

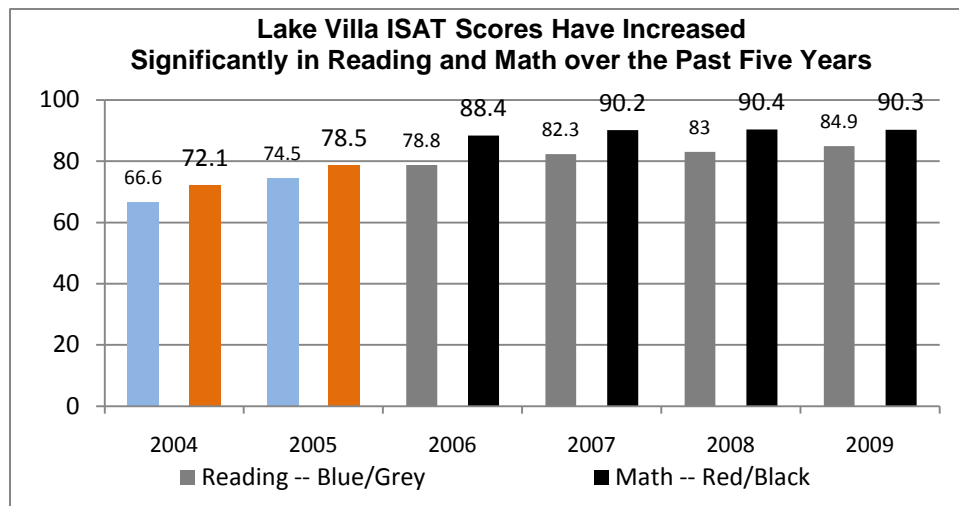
White Paper Series

Lake Villa School District 41

Lake Villa, Illinois

The
Leadership
and Learning
Center™

Lake Villa's 2006 Partnership with The Leadership and Learning Center yields jumps in Reading and Math scores.



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Issues

- Each school in the district had different goals and professional development plans.
- The district's curriculum was only loosely aligned with the Illinois Learning Standards (ILS) and few, if any, teachers even referred to the curriculum documents.
- Lake Villa schools did not have consistent school improvement plans or an overall strategic plan to guide their improvement efforts.

Solutions Provided by The Leadership and Learning Center

- Working with The Center, Lake Villa's Accountability Task Force created an accountability plan that incorporated the district's student achievement targets and aligned each professional development initiative in this long-term plan with these targets.
- All district educators attended The Center's seminar, *Engaging Classroom Assessments*, where they created standards-based performance assessments directly aligned with the Illinois Learning Standards and developed an effective means to measure student achievement results.
- Using the accountability plan as the foundation, a template is now in place to guide schools and central-office departments in a continuous improvement cycle and in the development of school improvement plans.

1.0 Executive Summary

Lake Villa School District 41 is located in the northeast corner of the state and serves 3,353 students in pre-kindergarten through grade 8. Test scores from 2005 through 2009 indicate that student achievement has improved throughout Lake Villa School District. However, early on improvement was minimal, and the middle school was approaching its second year of Academic Watch status in 2006. Additionally, each school in the district had different goals and professional development plans.

Lake Villa leaders wanted to establish a comprehensive accountability plan that seamlessly aligned the school district's long-range strategic goals with accountability indicators. The school district also had three additional objectives: build the capacity of its entire staff to implement the plan, determine which educational initiatives were most effective, and communicate progress to the board of education, the parents, and the community.

In 2006, Lake Villa School District initiated a partnership with The Leadership and Learning Center to address the issues that the district was facing. Over time, a school district task force has created an accountability plan that encompasses Lake Villa's student achievement targets and creates a framework that anchors each academic and professional development initiative to this long-term plan. As a result of the work that Lake Villa has undertaken, teachers now have curricula and assessments that are aligned to state standards, each component of professional development is aligned with the district's long-term goals, and each school has clearly articulated goals and expectations. Furthermore, the district has made tremendous strides in student achievement between 2006 and 2009. Scores in most grades and subject areas continue to rise, and in 2009 three district schools met or exceeded the state average in *every* subject and for *every* grade level tested.

2.0 The Needs of Lake Villa School District 41

Lake Villa School District 41 began its partnership with The Leadership and Learning Center in the fall of 2006. Lake Villa Superintendent, Dr. John Van Pelt, was familiar with the seminars and successes of The Leadership and Learning Center when he initiated the partnership. Dr. Van Pelt had worked with The Center in his previous district, Waterloo Public Schools, in Waterloo, Iowa.

When Dr. Van Pelt joined Lake Villa, the district had been without an assistant superintendent for two years. As a result, many important instructional programs and curricular revisions had deteriorated. Most schools were making only minimal gains, and the middle school was approaching its second year of Academic Watch status. Additionally, each school in the district had different goals and professional development plans, as well as inconsistent school improvement plans. Professional development opportunities varied widely from school to school. Staff members needed the knowledge and experience to develop common formative assessments, analyze data to make informed decisions, develop appropriate and effective instructional strategies, and plan timely interventions when students did not make satisfactory progress.

At the district level, the curriculum was only loosely aligned with the Illinois Learning Standards and few, if any, teachers utilized curriculum documents. The district did not have a strategic plan, a common vision, or any SMART goals—goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely. There were no accountability measures in place other than those required by the state. Finally, there was only a loosely organized evaluation system for teachers, and there was no evaluation system for administrators. Through their work with The Center, district leaders recognized the importance of long-range planning and establishing an accountability process with measurable indicators of progress.

The district leaders' goal was to work with The Center to create and implement a district accountability plan that would be aligned directly with the district's professional development and student achievement goals and would meet the expectations of the Lake Villa community. The main goals of the accountability plan were to increase student achievement, create high expectations for student and staff performance, and develop a collaborative culture with excellent levels of leadership and support. Dr. Van Pelt strove to provide a philosophical framework to anchor all school initiatives.

