



STATEWIDE SUPPORT FOR THE IOWA INSTRUCTIONAL FRAMEWORK:

STRENGTHENING COACHING FOR
CLASSROOM TEACHERS

FALL 2020

NIET

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING



INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years, teacher leaders, instructional coaches, curriculum leaders, and administrators from across Iowa have been participating in training on the Iowa Instructional Framework. To date, educators from 98 districts have participated, along with experts from the Iowa Department of Education, area education agencies, and institutions of higher education.

Three kinds of training are offered: a three-day foundational course, a two-day “deep dive” training on specific indicators of strong classroom practice, and an additional one-day “train the trainer” session for those who will be redelivering training to others. Regional trainings were offered in person during the 2019-20 school year, up until schools closed in March. Training then was moved online, providing a key source of support for districts working to transition teaching and learning to a virtual environment. Training can now be offered in person or virtually, depending on district needs.

The training sessions have been well received. Hundreds of educators participated in in-person sessions over the

course of 2019-20, and more than 300 have registered or attended virtual sessions in 2020-21. Educators report a range of benefits from the training on the Iowa Instructional Framework, including:

- Improved skills as an **observer of classroom teaching**, including identifying the instructional needs of teachers and their students
- Improved skills as an **instructional coach**, with the ability to provide detailed and actionable feedback for improvement
- Able to use the framework to **guide the professional learning community** process and focus more on **student outcomes**
- Improved ability to provide **strengths-based coaching for teachers** and build trust in the process of improvement
- Improved ability to **make coaching student-driven**





BACKGROUND

The Iowa Instructional Framework describes elements of strong classroom practice such as questioning, presenting instructional content, and academic feedback. It creates a shared understanding of what high-quality instruction looks like and a roadmap for improvement.

Training offered by the state helps teacher and school leaders to use the framework as a guide to support teachers in self-reflection and in determining the most effective next steps to improve practice and meet student needs. The shared common language establishes a powerful foundation for coaching and collaboration. Online resources, including training modules and videos of lessons and coaching sessions, provide access to continued learning.

A report from the American Institute for Research on the Teacher Leadership and Compensation (TLC) System highlighted the use of a research-based instructional framework like the Iowa Instructional Framework as a strategy employed by districts seeing the most success from their TLC System investments. This report further unpacks how the Iowa Instructional Framework is supporting educators across Iowa.



98 districts

have participated in the framework training to date



26 institutions of higher education

are accessing the framework and associated online resources

Takeaway #1: The Iowa Instructional Framework provides a research-based tool to support high-quality coaching by teacher leaders and administrators

Under the Teacher Leadership and Compensation (TLC) System, Iowa is funding teacher leadership positions in every school district. The TLC System supports districts to create teacher leadership roles focused on leading professional learning for their peers and providing individual classroom coaching – two strategies research shows can be highly effective in improving instructional practice and increasing student learning.

In 2019-20, Iowa identified the [Iowa Instructional Framework](#) as an optional resource for districts to support the work of teacher leaders and help teachers to improve their practice. The framework, which is aligned to Iowa's Teaching Standards and Criteria, provides a clear, detailed description of effective instructional strategies, including questioning, student engagement, and thinking and problem-solving. Through the Iowa's partnership with NIET, the state has offered high-quality training on the framework for free to districts across the state.

These investments are even more important in this moment. In the transition to different learning modalities due to COVID-19, the framework has provided a roadmap for advancing teaching and learning through daily uncertainties. Defining teacher leader roles and responsibilities, fostering student ownership of learning, and deepening coaching conversations have prepared educators for addressing real-time needs of teachers and students.

Takeaway #2: Training on the framework strengthens the quality and consistency of coaching, helping teachers improve classroom instruction and student learning

Clear descriptions and examples of increasingly effective practice is part of the framework's power in developing teachers. Teachers can use classroom observation feedback as a baseline for how their instruction is impacting students, and work with a coach to plan how they will continue to strengthen their practice. Three types of training sessions have supported this process over two years.



1. Foundational Training on the Iowa Instructional Framework

Participants receive three days of training to support their understanding and skill in using the instructional framework to analyze instruction and provide coaching support to teachers including specific recommendations for strengthening practices. The training includes numerous opportunities to practice observing and analyzing lessons using the instructional framework, and preparing to lead coaching sessions with teachers.

After the three-day training, participants complete an observation certification test online to ensure they understand the framework and how to use it to observe and support classroom teachers. Training is provided to new cohorts of districts each year. Districts decide how many participants to include, which typically is a group of 3-8 teacher leaders and administrators, depending on district size. The first year of training was offered in-person in regional locations across the state. This past year, the training was delivered virtually.

2. Training for Facilitators

A one-day training is offered to participants following the foundational training series. This “train the trainers” session is for educators who will be training others in their district or school in the use of the instructional framework.

This fall, there were 70 virtual participants representing 25 districts along with participants from Iowa Department of Education and the regional area education agencies. The “train the trainer” training follows a gradual release model; NIET expert trainers model the process, assist participants to develop a conceptual understanding of the training, and coach the trainers to deliver the training themselves.

