

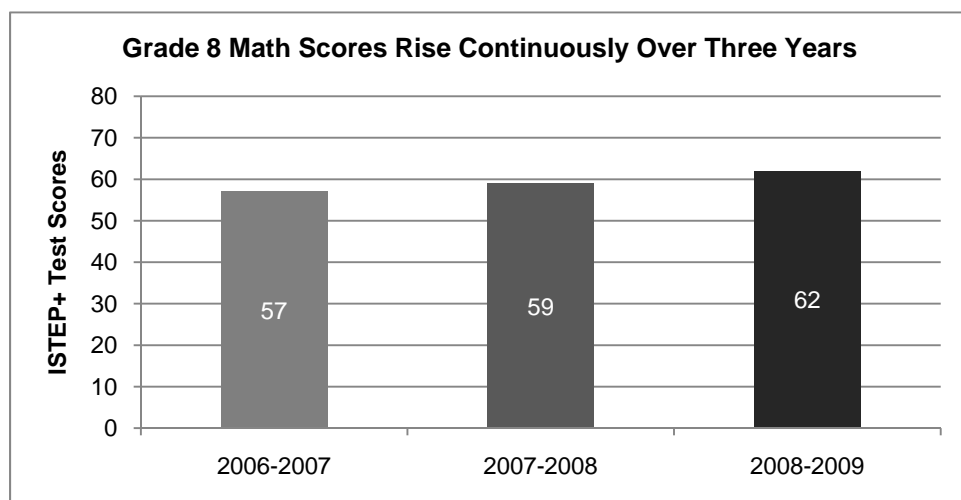
# White Paper Series

Elkhart Community Schools

Elkhart, Indiana

The  
Leadership  
and Learning  
Center™

**Elkhart Community Schools test scores have increased at every grade level since 2006 on the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress-Plus (ISTEP+).**



## Issues

- Changing demographics forced the district to re-examine teaching strategies in order to meet the needs of all students.
- An in-depth needs analysis revealed significant teacher and school isolation.
- Elkhart schools had a tremendous amount of student data but no common way to analyze the data and implement data-driven decision making.

## Solutions Provided by The Leadership and Learning Center

- Elkhart educators were provided professional development and follow-up support on teaching strategies for all students, particularly English language learners (ELL), across subject areas and grade levels to accelerate academic achievement.
- An Elkhart professional development plan was designed and implemented to foster proven practices and processes to increase collaboration at all levels within the district.
- A framework based on The Center seminars, *Data-Driven Decision Making* and *Data Teams*, was created to provide educators with a shared, specific, and effective process for utilizing data to drive instruction based on district-specific common formative assessments.

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## 1.0 Executive Summary

Elkhart Community Schools (ECS) is an Indiana school district with 20 schools and approximately 13,300 students that has partnered with The Leadership and Learning Center (The Center) since the 2004-2005 school year. Over the past five years, ECS student achievement results have continuously improved across grade levels. Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress-Plus (ISTEP+) scores are up over 2007 levels in every grade, and math scores have improved in grades 3 through 8.

Providing follow-up implementation support has been a key strategy in assisting Elkhart educators after they have attended initial training and professional development sessions. Based on years of research, Elkhart leaders and The Center's professional development associates recognized early in their partnership that providing ongoing support for professional development was essential to sustain and anchor new initiatives into the culture of the district. Throughout the long-term venture with ECS, targeted implementation follow-up has been given a significant outlay of time, energy, and financial support.

In Elkhart, Center professional development associates worked directly at the school level to ensure that teachers and principals had the support to successfully implement the methods provided in training, including research-based strategies in the use of data, effective collaboration, and instructional best practices for ELL students. Using these strategies, the district has made great strides in improving teacher instruction and increasing student achievement.

## **2.0 The Needs of Elkhart Community Schools**

Elkhart Community Schools began working with The Leadership and Learning Center in the 2004-2005 school year. An extensive needs analysis, conducted in the beginning stages of the partnership, found issues such as teacher isolation and slow or no achievement growth across subgroups identified by No Child Left Behind as well as within grade levels.

