

**West Des Moines Community School District
SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN/BUILDING GOALS
MIDYEAR REPORT
January, 2010**

INDIAN HILLS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

GOAL #1: Learners will demonstrate improvement in critical thinking skills.

1. Where are you currently in terms of successful implementation of this goal? (What is the current status?)

After spending three years studying critical thinking through individualized study groups, the Indian Hills staff decided to focus on integrating critical thinking strategies into the curriculum through the district initiative of Essential Questions, common assessment of the essential questions, and creation of a guaranteed and viable common curriculum using the WDMCS Curriculum Guide. We are on our second year of completing this task. Questioning is the most used critical thinking strategy used to produce inquiry learning.

Seven learning groups have been formed around departments: English/Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, Math, Special Education, Music, and Elective/Exploratory Groups. Often these learning groups divide into even smaller learning groups by grade or course taught. An additional learning group, the PBS (Positive Behavior Supports) group was the eighth learning group formed.

Learning groups meet at least twice every month usually during the 1st and 2nd early out Wednesdays. They meet with Stilwell departments at least twice per semester. Finally, they meet with curriculum directors routinely during half day or full day sessions. The curriculum directors have taken strong leadership in this endeavor and we are thankful for them.

Each department is at a different place in the essential question process. Departments first must identify essential questions for each course. Often they look to national, state, and/or district standards when doing so. After the questions are created, the departments create units around the questions. Coming to consensus on which units should be covered has led to some rich discussion. The groups are making progress.

Once these tasks are accomplished, the groups begin to discuss how they are going to assess each essential question. The teachers understand that every teacher must assess the essential questions. Some are creating authentic assessments. Some are using formative assessment. Still others have created a list of different ways that essential questions can be assessed. Last year, we focused on essential questions and this year have revised essential questions and really focused on assessment. The groups have been asked to show their work in the WDMCS Curriculum Guide. It has been fun to watch these

documents continue to grow and evolve. Even more fun is to see how the documents take life in the classroom.

Updates from each learning group are below:

7th grade Language Arts has met with Stilwell twice this year: October 13th and December 1st. During our collaborative meetings we worked on making sure that both junior highs had the same reading assessment (AGS). Stilwell administers the test to its 7th graders in the fall and spring. Tests are administered to the 8th graders in the spring only. Indian Hills is working on starting the tests during the 2010-2011 school year. We also worked on a common rubric for speaking and listening as well as recreating our Standard #2 (non-fiction) Benchmark. We changed the verbiage to align with the Iowa Core. We also chose a new non-fiction reading selection that is cross-curricular.

8th grade Language Arts has met with Stilwell twice this year as well: September 1st and October 20th. They are implementing a new photo story-telling unit. The photos taken by the students will serve as writing prompts for various assignments. One of the professional days was spent at a workshop led by a professional outside of West Des Moines Schools.

One focus of the 7th and 8th grade science departments this school year is ELI (Every Learner Inquires). Indian Hills' science teachers have been meeting with science teachers from Stilwell, Valley Southwoods, Walnut Creek, and Valley. The objective of ELI is to improve current lesson plans by making them more inquiry-based. We have been examining the essential features of inquiry to get a better understanding of what true inquiry really is and how to incorporate it into the classroom. We also have been exploring different examples of formative assessment and how they fit into the inquiry classroom model.

The 7th and 8th grade social studies teachers have been continuing to streamline their curriculums with the changing classes. 7th grade has added a Fundamental Skills class to the 09-10 school year and are working through its curricular development while aligning it to their current essential questions and assessments from the regular social studies class. 8th grade is continuing to make improvements to the essential questions for both the Advanced and Regular Social Studies curriculum. The classes have essential questions and several common assessments, but are still developing with small changes to the individual classes as each of the three 8th grade teachers are working to become more aligned.

The 2009-2010 school year is another transition year for the Indian Hills math department. We broke into grade level groups and continued working on aligning our curriculum with the Iowa Core Curriculum. We also have adopted a new textbook series this year and time has been spent exploring and implementing the new material while aligning it as well with the Iowa Core Curriculum.

