



ONE UNSHAKABLE VISION

WORLD-CLASS SCHOOLS FOR IOWA

October 3, 2011



Dear Iowans,

Whether our children succeed in a global economy depends on whether we create world-class schools.

This blueprint is an urgent call to do just that. We must work together to transform schools so our youngsters are better prepared for a competitive international marketplace. Setting higher expectations for all students is essential so they are equipped to someday meet growing demands by employers.



As many old jobs become obsolete, getting students ready for new jobs requires more than raising achievement in subjects like math and science. Students today also must learn how to quickly assimilate new knowledge, solve problems, and be innovative.

Getting a great teacher in every classroom and a great principal in every building is the heart of the draft recommendations we are unveiling today. Nothing at school matters more than outstanding educators. At the same time, this is a comprehensive plan with many pieces that all fit together.

We hope you will consider them as a package, and that you will support putting these changes in place. Iowans have a proud heritage of treasuring education, and we have many fine schools as a result. Now, it's time to renew that commitment to serve Iowa students well into the 21st century.

Between us we have eight young grandchildren, most living here in Iowa. We care deeply about giving Iowa's young people the best possible education. Thank you for your support in the days ahead.

Sincerely,

Gov. Terry E. Branstad

Lt. Gov. Kim Reynolds

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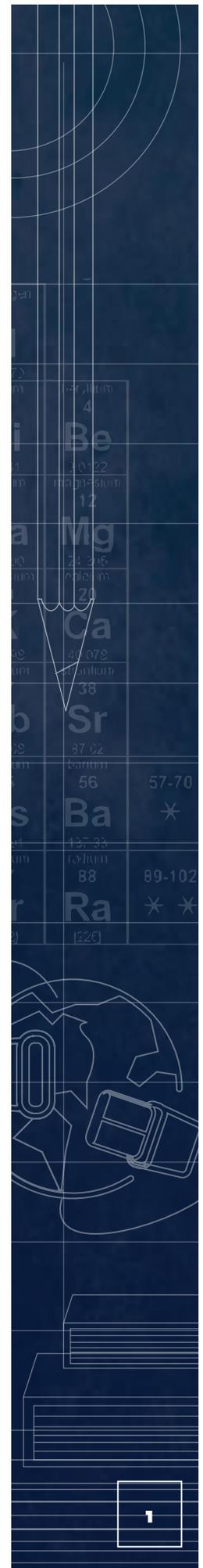
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ONE UNSHAKABLE VISION: WORLD-CLASS SCHOOLS FOR IOWA

Iowans have long shared a deep commitment to giving our children the best education possible. We recognize young people today must meet higher expectations than ever to thrive in this global, knowledge-based economy. For the sake of our children and our state, it is vitally important that we build on our tradition of excellence to improve our schools. Iowa's house of education still has a strong foundation, but it is also in need of a major remodel to be ready for the days ahead.

In 2010, the consulting firm McKinsey & Company published an influential report, "How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better." It detailed criteria for where schools fall on a continuum of "poor to fair to good to great to excellent." By most measures, Iowa's schools fall in the "good" category. Compared to numerous other systems around the world, Iowans deserve to feel proud of what takes place in schools across the state.

Iowans should be proud of our many first-rate educators who serve children on a daily basis, along with the tremendous efforts Iowa has made in recent years to support and improve teaching. Iowa schools have worked diligently to raise graduation rates, offer access to rigorous coursework, and prepare students for life beyond the classroom. Iowa has supportive communities that cherish their schools. And the state's distinguished education tradition has been a drawing card for families who want their children in good schools and for companies that want well-educated employees.

But, is it enough that Iowa's schools are just "good"? Why shouldn't Iowa's schools be among the best in the world? And why should Iowa's children deserve anything less than world-class schools?

It's up to us to roll up our sleeves and remodel this house of education - to create truly world-class schools for Iowa. This blueprint shows the way.

AN EDUCATION SUMMIT AND RISING TO GREATNESS

This summer, Gov. Terry Branstad and Lt. Gov. Kim Reynolds convened an education summit that offered a number of ideas about what strategies we might adopt to move Iowa's schools beyond being "good" to truly being world-class. The perspectives presented were broad and diverse.

As part of the summit, the Iowa Department of Education released a report, "Rising to Greatness: An Imperative for Improving Iowa's Schools." This sobering document showed Iowa's relative educational stagnation compared to other states. On a larger scale, and just as troubling, our country's results seemed to have stalled compared to many other nations.

