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ABSTRACT

An overview of Iowa public schools for the school year 1990-91 is provided in this report. Findings are based on school-site visitations made by the state "ambassador for education." Following an introduction, section 1 describes successes of the state public school system, some of which include changing classroom practices, increasing collaboration, meeting students' changing needs, and providing alternative programs and structures. The second section examines changing leadership roles, underscoring the need for professional development programs. Concerns of educators are discussed in the third section; these include societal problems faced by students, class size, lack of time, and institutional resistance to change. Visions for educational improvement held by teachers and administrators are described in section 4. The final section offers recommendations for improvement; these include providing motivation and investment, recognizing process as well as outcomes, and developing long-term goals. (LMI)

# A Journey Through Iowa Schools 1990-91



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**To all the educators**
**in Iowa who so willingly**
**shared their expertise with me**

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# ABSTRACT

As Iowa's Ambassador for Education, I spent the 1990-91 school year visiting with public school educators concerning what they were proud of, what was effective for them in their schools.

I made every attempt to balance my visits between large and small districts, rural and urban, and elementary and secondary. I also tried to visit schools in various geographic areas of the state. Although I was unable to meet teachers and administrators from every district, I did speak with nearly 2000 educators. The entire document summarizes the information they shared with me.

When asked what they were proudest of, most educators spoke of the people who work in the schools. Their comments were inclusive of the work being done by professionals and students. I categorized this work into six general areas:

1. Changes within the classroom. Educators emphasized the value of initiatives like hands-on math and Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement (TESA), as well as their own personal modifications to existing programs. Successful programs within the classroom had plenty of flexibility to allow for teacher autonomy. Teachers also found it important that classroom instructional changes were undertaken voluntarily by the teachers, but that support and continued commitment were promised at the building and district level.

2. Increasing the teamwork. In order to meet the increased demands on schools, educators stressed the need to work collaboratively. This collaboration involved middle school teacher teams, educators working with parent volunteers to assist students, AEA efforts to bring teams of teachers together to write curriculum, community and school partnerships, and connections with community colleges.

3. Meeting the changing needs of students. Even small-town Iowa schools reflected on the need to rethink the programs available for students of today. Programs for students who are at risk of dropping out or failing received growing attention from our school personnel.

4. Alternatives to isolation. To eliminate the stigma of student labels and provide higher quality education for all students, educators described and showed me various ways to accommodate special education students in regular programs. Pairing special education and regular education professionals required new skills.

5. Alternative programs and structures. Our old assumptions about schools and the way they operate have been dismissed by several districts. The alternative programs stretched from groupings within the classrooms to the academic focus of an entire district. The structures varied from alternative high schools to sharing arrangements for entire districts. The exploration of alternatives will remain an issue of attention for virtually every district I visited.

6. The impact of Phase III. Educators described how Phase III had enabled them to accomplish many of the successes outlined above. While Phase III did not receive all glowing marks, districts which appeared to be most satisfied with their plans found a balance between projects for individual teachers and focused development opportunities for all staff.

The success of these six areas appeared to be directly linked to school leadership. I found school leaders were not limited to administrators but teachers as well. In order to provide growth

experiences for these leaders, new programs developed by AEAs, professional organizations, and institutes of various origins were essential.

Leaders who modeled risk taking, who challenged the status quo and who understood the importance of professional autonomy tended to be identified by staff members as an impetus for positive growth in their districts.

Whenever I asked educators to describe what worked for them, they invariably included areas of concern which prevented them from being even more effective. The rapid pace of change in society, especially in the family structure, has had tremendous impact on young people. Naturally as significant adults in the lives of young people, teachers have additional responsibilities thrust upon them.

As the world changes rapidly around them, educators expressed a frustration with the lack of time to adequately plan lessons and collaborate with other professionals. Class sizes which were too large prevented educators from knowing students well enough to assist them. Because the needs of our student population have changed dramatically, lack of changes in some schools and classrooms posed a concern for me.

Educators shared their dreams and visions for the future. The concept of an ideal school brought unusual responses from educators. Even though many teachers were not familiar with the language of school transformation, they envisioned a school which could truly fit the definition of transformed.

Some teachers proposed keeping the same group of students for a number of years. Others discussed the possibility of eliminating traditional course titles in high schools and creating more interdisciplinary projects. Establishing coalitions with the community, to provide year-round programs appealed to some teachers. Eliminating labels for students and creating truly heterogenous classrooms was another suggestion. Teachers at various grade levels spoke of the ideal situation where assessment would be part of learning as opposed to testing which interfered with learning.

As educators, we have spent far too little time conversing about the ideal school situation. Time to create "visions of excellence" must be incorporated into the contract of every educator.

The final section "Where do we go from here" offers my interpretation of what I observed over the past twelve months. If we truly desire peak performing schools, we must support the peak performers working there now and enable more of our educators and students to reach that potential.

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# INTRODUCTION

I have just completed a journey which will forever change my life. It began exactly one year ago when I was named Iowa Ambassador for Education, the first person to be honored with that title. As teacher-ambassador, I represented nearly 30,000 professional educators in this state. Not only was that a tremendous honor, I have felt a tremendous responsibility to represent my fellow professionals well.

As is typical of any Iowa teacher, I wore blinders before this journey began. My blinders allowed me only to view one sixth grade classroom in one school in Iowa. My world consisted of 28 pre-adolescents who were struggling to balance academic challenges with the demands of their emerging social lives. Often the biggest concern of the moment was whether or not my students needed to wear overshoes at recess.

Never again will I wear those blinders. My journey this year has permitted me to view education from the outside-in, from 12th grade to pre-kindergarten, in large and tiny districts. I have roamed through over 150 buildings and met at least 2000 educators, both in their buildings and at numerous educational conferences and meetings. And although I will once again return to the confines of the classroom this fall, I do so with eyes wide open.

I owe so much to so many that I hardly know where to begin. First of all, my family encouraged and supported me throughout the year: I learned that my husband Bud is just as capable at cooking and washing as I am and that my babysitting parents have more stamina than I when caring for our two daughters. The sacrifices the family made for me can never be fully repaid.

This entire journey would not have been possible had it not been for Dr. William Lepley, State Senator Bev Hannon, and Governor Terry Branstad. Without their efforts and vision, the Ambassador program would not exist.

I owe a special thanks to Ted Stilwill whose insight and probing questions helped me clarify what I saw. The success of this journey is largely due to his guidance.

Although I will undoubtedly share this paper with others, I have written it basically as a selfish endeavor. It is my attempt to synthesize what I have experienced, to bring closure to my journey.

As I began my year-long journey as Iowa Ambassador for Education, my first decision was whether I would take a broad look at Iowa schools, describing what generally exists now, or whether I would look for what educators were proud of, describing what seems to be working and why. With the guidance of Ted Stilwill, I chose to focus on the successes of Iowa schools, those factors educators themselves identified as "What works."

In selecting schools to visit, I asked every educator I met to recommend teachers, buildings and programs I should see. I built a list of "Must Sees" which could have consumed the rest of my career! Once I had selected the school I wished to visit for a particular date, I simply called the superintendent or building principal and told her/him I wished to come. When I first explained my mission, many administrators seemed confused. But as I further explained my job, I was, without exception, welcomed to visit. I will never forget one superintendent saying,"You mean you REALLY want to know what we're doing which is RIGHT? You REALLY want to know the good things?"

Once I had decided that I wished to look for the exemplary features of schools, I had to determine whether I would take a quick snapshot of the programs or whether I wished to visit with educators in greater depth. Most of the time I chose a middle ground, wandering around and popping into classrooms, speaking with educators at lunch, chatting as they supervised recess. Lack of time remained my biggest frustration. I would have preferred spending a day per building, watching more teachers in action and speaking with each staff member.

My one regret in this entire experience is that there are so many excellent educators, so many excellent programs that I will never see. Although I attempted to visit all geographic areas of the state and balance my visits with rural and urban, I found it impossible to give equal attention to everyone. I recall a teacher I met recently at an AEA meeting who asked why I had not visited her district yet. My reply was, "There are over 400 school districts in this state and each has at least one building. With only 180 days in the school year, it is impossible to visit every district." I am reassured, however, knowing that the Ambassadors who will succeed me will have chances to view even more exemplary schools.

As I began my journey visiting with Iowa educators, I naively assumed that because the population of Iowa is relatively homogenous that our schools would be much the same no matter where I went. I soon discovered that schools which served very similar students and were only ten miles apart were often worlds apart in the programs, teaching styles and even the atmosphere of the buildings. Because of the great diversity I saw in our schools, I found it difficult and misleading to generalize. To say, "Iowa schools are thus and so," or "Iowa educators feel this way," would oversimplify the trends I experienced. Yet, having spent a year speaking with approximately 2000 educators, I did see and hear common themes. It is these common themes with specific examples that I share with you.

## Section One
# WHAT WE'RE PROUD OF

Whenever I contacted a school for a visit, I always emphasized that I wanted to see what the staff was proud of, what was working well for them. By far the most common response was, "We're proud of the people who work here." That pride included not only the educators but the students as well. Sources of pride for educators also ran the gamut from facilities such as Starmont's new school to student groups like Sioux City North High's award-winning jazz band.

I soon discovered, however, that most educators tend to be rather modest people. I recall observing the classroom of one fourth grade teacher who truly worked magic with her students in a science lesson. When I asked her about her inspiration, she seemed puzzled, as though what she was doing was quite ordinary. It never occurred to her that she should brag or that her ideas were worthy of being shared with others, even though she knew her students were experiencing success.

In finding out what people were proud of, sometimes it was useful for me simply to ask teachers what they were trying, what they hoped to accomplish. They were much more likely then to show or describe the successes and frustrations they were facing. Borrowing a thought from Charles Garfield and his book Peak Performers, top-notch performers in any field tend to be visionary and realistic at the same time. In other words, the peak-performing teachers and schools I visited were able to identify what was successful for them. But they were also clear to say, "Yes, this is working for us BUT we want to do so much more...."

Up front I want to tell you that I found an abundance of peak performers in schools, teachers and administrators quietly helping students prepare for life. Unfortunately, most do not receive any fanfare or any awards, even though they help our richest resource, children, prepare for an increasingly uncertain future.

The ideas identified here are but a small fraction of successes described by the educators I met. I have eight legal pads chocked full of success stories shared by teachers and administrators! I also hasten to add that these are successes THEY identified. I did not do the identification, nor did I attempt to verify the success. Whenever possible, I spoke with other educators and students to gain their perspectives about the successes.

## CHANGES WITHIN THE CLASSROOM

As a sixth grade teacher, I must admit that the innovations and successes I saw right in Iowa classrooms intrigued me most. That is where the true impact of school transformation is played out, where the final accountability for all our reforms must lie. If all our efforts at structural change, shared governance and outcomes do not reach the classroom and the students working there, then our energies have been wasted.

When first implemented, few teachers ever imagined that many of the innovations they now use daily would forever transform their teaching. For example, the most commonly cited experience selected by Iowa teachers was the Iowa Writers' Project (originally the Southeast Iowa Writers' Project). The emphasis of IWP involves the process of writing, the transfer of ideas from the mind to paper. Process writing is far different from teaching grammar and punctuation skills in isolation and hoping that students will somehow magically incorporate these skills into their writing.

