



School Improvement Booster

An e-newsletter provided by

Iowa School Finance Information Services (ISFIS)

June/July 2014: ISFIS Conference Summary

2014 ISFIS CONFERENCE

We had a great day at this year’s ISFIS Annual Conference in June. Plenty of learning, conversation, and comradery. The conference is a great opportunity for us to hear what services and programs school leaders need, and so guides the development of our programs and services. The trade show exhibitors reported how much they enjoyed meeting some of you for the first time, as well as seeing old friends. Extensive time for networking was built into the breaks, including the lunch break when people chatted about what’s going well in their schools and what tips they might learn from others.

If you haven’t already filled out the conference evaluation, [here’s the link](#) for doing so. Thanks for helping us make next year’s ISFIS conference even better.

[This is the link](#) to all of the materials that were used at the conference. Use these presentations and resources with your staff, school improvement team or board. Share the advocacy materials with parents, advocates and legislators. Use the school improvement information to beef up content for your school year kick-off presentations and celebrations. Dedicate some summer quiet time to read through and learn what things might help you work more effectively and efficiently to improve student learning.

SESSION SUMMARIES

The following summaries describe this year’s conference sessions.

Making Collaboration Work, Dave Nagel, Corwin Press

Whether your school is a TLC grant recipient or you are planning on participating in the future, how do you make sure school leaders and staff work to improve instruction, and as a result, student learning? School improvement consultant Dave Nagel is an expert in culling through the research base and best practices, and provides a variety of other sources and tools to help guide your learning and implementation. Dave shared very interesting information including these elements of effective professional development.

- Involve external experts.
- Stay in it for the long haul.
- Deeply engage teachers.
- Challenge teachers’ existing beliefs.
- Lead for teacher learning – provide the time and expectation that everyone will engage.
- Use the Joyce and Showers model of professional development, aka the Iowa Professional Development Model, as you add instructional skills to teachers’ instructional tool kits.

Does your teacher leadership plan commit to all of these elements? For more information contact Dave at dave@davenagel.com or 317.670.0270.

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Visible Learning, Dave Nagel, Corwin Press

Dave is one of 25 trainers in John Hattie’s Visible Learning in North America. He noted, “Professor John Hattie and his Visible Learning research provide schools and districts the true evidence we have sought about what actions and influences will have the greatest impact on student learning and achievement. The Visible Learning research evidence shows that the typical effect size we should expect in schools is 0.40. That should be the progress (measured by effect sizes) we make. Anything less than that is not good enough, and we should be doing something about it.” He shared educational actions that have significant effects and those from the research that do not – student expectations, formative evaluation, and micro-teaching yield statistically meaningful results, for example, while retention, changing schools, and problem-based teaching do not.

For more information contact Dave at dave@davenagel.com or 317.670.0270.

Using Technology to Improve Student Writing, Jon Muller and Susie Olesen, ISFIS

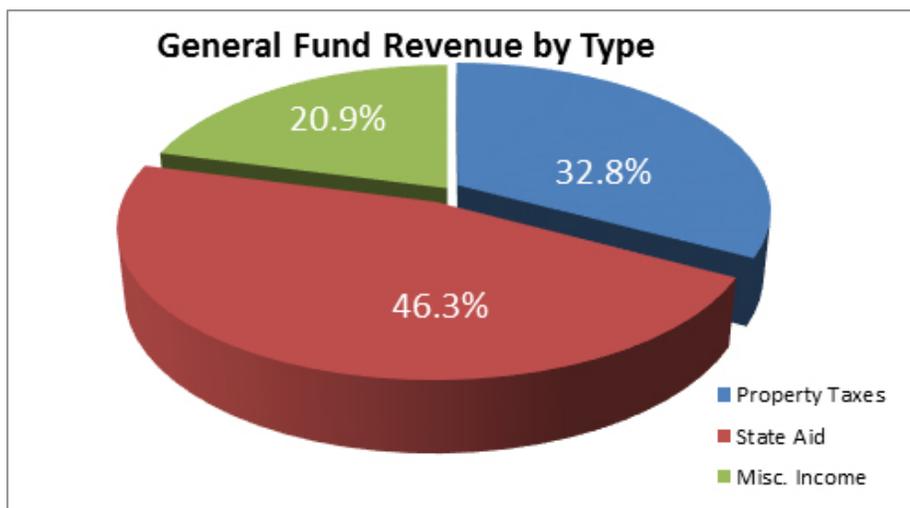
Did you know that writing is a critical skill necessary for success in almost every profession? Did you know that about 75% of students at 8th and 11th grades were not proficient writers on the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress? Now that we know that using technology to write leads to better writing and improves reading comprehension, there’s something we can do to increase student opportunities to write without burning out hard-working teachers. Jon and Susie shared data about the importance of writing and the new ISFIS electronic writing tool, WritetoLearn®, at this session. Contact Susie for more information related to this program at 515-251-5970 or Susie.olesen@isfis.net.

