Overview: Project EXCEED is a comprehensive, measurable, and sustainable initiative that has raised the bar for academic achievement for all 24,000 Indiana archdiocesan students, serving 12,000 in Marion County alone. The archdiocese has seen significant growth in the proficiency of its students mastering the Indiana Statewide Tests of Educational Progress (ISTEP+), with a 10.5% increase in overall scores. Enclosed is a summary of its three over-arching goals, key results achieved to date, and a strategy for moving forward. Project EXCEED has been made possible through a challenge grant by Lilly Endowment Inc. and generous matching contributions from other corporate and individual donors.
Goal One

Attract, retain, train, and reward the very best Catholic educators and commission them to deliver instructional excellence.

This goal has been accomplished primarily through a master teacher career-ladder program called the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP), an initiative of the Milken Family Foundation. Designed to increase student achievement, TAP strengthens teacher performance, and implements new career opportunities through four principles activated in each school. The four principles are: ongoing and applied professional growth; performance-based accountability and compensation; multiple career paths; and expanding the supply of high quality teachers.

Professional development activities are coordinated and implemented through the Center for Catholic School Excellence. Mentors are certified by the archdiocese through a 52-hour training course in compliance with all state requirements. Opportunities are provided for classroom visits and feedback on key elements that impact student achievement. Teachers’ skills have noticeably improved and great strides have been made in the areas of teacher awareness, understanding and alignment with state standards; support of other teachers; and in supporting students in their academics through data analysis.

Key results for Goal One to date include:

- Since 2002, more than 4,220 staff participated in 314 professional development activities.
- Initial performance pay awards have totaled $146,687.06 for 120 teachers.
- The training programs in urban schools are showing gains in student performance as demonstrated by improved skills, like reading mastery.
- Many schools now have a Professional Learning Community (PLC), a group of stakeholders within each school who make key decisions and enhance school leadership.
- Initial performance pay awards have totaled $146,687.06 for 120 teachers.
- Since 2002, more than 4,220 staff participated in 314 professional development activities.
- Students in the archdiocese continue to improve on the Indiana Statewide Test, curricula available online to staff and parents at www.archindy.org.
- 40 schools accredited by the North Central Association, Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCACASI) with another 11 currently in the accreditation process.
- Key results for Goal Two to date include:

  - Implementation of several sophisticated measurement tools to monitor student achievement, such as value-added ISTEP+ reporting.
  - School improvement plans for 2005-06 school year for all 67 archdiocesan schools.
  - 40 schools accredited by the North Central Association, Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCACASI) with another 11 currently in the accreditation process.
  - Successful implementation of Scantron Curriculum & Standards Alignment; all curricula available online to staff and parents at www.archindy.org.
  - Students in the archdiocese continue to improve on the Indiana Statewide Test of Educational Progress (ISTEP) at a significant rate.

Goal Two

Raise the level of student performance and report progress in achieving excellence.

New approaches to measuring performance have been accomplished through Project EXCEED and the TAP program. While a significant value is still placed on the results of standardized tests, these tests alone do not always paint an accurate picture of a student’s lifelong learning potential. Rather, one must look at each student’s individual growth and proficiency. This “value-added” approach measures a student’s progress against him- or herself throughout their education, which eliminates the influence of psycho-social indicators on overall achievement scores.

Value-added data collection moves accountability to the individual-level for both teachers and administrators. This higher level of accountability and assessment is necessary if student achievement is going to be connected to teacher evaluation. After a four-year commitment to initiating value-added reporting, the archdiocese will release a 2005-06 ISTEP+ value-added report in late spring of 2006. Baseline ISTEP+ data for 2006 alone already indicates advancement in overall academic achievement for students in the archdiocese.

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Goal Three

Reach out to and enhance the performance of students with special needs.

Through Project EXCEED the archdiocese introduced a systemic approach to identifying and providing instruction for exceptional learners in regular classrooms. Success has been achieved through educating teachers to accommodate students learning differences while maintaining high standards for instruction. Exceptional learners are defined as those who have unique learning styles, language barriers, or learning disabilities, as well as children who excel academically.

Project EXCEED created opportunities to implement intensive staff training on differentiated instruction and best practices. Great strides have been made to achieve system-wide inclusion of exceptional learners. Project REACH provides a framework to support inclusive Catholic education for all students. Project REACH bridges this information gap with teacher training in the areas of differentiated and brain-compatible instructional strategies.

University partnerships have been pursued to significantly enhance service exceptional learner populations. Two key partnerships include those with the University of Dayton (the Lalanne Program) and Marian College. Furthermore, teachers now have access to a 32-hour multi-sensory reading course. This course provides knowledge and skills in five areas determined by the National Reading Panel as essential: phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. All strategies are based on current brain research, and include visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile approaches to the teaching of reading and are easily transferred to other subject areas.

Key results for Goal Three to date include:

- A 20 percent increase in the number of students with special needs served since the implementation of Project EXCEED.
- More than 2,584 educators have attended 131 training programs on topics such as autism, gifted and talented learning, brain-compatible instruction techniques, and more.
- Lesson plans written by teachers in the Reach program are accessible to other teachers via the website.
- 222 educators completed the multi-sensory reading course, with noted student improvement resulting.
- 22 schools received technology upgrades and 2.5 technology support staff have been hired.

The longer the student is with the archdiocese the better the student performs.

Annette “Mickey” Lentz
Executive Director, Catholic Education

Estimated operating cost of Catholic schools in archdiocese, 2004-05:

Elementary schools: $3,989
Interparochial high schools: $7,679
Public school K-12 composite estimated cost-per-pupil: $9,642, source Indiana Department of Education website.

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Moving Forward: Sustaining, Replicating and Implementing School Improvement

Through the Project EXCEED grant funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. and matching donors, the Archdiocese of Indianapolis implemented school improvement efforts resulting in documented gains in student achievement. Since its inception, the Building Communities of Hope: Project EXCEED campaign has generated pledges of $18,805,107 from individuals, corporations, foundations, and agencies. In addition to fundraising success, the archdiocese has made significant advancements in the academic achievement, growth and proficiency of its students. ISTEP+ results continue to increase, demonstrating positive gains in the number of students passing ISTEP+ and overall student growth. New dynamic value-added interpretation of ISTEP+ data will allow the archdiocese to evaluate and monitor each student’s individual levels of growth and proficiency.

Project EXCEED has fostered an extensive series of interrelated innovative programs and resources for students, teachers, parents, and administrators. These programs must be consolidated and strategies for sustainability and system-wide integration must be identified and implemented if we are to remain on this trajectory of success.

Based upon the values of the Roman Catholic Church, our goal is to guarantee Every Student Every Day—Challenge and Success. With the TAP program serving as the flagship program born out of Project EXCEED, the archdiocese will move forward with three guiding questions:

- **What is important?** A comprehensive system of evaluation to determine the impact that instruction has upon gains in student achievement.
- **What to do?** Provide staff the opportunity to meet, learn, plan, mentor and share with others, and engage in allied professional development leading to increased student achievement.
- **Did our efforts make a difference?** Use value-added evaluation and performance-based compensation to track student progress, seeking appropriate achievement growth each year in our schools.

With just months remaining in the original Project EXCEED grant period, students of the archdiocese system have benefited from innovative approaches to ensuring success one student at a time. Now, we must move forward to bring the most successful programs of the initiative to all archdiocesan classrooms, creating a community of lifelong learners and passionate, well-trained lifelong educators.

Every Student Every Day—Challenge and Success.