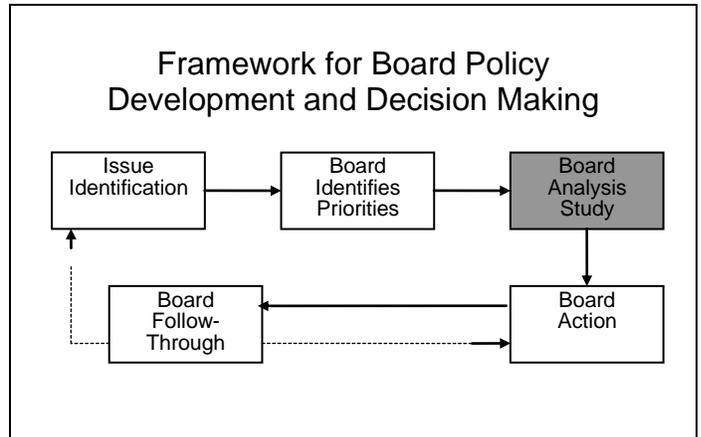


Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

January 14, 2010



- Agenda Item:** State Board Work Session: Innovation in Education
- Iowa Goal:** All
- Equity Impact Statement:** Effective innovative practices can benefit all students.
- Presenter:** Work Session
- Attachments:** 1
- Recommendation:** It is recommended that State Board members participate in this work session.
- Background:** At the State Board Retreat last June, the Board requested a work session to continue their discussion of innovation in education. Specifically, the Board wanted to discuss what innovation means to them, including how we might recognize innovative programs and practices.
- This session will provide an opportunity to discuss innovation and the Board's role in promoting effective innovative practices. A background paper is provided with some questions to start discussion on the last page of the document.

INNOVATE. ADVOCATE. EDUCATE.

Defining, Recognizing, and Promoting Educational Innovation in Iowa

By its nature, education is – and should be – about innovation. After all, by definition, nothing is more innovative than the transfer of knowledge.

Iowa has a well-earned reputation for and long history of quality education. *And for showing the leadership to maintain that quality.* From being the birthplace of student assessments to home of one of the nation's top state-wide community college systems to championing educational opportunities for students of all abilities, Iowa has been a leader.

in no vate /in'-e-vāt/ v :
to introduce something new :
to do something in a new way

But will Iowa continue to lead? Today, many Iowans may fall into one of two categories: (a) resting on past laurels, or (b) denying the need for future change.

Innovation means change, and change can be uncomfortable. But, it can also make us better, smarter, and keep us moving forward. That is what change must mean for Iowa.

Governor Culver, in his recent address to the Iowa Association of School Boards, made clear that innovation in education cannot wait: “I believe now is the time to challenge this state to rethink education. From preschool to college, the old ways of doing things are no longer an option.”

Some of these changes will result out of necessity, such as the impact of the economic recession on state and local budgets. But many will result from opportunities to improve learning, such as implementing the Iowa Core Curriculum and succeeding in reforms made possible through Race to the Top.

The Iowa Department of Education and the Board of Education must be the lead agents of change, reform and improvement in education, as well as the messengers that define our state as a leader in innovative education.

For the Department, the Board – and our state – ‘innovation’ is an umbrella which may define our work on education in Iowa.

This document provides an outline of areas to consider in defining and identifying educational innovation in Iowa. It also raises questions for the Board to consider at its January 14 meeting on ways to recognize, advocate and communicate such efforts.

DEFINE

A great deal has been written and said about innovation, but do we know what it is? The word has been largely usurped by technology, as if a new app or a better wireless connection is the only way ‘to do something in a new way.’ But, while technology plays an increasingly important role in education, it alone is not innovation. For education, it means much more than how the latest gadget is applied.

So, what is innovation when it comes to education?

A recent report comparing state school reform efforts suggests that “educational innovation means discarding policies and practices that no longer serve students while creating opportunities for smart, entrepreneurial problem-solvers to help children learn.”¹

**Educational Innovation =
Improvements in
Outcomes**

Going further back in time, a 1973 research paper for the former U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare examined ways to create incentives for educational innovations, and attempted a definition. It was clear on what it was not: “educational innovations are often not products or technologies, as usually thought of.” Conversely, it suggested “a successful innovation is one that can show improvements in educational outcomes, improvements in working relationships or processes within the school system, or reductions in cost without reducing significantly the quantity or quality of desired outcomes or processes.”²

Thirty years later, this definition was echoed more concisely in a paper for the British Cabinet Office on examples, including in the area of education, of public sector innovations. Innovation was defined as “the creation and implementation of new processes, products, services and methods of delivery, which result in significant improvements in outcomes, efficiency, effectiveness or quality.”³

Over the span of three decades, three words jump out as a summary of educational innovation: IMPROVEMENTS IN OUTCOMES.

