

# Iowa Department of Education



## Conversation Starters for 2014-2015 Site Visits for Non-Public Schools



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## **BOARD OF EDUCATION**

1. Please introduce yourself by stating your name and number of years you have served on the Board of Education then please tell us about the school's vision, mission, and goals.

- What role (if any) did you have in writing the vision, mission, and goals?
- What data were used to write/formulate the vision, mission, and goals?

2. How is the school preparing students to be respectful of cultural differences so they will be able to live and work in a diverse environment and global economy?

3. How is the school preparing students to be college and career ready?

- How is the school preparing students for life-long learning such as (employability, financial, health, and civic literacy)?

4. What student achievement data does the board review and what have you learned from the data about the achievement of ALL students in your school? Have you made any programmatic changes based on the data? If so, please share

5. What school information does the board share with the public and how is this information communicated?

6. Describe the process and materials used to evaluate the Principal and how this process has benefitted the principal and the board.

7. In what ways does the board seek input from school stakeholders such as parents, teachers, community members, and administrators? Can you share some examples of those suggestions provided to the board? When was your last needs assessment?

8. What is the school's current focus for professional development? How is the board kept informed of the school's professional development focus and results? What is the current focus of professional development for the board?

9. How is the board helping the school meet its long-range goals?

10. Please share what you believe to be your school's:

- Accomplishments since the last site visit (5 years ago)
- Changes hoped to be achieved in the next five years
- Obstacles

## GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

1. Please introduce yourself by stating your name, grade level or content area, and respond to this question: How do your professional practices align with the vision, mission, and goals of the school?
2. Describe how the school has clearly articulated a vision for the Iowa Core implementation, including expected results for students? Do school stakeholders understand and agree with this vision?
3. Are there opportunities for teachers to assume leadership roles within the school? If so, describe those opportunities. Are all teachers encouraged to assume leadership roles?
4. Describe your teacher evaluation process in the school. What impact does your evaluation have on your instructional practice(s)?
5. What does the school do to ensure a safe learning and social environment for ALL students?
6. To what degree is bullying/harassment occurring in your school? What steps has the school taken to address bullying and harassment issues?
7. Sometimes students are teased (harassed) and it can happen in different ways. (i.e., calling names, make fun of someone, teasing in a hurtful way, excluding someone from a group, ignoring someone on purpose, hitting, kicking, pushing, shoving, starting false rumors, threatening messages on email, text, chat room, etc., making sexual jokes about someone, making fun of someone because of their religion, hurtful gestures to someone). In your opinion, how often does this happen at your school?
8. Are students and staff accepting of students who are “different” than themselves (racially, culturally, socioeconomically, physically, etc.)? How is the school preparing staff and students to be accepting of those who are different from themselves (racially, culturally, socio-economically, etc.)?
9. Do students leave this school prepared to live and work in a diverse environment and global economy? Please provide examples.
10. What tools and technology are available in your school and how are they used to enhance instruction and student learning?
11. How are teachers involved in determining the focus of professional development? How are educators engaged in high-quality professional development that is designed to rapidly and significantly improve their ability to teach the Iowa Core?
12. How is professional learning changing your classroom practices? How is this professional learning designed to incorporate the use of high-quality instructional materials?
13. What student achievement data do you review and what have you learned from the data about the achievement of ALL students in your class(es)? Have you made programmatic changes based on the data? If so, please share. (If needed, prompt with programmatic changes such as: SES, Racial/Ethnic, ESL, Gifted/Talented, etc.)
14. What steps has the school taken to address achievement gaps?
15. How do you engage parents as partners in their child’s education?

16. How do teachers adjust their classroom instruction to meet individual student learning needs?
17. What kind of professional development has your school provided to help you work effectively with diverse learners? Implement multicultural, gender fair approaches to instruction and curriculum? Can you share some examples of how you implement multicultural, gender-fair instructional approaches and curriculum in your classroom?
18. How is this professional learning changing classroom practices?
19. Please share what changes you hope your school will achieve in the next five years.

