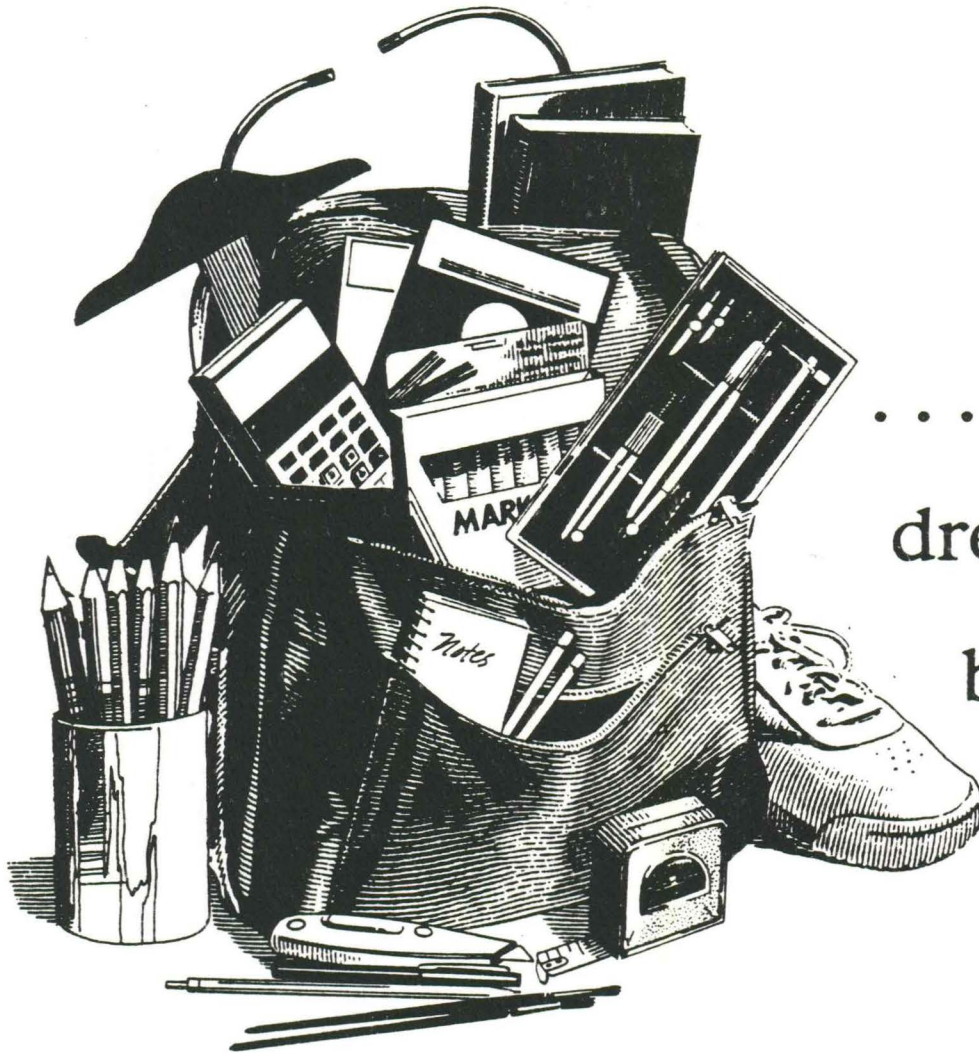


IOWA SCHOOLS



... where
dreams
begin !

Nancy Mounts
Ambassador for Education
1992 - 93
Iowa Department of Education
Grimes State Office Building
Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0146

3-1636

My appreciation to:

Chuck Mounts, my husband of 35 years and a fine teacher in his own right, who has supported me every step of the way and has kept the home fires burning very brightly.

Ted Stilwill, my mentor while I served as Ambassador for Education, who has gently guided me through the most incredible year of my professional career.

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INTRODUCTION

"Nancy, have you enjoyed this year as Ambassador for Education?" That is a question I have been asked hundreds of times in the past months. My response goes something like this: "Would you enjoy being told you are wonderful every single day for a year? Would you enjoy having a schedule that is so flexible and self-directed that you could utilize each day to the maximum? Would you enjoy working with and for some of the finest educational leaders in the nation? Would you enjoy seeing first-hand the innovative and interesting things happening in school districts throughout Iowa?"

Have I enjoyed this year? The answer is a resounding YES! Serving as Ambassador for Education has changed and enriched my life both personally and professionally. I will never be the same.

If only every teacher and administrator in Iowa could have one week of what I have experienced this year. We would be so energized that there would be no holding us back.

This has been a year of discovery for me - discovery that schools all across Iowa are on the move, that Iowans are increasingly aware that we need 21st century schools for 21st century children, and that transformation means more than innovation; discovery that I have spent 34 years teaching in isolation and that there is another world out there; discovery that even though I was spending longer hours on the job than I did as a teacher, I was not as tired at the end of the day; but most of all, discovery that I am most certainly not the best teacher in Iowa, but that I represent thousands of excellent teachers in this state.

