OVERVIEW PRESENTATION GUIDELINES FOR SITE VISITS AND SEVEN CHARACTERISTICS OF IMPROVING DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

The overview enables the district/school to showcase its programs and services to the visiting team. The overview also sets the expectations for what team members will see and hear during the site visit.

The seven characteristics of improved schools specifically address the actions that districts and schools might be taking to continuously improve, as well as to answer the four constant conversation questions found in the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) section of C-Plan. The descriptors for the seven characteristics provide information that the district/school can use to describe the overall picture of its school improvement efforts.

The district/school is encouraged to prepare for the overview by giving consideration to its school improvement journey through the "**what**" and "**how**" of each of the following characteristics:

Vision, Mission, and Goals
Leadership
Collaborative Relationships
Learning Environment
Curriculum and Instruction
Professional Development
Monitoring and Accountability

Districts/schools are also asked to:

- Plan the overview to include significant data and attributes of programs, initiatives, and activities of each characteristic that are unique to the district/school.
- Provide an update on progress the district has made since its last accreditation site visit regarding recommendations and non-compliances.
- Include attention to the district's/school's Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program for Four Year Old Children, if applicable.
- Provide a summary of what the district has learned through the Iowa Core process and "next steps" with implementation.

Suggestions:

- Prepare a handout with note taking space to provide to each site visit team member.
- Avoid including detailed information in the school/district overview that can be found in other documents provided to the site visit team.
- The overview presentation should not exceed 45 minutes.

Recommended Agenda:
I. Welcome and Introductions (5 minutes)
II. School/District Overview (45 minutes)
III. Follow-up Questions/Answers (10 minutes)

Note: Iowa Core Outcomes #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, and #6 have been incorporated into the Seven Characteristics of Improving Districts and Schools. This includes the Overview Presentation Guidelines, the Seven Characteristics of Improving Districts and Schools, and the site visit report:

Outcome #1
School leaders build and sustain system capacity to implement the Iowa Core.

Outcome #2
Community members and other supporting agencies work together to support the implementation of the Iowa Core.

Outcome #3
A continuous improvement process to improve teaching and learning is used at the district and school level.

Outcome #4
District/school leaders and other educators monitor and use data to increase the degree of alignment of each and every student's enacted curriculum and other relevant educational opportunities to the Iowa Core.

Outcome #5
Educators engage in professional development focused on implementing characteristics of effective instruction and demonstrate understanding of essential concepts and skills.

Outcome #6
Educators implement effective instructional practices to ensure high levels of learning for each and every student.

SEVEN CHARACTERISTICS OF IMPROVING DISTRICTS / SCHOOLS

Vision, Mission, and Goals

In improving districts and schools, the vision, mission, and goals support student learning of the Iowa Core and are clearly communicated in the school and community. Stakeholders understand and share a commitment to the expectations, goals, priorities, assessment procedures, and accountability. The vision guides allocations of time and resources. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- A clearly articulated mission is established collaboratively with stakeholder groups representing the diversity of the community.
- Vision, mission, and goals are communicated throughout the system and community.
- The vision and mission of the district/school guide teaching and learning.
- Every five years, the comprehensive needs assessment process, with input from stakeholders, is used to review and revise the beliefs, mission, and/or vision; major educational needs; and student learning goals.
- Academic and academic-related data are analyzed and used to determine prioritized goals.
- Goals guide assessment of student achievement, district/school effectiveness, and the allocation of time and resources.
- The vision, mission, and goals support values of respecting and valuing diversity.

Note: *Vision, Mission, and Goals incorporate Iowa Core Outcome #1: School leaders build and sustain system capacity to implement the Iowa Core.*

Leadership

In improving districts and schools, leaders communicate a shared sense of purpose and understanding of the organization's values. The school board, administrators, and teachers are focused and committed to providing the expertise, guidance, and resources needed to build capacity and support teaching and learning. Leaders have a visible presence, provide resources, and ensure two-way communication between the educational system and stakeholders. Leaders provide encouragement, recognition, and support for improving student learning and staff performance. Leadership is committed, persistent, proactive, and distributed throughout the system. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Policies and procedures are established to effectively support district/school operations, including the ensurance of hiring staff qualified for assignments.
- The school board and district administrators implement an evaluation system that provides for the professional growth of all personnel.
- Policies and practices are implemented to reduce and eliminate discrimination and harassment and to reflect, respect, and celebrate diversity.
- The role and responsibility of administrative leaders is supported, respected, and understood.

