

Berwick Alternative Elementary School

Columbus Public Schools

Columbus, Ohio

Superintendent: Gene Harris

Principal: Leanne Katterheinrich

<http://www.columbus.k12.oh.us/berwick/>

Berwick Alternative Elementary demonstrates that students attending a school noted for its exemplary math and science programs can also excel in reading. Berwick Alternative was named a 2003-2004 School of Promise because of the reading proficiency scores of their third- and fourth-grade students, including their students with disabilities. Located on the east side of Columbus, Berwick Alternative is a math-science alternative school within the Columbus Public School District. Acceptance into the school is 100 % by lottery. In 2004-2005, all but three of its 350 students in kindergarten through fifth grade resided outside the neighborhood where the school is located.

Berwick Alternative teachers have high academic standards and expectations for all of their students, 45.4% of whom are economically disadvantaged. It is the philosophy of the staff that “all students can learn -- there are no excuses for a student not to learn” and that “it is the responsibility of the teachers to figure out how students learn and how to teach them.” Many of the school’s strategies for insuring student success are listed below. These strategies are discussed in more detail throughout this case study:

SCHOOL PROFILE	
2003-2004 Building Rating	Effective
Enrollment	344
Grade Levels	K-5
Economically Disadvantaged Students	45.4%
Students with Disabilities	20%
Black Students	79.6%
Hispanic Students	2.9%
White Students	15.8%

COLUMBUS PUBLIC DISTRICT PROFILE	
2003-2004 District Rating	Academic Watch
District Enrollment	61,590

- Continually assessing student performance and revising instruction accordingly;
- Differentiating student instruction;
- Providing time for collaborative planning and instruction across general education, special education and Title I;
- Using physical education, music and art instruction to support reading skills;
- Aligning the curriculum across grade levels;
- Providing intensive reading instruction, intervention, and remediation;
- Implementing the district’s integrated reading and writing literacy program that is aligned with the state standards;
- Keeping ahead of the district curriculum pacing chart to allow for intense remediation;
- Preparing for the writing proficiency test in numerous ways;
- Conducting administrative walk-throughs to help teachers reflect upon their teaching;

Using volunteers to support school goals;
Implementing a building-wide discipline plan.

Designing Instruction to Ensure Every Student's Success

Every school in the district has a School Continuous Improvement Team (SCIT) and must turn in a building plan every nine weeks. Berwick Alternative's team, consisting of one teacher from each grade level, parents and the administrator, reviews the results of proficiency tests and the scores on daily classroom work such as worksheets, quizzes and tests, to identify performance weaknesses. Based on the findings of the team, the entire staff develops the building plan, with objectives for each nine-week period.

Data-driven Instruction

Leanne Katterheinrich, principal at Berwick Alternative, is a strong advocate for using data both to track the progress of students and to determine learning gaps in need of instruction. In her office, she keeps records on every student in the school, personally monitoring each to make sure of his or her progress.

This focus on data is reflected in how the staff members at Berwick Alternative operate. They continually assess where students are performing and then work to provide support in areas of need. During the 2003-2004 school year 83.1% of all third graders scored proficient or above on the reading achievement test and 81.6% of all fourth graders passed the reading section of the Ohio Proficiency Test (OPT). Contributing to these passage rates were the scores of the fourth grade students with disabilities, 83.3% who scored proficient or above on reading. Berwick Alternative students, including those with disabilities, have met or exceeded the 75% standard for reading for the last three years as depicted in the bar graphs at the end of this report.

In addition to state-mandated testing, the staff conducts assessments and evaluations on an ongoing basis. Data charts track and document student progress, showing exactly how far students have come, if at all, from one evaluation segment to the next. For example, in the upper grades, the teachers use Target TEACH, an instructional software management program that maps out the curriculum and matches current achievement test requirements with what is taught in lessons and textbooks. The program monitors student progress through periodic benchmark tests. At the end of the eighth week of each marking period, the students are tested comprehensively. The staff reviews the assessment data, then does one week of intervention as needed. When Literacy Across Columbus Elementary Schools (LACES) is introduced in the upper grades next year, the Dominie test will be used for reading.