"Nancy, what did you do during the 1992-93 school year?" is another commonly asked question. Here is what I did and how I focused my efforts.

1. Visited local school districts, area education agencies, community colleges, and four year colleges and universities.
2. Represented Iowa teachers on committees and at conferences.
3. Gave presentations/speeches to students, educators, and community members.

Perhaps a little trivia will further explain this year. I drove over 30,000 miles crisscrossing Iowa from College Springs to Elkader and from Keokuk to Rock Rapids. I visited countless schools in 71 different school districts, and participated in 32 conferences. I gave 93 presentations to groups as small as ten or as large as 2,500. **I loved every minute of it!**

One administrator set the stage for this year when he said, "We are an energetic district with energetic schools with energetic teachers with energetic students." That energy was evident in every area of Iowa.

In addition, I must mention how impressed I was with the quality of Iowa teachers and administrators, as well as with the collegiality that characterizes the relationship between these two groups.

IOWA SCHOOLS INNOVATE

When I visited schools, I asked educators to show me what they were doing that was innovative and exciting. Every district had something interesting to showcase, and my regret is that time and space will permit me to mention just a few.

Many districts are integrating curriculum at all grade levels. I visited a third grade classroom in Storm Lake where the teacher was using a thematic approach. On this particular day, the room was a rain forest, and she used that theme to teach math, reading, writing, cooperation, problem solving, and Spanish - all in the course of an hour. Her classroom was a virtual beehive of activity with every student involved.

Forest City High School has a new look in many disciplines. The physical education and home economics teachers team for Conditioning and Nutrition, the agriculture and biology teachers team for Natural Resources, the language arts and history teachers team for Compacted American Literature and United States History. Students, teachers, and administrators are enthusiastic.

New Art Basics is taught in Eldora-Providence. It is a collaborative effort between the School of Design at Iowa State University and over 100 teachers in Iowa school districts. This is much more than the traditional art course because it incorporates higher order thinking skills, problem solving, and cultural heritage; and students also develop the technical art skills. In addition, the projects relate to other disciplines. The teachers and the College of Design are on a computer network which enables them to share new ideas and strategies.

Cedar Falls High School has a technology program which I believe should be replicated across the state. A Christa McAuliffe Fellowship in addition to local grants provided a year's leave of absence for a language arts teacher. He then developed a curriculum and wrote the software to teach writing in a networked computer lab. There is consensus by all involved that this program is far superior to the traditional methods used to teach composition and rhetoric. The teacher has documentation to show that students of all ability levels achieve at higher rates. Student motivation is obvious - they arrive in the lab as early as 6:30 a.m. and stay as late as 6:00 p.m.

Improvement of technology in schools is of prime concern. The creativity of districts to develop new resources to fund technology is amazing. Woodbury Central invested money at 9 percent in a financial institution that offered a free computer for every \$3000 deposit. Van Buren received a Department of Energy grant to become one of five districts in the Ames SuperComputer Program. Mount Ayr and Elkader have used every innovation imaginable to provide up-to-date technology for staff and students.

The Clarion School District borrowed money from a local bank so that each teacher and administrator could have a personal computer at home. The school then leased the computers to the staff with monthly payroll deductions. At the end of three

years, the computers could be purchased from the district for a dollar. What a great way for educators to become computer literate! Everyone was a winner - the bank, the school district, the staff, and the students.

Everett and Irving Elementary Schools in Sioux City are excited about a new program they have implemented called Reading Recovery. It is designed to give the struggling reader intensive support in the primary grades. The research indicates that the average time in the program is 12-16 months with 86 percent of the students needing no further help. Clear Lake has been instrumental in forming a consortium of schools in northern Iowa that will implement Reading Recovery during the 1993-94 school year.

As a secondary teacher who had not been in an elementary school for a very long time, I was continually impressed with the "look" of elementary classrooms. They are so interesting and stimulating with seasonal decor, displays of children's work, and - talk about innovation - no two rooms are alike. The "I'll hang a calendar up and that's all this room needs" theory is definitely passé.

A middle school classroom in Glenwood is an experience in itself. The teacher describes the class as a writer's workshop, but if you didn't know better, you would think you were in the Henry Doorly Zoo. What a fantastic place for children to learn.

Among others, Remsen-Union and Forest City High Schools are initiating a new grading system - A, B, C, No Credit. The D- (just get by and get out of here) grade is out the window. Students are being held to higher achievement levels, and they are responding well. Those earning a No Credit will have a second opportunity during the summer to meet the objectives and thus earn course credit.

