(DES MOINES) - Gov. Terry Branstad and Lt. Gov. Kim Reynolds today released an education reform package that will bring Iowa closer to its goal of providing a world-class education to all children, no matter where they live.

The package presented for the 2013 legislative session focuses on providing great teaching in every classroom to raise student achievement and to prepare Iowa's children to compete for jobs in a competitive global economy.

"We have many good schools with committed educators, but they are stuck in a system designed for the 20th century, not the 21st century," Branstad said. "I am ready to invest significant resources into these educational reforms, which truly have the power to dramatically raise achievement."

Branstad added: "I do not believe we should spend even one minute discussing additional resources to prop up our current educational structure until we have first agreed on the reforms our children need."

The investment proposed by Branstad and Reynolds scales up over five years, starting with $14 million in the first year, $72 million in the second year, and $187 million at full implementation in five years.

Other states and nations have made dramatic, whole-system changes that have pushed their education systems past Iowa's. Iowa, meanwhile, has slipped from being a top performer to middle of the pack on national tests.

"Iowa's children deserve the best education we can provide so they leave our schools with the knowledge and skills necessary for successful and rewarding lives," said Iowa Education Director Jason Glass. "We stand at a pivotal moment in Iowa's storied education history, in which we have the opportunity and will as a community to make the transition from being 'good' to being 'great.'"

World-class schools are one of four top priorities set by Branstad and Reynolds, along with 200,000 new jobs, a 25 percent increase in family incomes and to reduce the cost of government by 15 percent.

The centerpiece of their 2013 education reform package is establishing a new teacher leadership and compensation system. This proposal is based on recommendations from the Task Force on Teacher Leadership and Compensation, which thanks to the Legislature's action, was established as a diverse group of Iowans who spent seven months studying this issue.

The teacher leadership and compensation system raises the status of the teaching profession and attracts and retains talented educators through these approaches:

- Raise Iowa's minimum starting salary from $28,000 to $35,000 to make teaching more attractive.

- Keep top teachers in front of children, but pay these teacher leaders more to take on more instructional leadership responsibility alongside school administrators, which will strengthen the teaching throughout the building. Teachers who are selected for model, mentor and lead roles will be paid more for sharing their expertise and for working additional days to coach, co-teach and to foster collaboration among all educators.

- Give brand-new teachers a reduced teaching load in their first year so they can spend more time learning from outstanding veteran teachers.

The teacher leadership and compensation system, which will be phased in over several years, gives school districts the flexibility to customize leadership roles to meet their local needs. It builds on landmark, bipartisan legislation in 2001 that created, but never funded, a teacher career ladder.

“This is about strengthening the teaching profession for the benefit of both students and teachers,” Reynolds said. “Teachers are the single most important influence on a child’s success inside school, and educators are being asked to do much more to prepare students for our knowledge-driven economy. We must make sure new teachers are ready to rise to that challenge, while also providing more support for teachers already in the classroom.”

The education reform package introduced today by Branstad and Reynolds also includes four other components:

- Teach Iowa Initiative: Expands an existing program to provide both relief and incentive through tuition reimbursement to top students who commit to teach in Iowa schools for five years, with a focus on hard-to-hire subjects such as math and science. Teach Iowa scholars will receive an extra $4,000 for each year of service, for a total of $20,000. This initiative also includes a new pilot program to strengthen clinical experience with a full year of student teaching in the senior year of college, rather than the typical one semester.

- College- and Career-Ready Seals: Use diploma seals to identify and recognize

graduating high school students who demonstrate that they are college- and career-ready. A blue-ribbon commission of business and education leaders would set high standards for the seals to better define what it means to be college or career-ready. The seals are in addition to a high school diploma. The purpose is to help students better prepare for the future and to align education with workforce development in a thoughtful way.

- Improving educator evaluations: Iowa needs to update existing teacher and administrator evaluations to provide more valuable feedback. This will include deciding how student achievement growth should count. This work should help the state win a waiver from the federal No Child Left Behind law.

- Expand the Iowa Learning Online program: This proposal expands an existing program at the Iowa Department of Education to allow more high school students the opportunity to take high-quality online courses taught by Iowa teachers. Small districts that often struggle to find applicants for hard-to-hire subjects also will find this helpful. This will require an initial state investment, but would be self-sustaining in three years.

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