



Framework for Setting Priorities

The Student Achievement Team’s priority list focused on:

- Increasing student achievement and improving graduation rates so that more students are prepared to succeed in post-secondary education, workforce training, and life; and
- Reducing the achievement gap among the different income, gender and ethnic groups.

When prioritizing activities to support these goals, the team continued to return to discussions of equity. If we are to address the achievement gap, we must continue to ask questions about how decisions impact equity of opportunities for all students to learn and achieve. Equity was discussed as it related to each of the following criteria that the team used to prioritize its choices.

**1) Maintain base funding for schools**

It can be difficult to make and sustain progress when funding sources fluctuate from year to year. In addition, many strategies to improve student achievement involve a multi-year approach. Schools can make more strategic use of their resources if the core funding is predictable and reliable.

**2) Prioritize programs that demonstrate links to research-based best-practices**

Programs with proven results should be prioritized. Quality early learning experiences, such as those provided through the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), are modeled after what research has shown to be effective strategies that address the achievement gap early and provide lasting effects (higher graduation rates, less criminal behavior, etc). The importance of teacher quality is a consistent theme in education research, as is the key role that building leadership plays in setting expectations for quality learning.

**3) Provide state and regional infrastructure needed to effectively manage the early learning and K-12 education systems and provide efficiencies where possible**

The statewide K-12 and early learning system must be supported by a basic state and regional administrative structure that collects data, distributes funds, awards grants, and provides other system supports. In addition, many state and regional functions offer efficiencies to the system at large, such as consistent content in math professional development activities.

**4) Make strategic investments targeted at known challenges and opportunities**

For example, student achievement levels in math and science remain low. Targeted investments to address the alignment of teacher preparation and training, curriculum, instruction, and assessment with updated state standards



support further improvements in math and science instruction and learning.

**Description of the Priority List**

The state basic education programs are the team’s highest priority activities followed by the student services at the School for the Deaf and School for the Blind. The next set of priorities continues to emphasize direct services to children and students, such as maintaining the K-4 class size enhancement, all-day kindergarten, and ECEAP.

The middle section of the priority list includes programs that maintain targeted professional development for teachers and provide incentives for teachers to attain certification through the National Board. While most of the current early learning quality programs are included in this priority area, the team recommends that these support programs serve communities with the highest needs first.

State and regional educational support activities are also prioritized within the middle section. The decision to place these activities in this area illustrates the team’s recognition that state and regional activities support the overall operation of the system. The activities include: curriculum and instruction coordination, school improvement programs, school business services, certification services, regional math and science instructional coaches, and the assessment system. The team reduced the administrative activities for state and regional agencies by 5% and included that portion of the activity lower on the priority list.

Three new activities were prioritized above many remaining current activities. The final stage of upgrading the general apportionment system and development of an e-Certification system enhance stability and efficiency of the system. Additionally, a state and regional technical assistance system is created for school districts facing financial challenges.

The next major activities on the priority list are local effort assistance (levy equalization) followed by the Student Achievement Fund (I-728). It was difficult for the team to choose one of these activities above the other, but the team’s overarching interest in equity tipped the scales for levy equalization. Notably, several programs that cover similar uses as I-728 received higher priority because they are targeted in their uses, such as K-4 class size, or targeted to the most at-risk schools and communities, such as all-day kindergarten in the highest poverty schools.

The next priorities include services for targeted populations (gifted education and the youth academy). In addition, the team included a new activity that provides funding to assist school districts in purchasing new curriculum or supplemental instructional materials that align with the revised math and science standards.

The activities in the lowest priority section were not as closely aligned with the team’s identified strategies or with research-proven approaches.