

SEPTEMBER 14, 2015

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Greetings Race to the Top Friends!

We want to wish all of you a smooth start to the FY 15-16 school year. Budget talks delayed the introduction of the Race to the Top (RtT) coaching program, but we have recently been approved to proceed. Your district coach will be contacting you via phone or email shortly. Please feel free to reach out your coach or our staff at the Center for Performance if you have any questions, comments, or concerns as we head into the final months of the grant.

Make sure to mark your calendars for Tuesday, September 29th for the Fall All-District Conference. It will be an informative day featuring panel discussions on PERA/Student Growth and technology, as well as an excellent keynote address from Dr. Laurie Barron.

Grant Housekeeping

As the fall semester is getting underway, we wanted to remind all of the districts to go into your Scopes of Work on the MyIIRC site. Keeping these updated is an important part of tracking the great progress made by the districts and will allow the coaches and us here at ISBE to provide some targeted technical assistance. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact us or ask your coach.

Resources from the Illinois Center for School Improvement

The Illinois Center for School Improvement (Illinois CSI), a partnership between ISBE and American Institutes for Research, was created to raise student performance and close achievement gaps in the lowest performing school districts by increasing the capacity for exceptional teaching and learning. Illinois CSI accomplishes this mission by providing Priority and Focus services as part of ISBE's waiver granting flexibility from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act's No Child Left Behind law.

In its work, Illinois CSI introduces district and school leaders to strategies intended to transform their practices. Some of these resources include:

- A [data-gathering guide](#) that helps determine whether districts and schools are optimizing their data-gathering practices (e.g., walk-throughs, classroom observations, and learning rounds). This guide provides explicit

“The goal of education is the advancement of knowledge and the dissemination of truth.” – John F. Kennedy

instructions for various ways to gather relevant data necessary for informed decision making.

- A [VIEW protocol](#) (Vitals, Inquiry, Expectations, What now) helps district and school leaders develop consensus around strategic priorities (what Illinois CSI calls “worthy targets”).
- Illinois CSI’s [meeting protocol template](#) helps leadership teams create effective plans.
- An [easy-to-read brief](#) that highlights the research-based characteristics and importance of high-quality leadership in districts and schools.
- A “[Plan/Process Review](#)” protocol, which provides district and school leaders with a list of reflective questions for identifying the strengths and weaknesses of any plan being prepared for implementation.

For more information about Illinois CSI, visit www.illinoiscsi.org.

Local Assessment Support

Although the Local Assessment Support (LAS) project has concluded, the LAS materials are available on the Balanced Assessment [webpage](#). These materials include assessment literacy training modules, workshop materials, and example classroom assessments.

The LAS project will continue posting example classroom assessments throughout the year. Please check the Balanced Assessment [webpage](#) regularly for updated information and assessment literacy resources.

Lessons Learned

Mid-Year Progress Reports went out in January and we would like to extend a hearty thank-you for getting the reports completed and returned. The responses you provided give the Center for Performance insight into the achievements and the challenges each districts faces. While reviewing the reports, several quotes expressed the sentiment of the RttT Grant. Graciously, we wanted to share a few of those with you:

“We are very excited about the opportunities that have been afforded to us by the RttT program. We have taken these opportunities and put them to great work. We are seeing successes in our students’ progress, teacher and administrator communication, a much improved relationship with all of our stakeholders because of consistent communication and consistent terminology; i.e., school report card. We are very proud of our progress, but also know we have much work to do. Time and money are still factors in attempting to achieve all of the work we have set for ourselves; however, the work and progress is very satisfying.” -Carbon Cliff Barstow 36

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”
– William Butler Yeats

“Annually, our building and district improvement teams correlate information

from the 5Essentials with measures of student growth from the previous year to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement. These areas for improvement then become the School Improvement Plan for the subsequent year, with detailed task plans designed to address each area.” -Eastland CUSD 308

The Feast – Summer Institute

[The Feast](#) was a week long summer institute for teachers to learn about integrating technology into their curriculum and to hone skills on emerging tech. This institute was specifically geared towards the Race to the Top districts. ISBE provided funds from the grant to pay for districts to send up to 5 teachers and provide a stipend to help support travel to The Feast. Eight districts attended. The institutes were held in Bloomington (June and July) and in East St. Louis (July). ISLE partners provided some of the sessions at The Feast, which gave teachers time to learn about the MyIRC Dashboard, iOER resource, and data and identity advancements that are coming out of the ISLE initiative. Over 200 teachers attended in Bloomington and over 60 attended in East St. Louis.

