



# School Improvement Booster

An e-newsletter provided by  
Iowa School Finance Information Services (ISFIS)

November/December 2014: Expectations: Do they matter?

## ISFIS AND INFORMATION

If we all had all of the answers, students would have off-the-chart learning experiences in every classroom every day. While there are magnificent learning experiences going on in Iowa schools, our data tell us we aren't reaching all students. Our goal isn't to cast blame or point fingers. We invite everyone, including our staff here at ISFIS, to examine our beliefs and practices and be sure that what we think about students and what we do offers support as they grow into the healthy, smart adults we know they can become.

A friend committed to school improvement once commented, "If we aren't just a little bit uncomfortable, we aren't learning." Whatever we share, whether it's about testing, curriculum, policy, expectations, and other topics, is offered in the spirit of learning.

## EXPECTATIONS: DO THEY MATTER?

The short answer is, yes, expectations do matter. The longer answer is they matter for everyone – parents, teachers, administrators, community members, and students. While a few fortunate students see and hear high expectations at every turn and receive support to meet those expectations from parents, peers, the school, and other community organizations, that is not the case for all. It is incumbent upon Iowa schools to be a voice of high expectations for all students and provide the supports students need to reach those expectations.

David Leonhardt noted in *The Upshot* (2014), "The phrase 'soft bigotry of low expectations' is inevitably associated with George W. Bush, who used it frequently. But whatever your politics, the idea has undeniable merit: If schools don't expect much from their students, the students are not likely to accomplish much."

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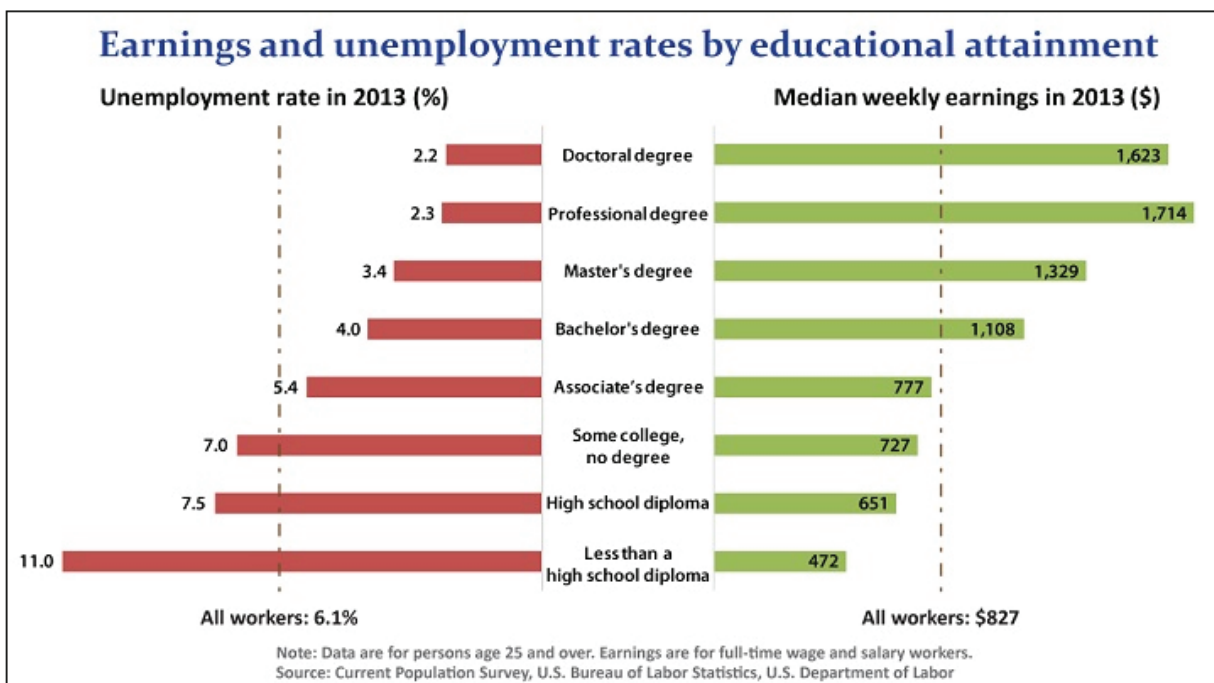


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The Bureau of Labor Statistics from the US Department of Labor offers [this data](#) related to educational attainment. Higher education matters and as an education community, we need to figure out how to more effectively communicate to students the importance of higher education and that it is attainable for virtually all students.



