

University of Northern Iowa

College of Education White Paper: Iowa Core Curriculum

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Each day we are reminded that we live in a rapidly changing global environment. This is especially evident in working with our youth who are tethered to the internet, fully engaged in technology-based social networking, blog, wiki, and expect instantaneous responses as they twitter with colleagues around the world. Our economy has moved from the industrial era to the information era and now is well on the way to the era of creativity and innovation. Social, political, economic, and environmental changes are providing the challenge to transform our educational systems to address the needs of the 21st century. The changing global platform sends a very clear message that our future depends on students acquiring a very different set of essential concepts and skills to prepare them for life in this new era.

Iowa has taken a comprehensive approach to address the challenge of preparing students to live in this complex global environment. In response to the demands of life in the 21st century, the Iowa Department of Education developed the vision and framework of the Iowa Core Curriculum (ICC). The ICC includes essential concepts, and skill sets in the areas of mathematics, science, literacy, social studies, and 21st century skills. Iowa legislation defined the 21st century skills as the areas of financial literacy, health literacy, technology literacy, civic literacy, and employability skills. In addition to the content, the ICC includes robust instruction, and authentic assessments. On May 1, 2008, Governor Culver signed the legislation that mandated the full implementation of the Iowa Core Curriculum in grades 9 – 12 by 2012, and in grades K – 8 by 2014.

The vision for the ICC includes the following:

- Each and every K – 12 student will learn the identified essential concepts and skills sets.
- Each K – 12 educator will embed the essential concepts and skill sets in rigorous and relevant instruction informed by ongoing formative assessment.
- Each and every educational leader will support and ensure an aligned system of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, focused on the ICC.
- The Iowa Department of Education, AEAs, LEAS, and collaborative partners will work together to provide the systems of supports to establish and sustain structures for the essential concepts and skill sets, instruction, and assessment. (Iowa Core Curriculum Overview, January 22, 2009)

To move from our current educational structure to a level of greatness, the vision for education in Iowa must move beyond student proficiency as the goal, to the vision that each and every student will graduate from high school with the skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed for a satisfying quality of life, post-secondary education, and work.

Establishing the ICC vision is the first step in transforming Iowa's educational institutions to a world-class system. Highlights of the vision include the understanding that each student can and must achieve at high levels. The barriers that promote disparity in learning must be dissolved and replaced with structures that provide each student necessary supports for learning.

The ICC incorporates essential concepts and skills with equal importance focused on instruction and assessment. 21st century instruction engages each student in cognitively complex learning experiences that have relevance beyond the walls of the classroom. The learning experiences are designed to promote

student ownership for his/her learning while developing 21st century skills that include innovation, creativity, adaptability, and cultural competence. Assessment for the ICC is more complex than what is traditionally measured through bubble sheet testing. Determining student learning of the ICC will be based on authentic assessments that could include portfolios, presentations, collaborative research activities, and other project based learning experiences.

University of Northern Iowa faculty were active participants in the ICC development processes. UNI faculty participated on each of the ICC essential concept and skill sets writing committees. Our faculty also provided leadership in the development of sample units for professional development related to the ICC. UNI faculty partnered with Iowa Department of Education and Area Education Agency consultants to develop and provide professional development opportunities with local educators across Iowa.

The changing world dynamics require a very different kind of educational experience than most of us had. The ICC provides a comprehensive approach to providing Iowa's students the skills, knowledge, and disposition needed for the demands of the 21st century. Fully realizing the vision of the ICC will require a restructuring of our current system. According to the report by the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce (2006), "It is a world in which comfort with **ideas** and **abstractions** is the passport to a good job, in which **creativity** and **innovation** are the key to the good life, in which high levels of education - *a very different kind of education than most of us have had* - are going to be the only security there is." The challenge before all stakeholders is "*do we have the "will" to make the necessary changes to our educational institutions, preparing each student with a world-class education*"?