

Illinois Learning Standards Implementation Study: Abstract

Federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation continues to highlight the importance of state learning standards to articulate what students should know and be able to do. Standards-led reform has become standard operating procedure for states. Current research-based literature reinforces the potential of learning standards to positively affect teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Linn, 2003; Thomas, 2003). Since the development of Illinois Learning Standards (ILS), the state of Illinois has focused upon supporting implementation of the standards in every classroom serving children from birth through grade 12. A previous study conducted on implementation of the ILS found that in a majority of districts, implementation was moderate, a Transitional Level 3 on a 5-level scale and characterized by an increased focus on and overall awareness of the importance of implementation (DeStefano & Prestine, 2002). Based upon these findings, the state has provided guidance and support to districts to further implementation.

The importance of continuing to study the extent of ILS implementation is clear. Allowing programs to mature in order to assess true effects of program implementation has been noted in the literature (Campbell, 1984). It is particularly timely in light of the heightened importance of standards under NCLB to continue to evaluate progress schools have or have not made in implementing ILS and the relationship between ILS implementation and student performance.

The project is conceptualized as a management-oriented, external evaluation designed to summatively evaluate ILS implementation and determine the degree to which supplemental resources have assisted school districts in increasing standards implementation to the highest levels (Weiss, 1998) delineated by ISBE-developed Rubrics for a Standards Implementation System (ISBE, 2002). Our design is organized around three main objectives: (1) to work collaboratively with ISBE staff and practitioners throughout the evaluation; (2) to collect, analyze, and interpret information to answer the evaluation questions cited in the RFP and others deemed critical by the client; and (3) to report to all identified audiences, on a timely basis, the evaluation status and findings. These objectives build upon the previous study to both assist in conveying longitudinal trends and to continue to meet the informational needs of the client and the evaluation team.

The evaluation is designed to produce information about standards implementation and impact at the state level, as well as provide insight into how the ILS have influenced classroom practice, professional development, and other dimensions of schooling. To achieve this goal, we will utilize both qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods. The quantitative component, intended to determine the nature and extent of ILS implementation across the state, employs a statewide survey; the qualitative portion, designed to provide insight into which implementation strategies are working best to increase student achievement, relies on two methodologies: mini and intensive case studies. Both components will be guided by a conceptual framework: the ISBE-developed Rubrics for a Standards Implementation System, which apply five levels of increasing implementation across seven dimensions of schooling (DeStefano & Prestine, 2002).

Finally, our reporting strategy is to maximize the usefulness of the plethora of rich data we collect. Thus, we will share information with the client through both formal and informal mechanisms (e.g., quarterly and annual reports to ISBE; research briefs to districts; and professional presentations). Because sharing information with a larger public audience is important, we include plans, with ISBE approval, for a webpage, press releases, and other formats useful for disseminating information about ILS implementation to the public and other key constituents.

Conceptual Framework

The previous evaluation of ILS implementation employed a framework developed by the Education Commission of the States (1996) and adapted it to the Illinois context during the previous evaluation (DeStefano & Prestine, 1999). This framework, presented below in Table 1, describes five stages or levels of increasing implementation.

Table 1. Stages of Implementation of Standards-Led Education

<u>Stage of Development</u>	<u>Description</u>
Maintenance of a Non-Standards-Led System	Education system is focused on teaching rather than learning. Improvements are made to what is already being done in hopes of getting more efficiency out of the existing system.
Awareness and Exploration of a Standards-Led System	People realize that incremental improvements won't improve learning for all students, and they begin to explore standards as a base for instruction and measuring student learning. Community dialogue, exploration of new approaches, and deepening understanding of what it will take to implement standards are characteristic of this stage.
Transition to a Standards-Led System	There is widespread community agreement to move to a standards-led system. Evidence has been collected that standards will raise student achievement. Existing programs and practices are evaluated in terms of their support for standards, and new practices and programs are put into place. The system (including curriculum, assessment professional development, and higher education) begins to be realigned to support the achievement of high standards by all students.
Emerging New Infrastructure to Support a Standards-Led System	The focus is on creating ongoing support mechanisms for a standards-led system. This can include aligning all policy and practice; using accountability data for continuous improvement and resource allocation; aligning teacher and undergraduate education to support achievement standards, and aligning the work of external assistance providers and resources available in the system.
Predominance of a Standards-Led System	The on-going support mechanisms created in the previous stage are in place. A key characteristic of this stage is "high involvement planning and review of system results. This planning and review process provides the mechanism for an evolving vision and improvement of education that helps all students achieve high standards.

The stages delineated in this framework remain relevant in evaluating the extent to which the ILS have been implemented since the previous study. DeStefano and Prestine (1999) further adapted the conceptual framework by delineating seven dimensions of standards implementation:

- I. Affective Responses
- II. District Infrastructure
- III. Professional Development
- IV. Curriculum Development
- V. Instruction
- VI. Student Learning and Assessment
- VII. Community Awareness

Based on the five stages and seven dimensions of implementation, ISBE developed the Rubrics for Standards Implementation System (2004). These rubrics were designed to define what the educational community (districts, schools, educators, students, and parents) and surrounding community and groups should *know* and *be able to do* in order to become standards aligned. These rubrics form the conceptual framework of this evaluation. They will guide all aspects of the evaluation (including survey items and questions for qualitative instruments) and will allow for multi-method analysis and consistency of longitudinal data collected during the previous evaluation and study of current ILS implementation resources.

Evaluation Questions

Both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the evaluation will focus on providing answers to the evaluation questions listed in the RFP and relate clearly to the dimensions in the conceptual framework. Table 2 below lists the questions and the dimensions to which they relate.

Table 2. Evaluation Questions and the Dimensions of ILS Implementation

Evaluation Question	Dimension(s)
1. To what extent are local practitioners informed of the ILS and other ILS-related resources (Rubrics for Standards Implementation System Performance Descriptors, Classroom Assessments and Student Exemplars; The Illinois Assessment Frameworks (IAF); English Language Learner Standards; Illinois Alternate Content Standards, Early Childhood Standards; Illinois Birth to 3 Program Standards; and Standards-Aligned Classroom Initiative)?	I. Affective Responses II. Community Awareness
2. To what extent do local practitioners perceive that local school boards, parents, businesses, community groups, ISBE, Regional Offices of Education, institutions of higher education, and business and community groups are helping to implement the Illinois Learning Standards?	I. Affective Responses VII. Community Awareness
3. What are local administrators and teachers doing to facilitate implementation of the ILS? How have they changed their roles as a result of implementing ILS?	II. District Infrastructure III. Professional Development IV. Curriculum Development V. Instruction VI. Student Learning and Assessment
4. What factors are facilitating or inhibiting learning-standards implementation and students' achievement of the ILS?	All Dimensions
5. How have curricula changed as a result of implementing the Illinois Learning Standards?	IV. Curriculum Development V. Instruction
6. How have teaching and learning changed as a result of implementing the Illinois Learning Standards?	V. Instruction VI. Student Learning and Assessment
7. How has professional development changed as a result of implementing the Illinois Learning Standards?	III. Professional Development
8. How have assessment processes changed as a result of implementing the Illinois Learning Standards?	VI. Student Learning and Assessment
9. What are the relationships between the implementation strategies and student achievement of the Illinois Learning Standards?	All Dimensions