The special education teachers have written five essential questions that will be integrated into the units of the new 7th grade Foundation of Social Studies class

and curriculum guide, as well as in the Study Skills class curriculum. The five essential questions are 1.) How will having organizational skills help me in my academic career or in my classroom learning? 2.) How can I demonstrate independent learning and how will this skill affect post secondary living, learning, and working? 3.) What makes me a successful learner? 4.) What does it mean to be a self-advocate and why do I need to be one? 5.) How will prioritizing my time and tasks help me be more successful? We developed the essential questions in collaboration with the special education teachers at Stilwell. The curriculum guide work and common assessments are in the process of being developed with the Foundations of Social Studies curriculum team.

Indian Hills and Stilwell vocal music teachers reviewed the Valley Essential Questions and chose four areas that we thought were appropriate for our junior high students. The level of knowledge and expertise we ask our kids to master should then serve as a tool for continued vertical articulation in their high school years of solo and ensemble singing. In reviewing the three components to our Essential Question work:

- 1) Our Essential Questions are finished
- 2) The WDMCSD Course Guide is finished for the high school. We're still trying to edit and
Revise for 7th and 8th graders.
- 3) Our common assessments are finished, but we struggle with how to actually evaluate.

This year in Orchestra, during meetings with my counterpart at Stilwell, we have discussed our current teaching models and the way in which we prepare our students for their concerts and solo presentations. Also included in discussions, was what we want to impart on our students as they begin their high school careers. We also discussed the typical pitfalls of students at this level and ways in which we address them. I am teaching the following aspects to my students through worksheets I have developed on my own using the finale program available to me on the district computer in the instrumental room.

Students should learn to play and demonstrate understanding of the first 3 sharp key signatures (g, d, a) and the first 2 flat key signatures (f and Bb). In order to learn these skills and reading and playing correct notes, students practice these sheets together in group class at the start of each rehearsal. In addition, a rubric was created so that students could learn to assess correct playing by themselves through practicing assessing the performance of other students. During lessons we have been using the rubrics and using discussion to understand the methodology behind playing correctly and understanding why some playing is correct and some is not. The rubric contains information on playing in the key signatures as well as aspects of playing necessary for correct performance in any key signature.

The band learning group has been focusing on aligning common assessments between junior high school bands. We have discussed and aligned: 1) Scale expectations for winds and octave requirements, 2) Lesson materials used for

assessments (sight reading band music), 3) Range requirements for all instruments, 4) Percussion sticking exercises, elementary and advanced rudiments, and 5) Rhythm expectations for each grade level.

The Reading department has discussed assessments and shared ideas with the English department concerning this issue. Timed Readings Plus by Jamestown was decided upon as our school-wide assessment tool, which is a time-efficient test that evaluates both recall and inferential thinking skills in regards to reading comprehension. It was also decided that assessing students' oral fluency at the middle school level was not necessary. Taking the Terro Out of the ITBS curriculum was shared with the English department as well. Future planning will be used to avoid overlap between English and reading classes.

The libraries at Indian Hills and Stilwell support teachers and their common assessments within curriculum including: technology, research, and reading. However, actually assessments are typically done by the teacher assigning the homework. Appropriateness and techniques are often discussed during collaborative sessions.

The counselors wrote four essential questions which addressed Career Exploration for 8th graders. We developed a core curriculum plan to meet state guidelines set forth by the state of Iowa. The purpose is to provide students a format in order to explore their future plans as they relate to their careers and curriculum (development of a "**Four year High School Plan**" to be followed in meeting graduation/and future goals). Our essential questions consist of: How is "ihaveaplaniowa" useful in career exploration and development of a personalized "**Four year High School Plan**"? How are individual assessment results utilized in career exploration and curriculum plan development to assist in achieving future goals? How do students apply their knowledge of "*self*" in relation to career exploration and curriculum plan development? Did the student create their own personalized "**Four Year High School Plan**", have a parent sign and date the plan and submit it in a finalized form to the school counselor for future reference?

The physical education department has looked at our current grading system and has discussed possible changes for next year. We are continuing to implement our essential questions towards all of our units. We are also looking into adding units to our curriculum that align with the Iowa standards and will be more specific towards our essential questions.