3. Deep Dive Training on Elements of Practice

Based on feedback from educators, “deep dive” sessions have been offered to provide further guidance on key indicators of instructional practice. These two-day sessions provide educators the opportunity to go deeper into specific indicators from the framework and are delivered either in person or virtually. In the first year, sessions focused on four indicators: *Standards and Objectives, Activities and Materials, Thinking and Problem Solving, and Presenting Instructional Content*.

This year, the deep dive trainings were offered in November with a focus on the *Learning Environment* and *Social and Emotional Learning*. The sessions in January will support participants to build their skills in the areas of *Teacher Knowledge of Students* and *Effective*

Use of Student Work. These sessions help coaches to strengthen these critical skills across multiple modalities of learning.

Takeaway #3: Online resources, including training modules and videos of classroom lessons and coaching sessions, provide educators with access to continued learning

Following the training, continued learning for participants is supported through the EE PASS online portal. Materials and resources on the portal, including videos, enable participants to practice and deepen their skills in accurately observing lessons, categorizing evidence and analyzing the lesson, developing and delivering pre- and post-observation coaching conversations, and planning for professional learning.

Additionally, a participant handbook offers detailed explanations of the indicators of instructional practice, classroom examples, coaching questions, and tools to support the pre- and post-observation conference and coaching process. These tools and resources support leaders in selecting specific instructional indicators that meet the greatest needs of their classroom teachers and students in order to plan professional learning opportunities and coaching conversations, as well as advancing their own professional learning.

**70 educators
from 25 school
districts**

participated in virtual
“train the trainer”
sessions in October
2020, along with
participants from AEAs



**157 educators
from 34 school
districts**

are registered for
virtual “deep dive”
sessions in
November 2020 and
January 2021

Takeaway #4 : Feedback from participants is overwhelmingly positive

Educators from about 100 districts are using the framework and online resources to improve classroom instruction. Here are some of their reflections.



In a time of so much unknown, the Iowa Instructional Framework is an effective tool to guide many of the district leadership decisions as well as those at the building and classroom level. The framework is easily adaptable to online teaching and learning, as the domains and indicators do not change just because learning is happening online. Good teaching is the same no matter the modality.

– Dr. Cara Doak, student achievement coordinator at Grundy Center Middle/High School

Grundy Center Community Schools, East Central Iowa

The adoption of the Iowa Instructional Framework in Grundy Center Community Schools has helped educators establish a common language for instructional coaches and teachers, clarify expectations, and “get to the heart of the matter – helping our teachers grow,” said Dr. Cara Doak, student achievement coordinator at Grundy Center Middle/High School. “The framework makes the coaching conversation more intentional, thought-provoking, and reflective, which is beneficial to all teachers.”

Dr. Doak was among educators from across the state who attended NIET trainings on the framework earlier this year. Those lessons proved valuable during the unexpected events to come. “These sessions afforded

our district the opportunity to learn together and gain a deeper understanding of how the framework can positively impact students at all grade levels and subject areas,” Dr. Doak said. “We focused on how to support teachers as facilitators of knowledge acquisition. It demonstrated how teachers can place the cognitive load in the students’ hands.”

Dr. Doak credited the framework’s focus on exemplary teaching as an “integral element” of the district’s work. “In a time of so much unknown, the Iowa Instructional Framework is an effective tool to guide many of the district leadership decisions as well as those at the building and classroom level,” she said. “The framework is easily adaptable to online teaching and learning, as the domains and indicators do not change just because learning is happening online. Good teaching is the same no matter the modality.”

Urbandale Community School District, Central Iowa

Formalizing the roles of teacher leaders under the TLC program helped Urbandale Community School District create a network of coaches, according to Dr. Crista Carlile, director of teaching and learning. “The role of a coach is integral in our support of teacher growth,” said Dr. Carlile, who views the coaching model as the cornerstone of the district’s curriculum work and professional learning. “We are creating a culture where teaching is a team sport and a public act. The formal teacher leadership roles are the conduit to achieving this culture.”

Clearly defining and communicating the responsibilities of teacher leaders – whether school administrators, district instructional coaches, or curriculum facilitators – helped educators in these roles build relationships and trust with teachers. Implementing the Iowa Instructional Framework took their professional learning communities to an even deeper level.

With teacher leader roles and support structures in place, Urbandale was equipped to adapt to shifts in instructional focus after the pandemic hit – from prioritizing standards for learning to revisualizing learning in the fall to make up for lost time. With the district offering in-person, hybrid, and online options this year, teacher leaders have helped teachers to learn new technologies and adapt instructional practices for a variety of modalities.