I found process writing to be heavily prevalent in certain areas of the state, depending on which AEA I was in and how available the training was. A particular school building either appeared to be virtually all IWP or not at all. When asked how the innovation had started in any particular building, the answer was nearly always the same. One or two teachers in a building had gone to the training in the summer, had piloted process writing in their classrooms and had told their fellow teachers about the success their students were having.

It is interesting to see that process writing seems to be growing in acceptance even though it is certainly not that recent (1978). As more elementary teachers have gained expertise in writing themselves, they have shown increasing dissatisfaction with the worksheet/workbook format of the reading programs they were using. Many elementary teachers have moved their reading programs to a broader literary focus. The whole or integrated language movement has been a natural progression for teachers who believe in process writing.

The lesson I learned from discussing process writing with teachers applied to more than just this one innovation. First of all, process writing has taken the teacher out of the mode of being the information giver, the source of all knowledge in the classroom. The students have become the workers in these classrooms. And teachers have begun to transfer the student-as-worker concept to other areas of the curriculum besides writing. As one elementary teacher in Mt. Vernon said, "No longer will students be the audience while I stand up in front of the room and perform."

Linda Calvin at Urbandale High School expressed the same thought when she spoke about authentic curriculum in her high school social studies classes. Her analogy of teacher as coach, students as players emphasized the active role students now play in their own learning.

Active student involvement has gone a step further in some districts. Student-led conferences at Spirit Lake Middle School placed the responsibility for assessing and designing the conference with the student. A few teachers at South Tama Intermediate School were attempting a similar program with younger students.

A second lesson from IWP has been the modeling teachers display to students. Before teaching the writing process, teachers become writers themselves. They experience the challenges their students will later experience. They show students how they struggle to perfect their own writing, sharing the questions they have about what they have written.

Similar modeling of teacher inquiry occurs with programs in process science (Chatauqua and SSCS, for example). In the training, teachers pose their own legitimate questions for research rather than simply verify experiments done by others. A high school biology teacher at Davenport West designed a course which requires students to pursue original research, research she, as a teacher, does not know the answer to. A group of fifth graders at Alburnett tackled an experiment that the teacher admitted stumped even scientists.

The third general lesson to be learned about many successful innovations follows the philosophy of process writing: ownership. Just as we observed that students take more pride in writing which they own, so it is with teachers. When they "own" an innovation and choose to fit it to their style of teaching and their particular student population, they continue to work to perfect it. Just as a successful teacher of process writing must first develop and practice his/her own writing talents to be truly effective in teaching writing, so it is with any other teaching method.

Other "teacher-owned" innovations which educators spotlighted included the hands-on science programs such as the 4-9 Project, principles of technology, cooperative learning, and emphasis on math manipulatives such as Math Their Way. These received high recommendations from Iowa educators because the basis for success is active student involvement in learning.

I observed literally hundreds of spin-off innovations which teachers had personally designed and therefore owned. Teachers at Meeker Elementary in Ames talked about the "Great Math Treasure Hunt" and "Asian Enigma" which had originated in the minds of their own staff members. A course at West Delaware High School called "Great Ideas" teamed social studies and English teachers for an integrated humanities experience. Students in a Mason City elementary school wrote their own newspaper of the 19th century, incorporating historical events of the time into a format of interest to young people. A kindergarten teacher in Oxford Junction shared her innovative hands-on math projects with fellow teachers. Project Think at Independence gave elementary students the experience of starting a real business, taking out a loan, and writing and selling their own logic puzzle books. A high school biology teacher at Sioux City North utilized information provided by a cystic fibrosis organization for use in a probability unit. Students at Clarence-Lowden have conducted research on World War II veterans in their community.

Not all the innovations were right inside the four walls of the classroom. Third grade teachers and students at Roland-Story developed an outdoor education area and beautified the school grounds at the same time. High school biology and agriculture students at Monticello created and maintain an outdoor education facility which doubles as a wildlife preserve. Several middle school teachers described outdoor education experiences, camping trips, or retreats to church or scout camps as enriching the programs they offered students.

Although teachers like these were quick to tell me that many exceptional ideas were not necessarily theirs alone (frequently they said,"I stole this idea from so and so but I changed it like this to fit my students"), they felt their skills as teachers were further enhanced when they designed classes themselves. In fact, I saw so many teacher-designed ideas which I wanted to "steal," that an entire book could have been written and readily marketed for other teachers. As one highly creative teacher at Stuart-Menlo said, "I have so many ideas. I just wish I had the time to develop all my good ideas."

Although I found innovative ideas in small and large districts, I did find some interesting trends. While teachers in small districts expressed greater satisfaction in the degree of professional autonomy they were allowed in implementing curricular changes, teachers in larger districts identified support and training opportunities were more readily available to them.

The innovations listed above were initiated by individual teachers or teams. They were not whole-school mandates or formally adopted curricular changes until staff members determined the change was internalized. No one came in and said, "Thou shalt do..."

But does that mean that successful programs allowed teachers to just pursue their own interests? Have such divergent paths played havoc with student learning?

I posed those questions at an Iowa City elementary school where I saw whole language philosophy being implemented in a variety of formats. When I spoke with teachers, this is what I heard. "We are all following the same path, the same philosophy. As our superintendent said, we are on the same road. But some of us will be at different points along the road. Some will have traveled faster, others will take an important detour or a rest stop. Some of our progress depends on the group of students we work with."

Primary teachers at Keokuk this year have piloted whole language programs tailored to each teacher and her students. Two first grade teachers emphasized the close communication they had established as they honed their programs. "We tell each other what is working well and ask for advice when we have difficulties. But we really know what is going on in other teachers' rooms."

Another teacher reminded me that we need to celebrate diversity, a key element of many mission statements in districts I visited. "The strength of our school staff is the diversity, the individual

strengths that professionals bring together as a team." She further specified that students are not the same and neither are all the teachers. "We wouldn't want them all to be the same."

Administrators and teachers alike felt if the school established a broad framework (in some places being called outcomes), that teachers should be allowed autonomy on how to teach. A first grade teacher at East Buchanan reminded me, "After all, I spend all day, every day with these children. I am constantly diagnosing what they need. I need a great deal of freedom to adapt my teaching to what will be best at that time." But she also pointed out that teachers must have training in how to be effective "kid watchers."

With increased emphasis on active student involvement in learning, many teachers talked about needing more teaching skills than ever before. "I find I need a whole repertoire of skills now. I'm not just lecturing and handing out worksheets anymore," was the common sentiment expressed by a Fairfield math teacher. In order to provide teachers with a wider range of teaching models, districts have increasingly focused staff development dollars on enhancing teachers' skills.

Not surprisingly, teachers rarely identified whole-school programs as being a source of pride. When I asked administrators what they felt had been successful, they sometimes pointed to a staff development program which had involved the entire staff. Teachers were hesitant to give such wholesale school staff development programs glowing marks. Where innovations for the classroom were brought in for whole-school adoption, those identified as being successful allowed room for personal and professional growth and a great deal of teacher autonomy.

One of the most recognized whole-staff programs was TESA (Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement). Both teachers and administrators tended to praise its value. When pressed for a reason, they generally felt that it had direct application to teachers in the classroom and how they were teaching. But the real strength highlighted by teachers was that TESA provided an opportunity for teachers to observe fellow teachers in the classroom, not as critiques but as learners. An educator in north central Iowa praised the classroom observations of teachers outside her grade level and area of expertise. "I always thought it would be easy to teach music class since they only have students sing. But when I observed in her classroom, I gained a whole new appreciation for what she is doing."

Other programs of peer observation and peer coaching received praise from teachers. The strength of the career ladder at West Delaware, in the opinion of teachers, has been practicing models of teaching with a trained peer coach. Programs in Marshalltown and Bettendorf provided for pair-peer coaching. Teachers in a consortium of schools throughout the state who trained in Bruce Joyce's Models of Teaching expressed similar strengths in the peer observation component.

A third-grade classroom in the Waverly-Shell Rock district was identified this year as a model classroom for implementation of the NCTM (National Council for the Teachers of Mathematics) standards. Not only did area teachers visit this classroom in action, but afterward the teacher sat down with the visitors and reviewed the lesson and answered questions. Teachers felt the strength of this model involved both seeing the teacher and students in action but also the reflection time afterward when everyone could share ideas and probe for further suggestions.

I visited with two teachers at Ft. Madison, one a kindergarten teacher and the other a third grade teacher, who have been peer coaches for each other. They used terms like "opening up the classroom" and "having another set of eyes" in encouraging other teachers to establish such programs.

When I asked teachers to generalize about successful staff development programs, they tended to include these criteria: 1). Useful in the classroom; has practical value 2). Voluntary participation by teachers 3). Flexible enough to accommodate different "comfort levels" for teachers 4). Not

tied to the teacher evaluation process, at least not until teachers have accepted and practiced the "skills" (this seems to be a reason why Madeline Hunter has an undeserved bad name among teachers) 5). Continued support and follow-up as teachers "practice" the skills 6). Commitment to a particular focus more than one year ("Last year we 'did' learning styles. This year we're 'doing' cooperative learning. What will it be next year?"); eliminate the one-day dog-and-pony shows of the infamous "Staff Development Days"

## INCREASING THE TEAMWORK

Just as opening up the classroom has encouraged teachers to reflect more about their teaching practices, team efforts have encouraged groups of educators to reflect on the practices and structures of schools in general. One middle school teacher likened the skills needed for this teamwork to "cooperative learning for big people."

One of the most common themes I heard from educators involved the necessity of working as teams. Several primary teachers reported that they had informally planned teaching lessons as teams for years. However, most of the accolades for team planning came from middle school staffs.

Middle school teachers who have common planning time during the day identified that scheduled time as essential for sharing information about students. A typical middle school team in Cedar Rapids Roosevelt Middle School might be four "core" teachers and one special education teacher who serve approximately 100 students at a grade level. One middle school team meeting I attended discussed the following: 1). A student whose mother appeared to be doing the homework for her daughter; what approach should be taken with them; 2). A boy whose attitude toward school had slipped; teachers knew his older brothers were picking on him; his step-father did not get along with the boy; counselor volunteered to assist homeroom teacher in this matter; 3). Request by a teacher for a student to come before the team to discuss frequent tardiness to classes; 4). a new student who was moving here from Missouri; team assigned her a schedule and homeroom.

Although it may not directly be tied to team planning, one team in this school felt successful integration of special education students had occurred as a result of teaming. Because a special education teacher was a member of the team, special education students could be more naturally integrated into the regular curriculum and the special education teacher knew what skills/activities to emphasize when working with students. In fact, this particular educator had three students who wanted so badly to be integrated into all curricular areas that they received permission from their parents to stay after school for tutoring, rather than receive services in a "pull-out" manner. In some cases these special educators taught some regular education classes too so class sizes could be reduced for the entire team.

A different team meeting I attended focused only on curriculum that particular day. Teachers shared what they were doing that week in classes so they could "connect" with each other. They were planning an interdisciplinary unit on Afro-Americans and wanted to be sure the transition would be smooth. This team found that they had to carefully schedule their team planning time. Originally they found themselves spending each planning session talking about the same twelve students. For them, this was a workable schedule: Monday: student referrals; notes from the building; Tuesday: curriculum for the entire team for the week; Wednesday: each individual teacher's plans for the week; Thursday: other staff share concerns (counselor, media specialist, etc.); Friday: concerns about individual students.

