



School Improvement Booster

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

June 2013: 36 Hours of Collaboration

New Education Reform Bill

The Legislature adjourned Thursday, May 23, 2013, having passed a significant education reform bill, which Governor Branstad signed into law on June 3. ISFIS has put together a summary of the bill, [HF215 Conference Committee Legislative Summary](#), which we invite you to read. This document includes a thorough explanation of the legislation and implementation timeline template to help local leaders think about next steps. However, please keep in mind there is much work to be done before we know how this legislation will unfold. Administrative rules have to be written and processes determined by the State Board of Education and the Department of Education. Significant guidance will come forward. Commissions and Task Forces have work to do in setting criteria and evaluating systems. This is a good time to be paying attention and learning before being tasked with implementation. Our annual [ISFIS Conference on June 20th](#), will feature Dr. Ryan Wise, recent Ph.D. recipient from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Dr. Wise is the Director of Strategic Initiatives, Iowa DE, and one of the key architects of the teacher leadership provisions of the Governor’s education reform legislation, as well as the facilitator of the Teacher Leadership and Compensation Task Force. He will share significant information and insight into the work ahead of all of us. We invite you to attend.

2013 ISFIS Conference

Join us on Thursday, June 20th at the West Des Moines Marriott for the 3rd annual ISFIS Conference. [Click here for more information](#) or [click here to register](#).

36 Hours of Collaboration


During the 2011-12 Legislative Biennium, Peer Review and Collaboration were added to Iowa’s teacher quality and professional development expectations. Many districts are just beginning to implement these requirements. Here is some just-in-time information about why collaboration is important and considerations for the kind of structure and practice it takes for collaboration to benefit student learning. *(cont’d on Page 2)*

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Iowa Code 284.6 (8) sets the expectation for 36 hours of time:

8. For each year in which a school district receives funds calculated and paid to school districts for professional development pursuant to section 257.10, subsection 10, or section 257.37A, subsection 2, the school district shall create quality professional development opportunities. Not less than thirty-six hours in the school calendar, held outside of the minimum school day, shall be set aside during nonpreparation time or designated professional development time to allow practitioners to collaborate with each other to deliver educational programs and assess student learning, or to engage in peer review pursuant to section 284.8, subsection 1.

In addition to the 36-hour minimum, the following language on peer review squarely places the focus on improving instruction rather than on evaluation.

Iowa Code 284.8 (1)

284.8 Performance review requirements for teachers — peer group reviews.

1. A school district shall provide for an annual review of each teacher's performance for purposes of assisting teachers in making continuous improvement, documenting continued competence in the Iowa teaching standards, identifying teachers in need of improvement, or to determine whether the teacher's practice meets school district expectations for career advancement in accordance with section 284.7. The review shall include, at minimum, classroom observation of the teacher, the teacher's progress, and implementation of the teacher's individual professional development plan, subject to the level of resources provided to implement the plan; and shall include supporting documentation from parents, students, and other teachers. ***The first and second year of review shall be conducted by a peer group of teachers. The peer group shall review all of the peer group members. Peer group reviews shall be formative and shall be conducted on an informal, collaborative basis that is focused on assisting each peer group member in achieving the goals of the teacher's individual professional development plan. Peer group reviews shall not be the basis for recommending that a teacher participate in an intensive assistance program, and shall not be used to determine the compensation, promotion, layoff, or termination of a teacher, or any other determination affecting a teacher's employment status.*** However, as a result of a peer group review, a teacher may elect to participate in an intensive assistance program. Members of the peer group shall be reviewed every third year by at least one evaluator certified in accordance with section 284.10.

While some of the language in Iowa Code 284.6(8) and 284.8(1) was new last year, collaboration has been around in Iowa for some time. It goes by many names – peer coaching, data teams, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and learning teams, to name a few. In the most effective collaborative environments, teachers work together in formal structures to improve instructional practice to increase student learning.

Carrie Leanna, Michael Fullan, and Andy Hargreaves Make the Case for Collaboration

Carrie Leanna from the University of Pittsburgh shares her research in “[The Missing Link in School Reform](#).” She notes the first place teachers go for help is to their colleagues. Her research indicated that human capital (instructional skill) and social capital (professional relationships with colleagues) are both important in student success. “We found that the students of high-ability teachers outperformed those of low-ability teachers, as proponents of human capital approaches to school improvement would predict. More significant were the interactions between human and social capital.

Students whose teachers were more able (high human capital) and also had stronger ties with their peers (strong social capital) showed the highest gains in math achievement. Conversely, students of teachers with lower teaching ability (low human capital) and weaker ties with their peers (weak social capital) showed the lowest achievement gains. We also found that even low-ability teachers can perform as well as teachers of average ability if they have strong social capital. Strong social capital can go a long way toward offsetting any disadvantages students face when their teachers have low human capital.” (cont'd on Page 3)

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Dr. Leanna notes that policymakers must invest not only in human capital, but also in social capital, an effort that would enhance collaboration and information sharing among teachers.

Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves, in their book *Professional Capital*, add decisional capital to the mix. They suggest that teachers are faced with a myriad of complex decisions every day and those decisions highly impact the learning of their students. The best decisions are made when highly skilled teachers work together in well-functioning collaborative teams to make effective instructional decisions. Put those three together and Fullan and Hargreaves identify this triad as Professional Capital. Read the quote below with your leadership team and then answer these questions: What are the core principles currently operating in your school? What should they be? What are the commitments and capabilities you want all staff to have? How are you building collective responsibility? How do you define the greater good? What gets in the way of the greater good? How do you overcome those obstacles? This conversation will help you extend your collaborative culture and make the best possible use of the 36 hours and peer review mandates.

“The core principles that draw on and build professional capital in schools are the same as those that cultivate professional capital through an entire system... They are about developing your commitments and capabilities, pushing and pulling your peers, exercising collective responsibility together and collaborating with your competitors across the whole system for the greater good that transcends us all.”

Hargreaves, Andy and Fullan, Michael; *Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School*; Teachers' College Press, 2012. (p. 146)

A Case Study: One School's Success in Collaboration

High poverty Jacob Hiatt Magnet Elementary School in Worcester, Massachusetts, implemented a structured, collaborative approach to student learning that yielded elevated results. Their model includes several tiers of collaborative meetings, including weekly 60 minute sessions, Instructional Rounds and time to prepare for and reflect on that process, professional development, monthly assessment meetings, and afterschool staff meetings 2 or 3 times monthly. Professional development and building the instructional repertoire of teachers was a critical part of their school improvement work. We were reminded of Mike Schmoker's quote about the importance of building professional knowledge. “In a research-poor context, isolated experience replaces professional knowledge as the dominant influence on how teachers teach.” This quote reminds us that sharing what we currently know isn't enough – we have to constantly tend to building professional knowledge, sometimes through external experts.

The information from Worcester also suggests these elements must be present for collaboration to be successful:

- Sufficient time provided for teachers to discuss student learning needs and share, review, and provide feedback on instructional practices that address these needs.
- Collaboration operated as a mechanism for teachers to improve instruction and build expertise.
- Collaboration seen by district and school leadership as the primary vehicle for supporting improved instruction and student performance.
- Collaboration as part of a coherent school improvement plan and structured with clearly mapped goals and objectives.

[This Power Point presentation](#) has wonderful nuggets of support as schools work to improve upon their collaborative environments – both conceptual ideas and nuts and bolts information. Schools leaders and instructional teams may want to review the PPT together and do some internal inventory and soul searching of practice in the district/building. What does our collaboration look like? Do we focus on student learning, work toward improving instruction and have clearly structured team meetings with goals and objectives?

Toledo Model for Peer Assistance and Review

The Harvard Graduate School of Education shares [A User's Guide to Peer Assistance and Review](#). Peer Review is one of the activities for which the 36 hours of collaboration legislated in 2011 could be used. The Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program described in this manual is focused primarily on new and underperforming teachers and was first implemented in Toledo, Ohio, in the 1980s. The User's Guide notes, "PAR's mentoring component helps beginning teachers succeed and, thus, increases retention. PAR also makes it possible to help ineffective tenured teachers improve or to dismiss them without undue delay and cost because of the program's clear assessment process and the labor-management collaboration that underpins it. This process of selective retention can lead to a stronger teaching force and promote an organizational culture focused on sound teaching practice. Union leaders say that the program professionalizes teaching by making teachers responsible for mentoring and evaluating their peers. With its specialized roles for Consulting Teachers (CTs), PAR also has the potential to differentiate the work and career opportunities of teachers." As your district considers participation in the education reform Framework, Instructional Coach or Comparable System models of teacher leadership, lean on this research base and lessons learned from others to define a successful teacher support and leadership system focused on improving instruction. Even though Iowa's peer review has differences, such as its distinct separation from the evaluation process, much of the best practice of supporting other teachers in developing their instructional skills will apply.

Research on the Impact of Collaboration on Student Learning

In the 2008 "[A review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning](#)," Vecsio, Ross, and Adams present an overview of the characteristics of professional learning communities (PLCs) and review 10 American studies and one English study on the impact of PLCs on teaching practices and student learning. "Although, few studies move beyond self-reports of positive impact, a small number of empirical studies explore the impact on teaching practice and student learning. The collective results of these studies suggest that well-developed PLCs have positive impact on both teaching practice and student achievement. Implications of this research and suggestions for next steps in the efforts to document the impact of PLCs on teaching and learning are included."

