



## School Improvement Booster

An e-newsletter provided by

Iowa School Finance Information Services (ISFIS)

February 2013: Supports for Student Learning

This School Improvement Booster is focused on two interconnected and critical components of leading your school to elevated student learning – **Collaborative Learning Teams and Instructional Initiatives.**

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We are constantly adding information to our Facebook and Twitter accounts – politics, finance, school improvement and other interesting “stuff” that strikes our fancy. Our Facebook account can be reached by typing in *Iowa School Finance Information Services -ISFIS* in the Facebook search function. Our Twitter feed is *@ISFISInc*. We invite you to join the fun, “like” us, and repost the feeds that you find interesting.

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

## Collaborative Learning Teams

Schools all over Iowa are working hard to implement collaborative teams, called Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), Data Teams, Peer Coaching Teams, Learning Teams, etc. Working in a collaborative environment is critical to success, and we applaud the current focus on teaming. Research gathered by the Midwest Regional Education Lab (REL) noted several school leadership/principal actions in collaborative team work that boost student learning including distributed leadership, tight agendas within highly structured team meetings, promotion of a shared sense of responsibility for student learning, and the modeling of the use of data to make decisions. *(Cont'd on Page 2)*

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The following action really zeroes in on instructional improvement:

**School leaders provide resources to support evidence-based collaborative inquiry and follow-up support in the classroom** (Blanc et al., 2010; Cosner, 2011; Young, 2006). School leaders provide teachers with resources to support collaboration, such as relevant professional development, lesson plans, curricular materials, and colleagues' expertise. In addition, the principal or a member of the distributed leadership team provides follow-up support for teachers in the classroom and monitors the implementation of instructional practices emerging from collaboration."

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## Instructional Initiatives

Implicit in the paragraph above is the notion of instructional initiatives. Everyone is trying their best, but sometimes, teachers and principals just don't know what to do next to ensure all kids learn the Core to high levels. Think about this. You are asked by your boss to play championship golf starting next year. What would you do? Well, here's what we'd do...

- 1) Identify the parts of our golf game that really need help. (In education, this would involve analyzing data that informs us of our weakest areas.)
- 2) Get help as we figure out how to get started – external voices with exceptional expertise in the game of golf. (In education we would do a literature scan of the best strategies that yield results in our weakest area. We would consult with experts we know at the AEA, in other schools, or even write emails to experts in the field – they generally respond!)
- 3) Get a top-notch coach – one who has a proven record of producing champions on the golf course. While we love to play with someone who's very good, in order to achieve what we've been asked to achieve, we must seek out the very best coach. (Get a consultant who has taught the strategies we want to learn and gotten results. This could be someone from the AEA, the local university, or an external expert, but they must have used the strategy successfully in a classroom setting, not just read about it or gone to a workshop about it.)
- 4) Insist the coach help us understand the theory behind our overall plan – when to use a wedge, how to put together an overall game plan, how to never three putt. (Study the research around the new instructional strategy – when it works, what to expect students to be able to do as a result of the strategy being used in the classroom, etc.)
- 5) Expect multiple demonstrations of what we want to learn from the coach or other experts showing us how to grip or swing the club, chip, putt, etc. (See 15 to 30 demonstrations of a strategy of moderate complexity.)
- 6) Engage in regular practice of our new skill every day – multiple times – with our coach and with our friends. Practice makes perfect. (Engage in 15-30 practices of a strategy of moderate complexity.)
- 7) Talk to the coach and our peers about how it's going. Plan what particular shot we're going to work on. Analyze our scores, our number of puts, how many shots to get to the green. Identify the errors, the successes, see more expert demonstrations. (Look at student work. Plan lessons together. Analyze data. See more demonstrations, etc.)
- 8) Buy the best equipment available – Our grandfather's club may mean something to us emotionally, but research whatever is the state of the art today – based on input from experts. (Buy materials necessary for an effective implementation – books, data systems, math manipulatives, assessment tools, etc.)
- 9) Constantly analyze where we are, using data and information, and identify what needs to be worked on next to improve our game, as the most successful pro golfers do. (Same behavior for teachers and principals)
- 10) Keep a constant eye on where we are going: get a schematic of the golf course, see footage of others playing it so we know where the sand traps and gullies lie in wait. Determine a plan to navigate the course. (In education, that means reviewing the standards and figuring out what might have been omitted in your previous curriculum or lesson plans, assess students to determine if they have already mastered what will be taught today or if they haven't yet master what was taught yesterday, put in place a map of content and instruction and be ready for chipping out of the woods if you go astray.) (Cont'd on Page 3)

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Wouldn't it be remarkable if we used this same process to ensure teachers have the instructional skills they need to teach all kids the Core Curriculum? We do have a similar process embedded in our Iowa Administrative Code – the Iowa Professional Development Model.

We've had successful instructional initiatives in the past in this state – Every Child Reads integrated the strategies of Read Aloud, Talk Aloud, Think Aloud, and the Picture Word Inductive Model and Explicit Instruction; Second Chance Reading; Cognitively Guided Instruction, etc. Schools that had high implementation of those strategies, done with fidelity, using the IPDM, and engaged in the study of implementation to be sure teachers were using them in classroom practice, got positive student learning results. And in many cases, very significant positive student learning results.

So if you have an area in which your school is struggling, talk to your AEA colleagues. They can help you with instructional initiatives. Or find an expert with a proven track record in the area in which you need instructional support. Ask them to help you think through all the pieces and discuss how collaboration and an instructional initiative can support your school improvement work.

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## Skills Iowa Support for Summer Learning

Last summer Skills Iowa provided a class in a local district where teachers received recertification credit. We thought more of you might find this useful, so we are offering these classes this summer at your school sites if you are interested. You are certainly welcome to invite other districts in your area to participate.

- **Skills Iowa Looks at Student Work:** This class would be facilitated by Susan Westlund and Susie Olesen. It would assist schools in using the Skills Iowa data as a stepping off point into a deeper examination of student learning. Additional focus would be on strengthening the implementation of your collaborative teams, helping participants learn how to provide honest and forthright feedback in the collaborative process.
- **Using Skills Iowa to Get the Data You Need:** This class would be facilitated by your trainer and/or Susie Olesen and would help teachers be more familiar with all of the reports available through Skills Iowa and how Skills Iowa can be used to facilitate the work of your collaborative teams.

If you are interested, contact Susie at ISFIS ([susie.olesen@isfis.net](mailto:susie.olesen@isfis.net) or 641-745-5284).

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## Quotes

*“Learning on the job, day after day, is the work.” - Michael Fullan*

*“During the final two weeks of training (at umpire school), our students work simulated game situations in which our staff members role-play as players, managers, and coaches. They are given immediate feedback following each camp game.”- Jim Evans*

*“We had the ball in the right hands. Dan's been there every day, making 200 three-pointers a day all week. That's the one that counted.” - Coach Darrell Burmeister on the importance of practice, when commenting on the game winning three point shot by one of his players during the sub-state tournament basketball game*

***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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