The entire student body at Tri-Center High School utilizes one day each spring for a field trip to the metro Omaha area. Each class has a schedule that offers them an introduction to at least two new experiences. This year they will visit Boys Town, Joslyn Art Museum, Union Pacific Museum, SAC Museum, Nebraska Furniture Mart, Holiday Inn Central, and Omaha World Herald. They will learn about careers, arts, science, education, and business.

IOWA EDUCATORS EXPRESS CONCERNS

The second question I asked teachers and administrators was, "What is your greatest concern?" Number one on everyone's list, and I mean everyone, is the at-risk student. This is a very serious problem in Iowa.

When I began teaching in 1958 about half of the children graduated from high school, the others were what we now refer to as drop-outs. I felt I was doing a good job in those days, but for all practical purposes I was working with only the upper

half of the class. In 1993 we are educating all children, and it is an **economic** necessity for the survival of Iowa that we do just that.

In those days, if kids had problems, we simply hoped that either the kid or the problem would go away. The problem didn't go away, but the kid often did. Today, we are paying an enormous price for that misguided hope.

At the mere mention of at-risk children, educators have poured out story after heartbreaking story - a child who was brutally lashed with a horsewhip, or another who was forced to have sex daily with her grandfather while an aunt took pictures, or a boy who had no place to sleep on a cold, wintry night because his father was in jail and the family evicted. It doesn't take a Rhodes scholar to understand that these children are not concentrating on what is happening in the classroom but on survival.

Could any teacher respond, "You'll get over it," or "Keep a stiff upper lip," or "I'd like to help you, but my class is waiting for the geography test"? We all know the answer. The teacher drops everything and goes in action - action that will take much longer than a few minutes or a few hours. The geography test will have to wait.

The most difficult thing about being a teacher is that your heart is broken every day.

The general public is often in denial about the seriousness of the at-risk problem, because they have no point of reference. Their children and grandchildren have adequate clothing, enough to eat, a place to live, and school supplies. However, I believe that all Iowans would be activated when actually confronted with a child at-risk.

Nothing illustrates the demographics of Iowa better than the school children. Schools don't recruit kids, we teach the kids who come to our doors. At-risk children go to school in small school districts and in large school districts, in rural districts and in urban districts, in every school district in this state. These kids look just like their parents - just like Iowans.

We have more and more children for whom learning is difficult. Yet, at the same time expectations on schools are increasing daily.

Young teachers are not prepared for the enormity of at-risk children. As one first year teacher stated, "No one told me in college that I would have kids without mittens."

A superintendent in one district asked me to visit "Mrs. Smith's" classroom. He gave her a glowing recommendation saying that she was the best young teacher he had ever seen. "Mrs. Smith" was indeed everything that the superintendent had said - innovative, energetic, organized, caring. Later on that day she and I had an opportunity to talk alone. When I told her of the superintendent's remarks, she

burst into tears and said that she was not planning to teach next year. She felt there was not enough time in the day for her to prepare, to teach, and to address all the problems that her children brought to school. She will be a great loss for education.

Prekindergarten programs are especially essential for the children who are the most at-risk. These programs don't have to be delivered by the schools, but they can be.

Spencer's Early Childhood Center, Cherokee's Early Childhood Learning Center, Davenport's Monroe Elementary Preschool, and Council Bluff's Kids Count are preschools which are partially funded by Department of Education At-Risk Grants. These are outstanding examples of prekindergarten programs. Each has a strong parent component which involves home visits, parent volunteers in the classroom, and family nights. As a result, parents feel more comfortable in schools. I visited many other quality preschools - South O'Brien, South Page, Irwin-Kirkman-Manilla, and Woodbury Central, to mention a few.

In the Clarion School District, private day care, private preschool, Head Start, special needs preschool, transitional kindergarten, and kindergarten are all housed in the elementary building. The support that these programs are offering young families in Clarion is outstanding. The Jefferson-Scranton School District provides an almost identical support system for families in that area.

Educators have responded to the needs of at-risk children with a wide variety of programs. Almost every school has a student-teacher assistance team in place. Many also offer support groups for students with special problems.

Davenport and Des Moines have instituted School within the School programs as a part of their drop-out prevention strategy. These schools are designed for teenagers who are not identified as having special needs but are at risk for other reasons. The goal is transition back into the regular program.

Home economics teachers in many districts are heavily involved in a program for teen parents called Graduation, Reality, and Dual Role Skills (GRADS). It focuses on self esteem, pregnancy, parenting, and employability.

Obviously, there are many good people trying to solve the same problem. Sometimes we are talking to one another, sometimes we are not. This fragmentation often leaves huge gaps.

Educators as well as the general public often question whether or not teachers are trying to do too much outside of the traditional teacher role. They are absolutely correct, but until we implement a different model, the child who reaches out to his/her teacher may have only that teacher.

Let's look at this model. Des Moines, Dubuque, Marshalltown, and South Tama participate in the School-Based Youth Services program in which community service agencies are located in or near schools. Its purpose is to improve student

health and success in school by improving the ability of other community agencies to deliver services. Teachers often deliver human services because they have the daily contact with children. It makes a great deal of sense to bring agencies on campus so that they too can have daily contact with children.