Additionally, the district's demographics were changing. Many schools had a rapid and significant shift in student population that brought much higher levels of diversity to the district, including many English as a second-language learners along with greater numbers of other minority students. Several schools faced challenges adapting to their increasingly diverse populations. Overall, negative trends in student achievement and multiple cases of not meeting annual yearly progress (AYP) targets resulted in the potential for state intervention in failing schools. These trends created a sense of urgency—a need for action and the harnessing of collective energy within the district.

In response to these growing concerns, a professional development plan was designed which focused on training Elkhart educators to collaborate on data, select effective instructional strategies, and design meaningful assessments. Throughout the past five years, Leadership and Learning Center professional development associates have worked with Elkhart stakeholders at all levels. The goal has been to build the district's internal capacity by providing training in designing and developing performance assessments, data-driven decision making, data teams, and effective teaching strategies to every Elkhart educator.

### 3.0 The Role of The Leadership and Learning Center

Using a comprehensive needs assessment as a foundation for targeted improvement, Elkhart leaders worked with The Leadership and Learning Center's professional development associates to create a plan that would address the district's changing needs as well as provide teachers with research-based training, long-term support, and capacity building. By providing on-site follow-up support for all staff development, Elkhart leaders were better prepared to provide for sustainability and continuity as each new initiative was implemented.

The Elkhart Community Schools' professional development plan included the following services conducted by The Leadership and Learning Center beginning in the 2004-2005 school year:

**On-Site Professional Development:** Each seminar listed below fulfilled a distinct need for teachers at schools throughout Elkhart.

- *Making Standards Work* (recently updated, now titled *Engaging Classroom Assessments*) provided Elkhart teachers with the strategies to create standards-based performance assessments that directly aligned with the district's standards. In turn, these assessments provided an effective means to improve student performance in the classroom and on high-stakes standardized tests. The district's educators learned why performance tasks with accompanying rubrics for assessing student proficiency are so powerful and the compelling research that links writing across the curriculum with higher standardized test scores.
- *Data-Driven Decision Making* (recently updated, now titled *Decision Making for Results*) and *Data Teams* seminars. These seminars provided attendees the tools to create measurable indicators based specifically on Elkhart assessments, the expertise to collaboratively select and analyze student data, implement intervention, and track progress.
- *Five Easy Steps to a Balanced Math Program* provided strategies focused solely on improving math instruction. This seminar showed participants how to sharpen the instructional focus of each class period by using strategies to balance computational skills, conceptual understanding, and problem solving.
- *Effective Teaching Strategies* focused on providing Elkhart educators with an overview and modeling of effective instructional strategies with concrete, customized examples that could be immediately implemented in Elkhart classrooms. Participants were given assistance in planning the implementation of strategies for an upcoming unit of instruction, as well as how to share strategies.

- *Common Formative Assessments* provided participants with the training and tools needed to create interim assessments designed specifically to inform instruction with quick feedback. Formative assessments are collaboratively designed by grade-level or subject-area teams of teachers, and administered to all students in a grade level or course several times during the school year. In Elkhart, all formative assessment items are intentionally aligned to the district's Power Standards and include both multiple-choice and constructed-response questions. Participating teachers learned how to analyze student assessment results in data teams in order to plan and differentiate instruction. Such results provide *predictive value* as to how students are likely to do on each succeeding assessment, in time for teachers to make instructional modifications. Elkhart educators designed their work as matching pre- and post-assessments to ensure same-assessment to same-assessment comparisons. Additionally, these assessments are similar in design and format to district and state assessments.

**Implementation Visits:** The Center's professional development associates and Elkhart leaders recognized that focusing on implementation was essential for the success of district/school change and thus improvement. From the beginning of the partnership, implementation visits were given the same outlay of time, energy, and financial support as the initial seminars. In Elkhart, Center professional development associates worked directly at the school level to ensure that teachers and principals had support to successfully implement focused and proven initiatives successfully.

