

Cleveland Schools that are Making a Difference



LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

CITIZENS' ACADEMY

CLEVELAND SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

THE INTERGENERATIONAL SCHOOL

JOSEPH LANDIS

MILES PARK

ORCHARD SCHOOL OF SCIENCE

ST. FRANCIS

ST. MARTIN DE PORRES

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

SUCCESSTECH

URBAN COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Cleveland Schools that are Making a Difference

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The Institute for Student Achievement

is honored to be involved in this research project to identify successful schools in Cleveland. Over the past months, researchers from ISA's strategic partner, the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching at Teachers College, Columbia University, have visited a number of highly successful public, private, parochial and charter elementary and secondary schools in Cleveland to identify and describe those best practices that are unique to each school and those that are common to all of them. These schools are providing a supportive social/emotional climate and educational opportunities that enable their students to be successful.

There is a great need in our country for more schools like the ones you will read about in this publication, and we hope that others, both within and beyond Cleveland, will learn from what these schools do.

This research project is unique. Although studies are often done to identify what makes a successful public, private, parochial or charter school, this research project brings together these four types of schools — all serving the same student population. These are students from economically challenged backgrounds who are often low performing, but who have the same aspirations and same abilities as their peers from more affluent, educated families. They just need the same opportunities.

This study demonstrates that different types of schools can provide all students with the excellent education to which they are entitled. From our research, we have been able to learn about those practices that contribute to school success and to tell the stories that are behind the student achievement data that are published in state education department school report cards.

Dr. Gerry House

Chief Executive Officer
Institute for Student Achievement

There are great schools in Cleveland—

just ask parents, teachers, students and neighbors. All too often, their stories do not make headlines, their teachers are not celebrated, their children are not recognized. But every day in Cleveland, in traditional public schools, in private schools, in parochial schools and in charter schools, principals are leading, teachers are teaching and children are learning. This report highlights 13 Cleveland schools where good things are happening every day, where students are achieving in some of the area's most economically challenged neighborhoods. They are ***Cleveland Schools that are Making a Difference***.

In 2007, the Cleveland and George Gund foundations engaged independent researchers to provide tangible evidence that quality educational opportunities can be — and have been — created in a cross section of Cleveland schools. This project emerges from a desire to identify, describe and share best practices that exist within Cleveland schools that are making a positive difference in students' achievement. It serves two purposes — to increase awareness of effective schools in our city and to enable educators to share best practices across schools.

To ensure independence and objectivity, the foundations contracted with the New York-based Institute for Student Achievement and the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching at Teachers College, Columbia University, to act as principal investigators. A local consulting firm, Candor LLC, provided objective analysis of student achievement data from the 13 schools included in this report. All schools met several key criteria: they were operating in the 2004–05 school year; the majority of students were economically disadvantaged; and they were demonstrating progress in student achievement gains as evidenced from state report card data, value-added student achievement data, standardized test scores and graduation rates. Additionally, they represented a cross section of traditional public, private, parochial and charter schools.

Researchers spent months conducting site visits, reviewing data and interviewing students, teachers, principals and parents. They looked at six dimensions that research shows are critical factors in positively impacting student learning: shared vision, curriculum,

instruction, use of data, school environment and professional development. In addition to the site visits, researchers hosted a principals' roundtable, where leaders from participating schools had the opportunity to discuss similarities and differences in their schools and compare their leadership styles. The research team documented its findings and conclusions in a comprehensive report on the schools, and the foundations created profiles of the schools for presentation in an executive summary. Both are available online at www.clevelandfoundation.org and www.gundfdn.org.

The 13 schools included in this report succeed by multiple measures: students' test scores, teacher satisfaction, community and parental support and administrators' commitment to helping each child reach her or his potential to learn and thrive. Researchers discovered common threads — strong leadership, innovative curriculum and instruction, an emphasis on teacher development — as well as differences ranging from subtle to profound. The staffs of these schools are mission driven and put the interests and needs of children first. Principals model and reinforce a strong positive school culture and provide strong support to teachers. Parents are involved, and the relationships among staff and students and parents are proactively built and maintained. These schools are engaged in continuous learning and improvement and maintain high standards in all areas.

In all 13 schools, researchers found students who were active and engaged. Students consistently highlighted the same factors when asked why they liked their schools: teachers who challenged them, principals who interacted with them, coursework that interested them and feelings of safety and security that allowed them to focus on schoolwork.

The latter, safety, was tested recently. Following researchers' visit, SuccessTech was the site of a tragic school shooting involving one of its recently transferred students. A few months later the principal of Orchard School of Science was injured while breaking up a highly publicized fight between two students. In both cases, staff remained steadfast in their commitment to create environments that

fostered students' growth and development. From our perspective, these schools deserve to be lauded for their ability to handle such challenges — the same challenges faced by educators throughout the country — with dignity, grace and strength of spirit.

Our hope is that ***Cleveland Schools that are Making a Difference*** will inspire you to think differently about Cleveland's schools. These are schools that can share and disseminate locally-tested, effective strategies and practices to raise student achievement. They can help spread the knowledge of successful educational practices and raise community awareness around ways to provide a quality education to all of Cleveland's children and youth. While we are pleased to highlight these examples of effective schools in Cleveland, this list should not be considered definitive; there are several other schools making a difference in Cleveland that could easily be heralded for their achievements.

We invite you to step into these 13 schools, where the women and men who lead and teach are dedicated professionals who face daily challenges with perseverance, creativity and optimism. We also invite you to meet some of the students who are shining examples of our city's future. We know you will agree that they are worthy of our support, encouragement and investment.

We thank our researchers and the staff and students who welcomed them into their schools. A special note of appreciation to Jennifer Cimperman, public relations officer at the Cleveland Foundation, who provided valuable editing services on the report and executive summary, and to Annabel Bryan, program assistant at the Cleveland Foundation, who provided administrative support throughout the project.

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Researchers Contributing to this Report

The Institute for Student Achievement (ISA) is a nonprofit organization that partners with schools and school districts to create academically rigorous, personalized learning environments that prepare all students for success in college and beyond. Founded in 1990, ISA is led by Dr. Gerry House, an accomplished educator and former superintendent for schools in Memphis, Tenn., and Chapel Hill, N.C.

The National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching (NCREST) at Teachers College, Columbia University, was created in 1990 to document, support and sustain the education restructuring efforts occurring in New York and across the nation. NCREST conducts research, fosters connections and develops resources to help education practitioners, reformers, researchers, parents and community members re-imagine and create schools that are responsive, equitable and successful. NCREST is co-directed by Drs. Jacqueline Ancess and Thomas Hatch, with Senior Research Associate Elisabeth Barnett acting as lead researcher on this project.

Douglas Clay, principal of Candor LLC, provided analysis of student achievement data.

PART ONE

School Profiles

Louisa May Alcott
Citizens' Academy
Cleveland School of the Arts
Benjamin Franklin
The Intergenerational School
Joseph Landis
Miles Park
Orchard School of Science
St. Francis
St. Martin de Porres
St. Thomas Aquinas
SuccessTech
Urban Community School

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

Address..... 10308 Baltic Road
Type of School..... Cleveland public
Grade Levels..... K-5
Principal..... Eileen Stull
Date of Visit April 3, 2007



Researchers Said

“The school’s philosophy is based on the idea that all children will learn and that they can reach their potential through high-quality instruction. The idea that all children will learn is promoted through the use of balanced literacy and an atmosphere of instructional and community-oriented accountability.”

About the School

Located in the Edgewater-Cudell neighborhood on the west side of Cleveland, Louisa May Alcott school was built in 1926. It is one of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District’s few remaining K-5 schools as it is surrounded by a residential neighborhood without additional land to expand. Alcott has a mixed student population demographically, with 47 percent white, 34 percent African-American, 12 percent Latino and 7 percent multi-racial. Thirty-six percent of its students have disabilities.

Alcott students have scored consistently higher than the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) average on state achievement measures. Two-thirds of the results on state assessments also showed significantly greater student progress than expected. This “greater-than-a-year’s growth,” value-added measure was also evident on other assessments over time. The black-white achievement gap was very low compared with CMSD and the state, and the gap between students with disabilities and regular education students was zero. Approximately 218 students attend the school.

Everyone at Louisa May Alcott — the school administration, teachers, support staff and parents — are viewed as stakeholders in each child’s education. Children are expected to show educational responsibility. This philosophy has resulted in exceptional student outcomes. Alcott was honored for its success with a 2004 No Child Left Behind Blue Ribbon award and was acknowledged as an Ohio School of Promise in 2002, 2003 and 2004. (To help close achievement gaps in Ohio, the Ohio Department of Education developed the Schools of Promise program to identify, recognize and highlight schools that are making substantial progress in ensuring high achievement for all students.)

Current Principal Eileen Stull has been in the education field for 29 years. She worked as an assistant principal for three years and as principal for five. Principal Stull continues to implement the universal leadership model for school success established by her predecessor, Maureen Berg. Further, everyone at the school is committed to the idea that every child can learn. This philosophy has resulted in exceptional student outcomes and recognition that Alcott is one of Cleveland’s finest elementary schools.

Shared Vision

The principal spoke about the school’s expectations for high achievement. In her view, the foundation of a successful school is a culture where students believe in themselves and one another. The school’s guiding principles are based on safety and respect. During the visit by researchers from the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching (NCREST), everyone interviewed said that the safe environment at Alcott is one of its best features.

The teamwork and commitment of staff contribute to the sense of shared leadership. When asked what makes Alcott different from other schools in which they worked, teachers unanimously agreed that the small school setting, along with teacher cooperation when working with each other and their students, is exceptional. “Everyone knows their job,” commented the kindergarten teacher. Another teacher said that faculty and staff take pride in their professional standards. A parent applauded the principal for being a hands-on leader who has successfully maintained a culture where the staff is team-oriented. “Every teacher is great,” she said. “If someone new comes, they get on board.”

The reading specialist commented on the high level of parental support and how it promotes a school culture where everyone accepts responsibility for each student’s success. A parent said that the school is very welcoming and maintains an open-door policy. Speaking about how the school maintains a shared vision, the parent said that the principal promotes a leadership model based on clear structure. For example, the principal has control over the morning rush of students in such a way that makes all students feel safe, secure and accountable — accountability is demanded from the kids and there are

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT



consequences when they act up. Everyone, including parents, supports holding kids accountable and responsible early in life. “Once you get that,” a parent said in reference to developing a habit of discipline, “everything else falls into place.”

Curriculum

Stakeholders attribute much of the school’s success to use of a core reading mastery curriculum supplemented by Direct Instruction (DI), a research-based reading program adopted about 10 years ago. At that time, scores on the Ohio Fourth-Grade Reading Proficiency Test were very low. Now 93 percent of Alcott’s students have tested “proficient” in reading.

The principal said the DI reading program has been the single most powerful contributor to the school’s success. “It is very powerful and works for most kids,” she said. It is fully aligned with research and includes explicit, systematic phonetics instruction where speed and fluency are emphasized. To date, the school has raised more than \$700,000 that has, among other things, allowed it to buy DI materials, provide DI’s professional development to all teachers and hire an on-site DI consultant.

In addition, every teacher interviewed emphasized the importance of local and national standards. Researchers observed that teachers are clearly addressing standards; they are able to prepare students to meet and exceed the reading and writing goals in CMSD’s Academic Achievement Plan as well as local and federal guidelines for student achievement.

Alcott is designed and equipped to meet the needs of students with handicaps and other health impairments such as orthopedic handicaps, learning disabilities and developmental delays. One-fourth of the student body is designated to receive special education services, and they participate in a full inclusion program. The special education teacher reported that a very small percentage of students struggle with curriculum content and the structured reading. “At the primary level, we move them back,” the teacher said. “But if they progress, we move them into [the next] level. As they get in the upper grades, we use the Horizons program, which focuses on specific areas. In the self-contained class we use the Edmark series, which is totally the opposite of DI reading. Edmark focuses on basic vocabulary.”

Instruction

While DI also shapes the school’s instructional approach, the principal made clear that the DI label oversimplifies Alcott’s instructional practices. Teachers use a variety of methods and techniques to encourage learning and promote student success. One teacher described ways she integrates art into lessons. Another discussed how she ties food-related topics into literacy. “Nothing we do focuses on one thing,” added another teacher. “Although we use DI, we are able to add our creative uniqueness.” The math and social studies teacher commented that teacher buy-in and collaboration invite instructional creativity. “There is flexibility amongst the prescription,” the math teacher said. “If we feel something is missing, we don’t hesitate to fill in the holes.”

Alcott also uses Janet Cosner’s Formula Writing, an organizing mechanism that helps students learn the basic elements of writing. Students use a formula and a pre-writing “wheel” to organize their ideas before writing. Students evaluate what specific question the prompt is asking. They follow a formula that focuses on a topic sentence, two to three examples with supporting details and a summary sentence. The mechanics of writing are reinforced through practice.

The teachers who spoke to the NCREST team made it clear that they do not “teach to the test.” However, preparing students for the Ohio Achievement Test (OAT) is something that is done all year long. Strategies for test preparation include peer-to-peer tutoring, where a student in a higher grade is paired with one from a lower grade. Pairing students together encourages a level of responsibility for both students and also promotes opportunities for students to grow socially and emotionally.

Use of Data

There is regular and ongoing use of data to improve student outcomes at Alcott. For example, CMSD quarterly benchmark tests in reading and writing are compared with DI-generated assessment data. The principal does an initial analysis of the data; it is then shared with teachers so that they can plan for the needs of each child. The principal also reported that the faculty and administration examine and analyze OAT results. Data is disaggregated to drive improvement strategies in the classroom.

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT



School Environment

Many Alcott teachers have been there since it re-opened as an elementary school in 1997 after having served as a vocational “opportunity center” since 1981. They have experienced the evolution of the school from where it was 10 years ago, when test scores were at an all-time low, to where the school is now — one of Cleveland’s most successful elementary schools. Teachers interviewed said they came to Alcott because of the location, as well as for its other qualities. Many teachers stated that it is the students who make the environment as fun and exciting as it is. The special education teacher said that she particularly likes Alcott’s school environment because it practices full inclusion for its special-needs students.

The NCREST team observed a nurturing, supportive learning environment that was also safe and orderly. Teachers, parents and students treated one another with respect. Parents worked collaboratively with faculty, staff and students. All agreed that school decision-making allowed input from parents and also from students.

One strategy for promoting this positive environment was the daily morning assembly observed during the school visit. When the morning bell sounded at 9:15, students were seated with their teachers in the school auditorium. The principal made morning announcements and talked about the day ahead. As she does every morning before students are dismissed to class, Principal Stull then asked two questions: who are the best-dressed kids in Cleveland, and who are the smartest kids in Cleveland? Each time, the students shouted “we are!” with enthusiasm.

Teachers primarily handle students with discipline challenges before the administration steps in. “We all believe that control of the students begins in the classroom,” said a teacher. In addition, the school has a fully functioning Intervention-Based Assessment (IBA) team. The team meets every Friday morning to discuss ways to help students who are struggling. Sometimes teachers meet with parents and other school staff to brainstorm solutions to particular students’ challenges. In some cases, the child may be expressing behavior that will require an individual education plan. Sometimes, as pointed out by one of the teachers, an individual student might just need to be motivated. The group has developed a “treasure book” of ideas on ways to help students with different problems.

Professional Development

There is a leadership team in place that surveys teachers’ needs, goals and how they plan to reach them. Professional development is designed to support them. A leadership team member said that many faculty members who participate in outside training return to the school to train their colleagues. During in-house professional development sessions, teachers get a chance to share resources and collaborate with one another. “We are the experts collaboratively,” one teacher said. “We all learn from each other.” Teachers do not get a chance to formally visit one another’s classroom, but the school is considering how to implement a peer coaching strategy.

CITIZENS' ACADEMY

Address 1827 Ansel Road
Type of School Charter school
Grade Levels K-5
Executive Director Perry White
Principal Kristen Glau*
Date of Visit April 2, 2007

* At time of visit, the principal was Monyka Price.



Researchers Said

“In this ‘no excuses’ culture, teachers do whatever is necessary to help their students succeed.”

About the School

Citizens’ Academy was founded in 1999 based on the premise that urban students can excel. It began as a K-2 school and now serves students through the fifth grade. Located near University Circle on the east side of Cleveland, this public charter (community) school draws most of its students (70 percent) from surrounding neighborhoods. Ninety-seven percent of its students are African-American and 20 percent have disabilities. The strong majority of state assessment results (93 percent) were higher than Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) averages, as well as those of other urban districts across the state of Ohio. The school also boasts a strong upward trend in overall achievement over the past three years. Enrollment during the 2006-2007 academic year was 393 students.

The strength of Citizens’ Academy lies in the collective vision to prepare every student for college. To achieve this vision, the staff, students and community go above and beyond the norms of many other elementary schools: teachers visit the homes of their students, curriculum coordinators thoughtfully develop lessons based on the needs and strengths of the children, the administrative staff studies data to create structures that support students and staff, and parents work with Citizens’ Academy staff to help children in the home. This strong commitment to students and parents, and a dedication to improve pedagogy, makes Citizens’ Academy a model charter.

Shared Vision

The mission of Citizens’ Academy is to enable students to graduate from a four-year college. Supporting this idea, each classroom is labeled with the alma mater of the teacher. To fulfill the mission, the school promotes a “no excuses” culture with the commitment that all decisions will be made in the best interest of students.

Throughout the school, good citizenship is a focus. Citizenship class occurs daily for 15 minutes and addresses

the seven virtues of citizenship: generosity, honesty, loyalty, courage, responsibility, perseverance and respect. Additionally, the Citizens’ Academy Pledge is visible in all classrooms and recited each day. Photos and names of students from each classroom who are selected as Citizen of the Month are displayed in the hallway. These students are honored at monthly public assemblies and receive books and pins as prizes.

To ensure that parents are fully involved in their children’s education, teachers make visits to every child’s home at the beginning of each school year. This allows them to meet parents face to face, discuss the school’s expectations and encourage parents to help their children to learn. These visits help demonstrate to families the deep commitment of Citizens’ Academy teachers to students’ success.

Curriculum

At the beginning of each year, the administrative team — the assistant principal, principal and curriculum coordinators — meet with teachers individually to communicate goals for their classrooms. Goals are based on teacher requests, teacher reflections and student achievement data, such as Ohio Achievement Test (OAT) results. In some cases, a goal may be assigned to all teachers. For example, higher-level thinking in math was identified as a school-wide need, so workshops on math instruction were offered to all K-5 teachers.

Teachers consult state standards, test preparation materials and curriculum maps to shape lessons in their classrooms. Additionally, curriculum coordinators are largely responsible for the structure and content of implemented curriculum. Coordinators meet weekly with grade-level teams to draft curricular goals for the week and evaluate progress on the previous week’s goals.

Students spend the first four hours of each day in math and literacy “blocks.” During literacy and math blocks, teachers are expected to differentiate instruction within their lessons. There are four blocks within each grade level (enriched, grade-level, below grade-level and special education). Students in the below grade-level group participate in an additional math or literacy block in the

CITIZENS' ACADEMY



afternoon. Special education students have their own literacy and math blocks rather than being included with other students in literacy and math classes. Placement in literacy and math blocks is dependent on state test results, Scantron testing for math and literacy and teacher/coordinator recommendation. Placement decisions are made in May for the following academic year.

For struggling students, tutoring is provided during the day by members of the community and after school by classroom teachers. Those needing extra help in reading or math may meet with the instructional coordinators in the afternoon. Additionally, math and reading teams meet on Saturdays for the fourth and fifth grades.

