



PEI

PROFESSIONAL EDUCATORS OF IOWA

Professional Educators of Iowa

Comments on the Governor's Plan

Dear Rebecca,

Almost daily, we have had someone ask for our opinion on the Governor's new education plan. We do not have an official PEI stance because we do not pretend to have one view that covers all of our members on such a broad issue, that is unless there is a contradiction of our by-laws and operational statements. We do however, believe that child-centered education is best regardless of the agency, individual, or system that is delivering it. Under those guidelines the following is my assessment which has been carefully scrutinized by the rest of the office staff. We tend to not pull our punches on this and hope that it stimulates your ideas as we challenge you to directly contact the agencies who will eventually approve, modify, or scuttle the entire project.

ONE UNSHAKEABLE VISION: WORLD-CLASS SCHOOLS FOR IOWA

What does all this mean under these lenses?

by
Jim Hawkins

Although, the Vision document states, "This blueprint is not a list of options to be cherry-picked based on special interests, ideology, political affiliation, or whether one is within or outside of the education profession", the reality is that upon release the picking, scrutinizing, and speculation began almost immediately. With the months of work that has gone into formulating this plan, it would have been unfair to give a "knee-jerk" reaction to its content. As a PEI policy, we express member's views on items that can be surveyed and that are not policy items already defined within the organization. The final value to any educational policy is the student impact. That is the determining factor for whether PEI is in favor, against, or even silent on issues. The Vision proposal is no different. We will start with some truths that are not reasonably contestable and use these as lights on the individual items.

1. You can't teach what you don't know.
2. *"The true rule in determining to embrace or reject anything is not whether it have any evil in it, but whether it have more of evil than of good. There are few things wholly evil or wholly good."*
Abraham Lincoln
3. The biggest friend of truth is time.



The first premise

The first premise in the Vision is that most of the changes need to happen in the PK - 12 systems.

That addresses predominately teachers and principals. I agree that every student should have good teachers and principals. I would go on to add that every student should have good professors. There needs to be provision for quality teacher instruction and training on the college level. Each and every college professor who is a part of teacher training should be modeling quality instruction in every class including appearance, content, and delivery! It is time that the illusion that every college professor knows how to instruct and train instructors for our PK - 12 schools is exposed. We must have assurances that the teacher of the teachers was truly successful at the PK - 12 levels. This is a quality control issue.

The second premise

The second premise or assumption in the Vision is that the mentoring system is a vital key to quality instruction.

The word mentoring was rarely if ever used a few decades ago when Iowa's public schools were truly the best in the nation. The real mentors were the teachers themselves who were teachers both on and off duty. They took the responsibility to look and act professional in their communities. With the advent of relational theories in the late sixties and seventies, the colleges were telling the new teachers to get on the floor with the students and dress like them so they could "relate" to them. That started an onset of the discipline and respect issues that created the havoc within the public schools and likewise brought about the increase in private schooling and home schooling. Conduct, appearance, and discipline codes instituted by school boards and upheld by administrations will make monumental correction on these issues.

The specifics of the Vision

http://www.educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=12389&Itemid=4303

Here is the topical list within the document:

Attracting and Supporting Talented Educators
Improved Educator Recruiting and Hiring Practices
Creating Educator Leadership Roles
A Meaningful and Peer-Based Evaluation System
Transformational Teacher Salary Structure
Job Protections Based on Effectiveness
Free Principals to Lead
Improve and Expand the Iowa core
A Next Generation Assessment Framework
A New Accountability System
Ensure Third-Grade Literacy
Fueling Local Innovation
Increasing School Innovation
Online learning options
Any Time, Anywhere Learning and Ending the "Factory"
Educations Model
A Statewide Parent and Community Engagement Network
Iowa Education Goals - Defining World-Class Student Outcomes

I was going to write on each of the topics item for item, but that would be overwhelmingly long so here are a few observations and subsequent questions. The real value is what you as members think about the Vision in its entirety. The initial questions that I have are:

