

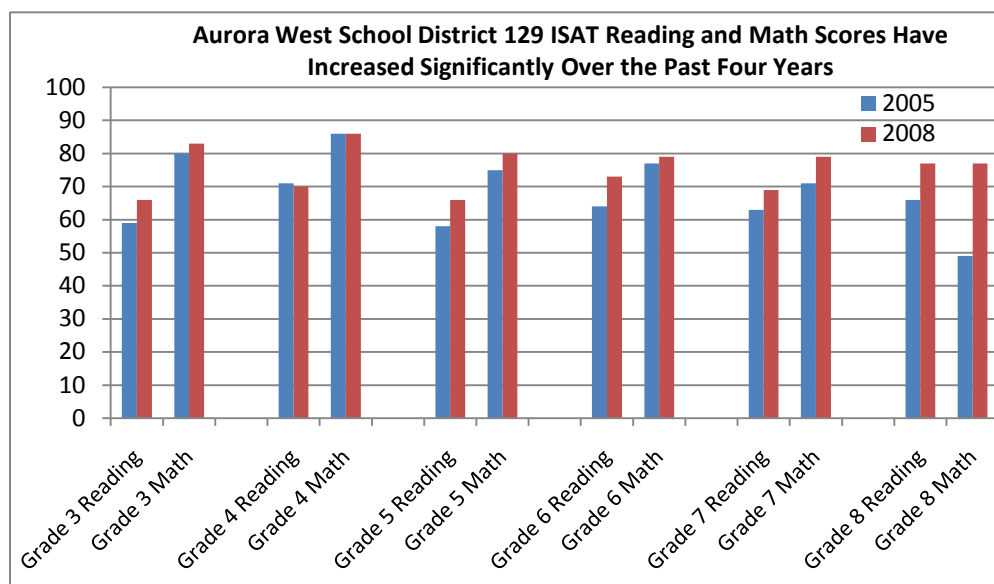
White Paper Series

Aurora West School District 129

Aurora, Illinois

The
Leadership
and Learning
Center™

Aurora West School District 129 ISAT scores have risen in every 2005 tested subject in every grade level from the 2005 to 2008 school year.



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Issues

- District leaders wanted to implement a more systematic approach to instruction and professional development.
- The district did not have a common system to assess achievement scores and monitor student achievement.
- Each school approached data analysis differently.

Solutions Provided by The Leadership and Learning Center

- Working with The Leadership and Learning Center, School District 129 leaders have developed a comprehensive professional development plan that is linked directly to the district's goals and initiatives.
- With assistance from The Center, District 129 leaders and staff have developed a set of Priority Learning Targets and common formative assessments that are aligned directly with these learning targets.
- District staff has been trained in The Center's seminars, *Common Formative Assessments*, *Data-Driven Decision Making* and *Data Teams*. These seminars provide the tools to differentiate between unnecessary student data and data that is relevant to driving instruction based on assessment results.

1.0 Executive Summary

Aurora West School District 129 is located in northern Illinois and serves about 12,500 students. The district is comprised of eleven elementary schools, four middle schools, one high school, one child development center, and one special-education facility—all of which serve a growing and diverse population from urban, suburban, and rural areas. Based on the 2009 Illinois District Report Card, the student population is currently 44.2 percent Hispanic, 33.7 percent Caucasian, 16.3 percent African-American, 2.4 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, .2 percent Native American, and 3.2 percent Multiracial.

Under the leadership of Dr. James Rydland, Superintendent, the district created “Vision 129.” This comprehensive, multi-year plan is focused on improving student learning. The plan concentrates on four areas:

- Active community involvement
- Financial responsibility
- Safe and secure buildings
- Powerful teaching and learning process

In the 2005-2006 school year, School District 129 initiated a partnership with The Leadership and Learning Center. At that time, the district had no common system of assessment; each school approached data analysis differently. As a result, district leaders wanted to create and implement a more systematic approach to instruction and professional development.

Using Vision 129 as a foundation, The Leadership and Learning Center worked with district leaders to provide training in assessment strategies tied to district standards and in the use of data to drive instruction. The Center also helped District 129 align their professional development plans with district initiatives including the goal of preparing all educators and school leaders to meet the needs of the district’s growing and increasingly diverse student population.