Other implementation and monitoring strategies included:

- On-site support for central office administrators
- Systematic, routine, and continuous communication between Center professional development associates and district and school leaders
- Frequent monitoring, measuring, and collective reflection about both adult practice and student achievement data
- Developing data teams to enable principals to collectively review and demonstrate that the essential, agreed-upon learning expectations were being taught—and how successfully—per the results of common formative assessments and the data-team process
- School walk-throughs by small teams of principals
- Periodic, face-to-face reports by principals to the superintendent regarding the degree of implementation and the resulting impact on student achievement

**Leadership Coaching:** In the 2008-2009 school year, Elkhart leaders made the decision to broaden their implementation strategies by expanding leadership coaching from select principals to all 20 principals within the district. The highly individualized coaching was specifically designed to meet the superintendent's goals that all data teams would be implementing the five-step data-team process and that common formative assessments would be in place at all schools.

Each coaching session was directly aligned to both the district and schools' stated goals and designed to:

- **Reinforce attention on the instructional and learning focus** of the schools' data-team work to ensure this work was aligned with the schools' annualized improvement plans
- **Gather data** about instructional strategies and student learning to supplement other data about educators' practices and student performance
- **Stimulate collegial conversation** about teaching and learning
- **Identify proven strategies and learn from other participants** through sharing observations, experiences, and perspectives, and engaging in inquiry
- **Deepen understandings and practices** by specific, ongoing feedback
- **Deepen understandings and practices** related to continuous school improvement efforts

This coaching program relied on over 30 years of foundational research on leadership, human development, organizational development, communications, and emotional intelligence. Additionally, the coaching included case study findings and practical applications from the practice of successful Leadership and Learning Center coaches and others in the field that directly related to each school's stated goals.

**English Language Learner Strategies:** Support for English language learners (ELL) was devised as a comprehensive program to provide a path to academic achievement for these students. The training, provided for K-12 educators, was developed to support implementation of Elkhart's standards-based curriculum along with effective classroom teaching strategies (sheltered instruction) for all English language learners. This training supports English learners in achieving and sustaining high levels of academic, linguistic, and multicultural understanding in addition to providing support to Elkhart teachers and leaders on the most effective strategies and how to differentiate instruction successfully.

This training was designed to:

- Improve the instruction and assessment of English language learners
- Enhance each teacher’s ability to understand and use curricula, assessment measures, and instructional strategies for English language learners
- Provide research-based strategies to assist teachers in increasing pupil English proficiency and academic achievement
- Be of sufficient intensity and duration to have a positive and lasting impact on teacher performance in the classroom

**On-Site Certification Training:** Certification training builds long-term support for the focused professional development initiatives by building internal capacity and saving significant costs. In Center certification trainings, teacher-leaders are prepared to guide professional development and effectively teach the content and implementation of The Center’s seminars within their own district. Certified trainers gained a deeper understanding of the seminar content and learned new tools to support other educators throughout the district who were applying the content in their classrooms. Elkhart Community Schools provided certification for a diverse group of leaders in *Making Standards Work (Engaging Classroom Assessments)*, *Data-Driven Decision Making/Data Teams (Decision Making for Results)*, and *Five Easy Steps to a Balanced Math Program*.

Each certification training was directly aligned with Elkhart’s specific goals to provide the most appropriate implementation support for classroom educators to increase student achievement.

**Keynote Presentations:** Elkhart Community Schools invested in keynote presentations for all district staff as well as community stakeholders. The goals of these events included introducing, explaining, and motivating educators about The Center’s research-based strategies and professional development, providing Elkhart staff with a comprehensive understanding of the district’s professional development plan, and also celebrating Elkhart’s successes as implementation of strategies commenced and student achievement began to climb across grade and subject areas.

## 4.0 Elkhart Community Schools' Results

Elkhart Community Schools uses the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress-Plus (ISTEP+) assessment to test students in English language arts, math, and science. The ISTEP+ is a standards-based test that measures how well students are meeting the state's grade-level expectations. High school students are required to pass the grade 10 ISTEP+ in order to graduate.

