

# DOING WELL PREVENTS DOING TIME

School reforms replacing rote learning with Deeper Learning and the Iowa Core standards and assessments will help kids succeed and avoid crime

## WHO WE ARE

FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS is a national, bipartisan, nonprofit, anti-crime organization. The organization has a membership of nearly 5,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, district attorneys, other law enforcement leaders and violence survivors nationwide, including more than 120 in Iowa. The members take a hard-nosed look at what approaches work—and what don't—to prevent crime and violence. They then recommend effective strategies to state and national policymakers. It operates under the umbrella of the Council for a Strong America.

## OUR SUPPORT

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To avoid crime in Iowa we need our youth to gain the real academic and social skills necessary to be successful in school, on the job and in life.

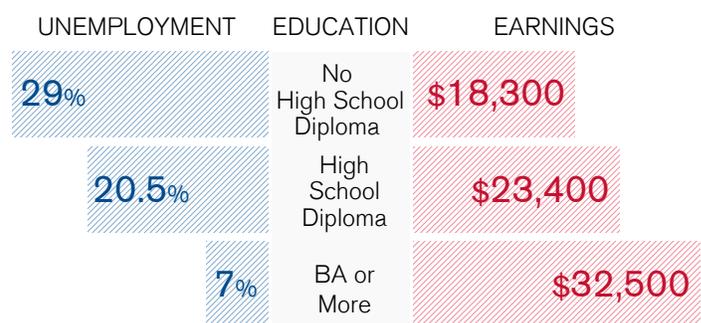
We in law enforcement continue to be concerned with the high number of people – mostly young men – who become seriously involved in crime. For example, in 2013, there were over 100,000 arrests of individuals in Iowa.<sup>1</sup> Nationally, the total population under supervision of the adult correctional systems has risen from close to two million in 1980 to nearly seven million in 2012.<sup>2</sup> Iowa currently has approximately 7,500 men as inmates under control of the Iowa Department of Corrections.<sup>3</sup>

We know from experience that crime is connected to whether young men are employable at decent wages. At the founding of our state, most young men who were physically fit found work on our farms. But now, young men who have not received relevant and effective education are increasingly unable to manage the challenges of modern farmwork, or find employment with reasonable wages elsewhere in our 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. Experts on the skills gap have reported that in February of 2013, “There [were] 79,000 unemployed Iowa workers. Despite an unemployment rate of 4.9 percent, Iowa employers say everyday they cannot find workers with the right skills.”<sup>4</sup> Even jobs previously considered “manual labor” (e.g., car mechanic, welders, and certainly today’s farmers) now involve the use of advanced technology and can often require training beyond high school. In our own field of law enforcement, we have seen that the people we hire need to be better educated and comfortable interacting with sophisticated software developed to protect the public.

Iowa has been one of the nation’s leaders in providing preschool, with 68 percent of its preschool-aged children served by one of the two state prekindergarten programs (the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program, 57 percent and Shared Visions, 3 percent) or by Head Start (8 percent).<sup>5</sup> More work needs to be done to improve pre-kindergarten quality across the state, but this is a good start. When it comes to K-12 reform, there is still much room for improvement: only 36 percent of Iowa 8<sup>th</sup> graders are proficient in math, 37 percent are proficient in reading and only 35 percent are proficient in science.<sup>6</sup> Even though Iowa has the highest on-time graduation rate in the nation, still, 10 percent of

## UNEMPLOYMENT AND EARNINGS

For those under age 25 in 2009.



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics; US Dept. of Commerce

Iowa high school freshmen do not graduate within four years.<sup>7</sup> And, even among those who graduate, 19 percent who try to join the Army, for example, are not able to pass the military’s entrance exam.<sup>8</sup> Too many Iowa students are not getting the education necessary to be employable in the new Iowa economy.

This means that too many young men are finding it economically worth the risk to make money illegally or are occupying their time in ways that bring them into contact with us in law enforcement. Of course we arrest well-educated individuals, too, for all sorts of crimes. But key research done by Eric Gould of Hebrew University and his colleagues shows that long-term changes in wages and employment opportunities among non-college educated men may explain as much as half of property and violent crime rates.<sup>9</sup> And, there is no disputing that less educated individuals are more likely to be involved in crime: for example, a national analysis showed that almost 7 in 10 inmates in our state prisons had failed to graduate from high school, whereas fewer than 3 in 10 of the general population had failed to graduate from high school.<sup>10</sup> In Iowa, 17 percent of state prisoners have less than a high school education.<sup>11</sup> Our current education system is not working for too many young people, particularly boys.

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## The Iowa Core is part of ongoing efforts to incorporate Deeper Learning into our schools to improve our education system.

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There is a growing awareness that rote learning is not adequate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Students need deeper learning skills, such as the acquired ability to analyze different documents and distill valid conclusions not attainable by reading just one piece. In math, instead of simply memorizing a lot of formulas, education will be better connected to real-world examples of applying math skills so young people can really understand how, for example, carpenters use geometry in daily life, or how to determine the impact of different interest rates when making important purchases. Those are only two examples of how deeper learning is being incorporated into the Iowa Core.

The Iowa Core is a rigorous set of educational standards for English language arts and mathematics for K-12 education that can help ensure that Iowa students are prepared for college and careers. They reflect changed needs for a well-educated workforce of young men and women who have mastered core academic content, and involve the deeper learning skills of being

able to think critically, solve complex, real-world problems and communicate effectively.