- A clearly defined system and expectations are established for the collection, analysis, and use of data regarding student achievement and progress with the CSIP section of C-Plan.
- The capacity of staff, students, and parents to contribute and lead is built and supported.
- Opportunities for participation are provided for input, feedback, and ownership for student and system success among staff, students, parents, and community.
- Equity in access to learning opportunities and compliance with local, state, and federal legislation is ensured.
- Leaders at all levels understand and manage the change process.

Note: *Leadership incorporates Iowa Core Outcome #1: School leaders build and sustain system capacity to implement the Iowa Core.*

Collaborative Relationships

In improving districts and schools, stakeholders understand and support the mission and goals of the district/school and have meaningful roles in the decision-making process. Collaboration results from a culture of participation, responsibility, and ownership among stakeholders from diverse community groups. Multiple partners including parents, school boards, business and industry, supporting agencies, and other community entities are interdependent, with schools functioning as an integrated system. This provides a coordinated approach, consistent communication, additional opportunities for learning, and the ongoing supports needed for students to be successful. Educators in the system develop and nurture a professional culture and collaborative relationships marked by mutual respect and trust inside and outside of the organization. The system works together with balance between district direction and school autonomy. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Instructional staff is provided opportunities for interaction to focus on professional issues.
- Instructional staff constructively analyzes and critiques practices and procedures including content, instruction, and assessment.
- Instructional staff follows established procedures to resolve professional conflicts, solve problems, share information about students, and communicate student information to parents.
- Processes and procedures invite and respect stakeholder input, support, and interaction are implemented by the district/school.
- Parents are involved as partners in the educational process.
- Positive alliances among school staff, students, parents, and diverse community groups are created and nurtured.

Note: *Collaborative Relationships incorporates Iowa Core Outcome #2: Community members and other supporting agencies work together to support the implementation of the Iowa Core.*

Learning Environment

In improving districts and schools, the school environment is conducive to teaching and learning. The environment is safe, orderly, purposeful, and free from threat of physical, social, and emotional harm. Teachers are familiar with students' cultures and know how to work effectively in a multi-cultural setting. Students are guided to think critically about learning and have opportunities to apply learning to real world situations. Classrooms are integrated with diverse learners (i.e., gender, race, special needs, at-risk, and gifted and talented). Evidence includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Rules and procedures for behavior and consequences are clearly communicated and consistently administered.
- School facilities are physically accessible and school routines enhance student learning.
- Materials, resources, technology, programs, and activities reflecting diversity are available to all students.
- The district/school provides a clean, inviting, and welcoming environment.
- A clearly understood crisis management plan is established, communicated, and implemented when necessary.
- Teaching and learning are protected from external disturbances and internal distractions.
- The district/school reflects the contributions and perspectives of diverse groups and preserves the cultural dignity of staff, students, and parents.

Note: *Learning Environment incorporates Iowa Core Outcome #2: Community members and other supporting agencies work together to support the implementation of the Iowa Core. Learning Environment incorporates Iowa Core Outcome #3: A continuous improvement process to improve teaching and learning is used at the district and school level.*

Curriculum and Instruction

In improving districts and schools, curriculum challenges each student to excel, reflects a commitment to equity, and demonstrates an appreciation of diversity. There is emphasis on principles of high quality instruction and clear expectations for what is taught. Educators have a common understanding of quality teaching and learning. Content, instruction, and assessment are designed to accommodate a wide range of learners within the classroom. Teachers have knowledge and skills needed to effectively implement characteristics of effective instruction. The staff accepts responsibility for students' learning of the Iowa Core. This is accomplished by monitoring and using data to increase the degree of alignment of each and every student's enacted curriculum. Instructional time is allocated to support student learning. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Educators implement effective instructional practices to ensure high levels of learning for each and every student.
- School and classroom tasks and activities are inherently engaging, relevant, and lead to application of knowledge to authentic tasks.