3.0 The Role of The Leadership and Learning Center

The Leadership and Learning Center worked with Lake Villa leaders throughout the 2006-2007 school year in the development of the accountability plan. The Accountability Task Force was comprised of 24 members representing all district stakeholder groups, including staff, district leaders, and members of the teachers' union. The resulting document is an accountability plan that supports a clear vision and articulates the district's strategic goals. To measure progress toward accomplishing these goals, the plan includes both Tier One¹ indicators to monitor district achievement and Tier Two² indicators to monitor school-level achievement.

Following the development of the Lake Villa Accountability Plan, district leaders used the document as a foundation for the creation of a professional development plan to address the needs of each school's teachers. Furthermore, by planning for such issues as teacher and leader turnover, The Center's professional development associates also helped Lake Villa address sustainability and long-term support.

Beginning in the 2006-2007 school year, Lake Villa School District initiated a professional development plan that was directly aligned with the district's newly developed accountability system. This plan included the following strategies:

Making Standards Work (recently updated, now titled *Engaging Classroom Assessments*):

This seminar provided Lake Villa educators with strategies to create standards-based performance assessments that directly aligned with Illinois curriculum and priority standards. The assessments designed in this seminar provided an effective means to improve student performance in the classroom and on high-stakes standardized tests and measure student achievement results. Participants learned why performance tasks for assessing student proficiency along with accompanying rubrics are so powerful. They also saw compelling research that links writing across the curriculum with higher standardized test scores.

Data Teams and Data-Driven Decision Making (recently updated, now titled *Decision Making for Results*): Both seminars were conducted several times between 2006 and 2008 to ensure that all Lake Villa educators had the opportunity to attend. These seminars gave Lake Villa educators the tools and strategies to create measurable indicators, the expertise to collaboratively analyze data, the means to track progress, and the ability to implement effective intervention.

¹ Tier One Indicators: Measure performance and progress toward achieving district-level goals.

² Tier Two Indicators: School and district strategies that are aligned directly with Tier One Indicators.

The primary goal of The Center's *Data Teams* seminar was to instruct Lake Villa teachers how to maximize effective instructional practice via constant monitoring of prescribed materials. This seminar works in conjunction with the *Decision Making for Results* seminar. Together, these seminars gave Lake Villa participants the tools to analyze relevant student data effectively in collaborative teams. Teachers applied results not only to inform instruction for individual students, but also to evaluate and improve core general education practices and the overall effectiveness of interventions.

The Leadership and Learning Center professional development associates aligned all data teams work to directly correspond with the Tier One and Tier Two indicators cited in the Lake Villa Accountability Plan.

Today, data teams are currently in place and active at all Lake Villa schools and grade-level teams share pre- and post-test writing results on common formative assessments every six weeks throughout the school year. Grade-level teams also meet on a district-wide basis to share the writing instructional strategies that have had the greatest impact on improving student learning.

Furthermore, the superintendent, the executive director of teaching and learning, and the principals meet with learning teams weekly during the school year. Ongoing evaluations of the implementation of the accountability plan are completed and shared three times per year. Finally, all administrators are trained in making informal, walk-through, classroom observations and conducting follow-up conversations with teachers as part of the monitoring process.

Common Formative Assessments: This one-day seminar provided Lake Villa educators with training to create interim assessments, collaboratively designed by grade-level or course teams. Assessments are administered to all students in a grade level or course several times during the school year. These common formative assessments are similar in design and format to district and Illinois state assessments and results can be analyzed and utilized via the processes learned in *Decision Making for Results*.

Implementation Visits: Lake Villa district leaders encouraged on-site professional development by planning implementation days at all Lake Villa schools. The Center and the district designed each implementation visit to directly align with each school's individualized needs, as well as the Lake Villa Accountability Plan. Each school worked one-on-one with a Center professional development associate to concentrate on specific, stated goals and needs.

Certification Training: Lake Villa leaders invested in professional development sustainability by certifying district leaders to guide professional development and teach The Center's seminars within the Lake Villa district. On-site certification also enabled Lake Villa to build internal

capacity and save money on future professional development costs. District leaders attended certification training in The Center's *Data Teams* and *Data-Driven Decision Making (Decision Making for Results)* seminars. Certified leaders gained a deeper understanding of the seminar content and learned new tools to support other educators who were applying the content in their classrooms. All professional development goals remained directly aligned with the Lake Villa Accountability Plan.

Keynote Presentations: Lake Villa leaders commissioned a “kick-off” keynote presentation to gain support of community members as well as a wide variety of district-wide stakeholders. School board members, school administrators, teacher-leaders, and classroom educators all attended this keynote. Other keynotes for district staff updated Lake Villa personnel on the progress they were making in increasing student achievement and reaffirmed the district's long-term goals and accountability plan.

4.0 Lake Villa School District 41 Results

Test results provide an indication of whether students are progressing toward mastery of state content standards. Lake Villa Public Schools uses the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) to measure how well students are meeting the state's grade-level expectations. The ISAT is given in grades 3 through 8 in reading and math, in grades 4 and 7 in science and in grades 3, 5, 6 and 8 in writing.

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.

Lake Villa Public Schools made momentous gains on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test over the past three years. From 2006 through 2008, students in grades 3 through 8 met or exceeded the state average on the ISAT across all tested subject areas.

Other significant achievement gains include:

- In 2007 and 2008, district scores reveal that Lake Villa students exceeded the state average in reading at *every* grade level. In 2008, district students exceeded the state average in math at *every* grade level.
- Three district schools met or exceeded the state average in *every* subject and for *every* grade level tested.
- In 2008, science scores exceeded the state average for *every* grade tested.
- In 2009, more than 80 percent of students scored proficient or above proficient in reading and science. The percentage of students proficient or above in ISAT reading increased almost two points to 84.9 and the percentage of students proficient or above in ISAT science increased almost three points to 87.31.
- The curricular and instructional priority the past two years has been writing. The district-wide average on the writing portion of the ISAT increased from 50 percent proficient (2006-2007) to 72 percent proficient (2008-2009), a twenty-two-point gain in two years. The district goal for next year is 80 percent proficient.

Lake Villa School District 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:

- More than 40 data teams are active throughout the district.
- A newly created template is guiding schools and central-office departments in the continuous improvement cycle and directing the development of school improvement plans.
- Staff collaboration is more focused and effective and the staff's ability to impact student achievement and high-priority learning outcomes continues to grow. According to Lake Villa leaders, "Educators have become more confident that the district's focus on literacy is improving overall student achievement."