¹ “Leaders and Laggards: A State-by-State Report Card on Educational Innovation,” Center for American Progress, U.S. Chamber of Commerce and American Enterprise Institute (Washington, DC: November 2009)

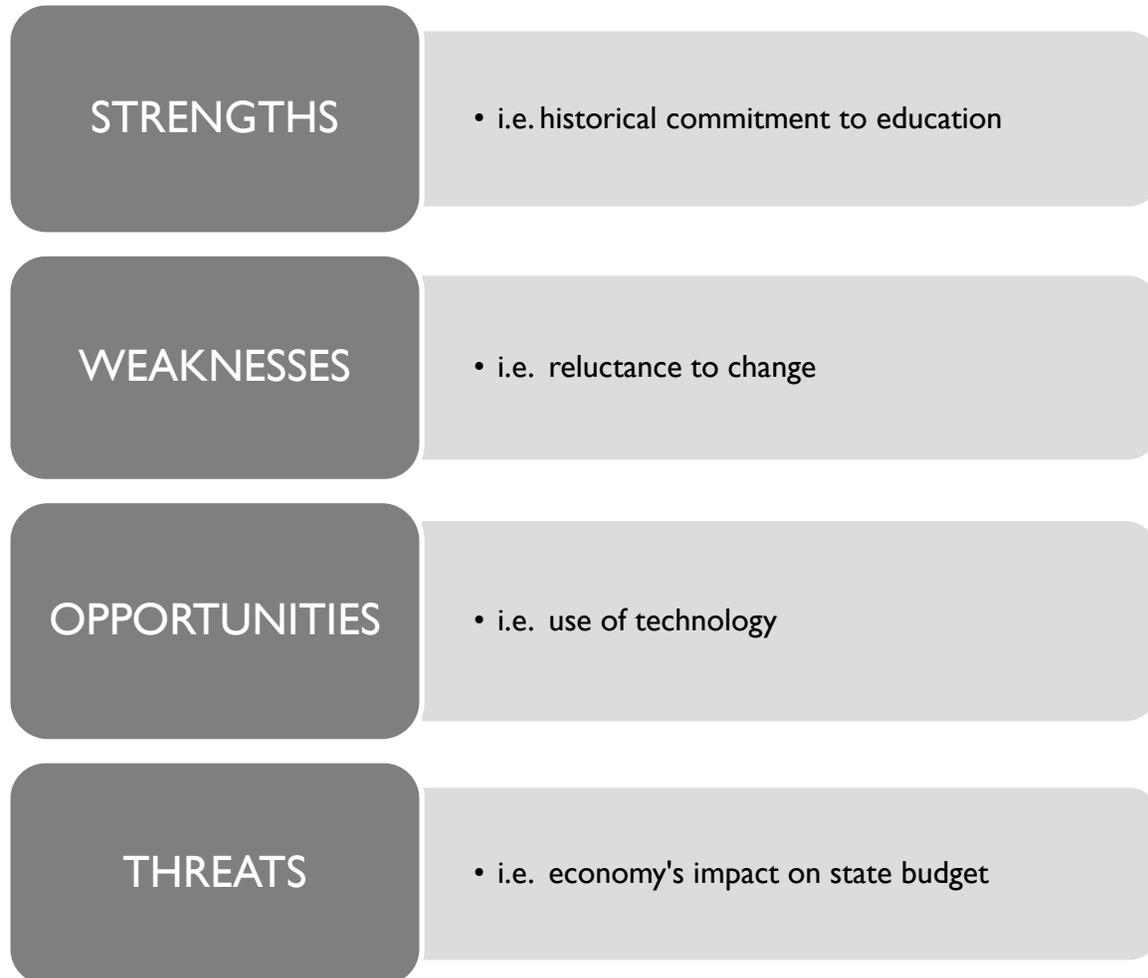
² Pincus, J and Weiler, D, “A Program of Research on Incentives for Educational Innovation,” National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (Washington, DC: October 15, 1973)

³ Mulgan, G and Albury, D, “Innovation in the Public Sector,” London: Cabinet Office (2003)

SWOT ANALYSIS

A first step in developing an approach to how educational innovation is best implemented is to simply review the pros and cons of the current environment in Iowa.

One part of the Board's discussion would be to develop an initial list of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing Iowa when it comes to implementing educational innovation:



Possible Questions/Discussion

How is the climate for innovation in Iowa? What role can the Board play to improve the climate?

RECOGNIZE

While the start ('introducing something new') and finish ('improved outcomes') of innovation can be defined, the means in between is less clear. As it should be. After all, if we can define how innovation works before it is attempted it is not very innovative.

The section below lists examples of areas where innovation is occurring on the local level and/or might occur state-wide.

