ISTEP/A-F Talking Points:

* Schools all over the state are dealing with uncharacteristically low ISTEP scores and A-F grades. School grade (A-F) drops are not limited to any one particular city, corporation, diocese, public school, non-public school, etc.
* The drop in A-F letter grades this year is not a reflection of loss of quality education for your family/community.
  + “We know that the scores do not accurately reflect the great teaching and learning that is happening in our classrooms every day and that assigning these grades could have a devastating impact on our communities,” Samantha Hart, a Department of Education spokeswoman, said in a statement.
* The preliminary A-F letter grade drop and questions of ISTEP validity revolve around the 2014-15 ISTEP being a new assessment with new standards, and no transition period for accountability to adjust to changing standards.
* For Parents: If you are worried about your child’s or school’s scores, please talk to teachers and school administrators, who are more than capable of assessing the quality of teaching occurring and your child’s day-to-day learning progress more holistically than the 2014-15 ISTEP.
  + Please continue to encourage students and let them know how proud you are of them and their efforts to continue to do their best, regardless of their scores.
* To Teachers: We are extremely grateful for your dedication to our students, school, and community. We thank you for all of your continued hard work, and understand that the 2014-15 ISTEP is not an accurate reflection of your teaching ability or the learning occurring in your classroom.
* The School Board of Education, Indiana Department of Education, Indiana General Assembly, and the Governor’s Office are all analyzing this year’s ISTEP results and examining ways to best rectify concerns around ISTEP scores and the associated accountability ofA-F school grades
  + Some have proposed holding schools harmless and decoupling teacher evaluations.
  + A permanent committee of testing experts may be created to oversee development and operation of standardized testing.
  + Please voice your concerns to your local legislators.
    - You can find your legislator at <https://iga.in.gov/legislative/find-legislators/>

Messaging Pointers:

* We have not encouraged the carte blanche bashing of the IDOE, legislature or other state agencies in our overall communications around concerns with the State testing and accountability.
* We need to view the test results through their limitations. Utilize data that is helpful for improvement but not be overly discouraged by the transitional effect of the new standards and assessment protocols.
* Remember to affirm students and teachers for their handwork and effort while always look for ways to improve.
* Always remember standardized testing, although important, in only one metric of quality. For all our schools a more holistic approach to viewing mission and quality is foundational to who we are.

Sample Parent Letter

Dear Parents,

After a long delay and much controversy, the Indiana Department of Education has released the ISTEP results to schools the 2014-15 ISTEP test. It is being reported that scores all across the state are significantly lower than previous years’ results due to many testing issues. When the A-F school letter grades, which are largely based on ISTEP scores, are publically released, we ask you to keep a few things in mind.

First, a sharp drop in ISTEP scores and lower A-F letter grades will most likely be experienced by many, if not most, schools across the state. This issue is not limited to any geographical area, school district, or school. Unexpected drops in ISTEP scores and A-F grades are being experienced in every type of school and community.

Second, this year’s unusual drop in scores and A-F school letter grade is not an accurate reflection of the quality of education your child is receiving. Our school still has the same excellent teachers, administrators, staff, students, and families that made our school and community great in previous years. We strive to provide the best quality of education for all our students. A single test does not accurately reflect the progress and learning occurring at our school on a daily basis. If you are concerned about your child’s scores or the quality of our school, we invite you contact us so we may discuss your child’s progress and learning more precisely.

Third, the Indiana Department of Education, the State Board of Education, the Indiana General Assembly, and the Office of the Governor are all working to find the best way to rectify issues with the ISTEP test. There are many reports and many opinions about what caused ISTEP scores and A-F school letter grades to drop so dramatically this year. Without weighing in on any of these arguments, we do recommend that you research these reports, and then contact your local legislators and voice your concerns. Solving the issues surrounding ISTEP scores and A-F letter grades will not only help our school and our students, but also other schools, communities, and students across Indiana.

Finally, we want to thank our school’s teachers and families. Our teachers are dedicated and work tirelessly to educate our children best. Their effort every day is what makes educating our students with a well-rounded curriculum possible. Their dedication and extra-mile efforts make our school great. We would also like to thank you as parents, not only for your understanding during these ISTEP issues, but also for your continued support. Learning and educating do not end in the classroom. Your efforts at home undergird students’ success at school. Parent support drives in our school and community.

We greatly appreciate your dedication, and look forward to continuing this open dialogue about ISTEP, A-F school letter grades, and the quality of education our school provides.

If you have any additional questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Best Regards,