5.0 Lessons Learned in Lake Villa School District 41

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

Inclusion: From the initial planning stages, Lake Villa clearly outlined the responsibilities of key stakeholders. Working with The Leadership and Learning Center, district leaders and the board of education appointed parent and community representatives to serve on a comprehensive Accountability Task Force with a diverse group of teachers, administrators, and union representatives. Including a diverse group of stakeholders helped all groups feel like their voices were heard, and the resulting accountability plan clearly reflected the goals and interests of each group. Furthermore, community involvement provided for a common understanding of the district's initiatives, core priorities, and goals.

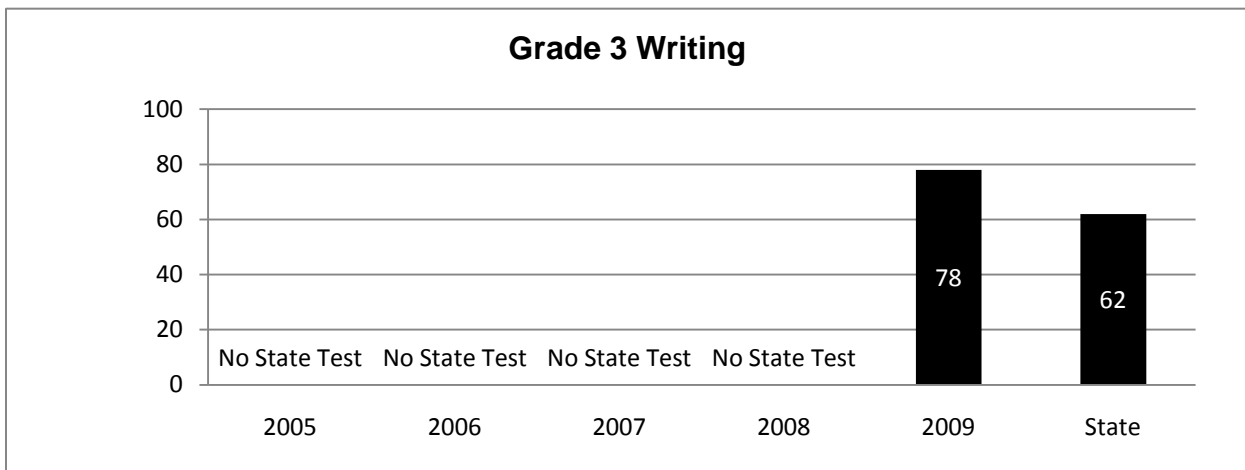
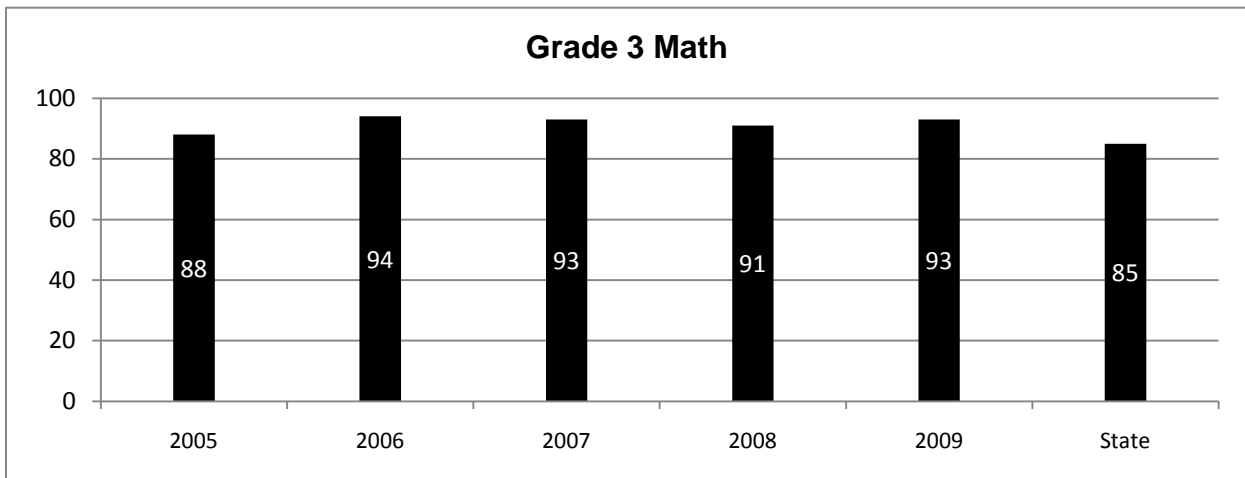
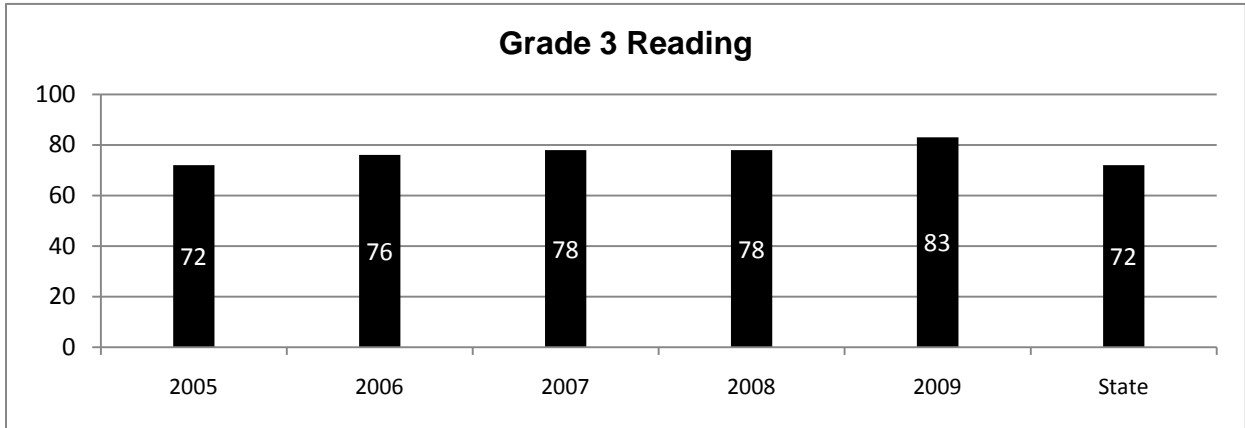
Align Initiatives: District leaders continue to use the Lake Villa Accountability Plan as the foundation for all professional development work. Using the plan in this way ensures that new initiatives are aligned directly with the district's identified needs and goals. The Tier One (district) and Tier Two (school) indicators remain as constant reminders of accountability as district stakeholders move forward with their future educational plans.

