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## LEARNING SUPPORTS IMPLEMENTATION IN IOWA: YEAR 2 EVALUATION AND FINAL REPORT

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# Learning Supports Implementation in Iowa: Year 2 Evaluation and Final Report

## Executive Summary

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) conducted the evaluation of the Safe and Drug Free Schools data quality grant for the Iowa Department of Education (DE). Although this was a three-year grant, for various reasons, implementation did not begin in earnest until Year 2.

There were two major goals for the data grant. The first was to effect improvements in the way educational data are collected in Iowa. The second was to try out a new process for how data are used by schools and districts, called *Learning Supports*. In this report, we describe what we learned about both in our evaluation.

First, with respect to *data collection*, we learned that users of the statewide student record data collection system, Project EASIER, are very happy with the trainings they receive, with more experienced users significantly more satisfied than newer users. An analysis of a second data system, Iowa's Comprehensive School Improvement Plan system, showed that the sampled school improvement plans—which contain Safe and Drug Free Schools applications—did not reflect a thorough application of the Principles of Effectiveness, and did not do a good job integrating academic and nonacademic data (discipline, drug, violence data) into school planning processes. The DE is prepared to conduct additional training to increase the quality of these CSIPs from a Safe and Drug Free Schools perspective. Finally, from a focus group with data collection staff from multiple Iowa Area Education Agencies (AEAs), we learned that challenges DE must still face in the data collection system include staff who are very good and dedicated but too few in number, and problems with the timeliness of state data requests and the process of reporting data to the state. We learned that disparate DE initiatives create disparate data requirements that create conflicts and redundancy. There was a plea that the DE work on a coherent plan for schools that integrates the various disconnected projects.

With respect to *data use*, our evaluation of the Learning Supports initiative indicated that having clear guidance and support from the state, a strong local leader, and adequate funding were associated with better implementation of Learning Supports. Teams were working together much more effectively in the second year of the initiative. Districts doing a better job implementing Learning Supports had higher reading and math achievement than districts with poor implementation. We would expect that if the initiative had been able to complete a third year, that these gains would have been even greater.

## Evaluation Results: Data Collection Activities

AIR's evaluation of the DE's data collection system had three components: Project EASIER evaluations, CSIP analyses, and the AEA focus group. Details of each of these are presented in turn.

## Project EASIER

Iowa's student record collection system is called Project EASIER. This system began in 1995–96, with a significant expansion in 2004–05 to meet state and federal reporting requirements such as those in NCLB. Districts send individual student records through a secure web interface to the Iowa DE which, in turn, aggregates the information at various levels. Selected summary information is made available to districts and to the public via the Iowa DE web site. The AIR evaluation examined the level of satisfaction among participants in a series of Project EASIER training events.

Goals of the grant with respect to Project EASIER included improving the system's ease of use and helping LEA staff understand how to use the system more effectively. To assess these outcomes, AIR designed feedback forms that were administered following Project EASIER trainings in the spring and fall of 2006, and the spring of 2007. All of the trainings received consistently high satisfaction ratings, ranging from an average of 4.0 to 4.4 on a scale of 1–5. Respondents with more years of experience with Project EASIER were significantly more likely to be satisfied with the DE's training workshops.

Complete reports from the last two training events (fall 2006 and spring 2007) are included in Appendix A of this report. (The Spring 2006 evaluation summary was included in last year's annual report.)

## Analysis of the Safe and Drug Free Schools Quality of District's CSIPs

Iowa's CSIPs, which cover a 5-year period, include applications for Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act funding and therefore should be built upon the federal Principles of Effectiveness. The DE also hopes to see an increasing integration of drug and violence data with academic data in the course of planning for school improvement. AIR and DE staff collaborated in the construction of a rubric that allows each of the 15 CSIP elements to be rated in terms of how well it embodies the Principles and integrates Safe and Drug Free data. A copy of the rubric is included as Appendix B.

Every year, one-fifth of Iowa's 370 school districts' CSIPs are carefully reviewed by the DE through a process that includes site visits. This year, the DE asked AIR to use the rubric to rate the quality of 63 districts that were scheduled to be reviewed in 2007. We found that none of the sampled districts were "excellent" and many were "poor" in terms of how well they demonstrated the Principles of Effectiveness and showed an integration of Safe and Drug Free Schools planning with overall academic planning. On a 0, 1, 2 scale, the average score across all sampled districts was 1.0, with a range from 0.2 to 1.3.

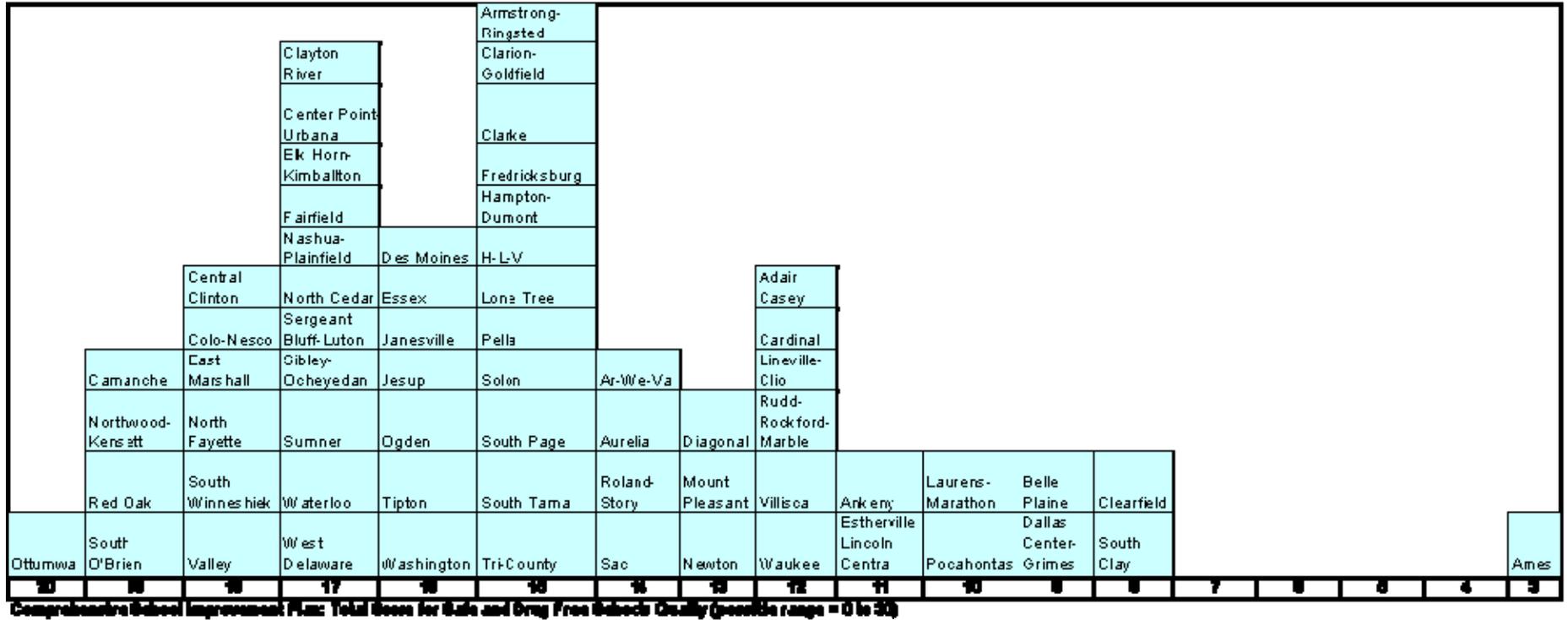
AIR staff analyzed CSIP quality scores to see if they varied according to district characteristics. The only district characteristic related to CSIP total scores was pupil/teacher ratio (for the district). The higher the ratio (i.e., the larger the class sizes), the better the CSIP total scores were. Scores for item IIB (process for determining what the district will do to meet its long range goals), item IIF (what actions/activities will the district use to address prioritized needs, established goals, and gaps), item III (how will the district know whether student learning has

changed), and item IVA (process to evaluate implementation of action plan) were all positively associated with pupil/teacher ratio. These factors have in common the necessity for broad team structures and a focus on Safe and Drug Free Schools issues.

Within the CSIP, the only item that was independently related to district characteristics was II G, “How will we support implementation of the identified actions?” Higher scores on this item required clear identification of who would be responsible for oversight of the money, personnel, time, or professional development resources applied to address the district’s identified needs. For this item, smaller district size (and all that goes with that, such as lower total population, fewer students, fewer schools, and fewer staff) was associated with better scores on the CSIP.

The distribution of total scores for the 63 sampled districts is presented in the chart on the following page. There were 15 items that were scored 0–2; therefore the possible range was 0–30 for total scores.

Distribution of CSIP Safe and Drug Free Schools Quality Scores for 63 Districts Receiving DE Reviews in 2007



## AEA Data Collection Focus Group

A group interview was held on March 8, 2007, with seven AEA data staff to assess AEA's satisfaction with state data collection systems. Overall, the AEA staff participating in this group interview expressed satisfaction with the personnel at DE, whom they described as hard-working and responsive. However, the group noted that DE was short staffed and there were problems with the timeliness of state data requests and the process of reporting data to the state. AEA staff also noted that DE did not see them as partners in data use, only as reporters of data. The staff added that data systems were too driven by federal requirements, and not enough by school data needs. Specific ways that participants noted that the DE could be more helpful included the following:

- ***Encourage more 2-way communication.*** The participants agreed that DE can be helpful in opening up a 2-way line of communication directly with AEA staff in regard to data sharing and reporting. This is already evident in the DE's Project EASIER AEA data cadre meetings. However, these meetings do not have representation from local districts that provide different views, which may be important additions to the conversation. Also, AEA staff can assist DE by ensuring that school districts in their areas have completed and submitted their data and are able to respond to last-minute requests from the state. Along these lines, AEA staff is aware that the state office receives last-minute demands for information from the legislature and others; however, it would be helpful for the SEA to give AEA and district staff more advance notice when they make requests.
- ***Request reports in a timely manner; ensure web pages are functional.*** Timeliness is a barrier to producing data reports for analysis. There is a "hurry up, last minute approach from the state" that makes it challenging for schools and AEAs to get information to DE in a timely manner. AEA staff noted that the checklist of elements required for the annual progress reports was not posted until the last minute. DE web pages are often not debugged and functional when the reporting window opens. More efficient web programming at the state end would help data reporting processes run more smoothly.
- ***Reduce the number of data systems.*** Another challenge to districts is the large number of different data systems created or commissioned by the state. For example, new software applications are developed for each new piece of data required by the state, but these new applications may not connect to each other. For example, the new system being developed to report special education student information does not connect to EASIER or IMS. There are student ID discrepancies across the student data systems that pose serious integration challenges, and make verification of the quality of reports impossible. Reducing the number of data systems, requiring that new systems integrate with current databases, and providing additional training to AEA and school staff on new systems that are introduced would help AEA staff to respond to these changes.
- ***Provide better access to state data systems.*** AEAs experience great frustration trying to get data out of state data systems. The AEA staff uniformly reported that they would like to have increased access to district and building level data from the State's data systems.

AEAs would like to access individual test data and other student information and follow those data elements across time. There typically are no “export” functions in state data systems, though, and AEA staff instead must transcribe data from websites one district or building at a time (which raises the possibility of data errors). The timeliness of state data is also a frustration for AEAs. They need data at the school level on a real-time basis, not a year later in a summary report. At the same time, AEAs recognize that data reporting will only move as quickly as the slowest district. The AEA may be more helpful to districts in meeting their timelines if the AEA and SEA could work together more effectively.

- ***Create one vision/message.*** AEA participants in this group interview stated that the absence of a unified vision at the SEA that cuts across regular education, special education, migrant students, and so on, contributes to a patchwork of duplicative data systems, redundant training, and sometimes even contradictory messages. For every new initiative that has data collection and reporting requirements, new forms are added rather than modifying existing data schemes. Data collection and data clean-up work becomes duplicative. For example, the Learning Supports initiative is disconnected from the achievement data collection and accountability. There are reading initiatives, high school initiatives, a high school standards project, another for PBIS, and the list goes on, yet these programs are not coordinated. One AEA participant reported that there was a district in his AEA with five different reading programs, at least partially the result of multiple State initiatives. The state needs one vision with coordinated, aligned goals and projects.

The participants’ message to DE is, “We need you to work together. ...Don’t waste our time on disconnected projects for schools. We need one coherent plan; not mixed messages.”

The group interview summary report is included in Appendix C.

## **Evaluation Results: Data Use/Learning Supports**

The major data use initiative conducted through the Safe and Drug Free Schools Data Grant was the Learning Supports Initiative. Learning supports are the programs, procedures, services, and strategies that are implemented to create conditions and environments that promote student learning. These supports focus on the creation of caring, engaging learning environments that foster student connectedness and nurture youth development by helping students to build the necessary social, emotional, and other life skills to help them succeed in school and beyond. A learning supports system is created when people coordinate efforts to ensure that barriers to learning are reduced for all students so that they experience success in school.

Learning Supports are designed and implemented by Learning Supports teams at the local level. Under this grant, ten districts were invited to pilot this initiative by creating or re-purposing teams to fulfill the Learning Supports functions. AIR evaluated these efforts in the following ways:

- We analyzed data on participant satisfaction with training events for the Learning Supports teams
- We conducted site visits and/or interviews with all Learning Supports teams
- We collected online Team Climate Inventory data, rating the quality of Learning Support Team functioning

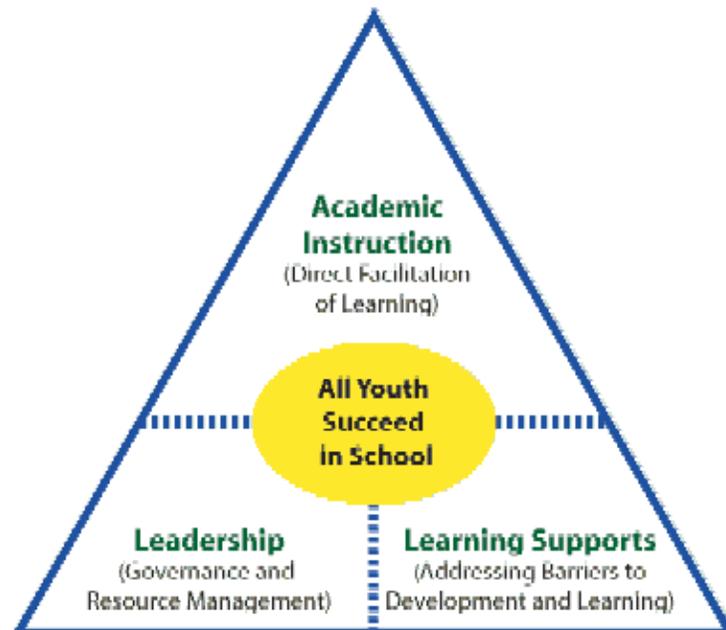
Results of each of these lines of inquiry are presented in the following sections.

## About Learning Supports: Conceptual Framework

The physical, intellectual, social, and emotional aspects of students’ lives are woven together like a tapestry, and students’ readiness and motivation to learn is deeply connected to how they are functioning in these other areas. Unfortunately, many students are confronted with a wide range of learning, behavioral, physical, and emotional roadblocks that interfere with their abilities to participate fully in school life and benefit from the instruction that their teachers provide. While children across the U.S. are becoming increasingly challenged by mental and behavioral difficulties, the research clearly demonstrates that the use of rigid or harsh disciplinary practices in schools is not effective in placing students back on track for academic, emotional, and behavioral success (Sugai et al., 2000; U.S. Public Health Service, 2000).

The Learning Supports initiative views success in school as the responsibility of more than just the school itself. In fact, for those youth with barriers to learning, success often requires the collective response of many services and resources available through the community. Therefore, becoming “successful in school” requires a three-pronged approach:

1. Provide quality instruction and address academic rigor.
2. Provide visionary and dedicated leadership to support the work of the school staff and students.
3. Ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to learn and succeed in school by providing Learning Supports.



Learning supports are the programs, procedures, services, and strategies that are implemented to create conditions and environments that promote student learning. These supports focus on the creation of caring, engaging learning environments that foster student connectedness and nurture youth development by helping students to build the necessary social, emotional, and other life skills to help them succeed in school and beyond. A learning supports system is created when people coordinate efforts to ensure that barriers to learning are reduced for all students so that they experience success in school. This system has interrelated components that together produce effects impossible for any one of them to produce alone. In practical terms, all parts of the system are important and work together effectively toward a common result: success in school for all students. This system of supports includes six areas:

- 1) Supplements to Instruction (academic, leadership, enrichment, and recreational supports and opportunities);
- 2) Family Supports and Involvement;
- 3) Community Partnerships;
- 4) Safe, Healthy, and Caring Environments;
- 5) Transitions; and,
- 6) Child/Youth Engagement.

Interventions in each of these areas serve as pillars of support in preventing problems and intervening as soon as problems arise. Supports in these areas also focus on helping students to develop their own personal motivation for learning, and to reengage students who have lost their way (Adelman & Taylor, 2001). These learning supports can provide the conditions necessary for student learning only when they are well-coordinated, based on data that identifies the specific needs of students, and are organized to meet the full range of these needs (universal, targeted, and intensive).

## Evaluation of Learning Supports Training Events

The Iowa DE provided a variety of training options to the Learning Support team members in the field test districts. Topics addressed at these training events included results-based accountability, connecting schools and families, and data use and analysis tools and materials. Although the actual forms used to evaluate the sessions varied across events and cannot be directly compared, overall training scores were high. The most consistently positive feedback from attendees highlighted the importance of having time to work together in teams. Participants also appreciated having tools that could be used immediately and implemented back in their schools. Indeed, Learning Supports team members did immediately implement some of the information gleaned from workshops. Several pilot sites began creating family and school connectedness programs as a result of the Karen Mapp workshop held in December 2006; others began evaluating their programs based on the tools provided by Mark Friedman during his February 2007 workshop; and several teams mentioned their use of tools to analyze their Iowa Youth Survey (IYS) data provided at the October 2006 workshop. In particular, teams especially valued state-level supports, while area-level supports were rated less highly.

## Learning Supports Site Visits

In the second year of the evaluation, AIR staff conducted all site visits to districts participating in the Learning Supports field test. Pre-visit telephone interviews were conducted with all ten Learning Supports field test team leaders between March 14 and April 19, 2007. These interviews focused on more factual and straightforward questions about Learning Supports implementation; the more complex questions were addressed during the in-person visits. Site visits were completed for nine districts (Alta, Bondurant Farrar, Ft. Dodge, Iowa City, Knoxville, Louisa-Muscatine, Red Oak, Van Buren-Keosauqua, and West Des Moines) between April 2 and May 3, 2007. The Iowa DE requested that AIR staff conduct only a phone interview with Marshalltown Community School District, because that pilot site never began implementation in earnest. The complete reports for all ten sites are included in this report as Appendix D.

### **About the Learning Supports Field Test Sites**

Ten school districts were selected as pilot districts for the Learning Supports program: Alta, Bondurant Farrar, Fort Dodge, Iowa City, Knoxville, Louisa-Muscatine, Marshalltown, Red Oak, Van Buren/Keosauqua, and West Des Moines. These districts represent a diverse range of communities across the state and are supported by more than half the Area Education Agencies (AEAs) in the state (AEAs 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, and 267). Districts included range in K–12 enrollment from more than 550 students (Alta) to nearly 11,000 (Iowa City). Free and reduced-price school meals figures were also diverse, from 14% in Bondurant Farrar to 41% in Ft. Dodge. Although the racial makeup of these ten districts was fairly homogeneous (ranging from 88% white in Marshalltown to 99% white in Van Buren/Keosauqua), figures were consistent with the racial composition statewide.

### **About the Learning Supports Teams**

The Learning Supports teams were primarily composed of teachers, administrators, and other school staff in the K–12 system; however, most teams also included at least one AEA staff and one or more community representatives including parents and substance abuse/mental health support service staff. Although the make up of the teams had not changed significantly since last year, the membership varied greatly among teams. West Des Moines was one of the few teams that included an independent parent representative who was not also a school staff member; although other teams stated that they would like to add the parent perspective. Red Oak included two AEA representatives in their team and several team members played dual roles, such as the K–12 resource officer who was also a local police officer and the elementary school administrator who also served as the curriculum director. Louisa-Muscatine included five AEA staff, and Knoxville relied heavily on their AEA representative for positive behavioral supports (PBS) training and assistance. Other teams, particularly Van Buren and Iowa City, had little contact with their AEA counterparts and they relied on other community agents such as the Drug-Free Community grant administrator and substance abuse counseling service staff, respectively.

Team composition varied depending on whether the team represented a building or a district. Building-focused teams included West Des Moines, which served the elementary school; Knoxville, which served two elementary school buildings; and Bondurant Farrar, which represented the secondary school. In some teams, although the intention was to serve students

throughout the K–12 system, the current focus was on specific grade levels or secondary school buildings. For example, Iowa City and Fort Dodge focused their efforts at the secondary school level and anticipated expanding their work to the lower grades in the future. The Iowa City team, serving the largest number of students in the Learning Supports field test, included two layers of teams. The first layer involved Learning Supports teams at five of the six secondary schools; the second layer included at least two representatives from each building team at the district level meetings.

The majority of Learning Supports teams self-reported that they were cohesive and worked well together. The building-focused teams tended to show greater cohesiveness, because the staff met and interacted frequently. When the teams served larger numbers of students across multiple buildings, the cohesiveness and alignment of goals was strengthened by monthly meetings and frequent communications via e-mail and phone calls. Leadership appeared to be a key element of the success of Learning Supports teams in setting clear, attainable goals and moving forward in using results to make changes. The teams in Fort Dodge, Red Oak, Louisa-Muscatine, West Des Moines, Van Buren, and Alta all pointed to the leader of their Learning Supports team as providing necessary guidance and momentum. In Knoxville, the team noted the strength of their AEA representative, who worked at the school in other capacities in the past, as a “coach” who provided guidance and vision to their PBS efforts. Most of these teams met monthly or biweekly. In Red Oak, the team explained that the diversity of members from across the K–12 system as well as their parent and AEA members provided different perspectives. Although this was a great strength, it also challenged the team to maintain its focus; however, when efforts were focused on a clear goal, team breadth supported success.

On the other hand, the Bondurant Farrar team leader noted that due to a lack of time and human resources, he had not been able to provide the leadership required for this grant. In fact, he was unsure about whether the team would continue with Learning Supports for a third year. In Iowa City, the lack of buy-in from most school administrators resulted in less progress; however, in one school building with a strong Learning Supports team leader, there were significant gains in outreach to the community and improvements in its systematic review of at-risk students. The Iowa City building teams met monthly or twice a week, while the district level team met twice a year.

Regardless of the size of the district or the area that the teams represented, all of the team members were secure in their understanding of the needs and challenges of the students that they serve. Many team members cited their connection to the community through organizations in which they were members; the data they collected through surveys and other data sources; interactions with community agents such as police officers, parents, youth groups, and churches; volunteer parent and youth coordinators; hands-on and direct experiences with students, particularly at-risk youth; communications with parents and families; and communication among school staff.

Each of the Learning Supports teams was able to clearly identify their mission, which generally aligned with the district mission and vision as reflected in district statements and the comprehensive school improvement plans (CSIPs). West Des Moines developed their own team vision statement, which was used throughout the school as the “belief statement.” For all of the

Learning Supports teams, the grant promoted goals that included: school safety, student and family connectedness, reducing barriers for students, preparing students for their futures, and creating life-long learners.

### **Mobilization of Team Activities**

Team activities and implementation varied across the sites; however, nearly all of the teams had progressed since the first year of implementation of the grant. In this second year of the grant, the pilot sites had identified their focus and conducted activities and in some cases the Learning Supports teams did a significant amount of work. Bondurant Farrar was the only functioning team that had not conducted any activities through the grant, although they did attempt to put together a suicide prevention effort using another grant (but the effort fell through). Synopses of the variety of activities conducted by Learning Supports teams are described in the chart below.

<b>Field Test Site</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Results</b>
<b>Alta</b>	Parent involvement and interaction, increasing student connectedness, and improving student achievement	Created an advisor-advisee system that includes a pre- and posttest for students and parents with questions pulled from the IYS related to student connectedness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The team is still in the early stages of collecting data, but plans to use the data results next year to evaluate the effectiveness of the advisor-advisee system.</li> <li>▪ They will also review attendance data and test scores to see if there is an increase in achievement and parent involvement.</li> </ul>
<b>Bondurant Farrar</b>	None at this time	None at this time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ May relinquish the grant in the third year.</li> </ul>
<b>Fort Dodge</b>	School success with an emphasis on transition to senior high school	Developed a Freshman Academy to ensure successful transition for students to high school. Goals include maintaining or improving attendance, decreasing discipline referrals, ensuring academic credit earned, increased achievement, and decreased drop outs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The alternative school administrator on the Learning Supports team reported that his year he has received no transfers from the freshman class so far, the first time this has occurred.</li> <li>▪ The team reviewed 5 years of data, which will provide the baseline for this year's data, in which the team will determine changes in student safety, school climate, student retention, and improved behavior and academic achievement.</li> <li>▪ An end-of-year survey of student perspectives on the Freshman Academy will also be used to review the process and features of this effort.</li> </ul>
<b>Iowa City</b>	School failure, school safety, and student connectedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Each building develops and implements its own programs after analyzing data first to identify at-risk students, and then to determine whether the issue is study habits or behavior related to school safety and connectedness.</li> <li>▪ One building uses a triage system that includes weekly meetings to share notes, ITBS data, attendance, discipline referrals, and other data to identify the students who need help and discuss the best options for intervention.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The team hopes to build the infrastructure to support their goals.</li> </ul>

<b>Knoxville</b>	PBS; increasing attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a psychologist at the elementary school for services to families once a week.</li> <li>• Developed “B cards” that are used to reward positive behavior of elementary students, which includes training of students on the rules and sharing information about the process with parents who can use the same process at home.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Growth in ITBS scores, which the team attributes to a weekly review of attendance and academic data.</li> </ul>
<b>Louisa-Muscatine</b>	Community connection to form relationships with families; the team believes that “parent involvement is effective involvement”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Programs related to achievement, increasing attendance at parent-teacher conferences in junior/senior high school, bullying prevention, and credit recovery.</li> <li>▪ Family fun night at the school where information about math and literacy are shared with parents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Information gathered through surveys, ITBS/ITED data, and parent-teacher conference participation data will be analyzed to evaluate current programs and determine whether those programs should continue or change. Changes will be based on no less than 3 years of data.</li> </ul>
<b>Red Oak</b>	School climate and student connectedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Developed informational packets about school climate and culture that reflect district data for the community.</li> <li>▪ Created a transition survey for students and parents transitioning to new school buildings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The team will review data in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the grant to assess trends and evaluate their efforts.</li> <li>▪ The team has a preliminary sense from the data that students are more aware of bullying prevention issues.</li> </ul>
<b>Van Buren/Keosauqua</b>	Substance abuse prevention leading to a safe and supportive environment for students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Training and information sharing on a framework for understanding poverty.</li> <li>▪ Training for all staff on bullying prevention.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Through surveys the team has learned about staff, student, and parent perceptions of school safety, underage alcohol and drug use, and school transition, in addition to achievement data. Based on that information staff has identified their focus for training and further data reviews.</li> <li>▪ Partnering with the Safe Coalition, the Safe Schools Healthy Students grant, and the sheriff’s office to address underage drinking attitudes and behavior in the community.</li> </ul>
<b>West Des Moines</b>	Academic achievement, school safety, and positive behavioral supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Developed a “Paws Shop” for children who have earned “Paws” for good behavior and can use those credits to purchase items in the school store.</li> <li>▪ Implementation of a “Vision Survey” given to all students, staff survey, and an online parent survey.</li> <li>▪ Training on PBS provided to all staff.</li> <li>▪ Use a PBS team implementation checklist.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use future results to set priorities for PBS, climate issues, and achievement scores and to determine whether their initiatives have worked well or should change.</li> <li>▪ Training sponsored by the SEA has led the team to plan a new Family Center in the coming year. This center will “welcome and honor parents and families” by providing a place to meet and talk, access the internet and phones, and share information about resources in the community.</li> </ul>

## Funding

In this second year of the grant, many of the teams were considering how to increase funding and access other sources to support their efforts. Teams that had located additional funding included Iowa City, Knoxville, Red Oak, and Van Buren (sources included federal grants; donations/gifts; fundraisers; in-kind donations and contributions from community organizations and businesses; and volunteer support). West Des Moines used building funds to supplement the Learning Supports initiative. Currently, Bondurant Farrar, Fort Dodge, and Louisa-Muscatine were not seeking additional funding.

The team in Van Buren had access to a federal Drug-Free Communities grant and a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools grant for after-school programs, and they created a partnership with the Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant coordinator for team activities. The team also pointed out that after failing to receive a Wellness grant, they decided it was a “good thing” because it allowed the team to focus on ongoing activities with current resources rather than continue to add new activities that come with additional funding.

On the other hand, the Learning Supports data grant has been too small to make an impact in Iowa City’s large school district. Instead, this team relied on other funding for social and emotional programs in the district. Additionally, the district accessed local property taxes that were ear-marked for at-risk programming. Although the district team was considering additional grants, they first wanted to identify their needs and then determine what grant would best fit those needs. An additional challenge for the Iowa City team has been in allocating funding per building; solving this problem is a team goal for the coming year.

All of the teams concurred that additional funding through any source would be helpful in fulfilling their goals.

## Project Sustainability

Many of the teams have considered how to sustain the grant after funding ends. Efforts of various Learning Supports teams are described below.

- **Community outreach.** Most of the teams attempted to connect with the surrounding community and involve them in promoting the goals of the Learning Supports initiative. Community involvement included outreach to local organizations like the YMCA, agencies that provide mental health and substance abuse services, community businesses, churches, neighborhood centers, parks and recreation offices, parent-teacher organizations, and volunteer groups. Iowa City has also used technology to increase their outreach to parents by creating an automated telephone tree that dials out to parents and a real-time student information website.

The Knoxville Learning Supports team developed a “Family Fun Day” at the school that invites parents and students to participate in activities led by teachers, while also providing information and resources from the public library, summer academic activities

for kids, health services, summer school, and other community resources. Similarly, the West Des Moines team is developing a Family Center based on information they learned at an SEA-sponsored training by Karen Mapp on parent involvement.

In another example, the Van Buren/Keosauqua Learning Supports team partnered with the sheriff's office, local government, and area businesses to reduce alcohol abuse and underage drinking. Data were shared between these groups to support the Learning Supports initiative. Also, the team coordinated with the Safe and Drug Free Schools staff to place weekly articles in the local newspaper and to provide mental health services onsite at the schools.

- **Internal/external champions.** Most of the Learning Supports teams considered their team members to be internal champions, and particular members played important roles as volunteer coordinators, at-risk youth coordinators, team leaders, managers of specific initiatives, and liaisons to other community organizations. These members helped to connect the Learning Supports initiative to the community. For those teams that reached out to the community and created partnerships, their external champions ranged from parent-teacher organizations and the school board to local business leaders and service agencies.
- **Changes in the environment and new opportunities/challenges.** Learning Supports team members were also a part of the communities in which they worked, so they were often involved in different organizations from which they could draw information, trends, new ideas, and feedback to support initiatives develop and support their plans. In several field test sites, the AEA staff provided surveys, staff training and resources, and other types of support to collect, analyze and report data. The stronger these ties were among the team and with the community, the greater their ability to respond to opportunities and challenges. In addition, district-based teams that were made up of a wide variety of team members had a broader view of community needs.

### **Role of the Iowa Department of Education and Area Education Agencies**

Several teams mentioned during the site visits that the first year of the Learning Supports was unfocused and the information provided through training was overwhelming. In the second year of the initiative, though, teams emphasized that the training provided by the DE and technical assistance provided at workshops, from state staff and consultants, and through data analysis was “wonderful.”

The DE provided data from the Iowa Youth Survey, ITBS/ITED, and other sources. They also helped to locate additional data sources for pilot sites. The DE provided comparative data that districts could pull from the state website to look at other district data as well as annual data. All of the teams praised at least some of the workshops that were provided by the DE over the past year.

The teams also identified things that the DE could do better. They recommended that the DE provide agendas and clear descriptions of workshops in advance, provide training events closer to the location of the pilot sites, and conduct separate training for the larger districts. Two sites suggested that the DE provide training with a focus on 1:1 technical assistance rather than a “one size fits all” approach. Another suggestion was to provide future training via video conferencing to save time and travel costs, while allowing more staff from the pilot sites to participate. Van Buren recommended that the DE provide additional training on reporting data and publicizing it in understandable ways, as well as on social marketing, a “critical and goal-oriented piece that all the pilot sites could benefit from to impact families and communities.”

The AEA role was especially salient for several of the Learning Supports teams. In Louisa-Muscatine, the AEA provided training, set up a PBS program in the schools, created a parent-liaison program, and assisted with other team needs. Other sites found their AEAs helpful in designing surveys, analyzing data relevant to student needs, and providing technical assistance. In Bondurant Farrar, the AEA staff member provided training on PBS and other topics, as well as hands-on support such as classroom observations.

For some teams, though, the AEA was unresponsive or disengaged. Nonetheless, members of these teams stated that they would appreciate additional support from the AEA if possible and when there was a clear role for these staff to take on.