Students are assigned one of three scores for their performance on the ISTEP+: (1) did not pass (not proficient), (2) pass (proficient), or (3) pass+ (proficient+). The state's goal is for all students to obtain a pass or pass+ score on the test. ISTEP+ scores are important to schools because they are used to place the school in one of five state accountability categories. Schools in academic probation must follow specific steps to improve performance.

Elkhart Community Schools' results indicate that student achievement results are now rising. Elkhart's Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress-Plus (ISTEP+) scores are up over 2007 in every grade, and math scores have improved in grades 3 through 8. Looking at specific sites, individual schools are making tremendous strides in their goal to help all students reach proficiency:

- At Beardsley Elementary School, fifth grade students gained 31 percentage points over their fourth-grade ISTEP+ scores and 80 percent of sixth-grade students passed the math section in 2008-2009.
- Numerous middle schools surpassed the state average in math.
- Elkhart Central High School saw a 20 percent increase in the number of students scoring proficient and a 28 percent increase in the number of students scoring proficient+ in writing applications.

Elkhart Community Schools' leaders recognize that results of professional development cannot be assessed by test scores alone. According to the Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. John Hill, the district has identified significant improvements in teaching strategies and the use of student data: "We can say with assurance that Elkhart Community Schools has a collaborative work environment, based on the work of our 171 data teams. Because we expected every teacher and administrator to become engaged in professional development and to implement what they had learned, we have developed a common language, a data-teams culture,

groups of teachers who make data-responsive decisions, and a leadership team that promotes high-fidelity collaboration.”

Other effects of The Center’s professional development include:

- Principal-level data teams that meet monthly and that provide building principals the opportunity to review specific academic progress in their respective schools with fellow principals from other schools. These teams engage in collaborative discussions regarding problem solving, building teacher-leaders, and strengthening the work of their teacher data teams.
- An increase in the percentage of teachers that are strategically incorporating effective teaching practices within their instruction based on classroom-walkthrough data, document analysis (Data Team™ minutes), and self-assessment (using a rubric developed by Robert Marzano).
- Improved support for and monitoring of district-wide implementation efforts by central-office staff.

Elkhart Community Schools and The Leadership and Learning Center continue in their professional development partnership and the implementation of targeted strategies for district educators at all levels.

