

Iowa Department of Education



2013-2014 Conversation Starters

Site Visits for Public Districts



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BOARD OF EDUCATION 2013-2014

This interview should include less than a quorum of board members unless notice of the meeting has been properly published.

1. Please introduce yourself by stating your name and number of years you have served on the Board of Education and respond to this question: How does the board maintain focus on the district's current vision, mission, and goals?
2. How is the district preparing students to be college and career ready?
(If needed, prompt with: employability skills, working in a diverse environment, life-long learning skills, and financial, health, civic, and technology literacy)
3. What do your data show about the achievement of **ALL** students? Positive changes? Changes still needed? Or have changes been made as a result?
(If needed, prompt with: Free/Reduced, Racial/Ethnic, ESL, Gifted/Talented, etc)
4. How does the school board communicate important district information to the public?
(If needed, prompt with: finances, student achievement, etc.)
5. Describe the process and materials used to evaluate the Superintendent.
6. How is this process of evaluating the Superintendent benefiting the superintendent and the board?
7. In what ways does the school board seek input? Please provide examples.
(If needed, prompt: Administrators, teachers, parents, community)
8. Who is the equity coordinator and what have they done in the past five years to ensure equity in programs and employment?
9. How is the board kept informed of the district's professional development focus and results? What professional development has the board engaged in over the past year?
10. What is the board's role in helping the district meet its long-range goals?
11. Please share what you believe to be your district's:
 - Accomplishments since the last site visit (5 years ago)
 - Obstacles
 - Changes hoped to be achieved in the next five years

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION (CTE) TEACHERS 2013-2014

1. Please introduce yourself by stating your name, program area, and respond to the following question: What are the strengths of the program area you represent?
2. Please share a few examples of how your program is integrating the nine (9) components of “All Aspects of an Industry” into your curriculum. The components include:
 - Planning
 - Management
 - Finance
 - Technical Skills
 - Principles of Technology
 - Labor Issues
 - Community Issues
 - Health and Safety
 - Personal Work Habits
3. Would all students in your program say they feel safe in the classroom, *safe with their peers*, and safe in their school? Why or why not?
4. How do you ensure the safety of students in your shop/lab? Describe how teaching and learning of safety components is addressed in your curriculum and program.
5. Give examples of how academic concepts are integrated into career and technical courses. What opportunities do you have to collaborate with academic teachers to develop authentic examples of these concepts for use in academic courses?
6. How are you supported in participating in building, district, and CTE content-related professional development?
7. How are you progressing toward meeting the six (6) Program of Study criteria in each of your programs?
8. Tell us about the CTE Advisory committee or council’s involvement with CTE programs. Include how the committee assists in addressing Program of Study requirements such as identifying standards and benchmarks, critical competencies, technical skill attainment assessments, and proficiency level.
9. Explain how you assist in gathering/reporting/compiling CTE data for reporting purposes (i.e., data reported in Plus CTE). Do you have opportunity to review DE consultants’ feedback? How are end-of-year performance data used in the continuous improvement of your program?

10. Briefly describe the district's CTE program review process.
11. When was a formal program review last completed for your area?
12. How have the findings from recent program reviews impacted progress or change in the CTE programs?

CTE ADVISORY 2013-2014

1. Introduce yourself by stating your name and representation and respond to this question: What do you view as strengths of the district's CTE programs?
2. Is the CTE Advisory committee a regional advisory committee or a local advisory committee? What is your understanding of the role and responsibilities of this committee?
3. What data have you seen regarding the CTE programs and how are these data being used?
4. Describe your involvement in addressing the components required in a CTE Program of Study

Reviewing Standards and Benchmarks

Identifying critical competencies

Reviewing course sequence plans

Reviewing/approving Technical Skill Assessment Instruments

Determining Proficiency on Assessments

Determining who is tested

5. What changes do you think would be beneficial for the district's CTE programs?

CURRICULUM DIRECTOR 2013-2014

1. What is your involvement in the design, implementation, and evaluation of professional development?
2. How does the district ensure students with diverse learning needs, including preschoolers, have access to the general education curriculum? (G/T, At-Risk, alternative setting, ELL)
3. How do you ensure all district personnel are working toward the goals noted in the district's/school's C-Plan?
4. What is the established process for peer review? What impact has it had on student learning?
5. As a district, how are student learning data used systemically to improve teaching and student learning?
6. Describe the opportunities teachers have for district and building level conversations about curriculum, including implementation of the Iowa Core.
7. Please share what changes you hope your district will achieve in the next five years.

