



# THE BEACON

SUPPORTING HIGH ACHIEVEMENT FOR ALL CHILDREN THROUGH POLICY RESEARCH

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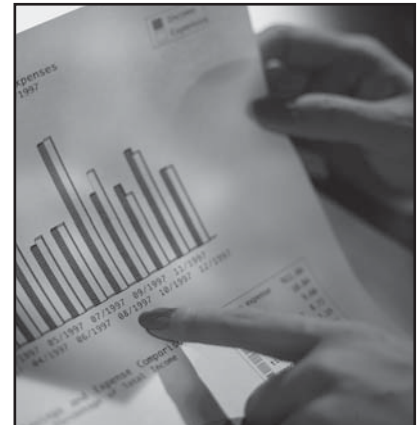
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## COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT ASSESSMENT PROVES POWERFUL FOR CEDAR FALLS SCHOOLS

The Iowa School Boards Foundation (ISBF) has launched a new service to help districts study their school improvement efforts.

ISBF's Comprehensive School Improvement Assessment (CSA) was conducted in the Cedar Falls school district this past fall. After the ISBF team conducted surveys, interviews, focus groups, made observations and gathered district data as part of this comprehensive diagnostic service, the board-superintendent team received a report that provides powerful information to help them move forward with their Iowa Core Curriculum implementation and their overall school improvement plan.

"The Comprehensive School Improvement Assessment (CSA) process is the best tool I've seen for analyzing the interconnectedness of a school district's curriculum, instruction, and assessment



systems," said superintendent Dave Stoakes. "Tony VanderZyl and the ISBF team have provided the necessary data to focus our Iowa Core Curriculum work on the areas that will without question enable us to craft and implement a more rigorous academic program."

Data were collected relative to the elements found in high performing schools. The ISBF CSA team analyzed the *CSA continued, page 7*

### What is the 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 uses 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 conduct extensive data collection and a diagnostic analysis in order to make specific recommendations for advancing the district's approach to improving student achievement. A public and written report is issued upon completion of the diagnostic review to share the findings and make recommendations. Support is also 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.

## LETTER FROM THE ISBF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dr. Mary  
Delagardelle

Dear Friends of the Iowa School Boards Foundation,

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continuing support of the Iowa School Boards Foundation and provide some updates about the work that you have made possible.

During the 2009-10 school year, Foundation staff were very busy conducting research, disseminating findings and information to educational leaders, and supporting the use of research and data in Iowa schools. Some highlights of our work over the past year include:

- Continuing work on the Lighthouse Project – in Iowa, nationally and internationally.
- Continued support to Iowa school districts for studying achievement data with the iGrowth tool – a data organization tool that allows districts to study their achievement data from a growth perspective.
- New information briefs providing summaries of research for district board and staff members.
- A study of the rigor and comprehensiveness of the Iowa Core Curriculum.
- A national survey of school board members and superintendents.
- Launching a Comprehensive School Improvement Assessment Service (CSA) to help districts study their school improvement processes.
- Another year of serving as the re-granting agency for the Qwest Foundation Teachers and Technology grant program.
- Development of a toolkit for facilitating budget conversations and establishing priorities.

As we move forward into the current fiscal year we will continue to support educational leaders with objective and reliable information about the role of the board and what matters most for improving student learning.

Schools are facing difficult financial times and it is critical they have access to good information as they prioritize and confront 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,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Delagardelle". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

# CONNECTING FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS: ISBF RESOURCE KIT EXPANDS!

## The Board's Role in Engaging Families

We know that children with families who are involved in their education tend to be more successful in school. That's why ISBF is expanding resources to help school leaders ensure family engagement efforts are grounded in research and are focused on student learning needs.

The newly published ISBF information brief, *The Board's Role: Engaging Families to Improve Learning*, describes key roles and actions designed to help the board/superintendent team lay the foundation for successful districtwide initiatives that maximize parents as important partners in children's learning. Developing a set of positive beliefs at the board table about family involvement is just one example of the steps the board can take to chart the course for meaningful school-family connections resulting in improved student learning.