Instruction

Differentiation of instruction and cooperative learning are highly encouraged at the school. A few teachers were chosen to attend workshops on differentiated instruction at Cleveland State University and then share their experiences with the remaining faculty. The school also encourages posting of a daily agenda that is communicated to students. On any given day, each child should be able to answer the question, “What do you want me to learn today?”

Teachers in each grade level are expected to be at the same place in their instructional plan. This is meant to provide a common denominator within each grade level. Additionally, test preparation is embedded into literacy and math instruction each day. At Citizens’ Academy, test scores are very important.

Use of Data

Students are assessed often and instruction is adjusted accordingly. Kindergarteners are assessed in April and May before they arrive at school. They are also screened by a hearing and speech specialist and by the entire kindergarten team. If the incoming kindergarten student cannot perform important, developmentally appropriate tasks, students and parents are expected to attend a two-week session during the summer designed to help the child prepare for kindergarten in the fall.

As a school, there is a commitment by staff to do measurably better each year. For the Citizens’ Academy staff, data provides the necessary information to determine and understand what children are learning and not learning. With the help of curriculum coordinators

and the principal, data is used to drive instruction and individualize instruction to meet the needs of all learners. Citizens’ Academy follows an assess-plan-teach approach. Teachers use short-cycle assessments and work often with informational texts. Much time is spent on practice for Ohio tests. Scantron data is collected and disaggregated by the teacher.

The use of data and assessment information is an obvious strength of Citizens’ Academy. Administrators, teachers, students and parents work collaboratively to make sense of students’ achievement data and to create and assign goals for teachers and students based on data results.

School Environment

The culture of the school supports and encourages sharing and collaboration. Teachers serve as mentors to other teachers, with mentors assigned based on teachers’ needs and mentors’ strengths. Teachers also have multiple opportunities to visit the classrooms of their colleagues. Visits usually occur when teachers request them. For example, one teacher may say, “I know teacher X has very good classroom management skills. Is it possible for me to have my classes covered so that I might observe her classroom?” In this example, a substitute teacher would be provided and the teacher making the request would be released to visit classrooms for the day.

As part of maintaining high expectations, rules are visible in each classroom. Parents, teachers, students and administrative staff are all expected to follow the “no excuses” policy. Students must be present each day, on time and with completed homework. Parents are expected to support their child’s learning at home. Teachers are expected to do whatever necessary to make students succeed, including working long hours, tutoring students at lunch and attending professional development meetings. In addition to the “no excuses” policy, there is also a familial aspect to the school. The administrative and office staff knows each student by name. Parents feel comfortable talking to the principal, teacher and other support staff. The principal makes a concerted effort to greet each student every morning.

From the perspective of parents, Citizens’ Academy provides a safe, creative and fun environment for students to learn. Parents are able to call their children’s teachers and meet with administrative staff at any time. If there is an issue with a child, all involved — including the student,

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teacher and administrative staff — will meet immediately to quickly alleviate the problem. In addition, the school has a PeaceBuilders program to encourage resolution of problems without conflict or bullying.

Professional Development

The administrative staff at Citizens' Academy subscribes to the belief that "support, guidance and assistance leads Citizens' Academy to success." Professional development seminars are presented during training at the beginning of the school year and through in-service sessions throughout the academic year. Teachers also attend training offered by the Ohio Department of Education and other organizations.

Teachers have regularly scheduled opportunities for self-study. At the end of the school year, each teacher writes a reflection to the principal voicing his or her "strengths and stretches" of the year. Based on these reflections and student assessment results, the principal and curriculum coordinators design professional development for the year. Curriculum coordinators also meet weekly with grade-level teams to provide guidance with instructional practices and assessments and to help problem solve when individual students are not meeting expectations. Teachers have the regular support of the literacy and math curriculum coordinators and the opportunity to visit their colleagues' classroom whenever needed.

CLEVELAND SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

Address..... 2064 Stearns Avenue
Type of School..... Cleveland public
Grade Level..... 6-12
Principal..... Barbara Walton, Ph.D.
Date of Visit May 14, 2007



Researchers Said

“At CSA, students must work very diligently to balance academic achievement with busy performance schedules. Several students shared that meeting academic requirements, along with appropriate conduct, are required in order for students to participate in performances.”

About the School

Cleveland School of the Arts (CSA), opened in 1981, is one of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District’s specialty secondary schools. It is located on the east side of Cleveland in University Circle and draws students in sixth through 12th grades from across the city. Eighty-nine percent of students are African-American, 8 percent are white and 4 percent have disabilities.

Scores on state assessments were higher than Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) averages, as well as the averages of other urban districts across the state of Ohio. The school has demonstrated upward trends in passage rates and performance indices over a three-year period and strong value-added measures for a high school. CSA has very high attendance and a 99 percent graduation rate, with 90 percent of graduates reporting that they have gone on to attend college. Approximately 630 students are enrolled in the school, which was named an Ohio School of Promise for the last four years, a distinction indicating that CSA is making substantial progress in closing the academic achievement gap.

CSA offers a blended, college-preparatory academic program and a pre-professional arts program with five majors: literary arts, dance, instrumental/vocal music, theater and visual arts. As a specialty school, students are selected through a competitive audition process and must meet minimum academic entrance requirements. Additionally, students must maintain a minimum grade point average of 3.0 in their arts major and 2.0 in their non-arts courses to remain at CSA. Approximately 3 percent of CSA students reside outside of the district and pay tuition to attend the school.

According to Principal Barbara Walton, her greatest challenges when she arrived at the school 10 years ago were a lack of cohesion among faculty members and an unstructured learning environment. She describes two key events that have raised the level of faculty collaboration and school-wide organization.

First, the faculty and Principal Walton established Parent Education Nights (PEN) to match parents with interdisciplinary teams comprised of both academic and performance faculty. In preparation for the PENs, Principal Walton asked everyone (teachers, students, parents and auxiliary staff) to read “A Choice of Weapons” by Gordon Parks. PEN meetings were then used to create a collaborative environment where the entire community could, through the use of a common text, create a unifying vision for the school.

Second, Principal Walton initiated a “Learning Walks” program in which all members of the school community (teachers, principal, union representatives, etc.) visited teachers’ classrooms and provided immediate feedback to help strengthen teaching practices. These Learning Walks sometimes took place at other schools, which aided and encouraged veteran teachers to bring new ideas into their classrooms. The collaborative ventures helped transform the culture of CSA into a positive environment with committed faculty who work to increase the level of learning and students’ academic outcomes.

Shared Vision

The school’s vision is focused on high levels of learning for all students. The principal clearly states that the overarching goal is to send every child to college. Formally, the CSA mission is to provide training in the arts with a rigorous college preparatory education. During the visit by researchers from the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching (NCREST), students reported having frequent conversations about college with their peers. “It’s just expected of CSA students,” asserted one student. Also important are the development of values, ethics and a sense of social responsibility. CSA’s four key indicators of student success include attendance, test performance, graduation rates and college acceptance.

CLEVELAND SCHOOL OF THE ARTS



CSA students exceed district-wide averages for the four indicators, the result of shared efforts and commitment of faculty, students and parents.

CSA's mission is further enabled by financial contributions from the Friends of the Cleveland School of the Arts, a non-profit organization established to support the mission of CSA by "creating an environment that empowers children with the opportunity to achieve excellence through an arts education." Established in 1982, Friends has raised more than \$18 million to augment funding from CMSD. Money raised is used to support artistic and academic programming, such as artists-in-residence, private music lessons, production of plays and exhibits, international tours, accelerated reading and math programs and student scholarships for summer study. Its offices are physically located on the CSA campus.

Curriculum

Principal Walton has established teaching teams for the sixth through ninth grades that focus on curriculum planning by grade. In addition, the schedule allows for a core curriculum-planning period with parent participation. Parents are included as a way to inform them of lessons their children will receive and, more importantly, to increase support of schoolwork in the home. In the 10th through 12th grades, teachers plan with their departments.

Despite its identity as a performance-focused school, CSA students spend only 53 minutes of the scheduled school day in performance classes; the majority of their time is spent in academic courses. Students, faculty and parents are well aware that the school's priority is for students to meet and exceed CSA's academic expectations.

Currently, CSA uses Accelerated Reader (AR) and Accelerated Math (AM) programs for students in grades six through 12. With the AR program, students must read a certain number of books and then complete assessment modules via computer. Performance is tracked through a point system. AR reports (used by students and school staff) provide detailed information about students' reading. This information assists teachers in creating unique performance plans for students according to their reading strengths and weaknesses.

For students, down time is referred to as "book time." This was instituted as a way to increase reading levels among students, most of whom enter CSA reading three years below grade level.

Instruction

Several faculty members interviewed reported project-based learning in which academic and performance faculty work collaboratively to create lessons that integrate students' creative and academic knowledge. One student shared that learning was easier because of the continuity across teaching topics, helping students "tie things together."

During the NCREST visit, a number of classrooms were observed that exemplified teaching practices that promoted student thinking and supported student learning. Highlights from these observations included:

- Students in the trigonometry class used geometry-based concepts and were asked to apply them to their performance work. Resulting projects were displayed around the classroom. It was a very intense class, with students showing significant comfort responding to difficult, abstract content.
- Students in second-year Spanish class were asked to create a career passport entirely in the language, consisting of a student's resumé, letter of interest and personal history. During the observed class period, students were helping each other learn by working in groups. Many CSA students travel abroad for performances or participate in the Summer Study Abroad Program, which further promotes foreign language learning.
- Twelfth-grade English class students were sitting in groups of four and five using a textbook to discuss "what a confession means to you." Their task was to look at the intersections among religion, law and confessions in preparation for reading "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.
- AP English (honors) appeared to be especially challenging. One student reported that the teacher "expects everyone to get a 5 on their AP exams and do the work in class." He also shared that he "appreciates the rigor."
- In the Visual Arts class, a representative from a local college offered a presentation on the variety of arts programs the college offered. Interestingly, even seventh-grade students were engaged and thinking about how their high school arts experience could be used to prepare for college.

CLEVELAND SCHOOL OF THE ARTS



School Environment

Cleveland School of the Arts is a dynamic, thriving educational environment. Since students must audition for coveted spots, parents, students and teachers are heavily invested in students' positive educational outcomes. Students are motivated by their peers and by the institution, and CSA has created an atmosphere where students are goal-focused.

Students at CSA learn in an open, warm and uninhibited environment. Performance art somehow exposes aspects of students' abilities and passions that are not always evident in traditional learning environments. This provides opportunities for students to collaborate personally and professionally and to understand each other more genuinely. Confrontations are less likely because many of the students perform together. Additionally, students avoid negative behavior and pursue high academic achievement, in part because they don't want to jeopardize their ability to perform, but more importantly because they don't want to hurt their chances of being accepted to a good college or university. When asked how people get along, one student responded, "There's really no need to get in a fight with someone because you might have to perform with that person later that day or week."

Student work is displayed throughout the school; hallways are covered with large charcoal self-portraits and colorful banners hang from the ceiling. Additionally, there is a wall with pictures of recent alumni and the colleges they chose to attend. The sounds of music and voices emanate from classes throughout the school. Students engage in authentic arts experiences such as *commedia dell'arte*, where they dress in self-made costumes and improvise without inhibition.

The Friends of the Cleveland School of the Arts plays an important role in garnering community support. They have introduced a sophisticated, innovative marketing approach to showcase the school's accomplishments. Students' academic and performance-based achievements are conveyed in ways (media packets, press releases, high profile events) that motivate individuals and other organizations to support the school's initiatives. The collaboration between CSA and the Friends of the Cleveland School of the Arts has brought this Cleveland school national recognition, providing students, parents and all those associated with it a deep sense of pride and commitment.

Use of Data

Data on students' performance levels and progress is readily available through the AM and AR programs. Additionally, statistical information about CSA students, including a comparative regional summary (2005-2006) of reading, writing, math, science and social studies grades, as well as attendance and graduation rates, is readily available. Principal Walton uses various reports to monitor student academic progress and to work with teachers on ways to increase their effectiveness in the classroom.

Professional Development

Teacher recruitment and retention have been particularly challenging for CSA in recent years. At the time of the researchers' visit, the school did not have an assistant principal, leaving the principal to wear many hats. Like many other Cleveland public schools, CSA has lost a significant percentage of its teaching staff due to budget cuts.

However, professional development is an integral part of CSA. Peer professionals conduct most professional development in-house. Some professional development occurs at the district level as well. Additionally, faculty in special performance areas (chorus, band, voice, acting, etc.) attends discipline-specific conferences and workshops. Friends of the Cleveland School of the Arts also works to provide in-services for CSA staff, specifically focusing on community development and event planning.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

Address..... 1905 Spring Road
Type of School..... Cleveland public
Grade Levels..... K-8
Principal..... Kimberly Cantwell
Date of Visit April 3, 2007



Researchers Said

“Teachers seek to engage student thinking in multiple ways. One instructional priority was the development of literacy skills in the content areas. We observed journal writing in art classes and reading and writing activities in a computer class.”

About the School

Located in the Old Brooklyn neighborhood on the west side of Cleveland, Benjamin Franklin is one of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District’s elementary schools. It is housed in an idyllic brick building constructed in the 1920s and is surrounded by a residential neighborhood. The school’s student population is mixed demographically: 72 percent of students are white, 16 percent are African-American and 11 percent are Latino. Eighteen percent of students have disabilities. The school’s scores on state assessments were higher than Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) averages as well as averages for other urban districts across the state of Ohio. The school has demonstrated upward trends in passage rates and performance indices over a three-year period and strong value-added measures. The racial and special education achievement gaps were also dramatically lower than CMSD averages. Benjamin Franklin has 784 students.

Principal Kimberly Cantwell noted that Benjamin Franklin recently made the transition from a K-6 to a K-8 school. The transition was relatively smooth as the school added a grade level every year rather than all at once. Researchers from the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching (NCREST) arrived for their visit to find children filing into the building. The principal’s camaraderie with children was apparent as she greeted each entering student by name.

Shared Vision

Benjamin Franklin teachers and staff expressed a persistent commitment to high levels of learning for all students and a commitment to shared decision-making at the building level. They repeatedly talked about a common standard of excellence and of holding students to “high expectations.”

Parents at Benjamin Franklin are very involved in the life of the school. The principal stated that there are two parent organizations, the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and the newly formed Student Parent Organization (SPO). Both groups participate in decision-making at the school.

To keep parents informed, the principal personally authors a monthly newsletter including homework and reading tips in addition to news and upcoming events at the school. “I have an open-door policy and good communication with the parents,” she said. Parents echoed this sentiment. “She [the principal] listens to us,” one parent said. “She cares about what we think, and we all care about the kids.”

It was also clear that the teachers enjoyed collaborating and sharing resources with one another. “Teachers like and care about each other,” the principal affirmed. “Their level of respect for one another is high.” A teacher stated that she “would not trade anywhere for Benjamin Franklin, due to the staff involvement.” The school’s librarian, who provided a tour of the library and pointed out all of the resources she obtained through grants, said that she held a workshop for other teachers on grant writing that resulted in some teachers obtaining funding for their classrooms.

Curriculum

During the NCREST visit, every teacher provided a common response to the question about how the school organizes its curriculum: “around the standards.” Standards-based curriculum was visible throughout the school, and CMSD standards were posted in classrooms, in hallways and in administrative offices. Researchers observed multiple examples of ways teachers followed these standards.

In a second-grade class, a teacher used Formula Writing — a method promoted by the district — to address language arts curriculum standards for this group. In a fourth-grade class, students studied science vocabulary by playing Jeopardy, thereby addressing both literacy and science standards for fourth graders. Both teachers used interactive whiteboards they obtained through grants.

Teachers and the librarian also use Accelerated Reader (AR) software to support students’ reading. During the NCREST

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN



visit, the librarian walked amongst the shelves pointing out the numbering system for the software and showing examples of how the software assesses students' reading comprehension. Teachers have found the software useful in encouraging students to read, especially in supporting students' reading at their individual levels.

Teachers spoke explicitly about tying literacy to all subjects. Additionally, teachers stated that curriculum is designed to promote high levels of learning for all students, and they spoke specifically about ways students help other students through tutoring, mentoring and peer mediation. Teachers also shared how they seek to promote an atmosphere that encourages students to support other students in their classrooms.

Instruction

Instructional practices at Benjamin Franklin are based on a high degree of professionalism and collegiality. Teachers and administrators spoke of possessing high expectations, not only of students, but also of themselves as professional educators. One teacher compared experience with previous workplaces and said that the expectations for professionalism were particularly high at Benjamin Franklin. Another said that she sought a position at Benjamin Franklin specifically because of the professionalism of the faculty and the school's commitment to aligning curriculum to CMSD standards.

NCREST researchers observed teachers engaging student thinking in multiple ways and providing students with opportunities to create and work on long-term projects of their own design. In an art class, students individually designed recreational centers and created PowerPoint presentations to pitch their designs. Students also appeared to be involved in out-of-school learning experiences, and teachers sought out grant money to support those activities.

Another way teachers supported students' learning was by integrating technology in the classroom. The faculty's use of technology was quite impressive. They have independently obtained grant monies for this purpose, and they have devoted time and resources toward learning and using the technology with their students. Student-generated and student-directed products are emphasized, and student work is abundantly displayed.

Use of Data

Data and assessment information at Benjamin Franklin are used in an ongoing way for school and instructional improvement. One of the ways teachers use their common grade-level meetings is to review student data to inform differentiated student learning opportunities and flexible groupings in the classroom. The principal also talked about utilizing SchoolNet, a district-wide software program, to print out benchmark test results for students. She shares these benchmark reports as well as data provided by the district with grade-level teams. According to the principal, data is also disaggregated by student demographic categories and by individual classrooms to better identify ways to improve instruction.

In addition, researchers observed teachers using rubrics as a way in which to provide students with specific feedback and information about their progress toward learning goals. Rubrics were posted alongside student work with comments on how students fulfilled learning goals.

School Environment

The environment at Benjamin Franklin is supportive and nurturing. The physical building itself possesses a long history and is located within a supportive residential community. While the age of the building has posed some challenges, particularly with technology integration, the stakeholders of the school have invested their energies in creating an atmosphere of respect and caring. The environment at Benjamin Franklin also appears to be safe and orderly. NCREST researchers observed very few disciplinary infractions by students, and students seemed to be supportive of one another. Rules and procedures were clearly posted in hallways and classrooms, and students seemed to follow and respect them.

The school's Intervention-Based Assessment (IBA) team helps identify and intervene with students who are struggling. In addition, teachers have regular common grade-level meetings where they meet to discuss students who are struggling, review data and conduct parent-teacher conferences as a team. During these meetings, teachers are able to identify students who are having difficulty and address their concerns. "We give up our lunches to work with the children," one teacher explained. "We are all concerned with the educational success of all the children."

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN



One way Benjamin Franklin involves the community is through its partnership with the GroundWorks Dance Theater. Through the Initiative for Cultural Arts in Education (ICARE) program, professional dancers from GroundWorks come to the school to integrate arts into the curriculum. The culmination of dancers' six-week period at the school is a student performance for parents displaying what they have learned in relationship to dance, movement and music.