The teachers also analyze the results of the Metropolitan Achievement Tests (MAT8) to identify what each student knows and how a student will think on the test. The results on the MAT8 test and the achievement test are compared. The reading intervention specialist works with kindergarten and first-grade students in a pull-out format using the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) to evaluate individual student development in readiness and early reading skills as well as to provide grade-level feedback on instructional objectives.

Differentiated Instruction

In addition to evaluating each student's skill level, the staff looks at each student's favored learning modality. A variety of different approaches might be employed, such as the Stevenson reading program, Semple math, touch math and the phonic alphabet. To get seemingly uninterested students involved, teachers try to find a "hook," something that is of interest to the students, such as art, music, song or dance. One teacher used rap to develop an understanding of vocabulary. The Berwick Alternative staff has found that the arts are a good medium to help students learn to visualize, a skill teachers believe necessary for developing effective learning strategies.

Different student groupings are also used, depending on the situation and the student. In the primary grades, varied group ing is used for reading instruction, while flexible skill grouping is used for specific skill intervention. One day a week, staff members work with small target groups that rotate among four teachers. The students are grouped based on their scores on reading benchmarks, and the teachers adjust the lessons according to the students' needs.

"If a student is having difficulty learning, we find a different way to teach them. There are no excuses when a child is not learning." A teacher

Co-planning between general education teachers and intervention specialists, between teachers at the same grade level and among teachers in different subject areas greatly enhances student performance at Berwick Alternative. The general education teachers and the intervention specialists (READ and special education) work as a team to plan together for the benefit of the students. For example, the special education intervention specialist collaborates with the general education teacher to tie IEP goals into regular classroom instruction. The specialist then assists in modifying instruction so students with special needs can remain in class and still meet their IEP goals. When the special education students must leave the general education setting to receive services, they still do not miss any material being taught by the general education teacher because the general and special education teachers coordinate their instruction. Teachers also vary their roles with students. The intervention specialists may take the lead instruction while the regular classroom teacher works with students requiring intervention.

At every grade level, teachers work in pairs. These teaching partners have common planning times built into their schedule that they use to exchange ideas to enhance the success of their students. They develop interventions, plan instructional lessons to re-teach students who do not understand certain material and create enrichment activities for students who have mastered certain material. Teachers also work across departments to support and enrich the curriculum. For example, art, music and physical education teachers work closely with classroom teachers to provide lessons that are more engaging and have more impact.

Curriculum Alignment

Recognizing a need to align instruction from grade to grade, the Berwick Alternative staff took action. They began by identifying the skills and knowledge the students needed to succeed in the upper

"It's okay if kids can't do it. It is the teacher's responsibility to figure out how to teach them. It is not the student's problem. The attitude at the school is that all students can learn." A teacher

grades. They then determined what needed to be taught in the earlier grades to prepare students for the upper grade curriculum. This alignment process not only enabled the staff to eliminate any gaps in the curriculum; it also allowed teachers to observe classes in the grade above and below the level they taught.

Intervention

Berwick Alternative's Student Assistance Intervention Learning (SAIL) committee addresses concerns of individual students who require some form of intervention. The SAIL committee includes one staff member from each grade and follows specific procedures in carrying out its duties. Among other things, the committee determines how students are functioning, identifies interventions to assist students and provides information to teachers and parents. This useful information is a regular topic at staff meetings.

Providing Rigorous Instruction Aligned to Standards

Integrated Literacy Program

Berwick Alternative was one of 30 Columbus Public Schools selected to implement Literacy Across Columbus Elementary Schools (LACES) in the primary grades during the 2003-04 school year. LACES is a literacy program developed by the Columbus Public Schools District that is aligned to Ohio's Academic Content Standards. A team of highly qualified teachers from throughout the district reviewed the National Reading Panel's "Best Practices," the Academic Content Standards, the data disaggregated from the four reading programs used in the district, and the students' reading test scores to design and construct LACES. This comprehensive literacy model is designed to integrate phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary skills, and small group re-teach and enrichment into the 120-minute literacy block.