## Guiding Questions – Powerful Tools

“What evidence do you have that parents know and understand what their children are expected to learn this year?”

This is just one example of a simple but powerful guiding question that the board can use as an effective leadership tool. Routinely asking open-ended questions related to school improvement efforts helps the board identify and convey expectations for staff. Dialogue between the board and staff in response to guiding questions helps identify important resources and supports needed to ensure staff successfully meet the set expectations.

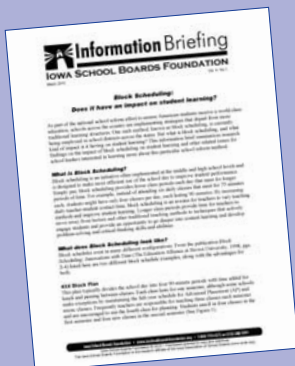
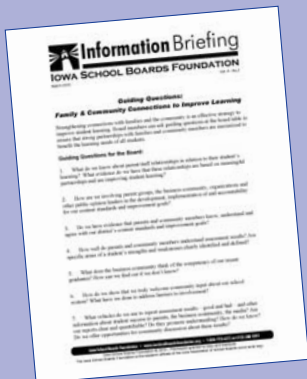
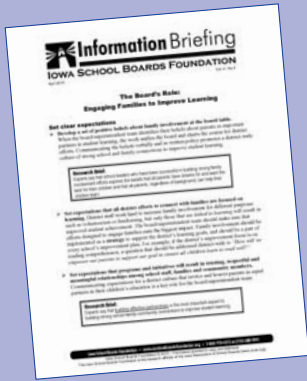
The new ISBF publication, *Guiding Questions: Family and Community Connections to Improve Learning*, provides school leaders with a list of effective questions designed to ensure school-family-community connections result in improved student learning.

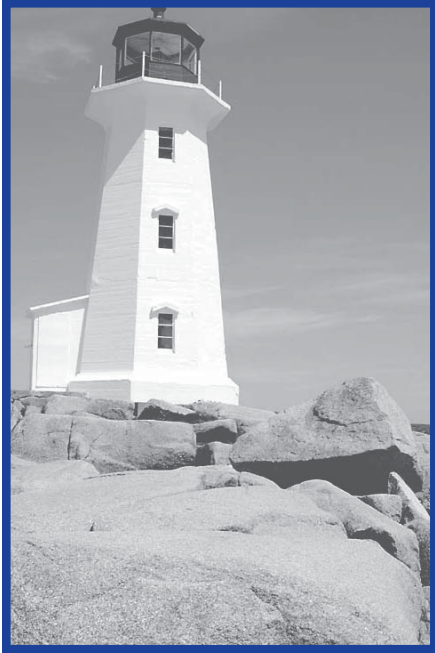
## New ISBF research summary on the impact of block scheduling

In response to a local school board member's request for help, ISBF recently published the new information brief entitled *Block Scheduling: Does it have an impact on student learning?*

ISBF staff analyzed and summarized findings from quality research articles to help determine how efforts to restructure and make more efficient use of the school day impacts student performance. This new brief can provide background information to use when exploring options and engaging dialogue between school leaders and staff when designing initiatives to meet district student learning goals.

**All of these publications, along with other reports and tools, are available at [www.schoolboardresearch.org](http://www.schoolboardresearch.org).**





# The Lighthouse Project

## The Lighthouse Project in Iowa

*Building Cohesive Districtwide Leadership and Continuity*

IASB staff continue to provide boards and districts in several regions of Iowa with Lighthouse services designed to improve board leadership for student learning.

For this issue, we're going to zoom in our work in one area of the state. School boards and superintendents from three districts in AEA 1 began their work with Lighthouse in Fall 2008. Having learned together about the role of the board in leading for student learning and the areas of work in which they engage to do so, the boards have studied data from their district and are working with the district staff to define, implement and monitor improvement efforts and their impact on student achievement.