According to administrators and students, public recognition of student and teacher achievements is an important aspect of the culture at Benjamin Franklin. While expressing a desire to do more, the principal shared that she recognizes teachers through verbal praise and by sharing "mementos of encouragement." For example, she has created a "U-Rock" Award for teachers where she selects a unique rock from near her home and gives it to the art teacher to design. She then awards it to a teacher to let them know she appreciates their work. These are highly coveted rocks among teachers and a fun way to share a lighthearted laugh. To recognize student achievements, there are awards programs each semester. Additionally, hallways and classrooms are covered in student work, and researchers observed verbal praise of students by teachers and administrators both in and out of the classroom.

Professional Development

Professional development is important to teachers and administrators at Benjamin Franklin. There is a strong sense of collegiality among teachers, and they share information and communicate on a regular basis. Teachers meet two periods per week for common grade-level planning, and exemplary teachers sometimes model lessons for their colleagues. The school has also used professional development days for cross grade-level planning.

Instructional resources are effectively shared among the faculty. "We are in constant communication," one teacher said. "If one person has something that we could all use or benefit from, we all learn about it." Teachers and administrators take initiative at Benjamin Franklin when there is a concern or problem and seek professional development opportunities accordingly. "When the students see that we are taking [learning] seriously," one teacher said, "so do they."

Administrators support teachers' professional development, and the principal regularly posts professional development opportunities offered by the district. Teachers

stated that they seek to attend workshops offered by the district or send an individual from their grade-level team who can come back and share their resources with the rest of the team.

THE INTERGENERATIONAL SCHOOL

Address 12200 Fairhill Road
Type of School Charter school
Grade Levels K-8
Executive Director Brooke King
Principal Catherine Whitehouse, Ph.D.
Date of Visit May 14, 2007



Researchers Said

“The Intergenerational School (TIS) challenges traditional concepts of age segregation to create a community of learning where individuals of all ages, backgrounds and socio-economic levels thrive and excel.”

About the School

The Intergenerational School (TIS) is a public charter (community) school located near University Circle on the east side of Cleveland. Approximately 140 students are enrolled in this small school. Eighty-seven percent are African-American. Most students come from adjoining neighborhoods in Cleveland. Now in its seventh year, TIS has been rated “excellent” by the State of Ohio for three consecutive years. Results from third-grade assessments are dramatically higher than Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) averages, with 100 percent of students displaying mastery of reading and math. Performance indices have increased greatly over time, as have passing-rate trends.

TIS has a unique educational model and non-graded curriculum. The school shares space and programming with Fairhill Center for Aging, a multi-organization campus dedicated to successful aging, allowing students to learn and interact with caring adults of all ages. Students are admitted through an open enrollment process or by lottery if the number of applicants exceeds available classroom space.

In addition to the founding principal, Catherine Whitehouse, there are seven board members and an executive director, Brooke King, who focuses primarily on management issues and generating community support for the school.

Shared Vision

The philosophy of TIS is grounded in two main concepts: learning is a lifelong developmental process and knowledge is constructed in the context of culture, experience and community. TIS students learn in flexible, multi-age groupings based on their developmental needs. The developmental stages are emerging (approximately equivalent to grades K-1), beginning (grades 1-2), developing

(3), refining (4), applying (5-6) and leadership (7-8). Students are placed in class groupings with these designations rather than in traditional grade levels. Learning is organized so that students are given the opportunity to learn in their own ways at their own paces. “[It’s] not about the grade level,” the executive director of the school said, “but rather it’s about the learning stages. Children are empowered in their learning. They know where they are and where they need to be.”

In the multi-age setting, older students are encouraged to serve as mentors, or role models, to younger students in their classrooms. “The whole school climate is all about learning,” Principal Whitehouse said. “Students do not move on until they have mastered material.” Older students who enter TIS from schools with grade levels are placed in classes at their learning levels. Partially for this reason, older students may be seen in the same class with younger students. Students at TIS progress to the next level when they have passed each set of standards at 90 percent mastery as well as demonstrate a “proficient” level of achievement on appropriate state tests.

Seven school values are important ingredients of TIS’ school culture: personal integrity, work ethic, choice and accountability, interpersonal skills, shared and responsible use of resources, celebration of diversity and honoring the interconnected web of life and time. Each value is assessed and documented in students’ trimester report cards.

Curriculum

Created by the principal, the curriculum is based on Ohio’s state standards and constructed with input from teachers. The curriculum serves as a framework to assist teachers in planning lessons, and it is regularly revised and improved to assure that students are prepared for Ohio’s state tests. The curriculum is described as holistic (taking into account the whole student in the context of his or her community), meaning-based (incorporating authentic tasks) and constructivist (allowing students to arrive at their own understanding of each topic of study).

Because curriculum serves as a guideline rather than a prescribed format, teachers are treated as professionals

THE INTERGENERATIONAL SCHOOL



and given the flexibility and freedom to enact it as they deem appropriate for their students. Principal Whitehouse makes clear that she views her teachers as highly capable. She believes that smart and professional teachers are able to make curricular decisions. Teachers state that they feel respected as professionals to make decisions and have a deep respect for the knowledge and commitment of the principal. Feedback from the principal is welcomed because everyone is working toward a common goal — to move students forward academically and socially.

In terms of learning materials, some teachers use Bridges to Mathematics, a structured program. However, there is no expectation that a textbook must be used. In language arts, all students are assessed and expected to read their “just right” books — books that are deemed right for their skill levels — independently each day. Some teachers divide their classes into literature “circles” based on reading levels. Each group chooses a book and regularly meets to discuss topics related to their book. With the different levels of learning in each class, children learn to help each other.

Instruction

Differentiation of instruction and student-centered learning are central to the TIS philosophy. However, teachers find it easier to differentiate in reading and much harder to differentiate in math. Because of this, the school organizes its schedule so that students across developmental grade levels are able to move to the most appropriate math class. Although teachers design classroom experiences that promote real learning, a significant amount of time is also spent preparing students to succeed on state tests.

During a regular classroom day, teachers encourage students to be “thinkers and learners.” Instead of condemning students’ negative behavior, teachers encourage their students to make better choices and learn from their mistakes and the mistakes of others. Teachers question their students’ behavior often, asking them, “How can you be a better thinker and learner?” or “What would be a better choice?” Students are encouraged to share and learn from mistakes, and they appear comfortable doing so.

At TIS, teachers make every attempt to create lessons that are real and authentic. For example, a teacher described her approach to teaching percentages in math (and life

skills) by planning to have students attend a fancy dinner. To prepare for the dinner, students learned about place settings and how to calculate a tip using their knowledge of percentages. After attending the dinner, they created a PowerPoint presentation about the experience to share with participants in the adult-care facility in their building.

Many teachers also used themes to integrate subject areas. For example, one teacher used the theme of the rain forest to discuss the idea of responsibility and interdependence. She discussed with her students the importance of understanding how their behavior can affect the school community, neighborhood community and global community. In the classroom, a wall was painted by students to portray a rain forest.

Use of Data

The majority of assessments are created by the principal and teachers. Data forms the basis for moving students from one level to another. There are benchmarks in reading, writing and math. In science and social studies, assessments are more portfolio-based. It is common for students to be in several levels on different subjects. Assessments are used to drive future instruction and to provide evidence of student progress and growth.

To communicate with parents, there is a separate report card for each developmental level that provides a detailed listing of learning objectives to be mastered and indicates their child’s progress. This rubric allows parents to see exactly what their child has learned and what needs to be done before a particular stage is mastered. The principal uses data collected from assessments, along with data from state tests, to follow each child’s progress.

School Environment

The school’s intergenerational focus suggests that people of all ages come together as lifelong learners to form an educational community. It is expected and taught that everyone can learn from everyone else. Reflecting this belief, each class adopts a long-term care facility — nursing homes, assisted living, day programs or other senior-focused organizations — and works with them throughout the year. These relationships permit an exchange of knowledge between students and their older counterparts. For example, students may teach long-term care residents about African culture, while Jewish history may be taught to students by senior residents.

THE INTERGENERATIONAL SCHOOL



In addition, a regular core of mentors works with students a minimum of two hours a week. In addition to helping students with reading and math, they provide personal support. Mentors develop meaningful relationships with students and help guide them through their academic and social successes and challenges.

Parents describe TIS as a safe and comfortable place for children to learn. Many of them drive long distances so that their children can attend TIS. They describe a caring staff and appreciate the staff's willingness to meet each child's needs. Parents are also thankful for after-school activities and exposure to art, manners and life skills.

In order to create a calm and respectful learning environment for all, TIS maintains a school-wide discipline plan, developed collaboratively among the staff, with a zero-tolerance policy for fighting and bullying. There are four basic school rules that are implemented and enforced consistently by all TIS staff in the classroom, hallways and playground throughout the school day: be respectful of yourself, others and materials; be where you are supposed to be at all times; keep your hands, feet and objects to yourself; and one person speaks at a time.

At TIS, students learn that one student's behavior will not be allowed to deter the learning of other students. As the principal notes, "every moment is a teaching moment." If the same students continue to have behavior issues, the teacher and principal sit down with the parents to figure out how to help the child. The faculty make an effort to teach students about choices and accountability. They can be frequently heard asking students, "Do you feel like that is the best choice for you?"

In addition, the CARE program (Citizens Acting Responsibly Everyday) offers positive rewards for good behavior. Students who behave earn a point for each positive day. To earn points, students must also get to school on time with homework complete. During the visit by researchers from the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching (NCREST), many students were seen wearing or holding necklaces showing their point totals. Students who reach 25 points are invited to a CARE lunch with an adult of their choice. To celebrate their accomplishment, pictures are taken with their guests and cake is shared.

Professional Development

The school works hard to hire teachers who have a strong theoretical grounding in constructivist approaches to teaching. After teachers are hired, the principal serves as their mentor. According to the principal, the school has a "hugely collaborative approach where teachers are constantly working together." A very experienced teacher commented, "I am continuing to learn from teachers who have their master's in the constructivist style [of teaching]. There is a lot of sharing between new and experienced teachers." To support teachers, the principal regularly visits classrooms and guides teachers in their instructional decisions. Teachers regularly self-reflect, and the principal also reflects in writing on classroom visits.

In addition, numerous professional development days are allocated to grapple with issues related to instruction, curriculum and student behavior. Teachers work collaboratively to figure out how to best address challenges together. For example, the staff discussed how to best implement a school-wide behavior plan. They agreed that three to four rules, all implemented continuously and age appropriately, would work best for their school environment. Significant staff time was also spent creating a positive discipline plan; in fact, the idea for CARE was developed in a staff meeting.

In terms of formal professional development, each teacher has an individual development plan. The principal works with each teacher so that his or her goals are met. Title I funds are also designated for professional development days. "Everyone is always striving to improve their craft," Principal Whitehouse said. "There is constant change."

JOSEPH LANDIS

Address 10118 Hampden Avenue
Type of School Cleveland public
Grade Levels K-8
Principal Sandra Brinson
Date of Visit April 2, 2007



Researchers Said

“A strength of this school is its warm environment; the principal and teachers alike are committed to the well-being and success of the students.”

About the School

Located in the Glenville neighborhood on the east side of Cleveland, Joseph Landis is one of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District’s elementary schools. The school has long been proud of its good reputation, and housed grades K-5 for many years before converting to a K-8 school in 2005-06. Ninety-eight percent of Joseph Landis’ students are African-American and 20 percent have disabilities. For the majority (88 percent) of state assessments during the study period, Joseph Landis showed greater-than-expected progress on student achievement measures. The school exhibited very strong equity measures with its special education population. Total enrollment is 431 students.

A friendly atmosphere prevails at Joseph Landis; everyone at the school seems to know the students and their families. School staff is frequently in touch with parents to keep them connected with the school community. The school leader, Sandra Brinson, served as assistant principal before taking the helm five years ago. The school has adjusted to its sudden infusion of grades 6-8 in the 2005-2006 year, and this year, Principal Brinson reports, “Now, my middle school is phenomenal!”

The school’s inclusive special education program is especially notable. Students with disabilities are included in traditional classrooms when possible and offered individual and small-group attention when needed. A team that includes a psychologist, speech therapist and occupational therapist, along with a talented group of teachers and paraprofessionals, provides extra assistance.

Shared Vision

In talking with researchers from the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching (NCREST), the principal remarked that she is focused on kids, not grown people. She demonstrates this in many ways: playing basketball with students, providing guidance to parents

and making sure that student needs are always at the center of decisions. At the same time, Principal Brinson focuses much of her energy on supporting teachers. She believes that her job is to empower them to strengthen their own practice and to work collaboratively to benefit the school community.

Landis’ teachers and staff share the principal’s concern for children. Teachers meet twice a week in grade-level teams to undertake planning and collaborative activities. The principal gives the teams focus questions related to improving the school and students’ experiences. These focus questions range from how to improve student behavior to how to improve test preparation. Each team reports their conclusions or recommendations back to the principal. Teachers said they feel that their opinions matter in setting the direction of the school. Principal Brinson reports that the teachers are very self-motivated and collaborative.

Whether because of the personal leadership style of the principal or the history of frequent, sweeping changes within the district, Landis has committed itself to flexibly handle changes. This flexible responsiveness was evidenced by the staff’s ability to transform themselves successfully into a K-8 school from a K-5 school without the benefit of additional personnel and with a group of teachers with almost no experience with middle school education. They have also had to adapt to funding cuts in their special education program and other changes as mandated by the district and the state.

There is a parent academy where parents learn different strategies for supporting their children’s education. While parents are generally not involved in school-wide planning, many of them show support for the school by helping out when needed and working to resolve problems that their children may have. The school is also supported by volunteers from numerous educational and community organizations, such as Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland State University, Bethany Church and others.

JOSEPH LANDIS



Curriculum

The school's curriculum is informed by state and district standards. This is reinforced by the need to prepare students for the Ohio Achievement Tests (OATs), which are the basis for evaluation of students and the school as a whole.

As required by CMSD, the staff is trained in Formula Writing. Because Principal Brinson is convinced of its value in strengthening students' writing skills, she has purchased a number of additional books from the Formula Writing series and encourages teachers to use them. Further, teachers are encouraged to regularly incorporate instruction in writing into their lessons. In some cases, teachers select building-wide themes. For example, during Black History Month, English teachers developed black history projects; science teachers had students research the life of a black scientist and the social studies teacher involved students in a project on black politicians.

Core teachers are supported in their work by a group of auxiliary teachers in art, music, library, physical education and technology. For example, the librarian/technology teacher offers weekly computer classes to all students to support their areas of study. Regular classroom teachers provide information on their plans for upcoming weeks so that technology lessons can be appropriately tailored. In addition to a permanent computer lab, a mobile wireless computer lab is available for teachers to bring into their classrooms.

Most special education students spend time in regular classrooms as well as in special education classrooms, where about eight students work with one teacher and one paraprofessional. The instructional program is informed by professional development that the staff received from the Cuyahoga Special Education Service Center. Some teachers were especially enthusiastic about opportunities for training in the TEACH method developed in Asheville, N.C., for working with autistic students.

Instruction

Principal Brinson encourages teachers to use project-based learning, hands-on activities and the arts as a part of their instructional plans. An example of project-based instruction is the school newspaper run by the eighth-grade class to which all students are required to contribute. Students are also involved in journal writing in different classes. Arts education is widely integrated with other projects and is

an important aspect of the school's instruction. In addition, the school takes advantage of field trips made available from the district as a way to enrich curriculum.

There is a commitment to differentiated instruction that is supported by the presence of the special education program. The principal noted that the science teacher is especially skilled at differentiating lessons for students at different levels. The reading teacher was observed leading a lesson to help special education students find and appreciate "just right" books — books that are just right for their abilities that would be interesting to them and moderately challenging.

Struggling students are helped in multiple ways. A fifth-grade teacher described offering regular after-school tutoring sessions, especially before the OATs. She also had students buddy-up to help each other. In addition, there are volunteers from outside organizations who tutor students in need of extra help.

Use of Data

The school makes a point of using data provided by the district and the state — primarily results from the OATs and from twice-yearly benchmark testing (October and February) done district-wide to help assess progress toward competencies tested on the OATs. There is a core group of teachers who meets regularly with the principal to discuss results of the tests and to think about implications for the school in such areas as how to best group or place students and what specialized instruction in reading and math is needed. Recognizing that OATs are used to measure both student and school progress, test preparation is taken seriously. Teachers work together to develop and share strategies for assisting students, such as helping students understand typical test questions or drilling them on sets of questions.

In addition, students are encouraged to understand their own scores and to work on improving them. Students become excited when they see the progress they are making. In addition, the school recently began sending out information to parents on students' benchmark test scores; parents are encouraged to help their children work on the subjects with which they are struggling.

JOSEPH LANDIS



School Environment

The atmosphere at Landis is such that some of the students call Principal Brinson “grandma.” She spends time with them and makes sure that students are engaged in positive activities. Teachers are also very involved with the students. One teacher noted that many students come to school with emotional issues that have to be acknowledged before they are ready to learn. However, students are also held accountable. The principal said that she is very positive, but also stern. She believes in active discipline and doesn’t permit disrespectful or disruptive behavior. Teachers also talk about ways that they hold students accountable for their behavior and for their learning. For example, students are expected to make up work if they come late to class.

The school has experienced multiple changes in recent years. Rather than being thrown or embittered by these changes, they have found ways to cope with each of them. The principal talked of “just overcoming the odds” and “thinking outside the box” as ways to confront adversity in cases such as the one where the school became an instant K-8 school with no staff who were prepared to teach at that level.

Teachers state that the camaraderie is important to staff retention and student success. “If I don’t know something,” one teacher noted, “I feel comfortable sharing it with the core team so that I can get assistance.” There was a sense that no one is left alone to solve problems; finding solutions is a team effort. One teacher noted that all teachers and staff are willing to give “1000 percent” to help students. She felt that many at the school based their work on a spiritual foundation, stating that at Landis, “you work with a child as though you have God looking over your shoulder.” Many people complete extra tasks to keep everything working well. For example, some teachers volunteer to run after-school activities for kids. One teacher has organized a gospel choir to perform in veterans’ hospitals and nursing homes, a very positive experience for both residents and students. This kind of atmosphere is “very contagious” and has been actively fostered over time by both the previous and current principals.

This positive “contagion” involves the kids as well. They recite a daily pledge about success that follows the salute to the flag. They pledge to be prepared for the future and to help and respect others. Teachers work to make sure that students feel a sense of ownership of the school. They

involve older students in helping younger and special education students, and a student council was recently started.

Professional Development

The principal puts a great deal of emphasis on professional development, both formal and informal. She regularly plans professional development opportunities within the school, often in conjunction with staff meetings. In addition, she purchases helpful materials for staff such as a book on middle school education that helped them to quickly ramp up their sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade programs. She also regularly sends teachers to workshops offered by CMSD and others.

According to the principal, teachers are very self-motivated, collaborative and help each other. Many of the professional development sessions offered at the school are voluntary, but these are usually attended by at least 80 percent of teachers, if not more. Many faculty meetings start with business and then turn to a professional development topic. Some examples of past professional development sessions include sharing student work and discussing how to score it; conducting walk-throughs of other teachers’ classrooms with feedback; and studying Bloom’s taxonomy (this was posted throughout the building in different rooms) and then discussing ways to move lessons up to the next level.

MILES PARK

Address..... 4090 East 93 Street
Type of School..... Cleveland public
Grade Levels..... Pre K-8
Principal..... Kelley Dudley
Date of Visit April 3, 2007



Researchers Said

“It was very evident that students felt that the school belonged to them. They were smart and vocal.”