## **Project Concerns**

When asked about their concerns, most of the Learning Supports teams responded with comments about project sustainability, the lack of adequate resources, questions about continuation of the grant, and some specific immediate needs of the teams. These comments were shared with the SEA during several telephone calls during the months of the site visits.

One critical issue noted by three teams was that effective implementation of Learning Supports has helped them to identify student needs, but the district did not have the resources required to address those needs. A major theme was that doing Learning Supports well requires time, money, and people that the pilot test alone could not provide.

Although the teams that actively implemented Learning Supports witnessed positive effects on student behavior, school climate, and school connectedness, and gained knowledge and skills through training, they require continued funds and other resources to maintain their efforts.

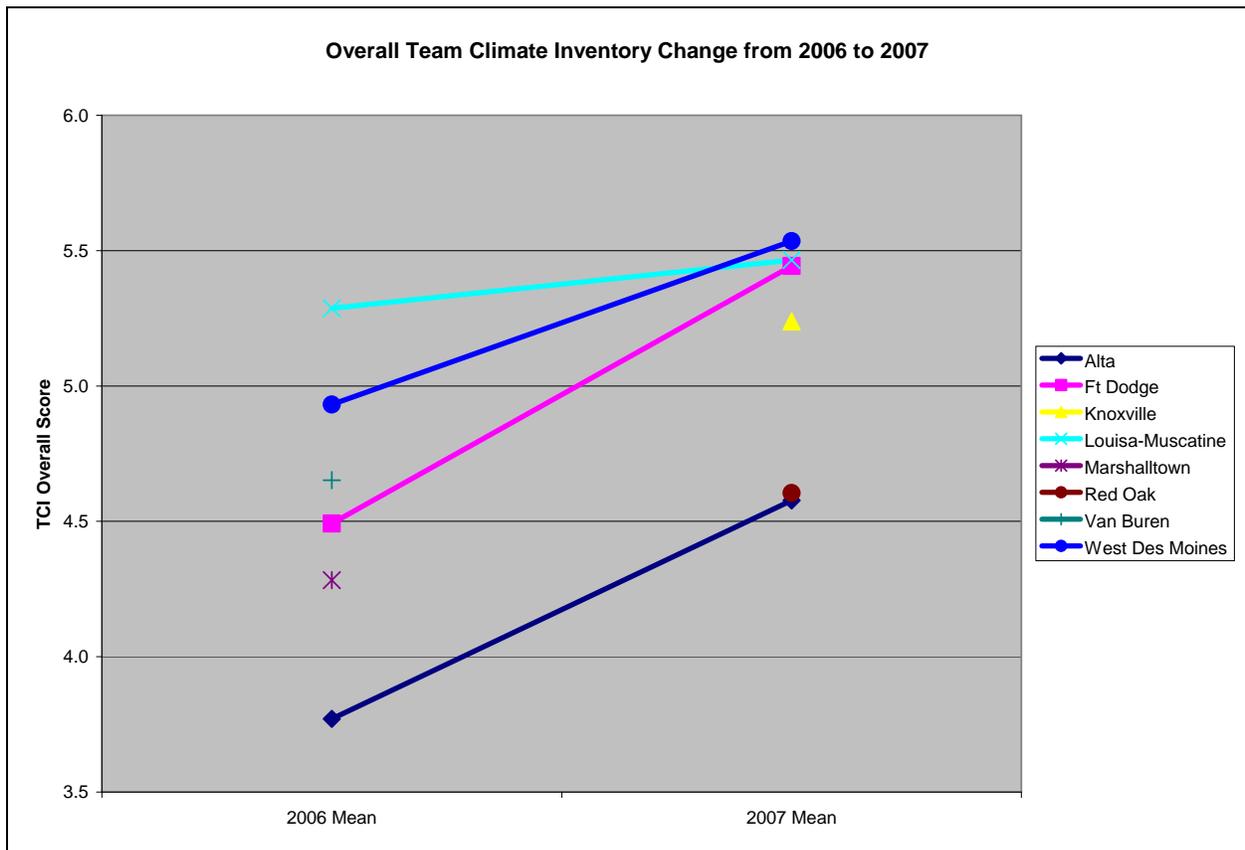
## **Team Climate Inventory Results**

All Learning Support team members were invited to take an online survey rating the quality of their team functioning. We used the Team Climate Inventory (TCI)—a standard, well-validated measure of work group climate that is used frequently in organizational psychology. The TCI measures four factors that indicate of effective team performance: Team Vision (clarity, perceived value, sharedness, and attainability); Participative Safety (decision-making, information sharing, and interaction frequency); Support for Innovation (articulated and

enhanced support); and Task Orientation (commitment to excellence, preparedness, and collaboration).

The online survey was open from February 2–May 25, 2007. AIR offered a \$5 incentive to encourage participation. Forty-nine Learning Supports team members from nine of the ten field test sites (excluding Marshalltown), responded to the survey. Data were downloaded and analyzed by AIR staff.

Team Climate Inventory data showed clear movement toward higher-functioning teams during the second year of Learning Supports implementation. Scores for each of the four scales improved markedly. Although two years of data is not enough to establish a trend, the data were very consistent across the four districts that had two years with adequate team member participation to yield a team score. The average slope for the two 7-point Team Climate Inventory scores (Vision and Task Orientation) from 2006 to 2007 was 0.9; the average slope for the two 5-point scales (Participative Safety and Support for Innovation) was 0.4. These values reflect steep change over a 1-year period.



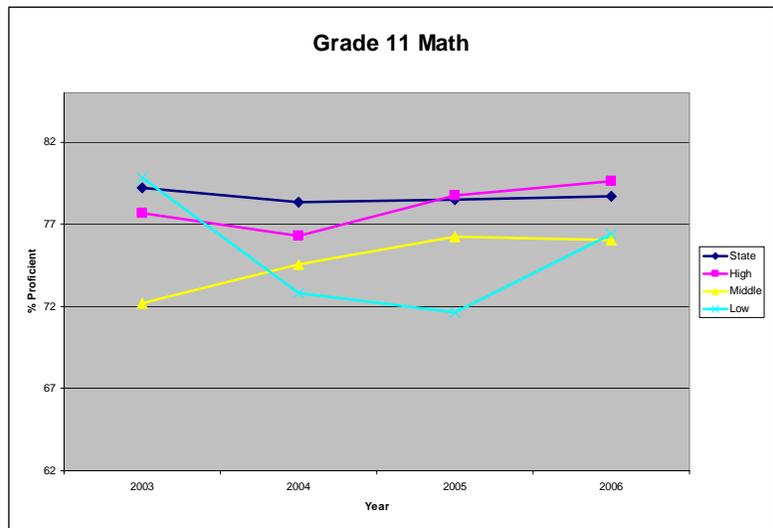
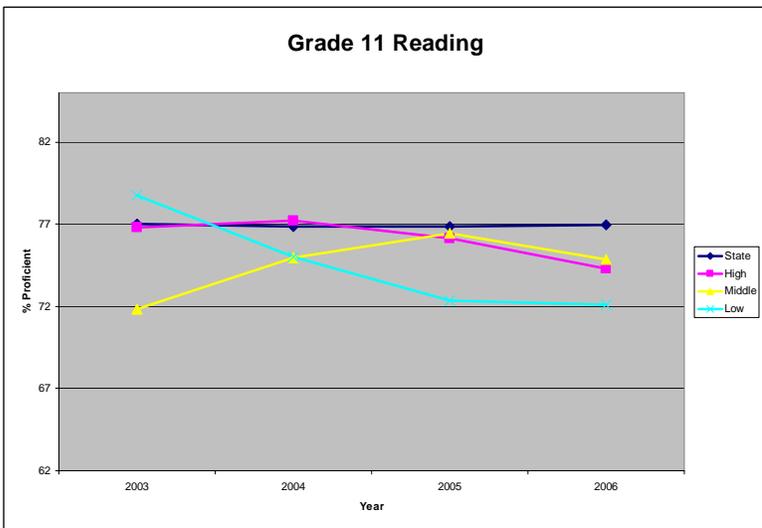
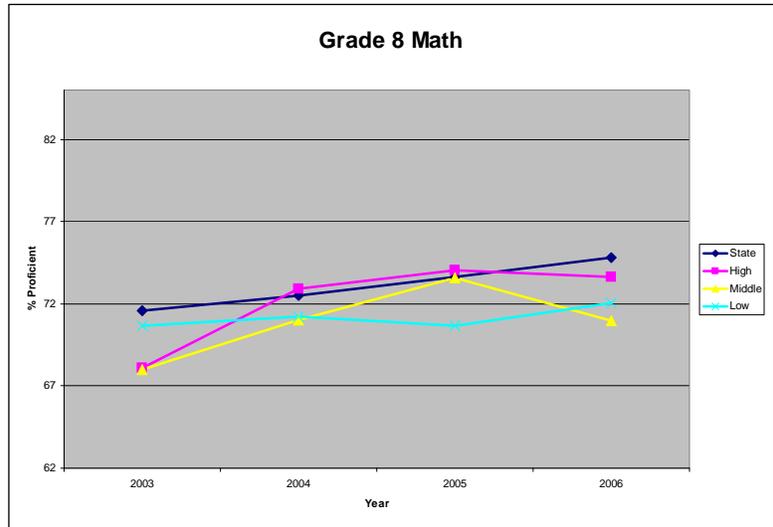
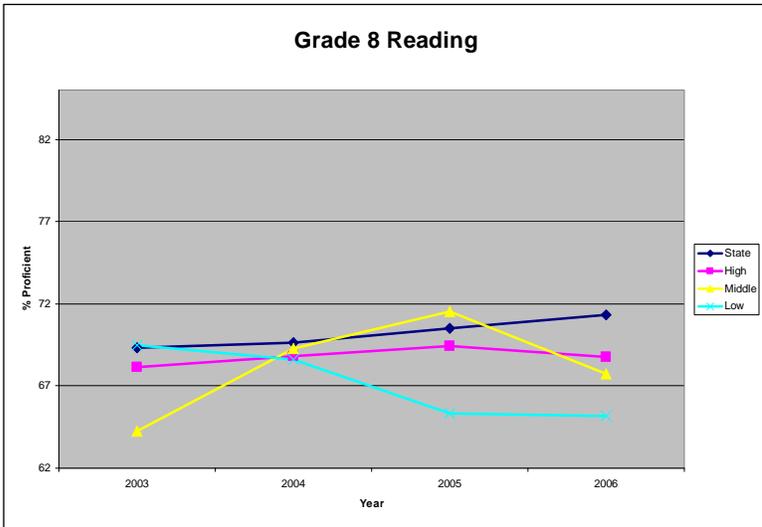
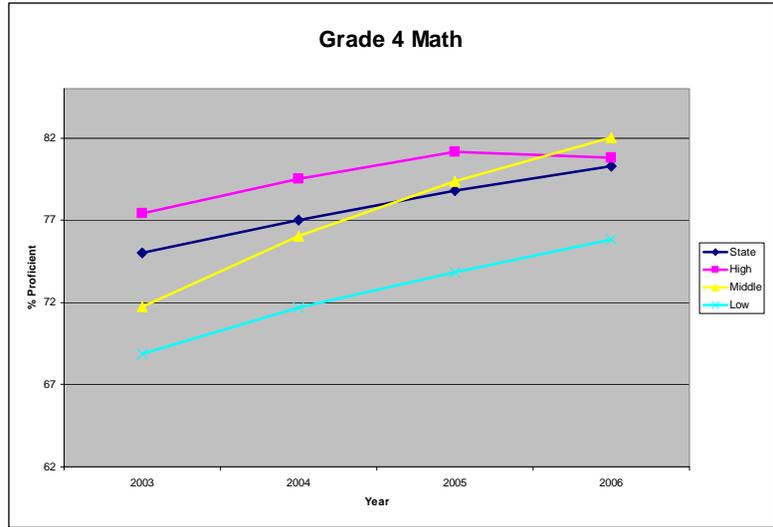
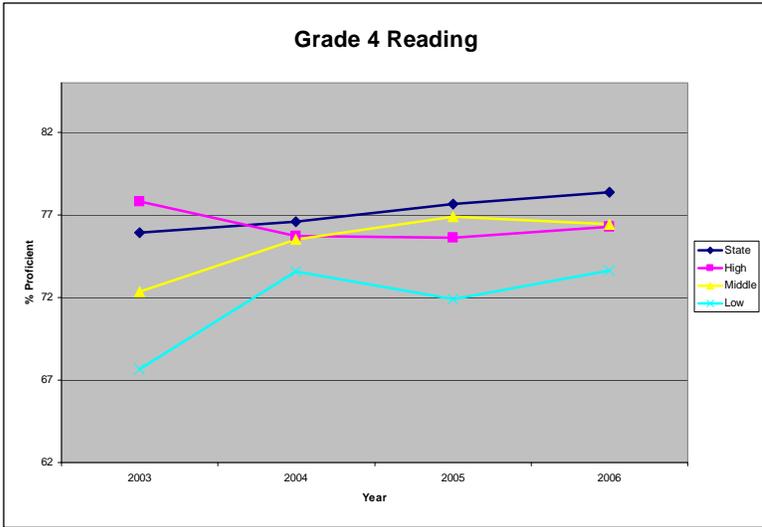
## Achievement Data

Although two years is not enough time to expect a very different result for student achievement, we examined district-wide achievement scores for the ten participating districts. Data were

downloaded from the Iowa DE web site for the years 2003–2006, and included the percent of students scoring proficient on the grade 4, 8, and 11 reading and math tests. Districts were coded by the evaluation team into low, medium, and high levels of implementation based on site visit results. The mean achievement scores for these groups were then graphed, with the state average as a comparison point. Because of the small number of districts involved, this analysis is strictly visual and descriptive, not inferential.

Visual data analysis showed that although achievement levels for field test districts were below the state mean, the percent proficient for reading and math at grades 4, 8, and 11 were consistently higher for the medium and high implementation groups than for the low group. One way to measure the vertical spacing of trend lines on a graph is to compute the y-intercept of a regression line plotted through the four years of achievement data. For these data, averaging across all achievement tests, the y-intercept crossed at 1.7 percentage points higher for the high implementation group than the low group (74.1% proficient overall vs. 72.4% proficient).

Graphs of these data are presented on the following page.



## Conclusion

In this second year of the Learning Supports initiative, the majority of field test sites were able to leverage the data grant's funding and training to achieve positive outcomes. Eight of the ten pilot sites reported improved student behavior and expected this improvement to serve as groundwork for future academic success. Some of the important themes that may be drawn from the Learning Supports evaluation include:

- **Team leadership and communication.** The success or failure of a team is dependent on clear leadership and a shared vision. Successful teams communicated frequently and met at least monthly to discuss the program's progress. Even when all team members could not participate actively, having a large team drawn from all relevant departments in the school or district helped to ensure adequate support for program efforts.
- **Training and support.** In the first year, implementation of the Learning Supports initiative was slow in part due to what respondents described as a lack of clear guidance regarding what teams were supposed to actually *do* at the local level. In the second year, an improved training plan led to greater understanding of the vision for Learning Supports and more effective and enthusiastic implementation. The training events provided tools, materials, and teamwork time that could immediately apply to action back at home. In addition, the ongoing support of DE staff and consultants were critical to continuing the efforts of the pilot sites.
- **Peer sharing.** In both site visits and on training evaluation forms, team members consistently indicated that sharing information with each other was important both to provide them with new ideas and to support their current efforts. One team specifically suggested a peer mentoring model to help the sites learn from each other.
- **Project sustainability.** Team efforts to sustain the Learning Supports initiative varied greatly. Some teams relied on the grant to provide staff development that would carry through future efforts, other teams plan to seek out additional funding. The key to ensuring that the teams' efforts would continue is resources: personnel, funding, and training. In addition, teams with a clear vision of how to implement the initiative in their school or district will likely continue those efforts after the grant funding ends.

AIR's evaluation also uncovered two major challenges in realizing the goals for this (or any) initiative:

- **Disconnected state initiatives.** A major obstacle to successful Learning Supports implementation was a tendency to see any initiative in Iowa as being associated with a particular constituency (such as special education or high schools) and therefore not applicable to all. Respondents expressed concern about the large number of new, separate programs that are initiated by the DE without a clear statement of what they replace or how they fit with existing programs or systems. The implication of our data is that the DE could help reduce fragmentation and redundancy in districts by beginning to break through silos that exist at the state level.

- **Inadequate resources.** One especially painful realization for Learning Supports teams was that using data well can at times create knowledge of student needs that schools or districts lack the resources to address. One salve for this wound may be direct support by the DE or the AEAs (such as by providing training and materials for evidence-based social emotional programs). An alternative or supplementary way of helping might be to increase the level of discretion that school leaders have at the building or district level to allocate resources in line with local priorities.

In sum, the AIR evaluation has revealed that there is broad-based satisfaction with the student record data collection system in Iowa. Districts have much room for growth in having their CSIPs reflect an integrated view of non-academic data and programming, but the parochial culture of specialization and narrow focus within the school system is beginning to break down in some areas.

Our evaluation of the Learning Supports pilot test was designed to be descriptive and formative, providing understanding of the factors related to successful implementation and a preliminary sense of outcomes. Not surprisingly, the site visits yielded data that emphasized the powerful roles of leadership and time in implementing an initiative. At the end of two years, the Learning Supports teams were functioning well and had increased their awareness and use of data. They were more interested in analyzing data to see where they have been and to determine future directions—they see the value of data. Several teams witnessed a direct impact on the behavior of students and families in some schools due to interventions selected and implemented through the Learning Supports initiative. Continuation of these efforts will depend largely on the capacity of districts, with AEA and DE support, to identify and apply additional resources to their efforts.

# Appendix A: Project EASIER Participant Evaluation Report

## Project EASIER Fall Workshops September 2006

### Participant Evaluation Report

#### Summary

In September 2006, the Iowa Department of Education presented five one-day regional workshops for Project EASIER. These workshops were held in the following locations on the dates noted:

- Council Bluffs, September 7
- Cedar Falls, September 11
- Ames, September 12
- Bettendorf, September 18
- Sioux City, September 20

Iowa Department of Education staff collected participant evaluation forms after the end of each workshop and then submitted the forms to the American Institutes for Research for analysis. This report presents the results of our examination of participant feedback and suggestions for future workshops.

#### Report Methodology

Participants were asked to complete and submit evaluations of the overall workshop and the sessions they attended, and to suggest future dates, locations, and improvements for future meetings. The following chart provides the location, number of pre-registrants (as a proxy for the number of attendees, which was not available), number of evaluation forms collected, and the estimated response rate:

Location	Number of Pre-Registrants	Number of Evaluations Collected	Estimated Response Rate
Council Bluffs	96	22	23%
Cedar Falls	168	48	29%
Ames	234	31	13%
Bettendorf	116	36	31%
Sioux City	94	26	28%
<b>Total</b>	<b>708</b>	<b>163</b>	

From a total of 708 pre-registered attendees only 163 evaluation forms were completed and submitted, approximately a 23% response rate. This evaluation report summarizes numerical ratings and written comments about the meeting.

## Characteristics of Attendees

### *Role*

The participant evaluation form provided a set of responses and asked to check which role best described them. The chart below presents the breakdown of roles represented at all five workshops combined. All attendees completed this section of the evaluation form. Most respondents were district administrators or district administrative professionals in support staff roles and approximately 20 attendees who selected “other.” This information is presented in the two tables below.

Several respondents checked multiple boxes, and because there was no indication of which was the primary role, both entities were coded. The seven attendees that selected multiple categories are shown in the third table below.

### Roles of Conference Participants

<b>Role</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
School District: Administrator	44	27.0%
School District: Administrative Professional (Support Staff)	72	44.2%
School District: CTE Personnel	1	0.6%
School District: Curriculum Coordinator	5	3.1%
School District: Technical Personnel	19	11.7%
School District: Other	20	12.3%
Area Education Agency	2	1.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>163</b>	

<b>School District: Other</b>		
Business Manager	1	5.0%
Counselor	9	45.0%
Secretary	5	25.0%
EASIER Coordinator	2	10.0%
Data Coordinator	1	5.0%
Assessment Coordinator	1	5.0%
Perkins Coordinator	1	5.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	

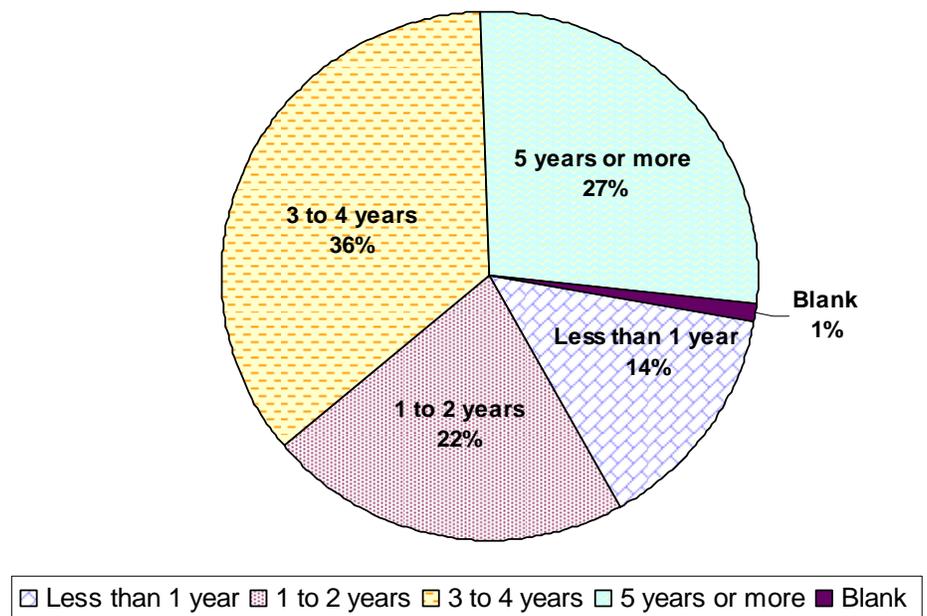
<b>Dual Role provided:</b>		
School District: Administrative Professional (Support Staff)	1	14.3%
School District: Technical Personnel	4	57.1%
School District: Other – LEA	1	14.3%
School District: Other – Systems Administrator	1	14.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	

### *Experience with Project EASIER*

Next, conference participants were asked to check the category that represents the number of years they have been working with Project EASIER. The response “3-4 years” was most frequent and the response of “less than 1 year” was the least frequent. In other words, only 15% of staff who attended the workshops had been involved with Project EASIER for less than a year.

The following pie chart presents a graphic representation of the years of experience with Project EASIER of attendees across the five workshops.

**Years of Experience with Project EASIER**



### *Participation in prior trainings*

Participants were also asked if they had previously participated in the Project EASIER Data Conference held in Des Moines, Iowa in April 2006. Two thirds of the respondents (66.9%) had attended the earlier conference, which appears to have implications for how much they believed that they learned from the recent September workshops and also how well they connected to the outside resources that are available to them on this project. In the next several pages a number of graphs present an interesting correlation between years of experience with Project EASIER and their self-reported learning and access to resources. The chart below provides the number and percent of responses in each category.

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	109	66.9%
No	48	29.4%
<i>Left item blank</i>	6	3.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>163</b>	

## Conference as a Whole

*What were the numerical ratings for the meeting?*

The evaluation forms asked respondents to rate several different aspects of the meeting. The mean ratings for individual items ranged from 4.01 to 4.46 on a 5 point scale. **Note:** Items were re-coded such that *higher* scores reflect *greater* agreement with the items and therefore higher levels of satisfaction with the workshop. In this case, we re-coded the scores so that now 5 represents “Strongly Agree” while 1 represents “Strongly Disagree.” The chart below provides the average score for each item, as well as the number responding with N/A and the number who left each item blank. These data are represented graphically on the following page.

Item	Average Score	N/A	Left Blank
5a. Handouts/materials provided will be good reference material	4.46	0	1
5b. Format of the workshop allowed me to learn	4.18	0	2
5c. Increased my understanding of requirements	4.14	0	2
5d. Questions and concerns were answered	4.04	3	3
5e. Student information system vendor sessions were useful	4.07	35	17
5f. Project EASIER staff provided adequate support during school year	4.32	12	4
5g. I would attend this type of regional workshop in the future	4.27	0	1
5h. I feel more confident about my tasks	4.01	0	2
5i. I was provided adequate information about the workshop in advance	4.28	0	1
5j. The workshop facilities were adequate	4.46	0	1

Items receiving the highest scores were 5a, 5f, and 5g: participants liked the handouts and materials received, they felt the Project EASIER staff was supportive throughout the school year, and they rated the facilities as adequate. Those receiving the lowest ratings were 5d, 5e, and 5h, although even these lower ratings still show a generally high approval. Nonetheless, the areas that may need to be addressed at future workshops include improvement in the vendor sessions (this is also reflected in the qualitative comments section below), more adequate responses to questions and concerns raised during the workshop, and effectively addressing concerns so that attendees can feel more confident about their tasks.

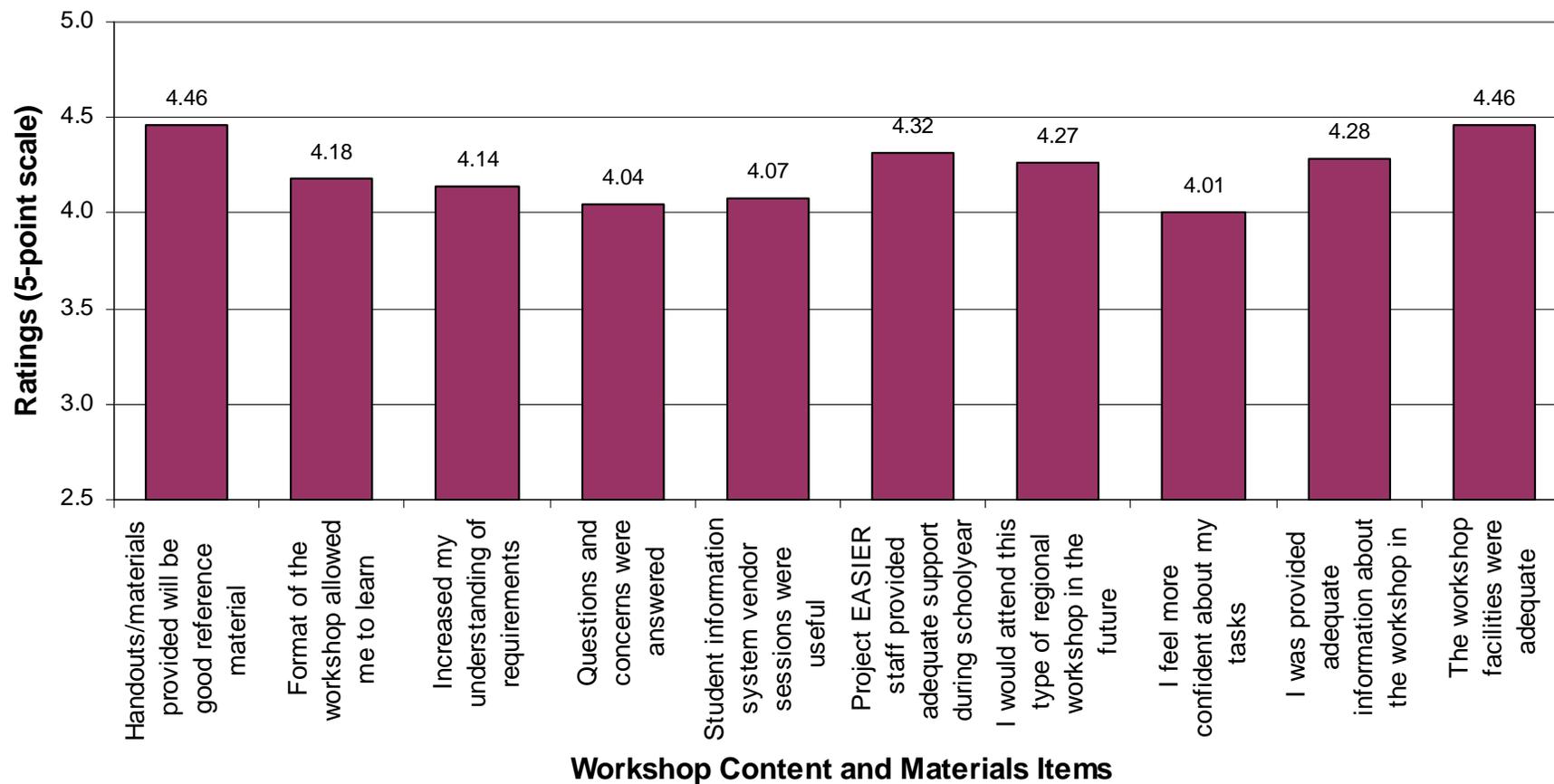
Two questions that were left blank or marked “N/A” the greatest number of times were 5e (vendor sessions) and 5f (support during the school year). This may reflect the low number of attendees to the vendor sessions and the type of relationship between attendees, who were predominantly district administrators and support staff (such as secretaries), and the Project EASIER staff. Future evaluation forms may deter the high number of blank responses by presenting the question about vendor sessions as a separate category.

The chart on the following page presents the average ratings of responses to questions about the overall workshop content and materials.

