



A MONTHLY JOURNAL
FOR IOWA EDUCATORS

School Leader Update

March 2013

Where poverty meets proficiency

It may be well known that high-poverty schools will have lower proficiency rates than their more affluent counterparts. Sure, it's well known. But it is wrong.

There are districts across the state that, despite 55 percent or more of their student populations qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches, have students exceeding the state-wide proficiency averages in reading.

Educators from these districts agree that there's no magic bullet to produce these results: You look at data, determine the right direction to go, and do it. And they are adamant on this: Poverty cannot be used as an excuse for low achievement. That is not to say that poverty, in and of itself, doesn't produce its own set of special circumstances. "Kids come from backgrounds that are ...

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Helping all Iowa students read proficiently

We celebrated the good news recently that Iowa's graduation rate is on the rise.

One key reason we're seeing success in this area is that school districts are stepping up their efforts to identify and engage students who are most at risk of dropping out. These schools are working to solve the problem before it happens.

Iowa is positioned to take a similar preventive approach to reading problems in schools.



Jason Glass, Director

Everyone agrees on the importance of reading as a gateway skill to learning. Most children make the jump from "learning to read" to "reading to learn" by the end of third grade, so early intervention is critical. As an education system, we are working together to put in place Response to Intervention, a proven practice to help schools identify, and intervene with, struggling readers early on.

We do this by adapting instruction to fit those students' individual needs and then monitoring their progress. Response to Intervention is not a packaged program. It is a data-powered approach to meet the needs of all students. This approach should be in place in every school in the state, although it should be tailored to fit each school's individual needs.

To achieve this, schools need an early warning system to identify students whose reading skills are on track, as well as those students who are struggling to read. In February, the Iowa Department of Education [released important information about the tools](#) that will support a scale-up of Response to Intervention starting this fall.

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Pilot test of Smarter Balanced assessments

In the coming weeks, schools across Iowa will participate in the pilot test of the Smarter Balanced assessments in grades 3-11. The pilot test will allow Smarter Balanced to evaluate the performance of assessment items and the test delivery system under real-world conditions. This information will be used to develop additional items and performance tasks, conduct initial scaling, and refine the test engine over the next 18 months.

Participation in the pilot test is voluntary. Schools will have access to support and resources, including a training test to become familiar with the format of the online assessment. Since the pilot test is designed to be a test of the items and performance tasks — not an opportunity to report on student learning — schools will not receive student scores and the test will not replace other statewide assessments.

There are two important phases to the pilot test. Nearly 200 schools have been recruited to participate in the scientific sample based on demographic characteristics. The scientific sample will ensure that the results from the pilot test accurately represent the student population across Smarter Balanced member states. Schools in the scientific sample will administer one content area (either mathematics or ELA/literacy) in up to two grades during a pre-determined two-week window under secure conditions. Schools not selected as part of the scientific sample may still volunteer to participate through an online survey. Iowa schools can sign up to participate in the volunteer portion of the pilot test by completing the online survey before March 27: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/SmarterBalancedPilot>.

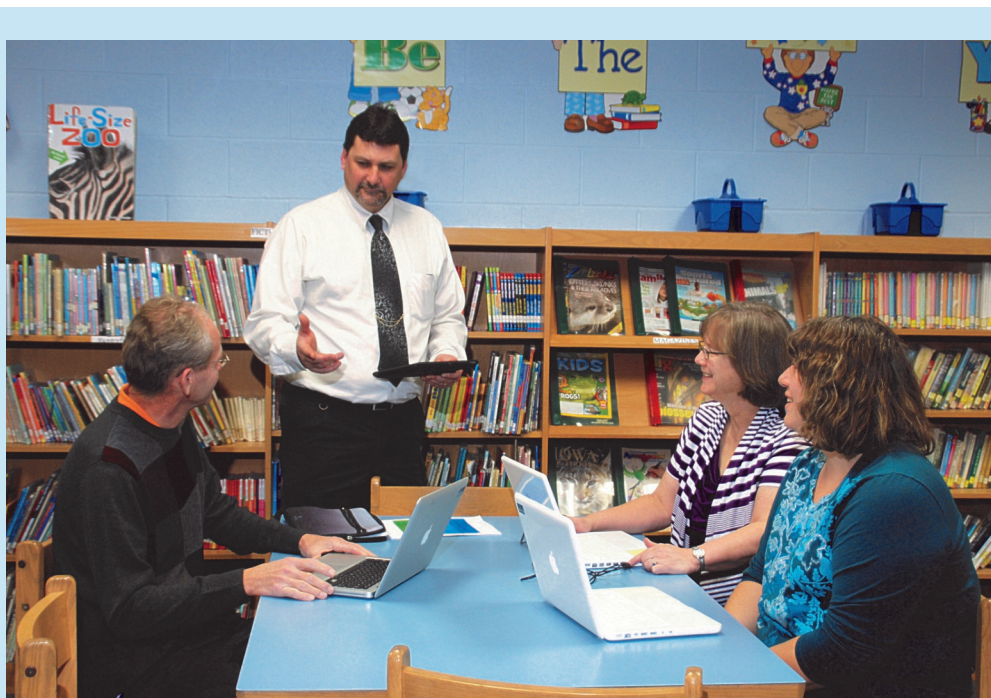
The Smarter Balanced assessment system — with formative, interim, and summative components — is designed to provide better information and tools to improve teaching and learning. As a Smarter Balanced governing state, Iowa plays a leading role in the development of next-generation assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards. Iowa educators have participated in the development and review of assessment items, achievement level descriptors, and test specifications.