Make no mistake: The international competition Iowa's children will face is merciless and unrelenting – it does not care whether or not we get our house of education in order. But a visit to one of the many Iowa towns with a crumbling building that once was a bustling factory provides all the evidence we need that our world has changed. The reality we must face is that many low-skill jobs have left this state, and the nation, and they are never coming back.

Despite all our challenges, many accomplishments work in Iowa's favor. Iowa's historic commitment to education has laid a strong foundation, which gives us a huge head start in building world-class schools. There are bright spots of emerging greatness all across this state in schools that set high expectations for all students and innovate to provide more engaging opportunities. We now have the responsibility to make sure this happens across Iowa.

This blueprint shows specific steps we can take to move our schools from “good” to “great” to “excellent” – not with isolated approaches, but by having our whole system work better together and in symphony.

This blueprint is not a list of options to be cherry-picked based on special interests, ideology, political affiliation, or whether one is within or outside of the education profession. It is a set of changes designed to work together to create an “all-systems-go” approach. Lasting and meaningful change requires this sort of commitment and transformation. The whole system must change to improve. Our efforts must be focused and sustained.

This blueprint details a comprehensive vision that can put Iowa’s schools on par with the top schools in the world.



THE CENTERPIECE: GREAT TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS

Anyone who has spent any time in a classroom can tell you there are differences in educator quality. The centerpiece of any approach with the capacity to create world-class schools is a great teacher in every classroom and a great principal in every building.

Imagine you wanted to build a great orchestra. You’d start by getting the best raw talent and provide your musicians with high-quality and “hands-on” practice time. You’d be picky about who got to perform, and you’d constantly think about whether you had the right people in the right places. You would make sure the members of your orchestra received honest, helpful feedback on their performance. You’d also make sure you had an inspiring conductor to lead your orchestra.

Making sure every student has great teachers and great principals isn't any different. Clear, specific steps exist to make such improvements. These include:

Attracting and Supporting Talented Educators

- > Raise starting teacher pay to attract better candidates into education.
- > Create a statewide teacher scholarship program so more of the brightest students choose education as a career in hard-to-staff areas, such as math and science.
- > Raise the grade-point average to 3.0 for entry into teacher-preparation programs.
- > Raise the bar for teacher candidates on an initial screening assessment into teacher-preparation programs.
- > Have teacher candidates demonstrate evidence of perseverance and leadership as part of their entry into teacher-education programs.
- > Continue efforts currently under way to increase coursework in core content (mathematics, science, English-language arts and social studies) for future elementary teachers, and increase hours in subject-specific coursework for secondary teachers.
- > Improve clinical (field-based) experiences for new teachers through approaches such as better student-teaching experiences, making sure teacher candidates have high-quality mentors, more time for solo teaching, learning how to design dynamic and engaging lessons in the field, and greater supports for new teachers.
- > Newly created teacher mentors in all schools will serve as adjunct college and university faculty in supervising student-teaching, effectively opening student-teaching for any school in the state.
- > Expand alternative pathways into teaching, the principalship, and the superintendency, so more top talent can enter the field. Rigorously screen these new educators, provide mentoring supports, and require ongoing learning to help them be successful.
- > Require all (elementary and secondary) prospective teachers (including alternative routes) to demonstrate content mastery via an assessment designed for that purpose.

Improved Educator Recruiting and Hiring Practices

- > Develop a statewide “one-stop” educator recruiting system for Iowa. This would include designing a new Teach Iowa website where all education jobs would be posted, a unified state application process and background screen, and links to facilitate the licensure process.
- > Check all teacher applicants for the right personality, characteristics, and skills needed to be a great teacher.
- > Create more hiring options by allowing reciprocity for teaching licenses from other states.



- > Require a multi-step hiring process for teachers and principals involving recommendations of current teachers and parents from each building. Based on the recommendations from these school-level hiring teams, school administrators and school boards make final choices.

Creating Educator Leadership Roles

- > Establish Mentor teachers in every building in the state to coach student-teachers, new teachers, and veteran teachers toward improvement.
- > Establish Master teachers in every building in the state to help in peer evaluation and to serve as instructional leaders along with principals.
- > Selection into Mentor and Master teacher roles occurs through a competitive process, and the positions are “at-will.” Mentor and Master teachers removed from these leadership roles go back to being Career teachers.
- > Require all teachers in Iowa to meet weekly in small groups to plan and collaborate exclusively on teaching, student learning, and student results.
- > Establish a teacher-led curriculum committee in each district to have teacher voices included in curricular decisions.
- > Create Apprentice principals who receive coaching and other training from more experienced leaders from districts and Area Education Agencies.
- > Create Career principals for school administrators who demonstrate strong leadership and success in running buildings.
- > Establish Mentor principals who would help coach Apprentice principals.

