



Central Community Elementary School

Reading Community School District
Reading, Ohio

Principal: Mrs. Connie M. Garafalo

<http://www.readingschools.org/central/index.html>

Reading's Central Community Elementary School is a high poverty, high performing elementary school (kindergarten through sixth grade) in an urban fringe district outside of Cincinnati. The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) rated Central Community as "Excellent" for meeting all 14 State indicators in 2003-2004 and 2004-2005. Only 25 percent of all public schools in Ohio received the designation as "Excellent."

ODE recognized the Title I targeted-assistance school as a *School of Promise (SOP)* in 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 for high student performance in reading and mathematics on the Ohio Achievement Test (OAT) or Ohio Proficiency Test (OPT). To meet the criteria for *Schools of Promise*, Central Elementary had to enroll at least 40 percent or more of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and meet or exceed the State standard of 75 percent passage in reading and/or mathematics (overall and for each racial/ethnic subgroup). In 2003-2004 ODE also recognized Central Community as one of 14 elementary schools in the state that improved the performance of students with disabilities.

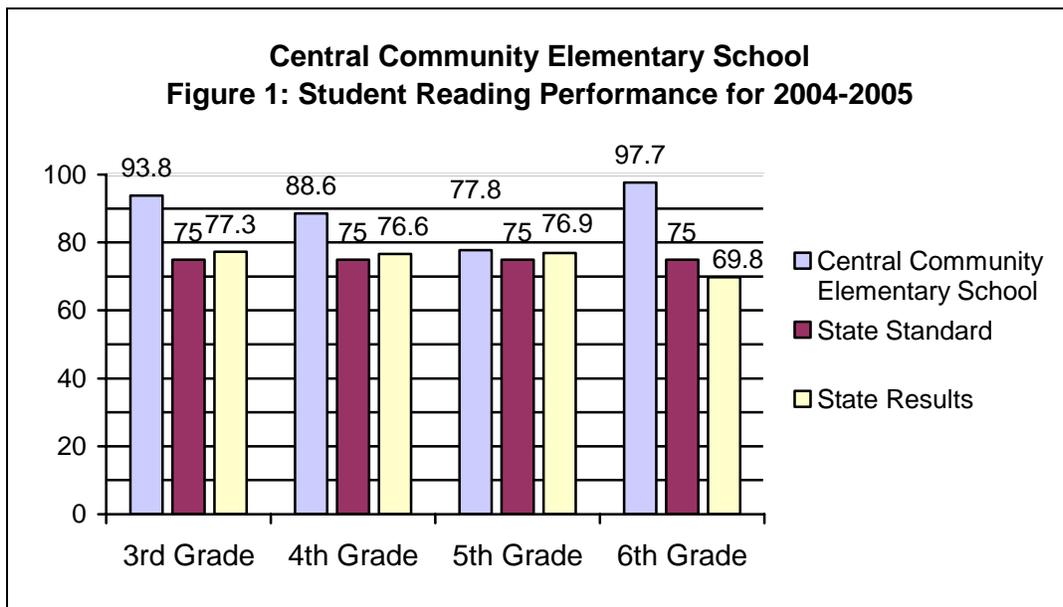
In addition to state recognition, the U.S. Department of Education designated Central Elementary School as a *No Child Left Behind-Blue Ribbon School of Excellence* in 2005; a

2004-2005 Central Community Elementary SCHOOL PROFILE	
2004-2005 Building Rating	Excellent
Student enrollment	313
Grade Levels	K-6
Economically Disadvantaged Students	51.9%
White Students	90.7%
African American Students	5.7%
Students with disabilities	13.8%
Source: Ohio Department of Education, 2004-2005 School Year Report Card for Central Community Elementary School	

school with at least 40 percent of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and dramatic student performance. The *No Child Left Behind—Blue Ribbon Schools Program* honors public and private K-12 schools that are either academically superior in their states or that demonstrate dramatic gains in student achievement. In 2005, only 14 public schools in Ohio and 246 public schools across the nation received the award.