For more information on the pilot test, visit: <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/pilot-test/>.

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... not as ready to learn as others when they enter school,” said Tina Gress, principal of Charter Oak-Ute’s elementary school. “We have to do some catch up. But I don’t think you can use low income as a crutch.” Read the full story at www.educateiowa.gov.

Right: Murray Superintendent Alan Miller meets with staff members. The Murray district is one example of a system in which poverty doesn’t interfere with student success.



Financial Know-How Challenge: Win \$1,000

Your high school could have a chance at \$1,000 when your students increase their financial understanding in the Iowa Financial Know-How Challenge between now and March 29. The challenge also helps high schools work toward Iowa Core 21st Century Skills requirements. Enter at www.studentloan.org/EnterChallenge.

Iowa high schools that incorporate the online financial literacy tutorial Student Loan Game PlanSM into their classrooms by **March 29** can register in the Iowa Financial Know-How Challenge and be entered in a drawing for a chance to win one of 30 cash prizes. The drawing will award each winning school \$1,000 total for its financial literacy programs and scholarship fund.

Iowa Student Loan[®], the Iowa Department of Education, the Iowa Jump\$tart Coalition, Junior Achievement of Central Iowa and the Iowa College Access Network are the sponsors of this program.

Increase Students' Financial Knowledge

Your students will learn how they might reduce their need to borrow for college through Student Loan Game Plan, an innovative online tool from Iowa Student Loan.

"Students often borrow for college without realizing the effect it will have on their future finances and lifestyle," said Steve McCul-

lough, president and CEO of Iowa Student Loan. "Student Loan Game Plan provides high school students with achievable ways to save for college and helps them understand the consequences of over-borrowing for their education."

Help Meet Iowa Core Requirements

Student Loan Game Plan, as well as other materials and resources offered by the partnering sponsors, helps meet financial literacy requirements for the Iowa Core 21st Century Skills.

Learn More

For more information about the challenge and how available resources align with the Iowa Core requirements, visit www.studentloan.org/EnterChallenge. You may also contact Matt Brown at Iowa Student Loan at (800) 243-7552, ex. 7656, or by email at mbrown@studentloan.org.



Teachers wanted for Iowa Assessment studies

Iowa teachers are being recruited to participate in alignment and standard-setting studies for the Iowa Assessments in March. The Iowa Department of Education has contracted with Data Recognition Corporation to complete this work, which will cover grades 3-8, 10, and 11 in reading and mathematics and grades 5, 8, and 11 in science. The studies are expected to be complete in June.



Alignment is an important part of curriculum development because it enhances communication among educators at each grade level and between grade levels. The process includes making sure that the same topics are written, taught, and assessed. The alignment study will look at the written and assessed curriculum. Equally important is setting performance standards at each grade level that will indicate whether students are on track for the college- and career-readiness goal.

Teachers who are knowledgeable in the content area and who are available to participate are encouraged to contact the Iowa Department of Education by March 8. Applicants may apply at <http://www.cvent.com/d/jcqryx>. The alignment study will take place March 28-29, while the standard-setting study is scheduled for four days during the following week. For more information, contact Dianne Chadwick at 515-281-3718 or dianne.chadwick@iowa.gov.

