



School Improvement Booster

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

September 2012: Improving Instruction

Keith Leithwood, Karen Seashore Louis, Stephen Anderson, and Kyla Wahlstrom, supported by the Wallace Foundation, produced two landmark studies about school leadership, the first in 2004, [How Leadership Influences Student Learning](#) and a second in 2010, [Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning](#). In the second study they write, “In developing a starting point for this six-year study, we claimed, based on a preliminary view of the research, *that leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning. After six additional years of research, we are even more confident about this claim.*” In other words, SCHOOL LEADERS MATTER.

Just this year, 2012, the Wallace Foundation released the first in a series of reports called The Wallace Perspective in which they looked at their work in leadership and identified five leadership practices that they find as central to effective school leadership.

1. Shaping a vision of academic success for all students, one based on high standards;
2. Creating a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit, and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail;
3. Cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their part in realizing the school vision;
4. **Improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn at their utmost; and**
5. Managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement.

This issue is focused on **improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn at their utmost.** (The Wallace Perspective, 2012) Improved instruction depends on a core commitment to professional development and a culture of learning, two primary responsibilities of school leaders and areas where we need to shore up our expertise.

Responsibility for Improving Instruction from Many Role Groups

While there are many areas of leadership that are important and come with learning expectations, no area is richer with content and process or more important than improving instruction. All levels of the system must tackle learning to improve instruction. Below are some of the tasks and actions in which various groups in the school must engage, but it is by no means an exhaustive list.

School board members must:

- Communicate to the community and staff that it is possible for virtually all students to learn well, and it is through effective instruction, a collaborative learning culture which includes a robust professional development effort; connections to home, and strong leadership that we can and will make this happen.

(cont'd on page 2)

IN THIS ISSUE:

School Leadership: Part IV - Improving Instruction.....	1
Responsibility for Improving Instruction.....	1-2
The Iowa Professional Development Model.....	3
Scenario for Improving Instruction.....	3-5
Stephanie Hirsch on Professional Development.....	5
Next Steps.....	5
Quotes.....	5
Grant Opportunity.....	6

(cont'd from Page 1)

- Learn and understand what it takes to improve and change instruction together at the board table.
- Allocate and prioritize the adequate resources necessary to support instructional improvement.
- Set goals and expectations with input from the superintendent and other staff members for instructional initiatives at the board table.
- Provide oversight for instructional initiatives through reports and conversations with staff at the board table.
- Communicate positively about initiatives in response to community concerns.

The superintendent must:

- Support the board's learning of their advocacy, vision, oversight and support roles in this critical work.
- Communicate to the community and staff that it is possible for virtually all students to learn well, and it is through effective instruction; a collaborative, learning culture which includes a robust professional development effort; connections to home, and strong leadership, that we can and will make this happen.
- Share why it is the responsibility of the district to engage in building the skills of the teachers.
- Explain the issues related to an effective professional development system – time, external support, leadership, blips along the way, etc.
- Develop adequate budgets and recommend a prioritized resource allocation to the board.
- Continuously monitor the progress of instructional initiatives.
- Establish expectations and provide support to principals as they lead staff through this work.

Central office personnel must:

- Be fully cognizant of the time and professional expertise necessary to implement the Iowa Professional Development Model.
- Participate in selection of initiatives to ensure most effective are chosen based on data and information..
- Assist with school leadership teams as they identify their particular focus through the use of data and choose the initiative that best suits the needs of the school.
- Fully participate in the instructional initiatives, so there is clarity about the expectations and needs associated with the initiatives.
- Continuously monitor the progress of instructional initiatives, both implementation and student response to new instruction.
- Ensure building leaders are adequately trained and supported with the skills they will need to support implementation of professional development initiatives.
- Ensure there is adequate time and support at the building level to well implement instructional initiatives.

Principals and teachers must:

- Select research-based instructional initiatives for approval by policy makers based on student need.
- Monitor implementation of the initiative and changes in student learning related to implementation and improved instruction.

Principals must:

- Establish the expectation that school is for all students, which elevates staff expectations for all. (Learn more about this concept at [National Public Radio's Teachers' Expectations Can Influence How Students Perform](#)).
- Set expectations and provide support to instructional staff in the implementation of an instructional initiative.
- Participate fully in the instructional initiatives.

Teachers must:

- Engage fully in the instructional initiatives.
- Improve instruction so more students have access to learning.
- Constantly learn and model that learning for students.

The Iowa Professional Development Model

In many schools this focus on improving instruction is implemented through use of learning teams, often called study teams, professional learning communities (PLCs) or Data Teams, among others. Learning teams are excellent vehicles for teachers to address common problems, look at data, plan lessons together, support each other, etc., but these structures alone are not enough. Until all students are learning well, teachers need instructional repertoires beefed up. We've seen that done best by commitment to instructional initiatives delivered through the [Iowa Professional Development Model](#).