Often the teachers responsible for the exploratory subjects (music, industrial tech, home ec, etc.) have felt left out of the team planning process. While the "core" team is meeting, the exploratory teachers have the students in their classes. However, a closely-knit team of exploratory teachers at

Cedar Rapids McKinley Middle School successfully supported efforts for the entire school. This team coordinated outdoor activities for stress reduction, a career education unit, grocery store receipts for free computers, and a display for Red, White, and Blue Day. They regularly met with the counselor and the media specialist so they could work to assist individual students.

Teaming for fifth grade teachers at Sergeant Bluff-Luton was further enhanced when they all attended a math workshop together. The common experiences strengthened their teaching skills and provided focus for their planning time.

An Anamosa Middle School team summed up the benefits of team planning: 1). Focus on individual students so they can't "fall between the cracks;" 2). Student absences are spotted before they become habitual 3). Concerns for difficulties in a student's personal life; assistance is sought for student before a crisis occurs; 4). Teachers coordinate homework and tests so students do not have everything on one day; 5). Natural interdisciplinary ties are established; 6). Teacher realizes that his/her subject is not the only thing a student needs to know.

Although team planning was important to middle school teachers, educators at alternative high schools talked about the necessity for team planning in that setting. I observed a team meeting at Central High School in Dubuque where teachers discussed individual students of concern. Because alternative high schools usually serve a unique population of students, the obstacles these young people face are often more complex than those of students in a traditional setting. These teachers acknowledged that they needed all the wisdom they could find to aid them in helping these students. Team support was absolutely essential for them.

The teachers I spoke with who did not have a common team planning time put it on the "Wish List." A high school teacher at Turkey Valley expressed the sentiment when she said, "We ALL need to have time during our working day to meet as teams. If we're going to provide opportunities where students make connections among subject matter, we, as teachers, need to meet regularly to plan these activities."

Of course, administrators agreed with this opinion. The missing ingredient, as usual, has been money. In order for teachers to have team planning and individual planning time, either more staff must be hired or alternative scheduling/creative structures must be developed.

One possible way to "buy time" for teachers in the future may involve the use of volunteers or support personnel. Teamwork may involve more people than simply school staff members.

Cody Elementary in the Pleasant Valley district has relied entirely on volunteers for its writing center. Students dictate stories and create books which are constructed by volunteers. Rather than spending precious class time on construction of books and covers, student and teacher time can be devoted to other academic tasks.

Teamwork has expanded outside the school district boundaries in the curriculum writing process. Teachers in AEA 6 and 7 praised the team efforts in writing curriculum coordinated by the area education agencies. In the summer, each district sends top-notch teachers to the AEA to share current research, trends, and teaching ideas. Especially in the smaller districts where there may be only one biology teacher, for example, it is difficult to bounce ideas off other educators, so the team effort at the AEA is invaluable for them.

Western Hills AEA coordinated a similar curriculum writing opportunity. Teachers from a moderate-sized district in this AEA found the shared curriculum writing provided insight into innovations in teaching. "We don't have a curriculum director...No one really had the time to coordinate all our curriculum, so we had a real hodge-podge," was the opinion of the

superintendent in this district. Most of the districts who participated in such efforts used Phase III to fund this work.

Although the type of services available through AEAs varied across the state, teachers in small districts were especially appreciative of AEA consultants and coursework. Without the assistance of AEAs, these districts felt they would not have had the resources to provide teachers with the expertise they needed.

Teamwork with the community has served to promote both the school district and the community. The Fairfield Chamber of Commerce regularly brought guest speakers to the high school to inform students of careers. The Chamber also sponsored teacher appreciation events and provided scholarship opportunities for students. Students at Louisa-Muscatine and Ottumwa were exposed to professionals from their communities and cities throughout the state in career awareness days.

Fitting the needs of the community with the needs of the school fit the description for the community/school library in Amana. Since the community formerly had no library, a previous administrator thought a shared facility could enhance programs for everyone. By combining their resources, the library provided expanded hours throughout the school year and into the summer. It opened the school in both a literal and a figurative sense.

The Growth Corporation for Traer also has worked closely with the school to promote the community. Recently a nearby district, Parkersburg, began television ads in the Waterloo area. These ads boasted about the quality of the school district.

The Cedar Rapids Schools have worked with businesses in their community to provide daycare and preschool for employees of these companies. The businesses either donated a lump sum of money or facilities to get the project off the ground. Once the program was in operation, parents generally paid for the service.

Some of the teamwork which was identified as successful involved cooperation between high schools and community colleges. The Indianola Learning Center, the alternative high school for Indianola and surrounding districts, worked this past year with DMACC, the Des Moines Area Community College. In the future the Indianola facility plans to link with the Department of Labor and John Deere to further upgrade the opportunities for students.

Kirkwood Community College and Northeast Iowa Community College have cooperated with vocational programs in area high schools so students can complete community college requirements before high school graduation. Vocational teachers have been supplied with a list of competencies which they "check off" for students enrolled in their courses. If the student then chooses to attend either Kirkwood or NICC, the student can have "advanced placement" in courses.

The Tucker Vocational Center in Council Bluffs is a joint effort between area school systems and Iowa Western Community College. The staff members are all Iowa Western teachers except for the director and secretary who are employed by the Council Bluffs Schools. Each session is two and one-half hours so students were usually enrolled the other half day at their home high school. Staff at the Tucker Center spoke of plans to start a high tech program at the middle schools which will be a module-format.

Schools in Decorah benefitted from a partnership with Luther College to obtain grants for computer technology. Each building was equipped with a computer, modem, scanner, and printer for use by students and teachers.

Businesses in Ottumwa strongly supported Education Week events. They provided guest teachers for classrooms, facilities where teachers and students could "show off," and funds to sponsor a reception for teachers. Mason City educators described similar support from businesses in their community.

An art teacher in Decorah formed a partnership with a local store to display student artwork in an artists' "show." Not only did students have an opportunity to show off their talents, but citizens from the community were able to see the young artists' products.

Discussion about proposed partnerships was common among educators from various parts of the state. Partnerships which appear to be most successful are truly symbiotic, each partner clearly benefitting from the cooperative efforts.

## MEETING THE CHANGING NEEDS OF STUDENTS

Not too long ago, a parent asked me at conferences if students today were really that different than when we were growing up. I responded, "How has society changed since we were in school?" As she and I listed the changes in society, even in our rural Iowa setting, it became evident that students have changed too. Many of the schools I visited have become increasingly sensitive to these changes and developed innovative programs to meet those needs.

No matter which part of the state I visited or the size of the district, the changing needs of the student population was called to my attention by educators. A principal in a small rural district in southern Iowa reminded me that many of our present school systems were basically designed for the needs of students who had strong ties to agriculture. "50 years ago most of our graduates, those who stayed in school long enough to graduate, went back to the farm to work... Now almost none of our students choose farming. In fact, most of our students leave this community, never to return." Educators agreed that changes are needed in the schools. The degree and type of changes they feel are needed, however, are up for debate.

In recognizing changing student populations, districts formulated plans to meet these challenges. For example, high school teachers at Fairfield found that so many of their students were either working after school or so involved in other activities that they had difficulty completing their homework or finding a time to seek help from individual instructors. Rather than just complain about the number of students working, the staff designated first period of the day as a study/tutoring time. They reported to me that students now come to class better prepared and, therefore, have become more active participants in class. "If this effort increases student achievement, we need to continue it," was the sentiment of one high school teacher.

The growing concern for students who are at risk of failing and dropping out of school or becoming involved in self-destructive behavior has marked the recognition that our student population has changed. Student assistance teams were identified as strengths in many buildings. A LeMars counselor emphasized that the "at-risk" label can apply to any student at some point in his/her life. The success of any assistance program, in his opinion, was its flexibility in recognizing and dealing with student needs before a crisis occurred.

The formation of a student assistance plan has required much time and thought, according to educators. I spent time visiting with educators from four districts in AEA 2 who participated in a four-day residential training retreat with a cadre of school and community members. Based upon the belief that drug abuse is a symptom of at-risk behavior and not the source of the problem, these cadres focused on early intervention. An educator from Clear Lake spotlighted the emphasis on starting support for at-risk students in the elementary first. "We feel there is a greater need at the

elementary level, that we can make a greater difference there. If we wait until a student is in high school, all we can offer is a band-aide approach."

Although not involved in the AEA 2 consortium, a teacher in Grinnell echoed the same thoughts, "We can't wait until high school to focus our at-risk efforts. The problems start in elementary school. We just see the evidence of a problem more clearly at high school when the student gets picked up for drinking and driving or drops out of school because he's failing."

Recognizing the need for early intervention, the state of Iowa has funded a number of at-risk programs this year. I attempted to visit a number of these to find out what was working for each one. At one of the elementary schools in Dubuque which received a grant for at-risk early elementary students, teachers praised the use of an instructional strategist who worked directly with students needing assistance. Citing the familiar problem in the traditional special education model that students must fail consistently before receiving help, this model of using an instructional strategist has been more preventive. The strategist assisted children on specific areas of need. For example, three students in first grade who were having difficulty in counting beads received help from the strategist right in the regular classroom. The next week, the strategist might be working with a different small group of students who needed help in retelling a story. In fact, some of her time was spent working with four kindergarten students who could already read when they started school. She provided extended opportunities for them to enjoy reading, to make certain they had a chance to expand their reading opportunities.

This Dubuque school also believed strongly in parental involvement, assisting parents in working with their own children. Programs such as "How to Read to Kids" promoted practical techniques for parents.

Down the river in Davenport, an elementary building receiving a similar grant decreased class size and employed a full-time parent educator, a nurse, and a counselor. The lead teacher in this building expressed the viewpoint that if teachers are to more effectively meet the needs of at-risk students, then the teachers must be given support and assistance which is useful to them. Every Thursday from 2:00-3:20, all teachers are freed from their classroom duties to focus on teaching programs. The lead teacher volunteered to me that the grant provided a needed "catalyst for change" in this building. Bringing in the additional personnel spurred the rest of the staff to "transform."

Educators at three different at-risk grant sites in Cedar Rapids pointed out how each site developed a proposal unique to the student population. One elementary school which has a high proportion of its students identified as at-risk tailored its program to individual students, much like the IEPs for students identified as special education. Another school concentrated its efforts on the statement, "Every student can succeed," and ways to put that belief into practice. The third building is looking at alternative ways to qualify students for programs like Chapter I and special education. Each expressed the desire to better integrate their at-risk plans with special education mainstreaming, community-based services, and continued education of parents and staff.

While most of the at-risk grants were for preschool and elementary age children, the School Based Youth Services grants have served older youth. Two of the districts piloting School Based Youth Services spoke highly of the communication occurring between agencies and the schools. Even though her district was not a grant recipient, Superintendent Barbara Grohe of Iowa City caught the value of these efforts. "Now that we've discovered that the problems thrust on us by society won't go away by bellyaching, we're seeking collaborative efforts to solve problems."