Governor's Volunteer Awards

Do you have volunteers in your district or school you would like to honor? Sign them up for the annual Governor's Volunteer Awards.

Volunteers may be selected for an award in one of several categories: individual, group, disaster volunteer, or length of service. Each summer, regional award presentation ceremonies are held across the state to recognize hundreds of volunteers for their commitment, service, and time.

There is a small handling fee for each nomination form submitted, which helps cover the cost of printing certificates, invitations, and ceremony materials, as well as memento photos, pins, and postage.

Award recipient criteria include an individual or group who has:

- demonstrated exceptional commitment to volunteerism by helping with a special project or ongoing activities;
- demonstrated exemplary leadership, creativity, cooperation and hard work in their service to others;
- made an outstanding contribution to state or community through volunteer service.

For more information or to receive nomination papers, contact the Iowa Department of Education's Ruth Jones at ruth.jones@iowa.gov. The deadline to submit nominations is April 5.



Early Childhood Preschool Programs

GOLD Assessment System: Time to review

The winter checkpoint for all programs under the state GOLD license was February 15. This is a good opportunity for administrators to review the amount of documentation for each child as well as the child information page. The state unique student identification number should be entered for each child in special education, Shared Visions, Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program or any other district-operated preschool. The state unique student identification number should be entered in the text box Student ID. All funding sources for children in special education, Shared Vision, Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program or any other district-operated preschool should be entered under Funding Sources.



BEDS spring collection will have additional questions



The spring Basic Educational Data Survey (BEDS) collection will include additional questions regarding child care. District officials should anticipate questions related to the number of classrooms, ages served, the agency providing oversight, and the type of standards implemented. Districts may operate or contract for child-care services. Child-care services must be licensed by the state Department of Human Services or follow Iowa Department of Education guidelines. That collection opens May 9.

For more information on the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program, go to [http://](http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=940&Itemid=1279)

www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=940&Itemid=1279 or contact Penny Milburn at penny.milburn@iowa.gov or 515-281-7844, or Amy Stegeman at amy.stegeman@iowa.gov or 515-725-2273.

Nutrition and Health Services

Summer workshops focus on child nutrition programs

Iowa school administrators and food service directors or managers are encouraged to participate in a series of child nutrition workshops offered this summer by the Iowa Department of Education and Iowa State University Extension. Seven workshops throughout June and July will cover a range of topics, including food safety, financial management of school food service programs, and school meal regulations. The schedule is as follows:

JUNE

- June 13: Manager's Update
- June 18: ServSafe
- June 19: Produce Safety
- June 20: HACCP 101 Workshop
- June 25-27: Procurement Workshop

JULY

- July 9-10: Financial Management
- July 30, 31 and August 1: New Managers' Orientation
- July 30-31: Healthy Meal Planning*

*Option only if previously attended New Managers' Orientation

A complete schedule, including workshop descriptions, is available at:

http://educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=442&Itemid=866. For more information, contact Sandra Fiegen at sandra.fiegen@iowa.gov.





Legislative Update

Contact Mike Cormack for all legislative items: mike.cormack@iowa.gov or 515-281-3399.

Cormack at the Capitol

Wrestling with education reform

From my high school days of rooting for "Bulldog" Bob Brown at the Humboldt High School gym to today, with the antics of Vince McMahon, I have been a professional wrestling fan. In college, I saw the vicious German "Baron" Von Raschke place his claw hold on another wrestler's poor melon, forcing his opponent to quit to get that vice-like grip off his head. This was at the Blue Earth County Fair in Minnesota, where later I witnessed the same vicious "Baron" with glasses and street clothes on, examining pickle jars and quilts at the 4-H exhibition. I found out he was actually born in Omaha; he was a substitute teacher.

Things rarely are the way they seem. Just as professional wrestling is a carefully choreographed performance, so it goes in the Legislature.

Both the Iowa House and Iowa Senate have live floor action that you can watch on the bills as they are deliberated. I love watching floor debate and recommend it. But, much like professional wrestling, the results of the action have been determined well before any of the arguments are made. When the Iowa House came into action on education reform, there were roughly 30 amendments and the debate on the bill lasted for about six hours. I correctly predicted before the bill even started which amendments would be adopted, which would fail and what the final vote would be. The simplest rule to know is that if a bill is being voted on in the House or Senate, it will pass, no matter what is said by the House Democrats or Senate Republicans this year. In my eight years in office, I saw one bill (an increase in the speed limit) fail on the floor of the House after lengthy debate. In that case, some members didn't follow the script as planned.



