

# Iowa Learns Council

## *Case for Change*

### **Introduction**

Our Iowa educational system has a long and proud tradition of excellence. From kindergarten through college, students in Iowa have had access to quality educational opportunities. So why, an Iowa Learns Council? We, along with our nation, are facing unprecedented demands to produce a future bright with highly skilled graduates from postsecondary and secondary schools. No longer can the nation and the state afford to have even one student who drops out or even one student who does not attain a high degree of basic skills, thinking skills, and the ability to work with others. Our school systems have provided access to the poor, the newcomers, and the young that is unparalleled anywhere in the world. But access does not alone ensure for every one of our students success after walking across the graduation stage. Iowa wants the best for every one of our young citizens. The Iowa Learns Council, created and chaired by Governor Vilsack, built its recommendations on the belief that Iowans intend to ensure a strong educational system for every student, regardless of their background, their environment, the date of arrival in this state, or their abilities. The Council has built its recommendations on the following premises:

- Iowa's college-participation rate of Iowa high school graduates is close to the highest in the nation, but fewer than half our high school graduates complete any level of postsecondary education. Post-secondary training is a key to our economic success.
- Iowa's high school graduation rate is among the highest in the nation, but for our students who comprise a minority group or are educated in larger school settings the rate falls dramatically.
- There are valuable resources currently available to help families with young children, but too many families cannot access these resources, as there simply are not enough quality early care and education programs to meet the needs of working parents.

The simple fact is that what was good enough for Iowans in the past will be nowhere near good enough for them in the future, regardless of our past success. The need for a more effective education system is created not by a decline in productivity, but by the need for radical improvements in productivity to keep pace with the changing needs of our students and our world. Indeed, Iowa's education system must become better if we are to:

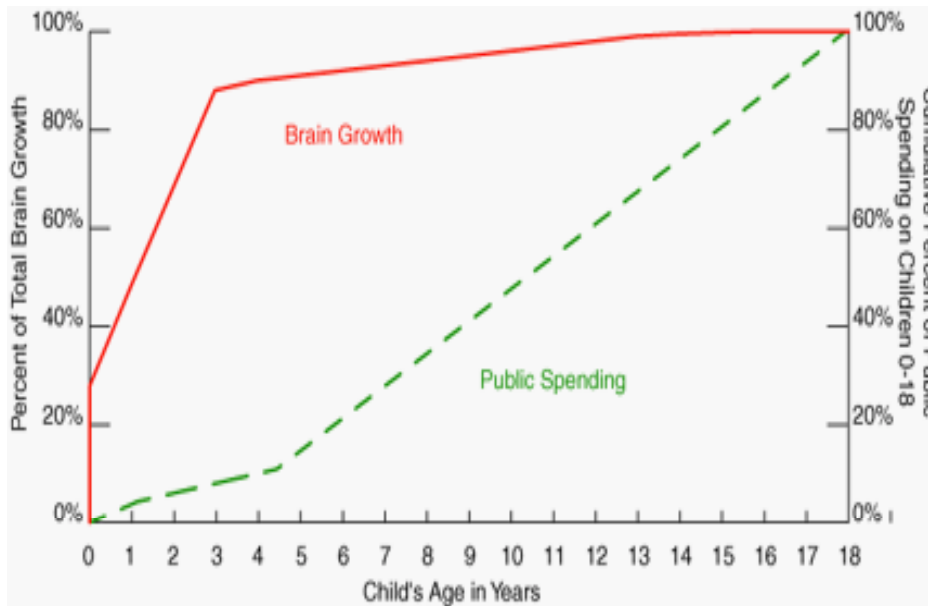
- enhance and maintain our preferred quality of life;
- enhance and maintain job opportunities and Iowa's population;
- compete economically as a state.