EQUITY COORDINATOR 2013-2014

The equity coordinator may be a part of the superintendent interview or part of the building principals' interview(s), as appropriate.

1. How does the district notify staff, students, and parents about your role as Equity Coordinator?
2. How do students, parents, and staff get information about the district's procedure for processing grievances related to the non-discrimination and harassment policies?
3. What equity / diversity-related issues / grievances have you dealt with in the past year?
4. What are you doing to ensure that students and staff are culturally competent?
5. What have you learned from your most recent analysis of building, program, and course enrollment data by racial/ethnic background, gender, and disability?

GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS 2013-2014
PreK-12

PreK-12 Teachers (group of 10-12 PreK-12 general education teachers): This interview should contain a group of 10-12 PreK through grade 12 teachers' representative of grade levels and content areas. The group should have a balanced representation of gender and include teachers of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds when possible. District enrollment will determine the number of PreK – 12 teacher interviews to be conducted.

1. Please introduce yourself by stating your name, grade level or content area, and respond to this question: How do your professional practices align with the vision, mission, and goals of the district?
2. How are you encouraged and supported to take on leadership roles in your district and building?
3. Please share how teachers are evaluated in the district. What impact does the evaluation have on instructional practices?
4. Please describe the opportunities of collaboration among:
 - Colleagues (36 hours)
 - Students
 - Parents
 - Community
5. What does the district do to ensure a safe learning and social environment for **ALL** students?
6. To what degree is bullying/harassment occurring in your school and what is being done to address these occurrences?
7. What tools and technology are available in your school and how are they used to enhance instruction and student learning?
8. What is the established process for peer review? What impact has it had on student learning?
9. Describe the district's progress toward implementing the Iowa Core.
10. How are teachers involved in determining the focus of professional development?
11. How has the district's professional development helped to improve teaching and learning?

12. What do your data show about the achievement of **ALL** students? What changes in achievement have occurred?
13. What steps has the district taken to address achievement gaps?
14. How do teachers adjust their classroom instruction to meet individual student learning needs?
15. *NCLB required question:* Describe the process used to maintain security of the Iowa Assessments test materials prior to, during, and after test administration.
16. Please share what changes you hope your district will achieve in the next five years.

HIGH SCHOOL / MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS 2013-2014

These are two separate interviews:

1. Please introduce yourself by stating your name and grade and respond to this question:
What tools and technology are available in this school and how do teachers and students use the technology?
2. Describe the opportunities students have to develop and use leadership skills and provide input to school staff.
3. Describe an effective strategy teachers are using to help you learn.
4. How do you know if you are learning?
5. How do your teachers know if you are learning?
6. What does your school do to help **ALL** students be successful and learn?
7. In what ways do teachers make the connection between the real world and what you're learning in the classroom?
8. How is the school preparing students for the next level of education and/or the workforce/careers?
9. Sometimes in all schools, some students are teased (harassed). In your personal opinion, to what degree is that happening in your own school? (Above average, average, below average)
10. What actions do students take if they are bullied or harassed or see that happening to someone else?
11. Please share what academic and non-academic (such as extra-curricular, climate, culture or other) changes you hope your district/school will achieve in the next five years.

INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT STAFF 2013-14

This interview is with paraprofessionals (e.g., Special Education and Title I).

1. Please introduce yourself by stating your name and assignment and describe the collaboration that occurs among yourselves and the classroom teachers with whom you work.
2. Describe the instructional duties assigned to you by your supervising teacher. (If not already described in response to question #1)
3. How are you informed of your job role and responsibilities?
4. What training have you had to prepare you for your assignments?
5. Do you feel you need additional supports to do your job well?
6. For those of you assigned as a one-to-one paraeducator for a student, how have you been trained to decrease student dependency on your assistance?
7. What training and support have you received to prepare you for addressing student behavior and school climate issues, including bullying and harassment?
8. What is your role when the supervising teacher is out of the classroom for other assignments (e.g., to co-teach in a classroom)?
9. Describe the evaluation process for paraeducators?
10. Please share what changes you hope your district will achieve in the next five years.

