

Speaker: Jason Glass, director of the Iowa Department of Education:

Well good morning, thanks everybody for being here today. With the governor's Education Summit just a few days away, I'm pleased to present a report called "Rising to Greatness: An Imperative for Improving Iowa's Schools." This report will help frame the debate about what it will take to restore Iowa's standing as a leader in education.

Iowa has a proud tradition of educational excellence. The ACT college entrance exam and the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills started here. Iowa led the nation in scholastic achievement for decades. Teachers from Iowa's colleges and university education programs have been a highly sought-after national commodity. And today, there are many, many good schools across this state.

But while our foundation is strong, this house needs an upgrade – we need a serious remodel.

The proud tradition of education that has been one of Iowa's strengths, has today become a liability. The perception of greatness has slowed the state's real rise to greatness in education. It's not that the quality of schools has eroded; in fact many of the schools today across Iowa are better than they ever have been. It's that Iowa's results have stagnated in comparison to other states and other nations who have made dramatic gains that are paying off in the classroom and beyond.

It's up to us now to have the courage and be willing to do the hard work of a whole system remodel of this "house" of education.

Iowa's slide toward the middle of the pack has coincided with a shift in population. Metropolitan areas are growing while rural areas are shrinking. Schools have more minority students, students who don't speak English as their native language and students who face economic hardship. The state has taken steps to evolve in light of greater diversity in business, industry and population, but we need a focused approach on improving education.

We must give all students in Iowa a world-class education - Iowa's children deserve nothing less.

Right now, as the report will show you, Iowa students are missing the mark in math and reading competency. An important note to this is that the pattern exists not only among disadvantaged or minority students, but also among the state's white and relatively affluent students. This is significant - Iowa's white students are also underperforming their national peers and this becomes even more troubling from an international perspective. The report will show you that while Iowa has become increasingly more economically and ethnically diverse, white students are falling short across the board. The pattern suggests that no location, city schools or rural, or single demographic group are singularly to blame for Iowa's stagnant scores - we have a whole system problem that will require a whole system remodel.

Iowa's scores on NAEP, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, have not kept up with other states. In 1992, for example, no state scored higher than Iowa on the NAEP in fourth-grade reading. By 2009, however, 13 states scored significantly higher than Iowa did. Scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, the Iowa Tests of Educational Development and the ACT college entrance exam also have flat-lined. While the state's performance has not diminished, and that is an important fact to note – the state's performance has not diminished, results in other states and other nations have climbed at a faster rate. Iowa should care about being in this holding pattern because student achievement results are key to restoring our tradition as state education leader.

If you aren't getting better, you are getting worse.

The report will show you another troubling pattern of achievement gaps in Iowa. These gaps exist between poor and more affluent students, as well as white students and their Hispanic and African American counterparts on a variety of measures, including standardized test results, dropout rates and graduation rates.

The gap in achievement between students in Iowa with and without disabilities on the 2009 NAEP results are the worst in the nation. This is simply intolerable. As someone with a background in special education, I can tell you this one is personal to me - Iowa will remodel and upgrade its approaches for serving these exceptional children.

The report card also will show you that, despite Iowa's above-average scores on the ACT college entrance exam, the percentage of high school students who meet all four ACT benchmarks showing they are ready for college was about 30 percent in 2010. Given the global nature of the economy, we've got to do better. And in Iowa, primarily college bound students are the only students who take the ACT. We can't waste the future of a single kid - every Iowa student needs to graduate ready for college and careers in a globally competitive context.

So Iowa once led the nation in student achievement. Our challenge now is to put on that foundation an education system that's the best in the world. To reach that goal, our education system must set a clear, reform-minded policy direction that builds on the strengths and past successes but also takes on and aggressively adopts whole system improvements with lessons learned from the highest performing systems in the world and adapts them to this context.

We have to have highly effective educators working in symphony together for every student. We have to have a high set of expectations for every student and clear - fair measures for results. We have to rekindle our innovative spirit, one that pushes our education system to take on new approaches, learn from them - and keep getting better.

This report and the upcoming education summit are intended to spur discussion and constructive thought about what Iowa has to do to as part of this major education remodel. Over the weeks ahead, we will be listening and working with people and groups across the state to identify the specific strategies we have to take on as part of this effort. We have to build a coalition that's in service of one thing and that's improvement that is irrespective of party or ideology but instead built on pragmatism, reason, tolerance ... and most importantly love for Iowa's schools and love for Iowa's children.

Thank you, and I'll turn it over to Jay Pennington, chief of the Iowa Department of Education's Bureau of Information and Analysis Services for more information and then we will take some questions.

Speaker: Jay Pennington, chief of the Iowa Department of Education's Bureau of Information and Analysis Services

Thank you Director Glass. When Director Glass joined the Department of Education, he challenged me and my team to dig into our data and provide an update on the status of education in Iowa based on solid information and analysis. He was interested not only in knowing what the trends look like but also wanted to know the reasons behind the trends. The publication is a synopsis of these findings. What you see in the report are only a few examples of the information we analyzed.

In building this report we looked at the longitudinal trends in different ways. I am going to highlight a few of the findings.

First, we examined shifts in the state. Iowa is different than it was 10 or 20 years ago. It has become more diverse. There are more students eligible for free-or-reduced priced lunch. There are also more minority students than ever before. The goal was to determine if these factors could explain the achievement trends. As you will see in the report while these factors do have some impact this is not the reason for our stagnate test results.

Second, we analyzed the results on the National Assessment of Educational progress. NAEP is the only measure that provides national level results. We picked 2 different grades and content areas (Grade 4 reading and Grade 8 mathematics). Reading proficiency in third grade is a make or break time where students start reading to learn instead of learning to read. Grade 8 mathematics measures an important time where students prepare for the foundation of higher math requirements needed in high school and college.

And as you can see, in these 2 examples there is a flat line in Iowa results while the national average converges with Iowa. The nation has shown continued growth over this 19 year window. And Iowa is now in the middle of the pack in NAEP performance.

Next, we wanted to know how Iowa compared to other states. And as you can see between 2003 and 2009 Iowa ranked near the bottom nationally in growth. While other states are making progress in 4th grade reading, Iowa lost ground.

It is also important to look at multiple measures in examining longitudinal trends. In this example, the results on the Iowa Test of Basics Skills in grade 4 reading they're flat over the past 9 years.

Next, we wanted to determine the reason for the lack of growth in achievement test results for Iowa students. An alarming trend appears which is depicted in this map. Iowa is a largely homogenous state. It was surprising to find that white students are underperforming. When disaggregating the data it was determined that the group average was lower than peers nationally. This was true for white poor and non-poor students. This

suggests that while diversity does play a role, the reason for our stagnate test results is our majority students are underperforming.

Lastly, we examined the achievement gap. In looking at the Iowa Tests we concluded that the state as a whole has been unable to gain ground in closing the achievement gap. These continue to be large and persistent. And I think the most telling finding in the report is the achievement gap in students with disabilities. In grade 4 reading and grade 8 mathematics Iowa has the worst achievement gap in the United States between students with and without disabilities scoring at or above the basic achievement level on NEAP.

This provides an overview of some of the findings in this report.

I want to reinforce Director Glass's earlier comments. The goal of this report is not to place blame on any one group or individual. We all must work together to raise the bar in order to again become the leader in education. A decade into the 21st century Iowa must choose a new direction. The students we educate today must learn to innovate and take command in the 21st century. It is not enough to learn how to use technology or mobile apps, student must understand their design, it is not enough to learn to speak well or write accurately. These are pre-requisites for the future. The opportunity for change is upon us and those states and countries that succeed will build and own the future.