A parallel model is the family resource center. Instead of the school being the "family resource center," the school can function more effectively within the center. Child development programs, before and after school child care, support services to parents of newborns, adult literacy programs, and family health services are accessible for families within the school community. This frees teachers to do what they do best - teach, and allows other human service agencies to do what they do best - provide support services to families.

If we were really smart and wanted to be proactive instead of reactive, schools would require that every student take a relationship/parenting class as a prerequisite for graduation. If it is critical for every student to understand American History, it is even more critical for every student to understand the responsibilities and obligations of parenting.

Shortly after I was named Iowa Teacher of the Year, a former Family Living student telephoned me from California to offer his congratulations. We visited a few minutes, and I will never forget what he said. "Mrs. Mounts, you were the only mother I ever had. I now have three children of my own, and I think about the ideas we discussed in Family Living related to parenting every single day. My family and I can never thank you enough." I have included this conversation not for personal recognition, but merely to illustrate the importance of parenting classes.

IOWA EDUCATORS EXPRESS NEEDS

The third question that I asked educators was, "What do you need to be more effective with students?" Their response was loud and clear - quality staff development and time away from students to work with other educators.

One of the great mistakes in education was the issuing of the Permanent Professional Certificate which was at one time "valid throughout lifetime of holder except when revoked for cause." In a nutshell, it meant that a teacher with a Master's Degree was not required to take any further coursework. Fortunately, that has been recently changed so that all teachers are required to upgrade their skills on a regular basis.

Education is changing so rapidly that educators need almost daily staff development in order to keep current. Staff development is very uneven in Iowa, with some districts providing a great deal of support for the growth and development of the staff, and some providing almost none. We must make a much greater commitment to staff development or as one educator put it, "sharpening the saw."

Quality staff development is dependent upon teachers having time without students. To make that happen, we need to change the public perception that teachers are working only when they are actively involved with students. Finding this time is not always easy with the present calendar. One strategy is early "outs" several times a month, and the number of schools using this strategy is too great to enumerate. Sergeant Bluff-Luton, Remsen-Union, Logan-Magnolia, and Algona are among many districts using Phase III monies to add additional staff days. Other communities are investigating school calendars with less than 180 student days so that staff can have time together to be innovative and creative. Although no one likes to see children in school fewer days, that alternative is preferable to plodding along using the same outdated strategies year after year.

Algona hired substitute teachers for each building so that teachers could spend an entire day planning as a staff. When a trainer comes to a school in the Norwalk District, substitute teachers are part of the package. We all want our schools to be second to none. That means restructuring. However, restructuring won't happen unless teachers have creative planning time without students.

Area Education Agencies can be important players in the staff development picture. School districts in Northern Trails Area Education Agency have formed the North Iowa Connection Consortium. A major emphasis has been the annual residential training. Member districts send teams to be immersed in state-of-the-art school improvement concepts and strategies. Teams then develop action plans designed for their local situation. The philosophy at Northern Trails is that staff development is not a 100 yard dash but a marathon.

There is a desperate need for support for beginning teachers. Unfortunately, the beginning teacher all too often has seven preparations in an eight period day, coaches volleyball, basketball, and softball, and sponsors the junior class. The staff development is called, "Sink or Swim." A steering committee in Loess Hills Area Education Agency is responding to this need by designing a new teacher induction program. The initial plans call for each district to grant new teachers paid leave to attend thirty days of staff development over a three year period. At first glance this may appear to be a costly program, but over the long haul, it will be cost effective.

The school districts in Loess Hills believe in putting a large share of their resources into people. I visited a number of districts in southwest Iowa, both large and small, and the results of that commitment to staff development are readily apparent.

Collaboration seems to be the name of the game in many area education agencies. Twelve school districts in Area Education Agency 7 jointly planned and funded a stimulating staff development day at Sumner. Area Education Agencies 3, 4, 5, and 12 have formed the Northwest Iowa Area Education Agency Cooperative Leadership Academy to bring workshops on assessment, transformation, outcomes-based education, and site-based decision making to educators in northwest Iowa.

Teacher preparation institutions also play an important role in staff development. Thousands of educators take many valuable courses every year from colleges and universities. Because time is an educator's most precious resource, I would like to see college courses offered in a more time effective mode. We need to move away from the idea that three credit hours can only be earned with 45 contact hours. The real question is not how much time is spent in the course, but how much that course impacts the ability of educators to do a better job. Results-based education is as applicable in this arena as it is at any other level.

The most pressing problem relating to staff development is that the information needs to reach every single member of the education community. Too much of the time two teachers and two administrators attend a conference, and what they learn doesn't permeate the entire school district. A good model for schools to follow is the one used in Norwalk. They send teachers out to learn and to learn to teach teachers. Then those teachers teach teachers new concepts and ideas. Sound confusing. It's not. It is powerful and effective.

