

Implementing the Inspired Learner Model



The **Inspired Learner Model (ILM)** can operate in US public elementary schools with existing budgets and staffing levels. ILM can provide every child with the advantages of learner-centered education while meeting state student performance assessment expectations.



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Contents

The Inspired Learner Model	1
Leadership Team	2
Building Support Among All Stakeholders	3
Building Support Specifically Among Educators	4
Steps for Implementation	6
Overview of Costs	7
Dollar Amounts	8
The ILM Lab School	9
ILM Lab School Positions and Costs	10
Sources of Funding	11
Sample Timeline	12
Looking Forward	13



**Center for
Inspired
Learning**

The Inspired Learner Model

In the learner-centered* **Inspired Learner Model** (ILM), a school's primary focus is on involvement and interactions. Students learn collaboratively in active settings that reflect real-world experiences. Teachers and support staff are tasked with being attuned to each child's unique needs, passions, strengths, and weaknesses. The connections built between educators and students endure for the whole time the student attends a specific school. Assessments are designed to provide opportunities for students to practice, enhance, refine, and demonstrate the knowledge and skills they have acquired. This approach:



- Makes school more relevant and fun for children
- Gives students who are frustrated and bored an incentive to apply themselves
- Results in higher academic achievement
- Levels the playing field for children from various cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds
- Improves parent-child relationships
- Improves student-teacher relationships
- Improves social skills

The first step in creating a dynamic learner-centered school is to dismantle the obsolete and harmful Whole Classroom Instructional Model (WCIM, sometimes called the Teacher-Centered Model), then rebuild the education experience from the ground up.

The second step in transforming schools into a learner-centered model is embracing the idea of motivating children. Every school teacher knows that it is possible and rewarding to teach 100 children who care about their school and WANT to learn and that it is impossible to teach even one or two who are not motivated to learn or care. We can do this by using technology to teach basic skills, thus freeing up the teacher to:

- Create a project and activity-based experiences around student interests
- Offer tutoring support
- Assess/test student progress regularly

To design the new model, we must see ourselves as engineers designing the best possible learning environment. Part of this is recognizing that the old model puts an unhealthy and unsustainable amount of work, stress, and expectations on teachers.

Let's structure education so that we are giving teachers all the support they need so our children are educated not only to achieve academically but also to help them reach their full potential as human beings and citizens. **If we want a world with more equity, sustainability, peace, justice, empathy, and compassion, this is the least we can do to support the profession of those who shoulder the responsibility of preparing kids for life.** This document shows how to transition a public elementary school from the Whole Classroom Instructional Model to the Inspired Learner Model.



* "Learner-centered" education is sometimes called "student-centered." These terms are interchangeable. We use "learner-centered" in CFIL literature.

Leadership Team - Three Key People



Implementing the Inspired Learner Model (ILM) in public elementary schools is envisioned as a partnership between the Center for Inspired Learning (CFIL) and individual school districts. There are three people who are key to having a successful transition to ILM. Working in tandem, these are the individuals who will guide the process, provide leadership, and hold the vision for the promise and possibilities of learner-centered education in a given school or school district.

1. The District Superintendent

As the school district's senior leader, the Superintendent's support is critical and necessary to make such a fundamental change in the education model used in an elementary school. Not only do they make the final decision on such matters, but they are also crucial in bringing school board members and other stakeholders on board. The implementation plan outlined in this document assumes that the Superintendent supports implementing ILM in their district. If such support from a Superintendent does not exist, and people still want to advocate for ILM in their local schools, CFIL can still help build a grassroots movement for advocacy. However, our priority is to focus our efforts where we already have the Superintendent's support.

As one of the first steps of implementation, the Superintendent will find someone within the district who will become the Principal of the ILM school. If the goal is to implement ILM in multiple elementary schools, CFIL recommends getting the program up and running in one school first and then expanding into more schools within the district.

2. The ILM School Principal

This person should share the vision of ILM and have the skill set necessary to transform the school and lead the school after implementation. Once this person is identified and charged with their new task, they will implement ILM in accordance with the steps outlined later in this document.

