May 2003
An Addendum to
Raising Achievement: Closing the Education Gap
Introduction:

Job Alike Groups (JAGs) are a significant and important part of the Urban Education Network of Iowa (UEN). JAGs are composed of the middle and upper management professionals from the eight member districts of the UEN. Each year, the JAGs convene at a drive-in conference to address a specific issue and to share mutual concerns and priorities relative to their job specific function(s). The results of their work is compiled and shared as a handbook that can then be easily referenced for day to day planning and implementations by all school districts.

The 2003 UEN JAG Drive-In Conference convened April 17th and focused upon specific and appropriate strategies that can be implemented to close the achievement gap; in all grades, all schools and all subjects. These real and practical strategies can be applied by member districts as they address the major challenges of student achievement. This material is an addendum to the UEN report, Raising Achievement: Closing the Education Gap, December 2002 and is designed to complement that effort.

The strategies included in this handbook are presented under the job title of each Job Alike Group, placed in alphabetical order. They can be referenced by all who are interested but may have more application to those with related functions. They also can be applied in every school, at every grade level. The strategies are all inclusive and are shared as they were developed. Individual schools are encouraged to extensively review all 18 categories and select those techniques that will be useful to the total grade level or school. Commitment and follow-through is critical. Working as teams or units within individual schools will generate and maintain a support system that is important for success.

These strategies are shared as a means for teachers and staff to help all students reach their academic potential. Some may be more applicable than others, but they all have value. The strategies should serve as a strong support system to all school districts, buildings, teachers, students and community alike as they work together to help all students achieve success.

Make a commitment. Establish teams. Work together. Support each other. Make things work better for you and your students.

GOOD LUCK!

A special thank you to Judy Jeffrey, Administrator, Division of Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education, Iowa Department of Education, for her motivation, challenges, and information that speaks so clearly to those who listen.
Guiding Principles

The Urban Education Network of Iowa is a coalition of Iowa’s eight largest school districts. We function as a support and information system, sharing mutual concerns and priorities which impact the education of all children. We believe academic achievement is the primary function of all school districts. Our members acknowledge that ethnicity, race, gender and socio-economic status are significant educational factors; are committed to efficient and effective teaching and learning; and, actively promote strong public policy for urban schools and their students.

We believe we are what we practice. We commit ourselves to:

• listening to our constituents
• representing all urban families
• addressing the needs of all children
• embracing the strengths of diversity
• acting with integrity
• functioning fully as a community partner

We live by these principles; they direct our work.

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Cedar Rapids • Council Bluffs • Davenport • Des Moines • Dubuque • Iowa City • Sioux City • Waterloo
Community School Districts
**Board Members**

To be effective, we must have the will.

- Appeal to what will “grab” people economic well being of community, less crime – as well as the educational and moral reasons for action.
- Be very open with information – HONEST
- Engage others – chamber, churches, community groups.
- Build to facilitate community use. Bring people into schools in multiple ways (mentors, other volunteers, tours)
- Policies must be balanced with not making expenditures that use instructional dollars
- Assure participation of students most at risk as well as others.
- Policies must focus on keeping kids in school.
- Equity must be an under\girding policy.
- Engage parents – very hard, but very important to keep trying to do it through forums, e-mails, letters, seeking a response.
- Must be clear that boards want and need input and guidance but must ultimately take – decision-making responsibility.

**Community Relations/ Communications**

Set up a central registration site for ELL parents to register children, including community agencies, housing, medical resources, etc.

- Do research in community to develop statistics to convince entire citizenry of benefits of closing gap. Educate community through newspapers, television, brochures, etc.
- Contact churches, businesses, neighborhood associations to get their help in developing contacts in minority communities.
- Develop incentives to come to meetings – door prizes, free books, etc.
- Have meetings in evenings, Saturdays – use other buildings in minority communities.
- Work with cable and dish providers to get demographics of who is using it.
- Tap into leadership of ethnic groups – just school people.

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**Strategies for Closing the Gap**

**Closing the Achievement Gap/ the Challenges Ahead**

“Ingenuity, plus courage, plus work, equals miracles”

Bob Richards
Olympic Gold Medalist
Encourage community groups to hold banquets, recognition ceremonies, etc. ACT-SO, Fraternal organizations provide cotillions, balls, etc.

Ask alumni organizations to cite success stories or come visit schools and talk to students.

Arrange job/college fairs that target specific minority groups – Black Fairs

Hold educational summits, invite parents of specific ethnic groups & provide child care and tutors

Keep repeating the message – stay on focus. Don’t be afraid to offend anyone.