German "Baron" Von Raschke demonstrates "the claw."

So, why does the minority party argue on bills when they can't win? Unlike wrestling, they aren't veterans who are scripted to put up a good fight and lose to make their opponent look good. Just the opposite: The minority controls the time by the amount of amendments they offer; they sometimes alter the legislation by having amendments adopted; they make arguments for the other chamber or Governor to consider; and they can try to influence public opinion by being quoted in the media. I have seen floor debate go on long enough that the majority party quits, like that poor fellow in the Von Raschke claw, to move on to other issues, but only if the issue isn't a major priority of the group.

The Iowa House Republicans did pass a version of education reform that largely contains elements of the Governor's original proposal and added some measures of their own to it. They included 2 percent additional spending to supplemental state aid (formerly known as allowable growth) on the bill, as well. Please click on the following link to view the letter from Director Jason Glass that summarizes the status of the legislation as it passed the Iowa House: http://educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=15006&Itemid=4434.

Legislative Update continued

While the Iowa Senate was holding subcommittee meetings on the proposal, it hadn't voted on the measure by that time. That meant that House File 215 would be sent to the Senate for its consideration.

Ultimately, both sides are likely to insist on their versions of education reform, leading up to a 10-member conference committee made up of five from each chamber working on a final bill.

If this were wrestling, it would be like the pay-per-view steel cage match that settles the feud once and for all. Whatever is determined by the conference committee must be voted on and approved or rejected without amendment from the floor of both chambers. If education reform takes place this year, it will likely be done in this manner.

But the process, the negotiations between the two chambers and the Governor's office behind the scenes, will determine what is in the final version of education reform. That doesn't mean public input isn't important: Much of what those discussions lead to will be based on the comments made to legislators. Whatever your thoughts on this bill, please contact your legislators to let them know your thoughts.

My sincere hope is a compromise will make both political parties and chambers feel good about passing education reform. While the debate over the bill at this time might seem like the Baron and his claw, I hope the final legislation is more like the gentleman at the 4-H stand.

In the end, the good guy always wins in wrestling, no matter how many steel chairs hit him. May Iowa's education system also be the winner in this legislative session, after absorbing some bumps and bruises along the way.

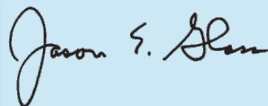
Continued from page 1, Director Glass

These tools will be provided at no charge to our schools and districts.

This is a huge development in our shared commitment to help all Iowa students become proficient readers.

You can read more about Response to Intervention in a report issued by the Iowa Department of Education a few months ago called "Overcoming the Achievement Divide." This report is available on our website at www.educateiowa.gov.

As always, thanks for all you do on behalf of our state, our schools, and our students.





Legal Lessons

Contact Nicole Proesch for all Legal Lessons items: nicole.proesch@iowa.gov or 515-281-8661

School safety, diploma requirements, certificates, and students with disabilities

School Safety

Classroom Locks

School administrators are considering extraordinary steps to secure their buildings against unauthorized entry. This memo is not final guidance; rather, it is intended to make schools aware of the minimum allowable fire code requirements. The Iowa Department of Public Safety is putting this out to try to get ahead of the classroom safety debate before other well-intentioned acts take place, such as installing deadbolts on classroom doors. At the outset, this may not appear to be an issue. However, if the doors are also locked to prevent exit in any type of emergency, this is not only a violation of Iowa's fire safety regulations, but schools incur unnecessary debt to install and remove the locks. Please see the following for guidance about locking classroom doors: http://www.educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&qid=15014&Itemid=4434

Contact your local fire inspector for more information regarding fire code requirements. A list of inspectors is available at: <http://www.dps.state.ia.us/fm/main/contact/index.shtml> Please see the following for other resources on school safety: http://educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=769&Itemid=2683

Diploma Requirements, Certificates, and Students with Disabilities

Diploma Requirements – Alternative School Programs

Following are guidelines for districts to use for their students who complete a plan of study at an alternative school program, including a community college alternative school program.