Experts Beverly Showers and Deb Hansen share information about the [Iowa Professional Development Model](#). When you get to the web page with the videos, view the ones on design and collaboration. (*cont'd on Page 3*)

Theory: This professional development (PD) element helps everyone understand why the staff is engaged in learning the new strategy or model, how it works, and what can be expected in terms of student learning from implementing it into classroom practice.

Collaboration/Coaching: In this element of the model educators are working together to plan lessons integrating the new strategy or model into their instruction. The purpose of this process is to ensure implementation into classroom instructional practice.

Practices: The practices must begin happening immediately after seeing the first demonstrations so the learners don't forget what the strategy or model looks like. The amount of demonstrations and practices depends on the complexity of what is being learned and how adjacent it is to current instructional practice being used by the teacher. If it's somewhat familiar, it may require fewer demonstrations and practices. If the new strategy or model isn't similar to what the teacher is currently doing, it will take more demonstrations and practices.

Demonstrations: This PD element focuses on educators viewing live or taped demonstrations of the new strategy or model being learned. Some of these demonstrations should be implemented with children, but watching demonstrations without children present is also okay. Demonstrations serve the purpose of the educators seeing what they are expected to do, what the strategy or model looks like.

Full Implementation is dependent on thorough professional development: Research shows the importance of using the entire professional development model, including feedback and coaching, in order for implementation to reach accurate use in the classroom. Source: *The Coaching of Teaching*, by Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers, *Educational Leadership*, October 1982:

Type of Training Provides	Skills Development	Accurate Use in Class
Theory/Knowledge	5%	0-5%
Theory/Modeling	50%	5%
Theory/Modeling/Practice/ Feedback	90%	5%
Theory/Modeling/Practice/ Feedback/Coaching	90%	75-90%

Scenario for Improving Instruction Utilizing the Iowa Professional Development Model

The staff at Good Place Middle School is organized for success. They have grade-level learning teams that meet at least weekly. The groups examine several kinds of student learning data at their meetings – state test data, benchmark data, student writing samples and other student-produced work. From that data, the group identifies student learning deficiencies and develops plans to address deficiencies.

The Good Place Middle School 7th grade learning team's data indicates students fall short in the areas of math problem solving as well as reading and writing informational text (all in the Iowa Core Curriculum.) (*cont'd on Page 4*)

(cont'd from Page 3)

This is a lot to take on all at once, so the team decides to take on math problem solving and writing informational text with the hope the focus on writing will enhance students' performance in reading informational text. The team studies research to get ideas about how they might address this content, searching for best practice instruction. The team sets targets for improvement and then works to meet them. They plan lessons, integrating what they've learned from the research into those lessons. They examine student response to the lessons, all in the identified areas. While there is some progress being made toward the targets, students are not improving at the rate the learning team predicted. The team realizes they need outside expert help.

The principal, Jane Smith, regularly attends the learning team meetings. She is aware that 6th and 8th grade students are experiencing similar learning needs. Additionally, each grade level learning team is represented on the building level leadership team, comprised of Ms. Smith, teachers, AEA personnel and occasionally attended by Mr. Jacobs, the superintendent. The leadership team members have also noticed the common areas of concern – math problem solving and reading and writing informational text. Together they realize the teachers may not possess the instructional skills in these areas necessary to raise achievement to acceptable levels. No one is upset. They see the improvement of instructional skills as part of the ongoing responsibility of the school district, work that must be tackled, just as other businesses must provide ongoing learning for their employees to meet new challenges. Together they begin to formulate plans to address the instructional deficits. They know that until all of their students are learning well, instructional staff must continue to add instructional skills to their teaching repertoires.

The staff at this school understands the value of and is committed to the Iowa Professional Development Model. They know that for teachers to gain executive control of new instructional strategies and models, they must engage in professional development that integrates theory, demonstration, practice and collaboration/coaching into the professional development initiatives. The AEA consultant notes there is a math problem solving initiative currently being offered through the AEA, utilizing the Iowa Professional Development Model. She shares the research used to develop the instructional strategies teachers are learning in this initiative. The leadership team agrees that the math teachers could beef up their instructional skills in math problem solving through participation. This is good news to Ms. Smith since she wondered how on earth she would pay for expert intervention for the three math teachers at the middle school as well as fund a writing initiative for other staff members. Ms. Smith meets with the math teachers and lays out her plan for their instructional development. She explains to the math teachers (all well aware of their situation), she would like to reconfigure the learning teams so that all of the math teachers are on the same team. That will give them more time together to solve problems directly related to math. They are very pleased with this reconfiguration. Additionally, she tells them about the PD available through the AEA and she would like to enroll them in that PD. At first they resist the PD because they don't want to be out of their classrooms. Ms. Smith stresses the need for ongoing learning and makes it very clear the issue at stake is student learning. She knows they are committed to that. They are and agree this will be time well spent. They will continue their collaborative team work back in the district, integrating the new math instruction into the classrooms and receiving support from their colleagues through the learning team meetings.