About the School

Located in the Union-Miles neighborhood on the east side of Cleveland, Miles Park is one of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District’s elementary schools. In 2006-07, the school was located in a temporary space while awaiting a new campus. It has since relocated to a new facility. Ninety percent of Miles Park’s students are African-American, 8 percent are white and 23 percent of students have disabilities. The majority (69 percent) of assessments during the study period showed greater student scores than Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) averages. Miles Park has a history of strong value-added measures, with students achieving significantly more than one year’s gain for one year’s worth of schooling. Miles Park also showed consistent, statistically significant growth over time in reading, math, social studies and science scores. Approximately 500 students attend the school.

Students’ educational abilities range from learning disabled to gifted and talented. A number of Miles Park students have scored “advanced”— the highest rating possible — on the Ohio Achievement Test (OAT). Most Miles Park students come from the immediate neighborhood. In addition, Miles Park receives and educates children from the local homeless shelter. These students, as well as those with special education needs, are efficiently and sensitively incorporated into the Miles Park learning community. Even in its aged temporary space, researchers from the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching (NCREST) found the atmosphere lively; student work was attractively displayed along the walls.

The Miles Park community’s self-perception parallels that of high-performing schools. Unlike some learning environments where students are seen as recipients of a service or raw materials waiting to be molded, students at Miles Park are active members of the community. Students show excitement about learning; they reflect the high expectations placed on their academic and social performance.

Miles Park is a unique setting where data and technology are used enthusiastically, leadership is flexible and the students demonstrate citizenship. Kelley Dudley, the principal, values collaboration; she asks her staff to constantly weigh in on issues and has created a trusting dialogue with the teachers, students and parents.

Shared Vision

One of the unique aspects of Miles Park is that students, teachers and parents actively live the school’s mission. Posted throughout the campus are the school’s four leading principles: be respectful, be responsible, be a good citizen and be in uniform. The school also has a great support base in the community, including a number of alumni. Visible parent and community support has been a major protective factor for the school during its transitions.

While there is a great deal of academic monitoring by the principal and the assistant principal, teachers are given much autonomy over instructional and extracurricular activities and programming. A number of teachers commented on the approachability of the principal and her willingness and openness to try new things.

Students share in decision making at Miles Park. According to Principal Dudley, students often come to her to request special programs and activities. For example, students requested more visits to colleges in addition to the school’s annual trip to Kent State University. In response to the students’ request, faculty is working on a trip to Central State University. Students also expressed a desire to have a talent show. For each request, students must prepare a proposal that describes their idea, identifies a staff member who will monitor the activity and indicates how many students they anticipate will participate.

Curriculum

Miles Park’s curriculum is determined by Ohio state standards, as well as the needs of the inclusion classrooms and Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for those students who require interventions. Most teachers use rubrics — a set of criteria and standards linked to learning objectives — to convey assignment expectations and as tools to track achievement. “Because the kids know what their job is,”

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one teacher said, “they feel confident when working on assignments.” Differentiated instruction is used in several classrooms, and students are regularly encouraged to help each other. According to another teacher, this approach helps students rely on their peers.

The Miles Park curriculum is based on a model of inclusion that addresses the needs of all students, including those with special needs (cognitive and emotionally disabled). Most students, regardless of ability or disability, are served in regular classrooms supported by regular educators, special educators and special education assistants.

A prominent initiative at Miles Park is the school’s approach to reading instruction; Accelerated Reader (AR) is part of the culture and serves as a common thread that ties administrators, teachers, students and parents together. One teacher who has worked in several other Cleveland schools shared that Miles Park uses the AR program in a truly meaningful way. Reading is a focus across the curriculum, and staff encourages reading on an ongoing basis.

Instruction

Researchers observed several practices that engaged student thinking and supported learning:

- One inclusion classroom had 21 students, ranging in ability from first to fifth grades. Students sat in groups at tables working on different worksheets and projects. Pictures of the students were on the wall. Also, there were two prominently displayed charts, one monitoring the students’ progress in AR and the other celebrating the “100% Club” (students who completed the AR goal). Most students worked with the teacher on a project about graphing.
- “Can I take a test?” a student in another class asked. This referred to an AR quiz. In this class, students used the computer workstation to access a web site where they could assess their reading levels. During class, the teacher asked one of the students what he was reading. The student showed the teacher the book. “I bet that is right at your level,” the teacher said. The student nodded.
- In a first-grade science class, children were involved in an experiment about bubbles. The teacher was demonstrating and the students all had data sheets before them and were recording the outcome of the

experiment — whether the bubble popped and under what conditions. Students were eager to answer questions. Notably, these first-grade students used very sophisticated language, including “hypotheses,” to describe their assumptions. It was evident that this teacher had high expectations of her children. All of the children in this inclusion classroom were engaged and attentive.

Use of Data

Principal Dudley is very technologically savvy; she enjoys synthesizing data and uses it in every aspect of her leadership. Data derived from AR assessments is most regularly used. The principal makes it a point to keep close track of each child. She uses data to detect trends among specific populations of students, such as those from the homeless shelter, and to create educational approaches that improve their learning environment. Data is also used to alert the school to possible social or family problems. For Principal Dudley, data showing decreased progress towards reading goals for a particular student may be an early indicator that something is going wrong at home or at school. This allows her to intervene preemptively and, hopefully, circumvent a more difficult problem.

Data generated from AR also informs her leadership practice. Through vigilant monitoring, she is well informed about teacher and student performance. She uses data to broach conversations with teachers, providing feedback on classroom and student progress. The principal and administrative staff are very generous with praise and make sure to acknowledge teachers individually for their accomplishments. Teachers’ classrooms are recognized with a pizza party when all of the students reach 100 percent of their reading goals.

School Environment

Principal Dudley is a very hands-on principal; she spends a great deal of time interacting with the students. She often utilizes lunch periods to engage students in informal discussions about education topics. She said students and parents have known her for a long time and they feel comfortable telling her when something is going on in the school or in the neighborhood.

Citizenship is an important aspect of the Miles Park community. The school serves a range of students, and care is taken to create an inclusive environment for all. In each

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of the classrooms observed, it was difficult to distinguish grade-level abilities. Even more importantly, there were no instances of teasing or taunting; students worked very well together. According to several teachers, making fun of others is not allowed. Students are told that they are only competing with themselves.

The principal and her staff have recently initiated several programs that focus on collaboration, academic achievement and citizenship. The school's B-Bucks Program is an incentive program based on behavior modification. B-Bucks can be earned for just about anything, but primarily they are given out for special academic achievement or good citizenship. The school has a store called "The Hive" that opens on Fridays to coincide with the school's "paydays." According to the principal, it's another way to teach children that they, like us, have a job to do — learn! In the store, students can purchase different small items, such as lipstick, pens and shirts.

Students and staff made comparisons between Miles Park and other schools. "Our school is different; there isn't all that fighting," one student said. "We don't have time to sit and play around because it takes away from our education." Other students agreed that there was little room for bad behavior at Miles Park. Apparently, Principal Dudley does not hesitate to contact or even visit parents. A united effort is put forth to communicate expectations (social and educational) to new parents and new teachers.

Students, particularly those in the higher grades, seem to have a keen awareness of the importance that good behavior and interactions have on learning. As a result, it seems as if they see themselves as partly responsible for maintaining a sense of order in the school. "I am part of the Miles Park security team," one young man said. "When we see the younger kids acting out, we explain to them how they should behave. We are here to learn." The other students agreed. A teacher echoed this sentiment. "This is by far the most effective school that I've taught at," the teacher said. "We have no security issues." The principal and assistant principal are responsible for handling serious conflicts and disciplinary issues. The philosophy is that it is better to have a child in the principal's office than in the classroom stealing educational time from other students. Over the years, the principal has developed a "don't blame the parent" approach when working with parents of children whose behavior requires intervention. That is, parents who are contacted by someone at school often have a preconceived notion that they are going

to get reprimanded. This is not the case at Miles Park. In most cases, Principal Dudley is focused on "putting the ownership [of the unwanted behavior] where it belongs, on the child." She also conducts home visits when necessary.

In addition to the efforts of the principal and vice principal, Miles Park has an Intervention-Based Assessment (IBA) team consisting of teachers, parent aides, social workers, special education teachers, administrators, school psychologists and anyone who can provide some input that will aid in the creation of effective intervention strategies to help students and parents.

Professional Development

According to Principal Dudley, a lot of professional development takes place in-house. This is partly due to the large staff turnover that has occurred at the school in recent years. Workshops and in-service content can be tailored to address specific needs, such as helping teachers with data monitoring and analysis. Often, teachers with specific strengths are identified to teach professional development workshops. For example, one teacher who had received advanced training taught rubric development to the entire teaching community; another teacher who was particularly skilled in using technology and Internet resources taught a technology workshop. Teachers also collaborate by sharing teaching approaches that will help their students, especially in math and science. Also, the faculty meets formally once a month.

The principal often writes letters to teachers to let them know what she is observing and, when a student is doing poorly, to suggest interventions such as making a phone call to the parent or seeing what (if any) issues the child is having. Often, she offers to help the teacher, but other times she reports stepping back as "teachers make a lot of decisions... and you have to build up a level of trust."

ORCHARD SCHOOL OF SCIENCE

Address..... 4200 Bailey Avenue
Type of School..... Cleveland public
Grade Levels..... Pre K-8
Principal..... Mary Anne Knapp
Date of Visit..... April 3, 2007



Researchers Said

“Orchard’s curriculum is designed to promote high levels of learning for all students and is described by the school’s curriculum leaders as an inquiry-based, rigorous, rubric- and criterion-driven, hands-on approach that emphasizes small-group and cooperative learning.”

About the School

Located in the Ohio City neighborhood on the west side of Cleveland, Orchard is one of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District’s elementary schools. The school grounds are enclosed by a beautiful iron fence that displays figures of children instead of traditional vertical stiles. Orchard School has recently experienced a period of major change; formerly a successful and celebrated model K-5 magnet school, it became a neighborhood K-8 school.

Orchard has a mixed student population demographically, with 44 percent African-American, 31 percent white and 22 percent Latino. Approximately 22 percent of students have disabilities. Orchard displayed strong value-added measures with state and other standardized assessment results, showing greater than a year’s growth. The majority of the school’s assessment results were greater than Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) averages, and Orchard had much lower racial and special education achievement gaps than CMSD averages. The school’s enrollment is 534 students.

Teachers are working hard to meet the needs associated with becoming a K-8 school, particularly in the areas of curriculum, school culture and instruction. Progress towards bringing students up to their appropriate skill and academic levels is evident: hallways are filled with student work and there is an abundance of energy, a positive business-like atmosphere and a strong sense of purpose.

Shared Vision

Orchard School involves its many stakeholders in the process of developing a shared vision. Interviews with faculty, parents and administrators revealed many examples of shared leadership opportunities, including faculty meetings, grade-level meetings, student council

gatherings and a parents’ leadership team. The school governance team includes “compact teams” composed of representatives from different constituent groups, such as parents, faculty, teachers and administration. Principal Mary Anne Knapp is a former Orchard School teacher, giving her an authentic understanding of teaching practice at the school and giving teachers access to leadership.

Orchard parents state that they feel that the school truly listens to them. Parents are permitted to examine the school’s proposed budget and to make suggestions. Parents are strongly encouraged to get involved and are usually invited to meetings through written and verbal communications. The school wants parent involvement for a variety of reasons, with one being to enhance the safety of the school.

Teachers and counselors are also part of the school’s shared vision. They share resources and develop cooperative initiatives through collaboration on lesson planning, including guidance lessons. Grade-level meetings occur weekly for 94 minutes; teachers determine the agenda with input from the principal. Each week the principal proposes a topic or focus question for grade-level teachers to discuss during their weekly meeting, such as interpreting data. Researchers from the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching (NCREST) observed high levels of teacher collaboration and data fluency during a meeting of first-grade teachers. Teachers attending this meeting discussed interventions for children who had never been read to, heard a nursery rhyme, or been asked, “what does apple start with?” prior to entering kindergarten.

Curriculum

Like other Cleveland schools, Orchard uses Formula Writing. In addition, the computer-based Accelerated Reading (AR) program supports the English/Language Arts (ELA) program. The program includes leveled reading for students (each student completes 25 books per year) and assessment via a built-in progress monitor. Orchard faculty are currently involved in efforts to improve the school’s math curriculum. Orchard relies on short-cycle testing, pacing charts,

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benchmarks and matrices to organize content and support teachers.

The school works to provide students with opportunities to understand the applications of school-based learning. Students are encouraged to create and work on a variety of projects. They are involved in out-of-school learning experiences, including the Cleveland State University Science Fair, and in after-school activities such as intramural sports, guidance lessons, a big brother/big sister program and a chess club. Orchard School earned an honorable mention in Cleveland State's science fair, and it was identified as having the best science program.

Instruction

Teachers develop plans on a monthly basis that include their goals for small-group learning and differentiated instruction. They continuously assess students and consult student data to inform grouping practices. Flexible grouping and an emphasis on differentiated instruction were most often observed in English Language Arts instruction. Third-grade students were observed working in small, leveled (divided by grade level) reading groups. In each, an older student led them through a reading exercise in which younger students took turns reading passages aloud. In a second classroom, the teacher conferred with a small group of students on editing while a larger group of students worked independently. Students were observed working in their table groups in several classes; in one class, students worked independently on stories (fifth grade) while in another, students in table groups were observing cells under a microscope (seventh and eighth grades).

Systems are in place to help students organize their learning. A first-grade class was divided into learning teams and expectations were clearly stated. The objective of the lesson was posted, the day's agenda listed the activities for the day, and the "Do Now" instructions on the board directed students in their work as soon as they walked into the classroom. Several classroom observations showed such routines to be widespread; students knew exactly when and how to do things, such as cleaning up materials. Teachers frequently used tools such as graphic organizers, a daily agenda, multiple drafts and rubrics to support student work.

Student work was displayed throughout the school and followed a consistent format. All displays included the title of the work, its purpose, rough drafts, finished copies and

rubrics. Work viewed included "Oceans and Continents" and "Spring Stories" (first grade); "Layers of the Atmosphere" (integrated science, seventh and eighth grades); "Genetic Babies: A Classroom Simulation Activity on Inherited Traits" (sixth grade); "We Read a Lot!" (first grade); and student-created dioramas (third grade).

Orchard uses a Student Work Modification Plan for students with special needs. This plan includes modifications or adaptations in the following categories: classroom environment (such as preferential seating or having a work partner), instruction (cueing, modeling, copies of notes, books on tape), assessment (reduced content, extended time, use of notes), grading (no spelling penalty, grading for effort) and organization (assisting with organization, putting assignments in a planner).

Use of Data

Orchard uses both formative and performance-based assessments to inform teaching and learning, though more emphasis is placed on formative assessment. The entire building examines assessment data in grade-level teams to identify students' strengths and weaknesses. This practice was observed at a first-grade team meeting. Data was disaggregated by student demographic categories and by classroom to identify ways to improve instruction.

In faculty interviews, NCREST researchers learned that Orchard relies on data from the Ohio Integrated Systems Model (a tiered model of prevention and intervention aimed at closing achievement gaps), Ohio Achievement Test (OAT) benchmark tests, AR program assessments and K-2 Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), a series of short tests administered to students in grades K-3 to screen and monitor student progress in acquiring reading skills.

The school issues standards-based report cards, and teachers provide students with specific feedback on the extent to which they are accomplishing learning goals. They also ask students to keep track of their own performance toward specific goals. The AR program also provides immediate feedback through point-in-time assessments.

School Environment

Throughout the school, an emphasis is placed on "accountable talk" in which students are held responsible for engaging in thoughtful and respectful communication with their peers, teachers and others. Prompts and reminders are listed in teacher-made posters displayed

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in each classroom. This common approach to selecting appropriate phrases reflects teacher collaboration. Clear expectations and rubrics for learning and behavior are evident across grade levels. This, too, suggests a high level of teacher collaboration.

Teachers and building leadership describe Orchard as a friendly place to work. The physical environment and school routines have been structured to promote safe, respectful and cooperative behavior. In all classes visited, “accountable talk” phrases and the Orchard School Safety Pledge were displayed for everyone to see. Clear rules and procedures pertaining to school-wide behavior have been established and also are visible in all classrooms.

Strategies that teach and reinforce student self-discipline and responsibility are implemented, such as Response to Intervention (a tiered response to problem solving and behavioral intervention). There is also an Intervention-Based Assessment team (IBA), a district-wide system for early identification of and intervention for struggling students. In addition, students’ regular attendance in school is encouraged through the use of incentives and regular phone calls home.

Throughout the year, several evenings are scheduled for parents and students to come to school together. These include Literacy Night, Math Night and Science Night. Literacy Night is designed to inform parents and to teach them how to support the school’s literacy efforts at home. The evening begins in the library with a “celebrity reader” followed by an opportunity for each student to select two new books to take home (funded by grants). On math and science nights, teachers share what they are doing in class with students and practice these same skills with parents. A “mad scientist” from the Mad Science organization stages experiments and demonstrations for participants. At these evening events, representatives from a community organization are available to meet with parents to discuss opportunities for them to further their own education. They provide information on GED, literacy resources and babysitting services.

Professional Development

Teachers have regularly scheduled opportunities for informal day-to-day professional development in the form of study groups, retreats, common planning periods, grade-level meetings and grade-level notebooks. Orchard teachers and administrators both report that teachers are involved in decision-making regarding professional development. Adequate time is allocated for capacity building and trying out innovative practices. Teachers benefit from a high level of professional safety; they take risks, examine student test data to inform their teaching weaknesses and seek assistance from their colleagues, the principal and curriculum leaders.

Teachers have two days of professional development in the summer funded by grants, usually occurring five days before the academic year begins. Professional development during the summer of 2007 focused on differentiated instruction. Past professional development has included preparation for the 90-minute literacy block, participation in the SMART consortium focused on math, preparation for short-cycle assessments and support to design scaffolded lessons.

Attendance at external professional development sessions is also encouraged, and teachers are expected to teach other teachers what they have learned. This model is effective because it requires teachers to really know and understand information to be able to teach their colleagues. Professional development is aligned with structures in place in the school, such as the use of literacy blocks and the emphasis on differentiated and small-group instruction.

ST. FRANCIS

Address..... 7206 Myron Avenue
Type of School..... Parochial
Grade Levels..... K-8
Principal..... Sister Karen Somerville
Date of Visit May 14, 2007



Researchers Said

“A key initiative at St. Francis is the PeaceBuilders Program, a nationwide, anti-violence youth program. When conflicts happen, the students form peace circles where they share their feelings with the other person in the conflict. Students reported with great pride and enthusiasm if they had been designated or recognized as a ‘PeaceBuilder.’”

About the School

Located in the St. Clair-Superior neighborhood on the east side of Cleveland, St. Francis is a Catholic school that has served children in the city for more than 100 years. Part of the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, the school is also affiliated with the Sisters of Notre Dame, who have a tradition of providing Catholic education throughout the world. Ninety-five percent of St. Francis’ students are African-American, 4 percent are Latino and 1 percent are multi-racial. Seven percent of students receive special education services. The results of all achievement tests for students were greater than expected when earlier ability measures were factored into the analysis. Student cohorts were followed over time, and student achievement increased as students progressed through the school. The majority (86 percent) of achievement test results also improved across cohorts of students in upward three-year trends.

Sister Karen Somerville has served as the principal of St. Francis for the past 14 years. The school’s interior is bright and inviting; researchers from the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching (NCREST) observed that classroom doors were open and rooms were neatly and colorfully decorated with pictures of school activities and students’ work. Students were neatly dressed in uniforms.

