

Indiana Student Achievement Institute

ELEMENTS OF HIGH ACHIEVING SCHOOLS

Since 1996, the Indiana Student Achievement Institute has helped over 250 schools in Indiana work through the Institute's school-improvement process, *Vision-to-Action*. This process is based on the foundational belief that a one-size-fits-all answer to raising student achievement and closing achievement gaps does not exist. Instead, schools and communities use the *Vision-to-Action* process to 1) create a culture of high expectations for all students, 2) establish a lofty vision and realistic goals, and 3) discover high-leverage strategies that are "right" for raising student achievement and closing achievement gaps in the local school and community.

InSAI's *Elements of High Achieving Schools* reflects the lessons learned not only from educational research, but also from InSAI's schools over the past ten years, especially the schools who have received InSAI's "Top Gainer" award for showing solid improvements in student achievement as measured by the Indiana Statewide Test of Educational Progress Plus (ISTEP+). The elements listed here are grouped by InSAI's seven force fields: 1) Expectations, 2) Curriculum, 3) Instruction, 4) Assessment, 5) Extra Help / Time, 6) Guidance, and 7) Environment.

It is important to note that schools demonstrating one or a few elements are not as likely to be high achieving. For example, a school might have wonderful instructional practices with fully engaged students. However, if that school is teaching third grade content to their sixth grade students, high achievement will not occur. Conversely, a school may be implementing a world-class curriculum, but high achievement will not occur if the students are not engaged. Therefore, schools should consider the degree to which they implement each of the Elements of High Achieving Schools listed in this document.

1. EXPECTATIONS

1. Students, faculty, parents, and the community share a common vision for student achievement that:
 - a. Is based on a common set of core convictions that support high student achievement
 - b. Includes a detailed description of adult attitudes and behaviors
 - c. Includes a detailed description of student attitudes and behaviors
 - d. Includes the ideal student achievement data

2. All students are surrounded by adults who:
 - a. Believe all students are able to learn
 - b. Expect all students to learn rigorous academic content
 - c. Expect all students to continue their education after high school
 - d. Believe that schools are capable of teaching a rigorous curriculum to all students
 - e. Accept no excuses
 - f. Are willing to do 'whatever it takes' to help all students learn at a rigorous level

3. Each student, faculty member, parent, and the community member has a personal rationale for raising student achievement. For example:
 - a. A personal conviction that all students deserve to learn at a rigorous level regardless of ethnicity, income level, gender, learning style, etc.
 - b. A personal commitment to help all students become productive members of a global economy.

4. Adult expectations are concretely and clearly described in measurable terms through:
 - a. Graduation requirements that reflect high expectations
 - b. Academic standards for each grade level or course
 - c. Assignment and report card grades that reflect mastery of academic standards

5. Adult expectations for academic success are conveyed to students through:
 - a. Parent involvement in school activities and daily discussions about class work
 - b. Guidance relationships (via community mentoring programs, advisor-advisee programs) involving caring and trained adults who meet individually with students on a regular basis for the purpose of conveying high expectations and advising students as they progress along the pathway to their academic and career goals.
 - c. Annual educational goals written by the student in partnership with his or her teacher(s), parent(s) or guardian, and other significant adults, that are monitored on a regular basis.

2. CURRICULUM

1. A sound curriculum:
 - a. Includes both content and process knowledge
 - b. Aligns with world-class standards such as the Indiana Academic Standards
 - c. Enables students to:
 - succeed at the next educational level
 - become productive members of a global economy
 - become responsible citizens
 - d. Coordinates between:
 - classrooms
 - grade levels
 - building levels
 - disciplines

3. INSTRUCTION

1. Sound instructional practices:
 - a. Align with specified content standards
 - b. Engage students in learning by
 - Being responsive to current student knowledge and skill level based on frequent classroom assessments
 - Addressing learning styles, readiness for learning, and student interests
 - Addressing differences in culture
 - Requiring students to be active learners (with teachers as academic coaches)
 - Incorporating technology as a learning tool
 - c. Show connections between multiple disciplines and the real world by
 - Including instruction both at the school site and at the work site
 - Including collaborative teaching between teachers and community members
 - d. Provide extra help and adequate time for mastery
 - e. Are delivered by teachers who:
 - are deeply committed to all students learning
 - are passionate about what they teach
 - accept “no excuses” for students not learning
 - are highly qualified both instructional practices and content area(s)
 - f. Include assignments that:
 - Align with the Indiana Academic Standards
 - Engage the students
 - Compel students to “stick with it”
 - Challenge students enough to result in a sense of satisfaction when finished
 - Require students to solve problems
 - Require applications between disciplines
 - Require applications to real-life scenarios
 - Address that which motivates students

4. ASSESSMENT

1. Sound classroom assessments:
 - a. Align with world-class standards such as the Indiana Academic Standards
 - b. Require students to use content and skills to solve real-world problems
 - c. Provide multiple methods for showing mastery
 - d. Provide multiple chances for showing mastery
 - e. Use an evaluation rubric

2. Students use the results of classroom assessments to:
 - a. Evaluate their learning strategies
 - b. Identify standards (content and/or skills) that they have not yet mastered
 - c. Develop or refine their personal learning plan

3. Teachers use the results of classroom assessments to:
 - a. Evaluate their teaching strategies
 - b. Identify standards (content and/or skills) that the students have not yet mastered
 - c. Identify students that did not master the standards
 - d. Develop plans (as appropriate) for re-teaching standards as:
 - classroom lessons for all students
 - individual remediation for students as needed

