The Institute for Student Achievement (ISA)'s evidence-based whole school reform model supports the reform of high schools into personalized, vibrant high performing educational organizations that develop the capacity to graduate all students prepared for success in post-secondary education and careers.

ISA meets all federal guidelines for evidence-based school improvement and has a study which meets the What Works Clearinghouse guidelines.
Eight Common Questions about Evidence-Based Whole School Reform

Q: What Does Evidence-Based Mean?
A: “A widely used adjective in education, evidence-based refers to any concept or strategy that is derived from or informed by objective evidence—most commonly, educational research or metrics of school, teacher, and student performance. Among the most common applications are evidence-based decisions, evidence-based school improvement, and evidence-based instruction. The related modifiers data-based, research-based, and scientifically based are also widely used when the evidence in question consists largely or entirely of data, academic research, or scientific findings.” From The Glossary of Education Reform

Q: What is whole school reform?
A: Whole school reform is a comprehensive, coordinated, integrated method of improving school and district academic performance, especially the achievement levels of traditionally underperforming students. It incorporates every aspect of the school: culture, curriculum, instruction, assessment, social/emotional support, professional development, operations, and family/community engagement. A foundational belief of the whole school approach is that piecemeal efforts are less effective and almost never deliver sustainable results. They rarely address the root causes of ongoing barriers to educational equity and excellence, and the issues caused by them continue to reappear and undermine program-based, isolated initiatives. The power of the whole school reform model is the synergy created among the strategies when they work together. It is synergistic action school wide that creates the possibility for transformative, sustainable change.

Q: Is there a specific whole school reform model?
A: No. Whole school reform is an evidence-based approach based on the most rigorous research on effective teaching, learning and assessment, school culture, stakeholder engagement, leadership, and management. While these models have core principles and strategies, the implementation of these principles and strategies is designed to meet the needs, resources, and structures of individual schools. It is not a prescriptive model, but a capacity building process that meets schools where they are and helps them reach clearly established goals.

Q: Is Whole School Reform an experimental approach?
A: No. Whole or Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) emerged in the early 1990s. It was incorporated into the 1994 reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA). Over the years, studies have shown schools that implemented whole school reform models for five or more years showed considerable achievement gains. CSR was also found to be equally effective between high- and low-poverty schools.
Q: Does data support that ISA’s whole school reform model is successful?
A: Our data provide concrete evidence that a comprehensive whole school reform model can achieve and sustain impressive results. For example:

- ISA students are 5 times more likely to be promoted to 10th and 11th grades than their peers in similar schools and 3 times more likely to be promoted to 12th grade.
- ISA’s predominantly African American and Latino student population has a 4-year cohort graduation rate of nearly 80%. This dramatically exceeds the national high school graduation rate of 60% for African American students and 58% for Latino students.
- 81% of ISA students graduate or are still enrolled after 4 years in college.
- A sub-group study by IMPAQ International found that African American male students outperformed matched comparison students on significant high school outcome measures, including promotion, on track to graduation, and graduation.

Q: Why is the ISA Model the only high school whole school reform model listed in the US Department of Education’s What Works Clearinghouse?
A: The USDOE established a set of criteria for what constitutes an evidence-based, whole-school reform model. First, a whole-school reform model must have demonstrated evidence of effectiveness for improving student outcomes that meets the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) rigorous evidence standards. Second, the model must be designed to improve student academic achievement or! attainment; be implemented for all students in a school; and address, at a minimum, school leadership, teaching and learning in at least one content area; student non-academic support; and family and community engagement.