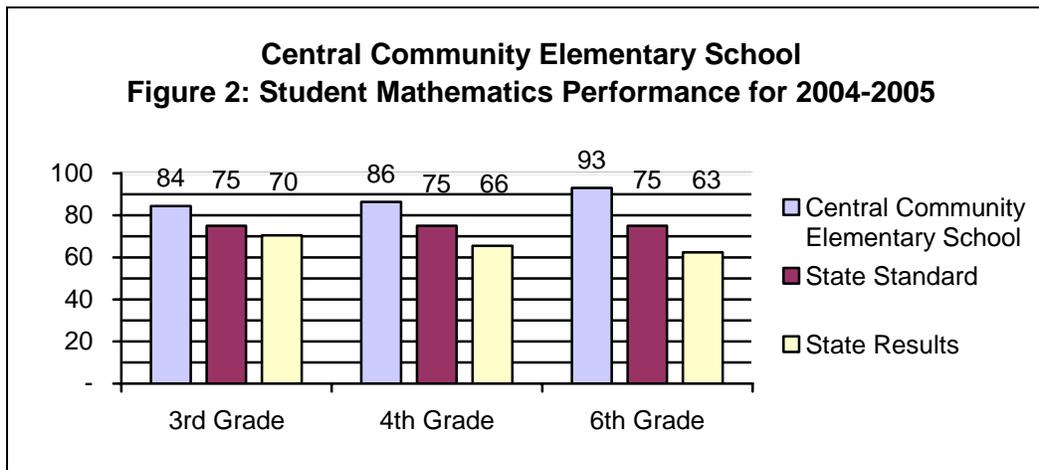
Comparison of Central Community Elementary School’s Aggregated Performance to State Standards and Results

Figure 1 displays the percentages of Central’s students in grades three through six who scored proficient and higher on the OAT or OPT reading in 2004-2005. Central’s performance is compared to the state standard of 75 percent and the state results for that school year. As you can see from figure 1, Central’s students at each grade level performed between 10 and 27 percent higher than the state average in reading.



Sources: Ohio Department of Education, 2004-2005 School Year Report Card for Central Community Elementary School; Ohio Department of Education, 2004-2005 Annual Report on Educational Progress in Ohio

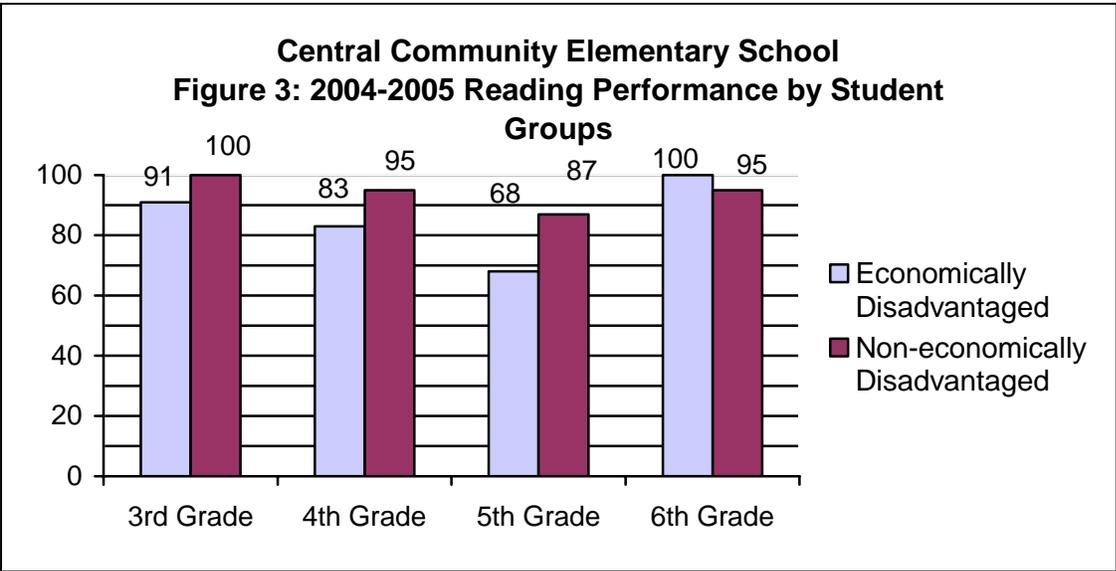
Figure 2 displays the percentages of Central Community Elementary School students in grades three, four, and six who performed at proficient and above on the OAT or OPT in mathematics in 2004-2005. Central's performance is compared to the state standard of 75 percent and the state average results that school year. In 2004-20005, Central Community students at third, fourth, and sixth grades levels performed between 14 and 30 percent higher than the state averages in mathematics.



