



# Iowa Republicans: Real Solutions for Iowa's Families

*Republicans take the lead on offering bold solutions to Iowa's problems*

## **ISSUE GROUP #2 Iowa School House Initiatives**

With nearly 60% of Iowa's state budget devoted to some form of education spending, Iowans have every right to expect an educational product that prepares our students for college and/or a career. Unfortunately, even though Iowa students averaged the second highest ACT scores in the nation, a whopping 71%<sup>1</sup> of students who took the ACT in 2008/09 were not prepared for college and 50%<sup>2</sup> of our graduates must take some form of remedial class work when they get to college.

Most Iowans are justifiably proud of their local public schools. However, we cannot let that pride blind us from the reality that the standards, expectations, and accountability measures that were good enough a decade ago, might no longer be good enough today.

In addition, we must never allow the level of spending on education to be the sole yard stick that measures our success. Our students, teachers, and parents deserve an educational system that aligns our educational products with the needs and demands of a changing world.

Republicans have real solutions to help ensure students and teachers achieve at higher levels while providing parents and taxpayers with greater transparency and accountability for their success. Here is what Republicans will do if Iowa voters give them the opportunity:

### **Set Core Academic Standards and Empower Local Teaching Professionals**

Governor Culver and legislative Democrats have approached academic standards by prescribing a one-size-fits-all, top-down, experiment on our students and teachers. Attempts to create a statewide core curriculum have focused on educational inputs that limit the flexibility of local teachers, parents, and school boards.

Instead, Iowa Republicans propose a series of academic achievement standards that align academic standards in reading, mathematics, history, and science with the demands of the global economy, careers, and further education, so that earning a high school diploma means a high probability of success. Our students are no longer competing with students in the Midwest, but with students in India, Russia, and China. In order to compete internationally, we must have world-class standards. In addition, Iowa Republicans propose to empower Iowa teachers, parents, and local school boards with the authority to determine the content of a local core curriculum and design local programs that help students meet the new state standards.

## **Exit Exams for Graduating Students and Entrance Exams for New Teachers**

Setting high academic standards for our students and teachers is the first step in our educational reform agenda. Step two involves the development and implementation of appropriate testing tools to ensure students have met those standards and teachers are proficient in the subject matters in which they teach.

To be considered proficient in Iowa a student can be ranked as low as the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile on the ITBS and ITED tests. In 2007-08, 23% of Iowa's 11<sup>th</sup> graders did not meet even this watered-down reading proficiency definition, nor did 22% in math<sup>3</sup>. Yet, in Iowa we graduate over 90% of all Iowa high school students. Republicans view this as a failure of the system and a result of setting low expectations for our students. This doesn't make any sense and devalues the diplomas awarded to students who actually meet basic academic achievement standards.

Iowa Republicans will work to adopt legislation that requires the development and implementation of rigorous exit examinations in all basic academic subjects for graduating seniors to ensure those receiving diplomas possess the necessary skills and knowledge to successfully compete in the world.

In addition, it is not enough to subject our graduating seniors to such proficiency exams if their teachers have not been asked to go through a similar process. Iowa is one of only a handful of states that does NOT require new incoming teachers to pass basic proficiency exams in the core subject matter they intend to teach<sup>4</sup>.

The results of a pilot teacher testing program in Iowa showed that 34% of students seeking a teaching license were able to pass either the entrance math or biology test. At the very least, Iowa Republicans will bring forth legislation that requires incoming teachers to pass the same exit exam in their subject matter required of graduating seniors before they can be licensed to teach that subject matter in an Iowa classroom.

## **Parent and Taxpayer Right to Know Act**

The final key to the educational reform process is accountability. Parents and local taxpayers must be provided with the tools to evaluate the performance of their school system and hold local educational authorities accountable.

Republicans have previously passed legislation requiring local school districts to post an annual "Report Card" such that parents and taxpayers are fully informed on the effectiveness of their school system on a wide variety of performance measures.

Unfortunately, Governor Culver and legislative Democrats have quietly passed legislation to gut Iowa's Report Card system and eliminate the public disclosure of key performance standards such as the percentage of district high school graduates who were not proficient in reading, math, and science. In addition, they struck a requirement that school districts provide written notification to parents when their child is reading below grade level.

This back tracking on the commitment to parents and taxpayers by Iowa Democrats is unacceptable. Republicans promise to not only restore the past performance measures, but to require the development and publication of comprehensive performance measures on an annual basis—including the true cost of educational delivery in each Iowa school district and comparative rankings with similar Iowa school districts.

Iowa Republicans will provide parents and local taxpayers with the necessary tools to hold their school systems accountable for the delivery of an education that meets the academic standards necessary to provide our students with a truly world class education. These tools are provided not as a tool for punishing under-performing school districts, but to provide early identification of problems to encourage a cooperative community effort to solve potential problems and bring their schools to an acceptable level of achievement.

<sup>1</sup> American College Testing, August 2009

<sup>2</sup> ChetCulver.com

<sup>3</sup> Iowa Department of Education

<sup>4</sup> National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification, 2000b

**Iowa Republicans: Real Solutions for Iowa's Families** is a joint project of the Republican Party of Iowa and the Republican Iowa House and Senate Caucuses. Through this project Iowa Republicans will promote a series of bold solutions to the problems facing our state in areas ranging from the budget to education, the environment and energy, family, health care and transparency.

Paid for by the Republican Party of Iowa. Not authorized by any candidate or candidate's committee.  
621 E. 9<sup>th</sup> St., Des Moines, IA 50309 515.282.8105 [www.iowagop.org](http://www.iowagop.org)