







INSTRUCTIONAL EXCELLENCE

IF Benefits and Conditions for Success

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How Will The IF Help Teachers and School Leaders?

Teachers and school leaders who participated in the pilot and implementation of The Instructional Framework (IF) and interviewed for an independent case study about the work said they experienced many benefits.

Benefits

Learning from a framework written, reviewed and tested by classroom teachers:

- Teachers appreciated that from the start, The Instructional Framework was informed by gaps in the classroom and created, reviewed, piloted and implemented by classroom teachers. Too often, they said, other such frameworks seem to be created by publishing companies with limited insight into the realities of a classroom.

Helping teachers become skilled at Common Core standards:

- Teachers can be given expectations for meeting Common Core standards without the resources for how to do that, particularly in teaching multiple standards at the same time. The Instructional Framework provides that guidance sequentially, in manageable learning targets, and in an organized and user-friendly fashion.
 - ▶ “The Instructional Framework will be able to help teachers focus on mastering standards that students need to meet for the grade level,” said Jasmine King, eighth-grade teacher at G.E. Peters school. “The framework is filled with great strategies to help comprehension.”
 - ▶ “I felt like in my years using The Instructional Framework I grew a lot as a teacher and that goes back to me learning The Instructional Framework,” said Tiffany Purdie, third-grade teacher at Creation Village World School. “I grew in my knowledge of standards. If you know what the standard entails, it’s going to be a lot easier to plan for the classroom.”

Serving as a road map for teachers to help them reach their goals as a best practice educator:

- The Instructional Framework has helped participants understand how to apply critical teacher practices like reflective learning and backward planning. While both are expectations of teachers, many participating teachers said that they did not fully understand how to do these practices until they participated in The Instructional Framework. The framework also provides model lessons and examples of assessments and lays out how to apply those assessments within a lesson.
 - ▶ “It helped me become a better teacher and had a great impact on the school,” said Gladys S. Guerrero, former kindergarten teacher at G.E. Peters school. “It made me confident in my trade. I embraced it because I felt it empowered me to do my job to the best of my ability and it awakened my creativity.”
 - ▶ “The purpose is to make things easier for teachers,” said LaKeisha Dickerson, seventh-grade teacher at G.E. Peters school. “You’re constantly getting better as a teacher and your students only benefit from that.”

Helping teachers see how they can break free from textbook-driven standards:

- The IF provides flexibility and resources to teach standards in ways that are better suited to their classroom.
- The one-size-fits-all approach of textbooks can be limiting, as it does not meet the needs of all students. The Instructional Framework gives guidance on how teachers can meet standards while crafting their lessons to their classroom students.

Having unit themes aligned across grade levels promotes opportunities for teacher collaboration:

- Themes support schoolwide focuses and activities.
- Teachers said that the framework helped them partner with teachers in different grades to make sure that their teaching built upon each other's from grade to grade.

Making learning relevant and fun for students (and teachers):

- Teachers said The Instructional Framework, with its emphasis on making real-world connections and providing resources for students with different interests and learning styles, consistently engaged their students in learning.
 - ▶ Tiffany Purdie shared that she learned how to give her students ownership of their learning to the point that they were doing much of the talking in class, leading discussions and asking each other questions in their reading groups.
 - ▶ Myrna Candelaria, a veteran teacher who helped coach teachers on the framework, said that The Instructional Framework's emphasis on real-world learning makes teaching more enjoyable for the teachers as well. At times, teaching can become mundane. But when teachers are asked to think about a lesson in terms of its relevance to students' lives, it can reignite their love of teaching.

Creating routines for students that increase their engagement in the classroom:

- Teachers said that The Instructional Framework created needed routines for students such as posting essential questions for each unit. The essential questions and other aspects of the framework provide a consistent pattern to students that helps them know what to expect. Many teachers said that consistency led to increased engagement on the part of their students, particularly those who had struggled with paying attention in class.
 - ▶ "Studies show that when students follow a routine throughout the day, learning is increased, and engagement is increased because they understand what's expected of them," said Chris Simons, principal at Olney Adventist Preparatory School. "And engagement increases retention and retention better prepares a student for life outside of the school."
 - ▶ Such routine also helped with classroom management, teachers said. "It helped with classroom management because the kids were engaged," Guerrero said. "Parents were happier because they saw that the kids were learning."

Simplifying planning time:

- Teachers said the structure of The Instructional Framework simplified their planning time, in part because it gave them ideas about how to teach the standards as well as several resources.

Necessary Conditions for Success

Teachers and school leaders as well as foundation staff who participated in The Instructional Framework pilot and implementation said the following conditions should be in place for it to be successful in other schools.

