

January 11, 2008

**Findings and Recommendations:
Senate File 601, Section 128
Research and Development Prekindergarten through Grade Twelve School
Feasibility Study**

Background:

Senate File 601, Section. 128, passed by the Iowa General Assembly and signed by Governor Chester Culver in 2007 required the following:

“RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PREKINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE TWELVE SCHOOL == FEASIBILITY STUDY. The Department of Education and the University of Northern Iowa shall convene a task force to study the feasibility of creating a research and development prekindergarten through grade twelve school for the State of Iowa. The task force shall include, at a minimum, University of Northern Iowa faculty and representatives from other institutions governed by the State Board of Regents and from school districts which offer prekindergarten through grade twelve. The task force shall address the possibilities of creating a site where innovative and promising practices can be studied and implemented to improve the achievement of students in prekindergarten through grade twelve, processes in which the findings of such studies are shared with Iowa educators, and an appropriate governance structure, and shall address the necessary funding and funding sources for the school. The task force shall consider the existing laboratory school located at the University of Northern Iowa as the site for the research and development prekindergarten through grade twelve school. The task force shall submit its findings and recommendations in a report to the general assembly, the State Board of Education, and the State Board of Regents by January 14, 2008.”

In the fall of 2007, Iowa Department of Education Director Judy Jeffrey and University of Northern Iowa President Ben Allen convened a 14-member task force to address the feasibility of creating a prekindergarten through grade twelve research and development school for the State of Iowa. (Members are included in Appendix 1). In order to develop findings and recommendations, the task force members examined research and development centers in other states as well as the needs of Iowa educators and students. The task force members met four times throughout fall.

It should be noted that while the task force members reflected a broad perspective of Iowa educator viewpoints, members also expressed the opinion that if the Iowa General Assembly and Governor Culver take action regarding the recommendations below, additional expertise should be sought concerning sustained funding for the research and development school, as well as stakeholder input for specific implementation plans.

Principles that shaped the findings and recommendations:

In order to determine the findings and recommendations, a set of guiding principles were agreed to by all task force members. The guiding principles directed the recommendations and should also guide future funding and implementation plans.

Guiding principles:

1. Raise and sustain the level of all Iowa PreK-12 students' educational attainment and personal development through innovative and promising practices. (PreK-12 student focused)
2. Enhance the preparation and professional competence of Iowa educators through collaborative inquiry and exchange of professional knowledge in teaching and learning. (educator focused)
3. Focus on research which transforms practice to meet the changing needs of Iowa's educational system.

Findings and recommendations:

After careful study of various research and development centers in other states and in consideration of the needs of Iowa schools, task force members determined that not only is it feasible to create an Iowa research and development school, such a school will be highly advantageous for the entire state. The school, with a statewide mission, will reinforce the already prominent and respected position that Iowa educators have earned nationwide. It will allow Iowa to continue to lead the way with educational research including the ways Iowa teachers can improve student learning. As Iowa school districts seek to improve learning of all students, teachers need proven teaching methods.

The school will target its research on challenges that face Iowa schools and partner with educational researchers at the University of Northern Iowa, Iowa State University, and the University of Iowa, as well as the teacher preparation programs at Iowa's independent colleges and universities, to test and implement new teaching methods. In order to meet the needs of Iowa teachers, both those still in college preparing to teach as well as those currently teaching in Iowa's schools, task force members agreed that the function of such a school must go beyond research and development to include demonstration and dissemination of best teaching practices (research, development, demonstration, dissemination or RDDD). Demonstration and dissemination activities will not only occur in the school but will also occur in partner school districts and teacher preparation programs at our colleges and universities.

Task force members also recognized that Iowa's future depends upon preparing students to be responsible citizens and active participants in a democratic society. Focusing research on how to best prepare PreK-12 students for promising careers in

Iowa's most critical employment shortage areas will not only benefit Iowa's economy, but also ensure that Iowa's students have the preparation necessary for post-secondary education.

Furthermore, task force members concurred that the research, development, demonstration and dissemination program should be centered at the existing Price Laboratory School (PLS), overseen by the University of Northern Iowa. Using PLS has several benefits, to the state, the Iowa Department of Education, the University of Northern Iowa (UNI), and to the other Regent universities and their teacher preparation programs. The state will benefit due to the experience that UNI and PLS staff have in conducting and completing research in a PreK-12 school.