Sources: Ohio Department of Education, 2004-2005 School Year Report Card for Central Community Elementary School; Ohio Department of Education, 2004-2005 Annual Report on Educational Progress in Ohio

2004-2005 Central Elementary School Disaggregated Reading Performance by Student Groups

Not only did Central Elementary report high aggregated performance on the OAT and/or OTP in reading and mathematics, but major student groups under the *No Child Left Behind Act* also performed well. Figure 3 displays the percentages of Central's students identified as economically disadvantaged or non-economically disadvantaged who scored proficient and above on the 2004-2005 OAT and OPT reading assessments in grades three through six.



Source: Ohio Department of Education, 2004-2005 School Year Report Card for Central Community Elementary School

Methodology

The purpose of the Schools of Promise Multiple Case Study is to highlight and document effective research-based strategies used by selected urban schools according to the *SOP Framework of Practice* (a review of research and literature organized around five themes) and the *SOP Implementation Inventory*. The study focused on the schools piloting the *SOP Implementation Inventory*, which is a tool designed to help a school examine and document its practices using the *SOP Framework of Practice*.

The Ohio Department of Education selected six urban schools for the study based on student performance on state assessments in either, or both, reading or mathematics. Once a school agreed to participate in the study, a researcher from RMC Research Corporation visited each site for one day and trained the principal and a school team, identified by the principal, in the use of the *SOP Framework of Practice* and the *SOP Implementation Inventory*. The school principal and a team s/he appointed completed the *SOP Implementation Inventory* and submitted the completed Inventory with supporting documentation to RMC. Additional records

were obtained from the school and the Ohio Department of Education's Web site, the district's Web site, and the school's Web site. Two researchers reviewed and analyzed the completed inventory and documentation according to each theme and sub-theme of the *SOP Framework of Practice*. They identified additional questions to be asked during validation site visits. One researcher conducted a two-day validation site visit in April 2006 that included: six classroom observations and individual interviews with the principal, counselor, seven teachers, two students, and three parents. The researchers collected data on the classroom observations using a standard protocol. The interview questions were open-ended and tailored to each school based on the review of the submitted *SOP Implementation Inventory*. The researchers reviewed and qualitatively analyzed all collected data using the five themes of *Schools of Promise*.

Organization of Case Study

The case study report is organized according to the five *Schools of Promise* themes, which include rigorous instruction aligned to state standards, leadership that focuses on continuous improvement, instruction designed to ensure every student succeeds, engagement of parents and community in supporting student success, and creating a culture where each individual feels valued.

Rigorous Curriculum and Instruction Aligned to State Standards

The first of five *SOP* themes is: *Schools of Promise* delivers rigorous instruction aligned to the state's academic content standards. Central Community Elementary School's alignment of curriculum and instruction to state academic content standards started approximately four years ago. At that time, teachers and consultants from the Hamilton County Educational Service Center (ESC) created English Language Arts (ELLA) and mathematics curriculum calendars and maps. The purpose of the calendars and maps are to guide student learning and teacher

instruction in the state standards. The calendars map the grade level indicators and benchmarks and identify available materials and assessments for teachers to use. The maps are based on a four to six week cycle followed by grade level assessments. The calendars and maps are updated annually by teachers. Teachers use the calendars and maps to drive the scope, sequence, and pacing of instruction. Interviewed teachers reported the curriculum maps ensure the vertical and horizontal alignment of the curriculum across grade levels.

Instructionally, the school devotes 120 minutes per day for English Language Arts (ELA). The school uses a guided reading approach that addresses the five components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency). The two Title I Reading Specialists team-teach with the classroom teachers and model lessons during ELA instruction. The school uses a variety of assessments to monitor student progress and make instructional decisions. Teachers at all grade levels use: (1) *Developmental Reading Assessments (DRA)*, published diagnostic assessments, to assess students' comprehension, fluency, and reading levels; (2) running records, which are informal teacher assessments of students' oral reading and comprehension; and (3) *Concepts About Print* assessments, which are informal reading assessments of students' knowledge of print. The assessments provide teachers helpful information about a child's reading level and his/her understanding of the use of print in texts. In grades three through six ELA assessments include monthly district-wide short-cycle reading assessments, known as the *Reading Assessment Program (RAP)*. The RAPs, based on grade level indicators, require students to read a passage and answer multiple choice and open-ended questions. Teachers are provided time to analyze the test data to determine students' needs. All teachers monitor student progress in ELA on a monthly basis. Staff use the monthly progress and assessment data to determine what additional student interventions may need to be implemented.

