



November 2011 School Improvement Booster: Professional Development

Welcome to a new ISFIS publication, the *School Improvement Booster*. We hope you will enjoy this e-newsletter and you are welcome to distribute it in your district to anyone you think might be interested – the faculty, the school board, or even the community. At ISFIS we are committed to providing resources to support the challenging and important work of Iowa Schools. We hope this publication achieves that goal.

The Governor's Blueprint for Education

The Governor continues to travel the state, holding town hall meetings to discuss his blue print for education, [*One Unshakable Vision: World Class Schools for Iowa*](#) . This reform package addresses many of the issues embedded in school reform efforts across the country. There is significant discussion about teacher performance, but little is mentioned about professional development (PD), an important pathway to more effective teacher performance. While PD may be an implicit part of the blueprint, it is so critical to success, that it should be addressed explicitly if we expect our educational system to change to meet the demands of students in the 21st Century.

To understand where we are today, it is important to review where we have been. Iowa has a professional development plan that was developed by Iowa stake holders several years ago. The development of that plan was facilitated by Beverly Showers, one of the premier researchers in professional development in the world. Unfortunately, all of the components of this professional development model have not yet been fully implemented. We suggest that we dust that plan off and take a look. This look will aid school districts in implementing local reforms, as well as informing state level policy makers. With proper state support, could the model assist in elevating teacher learning, either as part of the Blueprint or as a standalone strategy?

Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers developed a professional development model in the 1980s that has a laser like focus on improving instruction and as a result, improved learning for students. This same focus is part of the Iowa professional development model Dr. Showers helped design for Iowa schools not all that long ago. Below are the components for learning new instruction:

- **Theory:** Educators learn continually about the new instruction being studied – what the results for students were when the instruction was well implemented, why it works, with what students and content it works best, and other background information related to implementing the new instruction.
- **Demonstration:** Moves of the new instructional skill are explicitly understood and identifiable. Educators see multiple demonstrations of new instruction – 15 to 30 depending on the complexity of the instructional skill. They see the demonstrations in staff development, by visiting classrooms, and in small group meetings. Modeling has a powerful impact on behavior.
- **Practice:** Teachers practice the instructional skills being learned multiple times. Concert pianists and scratch golfers become skilled in their craft as they practice extensively. Teachers, too, must practice the new instruction being learned in order to perfect it and be able to do it easily. Knowing when to use the strategy and being able to implement it easily is called executive control.
- **Coaching:** Coaching comes in at least two persuasions (don't these sound a little bit like the Master and Mentor teachers proposed in the Blueprint?):
 - **Expert Coaching:** This is provided by someone very skilled in the instruction being learned. This coach has implemented the instruction extensively with students, knows the moves of the instruction, understands the theory behind it, and has executive control of the instruction. This person can observe teachers as they practice and implement the new instruction and then provide demonstrations of the skill that address the shortcomings in the practice that were observed. This is NOT someone who goes away to a workshop and comes back to teach what has been learned.
 - **Peer Coaching:** This is equally important to expert coaching. This happens when small groups of teachers (ideally 3) work together to implement new instruction. They rehearse for one another, plan lessons together that embed the new instruction, observe one another, look at student work that results from the new instruction, and other activities. They meet regularly together – at least an hour per week.

In addition to this cycle, implementation of the new instruction is carefully studied. Is the new instruction being implemented in classrooms? Is it being done in a way that will improve student learning? What supports are needed to ensure teachers are learning this new instruction well enough to gain executive control? After all, if the

new instruction isn't transferred from the Wednesday afternoon early out into classroom instruction, we can't expect student learning to improve.

What does current law require regarding professional development and the Model?

All professional development plans, including district, attendance center, and individual plans, must follow the Iowa Professional Development Model as outlined in Iowa Code Chapter 284.6. Per Iowa Code the professional development must contain research-based instructional strategies aligned with the school district's student achievement needs and the long-range improvement goals established by the districts.

The IPDM technical assistance guide has been updated to reflect law changes to the teacher quality student achievement act in 2007, including the teacher quality committee roles in determining the use of professional development supplement per pupil funds. Reference to the changes is included in the January 2011 Student Achievement, Accountability and Professional Development Annual Report posted on the [DE's website](#).

The ISFIS subscriber web site has a page dedicated to professional development. It includes links to the IPDM, the technical assistance guide, a description of PD funding, including requirements for expenditures of the PD supplement per pupil and core curriculum PD funds DE guidance letters and FAQs, all in one place.

What is the state of professional development in Iowa schools?

It would appear that many schools are engaged in professional development that supports the Professional Learning Communities model or Data Teams. These are useful structures for teachers to meet regularly and with a common group. Most of these groups bring data in the form of test scores, student work, and observations. They analyze the data and then plan instruction to address the weaknesses identified. Later they come back together again to reflect on the instruction and student results. This is a very useful cycle. However, the Joyce and Showers model asks schools to take another step. As schools realize the areas in which their students are deficient, the Joyce and Showers model invites the teachers to learn new instruction in that area from an expert. One school's data indicated that their students were lagging in writing non-fiction text – not just in grammar and mechanics, but in establishing a purpose for writing, developing coherent ideas, determining what sort of text structures to use, and so on. This school hired external consultants to help determine the best strategies for teaching that important life skill – writing non-fiction text. In conjunction with the school administration and teacher leaders, the experts incorporated theory, demonstrations, practices, and both peer and expert coaching into the work in the schools. They didn't rely entirely on the expertise of their existing

faculty. They knew that new instructional learning had to be introduced to that faculty. The results were exceptional. Student writing of nonfiction text improved dramatically. It wasn't lack of trust in the faculty, but actually demonstrated a high level of commitment and confidence that the faculty would learn new instructional skills and use them to elevate the learning of students. And indeed that happened.

Skills Iowa Grant Writing Resources

We know that you are always looking for ways to fund projects like Skills Iowa, so we have added a Grant Writing Resources section to our [website](#) . Please note this resource contains grant language for Skills Iowa, lists all the Iowa Gaming Foundation websites and the dates proposals are due, as well as other grant writing tips. We will keep adding resources to this as we become aware of them. We hope this is helpful and would appreciate any suggestions you have to add to it.

Quote

“It’s plain from the research on training that teachers can be wonderful learners. They can master almost any kind of teaching strategy or implement any kind of sensible curriculum if the appropriate conditions are provided. It is also clear that those who criticize the motivation of teachers, worry about their willingness or ability to learn or believe the only way to improve the teaching profession is to change the personnel, are fundamentally wrong. High quality training will give excellent results. Important new learning involves pain, and teachers are well able to withstand the discomfort. In many quarters teachers have been undersold as learners simply because inadequate training has been provided.” -Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers

And Finally...

... it is with this idea – the inclusion of a commitment to robust professional development – that we ask you to read the Governor’s Blueprint, consider where it might lead your school district, and provide the Governor and state policy-makers with feedback on how the Blueprint can support Iowa school districts toward meaningful reform.

If you have any question or ideas, please contact Susie Olesen at Susie.olesen@isfis.net or 641-745-5284.