



What is Skills Iowa?

Skills Iowa provides two technology tools to Iowa schools and the training and support to implement them through a federal grant:

Skills Tutor provides 5 – 10 minute tutorials in reading comprehension, vocabulary, mathematics, language, library skills and some science to students in grades 3 -12.

Assessment Center is a tool that can be used to assess students in grades 3-12 in reading comprehension, mathematics and the conventions of language so they can determine where to go next with their instruction.

Both of these programs have excellent reporting features that can analyze data and provide specific information much more quickly than has been possible in the past. As in the business world, the computer can be used to do things we have traditionally done in schools by hand more quickly and efficiently.

IASB provides not only the tools but also the training and support for implementation of the tools. The research is clear that unless educators receive significant training and support, most educational innovations will go by the wayside. So to help ensure implementation with students and resulting student learning, we provide that necessary support for implementation.

Both of these tools are web-based, so students, teachers, principals, and parents can access them wherever they have access to the Internet – at home, at school, at the public library or community centers. These tools and the training and support to implement them are provided at no cost to the local district and paid for by the grant.

How many schools and student participate in Skills Iowa?

Currently Skills Iowa serves approximately 85,000 Iowa kids in 114 school districts in 300 buildings in Iowa.

What is formative assessment and what does the research say about formative assessment and Skills Iowa?

Formative assessment is an educational practice where teachers use information from student assessments to determine what to teach next based on what kids have demonstrated they know and can do (or don't know and can't do). Paul Black and Dylan William studied all the research related to formative assessment and wrote an article in a well respected educational journal called Phi Delta Kappan in 1998. They said, "All these studies show that innovations that include strengthening the practice of formative assessment produce significant and often substantial learning gains."

Is Skills Iowa the only kind of assessment teachers should use formatively?

Absolutely not. Teachers have a myriad of data at their fingertips and effective teachers use it all. They observe and listen to students regularly and learn more about what those students know and can do. Effective teachers examine the daily work of their students. They create short assessments on the spot to determine what students know and act on that immediately. They look at projects students have created. They study end-of-unit assessment results whether those results are traditional tests or student created projects. Effective teachers use whatever kids produce or say to inform their instruction. Skills Iowa provides information teachers can add to their already rich data environment.

Does Skills Iowa work?

A study done of the 2008-09 Skills Iowa project using Iowa Test data as the indicator of learning, found that when the Skills Iowa tools were used, student achievement went up, particularly among the most struggling learners. IASB has made recommendations for further study to see if these conclusions will be supported in future years. We know that implementation is critically important to the success of this project, so we continue to try to figure out how to make sure the data and information schools get from these tools is used to drive instruction.

How is Skills Iowa used in Iowa schools?

First and foremost, our goal is that Skills Iowa data is used to determine where to go next in their instruction. That is the most important focus of the project. Beyond that, local schools determine how they can best use Skills Iowa to support the learning of their students.

Can technology replace teachers?

Absolutely not. In those classrooms where Skills Iowa is used well, principals, faculties determine how to use the tools in ways that best supports the learning of students. Skills Iowa, nor any technology program, will ever take the place of a fine teacher, but Skills Iowa can provide important data and information as teachers provide practice, remediation, and acceleration for their students.

When are students expected to use the Skills Iowa tools?

Each school determines how the Skills Iowa tools will work best for them. Some students use the tools during computer lab time or in the library. In some classrooms there are learning centers where students can use the Skills Iowa tools. Some teachers use the tutorials to teach a concept to the whole class on an overhead projector as a way to introduce a concept or skill. Some students are assigned Skills Iowa work as homework and either do it in the lab or classroom before or after school, at the community center, at the public library, at home, or at a friend's home.

How long has IASB been involved with Skills Iowa (and before that Following the Leader) and who is involved?

IASB has been involved with this program since the 2004-05 school year and the program has been provided in the following number of school buildings:

04-05 - 93 school buildings
05-06 - 222 school buildings
06-07 - 210 school buildings
07-08 - 225 school buildings
08-09 - 225 school buildings
09-10 - 300 school buildings

If you want a list of the 300 participating school buildings this year, go to the Skills Iowa website: <http://www.ia-sb.org/skillsiowa/skillsiaschools.aspx>

Not all schools have been in the program for the entire time. Sometimes schools decide the Skills Iowa tools don't work for them, so they drop out. There is no mandate for participation. Schools decide if it works for them.

How do schools become involved in the program?

IASB has sent out numerous emails to school superintendents inviting them to learn more about the program. If a school responds with interest, Susie Olesen, the project director, or another person working for Skills Iowa, goes to the school and demonstrates the use of the tools, usually to a leadership team from the interested school.

If you have anymore questions about Skills Iowa, send Susie an email at solesen@ia-sb.org. Additional information can be found at the Skills Iowa website: www.skillsiowa.org