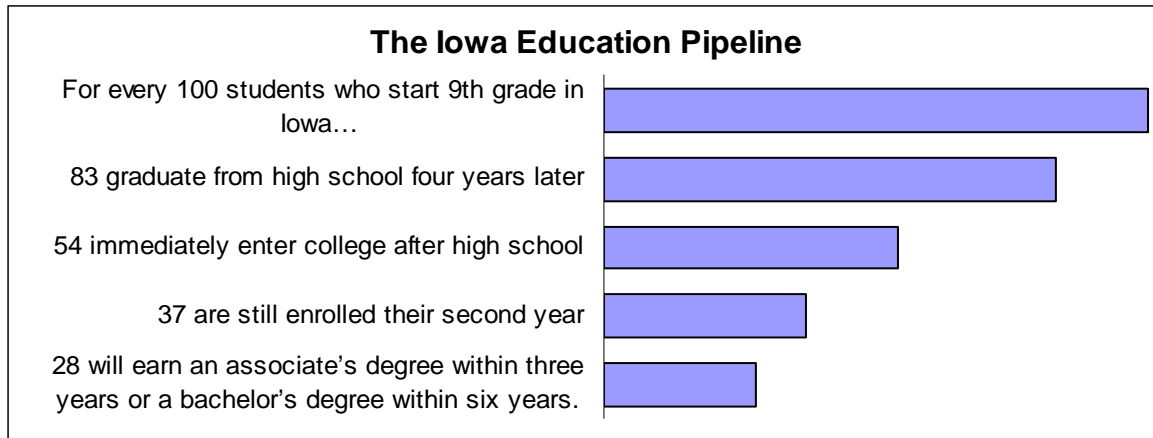
## The World Is Changing – Education Must Keep Pace

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has arrived but education policy remains stubbornly rooted in the 1900s. The educational results demonstrated by our current educational arrangements and processes don't meet current demands, not to mention the increasing demands that today's students will need to meet in the future. Iowa can boast of its current educational achievements relative to other states, but from boardrooms to factory floors, from global competition to main street America the accepted notions of educational priorities are mismatched to modern realities. Mismatches also occur within and across the various stages of the education system itself.

These mismatches include:

- the critical importance of human development in early childhood as opposed to Iowa's low investments in early education;
- the desire to attend college opposed to the actual completion of a degree or training program;
- projected career opportunities as opposed to today's current career preparation;
- the promise of educational opportunity for all students opposed to the achievement rate of our poor and diverse students;
- students' skills at graduation as opposed to those needed in the workplace today;
- Need for a seamless, aligned education system as opposed to duplication of efforts, lack of common purpose, and articulation from one level to the next.





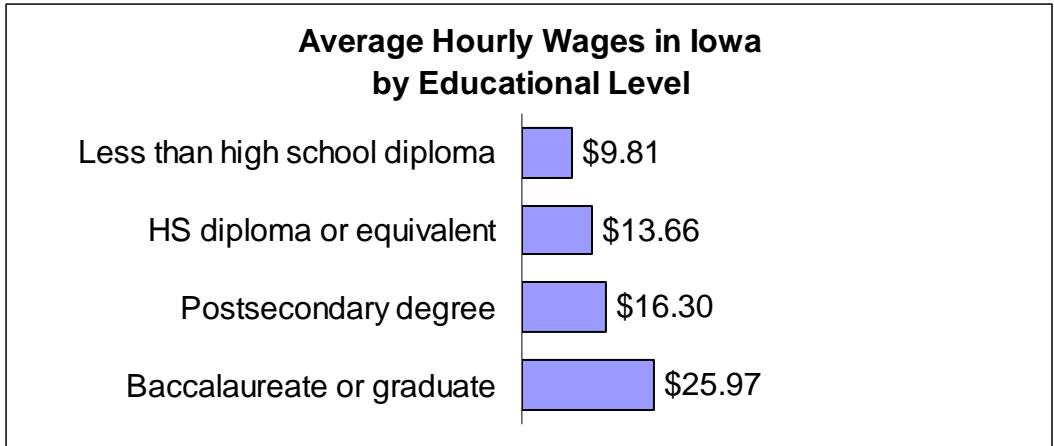
Source: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education ([www.highereducation.org](http://www.highereducation.org)). Data are from 2002.

### Iowa's Economy Depends on Educational Excellence

Education is the key to economic prosperity today, and will be even more so in the future. While education enriches lives in ways that cannot always be measured in dollar terms, and many factors must contribute to Iowa's successful economic future, no factor will be more critical to Iowa's economic vitality in that future than the education of our citizens. The evidence is compelling:

- Education determines future income. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that a postsecondary degree is the main source of preparation for 49 of the 50 highest paying occupations in the U.S. economy.<sup>1</sup>
- Skill development through education provides a qualified and productive workforce.
- A pool of well-educated workers is the primary factor in attracting and retaining high-skill, high-wage industries.
- An educated, well-paid population supports higher state and local tax bases, spends money throughout the state and local economies, and contributes to a superior quality of life in communities all over the state.