## Quantitative Ratings

### Project EASIER Fall Workshop - September 2006

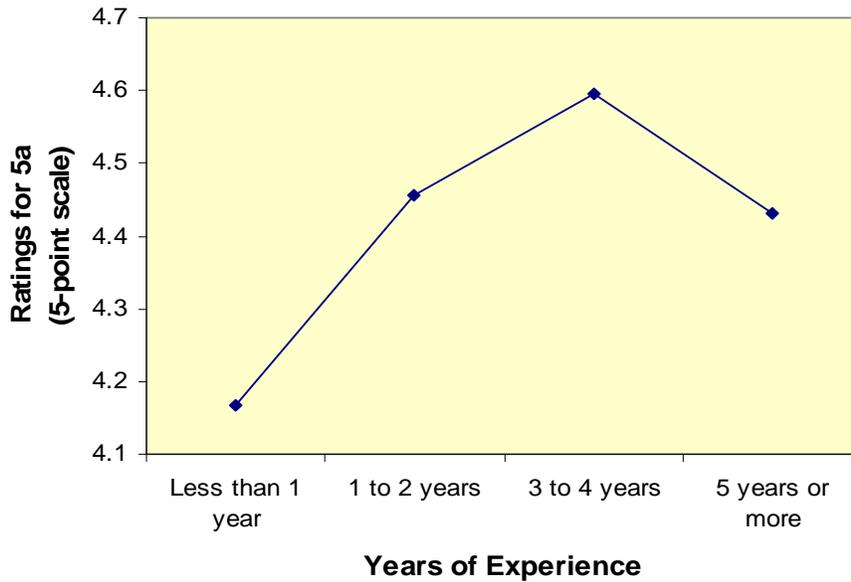
#### Content and Materials Ratings



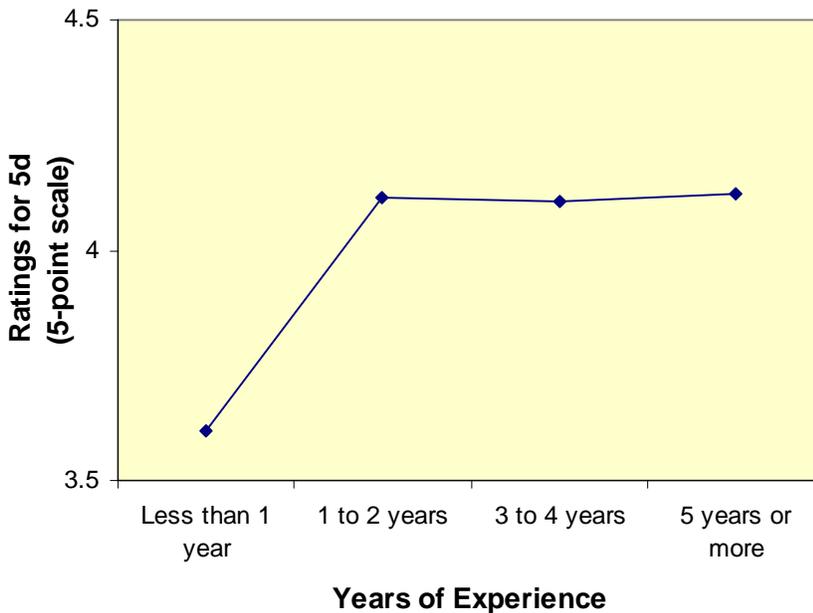
*Differences in Numerical Ratings based on Respondent Characteristics*

There were no significant differences in average or individual evaluation item ratings based on training location/date or by respondent role. However, there were differences in the evaluation items based on the respondents' years of experience with Project EASIER. Significant differences existed for the following five items as well as the mean across all satisfaction items. In each case, respondents with more experience in Project EASIER were more satisfied with the workshop. The following graphs reflect those evaluation items that showed a significant difference for staff with Project EASIER experience:

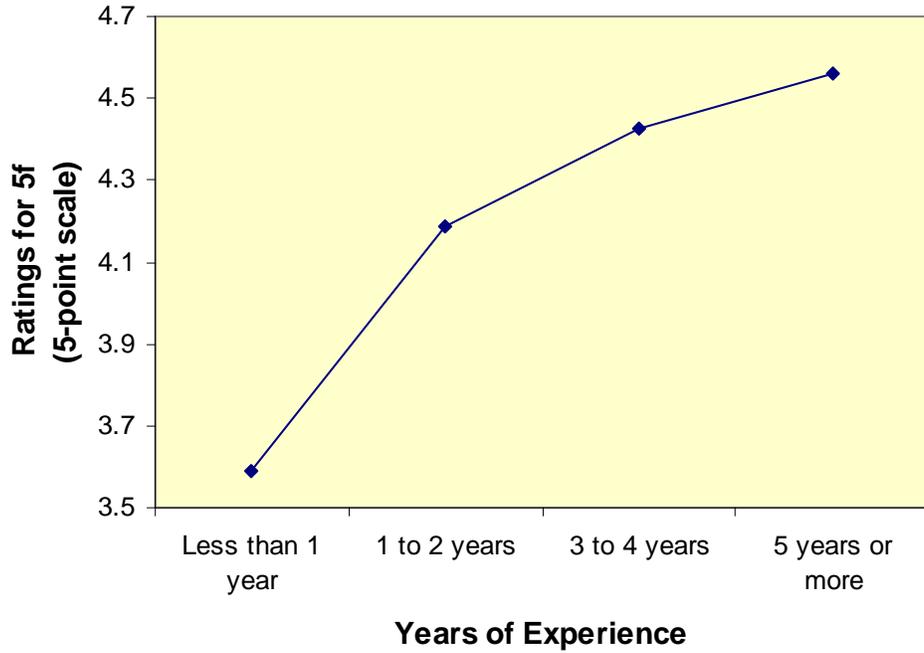
*5a. The handouts/materials provided during the workshop will be good reference material.*



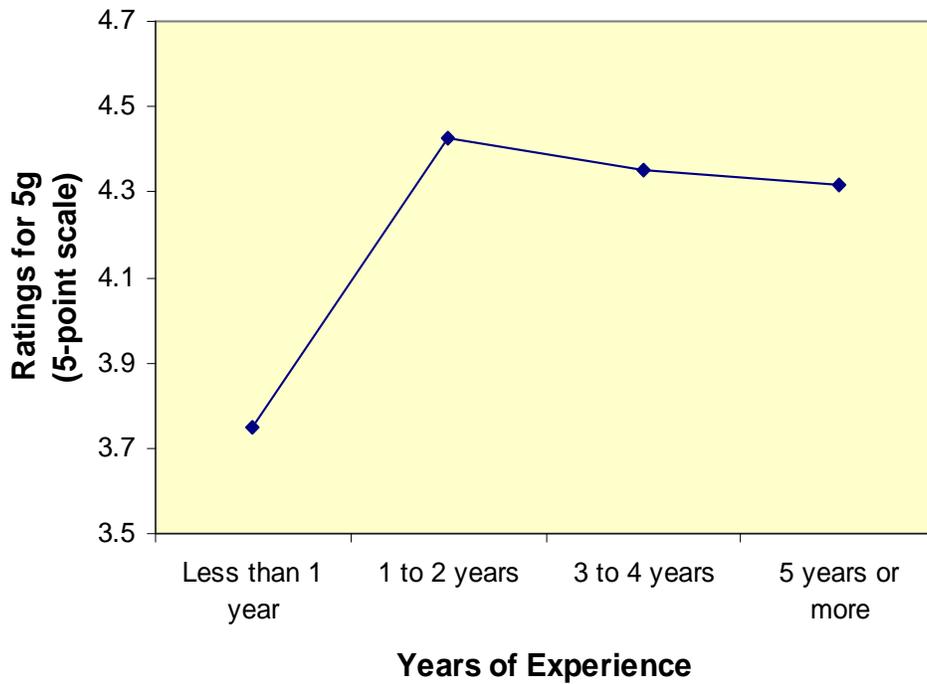
*5d. I was able to get my questions and concerns regarding Project EASIER answered.*



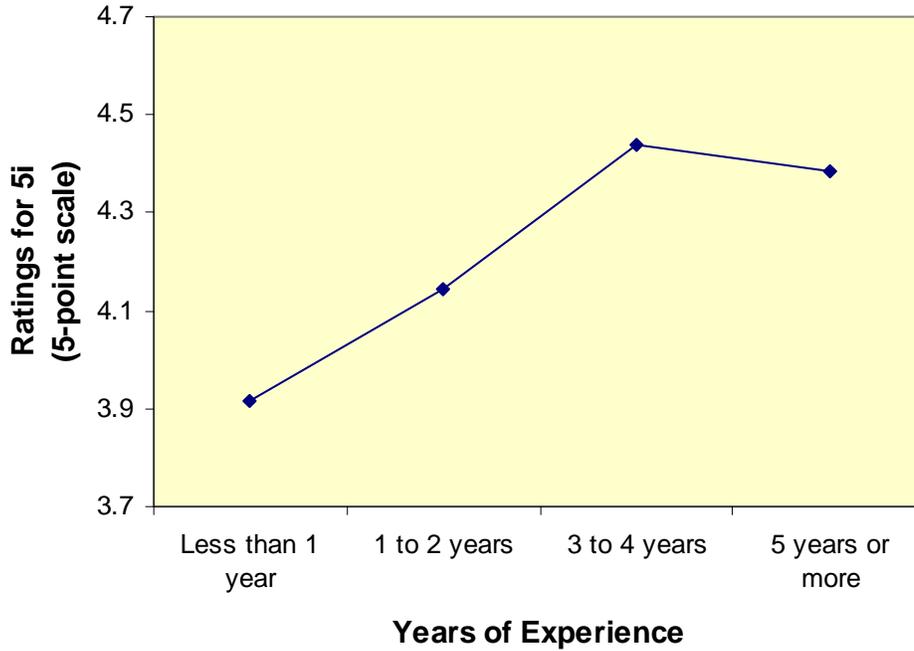
5f. Throughout the school year, Project EASIER staff provide adequate support to me.



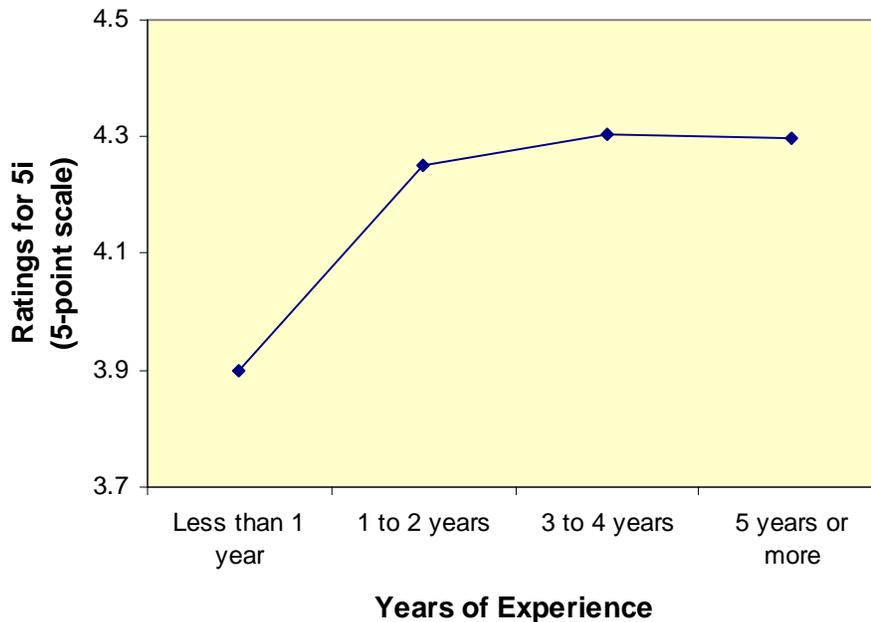
5g. I would attend this type of regional workshop in the future.



5i. I was provided adequate information about the workshop ahead of time (agenda, registration, directions, etc.)



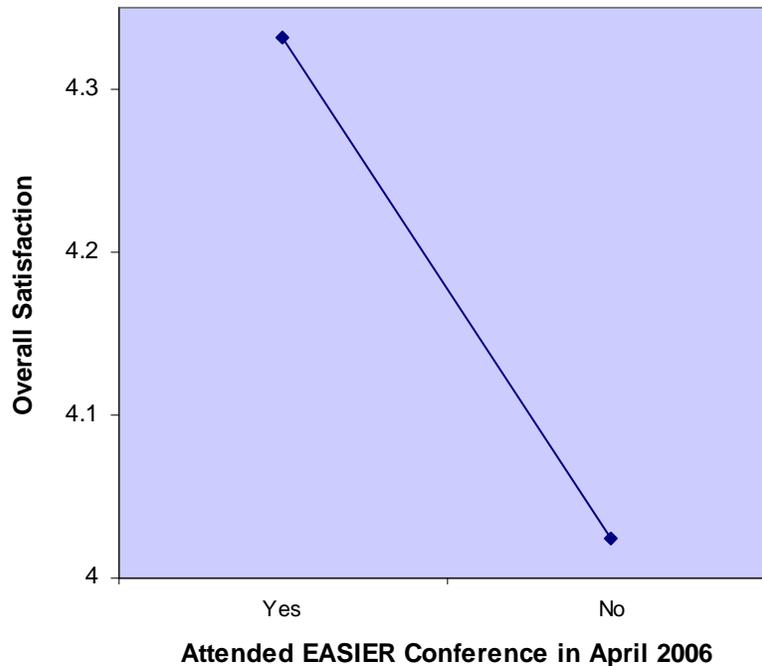
Average of all satisfaction items (5a through 5j).



Reinforcing the finding for respondent experience is the effect associated with having attended the Project EASIER Data Conference in April 2006. Every satisfaction item except items 5e and 5j (“I found it useful to have student information system vendor sessions at the workshop” and “The workshop facilities were adequate”) showed significantly higher satisfaction among

participants who had attended the April workshop. There were no significant differences for items e and j.

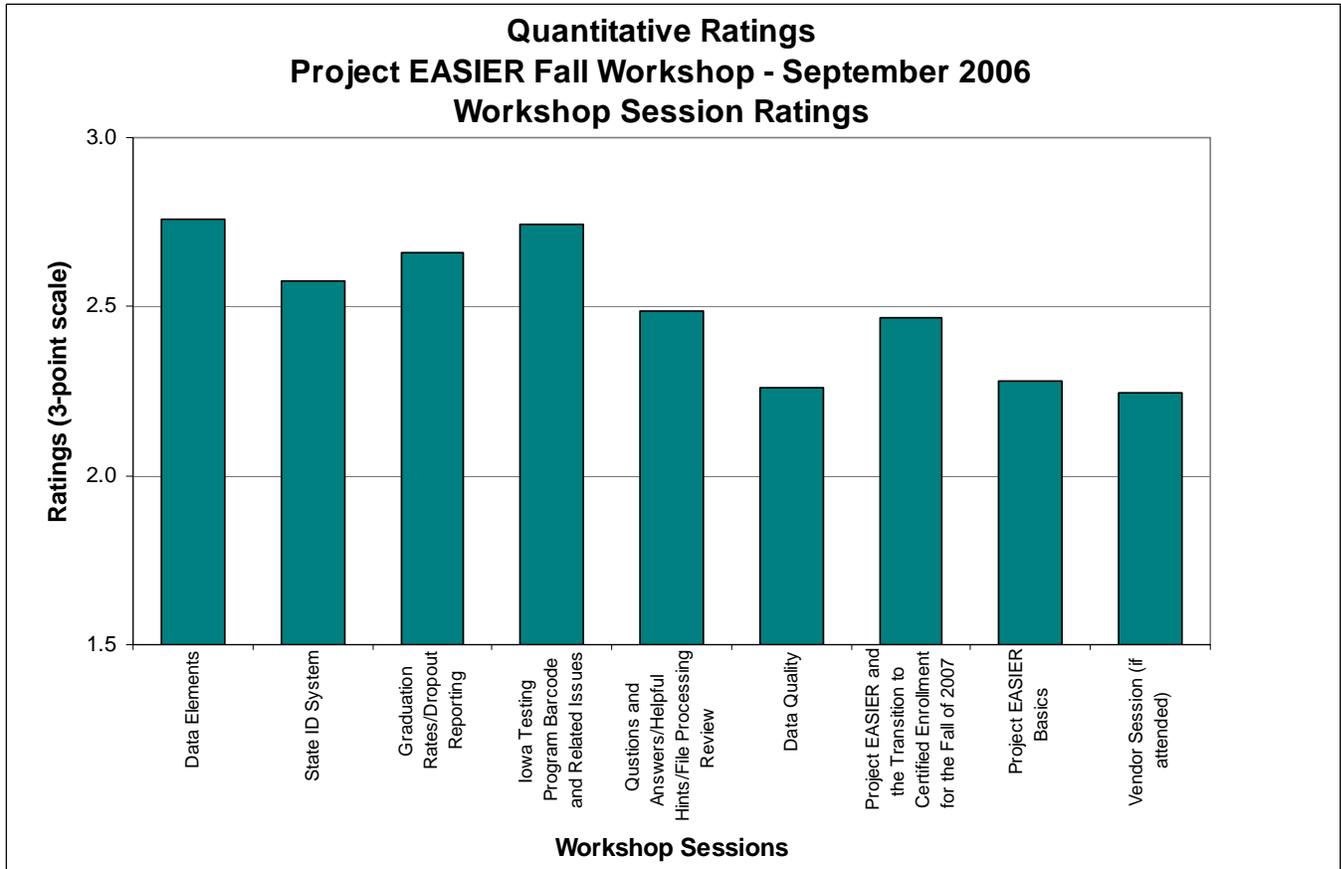
The graph below presents the difference in satisfaction between those who had attended the April workshop and those who did not.



*Which sessions were most popular?*

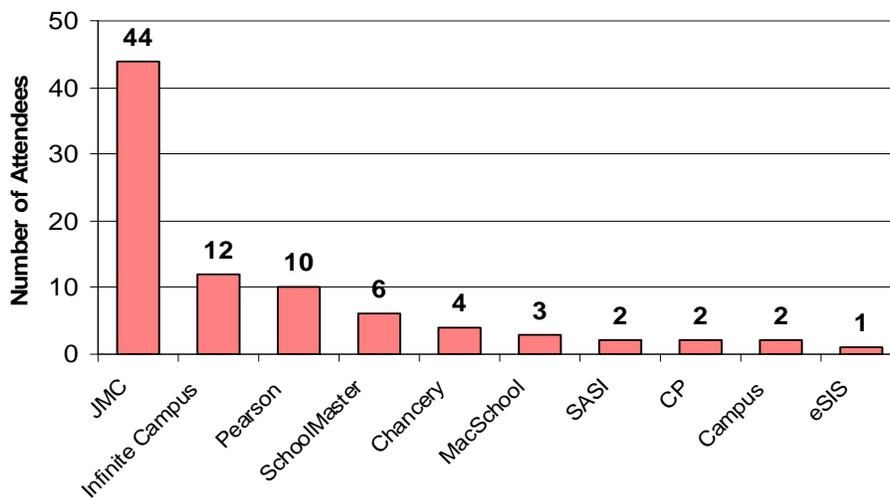
Attendees could choose from a variety of breakout sessions to attend during the workshop. The evaluation forms gathered from the five area workshops reflect the rating for each session only for those respondents who both attended the session and completed an evaluation form. **Note:** Items were re-coded such that *higher* scores reflect *greater* agreement with the items and therefore 3 represents scores for Very Informative and 1 represents scores for Not Informative. In addition, respondents marked the session as “N/A” if they did not attend.

With respect to the ratings of how informative individual workshop sessions were, the two workshops that were significantly more informative than the (already high) average of 2.53 were “Data Elements” and “Iowa Testing Program Barcode and Related Issues.” The chart below show presents the average scores of each session across the five 1-day workshops.



Of those participants across the five workshops who attended a vendor session, the following chart presents the number of attendees for each of the vendor sessions provided. The vast majority of these respondents elected to attend the JMC session, which reflects the large number of state districts that use this company's software products.

#### Vendor Sessions Attended at Workshop



*In what month would respondents prefer the next conference be held?*

Workshop participants were asked to check a box noting which month in early 2007 would be their preference for attending the spring 2007 Project EASIER training. From the three options of February, March, or April available, the chart below describes attendee responses. Some attendees selected more than one month, so the total number of responses adds up to more than the 163 total number of evaluation forms received. Both March and April 2007 are the preferred dates; blank responses are included as well.

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
February	27	15.3%
March	62	35.2%
April	69	39.2%
<i>Left item blank</i>	18	10.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>176</b>	

*Where else might future Project EASIER workshops be held?*

The September Project EASIER workshop attendees were also asked to provide ideas for other cities and locations where future trainings, such as the spring 2007 trainings, could be held. Groups of respondents from each of the five area workshops responded with suggestions for cities and facilities in their regions. Below are lists of cities and locations grouped by the location of the September workshop. Cities are listed first, then the location or multiple locations suggested by the respondent. Several respondents at the Ames workshop suggested conducting the training via ICN.

**Ames, Sept 12th**

Algona: Iowa Lakes CC  
 Fairfield: Best Western  
 Newton: DMACC  
 Oskaloosa: William Penn University  
 Ottumwa: IHCC  
 Fort Dodge: ICCA  
 Mason City/Clear Lake: Call Chamber or  
 AEA 267 or NIACC  
 Ames: ISU-Sherman  
 Des Moines: Event Center or Hyvee Hall  
 None: ICN

**Bettendorf, Sept 18th**

Maquoketa: Ohnward Fine Arts  
 Muscatine  
 Dubuque: DCDS/Keystone AEA  
 Burlington: AEA/Conference Center  
 Iowa City  
 Bettendorf: AEA 9 Mississippi Bend

**Cedar Falls, Sept 11th**

Calmar: NICC  
 Charles City: HS or NIACC  
 Fort Dodge  
 Ottumwa: Southern Prairie AEA  
 Peosta: NICC

Elkader: AEA 1

Marshall Town: AEA 267 or MCC/ICVE  
 Mason City: NIACC  
 Clear Lake: AEA 267  
 Iowa City: Grant Wood AEA  
 Cedar Falls: AEA 267  
 Cedar Rapids: Five Season Center, GWAEA,  
 Kirkwood, or Marriott

**Council Bluffs, Sept 7th**

Atlantic  
 Corning  
 Creston  
 Las Vegas, NV  
 Lenox  
 Carroll: Carrollton Inn  
 Denison: Boulders Conference Building  
 Red Oak  
 Council Bluffs: Holiday Inn-Ameristar or  
 Red Coach Inn or other hotel

**Sioux City, Sept 20th**

Cherokee  
 Spencer: Regional Events Center  
 Fairgrounds  
 Sioux City: Convention Center or WIT  
 Storm Lake: BVU or ICC or AEA

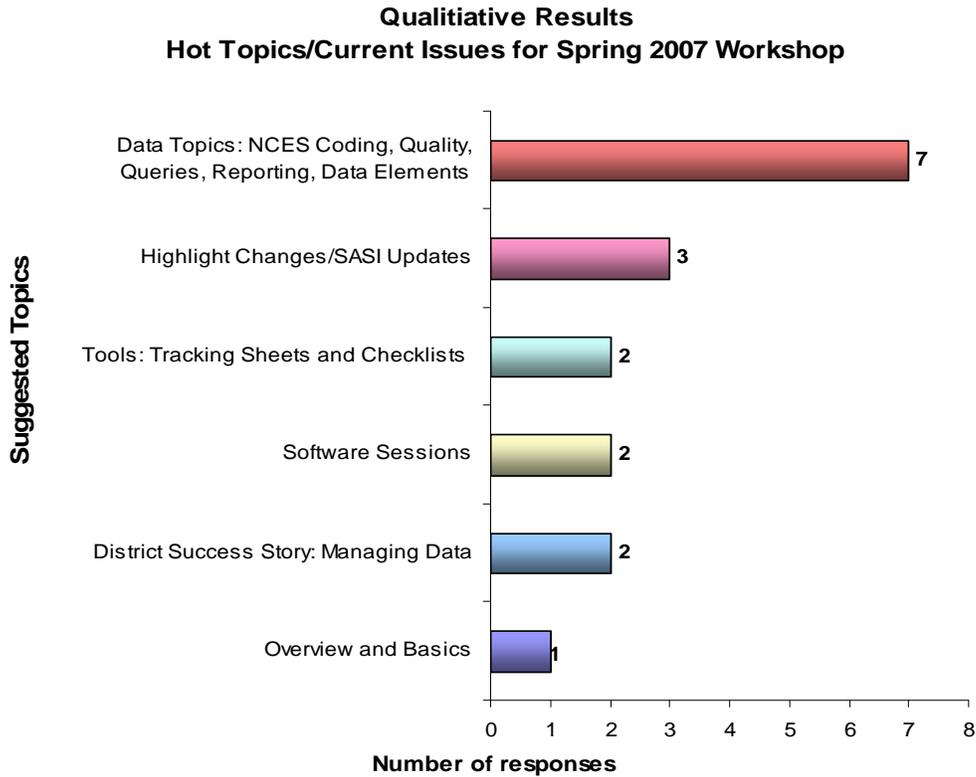
*What topics did respondents wish would have been included in the conference?*

In the qualitative analysis of written comments for this evaluation item, comments were grouped into the common themes that emerged. Although only seventeen people responded with suggestions for topics for future workshops, these topic ideas may be helpful for the Department to consider as they plan future workshops. The suggestions include

- **Data Topics:** Respondents want more sessions offered on various topics related to data such as NCES coding, data quality, running data queries and reports, and data elements.
- **Highlight Changes:** Several attendees wanted the workshop to highlight any changes made over the past year, even if the changes had already been introduced.
- **Tools:** A couple of attendees asked that tools such as tracking sheets or checklists be provided during the training.
- **Software Sessions:** A couple of attendees mentioned that they would like to see additional software sessions.
- **District Success Story:** Two attendees suggested that the workshop planners select a district that has done a good job in managing and reporting their data to present a session on how they accomplished this goal

- **Overview and Basics:** An attendee asked that future workshops provide an overview and basics session for newer attendees. This may help to address the lower overall satisfaction of the new staff reflected in earlier ratings of the workshops.

These qualitative comments are also shown graphically below.

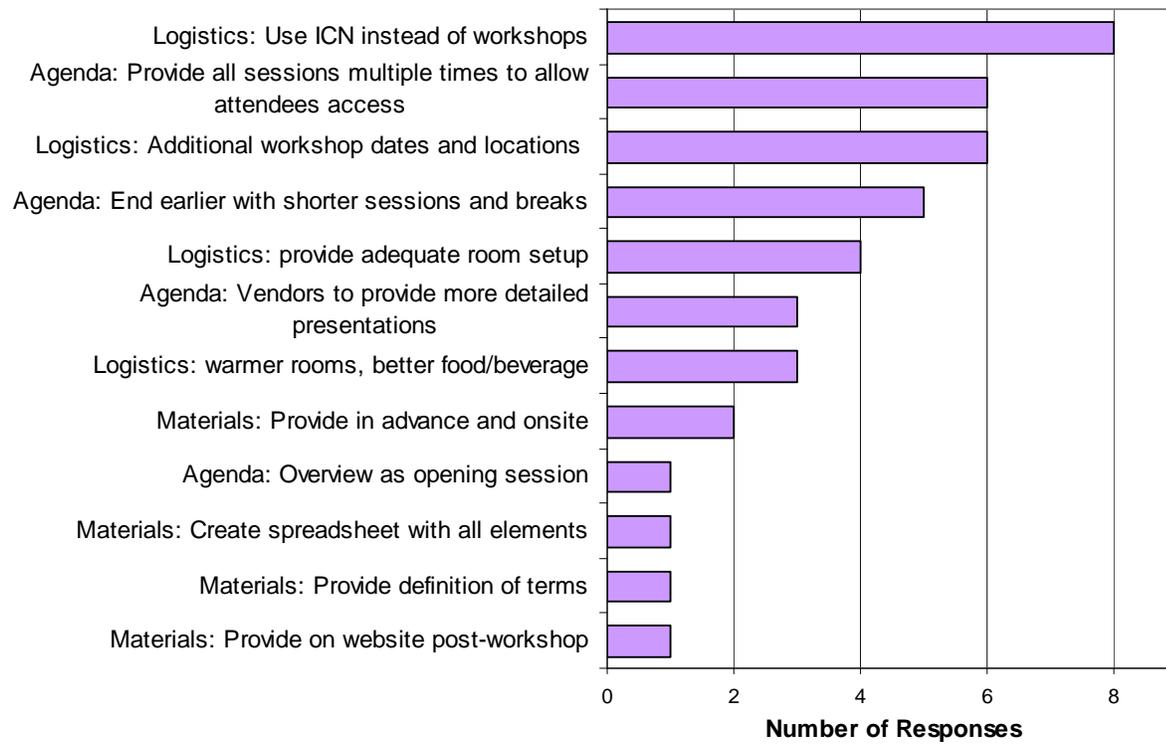


*What did respondents think would make the workshops more effective?*

Forty-one attendees responded with helpful ideas and suggestions for ways to improve future Project EASIER workshops. Most of these responses fell into a few main categories: materials, agenda, and logistics suggestions. The responses are summarized in the graph below in descending order from the most to the least frequent suggestions.

## Qualitative Results

### Suggested Improvements for Future Workshops



**Project EASIER  
ICN Spring Reporting Training  
April 2007**

**Evaluation Report**

**Summary**

The American Institutes for Research analyzed feedback collected by the Iowa Department of Education (DE) from participants who participated in the Spring Reporting Training for Project EASIER. The training was held through the Iowa Communications Network (ICN) broadcasts at locations across the state during the week of April 25-30, 2007. Seven 2-½ hour sessions were held to review the requirements for Project EASIER, BEDS, and Early Intervening Services.

Overall the training was well-received by participants, receiving an average of 4.04 on a 5-point scale. Participants also provided helpful feedback through their written comments provided on the workshop evaluation forms, as reflected in this report.

**Report Methodology**

The Spring Reporting Training for Project EASIER was held online through ICN broadcasts and the evaluation form for this training was made available to participants on the DE website. The ICN broadcasts do not require individual registration, so there is no way to know the exact number of participants. In addition, each participant was required to print out and mail or fax their evaluation forms to DE. As a result, the total number of attendees is unknown and the response rate cannot be calculated for the 65 evaluation forms received by DE. The evaluation report summarizes numerical ratings and written comments about the meeting from this subset of participants.

**Characteristics of Attendees**

*Function/Role in the District*

Participants were provided a set of responses and asked to check which best described their main function in their school district. Most of the respondents were administrative professionals (support staff) or administrators. All of the respondents answered this question and the chart on the following page provides information on the number and percent of each entity represented.

**Roles Represented by Workshop Participants**

<b>Function/Role in the District</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Administrative Professional (Support Staff)	38	58%
Administrator	15	23%
CTE Personnel	1	2%
Curriculum Coordinator	1	2%
Technical Personnel	5	8%
Other*	5	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*Respondents indicating “Other” for this question offered the following explanations:

- Business Manager
- Counselor Services/Support Coordinator
- High School Counselor
- Student Information Coordinator
- Teacher, SIS Support

### *Experience with Project EASIER*

Conference participants were asked about the number of years they have been working with the Project EASIER program. The majority of respondents reported that they have been working with Project EASIER for “5 years or more.” Though the response “5 years or more” was highest, 93% of respondents have been working with Project EASIER for a year or more.

The following chart provides the number and percent of respondents in each category.

### **Years of Experience with Project EASIER**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Less than 1 year	3	5%
1 to 2 years	8	12%
3 to 4 years	19	29%
5 years or more	34	52%
Blank	1	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100%</b>

### *Participation in prior trainings*

Participants were also asked if they had previously participated in a Project EASIER training presented in August 2006 by the Iowa Department of Education. Approximately 69% of respondents indicated they had participated in this earlier training. The chart below provides the number and percent of responses in each category.

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes	45	69%
No	15	23%
<i>Not sure (or left item blank)</i>	5	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100%</b>

### **Conference as a Whole**

*What were the numerical ratings for the meeting?*

The evaluation forms asked respondents to rate several different aspects of the meeting. The mean ratings for individual items ranged from 3.32 to 4.58 on a 5 point scale (with 5 being

“strongly agree.”) The chart below provides the average score for each item, as well as the number responding with N/A and the number who left each item blank.

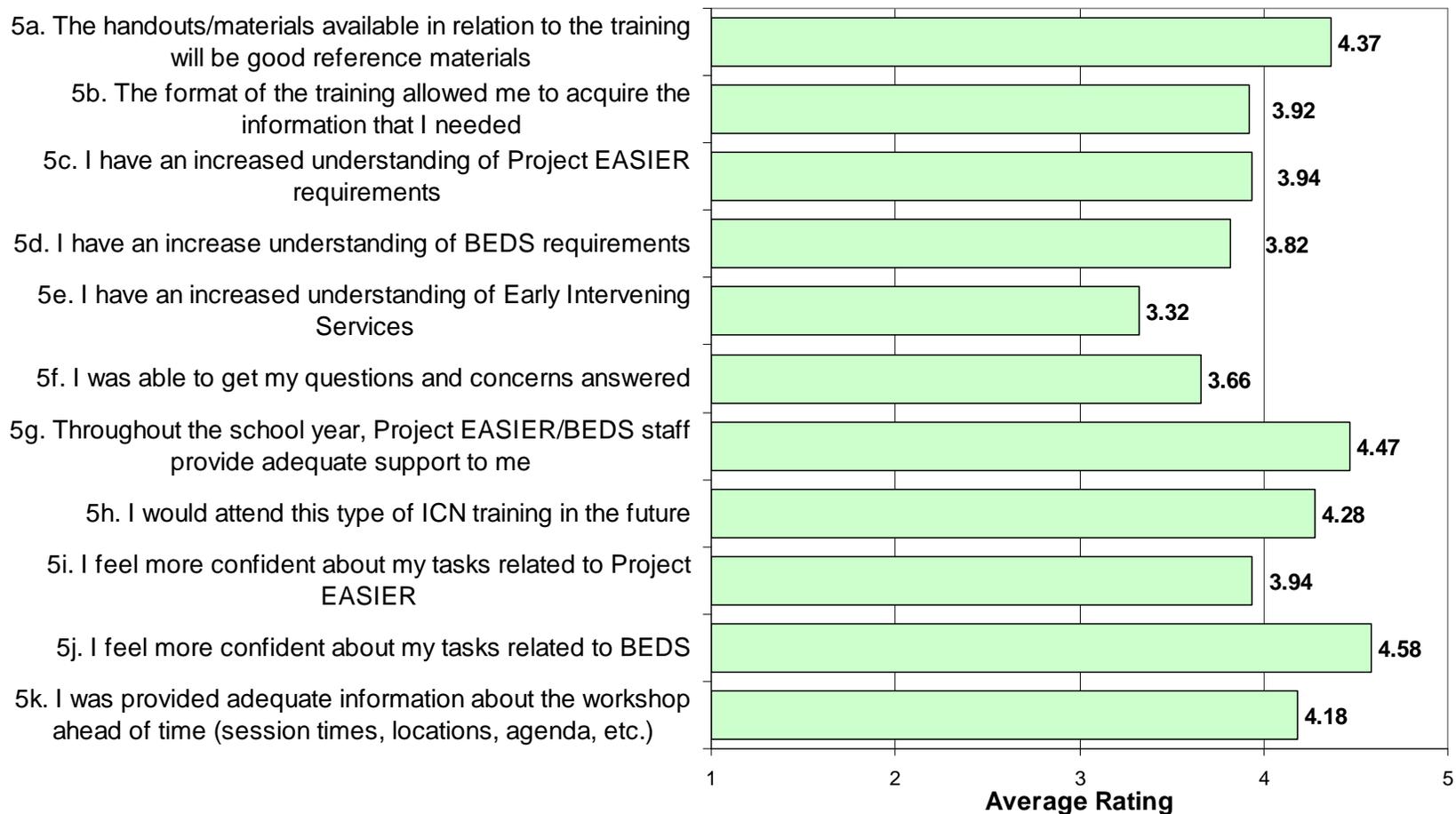
Item	Average Score	N/A	Left Blank
5a. The handouts/materials available in relation to the training will be good reference materials	4.37	0	0
5b. The format of the training allowed me to acquire the information that I needed	3.92	0	0
5c. I have an increased understanding of Project EASIER requirements	3.94	0	0
5d. I have an increase understanding of BEDS requirements	3.82	8	1
5e. I have an increased understanding of Early Intervening Services	3.32	8	1
5f. I was able to get my questions and concerns answered	3.66	11	1
5g. Throughout the school year, Project EASIER/BEDS staff provide adequate support to me	4.47	3	0
5h. I would attend this type of ICN training in the future	4.28	0	1
5i. I feel more confident about my tasks related to Project EASIER	3.94	0	0
5j. I feel more confident about my tasks related to BEDS	4.58	11	1
5k. I was provided adequate information about the workshop ahead of time (session times, locations, agenda, etc.)	4.18	0	0

Items receiving the best scores were 5a, 5g, 5h, 5j, and 5k. In terms of logistics, participants liked the handouts and materials received and they were provided adequate information about the workshop in advance. Regarding the substance of the training, respondents felt more confident about their tasks related to BEDS and received adequate support from staff throughout the school year for Project EASIER/BEDS. Also, respondents rated highly the likelihood that they would attend another ICN training in the future.