This has been a year of constant staff development and learning for me. I have been able to attend more conferences this year than in the previous thirty-four years combined. I often think about the ramifications of returning to the classroom next year. Although I love teaching and enjoy the students and staff at North High School, I have moments when teaching doesn't sound as appealing as it once did. You see, I don't want to go back into a box. I still want the freedom to learn, to explore, and to dream. We are sunk unless all teachers have those same opportunities. We must get teachers out of boxes and into the world - the future of Iowa's children depends on it.

IOWA EDUCATION NEEDS TO CHANGE

All of my presentations this year have included the following comments. I began teaching in 1958, and not much has changed in education in those 34 years. Most school buildings look the same, and most educators work within the same organizational structure and use many of the same techniques. And yet, the world has most certainly changed. Children have changed, and their educational needs have changed.

I now realize that the following comments would be more accurate. My grandmother graduated from an Iowa high school in 1900, and not much has changed in education in those 93 years. Too many buildings look the same, and most educators work within the same organizational structure Hospitals, banks, grocery stores don't look like they did in 1900, and they certainly have changed the way they deliver services. Schools should be no different. The system we are using was created to meet the needs of a different time - a time when only 5 percent of the children graduated from high school - a time when the children of Iowa were very homogeneous - a time when change was very slow and deliberate. Our educational system has not changed fundamentally for 100 years. Many people

know what changes need to take place, and yet the system remains the same. Schools are locked in time. We all resist change because it is difficult and makes us uncomfortable. The only person who likes change is a wet baby.

Furthermore, we know that people accept change at different rates. Studies show that 15 percent will change rather quickly, 75 percent will change at a slower pace, and 10 percent do not want to change at all. That 10 percent minority is the most vocal and visible, and as a result, all too often it drives the entire educational program while the 90 percent majority sits back and watches. We must all get involved.

If we want different results, we have to change.

In my opinion, Iowa is primed and ready for systemic educational change. In every single community and school district that I visited, people (students, teachers, parents, administrators, businesspersons) were talking about the need for change, and many school districts are actively involved in change.

If, as one businessperson said, "Timing is everything", now is the time!

Within the last two or three years, Iowans have become increasingly aware that we have rested on our laurels too long, that we need to look at new paradigms, that we need educational programs based on current research, and that we need an educational system designed for children who are going to live in the 21st century.

MORE THAN INNOVATION - TRANSFORMATION

The present system at the elementary level is based entirely on chronological age, even though we know that ability and readiness to learn have almost nothing to do with chronological age. Just as each child in my grandson's second grade classroom will be 50 inches tall and weigh 65 pounds on different days in different months, each child will also understand the concept of multiplication on different days in different months. Teachers and parents have understood that for generations. What we haven't understood is that we must change the system to acknowledge that reality. Let's do it - let's change the system to meet the needs of children!

We hear much talk about developmentally appropriate activities for children and children as global learners. What do those terms really mean?

As adults, we are often structured, sequential learners who think in abstract terms. We tend to limit our learning styles to the visual and auditory. Children use all modalities to learn. Young children learn best in an interactive, hands on mode which relates to their real life surroundings. They need to be allowed to explore, to try, to discover, to question. Their learning needs to be self-directed and open ended.

This quote from a preschool brochure in Spencer says it very well. "I hear, I forget. I see, I remember. I do, I understand."

Traditional (1900 style) classrooms have one teacher using the "stand and deliver" method of instruction in front of 25 silent, uninvolved children sitting in 25 desks lined up in straight rows. This is what we all understand, because this is what we have experienced. However, research does not support such a model.

Developmentally appropriate (1993 style) classrooms have a number of adults (teachers, parents, student teachers, grandparents, community volunteers) working with children in multiple-age groupings. The children are talking, they are involved, and they are learning.

When I visited the University of Northern Iowa's Price Lab School, I was amazed by the number of adults in each classroom. As a result, every child was actively engaged at his/her own rate of learning. It is said that a student who enters Price Lab in preschool and completes the program through graduation will have come in contact with 3000 adults. Think of the learning that takes place!

Roosevelt Elementary School in Council Bluffs is one of several schools using a non-graded approach. It all started when Roosevelt teachers and parents began having conversations about what Roosevelt School was doing and what Roosevelt School should be doing. Together, the teachers and parents wrote a proposal for an Innovative Grant from the Department of Education with a developmentally appropriate program as the focus. The end result is a non-graded elementary school.

Each primary classroom includes "first", "second", and "third" grade students. Three classrooms are then grouped in a pod of approximately 75 children. The children move easily from one multiple-age grouping to another depending on the needs and readiness of each child. No one seems concerned about who is six or seven or eight years old, just as no one is concerned about who is in the first or second or third grade. The same model is in place in the upper elementary.

