



## College of Education

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

## Research Highlights of Current Faculty Projects

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### Evaluation of the Implementation of Illinois Learning Standards (ILS)

Seeking to raise student performance in public schools on a large scale, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) first implemented the Illinois Learning Standards (ILS) in 1998-99. The ILS are a set of statements which define a core of essential knowledge and skills that all Illinois students enrolled in public schools are expected to know and be able to do. In January 1999, University of Illinois researchers Lizanne DeStefano and Nona Prestine began a four-year longitudinal evaluation of ILS implementation in schools/districts across Illinois, seeking to 1) assess the extent to which local districts are implementing ILS; 2) identify factors which enhance or inhibit implementation; and 3) investigate the relationship between ILS implementation and student achievement. The two research components include: a survey of Illinois practitioners (teachers, principals, and superintendents) and a set of intensive case studies with individual interviews and focus groups among practitioners and district personnel at selected schools within four diverse districts representing a cross-section of Illinois. The evaluators, exploring seven dimensions of implementation across a five-level scale, completed Year Two of the study in June 2000.

#### What this research can tell us:

Comparing results from the first year, DeStefano & Prestine detected an increase in implementation—a developing realization that the present system must change for all students to learn. Teachers and administrators at most schools described Level Two activity—awareness and exploration of an ILS-led system. They were beginning to consider implementation strategies; ILS introduction to parents and community members; and ILS in professional development, curriculum development, and textbook choice. A small but increasing number of schools showed Level Three activities—transition to an ILS-led system—with greater professional development surrounding ILS, specific timelines and policies for ILS implementation, and significant district level efforts to align the curriculum with ILS. Most of these teachers did not yet report changes in instruction and student learning. Parents, school boards, and the community reportedly had little awareness and understanding of the ILS and limited access to ILS-related information and educational opportunities. Building administrators and superintendents tended to rate ILS implementation at higher levels than teachers and varied greatly in knowledge and understanding of what implementation should entail. Unless enlightened and knowledgeable administrators lead and share in standards implementation, schools/districts are unlikely to change current practices significantly. Although ILS awareness and acceptance is growing, Illinois Scholastic Achievement Test (ISAT) scores remained the primary concern for schools and districts. To take ILS implementation activity beyond a superficial altering of the curriculum, teachers and administrators must recognize the link between the implementation of learning standards and raising ISAT scores. Through Years Three and Four, the researchers will examine the relationship of ILS implementation to student performance on the ISAT.

#### What this research means for Illinois public education:

Based on the first two years' findings, the researchers have recommended several actions to the state:

- ⇒ Direct state policy attention and resources toward improving the capacity of districts to manage instructional improvements;
- ⇒ Facilitate the development of implementation specifics at the district, school, and classroom levels;
- ⇒ Pay attention to teacher talk that implements ILS in lesson design, student work evaluation, and feedback to students and parents; highlight examples of student work to illustrate the standards;
- ⇒ Model stakeholder and community involvement: create community education partnerships, conduct public events, develop a prominent role for parent organizations, and identify districts with model web sites or other ways to disseminate information and ideas; and
- ⇒ Develop a role for higher education in standards implementation that would lead to ILS-based college admissions standards/procedures encompassing undergraduate admissions and teacher and administrator preparation and recertification.

**To learn more about this research:** DeStefano, L., & Prestine, N. (2000). *Evaluation of the implementation of Illinois Learning Standards: Year two report*. Report to the Illinois State Board of Education. University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Available: <http://www.isbe.state.il.us/ils/ILSReport.htm>.

#### We invite your response...

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