The item receiving the lowest rating was 5e regarding participants’ increased understanding of Early Intervening Services. This uncertainty about the topic is reflected in written comments included later in this report. N/A responses ranged from 0 to 11. Very few respondents left items blank and at most one respondent per item did not mark that item. The ratings are represented graphically on the following page.

Respondents with more years of EASIER experience were more likely to: agree that the format of the training allowed them to acquire the information that they needed; report an increased understanding of EASIER and its requirements; and feel confident about their EASIER tasks. Participants who had attended prior training events were also more likely to report that they were provided with adequate information in advance about the workshop.

## Project EASIER ICN Training - April 2007 Quantitative Ratings



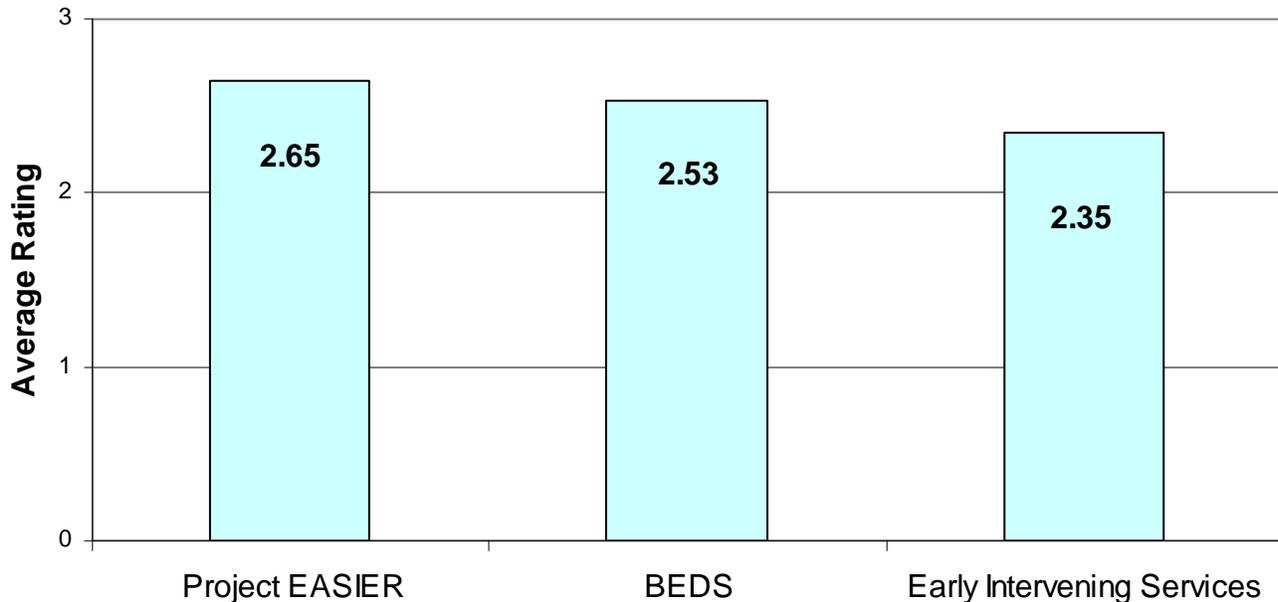
Which sessions were most informative?

Attendees were also asked to specifically rate the sessions on Project EASIER, BEDS, and Early Intervening Services on a 3-point scale with 3= Very Informative, 2=Somewhat Informative, and 1=Not Informative. Respondents could also note if they did not attend the session. The following chart shows the rating of each session as well as the number of respondents that did not attend or left the item response blank.

	Session Topic		
	Project EASIER	BEDS	Early Intervening Services
<b>Average Rating</b>	<b>2.65</b>	<b>2.53</b>	<b>2.35</b>
<b>Did not attend</b>	0	6	9
<b>Item left blank</b>	3	4	4

Attendees found the sessions on Project EASIER and BEDS to be more informative, which is also reflected in the written comments and may be due to the familiarity of attendees with EASIER and BEDS and less familiarity with Early Intervening Services. The ratings for these sessions are presented graphically below as well.

### Project EASIER ICN Training - April 2007 Informativeness of Session Topics



*In what month would respondents prefer the fall 2007 Project EASIER training be held?*

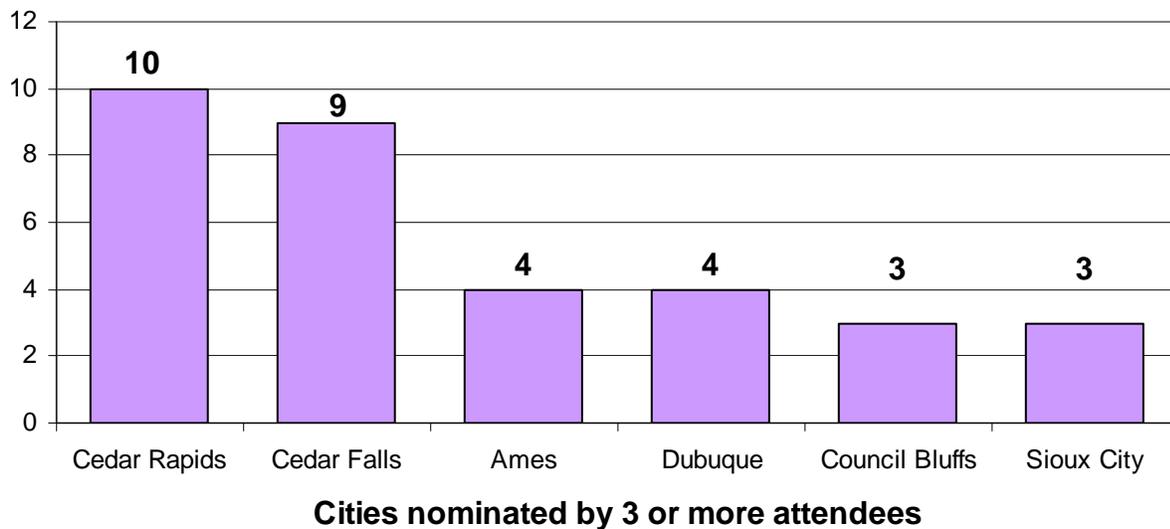
Conference participants were asked about preferences on which month would work best to attend Project EASIER training in the fall 2007. September was the most popular option and July was the least popular. Several attendees noted more that one month would be feasible. The following table presents the number and percent of responses in each category.

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
July	8	12%
August	17	26%
August or September	3	5%
<b>September</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>46%</b>
<i>Left item blank</i>	7	11%
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100%</b>

*What locations do participants recommend for future trainings?*

Participants were asked to recommend locations for future Project EASIER trainings. A lengthy list of cities and possible facilities were recommended by respondents. Cities that received at least three nominations for future meetings are presented graphically below. The full list of recommended cities and facilities are listed in Attachment A.

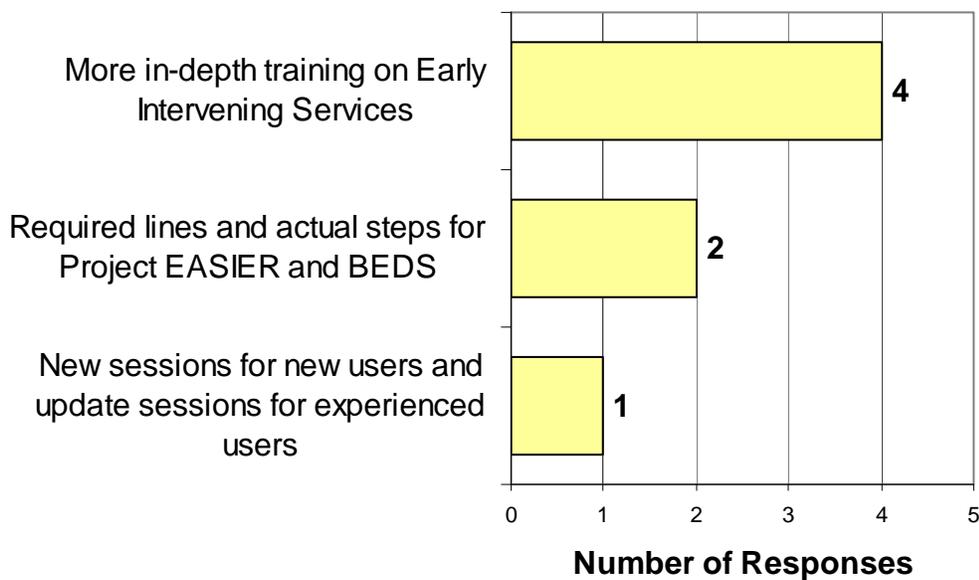
### **Project EASIER ICN Training - April 2007 Locations for Future Training**



*What topics did respondents wish would have been included in the training?*

Only a few respondents provided suggestions for additional topics to include in the ICN training. These included separating new and experienced users to focus the training on the specific needs of each group, which correspond with the additional suggestion to review specific requirements and next steps for Project EASIER/BEDS. In addition, several comments in the evaluation forms suggested that staff will need further training in Early Intervening Services. As one respondent wrote, “This should have been a session in and of itself, not a prelude to EASIER and BEDS.” These comments are shown graphically below.

### **Project EASIER ICN Training - April 2007 Topics to Include in Next Training**



*What did respondents think could be improved about the training?*

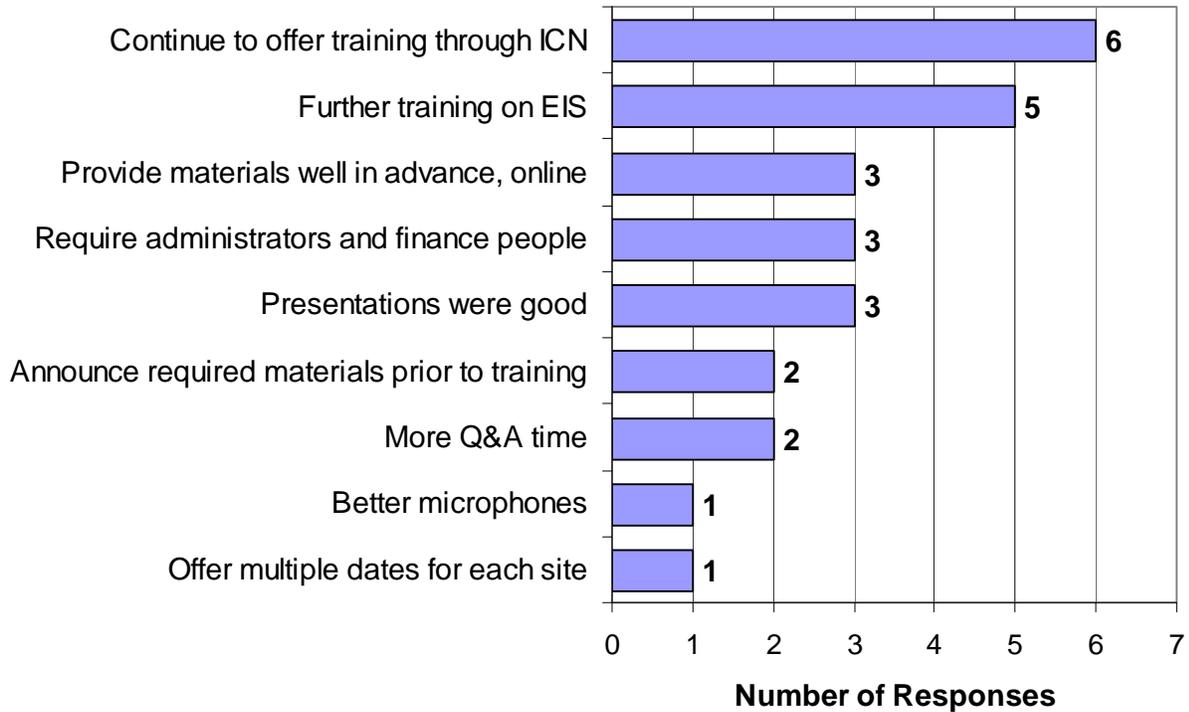
During qualitative analysis of the written comments for this item, comments were grouped (if possible) in some of the common themes that emerged. For the most part, respondents would like more in-depth training specifically on Early Intervening Services, which was also reflected in the suggestions for future training topics noted in the section above.

In addition, several respondents requested not only that DE post materials on their website earlier in advance of the training, but also to announce what changes have occurred to the documents to save participants time in finding those changes. The largest number of responses specifically

mentioned the ICN versus face-to-face training options and those comments were emphatic: “[I] would not have gone if ICN would not have been available in my home town” and “How kind of you to schedule ICN in the building where I work!”

Written responses are reflected in the graph below.

### **Project EASIER ICN Training - April 2007 Qualitative Comments to Improve Future Training**



## Attachment A

Responses provided to the question: *If regional Project EASIER trainings are available in the future, do you have suggestions for cities and facilities in your area?*

<b><u>City</u></b>	<b><u>Facility</u></b>
Ames	Sheman Building, Iowa State Center
Bettendorf	Mississippi Bend AEA 9
Cedar Falls	AEA 267
Cedar Rapids	Grant Wood AEA, Five Seasons Center, One of several convention centers, AEA/Kirkwood
Charles City	Charles City High School
Clear Lake	AEA 267
Council Bluffs	Holiday Inn
Creston	Green Valley AEA, High School, Southwestern Community College
Crystal Lake	W-CL-T High School
Dubuque	Keystone AEA
Early	High School
Estherville	High School
Fayette	Public Library
Humboldt	Humboldt High School, Rustix Restaurant and Reception
Iowa City	
Johnston	AEA
Madrid	High School
Marshalltown	Iowa Valley Community College
Marion	Grant Wood AEA, Five Seasons Center
Mason City	Mason City H.S.
Newton	DMACC
Osage	Osage High School
Pocahontas	AEA
Sigourney	High School, Indian Hills Community College
Sioux Center	Northwest AEA, Tyson Event Center
Spencer	Clay County Regional Event Center
Storm Lake	Buena Vista University
Sumner	HS
Tripoli	School ICN
Waterloo/Cedar Falls	

## Appendix B: CSIP Coding Rubric

	Poor	Adequate	Good/ Excellent
<b>I. What do data tell us about our student-learning needs?</b>			
A. What data do we collect?	<p>SDF 1: The CSIP does not contain evidence that the district’s needs assessment data include local objective data on both the incidence and prevalence of students’ violent behavior AND use of illegal substances. Title IV SDFSC Sec. 4115(a)(1)(A)</p> <p>District only reports academic data (including dropout and graduation) and suspension/ expulsion; addressing <i>academic</i> needs</p> <p>Missing IYS or other reliable data source</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A district must collect two types of student data: 1) incidence and prevalence of substance abuse, and 2) violence.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “Objective” data means valid and reliable information. In Iowa, most schools use the IYS; however, districts may use surveys other than IYS as long as they yield valid, reliable, objective data.</li> <li>○ The district does not have to directly collect the data; the information may be obtained from other sources.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ A district must collect two types of community data: 1) risk factors, and 2) protective factors, related to substance abuse and violence.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Risk factors are characteristics of a school, family, community, or peer-individual that are predictive of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drug use and violent behavior by the student in a school and community.</li> <li>○ Protective factors/buggers/assets are characteristics of a school, family, community, or peer-individual that have been shown to prevent alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drug use and violent behavior by the student in a school and community.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ A district also collects the following and draws connections between SDFSC efforts and some of the data sources mentioned below:</li> </ul>	<p>Needs assessments via surveys and/or focus groups with community, parent, student stakeholders with specific SDFSC concerns data</p> <p>Disciplinary office referrals (SWIS system as used for PBIS, or a parallel system)</p> <p>YRBS or any other high quality data collection that supports SDFSC issues/concerns</p>

	Poor	Adequate	Good/ Excellent
		<p>Possible Data Sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Student demographic data</li> <li>*Basic Educational Data Survey (BEDS) data</li> <li>*ITBS/ITED student achievement data (Grade Level Equivalents, Percentile Rankings, National and Iowa Norms)</li> <li>*Participation rates for ITBS/ITED in grades 4, 8 &amp; 11</li> <li>*Graduation rate (EASIER)</li> <li>*Daily Average Attendance data for grades K-8</li> <li>*Grade 7-12 dropout percentages (aggregate and subgroup)</li> <li>*Percentage of graduates planning to pursue postsecondary education</li> <li>*Percentage of graduates completing the core curriculum (4 years of English, 3 years of mathematics, science and social studies), via EASIER (note: ACT may not provide complete data here)</li> <li>*Percentage of graduates achieving a score of 20 on the ACT to indicate probable postsecondary success</li> <li>*Student discipline data for grades 7-12 (suspensions and expulsions)</li> <li>*Data from the Iowa Youth Survey in grades 6, 8 &amp; 11, every three years</li> </ul>	District looks at violence and substance abuse factors separately
B. How do we collect and analyze data to determine prioritized student learning needs?	<p>SDF 2. The CSIP does not contain evidence that the district has objectively analyzed BOTH the incidence and prevalence of students' violent behavior AND use of illegal substances. Title IV SDFSC Sec. 4115(a)(1)(A)</p> <p>Don't reference data</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Required by code to have a School Improvement Advisory Committee: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Must have parents and students on the committee (stakeholders represent the community; includes at least one board member)</li> <li>○ Function is to make recommendations to the board</li> <li>○ Required to meet four times/year</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Team looks thoughtfully at violence and drug data and analyzes within the context of the larger community.</li> </ul>	<p>Some statement about type of analysis, graphical analysis</p> <p>Action research</p>

	Poor	Adequate	Good/ Excellent
	analysis		
C. What did we learn through this data analysis?	SDF3. The CSIP contains no evidence that the assessment of student violence and illegal drug use is ongoing. Title IV SDFSC Sec. 4115(a)(1)(A)  Only academic needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The collection and analysis is on-going and tied to program evaluation.</li> <li>Identifies needs quantitatively; reports statistics for achievement/academic data</li> </ul> (Many CSIPs have climate needs but no measures)	Quantitatively identifies needs that are not instructional (may include dropout and attendance data)
D. From the data analysis, what are our prioritized needs?	A lot of different things that are unrelated; reactionary	Needs are linked to findings from 1C and 1A and response has SDF component.	Prioritized needs & how barriers to learning are being overcome
E. How will we develop goals and actions based upon the prioritized needs?	Activities are stated as goals  Someone other than the SDFSC Advisory or SIAC has set goals and determined activities	Mentions School Improvement Advisory Committee (SIAC). The more stakeholder involvement they have in developing goals and action plans, the better  Includes teachers, parents, and students in decisions	Goals are stated in the form of quantitative performance measures (e.g., 25% reduction..., 80% of students... a 50% increase...).
<b>II. What do/will we do to meet student-learning needs?</b>			
A. What long-range goals have been established to support prioritized student needs?	Absence of alignment  Goals not aligned to SDFS issues	Alignment of goals, data, and findings  Goals are linked to data sources, findings, priorities	Safe and drug free goals  Other conditions for learning

	Poor	Adequate	Good/ Excellent
			goals
B. What process will be used to determine what we will do to meet the long-range goals?	Just a few leaders	Team structure with multiple education roles represented, including teachers, students, and parents. May reference SIAC.  Professional development is used to address goals and SDFS issues	
C. What is our current practice to support these long-range goals?	Don't address SDFS at all	Alignment of practices, goals, data, and findings They have a long-range goal around achievement Have a SDF goal  Iowa Professional Development Model (IPDM) or other PD model as framework for academics and SDFS, although these 2 models may not be aligned.  (88 effective programs: <a href="http://www.iowa.gov/educate/content/view/680/554/1/4">www.iowa.gov/educate/content/view/680/554/1/4</a> )	Practices that serve both SDF and academic goals in an integrated fashion  Alignment of professional development for academics and SDFS.
D. How is our current practice aligned with or supported by the research base?	SDF 9. The CSIP does not contain evidence that the <b>program or activities</b> that are funded by Title IV, Part A are based on scientifically based research. SDFSC Sec. 4115(a)(1)(C).  Lack of alignment  Activities are not evidence based	Programs that have demonstrated effectiveness in preventing drug use, violence, or disruptive behavior are those that meet the standards of the Principles of Effectiveness.  Statements match data cited in 1A; Look for implementation of evidence-based programs  Scientifically based research is defined in NCLB under Title IX, Part A, Section 9101(37). (88 effective programs: <a href="http://www.iowa.gov/educate/content/view/680/554/1/4">www.iowa.gov/educate/content/view/680/554/1/4</a> )	SDFS to support student achievement
E. What gaps exist between our current practice to support long-range goals and the research base	Lack of recognition of the possibility for	Reasonable recognition of gaps; either there is no research base for some programs they are using or there	SDFS included. Perhaps some

	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Adequate</b>	<b>Good/ Excellent</b>
(include curriculum and instruction)?	continuous improvement	are some needs to which no programs have yet been identified	plan to develop a research base for what they're doing
F. What actions/activities will we use to address prioritized needs, established goals, and any gaps between current and research-based practice?	Just a few leaders	Team structure with multiple education roles represented, including teachers.  Actions are aligned with SDFS priorities and goals.	Students and parents are included
G. How will we support implementation of the identified actions?	Unrealistic, vague, unreasonable, or not complete	Money, personnel, time, PD Reasonable, realistic, in alignment with what needs to get done.	People assigned to take steps; must be specific person or role assignment
<b>III. How do/will we know that student learning has changed?</b>			
A. How will we know student learning has changed over time in relation to our long- range goals?	Lack of alignment of change assessment and data sources	Tracking systems with clear responsibility and accountability  Alignment with question 1	SDFS are addressed. Clear documentation of change analysis and valid change statistics; are they "turning the curve"
<b>IV. How will we evaluate our programs and services to ensure improved student learning?</b>			
A. What strategies/process will we use to evaluate how well the activities included in Constant Conversation Question 2 (What do/will we do to meet student learning needs?) were implemented?	SDF6. The CSIP does not contain performance measures that reduce student violence or drug use. Title IV, Part A Sec. 4114(d)(2)(B)(I)  SDF7. The CSIP does no contain performance	The district's performance measures must include goals on reduced violence or drug use, may include measure of attitudes that are predictors/precursors of drug use or violent behavior; and may include goals related to the quality of program implementation.  Performance levels for each indicator are locally determined.  Performance measures should be directly related to the	They clearly demonstrate how they're using formative data to make adjustments to their plan for implementing their strategies

	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Adequate</b>	<b>Good/ Excellent</b>
	<p>measures that are quantitative and/or contain levels of performance. Title IV, Part A Sec. 4114(d)(2)(B)(ii)</p> <p>SDF10. The comprehensive school improvement plan does not contain evidence of the periodic evaluation of the district's SDFSC program to reduce violence and illegal drug use. SDFSC Sec. 4114(d)(3) and Sec. 4115(a)(2)(A).</p> <p>Lack of alignment of evaluation and data sources</p>	<p>results of the school district's needs assessment.</p> <p>Adequate to include SDFS in a list of data elements if the operations performed on that list are reasonable/explained well.</p>	
<p>B. What implementation/student data will we collect, analyze, and use to determine how well each program/service described in Question 2 has been implemented to support our CSIP goals?</p>	<p>SDF5. The CSIP does not contain performance measures for the district's drug and violence prevention program. Title IV, Part A, SDFSC Sec. 4114(d)(2)(B) and 4115(A)(1)(B)</p> <p>Incoherence, incompleteness, lack of alignment</p>	<p>A district must identify performance measures to quantitatively assess the effectiveness of its prevention program in reducing illegal drug use and/or violent or disruptive behavior.</p> <p>A district may identify performance measures focused on specific increased in the prevalence of protective factors, buffers, and assets if they have been identified.</p> <p>Ought to draw from question 1A</p> <p>Adequate to include SDFS in a list of data elements if the operations performed on that list are reasonable/explained well.</p>	<p>Program-specific fidelity measures, and somebody is assigned to look at that</p>

## **Appendix C: AEA Data Collection Focus Group Report**

### **Data Collection Evaluation Group Interview (Focus Group) with AEA Data Collection Staff June 12, 2007**

#### **Introduction**

As part of AIR's evaluation of the Safe and Drug Free Schools data quality grant, we conducted a group interview to assess AEAs' satisfaction with the statewide student database/management system. This year's group interview differed from last year's in several ways. First, the participants represented different roles. Last year, the participants were drawn from attendees at one of the data grant trainings and tended to represent *data use* perspectives more than *data collection*. This year, six data system management staff was selected from five AEAs specifically based on their knowledge (and in some cases, immersion) in Iowa's various student data systems. Another difference was that although last year's group was conducted in person, this year, we conducted the group interview by phone. The participants in the group interview volunteered to participate in the discussion and their names will not be used in this report to protect their confidentiality.

#### **Participants**

The group interview participants manage data systems that include achievement and behavior data. These databases overlap with the state-level accountability systems and the district-level student information systems. The AEA staff provides a unique perspective on the interaction of data systems at each level and many important and helpful insights were gleaned from the discussion. The familiarity of the group on the call with each other helped keep the conversation open and participants often referred to staff from other AEAs when sharing information or making statements in response to the interview questions. While the group's perspectives are representative of AEAs across the state, each of the state's 12 AEAs has concerns that are specific to their region and their data management systems. The feedback from this group interview is reported below.

#### **Summary of Results**

Overall, the AEA staff participating in this group interview expressed satisfaction with the personnel at the Iowa Department of Education (DE), whom they described as hard-working and responsive. However, the group noted that DE is short staffed and there are problems with the timeliness of state data requests and the process of reporting data to the state. AEA staff stated that DE does not see them as partners in data use, only as reporters. Data systems are too driven by federal requirements, and not enough by area, district, and school data needs.

The participants' clear message back to DE is: "We need you to work together. Have a coordinated, aligned [plan for school improvement efforts]. Don't waste our time on

disconnected projects for schools. We need one coherent plan; not mixed messages.” AEAAs would like to have regular meetings with state and district staff to promote alignment of initiatives and data requirements.

## **Proceedings of the Group Interview**

### **1. To what extent is your AEA developing additional data collection elements/efforts beyond the state requirements?**

#### *What the AEAAs are doing*

As noted by one participant, “We are data custodians, not data users. We provide tools for schools to do data exploration. We provide programming and data storage centrally and secure access within the district.”

In one AEA, the staff use an assessment plan that is guided by a key set of questions. They focus on a set of indicators and data elements that are guided by key questions of the AEA and their districts/schools as well as state requirements. The data are reviewed three times each year.

AEAAs are required to submit Comprehensive School Improvement Plans (CSIPs) and one AEA reports using that tool for continuous improvement in addition to compliance. As the AEA improves its evaluation of programs, it is also becoming more systematic in tracking the different data elements that are collected and reported.

The required elements are used for checklists, which are available for site visits and accreditation. However, districts also look at additional data or review data in more detail. The data used depends on the goals of that district, so goals that deal with culture, climate, and safety will call for different sets of data than only those required by the state.

In addition, AEA data collected over time allow for trend data reports and analysis. For example, one AEA is able to look at data on children over the past seven years to see whether and how results have changed. Improvements continue to be made in the tracking of student assessment and achievement data.

The AEAAs want to look at school achievement data district by district to conduct their own analyses; however, they do not automatically receive access to this data from the state. Rather, AEA staff must copy individual group scores from the DE website, building by building, grade by grade, subgroup by subgroup, content area by content area—quite a time consuming process. For AEAAs that wish to access individual student data, they must receive approval and access from the district. AEAAs would like access to the official data that are provided by DE because these data have been cleaned in a uniform way across the state. If AEAAs receive data directly from the Iowa Testing Program and they clean it themselves, there is no guarantee that the final file will fully match the state file. In addition, the Iowa Testing Program data do not contain student, district, or building identifiers, which limits staff to AEA-wide analysis only.

#### **SPSS?**

The moderator asked the group specifically about SPSS, a software program that was referenced in the 2006 focus group. This group reported that SPSS is not in widespread use among schools because it is expensive. Even the AEAs with access to this software use a basic version to extract data such as Iowa Youth Survey data and then move it into Excel. Most schools have Excel, which is very inexpensive, user-friendly, and effective for descriptive data analysis.

### ***AEA data systems***

The HEART management information system developed by the Heartland AEA, the Grant Wood management information system developed by the Grant Wood AEA, and the SWIFT Knowledge management information system from AEA 267 provide tools for managing achievement data. There are similarities among these management information systems and some unique capabilities. According to the group, all but three of the AEAs use the HEART system. Only one AEA does not currently use any of these database systems.

AEAs using the HEART systems must agree to purchase their own server and identify staff to manage the software and data, and in return Heartland AEA staff provides training and software. In addition, other AEAs are asked to consider how they can contribute to the product over time. New tools and other aids to help users of the system continue to be developed and there is an informal and helpful cooperation across AEAs. The Grant Wood and AEA 267 systems are provided to individual districts for a fee.

## **2. What barriers do you encounter in data collection and reporting activities?**

### ***Extracting building-level data***

Participants report that DE collects ITBS data for reading comprehension, math, and science in grades 3 through 8, and 11, and will soon do so for grade 10. However, the AEAs would like access to data on a building by building basis. They have difficulty gaining access to these data at the state level.

### ***Training for secretaries***

In addition to data access, the AEA staff noted that finding time for in-service training for school district secretaries who actually conduct the data entry is challenging. Schools generally cannot afford to send secretaries to training for an entire day, but that training is necessary to ensure accurate and clean data. Some of the largest districts do not commit the resources needed to send these data entry staff to training, so they are instead trained by reading materials without access to someone who can answer their questions. “We constantly hear from building secretaries, ‘I wish someone would show us how to do this.’”

For example, the HEART management information system uses the bar code file from Iowa Testing Program as a means to import accurate student data into the system. Some schools find the process of creating bar code files from their local student management system to be confusing and they are not sure how to implement it correctly.

Several years ago, administrators represented a bottleneck for entering data. Now, those administrators have bought into the value of data; however, in some cases the secretarial staff still lack sufficient information and training.

### ***Time lag between reporting and data availability***

Although DE has done a nice job with developing a student data system, there is a time lag between the submission of data from districts and the generation of reports from the state. Sometimes there has been as great as a full year time lag. For example, a file of achievement data from the 2005–06 school year by building was still not available to AEAs by the middle of the 2006–2007 school year. Although AEAs must have access to data for accountability requirements such as the annual progress reports, they are unable to access this data in a timely manner to make decisions.

On the other hand, the state has shared concerns with the districts about late data submissions, which holds up federal data reporting for the entire state. In the past, this has resulted in part from a lack of communication between the state and districts. For example, some districts that used the state-developed website to upload data believed that their submission was complete when in fact it was not. The districts, however, were apparently not contacted by the state to notify them of their incomplete submission. One problem with the state website last year was the placement of critical information further down the web page, so that users missed that information. This year, the state revised the website to place all critical information at the top of the each web screen. In the future, the AEA staff on the call proposed that the state provide a list of districts that with missing or incomplete data so the AEAs can follow up with the schools and help ensure that data submissions occur on time. The AEA staff recognized that DE has a shortage of staff and that they do the best job they can. Participants stated that they would like to see greater collaboration and communication between the DE and AEAs to establish a partnership.

### **3. What is the effectiveness of data quality, collection, and hygiene training? Do you feel competent to provide support on data collection and hygiene?**

AEA participants stated that they do provide effective *data hygiene* training to districts. One AEA brings in data collection staff from the district to find out what they need, discuss what data collection means, and how to clean data.

AEA participants noted that the concept of *data collection* among districts is well-accepted, although each management information system has its own idiosyncrasies. Although the state and vendors provide training on local student information management systems, the AEA staff is not always included in these events. AEA staff provides training on their data systems to districts and may include general concepts about data management.

The AEAs understand the importance of *data quality*; however, most AEAs do not have an adequate number of staff to provide school-by-school support. Instead, they train school staff to find and correct problems in their own student information systems.

#### **4. Are there any areas in which the SEA could be more helpful?**

##### ***Encourage more 2-way communication***

The participants agreed that DE can be helpful in opening up a 2-way line of communication directly with AEA staff in regard to data sharing and reporting. This is already evident in the DE's Project EASIER AEA data cadre meetings. However, these meetings do not have representation from local districts that provide different views, which may be important additions to the conversation. Also, AEA staff can assist DE by ensuring that school districts in their areas have completed and submitted their data and are able to respond to last-minute requests from the state. Along these lines, AEA staff is aware that the state office receives last-minute demands for information from the legislature and others; however, it would be helpful for the SEA to give AEA and district staff more advance notice when they make requests.

##### ***Request reports in a timely manner; ensure web pages are functional***

Timeliness is a barrier to producing data reports for analysis. There is a "hurry up, last minute approach from the state" that makes it challenging for schools and AEAs to get information to DE in a timely manner. AEA staff noted that the checklist of elements required for the annual progress reports was not posted until the last minute. DE web pages are often not debugged and functional when the reporting window opens. More efficient web programming at the state end would help data reporting processes run more smoothly.

##### ***Reduce the number of data systems***

Another challenge to districts is the large number of different data systems created or commissioned by the state. For example, new software applications are developed for each new piece of data required by the state, but these new applications may not connect to each other. For example, the new system being developed to report special education student information does not connect to EASIER or IMS. There are student ID discrepancies across the student data systems that pose serious integration challenges, and make verification of the quality of reports impossible. Reducing the number of data systems, requiring that new systems integrate with current databases, and providing additional training to AEA and school staff on new systems that are introduced would help AEA staff to respond to these changes.