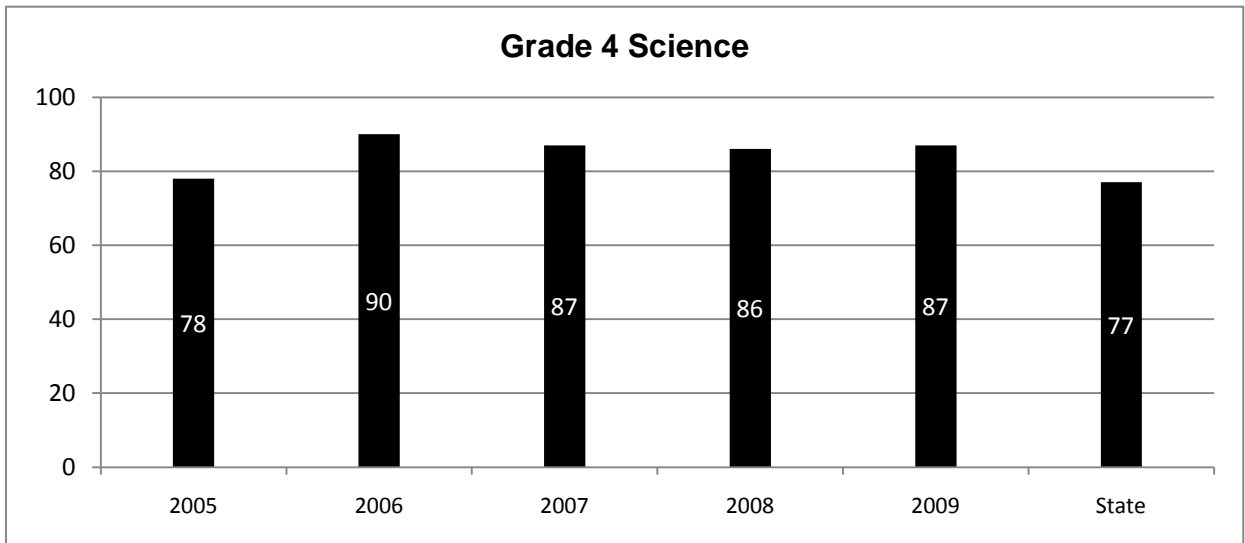
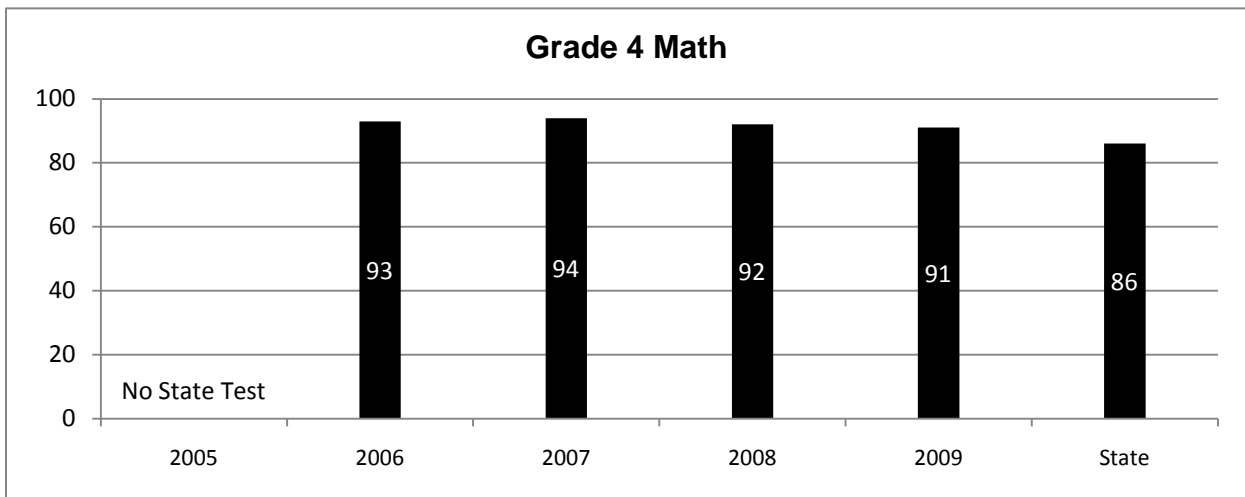
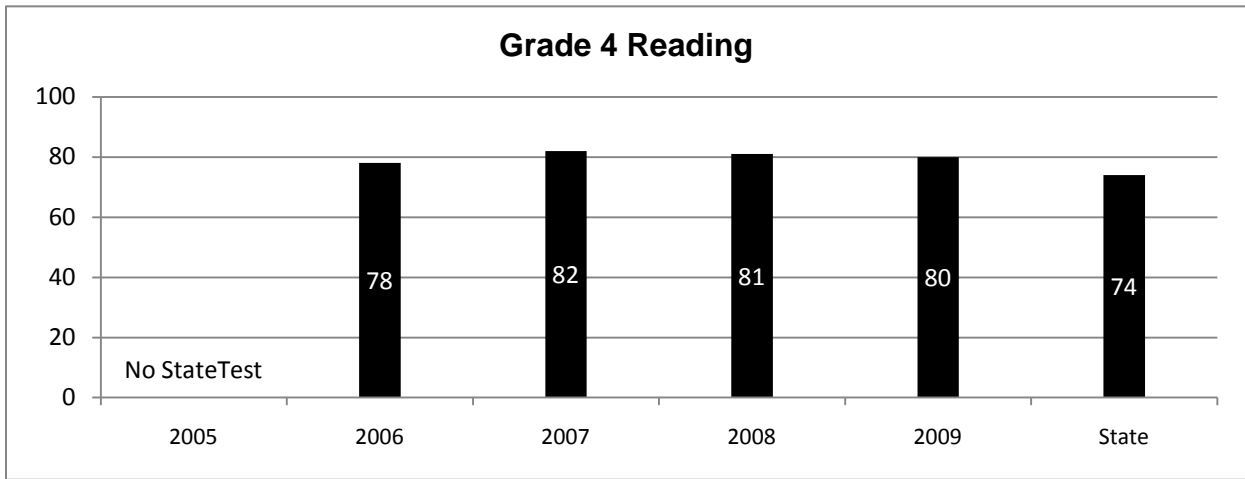
On-Site Certification Training: District leaders invested in professional development sustainability by certifying leaders to guide professional development and teach The Center's seminars within the district. On-site certification enabled the district to build internal capacity and save money on future professional development costs.

