



Redesigning Schools for the Right Results

ISA Blog

Since 1987 and the landmark report on education, *A Nation at Risk*, educators, politicians, philanthropists, and community leaders have been on a quest for the magic formula, the easily replicated recipe, the silver bullet that will transform education in the United States once and for all and turn dreams of educational equity and excellence into reality. ISA, however, has relentlessly followed where research and best professional practice have led us. In doing so, we have been able to design an effective model for whole school reform that consistently produces significantly improved results, especially for traditionally underperforming urban school students. ISA's designation by the US Department of Education (USDOE) as an evidence-based whole school reform approach was based on an evaluation study by the Academy for Educational Development (AED) and a comprehensive narrative submitted to the USDOE detailing the ISA whole school reform model. The AED study met the What Works Clearinghouse rigorous standards.

The ISA approach is a capacity building one defined and guided by its seven research-based principles that are operationalized in the school's organizational, instructional, counseling, and parent involvement components. Much of the power of the ISA whole school reform model lies in its three Cs: connectivity, coherence, and collective capacity. These critical characteristics of our model force our partner schools and us to go beyond simply altering structures and procedures. Instead they drive us both toward changing the thinking, the culture, and the practices of schooling itself.

The ISA model is not a linear, hierarchical one where each person operates in isolation. It is designed to intentionally connect people school-wide and cross functionally. In the ISA model, teaching and learning take place in communities—communities of practitioners learning and improving their practice together; communities of students and teachers designing and assessing high quality work together; communities of administrators and staff together defining and living a culture that supports and meets the needs of students, staff, and families. The difference between our model and more traditional ones is similar to the difference between what can be accomplished by individuals working in isolation from stand-alone computer terminals and the almost unlimited possibilities that emerge when individual computers are networked. Ideas and products can be shared and refined faster. One person can communicate



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Coherence is a second key aspect of the ISA approach. Every element of our model is guided by clarity of mission and purpose. Because each key principle advances and supports the others, they create a synergy which impacts positively on every area of the school from academics to discipline to relationships.

The third critical characteristic of our model is collective capacity. We must let go of the myth that there are tens of thousands of super heroes just waiting to be recruited into the education profession to save our schools. The truth is that we have to design systems of school reform that support and foster the ability of all educators to consistently get improved results for all students. No school can be transformed because of the success of a single person. The performance of an entire school improves when high quality teaching and learning take place in every classroom for every child every day. All of the staff must own all of the students and act on their commitment to and accountability for all students succeeding academically. I agree with Fullan who says, "...success does not come from ad hoc, individuals beavering away but rather from strategies that leverage the whole group...It is the collaborative group that accelerates performance." Our strategies to build collective capacity are a hallmark of the ISA approach. Faithful implementation of the ISA model by partner schools demonstrates that the ISA approach does, in fact, get exactly the results its designed to get—improved achievement for every student, regardless of race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status. and refined faster. One person can communicate with a colleague or with all colleagues simultaneously; and access to knowledge and expertise is no longer proprietary, but available to everyone.

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Contact ISA

(516) 812-6700
info@isa-ed.ets.org
www.studentachievement.org

One Old Country Road, Suite 250
Carle Place, NY 11514



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