A Meaningful and Peer-Based Evaluation System

- > Develop a new educator evaluation system that builds on the quality work Iowa already has in place with current best practices around evaluation.
- > Build research-based and reliable evaluation documents that recognize great teachers and administrators.
- > Develop a performance rubric for evaluation to show educators specifically where they are and how they can improve.
- > Include peer reviews in both teacher and administrator evaluations and require annual and multiple evaluations of all educators.
- > Create a coaching system that helps all educators improve based on evaluations.

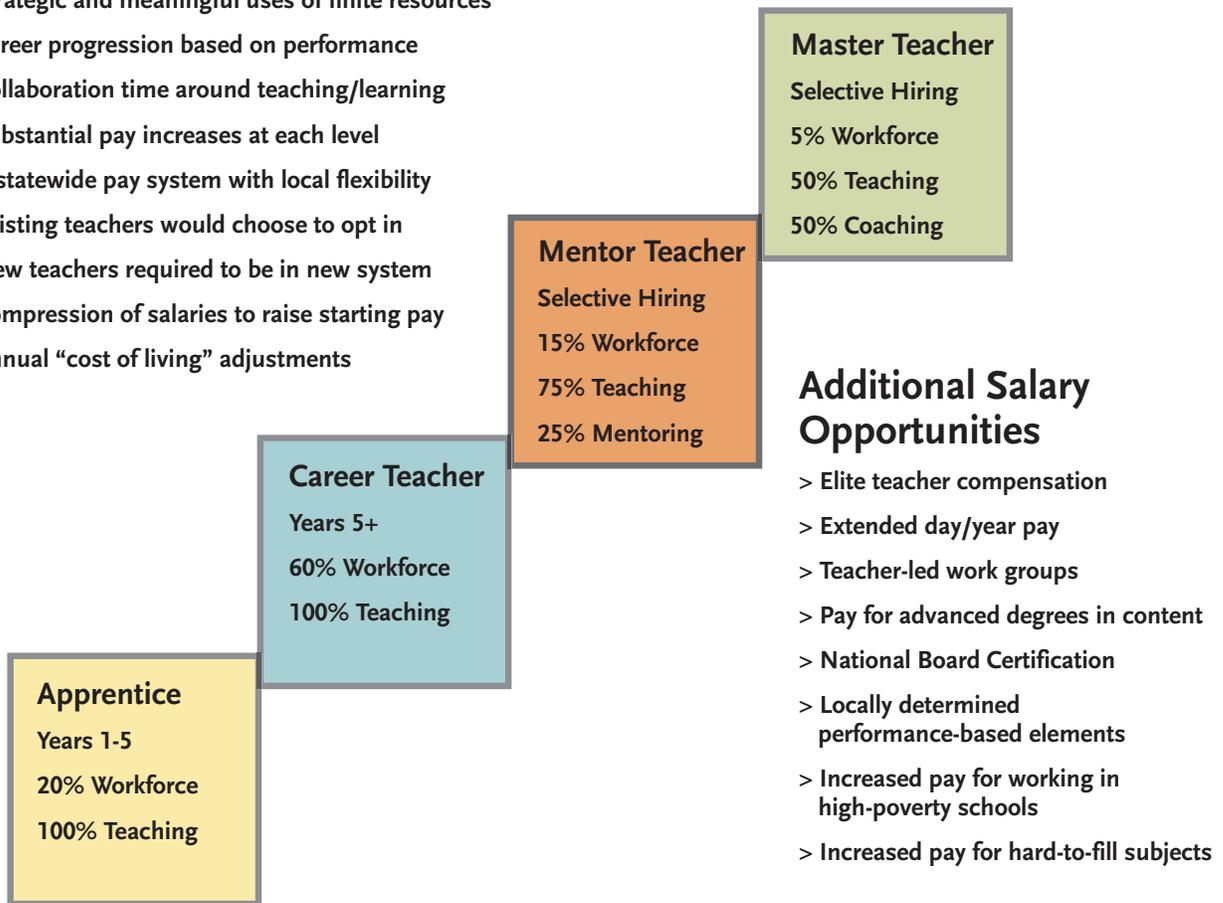
A Transformational Teacher Salary Structure

- > Implement a four-tier teacher compensation system with Apprentice, Career, Mentor and Master levels.
- > Increase beginning teacher pay significantly at the Apprentice level. Teachers with less than five complete years of experience typically start at this level. Apprentice teachers work an additional five days for professional learning or instruction.

