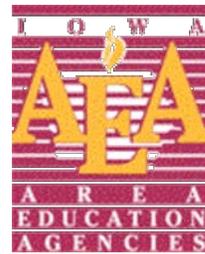


Iowa CORE Curriculum



Overview



October 22, 2009

Iowa Core Curriculum Overview

- Each and every K-12 student will learn the essential concepts and skill sets identified in the Iowa Core Curriculum for life in the 21st century.
- 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 ensure an aligned system of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, focused on the Core Curriculum essential concepts and skill sets
- 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.

- What vision does the Iowa Core Curriculum advance?

The vision for the Iowa Core Curriculum is to ensure the success of each and every student by providing a world-class curriculum. The Core Curriculum is designed to improve achievement of all students, preparing them for the world of work and lifelong learning. It identifies the essential content and instruction that all students must experience.

The technical assistance efforts supported by the Core Curriculum Department of Education Team, the Advisory Team and the Core Curriculum Area Education Agency (AEA) Network are designed to provide Iowa educators with the tools to assure that essential subject matter is being taught and essential knowledge and skills are being learned.

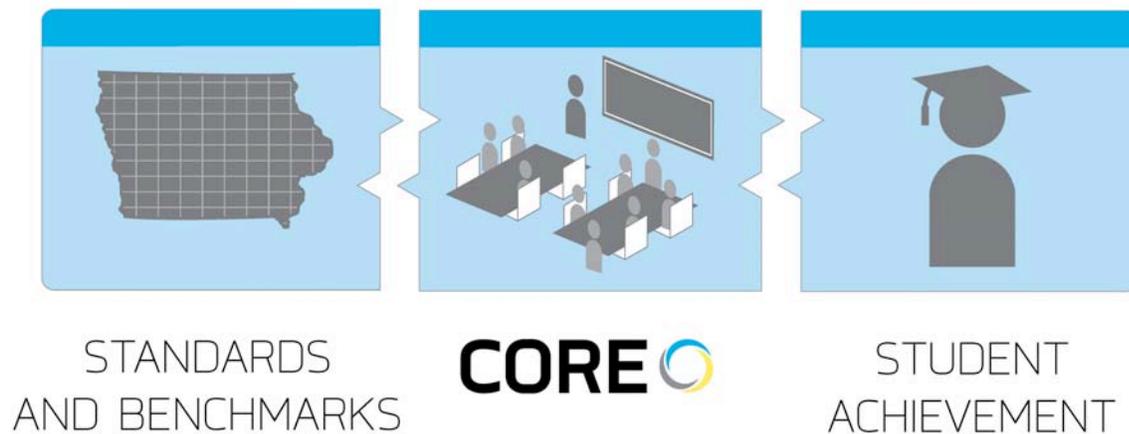
School districts that implement the Core Curriculum with integrity increase the likelihood that all students become life-long learners, productive adults, and engaged citizens. The Department improvement efforts are designed to yield positive results by enabling schools to prepare students to graduate with the 21st century skills and competencies needed to be successful in post-high school endeavors and the world of work.

- What policies created the Iowa Core Curriculum?

Senate File 245 (May 2005) and Senate File 588 (May 2007) established the voluntary Model Core Curriculum in K-12 literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, and 21st century skills. Governor Chet Culver proposed that the Core Curriculum be fully implemented by all Iowa schools – public and accredited nonpublic. The Governor signed Senate File 2216 into law May 1, 2008, which requires the full implementation of the Core Curriculum – in high schools by July 1, 2012 and K-8 by 2014-15. Implementation plans are required for high schools by July 1, 2010 and by K-8 schools by July 1, 2012.

- What is the Iowa Core Curriculum?

The Core Curriculum provides the details for teachers to make sure students reach Iowa's Core Content Standards and Benchmarks. It assists teachers in knowing how to integrate essential concepts and skills into student learning opportunities. The Core Curriculum is about teaching and learning; it provides examples of powerful instruction clearly tied to classroom assessments. It provides a comprehensive picture of effective curriculum that addresses pedagogy, content knowledge, and assessment.



The purpose of the Core Curriculum is to raise student expectations and change teaching behaviors to impact student achievement. The Core Curriculum provides the processes and establishes the urgency to set higher expectations and infuse more challenging and meaningful content into classroom instruction.

Standards in Iowa Education

The Iowa Core Curriculum integrates the Iowa Core Content Standards and Benchmarks, the National Assessment of Educational Progress frameworks, and national curriculum documents in literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, and 21st century skills.

In Iowa, we have many standards:

- **Accreditation Standards** – These standards describe minimum requirements that must be met for an Iowa school district to be accredited. A nonpublic school must meet general accreditation standards if it wishes to be designated as accredited for operation in Iowa.
- **Program Standards** – These standards describe the instruction that all public and accredited nonpublic schools must offer students prekindergarten through grade twelve.
- **Teaching and Leadership Standards** – These standards describe the performance Iowa expects of its educators.
- **Core Content Standards** – Broad statements that identify the knowledge and skills that students should acquire, in reading, mathematics, and science.
- **Performance standards** – Levels of performance are described as high – distinguished and accomplished, intermediate – skilled and moderate, low – marginal and weak.