Each student's LACES progress is charted to show exactly the gains made during each evaluation segment. The LACES curriculum provides benchmarks for student achievement that are laid out on pacing charts provided by the district. The charts inform teachers not only what students need to know every 9 weeks, but also what to teach each week. Berwick Alternative staff members try to work ahead of the pace that is set in the charts. They "compact and push" so they can cover the material and still have time to review. The staff feels that if they strictly followed the district-designed pacing charts, they would not get the results they desire by the time Berwick Alternative students take the proficiency test in March. Each school year, the goal is to have all students at the appropriate level by the end of the third grading period.

Ms. Katterheinrich uses the LACES walk-through process as she observes instruction to see if the LACES program is being implemented correctly. She believes the walk-through promotes reflective thinking, and she wants reflective teachers. She has seen the quality of reading instruction grow with the succinct focus throughout the literacy block. It is her belief that the walk-throughs and consequent reflective thinking have contributed to the improved test scores.

Tracking student progress in the LACES project provides information on individual, class and building progress. Data by class are graphed and displayed in the front hall for parents to observe. Building data is also compared with that of other schools and districts.

Berwick Alternative students who are not up to speed on LACES are provided tutoring and extra support every day. Some teachers volunteer their time to provide after-school or before-school tutoring. Both the special education and READ intervention specialists generally provide reading and academic support to special education and at-risk students outside the regular classroom. LACES may be used with students if they simply need more time or more steps to learn the skills. Different approaches are used as a child's needs change. Other reading strategies may be used to teach the student in different ways.

In addition to using LACES to improve literacy by integrating reading and writing, teachers at Berwick Alternative try to promote literacy by incorporating reading into the content areas. For example, in the primary grades, the teachers use the Harcourt Brace Math series that connects literacy and math through reading. Teachers integrate reading and writing in as many content areas as possible. The teachers have found that if students cannot problem-solve in reading, they likely will not be able to problem-solve in math.

Homework

Homework in both math and reading is given every night. Social studies and science are given once a week. Students are expected to do 10–50 minutes a night for each subject, depending on their grade level. The amount of time is determined by multiplying 10 minutes times the grade the student is in. Work not completed at home is done during Back on Track with the principal at recess time.

Integration of Content Areas

In the upper grades, every teacher works to tie the content areas together and teach reading through them. Each teacher does this a little differently. For example, there may be a 10-minute science review, and then a bigger block of social studies. Currently, teachers provide instruction in reading and math together. In math, the teachers introduce a process called thought, information, plan, solution. They use “Recipes for Learning,” a program that uses many procedure words. Deficits in reading are used to identify deficits in math. The teachers start with the hardest lessons first, a technique they call “compacting.”

This summer the fourth- and fifth-grade teachers are working on intensive two- to three-week block units for science and other content areas. The writing curriculum guide will be incorporated with the subject matter.

Writing Preparation for Proficiency

Students are prepared for the writing achievement test in a number of ways. The goal of one day's lesson may be to master specific vocabulary skills. On a different day, the students may be grouped according to the writing needs of the students. Teachers report that students enjoy learning writing, as well as other subjects, through such small group instruction.

A fifth-grade teacher who has a special education background and the fifth-grade reading teacher have been instrumental in providing extra support for students, including those with learning disabilities, who were experiencing difficulties in some areas. Students who were struggling with writing were assigned a special school newspaper project as an opportunity to improve their writing proficiency skills. Students

responded very positively to this challenge, even giving up their lunch and recess time to work on the paper. Because they felt their writing had a purpose, the students threw themselves into the project. They also appreciated the support of the two Parent Coordinators. Their completed newspaper included multiple genres of writing, such as interviews, informational reports, retelling, fictional narratives, personal narratives and letters to the editor. The students who worked on the newspaper were given special recognition at a PTO meeting. When notices were sent home with the students to invite the parents and students to participate in the award ceremony, one of the student's mothers called to check if her child had mistakenly brought home another student's invitation. She was concerned because her son had never received an award before. This parent was the first to arrive and the last to leave the meeting.