Learning Lab continues to be a class where students work on their academics under close supervision. There is no curriculum guide for Learning Lab; however, questioning students, goal setting, and individualized re-teaching of their curriculum dictates this important intervention for students that are at risk of failure. Each week student progress is determined by examining the data recorded from the previous weeks and close communication between teachers helps to identify additional support necessary for their continued success. Learning Lab is the ultimate example of knowing and lifting each child.

The ESL learning group has chosen the Essential Question: How can I make the most out of the opportunities I have? We are having bilingual speakers visit the classroom and talk with the students about their personal experiences. We will read THE CIRCUIT by Francisco Jimenez. To follow up, we will incorporate reading, journaling, grammar, and reading strategies in lessons. The students will then produce a 5 paragraph essay about one of their own experiences as a final assessment.

The Spanish I curriculum has gone through some trial and error during the past few years, since our most recent textbook adoption. Because of this, we only implemented a new curriculum we feel more comfortable with during the second semester of the 2008-2009 school year. We have been working on improving our essential questions and revising our district curriculum guide to be consistent with the new curriculum. Upon implementation of the new curriculum, we have begun to create common assessments for all Spanish I teachers to use. We are also working on recording recommended activities for each thematic unit onto the curriculum guide.

Indian Hills and Stilwell art spent time reviewing our Essential Questions and moved to discussing common assessments. We are continuing to discover what is similar and different between our classrooms and content. As we talked about projects, rubrics and tests it was decided that each teacher would work on gathering individual rubrics and tests to share with each other so we would have something more tangible to work with. This will make the development of our common assessment more efficient and effective.

So far this year, the Family Consumer Science Learning Group has continued to work closely with Stilwell's FCS department. We are currently in the process of completing the "WDMCS Course Curriculum Guide". We aligned all three courses that are offered in FCS at the junior high level. Essential Questions were written for all three courses which include: 7th grade Block, 8th grade Foods and 8th grade Sewing. While aligning these courses we worked with Valley's FCS curriculum guide to insure that the junior high level courses are a preliminary to the high school program. Both junior high schools also will be assessing students in the same way so if a student transfers from one junior high to another, the FCS course curriculum and assessments are identical. It was a very productive year.

The tech ed learning group will be meeting 7-12 to finish curriculum guides that are required for the upcoming DE visit. Essential questions were completed last year as well as deciding on core units to be taught and assessments that will be used. Essential questions will be aligned with national and state standards.

During last year's meeting, Consumer Education was able to basically complete the EQ's, district curriculum guide and compare the way we assess students. Essentially, we tend to cover the same types of topics, but not in the same way. We tend to be a project-oriented class, so the types of projects we do certainly vary. We will continue to compare the types of tests or quizzes we give, but because we don't cover the same topics in the same order, the content of these types of assessments may not be the same.

The PBS Learning group meets every other Monday before school and once per month on a Wednesday collaboration early out. PBS and school-wide rules were kicked off at the beginning of the school year after two years of studying and planning. Show Your Tiger Pride: Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Be Ready are the school-wide rules for the building. Posters were created for all areas of the building and hung, lessons were created and taught at the beginning of the school year and have been reviewed, a positive reward system was created and is ever evolving. Students earn Pride Cards when they are caught following the rules or doing something above and beyond. Students turn in Pride Cards for a reward. Pride cards are organized by team. Each month there is a drawing for a larger prize. In addition, teams select Tigers of the Month based on the school-wide rules. Each month, the building runs an early out schedule for a ZAP (Zeros Are not Permitted) Day. Students who have all work completed and have had no office referrals enjoy a selection of fun activities while the Zapped students complete work. All discipline data is entered into the Heart database. The PBS committee review the data and sets up interventions when and where needed. So far, discipline has reduced by more than 10% in the building. The PBS committee has members from all six teams and continues to work with the AEA for continued development.

This year the staff is reading the book *Whatever It Takes* by Richard DuFour. The staff has read articles on professional learning communities over the last two years and now is in the middle of reading the book. We had professional development training on August 14 and October 12 to go over the first two training modules.

2. What data or other evidence indicates progress towards the goal?

All 7th and 8th graders have taken the critical thinking pre-test on September 8 and 9 and will follow up with a post-test in the spring. Attached is the data from the critical thinking pre-test. The ITBS was given in November and results are in and currently being reviewed. Attached is data showing growth from 7th to 8th grade. Benchmark tests will be given closer to the end of the year.

