

## Building Instructional Excellence

### SCHOOL PROFILE

**Metro Status:** Suburban

**Grades:** High School

**Total Enrollment:** 2,423

**Eligible for Free or  
Reduced-Price Lunch:**  
53%

*“With curriculum transformation, we really had an opportunity to get ahead. We couldn’t wait. ICLE helps us stay ahead of other districts in our area, across the state, and even across the country.”*

### GOALS

- Adopt a school improvement plan that focuses on improving assessment scores and the graduation rates while supporting positive behavior, and a school-wide focus on literacy.
- Deliver instruction that it is relevant and rigorous, challenging to prepare students with skills required for success in college and career.
- Emphasize and improve communication among school staff, parents, and the community to foster and support learning experiences that challenge students.

### CHALLENGES

In 2008, Merrillville High School was selected among a group of four Northwest Indiana-area high schools to receive a five-year, five-million-dollar federal grant for Small Learning Communities. Under the leadership of Lorri Covaciu, Associate Principal, Merrillville partnered with the International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE) to improve the effectiveness of Merrillville’s academic programs and instructional practices.

A significant issue that confronted Merrillville was how to successfully address and meet the need for a rigorous and relevant education for all. Merrillville was looking for the best way to be proactive and prevent a culture of low expectations while creating a culture of success and college and career readiness.

### SOLUTION

#### ■ Clearly Define Best Practices And Implement Them Across the Curriculum

When students were not successful on the graduation qualifying exams in algebra and English, ICLE looked at the data to determine which skills were important for students to master in order to drive success. Merrillville’s middle school and algebra and English teachers shifted to a curriculum map that is adjusted as cohorts change.

## ■ Utilize Data to Drive Decision Making

Merrillville High School administered WE Surveys and the results suggested a disconnect in the perceptions of students and teachers. With the help of ICLE, this data was used to change instruction by incorporating the Rigor/Relevance Framework. Teachers also began using Gold Seal Lessons in their classrooms.

Information gleaned from a variety of data-collection methods, including but not limited to Educational Competency Assessment (ECA) data, Preliminary SAT (PSAT) data, and Advanced Placement data, drove Merrillville High School to shift to a trimester schedule in order to increase opportunities for enrichment, remediation, and credit recovery.

## ■ Stretch Student Learning Through Quadrant D Lessons

Merrillville teachers taught a Quadrant D lesson at a minimum of three times a year. Students were exposed to at least 15 Quadrant D lessons across each of their five classes per year. All teachers were required to include open-ended response questions on their assessments, and graded using a common rubric.

## ■ Establish A Continuous Improvement Committee to Address Student Needs

Merrillville High School staff provided the driving force behind substantive change as they brought independent ideas to the table, implemented them, and monitored success. Teachers communicated effective practices to one another during professional development, and every staff member was required to employ the practices within their classroom and discipline.

## ■ Transforming School Culture

A culture of high expectations and support from the top down helped drive goal setting and create a culture of continuous improvement. Throughout the school year, staff highlighted college and career opportunities by focusing lessons on graduation and beyond. Guidance counselors discussed four-year and post-graduation plans with students.

Positive behavior and success were celebrated through announcements and Merrillville High School's television station. Teachers were also recognized for contributing to students' successes. Students developed confidence, ultimately leading to greater growth and achievement.

*“The International Center for Leadership in Education team believed in our district as much as the educators in Merrillville believed in our students. The partnership and support of ICLE helped us continue to strive for excellence. The belief was the success was our only option.”*

# SUCCESS

Through a school-wide implementation of best practices, Merrillville's staff has become the driving force behind substantive change. They have increased student achievement through rigorous and relevant instruction, data-driven assessment and implementation, and the cultivation of positive and productive relationships between students, teachers, administrators, and the larger community. Merrillville has successfully achieved a 90% graduation rate and received recognition as the only 'minority-majority' large high school to receive an "A" grade from the state of Indiana for two consecutive years.