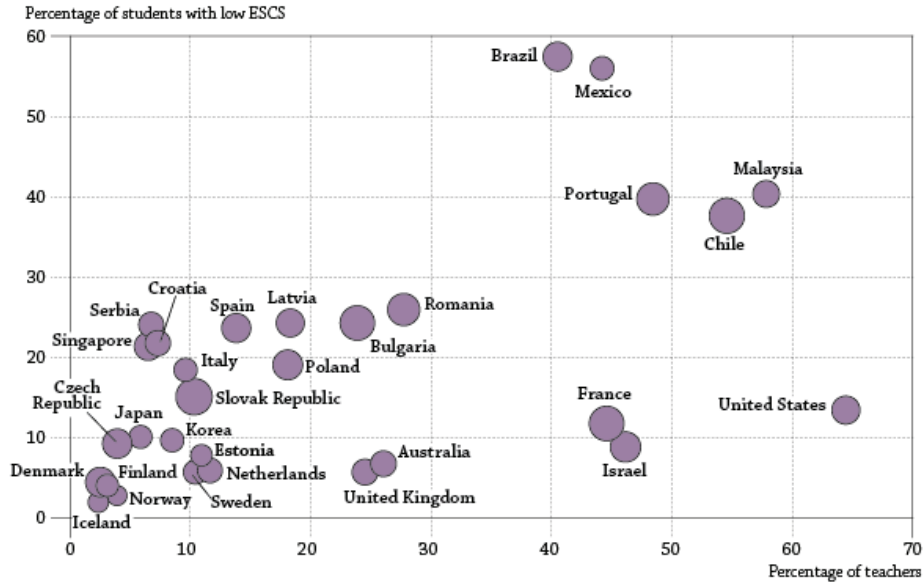
## DO WE HAVE HIGH EXPECTATIONS?

### Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

Andreas Schleicher, director of education and skills research, at OECD found in a [recent study](#) released in July of 2014 that American principals perceive more poverty in their schools than actually exists. “Based on the views of principals, a larger share of children in the United States are ‘socioeconomically disadvantaged’ compared with those in Brazil, Malaysia, Mexico, Romania and various other countries.” Schleicher added that, “he found the results especially worrisome because principals’ perceptions of disadvantage correlated more strongly with student performance than actual disadvantage. That is, low-income students perform particularly poorly on mathematics tests in countries where a large number of principals describe their students as disadvantaged — like the United States.”

On the chart on the next page “the horizontal axis shows the percentage of lower secondary teachers who work in schools where their principal reported that more than 30% of students in their school were from disadvantaged homes. The vertical axis shows the actual percentage of 15-year-old students from disadvantaged homes, measured by PISA’s internationally standardized index that summarizes various indicators of socio-economic disadvantage, including parents’ income and education level, educational resources at home, and other family possessions. In other words, the horizontal axis reflects school principals’ perception of disadvantage by national standards while the vertical axis reflects the prevalence of disadvantage as compared internationally.” On the following chart ESCS represents economic, social and cultural status.

## Social disadvantage



Note: The size of the bubbles is representing the strength of the relationship between mathematics performance and ESCS (Percentage of explained variance in mathematics performance)

## WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY ABOUT HIGH EXPECTATIONS?

### Pygmalion Effect

In 1965 Harvard professor Robert Rosenthal conducted research related to teacher expectations and student performance. He called his study, “[Pygmalion in the Classroom](#).” Students were given what was described as an intelligence test that would identify the 20% of students expected to “spurt” (or grow at an advanced rate) academically and intellectually over the course of the year. Names of these high achievers were randomly chosen, associated with no data whatsoever, and shared with teachers who thought they had been chosen by the test. Students identified to their teachers as “spurters” did grow at higher rates than those students without that designation. These identified students were described by their teachers at the end of the school year as happier, more likely to have happy successful futures, more intellectual, and more curious, among others. There were also some students who experienced increased growth that weren’t identified as potential spurters, but teachers found these students less likeable and less likely to succeed. Rosenthal’s conclusion? “...(W)hen teachers expect students to do well and show intellectual growth, they do; when teachers do not have such expectations, performance and growth are not so encouraged **and may in fact be discouraged in a variety of ways.**” (Tauber, Robert, *Classroom Management: Sound Theory and Effective Practice*, 4th Edition, 2007, Praeger Publishers.) This early study led to additional research about expectations in the classroom- some of which refuted pieces of Rosenthal’s study; other research confirmed it. The important point to be made from this and subsequent research is that expectations matter.

### Carol Dweck, Stanford University

Carol Dweck’s research in 2007 demonstrated that when students are taught that their intelligence is elastic –it can grow and increase - they do better in school. They attack problems and believe they can solve them, thinking they just need to know more to find a resolution. NPR ran an interesting story about that research which you can listen to [here](#). Dweck noted, “If you think about a child who’s coping with an especially challenging task, I don’t think there’s anything better in the world than that child hearing from a parent or from a teacher the words, ‘You’ll get there.’ And that, I think, is the spirit of what this is about.”

## Wallace Foundation

In “[Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning](#)” (2010) researchers for the Wallace Foundation referenced core leadership practices considered essential for successful leaders and identified high expectations for students and teachers as one of them. Conclusions are based on reviews of empirical research and on illustrative original studies carried out in educational contexts. These researchers also relied on a synthesis of evidence about managerial skills, compiled by Yukl (2002). One of the categories is **Setting Directions**. “This category comprises four specific (leadership) practices:

- o Building a shared vision,
- o Fostering the acceptance of group goals,
- o Creating high performance expectations, and
- o Communicating the direction.

Overall, it is a category of practices intended to establish what Fullan (2003) and others call moral purpose, a basic stimulant for the work in question. All of these practices are aimed at bringing a focus to the individual and collective work of staff members in the school or district.”

## Educational Partnership, Inc.: Research into Practice

Robert Williamson from Eastern Michigan University put together this [research brief](#) in 2012 noting the importance of high expectations and identifying some of the research that supports this concept. He notes, “High expectations for students is one of the ‘defining’ characteristics of all comprehensive school reform programs. When teachers have high expectations for students and provide tasks that are engaging and of high interest, students build self-esteem, increase confidence and improve academic performance (Brophy, 2008; 2010). Student confidence is critical because it is linked to student’s willingness to tackle challenging learning activities.” The studies identified in this paper offer information regarding the role of the principal, what high expectations look like, information about expectations and support, and more.

## How can we establish and support high expectations?

There are a myriad of ways to establish high expectations and we know here are so many great examples in Iowa schools. We hope you will share your practices with us so we can share them through this newsletter. Contact Susie Olesen: ([Susie.olesen@isfis.net](mailto:Susie.olesen@isfis.net) or 515-251-5970 x 6).

Below are some of the ways schools establish and support high expectations.

## Characteristics of High Achieving Schools

The state of Washington offers [nine characteristics of high achieving schools](#) and research to back each characteristic.

1. A Clear and Shared Focus
2. High Standards and Expectations for All Students
3. Effective School Leadership
4. High Levels of Collaboration and Communication
5. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessments Aligned with State Standards
6. Frequent Monitoring of Learning and Teaching
7. Focused Professional Development
8. Supportive Learning Environment
9. High Levels of Family and Community Involvement