The Core Content Standards are supported by a system that is comprised of several components: assessments, teacher professional development, curriculum, grade level expectations, and benchmarks.

A benchmark is a learning target for a grade level span. Grade level indicators provide further detail and show what learning targets look like for each grade K-8.

There is an evidence base supporting the implementation of the Core Curriculum. A significant body of work by multiple theorists and researchers asserts that the content of instruction plays a primary role in determining gains in student achievement (Garmoran, Porter, Smithson, & White, 1997; McKnight et al, 1987; Rowan, 1998; Schmidt, 1983a, 1983b; Sebring, 1987; Walberg & Shanahan, 1983). The Core Curriculum helps to focus the curriculum on higher order thinking skills and increase the cognitive demands placed on students. Challenging instruction yields positive student outcomes.

The Second International Mathematics Study (SIMS) and the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and other international studies suggest that providing students with opportunities to learn using a focused curriculum that emphasizes depth of knowledge and skills and encourages thinking and cognitively complex applications leads to improved student performance (Niebling, Roach, Rahn-Blakeslee, 2008).

- What does the Iowa Core Curriculum look like?

The Core Curriculum is not just a document distributed to school districts. Ongoing and sustained professional development and leadership will be required to guide and enhance curriculum content, classroom instruction, and classroom assessment. School district personnel will analyze both the content and instruction of their current curriculum, find the gaps, and as needed, restructure their current instructional program to incorporate the Core Curriculum. The Core Curriculum is not course-based, but rather is a student-based approach that supports high expectations for all students.

The Department is committed to providing leadership, policy, professional development, and technical assistance to assist Iowa's schools in enhancing learning for all students in each content area. The Department advocates and supports the implementation of a consistent approach to instructional improvement that integrates multiple components

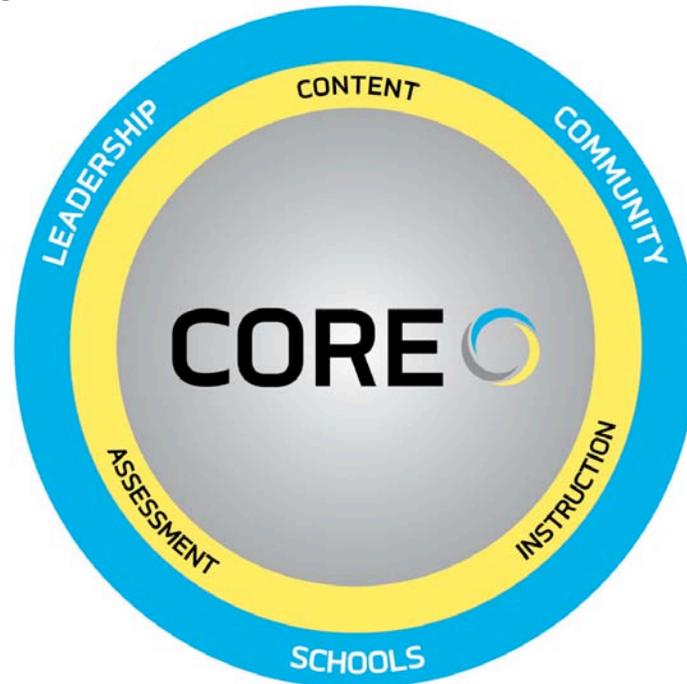
The Iowa Core Curriculum focuses on accelerating student achievement. Iowa has a system of Iowa Core Standards, Benchmarks, and grade level indicators that contributes to our tradition of high student performance. The Core Curriculum provides direction about essential content, authentic instruction, and authentic assessment for the core content areas of literacy, mathematics, science and social studies. An additional emphasis on 21st century skills addresses the content students need to flourish in a world marked by a changing workforce and rising global competition. The Core Curriculum provides all schools with the three essential characteristics of a quality instructional program: 1) a guaranteed and viable curriculum, 2) data-driven processes, and 3) practices and methodologies that are evidence-based.

The Department supports a range of instructional initiatives providing school districts and AEAs with replicable approaches to implement authentic instruction and assessment in each core content area. Literacy, mathematics, and science initiatives are currently being implemented across the state, as is professional development in authentic instruction that is not content area-specific. The Department has plans to include initiatives supportive of social studies and 21st century skills.

Quality education in Iowa is supported by the successful implementation of the Core Curriculum. This requires the inclusion of system level supports: Learning Supports, the Instructional Decision Making process, and the Iowa Professional Development Model. To accomplish an improved educational system and student learning through curriculum reform, school leaders at the state, regional and local level must maintain an unrelenting focus on improving not just the practices used by teachers to deliver instruction to all students, but also the organizational structures and supports.

