

THE INSTITUTE FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT'S EVIDENCE-BASED WHOLE-SCHOOL REFORM STRATEGY

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 evaluations (see attached reports) as effective for increasing student achievement. 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 are more likely to graduate from high school within four years than their comparison peers.

ISA'S WHOLE SCHOOL REFORM MODEL

The ISA whole school reform model is grounded in **7 research-based principles** that are designed to work synergistically to help underperforming schools graduate ***all*** students ready for college and careers. The 7 principles serve as a framework to transform a school's organizational and educational practices to a personalized and rigorous educational program that embodies the values and goals of the school community and produces a college-going culture. Our 7 research-based principles are:

1. A **college-preparatory instructional program** to provide all students with rigorous inquiry-based curriculum and instruction aligned with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and which embeds content and numeric 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 and produce 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 forms of 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 that includes individual and team job-embedded coaching, summer and winter institutes, workshops, technology, and other professional development strategies to help schools: (1) improve student academic achievement and attainment; (2) build school leadership skills for implementing the organizational and instructional changes necessary for whole school reform; (3) improve teaching and learning in the disciplines as well as numeracy and literacy in the content areas; (4) provide students with the social and emotional (non-academic) supports necessary for school success; and (5) foster family and community engagement.

1. Strategies for Improving Student Academic Achievement and Attainment

ISA's **college-preparatory instructional program** focuses on students' intellectual development and emphasizes the development of higher order thinking skills, habits of work, and mastery of critical skills in the core content areas. Literacy, writing, and numeracy are embedded in content areas across the curriculum. Other elements of the instructional program include a rigorous inquiry approach to curriculum and instruction aligned with the CCSS and the use of multiple forms of assessment 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 support network to be knowledgeable and engaged. The strong relationships generated by this team organization enable teachers to elicit higher levels of student performance. The team structure allows teachers to work collaboratively and collectively 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 whole 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 the whole school reform strategy to: (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, by:
(1) identifying indicators of high-quality, inquiry- and project-based instruction that aligns with the CCSS; (2) observing video and live images of high-quality instruction; (3) using an evidence-based approach in observations; (4) providing teachers with evidence-based, concrete, and actionable feedback and timelines for the implementation of changes in instructional practice; (5) using rubrics; (6) norming and moderating classroom observations; and (7) providing 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 their 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 Improving Teaching and Learning (Focus Area: ISA's Mathematics Program)

ISA's college-preparatory instructional program includes the **ISA Mathematics Program**, which facilitates school wide organizational and pedagogical change and supports math faculty and school leadership to develop and implement a four-year, rigorous, inquiry-based, and CCSS-aligned mathematics program that prepares all students to graduate from high school college-ready without requiring remediation.

We offer schools a customized, rigorous inquiry-based **mathematics curriculum**, aligned with the CCSS that develops students' capacity for mathematical thinking as well as their mastery of mathematics foundational knowledge and skills. The mathematics curriculum for Algebra 1 and 2 (pre-Calculus) and Geometry includes anchor units, lessons, performance tasks, lesson resources, formative assessments, and scoring rubrics. In addition, the curriculum includes access to the Online Assessment Reporting System (OARS), a data management and reporting tool customized for ISA math performance assessments.

Our **continuous professional development** for math faculty aims to build capacity to improve student performance in mathematics including: (1) building and expanding teachers' capacity to reflect on their own instructional practice in order to increase opportunities for diverse students (e.g., mainstream, ELL, and Special Ed.) to develop mathematical understanding and engage in mathematical thinking; (2) increasing teachers' mathematical content and pedagogical content knowledge; (3) expanding teachers' knowledge and understanding of CCSS in mathematics and their capacity to use the CCSS to develop diverse students' understanding of mathematics as a discipline; (4) increasing teachers' use of

curriculum-embedded performance tasks and other forms of assessments to develop diverse students' mathematical knowledge and thinking; and (5) supporting math faculty to develop and implement a four-year rigorous, inquiry-based, college-preparatory and CCSS-aligned mathematics program.

ISA provides **job-embedded individual teacher coaching** to support the implementation of inquiry-based, CCSS-aligned and college-preparatory instructional strategies in the classroom. ISA math coaching for individual teachers includes:

- co-planning and developing inquiry-based, CCSS-aligned mathematics curriculum units lessons, projects, and curriculum-embedded performance tasks and assessments
- modeling instructional strategies that elicit high-order thinking and facilitate classroom discourse in mathematics
- observing teaching and learning and providing evidence-based and actionable feedback
- locating and providing resources for teachers
- supporting the use of data including student work to inform instructional decisions
- integration of literacy into mathematics as a tool for learning

ISA also provides schools with **job-embedded team coaching** to support math faculty to develop and implement a four-year rigorous, inquiry-based, CCSS-aligned and college-preparatory math program. ISA team coaching includes:

- facilitating a process among math faculty to identify and prioritize math-related outcomes that they want to achieve and want their students to achieve and align these outcomes to the CCSS
- co-planning with teams to develop mathematics curriculum units and lesson plans
- building teachers' understanding and use of performance-based assessments including, designing and implementing performance-based assessments; analyzing student responses to the assessments to inform instructional change and interventions as well as to inform changes needed in course design and implementation
- co-facilitating team meetings to discuss and reflect on the effective implementation of the school's four-year math program and to identify continuing professional development needs

Our continuous professional development for math teachers also includes **inter-visitations** to ISA schools with exemplary mathematics programs in order to expand teachers' understanding of mathematical pedagogical knowledge. We organize and facilitate **teacher study groups** across our network of schools to expand teachers' mathematical content and pedagogical content knowledge, to help teachers connect theory, application, and problem-solving to real-life classroom situations, and to help teachers keep current in the field of secondary mathematics teaching and learning.

Math faculty participates in **ISA Institutes** for professional development including the annual three-day **ISA Summer Institute** that convenes educators across the ISA network of participating schools to provide them with opportunities to learn and collaborate with experienced practitioner experts. Mathematics sessions focus on the development of inquiry curriculum and instruction, differentiation, content and pedagogical content knowledge, and lesson and unit design. The **ISA Winter Institutes** are single-day sessions over two months that build on the work done at the ISA Summer Institute.

4. Strategies for Providing Student Social and Emotional (Non-Academic) Supports

ISA's **Distributed Counseling™** is a student advocacy and support system in which all members of the school community take responsibility for students' academic, social, and emotional development and college preparation 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 instructional and behavioral goals of the school; designing and implementing strategies to personalize students' experiences; and developing 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 **Success Navigator™**, 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 school leaders to develop family and community communication strategies and materials to inform families and community-based organizations about the purposes and plans for the whole school reform. They co-plan family and community outreach wherein families can meet the school leaders and staff to ask questions and learn about the redesign so that stakeholders support and have confidence in the reform effort.