Indian Hills created a critical thinking test from valid and reliable sources. We chose to use analogies as research has shown that they are the best indicator of critical thinking skills. Students have to be able to recognize a connection between two things by looking at two other things. Teachers review with students the many different connections that can happen in an analogy and practice the skills as bell work at the beginning of class and during Tiger Time.

The Jamestown reading passages used for the critical thinking test are organized in a very distinct way. The first five questions are usually recall questions. The second five questions are critical thinking questions: drawing conclusion, inference, etc. Students often score very well on the first five questions but have difficulty with the last five. We hope to show the most growth in the last five questions.

All learning groups, departments, teams, and committees send minutes from their meeting to the principals, department chairs, members of the group, and often to the whole staff.

- 3. Illustrate the key reason(s) why a particular strategy of the action plan for this goal currently has not, is not, or will not be implemented. Cite the rationale for this condition -- for example, is the condition due to time or resources, a change in priorities, or other circumstances which have emerged? (What conditions are impacting either current or future state?)**

We will be following the district timeline for benchmark testing. The testing will be completed during second semester.

Teachers will continue to work in their learning groups throughout the second semester and present out during the January 6 and May 5 Collaboration Day. Learning groups will continue to record minutes from each meeting. Teachers will continue to read the book *Whatever It Takes* and continue professional development on February 19 and April 23.

The critical thinking post-test will be given in the spring on April 27 and 28.

An update on the Action Plan will be given to PAC on February 4 and again May 6. This report will be posted on the Indian Hills website.

- 4. Which item(s) on last year's Student Shared Vision Survey was/were rated highest by your students?**

After looking at the percent of students who selected agree and strongly agree to each question, students at Indian Hills rated the item "I feel that at least one adult at my school knows me," as the highest with 85% in agreement. "I am successful in my school work" had 83% and "I feel that my school is helping to prepare me for my life after high school" had 80%.

- 5. Which item(s) on last year's Student Shared Vision Survey was/were rated lowest by your students?**

The Indian Hills' students rated, "I find joy in learning," the lowest on the vision survey with 55% in agreement and 14% in disagreement. This is the same category as last year.

- 6. What is your school doing this year to address the results of the Shared Vision Survey? (list 1-3 initiatives or programs)**

Every year Indian Hills looks at the Vision Survey results and make a list of ideas to improve results. Tiger Time has been the addition to the school day that has brought the biggest positive change and continues to bring positive change. The Tiger Time Committee meets a couple times each school year to organize and develop a calendar that meets the needs of students. One important day that is planned is "Team Time" where teams create team building activities for students

to get to know each other and the teachers. Another day called “Mindful Monday” is dedicated to critical thinking activities.

An area that is a concern is that 28% of the students report that they are not involved in school sponsored activities, clubs, or sports. The district and building have worked very hard to have after school activities for students. This year more students are involved in After the Bell. We have also increase intramural activity participation with various tournaments and have started a weight lifting program that meets every morning before school.

“Critical Thinking Strategies”

- Our goal is to discuss critical thinking and to identify some specific strategies to strengthen critical thinking in the classroom.
- *Classroom Instruction that Works*. Marzano, Pickering et al. ASCD. 2001
 - Cites “Identifying **Similarities and Differences**” as one of the most effective strategies to enhance critical thinking

-Research indicates that students with specific S/D instruction will gain up to 45% in achievement when compared to students who do not experience S/D instruction
(FYI: 34% improvement = 1 standard deviation)

-**Similarities/Comparing**: Venn diagrams, put into categories, T-Charts, graphic organizers...

-**Analogies**: the process of identifying relationships between pairs of concepts, in other words-identifying relationships between relationships

-**Metaphors**: the process of identifying a general or basic pattern in a specific topic and then finding another topic that appears to be quite different but has the same general pattern

-**Problem Solving**: Using the scientific approach to utilize multiple perspectives to uncover the issues related to a particular problem, design an intervention plan, and evaluate the outcome.