Furthermore, Center associates provided follow-up implementation support which has been key in assisting School District 129. Using these strategies, the district has made great strides in improving teacher instruction and increasing student achievement. School District 129’s Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) scores have risen in *every* tested 2005 subject in *every* grade level from the 2005 to 2008 school year.

2.0 The Needs of Aurora West School District 129

When School District 129 leaders contacted The Leadership and Learning Center in 2005, the district was facing numerous challenges. The district had no common system of assessment for monitoring student progress and it relied mainly on state assessments to drive school improvement planning. Also, although many schools were meeting achievement standards, district achievement scores varied widely. Schools did not have SMART* goals and schools were not consistently utilizing student data at all, while others had no systematic approach to data analysis. Furthermore, professional development did not consistently support the district's goals. Over time, the central office has undergone major revisions that include a newly assigned assistant superintendent, a new director of elementary education, a new director of secondary education, a new director of literacy, assessment and professional development, a new director of special education, a new assistant director of special education, and a new director of early childhood. Fortunately, these leaders worked together in a shared, focused direction.

The district superintendent, who was already familiar with the work of Dr. Douglas Reeves, forged a partnership with The Leadership and Learning Center based on his knowledge of The Center's past successes.

In response to School District 129's growing concerns, The Center helped the district design a professional development plan focused on training educators to utilize data, identify district Power Standards, create common formative assessments, and increase sustainable internal capacity.

* School and district goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely—SMART.

3.0 The Role of The Leadership and Learning Center

The Leadership and Learning Center’s professional development associates worked with School District 129 leaders to create a comprehensive professional development plan that would address the district’s changing needs as well as provide teachers with research-based training, long-term support, and capacity building.

The School District 129 professional development plan included the following services beginning in the 2005-2006 school year:

Power Standards and “Unwrapping” the Standards (now combined with *Making Standards Work* and re-titled *Engaging Classroom Assessments*): *Power Standards* and “*Unwrapping*” the *Standards* are one-day seminars designed to assist educators in utilizing classroom standards. Power Standards are a subset of the complete list of standards for every grade and for every subject. They represent the “safety net” of standards that each teacher should ensure that all students learn prior to leaving their current grade. Students who acquire this safety net of knowledge and skills will exit one grade better prepared for the next grade. In School District 129, these Power Standards are identified as “Priority Learning Targets.” The district has specified Priority Learning Targets in math, reading, writing, social studies, science, foreign languages, physical education and health, fine arts, and early childhood.

In the seminar, “*Unwrapping*” the *Standards*, PreK–12 educators learn an important practice that they can use to effectively impart the academic content standards to their students. Participants “unwrap” Power Standards and determine the Big Ideas or enduring understandings from them, then they write Essential Questions to guide instruction and assessment, and discuss ways to “work smarter, not harder” by involving all educators in the “unwrapping” process. Participants also have an opportunity during the seminar to deepen personal understanding of the process by practicing and applying the methods and by acquiring strategies to implement “unwrapped” standards in the PreK–12 instructional program immediately.

Data Teams and Data-Driven Decision Making (recently updated, now titled *Decision Making for Results*): These seminars provide attendees the tools to differentiate between unnecessary student data and the data that is relevant to driving instruction based on results. Additionally, participants learn new strategies to collaboratively analyze student data, create measurable indicators, implement intervention, and track progress.

The primary goal of the *Data Teams* seminar is to maximize effective instructional practice via constant monitoring of prescribed materials. *Data Teams* work in conjunction with The Center’s *Decision Making for Results* seminar. Together, these seminars give participants

the tools to analyze relevant student data effectively in collaborative teams. Results are applied not only to inform instruction for individual students, but also to evaluate and improve core general education practices and the overall efficacy of interventions.

Educators in School District 129 continue to utilize the *Data-Driven Decision Making* process and data teams are in place and active in all district schools.