Tuition at St. Francis is \$3,450 per child. Most students pay tuition through the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program, with 200 of the school’s 230 students receiving vouchers that pay either 90 percent or 75 percent of students’ tuition, depending on parents’ income. Only 11 percent of the total student body is Catholic, though the majority of St. Francis students go on to Catholic high schools.

Shared Vision

The school has incorporated the educational principles of the Notre Dame Sisters that focus on the dignity of the teacher, the worth of the individual student, thoroughness of instruction in all subjects and the centrality of religion in the curriculum. According to Sister Karen Somerville, staff is concerned with educating the whole child. “It’s important to be concerned about the child’s social, moral, physical and spiritual development,” she said. The school’s mission statement is clearly displayed in the main hallway and is lived out and alive in the school.

Parents are in good communication with teachers regarding their children’s progress and behavior. Sister Karen believes this is key to the school’s success. Parent-teacher partnerships are highly valued and promoted by the administration. Some parents also volunteer their time in various ways. Sister Karen would like to start a parent-teacher organization; however previous attempts have not been very successful. According to Sister Karen, parents are struggling to keep food on their table and provide for their families, and the vast majority have little time for extra activities.

Curriculum

As a parochial school, many aspects of the curriculum are predetermined. The Catholic Diocese of Cleveland Office of Catholic Education prepares and disseminates a course of study for Cleveland Catholic elementary schools. According to Sister Karen, St. Francis meets Ohio requirements with regard to state standards. The basic curriculum consists of language arts (reading, English, spelling, handwriting, phonics), math, social studies, science, health, computers, physical education, music and art. Additionally, the school has a dedicated auxiliary staff, including a school psychologist, a speech pathologist and Title One reading and math teachers.

St. Francis has implemented curriculum mapping. The recently implemented social studies map for the 2006-2007 school year indicates specific content, skills, accompanying technology projects and assessments (including performances, tests, peer assessments and writing assessments). Individual classroom curriculum maps are available on the

ST. FRANCIS



Internet, and teachers can draw ideas from other classroom maps. This review also helps teachers build upon the previous year's teaching and avoid repetition.

Notably, each skill area is linked to a particular "Catholic identity." All teachers are certified to teach religion, which is infused across the curriculum. "The Gospel and Christian social teaching are the basis of the religion curriculum," Sister Karen explained. Areas of focus include caring for the Earth, the belief that everyone is sacred and the promotion of living non-violently.

Instruction

A number of classrooms were observed where teachers engaged student thinking and supported student learning:

- On the day of the NCREST visit, fourth-grade students were learning about probability. Students seemed eager and engaged. The teacher used an interactive whiteboard and offered contemporary examples to help students understand probability. For example, he asked, "What is the chance that Beyoncé will come into our classroom today?" Students answered, "None." Later, he asked students about the probability that they would receive homework. To this question, the students responded with laughter and said, "It's certain!" Throughout the class, the teacher communicated high expectations and exposed students to advanced vocabulary.
- In a kindergarten classroom, a phonics lesson was under way. Students were sitting in rows in their desks. The teacher clearly explained the lesson and shared her expectations. "At the end of the lesson, I hope that everyone knows the 'an' family words," she said. She asked students to spell "an," and students were eager to respond. When a student was called, other students cheered her on. Students were given multiple opportunities for learning, and each student was asked to participate in one way or another before the lesson ended.
- In a seventh-grade classroom, children were learning about Greek gods. At the beginning of the class, the teacher conducted a quick review of the children's prior knowledge about the Greeks. Students were grouped into teams of two; one student was responsible for an Internet search using a laptop computer, while the other student used a textbook. The use of technology in this lesson plan was very helpful; students were fully engaged

in the Internet search as well as in the textbook research. Students were noticeably helpful to one another, particularly in locating Greek mythology web sites. An interactive whiteboard was also used to display students' Internet findings.

St. Francis students engage in many activities on and off campus. One of the school's goals is to expose its students to life outside of the classroom and their neighborhood. Around the time of the NCREST visit, two classes had spent the day on a farm in a rural area outside of Cleveland and a sixth-grade class was scheduled to go to the zoo. The school also provides a number of extracurricular opportunities for the students, including after-school clubs (geography, math, computer and writing). Students can also participate in the Power of the Pen program, an interscholastic program in written expression that allows students to compete in local, regional and state tournaments. (Last year, two St. Francis students made it to the state finals.) St. Francis students also engage in public service. Last year they raised funds to aid children in Africa and to support a local school for handicapped children. The students also contributed to a local food bank.

Use of Data

Data and assessment information are used by the teachers and administrators to provide constant feedback to parents about their child's progress. According to school policy each student receives four mid-quarter reports that are issued every five weeks. In addition, many teachers use the EasyGrade Pro program to print out progress reports every couple of weeks so that students and parents stay informed. These reports are also used to tailor lesson plans to students' specific strengths and weaknesses, including participation in group work according to reading or math level. Also, standardized achievement test data is analyzed and distributed by the principal and vice principal in a manner that makes it easy for teachers to analyze and use.

School Environment

The atmosphere at St. Francis is warm, and teachers appear at ease. Classrooms are carpeted, colorful and fun, and hallways are bright and clean. Most classrooms have interactive whiteboards. It is apparent that a lot of effort has gone into maintaining a safe and pleasant environment where students can learn.

ST. FRANCIS



The PeaceBuilders Program contributes to a peaceful learning environment by increasing positive, respectful and thoughtful behavior while decreasing violent and disruptive behavior. The program requires participation by teachers and students. Staff sign a commitment statement, and students agree to the PeaceBuilder Pledge:

“I am a PeaceBuilder. I pledge to praise people, to give up put downs, to seek wise people, to notice and speak up about hurts I have caused and to right wrongs. I will build peace at home, at school and in my community each day.”

The principles of the program are displayed in almost every room in the building, including the main hallway. When conflicts happen, students seek out a “wise person” to help them solve the problem. In addition to PeaceBuilder recognition, student academic and social successes are recognized in a number of ways, including awards for scholastic achievement, perfect punctuality and super cooperation. Many of these awards are displayed on walls outside classrooms.

St. Francis staff develop programs that meet the needs of students and create opportunities for their success. The underlying goal is to bridge the gap between environmental detractors and academic achievement. The staff does not believe in using excuses like “the student cannot do homework because there is no one at home,” the vice principal said. “It’s not acceptable for us to say, ‘Oh, they just can’t do it.’ So we have a homework club. If they don’t have a place and time to do homework, we have to provide it.” Parents are grateful for this support, especially those who do not have the educational background necessary to help their children complete some assignments.

Sister Karen shared that teachers at St. Francis really reach out to the parents; there is a constant stream of communication between teachers and parents. For example, when a child is disruptive, rather than the teacher stopping the class and dealing with the situation, the child is sent to the vice principal, who works with the student and/or the parent(s) towards a resolution of the problem. During the NCREST visit, several phone calls to parents were observed relating to a number of issues (behavioral, health-related, etc.). Parents reported that when school staff members see a problem, they “get right on top of it.” Even if a student misses one assignment, parents are notified. In this way, the school involves parents in students’ learning. In addition, formal parent conferences are held twice a

year and parents are required to participate in one annual fundraiser to support the school.

Professional Development

Professional development goals are developed by the St. Francis staff at the beginning of each school year. Most of the staff take advantage of workshops and in-service opportunities provided by the Office of Catholic Education through the Diocese. In addition, Sister Karen has brought a number of guest speakers to campus, including well-known educator Marva Collins, who presented a lecture on the use of quality literature in teaching children. Additionally, in-house faculty meetings are held twice a month. According to Sister Karen, having only one class per grade creates more opportunities for cross-curricular planning among teachers.

Teachers expressed great appreciation for their jobs and for the people they work with, and they reported that collaboration at the school is very strong. They share information about teaching practices as well as technology tips and information from professional development opportunities. Additionally, as students move from one grade to another, teachers share information about individual students to ensure smooth transitions.

ST. MARTIN DE PORRES

Address..... 6111 Lausche Avenue
Type of School..... Private Catholic
Grade Levels..... 9-12
President..... Richard Clark
Principal..... Mary Ann Vogel
Date of Visit..... May 15, 2007



Researchers Said

“St. Martin de Porres students spend an average of four days a week in regular classes and one day at a local job site. The work-study experience provides them with exposure to the world of work, helpful mentors and real-life job experiences. The curriculum offered at the school is rigorous and intended to prepare students for college.”

About the School

Located in the St. Clair-Superior neighborhood on the near east side of Cleveland, St. Martin de Porres High School offers a unique educational format that blends academic coursework with a corporate work-study program. The school is based in the Catholic faith and modeled on a school initially developed as part of the national Cristo Rey Network in Chicago. The school has mixed student demographics: 65 percent of students are African-American, 25 percent are white and 10 percent are Latino. All of the school’s scores on state assessments were higher than Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) averages, as well as the averages of other urban districts across the state of Ohio. The school’s students consistently show more than one year’s growth on national tests. Student enrollment is 360 students, though at capacity the school will serve 400 or more.

St. Martin de Porres was founded in 2003 and originally envisioned as a school for students who were academically prepared to enter a private school, but unable to afford it. Once the school opened, it became clear that the vast majority of students needed assistance of every kind. Most students enter one to two grade levels behind due to inadequate preparation for high school.

The school is located in a former school building leased from the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland. It has been upgraded with extensive local financial support and is attractive, clean and friendly. It is “owned” by its 19-member board, whose members were chosen because they were “on fire with the mission,” the president said. The work-study program functions as a separate organization under the direction of the same board.

Shared Vision

The school leadership attributes its success to its mission-driven, energetic staff, all of whom have a stake in each student’s success. Working at St. Martin de Porres is clearly much more than a job; rather, it is a calling. This is explicitly recognized by the school and embodied in a statement in their strategic plan that “one cannot give what one does not have.” Thus the school’s leadership devotes time and resources to developing the staff, not only in terms of knowledge and skills, but also in terms of personal and spiritual dimensions. The school recently hired a vice president for mission who is charged with staff development in relation to the mission and spiritual life of the school.

This vision extends to parents. St. Martin de Porres recently started a morning prayer gathering for parents, who are encouraged to stop in when they bring their children to school in the morning. In addition to the morning prayer opportunity, there is a yearly parent appreciation dinner. Parents are asked for input into school policies and practices via meetings and surveys. While parent involvement is less than staff would like, the school is working to build more ways for parents to connect with them.

As one of 12 high schools associated with the Cristo Rey Network, St. Martin de Porres adheres to 10 standards, including a commitment to serving only economically disadvantaged students and to being family centered. Once a year, network schools come together for mutual learning and support. School leaders indicate that without support from this network, their jobs would be much more difficult.

Curriculum

To ensure that St. Martin de Porres was able to offer students the best possible curriculum, school leaders asked an innovative team of experts to create the “curriculum they always wanted to write,” incorporating best practices of the 21st Century and creating an exemplary, rigorous college preparatory curriculum. As teachers were hired, they were brought into this development process as well. The resulting curriculum emphasizes several core principles: a focus on caring and social justice, a thematic

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approach across subjects and an emphasis on engaging students. Social justice was the overall organizing principle. Based on this, the group developed four themes — care for community, self, the world and the Earth — that correspond to the four grade levels and are intended to reflect students’ developmental levels over time.

The result was a set of guidelines rather than a rigid curriculum, with teachers responsible for creating “everyday curriculum.” Each section of the curriculum corresponds to a subject area and describes the school’s philosophical foundations pertaining to the subject; a scope and sequence for each grade level (performance objectives and topics or key questions); and cross-curricular connections. Suggested readings, activities and assessments are included. Ohio state standards are integrated, reading is taught across the curriculum, and ethical and religious themes are interwoven. Thus a structure is provided, but its concrete form depends on the knowledge, creativity and energy that individual teachers bring to the material.

The school has been working hard to fully implement this curriculum. Some teachers have fully embraced the approach; others have wanted more guidance or direction. A few have been concerned that students wouldn’t be adequately prepared for state tests. Overall, however, the curriculum is working well and is seen as a model by other Cristo Rey schools. The curriculum development committee continues to meet to develop additional units and refine existing ones, trying to incorporate teacher input to the extent possible.

The corporate work-study program is also a key part of the curriculum for St. Martin de Porres students. Each student is a member of a four-person team sharing one job, and each student is at the job site about five days a month. Employers pay the salary associated with the job to the school; this is used to defray a significant portion of each student’s tuition costs. The purpose of job placement is primarily to help students pay for their education, but it has multiple secondary benefits: providing workplace experience, teaching important job-related “soft skills” and helping students form relationships. Students also learn what it means to be in a corporate work environment and to have people depending on them in real life situations. Students’ supervisors often end up mentoring students over the long term.

To prepare for these roles, students participate in an eight-day training program that includes sessions during the summer before they enter the school. The program covers primarily workplace etiquette, communications and job expectations, along with an introduction to clerical skills. Placement at job sites depends on student interests, their performance in summer training and available openings. Almost all jobs are clerical, though a few are in a hospital setting.

According to school leaders, 90 percent of the job placements work out well, with students performing to expectations and supervisors satisfied. In cases where there are problems, the student is “fired” and goes through a five-week retraining program at the school. The student also is asked to reflect on what went wrong and to send a letter of apology to the former employer. Students are then sent to a new job site and are actively supported to make sure it works out for all involved. If a student is fired a second time, he or she is asked to leave the school.

Instruction

The school is working hard to differentiate instruction, as students come in at very different levels. Teachers find this somewhat easier in English classes, where different books may be assigned to different students. In math, they sometimes will split students into groups, or have them work on different problems. Part of the challenge is working to supplement the instruction of more advanced students so that they are adequately stimulated and challenged. For the upcoming year, all professional development will be dedicated to differentiated instruction.

In addition, the school has several ways to help students who are behind academically. Their original idea was to offer extra workshops for skill building, along with individual coaching sessions. This became too complicated to schedule. Instead, students who need help in reading use Read 180, a computer-based instructional program that has worked well. In addition, the school emphasizes reading across the curriculum and offers after-school academic assistance from teachers and tutors.

The curriculum calls for extensive, project-based learning tied to the school’s themes. An example is the 10th grade community health fair tied to the theme of care of self. Each student is given a topic to research, such as diabetes or nutrition, and instructed to create a publication or

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presentation. These are shared at a health fair to which parents and community members are invited.

Use of Data

The school is committed to using data to measure its progress against specific targets. Its strategic plan for 2007-2012 calls for an attrition rate of less than 15 percent; a job retention rate of 90 percent or more; a senior year graduation rate of 100 percent; a college acceptance rate of 100 percent; an attendance rate of at least 98 percent; and a 100 percent pass rate on the Ohio Graduation Test by the end of students' junior year. Pertinent information is regularly collected, compiled and discussed by teachers, administrators and the board.

Another important use of data has to do with student admissions and placement. Every student applicant takes a three-hour high school placement test of basic and cognitive skills. Students more than a grade level or two behind are not admitted because the school does not believe that it is prepared to adequately educate them. However, they are also concerned that the test currently in use has not served well to predict students' academic success or diagnose problems; they hope to replace it.

School Environment

The school shows its commitment to students in a number of ways, most importantly through interaction between adults and students. "The students will respond to you more if they trust you and they know you care for them," a teacher said. "The students lean on the staff if they have serious issues... If they know you like them and respect them, you will get a lot further with them. Another reason students do well is that teachers [follow up]. Teachers are persistent about students' completing assignments and being on time."

The spiritual foundation for this approach to work is evident in the way teachers talk about students, and in the ways students are encouraged to participate in religious activities. Teachers are continuously involved in discussions about ways to make the school better and are encouraged and empowered by the principal to take leadership on improving different aspects of the school.

The school is also working on ways to inculcate the idea that all students are going to college. They are moving toward having every student prepare a college transition plan with the help of teacher-advisors. In addition, teachers regularly talk about their own college experiences and

about what students will need to learn to be college ready. Also, the school has a guidance counselor and a social worker who help students think about the college application process. Students have been taken on college tours close to home and as far away as New York City.

Professional Development

In hiring staff, the school makes special efforts to find teachers who believe in the school's mission, who get things done and who will continually strive to make the school better. They try to recruit these dynamic people through Teach for America, minority job fairs, historically black colleges and various websites. Though they have not been successful in hiring many teachers of color, school leaders are justifiably proud of the team they have assembled.

The effectiveness of the school's unique curriculum depends on the energy, enthusiasm and creativity of the teachers. This has involved helping teachers to become comfortable with it and to learn how to implement it. In addition, teachers have needed support in understanding the needs of students they teach. For many students, the demands of school do not come easily — a fact that can be hard to understand for those who choose the teaching profession. The school and its board of trustees consider professional development to be a priority and offer extensive support to teachers.

This is reflected in opportunities for teachers to go back to school themselves while receiving tuition assistance. In addition, the school has sent teachers out to look at best practices throughout the country. Teachers have collaborative planning periods and regularly check in with other teachers, visit one another's classes and think about ways to apply the school's themes in their different classes. In addition, spiritual support is available from the vice president for mission or other school leaders.

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

Address 9101 Superior Avenue
Type of School Parochial
Grade Levels Pre K-8
Principal Sister Michelle Kelly
Date of Visit May 17, 2007



Researchers Said

“The principal and assistant principal talked of students’ enthusiasm, love and energy...They attributed student success to high expectations held by their teachers and described their teachers as concerned with both academics and the behavior of their students.”

About the School

Located in the St. Clair-Superior neighborhood on the east side of Cleveland, St. Thomas Aquinas opened in 1928 in what was then a middle-class, Irish-German neighborhood. Over the next half-century, St. Thomas Aquinas evolved with its community and now provides a unique blend of Catholic and multicultural education to 235 students mostly drawn from the surrounding neighborhoods. One hundred percent of St. Thomas Aquinas’ students are African-American and 11 percent of students receive special education services. The majority (83 percent) of achievement test results for St. Thomas Aquinas students were greater than expected when earlier ability measures were factored into the analysis. Student cohorts were followed over time, and student achievement increased as students progressed through the school. The majority (86 percent) of achievement test results also improved across cohorts of students in upward three-year trends.

All children are taught the development of religious, moral and Gospel values in a disciplined and orderly environment. St. Thomas Aquinas offers a variety of in-school programs, including boys’ and girls’ basketball teams (the boys were undefeated in 2006-07), girls’ volleyball, a Cultivating Community Day in partnership with John Carroll University, Poetry Week and a Black History Bee. The school is housed in an impressive building with high ceilings and ample classroom space for its students. In addition to its K-8 program, St. Thomas Aquinas contains two Head Start preschool classrooms and offers before- and after-school childcare to those who need it.

Tuition is \$3,450 per child. St. Thomas Aquinas accepts vouchers from the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program as well as financial aid offered by the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland.

Shared Vision

The school’s mission is communicated to students through morning mass, classroom practice and the Sisters of Notre Dame Distinguished Graduate Award, where a graduating student is recognized as a stellar example of three valued attributes: academic excellence; witness of God’s goodness through outreach to those in need; and witness to the Gospel values in daily life. Teachers who apply for employment commit to upholding this mission, and it is reflected in their classrooms.

Sister Michelle Kelly, the principal, described a high level of interest and support from parents. Upon assuming leadership of the school three years ago, she organized an event to introduce herself to the school community. Invitations were disseminated and, while she had not planned for such a large turnout, 110 parents from the community attended. Parents interviewed by researchers from the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching (NCREST) stated that the school strives to provide a strong, rigorous education where students are held accountable for completing homework on a daily basis. They expressed deep gratitude for teachers who extended themselves beyond their teaching roles and cared for students on a personal level. Parents seemed to hold unquestioning trust in the school, and researchers found little with which parents disagreed.

