



# THE BEACON

SUPPORTING HIGH ACHIEVEMENT FOR ALL CHILDREN THROUGH POLICY RESEARCH

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## IN PURSUIT OF HIGHLY QUALIFIED SCHOOL BOARDS A NATIONAL SURVEY OF SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS, BOARD PRESIDENTS AND SUPERINTENDENTS



ISBF/IASB are partnering with the National School Boards Association (NSBA), the Fordham Institute and the Wallace Foundation to conduct a national survey of school board members and superintendents. This survey will be the

first effort of its kind made to understand the attitudes and actions of school boards as they pertain to improving student achievement. The last national survey of school boards was conducted by NSBA and published in 2002, but only reported on the characteristics of school board members and their perceptions of the challenges they face. This survey will expand upon those previous areas but will include many more areas relevant to school governance than have ever been explored on a large scale before. *Turn to page 2 in this publication for examples of questions board members and superintendents will be asked.*

## QWEST, ISBF AWARD \$46,000 IN TECHNOLOGY GRANTS

The Iowa School Boards Foundation would like to thank the Qwest Foundation for making the third year of the Teachers and Technology grant program possible. This year, a panel evaluated nearly 70 grant proposals from all across Iowa and chose teachers from five districts to share \$46,000 in grants.

The Qwest Teachers and Technology grant program recognizes and rewards public school teachers who use innovative technology in the classroom to improve the educational experience for students. ISBF and Qwest staff believe this year's recipients are going above and beyond to do just that.

### Congratulations to the 2009 Winners:



**Des Moines Public Schools, Perkins Academy (Elementary): \$2,000**  
*Engineering: Hands-On Math and Physics*  
Teacher Zachry Christensen will launch an engineering project that provides students with an authentic application of science and mathematics through bridge engineering.

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## LETTER FROM ISBF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MARY DELAGARDELLE

Dear Friends of ISBF,

We would like to thank you for your continuing support of the Iowa School Boards Foundation and provide some updates about the work you have made possible. During the 2008-09 school year, foundation staff have been conducting research, disseminating research and information to educational leaders, and supporting the use of research in Iowa schools. We have been busy:

- supporting statewide efforts to ensure all children experience a quality early education.
- publishing numerous research briefs to support district decision-making related to improving student learning.
- supporting district efforts to improve the connection between the school, family and community.
- sharing research about board/superintendent leadership for improving student learning.
- partnering with NSBA, the Fordham Institute and the Wallace Foundation to launch a nationwide survey of board members.
- expanding the Lighthouse research through a second cohort of states participating in the project. These state partners are helping us field test a model of board development across the country.

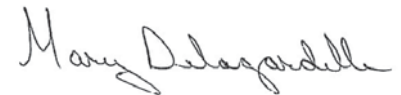
- completing a thorough review of the Iowa Core Curriculum that will become a significant part of the information shared during the 2009 IASB District Meetings.



The positive effects of these efforts are having a significant impact on district and board leadership for improving student learning.

As we move forward into the current fiscal year, we will continue to support educational leaders with objective and reliable information about what matters most for improving student learning. We also plan to supplement the research with meaningful support for using information in ways that benefit students and emphasize large-scale dissemination of what we learn. There is no greater time for confronting the challenges of improving public education and ensuring the success of all of our students. Your support is critical in that process! Thank you very much for your commitment to Iowa students and for your unselfish giving to deliver on the promise of public education – a bright and productive future for all of Iowa's children!

Very sincerely yours,



Survey continued from p. 1

### SAMPLE SURVEY QUESTIONS:



1. How do you view your role in relation to improving achievement?
2. How do you (board member) interact with the superintendent to accomplish district achievement goals?
3. How are you influenced by the institutional and operational differences among boards?
4. How do you prioritize your work?
5. How do you learn?
6. What are your beliefs about the drivers that most directly impact achievement?
7. What are your views about the roles of leaders, teachers and policies for improving achievement?

This survey will add significant knowledge to the field about the nature of school governance across the country, particularly as it relates to the unique role of local boards for improving achievement.

The ISBF team has been asked to create the database, pilot test, administer, organize and analyze data, create tables for the report, and host the completed database in the public domain upon completion. ISBF will be working closely with Dr. Mack Shelley from Iowa State University to fulfill these responsibilities on behalf of the organizations sponsoring the survey.