The school also devotes 90 minutes a day to mathematics instruction. Teachers blend inquiry based learning and teacher directed instruction with the use of manipulatives,

computers, and daily reinforcements. Mathematics assessments include the Ohio Diagnostic Math Assessments in grades kindergarten through second, curriculum-based assessments three times a year in grades three through six, textbook assessments, and teacher-made assessments. Teachers monitor student progress mathematics by using the monthly progress and assessment data to determine what additional interventions may need to be implemented to ensure every student meets high expectations.

To ensure coordination of instruction, each grade level has common planning time at least two times per week totaling 80 minutes. The principal created a master schedule in which grade level teams have common planning time. The principal meets with the grade levels during this time and teachers are able to plan lessons, discuss discipline and instructional strategies, and update the intervention specialist and/or gifted educator. The next section discusses their instructional and intervention approaches.

Teachers in grades three through six departmentalize. For example, one teacher may teach mathematics and reading to all students at that grade level while another teacher may teach science and social studies.

Providing Leadership that Leads to Continuous Improvement

The second theme is: *Schools of Promise* have leadership that leads to the continuous improvement of the school. The Principal, Mrs. Connie Garafalo, is in her sixth year at the school. Interviewed staff described the principal as a well-read instructional leader who is constantly introducing staff to the latest literature and research. She is visible throughout the school as she visits classrooms regularly, greets students in the morning, and will often cover classes so teachers may observe other teachers. Staff report she is always willing to problem-solve with them. Teachers describe Connie as supportive to their individual professional development needs. She encourages them to participate in appropriate conferences as well as leadership opportunities in the building.

Currently, Central has two instructional leaders who provide school-based professional development and program development to other teachers. The instructional leaders are classroom teachers who are given release time to plan initiatives to be discussed at department or grade level meetings. For example, the instructional leader for the primary grades met with teachers after school over a two month period to read and discuss implementing strategies from the book *Reading with Meaning* by Debbie Miller. Teachers practiced the strategies and then discussed the strengths and weaknesses of each strategy. Teachers also observed each other in classes as they implemented strategies. The intermediate instructional leader, who is a classroom teacher given release time, has focused on differentiated instruction strategies so all students can perform well on the OAT. In 2005-2006, Central used its in-service time to discuss the book *Framework for Understanding Poverty* by Ruby Payne.

In addition to administrative duties, Mrs. Garafalo plans in-services and other instructional programs and professional development opportunities for the school with the principal from another elementary school and the school's two instructional leaders (classroom teachers) who have release time. In addition to the school's professional development, the district provides four early release/in-service days for professional development activities for the two elementary schools. Topics may include curriculum map revisions, assessment revisions, or other grade level discussions. There are "hands-on" opportunities for the teachers at both schools to discuss strategies and resources. On occasion the two elementary schools will meet independently to discuss school-wide initiatives.

Providing Instruction to Ensure Every Student Succeeds

Theme three of SOP is: *Schools of Promise* design instruction to ensure every student's success. Central Community Elementary School's mission "is to prepare students academically, socially, and emotionally to reach their potential, become responsible citizens, and develop a love of learning that will continue throughout their lives." The mission statement was developed

by the leadership team, which is composed of grade level teacher representatives, specialists, support staff, the building principal and parents. Decorative plaques depicting the mission statement are visible in every classroom as well as in prominent locations throughout the school. The mission statement is also posted on the school website and in the student handbook.

The school's vision is, "We believe, achieve, and succeed." Interviewed students describe Central's teachers as believing students can succeed and challenging students to reach high expectations. Central identifies yearly targets based on the analyses of student OAT and OPT assessment data, particularly the item analysis. For example, for 2004-2005 school year, the school set the following achievement goals:

(1) 75 percent or more of all students would obtain proficiency or above on all mathematics assessments;

(2) all students in grade three through six would reach 75 percent or higher in reading; and

(3) all students in grades four and six would obtain proficiency or better on state assessments in writing, science, and citizenship. In addition, Central set the yearly expectation of student progress on the Ohio Diagnostic Math Assessments in grades kindergarten through second. The school identified targets for individual student progress on the *Developmental Reading Assessment* (DRA) and increased knowledge of basic mathematics facts through curriculum based measures. Students in grades three through six were expected to perform at high levels on the short-cycle district RAP Assessments.

To reach the school's vision and targeted goals, the school provides students various supports and interventions in reading and mathematics. The school has three full-time Intervention Specialists, who are assigned to students by grade level(s). There is one teacher supporting students in grades kindergarten through third, another supporting students in grades four and six, and one for fifth grade.