- Content, instruction, assessments, and policy are aligned.
- A shared vision of effective instruction is held by all instructional staff.
- Curriculum and instruction reflect contributions from diverse racial, ethnic, and personal backgrounds.
- Students are provided opportunity and time to learn.
- Teachers are provided with an instructional framework for units that employ research-based strategies for use with diverse learner characteristics.
- Instructional decision-making utilizes a process of collecting, analyzing, and summarizing data.

Note: *Curriculum and Instruction incorporates Iowa Core Outcome #4: District/school leaders and other educators monitor and use data to increase the degree of alignment of each and every student's enacted curriculum and other relevant educational opportunities to the Iowa Core. Curriculum and Instruction incorporates Iowa Core Outcome #6: Educators implement effective instructional practices to ensure high levels of learning for each and every student.*

Professional Development

In improving districts and schools, staff is engaged in ongoing learning opportunities designed to foster understanding of the Iowa Core standards and the improvement of instructional practices. Student achievement and other sources of data are used to set goals for professional development. The district provides learning opportunities that include theory, demonstration, practice, and coaching. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Professional development focus is determined through the analysis of student achievement and performance data.
- Professional development is focused and based on research-based strategies.
- Professional development sessions build on one another, are distributed throughout the school year, and sustained over time.
- Time is provided for teachers to collaborate and apply new content and pedagogical knowledge.
- An established system provides support to monitor and evaluate implementation of professional development and its impact on student learning.
- Formative student data and teacher implementation data are used to adjust professional development and guide instructional decisions.
- All school staff members, instructional and non-instructional, are provided professional development to support job roles and functions.
- Professional development activities contribute to the capacity of all school staff to develop cultural competence and to reflect and respect diversity in classroom and work environments.

Note: *Professional Development incorporates Iowa Core Outcome #5: Educators engage in professional development focused on implementing characteristics of effective instruction and demonstrate understanding of essential concepts and skills.*

Monitoring and Accountability

In improving districts and schools, the district/school establishes a comprehensive system that monitors and documents performance of student progress, curriculum, instruction, programs, and initiatives. The comprehensive system engages in continuous improvement processes to improve teaching and learning based on data. All elements of the system constantly adjust and improve to yield positive outcomes for all students. Results from assessments drive the goal setting and decision-making processes. Leadership supports a system that regularly analyzes student performance and program effectiveness. Instructional decision-making utilizes a process of collecting, analyzing, and summarizing data. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- A system for district-wide student assessments, including multiple measures that are valid and reliable, is implemented.
- Decision-making for the continuous improvement of instruction and student learning using student achievement and teacher implementation data is employed.
- The district's/school's cycle of program evaluation, as noted in its CSIP section of C-Plan, is implemented.
- Summative evaluation processes are used to determine whether professional development has resulted in improved student learning.

Note: *Monitoring and Accountability incorporates Iowa Core Outcome #3: A continuous improvement process to improve teaching and learning is used at the district and school level.*

Note: Through a study of research, the Iowa Department of Education's Bureau of Accreditation and Improvement Services identified seven characteristics of improving districts and schools. The characteristics of improving districts and schools are used to organize the comprehensive site visit process, as well as the organizer for the comprehensive site visit report. Sources: **Characteristics of Improved School Districts: Themes From Research**, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Olympia, Washington (2004); **Iowa Core** (2008), developed through the Iowa Department of Education; **What Works in Schools: Translating Research Into Action**, Robert J. Marzano, Association For Supervision And Curriculum Development, Alexandria, Virginia (2003); and **Accreditation Standards For Quality Schools**, AdvancED Worldwide, Tempe Arizona (2006).

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