1. Do you really think we should take the best teachers out of the classrooms to mentor? Shouldn't we put the new teachers in the best teacher's classrooms to observe?
2. Do you really think that the base pay is what attracts students to be teachers? It is the dream of doing something significant for others.
3. Where is the concept of "Servant Leadership" in the formula? The principal with the heart to serve and enable the teachers to serve and teach the students are the ones who will build the best schools.
4. What are the characteristics of the best teachers? I agree we should attract the best and the best are determined by the results of their students regardless of their level of ability or age. That can be measured! Put efforts into to assessment that is authentic.
5. Why wait to initiate licensure reciprocity? It is a good idea that can make available many more qualified teaching candidates. Frankly there is no place for any Iowa credentialing snobbery considering our state's national standings. We must separate licensure and credentialing from the hiring and firing power given to principals and superintendents. What this means is that the administrator has sufficient power over the teacher with the ability to employee or dismiss. They do not need credentialing power too. That must be separate.
6. Why doesn't the plan address the discipline - classroom management component?

7. Where is the follow-up data? What worked when we were the best?
8. Who will be involved in the peer process? Will we let the unions dominate or will all teachers have equal access?
9. Why is local control being continually eroded? The schools were the best when the locals had the most control, not state mandates.
10. Why are we expanding an unproven core curriculum?
11. Why is there an assumption that the principal is a good instructional leader? Where is their proof or how will we verify those who are?
12. Why are we giving all 11th-graders college entrance exams?
13. Why wait for third grade for reading readiness?
14. If we are so worried about "teaching to the test", then why don't we construct tests that require teaching what we want learned?
15. How do we afford such an elaborate plan?
16. Why do we continually require more in-servicing, recertification, and credentialing which is expensive and time consuming, when the trend has been in this direction and yet the decline in excellence has gone along a parallel track?
17. What are the provisions to improve and make relevant the instruction for those students who will not elect to go to college?
18. Will the expansion of government control give teachers any more freedom to teach, less paperwork, or increased support?

When you survey the entire document you will have numerous questions of your own you can easily yet to this set. These are what need to be asked of the Department of Education, the Governor, and the legislators. I maintain that the key to teaching is the teacher.

Just a few major keys for attracting and keeping good teachers are:

1. Provide a safe, clean environment.
2. Provide the materials and climate for enthusiastic instruction.
3. A reasonable salary.
4. Support the teacher when there are discipline issues.
5. Give the teacher support for classroom management.
6. Make students accountability for their actions.
7. Let teachers have standards even if those students who choose not to meet them may fail.
8. Reward the students who are serious about their education by letting them exist together without the disruptions of those who are choosing to fail. *

**One of the greatest powers that we all have is the power to choose. Help students to choose wisely and do not let those who do not choose wisely diminish the instructional time of those who want to learn.*

As opposed to a survey at this time, we recommend that you send your comments on the Vision directly to the Governor, to Jason Glass and to

your representatives and senators. We will appreciate being sent a copy of your correspondence so we see what is on your mind on the issues as well.

Jason Glass, State Director of Education

jason.glass@iowa.gov

Department of Education

Grimes State Office Building

400 E 14th St.

Des Moines, IA 50319-0146

Find your legislatures:

<http://www.legis.state.ia.us/aspx/Legislators/LegislatorInfo.aspx>

Governor Branstad

<https://governor.iowa.gov/contact/>

1007 East Grand Ave.

Des Moines, Iowa 50319

Phone: [515.281.5211](tel:515.281.5211)

Well, there is the opinion requested. It may be unpopular or raveningly brilliant. Probably it is neither, but I remember when we were on top of the game and Iowa was the education state. I do not see a great deal in the plan that reflects the values and processes that were so successful in the past. Where are they?

Sincerely,

Jim Hawkins

Professional Educators of Iowa