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**Early Childhood**

High Quality Early Childhood Programs for all children – birth through five. Model fully-funded/continuum of services.


Parent/Community Education around Early Childhood – communication of research, need, statistics, best practices.

Literacy based (language development, writing, vocabulary, phonic awareness)

Literacy provides vehicle (model) for students to learn – socialization integration.

Seamless transition into Kindergarten.

Early Childhood Advocate – leader, Quality Staff/Teachers, Teacher Associates, On-going professional development.

Develop a “model” program
- Common standards (primary program)
- Research based
- Economic-imperatives
- Educational-imperatives
- Moral-imperatives
- Data
- Assessment, Longitudinal data
- Portfolios

Building partnership with businesses, service organizations, and private companies around the importance of early childhood for the future of the community, state, and nation.

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Decreasing the gaps in achievement is an economic imperative, an educational imperative, and a moral imperative.

In the 1990’s, the gaps separating poor and minority students actually widened at most grade levels - in the 70’s and 80’s achievement rose dramatically and the gaps were cut almost in half – if that had continued with all states our gaps would look very different now.

“Closing the Gap: Done in a Decade”

Kati Haycock, Craig Jerald, Sandra Huang; The Education Trust, Spring 2001
Elementary Education

Clearly define expectations/objectives. Reading curriculum.

Resource/personnel administration - direct to schools with most need, to personalize the assistance.

Develop assessments that teachers trust. Personalize the data with research teams.

Staff/professional development during the contact day, during contract year.

Tape staff development sessions. Reading coaches do the follow-up with staff.

Using experts to deliver staff development, and coach the coaches.

Creative time adjustments of teacher schedules - i.e. front load the time so staff is available in larger chunks to facilitate staff development.

Fund literacy teachers to be hands-on coaches in classrooms to model effective instruction.

On-going staff development for principals in literacy.

Develop strategies for retrieving, analyzing, and distributing data in a timely manner.

Equity

The entire staff will receive continual professional development experiences both informal and formal that address:

- Race
- Gender
- English Language Learners
- Disability
- Poverty
- Sexual Orientation

Curriculum and instructional leadership must be trained in cultural competencies. They must incorporate equity issues in their program design, professional development, and provide guidance for their program area staffs.

All literacy instruction must include a cross cultural dimension for students delivered by cultural competent teachers.

Provide on-going opportunities for students to discuss issues of fairness, respect, and inclusion.

Host a series of community conversations in culturally specific settings by ethnicity, language spoken, socio-economic status, etc.

Initiate culturally specific advisory committees to provide on-going dialogue and establish long term, meaningful-school/community partnerships. These partnerships will address the distinctive achievement needs of our students.

Challenges Ahead

1. Debunking the myth
2. Creating the will to change
3. Doing the right things!

Doing the right things!

A. Clear district content standards
B. Accountability for learning
C. Raising the expectations
D. Accountability
E. Quality professional development
F. Addressing the barriers to learning
G. Allocation of resources
H. Parental and community involvement
**Evaluation**

Gather and report data in cohort groups to better reflect achievement, especially for subgroups.

Use appropriate norms, i.e. urban for urban populations for analysis of assessment data.

Communication of assessment information

-- what is being reported?
-- what are appropriate inferences?

Alignment of staff development/student achievement for goal of turning assessment “data” into useful information

Explore and align curriculum with tests/assessment. Continue practices required by ITAP Programs.

**Finance**

Help non-financial people by taking away tasks related to finance that takes time away from students.

Find creative ways to find redirecting resources (out-sourcing-transportation, custodial, nursing, financial, HR, payroll, accounts payable, technology).

Lobby for change in the school foundation formula that would result in more equitable tax rates across the state.

Shifting resources to other funds where legally possible-craft salaries, overhead costs to enterprise funds.

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**A Rigorous Math Curriculum Improves Achievement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Average NAEP Math Score (17 year-olds)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-algebra (or less)</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algebra</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geometry</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algebra II</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calculus</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, NAEP 1999 Trends in Academic Progress

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Most effective teachers are producing not just a little more growth, but as many as six times the learning gains produced by least effective teachers.
Grant Writers

- Make sure grants are aligned with district standards and goals for learning. Grants should support student achievement and not bring in activities that may detract/distract from teaching and learning.
- Seek out grants to fill gaps in funding and program areas (example: professional development, classroom technology, literacy, etc.).
- Integrate-grant-funded programs into the comprehensive program at the school level.
- Use grant opportunities to strengthen relationships and build new partnerships with parents and community groups.
- Continually monitor and report successes and lessons learned to stakeholder groups and seek ways to incorporate positive outcomes into the regular instructional program after the grant ends.