A New Mission That Motivates, Deb Selby, John Baylor Test Prep

In 2013, 80.5% of Iowa seniors indicated they intended to pursue post-secondary education. Although this percentage may seem high, too many students don’t follow their intentions. By 2018, there will be 3 million fewer college graduates than labor markets demand. On February 6, 2014, the Wall Street Journal noted, “Of the 10.4 million 25-to-54-yr-old men with no job, 75% stopped school somewhere short of a 2-year degree.” Deb shared the importance of the community and everyone in the school understanding the relationship among high ACT scores, financial support for college costs, crippling debt from soaring costs of higher education, college graduation, and life success. Contact Deb Selby at deb@johnbaylortestprep.com for more information.

School Finance 101, Larry Sigel, ISFIS

From spending authority to property tax rates, this session illuminated the Iowa School Finance Formula. Larry reviewed where the funds come from and allowable expenditures from each fund, which served as an overview and as a solid base for understanding Iowa school finance. Larry explained the importance of Dillon’s rule in regards to school finance, which allows that, “...schools only have the powers that are expressly granted to them by the state legislature, those that are necessarily implied from that grant of power, and those that are essential and indispensable to the district’s existence and functioning,” explaining the restrictions on monetary sources that school boards face when allocating funds. He also discussed the sources of school funding and how to calculate spending authority and solvency ratios. Contact Larry for more information (larry.sigel@isfis.net or 515-251-5970).



Negotiations and Comparability Issues: Use of Maps and Tools to Aid in Collective Bargaining, *Margaret Buckton, ISFIS*

There are plenty of resources to aid in understanding your district's relative comparability to set up negotiations for success. Margaret began by explaining arbitrator considerations required in Iowa Code Chapter 20 (past contracts, wage comparison, interest and welfare of the public, and the ability of the employer to pay) that will be considered should your district's negotiations get to that point. She also went over the available tools and other resources that make the data work easy for you and your school attorney during the collective bargaining process, including how to use the FACT tool as a snapshot or as an overall picture of your district's financial situation. These powerful tools, including the salary and benefits data in the FACTMaps and in the ISFIS Negotiations Exhibit Tool provide necessary information to have successful negotiations between teacher organizations and school boards. Better still, they help you plan early in the process to address comparability problems you might be able to anticipate. For more information contact Margaret (Margaret.buckton@isfis.net or 515-251-5970).

Background Check Compliance and Best Practice, *Margaret Buckton, ISFIS*

Margaret reviewed the various mandates for background checks, notice and reporting requirements, EEOC and FCRA federal requirements, and best practice considerations for district policy. Margaret began by going over the relevant legislation (SF 452, SF 2347, Iowa Code 279.69), which defines which school employees must have background checks, as well as the definition of school employee in this situation, helping you know to whom it does not apply (BOEE regulated applicants, non-initial licensure teachers who are checked and fingerprinted before contract signing, and bus drivers regulated under a different subsection). Iowa Code also dictates that teachers are the only employees that can be charged a fee for the background check, and then only for the initial check. Knowing that these many requirements can be difficult to keep straight, remember that there is a table of the requirements at www.isfis.net (Iowa Background Check Requirement Guide for School Districts). This session also provided sample letters to notify staff of rechecks and sample notification of pending adverse action notice required by the federal government. For more information contact Margaret (Margaret.buckton@isfis.net or 515-251-5970).

Considerations in Disclosing Employee Information, *Brett Nitzschke and Emily Ellingson, Lynch Dallas, P.C.*

Brett Nitzschke and Emily Ellingson, veteran school attorneys from Lynch Dallas, P.C., shared their firm's recommendations for what should and should not be included in a district employee's personnel file. They noted that employee's should have access to a copy of their own personnel file according to Iowa Code section 91B.1(1), "...including but not limited to performance evaluations, disciplinary records, and other information concerning employer-employee relations." They provided a document that addresses which types of employee information is a public record, and describes the district's role as the Custodian of a Public Record, citing relevant case material which can help further inform how a district is allowed to utilize and disseminate employee records. or Brett and Emily at 319.365.9101 ellingson@lynchdallas.com and brett@lynchdallas.com.