The Common Core State Standards were developed by teachers, researchers and other experts, including educators from Iowa, who helped develop the concepts and skills included in the Iowa Core. Led by the states' governors and chief state school officers, the resulting standards are now being voluntarily adopted by 43 states, including Iowa. The Iowa State Board of Education integrated the Common Core Standards into the Iowa Core in July 2010.<sup>12</sup>

The Iowa Core can help teachers ensure their students have the skills and knowledge they need to be successful by providing clear goals for student learning. The Core establishes the content and skills that children must learn at each grade level, but they do not tell teachers how to teach, nor do they specify a curriculum; these important decisions remain under teacher or local control.

### WHAT IS DEEPER LEARNING?

#### ✓ Master Core Academic Content

Students must be able to demonstrate a baseline understanding of core content knowledge and apply facts, processes and theories to real-world situations.

#### ✓ Think Critically and Solve Complex Problems

Students must be able to apply tools and techniques learned from core subjects to formulate and solve problems, using them to evaluate, integrate and critically analyze multiple sources of information. Students must be able to learn to reason and construct justifiable arguments creatively, encompassing non-linear thinking and persistence.

#### ✓ Work Collaboratively

Students should demonstrate the ability to cooperate together to identify and create solutions to social, vocational and personal challenges. This includes the ability to identify common goals; to organize resources necessary for meeting group goals; and to learn to communicate and incorporate multiple points of view to better achieve goals.

#### ✓ Communicate Effectively

Students must be able to organize their thoughts and findings in clear, meaningful and useful ways and express themselves in both written and oral forms. They must be able to listen well and present others' concepts, as well as their own.

#### ✓ Learn How to Learn

Students must be aware of their strengths and weaknesses and be able to monitor and direct their own learning. They should understand and be prepared to meet changing expectations in a variety of academic, professional and social environments.

#### ✓ Developing Academic Mindsets

Students must develop academic mindsets that are positive, motivated, and resilient. Students should commit to completing their work, meeting goals, doing quality work, and searching for solutions to overcome obstacles.

SOURCE: Hewlett Foundation



## WHAT DOES DEEPER LEARNING HAVE TO DO WITH CRIME PREVENTION?

The Iowa Core utilizes the Deeper Learning approach to make sure the education children acquire is not just rote learning and is more relevant to skills they will need if they are going to find productive employment. That can help them avoid crime. But deeper learning, beyond its use in the Iowa Core, also can include an awareness that children need to learn more than English, math and communication skills; they also need to learn social skills so they can learn how to learn in school, at work and in life. These skills for young children are as simple as learning to wait your turn or to “use your words.” Research shows, for example, that learning self-control as a young child is central to avoiding dangerous or violent behavior later in life.<sup>13</sup>

The best way to explain how important this can be is to discuss the Good Behavior Game.<sup>14</sup> In first grade, children playing the game were divided into two teams that competed to see which team could behave the best through following class rules such as asking permission to get out of their chairs, etc. The children joined together to help their fellow teammates master the self-control needed for their team to win. Their teams were given simple rewards such as getting to line up first for recess. Immediately, whole classrooms behaved much better. Fast forward to after the children were out of high school and researchers found that those who participated, compared to those in classrooms randomly assigned to not receive the game, were half as likely to be suffering from a substance abuse disorder. Other measures of behavior during their school years also signaled the likelihood of big declines in criminal activity later in life. The Good Behavior Game shows that self control and other social skills can be taught, and social skills are essential for succeeding in school and avoiding involvement in the criminal justice system later in life.

## WHAT GETS MEASURED GETS ACTED ON: EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENTS ARE CRUCIAL

Iowa is currently determining what their state assessment will be. An Assessment Task Force was commissioned in 2013 to recommend an assessment. The Task Force voted, 20 to 1, to recommend the Smarter Balanced assessment, an Iowa Core-aligned test developed by a consortium of states.<sup>15</sup> The state legislature will decide whether to accept or reject the Task Force’s recommendation. The aligned assessment will allow educators to determine how students are doing and to use this information to improve education, so more students will be college- and career-ready. It will also help schools, districts and even states to learn from successes elsewhere around the country, so that what seems to be working best in one locality can more rapidly be replicated elsewhere and then, if it works there, spread widely to other localities. Assessments will help teachers and administrators confirm whether what is working elsewhere is also working in their schools. The data from these assessments will help educators identify and share educational practices that work with other schools and districts. This increased use of common data parallels what is happening in law enforcement. Starting with CompStat in New York City, city after city throughout America is adopting successful approaches for collecting and using data more effectively. This new approach has begun to turn around America’s problems with violent crime in many cities. This is likely part of what has helped Iowa see its serious “index” crimes drop from over 110,000 a year in the 1980s and early 1990s into the 70,000s from 2009 to 2012.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to assessments, in order to affect student outcomes, experts report that districts will need to choose and adopt stronger curricula that are compatible with the Standards. Better pre- and in-service training will also be necessary, including support for teachers’ and leaders’ learning how to use the assessment data effectively.<sup>17</sup>

Because the Iowa Core is more rigorous than previous standards, the new assessments are likely to be tougher than previous state tests. At first there is likely to be a decrease in test scores, not because students are doing worse, but because we will be accurately measuring how students are meeting higher standards. The drop in test scores may alarm some people. We in law enforcement have also found that highlighting the data on where crime problems stand out can cause concerns, but it is the only way to begin to seriously address ongoing problems and find real solutions that work. Similarly, having rigorous standards and assessments for students will help ensure that students will be better prepared for success in postsecondary education and the workforce.

## CONCLUSION

Iowa's law enforcement leaders see Deeper Learning and the Iowa Core as integral to the effort to ensure that all students are college- and career-ready, and essential if we are going to successfully prevent future crime. What works to help all our young people be employable and succeed will also work to bring down crime. That is why we in law enforcement support the promotion of deeper learning and the Iowa Core with aligned learning assessments. It is how we will build a more successful and safer Iowa.

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