Skills Iowa Corner

Smarter Balanced and Skills Iowa

We couldn't help but notice how the Skills Tutor lessons employ the very skills required for success on Smarter Balanced Assessments. Beyond the multiple choice questions embedded in Smarter Balanced Assessments, kids will also have to drag and drop, select and highlight text that answers a question, draw geometric and other figures, and choose more than one correct answer, among others. All of these challenging (and engaging) response modes that demand more of students are already available to schools in the Skills Iowa Program. Best of all, students can practice the test-taking skills in the very areas that Assessment Center helps teachers determine they need more work. Contact Susie Olesen if you'd like a demonstration of how Skills Iowa can support teachers and students as we elevate expectations in the common core. (Susie@skillsiowa.org or 641-745-5284)

Skills Iowa Get-Togethers

We were pleased recently to visit Waterloo to share data and hear about their experience and progress with Skills Iowa. They have seen exceptional growth in several schools and it so happens that those are among the schools which use the Skills Iowa data most frequently. It's not a surprise. From the monthly reading benchmarks, three annual math benchmarks, and teacher made assessments, they are alerted through standards based reports, to problem areas, long before the state test is taken. The schools have responded to those needs instructionally and it has made a difference in the academic performance of their students. Kudos to the hard working folks in Waterloo. (*cont'd on Page 5*)

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Additionally, we were pleased to meet with educators from several schools who chose to participate in our Users' Group Meeting on June 6th in Des Moines. The ideas educators shared were smart, time saving, creative, and focused on student learning. We will highlight one of these uses every month, and will start with Jen Sigrist of Van Meter.

Van Meter uses Skills Iowa for implementation of all three assessment types - formative, interim/benchmark, and summative. Teachers use the data formatively as they make their own assessments for end-of-unit tests or a quick check on a concept. All students take the benchmark assessments provided by Skills Iowa. Teachers analyze that data to find gaps in curriculum and concepts and skills to reteach. They are never surprised at Iowa Assessment results because they have dissected the regularly administered benchmarks in math and reading, and they adjust their instruction along the way. Additionally, along with other data sources, Van Meter determines in what level of math students should be placed based on performance, not chronological age. The district uses the Skills Iowa benchmark data for their second assessment, so it is also used summatively. Using Skills Iowa for the second assessment provides the compliance tool they need, but they are thinking way beyond compliance. Congrats to the fine staff at Van Meter Schools.

Jen shared a sample of a portable data wall used by their collaborative teams. Jen laminates construction paper in the colors Assessment Center uses to represent achievement levels: blue for exceeding proficient, green for proficient, yellow for approaching proficient, and red for below proficient. She makes business cards with student pictures on them for each data team, putting temporary sticky glue on the back of each card, so the pictures can be moved around. These cards are placed on the data wall during data team meetings in the achievement level in which the student is performing as the team meets. The portable data wall and student cards provide not only a useful organizer for flexible group lesson planning, but also a visual reminder of the purpose of Van Meter's important collaborative work. Jen notes, "Seeing pictures of students, not just names, reminds us these are real kids for whom we are responsible."



Apps and Websites

Poetry from the Poetry Foundation

This app allows you to search for poetry by line and by topic, plus you can save your favorites. It's free and recommended for students 12 and up. Available in both Android and Apple formats. We found it in eSchool News in the article [New: 10 of the best Android and Apple apps for Education in 2013](#).

Smarter Balanced Sample Items

Smarter Balanced has released [sample questions](#). Iowa is one of the 43 states within the Smarter Balanced Consortium and may implement these assessments. That decision will likely follow consideration by the newly legislated Assessment Task Force charged in HF 215 with reviewing and making recommendations for the statewide assessment of student progress on core academic indicators. Their report is due by Jan. 1, 2015, so check out the sample questions in the meantime. Many Iowa districts are already participating in piloting the Smarter Balanced assessments. Note the rigor of the questions and the content. Talk about what support teachers will need in their collaborative teams to deliver the stepped-up level of instruction needed for all students to succeed. *(cont'd on Page 6)*

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Free Videos Made by Students Explaining Various Concepts

Free videos are available at this website called [Next Vista for Learning](#). Many are made by students explaining various concepts from line dancing to dividing fractions.

What You Can Learn about Public Speaking from Commencement Addresses

Fortune Magazine focuses on [what you can learn about public speaking from commencement addresses](#). The real treat at this site is a video of Steve Jobs' commencement address at Stanford several years ago.

Quotes

“My work shows that people do not thrive in an environment in which they feel judged, but they do thrive in an environment that they feel is interested in their development.” - Carol Dweck

“Collaboration, it turns out, is not a gift from the gods but a skill that requires effort and practice.” - Doug Reeves

“Collaboration allows teachers to capture each other's fund of collective intelligence.” - Mike Schmoker

“We must all hang together, or assuredly, we shall all hang separately.” - Benjamin Franklin

“The way a team plays as a whole determines its success. You may have the greatest bunch of individual stars in the world, but if they don't play together, the club won't be worth a dime.” - Babe Ruth

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

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