Even though only a handful of the schools I visited had received state at-risk grants, other buildings pointed with pride at their efforts to better meet the needs of at-risk and special education students.

## ALTERNATIVES TO ISOLATION

Although the term "Alternatives to Isolation" may be unfamiliar to most educators, it expresses the commitment I heard when educators spoke about breaking down the isolation of programs where students are labeled, whether it is special education, Chapter, at-risk, or talented and gifted. When asked what direction they were heading, many educators spoke of breaking the stigma attached to labels and the compartmentalized models which often result.

For example, at Sergeant Bluff-Luton, preschool handicapped children and children from the neighborhood participated in a half-day program. The teacher for the program emphasized the value of having neighborhood children act as role models for the handicapped youngsters, that the language development and involvement in play activities were superior to a full-day handicapped-only model. Her district must abandon this model, however, because the funding provided by the state was only for half day and they cannot continue to provide the option for regular education preschoolers to participate. They will return to the full-day handicapped-only model so they can receive full-day funding.

West Branch incorporated an existing community day care program with an at-risk three- and four-year old plan (they received a state grant). Staff cited similar results to those identified at Sergeant Bluff. They are even hopeful that students who might have been placed in a PDC (preschool special education) room outside the district can be educated in this heterogenous setting.

Several schools I visited had their own version of RSDS (Renewed Service Delivery System) before the state introduced the concept. For several years teachers at Epworth High School in the Western Dubuque Schools have teamed regular education teachers with subject-matter teachers, particularly in English and social studies classes. The resource teacher came into the regular education rooms to provide direct instruction and/or tutoring to accommodate students.

Cardinal Elementary in Maquoketa is an open-spaces school and found that facility conducive to integrating special needs students. Special education teachers are viewed by all students as part of the teaching "team." While visiting the school, a special education teacher was reading a story to a group of primary children while other teachers worked with groups of children on various projects and skills. It was impossible to tell from such a setting which students were special education, Chapter I or regular education students.

Special education teachers at an elementary building in Council Bluffs described their successes in working with regular classrooms. By teaming two or more special education programs, these teachers were freed up to work throughout the building, going into classrooms and working with regular education teachers.

Teachers, both in regular and special education, who have been part of such programs pointed out key elements in their success. First of all, these educators felt that to be truly effective, the regular and special education teachers must have some common planning time together. "Otherwise I don't know what the teacher plans to do, how I can be most effective," said a resource teacher at Council Bluffs.

A second vital ingredient for success appeared to involve the personnel. As a resource teacher from Grinnell said, "I wasn't originally trained to go into someone else's classroom...That can be quite threatening for some teachers. We [special educators] need training in how NOT to be too pushy."

An Ames teacher reflected, "The special education teacher must be incredibly well organized and flexible if mainstreaming efforts are going to work."

Neither are regular education teachers trained in how to best utilize the talents of another professional in the classroom. Teachers spoke of the unique talents in curriculum specialization that the regular ed teachers have and the instructional strategies that special educators possess. The challenge spotted by educators was how to truly work as an effective team in the classroom.

## ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS AND STRUCTURES

In order to meet the changing needs of students and the demands society is placing on the schools, alternatives to the traditional way of doing business in schools have become more evident. Some of these changes have been evolutionary, so the schools have been refining them for some time. Others displayed more rapid change. Educators were quick to point out that many of the programs they showed me were so new that they were not sure whether to label them successful. "We believe we're on the right track," was the viewpoint of an Ottumwa educator.

The first change in structure might appear to be small. Yet educators consistently brought it to my attention. Elementary reading programs appeared to be steadily moving away from the old "bluebird and buzzard" reading groups. To the casual observer in the classroom, no real changes would be apparent. Teachers were still working with small groups of students doing reading lessons, and students were silently reading alone or reading aloud with a partner. However, the small groups were flexible groups based upon a skill or activity for that day. The next day the teacher might work with the entire class or have a completely different configuration for the groups.

What amazed me was not the fact that groupings had changed from the old lock-step pattern. The surprising fact was the reason for the change: research. The research showing the negative effects of ability grouping (tracking at the high school level) is not new. Yet findings from educational research have not often been relied on by teachers in their classrooms. When I pressed teachers on the reason for their change, they cited the preponderance of research.

A few buildings instituted "no reading groups" in one year. Most, however, were like New Hampton where the first grade teachers implemented the plan the first year and the second grade will adopt the plan the second year, and so on. (Kindergarten teachers rarely use ability groups so the change had little impact on them.) In some schools, one or two teachers decided to implement the change all on their own. At Alburnett, for example, a first grade teacher told me of a workshop she attended last summer where the anti-grouping research was shared. This past fall she decided to implement it for herself.

At one elementary school in Davenport, the reading specialist in the building encouraged a "risk-taker" at first grade to give the plan a try, at least until Christmas. When I visited her in April, she spoke of her skepticism when she initially started. But she found the whole group/flexible group successful enough to institute the whole year. "I know that with the grouping I had before, some of the slower groups wouldn't have gotten this far. My only concern is for the really top students. I want to be sure I'm challenging them enough," was her only reservation.

A first grade teacher at East Buchanan who enrolled in a masters' degree program at UNI shared the research with her fellow teachers. Along with the movement to whole language, she abandoned strict reliance on reading workbooks and reading groups. Primary teachers in this district mentioned visits to other districts and support from AEA personnel as important factors in their decision. They were not trying to "go it alone."

Speaking from a personal perspective of someone who abandoned ability groups in reading three years ago, this change should not be taken lightly. For many of us, the accepted practice and only

known way of doing business in teaching reading involved the once sacred groups. Just as the Iowa Writers' Project has transformed the way we view students and their writing, so has the focus away from structured groups by ability removed preconceived ideas of student achievement levels. The importance has been the impact on students, how the students view their capabilities.

Middle schools too have examined the wisdom of accelerating or grouping students. The most common acceleration I found was in math where highly gifted math students often were encouraged to take algebra as eighth graders. They then would be allowed, in essence, to take five years of high school math. The jury appeared to still be out on the value of this practice. Middle and high school math teachers I spoke with are weighing this issue carefully.

Another demand being placed on schools and the students working there fit the concern that too many students fail, and therefore, drop out of school. Several changes have taken place to meet this challenge. For example, teachers in Adel-DeSoto, Clinton and Maquoketa have received training in mastery learning. Just as teachers believed the removal of ability groups removed the stigma of being a failure, teachers who described their successes with mastery learning spoke of giving students a second chance to learn.

Most teachers utilizing mastery learning set a mastery level of 80%. Students who meet or exceed that level work on enrichment activities. Those who do not achieve the 80% level receive additional instruction in a different manner than the initial instruction. Their progress is then reassessed.

In order to better meet the needs of students in the mastery learning model, one Clinton elementary building used teams of teachers, the learning resource teacher (better known to us as the media specialist) and flexible groups. For example, if there were two sections of third grade and 44 students mastered the skill and six did not, two of the teachers might work with the "mastery" students on enrichment activities. The learning resource teacher might work with the six students who needed reteaching practice. The teachers rotate the enrichment/reteaching duties, depending on the skills being presented.

Clinton teachers were quick to tell me that mastery learning did not seem appropriate for all subject areas. They were using this model for reading and math only.

While visiting Maquoketa Valley Middle School at Delhi, I observed students working in cooperative groups in a math class. This instructor combined the mastery learning model with cooperative learning. He assured me that he was still refining the program but was pleased with the student results so far. His biggest frustration, he said, was finding appropriate enrichment activities. He found the Math Counts materials suitably challenging, especially when students worked in cooperative groups.

Another response to the demands of society and the focus on active student involvement followed the cooperative learning example. Literature from the business community has informed us that more people are fired because they cannot cooperate with their fellow workers than due to job incompetence. Most work in the "real world" involves projects performed by a team and many classrooms have adapted that emphasis for students.

Teachers who identified cooperative learning as a strength of their classrooms generally distinguished cooperative learning from group work by the interdependence of the group members. They emphasized that the tasks in the group required students to rely on one another so one student did not bear all the responsibility.

As I observed in classrooms engaged in cooperative assignments, I noted that each teacher personalized the technique. Although most teachers spoke of the influence of the Johnson and

Johnson model (David and Roger Johnson from the University of Minnesota), there were few purists who followed their advice to the letter. Several teachers, particularly at the middle and high school level, gave only individual grades rather than group grades. Other teachers mentioned that the strict assignment of jobs/duties to group members either did not fit the assignments they gave or the student needs. Still other teachers preferred to have students work more often in pairs or groups of three rather than groups which were any larger. Most teachers also appeared hesitant to always structure the groups with one high-achiever, one low-achiever and two average-achievers. They appeared to group the students according to purpose of the lesson.

Davis Elementary in Grinnell chose cooperative learning as a staff development project for three years in a row. A teacher in that building spoke of the enhancement for integrating special education students when cooperative learning was instituted. "It's good for students learning to work together," she explained. Her building houses BD (behaviorally disordered) students. In order to work on socialization skills with one BD student, the resource teacher stayed with the BD student in a cooperative group in the regular classroom until he learned appropriate behavior skills for cooperative work.

Districts such as Center Point-Urbana used their own staff members as trainers for cooperative learning. The trainers I met had usually attended sessions during the summer in Minneapolis and came back to train fellow teachers.

One place where the demands of students and society have dovetailed successfully involved the use of technology in the curriculum. North Tama Elementary School in Traer was one example I visited. As recently as 1987 this building was limited to seven computers on carts. Due to the efforts of the administrators and four teachers, this district created a facility and program which has brought technology into use as a tool, not a separate program. By delaying the purchase of a school bus for one year, the Board earmarked $30,000 in start-up costs for a computer lab. Through the use of "quickie" inservices, teachers have been regularly updated about software and hardware. This district offered an annual computer symposium at minimal cost to other teachers in the area to come and share ideas with one another.

In several high school math classes I observed the potential power of technology. The graphing calculator could revolutionize upper level math classes in the near future. Graphing a quadratic equation by hand used to take students several minutes as they plotted points and approximated the curve or straight line of best fit. Now in a matter of seconds the calculator replaces the tedious plotting. In case outsiders think this is the "soft" approach, I observed one classroom where the teacher and students posed questions like this, "What if the x variable is doubled? How will the graph change? What would happen if we squared the entire equation?" Where class time was formerly consumed with mundane graphing tasks, now students can use higher levels of thinking and truly apply their math skills.

Courses in vocational areas such as business and industrial technology now rely heavily upon technology. Several of the business classes were typical of the one I visited at Maquoketa Valley in Delhi. Students in a model office classroom now have the opportunity to be educated to use software they will find in the job market. I observed students using CAD along with traditional drafting methods in design classrooms. The old days of building a bird house in "shop" class are being replaced with much more of a problem-solving focus which utilizes technology. In fact, due to the influence of technology, I found the business and industrial tech instructors were often some of the most highly skilled computer utilizers in schools.

Technology has started to open the classrooms in Iowa. Unfortunately, technology still remains a luxury in far too many schools.