About 4,500 board members and superintendents from across the country were randomly selected to participate in the study. The study is scheduled to be completed on the following timeline:

- Pilot test the survey – May/June 2009
- Administer the survey – June/July 2009
- Enter data, analyze the data, etc. – Fall 2009
- First draft of report – November/December 2009
- Final draft with essays – January 2010
- Publication of final report – March/April 2010

This is an exciting national effort and ISBF/IASB are thrilled to be part of it. If you have any questions or would like more information, please feel free to contact Mary Delagardelle at [mdelagardelle@ia-sb.org](mailto:mdelagardelle@ia-sb.org).

## UPDATES FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

The Lighthouse project continues to serve as a beacon to other states for building school board leadership for student achievement. In addition to the first cohort of states that have been working together to replicate the Lighthouse work in Wisconsin, Kentucky and Idaho for three years, a second cohort started in January 2009.

State associations in Oregon, Washington, Alabama and Connecticut began their work with a kick-off session for state-level project staff and partners. Each state is now in the process of selecting boards and districts for participation and beginning their board development work, using the materials and strategies from the Lighthouse project.

Across both cohorts, the state-specific facilitators and national project staff are collecting data from two districtwide surveys and student learning results to track improvements of both the district working culture and student learning. This information will drive the further definition and fine-tuning of materials and strategies for working with boards to build leadership for student achievement that has a track record of success.

## LIGHTHOUSE RESEARCH TAKES ROOT FOR IOWA SCHOOL BOARDS, IASB



As ISBF builds national connections for the Lighthouse project, the Iowa Association of School Boards is working

within Iowa to provide every board in the state with information and supports on best practice in governance to improve student achievement.

To help boards understand and apply the Lighthouse research, the IASB board development team:

- is working with more than 20 board/superintendent teams and several Iowa area education agencies (AEAs) in two-year partnerships where IASB provides learning and support for the board/superintendent team, while the AEAs provide support for the district staff, on effective school improvement practice. The effectiveness of the efforts is being evaluated through ISBF's Lighthouse multi-state research project.

- published *Leadership for Student Learning*, a book and companion study guide, based on the Lighthouse research and other sources. Board/superintendent teams can use the study guide process to discuss how the research findings apply to their current school improvement work.
- designed a board self-assessment and facilitated workshops to help boards evaluate their work in alignment with the Lighthouse research.
- developed a self-study package, available on DVD or Webstream, on the findings of the first two Lighthouse studies. This video learning package is being distributed free to IASB members, and for a fee to school boards throughout the country.

**For information on any of these services, contact the IASB office, 1-800-795-4272.**



## ISBF WEB SITE GROWTH CONTINUES

The Iowa School Boards Foundation Web site continues to grow in content and visits. Please visit [www.iaschoolboardsfoundation.org](http://www.iaschoolboardsfoundation.org) to see the ongoing changes, and be sure to check out the "Donate to the Foundation" link in the right-hand column to see how you can support the Foundation.

## THE CLIK PROJECT: ACCOMPLISHMENTS



In the fifth and final year of our Communities for Literate Iowa Kids (CLIK) project, ISBF is celebrating significant contributions and accomplishments

### Regional and Local Impact

ISBF's *Preschool Collaboration Toolkit* provided free, online access to numerous resources to promote effective school-community collaboration resulting in improved preschool services for children and families. Research briefs, sample meeting agendas and activities, and a budget tool are just some of the resources used by AEA consultants, school leaders and other community stakeholders to plan and implement expanded quality early learning opportunities.

### Local District Impact

Due to the generosity of our funders, ISBF staff provided free, direct services to our local school districts participating in the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program. Supports included effective community collaboration facilitation and extensive preschool grant development assistance. ISBF staff also provided timely and accurate answers to numerous questions received from school staff, especially in relation to the complex state-funded preschool grant process.

ISBF is indebted to the funders who made our work to improve early learning outcomes for young children possible. In particular, we would like to express sincere appreciation to our CLIK funders for their ongoing support over the past several years: EMC Insurance Companies, Jester Insurance Services and the Alliant Energy Foundation.

made toward ensuring quality early learning for Iowa's preschoolers. Project achievements span the state's system levels and range from legislative policy implementation support to direct school district services. Some of these include:

### State-level Impact

ISBF demonstrated a strong commitment to support the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program. ISBF's stance to promote effective school-community partnerships supported the legislative intent of the law and sent a positive message to educational decision-makers across the state. Staff also served on the committee that developed the legislative rules and advocated for high expectations for student learning and program accountability. In addition, staff provided support for each of the three preschool grant application funding cycles, supporting the state's process to increase quality preschool access.