## 5.0 Lessons Learned in Elkhart Community Schools

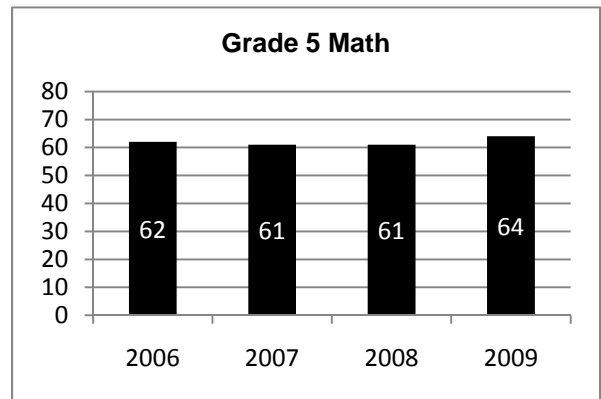
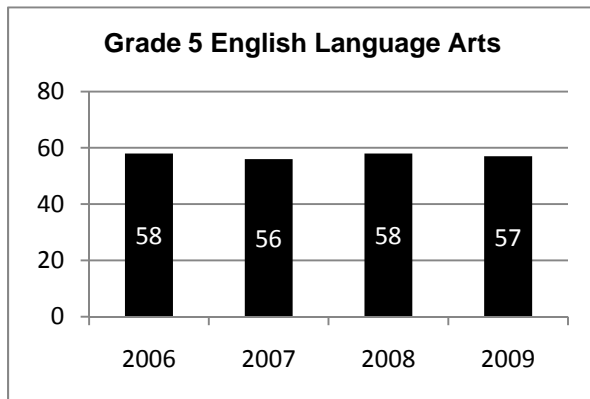
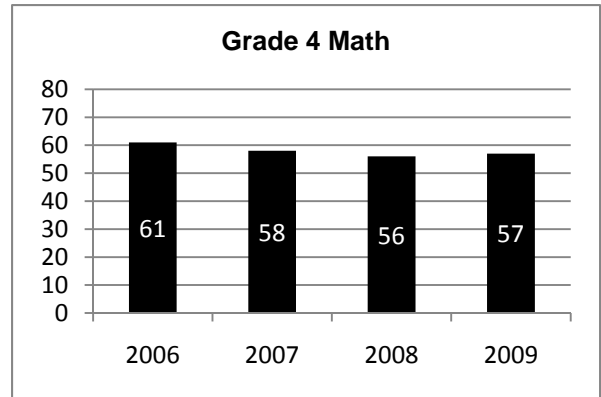
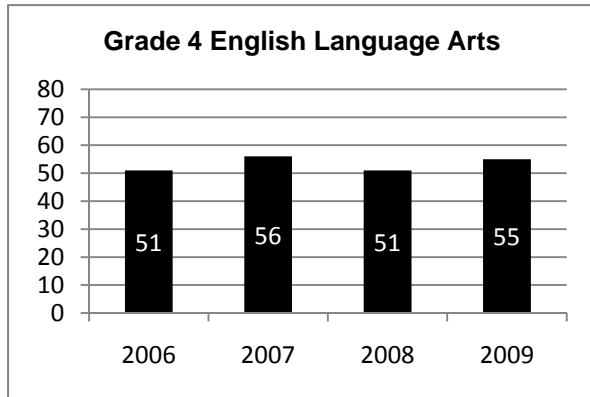
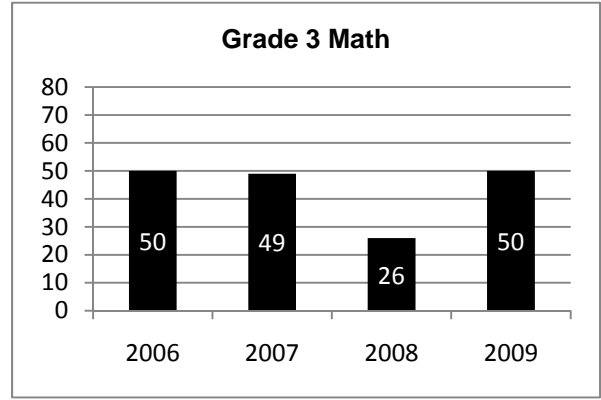
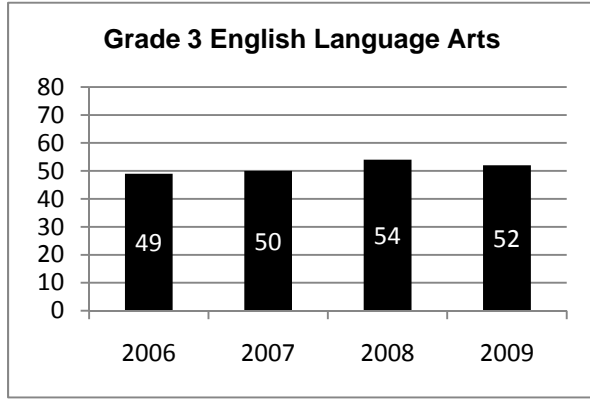
Elkhart leaders and The Center recognize the following specific lessons as integral to the district's continued success.

- **Implementation:** Elkhart leaders understood that implementation support was essential to the success of district and school change, sustaining initiatives, and improving performance, and they identified initial professional development as “the first stage” of work. Customized implementation strategies were a significant factor in meeting the needs of educators as well as student achievement results in Elkhart. The district ensured the professional development plan actively engaged all faculty in the change initiatives by scheduling implementation visits by Center associates to the schools. This process allowed classroom educators to have direct access to The Center's associates, in addition to providing ongoing monitoring of strategies and support for mid-course adjustments.
- **Continuity:** Elkhart Community Schools continues to work with The Leadership and Learning Center in an active and ongoing partnership. In the 2009-2010 school year, the district will continue with implementation visits and certified trainers will continue training educators throughout the district.
- **Planning:** Working with The Leadership and Learning Center, district leaders created a professional development plan that was directly aligned with the district's identified needs and goals. From the initial stages of the partnership, Elkhart strategized to bring in support from an outside organization, while also building internal capacity. Throughout the five-year partnership, the district has stayed with this course of action and has saved costs.
- **Resources:** Elkhart leaders continue to invest in books and other resources for classroom teachers and school leaders to align with the professional development initiatives.
- **Community Development:** Stakeholders from outside the district and *all* district staff were invited to attend keynote presentations and events. This type of community development provided for a common understanding of the district's initiatives, expectations, core priorities, and goals.