3. The Center for Inspired Learning Consultant

A Consultant from the Center for Inspired Learning will work in tandem with the ILM School Principal to successfully guide the transition of the elementary school to ILM. They will offer expertise in the steps required for transition and the operation of the ILM model once the transition is complete.

Together, the **Superintendent**, **ILM Principal**, and **CFIL Consultant** comprise the **ILM Implementation Leadership Team**.

Building Support Among All Stakeholders

We recognize that each school district and each elementary school has its own unique goals, challenges, culture, and dynamics. Interest groups such as parents, teachers, teachers unions, school administrators, and even students will want to feel heard and included in the process. Some may enthusiastically support the transition, some may be skeptical, and some may fight against it. Such responses, and gradients of them, are inevitable in creating such a fundamental change in the learning model used in a school.

We believe that the best way to navigate these dynamics is to create a process where stakeholders feel empowered and heard. The push for change must feel like it is an authentic grassroots desire for a better way forward, not another bureaucratic top-down “reform” dreamed up by people who don’t even live and work in the community, let alone are stakeholders in the local school or school district.



Sociological research into grassroots movements has shown that their resilience and chances of success are largely based on the strength of individual relationships among the people who are organizing for change. [Relational Intervention for Individual and Systems Change. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 38 (7), 886-900.]

To build and strengthen these relationships, the ILM Leadership Team should work with all stakeholders to bring them on board with ILM. The Center for Inspired Learning recommends using the following resources to bring people on board:

Documents from the Center for Inspired Learning:

A Brief Introduction to the Inspired Learner Model (better for the general public)
Inspired Learner Model Concept Paper (better for education professionals)

Report:

[Evidence for Student-Centered Learning](#)

by **Krista Kaput**, from the nonprofit organization **Education Evolving**

Book:

[Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That’s Transforming Education](#)

by **Ken Robinson, Ph.D.** and **Lou Aronica**

Online Videos:

[Stop Stealing Dreams](#) with **Seth Godin**

[Why Finland has the Best Education System in the World](#) with **Michael Moore**

[Build a School in the Cloud](#) with **Sugata Mitra, Ph.D.**

Still, the best way to inspire and motivate people is for the Leadership Team to be enthusiastic, knowledgeable, approachable, and sincere. There is no substitute for in-person meetings (or their pandemic equivalent).

Building Support Specifically Among Educators

This section was adapted from the section of the Center for Inspired Learning's Inspired Learner Model Concept Paper called "Onboarding, Training, and Staying Current."

Transitioning from the traditional Whole Classroom Instructional Model (WCIM) to the Inspired Learner Model (ILM) will present unique challenges for educators. Since most teachers had a WCIM education, were taught WCIM in college, and have only taught in WCIM schools, educators are likely to see WCIM as the way education is supposed to look. Here is one possible 8-step option for engaging educators with ILM.

Later in this document, you will find a page titled "Sample Timeline." The steps outlined below are intended to be used in tandem with that timeline.

Step 1

Educators need to be inspired before they will have the inner motivation to WANT to switch from a teacher-centered WCIM to a learner-centered personalized instructional model. Watching inspirational videos about learner-centered education is an excellent first step. There are many videos to choose from - a good list is available [here](#). This introduction to learner-centered education allows people to process the information at their own pace. This may be the first time some educators have considered a new approach to structuring a class or a school.

Step 2

A series of facilitated small-group discussions about the content of the videos may be helpful for listening to concerns, fears, hopes, desires, criticisms, etc. The discussion leader should be a trained facilitator who is familiar with learner-centered education modalities. This is not the time for convincing anyone of anything.

Step 3

Following this gentle introduction to learner-centered education, it may be useful to follow-up with a more detailed but low-key two to three-hour introduction to ILM. In this workshop, educators learn ILM fundamentals, including the components, curriculum, and other aspects discussed in this paper. There should be an emphasis on how the model works to inspire children to be motivated learners and removes many stresses and pressures from teachers.