ISA demonstrated to the USDOE and WWC how:

- the ISA college-preparatory instructional program, the grade level multi-disciplinary faculty team structure and an extended day and school year support school improvement and student academic achievement and attainment;
- ISA job-embedded leadership coaching and the ISA Leadership Network build school leadership skills for implementing the organizational and instructional changes necessary for whole school reform;
- ISA’s Mathematics Program, job-embedded individual and team teacher coaching, and professional development Institutes support schools in improving teaching and learning in mathematics and literacy across content areas;
- ISA’s Distributed Counseling™, job-embedded counselor coaching and the Counselor Network support schools to provide students with the non-academic supports necessary for school success;
- ISA school/leadership coaching supports schools to implement effective strategies for fostering and sustaining family engagement in the education of their children;
- evidence from independent evaluations of the ISA whole school reform approach, which show
- ISA was one of only three organizations that design and implement their own school-based
reform approach whose whole-school reform models were found to have met the USDOE’s program requirements and WWC’s evidence standards. ISA was the only proprietary, high school whole school reform model selected by the USDOE.

Q: Can you describe one of ISA’s primary implementation strategies?
A: Coaching is the cornerstone of the ISA approach and is concentrated in four areas: leadership development and strategic planning and implementation; content area coaching for individual teachers and teacher teams in literacy, mathematics, science, and social studies; grade level and content area coaching for teacher teams on using evidence-based protocols to improve classroom instructional practices and student work products; and coaching for counselors and teacher advisors to strengthen college counseling for students and families and provide social/emotional support to students when necessary. Coaching is also provided in ESL and Special Education.

Q: Is the ISA model another “silver bullet” that will not result in meaningful, sustainable change?
A: No, it really isn’t. The ISA evidence-based approach is not just a superficial restructuring of time, space and materials. ISA fully supports our partner districts and schools to completely re-culture their schools and build the entire staff’s capacity to increase and sustain student academic performance. This re-culturing includes addressing beliefs, expectations, values, school and classroom practices and processes, professional development, personalization and relationship building, leadership at every level, and continuous improvement. The ISA approach is based on seven research-based principles and five key strategies that are adapted and tailored to the school context. Our model is not guesswork. There are decades of solid research evidence and more than two decades of our own experience on the ground working with districts and schools to validate that the ISA whole school reform model works, especially with students who typically underperform on state, national, and international measures.
ISA’s Approach to Whole-School Reform

ISA’s approach to whole school reform is grounded in seven research-based principles that are designed to work synergistically to help schools graduate all students ready for college and careers. The seven principles serve as a framework to reform a school’s organizational and educational practices to a personalized and rigorous educational program that embodies the values and goals of the school community, builds on its strengths, and produces a culture of success. Our seven research-based principles are:

1. **A college-preparatory instructional program** to provide all students with rigorous inquiry-based curriculum and instruction aligned with your state standards, embedding content and numeracy literacy in the content areas.

2. **An extended school day and year** to provide additional opportunities for student enrichment and remediation

3. **A dedicated team of teachers and counselors** that provides a consistent support network and safety net throughout students’ four years of high school

4. **Distributed Counseling™** in which all faculty take responsibility for students’ academic, social, and emotional development through a student advocacy system that produces trusting and caring relationships with students that can be leveraged to increase students’ achievement

5. **Continuous professional development** to establish a collaborative professional learning community in which teachers, counselors, and school leaders participate in job-embedded coaching and other professional development opportunities, including ISA Summer and Winter Institutes

6. **Parental involvement** and engagement in their child’s education

7. **Continuous organizational improvement** through the use of multiple forms of data to monitor program implementation and student progress and performance outcomes.
ISA’s Whole School Reform Strategies

ISA uses a capacity-building approach to whole school reform that includes individual and team job-embedded coaching, summer and winter institutes, workshops, and other professional development strategies to help schools to: (1) improve student academic achievement and attainment; (2) build school leadership skills for facilitating and implementing the organizational and instructional changes necessary for whole school transformation; (3) implement a college ready, standard aligned instructional program in mathematics, ELA, science, and social studies as well as embed literacy and scaffolding strategies across content areas; (4) enact a student advocacy system that personalizes students’ experience and provides them with close caring relationships with teachers and the social and emotional supports necessary for school success; and (5) foster family and community engagement to develop a sense of agency and confidence among the diverse education stakeholders.