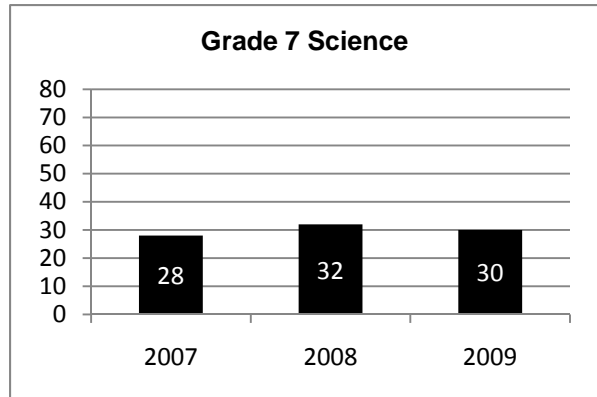
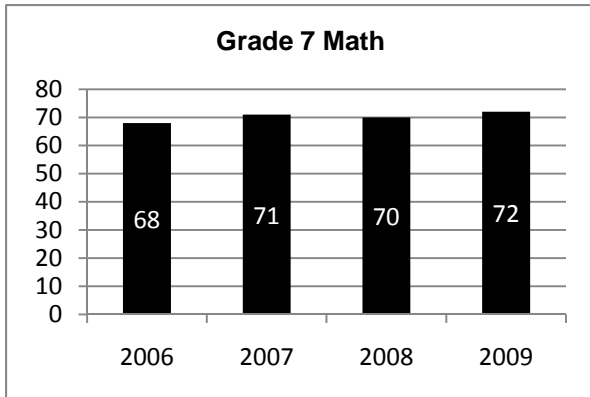
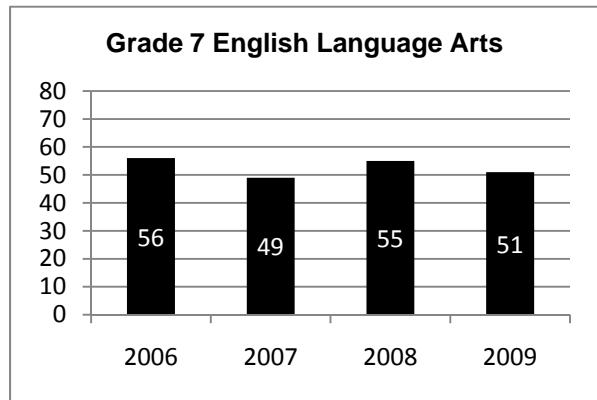
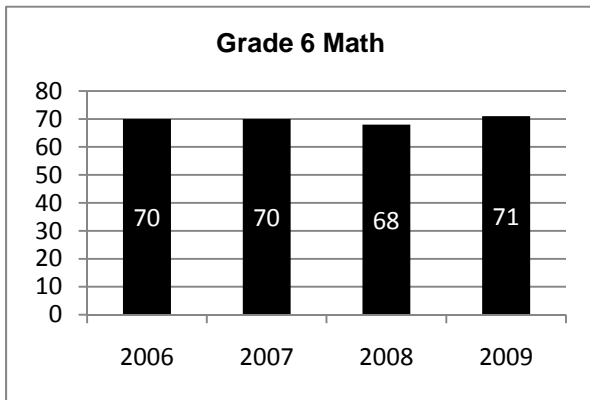
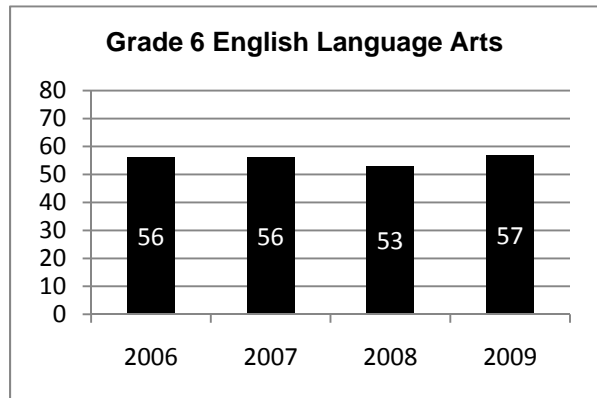
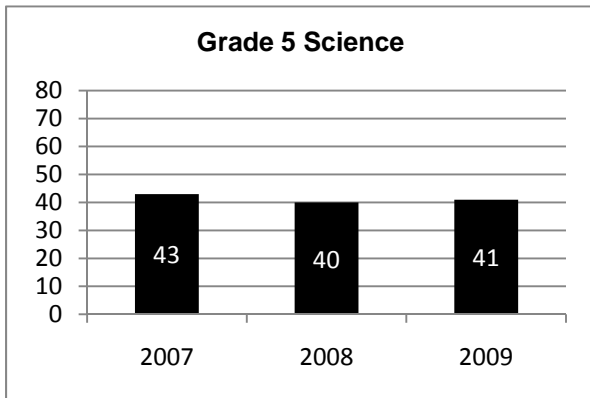
Elkhart Community Schools and The Leadership and Learning Center continue in a strong partnership based on meeting the needs of Elkhart staff and ensuring future student achievement success.