Sir Ken Robinson was a powerful and influential voice for learner-centered education for the past decade. His presentation "Do Schools Kill Creativity" is the most-watched video in the history of TED Talks. Robinson passed away in August of 2020, just as we were going public with the Inspired Learner Model. His voice and passion will be sorely missed. Our goal is realize the ides and vision he so eloquently put forth. Two of his TED talks are included in the list of videos linked to in Step 1.

Step 4

A more intensive series of three or four half-day ILM training sessions allow educators to dive deeper into the model's concepts. The critique of WCIM is more pronounced here, as its teacher-centered methods are compared to learner-centered methods. An essential part of this is role-playing students' and teachers' parts in the project and activity-based classrooms. The goal is for the educator to become excited about transitioning from a WCIM model to an ILM school.



Step 5

Within two weeks, another facilitated listening session is held in which participants again convey their concerns, fears, hopes, desires, criticisms, etc., about what they have learned about ILM and the critique of WCIM.

Step 6

Ideally, educators should visit other learner-centered schools as guests or as short-term apprentices. One option may be to visit a

Montessori school, a Waldorf school, or one of the many other schools that use components of ILM. Many of these are discussed in the Inspired **Learner Model Concept Paper** available from the Center for Inspired Learning.

Step 7

Immediately after adoption, and for the first several months, teachers and staff are observed regularly by someone with experience in an ILM environment, and debriefed at least once per week. After that, the observations and debriefs are scaled back and occur monthly. Subsequently, observations are more sporadic based on how comfortable the teachers are feeling and performing in their ILM roles and how much support the Principal feels is needed.

Step 8

At least once per year, ILM teachers should attend an ILM conference to receive news about the latest techniques, research findings, and best practices from the learner-centered and ILM world.

Ongoing

The Center for Inspired Learning will facilitate networking, cooperation, and sharing programs with education professionals in other ILM schools, building an ILM elementary school network.



Steps for Implementation

Once the leadership is in place, and there is enough support from stakeholders to move forward with ILM implementation, these are the steps that need to be taken. Many of these will happen concurrently based on the plan that has been formulated by the Leadership Team.

1) Reorganizing School Staff

Everyone who works in the school will have a new job description. Refer to the **Inspired Learner Model Concept Paper** for information on how each school employee's roles will change. Detailed new job descriptions need to be written. It's also helpful to create an organizational chart to have a visual to understand the bigger picture of how the ILM school is organized.



2) Reorganizing the School Building

A plan needs to be made for which rooms will be used as Project & Activity-Based Learning Classrooms, Tutoring Centers, Assessment Centers, and Online Learning Centers. If walls will be demolished or partially demolished to make bigger rooms, this needs to be determined early in the process and budgeted. It may be that such demolition/construction will need to be delayed until the following summer.

3) Presentations and Workshops

The Principal and CFIL Consultant will give presentations and workshops to describe how ILM works and how roles will change. These should be done in a way that understands people's natural tendencies to resist change. It's essential that they come out of these with at least the intellectual understanding that their jobs will be easier, more enjoyable, and less stressful in an ILM school.

4) Meeting with each Staff Member

One-on-one meetings will be necessary to go over individual questions and misgivings in a safe, confidential environment. This will also be the time to go over job descriptions and reinforce the components of ILM. (See the **Inspired Learner Model Concept Paper** for a listing and descriptions of the components.) In some cases, this may require two or more meetings for the staff member to feel confident in their new role and a robust comprehension of the Inspired Learner Model.

Overview of Costs

ILM has been designed to work within the confines of existing school budgets. However, there are some one-time costs associated with the transition. The salary costs below represent the time spent specifically on the transition, not during day-to-day duties after the school has been converted to ILM.



Principal's Salary

The Principal acts as the Project Manager during the transition. This process is significant and would not allow this person to have other duties within the school or school district during this time.

Curriculum and Assessment Director's Salary

As with the Principal, the Curriculum and Assessment Director has a significant role in setting up the ILM school that would not allow them to have other duties within the school during this time. During the transition, their job is the research and development of the individualized online learning program.