The Implementation of the ACA: What Just Happened and Why it is Important, *Dave Lyons, Founding Director and Chief Executive Officer, CoOpportunity Health*

January 1, 2014 marked the implementation of the largest portion of the Affordable Care Act: marketplaces, essential health benefits, employer and individual mandates, and a host of other major revisions to the health care system. David Lyons, CoOpportunity Health CEO and former Iowa Insurance Commissioner discussed how implementation has gone in Iowa and what this means for all of us as individuals, employees, employers, and school systems. Iowa is one of the 33 states that opted to participate in the federally built health insurance marketplace- as of this year, 11% of the eligible population have enrolled. Currently, school districts may have employees who are impacted by a flaw in the ACA, caused by the law not covering dependents in an employee's affordability metric (that health insurance for the employee may take no more than 9.5% of their income, however, this does not include dependents). Small districts might over time determine their employees would be better served by a subsidized Marketplace coverage. In the coming years, Iowa will be affected by Employee Choice Implementation (2015), small group redefinition to 1-100 employees (2016), and employer mandated coverage for companies of 51-100 (2015).

Operational Sharing Incentives, Management Fund Expenditures for 65 and Older Retirees, and Whole Grade Sharing Incentives – *Larry Sigel, ISFIS*

The passage of the Operational Sharing Incentives bill changed requirements related to what you can do and how much funding your district can receive. Larry went over the options that are available to your district and the financial impact, as well as some potential situations in which sharing or reorganizing would make sense (budget pressures, enrollment trends, mandated compliance, expanding student opportunities, and hard to fill positions, among others). Larry explained the positions that are eligible for sharing as well as the formula to determine supplementary weightings. In any of these sharing scenarios, it is imperative that districts build successful partnerships with one another through communication. Larry also addressed Whole Grade Sharing,

The Legislature also approved payment of Early Retirement expenditures from the Management Fund for those employees over age 65 (SF 220). Previously, the law stated the Management Fund could only be used for the early retirement of people between the ages of 55 and 65, but with this change, expenditures for employees over 65 who take early retirement can also come from the Management Fund. For more information contact Larry (larry.sigel@isfis.net or 515-251-5970).

Dependent Eligibility Audits: Process Description for Successful Implementation, Jon Muller, ISFIS, and Sheila Mason, Director of Human Resources – Classified Staff, Des Moines Public Schools

No matter the size of your school district, there is a very high probability you are providing health insurance benefits to people who are not eligible to receive them. That costs the district money, right to the bottom line of the General Fund and in some cases, it's a startling amount of money. Dependent Eligibility Audits provide a process to ensure the dependents identified by employees are actually qualified to receive benefits (commonly found ineligible dependents include ex-spouses, children over the age of 26, grandchildren, and nieces/nephews - often making up 6%-8% of dependents currently covered). Jon discussed the economics of audits, including laying out some best practices for schools to complete them internally, which is particularly salient for smaller schools. He went over how to avoid potential landmines that might arise in the process, as well as the potential timelines that an audit would take. Sheila Mason was also on hand to share the Des Moines Public Schools' experience in completing an audit which saved their district nearly \$1 million. She spoke about factors in their success, including communication, deadlines, the importance of one on one consultation and union involvement in the process, but most importantly working with employees and bargaining groups to achieve great results. More information available from Jon Muller (jon.muller@isfis.net or 515-251-5970).

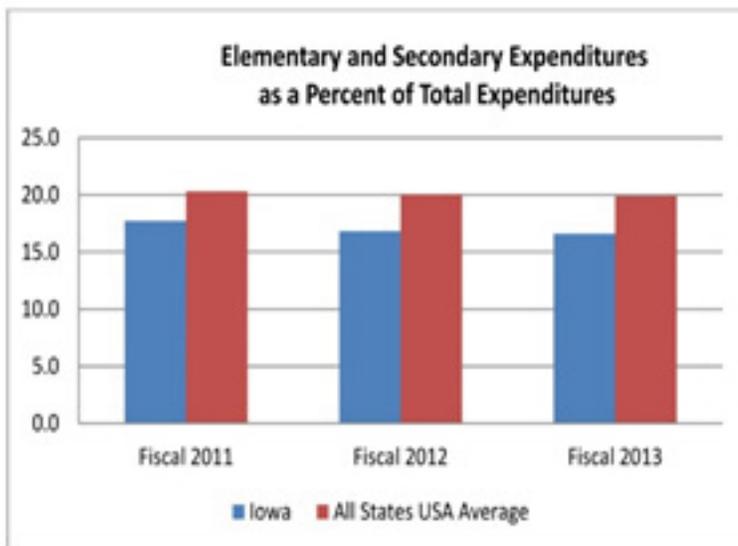
Excel Tips and Tricks, Larry Sigel, ISFIS

Larry covered some of his favorite Microsoft Excel tips and tricks. From understanding and using cell references to eliminate boring and repetitive tasks to conditional formatting built into Microsoft Excel, Larry highlighted ways to “work smarter, not harder.” Two other functions, vertical and horizontal lookups, were highlighted as ways to improve the speed and accuracy of user's spreadsheets.