## PROMOTING SCHOOL SUCCESS - NEW ISBF PROJECT PROPOSAL

As the successful CLIK project nears an end, evidence indicates there is still much work to be done to ensure children experience quality early learning and success in school. That's why ISBF is proposing a new project designed to meet existing needs in two educational domains to improve student learning: *early childhood education* and *school-family-community connections*.

### Early Childhood Education

Early learning is a priority in Iowa. Iowa's state-funded preschool program is well underway with 113 districts currently serving an estimated 8,500 children in quality programs across the state. ISBF proposes to support this growing trend in the following ways:

1. Quality Assurance and Monitoring
  - Policy Implementation Study
  - Clearinghouse of Information
  - Support the Use of Research
2. School-Community Collaboration

### School-Family-Community Connections

Recent findings confirm that parent involvement positively impacts student learning. The literature also suggests that school-community partnerships can benefit student learning. ISBF proposes to further these findings in the following ways:

1. Parent/Community Involvement Policy Study
2. Clearinghouse of Information
3. Support for Policy Development

By meeting the evolving needs of schools and other policymakers through new projects and services, ISBF will continue to meet our mission to foster excellence and equity in public education.

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## ISBF RESEARCH ON STANDARDS AND THE IOWA CORE CURRICULUM

Over the past several years, the foundation has conducted considerable research focused on state and local standards. The following research questions have guided our work:

- 1) What is the relationship between rigorous content standards and student achievement?
- 2) How rigorous and comprehensive are local district standards in Iowa?
- 3) How rigorous and comprehensive are Iowa's state standards and how do they compare to those of other states?
- 4) How rigorous and comprehensive is the Iowa Core Curriculum and how does it compare to the state standards in Iowa and to those of five high-performing states?

### Previous Findings

Our study of local district standards yielded three main findings. First, most district standards were not posted online and many district staff members could not easily locate them, when contacted by phone. Second, many district standards were lacking major content strands such as reading fluency or the mathematics process strands. Finally, we found a wide range in the level of rigor from district to district.

In our first "gap research," we studied 10-year trends in states' student achievement. Specifically, we looked at the performance trends on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the gaps in performance between students of poverty and other students. Trends in ACT and SAT scores were also included. Education Week Quality Counts (2006) ratings were used to assess state standards, assessment and

accountability policy. We found slight improvements in Iowa's performance on NAEP, ACT and SAT, while many other states made significant gains in performance and closing the gap. As a result, Iowa's relative ranking among the 50 states fell from the top five to around the middle. The Quality Counts (QC) rates Iowa policy on standards, assessment and accountability second to last among the 50 states. As did Swanson (2006), we found a significant relationship between the achievement gains and gap closures and the Quality Counts ratings. In other words, states with stronger standards, assessment and accountability policies tended to show greater achievement gains and greater gap closure.

The findings of our first gap study led us to take a deeper look. In our second gap study we identified five states that had made large gains in achievement and in closing the gap. We studied those states' policies, products and practices in standards, assessment, and accountability and compared and contrasted those to Iowa. When comparing the five high-performing states to Iowa, all five had significantly more rigorous standards; four of the five had significantly more rigorous assessments; and all five had more accountability policies and practices in place.

### Research on the Iowa Core Curriculum

Our latest research was designed to assess the rigor and comprehensiveness of the Iowa Core Curriculum (ICC) and to compare it to Iowa's state standards and those of the five states previously studied. We developed a rigor scale for that purpose, based on Bloom's Taxonomy, revised (2001). The ICC was compared to model national standards and was

found to be comprehensive, lacking no content strands in mathematics or the language arts.

The rigor of the essential concepts and skills of the ICC was found to be significantly greater than the Core Content Standards and Benchmarks of Iowa's state standards.

The rigor of the ICC was found to be comparable to that of the five states' standards previously identified.

We are currently using our learning from this research to work with Iowa Department of Education staff. We are using a similar process to assess and revise the essential concepts and skills of the ICC. The work will yield products and processes to help districts ensure their local standards are aligned to the ICC in both content and rigor, as required by Iowa law.

A more in-depth look at this study will be available at IASB District Meetings in June at various locations, as well as on the IASB ([www.ia-sb.org](http://www.ia-sb.org)) and ISBF ([www.iaschoolboardsfoundation.org](http://www.iaschoolboardsfoundation.org)) Web sites after the meetings are through.

Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R. (Eds.). (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching and assessing: A revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of educational outcomes: Complete edition*, New York : Longman.