Consulting Fees

A consultant from CFIL works with the Principal during the transition to ensure that ILM is properly implemented.

Training Costs

School employees, including teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, and other school staff attend workshops and training sessions facilitated by the Principal and CFIL Consultant.

Technology Costs

This includes computer equipment and software licensing fees,

Supply Costs

This includes project supplies for Project and Activity-Based Learning.

Remodeling Costs

Some schools may want to demolish walls between classrooms to make for larger rooms for Computer Labs and Project & Activity Rooms.

Note that any future costs associated with the above categories would be covered by existing school budget. For example, future technology costs would come out of the school's existing technology budget.



Estimated Dollar Amounts

The amounts here are estimates based on a wide range of factors and will vary by project, school, and school district. This page is intended to give a ball-park estimate for a school district considering implementing ILM in one elementary school of approximately 300 students. As the saying goes, “your mileage may vary.” **Existing school budgets would cover future costs associated with these categories.**



Principal’s Salary

\$100,000

According to salary.com, the median salary for a school principal in Washington State as of November 25, 2020, was \$116,020, with a typical range of \$102,473 to \$130,505, plus benefits. The salary depends on the location, education level, certifications, experience, and additional skills. For the sake of this sample budget, we are using a salary of \$125,000 plus \$25,000 in benefits, or \$150,000 total. We estimate that the principal will spend about eight months primarily focused on the transition. After that, they will do their “regular” job of being an active Principal. Using 8/12’s of the salary + benefits is \$100,000.

Curriculum and Assessment Director’s Salary

\$52,500

According to salary.com, the median salary for a school teacher in Washington State as of November 25, 2020, was \$63,379, with a typical range of \$51,917 to \$75,173, plus benefits. For the sake of this sample budget, we are using a salary of \$65,000 plus \$25,000 in benefits, or \$90,000 total. We estimate that this person will spend about seven months primarily focused on the transition. After that, they will do their “regular” job. Using 7/12’s of the salary + benefits is \$52,500.

Consulting Fees (includes materials)

\$115,000

The consulting fees estimated here are for one consultant from the Center for Inspired Learning working with a school district full time for eight months, followed by four months of half-time, followed by one year of 1/8th-time. Our fee is \$10,000 per month for full-time, pro-rated for the periods of half-time and 1/8th-time consulting. This amount covers the consultant’s salary, printing costs for manuals and other training documents, liability insurance, etc. Travel expenses are not included and are billed as a per diem based on the location of the school district. Part of the consultant’s job will be to assist the district in securing outside funding for ILM implementation.

Training Costs

\$30,000

Wages and associated costs for four half-day ILM training sessions for 30 staff members.

Technology Costs

\$45,000

Most school districts have invested in laptop computers for all elementary school students due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The result of this is that transition costs for technology investments to implement ILM are significantly less than they would have been otherwise. We include additional hardware costs for peripherals such as headphones with microphones for language classes, licensing fees for online learning programs such as Freckle, etc. Online learning licensing will average about \$100 per student per year. After the initial licensing, renewals would be covered by the existing school budget. Peripherals will be about \$50 per student. Again, future outlays in this area will also be covered by the existing school budget. So \$100 per student for initial software licensing plus \$50 per student for peripherals, times 300 students, comes to \$45,000.

Supply Costs

\$60,000

A one-time cost for project supplies for Project and Activity-Based Learning. Estimated at \$200 per student, multiplied by 300 students.

Optional Remodeling Costs

\$200,000

Some schools may want to demolish walls between classrooms to make for larger rooms for Computer Labs and Project & Activity Rooms.

Total: \$602,500 with Optional Remodeling Costs

\$402,500 without Optional Remodeling Costs

The ILM Lab School

ILM is not a static model. It is designed to be continuously improved. One of the challenges of some other learner-centered models is that they were designed many decades ago and are adhered to with little or no tolerance for change. At the Center for Inspired Learning (CFIL), we recognize that any education model, including ours, can be improved. We also know that change is inevitable in the world around us and that a resilient and effective education model must adapt to the times.

