
Evaluation of the Standards Aligned Classroom Initiative – Year 1 Report

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Purpose of Agenda Item

To report the findings and recommendations of the evaluation of standards implementation and to report progress on major activities to support standards implementation.

Expected Outcome(s) of Agenda Item

The Board will receive the reports and accept the recommendations of those reports.

Background Information

Three topics will be discussed and reviewed:
- the report on the evaluation of the implementation of the Illinois Learning Standards conducted by Lizanne DeStefano and her staff at the University of Illinois,
- the report on the evaluation of the Standards Aligned Classroom Initiative conducted by the professional development design team of the Illinois Regional Offices of Education, and
- an update on major ISBE initiatives to support districts in the implementation of the Illinois Learning Standards.

Evaluation of the Implementation of the Illinois Learning Standards – Year Three

ISBE commissioned the University of Illinois to conduct a four-year evaluation of the implementation of the Illinois Learning Standards. This longitudinal study began on January 18, 1999 and will end June 30, 2002. The report completed August 2001 covers the third year of the study with principal investigators, Drs. Lizanne DeStefano
and Nona Prestine, continuing. The researchers used a five-level implementation scale to determine the extent and nature of the implementation of the ILS:

- Level 1: Becoming aware of the ILS
- Level 2: Exploring implementation of the ILS
- Level 3: Transitioning to an ILS-led educational system
- Level 4: Attaining the benefits of an ILS-led educational system
- Level 5: Fully implementing an ILS-led educational system

The study has quantitative and qualitative components. During the third year, the researchers surveyed a random sample of 2,422 teachers and 136 building principals to determine the extent to which they were implementing ILS in their classrooms, schools, and districts. The researchers also conducted intensive case studies of ILS implementation in six districts (ten schools) – the latter consisting of 30 site-visit interviews with teachers and administrators. This year, the researchers conducted site-visit and telephone interviews with “best practice” schools. A “best practice” school was identified as one having “advanced implementation” of the Illinois Learning Standards. The findings were as follows:

- **Implementation of the Illinois Learning Standards has increased 26 percent from a year ago. As a state, Illinois is in transition to an ILS-led system with 43 percent of responding schools at level Three.** Level three is characterized by established plans, policies, and timelines for ILS implementation; linkages between district curriculum and ILS; teachers and administrators convinced ILS are the “way to go” to improve student learning; widespread impact on teaching, lesson planning, evaluation of student work, professional development and the like; new academic programs and policies shaped by ILS; and beginning student and community awareness of ILS.

- **Although the rest of the schools surveyed (57 percent) placed at Level 2 (Awareness and Exploration of an ILS-Led System), their average scores on several dimensions were at Level Three.** For example, curriculum development was 3.03, district/school infrastructure was 3.01, and professional development was 3.25. Although no schools placed at Levels 4 or 5, many of Level-3 schools’ scores on several dimensions are approaching Level Four.

- **Professional development, curriculum development, district/school infrastructure, instruction and affective response (in that order) are the most highly implemented dimensions – all averaging at Level Three.** Both survey and qualitative results indicate that ILS is having a greater impact on instruction and assessment at the classroom level than in previous years. More than 74% of teachers reported that curricular change was occurring as a result of ILS implementation.
- **Community and Stakeholder Involvement are low (Level One) at all levels of schooling, although it has increased from 1999.** Respondents indicated that parents, school boards, and the community had only minimal awareness and understanding of the ILS and limited access to information and educational opportunities about them.

- **Disentangling the unique contribution of ILS implementation strategies to improve student achievement will be a near impossibility.** Although the researchers have yet to detect a significant statistical relationship between ILS implementation and changes in ISAT scores, anecdotal information and teachers’ perceptions suggest that such a relationship does exist and is growing stronger.

- **Advanced ILS implementation schools share ten characteristics in common. These characteristics are as follows:**
  - changes in instructional practices that focus on problem-solving and higher-order thinking versus rote memorization and drill;
  - high levels of teacher involvement which included collaboration, sharing, and communication;
  - teacher ownership of the learning standards;
  - development of assessments to evaluate student progress on the ILS;
  - strong professional development aligned to ILS;
  - system-wide alignment to ILS;
  - reinterpretation of ILS as a school-wide vision of student learning;
  - emphasis on continuous improvement;
  - administrative support; and
  - building on existing strengths.

The recommendations of this years study remain consistent with previous years and emphasize concrete, sustained support for ILS implementation to district, school, and community stakeholders.

1. **Foster and support capacity building at the district level for effective standards implementation.** The importance of district-level involvement in standards implementation cannot be understated. As ISBE’s primary customers, districts are the major sources of capacity building for schools – coordinating, channeling, and controlling access to professional development, curriculum materials, and new instructional ideas.

2. **Use the levels of implementation and the themes developed from the best practice schools to illustrate specifics of advanced implementation at the district, school, and classroom levels.** Although a considerable number of schools have moved from Level Two to Level Three, few districts have attained the high levels of implementation seen in the best-practice schools. The ten themes provide benchmarks for schools seeking to increase implementation.
3. *Model community involvement.* Because ISBE views community involvement as a critical element in standards-based reform, it must demonstrate how parents and other stakeholders become involved in standards implementation. In particular, ISBE should develop “translations” of the ILS for various stakeholder groups (e.g., parents, board members, and business).