<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics (2004). Available: <http://www.bls.gov/oco/oco2003.htm>.



Source: Iowa Department of Workforce Development for 2002.

**Unemployment and earnings by educational attainment, U.S.**

Education attained	Unemployment Rate (2002)	Median Earnings (2001)
Master's degree	2.8%	\$56,600
Bachelor's degree	3.1%	\$47,000
Associate degree	4.0%	\$36,400
Some college, no degree	4.8%	\$34,300
High-school graduate	5.3%	\$29,200
Some high-school, no diploma	9.2%	\$22,400

Source: Unemployment rate, 2002 annual average: Bureau of Labor Statistics; earnings, March 2001: Bureau of the Census.

**Conclusion**

Iowa must develop the vision and conviction to build and sustain a world-class educational system that produces graduates who rank with the world's best if Iowans are to prosper in the future. By modernizing our educational system in ways designed to meet the challenges that confront Iowa, and investing in that system, our state can better attract employers, bring new wealth into the state, benefit individuals and communities, and enhance the quality of life statewide. Accordingly, Iowa must provide educators with the human, financial, and community-wide resources required to achieve this vision.

Education is everyone's business. More than ever before, we all have a stake in the success of our education system. More education and higher levels of achievement mean better income and higher standards of living for students, greater productivity for businesses, and a more vibrant economy for all of us. What is at stake is absolutely critical. The quality of life for ourselves, our children and our grandchildren hangs in the balance, and all of us share responsibility for meeting the challenge before us.

Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack appointed the Iowa Learns Council in September, 2003 to take a holistic view of the state's education system from early childhood through postsecondary education and into the workforce, and recommend strategies to ensure a seamless and coordinated system. The Council's membership reflects the awareness that meaningful and lasting educational change requires sustained support and collaboration from leaders in business, industry, government, and education. In addition, the work of the council reflects a response to the following critical needs for education improvements in Iowa:

- the need for an education system built on partnerships among students, parents, educators, the communities of business and industry, and the people of the state of Iowa and focused on continuous improvement to meet emerging needs;
- the need for an education system driven by understanding of student needs and focused on high expectations;
- the need for expanded professional development efforts for our educators;
- the need for leadership and advocacy by the state, its communities, and Iowa business and industry.

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# Iowa Learns Council

## *Recommendations*

### Partnerships

To meet the needs of today's students, we must assure new and stronger partnerships between parents and educators, among all levels of the education system, and among education leaders, community leaders and business leaders.

Educators understand the importance of continuous school improvement, and they stand ready to meet the challenge. But they can't be fully successful by themselves. Parents, business people, community leaders, labor officials and policy makers all need to work in partnership with education. Together, we can help with the daunting task of keeping education up to date with the accelerating pace of change in technology and the economy and maintain the long-term effort that we need to be successful.

We need to build more partnerships within education as well. Our nation is only now, decades after most women entered the workforce, coming to grips with the need to link early care and education with the rest of education in a more cohesive way. And we need to expand on existing partnerships to coordinate the transition from high schools to college and university opportunities.

Recommendations include:

- Establish a new Iowa Partnership for Education and the Economy. The Governor and Lieutenant Governor will appoint members from business, labor, education, families, communities, and state policy makers who will ensure a coherent connection with education and workplace needs. The Partnership will report annually on indicators of success by students, by education leaders at all levels and by employers.
- Provide a one-stop contact point for information useful to both educators and employers, including a state-level clearinghouse for internships, job shadowing experiences, and other workplace learning opportunities for students that are linked to economic development goals.
- Build an integrated, comprehensive early care, health and education system that includes transition plans so that all children move smoothly into the K – 12 education system.
- Develop and support partnerships at the local, regional, and state level that remove barriers and integrate resources to meet student needs.
- Create incentives for education and employment in fields that are most important for Iowa's economy.