- > Teachers with between three and five complete years of experience, who demonstrate effectiveness to their principal and a peer evaluator, and who are recommended by their principal, move to the Career teacher level. Career teachers teach 100 percent of the day. Moving to the Career teacher level comes with a substantial annual pay raise over the Apprentice teacher. Career teachers work an additional five days for professional learning or instruction.
- > Approximately 15-20 percent of teachers would become Mentor teachers through a competitive selection process. Mentors would teach 70-80 percent of the day and coach others 20-30 percent. These roles would come with a sizable annual pay raise, and they would work an extra 10 days in instructional or in planning/curriculum design roles.
- > Approximately 5 percent of teachers become Master teachers through a competitive selection process. Master teachers teach 50 percent of the day and coach/evaluate/plan 50 percent of the day. These roles come with a large annual pay increase, and they work an extra 20 days in either instructional or in planning/curriculum design roles.

New Salary System Overview

- > Strategic and meaningful uses of finite resources
- > Career progression based on performance
- > Collaboration time around teaching/learning
- > Substantial pay increases at each level
- > A statewide pay system with local flexibility
- > Existing teachers would choose to opt in
- > New teachers required to be in new system
- > Compression of salaries to raise starting pay
- > Annual “cost of living” adjustments



Additional Salary Opportunities

- > Elite teacher compensation
- > Extended day/year pay
- > Teacher-led work groups
- > Pay for advanced degrees in content
- > National Board Certification
- > Locally determined performance-based elements
- > Increased pay for working in high-poverty schools
- > Increased pay for hard-to-fill subjects

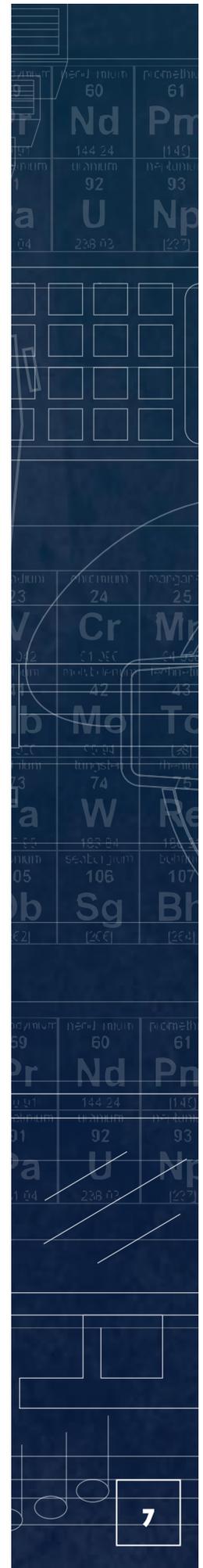
- > Additional options for increasing pay would be available to all teachers who:
 - > Teach in critical shortage positions, such as mathematics, science and special education.
 - > Work in schools with high levels of poverty or special challenges.
 - > Earn National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification.
 - > Earn “Exceptional Teaching” awards for demonstrating greatness in teaching through a rigorous selection process.
 - > Earn an advanced degree or take coursework in the subject they teach.
 - > Take on additional academic duties as determined by the local district.
 - > Work in extended day or year programs to help students who need catching up.
 - > Take on larger class sizes (if they demonstrate quality teaching).
 - > Earn performance-based awards designed locally - for individuals, groups, teams, grades, buildings, or entire districts.
 - > Teachers currently working have the option of staying on the old “step-and-lane” or “lock-step” salary system or coming across to the new system. The transition is a permanent change.
- > Annual cost-of-living adjustments to the new system will be considered locally.

Job Protections Based on Effectiveness

- > Using a collaborative approach, the state will establish a definition and observation-based measures of effective teaching.
- > Teachers at the Apprentice level are “at-will” employees who have their contracts renewed annually at the discretion of the local school board.
- > Teachers above the Apprentice level who are evaluated as ineffective must be provided an individualized improvement plan and supports to improve.
- > Teachers above the Apprentice level have due process for dismissal. These teachers may be recommended for dismissal after two consecutive years of ineffective performance as measured by supervisor and peer-based evaluations. They have the opportunity to make their case for continued employment to the school board.
- > School boards have the final say in dismissals, and school board members must be trained on the evaluation process and the definition of effective teaching.
- > Teachers with the current standard state license (who stay on the “step-and-lane” pay system) have the same system of supports, and face the same dismissal process, if they receive two consecutive years of ineffective evaluations.
- > Layoffs are decided locally, but take individual performance, certifications, student needs, and school needs into account first. Seniority will only be taken into account after these other factors are considered.

