



December 2011 School Improvement Booster: Leadership

This is the last issue of the School Improvement Booster for 2011. We are surprised it's already December! At ISFIS we know the axiom "Time flies when you're having fun!" is the absolute truth. We have had a great year. We know the work you do is critical to Iowa's future and we are honored to contribute to your success in any way we can. We wish you all a restful and joyous holiday season.

Margaret, Larry, Sean, Traci, and Susie

Where are we with the Iowa Core?

We've sensed some signals that educators may be tempted to postpone work on implementation of the [Iowa Core](#), thinking it might change significantly or go away. With state and national uncertainty, given the pace of change and whims of mandates past and the hard work in front of us all, it's certainly tempting to think, "Let's just wait this out."

We suggest another way to look at it. The essential skills and concepts in the Iowa Core, also included in the Common Core discussion at the national level, are critical for students, whether mandated by a higher authority or pursued at the local level. In the meantime, the mandate to implement is in Iowa law and in our calculation, unlikely to be repealed by the 2012 Legislature. We thought now is a good time to review the history of the Core and consider some of the issues you'll face as you implement, with much of this information coming from the Iowa Department of Education (IDE) Website FAQs regarding the Iowa Core:

"I thought the Model Core Curriculum was voluntary. What happened?"

The words "voluntary" and "model" were removed from the legislation establishing the Iowa Core, formerly known as the Model Core Curriculum, on May 1, 2008, when Governor Culver signed Senate File 2216 into Law. SF2216 required districts to develop implementation plans demonstrating full implementation of the Iowa Core for grades 9-12 by July 1, 2012 (that's this summer) and grades K-8 by 2014-15.

Some have wondered how the national standards (The Common Core) fit into all of this.

Here's what the IDE website says: "The Common Core State Standards in Literacy and Mathematics were integrated into the Iowa Core by Iowa State Board of Education action in 2010. All school districts and accredited nonpublic schools are required to fully implement the Iowa Core in grades 9-12 by July 1, 2012 and grades K-8 by the 2014-15 school year."

"Well those dates seem like such a long time in the future - why worry about it now?"

Some things to consider:

Although the Legislature could delay the implementation dates or turn the responsibility of curriculum back to local control, both of these scenarios are HIGHLY UNLIKELY. While there may have been some talk about that in the last election, a couple of factors suggest that there is still commitment to continue:

- 1) Although funding for the DE to support implementation was reduced for the 2011 fiscal year, there was \$1 million appropriated to the DE with the expectation that the Core implementation effort continue.
- 2) Gov. Branstad's Blueprint for Education Reform states: "Iowa took steps in the right direction by mandating the Iowa Core Standards in 2008 and adopting the state-led, voluntary, national Common Core Standards in 2010. Let's strengthen this work to set even higher expectations for all our students and put in place fair measures to improve instruction, recognize excellence, and target help to schools not meeting the bar." That doesn't sound like the Executive Branch is leading an effort to repeal the Core.
- 3) The Iowa Core has undergone a long and careful analysis by curriculum experts and stakeholder groups (local district, AEA, and Department of Education personnel, business and industry, and associations). The IDE website notes, "The vision for the Iowa Core is to ensure the success of each and every student by providing a world-class curriculum. The Iowa Core is designed to improve achievement of all students, preparing them for the world of work and lifelong learning. It identifies essential content and instruction of critical content areas that all students must experience."
- 4) Implementing these expectations and the curriculum required to deliver them will take time and professional development. There's no better time to take the next step than today! Another quote from the IDE website, "Further analysis reveals that the shift from a culture of teaching to a culture of learning would require a change in focus and environment. Content, instruction, and assessment must work together to develop the competencies and habits of mind essential for future success in college, careers, and citizenry in an increasingly complex global society."