Obviously, this sort of profound change requires parental support. The Roosevelt staff works very hard to foster that support. The latest poll indicates that 87 percent of Roosevelt parents are satisfied with the academic progress of their children. How about that for a ringing endorsement!

The non-graded approach allows most children to achieve far beyond traditional expectations. As one administrator in the northwestern Iowa explained, "In the present system, most elementary students spend two years in math remediation even though very few children need that remediation.

Now let's talk about transformation at the secondary level. Let's talk about Tech Prep.

Tech Prep is a major educational reform movement that focuses on providing meaningful educational and career preparation for the majority of high school students who will not complete baccalaureate degrees. It is driven by Perkins legislation at the federal level and by Senate File 449 at our state level.

Tech Prep is not unique to Iowa but is national in scope. There are working models in place in states such as Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Oregon, and South Carolina. It is a program targeted for the middle 50 percent of the high school population and is designed to replace the watered-down general curriculum that schools have traditionally offered those students.

Tech Prep focuses on learning outcomes achieved through multiple learning environments and teaching strategies which involve secondary and postsecondary institutions as well as business and labor. It is a rigorous program which holds kids to the same high standards as the College Prep program. Many have heard Bill Daggett speak about applied academics, integration of academic and vocational education, apprenticeships, and business and industry involvement in education. This is the basis of Tech Prep.

Tech Prep is not "the same old thing" renamed; nothing could be further from the truth. It is a new way for schools to do "business." Educators, parents, and the general public are ready for something different, something relevant, something called Tech Prep. In a recent PTA poll on proposals for improving education, 84 percent of respondents strongly endorsed "Combine academics and job training for high school students not going to college."

The following situations will further support Iowa's readiness for Tech Prep. Northern Iowa Area Community College and Hawkeye Tech, in conjunction with the Department of Education, organized a Tech Prep Conference which was held in Des Moines in early May. The planning committee initially expected about 600 participants. The actual number was closer to 1200! The same group is now organizing a Tech Prep Cadre to include three representatives from each merged area for a total of 45 participants. They have been swamped with requests pleading with them to make room for another and another and another participant. Are educators excited about Tech Prep? You bet we are!

Tech Prep is a systemic answer to many of the problems plaguing Iowa - at-risk children, business/education relationships, economic development, and limited resources. In Iowa, the secondary curriculum is driven by college entrance requirements. We do offer a high quality College Prep curriculum that serves the 25 percent of students who will complete a four-year postsecondary program very well. The other 75 percent of the students have not been well served.

The College Prep track is simply not relevant for the majority of high school students. We need to be teaching Algebra I for a better reason than just to prepare students for Algebra II. Students often ask teachers, "How will I ever use this information in real life?" As teachers we usually respond, "Just take my word for it,

you will use it." The real answer is that teachers often don't know how the student will use that information either. There is ample evidence to show that when education is relevant, attendance will go up and tardies will go down. Motivation, behavior, and the drop-out rate will improve.

In short, we need to be preparing students for the world of work, for meaningful employment. We have all sorts of programs to improve student self-esteem. However, the best program may be Tech Prep which will prepare students to compete successfully in a fast-changing high tech society.

Furthermore, Tech Prep meshes with at-risk needs because poverty underlies all at-risk factors. If we do Tech Prep well, the at-risk population will shrink. We need to connect employment with other family needs, and education is part of that picture. If we continue in the present course, all indicators are that our at-risk population will grow, and all our resources will be driven in that direction. This will diminish our ability to address other high priority issues.

The most important infrastructure is the human infrastructure. The best resource we could have in Iowa is economic development. Thus, our highest priority should be economic opportunity for every single student.

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If we are serious about transformation, we must look at new calendars, and we must restructure the school hour, day, week, and year. Our present school calendars were designed for 1900. In 1993, we need extended calendars that allow for flexibility. We need calendars with built in time for educators to work together. We need calendars designed for different communities with different needs.

Hoover Elementary School in Davenport uses a calendar designed specifically for its community. It is not just on the drawing board but up and working. As of February, 1993, the demographics of Hoover looked like this. Eighty-seven per cent of the children received free and reduced lunches, forty-two percent are of Caucasian origin, fifty-eight per cent are of Hispanic, Asian, or African-American origin, and seventy per cent reside in non-traditional homes (single parent, homeless, foster care, or with another relative).

A little over a year ago the staff began talking about Hoover and how it could serve the needs of its children and families more effectively. They decided that an extended school year was a good place to start. Because an extended school year demands additional funding, the staff wrote for and received grants from the Department of Education, U. S. West, Alcoa, Bechtol Trust, First Star Banks, and from other local contributors.

The Hoover school year begins in early August and ends the last of June. The calendar pattern is six weeks of school followed by a two week intersession repeated throughout the year. The intersessions are almost like camp, and the teachers use a thematic approach to focus on science and math. Attendance is voluntary during intersessions, but almost every student participates.