1. Strategies for Improving Student Academic Achievement and Attainment

ISA’s college-preparatory instructional program is aligned with state standards and focuses on students’ intellectual development and emphasizes the development of higher order thinking skills, habits of work, and mastery of critical knowledge and skills in the core content areas. Literacy, writing, and numeracy are embedded in content areas across the curriculum in order to support students’ acquisition and understanding of content area vocabulary and concepts and their capacity to navigate complex text. ISA supports teachers to develop and use multiple forms of assessment, including tests, formative and summative assessments, curriculum embedded and performance assessments to accurately capture students’ learning, monitor students’ progress, and guide pedagogical differentiation so that instruction meets the needs of diverse learners.

Through each of their four years of high school, students work with a grade level multi-disciplinary team of teachers and a counselor. This structure is designed to: (1) personalize the school environment; (2) create strong, in-depth connections between students and their teachers and counselor; and (3) enable the grade level team to be a support network that is knowledgeable, engaged, and can apply customized interventions. The strong relationships generated by this team organization enable teachers to elicit higher levels of student performance and affiliation with school. The team structure allows teachers to work collaboratively and collectively and learn from one another to support students’ success.

An extended day and school year provide students with opportunities for enrichment and advancement as well as remediation. We help schools to construct extended day/year opportunities whereby staff can provide students with the individualized time, attention, and other supports necessary for them to succeed with rigorous curriculum tasks and projects, skill development, and remediation. In addition, we help schools to implement extended day and year experiences such as tutoring, talent and leadership development, enrichment, internships, and curriculum-connected travel and tours.
2. Strategies for Building School Leadership Skills

ISA’s continuous professional development includes job-embedded leadership coaching to build school leaders’ instructional and organizational leadership skills to effectively develop, implement and monitor school reform. An ISA leadership coach works with school leaders individually and as a team to build their capacity in the following areas:

- **Using the ISA model as a strategy for whole school reform** (1) identify measurable goals, outcomes, and priorities for school and student achievement; (2) develop a strategic implementation plan; (3) develop a communication and engagement strategy for school stakeholders so that they are informed and have ownership of the goals and plan; and (4) develop a process for monitoring, assessing, and problem-solving implementation

- **Facilitating meetings, including using processes and protocols** for agenda building, handling instructional issues, discussion management, decision making, decision minutes, follow up, and accountability

- Developing and implementing organization structures to support implementation of the ISA model

- **Supporting high-quality, inquiry-based, college preparatory instruction** in all classrooms, as school leaders: (1) identify indicators of high-quality, inquiry-and project-based instruction that aligns with state standards; (2) observe video and live images of high-quality instruction; (3) use an evidence-based approach in observations; (4) provide teachers with evidence-based, concrete, and actionable feedback and timelines for the implementation of changes in instructional practice; (5) use rubrics; (6) norm and moderate classroom observations; and (7) provide curriculum resources for the improvement of teaching and learning

- **Analyzing local data to identify trends and needs for support**, after which school leaders monitor and use the findings to inform instructional, organizational, and professional development decisions and planning

- **Enacting actionable strategies to support teachers** in improving classroom rituals, routines and classroom environments

- **Developing and implementing strategies** for Distributed Counseling, parent involvement, external learning, and extended days and years

- **Developing and implementing a professional development plan** based on school goals and faculty needs to achieve those goals; and monitoring and assessing the plan’s implementation for effectiveness and making appropriate modifications

- **Using multiple forms of data** to inform decision-making and continuous organizational development

ISA’s continuous professional development for school leaders also includes participation in the ISA Leadership Network, a community of practice for whole school reform comprised of principals and assistant principals across the ISA school network. The ISA Leadership Network meets throughout the school year to engage in activities such as school visits, classroom observations, and instructional walk-throughs. The network also convenes annually for the ISA Summer and Winter Institutes.
3. Strategies for Implementing a College Ready, Standards Aligned Instructional Program

ISA provides job-embedded coaching in the content areas, facilitation of content team and/or grade level team meetings, and workshops as well as other forms of professional development to achieve the implementation of a college ready, standard-aligned instructional program that features scaffolding and differentiation to meet the diverse needs of students.