##### ***Provide better access to state data systems***

AEAs experience great frustration trying to get data out of state data systems. The AEA staff uniformly reported that they would like to have increased access to district and building level data from the State's data systems. AEAs would like to access individual test data and other student information and follow those data elements across time. There typically are no "export" functions in state data systems, though, and AEA staff instead must transcribe data from websites one district or building at a time (which raises the possibility of data errors). The timeliness of state data is also a frustration for AEAs. They need data at the school level on a real-time basis,

not a year later in a summary report. At the same time, AEAs recognize that data reporting will only move as quickly as the slowest district. The AEA may be more helpful to districts in meeting their timelines if the AEA and SEA could work together more effectively.

### ***Create one vision/message***

AEA participants in this group interview stated that the absence of a unified vision at the SEA that cuts across regular education, special education, migrant students, and so on, contributes to a patchwork of duplicative data systems, redundant training, and sometimes even contradictory messages. For every new initiative that has data collection and reporting requirements, new forms are added rather than modifying existing data schemes. Data collection and data clean-up work becomes duplicative. For example, the Learning Supports initiative is disconnected from the achievement data collection and accountability. There are reading initiatives, high school initiatives, a high school standards project, another for PBIS, and the list goes on, yet these programs are not coordinated. One AEA participant reported that there was a district in his AEA with five different reading programs, at least partially the result of multiple State initiatives. The state needs one vision with coordinated, aligned goals and projects.

As the SEA considers its new proposal for a state data warehouse, the AEAs encourage them to ensure that school and district needs are considered. A state data warehouse should not only have the data elements that are required for federal reporting; it also should have formative data elements (all tests, all grades, response to intervention) to meet districts' and schools' needs.

AEA participants noted that although the state feels that it cannot impose anything like standards on districts, districts' own standards may be connected and aligned across the state just as the curriculum is aligned across the state. Even without state standards, there can be increased coordination in what is coming from the state offices.

The participants' clear message back to DE is, "We need you to work together. Have a coordinated, aligned curriculum for schools. Don't waste our time on disconnected projects for schools. We need one coherent plan; not mixed messages."

## **5. Other Questions or Comments**

### ***SEA data staff are good, helpful, hardworking; and too few***

The AEA participants expressed that they are aware that the SEA is short staffed. The AEAs believe that state staff works hard and work long hours doing the best they can. SEA staff is as responsive and helpful as possible under these circumstances.

### ***Suggest regular statewide data meetings***

To encourage greater communication, the interview participants suggested that the SEA bring together stakeholders from the AEAs, LEAs, and others on a regular basis to talk through and address many of the issues shared during this group interview. Everyone should be in the same room at the same time during these planned periodic statewide conversations.

While data are being used around the state, it is not clear that people are using the data in a way that is constructive, or that good decisions are being made from these data. The current efforts of the AEAs are geared toward integrating all of the various data elements and systems. AEA staff really wants the SEA to increase the connection among systems and users and ensure that everyone is working together.

## Appendix D: Original Site Visit Reports

### Alta Community School District Site Visit Report

**Pre-site visit interview conducted: Monday, April 16, 2007 at 3:30 p.m.**

**Onsite group interview conducted: Tuesday, April 24, 2007 at 3:30 p.m.**

The evaluation of the Alta Learning Supports team (Learning Supports team) consisted of one telephone interview (pre-interview) on Monday, April 16, 2007, and an onsite group interview on Tuesday, April 24, 2007 that was tape recorded. In conducting the data analysis for this report, AIR staff reviewed the pre-interview and site visit notes, the audiotape of the site visit (as needed to support written notes), the district's CSIP, and an online district profile created by Iowa State University, Office of Social and Economic Trend Analysis. This report is divided into six evaluation domains: contextual background, team organization, team activities, funding and infrastructure, project sustainability, and the role of the state department of education. Additional comments or concerns expressed during the site visit are included at the end of this report.

#### *Contextual Background*

The Alta Community School District is located in northwest Iowa and serves the community of Alta in Buena Vista County. This site represents a small school district with 619 students, comprised of an elementary school, middle school, and high school. The district is supported by AEA 8. Based on the 2000 Census the community is designated as rural with a total population of 2,984 persons. In the district, Whites are the majority and both the Hispanic population (7.4%) and Other race or multiple races population (4.2%) are above the state average. The percentage of migrant/ELL students at the elementary school level has increased from 5% to 12% over the past few years. The median household income according to the 2000 Census in Alta was \$35,688 compared to the statewide median income of \$42,865 (2004 Census). Thirty-two percent of K-12 students were eligible to receive free and reduced-price school meals compared to 30% statewide. Available figures show that the high school graduation rates for the 2002-03 school year were 96% and above the state average of 90.8%. Enrollment is also projected to decline in the next few years.

According to the Alta Community School District 2004-05 CSIP report, students' needs are prioritized as follows:

- Improve vocabulary acquisition of students in grades 3-12
- Improve comprehension at all grade levels, with a focus at the elementary and middle school (K-8) for IEP and ELL students
- Improve and work on alignment of science curriculum grades 5-12
- Improve and work on alignment of math curriculum grades 5-12
- Improve and work on alignment of Social Studies curriculum grades 5-12
- Decrease discipline referrals grades 9-12
- Improve spelling grades 3-12

## *About the Team*

The team members include the following:

- Superintendent
- Principals of the elementary, middle, and high schools (3)
- Director of the Extension Office
- Guidance counselors for the high school and elementary school (2)
- School nurse
- Tri-Co Health Network member
- Special teacher of elementary and high school
- AEA members (2)
- Volunteer coordinator for elementary and high school levels

The Learning Supports team was initially formed with the support of the superintendent and members were selected that worked with children with social-emotional needs. However, the team realized that the learning supports initiative affects more than just these kids, and broadened its members. The administrators of each of the schools have been critical in making the team effective. The Director of the Extension Office and the volunteer coordinator have been helpful in reaching out to parents and the community. The Tri-Co Health Network is a federal grant program that provides health access and resources to schools and agencies in Northwest Iowa.

The team represents the district. The team meets monthly, although the AEA staff does not attend regularly and these members have been less “tuned in” to the Learning Supports team.

The mission of the Alta Learning Supports team is to increase parent interaction and student connectedness, which aligns well with the district mission of providing lifelong learning for all students. Parents are considered the first teachers and through partnership with parents the district is supporting life long learning. In addition, the team is careful to remain aware that they have limited time and resources, so they try to keep team members from “burning out.” Also, the committee has had fun in implementing the learning supports initiative. By partnering with the community and other professionals, they have gotten to know each other and built relationships that move their efforts forward.

The mix of team members including school staff, the volunteer coordinator, and community representatives provides a broader amount of knowledge to share. At the start of the year the team reviewed at-risk youth data for planning purposes, but they determined that in their small community all students would be part of their plan.

The team works well together. This year the team is more confident and prepared, which has helped the team to become more goal-directed and cohesive. The changeover of just a few staff has also helped to bring in perspectives.

### *Team Activities*

The team has analyzed data such as grading and has identified other grant programs that are used for students, such as the Tri-Co health grant. The team identifies and analyzes student needs by first reviewing data, such as the IYS, ITBS, ITED, DIBELS and the number of parents attending parent-teacher conferences. In particular, this year the team looked at attendance to determine early on whether there might be potential attendance problems with students. As a result, school staff is intervening and contacting parents in a timely manner.

The pre and posttests for advisor-advisee for students and parents uses questions that were pulled from the IYS. Also, Tri-Co health surveys provide additional information. At this time, the team is still in the early stages of collecting data. They know what they want to know and which data to collect, but they have not been collecting that data long enough to see results. The team anticipates that data results, such as attendance and test scores, will show an increase in achievement and parent involvement.

Last year, the team tried to encompass many areas, but they have turned their focus specifically on parent involvement and interaction, increasing student connectedness, and improving student achievement. The team would like to make communication more readily available between parents and schools.

The team will measure results by reviewing data over time and determining whether their efforts are working. For example, the team has created an advisor-advisee system that includes a pre-posttest for both students and parents. They use questions from the IYS that relate to school connectedness. In addition, they will review data on student attendance and track hours of parent volunteer time in the school and in parent organizations. The results of this data will inform the team as to whether the advisor-advisee system is effective.

In the past, the CSIPs have been developed by the administrators; however, next year the school improvement team will be included in this process. A number of the Learning Supports team members are also part of the school improvement committee, so there will be a lot of overlap with school committees and the CSIP. The team has also discussed adding parents to these committees to bring in outside perspectives. The team will ensure that the CSIP goals are reflected in their goals. All of the school committees will be working toward one common goal.

### *Funding and Infrastructure*

The team's Extension Office Director has actively sought out financing options through other grants and through contacts in other groups she participates in. The team has also connected with the Horizon Project, which is funded through the NW Area Foundation, to work with families to lower poverty levels and links have been shown between poverty and low student achievement. They are branching out to look at other groups that can support the same goals as the Learning Supports team. Also, the district has implemented study circles with high school youth as facilitators and participants. Their leadership series involves both youth and parents.

The team continues to discuss and work on identifying other financial options in the community. The Director of the Extension Office brings ideas to the team through her experiences and relationships in the community to discover what funding sources are available.

The superintendent and administrators are key members of the Learning Supports team both for their support of initiatives and their ability to make decisions about how to use resources.

The team is strongest in its communication systems and willingness to take action when they see where improvement is needed. In this second year of the Learning Supports grant, the team elected two members to be the leaders of the team. This leadership has been necessary to provide direction to the team. In addition, the team includes a member who deals with the budget, which the entire team reviews and discusses. With the improved direction and knowledge resources, the team is better informed.

The team collaborates well, although the data collection will be more consistent with the implementation and use of the Heart data system that the team will implement next year. The team just became involved with this new database system that will allow them to manage the data at the school level, and the AEA will help provide training and assistance with this system.

The strong communication, leadership, and the varied perspectives of the Learning Supports team members support the goals of the initiative.

### *Sustainability*

The team includes a volunteer coordinator, who has been very successful in reaching out and including the community in its efforts. Some of these efforts include: Rocking Readers – older students volunteer as teacher aides and read to the class; PIE partners – community businesses provide sponsorship; high school/college volunteers help students in the Math Olympics, science projects, as lunch buddies, and as Big Brothers/Big Sisters; parents – collecting soup labels and pop tabs for school equipment and other donations; Kiwanis's Club – purchasing bike helmets for 2<sup>nd</sup> graders to promote bike safety in conjunction with the school nurse (and Learning Supports team member) presentation on protecting the brain; and parent-teacher organization – planned a successful book exchange and will plan next year a reading challenge with teachers & students challenging each other to read more.

There are no current plans for social marketing efforts, although the NW Area Foundation project, outside of the learning supports program, helps to decrease poverty levels in the community. However, the goal of a future social marketing effort would need to include the school board and should promote the same goals of the school board, learning supports team, and the district.

All members of the team have been very involved in efforts, attended conferences, and implemented the ideas they have learned. There is not one individual person but rather the entire team is committed and supportive. The only team members that are not fully involved in the learning supports initiatives have been the two AEA members.

There are a number of community organizations that have partnered with the Learning Supports team to support its initiatives, including those listed above: Kiwanis, Tri-Co health, parent-teacher organization, and others. In addition, the Bridges mental health group brings professionals into the school and provides other mental health resources.

The team will evaluate changes in the external environment by placing those issues on their agenda. Team members look at demographics and studies in particular they look at the most current data and trends. For example, demographic data has reflected a growing Hispanic population, which impacts the team's focus on communicating with parents. Each member can bring information to the attention of the team.

The team members are part of the community and they share information and resources, as well as challenges and successes.

### *Questions about the State Department of Education's Role*

The Learning Supports team looks at the IYS; poverty data from the Horizons Project, which includes poverty, free/reduced lunch, population, housing, economic indicators and spending in the community, shifts and trends; demographic data that reflect a growing Hispanic population; and Tri-Co collects health data, such as immunizations, dental, teen pregnancy, mental health.

In addition to serving as the main source of IYS data, the SEA has also shared tools for Learning Supports teams to help narrow their focus. In Alta they are looking specifically at the alcohol and school connectedness tools. As a result, they have given presentations to the school board and faculty on school connectedness. Other data used by the team is internal, such as attendance, ITED, and other local data.

The second year of workshops provided by the SEA have been better organized and more focused than in the first year. The SEA is also learning how to meet team needs—the staff are helpful before, during, and after sessions and the team members feel that they can ask any question during the training.

The recent training on results accountability was not new information, but it was presented in a common sense way that can be used for the learning supports initiative and more broadly. The team found it particularly useful to meet with different attendees to talk about what works and what doesn't, sharing and hearing what other teams are doing. In addition, the Karen Mapp workshop provided tools and ideas for increasing parent involvement, which is a goal of the Learning Supports team. The SEA has also provided technology in the form of websites and other electronic information.

The AEA has provided limited assistance in the form of one AEA staff psychologist who helped the team with DIBELS data. During the first year the AEA staff attended the training in Des Moines; however, neither the AEA nor the Learning Supports team were certain what role the AEA should play. The Learning Supports team can call on the AEA as needed, and the staff will be helpful in the next year as the Learning Supports team begins using the Heart database.

The Iowa DE has provided many opportunities to the team for training. The team has been particularly pleased with the family involvement workshop led by Karen Mapp and how this information relates parents to student achievement. In addition, DE has created user-friendly tools and allowed the opportunity for conversations not only within teams but among school groups to help them understand each other and see what groups are doing. By requiring teams to bring their own data, the groups are able to use the tools and produce results. The strategies provided by training facilitators have helped the Alta team to reach their overall goals.

In the first year of the grant the implementation was in flux and the training was less clear and goal directed. In this second year of the grant, though, the training has been focused and the goals for each workshop have been clear.

### *Concerns*

While not a great concern, the team is interested in ensuring that the goals of learning supports align with the school system. Some members serve on the high school reform team, which fits well with the Learning Supports team—it's important to access all resources available. The team would like to improve its work with other groups and the AEA.

At a recent workshop the SEA sounded skeptical about the third year of the grant. The team is concerned to know whether there will be a third year.

## Bondurant Farrar Community School District Site Visit Report

**Pre-site visit interview conducted: Wednesday, March 28, 2007 at 9:30 a.m.**

**Onsite group interview conducted: Wednesday, April 11, 2007 at 3:30 p.m.**

The evaluation of the Bondurant Farrar Learning Supports team (Learning Supports team) consisted of one telephone interview (pre-interview) on Wednesday, March 28, 2007, and an onsite group interview on Wednesday, April 11, 2007 that was tape recorded. In conducting the data analysis for this report, AIR staff reviewed the pre-interview and site visit notes, the audiotape of the site visit (as needed to support written notes), the district's CSIP, and an online district profile created by Iowa State University, Office of Social and Economic Trend Analysis. This report is divided into six evaluation domains: contextual background, team organization, team activities, funding and infrastructure, project sustainability, and the role of the state department of education. Additional comments or concerns expressed during the site visit are included at the end of this report.

### *Contextual Background*

The Bondurant Farrar Community School District is located in south central Iowa and serves Bondurant and its surrounding areas in Polk County. The site represents a small community school district with 1,094 students and receives support from AEA 11. Based on the 2000 Census, the district is designated as Metro and the Learning Supports team considers itself a "bedroom community" of nearby Des Moines with a population of 3,878 persons. In the district Whites are the majority with minority populations below the state average in all categories. The median household income according to the 2000 Census in Bondurant Farrar was \$53,882 compared to the statewide median income of \$42,865 (2004 Census). Fourteen percent of K-12 students were eligible for free and reduced-price school meals compared to 30% statewide. High school graduation rates were 95.8% for the 2002-03 school year and are above the state average of 90.8%. Enrollment in the school district is projected to increase over the next several years.

According to the Bondurant Farrar Community School District 2004-05 CSIP report, students' needs are prioritized as follows:

- Continue to increase reading, math and science proficiency levels of all students with a focus on the following:
- Improving reading comprehension and vocabulary skills for low SES students and students with IEPs in 4th, 8th, & 11th grade.
- Improving math computation proficiency of 4th, 8th, & 11th multi-step problem solving.
- Work to increase student science scores on ITBS/ITED.
- Improve student to student respect.
- Work to decrease the use of alcohol and marijuana.
- Improve the administration of ITBS/ITED. Follow protocol.
- Develop a strategy to motivate students for success.

- Continue to improve the administration of district developed second assessments.
- Revise tests as needed with a focus on validity and reliability.
- Continue to improve character education program with the addition of an anti-bullying component

### *About the Team*

The members of the Bondurant Farrar Resource Management Team include two special education teachers, the at-risk coordinator, the school nurse who is also a parent of a secondary school student, the Assistant Secondary Principal, the AEA school psychologist, the AEA social worker, and secondary school guidance counselor. This team was chosen because they are involved with the students considered to have the most intensive needs. The team is essentially the same in make up as last year.

The Learning Supports team represents the secondary school building. The Learning Supports meets monthly and a subset of the group including the Assistant Secondary Principal, the At-risk Coordinator, and the guidance counselors, meet more frequently as needed to review student referrals that are made by faculty and staff.

The Learning Supports team has not developed its own distinct vision statement. Rather, it follows the district vision statement to “Help all students to develop their talents...”to become more productive citizens. The team focuses on personalization, connectedness (to the building and other adults), and getting students to the resources that they need. This seems to align with the district vision.

Team members include the special education teacher, school counselor, school nurse, and others that are most likely to interact with high need students, including at-risk kids. By the nature of their jobs and the small size of the school, they are aware of the kids who most need intervention. The team also reviews data from the IYS, local surveys, and teacher referrals for information about students, families and the community. The team also communicates with the school resource officer, who lives in the community and interacts with the families and helps provide needed interventions.

The team works together toward the three main goals of the Learning Supports for their school: suicide intervention and resources for students, positive behavior supports implementation, and the student referral process (formerly spearheaded by the building team/BAT). The latter two goals are based on IYS data. The team reviews data together.

### *Team Activities*

The team focuses on resources in the building, because resources in this small community are limited. One of the school resources has been positive behavioral supports (PBS) training. In addition, one of the guidance counselors has worked on a suicide prevention effort in the community by attempting to coordinate a grant that has since fallen through. This counselor is now working with another school district in an attempt to find alternative funding for the suicide prevention initiative.

The team reviews IYS data and find this information to be valid and reliable. Through referral data the staff determine which students require further review and assistance; however, the first year of referral data was collected last year and has provided only baseline data so far. To the degree that teachers know the students well, the data appears to reliably represent the students.

Additionally, suicide data collection has provided the team with a window of opportunity to look at options to implement for next year. Data has shown that there is a higher than average rate, so the team wants to look at the data to figure out the causes and what direction to go in.

The team focuses mainly on 3 areas: student connectedness, in which the Learning Supports team offers support to the PBS/personalization team; suicide prevention, which a guidance counselor is attempting to coordinate through external resources; and student referral, which builds upon the former Building Assistance Team to look at the types of referrals (e.g., hygiene, behavior, grades, family problems, etc.) This last focus is an attempt to reinvigorate a former program.

Although the school has only begun to collect referral data, they have already seen a decrease in office referrals. The team will continue to monitor data to ensure that they are targeting the kids who need the help. The team will review IYS data.

The team plans to use the student referral process to track the number of students referred, the number of students receiving support services, and the types of services they receive. They will compare the services students receive to what they have or have not received in the past. In regards to PBS and school connectedness, the team would like to measure the results of the referral data, student surveys, and staff surveys to determine where support has worked and for whom it worked. Next, the team will then need to decide how to continue to address issues to continue to make positive changes.

For the goal of PBS implementation, the team has reviewed preliminary data prior to implementation and the first year full year of data. From this data they have seen a reduction in office referrals and will review data again at the end of this school year. They will look to see whether the same students are referred and if they are released from services, for example are no longer in at-risk placement. If the students are considered at-risk for the long term, then the team will consider why they are still at risk. The team shares and analyzes data; they will evaluate and re-evaluate their programs based on results.

The CSIP was developed with input from a variety of sources over several years. This is perhaps the weakest point of the grant, which does not closely align with the CSIP. While the building focus of connectedness fits with the CSIP goals of personalization and PBS, the team has not verified that the two areas match.

#### *Funding and Infrastructure*

The team is undergoing a reconsideration of whether they have the human resources and time to devote to continuing through the next, third year of the Learning Supports initiative. If the team

moves forward with the third year of the project, they plan to review the CSIP and their team goals to review their alignment.

As noted above, one of the school guidance counselors attempted to implement a suicide prevention initiative using an outside grant; however, the grant funding did not materialize. The counselor continues to research other grants and possibilities with another school district. The county was working with the “yellow ribbon campaign” and the team thought it might be a potential resource, but it turns out that the program is not research-based. Additionally, the AEA has provided PBS training through an old grant that has since ended.

The team is still in the discussion stage of determining whether they should continue as part of the Learning Supports grant. If the team remains involved with the grant next year, they will look at how to access additional resources.

The team has been provided with latitude in using resources available at the building level. The committee has the authority to make all grant spending decisions. They communicate frequently because they all work in the same building. In addition to the team members, the entire building staff is relied on for referrals, PBS implementation, and follow through.

The team has not found resources beyond the LS grant to support their goals. In addition, the parents and staff are spread thin. The AEA provides support to the team in its efforts by providing training in PBS and encouragement to the team.

The school counselor attends monthly meetings of the county health department; however, this has not been useful as a resource for the LS team. The team also looking into the Columbia Teen Screen, but this requires additional funding, follow-up and a health program—the team needs more people and money to make use of these types of resources.

### *Sustainability*

The team recognizes that there is a lack of community involvement in the Learning Supports initiative; however, the school is located in a very small town. It has been difficult for the team to obtain resources and create partnerships. The town has only recently created a Chamber of Commerce.

The team does not have its own newsletter; however, there is a district and a regional county newsletter. Additionally, the district has a website and the school has just hired a technology coordinator who can help them to post information on the site to communicate with parents.

The Learning Supports team has many people supporting the grant initiatives. For example, the PBS grant and its team, in addition to the high school reform initiatives through the state and federal government. The team feels strongly that the Learning Supports project, regardless of the continuation of the grant, will be sustained in this district.

Although the team has not had staff time available to reach out to the community, they are aware of several churches, the Lion’s Club, and just a few organizations that exist in the community. At the most recent school board meeting the superintendent was directed to contact the YMCA to

potentially build a network for students and families. As the community grows and a new high school building is opened in the near future, the opportunities to connect with community organizations become more viable.

An important change in the external environment for Bondurant Farrar is the fast-growing community, which impacts the school system in terms of crowding and enrollment. This emphasizes the continued need for personalization initiatives. It will also impact the monitoring and deployment of resources. For example, there will likely be a third building added to the current elementary and high schools. This will require separating two staffs into three buildings and adding a new administrative leadership in a new middle school setting. It will become more challenging to spread resources across three buildings.

The PBS training and implementation has occurred in both buildings K–12, which the Learning Supports team believes will be sustained even as the community continues to grow and another school building is added. Although not a direct result of the learning supports initiative, the school is developing an ambassador system that trains current students to welcome new students to the school and ensure that those new kids are connected. This type of school wide effort assists the goals of learning supports and eventually these student ambassadors will be trained on anti-bullying and harassment intervention. The parents of these ambassadors have been involved as well.

In addition, the changes in the law to allow access to Title XIX funds have been a boon to the school in serving families. The school is able to give family information and resources to help them access the socio-emotional support from this change in the law.

#### *Questions about the State Department of Education's Role*

The school uses data that is provided directly from the state, such as the IYS data. However, the IYS data is provided every 2-3 years and decisions are made on data that is not current. In the interim, the school is working with the AEA to create online surveys. During the current school registration period, students are being asked to complete online surveys around climate and connectedness. This will provide summary data for the Learning Supports team to review and analyze. In addition, the team looks at student referral data through the AEA database.

Also, staff has completed a survey on effective behavior supports to determine their perceptions of connectedness of students and school policies around this topic. The AEA should be moving this to an online survey and staff will be asked again to complete the survey so the Learning Supports team can determine if staff perceptions have changed and how. The team is attempting to use multiple sources of data and if they receive funding for the suicide prevention initiative, the internal data will be helpful.

The school was asked to pilot the Learning Supports initiative by the AEA, because the grant reflects some of the school's efforts and goals. Given their previous efforts, they did not need as much of the training provided by the SEA. The school is small enough that staff and the team know what is going on with the kids. In the first year, the state provided lots of information in a short time frame and it was overwhelming.

This second year of the grant, the team has found that the training was more digestible because it was more spread out. The team found the ‘touch-up’ sessions helpful, such as the upcoming May workshop for special education teachers. The presenters have been top-notch—they present helpful information in a practical way and speak in an accessible terminology. The second year of training was much improved in that the pilot sites were able to select which workshops they attend. The workshop on selecting and evaluation programs was particularly helpful to the team in selecting a program that is research-based, uses the IYS data, and thinking about research proactively. Also, the team enjoyed hearing from the other pilot sites to learn what they are doing, to generate ideas, and get feedback to address problems and issues. The team work time provided to work on action plans was also helpful.

The AEA has provided staff training on PBS, personalization, rigor and relevance, and other NCLB related topics as well as supporting teams to attend workshops. The AEA has also developed online surveys of staff and students. The Heart database provides data on discipline and achievement; the AEA provides access to ITED and ITBS and provides this access in a timely manner. At the classroom level, the AEA provides hands-on support, such as classroom observations. They have consultants that provide psychology, social work, and special education expertise assigned to the building several days a week.

The SEA provided a workshop recently on Excel and how to present data for the AEA staff, and although that training was canceled due to snow they are expecting to reschedule. Additionally, the administrative level receives statewide training on data-driven leadership. The effect of this training filters down to the team and other staff to use data to make decisions.

### *Concerns*

The team’s greatest challenge is finding enough time to implement the learning supports initiative in such a small school environment with limited staff and time. The team members and other staff are stretched.

## Ft. Dodge Community School District Site Visit Report

**Pre-site visit interview conducted: Wednesday, April 18, 2007 at 9 a.m.**

**Onsite group interview conducted: Wednesday, April 25 at 10 a.m.**

The evaluation of the Fort Dodge Learning Supports team (Learning Supports team) consisted of one telephone interview (pre-interview) on Wednesday, April 18, 2007, and an onsite group interview on Wednesday, April 25, 2007 that was tape recorded. In conducting the data analysis for this report, AIR staff reviewed the pre-interview and site visit notes, the audiotape of the site visit (as needed to support written notes), the district's CSIP, and an online district profile created by Iowa State University, Office of Social and Economic Trend Analysis. This report is divided into six evaluation domains: contextual background, team organization, team activities, funding and infrastructure, project sustainability, and the role of the state department of education. Additional comments or concerns expressed during the site visit are included at the end of this report.

### *Contextual Background*

The Fort Dodge Community School District is located in north central Iowa along the Des Moines River. This site represents a medium size school district with 4,031 students and is supported by AEA 8. According to the 2000 Census the community is designated as large town with a population of 31,070 persons. In the district Whites are the majority with a Hispanic population (2.8%) equal to the state and Other race or multiple races population (2.6%) above the state average. Other minority populations are below the state average. The median household income according to the 2000 Census in Fort Dodge was \$34,947 compared to the statewide median income of \$42,865 (2004 Census). Forty-one percent of K-12 students were eligible for free and reduced-price school meals as compared to 30% statewide. High school graduation rates for the 2002-03 school year were 77.6% and below the state average of 90.8%. Enrollment in the school district is projected to decline slightly in the next few years.

According to the Fort Dodge Community School District 2004-05 CSIP report, students' needs are prioritized as follows:

- Improved reading comprehension for all students, K-12, with a focus on African American students, low socio-economic status (low SES) and students with IEPs
- Improved reading fluency for all students K-12, with a focus on students of low SES and students with IEPs
- Improved content area reading in grades 7-12.
- Improved mathematics performance for all students, K-12, with a focus on African American students, students of low SES and students with IEPs
- Improved achievement in all areas in grades 7 and 8
- Improved district graduation rate
- Improved learning environment in grades 7-12
- Increased use of technology as a means of improving student achievement

- Differentiated instruction
- Increased rigor and relevance at the Senior High

### *About the Team*

The members of the Learning Supports team include the AEA representative, curriculum specialist, the special needs coordinator, alternative education teacher, superintendent, student services coordinator, counselor, and building administrator for the middle and high schools. The focus of the team is on student support, so the team members include staff that is involved in the learning supports activities in their buildings. This is essentially the same team as in the first year of the grant.

The team represents the school district. The team usually meets on a monthly basis, and consistently meets after the statewide learning supports events held in Des Moines.

The vision or mission of the district and the Learning Supports team are the same—to meet the needs of all students that will in turn improve academic achievement.

The Learning Supports team draws upon a wide range of knowledge of its team members, including staff who work with at-risk youth and across grade levels. Team members are also active in the community as part of different committees and groups from which they bring in additional information about external factors and demographics. Team members also include those who work directly with students and their families, particularly high-need kids.

The team members work well together. They met initially to review the multitude of options they could pursue within the Learning Supports grant and decided together on the development of the Freshman Academy, which has been the main focus of the Learning Supports team. The Freshman Academy focuses on increasing graduation rates and meeting the needs of students transitioning into high school, which is a direct result of the overall team goal to increase student success in schools.

### *Team Activities*

The team has analyzed discipline data in great depth. In addition, the team decided to focus on the freshman class of high school by creating a Freshman Academy. The team is reviewing IYS data and survey results of graduates and post-graduates.

The main focus of the Fort Dodge Learning Supports team is the Freshman Academy. In support of this initiative, the team is reviewing a number of indicators of possible student struggles including:

- Attendance – student attendance in 8<sup>th</sup> grad and 9<sup>th</sup> grade and comparison. Student attendance typically drops in high school, so the goal is to maintain the same rate or decrease the drop.
- Discipline – referrals for 9-12 grades. The team goal is to decrease referrals by addressing the issue particularly with the freshman class.

- Credits – students can earn up to 16 credits per year and need 52 credits to graduate high school. The team set the target of freshman earning 13+ credits in their first year, including all credits in core academic areas.
- ITED – the team will also look at achievement data.
- Student survey – the team developed a student survey for the freshman class to complete at the end of the year regarding their perspectives on the Freshman Academy.
- Drop out follow-up survey – the drop outs from high school are followed with questions to determine why they dropped out so the school can identify ways to address student issues.

To ensure reliability of the data, the team is reviewing data from 5 years of attendance to use as a baseline average. They will compare the results of this first year of the Freshman Academy to the baseline. Also, the high school administration reviews the referrals for the freshman class, while recording and reviewing computer records of credits earned. The consistency of data and the hands-on review of incoming referrals give the team confidence that the data is valid.

The team’s focus has been on school success with an emphasis on the Freshman Academy they developed. The goal of the academy is to ensure that the transition to high school is successful for the entire district population. In developing this project, the Learning Supports team reviewed data on the high school freshman class performance over a period of 5 years, including discipline, attendance, academic success, and total credits earned by each student. These previous years will provide baseline data to compare against this first year of the Freshman Academy. Results will include a comparison of data and a review of a new end-of-year freshman survey pertaining to climate and safety. The Learning Supports team will hold an additional meeting each summer to review the freshman year data and determine the differences, strengths, and weaknesses of the academy.

The Learning Supports team will look at data for the freshman class and use the results of this information to determine what is working positively and possibly expand those services to other grades. Changes have already been made in response to data reviewed during the program year so far. For example, the “credit recovery” summer school program resulted from a review of student data.

The CSIP is developed by the district team, which includes many of the same members of the learning supports team. The Learning Supports team focuses on Goal 5 of the CSIP to ensure that all students experience a safe and drug free school environment that is conducive to learning. The learning supports initiative will strengthen this goal by providing additional data to analyze.

#### *Funding and Infrastructure*

The Learning Supports team has not pursued any additional financing options beyond the grant and currently available district resources.

There is no current plan to pursue new or different financing options. The district has already committed its resources to supporting the learning supports initiative, but they are not clear on

what additional resources they will need. The Learning Supports team includes the superintendent, who does have the authority to deploy or redeploy resources.

The team is small and informal. The Learning Supports team reviews and discusses the budget, they communicate well and rely on their team leader, and the members all contribute to help get the work done. The team initially looked at about 200 possible projects and decided to select just one to focus on, and have done an excellent job with that project.

Unlike small schools or districts, there are many competing ideas and needs to consider. The team would benefit from more time and resources, particularly human resources. The team has the right members to implement the learning supports initiative. These are stakeholders that are directly involved in the Freshman Academy and/or have the power and authority to get things done. Members bring important information to the team for review.

As noted above, the goal of the team is to increase student success. By developing and expanding on the Freshman Academy, which includes building communications across the school administrators and counselors, the team has effectively used its structure to enhance its use of resources.

### *Sustainability*

The parents of freshman level students are the largest community group involved in the learning supports efforts. In this first year of the Freshman Academy, there has been greatly enhanced communication with parents of both 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders. In addition, the middle and high school counselors and administrators have increased their communication and coordination in planning for the transition of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students to high school. More effective lines of communication have been developed and include an 8<sup>th</sup> grade assembly to review class schedules, the 4-year high school plan, and similar topics that address student fears about transition. On the same day as the 8<sup>th</sup> grade assembly, parents of this class are invited to an evening session to share information and discuss the expectations of the schools, students, and parents.