LEARNING SUPPORTS STAFF 2013-2014

PreK-12 Learning Supports Staff-(Gifted and Talented, Media, ESL, Title I, Technology) - This interview should include staff members that coordinate programs and/or provide services PreK-12. Included should be the coordinators for Gifted and Talented, Media, ESL, Title I, and Technology.

PreK-12 Learning Supports Staff - (Guidance, At-Risk, Alternative Program/School, School Nurse) - This interview should include staff members that coordinate programs and/or provide services PreK-12. Included should be the coordinators for Guidance, At-Risk, and Alternative Program/School, and School Nurse.

1. Please introduce yourself by stating your name and the program you represent and **briefly** share what you believe to be a strength of your program.
2. Please describe the components of the program you represent, including:
 - identification criteria
 - program components
 - transition supports
 - exit criteria
3. What data points are used to determine program effectiveness (academic/non-academic) and what is being learned from these data?
4. Please describe the opportunities you have for collaboration among colleagues, students, parents, and community.
5. What does the district do to create and sustain a safe learning and social environment for all students? In what ways does your program contribute to a positive school climate for all students?
6. What are the implications of Iowa Core implementation for your program and how are you aligning your program to the Iowa Core?
7. How does professional development provided within or outside the district enhance your work with students and staff?
8. Please share what changes you hope your district will achieve in the next five years.

PARENTS / GUARDIANS 2013-2014

PreK-12

This group should reflect the PreK-12 system with the same demographic distribution as that for the student interviews (e.g., academic performance, college and non-college aspirations, gender, and race/ethnicity). Interviewees in this group should also be selected from parents of students who are receiving services through programs such as Special Education, At-Risk, English as a Second Language, Gifted and Talented, Title I, and Alternative School / Program. District enrollment will determine the number of PreK-12 parent/guardian interviews to be conducted.

1. Please introduce yourself by stating your name, telling us about your children in school, and respond to this question: What do you think the district, or your child's school, does well?
2. How does the district/school involve parents/guardians as partners in their child's education?
3. How do you know how your child is progressing in school?
4. How does the district accommodate students with special learning needs in the regular education classroom (for example: students with IEP's, talented and gifted, and At-Risk)?
5. How does the district support learning experiences for children prior to kindergarten?
6. Describe the transition process that takes place as students move from level to level (Preschool to elementary, elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, high school to post-secondary, etc.)
7. Are there any obstacles that stand in the way of your child's learning?
8. How does the district involve community members?
9. What does your school/district do to ensure student safety?
10. How are parents' concerns addressed and suggestions used?

11. Please share what changes you hope your district will achieve in the next five years.

PRINCIPALS 2013-2014

PreK-12

Elementary, middle school, high school, and alternative school principals may be interviewed as a group or individually at a designated site within the district. Follow-up interviews may be conducted with individual principals, if necessary. In large districts, a representative sample group of administrators may be selected for the interview. The district's equity coordinator may be a part of this interview or part of the superintendent / curriculum director interview, as appropriate.

1. How do you communicate the district's vision, mission, and goals to staff, students, and parents?
2. In what ways do principals seek and use input from staff, students, parents, and the community? Were any actions taken as a result of this input?
3. Explain the **principal evaluation** process used in the district. How has it led to positive changes in instruction and student achievement?
4. Explain the **teacher evaluation** process used in the district. How has it led to positive changes in instruction and student achievement?
5. How do principals promote a school-wide environment that is safe, healthy, inclusive, and caring for all students, staff, and families?
6. What process is in place for people to report a homeless child, youth, or family to the district? Does the district have a formal means of recording homelessness as it occurs throughout the year?
7. What are the processes used by the district and buildings to collect and analyze formative and summative data regarding student achievement and program results? How is data analysis then used to plan next steps?
8. How does the district determine the focus of professional development (including use of data, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating professional development)?
9. What is the established process for peer review? What impact has it had on student learning?
10. How does professional development prepare all staff to address specific needs of students who have IEPs, are at-risk, potential dropouts, ELL, and/or gifted and talented?
11. Please tell us about the progress the district is making toward implementation of the Iowa Core.

12. **NCLB required question:** Describe the process used to maintain security of the Iowa Assessments test materials prior to, during, and after test administration.

13. **Special Education Monitoring Question:** How are decisions made about IEP students' placement in classes?

14. **Special Education Monitoring Question:** In what ways are enrollment patterns in classes monitored in regard to students with IEPs, particularly at the secondary level?