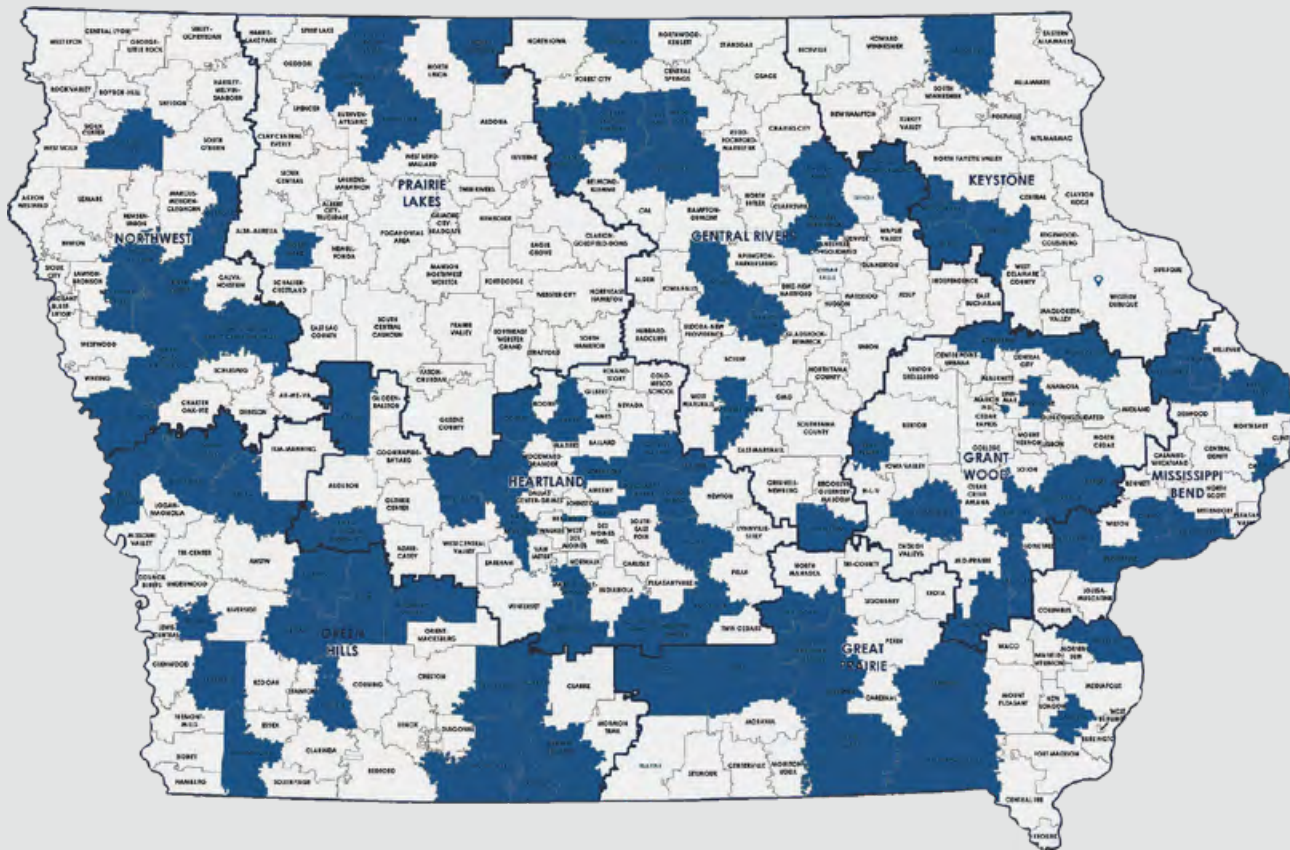


Takeaway #5: Framework training builds local capacity for high-quality coaching

Training in the use of the Iowa Instructional Framework allows teacher and school leaders to continuously push their practice to the next level, looking for new ways to deepen students' engagement and strengthen learning outcomes. These opportunities also allow educators to grow as leaders through coaching their peers and building schoolwide capacity – which benefits their students.

Districts Participating in the Framework Training

Nearly 100 districts across the state have benefited from training on the Iowa Instructional Framework (shaded on the map below in blue).



CONCLUSION

Teachers are facing unprecedented demands this year, teaching across multiple learning environments and new technology platforms, while at the same time responding to the social, emotional, and learning needs of each student. Whether they are leading in-person learning or virtual classrooms – or both – teachers need significantly more support in many areas. Leaders can help by providing practical strategies and support on how to engage all students in learning, identify and address student learning gaps, develop strong connections with parents, and build inclusive classroom and school cultures.

Training on the Iowa Instructional Framework is strengthening the skills of teacher leaders and administrators to respond to these needs. Working as a team, they are improving their ability to observe and analyze instruction, provide actionable feedback for improvement, and make coaching student-driven and

focused on student outcomes. Through the training, leaders and coaches are also building their capacity to plan and facilitate collaborative learning opportunities that directly address individual teacher needs and the needs of students in their classroom.

While these skills are critical this year, they build capacity for years of greater success. This opportunity to strengthen their own skills as instructional coaches helps administrators and teacher leaders to create an educator culture where colleagues believe in and foster each other's potential and work as a team to support student success. As districts across the state engage in this work, they are finding opportunities to learn from each other and strengthen the role of teacher leaders to ensure that every student has access to strong classroom teaching. This is work that has the opportunity to benefit Iowa's students for decades to come.