Participating teachers need to be open to learning and reflecting:

- Teachers who are not internally motivated to learn new approaches or who would prefer a “turn the page” curriculum will not be successful in using The Instructional Framework.
 - ▶ While an initial investment of time is required to learn The Instructional Framework and to establish reflective learning routines to make it stick, that work will pay off with all the benefits: becoming skilled in teaching Common Core standards, reaching goals as a best practice educator, having flexibility and resources to break free from textbook-driven standards, making learning relevant and fun, creating routines that increase engagement, and simplifying planning by promoting collaboration across grade levels.

Teachers should be included in the decision-making process when a school is deciding whether to use The IF:

- Since teachers are responsible for implementing it, it is important that they participate in the decision to bring it to a school and indicate whether they want to participate.
 - ▶ Hold a teacher and administrator meeting so that all participants understand what the school is trying to accomplish with The Instructional Framework. Teachers need to understand the why behind The Instructional Framework and what it will mean for their work, including the supports that the administration will provide.

Teachers need several months’ notice when planning to implement The IF:

- Advance notice is necessary to allow time for teachers to read and ask questions about the IF, assess resource alignment, determine any needs, plan for using the IF in conjunction with other scheduled obligations and incorporate it into planning for the next school year.
 - ▶ Read the entire framework first. As part of the planning in advance, teachers need to spend time reading the framework to understand its arc, where it is going and what to expect. It is not something that teachers can pick up and just follow one unit at a time. Having the whole picture is essential before diving in and beginning to teach it. Once teachers grasp the entirety of the framework, they will be able to be more creative. If they do not, the framework could become just another dull requirement that teachers have to carry out.
 - ▶ Start planning months ahead of the school year in which teachers will use it. Teachers implementing The Instructional Framework suggested starting at least in the summer and perhaps earlier depending on each teacher’s style in preparing for the next year. Taking that time in advance is necessary to ensure that teachers gain a strong grasp of the framework before putting it into practice.

Professional learning communities can help teachers learn the IF together:

- Implementing The Instructional Framework within a professional learning community can help teachers learn from each other and discuss how to ensure they are linking the standards from grade to grade.

The IF needs the dedicated support of school leaders:

- School leaders need to identify clear expectations for schoolwide use of The Instructional Framework and make it a priority to support teachers by establishing an ongoing reflective practice for learning. Without such clear direction, the implementation of The Instructional Framework can falter as other priorities emerge. School leaders need to make sure the school either has or will purchase the necessary resources, books and other materials to address the learning needs of different students.
 - ▶ Take the time to learn The Instructional Framework. School leaders wanting to use the IF need to dedicate time to learn it themselves. For leaders to gain buy-in from teachers, it is essential that they show they have the same commitment.
 - ▶ Set schoolwide professional development goals based on the IF best practices and build time in the school's annual schedule to monitor progress and provide feedback. To maximize learning, one-on-one planning time with an instructional coach or similar staff member is recommended for focused development. A reflective cycle of learning with action plans and follow-up meetings helps hold all parties accountable for their dedication to professional development.
 - ▶ Schedule planning time that's built into the new school year's calendar. This time is essential for teachers to have time to learn, plan and grow in their craft. Learning how to apply The Instructional Framework's best practices to develop purposeful lesson plans that engage and challenge a wide range of students takes time. Regularly scheduled planning time (both individual and collaborative) is essential for teachers to learn new concepts and strengthen existing skills. Individual planning time allows teachers to grow at their own pace, while collaborative planning time provides the opportunity for teachers to intentionally plan to multiple standards, leading to a deeper real-world connection for students.

School leaders will see the most engagement when they provide teachers with autonomy:

- Teachers should use their experience and judgment to make The Instructional Framework their own by making it a living document that they tweak according to each student's needs.

Tips for Using the Grade-level Documents

Teachers who participated in The Instructional Framework pilot shared a few tips for using the grade-level documents.

Take The IF piece by piece so that it does not get overwhelming:

- The Unit Overview and Unit-at-a-Glance documents show teachers how each unit can be taught over the course of nine weeks. It's important to remember that the weekly lesson seeds presented are ideas that can be used for inspiration, but it is up to the teacher which ones they'd like to develop into detailed lesson plans. If teachers approach The Instructional Framework thinking they need to teach everything in the Unit-at-a-Glance, they will be

overwhelmed. It was intentionally designed to provide guidance and flexibility for teachers to make their own decisions based on the standards and their students.

When using The IF, teachers should reflect and take notes along the way:

- It is important to record what worked, what did not work and why. For example, if a particular activity or lesson seed did not work out as planned, make notes about it and indicate whether it could be presented in a different way or needs to be jettisoned altogether for the future.

Build a big resource bank:

- When teachers get The Instructional Framework, they should look at the suggested texts and resources mentioned in each Unit Overview and Unit-at-a-Glance. Reading through the Unit-at-a-Glance will give teachers ideas of the texts and resources they will need depending on the lesson seeds they choose for teaching the weekly standards. Teachers can build their own resource bank using the resource suggestions depending on how they choose to teach the weekly standards and based on their current resources.