15. **Title IIA Required Question:** What steps does the district employ to ensure that poor and minority students are not taught at higher rates than other students by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers?

16. Please share what changes you hope your district/school will achieve in the next five years.

SCHOOL ADVISORY COMMITTEES 2013-2014

This interview will include representatives from the district's School Improvement Advisory Committee (SIAC)

1. Please introduce yourself by stating your name and representation. What is your understanding of the role and responsibilities of this committee?
2. What do you view as the strength of this committee?
3. What kind of information/data do you receive as a SIAC member, (probe for disaggregated data)? What does the SIAC do with the information?
4. What training have you received in understanding and using data?
5. In the recent past, what are some of the recommendations this committee has made to the board of education, in the required areas of:
 - Annual improvement goals;
 - Major educational needs;
 - Student learning goals;
 - Long-range goals that include, but are not limited to, the state indicators that address reading, mathematics, and science achievement; and
 - Harassment or bullying prevention goals, programs, training, and other initiatives.
6. Were the recommendations approved, and what has been the result?
7. Please tell us how the school and community work together, including sharing resources.
8. Please share what you believe to be your district's:
 - Accomplishments since the last site visit (5 years ago)
 - Obstacles
 - Changes hoped to be achieved in the next five years

SPECIAL EDUCATION DIRECTOR/COORDINATOR 2013-2014

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION CADRE TEAM MEMBER

Note to District Special Education Director/Coordinator: Please be familiar with, and bring to the interview, the following:

- All special education Corrective Action/Action Plans (e.g., I-STAR, Part B Corrective Action Plan, CEIS/Disproportionality, Suspension/Expulsion, etc.)
- District special education data profile
- District Developed Service Delivery Plan

Achievement Gap

1. What is the district's plan for closing any gaps between student with IEPs and general education students?
2. How has the district determined the root cause of its gaps and what are its findings?
3. If there are no gaps, how has the district achieved or maintained this?

Corrective Action Plan

4. In what areas (if any) was your district found to be noncompliant?
5. What has the district put in place to change practice and to assure that "practice change" is maintained?

Special Education Profile

6. Are there any Special Education Indicators in which the district is discrepant? What actions are being taken by the district?

District Developed Service Delivery Plan (DDSDP)

7. What was your involvement in the development of the DDSDP? If none, how did you familiarize yourself with the plan?
8. What were some key themes (big ideas) related to providing services in your district that are incorporated in the DDSDP?
9. What was learned from involving stakeholders in the development of the DDSDP and how was it included?

10. How was the DDSDP communicated to others?
- General Education Teachers
 - Special Education Teachers
 - Parents
 - NEW teachers, staff, and parents
 - Other stakeholders
11. In practice, how do you provide services along the full continuum of meeting student needs?
12. Please describe the district's philosophy and service delivery/collaboration model at each level (e.g., elementary, middle, high school).
13. What training and support have been provided to the district's special and general education teachers regarding models of collaboration?
14. What training and support has been provided to your special education teachers regarding the core and students receiving special education?
15. What gaps do you see between current practice and desired practice?

Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM)

16. Does your district have any students who require Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM), such as Braille, audio, large print, etc.? If so, how do you assure that students receive AIM in a timely manner?
17. Are your teachers prepared to support students who require AIM?

SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

1. Please introduce yourself (name and assignment) and describe how your teaching practices reflect the vision, mission, and goals of the district?
2. In what ways do the district and school ensure that all students have a safe, healthy, and caring learning environment?
3. How does your students' achievement growth compare to that of other students in your building (e.g., TAG, ELL, general ed, etc.)?
 - How is it measured and monitored?
 - How is this data/information communicated?
 - How has the comparison changed over the past few years?
4. What is your district's plan to close the achievement gap between general education and students receiving special education services, especially in literacy?
5. What are you currently doing to close the achievement gap between your students and those in general education, especially in literacy? (e.g. evidence-based strategies, using data, adjusting instruction)
 - Are your instructional practices different than those in the past few years, and if so, how?
 - Are your management practices different than those in the past few years, and if so, how?
6. How do you set rigorous goals for your students? Who is involved in that process?
7. How do you align your instruction, student needs, and the goals you have written?
8. How do you monitor your students' progress toward meeting their goals?
9. Do you have the resources and support needed to help your students meet their goals?
10. What role does the IEP team play in the process of serving students in your building?
11. Describe your teaching interactions with other teachers in your building/district in planning instruction?
12. Please describe how general education and special education staff work together to coordinate **instruction and services** for students.