Content Area Coaching. ISA content area coaches provide job-embedded coaching targeted to achieving the school’s goals and outcomes, and increasing teachers’ content and pedagogical knowledge. ISA content area coaching typically addresses the implementation of college-preparatory instructional strategies (e.g., higher order thinking skills, state standards, writing across the content areas); planning rigorous units, lessons, curriculum tasks, and curriculum-embedded assessments; scaffolding for the needs of diverse learners; using data to inform instructional decisions; and enacting personalization strategies. Coaches work with teachers on strategies such as project design and implementation, questioning, class discussion, and small-group instruction. Coaches may also model instructional strategies, conduct workshops, offer resources, and observe teaching and learning and provide evidence-based, non-judgmental actionable feedback for teacher improvement. ISA content coaches are former experienced and expert practitioners who are knowledgeable about school change and adult learning. They possess the content and pedagogical content knowledge necessary to support organizational and pedagogical changes. Most are local coaches who are knowledgeable about and sensitive to the local context.

Coaching for Grade-Level and/or Content-Area Teacher Teams. ISA coaching for grade-level and content-area teacher teams helps teams develop strategies for using meetings productively (e.g., through agendas and decision minutes); implementing distributed counseling (e.g., personalization strategies to leverage increased student achievement and improved student behavior); using our evidence-based protocols to assess student work for demonstrations of inquiry-based, higher-order thinking based on state standards, and to develop strategies to improve student performance; sharing effective teaching strategies; and integrating the state standards across the curriculum (e.g., argumentation skills, use of evidence), using multiple forms of data to assess student progress and inform instructional decisions.

Workshops. ISA coaches may provide workshops for the whole staff on issues that apply to all content areas, e.g., using writing to learn strategies, Socratic seminar, reviewing student work protocols, use of data to inform instructional decisions, group work, etc.

ISA Institutes. ISA’s institutes for professional development bring together teachers, counselors, and school leaders across the ISA network of partner schools and provide them with opportunities to learn and collaborate with experienced practitioner experts.
4. Strategies for Personalization and Student Advocacy

ISA’s Distributed Counseling™ personalizes students’ experience in schools through the development and implementation of a student advocacy system in which all members of the school community support students’ academic, social, and emotional development rather than the customary compartmentalization of responsibility for these components of students’ education. We support faculty development of knowledge and strategies for increasing student engagement in and affiliation with the school’s instructional and behavioral goals; designing and implementing strategies to personalize students’ experiences; and constructing and applying interventions that increase students’ opportunities for success and reduce incidents and unproductive behavior.

We collaborate with staff to: (1) build close, caring, trusting relationships between students and teachers so that teachers know students well; (2) implement a student advocacy system whereby every student has an adult advocate/advisor who is his/her go-to person so that there is a positive family partnership and communication with families; (3) develop and implement a four-year comprehensive advisory curriculum to prepare students for postsecondary education and careers, including personal, social and financial issues; guidance in completing college and financial aid applications; and personal, and adolescent development issues; (4) build teacher capacity to serve in teacher-as-advisor roles; (5) implement case conferencing and other team problem solving structures with regard to student issues; (6) develop student self-management initiatives such as peer mediation and conflict resolution to help students develop effective and constructive problem-solving skills.

Our continuous professional development for school counselors includes job-embedded coaching to support counselors’ expertise in Distributed Counseling and skills for working with staff on its implementation. Counselors also participate in the ISA Counselor Network, a community of practice comprised of all counselors across the ISA network that meets both formally and informally to discuss issues, trends, and best practices; share strategies; problem-solve challenges; and develop curriculum with ongoing support provided by ISA in the areas of conflict resolution, peer mediation, and advisory.