Another question that arises in most discussions of the Iowa Core is this, "**How will we assess student progress in the Iowa Core?**" The IDE website says, "Full implementation is accomplished when the district or school is able to provide evidence that an ongoing process is in place to ensure each and every student is learning the essential concepts and skills of the Iowa Core. A school that has fully implemented the Iowa Core is engaged in an ongoing process of data gathering and analysis, decision making, identifying actions, and assessing impact around alignment and professional development which is focused on content, instruction, and assessment. The school is fully engaged in a continuous improvement process that specifically targets improved student learning and performance." Whew! Quite a charge! But we recommend you consider these ideas:

- **In the Governor's Blueprint for Education, there is mention of formative assessment that is web-based. The description fits Skills Iowa to a tee.** Of course not everything can be assessed with multiple choice questions, but some essential concepts and skills can quickly and effectively be demonstrated with such a test. Skills Iowa is easy to use and there has been training in how to use it over time for many schools in the state. Use it to help your school assess the basics in the Iowa Core, preserving your staff's time and intellectual energy for those tougher to assess 21st Century skills.
- The core has integrated these six "universal constructs" as the building blocks for success in the 21st century: critical thinking, complex communication, creativity, collaboration, flexibility, adaptability, productivity and accountability. It will be difficult to assess these constructs and some of the more complex outcomes in the Iowa Core with any of the traditional concepts of testing that we've depending upon in our Iowa schools

for a long time. We think using Skills Iowa frees up teacher and administrator time to imagine and develop the more complex performance-based assessments that must be written and scored by hand.

In conclusion, the Iowa Core contains the challenging content we want all of our students to know and be able to do, regardless of whether the state mandates it. We know Iowa schools have high expectations for their staff and students. From these School Improvement Boosters to our Skills Iowa assessment and tutorial programs, we have resources that can help move your school forward with improved instruction and focus on essential skills and concepts. Let us know what we can do to help.

Free and Wonderful Technology Resources

Teachers are often looking for alternative strategies for teaching complex content. While lecturing isn't all that should happen in any effective classroom, it is a reasonable strategy to use in conjunction with other instructional models. Khan Academy provides free, easily accessible presentations for a multitude of topics from the arts to calculus.

Khan Academy: The [Khan Academy](#) is a non-profit organization funded by grants and donations that provides free educational resources to anyone. It was started by an MIT graduate, Salman Kahn, born and raised in New Orleans, Louisiana. He began tutoring his cousin in math in 2004 and others soon asked for help as well. He decided it would be practical for everyone if he put together tutorials that his friends and family could access on line. His collection of lessons grew into what's known today as the Khan Academy, including a library of over 2700 videos. Below are some examples from the vast offerings available at the Khan Academy website, many of which could supplement classroom instruction.

- **Primaries and Caucuses:** [This approximately 8 minute clip](#) describes the caucus and primary processes in context of the election of the President of the United States. This would be a nice support for students to learn the role of the caucuses and primaries in the electoral process.
- **Credit Crisis:** [This video](#) describes the credit crisis and the loaning of money to various businesses by the federal government.
- **Impressionist Paintings:** [This clip](#) is about the Renoir impressionist painting La Loge.

Leadership and Management :

Management versus leadership – an age old conundrum.

A friend once said, "If the buses crash, the hot lunch sickens the students, and the buildings are falling in, it will be hard to energize the community around learning." The article below supports that view.

What Makes a Good Leader? Harvard Business School's Working Knowledge

Harvard Business School's Deborah Blagg and Susan Young write in *What Makes a Good Leader?*, "Some great managers struggle with change and fail to be great leaders, while a great leader might fail to create a sense of stability in an organization and not measure up as a manager. HBS professor David Thomas points out that 'increasingly, the people who are the

most effective are those who essentially are both managers and leaders." Blagg and Young go on to share two critical elements of leadership:

- Great leaders communicate and they do that in a variety of ways including listening.
- Great leaders tell the hard truths. Those hard truths generate the need for change and improvement.

Check out [this link](#) for more about management and leadership from the Harvard Business School.

Quotes

Much research suggests that the most important factor in improving learning is strong instruction in the classroom. But effective teachers are not lone rangers: Their work is most reliably developed within well-organized schools where they have opportunities to learn with and from colleagues and can contribute to a clear vision and plan of action.

"School principals are the key players who organize these conditions for effective teaching. Not surprisingly, recent studies have shown that school leadership is second only to classroom instruction when it comes to improving student achievement."-Linda Darling-Hammond

A mighty maze! But not without a plan. - Alexander Pope

All assessment is perpetual work in progress. - Linda Suske

Please email or call with any questions you have. As always, we are looking for ways to make this newsletter more useful; if you have any ideas for content or format, let us know.

Thanks and Happy Holidays!

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