Curriculum

St. Thomas Aquinas is accredited by the State of Ohio through the Ohio Catholic School Accrediting Association and follows the approved curriculum prepared for all Catholic schools in the Diocese of Cleveland. Subject areas include language arts (reading, English, spelling, handwriting, phonics), math, social studies, science, health, computers, physical education, music and arts. This basic curriculum, based on Ohio State Standards, is created through the Diocesan Office of Catholic Education. There is one classroom for each grade level up to the fifth grade. In grades six through eight, boys and girls are separated and rotate among four different teachers who focus content on specific disciplines including math, science and social studies.

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS



Some St. Thomas Aquinas faculty incorporate additional units of study and materials as necessary to maximize student learning. For example, in a second-grade classroom the teacher was supplementing language arts curriculum with the “Read, Baby, Read” program designed by A Cultural Exchange, a literacy-based, nonprofit, multicultural arts organization that provides teachers and students with books and supplies to encourage reading and cross-cultural understanding. In one classroom, the teacher had students take turns reading aloud from the book “Lo Pon Pon,” a story set in China. When they finished the text, the teacher displayed a Venn Diagram on an interactive whiteboard and reminded students how to use the diagram. She then guided them in comparing and contrasting “Lo Pon Pon” to its Western equivalent, “Little Red Riding Hood,” using the diagram as a guide.

All students receive weekly instruction in a computer lab staffed by a technology specialist. In the early grades, students work on basic keyboarding skills. Older students do Internet-based research, develop PowerPoint presentations and Excel spreadsheets and use word processing skills with increasing proficiency. Under supervision, students are also able to play computer math games and use SuccessMakers and Helping Hands Basic Skill Development software.

In addition, St. Thomas Aquinas supports student learning through a variety of activities developed in partnership with other organizations. These include:

- Nature’s Neighborhood, a collaborative effort with Shaker Lakes Center and St. Clair-Superior Neighborhood Coalition that introduces students to the Doan Creek watershed to teach them about water conservation and quality and about natural bird migration pathways.
- Cleveland Opera on Tour, a collaborative effort with the Cleveland Opera that encourages students to develop an appreciation for opera as an art form.
- Cultivating Community Day, a partnership with John Carroll University where a group of sixth-grade students plan outreach and services for peers within their community.
- After-School Instrumental Music Program, which provides instrument lessons through an independent agency.

Instruction

In the school’s brochure, St. Thomas Aquinas faculty and staff describe their instructional practices as a combination of hands-on, whole language and traditional styles. During the NCREST visit, varied instructional styles were observed. In one classroom, a sixth-grade teacher was using an interactive whiteboard in a lesson on geology. The teacher began by passing out an “anticipation packet” and engaging students in a true or false quiz to assess their prior knowledge. Next, the teacher used the whiteboard to show students a video on the properties of various minerals, after which they turned to their worksheet packet and continued to answer questions. The teacher shared that the students would eventually select a specific mineral, create a PowerPoint presentation and use technology to share information with classmates.

In another classroom, a fifth-grade math lesson on multiplying decimals was under way. Students were encouraged to demonstrate controlled behavior when sitting at their individual desks, raising hands to respond to the teacher and speaking only in response to prompted questions. The teacher distributed a handout of problems copied from a textbook. At one point, she put a problem on the board and asked a student volunteer to come up and place the decimal point in the wrong place; she then discussed why this was wrong. Students were given highlighters and directed to highlight important sections of the text as told by the teacher. Students continued to answer remaining math problems as a group.

In-school honors awards are given four times a year to students who achieve high grades on report cards. Students in grades one to three can earn the Primary Achievement Awards each quarter, and students in grades four to eight can earn either honor roll or merit roll depending on their marks. Students are also given awards for attendance, punctuality, citizenship and effort.

Use of Data

St. Thomas Aquinas students in grades one through seven are assessed through the standardized Iowa Tests of Basic Skills. Students in grades one, three, five and seven are also given the Cognitive Abilities Test.

Report cards are issued four times a year, and parent conferences are held twice a year. Midterm reports are sent halfway through each quarter to notify parents of student progress. Student progress is recorded using the

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS



EasyGrade Pro computer program in which teachers enter data relevant to the academic performance of each student. These reports are printed and sent home either at the end of the school midterm period, or more often at the teacher's discretion. This program allows reports to be generated whenever necessary.

School Environment

St. Thomas Aquinas students described the best feature of their school to be its safe and non-violent environment. They are proud of its accomplishments, especially the school's sports program, and regard it as a fun place to get a good education. "It's a lot safer if your school does not need metal detectors," one student said. "I feel safe about the fire drills and tornado drills. My school is looking out for me. My friends make me feel safe, and the older kids look out for me. The front door is always locked. The screen has a buzzer so that [administrators] can see who's coming in."

St. Thomas Aquinas has instituted a school-wide PeaceBuilders program where students are encouraged to reduce negative confrontations and negotiate tensions. Every classroom displays a bulletin board of PeaceBuilders principles: praising others, seeking wise friends and advisors, noticing hurts and making amends, righting wrongs, giving up put-downs and helping others. One student credited this program with contributing to a safe learning environment.

The St. Thomas Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) supports events and activities that promote the school's mission and improve its overall program. The PTO meets once a month to plan for this involvement. Parents interviewed expressed faith in the teachers to use their pedagogical knowledge to benefit their children. Many parents volunteered to support school functions in their free time and voiced gratitude for the unflagging work that St. Thomas Aquinas teachers do with their children. Parents are also required to participate in one school fundraising effort each year. St. Thomas Aquinas continues to think of ways to sustain parent involvement. One of their future goals is to "creatively engage parents in the education of their children so as to create a whole community focused on the needs of children."

Professional Development

As described by the principal, professional development occurs on two different levels. First, teachers participate in professional development sponsored by the Diocese of Cleveland; currently teachers are involved in a curriculum-mapping project for social studies. Secondly, professional development occurs at the school level through in-service training. At some of these events, teachers listen to guest speakers who address issues related to their teaching practices. For example, a speaker from the Ruby Payne Network discussed understanding issues of poverty. Once a month students are dismissed early from school to allow for faculty meetings.

SUCSESSTECH

Address..... 1440 Lakeside Drive
Type of School..... Cleveland public
Grade Levels..... 9-12
Principal..... Johneita Durant
Date of Visit..... May 15, 2007



Researchers Said

“SuccessTech Academy students, faculty and staff find the unique, open school layout conducive to a nurturing learning environment. The open teaching areas allow for teachers and students to be constantly visible, keeping all members accountable to each other.”

About the School

Located in downtown Cleveland, SuccessTech Academy (STA) is one of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District’s specialty high schools. It draws students citywide, and bases admissions on an application and interview process that emphasizes expectations of students’ and parents’ commitment to the school’s goals and mission, rather than academic records. The student population includes both those who are struggling and those who are considered above average. Some have Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and others receive social work services. Eighty-eight percent of the students are African-American, 6 percent are Latino and 5 percent are white. Five percent of students have disabilities. The school boasts much higher-than-average high school attendance (93 percent) and a very high graduation rate (99 percent). All of the school’s scores on state assessments were higher than Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) averages as well as other urban districts across the state of Ohio. The school has demonstrated upward trends in passage rates and performance indices over a three-year period.

STA was first launched through a Model Secondary School Project grant written by a team of educators, community leaders and the current principal. Located on the third, fourth and fifth floors of a shared building, it occupies a unique, open space divided into sections with high open entryways rather than classrooms with doors. STA is currently in its fifth year, having phased in one grade level at a time. Students are taught in impressively clean, newly furnished classrooms equipped with the latest technological advances. The school serves approximately 240 students.

Shared Vision

STA was described by Principal Johneita Durant as a small, college preparatory school with a rigorous course of study and a goal of sending every student to college. The principal stressed that it is imperative for both students and parents to fit the “small-school” environment and commit to the goals of graduating high school and attending college. This means that students and parents give up sports teams and extracurricular activities commonly found in larger schools for the more intimate setting of STA. In exchange, students have the opportunity to earn college credits and enter professional internships.

The school’s guidance counselor described its small-community culture as one of its greatest strengths. In this setting, students build relationships with both their peers and adult staff members. Students confirm this. “I went to a school by my house, and it’s a totally different learning environment,” one student said. “Here, [the principal] is always in the hallways. The open space is good; you see everybody. You know what everyone is doing. The school is like a family. I can yell in one room and [the principal] will hear me down the hall.”

Students explained that they comfortably submit proposals to the principal if they have viable activity ideas for their school. One student jokingly commented that if her debate club proposal does not become instituted next year, she will protest to get it done. This demonstrates not only a strong sense of ownership by students, but also their roles in school-wide decision-making. Not surprisingly, many school activities and programs at STA have been initiated through the efforts of students themselves.

Curriculum

NCREST (National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching) visitors spent time in science, math and English classrooms. In two classrooms, teachers relied on adopted textbooks or related materials to align their teaching practices to state and district standards. In one class, a teacher constructed her own texts and materials to scaffold content knowledge. Additionally, the Successful Schools Network has established a consortium of lesson planning and resource sharing events among 10 different

SUCSESSTECH



schools in Ohio, including STA. The principal described this collaborative effort as a helpful source of lesson plans, ideas and teaching resources.

Due to budget cuts, STA has had to eliminate some classes and integrate content across core academic coursework.

However, STA boasts an impressive array of educational in-school programs and activities. Many of these have been instituted in collaboration with surrounding businesses, colleges and community organizations. Students stated that these options helped them stay engaged in school. These programs include:

- Entrepreneurship City (E-City), a Cleveland-based after-school program where students are given \$50 to put together a business venture concept. After drafting a proposal, students present their plans to business groups in a competitive bidding process to receive further support and actualize their ideas. One student from STA became a national winner of E-City and went on to graduate from STA and attend Cleveland State University.
- Robotics Club, a parent-initiated club where students use grant funding to study robotics and programming. By collaborating with a professor from Case Western Reserve University, students have an opportunity to meet after school and work on their projects both on the STA and Case campuses. Currently, STA is in its third year of participating in regional competitions.
- Advisories, a class structured into the academic program designed to focus on student issues, character building and school concerns. Students are also required to conduct one community service project. These have included volunteering at a center for young mothers and taking gift baskets to Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital and surrounding nursing homes.
- Internships, an opportunity for students to acquire career-related work experience off campus. During their placements, students keep a journal of their experiences and present these to a panel of teachers. Students must complete all coursework and final exams prior to internship work.
- Post-Secondary Education Options Program, a dual-credit program that allows STA students to attend classes on neighboring college campuses and receive both high school and college credits. Students said they used these

opportunities to connect to colleges and to familiarize themselves with college-level expectations.

Instruction

NCREST researchers observed varied instructional approaches, including collaborative grouping and inquiry-based instruction. In an English classroom, the teacher used student grouping to complete a learning activity. In this classroom, students were co-constructing knowledge on current conceptions of gender roles. Students first read a handout discussing the role of women in the 1950s, worked in pairs to contrast current perspectives, and then created lists of how women and men should act and behave. During this activity the teacher allowed students to respond to each other and take ownership of their ideas irrespective of the degree of controversy and contention.

In a science course, students were engaged in conducting an experiment drawn from a science textbook. After perusing the text, students were equipped with all the necessary materials to conduct their experiments. Students seemed to be well aware of the expectations of the classroom and proceeded in their work with little direction from the teacher. According to the principal, the science teacher "never tells students the answers, but has them work it out." In this classroom visit, the teacher did indeed have a student who had a question work it out, rather than provide the answer.

In an algebra course, students reviewed trigonometry functions by watching a video of a math professor who described the concepts and provided relevant examples. As they watched the video, some students asked the teacher for clarification and corrected a worksheet while they took notes. Later, students referred to this teacher as teaching his course like a college-level math class.

As seen from these observations, teachers employed a variety of approaches to make subject matter meaningful to their students. Students commented that teachers were also willing to work with them on an individual basis. One student stated that the nurturing environment of the school allowed her to comfortably approach teachers when necessary. Teachers also volunteer to stay after school for tutoring and to supervise school activities and clubs.

Use of Data

Teachers are able to access student test scores through on-line services and use them at their discretion to guide



their instructional practice. Teachers also use assessment measures from curriculum programs and self-created assessment strategies to gauge student progress. This was observed in the trigonometry course where students were self-checking a worksheet on classroom content.

School Environment

NCREST researchers observed that STA's setting is competitive and academically rigorous. Students seemed to openly embrace being part of that culture. Students noted that those in the upper grade levels often built a sense of school solidarity by helping newer students transition into STA. One student said that while older students may intimidate the younger students at other schools, at STA they are eager to introduce themselves in an effort to forge amicable, supportive relationships. Another student noted "We all help each other. We've learned to grow with each others." Another student said, "I know everyone and I feel comfortable. If I went to a regular high school, I don't think that I could fit in. If you are comfortable in your school, you're able to ask questions when you don't understand."

The commitment to this culture is evident in large and small ways. Students are required to memorize the school's vision, which is posted in every classroom, and recite it at special school functions. Junior and senior students pass along this recitation tradition to new students in lower grade levels. While the STA daily schedule is generally based on 80-minute class periods, students transition between classes seamlessly and with an interesting fluidity, without the use of a traditional bell system.

There is a high level of parental involvement at STA. The principal described several committed parents who regularly volunteer on campus. One parent has volunteered every Friday for the past few years. Another comes in once or twice a week to work in classrooms, and another has been volunteering almost every day even though his child graduated last year. In addition, the school has a School Parent Organization that meets every month to discuss school issues and help organize events.

Professional Development

Professional development occurs in a variety of ways at STA. Faculty meetings, or roundtables, are held on a weekly basis. At these meetings, teachers and administrators discuss student progress, identify students at risk, collaborate on curriculum development and share effective strategies from their practice. At these sessions, teachers

focus on consistency across subject areas. Interestingly, students recognize these efforts. "All of the classes work in conjunction with each other," one student noted. "All the teachers work together." She continued to describe how what she learned in math was aligned with the subject matter in science.

Additionally, four days prior to the beginning of each school year, teachers and staff convene for professional development and curriculum writing. At this session, teachers work together to generate coursework around a summer reading selection. In the summer of 2006, all students and faculty were required to read "They Died Crawling," a novel by local author John Stark Bellamy II. Teachers then developed curriculum using concepts, themes and ideas from the text. Teachers also attend professional development sessions at a number of the surrounding colleges. For example, one teacher opted to attend classes through the National Science Foundation's Math and Science Partnership at Case Western Reserve University, where she learned science experiments for classroom use, and participate in a robotics class at Cuyahoga Community College to refine mathematical pedagogy and robot programming.

Editors' Note:

Shortly after this field study was conducted, SuccessTech was the site of a tragic school shooting involving one of its recently transferred students. NCREST researchers express great sadness over this event. SuccessTech is striving to restore normalcy and reestablish the genuine feelings of safety and security expressed by teachers and students and witnessed by the NCREST team on their visit.

URBAN COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Address 4909 Lorain Avenue
Type of School Private Catholic/Christian
Grade Levels Pre K-8
Director Sister Maureen Doyle
Principal Pamela Delly
Date of Visit May 16, 2007



Researchers Said

“UCS students are explicitly prepared for the next stages of education, as the school stresses academic ability coupled with stamina. UCS students typically do well in high school. They are ready for greater academic challenges, and the social development provided by UCS helps them to relate to varied groups of students.”

About the School

Located in the Detroit-Shoreway neighborhood of Cleveland, Urban Community School (UCS) is a non-graded, faith-based, private pre-K through 8 school founded in 1968 and accredited through the Ohio Catholic Accrediting Agency. Most of the students who attend UCS are from the surrounding neighborhoods. The school has a mixed student population demographically, with 42 percent Latino, 35 percent white and 24 percent African-American. Six percent of students receive special education services. Forty-eight percent of the students are Catholic and 52 percent are Protestant; all students are encouraged to participate in their spiritual development and embrace their faith — whatever denomination that may be. UCS continuously tracks its graduates and reports that 91 percent of alumni graduate from high school and 62 percent of its students proceed to college. UCS currently serves 452 students.

UCS was founded in 1968 by the Ursuline Sister of Cleveland, along with a group of concerned teachers and community leaders. It opened on the parish grounds of St. Patrick, St. Malachi and, later, St. Wendolin, with grade levels spread across the three campuses. In 1977, UCS opened its Montessori preschool, and 10 years later it was the first school in Cleveland to receive the Excellence in Education Award from the U.S. Department of Education. An endowment fund was set up, and in the 1990s UCS’ board unanimously voted to expand the school to serve more children and to continue to improve the quality of education offered. Parent input was critical in the development of UCS’ strategic plan, including the decision to move to its present, unified location on Lorain Avenue. UCS’ new facility, opened in 2005, sits in the heart of an urban community.

The cost to educate one child at UCS is \$6,200 annually. Less than 5 percent of UCS families pay the full tuition. In fact, the school only accepts 5 percent of its enrollment from families who can pay. Annual fundraising and income from an endowment fund augment tuition dollars. UCS’ administrative structure includes a director and a principal. Principal Pamela Delly, who has worked for many years in schools serving children with special education needs, is responsible for the daily management of the school. Sister Maureen Doyle, UCS director, taught at the school before becoming its director 21 years ago. She is the face of the school to the larger community and is involved in all aspects of fundraising.

Shared Vision

The school believes in fostering school, family and community partnerships to guide the growth and development of each child — academically, emotionally, morally, physically and spiritually. UCS challenges students as individuals as they progress at their own pace to achieve their potential.

Teachers attribute much of the school’s success to their open relationship with UCS administration. This relationship includes a two-way, open door-policy where unannounced classroom visits from the administration occur regularly and teachers have direct access to administrators. Teachers are totally involved in almost everything that happens in this school. Many UCS initiatives, programs and changes are teacher-generated in response to student and family needs. Teachers construct their plans and share them with grade-level coordinators by formal and informal means.

Students leave UCS and go on to high school and college with a respect and appreciation for diversity. UCS graduates from the classes of 2003 through 2006 currently attend academically intensive schools including private and Catholic high schools in Greater Cleveland. UCS values its school and family partnerships. To build these partnerships, teachers conduct home visits for all students in grades K-4 and parents are required to attend two conferences per year where report cards are distributed. Parents can

URBAN COMMUNITY SCHOOL



visit classrooms any time, and there is a phone in each classroom that facilitates parents' access to their children's teachers.

Curriculum

UCS' curriculum is designed to prepare students to face problem-solving situations, respond to issues in their community and, eventually, to effect improvements in society as a whole. The school is undertaking a curriculum-mapping initiative and plans to use Rubicon Atlas software to structure the mapping process. They will map the curriculum both vertically and horizontally as they shift from their own curriculum toward standards-aligned Diocesan curriculum. Teachers continue to work collaboratively to write curriculum and lesson-plans.

UCS prepares its students to participate in a Graduation Outcomes Project — a capstone experience required of all UCS eighth graders. In preparation for this culminating project, students are engaged in a series of activities. Researchers from the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching (NCREST) observed an eighth grade class preparing to present their Graduation Outcomes Projects publicly (scheduled for the following evening). Many tri-fold boards displaying students' projects were set up around the room. Examples of project topics included global warming, eating disorders, disabilities and second-hand smoke. Several students presented their projects during the class period.