Providing Leadership that Results in Continuous Improvement

Teachers at Berwick Alternative appreciate Ms. Katterheinrich's leadership. They emphasize that her knowledge of and emphasis on data have driven them to use such information to determine instruction. Her focus on finding ways to help every child learn is reflected in the extra effort teachers put forth to make sure that all students at Berwick Alternative make progress. The teachers noted that Ms. Katterheinrich holds high expectations for everyone involved: the students, the teachers, all other staff members and herself.

"I treat staff like I would want to be treated and treat the kids like I would want to be treated."
Leanne Katterheinrich, principal

Ms. Katterheinrich shares leadership for following through on the needs of students with disabilities primarily with Karen Sherman and Iris Ziglar, long-time teachers at Berwick Alternative who have pertinent experience and backgrounds. They focus on making sure that students who are struggling in any area are provided consistent support.

Professional Development

The district provides four professional development days, one day every other month. One of those days is for building-level professional development; this year Berwick Alternative's day focused on math and science. Three of the days are elective: teachers can individually choose to attend meetings and conferences based on their interest and need. The school also has early release days, giving the staff ninety minutes for in-building professional development. This year the early release days focused on a staff development program by Gary Chadwell that shows teachers how to improve thinking and writing across the curriculum using his five types of writing. They also studied the literacy component of reading. Important aspects of early release days are highlighting teacher achievements and allowing time to sit, talk and learn from each other.

In the past year, Ms. Katterheinrich took a Columbus Public School (CPS)/OSU course entitled the Urban Administrator: A National Treasure to continue to expand her knowledge and expertise in leading her urban staff to continued excellence. As she wanted to look more at diversity and poverty, she participated in the sessions on the work by Ruby Payne. Lastly, the staff has committed to working through Marzano's book *Classroom Instruction that Works* to focus on the top researched based teaching methods.

Engaging Parents and Community to Support Student Success

The principal and staff work hard to help parents realize their critical role in the education of their children. They view the relationship between parents and the school as a partnership; therefore, the expectations the school has for parent involvement are stated up front. When new students arrive at Berwick Alternative, both parents and students are taken on a “field trip” through the school and classroom to spell out the behavior that is expected. Berwick Alternative’s staff members recognize that some parents did not have positive experiences in school, so they make it a point to support parents, encouraging them to talk about their children.

A concerted effort is made to keep the lines of communication open between school and home. In the primary grades, reading and homework logs that are sent home every night must be signed and returned. The reading and homework logs and student planners are sent home for a parent’s signature once a week in the upper grades. Letters, sent home every week in all grades, include short stories about what is happening in the classroom, and each includes something positive about what the parents’ child did that week. In addition to teachers calling parents just to share positive things about a child, suggestions regarding how parents can support their children are also sent home periodically.

Opportunities for parents to volunteer or participate in activities are made available in a variety of ways each year. In 2003-2004, despite the fact that the majority of Berwick Alternative parents are employed and live at varying distances throughout the city, the school had over 2,200 family members participate in educational events throughout the school year, including the Book Fair, Let’s Do Lunch, Field Day, Kindergartener Orientation and Berwick Alternative Camp. In 2004-2005 the school held a variety of evening programs such as the Soul Food Dinner celebrating Black History Month, Open House, Meet the Teacher Night, Math-Science Night, Inquiry Science Night and Fifth Grade Celebration.

Many parents regularly volunteer their time to work at the school or at school functions. Two parent coordinators try to get parents involved in various school activities, such as the newspaper project described above. These parent coordinators work at least 10 hours a week, often even more. Another parent, known as the homework lady, makes random, surprise visits and passes out treats to students who have completed their homework.