## **Celebrations: Marzano, *The Art and Science of Teaching***

In his book *The Art and Science of Teaching*, Robert Marzano notes, “Arguably the most basic issue a teacher can consider is what he or she will do to establish and communicate learning goals, track student progress, and celebrate success.” This statement can certainly be considered at the most micro level on a daily basis and a macro level for big events like high school graduation. Celebrations build relationships and recognize hard work and perseverance, and don’t necessarily need to be structured events. They can be as informal as an appreciative smile and a pat on the back or as formal as an elaborate graduation ceremony. Keep in mind that this isn’t an endorsement of concrete rewards every time a student does something positive. Rather it’s encouragement for genuine appreciation of student accomplishment. One graduation recently attended was a celebration not only of the graduating seniors, but also a celebration of education. The elegant program not only listed the order of events for the graduation ceremony, but also identified the 125 or so graduates’ accomplishments, scholarships if they received them, and their post-secondary plans, including the schools they would attend, the military, or jobs they were pursuing. Additionally, all of the teachers from the system, including those from elementary, middle, and high schools, marched in with robes and regalia that indicated their level of educational attainment, providing models for higher learning for the entire community. Faculty degrees and schools attended were also listed in the program. When students went across the stage, their families were asked to stand and be recognized for the commitment and support they’d offered thus far and for that they would offer in the future. While this ceremony took some thought, planning, expense, and time to put together, it is one that the students, parents, and community appreciated and learned from. It recognized students’ past accomplishments and set the stage for the future, as well as highlighting the value of education for all. It was one more way of expressing and celebrating high expectations for this school’s students.

## **Field Trips: Not just for Elementary School**

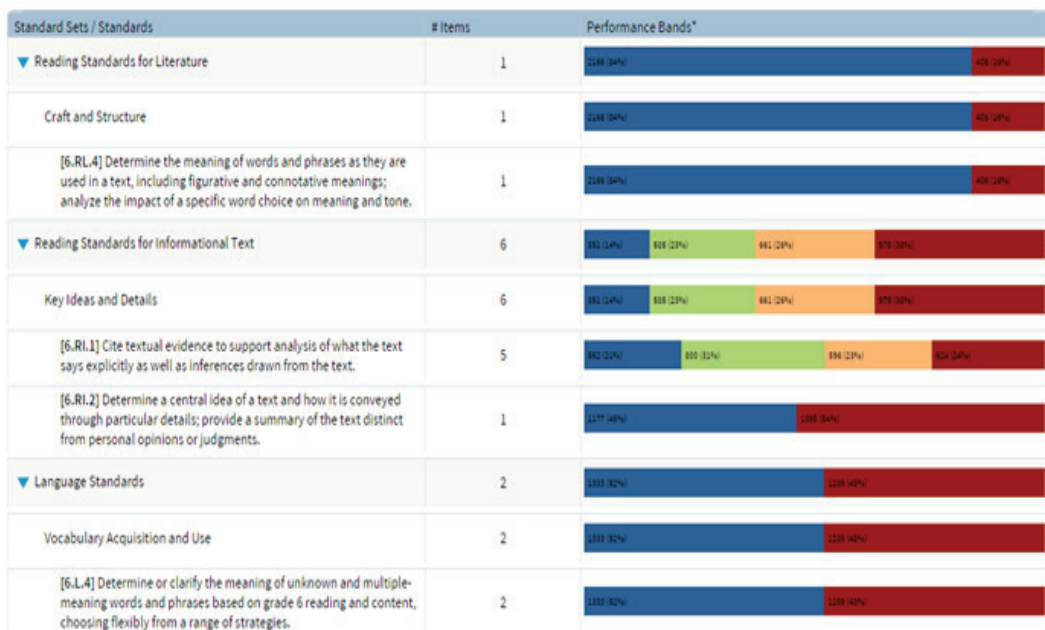
As noted previously in the chart related to earnings and unemployment from the US Department of Labor, high expectations must come into play when students are planning for post-secondary education. Numerous K-12 schools across Iowa support and encourage students’ post-secondary aspirations as they investigate careers throughout their school experience and once in middle and high school through school-sponsored field trips to our state universities, private colleges and universities, community colleges, and other post-secondary institutions. While some families provide these experiences for their children, not all know the visits are part of the college planning experience. Many families don’t have the financial wherewithal to make trips to post-secondary schools.