Each morning at Hoover begins with the entire school participating in Superstart, which is like nothing I have ever seen or experienced. It is a fun time filled with music and laughter, a time to shake off what may have happened since yesterday, and a time for staff and students to fire up for a new day and new learning experiences. I felt Superstart was so dynamic that I asked the staff to tape it, and they graciously forwarded a copy to me. Perhaps Hoover should package and market Superstart.

SUPPORT FOR TRANSFORMATION

I would be remiss if I did not mention the importance of Phase III and the New Iowa Schools Development Corporation (NISDC) in transformation.

The transformation of Iowa schools is going to cost money - especially in the beginning. Down the line, I think it will be more like the Pizza Hut ad of "4 bucks, 4 bucks, 4 bucks" - a real bargain that will go on and on and on.

Unfortunately, schools are operating with very limited funding. This is where Phase III enters the picture, because Phase III proposals focus on transformation.

As a result of what I have seen this year, I have been "transformed" from someone who was neutral about Phase III to someone who now considers Phase III essential seed money for educational excellence in Iowa. Simply stated, Phase III represents hope - hope for administrators, hope for teachers, and most importantly, hope for children.

Periodically, there are initiatives to eliminate Phase III. That must not be allowed to happen, because killing Phase III will be like eating the seed corn.

NISDC is also an important part of the transformation picture. It is a powerful coalition representing Area Education Agencies, Business and Education Roundtable, Iowa Legislature, Colleges and Universities, Community Colleges, Iowa Association of School Boards, Iowa Department of Education, Governor's Office, Parent Teacher Association, Iowa State Education Association, and School Administrators of Iowa.

The 1992 Iowa Legislature appropriated funds to the Department of Education for school transformation projects. The Department of Education then contracted with NISDC to implement the School Transformation Design Project, and NISDC awarded Planning Grants to Council Bluffs, Des Moines, Dubuque, Marshalltown, Monticello, and to a northwest Iowa consortium. In addition to funding, NISDC provides support and coordination to each team.

Council Bluffs is using their grant to design a "lab" school to train teachers to teach for the future - for systemic change.

The 1993 Legislature, understanding that the "same old thing" in education is not good for Iowa, wisely increased the appropriation for transformation projects. This will enable NISDC to expand an excellent initiative and further facilitate the transformation of Iowa Schools.

LET'S CONNECT

There is no doubt that education in Iowa is vibrant and alive and moving. Educators, parents, and entire communities throughout the state have wonderful things in place. However, we must develop linkages between all efforts so there are not isolated initiatives or silver bullet approaches to change. We must connect.

A good place to begin is within individual school buildings. Every person in the building is an educator, and we are all part of a grand strategy to serve our students.

Hoover Elementary in Davenport understands connect. The first member of their team that I met was the custodian. She invited me to visit the boiler room, and it was definitely worth the trip. I have never seen a boiler room like that in my life - so clean that you could eat off the top of the boiler. The custodian takes great pride in the appearance of the entire school, and she also takes great pride in the fact that she is an integral part of the instruction team.

Educators also need to connect with parents and families, and we need to have "family friendly" schools.

Educating kids is much easier and more effective if it's a partnership between families and educators. Teachers often act as though we are intimidated by parents, thus giving them the impression that they are not welcome in the schools. We need to communicate with parents - all parents - parents in every demographic group - parents who are like us and parents who aren't like us. Educators need to initiate this partnership, because parents, especially those who have not experienced personal educational success, often don't know how to access the system.

All too often, educators communicate with parents by offering a parenting class at the school. Usually four parents attend, and they are already the four best parents in the school. How about a Family Fun Night like the one I attended at Lowell Elementary in Sioux City? We began with a delicious "school lunch" prepared in the Central Kitchen (which dispelled the myths about school lunches). After that, as families we participated in games and storytimes, each of which had parenting skills subtly interwoven throughout the activity. Family Fun Night brought many families into Lowell School in a very positive way that will certainly foster good parent/teacher connections.

The last time I looked in the *Iowa Education Directory*, most public schools in Iowa have the words "community" and "school" in their names, as in Sioux City

Community School District. Do we sometimes forget how important it is that the community and school connect?

Educators invite the community into schools for open houses, athletic events, and parent/teacher/student conferences. Let's invite the community into the schools through expanded volunteer programs. We could follow the model that hospitals use for their very successful volunteer programs. Hospitals use volunteers for two reasons - to provide additional resources, and no less importantly, these volunteers become advocates for that hospital. Schools could also use additional help, and we certainly need advocates.

The Sioux Center School District has a strong volunteer program which is facilitated by a salaried volunteer coordinator. All too often school districts make the position of volunteer coordinator an add-on to an already over-extended staff member. A well coordinated volunteer program will pay for itself a thousandfold.

