

Using the Resistance Reducer Tool

(An example from Iowa submitted by Dr. Troyce Fisher, director of the Iowa Wallace grant)

Creating a Sense of Public Urgency for Change

Context: The Leadership Partnership is the steering committee that directs the work of the Wallace grant in Iowa. It represents fourteen different shareholder groups, all of whom have a vested interest in supporting leaders as they work for increased student achievement for all. In a retreat in March of 2009 the group began to address barriers that might exist for all school leaders as they work to implement the Iowa Core Curriculum.

Working Assumptions With Which We Began:

1. Leaders at the local level need external support from key “consumer” groups in order to change the nature of schooling in order to produce results that match 21st century needs.
2. Leaders at the local level need support from practitioners within the educational community because they so often impact external “consumer” groups.
3. We lack a sense of urgency in Iowa to make the changes implicit in the Iowa Core Curriculum.
4. We lack the public will to support leaders in making transformative changes in practice.
5. It is the relationships at the local level that will allow the permission and support necessary to impact school improvement.
6. The constituencies represented in the Leadership Partnership recognize that without a planned effort to create a public sense of urgency and public will that can provide “political cover” to leaders, we will not accomplish the goals of the Iowa Core Curriculum.

After spending time identifying what we’re moving towards and from as we create successful learners, earners, and citizens we began the work of crafting our message for the general public. We knew we needed to be articulate about what we’re hoping to change “TO” (minus “educationese”) while at the same time not creating a crisis of confidence in our schools as they currently are delivering learning experiences.

We used the “Translating The Message” portion of the tool and the conversation became very rich. We took key words and phrases that we often use to frame the message about why schools need to change and then tried to anticipate how key constituencies might get confused and/or resist the message because of how we stated it. Here are some examples of our work:

When We Say:	They May Hear/Think:
21 st Century Learning	Aren’t we already in the 21 st century?
Higher Order Thinking Skills	Educational gobbledygook
Technology	Computers
Regionalization/Collaboration	School consolidation
Iowa Core Curriculum	Content only (not rigor, relevance, pedagogy)

That exercise helped us identify areas of resistance and how we might minimize them at the onset by crafting our words carefully. Then we went back to the first part of the tool to identify actual changes that are implicit in the Iowa Core Curriculum and identified the pluses and minuses of each of the major changes by framing them as gains and losses for those impacted. (In another application of this tool, a steering committee charged with redesigning our principal academy went through the first portion of the tool as a way to surface its thoughts about the proposed recommendations. This proved exceedingly helpful. After identifying the pluses and minuses/gains and losses/, the individuals were literally asked to take a stand for which of three options they preferred. I doubt that we would have gotten as honest a distribution if we hadn’t surfaced the resistance in a safe way through the use of the tool.)

We kicked off the public sense of urgency campaign in mid-September through collaboration with the School Administrators of Iowa and Iowa’s intermediate service agencies by hosting Tony Wagner, author of the Global Achievement Gap. We are also using The Principal Story and a companion television program highlighting Iowa Principals for this campaign. We anticipate using the rest of the Leading Change Tools to further craft our approach as we develop resources to help local leaders.