K-12 schools have the opportunity to prepare for these trips in advance with students through career planning, preparing students for what to look for and what they’ll likely see during the visit, what questions to ask, how to conduct themselves, and more. Additionally, the K-12 school works with the institutions to have a busy day, filled with hearing from post-secondary students and faculty about academics, activities, dorm life, and more. They tour the institution and even hear about costs and financial aid. Back at the home school site after the visits, counselors, teachers, and administrators plan follow up events that include completing the FAFSA, applying to several different schools, and celebrating acceptance. In addition to this preparation work, one Iowa school offers guidance throughout their graduates’ educational careers. Some actually check at the beginning of the school year to see if their graduates actually enroll, leaving nothing to chance. If they did not, they seek these students out and offer assistance. These activities are part of what’s expected by parents and the community as K-12 schools prepare their students for the future.

# SKILLS IOWA CORNER

Skills Iowa is off to a great start. Thousands of students have taken math and reading comprehension benchmarks. More importantly, teachers and administrators have accessed over 7,000 reports over the past three months to determine where their students need to go next in learning. Thanks to all of you for your commitment to assessment for learning.

Here are a couple of reports that you might find interesting. The first one is related to the Skills Iowa October 6th grade reading comprehension benchmark assessment utilizing social studies text given to several thousand 6th graders. Blue exceeds proficient, green is proficient, yellow is approaching proficient, and red is below proficient. This is a look at the overall proficiency for Iowa students who took this assessment. Of course this report can be provided at the teacher level where a click on the colored bar tells you which students are in each performance level for each standard, so you can differentiate and target instruction from there.



And here are average scores from the 6th graders in the project who have taken the 6th grade reading assessments related to informational text on the informational text standards across two different assessments. Looks like many Iowa students may need a bit of work on main idea and summarization.

Standard Sets / Standards	# Items	Skills Iowa (7032)*
▼ Reading Standards for Informational Text	15	70%
Key Ideas and Details	12	68%
[6.RI.1] Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.	10	72%
[6.RI.2] Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.	2	49%
Craft and Structure	3	81%
[6.RI.4] Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings.	2	80%
[6.RI.6] Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.	1	81%

## QUOTES

“Children are not lazy. They may be frustrated, anxious or angry; they may have become disillusioned or defiant, self-critical or pessimistic, and they may lack confidence in their ability. But this is not laziness. The misconception that kids are lazy is one of the most common -- and most destructive -- misunderstandings of children.”

Kenneth Barish, Cornell University

“Simply raising standards in our schools, without giving students the means of reaching them, is a recipe for disaster.”

Anonymous Teacher

“If you expect nothing from anybody, you’re never disappointed.”

Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*

(T)he college degree is becoming the new high school diploma: the new minimum requirement, albeit an expensive one, for getting even the lowest-level job.”

New York Times

“Principals of high-achieving schools are effective in the following areas, among others: safe and orderly school environment; **goals focused on high levels of student learning; high expectations of students**; self-confidence, responsibility, and perseverance; visibility and accessibility; positive and supportive school climate; communication and interaction; interpersonal support; community outreach and involvement; rituals, ceremonies, and other symbolic actions; shared leadership and staff empowerment; instructional leadership; norm of continuous improvement; classroom observations and feedback to teachers; teacher autonomy; support of risk taking; and professional development opportunities and resources.”

Kathleen Cotton

## Activity for Learning Teams

Read this School Improvement Booster in your collaborative teams and together answer some or all of these questions.

1. What do high expectations look like in our school?
2. Which of the nine characteristics of high achieving schools do we have firmly in place? How do we know? What elements are we missing? Do we have a plan to work on the missing characteristics?
3. What supports do we have in place that help students succeed? Are they working for all? If not, what do we do to support the students for whom the safety net isn’t working?
4. Are there students we can identify by name for whom we do not hold high expectations? Who are they? What is our plan to change our expectations for those students?
5. Do we routinely celebrate academic success in our school? How?
6. Do we support kids as they plan for post-secondary education? How? Starting when?
7. Have we communicated our expectations to the community? How? If we haven’t, how can we develop a plan to do so?

*If you have any questions about the School Improvement Booster or suggested future topics,  
please contact Susie Olesen at [susie.olesen@isfis.net](mailto:susie.olesen@isfis.net).*

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