To effectively incorporate the Iowa Core Curriculum into practice, Iowa school leaders must support the implementation and sustainability of instruction. Leadership needs to be focused on learning, and leaders need to ask hard questions about teaching practices and student learning and consistently know and model the knowledge and

skills needed to do the work (Elmore, January 2002; May, 2002; November, 2003). As schools engage in the curriculum and instruction framed by the Iowa Core Curriculum, distributed leadership is needed alongside of quality professional development to ensure success. Leaders must make sustainability of instruction a priority by committing to and protecting the conceptual learning of students, distributing leadership and responsibility to others, and actively engaging in classroom environments (Hargreaves & Fink, April 2004).



- Students learn more and achievement improves when Content is challenging, relevant, and promotes engaging learning experiences.
- The quality of Instruction and learning improves when teachers know what to teach – The Iowa Core Content Standards and Benchmarks and the Core Curriculum provide the direction and details teachers need to know to plan and deliver effective instruction.
- Instruction is more responsive to student needs when authentic, valid and reliable Assessments are used to measure progress and motivate students to read their learning goals.
- The goals of the Core Curriculum will be accomplished when Schools and supporting agencies function as an integrated system and provide a coordinated approach, consistent communication, and differentiated delivery.
- Implementation of the Core Curriculum will be successful when committed Leadership actions are focused and committed to providing the expertise, guidance, and resources needed to support teaching and learning.
- Making systematic changes and providing ongoing supports to improve instruction, content, and assessment will be successful when the Community is fully informed and actively engaged in the process. Effective implementation occurs when multiple partners including business and industry and communities are interdependent.

- What are the benefits of the Iowa Core Curriculum to students?

The Core Curriculum:

- Ensures that students will grasp big ideas through a focus on essential topics.
- Moves students beyond superficial knowledge to deep conceptual and procedural knowledge through learning for understanding, problem solving, and inquiry.
- Provides students opportunities to learn rigorous, robust content through the effective pedagogy of the Core Curriculum. Students will leave school equipped to succeed regardless of their postsecondary plans.
- Enhances student engagement by involving students in interesting, relevant learning experiences that are motivating and lead to positive outcomes and less negative behavior.

For most students, the usual work demanded in school is rarely considered meaningful, or worthwhile. Learning tasks call for specific memorized information, retrieval of given information or application of routine computational procedures, but rarely do they call for higher-level thinking, interpretation, or in-depth conceptual understanding.

Newmann, King, and Carmichael, 2007

- Facilitates reduction in fragmentation and redundancy that sometimes occurs in school curricula thus creating more effective use of instructional time.
- Promotes the use of formative assessments that are based on authentic content taught in a meaningful way and engages students more directly in monitoring their progress and growth, thus providing a motivator to improve.
- Promotes clear communication between parents, teachers, and students about what a student is to know and be able to do as he or she moves through the K-12 educational system.
- Promotes student learning through the development of conceptual understanding and application of knowledge. Examples:

Math:	Shifts from memorizing and practicing facts and procedures to understanding and applying concepts, practices, and facts.
Literacy:	Shifts from a primary focus on reading and writing in English/Language Arts classes to the integration and practical application of all five literacy skills – reading, writing, speaking, viewing, and listening – across all content domains.
Science:	Shifts from lecture, an over-emphasis on textbook readings and “cookbook” labs to learning through actively investigating, designing experiments, questioning, exploring, and defending conclusions.

- Social Studies: Shifts from lecture and recitation of discrete pieces of information to the acquisition of knowledge and skills associated with the economic, political, civic, and social forces that are relevant to the world in which students live.
- 21st Century Skills Shifts from a traditional system that may not include the incorporation of these skills into curriculum for all, to one that requires that all students leave school prepared to succeed in the complex new, 21st century. Essential concepts and skill sets include employability skills, financial literacy, health literacy, and technology literacy.

- What are the benefits of the Core Curriculum to educators?
 - Teachers who deliver instruction focused on the Core Curriculum will have confidence that their content and pedagogy are research-based or evidence-based.
 - When the content is focused, quality professional development can provide important professional growth for teachers to improve their instructional practices. Teachers engaged in quality professional learning are more likely to be productive and positive learners and improve the learning culture of the school (Iowa Teaching Standards #2 and #7).
 - As school staffs analyze local curriculum and instruction to identify opportunities for improvement, they are likely to discover that they spend too much instructional time teaching content that is not essential and not enough time focusing on the critical content. This process will help schools determine what to do more of and what to eliminate or decrease.
 - As school staffs focus on improving instruction, they may discover instructional practices that are commonly used but ineffective and decide to replace those practices with more effective, research supported ones.
 - The Core Curriculum provides consistency among Iowa's schools and districts, which will aid teacher preparation programs at universities and colleges to better prepare teacher candidates to successfully enter Iowa's teacher workforce.
 - Teachers who are focused on the Core Curriculum are less distracted by fads and superficial projects that are unlikely to yield results.
 - When teachers design formative assessment practices based on authentic content, data will be useful for shaping future instruction.
 - The Core Curriculum provides school administrators further opportunities to support balanced leadership by giving them tools to actively help teachers with issues regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Standard 2, Iowa School Leaders Standards and Balanced Leadership Responsibilities).