

Western High School

Western Local School District (Pike County)



School Profile 2003-2004	
2003-2004 School of Promise in Mathematics & Reading	
School Rating	Continuous Improvement
Enrollment	416
Grade Levels	7-12
Percent Economically Disadvantaged	50.2%
Percent Racial/Ethnic Minority	NC <10

District Profile 2003-2004	
District Rating	Continuous Improvement
District Enrollment	909

Lesson 1: Providing Rigorous Instruction Aligned to Standards

Curriculum Aligned to the Standards: The school has a strong academic focus with a curriculum that centers on the Ohio content standards, and instruction geared toward achieving strong results in Ohio's accountability system. In collaboration with teachers from neighboring districts, teachers across the grade levels at Western have developed pacing charts, which incorporate the content standards and determine when each grade level indicator will be taught.

Instruction Aligned to the Standards: Teachers were observed using more problem-based methods of instruction, requiring students to not only find correct answers but also to think critically about the *process* for arriving at an answer. Even in classes where a follow-the-textbook approach to teaching was employed, teachers frequently asked students to explain their thinking in arriving at the correct conclusion.

Professional Development Aimed at Alignment: Ideas and instructional methods that teachers have encountered in professional development seminars have translated into changed classroom practices. Through a grant from Rural Education Aligned for Learning (REAL), math teachers discovered in an analysis of their performance data that there was a misalignment in their curriculum, which they later addressed.

Monitoring Student Progress: By developing pacing charts and using them to plan lessons and units, teachers are able to follow one another's progress across subject areas and grade levels. Teachers examine their own practices and student outcomes by analyzing performance data from the statewide assessments.

Lesson 2: Providing Leadership That Results in Continuous Improvement

Top-down Leadership for Policy and Enforcement: The principal is a constant presence in the school and acts as the filter through which most actions and permissions must pass. The principal meets the buses in the morning, greets parents as they bring their children to school, discusses any early-morning issues that might arise with teachers, and walks the halls to insure order. In addition, he frequently drops in on classes, looks over lesson plans and rules on requests made by teachers. Most teachers support the principal and depend on his guidance, and most parents appreciate the "strict but fair" environment of the school.

Bottom-up Leadership for Instruction: Teachers have taken the lead in turning state standards into actual practices and routines. Because a senior math teacher sits on the Ohio Graduation Test

committee, the state academic content advisory committee and the state science advisory committee, colleagues rely on this teacher and others to interpret reform measures issued by the Ohio Department of Education. Teachers, working in groups, also are responsible for establishing grade level indicators for the Literacy Curriculum Alignment Program. In short, they determine what to teach, what content to leave in and what content to reject.

Lesson 3: Designing Instruction to Ensure Every Student's Success

Inclusion: The inclusion of special needs students has influenced teaching methods, requiring teachers to practice differentiated approaches to instruction. Rather than relying on text alone to provide sufficient practice exercises for their students, for example, teachers craft expansion exercises that take into account the skills and abilities of various levels of learners. Besides including special needs students in the regular classroom, the school has resource centers that students feel comfortable going to for additional help.

Collaboration beyond the School: Department heads and teachers collaborate with colleagues in similar, neighboring districts, to share ideas on what works for their students.

After-School Program: Using a 21st Century grant, an after-school program was established to help struggling students; transportation was provided to take participating students home. Even after the grant concluded, several teachers continued to help struggling students after school or in early morning.

Lesson 4: Engaging Parents and Community to Support Student Success

Strong Community Support: Besides being the largest employer in Latham and the surrounding area, the school complex serves as the geographic and cultural center of the town. Most community members have some connection to the school as former students, current teachers, district employees or athletic boosters. The levy to build the new high school was approved by 83 percent of voters.

Smallness of the School: The small size of the school and close-knit community gives educators the opportunity to get to know students and their families, and to establish a shared mission for educating the community's children. Some educators take on a variety of roles within the school (e.g., the principal is the varsity basketball coach), which give them access to a greater number of parents and community members. Despite the numerous social interactions with parents and community members, it can be challenging for this small school to get parents into the school for academic reasons.

Lesson 5: Creating a Culture Where Each Individual Feels Valued

Respect and High Expectations: The school's culture focuses on respect for authority, compliance and clear responsibilities. These lines of authority and responsibility are present at every level. Individual teachers create the expectations for their classes, and these are prominently posted in every classroom. Schoolwide expectations for students are spelled out in detail in the student handbook, just as expectations for teachers are spelled out in the faculty handbook. The principal asks that teachers address student discipline at the classroom level; he also requires them to submit weekly lesson plans.

Discipline: Educators see a direct connection between school discipline and academic achievement. When administrators and teachers consistently execute the discipline policy, respect between teachers and students is established and teachers are more able to focus on instruction.

Student Needs a Priority: While educators hold high standards for students, they are also alert to the needs and circumstances of individual students, which teachers often know from living in the same community. For example, if a particular student is dealing with a difficult relationship or situation at home, the teacher may extend the deadline for a particular assignment. The student is expected to complete the assignment at the same level of performance; however, the teacher will offer the

student assistance to make sure that it happens. Students appreciate the extra care and encouragement that they receive from the staff.