## **HIGH SCHOOL/MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS**

1. Please introduce yourself by stating your name and grade and respond to this question: What tools and technology are available in this school and how do teachers and students use the technology? What is your personal opinion of the technology available and how it is utilized at your school?
2. Are you encouraged to develop and use leadership skills in your school? Explain how. Are all students in the school encouraged to develop their leadership skills in one way or another?
3. Describe a method teachers are using to effectively help you learn. How are teachers encouraging/inspiring students to exceed expectations? How are they “raising the bar?”
4. How do you know if you are learning and how do your teachers know if you are learning? How do teachers check to make sure you are learning what you should be learning?
5. What are some examples of how your teachers make the connection between the real world and what you’re learning in the classroom?
6. How is the school preparing students for the next level of education and/or workforce/careers? Do you think you will graduate from the school well prepared to live and work in a global economy? (If not, what could the school do better?)
7. Sometimes students are teased (harassed) and it can happen in different ways. (i.e., calling names, make fun of someone, teasing in a hurtful way, excluding someone from a group, ignoring someone on purpose, hitting, kicking, pushing, shoving, starting false rumors, threatening messages on email, text, social media, etc., making sexual jokes about someone, making fun of someone because of their religion, hurtful gestures to someone). In your opinion, how often does this happen at your school?
8. What actions do students take if they are bullied or harassed or see that happening to someone else?
9. Please share what changes you hope your school will achieve in the next five years.

## **INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT STAFF**

### **(Paraeducators)**

1. Please introduce yourself by stating your name and assignment and describe the collaboration that occurs among yourselves and the classroom teachers with whom you work.
2. Describe the instructional duties assigned to you by your supervising teacher.
3. What is your role when the supervising teacher is out of the classroom for other assignments?
4. Do you feel supported in your role?
5. What training have you had to prepare you for your assignments?
6. Has your performance changed as a result of this training?
7. Do you feel you need additional supports to do your job well?
8. For those of you assigned as a one-to-one paraeducator for a student, how have you been trained to decrease student dependency on your assistance?
9. Sometimes students are teased (harassed) and it can happen in different ways. (i.e., calling names, make fun of someone, teasing in a hurtful way, excluding someone from a group, ignoring someone on purpose, hitting, kicking, pushing, shoving, starting false rumors, threatening messages on email, text, chat room, etc., making sexual jokes about someone, making fun of someone because of their religion, hurtful gestures to someone). In your opinion, how often does this happen at your school?
10. How accepting are students and staff in this school of other students who are “different” than themselves (racially, culturally, and socioeconomically)? Do students and staff believe it is wrong to discriminate against someone because of his/her race, appearance, culture, religion, or other reasons?
11. What are the school’s expectations of you addressing student behavior and school climate issues, including bullying and harassment? (Monitoring and Accountability)
12. Please share what changes you hope your school will achieve in the next five years.

## LEARNING SUPPORT STAFF

1. Please introduce yourself by stating your name and the program you represent and briefly share what you believe to be a strength of your program.
2. Describe how the school has clearly articulated a vision for the Iowa Core implementation, including expected results for students? Do school stakeholders understand and agree with this vision?
3. Please describe the components of the program you represent, including:
  - Identification criteria
  - Program components
  - Transition supports
  - Exit criteria
4. How are parents engaged in their child’s educational planning and in the transition of their students’ plans after high school?
5. What data points are used to determine program effectiveness (academic/non-academic) and what is being learned from these data?
6. Sometimes students are teased (harassed) and it can happen in different ways. (i.e., calling names, make fun of someone, teasing in a hurtful way, excluding someone from a group, ignoring someone on purpose, hitting, kicking, pushing, shoving, starting false rumors, threatening messages on email, text, social media, etc., making sexual jokes about someone, making fun of someone because of their religion, hurtful gestures to someone). In your opinion, how often does this happen at your school?
7. How accepting are students and staff in this school of other students who are “different” than themselves (racially, culturally, and socioeconomically)?
8. In implementation planning of the Iowa Core, how have leaders prioritized the training of all teachers to align their classroom practice with Iowa Core Expectations? Please explain.
9. How do teachers and administrators in this school determine which students are most likely to need the most support to meet the expectations of the Iowa Core?
10. Are you included in professional development concerning the Iowa Core?
11. Please share what changes you hope your school will achieve in the next five years.