Free Principals to Lead

- > Expand the School Administration Manager (SAM) training program statewide. SAMs take care of managerial tasks, such as budgeting, accounting and attendance to free up principals to get out into classrooms where they can lead and support great teaching.





A RELENTLESS FOCUS ON LEARNING: HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND FAIR MEASURES

A common theme among high-performing education systems around the world is setting high expectations for all their students and the relentless work of teaching, measuring, and adjusting these standards to inspire continual improvement.

For years, Iowa resisted setting high expectations for all students, and instead gambled on seeing if each district could set high expectations on its own. Predictably, results were mixed.

Iowa took steps in the right direction by mandating the Iowa Core Standards in 2008 and adopting the state-led, voluntary, national Common Core Standards in 2010. Let's strengthen this work to set even higher expectations for all our students and put in place fair measures to improve instruction, recognize excellence, and target help to schools not meeting the bar.

Improve and Expand the Iowa Core

- > Raise the bar for the Iowa Core to put Iowa's standards on par with the highest-performing systems in the world.
- > Establish a standing state-level committee, made up primarily of teachers, to keep the standards up to date and make them a living document.
- > Use the Area Education Agencies as a unified, driving force behind implementing high expectations. Schools must align curriculum to state academic standards, and AEAs must support this effort through quality professional-learning opportunities in a systemic way.
- > Under the direction of educators from across Iowa, design a rigorous "model" curriculum by July 2013 that can be used as a starting point for schools and teachers in strengthening their own core-subjects curriculum.
- > Create high standards for critically important areas such as art, music and world languages. These subjects help foster creativity and communication, among other key concepts so vital to our children in this 21st-century global economy.

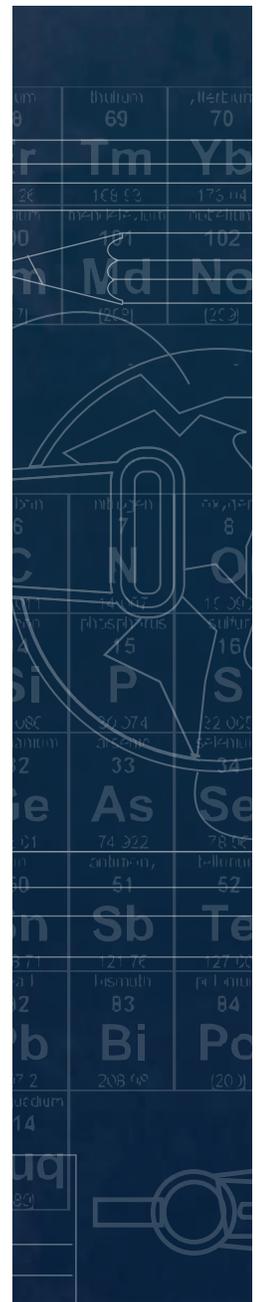
A Next Generation Assessment Framework

- > Adopt a kindergarten assessment to measure whether children start kindergarten ready to learn and leave kindergarten prepared for success in first grade. This assessment will help determine students' strengths and weaknesses, and will adapt instruction accordingly.
- > Develop new formative and summative assessments aligned with the Common Core Standards for grades three through eight. These assessments will be computer adaptive to reduce testing time, provide instant results, and will be available for both classroom and end-of-year purposes. Iowa is part of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, which is working to design such assessments by 2014.
- > A sampling of Iowa ninth-graders takes the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) every three years. This measure provides an international check-in for Iowa students and gets at higher-order skills, such as problem solving.

- > Put in place a suite of End-of-Course assessments for core subjects, such as English (reading and writing), Algebra, Biology, and U.S. History or Government in high school. These measures would set clear expectations for high school courses and provide a statewide systems check for how students are doing in core subjects. A cut score for students to pass End-of-Course exams would reinforce clear expectations and would be required for graduation. Significant remedial help would be provided for students who fail, along with multiple opportunities to retake exams.
- > Have all Iowa 11th-graders take a college entrance exam (such as ACT or SAT), with the state covering the cost. This measure gives Iowa comparable data to a number of other states, gives us a screen to see if our students are ready for college or a career, and gives every Iowa teenager one of the keys needed for higher education. Being college and career-ready is critically important in a highly competitive global economy.
- > Provide value-added measures for all districts, schools, grades, and educators. It is important to take into account student background characteristics (poverty, disability, language ability) and consider student growth when evaluating test results. Value-added measures provide a more equitable, more realistic picture of how students, schools and educators are doing. Value-added measures give Iowa a powerful lens through which to look at student achievement data. Individual teacher results should be part of a personnel file and not subject to open-records requests. This data should be used for improvement, not blame and shame.