## **Expectations**

We know that today's economy demands higher levels of education for more students. But we need to be clear about exactly what we expect from our students and from the education system that serves them. And we need to be sure that all the partners, not just educators, have a common understanding of what these expectations are, why they are important, and the support systems that are needed to achieve them.

We need to focus especially on the learning needs of younger children as they transition to Kindergarten, and the knowledge and skills needed by high school graduates, including critical thinking, teamwork, and communications skills as well as high levels of achievement in traditional academic subjects. Our job cannot stop there. Post-secondary education must continue to build and deepen the knowledge, skills, and abilities of all our students. The Council has found that these are particularly critical for the future of our children and our economy, but we aren't likely to be successful in these areas unless we have a clear, shared understanding of what our goals are.

Recommendations include:

- Adopt Early Learning Standards to provide guidance on the breadth and depth of learning for students who have yet to enter Kindergarten.
- Move aggressively to expand quality preschool opportunities for all students and assure universal access to high quality preschool programs for 3-4 year olds.
- Facilitate community dialogues to develop expectations for higher levels of achievement for high school graduates necessary for success in post-secondary education and the workforce and new ways these expectations can be met.
- Provide strong academic support systems for high school students and their parents to help prepare them to be successful in further education and work after they graduate.

## **Professional Development**

Teachers have within their grasp the future of our country. That future is our students. These students of today will sit in our halls of Congress, they will ply their muscles and minds to earn a living and contribute to our economic well being, they will raise families and live within our communities. They will contribute or they will take. Much of what happens will depend on their abilities to communicate, think, and work with others. These skills are learned at the knees of their first teachers, their parents, but as teaching continues throughout a student's pre-K through college or work experiences the teacher must have the most up-to-date tools of instruction to guide, learn, remediate, and extend and expand the student's mind and abilities. Providing teachers with these tools is accomplished through their initial training and on-going professional development. A state, a community, a college, or a school district cannot afford to shirk from the responsibility to provide the most current research on what works for improving and increasing student learning.

Recommendations include:

- Provide support programs for families with young children to enable parents to be their child's first and best teacher.
- Provide training opportunities focused on increasing knowledge and skills for child care providers and early childhood teachers through increased state and local incentives and investments.
- Renew the financial commitment to Iowa's Teacher Quality legislation as one of the top priorities for the Governor and the Iowa Legislature in this coming session. Specific funding for professional development that supports intensive research-based classroom strategies for our current teachers is necessary.
- Integrate skills necessary to succeed in the new economy including skills working in team environment, critical thinking and basic skill acquisition into curriculum and instruction. All teachers, regardless of their setting or age-level of their students, should value and integrate these skills into their efforts. Any training for teachers, pre-K through postsecondary, should integrate and emphasize these skills.

### **Leadership**

Leading change requires leaders who are courageous, collaborative, and committed. Hierarchies are being replaced by networks and integrated systems. Leadership responsibilities and traits are not the traits of yesterday but the traits of leading for learning for today and tomorrow. Today's leaders need a broad base of current knowledge and skills and a deep passion for continually improving education so that students can be as successful as possible. New governance, shared results, strategic alliances with partners must be linked in ways not "dreamt of" in previous leadership philosophies. Leaders facilitate transitions so that each student has the opportunity to build upon their knowledge, skills, and dispositions as they leave one level of education for the next.

Recommendations include:

- Provide educational leaders the support needed to enact changes that will provide students with the highest learning opportunities from birth through employment.
- Establish a Quality Rating System for early childhood providers that will inform parents and employers of early childhood environments that are of the highest quality.
- Create mechanisms for leaders at all levels of education to assure that students and their families can negotiate the transitions between levels smoothly by aligning expectations, curriculum, and skill development.

# Iowa Learns Council

## *Process*

Governor Thomas J. Vilsack appointed the Iowa Learns Council through an executive order issued on September 25, 2003, charging the council to conduct a holistic appraisal of all aspects of education in the state and to recommend strategies leading to a seamless and coordinated system. Council members were appointed from positions of leadership in Iowa education, government, business, and industry. The Iowa Department of Education; the Iowa Board of Regents; Iowa Department of Management; Iowa Workforce Development; the Iowa Department of Economic Development; and the Governor's Office shared staff support duties for the council.