The school uses a leveled Intervention Based Services (IBS) approach. The IBS team is chaired by the school counselor and includes Intervention specialists, teachers, and Title I staff members. The process begins by classroom teachers identifying a student's needs based on a lack of progress and provides Level One classroom interventions (e.g., one-on-one writing conferencing or additional practice with math flashcards within the classroom). The teacher collects data on the implemented interventions. If after a period of time, the teacher feels a student needs more intense support, that teacher will consult with colleagues and support educators to design additional Level Two interventions. Level Two interventions may include services by a tutor, Title I Reading Specialist, or community volunteer. The student may be pulled out of regular classes for periods of time to receive this support. The support personnel collect data to determine if a student is making progress. In kindergarten through third grades, students who are at Level Two in reading may receive Title I support from a reading specialist. An intervention tutor is in place at grades four through six to provide assistance for Level Two students in reading and mathematics. The intervention tutor may work with individuals or groups of students to present instruction in a more relaxed and personal manner. If a Level Two student is making documented progress, the interventions will continue. If a Level Two student does not make sufficient progress, the IBS team (including the child's parent/guardian) will convene to identify and develop more intense Level Three interventions. Level Three interventions provide daily specialized instruction to students. If a Level Three student does not make progress and the IBS team suspects a disability, a referral is made for special education eligibility.

In addition to in-school interventions, the school uses the *DRA* and *RAP* assessment data to identify and invite students in fourth through sixth grades to attend after-school classes in reading and/or mathematics. The one-hour after-school tutoring program is provided for eight weeks. The school relates the after-school instruction to the classroom material and reinforces

the instructional strategies. The school also provides an after-school mathematics enrichment class for fifth and sixth graders to extend the classroom discussions and activities.

As a result of the above interventions, the school reports they have not had a student fail a grade or be retained since they implemented this approach.

Engaging Parents and the Community to Support Student Performance

The fourth *SOP* theme is: *Schools of Promise* engage parents and the community to support student success. Central Community is committed to developing a mutually supportive educational team with parents. For parents of entering kindergarten children, the school offers the Springboard to Kindergarten Orientation Program held in the spring before school starts in the fall. During this time, parents are introduced to school staff, as well as kindergarten activities and expectations. Parents and children assemble take home packets with readiness materials. Each family is also loaned electronic tools like *Phonics Writing Desks* and *Leap Pads* to support their efforts with early literacy and phonemic awareness. The school received a grant from the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation to purchase these materials.

A parent-student handbook is distributed to every child and family. The handbook includes the school's mission, vision, beliefs, goals, calendar, and policies and procedures.

As the "Welcome Parents" sign by the front door indicates, parents are welcomed as active partners at Meet the Teacher Night, Quarterly Awards, Parents at Lunch, Fourth Grade Family Fun Nights, Conference Nights, and Parent Teacher Organization meetings. Parents and other community members are also welcomed as volunteers assisting in classrooms, with the early identification preschool program, on field trips, and in the computer lab. The school has a Parent Resource Library with materials that parents may borrow and use with their children. Materials include parenting books on child development and discipline for example. There is a

parent resource librarian who shares materials and provides training and materials to parents. Classroom teachers involve parents by assigning family projects to be completed at home.

The principal meets monthly with the Parent Teacher Organization officers prior to the formal meetings to discuss upcoming events, issues, and concerns. The school surveys parents at the end of each school year to collect information and assess academic concerns. This information is used to help set the school goals for the following year.

Interviewed parents reported that their children love school and hate to miss a day. Teachers were described by the interviewed parents as caring, committed, and approachable individuals who work with parents to address issues or problems. Parents and students know the school vision – “Believe, Achieve, and Succeed.” The vision is recited every day by school staff and students. Interviewed parents and students reported that teachers will do anything to help students succeed. For example, one parent reported that when a child was struggling in mathematics, there was frequent contact with the teacher and the teacher arranged for additional tutoring. Another parent reported that a teacher had worked with the parent to daily monitor a child’s behavior and learning. A third parent reported that the teacher helped identify a summer reading program for her child.

Central Elementary not only promotes parent engagement but has actively engaged a number of local community businesses to support the school’s programs. For example, one company provides scholarships to students for participation in an after-school science program called *Club Invention*. This company also sponsors an annual Black History Essay Contest each February. The company invites the winning students and their parents and school personnel to the company to read the essays and enjoy lunch. Employees from another company volunteer their time to help the school with the Center of Science Industry’s *COSI on Wheels*, a traveling program that bring hands-on science experiences to schools in Ohio.