- a. Always bear in mind that a student cannot graduate from a program. A student graduates from a high school. The vast majority of our districts do not have an alternative high school. They offer an alternative school program either directly or through a community college or through a consortium of other districts. Students who conclude their studies through an alternative school program get their diplomas (if earned) from their district of enrollment.
- b. A district may not set different core requirements for graduation for students in an alternative setting or program. For example, if the general graduation requirement includes seven credits for language arts, four for science, four for mathematics, and six for social studies, these core requirements must also be met by a student in an alternative setting or program. The flexibility offered in alternative programs may be reflected in scheduling issues and in elective courses, not the core curriculum.
- c. A district must offer just one basic diploma. Think of the basic diploma as the lowest common denominator of achievement (i.e., it reflects the successful completion of all core requirements). It is permissible to indicate high achievement on the diploma, such as "with honors."
- d. It is permissible to indicate on the face of the diploma that the student completed his/her studies via the alternative program. It is not mandatory to do this, since the transcript (which is more important than the diploma) will reflect all curricular data. If a district elects to indicate completion of credits via an alternative program, the word "program" *must* appear on the diploma.

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Legal Lessons continued

- e. Districts are strongly discouraged from lowering the electives requirements drastically.
- f. Notwithstanding the above paragraphs, if a district has an attendance center that is an alternative school (not just the program), the diploma may come from either the alternative school or the resident district and must state on the face of the diploma that the student is awarded the diploma for having met the graduation requirements of "(Name) School." The alternative school's graduation requirements may be different from the requirements for graduation from the district's traditional high school(s). When a student enters the alternative school, staff members should determine at the earliest practical time whose graduation requirements are going to be applied for the student.
- g. Community colleges may serve students from numerous districts. **The district officials need to work with the college officials to ensure that the college understands the number and type of the district's core requirements. A community college should not be offering a "one-size-fits-all" alternative school program.**
- h. As with students who complete their educational programs via an alternative program, the diploma awarded to a special education student must be similar in all significant respects to the basic diploma awarded by the district. The transcript is the communication means between the district and other entities. Explanations of modifications may be included on the transcript. For more information, see item below.

Grades, Certificates of Achievement, and Transcripts of Students with Disabilities

Diplomas/Certificates of Achievement

- In certain cases, special education students may receive a diploma without meeting the graduation requirements for the general education program if they meet their Individualized Education Program goals and graduation requirements set by their IEPs.
- Granting a student in special education a Certificate of Achievement (or Completion or Attendance) is appropriate for a student who is not able to meet the academic requirements for a diploma. Bear in mind the following:
 - Such an award does not end the student's right to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE). The right to a FAPE ends only either when the student reaches age 21 or successfully finishes a regular secondary education program. The same is true if a special education student obtains a GED; if the student is not yet age 21, he or she may still demand a FAPE from the district of residence.
 - A district is not required to end a student's educational program when the student has met the district's graduation requirements if not all of the IEP goals have been met (unless the student has reached age 21).
 - A denial of a diploma to a student is NOT a denial of a FAPE.

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Legal Lessons continued

Grades

- If a student has received some reasonable accommodation, but the curriculum has not been modified for the student, the grade shall not reflect that an accommodation was made. After all, the purpose of a reasonable accommodation is to level the playing field so that the grade will truly represent the student's intellectual abilities. Another way of thinking about it is that the accommodation merely removes the disadvantage to the student of his/her disability (e.g., giving a student extra time to take a test).
- If the curriculum has been modified, the report card and transcript may be coded or may include an asterisk to indicate a modified curriculum, but only if such coding is also used for general education students (because the report card cannot indicate that the student is a person with a disability unless the parent consents).
- Grading on a pass/fail system is acceptable for a student with disabilities if participation in the P/F system is voluntary and the same P/F system is available to all students.
- Using a grading scale that assigns lower grade weights to special education courses is not a violation of state or federal law as long as the lower weighting is the result of an assessment of actual differences in the difficulty of the course vis-à-vis a comparable regular education course, and is not related to the classification of students enrolled in the course. For example, a lower weighting scale for "Basic Science Applications" is permissible if Basic Science Applications is less rigorous than other science courses, but is not permissible if done because only special education students are enrolled in the course.
- A student with an IEP who is enrolled in a general education course for reasons other than mastery of the content (e.g., to learn social skills or organizational skills) may be excluded from class grading and may be evaluated on the objectives and goals of the IEP for the course.