Let's strengthen the school/business connection. We are mutually dependent on one another so communicating and collaborating make sense. It is important for educators to stop discounting all suggestions from the private sector with comments such as, "They just don't understand." I'd like to think that if the public sector and the private sector collaborated a little more, perhaps we'd both understand.

When I visited the West Monona School District, the superintendent arranged for me to visit with Chamber of Commerce members, in addition to meeting with school administrators and teachers. This is a superintendent who recognizes the importance of connecting.

The Waterloo School District has a full-time administrator who facilitates the school/business relationship. This administrator comes not from an education background but from a community/business background. She coordinates a number of programs including Partners in Education (business/education partnerships), Inspire Program (businesspersons mentoring individual students), and Fund for Excellence Foundation. Many consider Waterloo as one of the best in connecting schools and businesses.

The Denison School District certainly connects and collaborates with its community. Together, the school and community have built the Fine Arts Center and the Denison Aquatic Fun Center on the high school campus. Their next project is a city/school recreational center.

Glenwood needed a middle school and found one at the Glenwood State Hospital. It is a beautiful and spacious facility which last year housed 35 students from the hospital and now houses those same 35 students integrated with 300 other students. The good news is that the state no longer has a nearly empty building, and the school district has a fine facility for the grand price of one dollar per year. Oh, the benefits of making connections!

The local school districts, area education agencies, and community colleges need to strengthen their connections. Everyone flourishes when that happens. Some merged areas are connecting very well, and others have room for improvement.

I was a member of a group of twelve persons who visited Northern Trails Area Education Agency for a day. Our first session involved personnel from Northern Trails as well as personnel from Northern Iowa Area Community College. That pattern continued all day with the addition of personnel from local school districts. We met part of the day at the area education agency and part of the day at the community college. It was all but impossible to distinguish who worked where. In the next several weeks, I telephoned individuals with whom we had met for additional information, and twice telephoned the wrong agency. In northern Iowa they really know how to connect.

Harlan and O'Brien School Districts offer college level courses in conjunction with Iowa Western Community College and Northwest Iowa Technical College. Students receive both high school credit and college credit for these courses. Another connection pays off for students.

Human service agencies and schools sometimes don't connect very well, and yet we are often serving the same clientele.

Move the Mountain, with offices in Marshalltown, is an outstanding model for connecting agencies and institutions. Fifty-eight agencies that receive federal funding in five counties are involved in Move the Mountain. Their mission is to make their area the best place to raise a family. These agencies work hard **together** to get families out of poverty. They have developed an analysis of family life called, *A Measure of How Families Are Doing*, that would be of value to every community in Iowa.

And wouldn't this be great - connecting local school districts, area education agencies, community colleges, colleges and universities, and the Department of Education on a computer network? Hopefully, that will happen in the very near future.

I believe that part of the connection picture is to communicate in language that everyone can understand. All too often, educators communicate in professional jargon that even members of the profession don't understand.

We are all in this together. Only together can we "move the mountain."

LET'S BE ACCOUNTABLE

Every healthy family and organization is accountable. There is no better way to build trust inside or outside a system.

Accountability has not been education's forte in the past. It must be our forte in the future. We need to ask and answer the following questions. What are we trying to do? What are the strategies for doing it? How do we know that we are doing it? And then we need to communicate the questions and the answers to the public.

Educators wrongly assume that members of the community are knowledgeable about education. Members of the community wrongly assume that they are knowledgeable about education. Everyone is in the dark.

We should be reporting to ourselves and to the community about our progress and our results. Not only do taxpayers become discouraged when they don't see concrete results for their tax dollars, educators also become discouraged when we don't see concrete results for our efforts.

Over half of the school districts in Iowa issue an annual report to their communities. Every district should issue such a report. The best reports are attractively packaged and reader friendly. They need to be dispersed to every member of the community and that is very different from "made available" which usually means, "You can pick one up at the school district office during business hours." Proctor and Gamble would be out of business if it sat back and waited for customers to come to its door - schools will be out of business if we continue to sit back and wait.

It was my privilege to be included in Council Bluff's Tour of Programs for state and federal legislators. This was an afternoon for legislators to visit programs that are related to legislative issues and are funded by tax dollars. It is called accountability, or "Let us show you the results of state and federal funding." Legislators can then report what they have seen to taxpayers.

If Nike can convince an entire nation that every child needs a \$100 pair of sneakers, we can certainly convince Iowans that every child needs a quality education - but only if education is accountable to its customers.

A PARTING HOPE

It is my hope that the title of this Ambassador for Education report, *Iowa Schools - Where Dreams Begin*, symbolizes only the beginning of a whole new era in educating Iowa's children. It is my hope that within a few years a new edition of this report could very accurately be entitled, *Iowa Schools - Where Dreams Begin and Develop into Reality for Every Single Child*.