4. *Continue to evaluate ILS implementation for an additional five-year period.* Implementation was slow to take hold but is gaining momentum. The continuation of the study will permit us to see what “mature” implementation looks like in Illinois and enable ISBE to judge progress and guide state planning, policy making, and technical assistance to districts.

5. *Conduct a study to identify all the factors associated with positive changes in student achievement.* In addition to ILS implementation, many other “intervention” factors can affect student achievement. Investigating all these factors is more likely to provide a clearer picture of the determinants of positive changes in student achievement. A promising study might be to identify a sample of schools that have experienced significant increases in student achievement and investigate the factors associated with these changes.

**Standards Aligned Classroom Initiative**

The Standards Aligned Classroom Initiative is a yearlong staff development program designed to assist teachers and administrators to incorporate standards-based instruction into their daily lessons. This initiative is sponsored by the Regional Offices of Education. School staff members who participated in the program were provided an initial two-day workshop that taught them a specific approach to bringing the Illinois Learning Standards to their students. This training was conducted at the start of the 2000-2001 school year. Following the initial training, staff members participated in a local learning team. The learning teams met regularly throughout the school year to discuss challenges and to share experiences related to implementing standards into their instruction. In addition, a specially trained coach was assigned to each learning team. The role of the coach was to support and direct the efforts of the learning team.

To determine the degree to which participation in the training and learning teams impacted the attitudes, beliefs, and actions of the participants, a formal evaluation of the training program was conducted. The three components of the evaluation include the following:

- Administration of a pre-and post-test survey to participants in the program to assess changes in attitude and instructional practice.
- An evaluation of the teacher portfolios of a sample of teachers scoring high, average, and low on the pre- and post-test survey.
- An interview with a subset of program participants to determine specific factors that facilitated or hindered the implementation of the standards.
The analysis of the pre- and post-test survey data clearly showed that teachers in the Standards Aligned Classroom program became more positive towards standards-aligned instruction over the course of their participation. Specifically, teachers reported:

• More familiarity with the Illinois learning standards,
• Greater understanding of how to use the standards and assessment in planning classroom instruction and assessment,
• More consistent use of the standards in planning classroom instruction,
• Greater acceptance of a standards-aligned instructional approach as a positive impact on student motivation and participation,
• More confidence in their ability to use the standards,

Teachers expressed these positive changes regardless of grade level taught or the number of years of teaching experience.

Teachers with higher survey scores developed significantly better portfolios than those produced by lower scoring teachers. This suggests a relationship between the survey data and the production of real classroom materials.

Interviews with higher and lower scoring participants indicated that participants with higher survey scores were more likely to be members of teams that:

• Met more frequently,
• Shared leadership duties across team members,
• Volunteered to participate in the program, and
• Included team meetings regularly attended by an administrator.

This set of findings supports the ten characteristics of high implementation schools as outlined in the report from the University of Illinois.

Classroom Resources to Support Local Implementation of the ILS

Strengthening the Standards

The Standards Division, in collaboration with 280 school districts and representatives of parents, businesses, and other community groups is developing resources to facilitate implementation and student achievement of the Illinois Learning Standards.

Performance Descriptors. ISBE developed performance descriptors for every performance standard at every grade level. These descriptors, which were disseminated to school districts at the beginning of the 2000/2001 school year, provide teachers with clearer direction and guidance for aligning their curricula and instruction to the standards. They also can serve as the basis for setting local performance standards for every grade level. The American Federation of Teachers, annual review of state standards indicated that because of these descriptors and other standards resources, Illinois now has strong standards in every learning area.
**Classroom Assessment System.** During the past school year 280 school districts field-tested 400-classroom assessments. In addition to trying out the assessments, the field-test teachers met at the end of the school year to evaluate the resulting work. Panels of teachers at every grade level validated a “meets” and “exceeds” sample for each standard in the seven learning areas. ISBE staff is in the process of transferring 350 of these classroom assessments and the related student work samples to CDs for distribution to all school districts. Teachers will be field-testing the second half of the classroom assessments this school year. A complete set of classroom assessments and student work samples will be available for the beginning of the 2002/2003 school years.

**Community Involvement Project.** In July of 2001, ISBE funded a project with the Office of Educational Services at SIU to help school districts increase community involvement in the implementation of the Illinois Learning Standards. A larger effort of ISBE’s Communication Office aims to link this initiative promoting and marketing the ILS. Working in collaboration with state organizations of educators, parents, business and community groups (e.g., IEA, IFT, IPTA, Illinois Chamber of Commerce, Urban League), this project will develop a statewide network of educators and community groups to

- support standards implementation;
- establish five school-district demonstration sites of education and community partnerships in support of the standards;
- develop procedures and materials for involving community member in standards implementation, and;
- disseminate Community Involvement Resources to all school districts in the fall of 2002.

**Superintendent’s Recommendation**

I recommend the Board continue to support the evaluations of the implementation of the Illinois Learning Standards and the Standards Aligned Classroom Initiative and accept the recommendations of those reports. In addition, I recommend the Board direct the Superintendent and staff to analyze the recommendations and enhance the existing standards plan for their implementation by December, 2001. This plan should include and address related policy, legislative, communication, and partnership implications as well as communicate an integrated agency approach for their implementation.

**Next Steps**

Staff will review the recommendations and provide an enhanced plan for their implementation by December, 2001.