The ILM Lab School will be located in a public elementary school. It will be:

- 1) A pilot school where the ILM components will be implemented for the first time, the kinks worked out, and the model adjusted accordingly.
- 2) A laboratory for innovative methods and curriculum.
- 3) A place where teachers will be given the time and resources to document their findings.
- 4) A resource for other ILM schools to use in the development of their methods and curriculum.

The ILM Lab School will cost more to operate than a "regular" ILM school or a traditional school. For this reason, **100% of the additional costs will be covered by grants secured by the Center for Inspired Learning**. This gives the school district the opportunity to be the ILM movement's epicenter with no additional costs to local taxpayers.

CFIL envisions that the initial ILM Lab School will operate for 3.5 years. This is the approximate amount of time it will take to work through the components and curriculum in a thorough and comprehensive way. The school and CFIL may seek to extend this for more years, or even indefinitely.

The first six months of the 3.5 years will be spent setting up the ILM school, preparing for the first year of classes. The next three years will coincide with the academic years and be focused on improvement to the components and curriculum and the best ways to train teachers to work in an ILM school. Teachers and other staff members in the ILM Lab School will work collaboratively with professionals from CFIL to make this effort as productive and effective as possible.

A Center for Inspired Learning consultant will guide the laboratory aspects of the ILM Lab School, while the Principal will provide leadership to the school community.

This program's overall goal is to develop the best possible learning environment for students, the best possible instruction environment for teachers, and a holistic integration with the great community. On the next page is a summary of what positions will be funded via the grant(s) and a basic overview of what these educators will be doing in the ILM Lab School.



ILM Lab School Positions and Costs

The positions outlined on this page will be grant-funded and dedicated to the first ILM implementation in an elementary school. After this step is complete, they will shift their main focus to:

- Ironing out any wrinkles in the plan.
- Further development of the education model.
- Designing training programs for educators in other schools transitioning to ILM
- Writing up their findings and best practices for dissemination through Center for Inspired Learning (CFIL) and professional networks of ILM educators.

CFIL Consultant/Liaison

During the transition, this CFIL professional will act as a Consultant and work with the Principal to ensure that ILM is properly implemented. Once the school is up and running, they will become the Liaison between the Lab and CFIL and work closely with the Principal to oversee development activities.

Principal

The Principal will act as the Project Manager during the transition and then work with the CFIL Liaison to oversee the ILM Lab School's development activities. When the school is running, they will also perform the regular duties of an ILM school principal.

ILM Development Coordinators

Each of these five positions will help design their corresponding part of the Inspired Learner Model and assist with implementation. In ongoing roles, they will work under the CFIL Liaison and the Principal's guidance on refinement and further development of ILM. They will also support ILM teachers and paraprofessionals in their regular duties and in research activities as guided by the CFIL Liaison and the Principal. The five ILM Development Coordinators:

- 1. Curriculum**
- 2. Project & Activity-Based Learning**
- 3. Support & Assessment**
- 4. Online Learning**
- 5. Early Childhood Learning**

Based on the salary calculations on page 8 of this document, the cost to fund these positions is estimated to be around \$720,00 per year or about \$2.5 million over the 3.5 year period. To reiterate, this would be 100% covered by grants.



Sources of Funding

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, school districts across Washington State were struggling to meet budget shortfalls. Implementing the Inspired Learner Program should not add to the school district's financial stress. The model itself was designed to operate with the same budgets that are currently in place. However, the costs for transition need to come from somewhere. The Center for Inspired Learning will work with districts to ensure that adequate outside funding is available so that local school districts do not have to shoulder the costs.

On page 8, we estimated that implementing ILM can cost between \$402,500 and \$602,500. On page 12, we estimated that the first 3.5 years of operating the ILM Lab School would cost around \$2.5 million. Anyone with experience in managing and budgeting for a major project will know that costs can significantly vary due to a wide range of factors such as unforeseen expenses, unexpected obstacles, and fluctuations in materials pricing. The pandemic itself is an example of how easily the best-laid plans can be delayed or more costly or complicated than initially planned. Plus, the costs we use in this document are educated guesses based on state averages. For all these reasons (and probably many others), the previous page's estimated costs should be taken with a grain of salt.