ISA supports schools’ continuous organizational improvement through the use of data to monitor student non-academic outcomes, including providing professional development and support on the use of ETS’s High School SuccessNavigator™, an online tool that assesses critical factors related to students’ school success, including their academic skills, commitment, self-management, and social support.
5. Strategies for Fostering Family and Community Engagement

The involvement and engagement of families in the education of their children increases students’ opportunities for school success. In order to develop strong family support, the ISA school/leadership coach helps schools implement effective strategies for fostering family engagement. These strategies include: (1) providing regular communication with parents/caregivers about their child’s progress (e.g. electronic communication or phone calls by advisors to parents/caregivers); (2) conducting parent/caregiver teacher conferences; (3) conducting team intervention meetings with students and parents/caregivers; (4) structuring parent/caregiver information opportunities on issues critical to students’ success such as the school’s curriculum and expectations, college readiness, and college-going and how parents/caregivers can support their children to be successful in school; (5) providing parent/caregiver school orientation sessions; (6) supporting parents in creating a Parents Association and participating in meetings as needed; and (7) supporting the Parents Association to connect with key community stakeholders and leaders.

The ISA school/leadership coach collaborates with the school leaders to develop print and electronic family and community communication strategies and materials to inform families and community-based organizations about the purposes and plans for the school’s reform process. They co-plan family and community outreach programs wherein parents, guardians, and students can meet the school leaders and staff to ask questions and learn about the goals for the reform and the educational program plans so that stakeholders support and have confidence in the reform effort.
Implementation

ISA’s model is comprised of a six-step process:

1. **Introduction to the ISA model** and meeting with ISA personnel

2. **ISA’s College Readiness School Assessment** to identify areas where school is effectively implementing a college going culture and gaps. Components include:
   A. A survey of students and faculty on their perceptions of their school on the following indicators:
      i. College going culture (college preparatory instructional program, self-management skills, and knowledge about post-secondary education)
      ii. Student advocacy and support system
      iii. Student aspirations, ambition, and sense of efficacy
   B. Analysis of student outcome data (e.g., attendance, course pass rates, state exit exams, etc.)
   C. Classroom observations for evidence of college prep instruction and scaffolding
   D. Analysis of curriculum framework/teacher assignments and student work samples
   E. Parent focus group

3. **Identification of school and student outcomes** based on analysis of College Readiness School Assessment findings and school community vision and mission

4. **Strategic Planning:** How will the District use the ISA Model as a strategy to achieve improved outcomes?

5. **Support for Customized implementation** of the ISA Model:
   A. Job embedded coaching in the areas of: leadership, distributed counseling, content area inquiry-based, standards-aligned instruction; literacy and numeric literacy in the content areas, curriculum embedded and performance assessments; and grade level and content area teams
   B. Summer and Winter Institutes with sessions for school planning, curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, leadership, distributed counseling, and technical assistance
   C. Resources

6. **Ongoing Monitoring and Assessment of Implementation**
Organizational Background

The Institute for Student Achievement (ISA), a division of Educational Testing Service (ETS), is a 22-year-old, national high school redesign organization whose mission is to collaborate with districts and schools to support them in becoming high-performance educational organizations that provide students with intellectually challenging and supportive learning environments so that all students graduate ready for postsecondary education and careers. We have collaborated with schools and districts nationwide and have impacted over 70,000 students and over 4,000 teachers, counselors, and school leaders.

Since 2001, ISA has engaged in whole school reform in cities such as in Atlanta, Detroit, Minneapolis, and New York City. The majority of students in ISA schools are from low-income and high-need families: over 70% of the students are free/reduced lunch eligible and over 60% enter 9th grade with significant deficits in math and literacy. ISA’s whole school reform approach has been validated by two independent and rigorous evaluations as effective for increasing the achievement of high-need students in general, and African American male students in particular. Specifically these evaluations found that students in ISA high schools have better attendance rates, accumulate more academic credits, are less likely to drop out, and more likely to graduate from high school within four years than their comparison peers.