Additionally, the community has provided donations through an incentive program developed for the high school. In one example, at mid-term the school reviews student grades, discipline data, and overall GPA, then conduct a drawing and hand out iPods that were purchased by a local car dealership. This event was publicized through the local newspaper. Another presentation involved a prominent local person who is a former Fort Dodge graduate who spoke to the high school students about success. Students appeared to respond favorably to this presentation. The student survey that will be completed at the end of this first year of the Freshman Academy will ask for feedback on the success of this incentive program.

There is no formal social marketing that the Learning Supports team is conducting; however, they occasionally receive coverage in the local paper. Community coalitions that include Learning Supports team members spread the word around about the learning supports initiative. While there is no formal outreach, there is awareness and interest. All school staff are seen as resources and parent communication with the school and teachers in the implementation of the Freshman Academy are one example of ongoing change.

The high school administration was realigned to allow for a new administrator for the Freshman Academy. The new administrator for this freshman class and the realigned counseling staff provide an infrastructure that will support and sustain this initiative.

There are strong relationships with the Drug Free Alliance, the Character Counts Coalition, and the Community Action Network that lead to combining services, additional donations, and support for Learning Supports activities such as the mentoring program. The participation of Learning Supports team members on various committees and boards of organizations in the district have helped to spread information about the learning supports initiative and efforts of the school district.

The Learning Supports team will monitor external changes just as they have been, by looking at data district wide, consulting the parental advisory group, and staying informed about what is going on in the community. The process of realignment to serve the needs of the Freshman Academy has helped to streamline communications with parents of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students. In addition, the community has a high poverty population, so they view the learning supports program as important to maintain and expand opportunities for providing support and assistance to students.

The Learning Supports team continuously reviews and discusses information about the county, community, district, and region of the state as well as the views of members who participate in other groups. The development of the Freshman Academy was a direct response to the change in demographics of the students. This change in the external environment led the team to consider how to provide additional support for kids, particularly those in transition to high school. The alternative school administrator on the Learning Supports team reported that this year he has received no transfers from the freshman class so far—this is the first year that has occurred.

#### *Questions about the State Department of Education's Role*

The Learning Supports team uses a variety of data including: IYS, graduate and post-graduate follow-up survey, number of credits earned during freshman year, attendance, discipline data, state assessments, and district assessments. In addition, the district conducts a high school student climate survey and every 5 years conducts a community and parent survey. In high school, student grades are monitored biweekly so that intervention can be offered early on before the student fails. For those students that do fail, the Learning Supports team plans to implement a “credit recovery” program during summer school to bring those kids’ grades back up. Additionally, the Freshman Academy staff meet daily to discuss the progress of students.

As mentioned earlier, in addition to the academy the Learning Supports team is looking closely at discipline data that has been collected over the past 5 years to look at trends and to compare students across grade levels.

The SEA provides the IYS every few years and the Learning Supports team compares their data against the state.

The training provided on looking at the data from the IYS was very interesting and tools that help to re-crunch the data have been most helpful. Several other speakers have also been good, including Gene Hall on change and Mark Friedman on results-based evaluation. The workshops have also provided important opportunities for the various LS pilot sites to share information about their projects and learn about the efforts of others. The chance to network with other districts and schools is an unusual opportunity that the team has enjoyed. Also, Jane Todey and her staff have been very responsive and helpful when the team has called to ask for assistance.

The AEA has not been involved with the learning supports initiative beyond the membership of one representative on the Learning Supports team. The team expects to increase AEA involvement as it looks at the results-based change concepts provided through the Mark Friedman training and other changes as a result of the Gene Hall workshop. AEA work has been focused at the district level and less at specific sites like Fort Dodge.

The SEA has provided learning supports training over the past two years including Excel training and workshops by Karen Mapp, David Osher, and others. These workshops and training have been excellent.

### *Concerns*

The greatest concern of the Learning Supports team is finding enough time and resources to conduct the initiative. There is a minimal amount of resources and professional development guidance that the SEA is providing, which has been the incentive that the district needed to focus on a project. Without the Learning Supports grant, the team would not have been able to implement this project with the same formal, organized, and detailed level of effort. When funding for the school district decreases, these are the types of programs that get cut first, even though that is exactly when these programs are most needed.

The Learning Supports team is dedicated to the continuation of the Freshman Academy, and they plan to continue it even if the money from the grant ends. The goal for the team continues to be doing what's best for the kids. Another example of a past program that was funded through the AEA, Bridges, has remained in effect for many years. After the funding from the AEA ended, the district determined that it was worth keeping and found the resources to continue this expensive program.

The first year of the grant was rocky and the team was overwhelmed and unsure whether it would work out. Thanks to the efforts of Jane Todey, Ron Mirr, and the state staff, the team has found the second year to be more productive.

- Future site visits might be conducted using video conferencing. The AEA team representative offered use of their regional office with a polycom and video system.
- The team brought up a slightly different concern about the replacement of staff at the state level. There is someone who retired in March, Ray \_\_\_\_, who was the main point of contact for at-risk youth and related issues. Now, when staff calls the SEA, they cannot find any one person who can help them address their concerns. The team is very

concerned that they will lose support for their efforts to work with at-risk youth without a replacement of this important role.

## Iowa City Community School District Site Visit Report

**Pre-site visit interview conducted: Tuesday, April 17, 2007 at 9:30 a.m.**

**Onsite group interview conducted: Thursday, May 3, 2007 at 4 p.m.**

The evaluation of the Iowa City Learning Supports team (Learning Supports team) consisted of one telephone interview (pre-interview) on Tuesday, April 17, 2007, and an onsite group interview on Thursday, May 3, 2007 that was tape recorded. In conducting the data analysis for this report, AIR staff reviewed the pre-interview and site visit notes, the audiotape of the site visit (as needed to support written notes), the district's CSIP, and an online district profile created by Iowa State University, Office of Social and Economic Trend Analysis. This report is divided into six evaluation domains: contextual background, team organization, team activities, funding and infrastructure, project sustainability, and the role of the state department of education. Additional comments or concerns expressed during the site visit are included at the end of this report.

### *Contextual Background*

The Iowa City Community School District (CSD) is located in eastern Iowa. The site represents a large school district with 10,894 students and is supported by AEA 10. Based on the 2000 Census the district is designated as mid-size with a population of 89,949 persons. In the district Whites are the majority with a Hispanic population (2.8%) equal to the state average and Black/African American (3.4%), Asian/Pacific Islander (5.0%), and Other race or multiple races (2.8%) populations above the state average. The median household income according to the 2000 Census in Iowa City was \$37,295 compared to the statewide median income of \$42,865 (2004 Census). Twenty-one percent of students are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals compared to 30% statewide. High school graduation rates during the 2002-03 school year were 92.8%, which is higher than the state average of 90.8%. Enrollment in the district is projected to increase in the next few years.

According to the Iowa City Community School District 2004-05 CSIP report, students' needs are prioritized as follows:

- Improve reading comprehension for low SES students, students with IEPs, ELL students, and minorities in grades K-6.
- Improve vocabulary acquisition of students in grades 7 and 8.
- Improve reading comprehension performance at grades 7-12 for students with IEPs and students identified as struggling readers.
- Improve math problem-solving for 8th grade students for district subgroups.
- Improve the attendance rates in grades K-8.
- Improve the learning environment in grades 7-12.
- Improve the district graduation rate and drop out rate.

### *About the Team*

The Iowa City Community School District created two levels of resource management teams (Learning Supports teams) for the Learning Supports initiative. The first layer involves Learning Supports teams at five of the six secondary schools. (The remaining school is quite small with only 100 students and a few staff and serves as an alternative high school.) At each school the Learning Supports team consists of key staff who work with at-risk youth, juvenile court liaison, substance abuse counselor, school principal or associate principal, and United for Action youth counselor. The district-wide Learning Supports team consists of approximately two members from each building team, including the principal/associate principal and one or two other team members. In addition, the associate superintendent is a member of the district Learning Supports team.

The key agency and teaching staff were selected to be members of the team because they know the kids who have the greatest need and interact with them on a daily basis. The administrators add authority to the teams.

The members of the teams have not changed significantly since last year. There are varying degrees of buy-in, though, from the administrators. One principal in particular has embraced the learning supports efforts and serves as a model of how the teams should work. Other administrators have been less interested in the changes that are entailed in implementing the learning supports initiatives. The school district is quite large and learning supports is a big undertaking, so change is happening slowly.

The team represents the entire district. The learning supports teams were initially established in the secondary schools due to the challenges posed by the size of these schools, there has been some work going on in the elementary schools as well.

Building Learning Supports teams meet at a minimum of once per trimester, although some teams meet more frequently. At the end of each trimester, the building teams gather data and analyze their needs and resources.

The district Learning Supports team meets twice a year and this year they are considering a third meeting during the summer, because they are planning to do more in the next year of the grant. Very rarely do all teams meet together at one time.

The Learning Supports teams are trying to make the review of resources more formal and systematic. In one example, a secondary school looked at how they were using their resources and made changes that were relevant. They had hired an alternative education teacher for each of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, but found through analyzing their data that the staff were “catching kids too late.” They decided to blend the two positions so that each teacher interacts with both 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, which provided more continuity. In addition, they began to “graduate” kids out of the program after two years which freed up this resource for other students.

The district and Learning Supports team vision are aligned. There is a movement to make data driven decisions. This becomes more challenging at the building level because some staff are

resistant to change. However, the school board and the associate superintendent remain very supportive of this vision.

The team is knowledgeable of the needs and challenges of their students. Members of the building-based Learning Supports teams include staff who work directly with at-risk students, including teachers, counselors, and administrators. The team staff have many years of experience in the school system. Also, these teams meet frequently on an informal basis to share information and discuss individual student cases.

Different school-based Learning Supports teams have different approaches. In one school, the Learning Supports team meets every 6 weeks at the end of the grading period to review grades and the promotional status of students. In addition, they have weekly triage meeting at which the teachers, counselors, and administrators discuss students that require intervention. Another Learning Supports team meets infrequently, but smaller teams of teachers and counselors meet weekly to discuss the needs of kids and then share that information with the larger faculty. The faculty meeting at this school involves reviewing and discussing data, such as grades and failures and the need for direct interaction with families.

Some building teams are more connected to families than others. For the schools that are less connected, the teams would like to increase their contacts with families to better understand the needs of their students.

At the district level, the Learning Supports team has not coalesced yet; however, they plan to tie funding to the decisions made at the district level meetings. After this change occurs, the district level Learning Supports team will have more influence on the process. Overall, the goals of the district and building level teams is to determine which students are at risk of failure or failing grads and provide them with the support they need in order to increase achievement.

At the building level, Learning Supports teams vary in their cohesiveness. At one school, the team began by reviewing the many possible approaches but they have been caught up in addressing many of the needs of new students due to a large influx in students from another district. In another school, a longstanding team has become the Learning Supports team and continues to work toward school success. This team works well together.

In another case, the teachers are counselors and in this dual role they directly address the needs of at-risk students. They share the same goal as the administrators and teams exist at each grade level to meet and discuss students. These teams meet weekly and provide information to the Learning Supports team, which meets on Wednesdays to discuss the best options for intervention with specific students.

### *Team Activities*

Team activities for the Iowa City Learning Supports team take place at the building level and the student needs are analyzed and addressed somewhat differently at each building. All of the schools look at grades and attendance, and they focus on the individual student in their reviews. Some of the data they review include ITBS, attendance, discipline referrals, in-school and out-of-

school suspensions, credits earned towards promotion/graduation, D/F grades, IYS, and direct referrals from staff.

In one school, a system building-based team meeting has been developed that overlaps with the Learning Supports team goals. In this school, the building team meets six times per year (according to the 6-term grading system) to review cases of students who are not doing well. This is in addition to a weekly “triage” meeting that in which the 4 teams within the school share notes, ITBS data, attendance, discipline referrals, and other data identify the students who need help and discuss the best options for intervention. Other schools have less systematic processes, but they are working toward setting up a “triage” system and hope to implement this in the next school year.

The district team considers the data they review to be valid because it matches anecdotal evidence and what they observe directly with the students. The data helps them to understand the larger picture of what is going on to help them diagnose problems and determine how best to intervene. The challenge is not the validity of the data but how to review the data to help intervene with students that might otherwise be missed. Assuming that the data is valid, the building teams focus on the cause to help them diagnose student problems and intervene effectively. The team also notes that reviewing data across grade levels as kids transition up through the school system may not be helpful, because student behavior changes as they move from elementary to junior and senior high school.

The Learning Supports team has focused on school failure and connectedness. They first identify students who “are not making it” and receiving poor grades. Then, they determine whether the problem is poor studying skills or behavior related to school safety and connectedness. The IYS data has been useful in this analysis.

The team would like to develop key data points that are looked at consistently across the district. Some people have commented that the Learning Supports team has “patches of brilliance.” The team would like to be more systematic and ultimately see higher attendance rates, improved grades, and less substance abuse. By building the infrastructure to support these goals, the team hopes to improve outcomes for students.

Each building creates its own school improvement plan and then the district associate superintendent puts these building plans together into the full CSIP that is submitted to the Iowa Department of Education. The associate superintendent uses this opportunity to visit with each school principal as well.

Although the CSIP may be used as a guide, it is not a “living” document. Nonetheless, there is overlap among the CSIP development teams and building Learning Supports teams, which supports the CSIP and Learning Supports team goal of connectedness. The use of the CSIP goals during Learning Supports team planning and its alignment could be further strengthened.

### *Funding and Infrastructure*

The district already raises a “fair amount of money” for social and emotional programs in the district; however, the use of resources is more “reactive” in that the resources are identified first and then the need. For example, the Drop Out Prevention program, which includes academic, connectedness, and social-emotional supports, receives approximately \$3 million from local property taxes designated for at-risk programming. It is less clear how to allocate this funding per building. The team will consider how well the resources are managed and allocated, how the building needs have changed, what the buildings have accomplished, and what have been the outcomes. The team will look at the changing demographics of the community as they consider how to allocate funds.

The team recently reviewed an RFP for a safe and drug free grant and tried to determine whether it “fit” the district’s needs. The idea is to consider the needs of the district first, and then determine how to obtain the funding.

Ultimately, the superintendent has final decision making authority on how to deploy resources; however, the Learning Supports team can open up the process.

The district level Learning Supports team is attempting to build a more formal system based on the funding stream that they will manage in the coming year. Meanwhile, the building Learning Supports teams have varying levels of strength of communication.

The building team that holds weekly “triage” meetings began publishing topics that are marked “confidential” for staff to encourage them to review information and ask for more. The building teams are task-oriented, so each member has a clearly assigned task/role and must report back at the end of the 6-week grading period with updates about the intervention and whether it worked. Teams will know if the intervention worked because there will be fewer students who are not able to be promoted (to the next grade level). If the team’s predictions are not accurate, then this will inform them about what to look at in the following period. Triage information is also used by teachers to make a difference with at-risk students.

Another building team meets formally and posts minutes of each meeting; however, they are still working toward involving other staff outside the teams and sharing information. In some schools the communications combine formal and informal information sharing among teachers, counselors, and United Action for Youth (UAY) staff that interact frequently.

Time is the greatest constraint to all of the building teams as well as the district Learning Supports team. The needs of the students are increasing and there is “not enough to go around” in terms of resources. The Learning Supports team helps by increasing the contact time by the number of formal meetings per year; however, this also increases the responsibilities of staff. Some buildings find it hard to see the pay-off to “working smart” because there is a wide continuum of buy-in to the Learning Supports teams. Teams that work well do help, though, in providing support to the learning supports efforts. In addition, increasing parent involvement helps the teams to identify the problems of students, e.g., whether the poor grades are a result of poor study habits or due to some other issue.

The strength of the teams is in their ability to look at each individual child. They do well in assessing cognitive issues through a screening committee that has been structured to provide supports and plans. However, they still struggle with issues that are beyond mental health and substance abuse.

### *Sustainability*

Strong agency involvement exists in all the schools. Some of these community supports include:

- Mecca – provides substance abuse counseling services,
- Juvenile court liaison
- Four Oaks – provides mental health services
- UAY – supports youth organizations and provides counseling services
- Academic mentoring program
- After school tutoring – provided by parents, community member volunteers, and university students (who receive college credit for volunteering)
- Parent/community volunteers – retired senior citizens groups that work with below grade readers and non-readers
- University of Iowa – colleges of social work, psychology, and education consult with the school system and provide child psychologists and other student volunteers
- Neighborhood centers of Johnson County – in a couple of low income areas these neighborhood centers host outreach programs that include: youth-oriented activities; summer programs; monthly neighborhood meetings with the police, DHS, home owners, parks and recreation staff, et al; church outreach into neighborhoods including pastors from all-black churches; and other efforts that pool resources to meet the needs of the community and give support to families.
- Hills and West Bank – provides financial support for events such as a recent spaghetti dinner to help increase parent attendance to parent-teacher conferences.

In addition, the district has turned to technology to increase its outreach to parents and families. Through ConnectEd, announcements are made through the telephone system by autodialing to parents with messages that may be routine reminders or emergencies. The secondary school level utilizes the internet through CenterPoint. This system encourages families to view real-time student information such as grade books, attendance, and homework, and allows parents to email teachers. This has helped to set an expectation of a parent-school partnership, and requires that teachers will update information regularly on the internet site. Although this information is available for elementary schools, it is mostly used at the secondary level.

To welcome families and encourage them to visit, the schools have made changes in outreach. For example, schools now call parents when student behavior is identified rather than waiting until grades are affected. Outreach is more proactive.

In another example, with a growing Hispanic population the district has attempted to hire more linguistically diverse staff such as an associate principal that is fluent in Spanish. This year for the first time the schools have identified people in the community that are tied into the Hispanic population to increase a connection with that population.

Additionally, the district has repeatedly used the phrase “removing barriers to learning” in its many communications. This has become a commonly understood phrase in the community and has become a part of the philosophy and mind-set of the district. While schools are academically oriented, the district recognizes that there are barriers to learning for everyone. In the case of those at-risk students, what can be done? Now, the district has the language that is “safe” to use in addressing barriers that were not talked about in the past. This allows the district to welcome agencies that provide mental health, substance abuse, and other non-academic services into the schools without being labeled as “bad” simply because they need more help.

In return, other agencies in the district have come forward to offer help, such as the University of Iowa health group that offers weekly school-based health clinics. In addition, the district formed a partnership to provide mental health services onsite at school buildings. In just 2 months, the caseload increased to 25 people. The learning supports initiative has changed the way the schools view the child—rather than seeing a discipline problem, the schools see that there is a behavior issue and attempt to determine why it exists. They have the tools to address student problems in a different way. Also, families now see the schools not as just an academic center but as a system that is serving the whole child, and the whole family. As schools become more community oriented they are also becoming the center of that community support.

Schools have used their resources well and they can use the funding to directly address students. Hospitals, pharmacies, and city and local resources know that the schools will use their funding and resources efficiently.

Internal champions include the youth at-risk development coordinator, who chairs the group, as well as one secondary school administrator who has embraced the learning supports initiatives in her school. The associate superintendent has also been very supportive, although he does not have a lot of time available. The school board brought the Learning Supports grant to the attention of the district initially and they have continued to be supportive of and interested in the Learning Supports team efforts.

Although the Learning Supports team has political and school board support, there is a lack of buy-in from middle managers, i.e., school administrators. The Learning Supports team conducted a conference in 2003 that reached 200 people in the community and those people continue to talk about the learning supports initiative. In addition, the resources do not always “match the spirit” of the district’s needs or provide the amount of funding or time required.

The Iowa City school board looked at the learning supports program several years prior to the implementation of the current grant. They attempted to identify and remove the barriers to learning to increase academic success. Through their efforts, the district began to look at behavior, such as social and physical behavior, cognitive measures, and school attendance. The district has moved its thinking forward from assuming that a poorly performing student requires a tutor, to considering the mental health, substance abuse, and other issues that may impact a child. They have gained a broader perspective on what is getting in the way of learning. Even with changes in membership, the board has continued to be very supportive of the learning supports initiative and at the forefront of the agenda to look at data—they champion the learning supports initiative in the community.

Also, the district has worked with Ron Mirr, who provides grant writing and facilitation. He lives in the community and is very involved with the Iowa City learning supports initiative. Other community agencies have also come on board and provide continued support, resources, and funding that complement the LS grant, including the University of Iowa hospital, Emerging Philanthropists/United Way, Mecca, UAY, and the juvenile court system.

The district-wide Learning Supports team meetings frequently discuss the external environment, such as demographic changes and how to address them. The discussion itself is valuable because in such a large district it is important to share information across buildings. Action plans are then built upon the discussions.

The Learning Supports team is always looking at data, so when a funding opportunity comes along, they are ready to go after it because they know what their needs are and can determine if the grant goals align with the district goals. While a number of grants are available through other partnerships, the goals of the grants need to align with those of the school system. The team considers sustainability as they assess whether a grant will support their needs. In addition, as partnerships are formed with other agencies in the community, those partners in turn may help locate additional funding.

Also, the Learning Supports team recognizes that the district needs to make systemic changes and the team is trying to determine how to do this. Data has shown that what the district is doing works, but it is not enough. The district is just beginning to openly talk about safety, e.g., fighting and its frequency. They have not seen an increase or decrease over seven years of data; however, they have found there is a greater intensity of fighting in the schools. This is a new issue that had not been addressed in the past.

#### *Questions about the State Department of Education's Role*

The Learning Supports team uses IYS data (particularly school connectedness) as well as the district database that manages all school records including grades, attendance, discipline, tardiness, etc. There is so much data that it can be overwhelming. To begin to analyze this information a technology support staff developed a spreadsheet that correlated low grades, discipline data, suspensions, tardy reports, etc. Then, consultant Ron Mirr was asked to run the data through SPSS to make charts and simplify the information so it is more usable.

For example, the team looked at 8<sup>th</sup> grade retention rates and specifically at kids who had failed out of this grade and entered the alternative high school. Then, through in-depth data analysis and interviews with those students, the team was able to determine reasons for their failure.

The district also relies on their CenterPoint database and queries that were developed by the AEA. To encourage building buy-in, the district Learning Supports team asked the building teams to look for and analyze data relevant to their student needs. As a result, each school looked at somewhat different data, so the Learning Supports team will be more prescriptive to help the district to analyze the same type of information.

In addition to supplying IYS data, the SEA has been helpful in developing toolkits and providing state data that can be compared against the district's data. While the IYS is an important source of data, it is huge. The district has been using this resource since 1999 and is now able to view the third iteration of results and look at trend data and state comparisons, which helps the Learning Supports team to break down information and use it more effectively.

The Iowa City Learning Supports team members have found the SEA training to be "wonderful." Presenters have helped the team to learn how to interpret the IYS data and Ron Mirr showed them how to pull apart and analyze the data. Karen Mapp's training was also helpful.

The team noted that the initial training was not as helpful, because it covered too much information and did not offer enough time to process the information. Also, the districts piloting this initiative are very different in size and resources, so their needs were very different as well. For example, the Iowa City Learning Supports team already knew about learning supports before they took on the grant, so the introductory training was redundant. Now, the team works more efficiently by sending smaller teams to different trainings.

The workshop with Mark Friedman was particularly useful to the Learning Supports team and "changed how [they] do business." Ron Mirr has provided consulting help with the follow up locally. Also, technical help has been provided on Excel at SEA trainings and SPSS support from Ron Mirr.

### *Concerns*

The team would like to receive a clear learning supports model. They understand learning supports conceptually; however, they are unsure how to implement it. Even in the pilot of this grant, the districts require more guidance and structure. What should learning supports look like?

The Learning Supports team is concerned about obtaining additional funding. As their needs grow, they require more funding. This becomes more challenging at the secondary level. Elementary schools tend to have more support, while the junior and senior high schools require more money, resources, and personnel.

The team also recognizes that the district needs to reflect, refine, and reallocate more frequently in light of changing needs. Even if things are working well, they may have new or different needs and should switch programs. There is not adequate personnel and funding to support both current programs and new programs to address both changing and new needs. This includes adding more staff time for programs. For example, when the district took on a mental health grant they did not anticipate the additional work for the district secretary, so they had to reallocate this person. Although she does not have more time, she must contribute more to this particular project.

The Iowa City Learning Supports team would prefer that the SEA provide workshops around the state rather than require teams to attend statewide workshops in Des Moines, even if this results in less training over all. Given the size of this district and school teams, they would prefer to

have the training in their district with a focus on direct assistance rather than a “one size fits all” type of approach.

As a suggested next step for the SEA given its limited resources and staff and a desire to maintain the learning supports initiative, they should consider tying in learning supports with existing programs in special education and general education. This would provide a common language, model, use of resources, and data requirements. From a learning standpoint, when there are too many models that are disconnected, the implementation will not be effective. And schools cannot sustain multiple models and initiatives—this gets in the way of helping kids.

The pilot is providing \$10K per site for the 10 pilot sites—perhaps the project is too ambitious for such a small amount of funding, particularly in Iowa City. The school district is fortunate to have Ron Mirr in their midst to help fill in the gaps. They would recommend that the state provide more money to fewer sites, or fund according to size of the district participating in the initiative.

What will happen with the Learning Supports grant/initiative after three years? While the team can sustain the efforts of this grant by using data to evaluate their impact and will look at resources and how they are allocated, the team is not sure how to sustain their efforts without additional funding. When money is involved, there is an added motivation to the schools to persist.

In regards to training and technical assistance, the team has more success when planning occurs in the summer (June and August) with technical support provided throughout the year. This is more efficient for the district. It is difficult to get people to leave the building all day to attend a workshop in Des Moines, and in some cases the right people are not attending the workshops. It would be helpful to bring the workshops closer to Iowa City, and perhaps share the training with the pilot sites that are located close by.

## Knoxville Community School District Site Visit Report

**Pre-site visit interview conducted: Wednesday, March 28, 2007 at 12 noon**

**Onsite group interview conducted: Tuesday, April 10, 2007 at 1 p.m.**

The evaluation of the Knoxville Learning Supports team (Learning Supports team) consisted of one telephone interview (pre-interview) on Wednesday, March 28, 2007, and an onsite group interview on Tuesday, April 10, 2007 that was tape recorded. In conducting the data analysis for this report, AIR staff reviewed the pre-interview and site visit notes, the audiotape of the site visit (as needed to support written notes), the district's CSIP, and an online district profile created by Iowa State University, Office of Social and Economic Trend Analysis. This report is divided into six evaluation domains: contextual background, team organization, team activities, funding and infrastructure, project sustainability, and the role of the state department of education. Additional comments or concerns expressed during the site visit are included at the end of this report.

### *Contextual Background*

The Knoxville Community School District (CSD) is located in south-central Iowa and serves Knoxville in Marion County. The site represents a medium sized school district with 2,057 students and is supported by AEA 11. Based on the 2000 Census the district is designated as a small town with a population of 11,392 persons. In the district Whites are the majority and all other minority populations are below the state average. The median household income according to the 2000 Census in Knoxville was \$38,273 compared to the statewide median income of \$42,865 (2004 Census). Twenty-nine percent of K-12 students are eligible to receive free and reduced-price school meals compared to 30% statewide. High school graduation rates for the 2002-03 school year were 96.4% which is above the state average of 90.8%. Enrollment in the school district is projected to decrease in the next several years.

According to the Knoxville Community School District 2004-05 CSIP report, students' needs are prioritized as follows:

- Improve reading comprehension skills for students below the 40th percentile, regardless of their sub-group
- Improve math performance for students in grades 8 and 11
- Devote teacher professional development time to implement learning strategies throughout the curriculum in grades K-12
- Facilitate professional development through service plan meetings with AEA personnel, administrative team meetings, and professional development team meetings.
- Continue character education development in grades K-12

### *About the Team*

Following are list of current Learning Supports team members; however, in one month there will be some changes as noted below.

- Guidance counselor – works with all the students so was appropriate
- Physical Ed teacher – extra curricular point of view (and a male)
- Reading Specialist – struggling readers
- 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher – Lower Elementary
- 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher – Upper Elementary
- Parent of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade student – to provide insight from the parent perspective; this parent has had a child in the elementary school since kindergarten
- Principal – leader/chair of the team
- School Psychologist
- AEA staff

New team members will replace two of the current members next month. The purpose of the change is mainly to provide some rotation of the members and to add some new perspectives. The following are replacements:

- The Physical Education teacher will be replaced by the Media Associate
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher will be replaced with a 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher.

The team represents the building and thus consists of elementary school staff and one parent. The team meets at least monthly. The mission of the Positive Behavioral Supports program parallels the district-wide mission, which is to ensure that every student leaves the Knoxville Community School District socially responsible and academically prepared. Their goal is to create good citizens that have the skills to “make it” in the workplace.

Yes, the team reviews student records, files and test scores as well as district benchmarks and attempt to match their needs with that is required for each student at their level. The look at social and family needs as well. The team has access to a variety of community resources that offer cash or other help, such as gift food baskets around Thanksgiving time, clothes for children, and other items. The team identifies families or children in need for those community resources.

The team is very cohesive and work well together. Each team member brings different strengths and they complement each other. Depending on the project at hand, team members will provide support. All team members share the goal of wanting students to achieve, particularly in areas of reading and behavior improvement. The AEA member has been a particularly important member of the team.

### *Team Activities*

The team has identified and analyzed resources in the school and community. For example, the team found that several families of elementary school students are involved in counseling services at a local mental health services facility. The team contacted a psychologist from that facility and through discussions determined that it would be helpful to provide an office for that doctor once a week in the elementary school as a service to families. The team believes that this effort would increase attendance.

The Knoxville Learning Supports team uses the Heart database on a monthly or more frequent basis to help them make decisions about students—both individuals and groups of students. For

example, the data has helped them to determine whether to focus on behavior in the classroom or the hallway. All teachers have access to this data and can make recommendations. Teachers can count consequence slips, which are then used to determine whether a child requires an intervention of some kind. The Heart database also provides DIBELS results, basic skills, health needs, and other measures that provide the team with a broad picture of the students. The staff also use this data during parent meetings.

The team has created forms that staff fills out consistently when they review data, so that they are all reviewing the same type of data when making decisions. This form also provides agreed upon terms and definitions. In addition to providing a consistent and common format, staff can update the forms, share information, ask questions, and discuss the behavior of students and actions to address it while sharing a common understanding

The team uses the Heart database and other academic assessment data to determine whether behavior has improved and if so, then whether academic improvements have been made. Changes are assessed at the district level as well. The team looks at discipline referrals, instruction, academic proficiency, suspension and expulsion rates, attendance records, etc.

The results of the program are measured by reviews of the middle and high school honor rolls. The elementary school asks teachers of older students how children from their building are doing and whether there is a difference between their elementary school students and others in the community.

The school uses “B cards” to focus on behavior. For example, during recess and hallway activity, B cards are used to reward positive behavior. When the behavior is poor or there are a high number of reprimands, then the school will spend as much as a week re-teaching the rules.

The team looks at data for the whole year and address behavior with the result that academics improve. Basic skills have increased 10% in the past year, which is very encouraging for the students. As a reward, the children are given a group picture, which the team prefers over rewarding children with payments. The school has a system called “payment in kind” or PIK. Children receive PIK cards for positive behavior and may save up to purchase a gift item. The items are family oriented, such as games or outings instead of candy, and children are also learning how to save.

Data also helps the team to provide interventions and adequate support by keeping watch over students that require additional assistance. If they find that interventions are not working as a result of reviewing the data, then they consider what else can be done. When data indicates the need, the team will provide additional math, reading, and behavior interventions for students.

The Learning Supports team recognizes that there is a direct relation between student learning and the school environment. Less disturbances in the classroom leads to more learning, a greater the bond with the school leads to increased attendance, and order and discipline in the school and classroom lead to greater connectedness for the children.

The school recently showed growth in ITBS scores, which the team attributes to a close review of attendance and academic data on a weekly basis. For example, when students were found to have poor test-taking skills, the school provided test-taking work. Ultimately, the Learning Supports team is looking at data and not simply guessing at what the problem areas might be.

The CSIP in turn provides a very broad plan, such as increasing math and reading scores, decreasing suspensions, and maintaining an average daily student attendance of 96%. These goals are posted in the school. In addition, the team accesses data on a weekly basis on attendance, e.g., Hart data (consequence and discipline data), to see if the data are aligning with goals.

### *Funding and Infrastructure*

The school has received a number of gifts/donations from parents who have heard about the Learning Supports/Positive Behavioral Supports to help finance the continuation of the program. In addition, the school holds periodic fundraisers. Also, there is an initiative in the community that targets high school students that donated \$1,000 to the Learning Supports program after reading about it in the newspaper. Also, the school will continue to hold an annual fundraiser each fall to make sure money is available for this program.

The team is led by the elementary school principal, who has the authority to redeploy resources as needed. He is in charge of the budget and school accounts. The Knoxville team is based in the elementary school building, so the team meets and interacts frequently. The team does not require additional internal systems; however, the members work across other groups such as the PTO, professional development team, leadership team, and other group. This helps provide additional support and perspective in the Learning Supports meetings and enhances links to other resources.

The team would like to add a parent perspective and ties to parents and local businesses. They will rotate two members of the team next year to provide new ideas and perspectives from other teachers, while giving those teachers a leadership opportunity.