## Appendix One

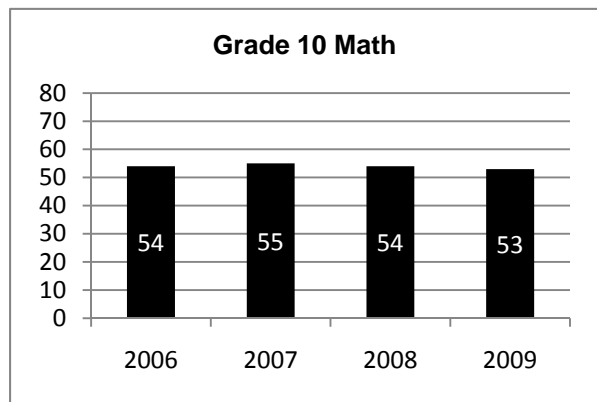
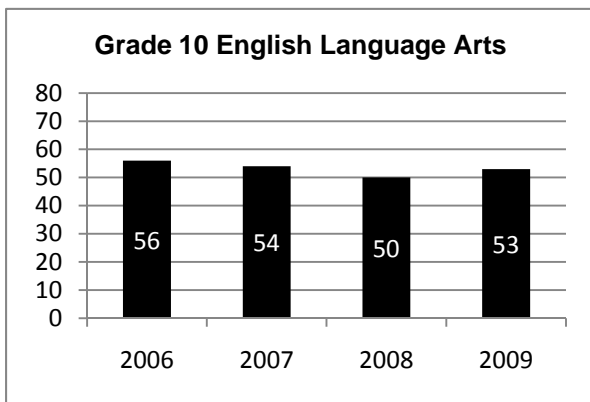
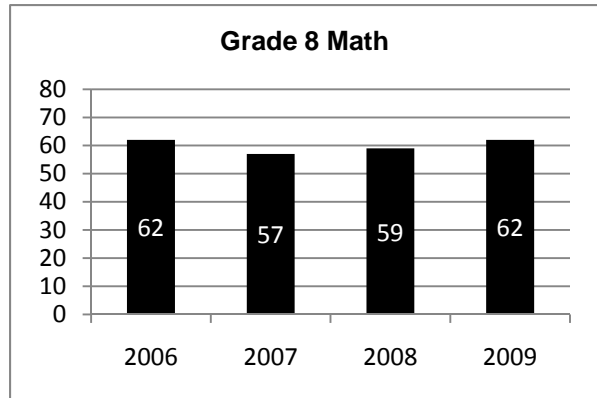
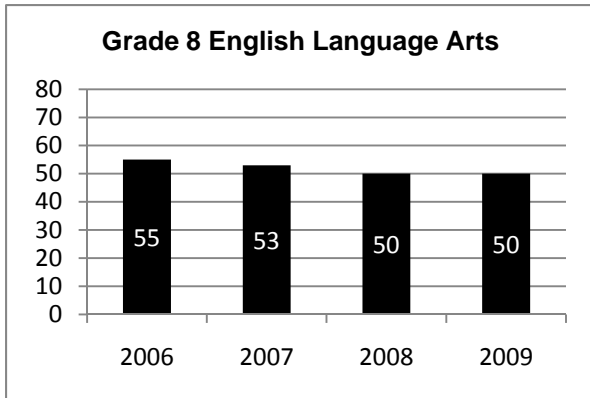
### Percentage of Students Who Scored Proficient or Proficient+ on ISTEP+