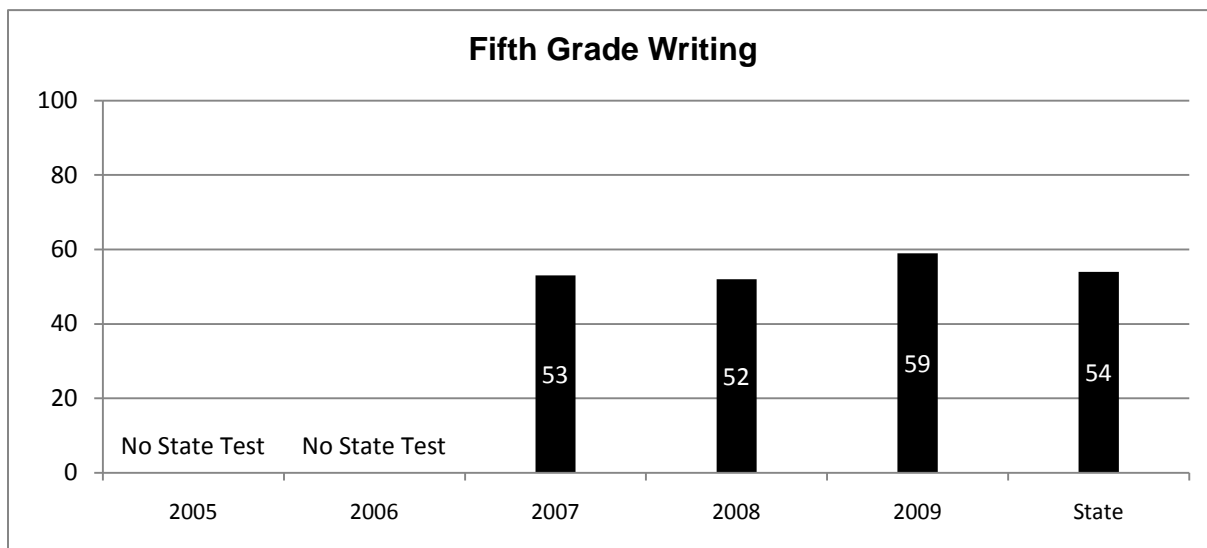
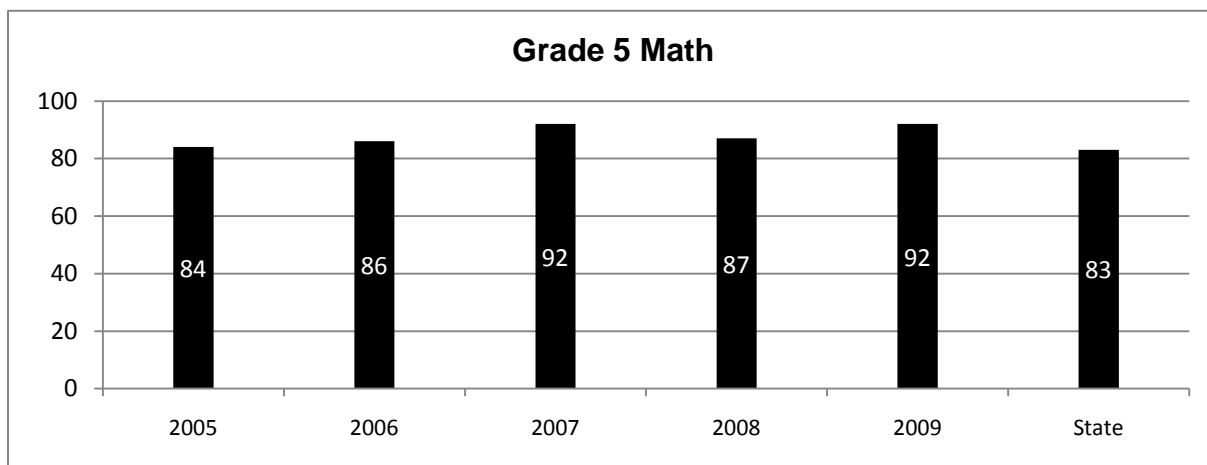
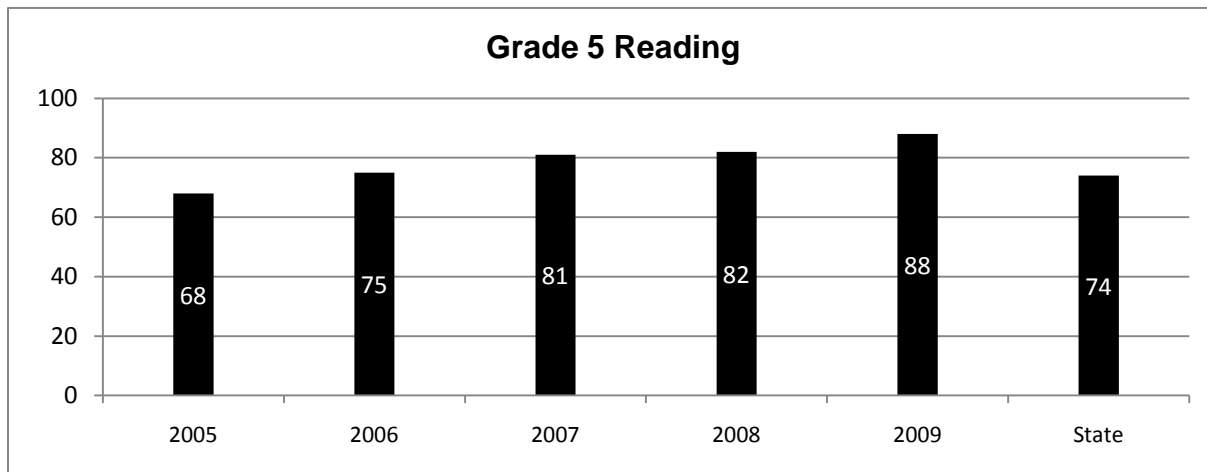
Monitor Results: Lake Villa leaders have established a process and structure to monitor results throughout the school year. This allows for midcourse adjustments, as well as a foundation to reflect on results at the end of the school year and see the "story behind the numbers." Lake Villa has also included a yearly executive review of the planning process for all administrators and teacher leaders to fine-tune their understanding.