Creating a Culture Where Individuals are Valued

The fifth *SOP* theme is: *Schools of Promise* create a culture where each individual feels valued. Central Community has a variety of programs to promote student leadership and positive student interactions and relationships. Twelve students participate on the Leadership Council. These students are selected by submitting a written essay on why they think they would be good leaders. The Council identifies how to help the school, assists teachers in monitoring students during recess, organizes a can drive, and raises funds during spirit week.

Central Community has four general rules that are part of a school-wide discipline plan: (1) respect others through actions and words, (2) listen and follow directions, (3) take care of the school, and (4) quiet in the hallway. Teachers maintain weekly behavior charts on students and whether students were respectful, listened and followed directions, took care of school property, and were quiet in the hallway. The school-wide discipline plan has colored cards with consequences so teachers can provide feedback to students. For example, if a teacher identifies an immediate infraction, a student is given a yellow card and misses 15 minutes of recess. Students can earn “Blue Devil Dollars” for good behavior. They spend these dollars at a PTO sponsored store.

In addition to the school-wide discipline plan, the school has created specific programs for students addressing bullying prevention and peer mediation. Students in grades second through fourth participate in a program, *Don't Laugh at Me*, a 10-week anti-bullying program. In addition, all fifth graders participate in a bullying prevention program. Fifth and sixth graders receive training in peer mediation. The school counselor recently started an anger management group for a small number of students and a student support group for students whose parents have divorced.

The school recognizes the majority of students over the course of the year through a program called, “Blue Ribbon Student.” Each week the homeroom teachers choose students based on quality work and/or high achievement. An identified student receives a “Principal’s

Award” pencil and has his/her picture taken with the teacher. The pictures and works of students are displayed on a bulletin board in the hallway of the school. At the end of each quarter, there is a recognition assembly for students who have achieved in academics, attendance, and attitude. This recognition involves students from all grades. Students receive various items based on their level of achievement (i.e., pencils, soft drinks coupons, breakfast with their parents).

When the school received the *No Child Left Behind-Blue Ribbon Award*, the whole school community was invited to participate in a town parade and celebration. Each grade presented a Blue Ribbon cheer and the PTO served lunch for everyone.

Summary

Central Community Elementary School is a high performing Title I targeted assistance elementary school (kindergarten through sixth grade) in Reading, Ohio. The school’s vision is “We believe, achieve, and succeed.” Since 2003-2004, the school has been rated and recognized by the Ohio Department of Education as an “Excellent” school and a *School of Promise* for aggregated and disaggregated student performance in reading and mathematics in grades three through six. In 2005, Central received the *No Child Left Behind-Blue Ribbon School of Excellence* award from the U.S. Department of Education for dramatic student performance of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

To reach their vision and this level of performance, Central Community has engaged in a number of significant research-based strategies reflected in the *Schools of Promise Framework of Practice*. The school staff has created a culture in which all individuals are valued and positive relationships among students, parents, and teachers are supported. Students and parents are made aware of the school’s expectations and school staff work with parents so all children meet the school’s expectations.

Based on the analyses of student assessment data, Central identifies student performance targets for state, district, and school assessments on a yearly basis. To reach those targets, Central extensively aligns their English Language Arts and mathematics curricula and instruction with the state's academic content standards and assessments. Yearly, the school updates their English Language Arts and mathematics curricula calendars and maps for all grade levels that identify grade level indicators and benchmarks, materials, and assessments.

To ensure that each classroom has sufficient time for learning, Central provides 120 minutes of ELA instruction and 90 minutes of mathematics instruction on a daily basis. The principal and two instructional leaders (classroom teachers with release time) work with other classroom teachers to learn about, explore, and experiment with research-based practices on an ongoing basis. The principal and grade level or department teams monitor the progress of every student on a monthly basis through formal and informal assessments. If a student needs additional support and intervention, the school has a four level Intervention Based Services approach that ranges from additional classroom interventions to referrals to special education. As a result of the intervention system, not one student has failed a grade or been retained. During the school year, Central staff recognizes and awards each student for reaching expectations and targets in attendance, attitude, and/or academic achievement.

In conclusion, Central Community Elementary School is an example of how a high poverty, Title I Targeted Assisted elementary school in Ohio is using the research-based practices identified in the *Schools of Promise Framework of Practice* to exceed state standards on assessments in reading and mathematics.