## **PARENTS/GUARDIANS**

1. Please introduce yourself by stating your name, telling us about your children in school, and respond to this question: What do you think your child's school, does well to increase student achievement?
2. How does the school involve parents/guardians as partners in their child's education?
3. How do you know how your child is progressing in school?
4. If your child has special learning needs (i.e., special education, English Language Learner, Gifted and Talented, At-Risk, etc.) how does the school accommodate your child in the general education classroom?
5. How does the school support learning experiences for children prior to kindergarten?
6. Describe the transition process that takes place as students move from level to level (Preschool to elementary, elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, high school to post-secondary, etc.)
7. In what ways does the school help your child achieve at high levels? Are there any obstacles that stand in the way of your child's learning?
8. How does the school involve a wide range of community members?
9. Sometimes students are teased (harassed) and it can happen in different ways. (i.e., calling names, make fun of someone, teasing in a hurtful way, excluding someone from a group, ignoring someone on purpose, hitting, kicking, pushing, shoving, starting false rumors, threatening messages on email, text, etc., making sexual jokes about someone, making fun of someone because of their religion, hurtful gestures to someone). In your opinion, how often does this happen at your school?
10. How accepting are students and staff in this school of others who are "different" than themselves (racially, culturally, and socioeconomically)? Do students and staff believe it is wrong to discriminate against someone because of his/her race, appearance, culture, religion, or other reasons?
11. How are parents' concerns addressed and suggestions used?
12. Please share what changes you hope your school will achieve in the next five years.

## **PRINCIPALS**

1. Describe how the school has clearly articulated a vision for the Iowa Core implementation, including expected results for students? Do stakeholders understand and agree with this vision?
2. How do you seek input from staff, students, parents, and the community? What actions have you taken as a result of input provided by these stakeholder groups? How does the school communicate with parents who do not speak English?
3. Describe the process and materials used to evaluate you and how this process has benefitted you and your work as an instructional leader?
4. Explain the teacher evaluation process used in the school. How has it led to positive changes in instruction and student achievement?
5. How are the principal and teachers deliberately and regularly engaged in discussions about the Iowa Core and how it relates to other initiatives in the school?
6. How do you promote an environment in the school that is safe, healthy, inclusive and caring for all student, staff and families?
7. How have you monitored and investigated the incidents of bullying and harassment in your school over the past year? Describe what you have found. Have the data been reported to the state?
8. What are the processes used by the school to collect and analyze formative and summative data regarding student achievement and program results? How is data analysis then used to plan next steps?
9. How are school staff engaged in high-quality professional development that is designed to rapidly and significantly improve their ability to teach the Iowa Core?
10. How is this professional learning designed to incorporate the use of high-quality instructional materials?
11. How is professional learning changing classroom practices?
12. How does professional development prepare all staff to address specific needs of students who have IEPs, are at-risk, potential dropouts, ELL, and/or gifted and talented?
13. Please share what changes you hope your school will achieve in the next five years.

## **SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SIAC)**

1. Please introduce yourself by stating your name and representation. What is your understanding of the role and responsibilities of this committee?
2. What do you view as the strength of this committee?
3. What kind of information/data do you receive as a SIAC member, (probe for disaggregated data)? What does the SIAC do with the information?
4. What training have you received in understanding and using data?
5. In the recent past, what are some of the recommendations this committee has made to the board of education, in the required areas of:
  - Annual improvement goals;
  - Major educational needs;
  - Student learning goals;
  - Long-range goals that include, but are not limited to, the state indicators that address reading, mathematics, and science achievement; and
  - Harassment or bullying prevention goals, programs, training, and other initiatives.
6. Were the recommendations approved, and what has been the result?
7. Please tell us how the school and community work together, including sharing resources.
8. Please share what you believe to be your school's:
  - Accomplishments since the last site visit (5 years ago)
  - Obstacles
  - Changes hoped to be achieved in the next five years