UNI's unique mission speaks directly to preparing quality teachers for Iowa schools, thereby ensuring that the emphasis on quality teacher preparation will continue and be strengthened. The plan for expanding the PLS role promises clear benefits to UNI by enhancing connections to Iowa schools, advancing the relationship with the Department of Education (DE), and increasing the research knowledge stemming from UNI's various colleges involved in educating teachers. Other teacher preparation programs will benefit as they become active partners in implementing the research agenda for the center.

The following recommendations are proposed as immediate next steps:

The Legislature should direct the President of the University of Northern Iowa and the Director of the Iowa Department of Education to establish two ad hoc committees to determine detailed plans for the RDDD school with a report due to the Board of Regents, the State Board of Education, the Iowa General Assembly, and the Governor no later than January 15, 2009. The two committees shall work in collaboration to ensure that the recommendations align.

- a. Finance and funding committee: Individuals from the University of Northern Iowa, the Iowa Department of Education, and educators with expertise in school finance should develop a plan for on-going operational and capital funding both through the identification of new funding sources and through the restructuring of existing statewide funding sources for the RDDD school. In particular, this committee should investigate needed updates to the existing PLS facility or a new "green school" that could serve as a demonstration site in energy efficiency and design for the entire state.
- b. Implementation committee: Stakeholders such as PLS faculty, UNI faculty, and Iowa Department of Education staff should determine a detailed transition plan for expanding the PLS role as an RDDD school and a detailed governance structure that outlines the specific roles and responsibilities of UNI, the Iowa Department of Education, and all individuals, boards, committees, and groups involved with the RDDD

school. The committee should also address the structural differences, stating the type of environment that must exist for a RDDD school to be effective, and how they will translate research to practice in a PreK-12 school.

The above two committees shall use the following findings in their work:

1. Iowa educators, both those already working in schools as well as those in Iowa colleges and universities preparing to be teachers and administrators, need a research and development site where innovative and promising practices can be studied and implemented.
 - a. The Price Laboratory School located at the University of Northern Iowa shall have its role expanded to become the State of Iowa Research, Development, Demonstration, and Dissemination (RDDD) school.
 - b. Iowa school districts, Area Education Agencies and colleges/universities will be recruited and selected to partner with the RDDD school at UNI to test and implement promising and innovative practices.
2. Both a board and a standing institutional research committee shall be appointed.
 - a. A board to provide oversight and direction to the RDDD school and shall be comprised of no more than 11 members who represent the following:
 - PreK-12 schools and districts
 - AEAs
 - Teacher of the Year
 - Regent universities
 - Independent colleges/universities (with teacher preparation programs)
 - State Board of Education
 - Board of Regents
 - Business
 - DE staff member
 - Public
 - 4 legislators (appointed from each caucus) (ex officio)The rotating chairs of the Board will be the Director of DE and President of UNI, and they will appoint mutually agreed upon board members.
 - b. A standing committee shall be appointed by the Board of Regents and the State Board of Education to serve as an institutional research committee to approve proposals for the RDDD school, review quality, and provide support for dissemination efforts.

3. The Research, Development, Demonstration, and Dissemination (RDDD) school will serve the entire state and should, therefore, be funded in a manner similar to other public school districts in Iowa.
 - a. A funding formula should be created for on-going RDDD school operations. In addition, weighted per pupil funding should be considered for “partner” demonstration schools to cover the increased expenses at those sites.
 - b. Capital expenditures including renovation and/or new construction of the school facility should be determined. The committee recommends a highly efficient green school as the overall long-term plans for the RDDD school facility.
 - c. Funding for the research, development, demonstration, and dissemination functions must be a priority.
4. The innovative and promising practices from the RDDD school will be shared with Iowa educators statewide.
 - a. The audiences for the innovative and promising practices include:
 - i. PreK-12 educators in Iowa’s public districts and non-public schools
 - ii. Area Education Agencies
 - iii. Deans, administrators, and faculty at all of Iowa’s teacher preparation colleges/universities
 - b. Communication will be shared in the following ways:
 - i. Use existing communication systems and current and emerging technologies
 - c. Involve Business and industry in a partnership to be:
 - i. Active, contributing partners to the research and development agenda
 - ii. Participants in exchange program along with PreK-12 and university faculty

Appendix 1: Membership list