A New Accountability System

- > Seek a waiver from the rigid and unrealistic accountability system required under the federal No Child Left Behind law, which unfairly punishes schools with high poverty rates.
- > Work with key education groups and leaders from across the state to design a new system that embraces accountability and puts student achievement at its center but also:
 - > Takes student growth or improvement (using value-added measures) heavily into account in the calculations.
 - > Uses assessments that are better aligned with the Iowa Core and Common Core.
 - > Takes into account that healthy and successful children are more than just test scores. We can measure student hope, engagement and well-being and make that part of our system.
 - > Makes sure teachers and other educators have the supports they need to succeed. Measures of staff working conditions and support should be part of our system.
 - > Brings in other key indicators, such as graduation rates and attendance rates.
 - > Measures parent satisfaction.
 - > Makes sure districts are good stewards of taxpayer dollars.



- > Districts and schools that score high on this new system have “earned autonomy,” where the state only visits them to congratulate them, or perhaps to ask how we can take their ideas to other schools.
- > Districts and schools that consistently struggle are provided additional supports, but also are subject to increasingly prescriptive direction from the state.
- > Align the fractured systems of accreditation, compliance monitoring and school improvement at the Department of Education to provide a system of unified supports and direction under the new system.
- > Update the state data reporting system to provide the public with a “dashboard” of all measures for each school and district in the state. Rate schools on a scale from “Exceptional” to “Persistently Low-Achieving” on this new accountability system.

Ensure Third-Grade Literacy

- > Require all districts to adopt a district-wide and research-based reading program for early childhood learning and elementary grades, with the goal of making sure children learn basic literacy early on.
- > Establish an “Iowa Center for Literacy Education” to act as a clearinghouse for best practices and research-based information. The center will provide guidance on strategies, curriculum, lessons, and individual student approaches to improve reading. This would link directly with the state’s ongoing efforts around “Response to Intervention,” which asks schools to have research-based instruction for all students and then make intensive adjustments for children who aren’t learning from the general approach.
- > Have all third-grade students taking the statewide reading assessment do so in March. Results must be made available to schools no later than April. Students with good reason may take alternative district-selected assessments (including portfolio-based assessments) instead of the state assessment, so long as those are approved by the Iowa Center for Literacy Education.
- > End social promotion for third-graders who read poorly, with numerous good-cause exemptions (disability, English Language Learning, for example) and multiple opportunities to pass. Being able to read after third grade is a critical juncture where children transition from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.” Moving children along who are not ready to do that puts them at a huge disadvantage for the rest of their lives.
- > Provide all third-graders who are retained the opportunity to attend a summer reading camp staffed by high-quality teachers. Students would have the opportunity to demonstrate literacy and move into the fourth grade at the end of the summer.
- > Allow schools to promote retained students to fourth grade whenever they can read.



A SPIRIT OF INNOVATION IN EDUCATION



The best organizations never sit still. They are always working to improve, innovate and accelerate. A study of the highest-performing school systems in the world reveals a continuous spirit of innovation and learning. High-performing systems aren't afraid to try new things and take chances. Most important, they learn from what went right and what didn't, and they keep growing.

Some Iowa schools are already very innovative. The spread of the 1:1 technology movement across the state and the early experiments with competency-based education (earning credit when students demonstrate mastery) are evidence of this. Continuously trying and evaluating approaches that have the capacity to raise student engagement and achievement must be our goal. We need to pour fuel on Iowa's spirit of innovation.

Every one of our schools should be centers of ideas for improving teaching and learning. With the right set of policies and supports, we can nurture great ideas and continue to grow toward having world-class schools.

Fueling Local Innovation

- > Establish an "Innovation Acceleration Fund." Districts, schools, or cooperating organizations (such as businesses, non-profits, or higher education) will identify local educational problems and find evidence-based and innovative solutions.
- > Through a competitive process, the most transformative of these ideas gets funded and, if the idea pays off, we can look at taking it to scale across the state.