13. How does the district ensure that students with IEPs receive instruction from teachers who are certified in the core content areas?
14. Regarding collaborative teaching:
- What training in collaborative teaching have you been provided?
 - How does the district and building assess the effectiveness of collaborative teaching (e.g., the consultative model and the co-teaching model)?
 - Are there any barriers to collaborative teaching? If so, what are they?
 - How are students supported in a collaborative teaching model?
 - How are the students' course grades assigned?
15. As your students progress through school, how are their transitions supported (including those from preschool to elementary, elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, from one building to another, and from one grade level to another)?
16. **High School Teachers:** Please describe the planning and preparation that takes place for student transition to assure they are college and career ready.
17. Do you know how your District Developed Service Delivery Plan was developed and who was involved?

COLLABORATIVE GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS-PreK-12 2012-2013

Note: Please bring a copy of the new District Developed Service Delivery Plan to this interview.

1. Introduce yourself (name and assignment) and describe how your collaborative teaching practices reflect the vision, mission, and goals of the district?
2. Describe your specific general education and special education roles in meeting student needs.
3. How does the achievement of students with IEP's compare to that of students not receiving special education services?
4. How are you working to close the achievement gap between general education and students receiving special education services (i.e., evidence-based strategies, use of data, adjusting instruction)?
5. How do you monitor your students' progress toward closing the achievement gap?
6. You should be familiar with the District Developed Service Delivery Plan (DDSDP). The following questions focus on aspects of the plan.
 - What was your involvement in the plan development?
 - What were some key themes (big ideas) related to providing services in your district that were learned from involving stakeholders in the development of the DDSDP?
 - How has the DDSDP improved your district's services for eligible students? What are the activities or contents of the plan that has made a difference in services (i.e., instructional rigor, use of data)
7. The full continuum of special education services is included in your DDSDP, and these services are based on the individual needs of your students. In practice, describe how you provide services along the full continuum for students.
8. Please describe how general education and special education staff work together to coordinate **instruction and services** for students including those involving transitions from preschool to elementary, elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, from one building to another, and from one grade level to another?

9. **Special Education Teacher:** Do you provide pull-out instruction for the student? If so, what specially designed instruction do you provide in those sessions?
10. **High School Teachers:** Please describe the planning and preparation that takes place for student transition to post-secondary experiences.
11. In what ways do the district and school ensure students have a safe, healthy, and caring learning environment?
12. The following questions are about collaborative teaching:
 - How does the district and building assess the effectiveness of collaborative teaching (e.g., the consultative model and the co-teaching model)?
 - What data points are collected to verify or refute the impact on student achievement?
 - What is the district learning about implementation?
 - Who uses that information?
 - Who assigns the grade to the student with an IEP?
13. How does the district make connections with the community?
14. Please share what changes you hope your district will achieve in the next five years.

**SUPERINTENDENT
2013-2014**

While this interview provides an opportunity to more deeply explore district programs and practices, it also provides the site visit team with an opportunity to ask questions that result from the district overview presentation, interview groups, and document review. It is also an opportunity for the interviewees to ask any questions he/she might have.

1. How do you communicate the district's vision, mission, and goals to staff, students, and parents?
2. Explain the superintendent evaluation process used in the district. How has it led to positive changes in student achievement?
3. Describe the process and benefits of the district's administrator mentoring and induction program. How is the effectiveness of the mentoring and induction program determined?
4. How is information regarding finances, student achievement, and other aspects of the district/school communicated to the public?
5. How are student learning data used systemically to improve teaching and student learning throughout the district?
6. What is the process to determine effectiveness of district programs (i.e., G/T, At-Risk, Special Education, ESL, etc.)
7. How does the district utilize the SIAC? Describe efforts used to seek balanced membership with regard to gender, race, national origin, and disability.
8. **Title IIA Required Question:** What steps does the district employ to ensure that poor and minority students are not taught at higher rates than other students by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers?
9. Please tell us about the progress the district is making toward implementation of the Iowa Core.
10. How does the district determine the focus of professional development (including use of data, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating professional development)?
11. Please share what changes you hope your district/school will achieve in the next five years.