As teaching methodologies have changed, so have some teachers questioned what they taught students as well. In a few districts, the discussion concerned authentic curriculum and authentic assessment. Providing students with experiences beyond the factual memorization level has necessitated a new form of assessment for some teachers. Linda Calvin, a social studies teacher from Urbandale High School, probably has more years of experience with authentic curriculum and assessment than any other educator in our state. Along with several of her fellow teachers, she has provided assistance to teachers at Linn-Mar and West Marshall, among others. Elementary teachers at South Tama and Moulton-Udell also described their efforts in authentic assessment.

The basic premise for each of these efforts rested on the belief that tasks should be authentic or close to real-life. The criteria by which these tasks should be assessed would be similar to performance criteria for the arts. For those teachers who touted authentic assessment, the real change in practice came when they determined that the mystery should be removed from assessment. Just as when students perform a solo at music contest and clearly know what the judge is looking for, so it should be with assessment in the classroom. The students should know what exemplary performance looks like so the guesswork on what the teacher expects is removed.

Currently some teachers involved in process writing have used a type of authentic assessment. Cedar Rapids students at eighth and twelfth grades are scored by a team of teachers in a holistic manner. North Scott teachers used a similar instrument for their students grades two through twelve. Denison teachers plan to train a group of parents in holistic scoring of writing. For teachers searching for a writing assessment instrument, the Iowa Testing Service offers low-cost holistic scoring materials and training manuals for teachers.

Another criticism of schools leveled by business has been the lack of focus in schools. Employers complain that a diploma is meaningless, that it signifies only that the students have sat through a required number of classes. In order to combat that reality, several schools in our state have pursued writing student outcomes, expectations of what students should know, be like and be able to do.

Educators at Adel-De Soto have written "exit outcomes" for each curricular area. While educators there admitted that they were hesitant to say that these outcomes were in final form, they felt the process provided a valuable first step. The real value they identified came from the dialogue where teachers openly revealed what was of primary importance in subject matter areas.

Teachers at Maquoketa have taken a similar tack in their outcomes. With outcomes written in each subject area, in the upcoming year they will be examining ways of assessing students. Teachers pointed out the time commitment has been more than they imagined it would be. Because the work in this district has been funded by Phase III, not all teachers have chosen to participate in writing the outcomes.

A committee of educators at New Hampton have written outcomes and tied needs assessment to them. They polled citizens and staff members concerning the importance of each outcome and how well the school was serving those needs. Although they have not yet assessed student achievement according to those outcomes, they pointed out that will be the next step.

Educators in Des Moines have discussed using descriptive outcomes for interdisciplinary courses but realize that they must continue to rely upon grades and traditional course descriptions so students can send colleges traditional-appearing transcripts.

The Linn-Mar district probably has the most ambitious and comprehensive outcome-based plan to date. Four staff members have devoted nearly full-time attention to outcomes and assessment. Their exit outcomes are broad and transdisciplinary (across disciplines). This spring the district assessed graduating seniors using authentic assessment instruments for baseline data. Rather than

examine the traditional curricular areas (e.g. language arts, social studies, math), they plan to eventually focus programs around the identified outcomes. If they follow this plan into the future, courses such as algebra 1 or world history may be rolled into new transdisciplinary programs.

In response to the growing need for employees to be high school graduates, school districts have made efforts to reduce drop-out rates. Earlier I mentioned student assistance teams as one route to prevent students from leaving school. Several high schools and some middle schools created at-risk programs which provide greater individual attention to students who are potential dropouts. Some of these programs, such as the one at Dubuque Senior, provided actual instruction in study skills and organizational techniques. Mason City High School utilized teachers from subject areas such as math and language arts to work with students in the at-risk center.

Despite these efforts, there are cases where students do not fit into the traditional high school structure. Years ago these students would have simply dropped out of schools and might have been able to secure decent jobs. However, those days are over. Alternative high schools were created to provide a second chance for students who might have been considered lost causes years back. Whenever I visited a moderate or large district, I asked to see their alternative high school.

Although I was hesitant to make value judgments in my travels, I must admit I was extremely impressed with the alternative high schools I visited (I spent time in nine of them). The respect displayed by the staff in these buildings was contagious, to say the least. They obviously believed strongly in modeling appropriate courtesy for their students. Remember that many of the students served in these schools were not successful in the traditional high school structure. This was not necessarily an indictment of traditional high school but as one Metro student told me, "I didn't get along very well at _____ because there were too many 'preppies.'" This student had been expelled from his home high school for fighting and was finishing his program at Metro.

When I visited alternative programs, there were two questions I always asked the educators I met: "What can traditional programs learn from the work you do here? If you had the chance, would you return to the traditional high school?" (Several alternative school educators had been RIFed from other schools and "condemned" to the alternative schools.)

In response to the first question, answers varied. "In the effort to teach history or math or English, remember there's a young person inside that body, a young person with feelings who really does want to succeed."

"We realize that these students need closer contact with at least one adult. They often felt lost in the regular setting. Too often their home lives are chaotic and they need a caring adult to listen." A Waterloo educator emphasized how we now must tailor programs to the styles of students rather than expect each student to fit the same mold.

These educators often put flexibility at the top of their list for necessary teaching traits. One science teacher at Dubuque Central spoke of the necessity for individualization in the program. "My students really are at all different levels. I can't just present a traditional lesson like I use to at _____. It would only fit maybe one student."

When asked if they would return to the traditional school setting, virtually everyone said either "No," or "I'd really have to think seriously about that." The Dubuque Central science teacher summed it up when he said he could not return to mass-production teaching with one class of 25 to 30 students for six periods in a row. The only caveat identified by a Davenport 2001 educator was the hours (he worked in the evening too).

In case it might be assumed that alternative programs were perfect, the educators themselves were self-critical. The director of the new alternative program at LeMars warned that too many

educators assume that alternative students are low ability and, therefore, educators may have low expectations of the students. She found, as have other educators, that these students range in ability just like the population in any high school. Attendance rates continued to be another problem facing several of the alternative schools. Balancing high expectations for students with some flexibility created natural conflicts when it came to student attendance. Virtually each of the nine schools mentioned the necessity for realistic, clearly defined attendance policies, not as a punitive posture but so students clearly understood the importance of accountability for them.

There was not a "typical" schedule or structure for the alternative schools I saw. Some schools, like Cedar Rapids Metro, are in session Monday through Thursday with Friday for contact with students and their families. 2001, the alternative school for Davenport, maintains evening hours. The Davenport School District operates a separate program especially structured for pregnant teens. Even the buildings which house these programs are not typical. Ft. Madison utilizes an older home while Ottumwa's program inhabits a former warehouse.

I devoted so much time to visiting these alternative programs because they focused on the former "throw-away" students of past years. If futurists are accurate in their forecasts, we will need to gainfully employ all of our young people in ensuing years just to maintain the workforce. The need for alternative programs undoubtedly will continue to grow. The need they fulfill is certainly not temporary.

Some districts have explored the possibility of alternative structures for their entire student population. In a way, sharing agreements between districts represent an alternative to the traditional K-12 plan.

In my visits to districts involved in sharing agreements, I made an effort to speak with teachers and students. Those districts experiencing a smooth transition generally spoke about the open communication they established with the communities at an early date.

No one told me the sharing agreements were easy to obtain., but they readily emphasized keys to their successes. Some of the districts shared athletic programs, especially football, prior to sharing academic programs. These educators felt the students tended to be more accepting of the sharing arrangements since they already knew each other. In fact, I found students were far more accepting of the possibility of consolidation than were either educators or citizens. One student summed up the situation, "It's easy for the kids because we already know each other. Our folks don't."

In order to unite the communities and staffs, the Dunlap/Dows City-Arion districts undertook strategic planning after one year of their sharing agreement. Teachers involved in that effort found the structure of strategic planning informative. Each community shared their educational beliefs, assumptions about education, and dreams for the future.

I listened with amusement as students and educators in some sharing districts described the crucial issues the public discussed prior to sharing agreements.' A common concern appeared to be "What will we call our athletic team? What will the school colors be?" In a community with a thriving alumni association, they debated the future of their association if they shared programs with the neighboring district. Sometimes teachers were really no different in their focus of concern. They often worried whether they would have the same classroom when sharing was worked out and whether they would continue to teach the same classes.

In districts where staff members were transferred from their buildings, I often found Teacher A from District XYZ teaching next door to Teacher B from District 123. Each operated under a different master contract (or sometimes one teacher's home district was not "unionized"). They each were paid from different salary schedules. Their Phase III plans were different. Despite these potential conflicts, most of the sharing agreements progressed more smoothly than teachers imagined they would.

As I drove through small Iowa communities, I realized that the school was often perceived as the last vestige of a once-thriving town. Citizens often assume that sharing agreements will lead to consolidation which will lead to the demise of the community. That concern must be balanced with the concerns for children. As a superintendent from rural Southern Iowa lamented, "I'm afraid that too many citizens are balancing the survival of their town on the backs of these children."

The teachers I met in these small districts tended to be strong supporters of rural education. They chose the lifestyle because they felt it was a better environment in which to raise children. Yet they related that it was becoming increasingly difficult to offer quality high school programs when there were only three or four students in physics, for example. They were open to options and alternatives. Some of their solutions and dreams for small Iowa districts are offered in the section DREAMS AND VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE.

## THE IMPACT OF PHASE III

Prior to my travels, I had heard various opinions of the efficacy of Phase III. Naturally I wanted to question educators about the successes/reservations about Phase III plans. Often when I asked educators what they were proud of, they pointed to programs supported by Phase III.

Realizing that individual districts wrote their own Phase III plans to suit the needs of their students, I naturally found great diversity in Phase III proposals. In the first two years of Phase III, several smaller districts where high school teachers might teach six different courses devoted money to writing curriculum. Teachers in some of these smaller high schools described how tight budgets had never allowed extensive curriculum work in the summer. These same districts were often unable to afford to send teachers to workshops or conferences where they could learn about new teaching techniques or methods.

Phase III gave these teachers a chance to increase or upgrade their teaching skills. For example, teachers at Olin talked about how they were able to attend a reading conference where they brought back ideas for whole language. Elementary teachers at the Elvira building in the Northeast Community Schools mentioned the impact the Chatauqua science program had on their teachers. The extensive success of TESA, Iowa Writers' Project, developmental math activities, cooperative learning, peer coaching and individual innovations would not have been possible without Phase III funding.

Phase III gave educators a chance to say, "What is it we have always wanted to do for students but could not afford to do?" Districts like Linn-Mar, Adel-DeSoto and Alburnett provided afterschool tutoring for students. Third and fourth graders in Akron-Westfield have been able to experience outdoor education activities with a naturalist providing expertise. Phase III dollars paid the salaries for media specialists in several districts so libraries could be open for students in the summer. Summer courses in Galva-Holstein were available for any student, not just those identified as remedial. A popular evening art class for students and their parents was instituted at a junior high with a large at-risk population.

In many cases, the first two years of Phase III allowed teachers to pursue those individual projects they had always been dying to do. Unexpectedly, this trend received criticism. But the trend was deemed positive by many teachers. When the district provided some method of sharing Phase III individual projects, teachers began to team up and involve fellow professionals in effective teaching programs. For example, in year 1 of Phase III, a teacher might have taken an AEA class in cooperative learning. Phase III might have paid tuition for the course and the extra time the teacher devoted to attending the class and developing materials for use in her own classroom. If given the opportunity, she might have shared cooperative learning strategies with other teachers.

In year 2, a team of teachers might have written a Phase III project where cooperative learning was the focus. In some cases, such team efforts led a whole building to focus staff development on cooperative learning. The growth of Phase III in such cases broke down the isolation of teaching to enhance more sharing of expertise.

The Phase III projects identified as most successful by teachers followed the same guidelines as the staff development programs identified earlier in this paper. Where teachers were active and vocal in designing the Phase III projects, they expressed satisfaction with the effort. When they abdicated the planning of Phase III to small core of teachers and administrators, the satisfaction with Phase III appeared to wane.

Most educators' opinions reflected that of a Sergeant-Bluff educator, "Phase III has been a blessing." Because it is human nature to be most vocal when life is going awry, more press has been devoted to Phase III abuses and dissatisfactions than to its successes. It seems unfair, however, to condemn Phase III in general when the few problems that arose could be traced to a few individual districts whose planning process needed revision.

The districts where teachers identified Phase III as especially successful balanced the personal and professional growth of their individual staff members with the focus of staff development training. It appeared that individual projects were often the key to identifying future projects worth pursuing by larger groups of teachers. Although they were moving toward more whole-staff focus with Phase III, several districts expressed an unwillingness to abandon the individual components of Phase III. "That's where we find out about new ideas... They're the innovations we might miss out on," was the common opinion.

A few educators expressed the desire to roll Phase III dollars into Phase II. Although I am sympathetic with the overall low salaries for teachers, my reply must be, "Show me how rolling Phase III dollars into Phase II will do anything for kids." Phase III enhanced the teaching skills of thousands of Iowa teachers and improved the quality of education offered the students in our state. I fail to see how simply transferring money into Phase II will produce the same quality results.

## Section Two
# CHANGING THE ROLES OF LEADERSHIP

If I had been writing about leadership in Iowa schools ten years ago, I might have titled this section KEYS TO SUCCESS IN ADMINISTRATION. The mantle of leadership has broadened the past few years, according to Iowa educators. Just as teachers told me their role in the classroom moved from information giver to coach and facilitator, so has the role of administrator started to move away from the stereotypical omniscient patriarch. But the transition has not been easy. As an educator employed by an AEA remarked, "Administrators today face a real dilemma. If they admit that they don't know everything, they're afraid teachers will think they're weak. If they try to bluff their way through issues outside their realm, they're viewed as insensitive and ignorant. How can they win?"

When speaking with one administrator, I heard the following remark, "We cannot expect this school to become better unless the people working here become stronger leaders." He was not just talking about the administrators. He especially included his teaching staff. Tom Winninger, keynote speaker at the spring conference of School Administrators of Iowa, reminded superintendents, "The new dynamic [of leadership] is in the hearts and minds of your teachers. The new dynamic is not in the administration office."

Enlarging the leadership roles of administrators and teachers alike has received support from some traditional and not so traditional sources. Several districts identified the Okoboji Leadership Institute as providing an avenue to bring together administrative and teacher teams. Originally started as a summer superintendent's conference, Okoboji has expanded to encourage district teams to attend. Hearing nationally renowned speakers and sharing experiences with other districts were key points, according to educators who ranked this institute high on their lists.

In another part of the state, AEA 2 established a summer leadership conference for districts it serves. Although only in its third year, educators I spoke with who represented three different districts, felt the conference provided necessary time and facilitation to review the school year just ended and to plan their district or building goals and programs for the upcoming year. The AEA provided resources for facilitator training so each school district benefitted from a trained facilitator to lead them in their sessions.

An even newer leadership focus utilizing school teams started in the fall of 1990. 28 Iowa school districts from various parts of the state were invited by ISEA to each bring a team consisting of a superintendent, principal, teacher, board member, and the Uniserv director (Iowa State Education Association regional director). Business consultant Pat Dolan facilitated the shared decision-making sessions where each district formulated a plan to build shared governance into their leadership team. The majority of these districts expressed interest in forming a network to share their successes, frustrations, and progress toward school transformation.

When discussing the increased leadership roles for teachers, administrators pointed out staff members who were highly respected consensus builders and were now leading staff in ways they never had the opportunity for in previous years. Numerous options were available in Iowa districts. Teachers in some districts became staff trainers in programs such as cooperative learning or became peer coaches. An increasing number of schools formed site-based teams where a building principal and teams of teachers established building goals or staff development initiatives.

Actually sharing the decision-making process has not been so foreign to some districts. Formulating Phase III plans has generally been a shared decision-making process, especially in districts where teachers were satisfied with their Phase III plan. One teacher at the state Phase III

conference reflected, "I don't know why our collective bargaining can't be as cooperative as our Phase III planning." Her remarks distinguished the collaborative nature of shared decision-making, contrasting with the inherent confrontational nature of bargaining.

All the talk of shared governance does not suggest that the role of administrators has diminished or become simple. Based on my own observations, successful school-based decision-making supports experimentation, risk taking, open communication channels, challenging the business-as-usual mentality and providing opportunities for professional and staff development to accompany these efforts. The administrator must be very strong, very secure to venture into the "unknown" like this. An administrator who feels threatened by staff or parents or students cannot succeed in shared governance situations.

Some buildings I visited seemed to have an aura of excitement about them. It was as though the spirit of innovation thrived in these buildings. Fascinated, I invariably asked the staff what constituted the magic about this place. They provided responses such as, "We're encouraged to grow," or "There's an expectation in our building that we should take classes to become better teachers," or "Everyone sort of stimulates everyone else." Clearly the leadership encouraged, in fact expected, that each staff member would continue to grow personally so the whole staff could grow.

Even if the administrator was not the primary force in such buildings, he/she clearly enhanced such a climate. I recall visiting one such district where, at first glance, the administrator seemed almost inept. But as I observed and spoke with these exceptional teachers, they reassured me that their principal was quietly working behind the scenes to promote their personal and professional development. "Have you seen this? Thought you might be interested," would be written on a flier or class description the principal might put in the mailbox of a teacher.

Teachers I met readily identified administrators they found most effective in enhancing school improvement. Several of these teachers pointed out that the administrator, usually the principal, asked key questions of staff members about the usual way of doing business. At one mid-sized school district in eastern Iowa, primary teachers told how they were uncomfortable when the principal started asking questions about their reading program. She challenged them to the pivotal question, "How do we know our reading program is working for students?" Not only was this principal the catalyst for improving the reading program, but she provided opportunities for teachers to visit other districts and attend reading conferences. She was both the stimulus for change and the support to carry out innovation. However, she left the solution for the problem clearly in the hands of the people who would implement the change, the classroom teachers.

In another part of the state nearly the same approach was the impetus for change. Teachers related how they felt a great deal of discomfort when their new principal started probing their heavy reliance on worksheets and workbooks. As one teacher described, "We really weren't sure about him the first year. But as we talked among ourselves and learned what teachers in other districts were doing, we found that we were really backwards. He didn't really ever tell us we couldn't use worksheets. He just gradually encouraged us to try other techniques."

A similar story came from a middle school where a principal provided research summaries to teachers concerning ability grouping. Rather than dictate to the staff that they abolish ability grouping, he provided summaries in the weekly bulletin to teachers. When I questioned him about this move, he admitted that he was confident that teachers needed information if they were to make a wise choice about grouping. He felt they would have balked, and rightfully so, if he had simply issued an edict to abolish such groupings.

This principal, like the others cited here, followed the advice of change specialist Michael Fullan. Fullan's research determined that change requires ownership and does not result from externally imposed procedures.

A high school social studies teacher shared how his principal inspired and challenged him to perfect his teaching skills. The teacher, already a highly-skilled innovator, told how his principal made him feel truly professional. "He doesn't provide pat answers or quick solutions...When I want to try something new he also doesn't always say yes. But he always listens...He's willing to really discuss teaching with me."

The common theme in stories like these centered on administrators posing questions, providing pertinent research results, and eventually relying on the shared professional judgments of teachers.

The administrator walks a fine line between allowing teachers professional autonomy and challenging the status quo. In the words of Edgar Schein, "The leader is likely to be the target of anger and criticism because, by definition, he must challenge some of what the group has taken for granted."

Beyond the initial issue which these leaders questioned, the tone was established that it was now appropriate for staff members to examine the assumptions they had operated under for years. Although I found the impetus for self-examination was usually instigated by an administrator, teacher-leaders also questioned established practices.

For example, in one elementary school which I visited late this spring, the teachers described the leadership a fellow teacher displayed this year in changing the heavy emphasis on ability groups in reading. This teacher began asking questions, especially about her own classroom practices. She provided a self-examination model by which other staff members began to look at their own grouping practices. When I spoke with the teacher-leader, she expressed the hope that this new movement of analyzing classroom techniques would continue, that they would constantly ask themselves if what they were doing was best for students.

With the new portrait of administrators, several school leaders voiced concern for lack of training in how to facilitate teacher teams and build consensus in the decision-making process. Most administrators took required courses in school finance or buildings and sites but virtually nothing in working with people. Just as teachers told me how incomplete their preparation had been in counseling students, so too administrators felt a void in how to work with other adults.

I must admit that I gained a new appreciation for school administrators. As they described what they were proud of in their schools, they also shared the challenges that confront them daily. One principal felt that a primary responsibility of administration revolves around improving instruction. Yet he expressed frustration that research shows usual rating scales for teacher evaluation have nominal utility as an improvement mechanism. A superintendent in Western Iowa excitedly showed me plans for a much-needed building program for his district. But the "selling" of the bond issue to the community consumed all his time. Administrators in other districts voiced frustration at the amount of energy they had devoted to promoting either bond issues or instructional support levies, often to have their efforts end in defeat.

Frequently I met teachers who I felt had the leadership potential to become administrators. When I asked them about this, a frequent reply was, "Who'd want that job?" One teacher told me that with Phase III available, she could work extra weeks during the summer doing "creative" work and make nearly the same amount of money as a beginning administrator.

Another teacher told me she had plenty of leadership opportunities as a teacher-trainer for cooperative learning. In the past when there were fewer chances for such leadership, she might have pursued a degree in administration. But her desire for leadership is being fulfilled in this new role.

A surprising number of districts I visited do not pay teachers for a masters' degree on the salary schedule if the degree is in educational administration. For women who are territorial-bound, the risk of earning an M.A. in administration and possibly not obtaining a salary increase strongly influences them. I shook my head in amazement as a teacher recognized as exemplary told me that the classes in school administration were some of the most beneficial for her in the classroom. But she will not receive extra pay when she finally receives her masters' because that degree will be in administration. "I know I'm a better teacher because of those courses. Why won't they pay for it?"

Leadership in Iowa schools is too important an issue to be left to chance. Only through constant awareness and action can we even hope to entice more teachers into educational administration.

With the increased expectations for school administrators, it became evident that schools could benefit from the shared expertise of all professionals working there. The spirit of collaboration among school board members, administrators, and teachers appears to be growing. The challenges facing schools today are too great for any one group to solve alone. As an administrator from Lenox put it, we simply must work together if we hope to provide the best education possible.

## Section Three
# CONCERNS

I seriously contemplated not including this section. The focus of this paper was intended to point out what was working, why it worked, and where we hope to be in the future. I certainly was not trying to emphasize the negative features of education in Iowa.

However, as I read over my notes prior to writing, I could not ignore the statements educators included. Particularly when I asked educators about their dreams for the future, they were quick to point out the shortcomings of the present.

When visiting schools, I often found myself vacillating between excitement and grim reality. The excitement was grounded in the new and innovative ideas and the highly-charged professionals I met in my travels. Teachers and administrators say that they cannot recall a time when the field of education has been more exciting, when they have been more alive.

The reality set in when I saw and heard about the tremendous challenges facing educators and young people today. In fairness to my fellow educators, I must point out the concerns.

No matter where I traveled, whatever the size of the district or the part of the state, the most common concern centered on the complex societal problems facing young people today. Even idyllic rural Iowa students must confront problems that you and I scarcely knew existed years ago. The changing family structure, temptations of premarital sex and drugs, the rapid rate of change from the industrial focus to an information-based economy and competition from foreign sources combined to place demands on youth. The Dick, Jane, and Sally portrait of Iowa families just does not give a true reflection of life today for many of our students. As retired UNI Professor Jim Albrecht says, "Ozzie and Harriet don't live here anymore. They've moved to Japan."

Teachers described how inadequate their training had been in dealing with the myriad of problems their students face. As one teacher reflected, "We're supposed to show empathy. Teaching is a helping profession. I just wish I knew what to DO to help these kids."

Another educator from a large central Iowa district felt frustrated that there were professionals such as guidance counselors in her district who had more expertise in dealing with student problems. "But nobody has the time to talk together about how we can learn from them."

"More and more responsibility and bigger and bigger problems are thrust on us without any new resources," was the opinion of an elementary teacher in rural southern Iowa.

This sentiment was echoed by a middle school teacher. "We're expected to solve society's problems, problems we didn't create. They're problems we're powerless to change."

When I pressed educators concerning why so many parents had relinquished their influence on their children, an overwhelming number of teachers felt parents just plain did not know how to parent. (speaking of parenting),"...It's the most complex skill there is and no one teaches you how to be a parent. We teach how to change a tire, bake a cake, even how to vote. But no one teaches you how to parent. I guess we think on-the-job training is enough. Well, it's not," was the sentiment of a high school home ec teacher.

An accompanying problem was voiced by kindergarten teachers I met. They pointed out students who entered school poorly prepared for any kind of learning. In the same classroom students

whose experiences prior to school years readied them provided stark contrast. In one urban elementary school, the kindergarten teacher told me that 24 of her 26 students started school one year below the "expected" level of kindergarten. She had spent 20+ years teaching kindergarten and understood the normal wide range of readiness for school. However, she and several other kindergarten teachers found the gap widening between those students who enter school "up and running" and those who must have been glued to the television for five years solid.

Because of the problems facing students and the increased pressure to prepare each student at higher levels of achievement, the second major concern was class size. Despite conflicting research findings pertaining to class size, teachers were overwhelmingly adamant that they could not meet the needs of students when there were too many students in the class. A middle school teacher pointed out, "Kids can hide in large classes. When class sizes are small, you're more likely to talk WITH students rather than dictate TO them."

A fourth grade teacher became specific as she described one student. "I literally lost Jason because I didn't have time to reach him. Those quiet ones you really lose."

As the kindergarten teacher with a class size of 26 said, "Students slip between the cracks right before our eyes."

When discussing the issue of mainstreaming special education students, class size consistently was highlighted. A middle school social studies teacher expressed, "When a student is disruptive or having learning problems, you're less likely to refer them for special education when [he's] in a small class. With a class of 15 or so, you can accommodate that student."

At another middle school, a math teacher voiced her frustration with class size and integrating special education students. "The [special education classes] have a cap on the number of students in their classes. But when special education students are in my class, there's no cap."

An elementary special education resource teacher suggested a solution which I observed in only a handful of districts. When special education students are integrated into regular programs, they should continue to be "weighted" for class size. For example, if a student is weighted 2.7 and is integrated into a regular education classroom, she should count as 2.7 students. "That way the teachers who volunteer to take special education students in their classes start out with fewer regular education students. They shouldn't have to take 25 regular education students and three or four special ed kids too," she remarked.

The third major concern dovetailed with the class size complaint: lack of time In the section of this paper describing teamwork, I elaborated why teachers need team planning time. But individual preparation time apparently is lacking in many districts. Teachers spoke about having five and six preparations with endless meetings after school. I smiled in understanding as I spoke with a newspaper editor who spent an entire school day in the classroom of a high school journalism teacher. "He doesn't get any breaks. When one class leaves, the other one files in immediately," he remarked.

"Shared decision-making is going to be tough when we don't have enough time now to do everything," was the lament of a teacher-leader. But because time is money in Iowa schools, alternatives solutions to "buy time" are needed.

The theme of change echoed a fourth concern. Although I saw dramatic changes in some Iowa schools, I heard from educators that there is far too much business-as-usual. "It's OK for other people to change their courses, but nobody wants to change their own," reflected the opinion of a high school principal faced with declining enrollments in vocational classes.

The clash between the academic and vocational programs was highlighted as a concern by several educators. Demands for increased graduation requirements in math and science and emphasis on foreign language by colleges have caused numbers in the vocational areas to decline. I was impressed by the applied math and science skills I observed being taught in vocational courses. I recall visiting one high school where the students in physics were performing a lab on electricity while in another part of the building students in electronics were performing a similar lab in the vocational department. Too often the academic and vocational instructors have little opportunity communicate about their curriculum.

However, most high schools realized that most of their students will not complete a four-year college degree and will need to rely on vocational training at some point in their lives. The problem appeared to be determining how much equipment and staff high schools could afford in the face of declining enrollments in vocational courses.

It may be my background in elementary education or my natural bias toward middle level education, but I personally found life in many high schools had changed very little in the 20+ years since I left high school. The standard fare in too many classrooms was teacher-lecture, student-listen. In all honesty, most of these teachers were effective lecturers. They just did not seem to realize that the old paradigm had shifted, that the mold for passive student education was no longer appropriate.

Even more disturbing were the buildings or districts resting on past laurels who seemed to say, "We've been good for the past 25 years. Everyone knows our reputation. Why change when everything is going well?" Problem is these districts quit critically analyzing what they were doing. Perhaps they are still on the right track. But I am concerned that Joel Barker's "Ground Zero Rule" applies to the traditionally strong districts. Barker says that when the paradigm shifts, everyone goes back to zero. I fear that the paradigm is shifting and too many districts will wake up to find all their past accomplishments mean nothing.

In a very few districts I heard this message, "We feel our teachers are most effective when they're in the classroom." The unwritten rule in such districts appeared to be, "Don't ask to visit other districts. Don't ask to go to conferences or meetings." Based upon the impetus for improvement shared by the majority of teachers, schools with the philosophy of "Stay home and teach" will rarely improve.

I found that I was consistently asking myself questions when I visited schools. One of the most common was, "What would it be like to teach in this building? What would it be like to be a student in this building?" Watching truly gifted educators work with students left me admiring how they could weave the art of teaching with enjoyment of students. On the other hand, I met some educators who definitely lost whatever fire inspired them to become an educator in the first place. I often wondered, "Why would someone want to go through life doing something he/she hated?"

Our profession does not do a very good job of weeding out incompetent teachers and administrators. I realize that our profession is not unique in that perspective. Yet as we strive to gain recognition from the public that we truly are professionals, we must confront the lack of competence on the part of that small contingent of co-workers. A high school teacher who brought up the topic of nonprofessional behavior expressed optimism. "I think there's two factors which will force these people out of the profession...As the pressure increases to transform schools, they will find out that they can't just teach the same lessons over and over again for the next upteen years....12-month contracts for teachers will scare the 8-to-4 folks out too."

Even though they were faced with genuine challenges, most educators did not consider the problems insurmountable. As a favorite quote of mine states, "Some people make things happen. Some people watch things happen. Some people wonder what happened." Fortunately, our profession is blessed with people who are determined to make things happen for the benefit of children.

## Section Four
# OUR DREAMS AND VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE

"It's not what vision is, it's what vision does." (Peter Senge, The Fifth Discipline)

Who among us has not envisioned an ideal world where dreams come true? My favorite inquiry in my visits was, "Tell me what an ideal school would be?" Eyes would light up or puzzled looks might cross their faces, but it was easy to see educators were eager to explore the "might be" or "should be" world of education.

Sadly, far too many professionals told me this was the first time they had spoken at length about their vision of the ideal school. We devote our hours to discussions about textbooks, discipline, school lunch, and yes, even whether students need boots at recess. Are we so task-oriented that we never "invest" in dreaming? How can we truly ever provide excellence in education without envisioning ideal education?

My clearest recollection of a personal vision came from a seasoned administrator who spent a precious hour speaking at length about what education should be. I wondered how many of his staff members knew this hidden side. In fact, when I later met his superintendent, I remarked that Mr. ____ certainly was visionary. "Him?" was the reply, "I never would have guessed it!" Are we considered to be slightly off-center if we share our dream worlds? Why have we not written "dream time" into our busy schedules?

Therefore, the primary dream I gathered from my cohorts revolved around the chance to do just that: dream, to create visions, to know each other professionally as well as personally. Unless we institutionalize the necessity of dreaming and temporarily remove ourselves from the everyday nuts-and-bolts discussions, we will remain just where we are.

We may need some guidance in the dreaming process, however. As I listened to the dreams of educators, I often heard images which were means to an end, not ends in themselves. Examples of this confusion abound in all sectors of our country. I have heard lawmakers and citizens who plea for a balanced budget. But a balanced budget is not a goal in itself. A balanced budget is the means to a goal, the dream our nation can reach if we have a balanced budget.

An example of a means to an end specific to education involved having more planning time during the day. Teachers commonly responded that their vision of an ideal school provided teachers with increased time. As a classroom teacher, I highly agree that we need such valuable time. But we must be ready to justify why that extra time is necessary. Referring to Senge's quote, "It's not what vision is, it's what vision does," I found myself often probing further with such ideas. "What difference would extra planning time make? How could you better educate students with extra planning time?"

Somehow, as educators, we must articulate what students and teachers would be doing in an ideal educational setting and then build an educational program and organization to support that ideal world. Too often we try to figure out the means first without having an end in sight.

I happen to be a promoter of shared decision-making in schools. But shared governance is not an end in itself. It is simply to means to an end, the path to follow to reach a goal. Shared governance, by itself, does not provide an ideal world for the classroom. It is one way to get there.

I conjured up the image of a road map recently to assist me in this means/end concept. If our vision and dream is analogous to a large city on a map, then the roads leading into the city are the various ways we can get there. Sticking to the map metaphor, each road has its advantages. Some will be bumpier, some more direct, some more expensive. Some might even be dead ends.

To be honest, most of us are enamored with the roads and just assume the destination is there. I know I was and still catch myself talking strictly about the paths. We have to keep the ideal school in our vision while we discuss how we plan to get there. Once I could discern a person's destination of the ideal school, then I could understand the path they described.

A common vision among educators consisted of a more continuous program of learning for students. A principal in northeast Iowa envisioned such a school. Possibly, he felt, we need to consider a revised school year. By coincidence, last year four of my sixth graders proposed a new school calendar. They felt we should have six weeks of classes in each term with one or two weeks in between each term. When I asked them about summer they said, "We'd start early in the morning so we could be done by 2:00 or so. Then the buses could take us to Little League or the pool." By eliminating the three-month summer gap, learning might stand a chance of being more continuous.

I met several high school teachers who felt frustrated with six to eight class periods a day. They too felt an ideal school should provide more continuity for students. I heard suggestions that schools closely investigate the "Cornell Plan" in use by Cornell College. Cornell teaches one course at a time for about six weeks. The students become immersed in one course so they do not become fragmented in their learning. The one-course-at-a-time concept appealed to a science teacher whose students were exasperated by limited lab time. Field trips and work in the outdoor lab would be more feasible with an all-day course.

An administrator felt the Cornell plan might work in smaller high schools where teachers are currently shared between districts. He thought a vocational agriculture teacher might spend six weeks at one high school and the next six weeks at the neighboring district rather than travel daily between buildings.

Discussion of a modified Cornell plan has been aired by three districts in Eastern Iowa. They considered having each high school specialize in a particular area. For example, High School A might become the Sciences School, High School B the vocational school, and School C the arts and communication school. Students would sign up for one course at a time, board the bus for the high school offering the course, and return to their home schools near the end of the day for athletics and music. Each six weeks the students would take a different course. In theory, students could receive a higher quality education since each district now finds it increasingly difficult to afford a comprehensive education. However, each community would retain a high school, thereby eliminating elaborate sharing or consolidation concerns.

Variations on the Cornell plan were suggested. One teacher thought two courses at a time would be ideal, one in the morning and another in the afternoon. Another teacher proposed an idea being piloted in Missouri: Students combine extended class times with a rotating cycle. On day 1 of the cycle, the students would take course A in the morning. In the afternoon of day 1, students would take course B. On day 2, they would have course C in the morning and course D in the afternoon. It might even be possible to have a third day in the cycle. According to the teacher who suggested this program, students would only need to prepare for two classes each day and could have extended class periods for labs. The plan could also do away with study halls since each block of time would have built-in study sessions.

Still other proposals exist for scheduling high schools. A small rural district has considered compacting most of the high school courses from September through April. In a May term, all

vocational courses would be offered, possibly taught by community college staffs. This district also tossed around the idea of summer courses such as outdoor recreation and environmental awareness so they could take advantage of staff from universities and neighboring districts. Students could take summer classes in settings other than the traditional high school building.

An urban elementary principal suggested using summer months as a cooperative effort between the local library, the school and recreation services of the city. Confronted with students who needed an enriching summer program, she hoped to offer enrichment courses at the school such as computer classes, provide bus transportation to the public library or open the school library, and coordinate with recreation programs. She wanted to be certain students did not "lose" the academic growth from the school year. She was hopeful that the summer program would be enriching, the type of opportunities the school did not have time to offer during the rest of the year.

In order to provide more continuous learning opportunities, one teacher envisioned keeping the same students for a number of years. As an elementary teacher, she found that by May she finally knew the strengths and skills of each students only to then send them on to the next grade. The following fall she knew she would spend about six to nine weeks just getting acquainted with her new students and discovering their unique personalities. If she kept the same students for a few years, she felt she would not "waste" the first quarter of school each fall just "backtracking. I did find a limited number of schools which believed in this dream and are piloting the multi-year concept, although the practice did not appear to be widespread.

Another common response to the ideal world question was "reduce class size." Because teaching appears to be a process of making decisions in situations that are largely unpredictable, teachers often feel overwhelmed by the constant demands placed on them. When I invited teachers to explore how reduced class sizes would enable them to provide an ideal education, they said they wanted more time to know students, to be able to counsel each one rather than make quick judgments and "move on."

A primary teacher spoke of the dream of working with a team of teachers who would keep the same students for three or four years. She suggested about 75 students of various ages might be assigned to a team of at least six teachers. Some of these teachers would have training in special education and gifted strategies as well. She described lots of flexible groupings where each student could "bond" with at least one teacher. Students in her ideal setting would not be labeled as special education or gifted. However, because there would be teachers especially trained in learning strategies, each student needing assistance could receive it.

A slightly different vision came from another elementary teacher. He suggested all certified teachers in the building be given a heterogenous class of about 15 students. He would eliminate virtually all pullout programs and labels for students. Because each teacher would be given 15 students or less, they could accommodate the individual abilities of the students.

I heard descriptions of ideal schools where students became involved in community service. One teacher cited findings that students are more likely to vote and be less involved in crimes when they participate in service activities.

A high school teacher in a traditional program supported the schedule of Metro High School in Cedar Rapids. He saw real value in having Friday for a team planning time for teachers and envisioned that day as community service day for high school students. He thought a variation of that plan might be feasible as well. Rather than having all students do community service on Friday, some students might do community service on Monday, others on Tuesday, etc. Each day of the week a different team of teachers could then be scheduled for team planning.

In the minds of most educators, an ideal world should make students feel they are part of a school family. High school interdisciplinary teams similar to the middle school teams were an integral component of another dream situation. A high school teacher who had read Ted Sizer's works favored teams of teachers working with a reduced number of students every day. Frustrated with seeing 140 students per day, he felt that limiting the number of students and seeing them in block periods would create a feeling of family. He felt the increasing feeling of alienation and the growing problem of at-risk students could be reduced this way.

In the minds of several teachers, an ideal school should provide continuity between subjects, just as reflected in real-life situations. Our artificial subject-area separations should be eliminated. Based upon this vision, a proposal for interdisciplinary teams came from a high school vocational teacher. Since so much of life involves working on projects in teams, he suggested piloting interdisciplinary projects instead of classes. For example, he suggested that students might invent and market a new product, similar to the Junior Achievement model. Teachers from vocational areas could work with the traditional academic areas as resources for students. That way students would see how connected the skills of communication, math, science and marketing are. He felt the arbitrary separation of subjects would be eliminated.

Based upon research findings that show the efficacy of parent involvement in a child's education, one primary teacher expressed a desire to know a student's family better. When she had so many students, she could not truly know the family as well. She dreamed of a school with the Parents as Teachers program to help the parents before babies are born. A teacher would be designated to work with the parent all through the preschool years and would be the child's teacher for the first few years of formal education. The transition between home and school would be smoother and the family could receive assistance in parenting skills.

I heard descriptions of ideal schools where assessment was an integral part of learning, where students and teachers cooperated in using assessment to guide the direction of a student's learning program. One teacher described how many hours now were lost from instruction of students through testing. She expressed a frustration that the information gained from such tests was of little benefit in planning for instruction. Her ideal school involved a variety of on-going assessments which could rely on observation by teachers (teachers would need further training in such diagnostic work, she realized), use of technology, and real-life "performances." She cited the Key School in Indianapolis where each student has a videotape of his/her performance on tasks such as reading or math. She felt teachers could be trained to closely assess student progress and parents and students could observe growth in skills over a period of time.

The teacher who emphasized real-life interdisciplinary learning situations suggested we must redesign assessment instruments to match real life. Although he did not have a ready-made idea about assessment, he definitely felt most existing "tests" would have little in common with interdisciplinary projects.

The visions proposed by educators appeared to be realistic. The teachers emphasized that their ideas would cost nearly the same as existing programs and could produce better learning conditions for students. They also pointed out that even though the vision of the ideal world might exist for many of them, they would continue to seek various paths to follow to reach their ideal school.

## Section Five
# WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

As I reflect on my journey, I realize that the journey truly has not ended. In fact, it is an initiation for my own continuous learning.

I learned the difficulty of the change process. Prior to and during my journey, I read change literature. But reading about change and viewing it firsthand are two different perspectives. I discovered how true Peter Senge's observation is, "People don't resist change. They resist being changed."

I learned we must trust the people working in the system, the peak performers and potential peak performers in our schools to make changes. We need to do as author Nancy Austin suggests, give a Medal of Defiance for individuals who are committed champions of an innovation. When people who take risks are not accepted by the rest of the staff there's a double loss: First of all, the innovation may be lost. But more important, the risk-taker is less likely to ever propose any innovation in the future.

As leaders, we must model the risk-taking process and provide support, even when the innovation falls flat. We must consider what Tom Sergiovanni calls "failing forward." When I think about it, the same is true of teachers who make a difference in the classroom. They too model innovation and create a climate of risk-taking for their students.

I learned that the motivation for change must be internal if transformation is truly to succeed. Our normal view of motivation in schools has been extrinsic for far too long. We discipline children, impose curriculum and mandate standards. The old adage, "What gets rewarded gets done," must be replaced with Sergiovanni's "What is rewarding gets done, gets done well, and without close supervision." The staff development programs and Phase III plans which were identified as most successful exemplified this new theory. Teachers who practice active student learning understand the difference between inviting and enticing students to learn vs. coercing students to learn.

The study of motivation has shown us that one of the deep intrinsic motivators for any of us is realizing a sense of respect for our work. We need to "open up" our classrooms so other professionals can learn about the work we do, the difference we make. We need to make a difference with our fellow professionals as well as with our students. I find that in too many cases where educators feel burned out that they feel powerless, as though they have no professional discretion or respect. The leaders who make a positive difference talk about an ideal school, but they do not dictate all the steps to getting there. They understand professional autonomy and ownership.

We need to revise the language we use when we speak of the investment we make in education. I recall reading an ad in the Wall Street Journal where an insurance company bragged about the thousands of dollars they invest in training just one agent. Instead of bragging about how much we invest in our teachers, we apologize for how much we spend on teachers.

We must recognize that excellence wears more than one face. Just as we strive to celebrate the diversity in our student populations, so should we celebrate the diversity in our schools. We should guard against any "measuring stick" which attempts to homogenize or mediocritize our schools.

As we move from focusing entirely on process in schools (Carnegie unit; courses of 42 minutes and 180 days), we must not allow ourselves to shift only to outcomes. We cannot have tunnel vision zeroed in on the destination alone. We must remember to consider how we get there. For example, what good is it if we develop students who are highly-skilled readers but hate to read? What if our students become extremely competent in math but swear never to take another math course again? We should never promise students that they must reach their destination before they find the pay-off. The journey must be the reward.

Finally we must continually challenge ourselves, critically analyze everything we do. The key question must be "What is best for our students?" We cannot rest on our record of excellence or our journey will never be complete.

The ultimate question I feel we must confront is, how can we make sure even more folks will make that journey ? How can we create a climate that enables more and more educators and their students to be peak performers, to make a positive difference? If we hope to create peak performing students, students who are prepared for life, we must heed Eliot Eisner's words, "The function of our schools is to enable students to lead richer, fuller lives outside school. Our function is not to have students just do better in school." We cannot allow ourselves to focus only on short-term goals. The real measure of our success in education must ultimately be measured by the success our students experience in real life after they leave school.

As Nancy Austin also reminds us, our focus in education is now changing from teaching more knowledge and skills in a haphazard way to teaching fewer bits of knowledge but doing it better. There is nothing sloppy or haphazard about excellence in teaching.

We are in a people profession. We recognize that it is easier to develop a lesson plan or a national testing program than it is to develop a learner. We also recognize that change does not come easily or quickly. If our goals, our visions, our dreams are sound, they are worth holding and pursuing.