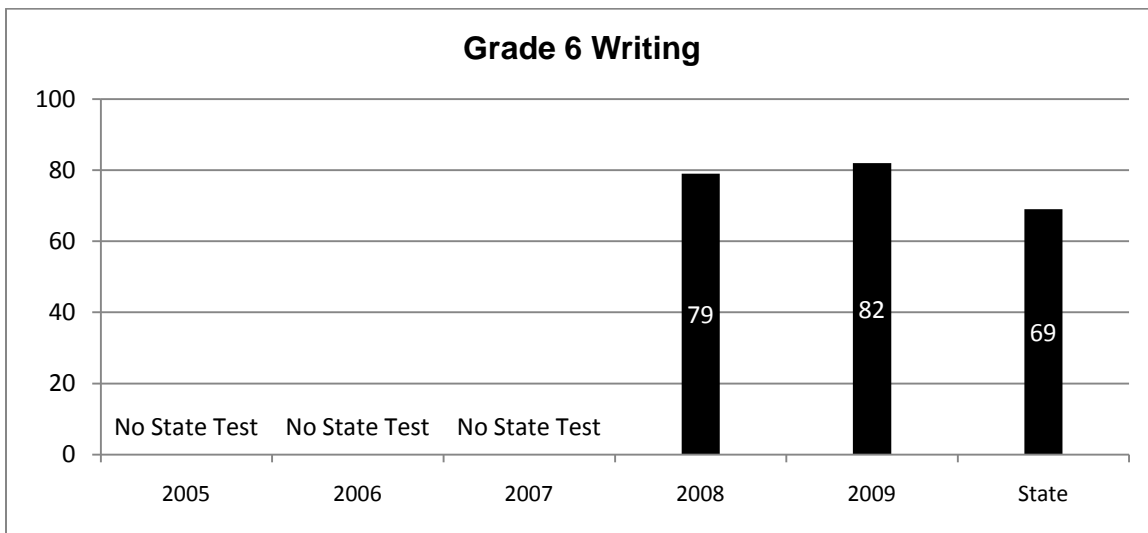
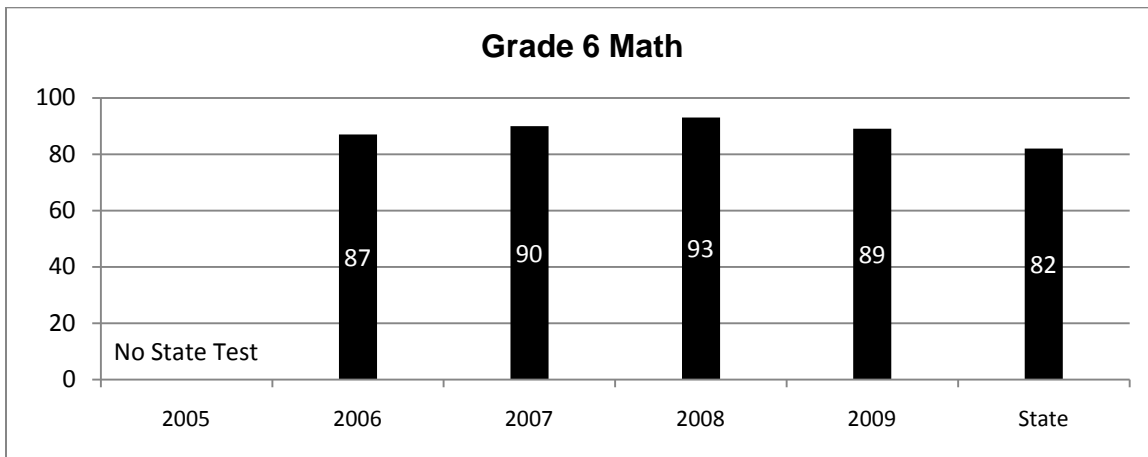
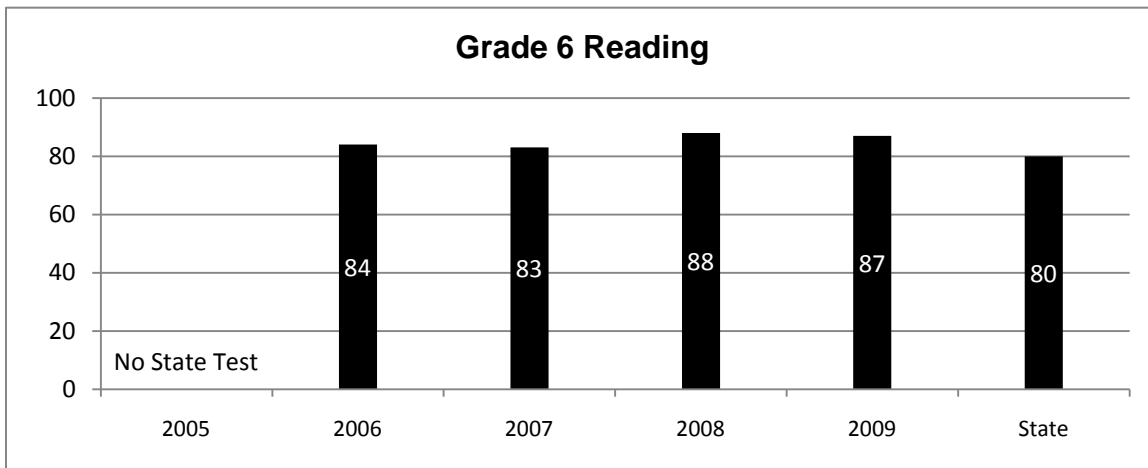
Lake Villa School District continues to work with The Leadership and Learning Center in an active and ongoing partnership. In the 2009-2010 school year, the district will continue with implementation visits, and new staff will receive training in *Decision Making for Results*. The partnership continues to grow as Lake Villa and The Leadership and Learning Center strive to meet the needs of district educators and continue to make remarkable student achievement gains.

