

Why IPLI? It's All about Community

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We are at the point in the year where the Indiana Principal Leadership Institute (IPLI) Cohort is entering the homestretch of its second year, and another Cohort is just rounding the first turn of its initial year. IPLI is now looking for a new stable of principals to take their mark at the starting line. For those principals giving consideration to applying to Indiana Principal Leadership Institute, the question, "Why IPLI?" is most assuredly entering their thought process. Indiana Principal Leadership Institute has a lot to offer.

First, it is affiliated with Indiana State University and the Indiana Association of School Principals (IASP). This affiliation offers participants a chance to work with leading educational leadership scholars from Indiana State University like Dr. Todd Whitaker, Dr. Steve Gruenert, Dr. Linda Marrs-Morford, Dr. Terry McDaniel, Dr. Ryan Donlan, and Dr. Bobbi Jo Monahan. This affiliation alone offers the participant rich experiences and connections that will serve a principal through his/her entire professional career. The connection with IASP assures you a two-year visit to the annual IASP Principals Conference with its nationally known keynote speakers, wonderful breakout sessions, and amazing networking opportunities.

Second, participation in IPLI assures you two years of solid professional development. When the whole cohort group comes together (about every other month) for the IPLI seminars, presenters from around the nation like Marzano Research and its High Reliability Schools network and Dr. Nancy Dana and her work with Action Research take center stage. Other speakers cover a wide swath of topics ranging from technology, to instructional best practices, to school climate and culture, and new teacher induction. You won't find better, more consistent principal professional development over a two-year span anywhere in the State of Indiana, and I would argue in the nation.

Third, there are additional benefits that come with being a part of IPLI. Some of these include free subscriptions to online professional development opportunities, free copies of professional articles, educational books, and opportunities to participate in surveys that focus on yourself, your staff, and your school. You are always treated like royalty during IPLI seminars with breakfast and lunch and snacks throughout the day. You might even get a free t-shirt or two along the way.

Sound good? Well, I have now served as an IPLI Mentor for two years and I would trade all of the above for what I feel is the best part of IPLI - the community you build and belong to. You will be part of a large cohort of about 50 other principals from around the state. This cohort meets as a large group at the July, September, November, January, and April seminars each of your two years. This cohort experience is where you have the presenters and guest speakers and multiple chances to interact with others through Ed Camps, discussion groups, and activities throughout the day. In two years, you will know many more principals and will have many more contacts than you did when you started with IPLI. If you are a Twitter user, your follow list will balloon and your followers will expand as well. You will meet friends for the first time that you will know when you retire. You will enter the experience with wide eyes but leave with a confidence that comes from time spent in something purposeful that you find success doing. Sound good? It gets better.

The truly best part of IPLI, and I do mean the truly best part, is the Regional Focus-Cohort Group. This is a smaller group (4 or 5 principals) that is led by an IPLI Mentor. You are geographically similar but diverse in make-up consisting of elementary, middle, and high school flavors. You sit together at each seminar, but you meet as a small group on the off months: August, October, December, February, March, and May. I love my Regional Cohort Group. I mean that. From the start we decided to visit one another's schools for our Regional Meetings. We begin with lunch at some local establishment and then go to the school for a tour. We then meet, do our business, answer questions, and share. We talk about similar concerns and brainstorm ideas together. We laugh. We are there for each other when struggles or tragedies strike but also pick each other up when we have a success. We email each other and share ideas. We have become friends. I love my Regional Cohort Group. I really do. I know that I will have a connection with them my entire professional career – something that wouldn't have happened without the IPLI experience.

You see, when it's all said and done, I believe that principals are no different than teachers who are no different than students. When you feel like you belong in a community of other like-minded individuals and are safe to try, to fail, and to try again – not only do you grow, but you prosper. Ask any current or past IPLI participant about what they enjoyed about their experience. They will mention the speakers and the professional development, but they will end on the people. Because while the professional development is outstanding for the moment, the relationships with others are the lasting elements. Why IPLI? Quite simply: It's all about the community.