Implementation Visits: To ensure educators could effectively implement the district's Priority Learning Targets and utilize the strategies learned in the *Data Teams* and *Data-Driven Decision Making* seminars, School District 129 leaders arranged for schools to receive additional coaching in the form of implementation visits. The Leadership and Learning Center's professional development associates worked closely with school leaders and educators to focus specifically on stated goals and needs. These implementation visits by Center associates made a significant impact directly at the school and classroom level.

Common Formative Assessments: This seminar provides participants with the training and tools needed to create interim assessments designed specifically to inform instruction with prompt feedback. In School District 129, Common Formative Quarterly District Benchmark Assessments are being developed in core content areas. Formative assessments are collaboratively designed by grade-level or subject-area teams of teachers, and will be administered to all students in a grade level or course at the end of each quarter (nine-week grading period). The formative assessment items are aligned intentionally with the district's Priority Learning Targets. Participating teachers learn how to analyze student assessment results in data teams to plan and differentiate instruction. Such results will provide predictive value as to how students are likely to do on each succeeding assessment in time for teachers to make instructional modifications. Additionally, these assessments are similar in design and format to state assessments.

Certification Training: Certification training builds long-term support for the 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 gain a deeper understanding of the seminar content and learn new tools to support other educators throughout the district who are applying the content in their classrooms. School District 129 teachers and leaders attended certification training in *Decision Making for Results*, *Data Teams*, and *Common Formative Assessments*. Participants in each certification training directly aligned their learning goals and results with the district's specific goals.

4.0 Aurora West School District 129 Results

Illinois uses multiple standards-based tests—the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT), the Illinois Alternate Assessment (IAA), the Illinois Measure of Annual Growth in English (IMAGE, eliminated in 2008) and the Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE)—to measure how well students are meeting grade-level expectations. The ISAT is given in grades 3 through 8 in reading and math, and in grades 4 and 7 in science. The IAA is administered to students in grades 3 through 8 and 11 in reading and math and in grades 4, 7, and 11 in science. The PSAE is administered to students in grade 11 in reading, math and science.

ISAT results show the level of proficiency a student demonstrates in each of the subject areas tested. Students are rated at one of four levels: academic warning, below standards, meets standards, and exceeds standards. The goal is for all students to score at or above the “meets” standards level.

School District 129 has made tremendous strides in increasing student achievement based on the ISAT scores. School District 129 ISAT scores have risen in *every* tested 2005 subject in *every* grade level from the 2005 to 2008 school year.

Other significant achievement gains include:

- From 2006 through 2008, over 70 percent of students have met or exceeded state standards in math at *every grade level tested*.
- Students in grades seven and eight have increased or maintained their math achievement scores every year from 2006 through 2008.
- In 2007, students in grades three, four, and five exceeded the state average in math. In 2008, grade four continued that achievement.

School District 129 leaders recognize that the results of professional development cannot be assessed by test scores alone. Teachers and staff throughout the district have made other significant gains in their professional development goals:

- Every school in the district utilizes the *Data-Driven Decision Making* process.
- Data teams are active and creating SMART goals and monitoring results in every district school.
- Participation in professional development training has significantly increased. The entire Teaching and Learning Leadership Team was present and engaged in the *Data Teams, Data-*

Driven Decision Making, and *Common Formative Assessment* seminars. The Teaching and Learning Administrative Team worked tirelessly on connecting The Center's work toward a comprehensive plan. This team, along with the Superintendent, also engaged in collegial follow-up conversations with principals to check progress toward deep implementation.

- The district implementation plan specifies using trainers that have attended The Leadership and Learning Center certification trainings. This practice ensures a method of providing ongoing, cost-effective professional development to all district teachers and leaders.