The "writing informational text" instructional skill development affects most other teachers in the building. The state, through the AEA, has sponsored a professional development initiative in writing, using the Iowa Professional Development Model. The leadership team will study this initiative and the data that has occurred as a result of its implementation and eventually make a decision about whether to work with the AEA to offer the initiative locally.

Once the initiatives have been chosen and begun, and targets established, the learning teams will continue to meet to study the theory behind the new instructional skills they are learning, plan lessons together integrating the new instruction into the lessons, rehearse the new instruction, observe each other in classrooms implementing the new instruction, examine student work, look at other assessment data, and monitor implementation of the initiatives. Additionally the school-wide leadership team brought together by Ms. Smith will continue to meet and guide the implementation of the initiatives. They will keep the school board in the loop regarding the progress of the initiatives. The need for learning teams doesn't diminish because of participation in an external professional development initiative but rather increases.

(cont'd on Page 5)

(cont'd from Page 4)

This brief scenario provides a glimpse of process and content that could improve instruction, if well implemented. All along the way, the implementation of the initiatives is studied and tweaked to make sure changes are effective.

More Scenarios by Bruce Joyce and Emily Calhoun

This earlier publication (1996), *Learning Experiences in School Renewal*, edited by Bruce Joyce and Emily Calhoun provides several more scenarios that provide a picture of what effective instructional initiatives could look like.

Stephanie Hirsch Writes about Professional Development

In *Building Professional Development to Support New Student Assessment Systems*, Stephanie Hirsch outlines the components of effective professional development:

- Collective responsibility for student success and ensuring best practices move from classroom to classroom and school to school.
 - Time set aside for consistent and ongoing learning, collaboration, and problem solving with colleagues.
 - Clear and measurable goals for student and educator learning identified from an analysis of data.
 - Research-based content as a focus for educator learning.
 - Intensive, sustained, and, when appropriate, individualized opportunities to develop deeper content or pedagogical skills.
 - Classroom-based follow-up and support for implementation of new knowledge and skills.
 - New roles for teacher leaders as facilitators, coaches, mentors, and more.
 - External expertise tapped from universities, agencies, and other organizations when expertise does not reside within the school.
-

Next Steps

Use these scenarios in a leadership team meeting and discuss how much your building/district's current practice looks like this scenario. In what ways do your staff and leadership excel in understanding the Iowa Professional Development Model? What key pieces are missing?

Quotes

“What distinguishes the education practices of the world’s highest-performing school systems is their focus on teachers. The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers.” - Barber and Mourshed (2007)

“The purpose of staff development is not just to implement instructional innovations; its central purpose is to build strong collaborative work cultures that will develop the long term capacity for change.”
- Michael Fullan

“...(T)he training research affirms that teachers are capable learners and are able to master a wide range of curricular and instructional strategies and to use them effectively in the classroom.” - Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers

Grant Opportunity

It is time to write for renewal and new 21st Century Community Learning Center grants. School districts utilizing Skills Iowa, now aligned to the Common Core in mathematics and English-language arts, may choose to include Skills Iowa in the after school program strategy to improve student learning. School leaders interested in finding out more about Skills Iowa, please contact Susie Olesen at susie.olesen@isfis.net or 641-745-5284.

The After School Alliance writes:

“Applications are now being accepted for 21st Century Community Learning Center (21CCLC) grants. Just over \$5.7 million is available for applications. The intent of the 21CCLC funds is to enable communities to design and implement effective out-of-school programs that will result in improved student achievement, and be enhanced by and sustained through community partnerships beyond the term of the grant. Applications for new grants are due December 7, 2012. Applications for continuing grants are due November 30, 2012. For more information, see the Request for Applications. If you are interested in applying, you must submit a Letter of Intent no later than November 9 by completing an online survey. Visit the survey at [here](#). More information about the grant can be found at the [Department of Education website](#).

They note there three regional application workshops:

Council Bluffs - Friday, October 26

Green Hills AEA (Halverson Center for Education), Jim Blietz Room
24997 Highway 92, Council Bluffs, IA. 51502

Des Moines - Monday, October 29

West Des Moines Learning Resource Center, Community Room
3550 Mills Civic Parkway, West Des Moines, IA 50265

Cedar Rapids - Thursday, November 1

Grant Wood AEA
4401 Sixth Street SW, Cedar Rapids, IA 52404

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

Iowa School Finance Information Services | 4685 Merle Hay Road, Suite 209 | Des Moines, IA 50322 | www.isfis.net