Increasing School Innovation

- > Provide greater waiver authority to the Iowa Department of Education, so when local school districts come up with a great idea for students that doesn't exactly fit into the current statutory configuration, we can provide flexibility to try new ideas. The State Board of Education would approve all such waivers, and the department would report to the Iowa Legislature annually on this flexibility.
- > Expand the pathways to allow for innovative charter schools in Iowa:
 - > Establish a transparent, multi-step process where the state approves charter schools after a thorough feasibility study, including a plan that addresses student and community needs.
 - > Require all charter schools to accept all students for whom the placement is appropriate, including those with disabilities and living in poverty.
 - > Fund charter schools on a level per-pupil playing field with other public schools.
 - > Hold charter schools to the same high level of accountability via the state's New Accountability System.
 - > Close charter schools that fail on the accountability system.



Online Learning Options

- > School districts can determine whether online options are appropriate for their students and can choose to make these courses available.
- > Create a state clearinghouse of high-quality online courses available to any student in Iowa.
- > Back the online courses with a licensed teacher and the best online learning technology available.

Any Time, Anywhere Learning and Ending the “Factory” Education Model

- > Expand and grow the schools and districts using a competency-based education system, where high school students who demonstrate they can master the content of a course don’t have to earn credit through traditional “seat-time.”
- > Expand high school student opportunities to learn through increased community career/technical internships and more higher education options that connect students with their dreams as soon as they are ready.

A Statewide Parent and Community Engagement Network

- > Establish a statewide effort to increase parent and community engagement in every school in Iowa.
- > Create paid teacher leader roles in high-needs schools, where these “parent liaisons” work to establish connections with families to get them more involved in their child’s education.
- > Target parent and community involvement resources toward high-poverty neighborhoods.

Iowa Education Goals - Defining World-Class Student Outcomes

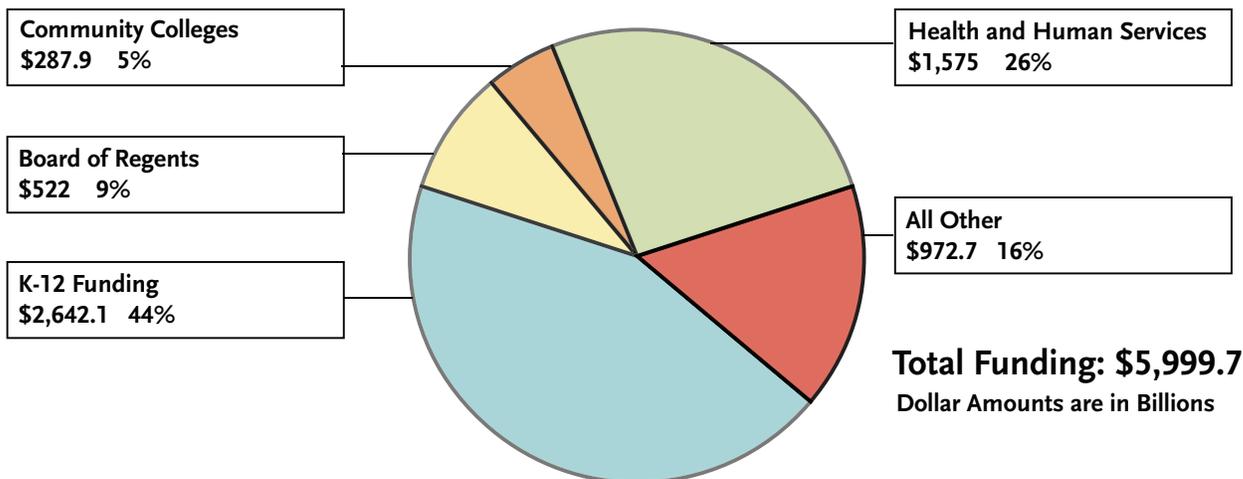
- > The top-performing state on national standardized assessments, such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).
- > Top 10 performance compared to other nations/jurisdictions on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) exam.
- > All students reading by the end of third grade, or receiving intensive help.
- > All schools meeting or exceeding expected growth trajectories using value-added measures.
- > All students in safe learning environments, engaged in their own education, and hopeful about their future.
- > Ninety-five percent state high school graduation rate.
- > Ninety percent of high school students demonstrating success on end-of-course exams.
- > Ninety percent of students demonstrating college and career readiness on a college-entrance exam.