5.0 Lessons Learned in Aurora West School District 129

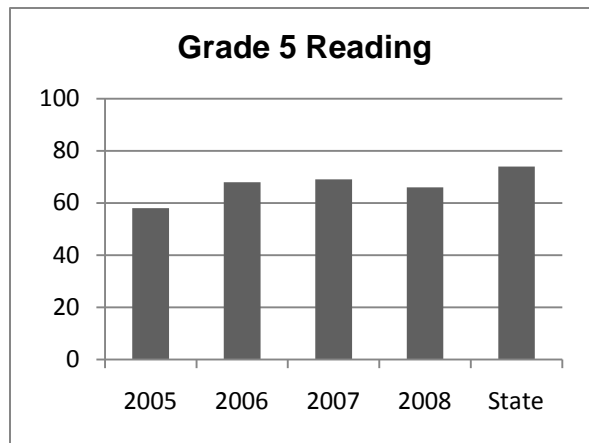
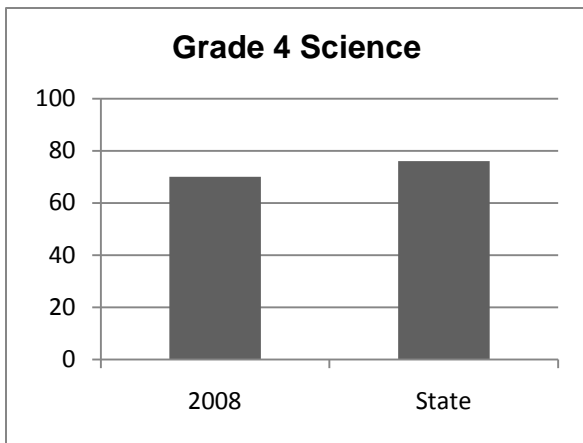
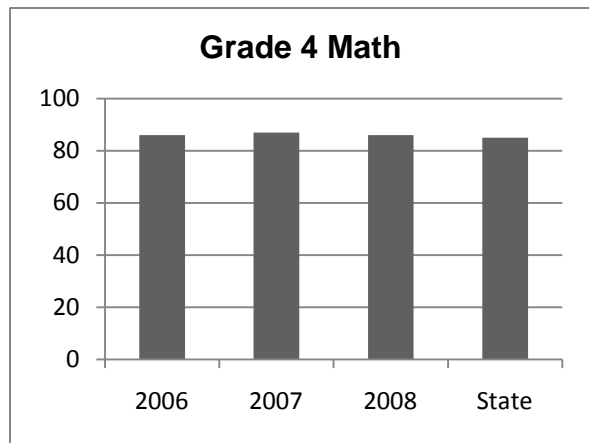
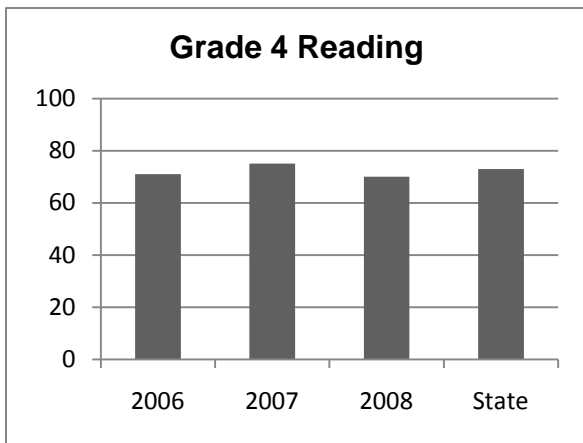
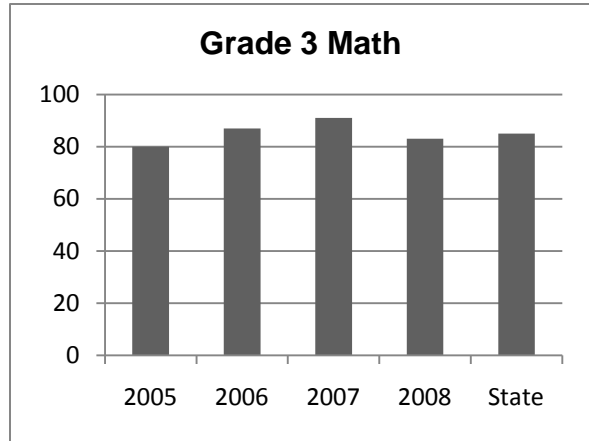
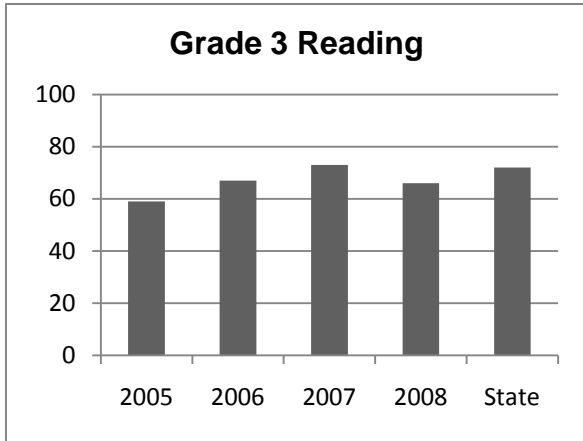
Throughout its work with The Leadership and Learning Center, School District 129 educators have worked diligently to improve student achievement. The following are specific lessons that district leaders and The Leadership and Learning Center recognize as integral to the district's success.