**Appendix One (Continued)**



## Appendix One (Continued)



## Appendix Two

### Percentage of Students Who Scored Proficient or Proficient+ on ISTEP+ by Subgroup

Grade 3 English Language Arts	
Female	57%
Male	47%
Black	38%
Hispanic	40%
White	62%
FRL	45%
SPED	28%
ELL	38%

Grade 3 Math	
Female	49%
Male	51%
Black	30%
Hispanic	39%
White	63%
FRL	42%
SPED	37%
ELL	38%

Grade 4 English Language Arts	
Female	58%
Male	52%
Black	38%
Hispanic	43%
White	67%
FRL	47%
SPED	23%
ELL	43%

Grade 4 Math	
Female	57%
Male	60%
Black	37%
Hispanic	52%
White	66%
FRL	52%
SPED	35%
ELL	50%

Grade 5 English Language Arts	
Female	62%
Male	51%
Black	41%
Hispanic	44%
White	66%
FRL	49%
SPED	24%
ELL	39%

Grade 5 Math	
Female	62%
Male	66%
Black	43%
Hispanic	53%
White	73%
FRL	56%
SPED	40%
ELL	51%

Grade 5 Science	
Female	41%
Male	42%
Black	18%
Hispanic	31%
White	53%
FRL	31%
SPED	24%
ELL	26%

## Appendix Two (Continued)

Grade 6 English Language Arts	
Female	65%
Male	49%
Black	34%
Hispanic	53%
White	67%
FRL	50%
SPED	16%
ELL	47%

Grade 6 Math	
Female	74%
Male	69%
Black	49%
Hispanic	68%
White	79%
FRL	65%
SPED	37%
ELL	64%

Grade 7 English Language Arts	
Female	56%
Male	46%
Black	31%
Hispanic	37%
White	63%
FRL	43%
SPED	15%
ELL	28%

Grade 7 Math	
Female	72%
Male	74%
Black	52%
Hispanic	68%
White	80%
FRL	65%
SPED	38%
ELL	64%

Grade 7 Science	
Female	25%
Male	35%
Black	13%
Hispanic	15%
White	43%
FRL	19%
SPED	13%
ELL	10%

Grade 8 English Language Arts	
Female	56%
Male	45%
Black	32%
Hispanic	36%
White	60%
FRL	38%
SPED	7%
ELL	30%

Grade 8 Math	
Female	63%
Male	62%
Black	69%
Hispanic	50%
White	72%
FRL	52%
SPED	19%
ELL	47%

## Appendix Two (Continued)

Grade 10 English Language Arts	
Female	61%
Male	46%
Black	30%
Hispanic	34%
White	64%
FRL	42%
SPED	16%
ELL	20%

Grade 10 Math	
Female	57%
Male	51%
Black	30%
Hispanic	39%
White	65%
FRL	42%
SPED	25%
ELL	27%

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