In this work, the boards find their relationship with a District Leadership team of educators and administrators from across the system to be a critical ingredient. "Little things" like finding time

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## Lighthouse Multi-State Project

What should a school board do when the focus area for improvement that they have set with their superintendent and district leadership, based on two years of data study and conversation, is not the same as the focus area of improvement mandated by the state due to lack of progress for a small subgroup of students in one subject area?

This is the question that a Lighthouse board is currently wrestling with in Oregon, working with our colleagues at the Oregon School Boards Association.

After extensive conversation and consultation with Lighthouse staff, the board, superintendent and leadership team in the district are researching instructional strategies that are effective across subject areas and grade levels and that are likely to produce improvement in both the locally-generated and the state-mandated focus areas of improvement.

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together, and getting clear on the content of discussions “big things” as they work together to make positive in the district. The IASB Lighthouse team has facilitated for the AEA 1 participants with superintendent and resident teams from Lighthouse districts that are “farther the Lighthouse road,” which the AEA 1 teams have said is beneficial.

The AEA 1 district superintendents have asked for a self-ent to guide them in determining what is needed as they increased leadership for the work and begin working with hard to chart “where to go from here” with coaching from Lighthouse staff.

These staff will use the information from these assessments to help coach the AEA 1 boards and superintendents. We also anticipate that it will help with continuing the Lighthouse work to incoming superintendents, and the AEA 1 district will experience on July 1.

Once a strategy is identified, the board and district partnership will:

• set expectations for the adoption of this instructional strategy across the district and student learning outcomes as a result;  
• create and establish the supports needed for teachers and administrators to be successful in implementing the strategy  
• monitor the impact of the strategy on student learning results; and  
• use the data and evidence that they collect and discuss to monitor progress and outcomes throughout the school year.

Examples of shaping board leadership based on research are developing across the seven states participating in the Multi-State Project: Alabama, Connecticut, Iowa, Oregon, Washington and Wisconsin.



## National Survey Project

The Iowa School Boards Foundation continues its partnership with the National School Boards Association (NSBA), the Fordham Institute, and the Wallace Foundation in conducting a national survey of school board members and superintendents.

The survey poses questions to board members and superintendents about areas such as:

- how board members view their role in relation to improving achievement,
- how they prioritize their work,
- how they learn,
- how they interact with the superintendent to accomplish district achievement goals,
- how they are influenced by institutional and contextual differences,
- and more.

Districts were sampled from NSBA’s database. All districts in the Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE) membership were surveyed, as well as a random sampling of districts with enrollments of at least 1,000 students from all 50 states. A survey was sent to all board members and the superintendent of each district in the sample. A total of 4,340 surveys were sent and 1,025 responses were received.

The writers are currently drafting the report and partner organizations are drafting the foreword to the report. The partner organizations will release the results in Washington, D.C. in mid- to late-August 2010.

Stay tuned and watch the Web site, and your inbox, for survey results this fall!

[www.schoolboardresearch.org](http://www.schoolboardresearch.org).

## CONGRATULATIONS! QWEST GRANTS 2010



For the fourth year, ISBF partnered with the Qwest Foundation to recognize and reward public school teachers who use innovative technology in the classroom to improve the educational experience for students. A panel evaluated over 150 proposals from across Iowa and chose teachers from five school districts to share in approximately \$50,000 of grant money. This year's winners are listed below. Congratulations to them all!

### 2010 Qwest Grant Winners

#### **Boone Community School District, Boone Middle School: \$7,170** **Bugging Yourself to Be Fit**

Teacher Scott Kelley will introduce his students to new sensors called bodybuggs that allow them to collect data with four different sensors: accelerometer, heat flux, galvanic skin response and skin temperature. The goal is to challenge students to use critical thinking skills to analyze their different lifestyles, activities and workout intensities to learn what works best for their individual bodies.



Northeast Community School District

#### **Fort Dodge Community School District, Fort Dodge Senior High School: \$8,500** **There's a Class for That!**

The goal for this project is to give high school students the technology, programming and employability skills to prepare for a career in computer programming, and start by creating their own applications for sale on Apple's iTunes store. Students will use iMacs and software kits to collaborate, learn and create new tools.