This past year, in an effort to reduce confrontations caused by money or material possessions and to help level the economic playing field, a uniform requirement was put in place. Parents supported and students easily adapted to the change, which the principal and staff believe to be positive.

Creating a Culture Where Each Individual Feels Valued

Acceptance of Differences

Berwick Alternative teachers continually tell students that they can learn and that the teachers will find a way to help them discover their best learning style. Differences in learning rates and styles, including those resulting from learning disabilities, are explained and discussed in class. Students discuss how all people in the classroom feel different from others at times. Because of the

“Students aren’t allowed to say, I can’t do it.” A teacher

open and caring attitude of the staff, the varied activities provided and the effective assistance students receive, students at Berwick Alternative think it is a privilege to go to a resource room for extra help.

Rewards

The students at Berwick Alternative are often honored for a variety of reasons, academic and otherwise. Teachers make it a point to create opportunities for the students to succeed so they can receive positive attention, such as being honored at student recognition programs or at monthly PTO meetings, putting their names in the school newspaper, and Let's Do Lunch Days. Students may be honored for academics, citizenship, good behavior or some other worthy reason. Another school student recognition program called the BUG Club recognizes and rewards the students who bring up their grade in one area in a grading period without dropping in any other. (Incremental academic steps at Berwick are just as critical as those routinely receiving praise.)

Behavioral Expectations

As noted earlier, behavior expectations are high at Berwick Alternative. As with academics, teachers individualize behavior strategies. When addressing behavior issues, they ask, "What is realistic for this child?" The primary tool for behavior management is catching students being good and rewarding them for their positive behavior in a variety of ways.

To coordinate activities with parents, the school also develops behavior plans for the home. These plans work like a contract and define the expectations for the parents and the school when students misbehave. As required for all schools, a letter of Intent to Suspend is sent to parents whose student has run into difficulties to get the parents into the school to address their students' misbehavior.

Support for Discipline

A variety of mechanisms are in place at Berwick Alternative to reduce the amount of time teachers must spend addressing discipline problems, allowing them to focus on instruction. Columbus Public Schools have a program called Positive Efforts for Adjustment and Knowledge (PEAK) that provides a staff person to assist with discipline issues. The PEAK staff person tutors students at lunchtime recess if they have not returned their homework, counsels students, provides supervision during time-out for reflection or in-school suspension, and consults with teachers to provide suggestions. Students are taught to pause and reflect on what they did, what happened when they did it, and what they will they do differently next time.

Intervention specialists conduct observations in the classroom to document and diagnose behavior disorders. If needed, individual behavior plans are written. Students sent to the office are required to write down what happened. Writing about the incident focuses the student on processing the behavior and provides further writing practice as well.

Currently the school is working on insuring that discipline is consistent and uniform throughout the building. New teachers are promptly introduced to the discipline philosophy of the school. Descriptions of acceptable behavior, such as during recess or regarding homework, are provided so that all teachers understand what is expected and

what actions need to be addressed. The Berwick Alternative staff also tries to be consistent regarding how misbehaviors are dealt with. This belief in the importance of consistent discipline pays off. After students have been at Berwick Alternative for a period of time, they are said to be “Berwicked,” meaning they do not exhibit behavior problems due to their intense focus on personal academic success. This phenomenon contributes to the school pride shown by everyone at Berwick Alternative.

Concern

This past year has been a one of challenges for Berwick Alternative. After having a stable staff for a long time, three staff members have retired, and others have taken promotions into the Gifted and Talented program. Because the district had a number of teachers available whose schools had been closed, the selection of teachers had to be made from that pool. For a variety of reasons, the teachers new to the school need to integrate the climate and culture into their belief that **ALL STUDENTS CAN AND WILL** learn at high levels. Efforts are continuing to increase collaboration among staff members with the goal of again “Berwicking” the entire staff.

What does the data say?

