



Title: **gArea educators attend Vision 20/20 initiative in Springfield**
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Area educators attend Vision 20/20 initiative in Springfield

By **CARMEN ENSINGER**

Campbell Publications

The Vision 20/20 summit held in Springfield recently has educators all across the state excited for the future of the public education system.

In November 2012, the Illinois Association of School Administrators (IASA) partnered with the Illinois Principals Association (IPA), Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB), Illinois Association of School Business Officials (IASBO), Superintendents' Commission for the Study of Demographics and Diversity (SCSDD) and the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools (IARSS) to develop a long-range plan to improve the public education system in Illinois.

The result of this collaboration has become known as the Vision 20/20 initiative, and it marks the first time all the major educational organizations have come together to try and come up with a solution to fix the state's "broken" education system.

The conference in Springfield was attended by representatives of many of the local school districts, including administrators and board members from Greene, Jersey and Calhoun school districts. This was the first of many more meetings to come, which aim to make needed changes to the educational system.

"I was very impressed with what I saw because it was the first time I have seen all of the associations come together for a common purpose," Carrollton School Board President Rodney Reif said. "What I liked most about this initiative is they are using the common sense business model approach to education and not just throwing stuff out there here and there. Their approach is to have a plan and see what works and what doesn't work and let's

move forward – not just throw darts at a board."

Calhoun Unit 40 Superintendent

Dr. Kate Sievers thinks Vision 20/20 is a great because it looks at each district individually.

"I think it is great because it is looking for adequacy and equality for all the schools in the state by looking at what each individual district needs or doesn't need," Sievers said. "Jersey and Calhoun districts might be right next to each other and touch as far as our boundaries go, but we have very different needs."

Vision 20/20 focuses in on four priorities within the educational system – highly effective educators, 21st Century learning, shared accountability and equitable and adequate funding.

Currently, the state doesn't have a system designed to attract, develop or retain highly effective educators.

The state, according to Sievers, discourages teachers from coming to Illinois and Vision 20/20 calls for reciprocity of teacher to go from state to state.

"You might be looking to hire a teacher who is currently teaching in Missouri," Sievers said. "Most likely, this teacher is going to have to take two or three more classes to get certified in Illinois plus take a test."

However, teachers in Illinois who move to Missouri or Indiana have no trouble.

"We are so close to those states, yet teachers coming here have to jump through so many hoops to
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just throwing stuff out there here and there."

Rodney Reif

Carrollton School Board President

20/20

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teach here," Sievers said. "We are hoping the legislators will work with us to get that corrected so we can have that reciprocity between the states and we can get those qualified teachers."

Then again, the state isn't any kinder to its own educators, either, by constantly changing the rules and requirement to teach courses, according to one local principal.

"The other problem is they keep changing things all the time," Carrollton High School Principal Leslee Frazier said. "We currently have one veteran teacher who has been teaching for years and now the state has come in and said he needs to take a course you simply can't find around here. They are making it extremely hard to not only find qualified teachers, but even keep the ones we have."

A way to address this issue would be to create education licensure reciprocity agreements. In order to be in the position to recruit and retain highly effective educators and administrators, the state should allow and streamline education licensure reciprocity agreements with the other states across the U.S.

The second pillar of importance, which deals with 21st Century learning is, according to illinoisvision2020.org, every district in the state should modernize its approach to learning by delivery of 21st Century instruction, which provides all students access



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to modern learning environments including technology such as computers and Internet.

“There are many districts out there who do not have Internet access or the correct bandwidth in order to run a lot of the programs in testing coming up,” Carrollton Superintendent Dr. Kerry Cox said. “Thankfully, we are not in that boat right now and our technology infrastructure is pretty solid.”

Another emphasis during the conference was the need for shared accountability. The state, according to the Vision 20/20 agenda, should adopt a differentiated accountability model to focus on continuous improvement, recognize the diversity of struggling schools and eliminate achievement gaps across the state. A differentiated accountability model would allow local flexibility, promote shared accountability and be sensitive to local district improvements.

More specifically, it would address the numerous unfunded mandates created by the legislature every year which all districts must adhere to, regardless of their relevance to the district. Unfunded mandates are just that – mandates the state is requiring be implemented but not providing the funding for this implementation.

“Since the year 2000, there have been 132 unfunded mandates that have been passed by our legislature,” Cox said. “Now that is not saying they are all bad, but 132 is a huge amount of mandates the state makes without the funding to go with it.”

Calhoun District had to spend \$3,500 to have a fire alarm in its greenhouse connected to the main building.

“That is an extra \$3,500 the district was forced to spend that could have been used elsewhere,” Sievers said. “I have only been superintendent for two-and-a-half years, but the amount of mandates I’ve seen is simply crazy.”

Vision 20/20 asks for these mandates to be classified as either essential or discretionary. Under Vision 20/20 mandates which deal with civil

rights, safety or federal mandates would be considered as essential, but others would be considered discretionary.

Ultimately, these new and unfunded mandates end up taking away classroom learning time and resources.

“If it is for the safety and well-being of the children, then the mandate is

well worth it,” Jersey Superintendent Dr. Lori Hopkins said. “But where we are lacking is personnel. The lack of funding has meant reducing the teaching staff, so not only do we have less money, we have less time in the classroom. Yet at the same time, these mandates require more accountability. The more and more I talk to school leaders and educators, people are really getting tired of these unfunded mandates.”

Vision 20/20 also advocates allowing education representation in the legislature responsible for making the laws.

“Often time the right stakeholders simply aren’t sitting at the table discussing the issues,” Hopkins said. “When we are talking about legislators making laws for school systems, we are missing a very, very important voice and that is the voice of the educator. Whether it be a superintendent, other district leader or teacher, it really needs to be someone who has been an educator and understands the responsibility of the teachers.”

The last pillar – equitable and adequate funding – is based on the fact the state should be able to provide equal educational access and opportunities to all students. But this cannot be accomplished until the state’s funding system, which fails to fund the very poorest of schools, is fixed.

This pillar draws heavily on the evidence-based funding model, which takes into account the costs associated with delivering quality, research-based programming, including allotments for teacher salaries and small class sizes.

“For greatest efficiency, districts should be allowed the flexibility to allocate state funds throughout their local district, allowing them to better

align resources to student’s needs.” Cox said.

Hopkins, like many others, agrees the formula the state currently uses to allocate General State Aid is outdated.

“Circumstances have changed over the years but this formula doesn’t take any of that change into consideration,” Hopkins said. “Funding should be based on the individual circumstances of each district and those can change often, and do.”

With the evidence-based funding model, the formula used in determining General State Aid would be based on the needs of the specific district.

“Right now, we all get the basic 89 percent proration, but this model would not have a proration in it,” Sievers said. “Basically, it would fund your needs. Right now, they look at need, but it is just a minor part of the formula as opposed to what it will be in the evidence based funding.”

Carrollton Board member Andy Stumpf, who is also a principal at Brussels, said the conference was an eye-opening experience for him.

“Probably the best part of the conference for me was going around talking to the administrators from different parts of the state,” he said. “Hearing how things affect districts differently around the state. Something which might have a big effect on us might not have any bearing at all on a county in the northern part of the state.”

Hopkins said it was the first time she had seen the gathering of forces from all across the educational structure come together for a common purpose.

“We had individuals there, not just superintendents or board members, but also community stakeholders who were also hearing the message,” Hopkins said. “There was a real sense of camaraderie of the people coming together for a good cause.”

Vision 20/20 will study the needs of every school district in Illinois leading to an evidence based funding model for each district. This will give lawmakers a scalable method to establish funding levels appropriate for each district.