Guidance

- Create K-12 student portfolios based on exit standards. Portfolios will include artifacts to support evidence of student achievement.
- Institute a board policy to support the implementation of a K-12 comprehensive guidance and counseling program, for all K-12 students. The program will address academic and career development as well as personal/social development.
- Continue demonstrating the effectiveness of early counseling interventions through data.
- Increase accountability for secondary counseling programs by evaluating how counselors and their programs impact student achievement.
- Work more closely with parents, guardians, community members (i.e. Greater Des Moines Community Foundation and Child and Family Policy Center) to ensure that all students have access to resources that support academic success and social/emotional development.
- Seek new ways to connect school counseling to school improvement initiatives.
- Identify and change systemic impediments to closing the achievement gap by teaming with teachers, administrators, board members, community members, and parents and guardians.
- Ensure all students are counseled and encouraged to participate in challenging and relevant classes.
- Continue to expand ways to welcome, understand, and appreciate the diversity of families.

“Quotable”

“If educators take the position that a child is incapable of learning until (all) needs are met, we may doom the child never to learn because poverty will persist, divorce will persist, sickness and human tragedy will persist.

Ideally, a child comes to our classrooms well-fed, warmly clothed, and securely loved. But this is not an ideal world and these are not prerequisites to learning. To believe that they are contributes to the ‘lowered expectations syndrome’ that depresses student achievement.

In actuality, academic achievement could be the only tangible success in an otherwise defeating existence, as well as the only way out of that existence.”

Robert R. Spiland, Superintendent
Fairfax County, Virginia Public Schools
Health

Promote strategies that 1) encourage partnership with parents and community providers, 2) facilitate coordinated health efforts that promote access to care, facilitate establishment of a medical home for families and focus on health issues directly linked to academic achievement.

Provide the development of school health advisory councils and wellness initiatives that support the mission of academic achievement. Include representation that mirrors the socio-economic and ethnic makeup of the district.

Review school health policies to ensure that they do not needlessly contribute to school absence, a lost of instructional time.

Develop strategies to encourage case finding and early intervention actions to meet the specific needs of at-risk families with pre-school children.

Promote the use of the school nurse as a resource to the classroom teacher in addressing student health needs that are impeding individual student achievements and in carrying out health promotion and health curriculum activities.

Actively promote employee health and school safety programs. Promote self help and supportive strategies that probably impact on staff absenteeism and work related injury.

A College Prep Curriculum Benefits Low Performers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Vocational</th>
<th>College Prep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Low-performing refers to bottom quartile on NELS test. Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Students Who Prepare for College and a Vocation, August 1999

A Strong H.S. Curriculum Can Shrink the College Completion Gap in Half

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Percent who earn a bachelor’s degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All college entrants</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrants who had strong H.S. curriculum</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: “College entrants” include only those who entered directly after graduating from high school. Source: Adapted from Adelman, Clifford, U.S. Department of Education, Answers in the Toolbox, 1999

Most importantly, these differences are not explained by differences in the race, socio-economic or prior achievement of the students, but mainly by the differences in the quality of the teachers.
High School Principals

Increase collaboration and amount of information.
Post standards in classroom for student communication.
Teachers set goals for each year through a formal conference each fall that centers around improving instruction and achievement.
Development and utilization of rubrics, grade quick for reporting, communicating to students and parents about progress.
Student learning presentations for parent conferencing rather than arena conference.
Engage senior teachers in working with some of the most struggling students.
Identify students who might be good teachers and encourage them now.
Identify specific community groups and increase opportunities for communicating concerns related to student achievement. Personalize communication.
Building relationship or bridges with various community agencies/groups to connect schools and cement relationship through student connections, i.e. retirement.
Increase awareness and knowledge of student served through specific school data.
Teacher teams focused on specific group of students to enhance achievement “house” structure for freshmen.
Embedded staff development during staff planning or on regular basis throughout the year. Planning cohort teams (20 teachers) conduct action research.
Use of peer teaching, training and coaching as well as contracting with University personnel to work in the classroom.