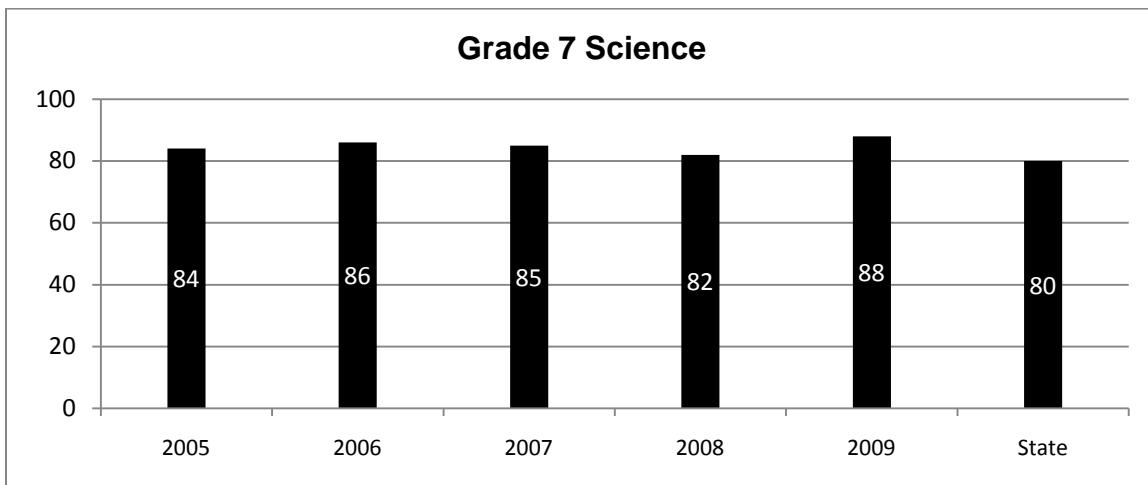
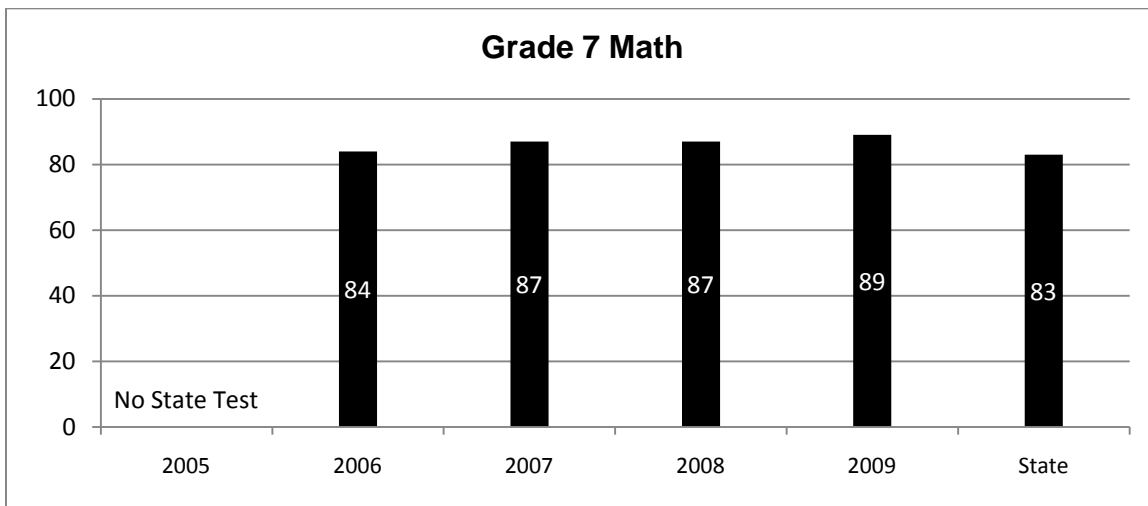
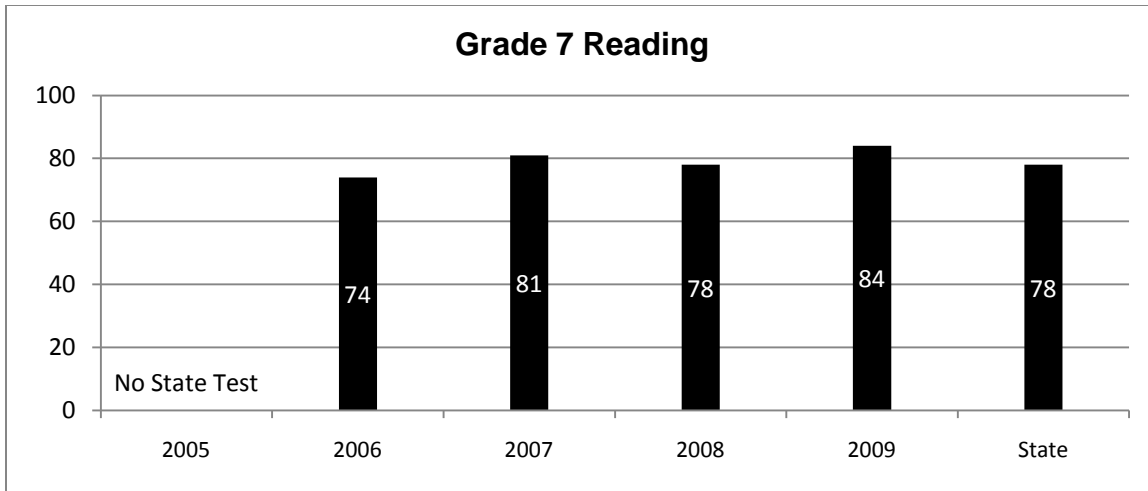
Appendix Lake Villa Student ISAT Scores