Swanson, Christopher B. (2006, January) *Making the Connection: A decade of Standards-Based Reform and Achievement*. Editorial Projects in Education Research Center.

*Quality Counts at 10: A decade of Standards-Based Education*. (2006, January 5). Education Week, Retrieved February 28, 2006 from [www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2006/01/05/17overview](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2006/01/05/17overview).

## WELLNESS FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS

It is important for school boards and district leadership teams to take stock of the student achievement levels in their districts - a wellness test, of sorts. The ISBF team has created two sets of tools for that purpose. The first is the Comprehensive School-Improvement Assessment (CSA) that is designed to diagnose the achievement wellness of districts and prescribe plans that will lead to high and equitable student achievement. The second is IGrowth, a suite of data analysis tools to facilitate student achievement data studies in districts.

### Comprehensive School-Improvement Assessment (CSA)



The CSA is designed as a constructive, diagnostic service to help school districts study themselves in

relation to specific conditions and beliefs associated with continuous improvement and higher levels of student performance. The service will use student achievement data, surveys, interviews, focus groups, observations and document reviews to determine the district's current status in relation to research-based characteristics of high-performing schools.

The assessment service facilitator and team members will collect data and will analyze the findings in order to make recommendations for advancing the district's approach to improving student achievement. A public and written report will be issued upon completion of the review to share the findings and make recommendations. Support will be provided for district staff to help integrate the recommendations into the

school district's existing improvement plan and to help connect district personnel with potential sources of ongoing support. The benefits of the assessment include improved achievement, staying/getting off "the list," preparation for your site visit and implementation of the Iowa Core Curriculum.



### IGrowth

IGrowth is a suite of data analysis tools for the study of district student achievement data. It graphically shows both proficiency and growth trends for subgroups and individual students. The tools allow districts to assess their current levels of student achievement, set goals and monitor progress. IGrowth enables district leaders to identify areas of strength as

well as areas that will need additional support.

The driving question that can be answered with IGrowth is whether all students are growing at least one year academically for each year they are in school. The tools track the growth for every student and subgroup over the past five years and report the percentage of expected growth that was made each year and over the full five years. The IGrowth toolkit is specifically designed to help district leaders conduct cost/benefit analysis on district programs and initiatives.

For more information or to sign your district up for either of these unique programs, please contact Tony VanderZyl at [tvanderzyl@ia-sb.org](mailto:tvanderzyl@ia-sb.org) or by phone at 1-800-795-4274, ext. 265.

# THANKS TO OUR DONORS

We could not do this important work without you!



**Monticello Community School District,  
Monticello High School: \$8,000**

*Positioning Yourself in Your Environment Project*

Teacher Molly Crock will purchase Global Positioning System (GPS) units and students will make hands-on connections between where they live and the areas around them. They will map locations of existing prairie remnants, wood duck house locations, IOWATER locations, and they will also navigate around the country.



**Winterset Community Schools,  
Winterset Senior High School: \$9,000**

*Utilizing Technology to Enrich the Study of Physics & Mathematics*

Teacher John Hughes will create a more effective teaching and learning environment by linking science and math instruction with cutting-edge classroom technology. Sensors and digital equipment will allow physics students to more accurately measure data in their experiments and analyze the outcomes.



**Fort Madison School District,  
Richardson Elementary School: \$11,000**

*Mobile Science Laptop Lab*

Teachers Stephanie Orth and Krys Plate will purchase a mobile science laptop lab for first- and second-graders. The lab, complete with document cameras, will enable students to learn and share their knowledge of frog or butterfly life cycles by collaborating with students from around the world and, in turn, have access to other students' work and research about life cycles.



**Washington Community School District,  
Washington High School: \$16,000**

*(1) Operation Graphing Calculators*

*(2) Computer Interface Technology for Use in Science and Math Classes*

One team of teachers will be purchasing graphing calculators and replacement battery packs for mathematics students to use in the classroom and on loan at home. A second team will purchase hand-held data collectors and assorted sensors with which students will be able to collect data in the classroom or out in the field, graph the data, print it, or transfer it to computers or flash drives.



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The Iowa School Boards Foundation is the research affiliate of the Iowa Association of School Boards, providing a sound base of objective, reliable information and research to IASB and other policy makers in shared commitment to excellence and equity in student achievement.

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Questions/comments can be directed to 6000 Grand Ave., Des Moines, IA 50312; 1-800-795-4272 or [sevans@ia-sb.org](mailto:sevans@ia-sb.org).