-**Cause/Effect**: The ability to perceive and anticipate the consequences of a given action or statement.

-**Questioning**: At many levels not just recall of facts. Use **Bloom’s Taxonomy**

-**Differentiation**: Teachers can differentiate process, product, and content according to student’s interest, readiness, and learning profile through a range of instructional and management strategies such as multiple intelligences, pre-testing, jigsaw, tiered lesson, tiered centers, tiered products, learning contracts, etc.

-**Inquiry Learning**: Use the five E’s of Inquiry Learning: Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate

-**Balanced Literacy**: Reading aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, modeled/shared writing, interactive writing, independent writing, speaking, and listening

-Middle School Philosophy: According to the NMSA developmentally responsible middle level schools provide curriculum that is challenging, integrative, and exploratory; multiple teaching and learning approaches; assessment and evaluation that promote learning; flexible organizational structures; programs and policies that foster health, wellness and safety; and comprehensive guidance and support services.

- **Technical Writing**

- Reducing metacognition to writing

- Research indicates that while having students explain, demonstrate or showing how to show how to solve a problem is effective.....having students write about how they solve a problem really puts them over the top.

Indian Hills Critical Thinking Test Summary 2009-10

7 th Grade Test Results			
Question	% Correct Pre-Test	% Correct Post-Test	% Gain or Loss
Reading #1	75.6		
Reading #2	96.3		
Reading #3	67.9		
Reading #4	87.6		
Reading #5	78.9		
Reading #6	92.0		
Reading #7	87.0		
Reading #8	54.8		
Reading #9	67.6		
Reading #10	81.3		
Analogy #1	78.2		
Analogy #2	82.2		
Analogy #3	60.4		
Analogy #4	46.6		
Analogy #5	79.2		
Analogy #6	71.5		
Analogy #7	83.2		
Analogy #8	91.9		
Analogy # 9	90.6		
Analogy #10	70.5		
Average	77.165		

*Source of reading questions: Jamestown Reading Inventory 7th grade level.

*Source of analogy questions: Houghton-Mifflin Analogies 7th grade edition.

8 th Grade Test Results			
Question	% Correct Pre-Test	% Correct Post-Test	% Gain or Loss
Reading #1	96.3		
Reading #2	96.0		
Reading #3	97.2		
Reading #4	74.8		
Reading #5	80.7		
Reading #6	76.4		
Reading #7	41.3		
Reading #8	51.9		
Reading #9	40.7		
Reading #10	75.5		
Analogy #1	60.9		
Analogy #2	68.0		
Analogy #3	85.4		
Analogy #4	64.9		
Analogy #5	59.6		
Analogy #6	87.3		
Analogy #7	89.1		
Analogy #8	62.1		
Analogy # 9	60.2		
Analogy #10	76.1		
Average	72.22		

*Source of reading questions: Jamestown Reading Inventory 8th grade level.

*Source of analogy questions: Houghton-Mifflin Analogies 8th grade edition.

8th ITBS Growth from school year 2008 to present school year 2009

Reading

	Vocabulary	Comprehension	Reading Total
8 th	10.0	10.0	10.2
7 th	9.2	8.8	9.1
Growth in N.G.E.	+0.8	+1.2	+1.1

Language

	Spelling	Capitalization	Punctuation	Usage & Expression	Lang. Total
8 th	10.1	12.7	12.8	11.3	11.6
7 th	8.9	9.5	10.3	9.7	9.6
Growth in N.G.E.	+1.2	+3.2	+2.5	+1.6	+2.0

Math

	Concepts/Estimation	Prob. Solving/Data Interpretation	Computation	Math Total
8 th	10.8	11.0	12.0	10.9
7 th	9.6	9.8	9.0	9.7
Growth in N.G.E.	+1.2	+1.2	+3.0	+1.2

Sources of Information

	Maps and Diagrams	Reference Materials	Total
8 th	11.0	10.6	10.8
7 th	10.1	9.6	9.9
Growth in N.G.E.	+0.9	+1.0	+0.9

	Core	Social Studies	Science	Composite
8 th	11.0	10.0	11.7	10.8
7 th	9.4	9.0	10.3	9.6
Growth in N.G.E.	+1.6	1.0	+1.4	1.2