That said, even in the improbable event that implementation costs double this estimate, outside sources will cover these costs. These sources may include the Washington State Office of Public Instruction, money allocated by the Washington State Legislature, and/or grants from foundations, corporations, or philanthropists. Much of the focus of the Center for Inspired Learning is working with these potential funders in showing them the advantages of implementing ILM and securing funding for its implementation in Washington State elementary schools. Part of the consulting fee paid to the Center for Inspired Learning goes to this effort.



Sample Timeline

To launch the Inspired Learner Model (ILM) at the start of a school year, planning needs to start a *minimum* of 9 to 12 months before classes start. Below is an example of a 9-month timeline with classes beginning in September.

January

- ▶ Acquire school board approval for the implementation of ILM in an elementary school. (The groundwork for this may take months of preparation and outreach.)
- ▶ Assemble the leadership team and begin strategic planning.

February

- ▶ Identify the Curriculum and Assessment Director. They will immediately begin developing the individualized online learning program.
- ▶ Identify supporters in each stakeholder group (teachers, parents, administrators, community members, etc.) and launch a coordinated effort to communicate the vision of ILM to others in these stakeholder groups. This effort will continue through implementation for as long as it takes to create cohesion around the change.

March

- ▶ Certified and classified staff learn more about the Inspired Learner Model and roles teachers play in the ILM school.

April/May

- ▶ Faculty and staff assignments are made; classrooms are designated; subject area specialists begin building relationships in the community to recruit instructors for Project and Activity-Based (PABL) classes. PABL program development begins.

June/July

- ▶ Background checks are finalized, and PABL assignments are confirmed. The school building is reorganized to accommodate ILM. When classrooms are ready, teachers move into their new rooms and focus on developing their newly assigned roles.

August

- ▶ All remaining preparations are finalized.

September

- ▶ Classes begin. For the first month, there is a heavy emphasis on student orientation to the new model, especially for those in grades 1 through 5. The leadership team meets weekly with school staff to collaboratively work through any sticking points or problems they encounter with the new model.

October

- ▶ School board members, parents, and guardians are encouraged to sit in on classes to see first-hand how ILM works. These visits can also be used as a recruitment opportunity to bring parents and guardians into active participant roles in the ILM classrooms.

Looking Forward

Getting to the point where we could put this document together took over ten years of investigation, trial and error, outreach, sleepless nights, breakthroughs, frustrations, and occasional moments of profound clarity. We can't thank you enough for taking some time out of your day to read these words and consider the ideas we are putting forth.

If you are even contemplating being part of the movement to implement the Inspired Learner Model in a Washington State Elementary School, we can't thank you enough. We did our best to blaze a trail, but there has never been a guarantee anyone would follow it.

And the truth is that the trail we are blazing is not even a new path. Many have come before us and given us the inspiration, motivation, and ideas to create the Inspired Learner Model. Counted among these individuals are Sir Ken Robinson, Maria Montessori, Ted Dintersmith, Rita Pierson, Geoffrey Canada, Peter Gray, Sugata Mitra, Rudolf Steiner, Reggio Emilia, and hundreds of others who have become aware of the perils of the Whole Classroom Instructional Model and decided to do something about it.

Imagine your local elementary school abandoning the obsolete, 100-year-old way of teaching, and converting to ILM. Think of what that would mean for the students, parents, and educators in your community. Now imagine that spark traveling to schools around the world.

Envision a future where children are naturally motivated to learn and leave school with the drive and the skills to confront and solve the problems that humanity faces. We at School Change Now come from diverse backgrounds, political perspectives, and geography, but we are all convinced that there is nothing more critical to our collective future than inspiring children to be curious learners, good people, and engaged citizens of their communities and our planet.

Sincerely,

The People at the Center for Inspired Learning