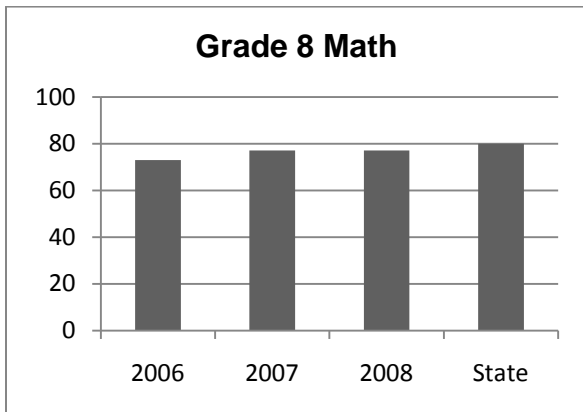
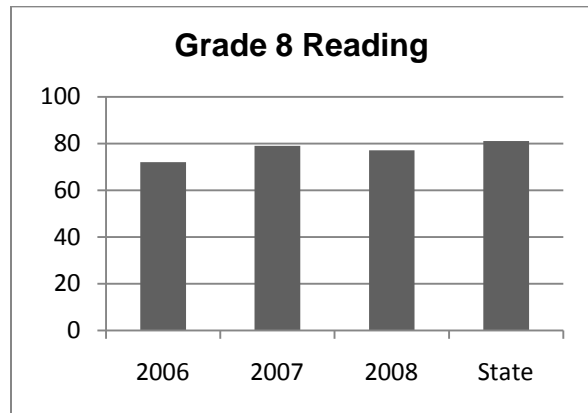
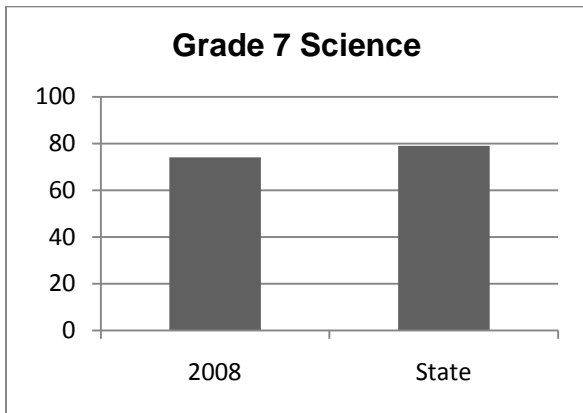
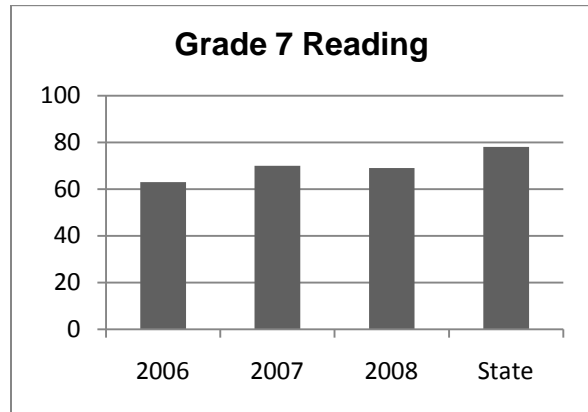
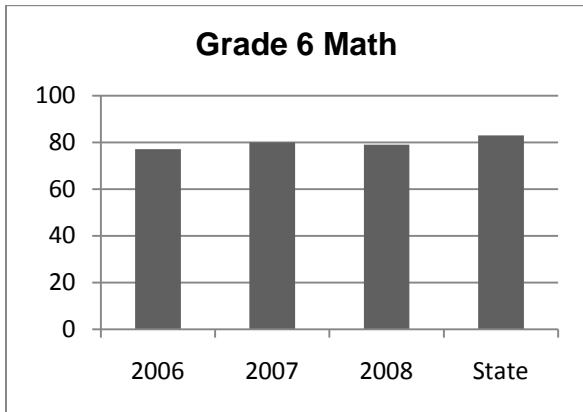
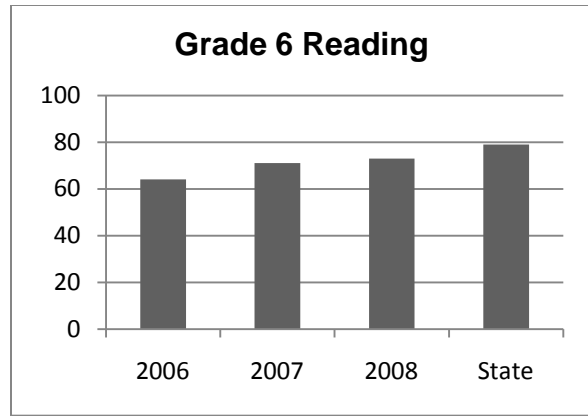
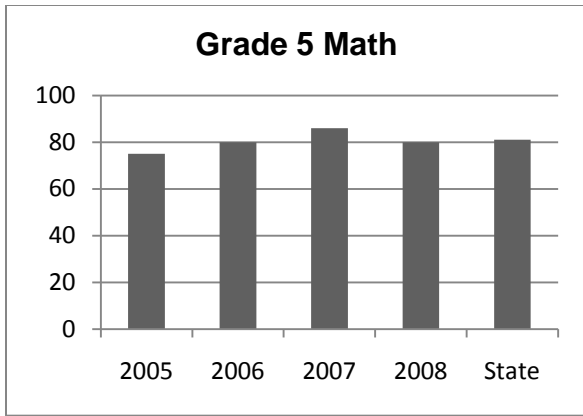
- **Communication:** School District 129 central office staff listened to building leaders and engaged them throughout the entire training and professional development process. In addition to seeking the input of building leaders early on in the development of the district's plans, central office personnel also conducted follow-up meetings with principals following each training within their particular school.
- **Power Standards and Assessments:** The district identified Power Standards—a “safety net” curriculum for grades PreK–12. Known as “Priority Learning Targets” in School District 129, specific academic targets are now in place for math, reading, writing, social studies, science, foreign languages, physical education and health, fine arts, and early childhood. Equally important, the district selected a group of PreK–12 content-area team leaders to initiate the development of common formative assessments tied to the Priority Learning Targets and allowed for district staff development days to continue and complete this work.
- **Research-based Practices:** The school district took a disciplined and focused approach to incorporating research-based best practices that are directly aligned with their identified needs.
- **Implementation:** District leaders supported school staff in their professional development efforts by including implementation visits provided by The Leadership and Learning Center professional development associates. This implementation support was essential to sustaining each initiative. This process allowed classroom educators to have direct access to The Center's associates for valuable feedback regarding the implementation of new strategies and insight and support regarding any necessary midcourse adjustments.
- **Certification Training:** School District 129 invested in professional development sustainability by certifying leaders to guide professional development and teach The Center's seminars within the district. Certification enabled the district to build internal capacity and save money toward future professional development.

School District 129 continues to work with The Leadership and Learning Center in an active and ongoing partnership that is based on meeting the needs of district staff and ensuring future student achievement growth and success. Future work includes identifying time for staff to hold frequent, ongoing, professional conversations focused on instructional decisions driven by data.

Appendix

School District 129 ISAT Scores





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