In addition to the summer institute, The Feast also hosts several events concerning educational technology. The regular Teacher Feast provides hands-on training, professional development, exposure to new classroom applications, and participants can get up to 2 hours of graduate credit for attending. Tech Coordinators Feast is organized by a Tech Coordinator Committee and the IlliniCloud to introduce districts to emerging technologies and their application within schools. In addition, there is a [KidsFeast](#) which is oriented towards students entering 6–8th grades. The students are engaged in various group activities, experiments and presentations concerning technology. On the final day, parents are invited to observe presentations conducted by the kids. For more information about The Feast and upcoming events, visit their [webpage](#) or [Twitter](#).



“The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education.”
– Martin Luther King, Jr.



Accessing Your Leadership Teams

District and school transformation requires leadership teams to operate at peak effectiveness. Studies suggest that when principals work with teams of teacher leaders to form school-based leadership, the speed at which transformational efforts occur is increased (Yager, Pedersen, & Yager, 2010). Research also shows that district leadership plays a key role in positive change (Herman et al., 2008). To reinforce the critical, collaborative roles performed by various leadership teams in a district, Illinois CSI has created surveys that district, school, and instructional leadership teams may self-administer. Each survey takes only a few minutes to

complete and provides a revealing look at whether meeting protocols, collaborative structures, and routines are aligned with [research-based measures of effective teamwork](#).

To access each survey, click on the corresponding link:

[District Leadership Effectiveness Survey](#)

[School Leadership Effectiveness Survey](#)

[Instructional Team Effectiveness Survey](#)

For more information about Illinois CSI, visit www.illinoiscsi.org.

Sources

Herman, R., Dawson, P., Dee, T., Greene, J., Maynard, R., & Redding, S. (2008). [Turning around chronically low-performing schools: A practice guide \(NCEE 2008-4020\)](#). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.

Yager, S., Pedersen, J., & Yager, R. (2010, Fall). Impact of variations in distributed leadership frameworks on implementing a professional development initiative. *Academic Leadership Journal*, 8(4), 195–200. Retrieved from <http://contentcat.fhsu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15732coll4/id/537>

Upcoming Events and Important Dates

- **2015 Fall Kickoff Race to the Top All-District Network Meeting: September 29th, 2015 in Springfield, IL** – You will receive an invite

shortly via email.

- F.S. ELA Academic Vocabulary: September 8th in Danville, IL – [Click here to register](#)
- Writing....It Matters! Intro to Writing....It Matters: September 15th in Urbana, IL – [Click here to register](#)
- State Board of Education Strategic Agenda Planning Session: Sept. 16-17th – [Click here for the agenda](#)
- Gifted Education Training and Networking: September 24th – Paxton-Buckley-Loda, IL – [Click here to register](#)
- The Illinois Reading Council 48th Annual conference – [Passport to Possibilities](#): October 1-3 in Peoria, IL
- Deadline to submit fiscal year 2016 School District Budget/Joint Agreement Forms to ISBE: Oct. 30
- Fiscal year 2016 School Technology Revolving Loan Program (STRLP) application deadline: Dec. 1 – [Click here to learn more](#)
- Southern Network Meeting – Dec. 1st – Kaskaskia College, Centralia, IL
- Central Network Meeting – Dec. 2 – Heartland College, Normal, IL
- Raising Student Achievement Conference; Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools: December 7-8th in St. Charles, IL - [To register or learn more click here](#)
- Northern Network Meeting – Dec. 9th – Kishwaukee College, Malta IL