



# School Improvement Booster

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

January 2013: School Safety

## School Improvement Booster: New Format

We are upgrading our School Improvement Booster to a more efficient use of your time coupled with our commitment to connect you with the resources you need to move your school forward. You'll experience a shorter and quicker read, but in keeping with the past, you'll find links to more information. We hope you find them useful. Let us know your needs and ideas so we can provide you the important information you need.

### Find us on Facebook and Twitter!

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.

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

## School Safety

While this topic is always important, recent events caused us to move it front and center. The reading on this topic speaks at length to the importance of people in the school – adults and children - feeling valued. So while safety is a physical issue – seatbelts, rules on the playground, locked doors in schools - it's also an emotional issue. A commitment to treat everyone we work with and meet – students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community – with respect and dignity is so important, yet never quite as easy as we think it should be. The constant effort of self-reflection and learning from others will support our continued progress in Iowa as we craft policies, structures, systems and expectations that help us fulfill our better human natures. We hope you find these resources helpful.

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## Education Week

Recently *Education Week* published their [17th annual Quality Counts](#) report on safety, discipline, and school climate. They noted, “National initiatives to improve schools tend to focus heavily on curriculum, testing, and personnel. But a growing consensus also recognizes that the elements that make up school climate—including peer relationships, students’ sense of safety and security, and the disciplinary policies and practices they confront each day—play a crucial part in laying the groundwork for academic success. Those factors, along with resources and the ability of school staff members to meet students’ needs, are seen as especially important for low-performing schools and at-risk students.” Additionally there is information about discipline more focused on righting wrongs than punishment called “[Restorative Justice](#),” which is gaining steam in both the courts and schools. This publication requires a subscription but some of the articles are free. We suggest you check it out.

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## Iowa Department of Education

The Iowa Department of Education provides an array of [safe schools resources](#) including, among others, a guide to manage threatening situations, a leadership handbook, and safety tips as well as links to other resources. Another page on the DE website also provides [resources](#) including a school self-assessment and threatening situation reporting materials.

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## National Association of School Psychologists

Below is a list of [15 components](#) compiled from the research by the staff at the Yale Child Study Center. These elements characterize a healthy, supportive school climate (Haynes, Emmons, Ben-Avie, & Comer, 1996). As you read each component or discuss them in your leadership team, ask yourself, “What do we do to make sure this is happening in our school?”

- Achievement motivation: Students at the school believe they can learn and are willing to learn.
- Collaborative decision making: Parents, students, and staff are actively involved in the decisions affecting the school.
- Equity and fairness: Students are treated equally regardless of ethnicity, gender, and disability.
- General school climate: There is a positive quality of all interactions and feelings of trust and respect within the school community.
- Order and discipline: Students display appropriate behavior in the school setting.
- Parent involvement: Parents participate frequently in school activities.
- School-community relations: The community is supportive and involved in the life of the school.
- Dedication to student learning: Teachers actively motivate students to learn.
- Staff expectations: Staff expects that students will succeed in school and in life.
- Leadership: The principal effectively guides the direction of the school, including creating a positive climate.
- School building: The physical appearance of the school building reflects respect for the school and community.
- Sharing of resources: All students have equal opportunity to participate in school activities, materials, and equipment.
- Caring and sensitivity: The principal shows consideration for the students, parents, and school staff.
- Student interpersonal relations: There is a high level of caring, respect, and trust among students in the school.
- Student-teacher relations: There is a high level of caring, respect and trust between students and teachers in the school.

## Interesting Apps and Websites

If you have apps or websites you'd like to share, send them to Susie at [susie.olesen@isfis.net](mailto:susie.olesen@isfis.net).

**Mapquest 4 Mobile:** Given the traveling I do around our great state, I've tried many navigation apps, but I prefer Mapquest. It's as useful on my iPhone (also available for Android devices) as it is on my computer. Gives voice directions and is easy to operate.

**Public Broadcasting System:** We don't even know where to start describing what's available at the [PBS website](#). There are free videos about history, current events, and news stories. A plethora of content is available for classroom use, as well as just plain old learning for us adults.

**Newseum:** [The Newseum in Washington, D.C.](#) is described this way. "The Newseum — a 250,000-square-foot museum of news — offers visitors an experience that blends five centuries of news history with up-to-the-second technology and hands-on exhibits." Michael Gartner of Iowa is on the board of directors. Their website also has a [digital classroom feature](#), providing lesson plans and many other resources.

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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

*The safety of the people shall be the highest law.* - Marcus Tuillius Cicero

*"I speak to everyone in the same way, whether he is the garbage man or the president of the university."* - Albert Einstein

*"I can win an argument on any topic, against any opponent. People know this, and steer clear of me at parties. Often, as a sign of their great respect, they don't even invite me."* - Dave Barry

***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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