Iowa Economic and Education Comparability: Education Coalition Data and Advocacy for Adequate and Timely School Funding - Brad Hudson, ISEA Lobbyist, Tom Narak, SAI Lobbyist, and Margaret Buckton and Larry Sigel, ISFIS ISEA lobbyist

Brad Hudson and SAI Lobbyist Tom Narak joined Margaret and Larry for this last General Session. ISFIS shared some data about Iowa that helped inform the advocacy efforts of the Education Coalition Funding Fact of the Week during the 2014 session. Of particular interest is the fact that Iowa has jumped 11 places in the national rankings of per capita personal income in the past 10 years, but education spending has not kept pace. Generally, the condition of Iowa's economy has a positive outlook; however, this prosperity has not translated to increased support for at-risk students, whose supplementary funding commitment is at just 9.8%, while the national average is 29%. Iowa's prosperity is also not evident in overall educational expenditures, which come in at just 16.8% of the total State expenditures, over 3 points below the national average. In fact, Iowa's per student spending has dropped by 11% since 2008 when adjusted for inflation.

Lobbyists also shared tips and suggestions for the kind of advocacy it will take both before and after the election to get a school funding decision in the first 30 days of the 2015 session.



School Vehicles, John Seefeld, Jester Insurance

Who can drive your school vehicles? “Your employees and anyone else while using, with your permission, a covered ‘auto’ you own, hire, or borrow.” He then explained insurance coverage issues and shared some interesting facts.

- Older drivers do not have more or worse accidents than younger drivers.
- More accidents happen on sunny days than cloudy, rainy, or snowy days.
- More accidents happen with an empty or almost empty bus, than a full bus.

The moral of the story is that accidents happen, and you need to be sure your coverages are up-to-date and adequate for your needs.

SKILLS IOWA CORNER

Skills Iowa provides two technology tools to Iowa School Districts. The assessment tool, edifyAssess provides information in reading comprehension and mathematics about the progress students are making throughout the school year by providing monthly benchmarks in reading comprehension and three annually in math for students in 3rd through 11th grade (through algebra 2 in math). Additionally, teachers can make their own assessments depending on student needs. The tutorial program, Skills Tutor, provides 1300 five to ten minute tutorials in reading comprehension, vocabulary, math, science and other disciplines. If you are interested in more information, contact Susie Olesen at ISFIS (Susie.Olesen@isfis.net or 515-251-5970, ext. 6).

As many of you know, we're going to be using edifyAssess next fall for our assessment program. edifyAssess is a new and improved version of Assessment Center, the tool we used previous to the 2013-14 school year. It has the reports we had come to rely on like Item Analyses, Individual Student Reports to be used for conferences, Usages Reports, and others. Margaret and Susie presented a Webinar on some of the changes which can be found at [this web address](#).

If you already know a date you would prefer for the "it's fall, let's get started" training, contact your trainer to schedule. Otherwise, they will be contacting you shortly.

Josie Gerriets (josie@skillsiowa.org or 515-229-9809)
 Rhonda Justice (rhonda@skillsiowa.org or 712-541-1594)
 Susie Olesen (susie@skillsiowa.org or 641-745-5284)
 Pam Oster (pam@skillsiowa.org or 515-720-6257)
 Doug Robbins (dougr@skillsiowa.org or 712-251-6938)

Additionally, we'll post calendars, directions, and other information related to our tools at our Skills Iowa website throughout the summer and into next year, www.skillsiowa.org. We look forward to working with you next year!

Thought you might like a glimpse of one of our old and reliable reports that we will be able to access again next year. Yeah!

0	 0%	C	D	C	D	C	D	C
1	 14%	C	+	B	B	D	D	B
7	 100%	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
6	 86%	+	+	+	A	+	+	+
1	 14%	B	+	D	A	B	C	A

QUOTES

“A Larry Quote” Larry shared his favorite school finance quote saying, “If I only had one day to live, I’d spend it talking about school finance...because it would seem like a lifetime.”

“A Margaret Quote” Margaret shared her favorite definition of lobbying, quoting former Senator Steve Warnstadt, “The best lobbying is gentle persuasion applied relentlessly,” and stated that some of us have to work on the gentle and some of us have to work on the relentless, but we all have to work together for the priority of educating Iowa’s students.

“For good ideas and true innovation, you need human interaction, conflict, argument, debate.”
 Margaret Heffernan

***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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