#### **Independence Community School District: \$8,555** **PK4 Smart Board Project**

Using Smart Board technology, preschool students will be encouraged to embrace creativity and innovation as they work on literacy and mathematics concepts. The goals of this project are to enhance student engagement and collaboration, to reach diverse learners, increase higher order thinking skills within a rigorous curriculum and extend teacher use and integration of digital technology.

#### **Northeast Community School District: \$10,000** **Project Harmony**

Sixth-graders will kick off a video conferencing project that will extend the boundaries of the classroom and connect them with experts and other learners around the globe. Students will use a netbook lab and Polycom system to interface and present projects to others, and open new dialogues. The curriculum will encourage projects such as comparing national and international human rights policies and documents to determine their impact on different nations.

#### **Cedar Falls Community School District, Peet Junior High: \$11,000** **Science Q.U.E.S.T.: A Quest for Understanding through Evaluating and Synthesizing with Technology**

The goal of this project is to increase student achievement and interest in science for students in 7th through 9th grades. Students will increase their participation in labs and will be able to work more intricately with variables in experiments, using new sensors, probes and equipment. Experiments will include measuring temperature, mass, heart rate, force and motion, and more.

## UPDATE: DATA USE PAYING OFF IN CARROLL

IGrowth, developed by the Iowa School Boards Foundation (ISBF) team, 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.

The Carroll school board, Superintendent Rob Cordes and Carroll High School Principals Steve Haluska and Tammie McKenzie, have used the IGrowth student achievement growth model for three years now. Steve and

Tammie have organized individual student goal setting using the IGrowth data.

Each student meets individually with his/her homeroom advisor to go over ITED and other data to set personal goals for the next year. Their efforts have paid off amazingly!

Here are a few numbers to showcase their gains. For their 9th graders in math, 94 percent were proficient and 41 percent scored in the top 10 percent of the national norms. The students grew an average of 1.88 years in one year, 58 percent grew at least two years,

and 39 percent grew at least three years.

Beating all odds, they are closing the achievement gap between upper- and lower-performing students and the poverty gap.

Carroll is now planning to move this individual student goal setting process using IGrowth to the lower grades.

For more information about this service, contact Dr. Tony VanderZyl, Assessment Consultant, [tvanderzyl@ia-sb.org](mailto:tvanderzyl@ia-sb.org), or (800) 795-4272.

## CSA

*continued from page 1*

Cedar Falls local standards and assessment plan for rigor and alignment with the Iowa Core.

In addition, team members did the following as part of the process:

- interviewed over 50 faculty and board members,
- observed 75 classrooms,
- received survey responses for all board members and staff,
- and analyzed numerous district documents.

These data were analyzed to identify district strengths, areas of needed improvement and recommendations.

One example of data analyzed includes the content and rigor alignment of district standards, assessments, and classroom instruction with each other and with the Iowa Core.

The CSA results were first presented to the board and administrative team, and then at the request of the district, to the entire K-12 staff as part of their Iowa Core alignment work.

One teacher with decades of experience commented that the information was the most powerful and useful he had received in all his years in the district. District staff will also use the CSA results to prepare for their five-year accreditation site visit coming up next year.

A CSA is now being conducted for the North Scott district and others have begun parts of the assessment or expressed interest.

If you want more information, contact Dr. Tony VanderZyl, Assessment Consultant and CSA Director, [tvanderzyl@ia-sb.org](mailto:tvanderzyl@ia-sb.org), (800) 795-4272.

## Some ISBF Data Tools Free Online!

ISBF, in partnership with the Iowa Association of School Boards, now offers a new, free tool online to help district leaders analyze the current state of student achievement in their districts.

The Student Achievement Data Tool was launched in Fall 2009 at the IASB Convention. It offers current and historical data for each individual school district, and allows you to view the growth and trends in each area. It also includes relevant questions to ask around the board table, to spark the necessary discussions around student achievement data.

To access this tool, visit [www.schoolboardresearch.org](http://www.schoolboardresearch.org) and click on "Our Research Projects and Services." Select "Student Achievement Data Tool."



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ISBF 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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