One student presented his research on disabilities to his peers and teachers. His project included background research, information on how his research could be applied in the community, survey questions and results, interview questions and responses and graphical depictions of his findings. His presentation addressed several disabilities, including blindness, quadriplegia, birth defects, bipolar disorder and learning disabilities. He explained the need for and purpose of the Individuals with Disabilities Act. For the community research and application aspect of the project, this student chose to interview a blind woman from the community. He tied his research to the Bible, commenting, "Even in Jesus' day, people lived with disabilities; people live with disabilities today." He was articulate and engaging, and his peers were respectful and attentive. His teacher and Sister Martha (curriculum supervisor) provided immediate feedback and coaching.

Teachers want students to feel and be successful as much of the time as possible. Special education students have Individual Education Plans (IEPs). UCS has many English-as-a-second-language students, and many parents speak only Spanish. Urban has several faculty members and secretarial and support staff who are fluent in Spanish.

Instruction

Small-group instruction, differentiated instruction, co-teaching and independent work are common practices at UCS. For example, in the kindergarten class, students worked in several small groups. One group worked with the teacher as they recited sentences and read aloud; another group worked with a second teacher on pre-reading skills, specifically vowel sounds (recognition and oration); and a third group worked independently at centers using math manipulatives (objects they could touch and count) or computers.

UCS uses a looping strategy, where students remain with the same teacher for two years. This strategy facilitates development of close relationships between students and their peers and between students and their teachers. It also provides opportunities for the older, returning children to experience leadership.

Classroom support is provided by two teaching assistants for lower elementary teachers to share on alternate days. Volunteers are found throughout the school. Some are available only for one day a year, while others are active on a weekly basis all year long. Students in upper grades are also tapped to work with younger students to provide tutoring and peer mediation.

Use of Data

In addition to using technology for instructional purposes, UCS highly values technologies that provide feedback about student progress. They use STAR reader and STAR math assessments, and students are reviewed four times per year to determine levels and progress. Urban also uses the Iowa Test of Basic Skills performance test as a tool for understanding the progress of its students. In the school's self-study, they compared their results with Diocesan scores.

URBAN COMMUNITY SCHOOL



School Environment

UCS is very fortunate to have a beautiful facility designed to support its instructional and curricular goals. Classrooms are large with flexible spaces that support small groups and many centers. The freshness of the new building and the resources available to teachers and students contribute to a stimulating learning environment.

Sister Maureen describes UCS as an open and friendly school where students and teachers work together. Teachers sit with small groups of children and establish good working relationships. Parents are supportive of their children and supportive of the school. Students at Urban are free to work together and assist one another. The labels “smart” vs. “dumb” do not exist amongst the kids. The school’s mediation program has been an effective strategy for preparing students for challenges that lie ahead.

UCS provides a nurturing and safe environment, and students and teachers appear comfortable in the school. Several teachers said that they chose to teach at Urban because they believe in the school’s philosophy and its approaches that emphasize a Christian/Catholic mission coupled with innovative ways of teaching. Urban teachers described the school as diverse in every way—economically, academically and ethnically.

To address challenging students, UCS has a pullout program and a full-time guidance counselor. The guidance counselor works to get at the root of what’s happening with the child while also reinforcing the teachers through Intervention-Based Assessment teams. Another approach to addressing student challenges is through grouping and differentiation.

One parent explained her reason for sending her child to UCS: “The school differentiates instruction to meet the different levels of readiness and diversity, and the school’s high level of accountability sets Urban apart from other area schools. The school is successful because it has high standards for faculty and kids. Standards and expectations are routinely discussed in staff meetings. Kids care about each other and diversity is valued.”

Professional Development

Urban Community School engages in ongoing professional development activities. This past year, teachers and administrators worked with materials from Dr. Mel Levine to learn more about “All Kinds of Minds.” Teachers read his publications and discussed ways to apply his work to UCS. During the summer of 2007, the faculty participated in a one-week program to become a “School Attuned.” This intensive program helped faculty members develop skills needed to assist students who have learning differences. UCS will continue to work with this program and will be a site where others can learn how to assist students, teachers and parents.

UCS has an informal turnkey approach to professional development. Faculty and administration choose workshops or professional development sessions that they wish to attend and, later, share information with others. A significant number of teachers are working on graduate degrees, and they bring back information from their courses on such topics as the use of technology, standards and integration. Teachers also get opportunities to visit the classrooms of their colleagues in order to see techniques that can be integrated into their own classes. In addition, the school’s curriculum coordinator facilitates a one-week training for teachers new to UCS. This program emphasizes differentiated instruction and the work of Carol Ann Tomlinson.

Common Themes

Factors Critical to Schools' Success

Researchers identified six dimensions across the schools that impact students' learning.

- Shared vision: A shared vision of continuous school improvement; a sense of purpose and community; shared ideas about excellence in classroom teaching.
- Curriculum: Alignment with standards; a guaranteed and viable curriculum; a curriculum that leads to future success.
- Instruction: Engaging student thinking; supporting student learning.
- Use of data: Multiple forms and sources of data used to make decisions about school improvement; disaggregation of data to improve outcomes for all students.
- School environment: A nurturing, supportive learning environment; a safe and orderly environment; plentiful student and family support.
- Professional development: A positive climate for teachers; varied ways of supporting professional development.

Common Leadership Practices Across the 13 Schools

Collectively the schools highlighted in this report span a range of grade levels and governance models (traditional public, private, parochial and charter) and have different access to financial, educational and community resources. Despite these differences, researchers identified common leadership practices that contributed to school success. Leaders of these 13 schools:

- Remain mission driven
- Put children first
- Reinforce a strong, positive school culture
- Strongly support teachers
- Involve parents and the community
- Take time to build relationships
- Engage in continuous learning and improvement
- Maintain high standards in every aspect of the school enterprise

Factors Critical to Schools' Success

By Elisabeth Allanbrook Barnett

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National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching

with Ruchi Agarwal, Monica Brooker, Jennifer Silwany, Debbie Sonu, Joycelyn Wilson and Mary Elizabeth Wilson

What can we learn about and from **Cleveland Schools that are Making a Difference**? First, and most importantly, the research team from the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching (NCREST) confirmed that excellence can be found in varied settings in Cleveland's education system — in primary and secondary schools; in traditional public, private, parochial and charter schools; in schools with long histories; and in new start-up schools. Across the city, research revealed that schools often work quietly and with little recognition while finding ways to help children succeed in their studies. These schools reflect a number of promising practices researchers identified as key to high student achievement:

1. *Shared vision: A shared vision of continuous school improvement; a sense of purpose and community; shared ideas about excellence in classroom teaching*
2. *Curriculum: Alignment with standards; a guaranteed and viable curriculum; a curriculum that leads to future success*
3. *Instruction: A focus on engaging student thinking and supporting students' learning*
4. *Use of data: Use of multiple forms and sources of data to make decisions about school improvement; disaggregation of data to improve outcomes for all students*
5. *School environment: A nurturing, supportive learning environment; a safe and orderly environment; plentiful student and family support*
6. *Professional development: A positive climate for teachers; varied ways of supporting professional development*

Shared Vision

A commitment to students: All schools highlighted in the report share a sense of purpose and an explicit focus on students. In most cases, they are preparing students for college. In all cases, they are focused on how to help students succeed educationally. This commitment is reflected in the willingness of administrators, teachers and other staff to give much more than their jobs require. At some of the parochial schools, the spiritual underpinning for this dedication to students is written into mission statements. At other schools, the commitment is just as

deep and grounded in the belief that all children deserve a chance and can learn if given the opportunity.

Living the commitment: In addition, these schools “walk the walk” as well as “talk the talk.” St. Martin de Porres has a vice principal for mission who helps the staff prepare themselves to be excellent teachers and administrators. Other schools have developed routines and rituals that reinforce their vision. These include daily morning assemblies, systems of rewards for positive behavior, opportunities for teachers to learn from one another, useful assessment systems and finding ways to keep students from falling behind.

A key part of living the commitment is a dedication to high standards. Many schools hold everyone mutually accountable — including students — to hard work and caring, appropriate behavior. For example, Benjamin Franklin teachers and administrators interviewed for this project talked about possessing high expectations not only of students, but also of themselves as professional educators. SuccessTech students seemed to openly embrace being part of a school that is competitive and academically rigorous. Cleveland School of the Arts students must work very diligently to balance academic achievement with busy performance schedules.

Shared decision making: School principals involve their staffs in making decisions and taking on leadership roles in varied ways. In response, teachers and others in the school often take their responsibility very seriously, behaving as leaders themselves rather than as job-holders. Under Louisa May Alcott's universal leadership model, everyone — from the janitor to the speech pathologist to reading aides — is responsible for guiding students, correcting them when they are misbehaving and for the success of the school.

Teachers frequently spoke of how much they valued being part of decision making in the schools and being trusted to do a good job in the classroom. Many of the school leaders provided a general structure and lots of encouragement, and then left many decisions to the discretion of individual teachers or groups of teachers. Urban Community School teachers attribute much of the school's success to their open relationship with the administration. This relationship includes a two-way, open-door policy where unannounced classroom visits from the administration occur regularly and teachers have direct access to administrators. Teachers say that they are “totally involved in almost everything that happens in this school.”

Parents' involvement: Levels of parental involvement vary across schools for a number of reasons. But all school staff described parents as very willing to support the school and their children's education. In some places, parents serve as regular volunteers and enter into school-related decision making through formal groups such as PTAs. In other cases, parents are caught up in the tasks of daily living and less able to spend time at the school.

Several schools take extra measures to reach out to parents. Teachers from both Citizens' Academy and Urban Community School visit every student's home at the beginning of the year as a way to get to know them and their families. St. Martin de Porres organizes a morning prayer opportunity for parents called "Minute with the Maker." A number of schools hold special events for parents and children to attend together. Orchard School of Science holds yearly "literacy nights," "math nights" and "science nights." In addition, parents are encouraged to examine and comment on the school's plan and budget.

Parents at St. Francis reported that they are notified when a student misses one assignment. In this way, the school involves parents in students' learning. In addition, formal parent conferences are held twice a year and parents are required to participate in one annual fundraiser to support the school.

Beyond academics: While schools highlighted in this report clearly make students' academic work and achievement a priority, many focus on other dimensions of living as well. Good citizenship is a frequent concern, as is caring for others. For example, at Citizens' Academy citizenship class occurs daily for 15 minutes and addresses seven virtues: generosity, honesty, loyalty, courage, responsibility, perseverance and responsibility. In the case of parochial schools, developing a spiritual life is also explicitly encouraged. St. Thomas Aquinas students are encouraged to model three valued attributes: academic excellence, outreach to those in need and witness to the Gospel values in daily life. Urban Community School's curriculum is designed to prepare students to problem-solve, to respond to issues in their community and, eventually, to effect improvements in society as a whole.

In some schools, students are deeply engaged in activities outside of the traditional classroom. Students at SuccessTech have the opportunity to earn college credits and enter professional internships. St. Martin de Porres students spend five days a month at a job site where they learn workplace skills as well as help finance their education. Cleveland School of the Arts students are involved in performances of various kinds. Students at The Intergenerational School regularly interact with older people in settings where they can both learn and teach.

Curriculum

Addressing standards: There is a high level of awareness of and adherence to Ohio state academic standards among the schools highlighted in this report. For the traditional public and charter schools, this was reinforced by the state testing regimen in which their students participate. The parochial schools had less external pressure and more flexibility, although many aspects of the curriculum at these schools are predetermined by the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland's Office of Catholic Education, which prepares and disseminates a course of study to Catholic elementary schools. This course of study is also based on state standards.

Prioritizing literacy and math: All schools are very concerned with insuring that students become proficient in reading, writing and math. Many use approaches endorsed and provided by the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD), including Accelerated Math, Accelerated Reader and Formula Writing. These were generally highly regarded by administrators and teachers. Another national system, Direct Instruction, is used at Louisa May Alcott and is found to be effective at meeting the needs of its very diverse students, including many with special education needs.

Other approaches are also in use. At Benjamin Franklin, a clear instructional priority is the development of literacy skills in content areas. Journal writing is done in art classes, as are reading and writing activities in computer classes. Teachers spoke explicitly about tying literacy to all subjects. At Citizens' Academy, students are grouped in literacy and math blocks where they spend the first four hours of each day. These blocks are fluid, allowing students to move at certain points during the year.

Curriculum innovation: Two schools highlighted in this report developed and used their own unique curricula. At The Intergenerational School, the curriculum was developed by the principal with input from some of the teachers. It serves as a framework to assist teachers in planning their lessons and is regularly revised and improved to assure that students are prepared for Ohio state tests. The curriculum is described as holistic (taking into account the whole student in the context of his/her community), meaning-based (incorporating authentic tasks) and constructivist (allowing students to arrive at their own understanding of each topic of study). At St. Martin de Porres, an outside expert was asked to convene a group to create the "curriculum that they had always wanted to write." The group organized the curriculum around four themes: care for community, care for self, care for the world and care for the earth. These themes correspond to four high-school grade levels and reflect students' developmental levels over time. This curriculum also allows teachers a great deal of latitude in its implementation.

Community partnerships: To provide support for student learning, a number of schools have strong partnerships with community organizations, colleges, businesses and arts organizations. These organizations help teach classes, volunteer tutors, help students prepare for the college application process, or offer jobs and internships. The Intergenerational School matches groups of students with senior citizens' organizations for collaborative learning activities. St. Thomas Aquinas has developed a collaborative effort with The Cleveland Opera that encourages students to develop an appreciation for opera as an art form. Benjamin Franklin has developed a close partnership with the Groundworks Dance Theater Company, whose dancers come to the school for six-week sessions to integrate arts into the curriculum. Joseph Landis is supported by volunteer tutors from numerous educational and community organizations such as Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland State University and Bethany Church.

Instruction

Differentiated instruction: A major theme and commitment among schools featured in this report is finding ways to support the learning needs of each and every student across very different skill levels and including many with special education needs or educational deficits. At St. Thomas Aquinas, boys and girls are separated into single-sex classrooms and rotate among four different teachers. Miles Park, Joseph Landis and Louisa May Alcott have developed effective ways to include special education students into regular classrooms wherever possible and provide help to students in small groups based on individual needs. Orchard School of Science and The Intergenerational School are notable for using data to inform their grouping practices.

Schools found it easier to differentiate reading and English instruction within a classroom than math instruction. An exception is The Intergenerational School, which organizes its schedule so that students across developmental grade levels are able to move to the most appropriate math class. Other schools are working on ways to better their math instruction for students with different needs and skill levels.

Accountability and high expectations: School staff makes it clear to students that education is to be taken seriously. Learning is framed as the students' most important "job," with adults maintaining high expectations for acceptable "job" performance. Students are generally expected to arrive at school on time, with homework completed and ready to learn. At the same time, schools are committed to giving students every opportunity to succeed. For example, St. Francis hosts an after-school homework club to make sure that students have the support they need to

complete homework. Citizens' Academy prides itself on its "no excuses" culture for students and adults. At Miles Park, school leaders are very generous with praise and make sure to acknowledge teachers individually for their accomplishments: classrooms are recognized with a pizza party when all of the students reach 100 percent of their reading goals.

Real life and project-based learning: All schools highlighted in this report work to make in-school learning meaningful and relevant and to engage students in different ways. This takes varied forms, including hands-on activities, projects tied to school themes and collaborations with community organizations. Interesting and creative examples abound. At Cleveland School of the Arts, faculty work collaboratively to create lessons that integrate students' artistic and academic learning. At Benjamin Franklin, students undertake projects such as designing recreational centers and creating PowerPoint presentations to pitch their designs. The curriculum at St. Martin de Porres calls for extensive project-based learning tied to the school's themes. An example is the 10th grade community health fair tied to the theme of care for self. At Urban Community School, students participate in the Graduation Outcomes Project, a capstone experience required of all eighth graders. At Joseph Landis, the eighth grade class runs a school newspaper.

Out-of-school learning is an important part of instructional practice at several schools as well. At St. Martin de Porres, a work-study program provides students with exposure to the world of work, helpful mentors and real-life job experiences. At St. Francis, one of the school's goals is to expose its students to life outside the classroom and the immediate neighborhood. It does this by organizing trips to farms, zoos and cultural performances.

Test preparation: Preparing students to do well on state achievement tests is a fact of life for schools highlighted in this report, as well as most other schools in Ohio. Most of the featured schools deal with this matter-of-factly. At Louisa May Alcott and Citizens' Academy, test preparation is embedded into curriculum throughout the year. In addition, Louisa May Alcott helps students prepare for tests by setting up peer-to-peer tutoring in which a student in a higher grade is paired with one from a lower grade. At Joseph Landis, teachers work together to develop and share strategies to help students succeed on tests.

Use of technology: A number of the schools have access to extensive computer technology resources, while others make do with minimal equipment. In a number of cases, faculty's use of technology to support student learning is impressive. SuccessTech has an array of well-utilized equipment, including desk-top computers, LCD projectors

and big screen televisions, in every classroom. A number of schools use “Smart” boards or “ActiveBoards.” Other schools have traveling computer labs. At Joseph Landis, the librarian/technology teacher offers weekly classes to all students to align computer skills, when possible, with areas of study in which students are engaged in their regular classrooms. At St. Thomas Aquinas all students receive weekly instruction in a computer lab staffed by a technology specialist. Younger students work on keyboarding skills; older students perform Internet-based research and create Power Point presentations and Excel spreadsheets.

Use of Data

Use of standardized test data: Schools most often report using results from the Ohio Achievement Test and, where applicable, district-level benchmarking tests to inform instructional practices. The analysis and use of this data is organized in different ways, largely dependent on the preferences of school leaders. At Joseph Landis, there is a core group of teachers who meets regularly with the principal to discuss the results of the tests and to think about implications for the school — for example, how to best group or place students and what specialized instruction in reading and math is needed. In addition, students are encouraged to understand their own scores and to work on improving them. At Miles Park, the principal makes it a point to keep close track of each child. She utilizes the test data to detect trends among specific populations of students (e.g., those from the homeless shelter) and to create educational approaches that improve their learning. At Orchard School of Science, the entire building examines assessment data in grade level teams to identify students’ strengths and weakness. Data are disaggregated by student demographics and by classroom to identify ways to improve instruction.

Specialized assessments: In addition, schools use various curriculum support materials (Accelerated Reader, Accelerated Math and/or Direct Instruction) to generate useful reports to help assess student achievement. At Cleveland School of the Arts and Benjamin Franklin, the Accelerated Reader reports are used to review students’ reading levels, lists of books read and vocabulary words mastered. This information assists teachers in creating unique performance plans for students according to their strengths and weaknesses. At Louisa May Alcott, the district’s quarterly benchmarks tests in reading and writing are compared to Direct Instruction generated assessment data. The principal does an initial analysis of data; it is then shared with teachers so that they can plan for the needs of each child. Urban Community School uses the STAR reader and STAR math assessments as well as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Students are reviewed four times per year to determine levels and progress.

Unique assessments: The Intergenerational School is unique in that the majority of its assessments are created by the principal and teachers. Students are designated to developmental levels rather than to grades, and data form the basis for moving students from one level to another. The school uses performance benchmarks in reading, writing and math, while in science and social studies the assessments are more often portfolio-based. It is common for students to be in several levels on different subjects. The assessments are used to drive instruction and also provide evidence of student progress and growth. In addition to the state report card, parents receive a separate report card associated with each developmental level that provides a detailed listing of the learning objectives expected to be mastered during that stage and indicating the child’s progress. Students also understand their placement and what they need to do to attain the next level of proficiency.

