



IOWA SCHOOL BOARDS FOUNDATION

# THE BEACON

SUPPORTING HIGH ACHIEVEMENT FOR ALL CHILDREN THROUGH POLICY RESEARCH

## SCHOOL BOARD RESEARCHERS GATHER AT FIRST NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM IN 30 YEARS



Esteemed scholar Dr. Frank Lutz addresses symposium attendees. Lutz was one of the original presenters at the first national symposium in 1975.

September 14th and 15th were red letter days for ISBF which hosted a national symposium of scholars of school board research for the first time in more than 30 years. Practitioners came together to discuss critical issues related to school board governance in America's public schools. Participants, from 30 states and two countries, represented universities, state school board associations, national organizations, state departments of education, state and regional boards of education, local school districts and local school boards.

"This symposium was the single most valuable board development I have ever attended," said IASB board member Craig Lohmann. "The discussions the [symposium] triggered afterward were enormously useful and really stuck with me."

Sixteen scholars presented research and led discussions related to the history of school board governance and theory, school board/superintendent relationships, the effectiveness of school boards in a democracy, the role of school boards in school reform, school board organizational and educational influence and the future of school boards. The research papers presented during the symposium will be published by Rowman and Littlefield in a book, *Relevancy and Revelation: The Future of School Board Governance*, available in early 2008. Watch the publishers Web site, [www.rowmaneducation.com](http://www.rowmaneducation.com), or the new ISBF Web site for information on how to order the book.

### LETTER FROM ISBF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MARY DELAGARDELLE

Dear Friends of the ISBF,

The Iowa School Boards Foundation is on a mission to provide objective, reliable information and research to school boards and other education policy makers that can guide their decision making and foster excellence and equity in public education. The 2006-2007 fiscal year was a busy year for the foundation, with evidence of progress ranging from increasing state and national understanding about the leadership role of school boards for improving student learning to the importance of early literacy development for Iowa children. This newsletter is dedicated to the highlights of our work and what lies ahead for ISBF. The positive effects of our efforts are and will continue to be seen regularly throughout the state and within the programs and services of IASB.

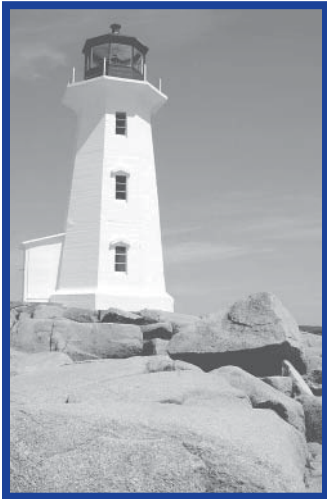
Public education is at a crossroads. Fifty years of targeted funding and significant effort has not resulted in the level of improved outcomes for all students we had hoped. It is a critical time to ensure our actions in schools are guided by research and good information and monitored through careful analysis of the impact and corrective action when progress toward our goals is not sufficient. Your support of the foundation is used to promote excellence and equity in public education and to help Iowa school districts ensure all students learn well. 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!



Sincerely yours, Mary Delagardelle

# THE LIGHTHOUSE PROJECT: UPDATE AND EXPANSION

Since 1998, the Iowa Association of School Boards, and later, the Iowa School Boards Foundation have been conducting research on the role of school boards in improving student achievement. The first Lighthouse study showed that school boards in districts with a history of higher student achievement were significantly different in their actions, beliefs and knowledge of what it takes to improve achievement than boards in lower achieving districts. This study became one of the first and only studies to make a research-based connection between the school board's work and the levels of student achievement.



In 2002, ISBF launched the second phase of the Lighthouse study, identifying ways local school boards influence conditions for success necessary to improve student achievement. As a result of this phase, the research team identified roles of the board, key areas of performance boards demonstrate as they play these roles and effective strategies for board development related to the board roles.

In the third and current phase of the Lighthouse project, Iowa is working with California, Idaho, Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri, Oregon and Wisconsin to study how and when the Lighthouse interventions are most effective and how to efficiently and effectively provide systems of leadership development to school board/superintendent teams for large numbers of school districts. State school board association staff will replicate the key Lighthouse interventions in districts in their states with training, support and monitoring by the Lighthouse research team. Other states will study different interventions but collect the same data each year to measure impact. This allows for an ongoing analysis of the implementation of various interventions with data-based studies of impact on the school boards, districts and student achievement in order to identify best practices in board leadership and development.

## NEXT STEPS: SCALING UP LIGHTHOUSE PARTNERSHIPS IN IOWA

Exciting times are underway as IASB integrates learning from the ISBF Lighthouse Project into programming for whole board/superintendent team training. In 2006, this type of ongoing training/support for whole board/superintendent teams began as a partnership with three districts in eastern Iowa, Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency (AEA 9) and IASB. The partnership holds much promise for engaging leadership from all levels of school districts in leading for improving student learning.

ISBF staff learned a lot about effective board/superintendent team leadership while working with Lighthouse pilot districts the past five years and is assisting IASB staff in weaving that knowledge into a scaled-up partnership with Mississippi Bend AEA 9 and the local districts. IASB will provide support to the board/superintendent teams and Mississippi Bend AEA 9 will coordinate support to district staff regarding district improvement efforts.