The current make up of the team is very effective in providing a variety of perspectives; the strength of the team is in the different roles of its members. For example, the physical education teacher works across school buildings and often has ideas or input that comes from seeing how things work elsewhere.

### *Sustainability*

The team reaches out to the community in a number of ways. First, the team members themselves are participants in various community and school organizations, as noted above. Second, the school has created a weekly newsletter to families and a monthly newsletter that can be distributed throughout the district and community. Third, members present information about the Learning Supports projects around the district to the school board, rotary club, parent groups, the local hospital, retired teachers groups, and others. People in the community are aware of their

efforts. Additionally, letters are sent to organizations throughout the county and the team has requested monetary donations to support their program.

In addition to the community outreach efforts, two team members will be interviewed on the local radio station about their projects. The team has also organized involvement in two parades in the town and appeared in articles in the newspaper. Recent volunteer efforts that gain awareness in the community have been a service project for the military, a food drive, and an Earth Day project in April that involved planting flowers and picking up trash. Another project has been the annual school "Fun Day." During Fun Day each teacher selects a community activity like bowling or skating, or a computer game room, or some other idea, and then parents are invited to participate as volunteers. Last year, approximately 70-100 parents volunteered. The team saw the opportunity to use this Fun Day as a way to provide information and resources to parents and families, so this year they will add information and resources from the public library, summer school, summer academic activities for kids, health, and other community resources. The team will also prepare a pre-post survey for parents and families to complete for the Fun Day in the fall to determine whether the information provided was helpful. The survey will be based on the types of resources that will be provided, and the pre-survey is intended to provide a baseline. The team would like to know whether this project makes a difference for families.

Additionally, the team is considering creating a DVD about Learning Supports. They already have a PowerPoint presentation that can be shared and may be added to their school web site.

Surveys of parents and staff have shown that they support the program. In addition to the donations provided by parents in response to news reports in the community about the Positive Behavioral Supports program, two committee members will be interviewed on the radio about the program. Team members continue to provide information to the community through the news.

While there is not one champion for the Learning Supports team in the community, there are a number of organizations that provide assistance. For example, the Rotary Club gives dictionaries to the 4<sup>th</sup> graders, the local recreation center provides activities throughout the district, and the New Covenant Church sends volunteers to various special school events. In relation to the B card program, when a group of children complete the B Puzzle, they are offered a free swim at the recreation center. Parents are also a great resource and have volunteered in the school PIK store.

The district high school conducts a needs survey and information filters down to the elementary school. The principal brings data about the teen behavioral issues to the Learning Supports team and they consider ways to address those issues from the elementary level. The most pertinent policy issues affecting this team is NCLB and how it affects them in terms of reading and math achievement.

The Learning Supports team uses data to make decisions, so changes in the community or school would be picked up on immediately. The team is also flexible and can adapt to changes such as a new mandate by learning about the requirements and then embedding those requirements into their current efforts. If the upcoming legislation about bullying is passed, the team will incorporate it into their Learning Supports work.

### *Questions about the State Department of Education's Role*

The team uses data from DIBELS, BRI, ITBS, and other data sets for academics, the Hart data for referrals, etc. The AEA is the main source of data for the school.

SEA training has been well-received. The team reports that speakers have been dynamic and knowledgeable. Often, they have found that hearing the information a second time has helped them, particularly after time has passed and they have more experience to build upon. In one training, the members worked as a 3-person team and put together a project based on that information. The SEA continually offers support and asks "how can we help you," which the team appreciates. They also report that it is helpful to have choices beyond the required training, so they can choose which workshop to attend based on their specific needs.

It has also been very helpful to have an AEA team member. This AEA "coach" is in charge of PBS in the district, so her guidance and support has helped the team to create a vision in terms of where to go next. The AEA member has been involved in the school through different roles over the course of several years, so she is very much a part of the school team. The AEA provides formal training on positive behavior supports and learning supports, as well as family and community supports and instruction. The AEA provides ongoing technical assistance in areas such as school ID evaluations, implementation, and checklists. The Heart database was developed by the AEA and this system provides both behavior and academic data. The database was developed with input from the team and teachers due to the relationship between the AEA staff and the school.

The SEA has provided workshops and statewide presentations, including a recent event that involved sharing among the pilot sites that was very helpful in terms of sharing ideas, suggestions, and support. In addition, the AEA provides periodic in-services to the team and training to the elementary school principal in data entry and use.

### *Concerns*

The team hopes that the grant continues. The team has strong administrative support and they work well together; however, they are concerned about how to build capacity and maintain/sustain their efforts. In an effort to address this concern, they are rotating members. They want to ensure that team members are interchangeable, so all members share responsibility and step up to provide help whenever necessary.

## Louisa-Muscatine Community School District Site Visit Report

**Pre-site visit interview conducted: Thursday, April 19, 2007 at 10 a.m.**

**Onsite group interview conducted: Monday, April 3, 2007 at 2:30 p.m.**

The evaluation of the Louisa-Muscatine Learning Supports team (Learning Supports team) consisted of one telephone interview (pre-interview) on Thursday, April 19, 2007, and an onsite group interview on Monday, April 3, 2007 that was tape recorded. In conducting the data analysis for this report, AIR staff reviewed the pre-interview and site visit notes, the audiotape of the site visit (as needed to support written notes), the district's CSIP, and an online district profile created by Iowa State University, Office of Social and Economic Trend Analysis. This report is divided into six evaluation domains: contextual background, team organization, team activities, funding and infrastructure, project sustainability, and the role of the state department of education. Additional comments or concerns expressed during the site visit are included at the end of this report.

### *Contextual Background*

The Louisa-Muscatine Community School District (CSD) is located in southeast Iowa and serves the communities of Louisa and Muscatine counties. This site represents a small school district with 956 students and is supported by AEA 9. Based on the 2000 Census both counties are each designated as rural with a combined population of 4,283 persons. In the district Whites are the majority with a Hispanic population (4.7%) above the state average and other minority groups below the state average. The median household income according to the 2000 Census in Louisa-Muscatine was \$46,862 compared to the statewide median income of \$42,865 (2004 Census). Twenty-six percent of K-12 students in the district are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals compared to 30% statewide. High school graduation rates for the 2002-03 school year were 92.4%, which is above the state average of 90.8%. Enrollment in the school district is projected to decline in the next several years.

According to the Louisa-Muscatine Community School District 2004-05 CSIP report, students' needs are prioritized as follows:

- Increase mathematics proficiency at all grade levels ITBS/ITED, Constructed Response, ACT, BRI.
- Increase reading proficiency to a higher level at all grade levels ITBS/ITED, Constructed Response, ACT, BRI.
- Improve graduation rate.
- Improve parent involvement.
- Create an educational environment that is safe and provides students the best learning opportunities.

### *About the Team*

Members of the learning supports resource management team, which is referred to as the student support team (SST) in Louisa-Muscatine, include

- Elementary school principal
- Second grade teacher
- Elementary resource special education teacher
- Junior high school math teacher
- Junior/Senior high school dean of students
- Junior/Senior resource special education teacher
- Junior/Senior high school counselor
- Juvenile liaison officer
- K–12 curriculum director
- AEA Social Worker
- AEA Social Worker
- AEA Social Worker
- AEA School Psychologist
- AEA Sp Ed Consultant

The team members were selected to provide a cross-section of K–12 staff that work with student supports. SST members participate in other committees, such as the Junior/Senior Team Success (At-Risk), Elementary STAR, and Olweus committees that address behavior. The AEA representatives connect the SST to the “bigger scheme” and they initiated the involvement of this school district in the Learning Supports initiative. Although there have been just a few staff changes, the roles of team members has not changed since the start of the grant.

The SST represents the district. The SST meets every other month as a whole team, while other committees that members are involved with meet more frequently. The SST members bring information from those other committees that deal with student behavior into their bimonthly meetings to ensure alignment of services across the schools.

Resources in the district are mapped to the goal of enhancing a system which addresses all six elements of the intervention framework (supplements to instruction, family support and involvement, community partnerships, safe/healthy/caring environments, child/youth involvement, and supports for transition). Initially, the SST evaluated their efforts across these six student support areas to determine the extent of the connection of the community and parents with the schools and what else might be needed to create a supportive nurturing environment by actively engaging parents in the education of their children.

*District CSIP goal:* Develop school, family, and community relationships with a common focus of improving student learning.

*Learning Supports goal:* To enhance a system which addresses all six elements of the intervention framework needed to create a supportive nurturing environment by actively engaging parents in the education of their children.

The Learning Supports grant has allowed the team to look at programs to answer the following questions:

- Are they effective?
- Do they serve the right population?
- Are there strong community linkages?
- Where is the district weak?
- Where can the district find additional community resources?

Relationship building is a strong focus of the district, particularly in addressing generational poverty and creating positive relationships with students and parents to effect a change. Teachers are learning about the importance of building positive relationships with these students. These types of goals and activities of the SST closely align to the district vision.

The Louisa-Muscataine team is knowledgeable about their students and families in the community, in particular, the high rates of poverty. The team continues to research data, such as parent communications and free and reduced lunch, and remain up to date with information about the community. They have a good baseline of knowledge due to the attention the district pays to data.

The team is very cohesive. The focus this year has been on family involvement, which reaches across the goals of the two schools for K–12. The team brings in a wide range of information, data, and ideas across buildings. The AEA is particularly involved as 5 staff reside on the learning supports team. The AEA staff noted that the team is secure in its knowledge of the kids in their schools, and so their strength is in selecting the right data to look at in order to make decisions. The team listens to the AEA input and proactively addresses the concerns of their community with the AEA support. The team set attainable goals with high expectations, which has resulted in successful efforts at increasing family involvement.

### *Team Activities*

The team reviews grade level and statewide test scores, parent surveys and other communications, behavior data, attendance, IYS, Sprick surveys, and other data. These data lead the team to consider how the learning supports initiative fits in with the needs of the community and how their efforts may be improved. The team was already reviewing and analyzing data prior to implementation of the learning supports grant. They find that the data is valid because it correlates with staff perceptions. Also, staff is able to compare different data points to see whether and where there is a correlation.

Community connection is the main focus of the SST this year, particularly in response to the district goal of working with school community to form relationships with families. The team believes that “parent involvement is effective involvement.” The Karen Mapp workshop provided by the Iowa Department of Education has been helpful in tying family involvement to

their student supports efforts. Some results have been the development of a family fun night, providing information on math and literacy to parents, and increasing the number of parents who attend parent-teacher conferences.

The team's focus this year will be on ITBS/ITED data, parent-teacher conference participation at the junior/senior high school, Olweus survey data, and credit recovery data. In other years, parent survey data are also included. Different teams and committees will review different data and in late May the SST will meet to evaluate the progress of their programs. Programs that are found to be effective will be continued, and those that are not may be revised or canceled. In the latter case, the teams will revise their action plans to ensure that programs are developed that will lead to success. The team realizes that systematic change takes time, so they review at least three years of data before making major decisions such as canceling a program.

The CSIP is developed by the district leadership team that includes representatives from K–12 and building and district administrators. The district leadership team meets to analyze strengths and needs of the district; this is shared with staff and AEA personnel. Then, district goals are set followed by building goals and plans that align to the district goals. Our goal is specifically directed toward District Goal III: Develop school, family, and community relationships with a common focus of improving student learning. Action Plan was completed and approved by Board of Education. The AEA is also helpful in introducing data to help the leadership team identify their needs and strengths. Based on the goals of the CSIP, action plans are developed for the SST and other committees. In addition, the teams develop a timeline to map out activities over the year. Mid-year the SST changed the focus of their activities after attending the Karen Mapp workshop, which gave them new ideas. At the end of the year, teams review the timeline and report on activities to the school board.

### *Funding and Infrastructure*

The district supports SST member attendance to the SEA-sponsored workshops and training through general funds. The AEA supports efforts of the team through a counseling grant and Olweus training. Additionally, empowerment funds for the Parent as Teachers Program, which is geared toward pre-K efforts in the district with a full-time director of the program. The parent-teacher organization (PTO) conducts some fundraising activities, and teachers help out on “Falcon Feed Nights” (area restaurants give portion of proceeds for the night to the school in return for school volunteers bussing tables).

The Louisa-Muscatine SST serves two counties, so there are occasional difficulties in aligning resources, especially when county requirements differ. The goal of effective parent involvement is particularly important to the team, because there are generational poverty issues in the community that are challenging for the parents, students, and school staff. The team is working with parents of students in this situation by increasing their expectations for their children while clarifying the school's expectations for students. The team is “just getting [their] feet wet” in this area and much of the planning this year was for events to take place in the coming school year.

The team makes recommendations regarding the use of funds from the Learning Supports grant to the school board. By showing what activities are planned and supportive data to the board, the team generally has free reign to use the funds from the grant.

The team structure is informal and everyone's ideas and input are valued. A group decision process is used to share ideas on the focus of the team. In addition, the team leader provides valuable direction. She serves as the central point through which team suggestions are brought to the attention of the district leadership team. The team finds ways to enhance current programs rather than create new ones that might require the approval of the school board.

The team structure has been "built to succeed" and direction has been clear from the start. Also, the team recognizes that it is important to provide adequate support for their team leader. If the learning supports team were not functioning well, then the structure would have already. Team members also sit on other committees in the district and contribute ideas, data, and other information to the learning supports team. Everyone's voice is heard and then streamlined to their goals. These goals effectively address the main goals of the district: increasing academic achievement, creating a positive environment, communicating with parents, and using technology. These goals are addressed with at-risk kids specifically and with all students generally.

### *Sustainability*

The junior/senior high school houses a team success group that includes community members and shares the same goals as the learning support team. This group is planning a fall bar-b-q and yard sales, with parent members providing support to these projects. Also, All Steel is a company with employees that volunteer to help tutor students after school. Lutheran Services also visits both the schools weekly to provide on-site counseling for students.

Although the team uses some community supports, it is an area in which they would like to grow by using more resources. They are challenged by the unusual combination of both Louisa and Muscatine counties.

The elementary school has implemented several new activities this year including

- Donuts for Dads and Muffins for Moms – opportunities for parents to interact with children and the school staff in the mornings before school begins
- Reading for Arts – an evening program for parents to select books to read with their children at the school. The school provides snacks like ice cream in the cafeteria.
- Game nights – the school provides games or the parents can bring games they like to play with children in the evenings.

The junior/senior high school has provided "question sheets" that provide answers for parents about the school in case those parents are too shy or intimidated to ask. The school has also been more proactive in publicizing information about school issues such as transition to school or applying for college. Specifically, the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade teachers are now visiting the elementary school to meet parents of children about to transition to the junior/senior high school and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students' families visit the junior/senior high school as well.

Now, the school is considering how to change parent conference night so that the parents are not placed in the large gym, which is potentially intimidating for parents. They are also going to create an area for young kids to keep them occupied when parents are visiting to learn about the school for their older children. In addition, a program for young teens includes providing books for parents and teens to read at home together.

This team is made up of individuals who value and put a great deal of importance and time on developing student relationships. They are advocates to the whole staff sharing the difference student relationships make in student achievement.

One of the community businesses, Bandag, is providing leadership training for students who are already strong leaders or who have potential but may be at-risk. Bandag has already trained over 100 students in leadership. Also, the PTO has been very supportive of the learning supports initiatives. At the schools an outside organization runs the canteens, and that business contributes to students in need by providing money for school lunches or sports equipment for students who cannot afford them.

Iowa is currently focusing legislation for access to quality pre-school programs, so the AEA has provided data for the team to analyze. The AEA brings state wide changes and initiatives to the attention of the SST

The district is structured in such a way that the staff is connected and cohesive. Everyone has a say and each person on the team is knowledgeable about what is happening in the community and school environment. The staff also know where there are resources and more information, as well as which committees or groups within the district can deal with which changes or goals. There is openness and sharing of knowledge that exists that contributes to the team's ability to respond to new changes or opportunities. The professional learning community in the district also serves as a structure through which the district can create strategies to address change.

#### *Questions about the State Department of Education's Role*

The team uses ITBS/ITED and IYS data, which is provided by the SEA. In addition, the AEA has provided data for the SST to analyze from the Sprick Parent Survey and parent-teacher conference participation data. In this latter case, the team learned that while over 90% of parents attended elementary school parent-teacher conferences, only 36% of parents have appeared for the junior/senior high school conferences. Last year, the team set a goal of 40% parent attendance and this year the goal is 50% participation.

Another data set the team looked at involved student failures, and as a result a credit recovery program has been put in place for students to stay after school for extra work time when they are found to be failing in the first semester. Next year a district wide survey of the community will be implemented that looks at perception of school safety and connectedness, bullying, respect, and the relationships between and among students and teachers.

The SEA provides IYS and comparison data that the team easily pulls from the state web site. The team has been able to compare their district to other similar areas around the state. Jane Todey has been helpful and supportive, and the Iowa DE staff generally help the team to locate the data they are looking for.

The Karen Mapp workshop was “awesome.” Also, the workshop using the matrix of strategies to determine areas of district strengths, weaknesses, and gaps was helpful and the timing of the event was good. The team had already collected and analyzed data, so the matrix workshop helped them to determine which programs to keep and which to remove. It was a good conversation builder.

When the grant began the workshops were overwhelming. The initial workshop with Hall and Osher provided short overviews on how to measure results. While it was a lot of information to digest, the team also felt it confirmed the work they were already doing in the district. The training also helped them to feel secure in the data they were measuring to show results.

The team was disappointed in the Excel training because it was very basic and the agenda of the training was unclear prior to the event. More explicit descriptions of workshops and detailed agendas prior to the events would be helpful.

Additionally, the grant has provided funding support to team members to attend a conference about at-risk youth. The team has brought back good ideas to share not only for the learning supports but also other programs. The training has served as professional development for team members to support students.

The AEA has provided a significant amount of support to the Louisa-Muscatine learning supports team. Their support has included sending a team member to attend the Counselor Academy, setting up the ABC program (achieving, behaving, caring), and leading a weekly character education/self-esteem group for high school girls. The AEA set up the parent-liaison program, which serves to involve parents in the school by asking them to help other parents who are not involved. For parents whose children receive behavioral referrals and are getting a negative message about their kids, other parents work with them to help them address these concerns with the school.

The team consults with the AEA staff when they have questions and receive timely and helpful feedback. The AEA sought out the Louisa-Muscatine district to take on the learning supports grant, and they have provided the team with other relevant social/behavior supports help. They provide training on OLWEUS and they help support the district in its empowerment grant efforts. The concept of supporting programs for children birth through 18+ began with the AEA.

The SEA provided training in the use of toolkits on climate and alcohol and drug abuse that have helped the team focus on a subset of questions from the IYS to create smaller surveys. The toolkits have been used with the committee and a few parents, but the goal is to implement this with all staff and to use future toolkits as they become available. The grant itself has been a guide that leads to discussions of IYS vs. local data. Other help has included the Excel training

and workshops led by Gene Hall and David Osher. Using data to measure relationships is hard, so the training has helped the team to figure out how to measure data and evaluate programs.

### *Concerns*

The team would like to see the grant continue through the third year and beyond. The team got the impression from the state that the grant may not be funded in the third year. They feel very strongly that the grant serves an important purpose that is outside the academic focus of No Child Left Behind.

In addition, the team suggested that the state introduce lateral support such as a mentoring program among learning supports teams around the state. Instead of going to Des Moines, the team would like to visit other programs both to provide input and suggestions and to learn from other teams. They would welcome other teams to visit their program to exchange ideas. This would help to professionalize the grant programs.

## Marshalltown Community School District Site Visit Report

**Telephone interview conducted: Wednesday, March 14, 2007 at 9:30 a.m.**

**Onsite group interview conducted: N/A**

### **BACKGROUND INFO**

Lisa Beames, Director of Instruction, Marshalltown Community School District, began her job in July 2006 and learned about the Learning Supports grant in October 2006. The site visits held in spring 2006 for the pilot sites did not include Marshalltown CSD, so this interview will provide the baseline data for the late start-up for this grantee. The goal of the district involves determining what fundamental needs exist so they can then create a framework. Within that framework they intend to tie in their Learning Supports grant. In the past, programs had been added to address immediate issues without considering the larger picture of where those programs fit within the framework of the district's goals.

According to the 2000 Census Marshalltown is designated as a large town and with 4,922 students it is considered a large size school district. In addition, the district has faced a significant demographic change from 5-7% ELL to about 20% ELL in the school system this year. The median household income according to the 2000 Census in Marshalltown was \$36,452 compared to the statewide median income of \$42,865 (2004 Census). High school graduation rates for the 2002-03 school year were 81.6%, which is below the state average of 90.8%.

Currently, the district is using a checklist to determine where there are gaps, strengths, weaknesses, and overlaps in programs and services and what interventions are needed in the areas of: safe, healthy, caring environments (direct instruction); supplements to instruction (classroom-focused enabling); crisis/emergency assistance and prevention; support for transitions; family support and involvement (home involvement in schooling); community partnerships (community outreach/volunteers) including family assistance; and child/youth involvement (youth engagement). For example, using this checklist in meetings the district has found that it is strong in the area of community involvement and partnerships between the schools and community. The programs and initiatives that may be considered within this checklist include general initiatives and specific school-wide and classroom based programs and services can be embedded into the matrix. These may be related to positive behavioral supports, programs for safe and drug free schools, full service community schools and Family Resource Centers, special projects initiatives such as School Based Health Center movement, the Safe Schools/Healthy Students projects, and the Coordinated School Health Program, efforts to address bi-lingual, cultural, and other diversity concerns, compensatory and special education programs, and the mandates stemming from No Child Left Behind.

According to the Marshalltown Community School District 2004-05 CSIP report, students' needs are prioritized as follows:

- Need to increase the reading and mathematics proficiency level of the aggregate and subgroups in 4th, 8th, and 11th grade students and in science for all 8th and 11th grade students.
- Need to close the achievement gap between proficiency levels of low SES, ELL, IEP, and Hispanic students in Marshalltown, compared to the same subgroups for Iowa.
- Increase the “connection” of middle school students to their learning environment (smaller teams)
- Increase the “connection” of 9th grade students to the high school to prevent social or academic dropouts.
- Reduce high risk behaviors in 6th-12th grade students (Youth Survey - SEARCH Survey)-SEARCH data will be received in July 2004.
- Study the recently received needs assessment from Marshalltown staff to further analyze needs which impact achievement.

### **About the Team**

Marshalltown CSD does not currently have a learning supports team that supports the grant; however, they are in process of putting together a core team that will include the following members:

- Administrators
- Teachers
- Community representation
- Representation from all levels, i.e., elementary, middle, intermediate, and high school, and from all buildings
- “Key” players, particularly ELL teachers, et al.
- Decision makers, i.e., those with authority to make decisions, such as the current grant lead, Lisa Beames

Although parents and students may be contacted as resources, the district does not currently envision including parents and students in the Learning Supports team meetings. The leadership supports team will be tasked with determining what resources are available. Currently, Marshalltown holds grant and leadership team meetings; however, there is no formal learning supports team.

### **Team Activities**

Although a learning supports team has not been put into place, the district has held other meetings to analyze resources and review data. Additionally, the Iowa Department of Education (DE) has been helpful in identifying data sources and in analysis of this data. The district is still in the process of gathering different types of data, and therefore it has not focused on one or a few areas for the learning supports grant. Some areas the district has collected data on include achievement, youth survey, elementary counseling, grants, perception and bullying, character education, etc. In terms of high school reform, the district has used data to effect change, such as opening an intermediate school between middle and high school to reduce the size of a very large high school.

The district recognizes the value of CSIPs in terms of accountability and compliance; however, they have not found it to be a useful tool for guiding the development of actual plans or to improve instruction. While the CSIP may be a starting point, more detailed plans are needed. The current Director of Instruction, Ms. Beames, was not involved in writing the most recent CSIP.

### **Funding and Infrastructure**

At this time, the district is using the funding available through the Learning Supports grant to fund meetings, participate in trainings, and increase their knowledge as they develop a coordinated system. This system will entail the integration of learning supports initiatives across all levels (elementary through high school) with the goals of improving student achievement and supporting other district initiatives. However, the district also notes that “You can only improve instruction so much before you realize [that] you have to improve the child.”

### **Sustainability**

While there are not current learning supports team efforts, the district does have a vision for how this should work. Learning supports will not be a single project; rather, it will provide a mechanism for the district to evaluate their efforts to address the needs of all children. It will contribute toward the big picture of how well the district is doing, including an evaluation of its learning supports efforts. The district will create a resource management structure, and then look at how the dollars are being used, whether the focus should continue or change, and whether the programs are efficient.

### **Questions about the State Department of Education’s Role**

As noted above, DE has been helpful in identifying data sources and in analysis of this data. The district employs a grant writer who contacts DE with questions or requests for specific data. In addition, Jane Todey has been very helpful in providing assistance, support, and in determining targets for the district. As the district continues to build data management systems, the state office has provided direct and specific technical assistance, such as higher end macro writing for EXCEL. Also, Jane Todey has provided support for data analysis of subgroups, comparing testing with attendance, and ELL data analysis.

The trainings offered by DE have also been very helpful and informative, and the district specifically mentioned the following training topics or events: social and emotional learning, Mark Freidman “Trying is not Good Enough,” leadership, etc. The district believes the intent of the learning supports grant is a good one, and they hope that the funding for this effort continues well into the future.

### **Concerns**

The district would like the learning supports to be viewed as a web of services, rather than a single program with a limited focus. The potential sustainability of the learning supports programs depends on how integrated it becomes within the larger system, and whether funding continues into the future. The district is attempting to be selective about projects to ensure that

they last, and the goal of the learning supports team will be to ensure sustainability in cases where the funding does not last.

## Red Oak Community School District Site Visit Report

**Pre-site visit interview conducted: Thursday, March 29, 2007 at 10:30 a.m.**

**Onsite group interview conducted: Tuesday, April 3, 2007, at 3:30 p.m.**

The evaluation of the Red Oak Learning Supports team (Learning Supports team) consisted of one telephone interview (pre-interview) on Thursday, March 29, 2007, and an onsite group interview on Tuesday, April 3, 2007 that was tape recorded. In conducting the data analysis for this report, AIR staff reviewed the pre-interview and site visit notes, the audiotape of the site visit (as needed to support written notes), the district's CSIP, and an online district profile created by Iowa State University, Office of Social and Economic Trend Analysis. This report is divided into six evaluation domains: contextual background, team organization, team activities, funding and infrastructure, project sustainability, and the role of the state department of education. Additional comments or concerns expressed during the site visit are included at the end of this report.

### *Contextual Background*

The Red Oak Community School District (CSD) is located in southwest Iowa and serves Red Oak City in Montgomery County. This site represents a medium size school district with 1,245 students and support from AEA 14. Based on the 2000 Census the district is designated as a small town with a population of 7,755 persons. In the district Whites are the majority and all minority populations are below the state average. The median household income according to the 2000 Census in Red Oak was \$32,509 compared to the statewide median income of \$42,865 (2004 Census). Forty percent of students are eligible to receive free and reduced-price school meals compared to 30% statewide. High school graduation rates for the 2002.03 school year were 89.4%, which is higher than the state average of 90.8%. Enrollment in the school district is projected to decline in the next several years.

According to the Red Oak Community School District 2004-05 CSIP report, students' needs are prioritized as follows:

- Continue efforts to improve reading comprehension for all students.
- Continue efforts to improve mathematics performance for all students.
- Continue efforts to improve science performance for all students.
- Continue efforts to enhance the learning environment for all students by increasing the inclusion of special education students into regular education programs.
- Continue efforts to improve the attendance rates in grades K-8.
- Continue efforts to create a safe and respectful learning environment for all students.
- Continue efforts to improve the district graduation rate.

### *About the Team*

Several members of the Learning Supports team initially met during a class at the AEA on the topic of learning supports. From that point forward, team members were added that include the following:

- High school special education teacher
- High school teacher
- Middle school administrator/principal
- Superintendent
- Elementary school administrator/principal, who is also the curriculum director
- Counselor for grades 4-5
- High school administrator/principal
- High school counselor
- School nurse
- K–12 resource officer
- AEA learning supports specialist
- AEA staff, who is also the high school building representative
- Middle school teacher (replacing a middle school counselor who could not continue)
- Lower elementary school administrator/principal (new)

The LS team is quite large and reflects the inclusion of staff from four buildings, ranging from the lower elementary to the high school level. In fact, the lower elementary school administrator is a new addition and will come on board at the next meeting. The superintendent will be leaving soon, so the person in charge from this point forward is the middle school administrator. The curriculum director (also the elementary school administrator) was added to provide assistance with data analysis. The middle school counselor had health problems and could not continue, so that person was replaced by a middle school teacher. The team hopes to add a parent; however, they do obtain parent input through the School Involvement Committee.

The team represents the district, so progress can be slow but their work is large scale and has a big impact. Although the Learning Supports team attempts to meet monthly, the size of the team has prevented the group from finding one consistent time to meet. In the next school year, they will put the Learning Supports team meetings on the school calendar so that it becomes a regular part of the district schedule. The size of the group has been one of the challenges for this team. The team also communicates by email.

At this time, the LS team has identified school resources through the SDF and At-risk funding streams. In the community, the team has contacted the local YMCA, the Chamber of Commerce, and a private counseling service for kids.

The Learning Supports team mission is to ensure that more students will feel safe and connected to this school. This very closely mirrors the goal of the district as stated in the CSIP.

The Learning Supports team receives input about the needs and challenges of their students and families through their individual connections with the community and through various surveys,

reports, and other data. One of the school board members, who is also a minister in the community, provides input to the Learning Supports team and through input of the middle and high school counselors who are members of the Learning Supports team. In addition, the team learns about student and family needs through various surveys, such as the resiliency survey conducted through the AEA that collects information about student feelings of safety and connectedness. The Learning Supports team also refers to the district CSIP, which highlights the minority population and the poverty level of students in the district.

The Learning Supports team is in agreement about its goals, although the methods through which each building accomplishes its goals differs. The team reports that they work well together and also have fun.

### *Team Activities*

The Learning Supports team reviews the IYS and OLWEUS data and resiliency survey results to identify student needs. From these data the team has developed packets that complement district data with climate and culture information for the community. They have also developed their own transition survey to address the needs of students and parents as children transition to new buildings from the early elementary up through the high school building. In addition, the SEA suggested creating an informal survey at the end of the registration process this year to provide some evaluation of the new process that Red Oak is attempting to implement.

The team believes that the results of this data are valid. For example, students responded with interest to the OLWEUS bullying survey. In any self-report there is a risk of obtaining invalid data; however, results seem to match what the team members find.

The main focus of the Learning Supports initiative is on school climate and student connectedness. The team is looking forward to collecting a third year of data so they can make comparisons and look at trends; only 2 years of learning supports data does not support making changes or decisions yet. The team reviews ITED and ITBS annually and expect that over time there will be increased achievement, increased graduation rates, decreased drop out rates, which would result from a positive change in climate.

A challenge for the team will be in measuring results across the district. It is much easier to measure results by building, each of which will have different data and results. This is where the training provided by Mark Friedman has and will be helpful, as the team selects the data that they will monitor and then analyze it to see what has worked. It is a good model and one that the team will continue to use.

The Learning Supports team plans to review results to see if their efforts have made positive changes. They will continue to review data collected to see if changes are working or not, and will use data to make decisions. At this time, they believe it is too early to make further changes. The OLWEUS survey will be completed next on April 30; however, this will provide only the second year of data. While the team is planning to wait for an additional year of results, they report a sense that students are more aware of bullying prevention issues. Also, this awareness may lead to an immediate increase in reports of bullying by students, which may not mean that

more bullying is occurring, but that the data collected is now more valid. Kids are more aware of what is acceptable behavior.

The district CSIP was developed by several staff pulled from the different schools, including some current members of the Learning Supports team. The CSIP also reflects input from the School Improvement Advisory Committee (SAIC), which found areas of the school that need improvement.

The Learning Supports team focuses on area 5 of the CSIP, which addresses school safety and school connectedness. The team believes that when kids feel safe and connected to the school, they will show academic progress. So, the team has focused on transitions across 3 buildings over K–12 years from the lower elementary building up through the high school level. The team is working to address the change of increased transitions for kids. For example, all of the school buildings are working on bullying prevention, although the middle school is further ahead of the other schools in implementing the Olweus program.

In another effort at expanding connectedness for students, the schools have decided to reorganize and build upon the 2-day registration process in the fall when parents sign up their children for classes. This initiative will incorporate a registration survey for parents to complete, a kid-friendly area during registration so parents can focus on their task, sharing community resources with parents, and possibly providing food,. Some community based organizations that might attend the registration day will include: teachers, AEA staff to talk about improving math and reading, the county conservation officer to provide short presentations, and other resources of interest to parents. By helping connect parents to the school and the community, this will lead to greater connectedness for the students. It will also make the registration process more “user friendly.”

### *Funding and Infrastructure*

The Learning Supports team has access to SDF and At-risk funding streams and they realize that they need to explore other options in the community. Also, they have found that some of the best ideas do not require additional funding.

As noted above, the Learning Supports team realizes the need to explore more funding options in the community; however, they have not begun that effort yet. The team has the authority to deploy/re-deploy resources, because they have several school administrators and currently have the superintendent of schools on the team.

The middle school principal has recently taken over leadership of the team, which the Learning Supports team members report has been immensely helpful to providing the group with leadership. The learning supports idea originated from two teachers who attended an AEA-led workshop on this topic, supported by the SEA. Including members from all areas of the AEA also has been helpful. Red Oak is a small school district, so the team is able to use the central office facility where there exists a large meeting room and access to district-wide information.