School Environment

The physical environment: There is little commonality in the physical environments of these schools. Some schools have lots of open space, while others have traditional, separated classrooms. Some are housed in their own buildings; others share space with another institution. Some are in new facilities and some are in centuries-old buildings. In all of these settings, however, student learning is taking place.

Respect, responsibility and safety: With schools located mainly in low-income, inner-city neighborhoods, a lot of thought has gone into how to make students and faculty feel safe and welcome. Much depends on establishing a culture in which everyone is responsible for civility and safety. In some cases, this is done in a formal way. For example, both St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Francis have instituted PeaceBuilders programs, a nationwide anti-violence youth program. When conflicts happen, students form “peace circles” where they share their feelings with others involved in the conflict. At Orchard School of Science, emphasis is placed on “accountable talk” in which students are held responsible for engaging in thoughtful and respectful communication with their peers, teachers and others. Prompts and reminders are listed in teacher-made posters displayed in each classroom. This common approach to selecting appropriate phrases reflects teacher collaboration.

In other schools, these ideas are woven into day-to-day school culture. At Benjamin Franklin and Louisa May Alcott, public recognition of student and teacher achievements is an important aspect of the culture. At Cleveland School of the Arts, confrontations are less likely because many of the students perform together. Additionally, students avoid negative behavior, in part, because they do not want to jeopardize their ability to perform, but more

importantly because they do not want to hurt their chances of being accepted to good colleges or universities. At The Intergenerational School, teachers encourage students to be “thinkers and learners;” instead of condemning students’ negative behavior, teachers encourage their students to make better choices and learn from their mistakes and the mistakes of others. Teachers question their students’ behavior often, asking them, “How can you be a better thinker and learner?” or “What would be a better choice?”

Discipline: Most schools have systems in place to encourage good behavior and correct bad behavior so that students can learn. In order to create a calm and respectful learning environment for all, The Intergenerational School maintains a school-wide discipline plan, developed collaboratively among staff, with a zero-tolerance policy for fighting and bullying. In addition, the school uses the CARE program (Citizens Acting Responsibly Everyday), which offers positive rewards for good behavior. Students learn that one student’s behavior will not be allowed to deter the learning of other students. As the principal noted, “Every moment is a teaching moment.” At Joseph Landis, the principal describes herself as very positive, but also “stern.” She believes in active discipline and does not permit disrespectful or disruptive behavior.

Student support: Most of the schools featured in the report (including all CMSD schools) have Intervention Based Assistance (IBA) teams to help students with academic, social or behavioral problems. In particular, Louisa May Alcott has developed a very active team that meets every Friday morning to discuss ways to help students who are struggling. Sometimes teachers meet with parents and other school staff to brainstorm solutions to individual students’ challenges. They have even developed a “treasure book” of ideas on ways to help students with different problems.

Student support can come from teachers or from other students. At St. Martin de Porres, teachers often take students to community events and interesting places to expose them to more of the world. They also show students that they care about their performance. One teacher commented, “If [students] know you like them and respect them, you will get a lot of further with them.” He continued, “Another reason [students] do well is that teachers ride them. Teachers are persistent — borderline annoying — about students’ completing assignments and being on time.” At Joseph Landis, teachers work to make sure that students feel a sense of ownership of the school. They have older students help younger and special education students and recently started a student council. At Miles Park, older students, in particular, seem to have a keen awareness of the importance that good behavior

and interactions have on learning. As a result, they see themselves as partly responsible for maintaining a sense of order in the school.

A sense of family: While some schools were more business-like, some had developed an atmosphere that was family-like. At Citizens’ Academy, “everyone knows everyone,” a staff member said; parents are able to call their children’s teachers and meet with administrative staff at anytime. At SuccessTech a student commented, “I went to a school by my house and it is a totally different learning environment. Here, [the principal] is always in the hallways. The open space is good; you see everybody. You know what everyone is doing. The school is like a family.”

Professional Development

Teacher buy-in: In addition to effective leadership, strong teacher commitment to the school and the students was evident at these schools. Low staff turnover and high teacher retention is one indicator of this commitment and is often reinforced by a high level of mutual regard among faculty and administrators and a spirit of collaboration. At St. Francis, teachers reported that collaboration at the school is very strong. They expressed great appreciation for their jobs and the people they work with. At Orchard School of Science, teachers indicated that they feel a high level of professional safety. They take risks — examining student test data to inform their teaching weaknesses and seeking assistance from their colleagues, the principal and curriculum leaders. These patterns are consciously fostered by school leaders and most effective when principals are able to determine what teachers are hired into their buildings.

A community of learners: Professional development in these schools depends to a great degree on resources within the schools themselves and the faculty’s willingness to share. Teachers often collaborated on learning as a group or took time to teach each other. For example at Citizens’ Academy, the culture of the school supports and encourages sharing and collaboration. Teachers serve as mentors to other teachers, with mentors assigned based on the teachers’ needs and mentors’ strengths. Teachers also have multiple opportunities to visit the classrooms of their colleagues. At Louisa May Alcott, a teacher stated, “We are the experts collaboratively. We all learn from each other.”

In some cases, school leaders set up structured opportunities for teachers to learn from one another. For example at Cleveland School of the Arts, the principal instituted the Learning Walks Program in which all members of the school community (teachers, principal, union representatives, etc.) visit teachers’ classrooms and provide immediate feedback to help strengthen teaching

practices. These Learning Walks sometimes take place at other schools, aiding and encouraging veteran teachers to bring new ideas into their classrooms. In a number of schools, guest experts have been invited to help teachers improve specific areas of knowledge or skills.

Common planning time: Most of the schools featured in this report set aside time for teachers to plan and problem-solve in groups. In some cases, they consider a school-wide problem or activity. In others, the focus is on the needs of individual students (e.g., Intervention Based Assistance teams). Often teachers meet by grade level or by disciplinary area. At Benjamin Franklin, teachers meet two periods per week for common grade-level planning, and exemplary teachers sometimes model lessons for their colleagues. The school has also used professional development days for cross-grade-level planning. At SuccessTech, faculty meetings, or roundtables, are held on a weekly basis. At these meetings, teachers and administrators discuss student progress, identify students at risk, collaborate in curriculum development and share effective strategies from their practice. A major focus is placed on alignment of the curriculum across subject areas.

Professional development workshops: Teachers and staff at the schools also benefit from participation in professional development opportunities outside of the school. These were generally provided by the school district, the diocese, or such organizations as national curriculum providers (e.g. Direct Instruction), or school networks (e.g., the Cristo Rey Schools). Frequently, teachers will bring back information from these events to share with others in the school. At Urban Community School, the staff has an informal turnkey approach to professional development. Faculty and administration choose workshops or professional development sessions that they wish to attend and then share information with others. In addition, a significant number of teachers are working on graduate degrees and bringing back information from their courses on such topics as use of technology or standards integration.

Conclusion

Not unexpectedly, *Cleveland Schools that are Making a Difference* share many common features, most notably a culture that supports learning for children and adults, high expectations, strong leadership and a spirit of perseverance. Working in difficult circumstances and serving children who face many challenges, principals and teachers in these schools tackle their jobs with great dedication, high levels of professionalism — and success.

Common Leadership Practices Across the 13 Schools

By Elisabeth Allanbrook Barnett

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On Oct. 1, 2007, the principals and other leaders of 13 schools selected as Cleveland Schools that are Making a Difference met to discuss what accounted for their success in helping students advance academically. They represented public, parochial and charter schools serving children in pre-kindergarten through high school. The conversation was facilitated by Dr. Gerry House, president of the New York-based Institute for Student Achievement, which helped identify the schools included in the report. A lively discussion ensued. Among the traits principals credited for success: a mission-driven stance; a “whatever it takes” culture; a safe and orderly environment; perseverance and flexibility; personal relationships; persistent parent inclusion; an ethos of continuous improvement; high expectations; and support for innovation.

Mission-Driven Stance

Underlying the principals’ commitment to their challenging jobs was a passion for the work and a belief in their schools’ mission. Some principals expressed a desire to create new and better approaches to educating urban children. Other principals were driven by religious-based convictions of lives spent in service to children. Some simply loved children and were willing to do whatever it took to give them better life chances. In all cases, they were clearly making personal sacrifices for what they believed in. This was often reflected in the attitudes of their faculty and staff as well.

Our way of making decisions contributes to our success. Decisions are made based on what is best for children.

Our community honors individuals of all ages who come together to learn. Each child is known as an individual, as a capable learner, [and is] met where they are and taken to the next level.

You’ve got to know what it’s about...what it’s like to work with urban kids. I wouldn’t trade my job for anything.

There is a high level of commitment by faculty. Taking extra responsibilities and duties is part of who the faculty is.

Developing the Culture

When the principals were asked about the two or three things that accounted for their success, almost all mentioned some aspect of their schools’ culture. In some

cases, this had strong historical roots; in other cases, school culture had been carefully and consciously nurtured by current or former school leaders. Some schools based their cultural norms on their faith, others on their belief in the importance of the work. Culture was often expressed and enhanced through the use of established rituals, routines and practices. Generally, culture engendered a “whatever it takes” attitude among the staff.

In schools with a long history in their neighborhoods, strength was derived from being a part of the community; in these cases, the parents often were committed to the school culture as well.

Another thing that contributes [to our success is] the “Citizens’ Academy way”— a set of governing rules that fit our culture and climate: how you walk in the halls, the way you interact in the classroom.

Ours is a 125-year-old school with strong traditions... We get lots of support from the sisters of Notre Dame. There is a very powerful educational heritage. Our goal is to keep that [heritage] alive, to in-service new teachers on this.

You need trust everywhere in the building. Even when there’s a union, everyone pulls together. When you open up and let people teach well, you build community.

Another beautiful thing about [our school]: it’s cool to be smart.

Safe and Orderly Environments

School leaders devoted a lot of time to establishing norms and routines that create foundations for safe and orderly environments. This was seen by most as a precondition for effective learning to take place. In many schools, creating a safe and orderly environment involved establishing clear rules for behavior and staying unflinchingly committed to them. Teachers were often involved in setting rules and in creating a climate in which rules were to be followed.

Several schools had established programs to prevent violence, most notably the PeaceBuilders program, which teaches students how to deal with anger. In the parochial schools, religious teaching and prayer also served as a foundation for creating positive behavioral norms. In all schools, principals reported multiple ways in which they encouraged positive behavior.

We keep reflecting back to children [and asking] “What would be a better choice?”

We are working on systems of positive behavior. The district has adopted a modified version. The behaviors are keyed to different parts of the building. This keeps everyone ready for learning.

Ten years ago we started the PeaceBuilders program, a national program that promotes non-violence. We teach the PeaceBuilder principles each year. Because of this program and our faith foundation, we have an environment where we can educate children.

Perseverance and Flexibility

Many principals experienced adversity — sometimes major and extreme hardships, sometimes small but irritating occurrences. Some stemmed from inside the schools, but much was attributed to external sources. They talked of the need to demonstrate flexibility and of a determination to overcome each problem as it emerged. Some principals had been ready to quit; others had never considered it. In all cases, they showed considerable grace in confronting adversity and a willingness to take on the world if it meant children would have a better chance. They were exemplars of the “whatever it takes” culture.

In a number of cases, principals were able to survive adversity because of the willingness of their staff to participate in creating solutions. Some of the principals told stories of difficulties that were overcome when everyone pulled together and supported the school, the children and each other.

Personal Relationships

These principals established close, mutually helpful relationships with teachers. They respected teachers and granted them decision-making power; in exchange, teachers were willing to go the extra mile. Relationships with children and families were also important; in all of the schools, children were known individually by the principal and more deeply by their teachers. Principals recognized the transformative power of these relationships.

Several principals talked of placing the needs of teachers ahead of their own. They believed that if the teachers were treated as professionals, they would do everything in their power to teach well and meet students’ needs.

I think [it’s about] trust. It’s key when your faculty feels like they can trust you. All that helps...letting them know that you care about them. Not just being a manager, but also being a model for how you want them to be with the kids.

My job is to make sure that my extraordinary professional teachers can teach. Whatever they need from me, it’s my job to give it to them.

Teachers ask things of you. When you say “yes,” you can ask more of them... [It’s also about a] personal touch — “How’s your mom? How’s your knee?” Also you let them know who you are.

Arms are put around those who are new; teachers feel very different than they have in other buildings. They say, “I can’t believe how everyone’s willing to help.”

Persistent Parent Inclusion

Parents were seen as important and usually willing partners, though this was not always the case. Parents supported their children’s schools and education in many ways: by volunteering, providing materials and watching out for the school after hours. Parents who were not eager to be involved were continuously pressed, cajoled and supported to become a part of school life. Principals believed that while students should be responsible for themselves, they were more likely to succeed when parents backed them up.

Parental support [at our school] is good. They back the school, want to be helpful, like the climate at the school, feel at home and [feel] welcomed. Good relationships with parents make it easier to deal with problems that arise.

We have respect for parents as partners. [The school and the parents] sign a contract agreeing what each will do to support the child’s education.

An Ethos of Continuous Improvement

These principals were committed to developing and sustaining an ethos of continuous improvement. They emphasized their commitment to learning and building, along with their staffs, better ways of doing things. In some cases, this was accomplished by examining and reflecting on available data. In other cases, it meant spending time and resources on professional development. Some school leaders made an effort to learn about best practices in other schools. An environment in which adults were learning and growing was seen as a good example for children.

We make lots of decisions based on best practices. We make visits to schools to learn others’ practices. We’re always evaluating what’s going on.

We always look at data, tests and formative assessments. Teachers turn in the binders monthly. Either I or the assistant principal is always at the grade level meeting.

High Expectations

The principals believed that every child could learn: children of all backgrounds, talents and life experiences; children with learning disabilities; and children with overwhelmed parents. They were not willing to make excuses for, or to accept excuses from children, parents, teachers or other staff. In many cases, this meant constant vigilance and extra time spent keeping everyone on track — insisting that homework be done, that children be in school on time and insuring that teachers were using diverse, creative instructional methods.

[This work requires a] relentless insistence on excellence in every component of the school — eating, learning, everything. It's very tiring; you can never relax your standard.

Our main focus is “every child is going to go to college... We focus on bringing all children along in reading and math. We spend a lot of time on these, especially reading.

Innovation

Though much of the success described by the principals primarily reflected their day-to-day work to maintain high standards, a number of principals talked about innovations implemented in their schools. Some of these were based on nationally known program models, while others were locally created. In some cases, innovations had been attempted and abandoned due to changes in district or state policy or because of budget cuts. However, a number of innovative programs were underway and many were proving to be successful.

There is a theme for each year. We read the same books in the summer as a springboard into the theme.

We have an age-integrated developmental approach to learning. It's life-long learning using a non-graded approach. We reject grade levels; classes are multi-age.

We are doing split gender classes in our middle school based on discussions among teachers.

All students are in jobs — mainly at businesses, some in schools. We start with three-week training in August. [It covers] safety, filing, corporate luncheons, how to look others in the eye, how to give a good hand shake.

Conclusions: Leading in Cleveland's Diverse Schools

Principals participating in the meeting had the opportunity to discuss similarities and differences in their schools and compare their leadership styles. These principals led schools that spanned a range of grade levels, had different governance oversight (traditional public, private, parochial and charter) and different access to resources. Many challenges they faced were based on these differences, yet there were striking similarities in the elements of leadership that contributed to their successes.

Repeatedly these principals mentioned common themes when reflecting on their leadership:

- Being mission driven
- Putting children first
- Reinforcing a strong, positive school culture
- Strongly supporting teachers
- Involving parents
- Taking the time to build relationships
- Engaging in continuous learning and improvement, and
- Maintaining high standards in every aspect of the school enterprise

Clearly Cleveland's schools — traditional public, private, parochial and charter — have a wealth of strong role models when it comes to school leadership.

Appendix: Methodology

By Doug Clay, Principal, Candor LLC

Schools were considered for inclusion in this report if they matched the general demographic profile of the city of Cleveland and drew the majority of their students from within the city. Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) schools, Catholic parochial schools, private schools and charter schools were all considered.

Student achievement data were not available in the same format for all types of schools. Consequently, different data profile formats were devised to compare schools within categories. A panel of researchers and foundation personnel then selected the final schools for observation and further study.

Public and Charter Schools: Achievement Test Results

Data from the Ohio Achievement Tests (grades 3-8) and Ohio's Graduation Test (grades 10 and 11) were available for multiple years for traditional public schools and public charter schools. These data were analyzed in a variety of ways in order to get the broadest measure of student achievement possible.

First, achievement data were compared as averages across all grades and subjects for schools and compared with overall averages of the CMSD and similar districts. Second, achievement test trends for up to three years were examined by subject and grade in order to determine if scores were increasing, decreasing, remaining relatively stable or were mixed over time. Following this analysis, a third measure of student achievement was examined. The state of Ohio categorizes student performance on achievement and graduation tests into five levels. These levels are given weights that allow for a more robust assessment of achievement. These index scores were analyzed for strength and trends in the same manner as overall passing rates.

Performance Index Calculation

LIMITED	x	0.3
BASIC	x	0.6
PROFICIENT	x	1.0
ACCELERATED	x	1.1
ADVANCED	x	1.2

= *Performance index ranging from a low of 30 to a high of 120*

The last common element of student achievement examined for traditional public and charter schools was between African-American and white students and students with disabilities. An achievement gap ratio is created by dividing the average achievement gap by the average overall achievement of the subgroup of interest. The resulting ratio is highest when the numerator (gap) is high and the denominator (achievement) is low. The gap ratio decreases with more equity between groups (lowers the numerator) or by higher achievement of the subgroup of interest (rising minority scores, regardless of majority scores). Schools with enough membership in each group were examined and achievement gap ratios were reported in data profiles.

Cleveland Public Schools: Value-Added Measures

Value-added measures refer to the progress of groups of students over time. It is another dimension of student achievement and much more compelling when student populations are highly mobile. The state of Ohio initiated value-added measures that follow individual students after the selection period of this study. However, CMSD participated in a pilot study for four years prior to the statewide rollout. These value-added progress measures were made available only for CMSD. Measures were aggregated for grade level and subject and reported over a four-year period.

Parochial and Private Schools: Success Metrics

Parochial and private elementary schools in Cleveland do not take Ohio Achievement Tests. High schools are required to take the Ohio Graduation Test, so they could be assessed in the same manner as public schools. In order to identify successful elementary schools in this category, parochial and private schools were first identified by diocese personnel and feeder high schools

as doing a particularly good job in preparing students for high school. Six elementary schools were identified by multiple respondents in this fashion. These schools were contacted individually for their students' achievement and demographic data. Achievement data supplied by the parochial schools consisted of Iowa Test of Basic Skills Achievement and Iowa CoGat Ability tests. Achievement data came from grades one through seven, and ability data was present for first, third, fifth and seventh grades.

Comparing the ability data to the achievement data allowed for a differential measure similar in scope to value-added. The Iowa results presented predicted scores based upon ability measures and actual scores, and the resulting measure was presented as positive, negative or equal. Candidates for inclusion in the study had two-to three-years' worth of data for review. Overall achievement scores were also viewed over time and across student cohorts. Lastly, we analyzed cohort growth over three years across grades. The combination of these measures gave a fairly robust view of achievement trends for these schools.

Data Profiles

Consistent data profiles were produced within each category of school and discussed by researchers and foundation personnel. Consensus was reached on the most successful, representative schools, which were then contacted for inclusion into the study.

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