The Governor's order formed the council into three working subgroups, or teams, and established a steering committee to coordinate their work. The responsibilities of each team focused on a particular stage of the educational sequence, as follows:

- *Team 1: Focus on Early Childhood*
- *Team 2: Focus on K-12 Students*
- *Team 3: Strengthening the Education-Economic Growth Connection*

Governor Vilsack convened the council's first meeting in October, 2003. From that time through the spring of 2004, each team met independently on at least three occasions, and conducted its research and review and developed recommendations according to self-determined consensus-building processes. The council steering committee coordinated the work of the respective teams. The steering committee also discussed the progress of the council with Governor Vilsack in February and May. At the request of Governor Vilsack, the council re-convened in August, 2004 to endorse its recommendations.

# Iowa Learns Council

## *Members*

Thomas J. Vilsack	Governor	Chairperson
Dr. Jose Amaya	Ames	Postsecondary & Economy
Frederick Buie	West Des Moines	Postsecondary & Economy
Dr. Patricia Cain	North Liberty	K-12 to Postsecondary
John Calhoun	Sioux City	Early Learning-Kindergarten
Christopher Carman	Cedar Rapids	Early Learning-Kindergarten
David Christensen	Mt. Pleasant	K-12 to Postsecondary
Terri Christoffersen	Toddville	Early Learning-Kindergarten
Dr. Nicholas Colangelo	Iowa City	K-12 to Postsecondary
Dr. Gwen Countryman	Iowa City/Dubuque	Early Learning-Kindergarten
William Decker	Iowa City	Postsecondary & Economy
Anne Jacqueline Dout	Pella	Postsecondary & Economy
Dr. Mark C. Draper	Council Bluffs	Early Learning-Kindergarten
Dr. Catherine Dunn, BVM	Dubuque	Postsecondary & Economy
Kathryn Erickson	Bettendorf	Early Learning-Kindergarten
Chris Evan-Schwartz	Cedar Rapids	Early Learning-Kindergarten
Judi K Eyles	Urbandale	Postsecondary & Economy
Dr. Ron Fielder	Swisher	Postsecondary & Economy
Dr. Sally Frudden	Charles City	Early Learning-Kindergarten
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Laurie Hempen	New London	Postsecondary & Economy
Dr. Robert Koob	Cedar Falls	K-12 to Postsecondary
Janice Kuhl	Ankeny	K-12 to Postsecondary
Connie Maxson	Creston	K-12 to Postsecondary
Dr. Fred Moore	Storm Lake	K-12 to Postsecondary
Dr. Michael Morrison	Mason City	K-12 to Postsecondary
Dr. Norm Nielsen	Cedar Rapids	Postsecondary & Economy
Phil Patton	Cedar Falls	K-12 to Postsecondary
Jane Peck	Ft. Madison	Early Learning-Kindergarten
Max Phillips	Woodward	Postsecondary & Economy
Kathie Readout	Marshalltown	Early Learning-Kindergarten
Barry Schaffter	Cedar Falls	Postsecondary & Economy
Mary Stewart	Ottumwa	K-12 to Postsecondary
Father Thomas Toale, PhD	Cascade	K-12 to Postsecondary
Marisa Van Dorn	Waterloo	K-12 to Postsecondary
Dinh VanLo	Des Moines	Early Learning-Kindergarten
Karen Vickers	Clinton	Postsecondary & Economy
Darlene Von Weihe	Carson	K-12 to Postsecondary

# Iowa Learns Council

## *Staff Support*

### Early Learning - Kindergarten

Lead: Kris Bell, Governor's Office  
Penny Milburn, Department of Education  
Dee Gethmann, Department of Education  
Shanell Wagler, Community Empowerment  
Jeff Anderson, Human Services, Community Empowerment

### K-12 - Postsecondary

Lead: Ted Stilwill, Department of Education  
Judy Jeffrey, Department of Education  
Jan Huss, Department of Education  
Laurie Phelan, Department of Education  
Tony Girardi, Board of Regents

### Postsecondary - Economy

Lead: Greg Nichols, Board of Regents  
Lane Palmer, Department of Economic Development  
Jeff Nall, Iowa Workforce Development  
Jan Friedel, Department of Education  
Barbara Boose, Board of Regents  
Tony Girardi, Board of Regents

## **Iowa Learns Council**

### ***Detailed Recommendations***

Attach 3 team reports.