In addition to the scale-up work with the eastern Iowa districts, a second partnership with Prairie Lakes AEA 8 and five districts and the AEA board/chief administrator team from north central Iowa kicked off this fall. Planning is also underway with two other AEAs to implement partnerships

with their agency and interested local districts. Scale-up work with these AEAs is slated to begin within the next year.

## ISBF TO IASB: LIGHTHOUSE INTEGRATION

For more than 60 years, Iowa school board members have turned to the Iowa Association of School Boards with the questions, "What is my job? What do I need to learn to be an effective board member?" Today, findings of the Iowa Lighthouse research by the Iowa School Boards Foundation are being integrated into IASB board development programs to ensure that the answers to those questions are credible, practical and meaningful.

Examples of the integration of ISBF Lighthouse research at IASB include:

- Identification of key roles of the board in IASB's board learning standards, which guide curriculum development and service across multiple programs.
- Inclusion of an overview of the board's roles in improving student achievement during orientation workshops for newly elected school board members.
- Design of an online course on the Lighthouse research to allow school boards in Iowa and nationally to learn about the findings of the study and consider its implications for their own work.
- Development and publication of *Leadership for Student Learning*, a handbook for school board members on improving student achievement, which includes summaries of the Lighthouse findings and guidance for school boards in applying that learning in their own districts.
- Integration into many other workshops, publications and consultation, as appropriate.

## ISBF LAUNCHES NEW TOOL TO MONITOR STUDENT GROWTH

This fall, ISBF is launching a newly-developed tool to enable boards and district leaders to analyze their student achievement data for strengths and areas of need. The I Growth tool can be used in conjunction with IASB Cost-Effectiveness tools to determine which intervention strategies are working and to focus resources most effectively. The model is adaptable to each district's needs and preferences, containing different graphic views of growth for student achievement. This tool allows boards and staffs to "drill down" to schools, classrooms, individuals, and different subgroups like poverty or minority populations.

## NEW STANDARDS STUDY TO SHAPE IASB PUBLIC POLICY

As a follow-up to the ISBF statewide study of district standards in relation to recommended standards, ISBF is investigating the relationship between standards, accountability, assessment systems and student achievement. At

issue: whether states and districts with rigorous standards, assessments and accountability are seeing greater gains in student achievement. Specifically, the ISBF research team is comparing Quality Counts ratings from *Education Week* against student achievement as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and college readiness on the SAT and ACT. The study will also look at the relative rank of Iowa among the other states and whether that rank is changing.

Preliminary findings suggest that more rigorous standards, assessment systems, and accountability are associated with greater gains in student achievement as well as closing the achievement gap between students of poverty and non-poverty students. The study of Iowa's ranking among other states has revealed some clear conclusions. First, Iowa ranks at the very bottom in the Quality Counts ratings of standards and accountability systems. Second, over the past eight to ten years, Iowa's ranking on the NAEP reading and math assessments has dropped from the top five to the

middle. Finally, considering overall achievement scores, gains in achievement scores, and closing the poverty gap in scores, Iowa ranks 42. Preliminary results will be shared during the district meetings this fall.

## NEW COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT SERVICE READY THIS YEAR

Researchers say a school that takes on a reform effort without a thorough assessment of its needs, priorities, strengths and weaknesses is likely to encounter failure down the road. With that in mind, ISBF's new comprehensive assessment service will be available this year to districts interested in systemwide improvement. The service will help districts work toward continuous improvement and higher levels of student performance using data and diagnostic analysis to make district-specific recommendations for improving student achievement. Support will be provided for district staff to help integrate the recommendations into the school district's existing improvement plan.

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In October, ISBF will launch its Web site, profiling foundation projects and work, connecting key audiences and foundation supporters, providing avenues for supporting the foundation and other key features. Stay tuned for more information on this exciting development!

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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## CLIK TOOLKIT TO PROMOTE QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The evidence is clear; the early years play a pivotal role in developing a solid foundation of learning that supports children's later success in school. Unfortunately, too many Iowa children still lack access to quality early childhood education. The good news is the state of Iowa recently took a giant step forward to increase access to quality preschool by passing legislation that funds the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program for Four-Year-Old Children. School districts interested in participating in



the voluntary program must work collaboratively with key community stakeholders to develop and implement preschool programs that meet the needs of children and their families.

ISBF's new Preschool Collaboration Toolkit, designed to support schools participating in the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program, is just one example of the many resources recently developed through the Communities for Literate Iowa Kids (CLIK) project. CLIK, now a clearinghouse for research and information, serves educational policymakers with resources and tools to promote quality, literacy-based early education in Iowa.

The Preschool Collaboration Toolkit along with

CLIK Information Briefings and other tools promote good policy and best practice to ensure all children have access to quality preschool education, independent of address. Currently, the toolkit and other resources are available on the IASB Web site at [www.ia-sb.org](http://www.ia-sb.org).

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