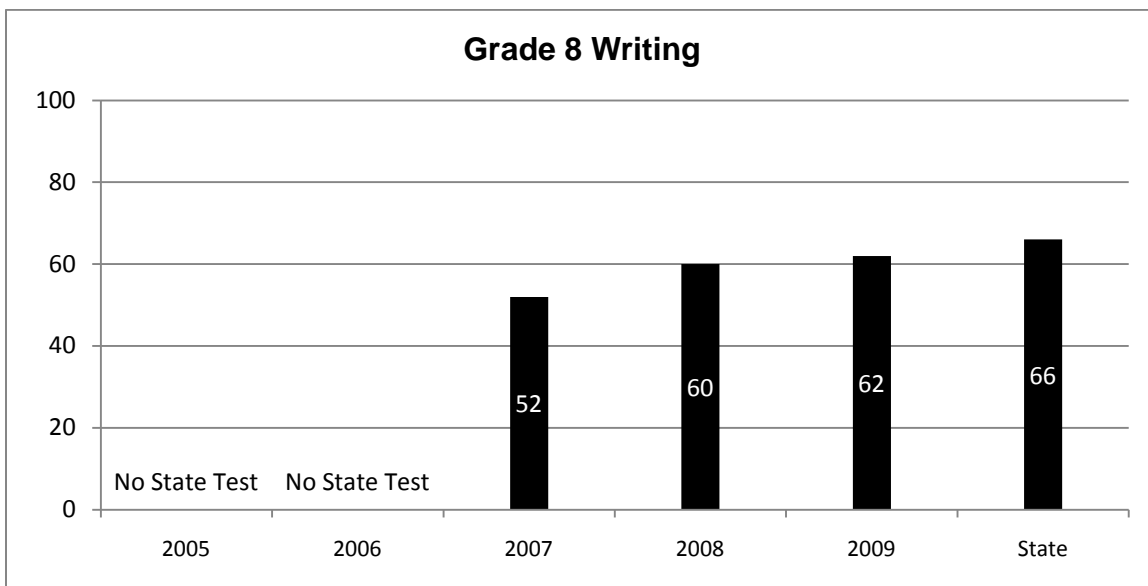
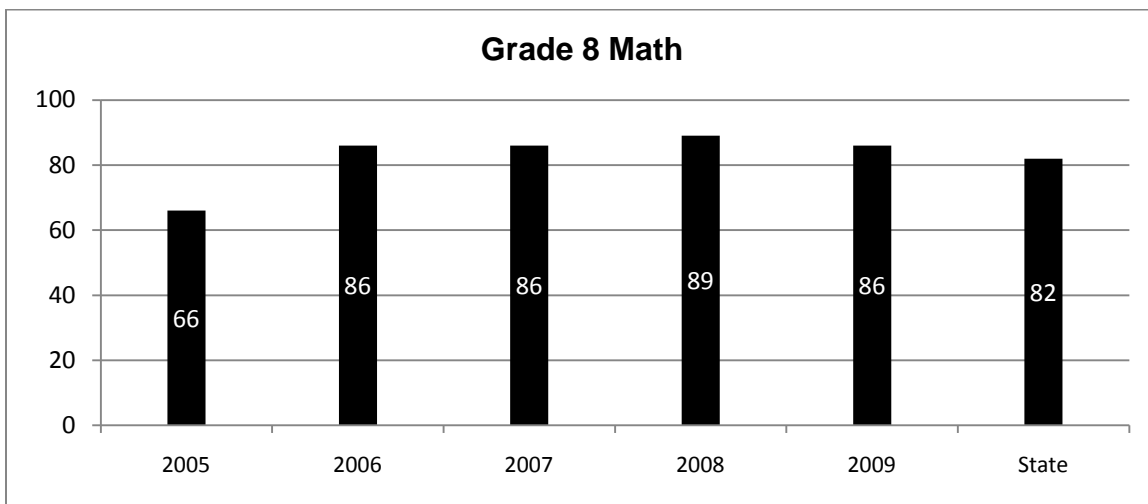
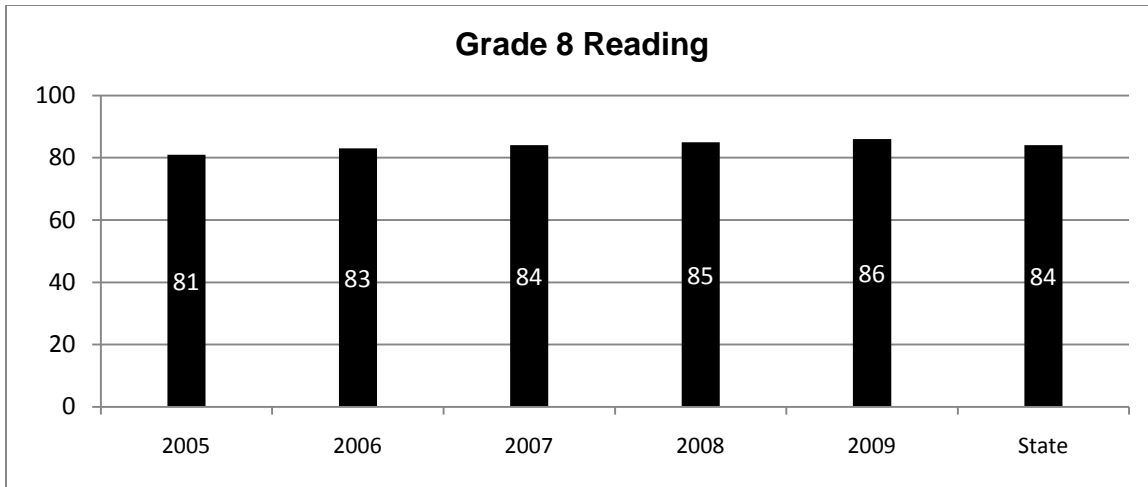












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