Teaching & Learning

- Iowa Core Curriculum: The Iowa Core Curriculum is designed to provide students with concepts and skills to prepare for the 21st century. Is the Core innovative? How?
- Race to the Top (RTTT): Will this one-time federal funding opportunity lead to innovation? What separates Iowa from the 49 other states? What innovations result from the application with or without RTTT funding?
- School choice: Iowa is already a leader in providing school choice for parents and students. Beyond open enrollment and home schooling, public schools in Iowa include traditional, Montessori, International Baccalaureate, year-round, and others. How are these improving outcomes? How can successful schools in one district provide a model of innovation for another district? Are special programs (i.e. IB) also helping schools increase enrollment?
- Charter schools: While Iowa has a relatively small number of charter schools, interest in them may raise due to the emphasis from Race to the Top. What models are most effective in Iowa? Can they be replicated?
- Alternative calendars/schedules: Have 'year round' calendars improved the outcomes of schools? Is it an approach to be promoted statewide? Have schools changed their daily schedules to improve time for learning and/or teacher preparation?
- Shared programming: How are districts cooperating across boundaries? What opportunities are being provided to students?
- Concurrent enrollment: What partnerships exist between community colleges, colleges and/or universities? How do such programs help secondary students? Does it prepare them for work and/or college?
- Dropout prevention/student retention: What are successful models of credit recovery? How do districts respond to individual student needs? Are districts working to bring dropouts back?
- College/career pathways: How are schools partnering with colleges or universities? Are college credit courses improving academic achievement? What new steps are districts using to help students identify and prepare for careers? What business partnerships or other 'hands on' programs have been successful?

Technology

- Technology Task Force: What policy recommendations will the Board or legislature need to consider? What are other states/nations doing that provide examples for Iowa? How can Iowa move forward in making the best use of technology to improve education?
- Online learning: How are schools making use of online learning opportunities? Are certain students (advanced, at-risk, etc.) finding increased access to special programs? What benefits will small districts realize from online programs?
- Expanding access to technology: What are schools doing to close the 'technology gap' for low-income students? How is technology improving links between teachers, parents and students? Are rural schools using technology for educational programs they otherwise couldn't access?
- Creating technology environments: How is technology being successfully integrated into schools? Is it improving progress in the classroom?

Leadership & Management

- Budget priority setting: Has a district's process in setting budget priorities positively impacted learning? Are districts using new ways to get input from teachers and communities?
- Cost savings: Are schools or districts saving money without cutting services? Or even improving services?
- Shared services: What steps are districts taking to share costs across boundary lines? Administrative? Purchases? Etc.

Staff

- Professional development: How are districts maximizing professional development sessions? Are schools finding ways to improve teacher preparation time?
- Alternative licensing: Are Iowa's alternative licensing programs helping to improve teaching in our schools?

Data

- Data Use: Will data help create a PK-16 continuum? How will Iowa's federal grant opportunity help in this effort?
- Assessments: Are districts using alternative assessments to supplement current tests? What impact is it having? How are results communicated with stakeholders?

Infrastructure

- "Green" schools: What are school districts doing to become LEED-certified or Energy Star labeled? Is this improving the learning environment? How is this saving money?
- Multi-purpose buildings: How are schools being used for community needs, such as partnerships with libraries, Ys, and others? Is this having a positive impact on education? Costs? Community?

Outreach

- Community support: Are schools and districts communicating with their constituents in new and improved ways? Have they established a process to get input in a meaningful way?
- Community partnerships: How are schools and districts using partners in the business or non-profit community to support education? Are there cooperative efforts with local governments?
- Parent engagement: What are schools doing to involve 'at-risk' parents in their children's education? How are schools using the time and talents of parents to provide support in the classroom? In the school? In the district?

Possible Questions/Discussion

Are there any areas of innovation that you would add to or delete from this list?

Are there areas listed which you feel are unique or particular strengths in Iowa?

OBJECTIVES

A focus on 'innovation' by the Board and Department could address some fundamental objectives that impact the behavior, performance and perception of education in Iowa:



Areas to consider in meeting such objectives could include:

Behavior

- Transparent and honest about need for change
- Work with policymakers and stakeholders
- Implement new policies and programs

Performance

- Opportunities to implement, replicate and sustain innovation
- More efficiency in the delivery of education
- Outcomes in the classroom improve

Perception

- Rethink approach to education
- Awareness of the results of work to improve education
- Recognition as a national leader in education

Possible Question/Discussion

What can the Board do to build interest in and support for innovation?

QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

As the Board brings focus on ways to define, recognize and promote educational innovation in Iowa, answers to the following questions are meant to provide some guidance – to Department staff and the Board itself – on how to best proceed:

- What does innovation mean to the Board? What does the Board hope to achieve through innovation? How do current efforts by the Board and Department support this definition?
- What characteristics could be used to identify innovative programs and practices? What characteristics does the Board consider innovative?
- What is the Board's role in promoting innovation in education? What specific actions can the Board take?