Human Resources

Hire highly qualified staff and hold them accountable for student achievement including closing the gap.
Initiate new teacher evaluation system with integrity.
Standardize competency requirements in Iowa for paraprofessionals to meet NCLB.
Quality professional development that is focused on student achievement (including SES, ELL, Diversity)
Elimination of barriers that prevent the assignment of the most skilled staff to high risk schools.
Allow flexible structures for employees. (workday, work load, school calendars, wages)

Select and develop high quality leadership.

Network with UEN colleagues to maintain and insure highly qualified staffing throughout the state.

Provide quality staff development for principals in the area of hiring highly qualified staff,

Sharing strategies that would enhance our mentoring programs (beginning and veteran staff).

Continue to focus our recruitment efforts on providing a diverse teaching staff.

Sharing best practices in remediation of staff.

The achievement gap is about poverty, race, expectations, teacher quality, parenting and test bias, but in the end, it is about literacy instruction...

when kids can’t, don’t or won’t read, it affects everything else they do...

Safety/ Crisis

Truancy perspective – kids need to be in school. Student achievement data can help truancy officers deal with this situation.

Mentoring is important to the truancy person.

Safe schools area a prerequisite for good learning environment.

Consider including students and parents in the crisis planning process as a way to contribute to a safe school.

Have regular meetings to assess the state of school climate.

In School...

• 38% not reading at grade level (70% African Americans, 65% Hispanic)

• 40% of all math errors on state tests are reading errors

• 60% of reading questions on ITBS are inferential

• There is no 6th grade math test...it’s cumulative; it is a 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 test
Secondary Education

- Revising and aligning content standards, benchmarks K-12 with assessments.
- Staff Development in literacy/math at middle school and high school.
- Special reading programs for struggling students.
- Intervention programs for groups of students.
- Improved programs and process to transition students into and out of middle schools.
- Creating smaller learning communities.
- Work out differentiated instruction and instructional strategies.

Student Services

- Collect valid data, analyze and develop change strategies based on identified deficiencies. There is a need to track cohort groups, including those students who exit SpEd so there is a valid measure of success. There is a need for UEN to track subsets with disability populations (SES, ethnicity, ESL, etc.) SpEd also is required to track data on other success indicators. These should be considered under NCLB (example: LRE)
- Focus on literacy and increasing teacher capacity to delivery appropriate instruction.
- Capitalize on the Reading First Grant Include SpEd teachers in training and hold them accountable for implementation.
- Eliminate instructional barriers – example: 90 minute blocks needed for literacy instruction.
- Examine enrollment in preschool programs. Are we reaching children from poverty background? How are we building vocabulary capacity?
- Target resources to high need students/buildings. Focus on proven methods to increase achievement.
- Examine personnel policies – best teachers in high need areas. Work with ISEA.
- Work in concert with general education to raise achievement, provide staff development, hold teachers and administrators accountable, etc.

Parents with professional jobs speak about 2,100 words an hour to their toddlers; those in poverty only about 600.

A five year old child from a low income home knows 5,000 words, while a middle class child already knows 20,000 words.


**Superintendents**

- Work with unions to place best teachers with high need students in high need schools.
- Offer quality preschool for all students with high needs.
- Analysis of time, graduation requirements, expectations. Make changes to increase expectations.
- Professional development in a directed way to truly change/improve instruction.
- Change job expectations of division leaders, department chairs, administrators, teachers and instructional coaches are diagnostic and focused.
- Pay attention to “gap” data. Use data to focus on results. Put a face on “gap” students.

**Technology**

**Administration/Board Policy**

- Standardization of curriculum adoptions
- Hardware/Software
- Openly communicate achievement gap
  - Data Warehousing – data in your face
- Staff Development – needs to be reappropriated
- Open Facilities to Communities

**Community**

- Close the digital divide through hardware acquisitions and community training
  - Community access to grades; curriculum

**Teachers**

- Data driven decision making training
- Eliminate digital divide for teachers
- Provide some ondemand training opportunities
- Curriculum management tools and collection center access.

**Students:**

- Reduce digital divide for students. Possibly through community partnerships or service projects.
- At home access to curriculum
Title I

The majority of Title I funds must be devoted to the hiring of “highly qualified” teachers.

The ideal service model is a Title I reading/math teacher working in the classroom. (36 hours a year are lost when child is “pulled out.”)

Reward students for their quality of thinking.

Whatever Title I teachers do with students should be directly related to classroom instruction.

Educate parents so they can become a primary support for their students’ literacy and math growth.

And beyond...

**Speaking is the number one skill for getting a job**

- 50% of high school dropouts are unemployed
- 65% of all prisoners are high school dropouts