5. EXTRA HELP / TIME

1. Sound extra help initiatives:

- a. Coordinate with classroom instruction
- b. Are provided by teachers, students, and community members
- c. Occur during and outside the school day
 - In-School Examples:
 - Remedial activities in the classroom for students who have not yet mastered content while other students participate in enrichment activities
 - “Double dose” of difficult high school content by allowing students to take a course twice during the school day (e.g. Algebra or Chemistry)
 - Out-of-School Examples:
 - After school homework clubs
 - Community tutoring program (Boys Club, faith organization, etc.)
- d. Include group and individual activities
- e. Provide structure for learning
- f. Meet individual student needs

2. Sound extra time initiatives:

- a. Allow students to learn at their own rates without penalty
 - Example:
 - Algebra taken over four semesters
 - Opportunity to take classroom work home for completion (provided students have used their classroom time wisely)

6. STUDENT GUIDANCE

1. Sound guidance curriculum programs:
 - a. Are developed with input from students, teachers, families, and community members.
 - b. Include content that will help the students become:
 - successful students
 - responsible citizens
 - productive members of a global economy
 - c. Include student standards and indicators in the areas of
 - academic development
 - career development
 - personal-social development
 - d. Support the school's mission statement, vision statement, and academic achievement goals
 - e. Include guidance activities that
 - Align with the guidance standards and indicators
 - Are delivered by the entire faculty, parents, and appropriate community members
 - Are delivered using sound instruction methods (see Instruction Force Field above)
 - f. Are accountable for:
 - Student achievement (in conjunction with all other school programs)
 - Targeted student choices (e.g., attendance, discipline, course enrollment)
 - Targeted student guidance standards and indicators
 - g. Are evaluated on a regular basis.

2. Sound guidance relationships:
 - a. Are caring relationships between a student and an adult who knows the student, values education, understands career development and educational planning, and can negotiate the educational system.
 - b. Include meetings between the student and his or her mentor/advisor on a regular basis.
 - c. Are implemented by a variety of people including teacher-advisors, community mentors, coaches, club sponsors, "adopted" grandparents, and parents.
 - d. Are based on a written plan including an annual calendar, guidance activities, and clear instructions for the mentor/advisor
 - e. Provide professional development for the adults who serve as mentors or advisors including training in the areas of the guidance curriculum, active listening, the limits of confidentiality, and referral procedures
 - f. Are accountable for:
 - Student achievement (in conjunction with all other school programs)
 - Targeted student choices (e.g., attendance, discipline, course enrollment)
 - Targeted student guidance standards and indicators
 - g. Are evaluated on a regular basis

7. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

1. Sound educational policies and procedures:
 - a. Support the mastery of a rigorous curriculum for all students
 - b. Support instructional strategies that engage all students in high-level, real-world problem solving
 - c. Require student progress be assessed on a regular basis against standards
 - d. Enable students to have extra time/help to master challenging content as needed (without penalty)
 - e. Require frequent notification to parents concerning student progress
 - f. Reflect attendance and punctuality expectations of the business and industry community
 - g. Clearly state and communicate behavior expectations and consequences to all students and parents
 - h. Establish behavior consequences that are instructional, issued on a continuum, are consistently enforced, and only remove students from a classroom when a student's learning or safety is at risk
2. Sound family involvement in schools:
 - a. Involves family members in a variety of school programs (mentoring, tutoring, curriculum review)
 - b. Involves family members in school governance
 - c. Enables family members to provide learning experiences at home
 - d. Provides two-way communication between school and family members
 - e. Encourages family members to talk to their children about school on a daily basis
 - f. Encourages family members to have high expectations for all students
3. Sound community involvement:
 - a. Involves community members in a variety of school programs (mentoring, tutoring, co-teaching, curriculum review)
 - b. Involves community members in school governance
 - c. Creates partnerships between the school and the community for the purpose of providing educational experiences for students.
 - d. Provides community events in the school building
 - e. Encourages community members to have high community expectations for all students
4. Sound instructional resources include:
 - a. Technology standards for students and teachers
 - b. Resources that are available to the students and community after school hours
 - c. Adequate time, space, and resources for student projects
 - d. Adequate time for teacher research, professional development, planning, and assessment
5. Sound student assistance activities (counseling, social work, psychological services):
 - a. Include staff development on referral options, child abuse procedures, and crisis response plans
 - b. Provide a continuum of services to help students address problems that interfere with learning
 - c. Adhere to a professional code of ethics
6. Sound leadership:
 - a. Enables all educators to be leaders and learners
 - b. Includes all administrators, teachers, students, counselors, parents, and community members in shared decision-making responsibilities
 - c. Ensures that day-to-day decisions are consistent with the school's vision and goals
 - d. Encourages all educators to be risk-takers
 - e. Ensures that all opinions are valued and that resistance is embraced
 - f. Demonstrates a tireless commitment to raising student achievement
 - g. Provides a structured system for open communications
7. Sound profession development activities:
 - a. Support the strategies in the local School Improvement Plan
 - b. Are required for all teachers, counselors, administrators, and paraprofessionals on a regular basis
 - c. Are provided by local educators who serve as "local experts" in various topics
 - d. Include a sequence of activities including information sharing, skill building, feedback/support, and refinement.
 - e. Are embedded during the school day
 - f. Include an evaluation