Transcripts

- Modifications to curriculum content may be reflected in the transcript via some coding or an asterisk, but only if such coding is also used for general education students. Remember that the transcript cannot identify the student as a student with disabilities unless the parent (or student if student is at least 18 years old) consents.
- Courses listed on a transcript may not be identified as special education courses.

Acceptable

Practical Math Applications

Basic Social Studies

General Science

Not Acceptable

Special Education Math

Resource Social Studies

Special Education Science

- Modifications or exceptions to the grading scale may be identified via asterisks or special coding if done so as not to identify the student as having a disability (unless consent is given). For instance, it is permissible to indicate via an asterisk that the student received a modified grade or completed work at a lower grade level, but using asterisks cannot be limited to students with disabilities.

For more information, please contact Thomas Mayes at 515-242-5614 or thomas.mayes@iowa.gov.

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Student Athletics

Students with Disabilities in Athletics

The United States Department of Education recently released a guidance document on participation in extracurricular athletics by students with disabilities. This document reminds us that students with disabilities are entitled to an “equal opportunity” to participate in extracurricular athletics. The documents remind schools and athletic associations that it is impermissible to categorically exclude children with disabilities from activities based on status or prejudice, that schools and athletic associations must consider modifications that do not fundamentally change the sport or result in an unfair competitive advantage, and that schools and athletic associations may wish to consider alternative activities for children with disabilities who are unable to participate in general athletic activities. The letter is available at the following web page: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201301-504.pdf>

For more information, contact Thomas Mayes at 515-242-5614 or thomas.mayes@iowa.gov.

Iowa's high school graduation rate increases

The graduation rate for Iowa's class of 2012 climbed statewide from the previous year, according to figures released by the Iowa Department of Education.

The statewide graduation rate is 89.26 percent. That's an increase of 0.94 percent from the 88.32 percent rate for Iowa's class of 2011, which [led the nation](#) in state four-year graduation rates. The 2012 graduation rate also remains above the 2010 rate of 88.8 percent.

Graduation rates increased significantly among students whose first language is not English (3.94 percent), students with disabilities (2.82 percent), and students from low-income backgrounds (1.59 percent).

The four-year graduation rate for the class of 2012 increased from the previous year in 172 school districts (54 percent) out of the 318 Iowa districts that had high schools. Ten school districts (3 percent) saw no change in their graduation rates from the year before, while 136 districts (43 percent) saw a decrease.



Eight of Iowa's 10 largest school districts reported increases in four-year graduation rates. Of those districts, Des Moines Public Schools reported the largest gain of 3.47 percent; the district's overall four-year graduation rate is 79.15 percent. Read more on the Iowa Department of Education's website: http://educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2827:iowas-high-school-graduation-rate-increases-&catid=242:news-releases

A wellness workshop for students

Help make high school a place where it's easy to be healthy and active. Take a team of students to Students Taking Charge, a wellness workshop for Iowa high school students, on April 4 in Boone.

Registration is open until March 15. Read about the workshop on the Iowa Department of Education's [website](#).

For more information, contact Carrie Scheidel at 515-281-4758 or carrie.scheidel@iowa.gov.

Calendar

- March 1 • Open Enrollment application due, Grades 1-12 for 2013-2014
- March 1 • AEA Budget—Last date for public hearing
- March 31 • Annual Audit Submission—Extension request

It is the policy of the Iowa Department of Education not to discriminate on the basis of race, creed, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, gender, disability, religion, age, political party affiliation, or actual or potential parental, family or marital status in its programs, activities, or employment practices as required by the Iowa Code sections 216.9 and 256.10(2), Titles VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. § 2000d and 2000e), the Equal Pay Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. § 206, et seq.), Title IX (Educational Amendments, 20 U.S.C. §§ 1681 – 1688), Section 504 (Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 794), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (42 U.S.C. § 12101, et seq.). If you have questions or grievances related to compliance with this policy by the Iowa Department of Education, please contact the legal counsel for the Iowa Department of Education, Grimes State Office Building, Des Moines, IA 50319-0146, telephone number 515/281-5295; or the Director of the Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education, Citigroup Center, 500 W. Madison Street, Suite 1475, Chicago, IL 60661, telephone number 312-730-1560, fax 312/730-1576, e-mail: OCR.Chicago@ed.gov



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