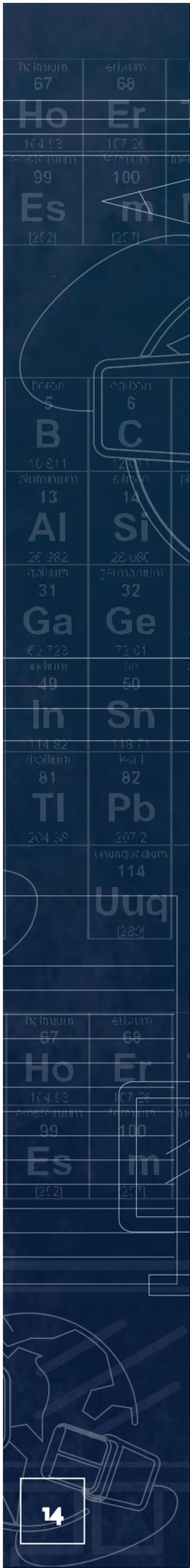
FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Improvements of this magnitude require that we consider carefully the financial supports necessary to build world-class schools for Iowa. With that, we must begin by critically examining the funds we already put into education and ask if we can use these more strategically and efficiently. We should all ask: Are we using the resources we already have in the best possible ways?

We have dramatically increased education spending in Iowa, and across this country, in recent decades. Yet our achievement results, by and large, remain flat. More money, by itself, does not seem to be a recipe for successful change. Dumping in more cash without meaningful changes just makes the same problems more expensive.

Fiscal Year 2012 General Fund Appropriations





While being more thoughtful and efficient with the money we have is important, world-class schools do require adequate resources to be successful. This blueprint features several aspects that require additional funding if we are to really move toward being internationally competitive. It is our intention to add funds to education spending, and this funding must be sustainable over the long term.

Estimates about costs are dependent on many variables and assumptions. While exact figures are still being tabulated for different models and scenarios, nothing in this report - including the costs to fully implement these strategies - should be considered outside the realm of possibility. This set of strategies is designed to be considered as a package.

The final recommendations will include a detailed accounting of costs.

TIMELINE

Great Teachers and Leaders	High Expectations and Fair Measures	Innovation
2012 to 2022		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free Principals to Lead New Evaluation Systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve & Expand the Iowa Core A Next Generation Assessment Framework A New Accountability System 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fueling Local Innovation Increasing School Innovation Parent & Community Engagement
2013 to 2022		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attracting & Supporting Talented Educators Improving Recruiting & Hiring Practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure Third-Grade Literacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online Learning Options Competency-Based Learning
2014 to 2022		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create Teacher Leadership Roles Job Protections Based on Effectiveness Transformational Salary Structure 		

CONCLUSION



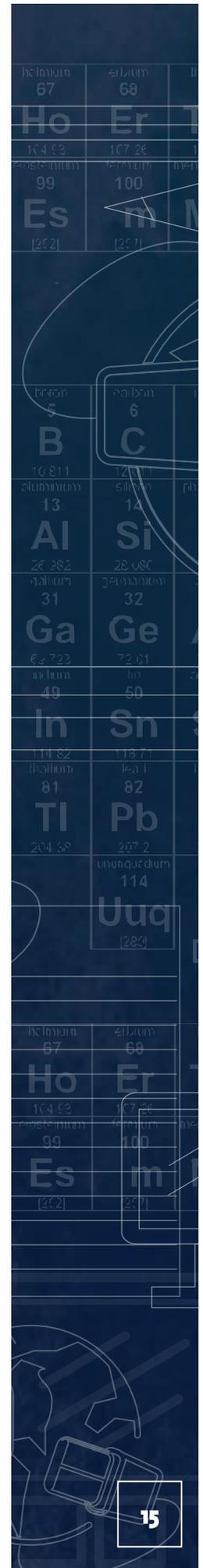
This blueprint represents a comprehensive plan. It lays out coordinated steps Iowa should take to begin the work of creating world-class schools. In the months ahead, the Governor's Office and the Iowa Department of Education will seek feedback to improve these draft recommendations before presenting a sweeping education-reform proposal to the Iowa Legislature and the people of this great state.

This blueprint builds on Iowa's strong education foundation but takes the steps necessary to remodel our house for years to come.

Our goal is lofty: Bring Iowa's schools on par with the highest-performing education systems in the world. The plan of action is lofty as well - arguably unmatched in scope by anything else attempted in the United States. But we must remember that we do not start from scratch. We already have good schools put in place by generations of Iowans before us.

Achieving the goal of creating world-class schools will not happen overnight. It will take a sustained effort that withstands the winds of political change. The journey should begin now with Iowans' renewed commitment to giving our children the best possible education.

That moment is upon us.



SUGGESTED READINGS

Educator Effectiveness

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