers.