

# **HIGH SCHOOL REVIEW SUMMARY**

## **2005**

A status report identifying technical assistance, policies, and promising practices to facilitate high school improvement statewide.

By the Statewide Review Team and Iowa Department of Education  
Summer 2005

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## Additional Resources

Condition of Education report: <http://www.state.ia.us/educate/ecese/cfcs/iys/index.html>

DE Focus on High Schools Report: <http://www.state.ia.us/educate/ecese/fohs/index.html>

2004 High School Summit video stream: [http://www.iptv.org/edu-feature\\_detail.cfm?id=130](http://www.iptv.org/edu-feature_detail.cfm?id=130)

Iowa Youth Survey Data: <http://www.state.ia.us/educate/ecese/cfcs/iys/index.html>

Iowa Learns Council: <http://www.state.ia.us/iowalearns/index.html>

National Governors Association, K-12 initiatives:

<http://www.nga.org/portal/site/nga/menuitem.4096192acba1c8899cdcbeeb501010a0/?vgnextoid=c3308cc156de1010VgnVCM1000001a01010aRCRD>

Council of Chief State School Officers, high school redesign initiatives:

[http://www.ccsso.org/projects/State\\_Strategies\\_to\\_Redesign\\_High\\_Schools/](http://www.ccsso.org/projects/State_Strategies_to_Redesign_High_Schools/)

# High School Review Summary 2005

Identifying technical assistance, policies, and promising practices  
to facilitate high school improvement statewide.

## Executive Summary

The quality of high schools – how well they prepare students for productive employment as well as active citizenship – has been part of the state and national agendas for several years. To help complete an action plan for addressing the issue of high school quality, the Iowa Department of Education and State Board of Education during the spring of 2005 conducted intensive information and data gathering from Iowa school districts to determine what communities expect and need from their high schools, and what they considered to be the barriers to achieving those expectations and needs.

A statewide review team of educators was assembled to produce this report that:

- ❑ Describes in Section I the actions to date related to the need for high school improvement.
- ❑ Summarizes in Section II the key data gathered during the spring of 2005 about rigor, relevance and relationships in Iowa high schools. The findings are organized into the six characteristics of successful high schools: high expectations for all learners, collaborative school leadership, high quality professional development to assure quality instruction at all levels, a high school environment that is student focused, rigorous and relevant curriculum, and school decisions that are based on data.
- ❑ Outlines in Section III the potential implications of that information by grouping the data into issues areas related to curriculum, funding, teaching, and local control/general operations.
- ❑ Makes recommendations in Section IV to address the issues raised. The recommendations are organized into three categories: 1) state law or policy; 2) technical assistance and support; and 3) promising practices to be shared among districts and educational entities.

The review team recommendations are explained in full at the end of this report. Highlights include:

### Policy Recommendations

1. Maintain local control for standards, curriculum and graduation requirements.
2. Strengthen the local control system with a stronger method of checks and balances to ensure that high expectations and high quality and the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century all are embraced by parents, community and educators.
3. Do not add any unfunded mandates.
4. Fully fund the expansion of the Student Achievement/Teacher Quality initiatives to improve compensation and professional development for educators.

5. Develop curriculum models or models of learner competencies, and continue to review the alignment of local and state assessments to these competencies.
6. Provide financial incentives for teachers in hard-to-staff areas.
7. Maintain strong requirements for teacher licensure and certification.

#### Technical Assistance Recommendations

1. Embed high school improvement efforts within each district's Comprehensive School Improvement Plan and Iowa Professional Development Model.
2. Provide support and resources to help districts and schools monitor quality implementation of the curriculum models.
3. Provide tools (such as needs assessments or focus group instruments) to help districts identify needs, frame action plans, and monitor progress toward improvement.
4. Support the development of stronger teacher/student relationships by providing organizational structure models and strategies to help schools reach an optimum student: educator ratio.
5. Provide support and resources for universal and quality implementation of the required 4-year student plans to all 8<sup>th</sup> graders.
6. Obtain results of the periodic community college employability/life skills survey and disseminate information to districts so they can use it as a planning and curriculum assessment tool.
7. Communicate frequently and regularly with all post-secondary institutions to address issues of curriculum quality and student preparation.
8. Advocate for changing the college entrance and scholarship requirements so they do not inadvertently discourage students from taking rigorous coursework.
9. Work with IASB and SAI to review local policies and practices.
10. Assist districts in communicating with their communities.
11. Continue to promote high expectations.
12. Assist with the alignment of PK-16 articulation.
13. Identify models for career education to ensure it is both meaningful and challenging.
14. Identify models for advanced coursework such as Advanced Placement and Dual Credit courses.
15. Strengthen implementation of a tiered system model of Learning Supports to help students who are struggling academically or socially.
16. Provide support and assistance for the implementation of the six key elements of high school improvement (high expectations, collaborative leadership, professional development, rigorous and relevant curriculum, a student-focused school environment, and student assessment and program evaluation).
17. Continue to update high school profiles to document changes that are occurring.
18. Examine the DE technical assistance and resources to ensure they are in line with priorities.

#### Promising Practices Recommendations

1. Expand the work of the High School Steering Committee to compile and validate promising practices.

Review team members included:

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Elaine Smith-Bright, School Administrators of Iowa  
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It is important to note that this document does not attempt to represent final conclusions about high schools or the improvements needed at the local level, or how local communities will implement those improvements. It should instead be considered a status report that must be periodically reviewed and updated. High schools must be monitored in the manner all Iowa schools are monitored – with the expectation of ongoing and continuous improvement.

# High School Review Summary 2005

Identifying technical assistance, policies, and promising practices to facilitate high school improvement statewide.

## **I. WHY? Understanding the Need for High School Improvement**

At the behest of the State Board of Education, Iowa has increasingly sharpened its focus on the changing needs of high school students. The Urban Education Network's 2001 "Redefinition of High School" report and the state's 2002 "Focus on High Schools" report highlighted the many challenges facing high schools. Governor Tom Vilsack convened a cross-section of Iowans in 2003 to study the transitions of students from prekindergarten to employment as part of the Iowa Learns Council. In 2004, nearly 1,500 participants attended the statewide High School Summit, adding to the momentum for a new look at high school education to ensure that graduates have the advanced skills necessary to succeed in an international marketplace – even or especially when it is contained within our own state boundaries. Noted author and New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman's latest book, *The World is Flat*, shows us that not only have the goal-posts been moved, but also the entire playing field. Students in Bondurant, Iowa, are now in competition with those in Berlin, Bangalore, and Beijing. As the workplace becomes more sophisticated and the world becomes smaller, Iowa high schools are challenged to equip their students with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in this rapidly changing environment.

"Our children," says Vilsack, "deserve and need a world class education that prepares them for the challenge of global competition."

As Governor Vilsack recently testified to Congress, the need to reinvent the high school is well documented. Graduation rates are too low, too many learners continue to struggle, and much of the curriculum needs to be revamped to better prepare our youth – not just to become employed, but also to be informed, concerned and productive citizens.

**The case for change is clear. The charge now is to encourage educators, families and community members to rise to the challenge of providing the kind of rigorous and relevant learning experiences and meaningful relationships that prepare every student for success.**

This HIGH SCHOOL REVIEW SUMMARY report seeks to provide that encouragement by identifying the technical assistance, policies, and existing promising practices that will facilitate high school improvement across the state. Here you will find summaries of key issues and findings from two recent, statewide data-gathering initiatives, High School Review Visits and Community

Conversations, which are explained in detail below. The recommendations at the end of the report seek to specifically address the issues raised during the Review Visits and Community Conversations, and are based on a combination of research, professional expertise, and knowledge of Iowa's current education policy environment.

**High School Review Visits:** Between March and June, Education Director Judy Jeffrey conducted 85 review visits across the state to meet with each school district to discuss the issues of rigor and relevance at their high schools. The meetings included a member of the State Board of Education as well as the district superintendents, high school principals, and a representative of the local board. A data profile of each high school was used as a springboard for discussions, which were casual and candid, and did not follow a prescribed script of questions or discussion topics. Notetakers were present to record key issues, particularly challenges or barriers to improvement, as well as program ideas that could serve as models for other districts. The visits, which generally lasted about 90 minutes, did not result in precise data about issues, but did offer valuable insight into the very real challenges from the local high school educators' perspectives. The notes from each meeting were summarized and culled so that common themes could be identified and highlighted in this report.

**Community Conversations:** This second initiative, also conducted during the spring of 2005, did result in measurable data that validated the issues revealed in the High School Review Visits. Community Conversations were conducted in 12 districts across the state – Whiting, Sioux Center, Anamosa, Clarke, Knoxville, Aplington-Parkersburg, Postville, Maquoketa, West Harrison, Urbandale, Charles City, and Webster City. Districts volunteered to host a Community Conversation, so sites were not chosen based on size or location. The host superintendent was encouraged to invite a balanced constituency of between 20-30 persons to represent educators, parents, students, community members, and business leaders. The conversations also included a trained facilitator, a public recorder, a set list of issues to discuss, and a written follow-up report. Meetings began with the facilitator providing an overview of high school recommendations from various studies such as those from the Iowa Department of Education, the Iowa Learns Council, and the Iowa Urban Education Network; as well as several national reports. Participants were invited to discuss what the recommendations might mean to their high school, and to voice whether they would or would not support the initiatives at their high school.

## **II. WHAT? Understanding the Issues Holding High Schools Back**

Iowa educators studying quality high schools during the past several years have reached consensus that the focus of high schools should be:

**All students** will graduate having had opportunities to take **challenging, relevant courses** that have **prepared them well** for productive employment and citizenship.

Additionally, Iowa educators agree that successful schools share these six characteristics:



- High expectations for all learners.
- Collaborative school leadership.
- High quality professional development to assure quality instruction at all levels.
- A school environment that is student-focused.
- Rigorous and relevant curriculum.
- School decisions based on data.

The issues and challenges raised during the High School Review Visits and the Community Conversations and summarized in this HIGH SCHOOL REVIEW SUMMARY report are organized under each of these characteristics. Readers will note a wide variance in the numbers of comments or responses regarding each issue; this is due the fact that not each characteristic was discussed in the same depth at every visit or meeting. Most notably absent are comments related to the importance of nurturing relationships in high school and creating connections for students, which have been documented in prior state and national studies.

**1) High expectations for all learners.**

- ❑ There is strong support and interest in the issue of high school reform.
- ❑ Some communities may not support the goal or assumption that 90 percent of all high school students should go on to complete, at a minimum, two years of college or post-secondary training.
- ❑ Not all communities agree that graduates need at least Algebra I and Geometry and Biology and a physical science course such as chemistry.
- ❑ To meet high expectations, schools need more technical assistance, not more mandates.
- ❑ Schools need the support and participation of families. Low expectations (expressed by students, parents, educators, and community members) are a barrier to increasing rigor.
- ❑ Raising graduation expectations of all must be the goal, while still respecting local school district variances that are inherent in the concept of local control.
- ❑ There appears to be a discrepancy in graduation requirements across the state, especially in the courses required for mathematics. The same requirement that students have “two years of math”, for instance, can mean different or no specific content requirements in different districts.
- ❑ Similarly, there are discrepancies in expectations among communities regarding whether students should have an academically rigorous senior year, or whether they should be encouraged to explore their interests.
- ❑ Students have different postsecondary intentions. This could result from employment opportunities within their communities, access to postsecondary education.

- ❑ There is a generalized acceptance for many students to take fewer and/or less rigorous courses during their senior year.
- ❑ Poor communication between families and high schools and post-secondary institutions has contributed to the misunderstandings about the preparation needed for success beyond high school.
- ❑ Lack of resources limits districts' and teachers' ability to make the changes they believe are needed.
- ❑ The state should not mandate requirements; it should not impede local control regarding high school change, but it should provide resources and support for policies and innovation.
- ❑ Many citizens do not understand the roles of the various parties (state legislature, federal government, state Department of Education) that impact schools.
- ❑ High expectations only at the high school level will not adequately address the core issue of preparation for productive employment and citizenship. Adequate preparation of students beginning in PreK, with well articulated curriculum, is necessary.
- ❑ Investments in quality preschool programs are needed to help assure all children have the best introduction to learning, socialization, and academics.

**2) Collaborative school leadership.**

- ❑ Active support from and participation by community is necessary for change.
- ❑ Expectations of postsecondary need to be clearly defined, articulated with K-12, and clearly communicated.
- ❑ Collaboration and transitions throughout the education system need to improve.
- ❑ State policymakers must commit to a plan of action and stay the course. School improvement needs to be a long-term investment.

**3) High quality professional development to assure quality instruction at all levels.**

- ❑ The call for increased expectations must come with appropriate professional development to give educators the repertoire of strategies necessary to engage all learners, including those who struggle.
- ❑ High school improvement is dependent upon a commitment to systemic, quality professional development.
- ❑ There are inconsistencies in the resources available to teachers to help struggling learners.
- ❑ Professional development needs time, relevant and needs-based content (e.g., strategies aimed at struggling students), and data to drive its improvement process.
- ❑ Individual district calendars and schedules can hinder the development of a professional development program. It is difficult to accommodate teachers from multiple districts in the same workshops. Teacher training needs to be built on existing positive initiatives (“promising practices”) that are known to boost student achievement. Schools must institute training sessions in math for elementary and middle school teachers who, in some instances, need more preparation in the content.
- ❑ Current professional development initiatives and activities sponsored by the department are working well and should be expanded to more schools and districts.

**4) A school environment that is student-focused.**

- ❑ High school staff must develop strong connections and healthy relationships with all students to support them as they are challenged by more rigorous courses.
- ❑ To ensure that all students graduate, the challenge for every school is to create a personalized learning environment for every student regardless of the district's enrollment size.
- ❑ Every student should have a personal advocate.
- ❑ Electives and extra-curricular activities provide the connections and relationships that students require to be engaged and thus successful in school.
- ❑ Staff reductions mean teachers and other school personnel do not have the time to provide meaningful counseling or cultivate relationships with students.
- ❑ Staff reductions have come at a time when student problems have risen in both intensity and frequency.
- ❑ There should be an expectation that post-secondary institutions also provide some level of student supports to help ensure student success.
- ❑ Career plans would be helpful for students, but must be flexible yet rigorous, and must have the support of families.

**5) Rigorous and relevant curriculum.**

- ❑ There is common agreement that each student should graduate high school having opportunities to take challenging, relevant courses that have prepared him or her well for success in post-secondary learning and the workplace, as well as productive citizenship.
- ❑ There was general consensus that local control be maintained in the development of standards, curriculum and graduation requirements.
- ❑ High schools will need to collaborate with others to offer students access to advanced or honors level courses – for example, AP courses, college courses, internships and courses.
- ❑ All high schools must provide multiple pathways for students to experience rigorous learning.
- ❑ High school curriculum choices should not be so limited that they limit student choices or preparation for options after high school.
- ❑ A 4-year college may not be the best option for all students for future employment.
- ❑ Financial aid for postsecondary training/education is critical for many.
- ❑ The call for increasing core graduation requirements to four years of English and three years of mathematics and science (4-3-3) as the sole solution to the problem of how to increase rigor was challenged.
- ❑ A high school experience should be more than just academics – however important they are. All our youth need to acquire a well-rounded education that equips them to be successful at work, in society, and as lifelong learners.
- ❑ The core academic areas and career and technical areas must be much more closely aligned and integrated.

- ❑ In order for our students to access and experience rigor in ways that maintain their interest and engagement, it has to be accompanied by the other two “Rs” – relevance and relationships.
- ❑ Not all rigor is attained through English, math and science. Rigor must be cultivated in all disciplines, including career and technical education courses and other non-core classes.
- ❑ Quality career and technical education experiences are vital to teach students the meaning of their academics and help them apply their learning.
- ❑ Many students need the applied courses to demonstrate competency. The quality and rigor of these courses must be assured.
- ❑ Students gain valuable social and workplace skills – such as teamwork – via non-core experiences.
- ❑ There is strong desire to maintain quality elective options.
- ❑ Simply increasing graduation requirements does not equate to rigor.
- ❑ While learning expectations are the constant, time and support for learning are important variables. Some students will need more time and different kinds of support to learn the same content.
- ❑ College entrance and scholarship GPA or class rank requirements sometimes prevent students from taking more challenging courses during their senior year, because they don’t want to risk a lower grade that would lower their GPA or class ranking.
- ❑ Educators believe all students, including seniors, should take a full load of challenging courses. But some families often allow seniors to lighten up the senior year, and some schools don’t have course options appropriate to meet seniors’ needs.
- ❑ Relevance helps keep students interested in what the curriculum has to offer them.
- ❑ True reform incorporating rigor and relevance must begin before high school. A careful PK-12 articulation (organized sequencing of content taught and learned) is essential.
- ❑ Local calendars and schedules make it difficult for districts to access and share rigorous learning experiences from other (e.g., online) sources.
- ❑ Small schools often have difficulty offering an array of courses because they cannot find or afford a teacher.
- ❑ Community members often have program areas or elective courses they want to maintain (i.e. agriscience or orchestra).
- ❑ The limited availability of teachers in certain content areas and/or geographic regions restricts curriculum quality and options.
- ❑ Teacher shortages in math, science, special education, career and technical education, foreign languages, and guidance prevent schools from providing additional courses and programs.
- ❑ Licensure requirements prevent some schools from offering innovative or integrated math and science courses.
- ❑ To provide students the best high school experience, schools should offer a curriculum with both breadth and depth.

- ❑ Local districts are concerned about the quality of some of the courses provided by alternative sources (through sharing agreements, from other educational institutions, or online sources).
- ❑ Some students choose not to access rigorous courses via distance learning because it is a less personal learning environment.
- ❑ High schools are challenged in terms of accommodating students in special education in a Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), particularly in algebra or other core graduation requirements.

**6) School decisions are based on data.**

- ❑ A few educators question whether the current mandatory test (ITED) is a good measure of the skills students need.
- ❑ High schools must communicate with employers regarding what skills are needed for employment, and whether their students have those skills.
- ❑ High schools must communicate with colleges and universities regarding whether their students were properly prepared for the college curriculum and environment.
- ❑ Using current data from various sources provides insights into the quality and effectiveness of schooling.
- ❑ Post-secondary data on student success should be available to all school districts.

### **III. HOW? Understanding How Lasting, Systemic Improvements Can Be Made**

The various issues raised in the High School Review Visits and Community Conversations have potential implications that bring about questions, which are divided into three categories:

1. Issues related to state law or policy.
2. Issues related to technical assistance.
3. Issues related to promising practices (i.e. sharing successful program models among districts).

Upon review of the findings, the Review Team drafted the following questions for consideration, which helped form the basis for the recommendations in Section IV. The recommendations also are divided into the three categories related to state law or policy, technical assistance, and promising practices.

**Policy Issues**

Although the department does not have singular authority or ability to change policy to help schools, it can affect some, and can influence other policymakers to change policy.

Related to curriculum:

- ❑ Does Iowa need mandated graduation requirements?
- ❑ Does Iowa need a uniform statewide curriculum for all students to assure the desired level of quality for all students?
- ❑ Should the accreditation requirements related to offer and teach be reviewed and updated to assure the desired level of quality for all students?

- ❑ Can we reach consensus on how to define and measure the essential skills or competencies needed for graduation, without weakening local control?
- ❑ Do current accreditation requirements limit or support positive change in high school?
- ❑ If “core coursework” becomes a formal policy, does “non-core” coursework also need to be “formalized” so that it is equally valued?
- ❑ Can college entrance and scholarship requirements be revised to better reward students who seek challenging courses?
- ❑ Can the state mandate “high expectations” among communities and families?

Related to funding:

- ❑ Where will resources be found to help schools build capacity to reach higher expectations? Will state funding be provided to cover expenses related to curriculum development, providing incentives for teachers in hard-to-staff areas, and staffing shortages to reduce student: teacher ratios?
- ❑ How can a balance be achieved between mandates and resources (time, people, money, energy, etc.)?
- ❑ How can the statewide support and technical assistance infrastructure be maintained when the DE resources (staff and funding) have been reduced?
- ❑ Can state resources be better targeted to meet the goals of increased rigor, relevance and relationships at the local high school level?
- ❑ Is it appropriate for a district to access full funding for a senior student who is only required to attend part of the school day?

Related to teaching:

- ❑ How can we build on the progress we’ve made to support high quality instruction as the primary influence on student achievement, rather than capitulating to high stakes testing?
- ❑ How can the investment in the Student Achievement/Teacher Quality initiative, now in its fourth year, be expanded to improve its impact and benefit to students?
- ❑ How can we better assure universal high quality teachers while respecting local control?
- ❑ Do we need to consider different licensing to provide greater flexibility in the assignment of teachers?
- ❑ Should licensure be studied to ensure requirements are not limiting opportunities for students?

Related to local control, general operations:

- ❑ Do state or local policies and practices on truants and dropouts inhibit or encourage a student to stay in school?
- ❑ What is the impact of the requirement for early graduation policies? Do they positively or negatively impact student motivation?
- ❑ How can local agencies be encouraged and supported to adequately meet the needs of school students and to partner with the school district?
- ❑ How can the state encourage local, community and regional agencies to collaborate and share data?

- ❑ What current requirements are better outsourced or eliminated to provide more time for academic instruction?
- ❑ What local board policies, practices and allocation of resources encourage (rather than discourage) students to stay in school and complete their studies?
- ❑ How can we establish a “checks and balances” system to strengthen the reliability of local control so it is in line with global realities?

### **Technical Assistance**

One of the department’s most important responsibilities is to provide technical assistance to districts and educators to help them meet the learning needs of students.

Related to curriculum:

- ❑ How can we expand and build upon current programs such as Career Academies that have proven successful in providing relevance to learning?
- ❑ How will the core curriculum models be explained and delivered to districts?
- ❑ How will the four-year student plans be modeled and delivered to districts?
- ❑ How can we assure universal, if not uniform, quality of courses (including advanced courses and dual credit courses) statewide?
- ❑ How can the state help all students, regardless of school size or location, have greater access to rigorous opportunities and experiences?
- ❑ How can we strengthen and expand our system of alternate course delivery (e.g. via the ICN and Iowa Learning Online)?

Related to teaching:

- ❑ How can the various components of the Student Achievement/Teacher Quality initiative (teaching standards, mentoring and induction, minimum salaries, evaluations, and individual and district career development plans) support the specific improvement of high schools?
- ❑ What supports will help schools and teachers increase their professional capacity to reach and reach out to more students?
- ❑ What current supports – such as Content Networks, Teacher Development Academies, and reading and math initiatives – can be targeted to high school improvement?
- ❑ How can teachers be supported in incorporating the Three R’s – rigor, relevance, and relationships – into their teaching practices?
- ❑ What innovative avenues can be offered so ALL high school teachers can access quality professional development?

Related to local control or operations:

- ❑ How can the support infrastructure be strengthened so that high schools have access to multiple local, regional, and state-level forms of technical assistance?
- ❑ How can the AEA system be maximized to provide technical assistance for high school improvement efforts?
- ❑ How can we encourage all stakeholders (students, families, educators, and community members) to increase their expectations for high school and participate in the improvement process?
- ❑ How can the Learning Supports initiatives be tapped and targeted to high schools?

### **Promising Practices**

During the High School Review Visits and Community Conversations, districts revealed many promising practices and local programs that are successfully overcoming some of the barriers identified by other districts in providing rigor, relevance and relationships for high school students.

- How can we find and validate “promising practices” and make them readily available for other districts and AEAs to replicate where appropriate? For example:
  - What rigor looks like in practice.
  - How to teach with relevance and relationships.
  - Competency-based curriculum development, instruction and assessment.
  - New strategies that help teachers reach struggling and diverse learners.
  - How to modify and adapt instructional methods to meet different course structures; for instance, the longer class periods of block scheduling demand entirely different teaching techniques, not simply longer periods of teaching.
  - How to identify and fully meet the needs of struggling high school students.
  - Methods to deliver integrated instruction, including the infusion of technology.
  - How to use data to guide the ongoing improvement efforts.

## **IV. RECOMMENDATIONS: Suggestions to Affect Lasting and Systemic Improvements**

The analysis team that examined data from the Community Conversations and insights from the High School Review Visits makes the following recommendations regarding technical assistance, policy, and promising practices to affect lasting and systemic improvements in Iowa high schools. These recommendations should be further evaluated by key stakeholders such as the State Board of Education, the Director of Education, and the High School Steering Committee to determine which ones they support, and to set forth an aggressive implementation plan for those items.

### **Policy Recommendations:**

1. Maintain local control for standards, curriculum and graduation requirements. The vast majority of communities and educators expressed strong support for local control.
2. Strengthen the local control system with a stronger method of checks and balances to ensure that high expectations and high quality and the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century all are embraced by parents, community and educators.
  - The goals of the checks and balances would be to assure quality of curriculum and teaching, and that budgets are targeted to meet district priorities.



3. Do not add any unfunded mandates.
4. Fully fund the expansion of the Student Achievement/Teacher Quality initiatives to improve compensation and professional development for educators.
  - ❑ Teachers clearly have a key role in leading the transformation of high schools from static institutions to becoming dynamic and vibrant learning centers. Iowa must increase the capacity of teachers to target their instruction, motivate students to achieve to the highest possible level, and serve as role models. These efforts require significant investments in teacher preparation, recruitment, professional development, and compensation.
5. Develop curriculum models or models of learner competencies, and continue to review the alignment of local and state assessments to these competencies.
  - ❑ The goal of the models would be to provide the universal level of quality and challenge currently lacking statewide. Care should be given to respect local control to apply the models in the manner that best meets the needs of their students.
  - ❑ Communities expressed a desire that Iowa continue to encourage and support comprehensive high schools with a wide variety of opportunities in core coursework, non-core coursework, electives, and extra-curricular options.

Since *A Nation At Risk* was published in the 1980s, high schools have been encouraged to provide a rich array of courses and learning opportunities for their students. As a result, larger schools have been able to offer an impressive breadth of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities. Now, however, the trend is toward the attainment of common core competencies – within and across the various courses (both core and elective), which had led to a narrowing of curriculum and student disengagement from education.

The issue becomes how to provide balance of opportunity to safeguard both choice and universally high expectations. This situation has been somewhat exacerbated by the promotion of the three core subjects (reading, math, and science) by the No Child Left Behind legislation, with the focus on the academic purpose of schools, which creates the perception that elective courses are less important. What is understood, however, is that increasing core requirements, the length of the school day or even the school year, by themselves, will not generate genuine or general school improvement. Students need opportunities though both core academics and elective fields to practice and master skills in critical and creative thinking, teamwork, and civic involvement in order to be productive adults.

6. Provide financial incentives for teachers in hard-to-staff areas.
  - ❑ Iowa faces a serious teacher shortage in the very content areas we are attempting to strengthen. Most other states have either loosened their licensing requirements (which we do not recommend) or funded incentives for these teachers – putting Iowa at a competitive disadvantage.
7. Maintain strong requirements for teacher licensure and certification.
  - ❑ Examine licensure practices to ensure they do not limit opportunities for teachers and students. Specifically examine certification for science and applied courses.

### **Technical Assistance Recommendations:**

1. Embed high school improvement efforts within each district's Comprehensive School Improvement Plan and Iowa Professional Development Model.
2. Provide support and resources so schools can monitor quality implementation of the curriculum models.
3. Provide tools (such as needs assessments or focus group instruments) to help districts identify needs, frame action plans and monitor progress toward improvement.
4. Support the development of stronger teacher/student relationships by providing organizational structure models and strategies to help schools reach an optimum student: educator ratio. Willard Daggett of the International Center for Leadership in Education argues that rigor – which he equates with coursework that elicits higher level thinking skills – is only achievable when accompanied by relevance, which he defines as application to real-life contexts. It is relationships, however, that complete the learning triangle. (insert graphic) According to Daggett, relationships are critical because students are much more likely to make substantial personal investment in learning if they know teachers and parents care about how well they do.
5. Provide support and resources for universal and quality implementation of the required 4-year student plans to all 8<sup>th</sup> graders.
6. Obtain results of the periodic community college employability/life skills survey and disseminate information to districts so they can use it as a planning and curriculum assessment tool.
7. Communicate frequently and regularly with all post-secondary institutions to address issues of curriculum quality and student preparation.
8. Advocate for changing the college entrance and scholarship requirements so they do not inadvertently discourage students from taking rigorous coursework.
9. Work with IASB and SAI to review local policies and practices.
10. Assist districts in communicating with their communities:
  - ❑ Conduct community forums about high schools and the required expectations for students, educators and other members of the learning community.
  - ❑ Communicate about what school and community supports can be provided to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of students.

- ❑ Promote community partnerships (involving career academies, internship opportunities, etc).
  - ❑ Help explain the role communities play in developing/defining rigor, relevance and relationships and their importance in learning.
11. Continue to promote high expectations.
  12. Assist with the alignment of PK-16 articulation.
  13. Identify models for career education to ensure it is both meaningful and challenging. Research indicates that dropout rates decline as students feel more connected to their school. This can be accomplished by maintaining school connectedness and the roles that electives, extracurricular activities, and parent support play in this process.
  14. Identify models for advanced coursework such as Advanced Placement and Dual Credit courses.
  15. Strengthen implementation of a tiered system model of Learning Supports to help students who are struggling academically or socially.
  16. Provide support and assistance for the implementation of the six key elements of high school improvement (high expectations, collaborative leadership, professional development, rigorous and relevant curriculum, a student-focused school environment, and student assessment and program evaluation).
    - ❑ The strength of Iowa's communities is a key reason why the state's local control education system has been successful and responsive to both student and economic needs. As expectations increase, a program of thorough, research-based professional development will play a key role in implementing those higher demands with consistent, high quality across the entire state system, without weakening the local ownership that we believe remains an important Iowa strength.
    - ❑ Expand professional development for teachers to develop skills in applying technology to their instruction, specifically for distance learning. We believe distance learning will greatly expand in future years to address the needs of teacher shortages and quality course offerings.
  17. Continue to update high school profiles to document changes that are occurring.
  18. Examine the DE technical assistance and resources to ensure they are in line with priorities.

### **Promising Practices Recommendation:**

1. Expand the work of the High School Steering Committee to compile and validate promising practices.
  - ❑ Establish a website to disseminate the information to all districts. A website allows the information to be updated frequently to best serve the districts.
  - ❑ Include an avenue for AEA sharing.