The Learning Supports team communicates easily through email, although they do not meet as regularly as they would like given the size of the team. The team does meet more frequently, though, when needed to support projects or programs that are coming up. In the next school year, the team hopes to schedule regular monthly meetings to ensure that the dates are on everyone's calendar. The team also attends the many workshops offered by the SEA, which provides additional time to communicate during drives to the training, group planning time during the workshop, and other ad hoc opportunities to talk.

The team hopes that regularly scheduled meetings will help to strengthen communication. Finding a member that will become the official note taker would also be helpful. Keeping administrators on the team is the most important way to ensure that the team is effective. Administrators are essential in offering authority and decisionmaking power to the team. The lower elementary school principal will soon be added to the team as well.

The current structure of the team works well with the important involvement of the administrators. In addition, it might be useful to add community members; however, this involvement does occur on a project-specific basis. The resources are available, even though they are not members of the team.

### *Sustainability*

A number of community organizations are involved with the efforts of the Learning Supports team, including the YMCA, Montgomery County Naturalist Club, the County Executive Agency, county health agencies, the Chamber of Commerce, the police (a police officer is a member of the Learning Supports team in the role of resource officers), and the Red Oak ambassadors. These ambassadors are business and community leaders who will greet families at the school registration.

The team has used social marketing as they focus on creating a more informative registration process for parents. They consider parents to be partners in the community. The schools also put on "transition nights" to share information about the transition process and to welcome parents of students to the buildings. A team member also writes articles of the newspaper, and the Red Oak schools are provided a weekly morning slot on the local radio to provide school reports. Each school building also creates a regular newsletter. The learning supports programs are announced in these newsletters, on the radio, through the community newspaper, and at student and family events at the schools.

The building administrators participate in Learning Supports training and ensure implementation at their respective sites. The OLWEUS anti-bullying program implementation at the schools is a successful example of their work. In addition, one of the AEA representatives on the team is knowledgeable of learning supports issues and has been a great asset to the team.

Each building has its own advocate, who provides support to the Learning Supports team depending on the project and the building that may be implementing the effort. Parents and community members are excited and helpful with the OLWEUS implementation, and this is an example of the passion of the community that supports the Learning Supports team's efforts.

The team plans to monitor changes in the external environment through the use of locally developed surveys for parents and students to complete on the topics of transition and registration. In addition, the School Improvement Team, which consists of parents, business leaders, and others in the community, provides feedback to the Learning Supports team. This committee gives the Learning Supports team “a good flavor of what is going on.”

The Learning Supports team is flexible and the diversity of the group has led to brainstorming lots of different ideas. Each member brings a different perspective to the team. While one of the team members is also a parent, the involvement of parents really depends on the project that is implemented and whether it requires this direct involvement. While having a breadth of team members from the K–12 system is exciting and invigorating, it is difficult to focus, and so the strength of the team can also serve as a challenge. Overall, though, the impact of the team is greater because of this array of members and the team is able to move further ahead. For example, the transition from each school building to the next is a much more coordinated effort.

### *Questions about the State Department of Education’s Role*

The team has accessed data both at the building level and through the SEA. Some of the data sources include: the OLWEUS survey; resilience survey; IYS; ITBS; transition and fall registration surveys; internal data that includes drop outs, graduations, office referrals, and attendance; low SES percentages; and the Iowa University Prosper Project data, which collects children’s attitudes toward drugs and alcohol as well as parent involvement in schools.

The Learning Supports team has found the workshops to be informative and helpful. They specifically mentioned the Mark Friedman training on a model that the team has already used several times with faculty, to address parent support, last year’s building improvement plan for the middle school, and other areas. It is a common sense evaluation process. Additionally, the Kevin Dwyer & David Osher workshops on safe, supportive schools were down-to-earth and practical. The CASEL training provided a way to look at data and tools offered by Ron Mirr were helpful in interpreting data, particularly in accessing the IYS data. The Karen Mapp workshop was also mentioned as helpful on the topic of parent involvement. The team mentioned several times that it was good to hear other districts share their experiences with learning supports implementation at the workshops.

The AEA has also been an excellent resource. One of the Learning Supports team members is an AEA “expert” in learning supports topics and has provided expertise on OLWEUS implementation. Her input to and support at all the workshops has been invaluable. This person was key to the initial involvement two years ago of two teachers that now serve on the Learning Supports team.

The Learning Supports team specifically mentioned Jane Todey at the SEA as providing a wealth of ideas and an excellent “brainstormer” who contributes to the team’s programs.

The SEA has provided a variety of helpful training, and the Learning Supports team has found the Mark Friedman workshop to be particularly helpful. Friedman’s training helped them

understand database accountability issues, how to use the IYS by pulling out relevant or pertinent information and then analyzing that data as a way to make or understand changes. In addition, the SEA has shared tools with the Learning Supports team, such as an Excel program that helps them to graph data along with a corresponding training.

### *Concerns*

The Learning Supports team members have found the SEA to be very helpful in asking what districts need and providing them with support. They are uncertain, though, about whether the funds and support will continue after the grant ends. Often, new programs are started and then a key person at the SEA leaves or the funding ends, and then it is not clear how the program will continue. The school district needs to prioritize the efforts it will sustain given limited resources. The Learning Supports team realizes that the impact of the current learning supports grant in changing climate and connectedness so far makes an impact; however, to sustain these changes and to look for new ways to make an impact, the district will require continued funding, resources, and support. As an example, the team has greatly benefited from attendance at SEA-supported workshops on learning supports topics. The school districts could not afford to send team members to these workshops, pay for substitute teachers, mileage, etc. without the additional funding provided by the grant. Again, the learning supports workshops provide not only additional training and tools, but also sharing and planning time for team members.

The Learning Supports team would like to continue the grant and are looking forward to receiving additional information from Jane Today. They also suggested that the timing of training just prior to the Easter Sunday weekend made attendance challenging and they recommend avoiding dates near major holidays in the future.

## Van Buren/Keosauqua Community School District Site Visit Report

**Pre-site visit telephone interview conducted: Wednesday, March 21, 2007 at 1 p.m.**

**Onsite Group Interview conducted: Wednesday, May 2, 2007 at 9:30 a.m.**

The evaluation of the Van Buren/Keosauqua Learning Supports team (Learning Supports team) consisted of one telephone interview (pre-interview) on Wednesday, March 21, 2007, and an onsite group interview on Wednesday, May 2, 2007 that was tape recorded. In conducting the data analysis for this report, AIR staff reviewed the pre-interview and site visit notes, the audiotape of the site visit (as needed to support written notes), the district's CSIP, and an online district profile created by Iowa State University, Office of Social and Economic Trend Analysis. This report is divided into six evaluation domains: contextual background, team organization, team activities, funding and infrastructure, project sustainability, and the role of the state department of education. Additional comments or concerns expressed during the site visit are included at the end of this report.

### *Contextual Background*

The Van Buren/Keosauqua Community School District (CSD) is located in southeast Iowa near and serves eight communities in Van Buren County (Bentonsport, Bonaparte, Cantril, Douds, Keosauqua, Mount Sterling, Selma, and Stockport) with Keosauqua being the county seat. This site represents a small school district with 739 students and is supported by AEA 15, although AEA support is in transition to AEA 16 according to the comments of the Learning Supports team. Based on the 2000 Census the community is designated as rural with a population of 4,084 persons. In the district Whites are the majority and minority populations are below the state average in all census categories. The median household income according to the 2000 Census in Van Buren was \$30,813 compared to the statewide median income of \$42,865 (2004 Census). Thirty-two percent of K–12 students are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals compared to 30% statewide. High school graduation rates for the 2002-03 school year are 97%, which is above the state average of 90.8%. Enrollment in the school district is projected to decline over the next several years.

According to the Van Buren Community School District 2004-05 CSIP report, students' needs are prioritized as follows:

- Improve math for 4th grade females who score 10% lower than 4th grade males;
- Improve reading comprehension of 8th grade students who score at least 20% lower in reading than in math. Focus improvement on 8th grade reading, currently at 63.9% and 8th grade science at 57.5% compared to math at 80.3%.
- Improve reading comprehension of students with IEPs K–12.
- Improve technology skills K–12 to help students compete in academics & workplace.
- Improve high school students completing the core (only 42%) of students (4 years of English and 3 years each of mathematics, science, & social studies (All complete Eng).

- Improve the learning environment in grades 7-12 particularly to address the decreasing % of 8th grade students who report that other students treat them with respect (decrease from 58% to 47% on Iowa Youth Survey) through Olweus Bullying.
- Decrease substance abuse rates (52% of students reported at least occasional use of alcohol on Iowa Youth Survey, 2% increase in methamphetamine use, 60% of students who reported at least occasional use of tobacco products) through SSHS grant programs including All Stars, Life Skills, Reconnecting Youth, and Incredible Years.

### *About the Team*

The current Learning Supports Resource Management Team (Learning Supports team) consists of the same members as last year as well as a few additional members. The Learning Supports team continues to perform the functions of the school district leadership team, which also develops the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) for the school district. The additional members of the team this year are the drug-free community grant administrator and two curriculum directors. The grant administrator was added to underscore the importance of substance abuse prevention in the community, although the representative has been unable to attend any meetings thus far. The curriculum directors are responsible for obtaining and analyzing data for the team.

The team is representative of the entire district and the community. In fact, one of the team members performs the dual role of substance abuse prevention and coalition coordinator. This person works to communicate with the community about substance abuse prevention efforts that are initiated by the Learning Supports team.

The team continues to meet on a monthly basis and looks for community input, particularly through the coalition coordinator. Dr. Stinson and the team also interact daily through email and through other informal community groups.

The Learning Supports team mission and the CSIP are in complete alignment. Both have the goal of removing barriers to learning for students. For example, the data analyzed in the Learning Supports team first identified a drop in achievement in reading and science for 7-8<sup>th</sup> graders. As a result, the team looked at additional data in an attempt to determine what changes were occurring to cause this drop and lack of success. The team learned that students as early as 5-6<sup>th</sup> grade were beginning to drink and smoke. Those same children noted in surveys and interviews that they received less support when they transitioned to the next grade levels. The Learning Supports grant is being used to address these issues.

The team is knowledgeable about the students they serve and their families, because they review a lot of data and look for information from multiple sources rather than just one indicator. Given the variety of data and sources, they believe that the information they have about students is reliable. Also, data match with ITBS for individual students is monitored as well as other test scores. Over the course of the past several years the team has collected data and can now view trends for academic achievement.

Through a pilot with Ron Mirr and in coordination with the Safe Schools Healthy Students grant, the team is reviewing IYS data annually. The district also brought in Dr. Ruby Payne’s “A Framework for Understanding Poverty” to provide insight to all staff about attitudes toward poverty. This has been particularly helpful to the team in their efforts to effect change in their community.

Additionally, several team members are also case managers and counselors who have hands-on and direct experience with students, particularly at-risk students. The Teen Screen is used with 10<sup>th</sup> grade students to determine their mental health needs, while pre-post testing is done for Olweus, All Stars, Life Skills, and other SAMHSA programs. A parent posttest is provided as well. Some team members are involved in after-school enrichment programs in their communities and hear the needs of parents and families through participation in these groups.

The team has undergone training on Olweus and other similar programs and they work together in small teams to implement this learning. The team is student-focused and makes collaborative decisions, and as the district leadership team they also plan goals for the schools. As an example, the team reviewed IYS and other data and learned that substance abuse is a problem in the community, particularly the use of alcohol and methamphetamines. They have since developed a goal to increase the identification of students who are at risk for substance abuse. Each team member is involved in the program and contributes to that focus.

#### *Team Activities*

The team looks at data on school climate, bullying prevention, substance abuse prevention, etc. and uses the data from those programs to determine activities. The addition of the substance abuse prevention grant manager has been helpful in this process.

The team analyzes data from many different sources and programs for both behavior and academic changes, including STAR, ITBS, and IYS. By looking at DIBELS and test scores, the team can identify students early in the year that may be in need of assistance through their Boost program. A review of IEPs and low SES students helps the team to identify gaps and consider what else they can do to address needs.

The sheriff’s department reserve officers also provide data related to student drinking and assault arrests. This helps the team to be aware of the need for additional behavior supports or anti-bullying efforts. The Safe Coalition in the community has its own focus on illicit drugs, alcohol, and tobacco use and the group shares data and findings with the Learning Supports team. This partnership was developed through the Safe Schools Healthy Students grant.

The team believes the data they review are valid, because they are able to look at multiple data sources. Even though the school buildings are separate, the data across grades is similar. In addition, Ron Mirr has been instructive in using and evaluating data. The team has participated in his district-wide workshop on this topic and receives hands-on support from him as well.

Additionally, the team has provided a survey to staff on perceptions of significant issues in the school. Although the final results are still being tabulated, the results show that staff found the framework for understanding poverty to be the best information they have received. They have also asked for more training in anti-bullying and would like to learn how to better recognize those students who are using substances or who are in need of mental health services.

As noted in #3 above, the Learning Supports grant is focusing on substance abuse prevention. This remains a pertinent topic since last year when a community survey determined that about 60% of parents find underage drinking to be acceptable. Each of the topics is important to support learning by creating a safe and supportive environment for students.

The results are measured through achievement tests and other indicators; however, the team reviews this data more frequently. For example, the IYS is given annually instead of the required every 3 years. Also, the ITBS and ITED are reviewed quarterly instead of annually in the content areas of reading and math.

The Learning Supports Learning Supports team is the same group that develops the district's CSIP, so the goals of both teams are the same. The team plan is the same as that of the CSIP—to remove barriers to learning. That may be addressed through anti-bullying, substance abuse and home abuse awareness, understanding poverty, and other programs. However, the ultimate goal is to remove barriers and/or provide bridges for students while addressing multiple needs.

### *Funding and Infrastructure*

Based on last year's goals for seeking out additional financing options, the Learning Supports team applied and failed to receive a Wellness grant. However, the team found that this may have been a "good thing," because it allowed the team to focus on ongoing activities with current funding rather than continue to add new activities and burdens with the new funds. The district continues to use the federal drug-free community grant as well as the 21<sup>st</sup> Century grant that supports after-school programs for elementary school children to keep kids safe. The need for an after-school program led to the creation of a new position at the elementary school level using district funds.

At this time the Learning Supports team is not pursuing new funding sources or other options. The federal grant and existing funds are supporting current programs, which are working well. The superintendent is the chair of the Learning Supports team and she has the authority to redeploy resources.

There is no formal structure or process beyond the regularly scheduled meetings and interim communications among team members. Their ad hoc communications are not limited and at the last district inservice the team had an opportunity to meet to discuss where their programs are strong or weak and how to sustain programs that are working well.

Communication within the team is strong. The team works in coordination with the Safe Schools Health Students grant staff and the Safe Coalition to promote the different programs that are offered in the district. Through this partnership they have created promotional items, bulletins,

logos that appear on bags and pizza boxes, all of which are efforts to brand the Safe Schools Healthy Students concept to effect cultural and systems change.

In addition, the fiscal resources are funneled through the grants that are available based on the needs of the team or community. For example, the Safe Schools grant can allocate resources to ensure that a team member receives Olweus training and professional development. The team can call for additional assistance in human resources from the different grant staff available. Also, the superintendent and project directors of district grants meet monthly or more frequently to discuss the funding stream. Meetings about funding are more formal than the other team systems.

The team would benefit from further training on use of its computer systems. Overall, the electronic communications and fiscal and human resources tracking that is conducted by computers enhances the team's flexibility in shifting resources.

The current structure of the team supports the goals of the initiative because it is flexible enough to bring in programs that help change beliefs in the greater community about drug use. The structure aligns with the goals of the team to change the community's outlook on substance use/abuse.

### *Sustainability*

The learning supports team involves the community in its efforts in a variety of ways. For example, the team will request that students and parents sign a pledge to provide alcohol-free graduation parties and then post a sign to that effect. Also, the Safe Coalition has ties with area businesses, the local government offices, individuals, and the sheriff's department. These ties inform programs by sharing goals and data.

Through the Olweus training staff have involved parents and created a coordinating committee with parents. Also, the team has developed a parent reading night. The Safe Schools grant staff place weekly articles in the local newspaper and creates monthly publications with information about their programs. The Karen Mapp workshop provided by the SEA was particularly helpful to the team as they attempt to increase parent involvement.

Recently, the team has succeeded in bringing a private company, contracted through the Safe Schools grant, to provide mental health services onsite at the schools. Professional counselors are available at the schools each week and this provides another vehicle for students and their families to get help. Through this new effort the team is education families and the medical community.

In addition to the strategies mentioned earlier included news articles in the local paper and monthly bulletins, the team also works to change behavior not only of students but also of other members of the community.

In conjunction with the sheriff's office, the team receives information about keg registrations and student alcohol-use incidents to determine whether parents or other adults are providing alcohol

to youth. The team is also providing education to merchants about checking IDs of people purchasing alcohol, providing community events that do not promote alcohol, and adding signs to all areas where beer is sold noting that it is illegal for minors to purchase alcohol. The team has also held town hall meetings with a panel of presenters that include the sheriff, state trooper, juvenile probation officer, substance abuse officer, and others to discuss drug abuse in the community. Students were given extra credit if they brought an adult with them to the town hall meeting.

In addition, the parent-teacher organization (PTO) created magnets with an anti-drug message and another with an anti-bullying message. They are planning to produce new magnets this coming year.

Internal champions include the superintendent as well as the Safe Schools Healthy Students grant coordinator. The latter is a former head of the English department and he has many ties to the community that help to support his work and contribution to the team.

A change since last year has been the use of “external champions” by the addition of a community liaison to the Learning Supports team. The community coalition coordinator has a half-time role that involves posting information to the website, putting news in the community newspaper, and communicating about Learning Supports topics such as tobacco and alcohol abuse prevention. The stop smoking campaign includes a partnership with the local hospital and the help of a doctor who shares information and provides support to the elementary school. Additionally, the school board is very supportive of the Learning Supports team.

Several strong partners exist in the community including the sheriff, a county representative who coordinates district staffing and responds to mental health and assistance requests, and the Empowerment Board that works with programs for children ages 0-5. In addition, the team collaborates with the county hospital, which runs a program titled Parents as First Teachers for early identification of needs.

The county board of supervisors has been particularly supportive of the Learning Supports team. In the past year, the board has approved a keg registration policy, so that liquor stores must regularly report the names of people who rent/buy kegs of alcohol. The resulting data is compared to sheriffs’ reports of under-age drinking and compared to determine whether parents are providing alcohol to minors.

In addition, there is a district-wide anti-bullying campaign using Olweus training. Not only are teachers and administrators receiving training, all staff including bus drivers, cooks, and other staff that interacts with children throughout the school system are trained in bullying prevention.

None of these efforts, though, reflect changes in the goals or priorities of the team. Rather, the team has been effective in implementing activities to support its goals and adding initiatives such as substance abuse prevention, bullying prevention, and others to help at-risk students and remove barriers to learning.

The team “creates most of the change...we represent change” in the community. They also respond to change and occurrences in the community. For example, during a recent bomb threat at the high school, staff were mobilized to lock doors, check student bags, escort kids, and counseling. The kids were challenged to take responsibility for their own school by reporting behavior of other students that is unsafe. Anecdotally, the high school students reported feeling more safe during the week of bag checks and they understood the reason for this process. The school also provides a mailbox for students to provide information anonymously to staff.

*Questions about the State Department of Education’s Role*

The Learning Supports team uses the IYS, Safe Schools Healthy Students, and ad hoc Zoomerang surveys in addition to other data sources to obtain additional information from the community, which includes school staff (teachers, janitors, bus drivers, et al) as well as parents. This survey helps the Learning Supports team to determine the needs of the community. The online survey is limited in reach due to the fact that there are large poverty areas in the district and parents do not have access to computers. To help reach more people, the survey was also printed out in a paper-and-pencil format. Additionally, the IYS and Safe Schools Healthy Students data were used to determine actions.

The SEA provides comparative data that the district can pull from the state website to look at other district data as well as annual data. The team also looks at schools of a similar size to see how they compare.

The team found the Karen Mapp and Castle workshops to be “outstanding” and “powerful.” Last year, they liked the Gene Hall and David Osher training, and are looking forward to the Osher presentation next week. Ron Mirr has also been very helpful in providing technical assistance. The team was unable to attend the Excel training and they would like more assistance in reporting data and publicizing it in understandable ways.

The team also recommends that the SEA consider offering a workshop on social marketing. This is a critical and goal-oriented piece that all the pilot sites could benefit from to impact families and communities. Also, the team would like access to persons at the SEA who may serve as direct resources for the Learning Supports grant.

The AEA has not provided support to the learning supports team. They have been disappointed with the quality of the AEA, which does not offer or share information. The one positive result of the AEA has been their purchase of the Heart database, which the team has found to help them generate valuable reports. The AEA is also providing some leadership training sessions, although most have not been helpful. The team has found that other AEA staff at training events was very helpful. The AEA is expected to merge with another AEA, so the team expects that this situation will improve. The learning supports team has had to be very proactive in order to obtain information or get help, and to this end they have “adopted” another local school which works with a different AEA.

The SEA offers a lot of training and technical assistance. A number of good trainings that the team has attended recently include: Karen Mapp workshop, Mark Friedman training, creating community feedback, and concern-based adoption to name a few. The trainings are also

informative because each school shares information about what has been effective or ineffective in their areas. The SEA provided training on using Excel that helped the Learning Supports team to analyze their data and learn how to use the IYS. Additionally, Van Buren has close contact with Ron Mirr, an evaluator who lives in their district, and provides ad hoc assistance in data analysis.

The Learning Supports team cannot send all members to every training, so they send about 4-5 members to each training or workshop with the caveat that those members must return to the larger group to train them. It is a train-the-trainer model of information sharing that works well.

### *Concerns*

The team is concerned about sustainability of their efforts. They have lots of supports, they can identify the needs of students, but this is sometimes beyond the school's capacity. For example, they can identify student mental health needs but do not have the capacity to serve those needs in the school. Teens and older kids need more support. The team will continue to use its train-the-trainer model for professional development to share information about anti-bullying and other program. They will also continue to educate and build awareness among all teachers and staff about these programs. There is an overwhelming amount of information, so the team will focus on how and why and when to expect results.

In addition, there are many different programs to choose from—anti-bullying, positive behavioral supports, and others that share the same goal. By spreading out to take on multiple programs, the impact may be diluted and the team may be unsure about which program led to the desired result given the many changes that are being implemented.

## West Des Moines Community School District Site Visit Report

**Pre-site visit interview conducted: Tuesday, March 27, 2007 at 11 a.m.**

**Onsite group interview conducted: Monday, April 2, 2007 at 10 a.m.**

The evaluation of the West Des Moines Learning Supports team (Learning Supports team) consisted of one telephone interview (pre-interview) on Tuesday, March 27, 2007, and an onsite group interview on Monday, April 2, 2007 that was tape recorded. In conducting the data analysis for this report, AIR staff reviewed the pre-interview and site visit notes, the audiotape of the site visit (as needed to support written notes), the district's CSIP, and an online district profile created by Iowa State University, Office of Social and Economic Trend Analysis. This report is divided into six evaluation domains: contextual background, team organization, team activities, funding and infrastructure, project sustainability, and the role of the state department of education. Additional comments or concerns expressed during the site visit are included at the end of this report.

### *Contextual Background*

The West Des Moines Community School District (CSD) is located in central Iowa. The site represents a large school district with 8,601 students and is supported by AEA 11. Based on the 2000 Census the community is designated as urban with 65,332 persons. In the district Whites are the majority and other minority populations approximate the state average. The median household income according to the 2000 Census in West Des Moines was \$56,807 compared to the statewide median income of \$42,865 (2004 Census). Twelve percent of K-12 students are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals compared to 30% statewide. High school graduation rates for the 2002-03 school year are 93%, which is higher than the state average of 90.8%. Enrollment in the school district is projected to increase in the next several years.

According to the West Des Moines Community School District 2004-05 CSIP report, students' needs are prioritized as follows:

- Need to focus instruction in mathematics, reading, and science that enables all students to be proficient.
- Need to focus instruction to strengthen achievement in IEP and Low SES students.
- Need to engage all students in activities and instruction that prepare all students for their futures.
- Need to focus instruction to eliminate student use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs.

### *About the Team*

The Learning Supports team is made up of the same members who participate in the school's Leadership team. The Leadership team helps to determine all school improvement goals, so the improvements that will be implemented under the Learning Supports grant fall within their

purview. The Leadership/Resource Management Team includes classroom teachers, special education teachers, parents, support staff (paraprofessionals), and a member of the business community from the Optimist Club. Although the members of the team have changed since last year, the roles of team members have not changed.

The team is representative of the building, only. The team meets twice monthly and they communicate over email when needed, such as in the case of broadcast messages about staff development or other workshops.

The Leadership/Learning Supports team has recently focused on the development of the team's vision statement, which is referred to in the school as the "belief statement." The Leadership team reviewed the belief statement, revised it, and submitted it to the faculty for discussion. The faculty provided feedback and now the Leadership team is in the process of rewriting this statement.

The Learning Supports team members are very aware of the student population at the K-3 school. This population includes a large percentage of free and reduced lunch students and 40% of students will be new by the end of the school year. The Learning Supports team and all teachers in the school can see all the data available and work together to address the whole child. This includes looking at not only academic data, but also using the family advocate within the team to address family issues. To support the goal of positive behavioral supports, the team also includes home visits to all homes as children begin kindergarten and one-to-one meetings with parents and teachers, so that parents feel involved and connected to the school.

The West Des Moines Learning Supports team is a very cohesive, collaborative group. They work together as a Leadership Team that addresses issues that arise for the school, and they work collaboratively with all school staff toward their goals. The collective Title I teachers in grades 1-3 meet regularly to discuss kids and areas of deficit. The faculty meetings weekly on Wednesday mornings and discuss the building goals.

The Learning Supports team is also the Leadership Team, which includes a variety of people whose involvement contributes to generating ideas. Team members take these ideas to the larger staff on Wednesday mornings and seek broader input. The principal takes all these various opinions under consideration before making decisions.

### *Team Activities*

At the start of the grant, the team was provided with a grid or rubric. The team uses this rubric each time it begins a new initiative, because it provides a structure for looking at resources such as funding, energy, people within or outside the school, etc.

Additional informal assessments of students are conducted during the year and these results match the district assessments. Each child is reviewed by at least 2 people as well, which affirms the validity of the formal and informal assessments. Again, the Learning Supports team is very collaborative, and more than one teacher knows each child well. The results of the measures and surveys will give the team a good idea of how the children are doing.

The Leadership team has a standing agenda for all meetings that includes academic achievement, school safety, and positive behavioral supports (PBS). While these agenda items remain for each meeting, team members may also add topics as needed.

The team measures results by reviewing the DIBELS, district benchmarks, IEPs, and via the “vision survey” given to all students. To address the focus on PBS, training is provided to all staff and the Learning Supports team implements a checklist which is 90% completed at this time. In addition, the team plans to implement a parent survey online with hard copies for parents without computer access as well as access to computers at the school.

Results are measured through the PBS team implementation checklist as well as through the staff survey and student vision survey to determine whether students feel connected to and positive about school. Following up on the training presented by Gene Hall, the Learning Supports team used the 4-quadrant review of what was done, who did it, was it done well, and did it make a difference. This 4-quadrant review was conducted for the first time last year and will be repeated again this year.

Review of the PBS survey data showed that the school needed to reinforce positive choices, so the team developed a “Paws Shop.” Kids earn rewards in the form of paper “paws” for behaving well, being nice, etc. and can save up and use the “paws” to purchase things in the school store. The goal is to move from this extrinsic to more intrinsic good behavior by reducing the number of “paws” that are distributed over the course of the year.

As much as the team likes to hear anecdotal information, they intend to have almost all priorities set on the basis of data. For example, PBS goals will result from data collected and analyzed, the parent-student survey will help inform climate issues, and the ITBS and achievement scores in math and reading will determine academic objectives. After reviewing data, the team plans to discuss the results and determine whether their initiatives have been followed well or should be changed.

The CSIP is developed by a broad group that includes the entire school faculty. The Leadership team plays a role in reviewing the plan that is presented to the faculty. The Resource Management Team for the grant is not yet at the point where they are prepared to review and analyze the data and then determine from that analysis where improvement or changes are needed. However, the team chair presents assessment and climate data three times throughout the year. The team reviews the data and attempts to come to conclusions; however, the team is still developing their skills in this area.

### *Funding and Infrastructure*

A positive aspect of the West Des Moines Learning Supports team efforts is in their review of the school budget. The school’s operating budget consists of four funding streams: the district, donations and grants, the PFC (parent group which conducts fundraisers), and the Learning Supports grant. The team looks at the whole financial picture and tries to determine to determine how the funding sources complement each other.

The Leadership/Learning Supports team has plans to meet next month to look at the budget, not merely to review funding sources for current projects, but as part of a planning process to determine where future funding will be needed. They will decide what initiatives are needed and then determine how much funding, time, and other resources are needed to support those efforts. From that point forward, they will look at how much additional funding is needed and potential resources.

The Leadership/Learning Supports team does not have the authority to deploy resources; however, the team chair does have this authority. However, the team members serve as advisors to the school about how to deploy resources.

The Learning Supports team views the Learning Supports grant as designed for staff development. The training provided to staff through this grant will remain after the grant has ended, while the school can obtain funding it needs for certain projects through the district.

The governance structure is essentially the Leadership Team which addresses standing items as noted above with additional agenda items brought to team meetings by members.

### *Sustainability*

The Learning Supports team brings PBS goals into the area schools that provide wraparound care for children in before- and after-care programs. Learning Supports team members share PBS goals at district meetings with the intention of spreading this information. Parents also use the PBS information they learn from the school to provide consistent interactions with kids that reflect PBS. In addition, the Optimist Club, Kiwanis, Variety Club, and YMCA provide resources to families.

The team developed a pamphlet that promotes PBS ideas and goals. This pamphlet is sent to all parents with children beginning in kindergarten and newcomers to the school as well as to parents in other areas to learn about the LS efforts at the school. Two years ago the Leadership Team studied internal and external customer service and revisit this topic each year. In addition, the Learning Supports team is planning to build a family center, an idea which resulted from an SEA-sponsored training presented by Karen Mapp.

The Learning Supports team has a great internal champion, a former team member who continues to serve on an *ex facto* basis. This internal champion is an award-winning teacher that is highly skilled and is a leader both in developing staff and making connections with parents. She plans and teaches collaborative and remains very involved with the Learning Supports team.

The Learning Supports team shared the “Paws Store” and family center ideas they developed with the Optimist Club representative, who took the idea back to the larger group. In turn, they have volunteered to help with setting up the family center, including funding, furniture, etc. Also, the YMCA offers a free 1-year membership for families with a child in the school. This contributes to physical and social resources for families.

At this time, the team does not have a structure in place to respond to changes in the external environment. As noted above, the team is still in the stage of developing its skills to move from data collection and review, to analysis and implementation based on conclusions drawn from the data.

The Learning Supports team is excited about planning a family center that will welcome and honor parents and families. They will provide telephone and computer access to parents, and a place for families to meet and talk. It will also provide a forum for sharing information and education with parents about the community, including the YMCA, parks and recreation, and other community resources.

Data collection is used by the team to be proactive. For example, parents are notified early in the year if kids have low grades. This informs parents early and allows teachers to address any educational or other issues early on. Likewise, attendance reports are mailed to parents if issues arise.

### *Questions about the State Department of Education's Role*

The school uses data provided by the SEA as well as its own benchmark data. They use climate data, school-parent surveys, PBS data, achievement data, and standardized test results to the extent these are available for the school, which only reaches grades K-3.

The Learning Supports team mentioned several times how useful and effective the SEA-sponsored training and workshops have been. The workshops provide ideas to the Learning Supports team that can be used immediately. The training has all been research-based and shown to be effective in other settings. The team cannot send staff to all workshops, so they attend the minimum training and have requested repeat workshops when they have found them to be particularly helpful, such as those presented by Gene Hall and Karen Mapp and the CASEL training on PBS and social-emotional learning. .

In addition to SEA training, the AEA has been very helpful with PBS coaching and other training, sustainability, and academic data from DIBELS.

The Learning Supports grant has been a “huge” support to the Learning Supports team. Team members attend satellite workshops on how to collect data, which data to collect, and how to make data-driven decisions. The training is directly related to the CSIP and the school’s learning goals. In addition, parent involvement has been goal-oriented not just to be involved but to help students learn. The grant has been very helpful to the team in seeing the usefulness of data and learning how to collect their own data points.

### *Concerns*

The Learning Supports team has no concerns; rather, it believes that the Learning Supports initiative has been very positive. It has helped parents and the school to find a common language. Some parents are using the “paws” at home as well.

The Learning Supports team is impressed that the SEA wants to evaluate this project. The Learning Supports is one of the few projects supported by DE that has an immediate impact directly on kids—rather than projects that are less user-friendly or require time to filter down. The Learning Supports initiative works well for the K-3 setting. PBS, CASEL, all of the information connects, e.g., Gene Hall’s information helps the team immediately evaluate their work and the Mapp training has improved family involvement and led to plans to develop the family center, and all of the training has been very motivating.