



Van Meter Schools: Portrait of a Graduate—Moving from a Vision to a Reality

What is a Portrait of a Graduate (POG)?

As attendees learned at IASB’s inaugural Summit on Student Success, Van Meter Schools has woven its POG into the district’s strategic plan.

Mission: The mission of the Van Meter Schools is to personalize learning for each student’s success today and tomorrow.

Shared Vision: To empower students to be learners who: communicate, collaborate, create and innovate, solve problems, persevere, think globally, and demonstrate employability skills.

The Vision

As Superintendent Deron Durlinger explained, the POG engages stakeholders to create a picture of what a graduate should look like upon leaving school. In other words, “start with the end in mind.” The district makes learning personal through innovative practices that align to the principles of competency-based education to produce college, career, and global ready graduates. How does Van Meter Schools take its POG from a vision to a reality? It starts with a five-step action plan:

1. Plan the engagement process.
2. Activate your Design Team of community members.
3. Create the visual and narrative story for your Portrait.
4. Adopt your Portrait and plan for implementation.
5. Measure your progress toward your Portrait.



Van Meter Schools presents their Portrait of a Graduate at the Summit on Student Success

Van Meter Schools uses a multitude of resources available to all Iowa districts, such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the Individual Career Academic Plan (ICAP), and Future Ready Iowa to guide their POG plan. Focus is given to the Four Domains aligned to the Iowa Teaching Standards:

Cognitive (what students need to know), Intrapersonal (what students need to process), Interpersonal (what students need to relate), and Instructional (what students need to do). The district doesn't shy away from challenging topics like Social & Emotional Learning, equality, equity, justice, global awareness, and innovation.

The Reality

What does this vision look like in reality for Van Meter Schools? The district allows grade level teams to set goals with a focus on cross curricular integration, along with a strong focus on communication with students, parents, and the community. The district's model for TK-5 students exemplifies these goals in action, with dedicated time for enrichment and interventions in math and reading; individual instruction for students who qualify for talented and gifted services; rotations for project completion focused on the arts; and engagement in daily physical education activity.

At Van Meter Middle School, the district leverages project-based and real-world applications that empower students to become effective communicators, collaborators, and problem solvers. At Van Meter High School, 21st century skills are integrated into everyday instruction, maintaining mutually beneficial partnerships with local community colleges and other organizations to provide students with the opportunity to explore pathways for life after graduation.



Van Meter Schools Superintendent Deron Durlinger engages attendees at the Summit on Student Success.

One of the most powerful aspects of Van Meter School's POG is its respect for teachers. The district prides itself on small class sizes and personalized environments to help each student reach their fullest potential. As Durlinger stated, "We have a goal in mind for what we think all educators should look like. What we expect out of our students we more than expect out of our teachers."

The Results

The results speak for themselves. For the graduating class of 2021, 91.5% of students are College Ready and 86.5% of students are Career Ready. What metrics are used to determine these results?

College Ready: 91.5% of graduates met GPA and one other indicator.

- 92.5% of students have a GPA of 2.8 or higher.
- 81% percent of students have earned college credits.
- 81% of students are Algebra II proficient.
- The average ACT score is 27.6%.

Career Ready: 86.5% of students met 2 or more of the Career Ready indicators.

- 28.3% of students have 25+ hours of community service.
- 85% of students have an attendance rate of 90%+.
- 89% of students participate in at least two extracurricular activities.
- 39% of students completed 3+ units in one career field or took college level CTE courses.

What's Your District's Portrait of a Graduate?

Van Meter Schools asks that you consider where your district is in the POG process. What is your role as a board member in developing, implementing, and measuring the success of your district's vision? Ask yourself that question if your district is seeking any of the following:

- A way to unify decision making for initiatives, resources, and capacity building.
- Additional pathways for learners within and beyond high school.
- Improved community partnerships.
- Development and measurement of future ready knowledge, skills, and dispositions.
- Reimagined graduate outcomes.
- Increased rigor and relevance.

In its simplest form, the Van Meter Schools POG follows a simple motto: "We want kids to own their learning."

To learn more about Van Meter Schools' Portrait of a Graduate program, visit their [website](#) or contact Superintendent Deron Durlinger at deron.durlinger@vmbulldogs.com.