

Lincoln Elementary School

Tiffin City Schools

Tiffin, Ohio

Superintendent: Don Coletta

Principal: Robert Boes

<http://www.tiffin.k12.oh.us/tcs/schools/lincoln/index.html>

“Schools need to be a place where people want to be” and “Pitch it where they can hit it,” says Robert Boes, Lincoln Elementary School Principal. These pithy quotes express the heart of the Tiffin City School District’s belief statements.

- Everyone has an individual capacity to learn.
- Schools should be organized around the needs of students.
- Schools must be safe and promote a positive learning environment.
- Children are our promise and hope for the future
- Student success requires various educational opportunities.
- The community and its families are important stakeholders in the education of our students.

Lincoln Elementary is definitely a place where people want to be. Teachers, students and parents use various words to describe the school: “it’s God’s country, “kid-centered and kid-friendly;” “fun, awesome, great” and “family friendly.” The principal describes the staff as “can do.” It all adds up to a positive learning environment. The two student council members who escorted the Schools of Promise team members through the building were brimming with pride about their school and the students’ accomplishments.

SCHOOL PROFILE	
2003-2004 Building Rating	Excellent
Enrollment	243
Grade Levels	K-5
Economically Disadvantaged Students	50.0%
Students with Disabilities	12.4%
White Students	91.8%

Teachers use a variety of instructional strategies “to pitch it where they can hit it,” to ensure that all students, 50% of whom meet low-income criteria, are succeeding. Test results for the 2003-2004 school year reflect their efforts. Between the 2001-2002 and 2003-2004 school years, the percent of students scoring proficient or above on the fourth-grade proficiency test increased by 14% in reading and 22.7 % in math with 96% passing reading and 93.8% passing mathematics. The third-grade scores were equally impressive, with 90.6% of the students scoring proficient or above on the reading achievement test.

Students with disabilities also demonstrated proficiency on the reading and math sections of the Ohio Proficiency Test during the 2003-2004 school year with 100% passing the fourth-grade reading and 85.7% passing mathematics. Results over time for this group of students indicate that math scores have progressively increased since the 2001-2002 school year while the percent of students with disabilities passing the fourth grade reading section of the test recovered from a downward trend during the 2002-2003 school year. (See bar graphs of the data at the end of this case study.)

TIFFIN CITY DISTRICT PROFILE	
2003-2004 District Rating	Effective
District Enrollment	2,921

The dedication and commitment of the staff and the improvement in student performance are impressive and have not gone unnoticed. The Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators (OAESA) selected Lincoln Elementary School as one of eight elementary schools in Ohio to receive their prestigious 2005 Hall of Fame Award.

Opportunities for All Students to Learn

The staff at Lincoln Elementary believes that their job is to give students the keys to unlock the doors to learning. They believe that all children can achieve, therefore all children are achieving. They refer to “at-risk” students as “at-promise.” When asked what factors contribute to their success, teachers responded, “one-on-one attention.” “We work on it until they get it. We don’t just let it go, and we make the kids responsible for it (learning) also.”

Four locally developed programs that have proven to be very effective in meeting the diverse needs of the students include the after-school Study Table Program, Positive Attitudes with Students (PAWS) and Harvesting Excellence In Highly Gifted and Talented Students (H.E.I.G.H.T.S.)

Study-Table Program

Teachers (fourteen of the sixteen staff members) and high school and Heidelberg College student volunteers staff the hour-long, after-school study table and are available to provide individual tutoring and/or assist students with homework assignments.

PAWS. A staff-mentoring program that involves all staff, certificated and classified. Each staff member serves as a role model mentor for teacher-nominated students who need extra care, encouragement and/or support. “For many kids, this is their safe haven.”

H.E.I.G.H.T.S. A program for gifted and talented students in third through eighth grades that offers students enrichment classes and project-based learning focused on higher order thinking and problem solving skills.

All Day, Every Day Kindergarten. Lincoln Elementary is one of the three elementary schools in the district that offers this program, funded through Title 1. It gives students a head start into first grade, with many students completing kindergarten already reading and writing. This program, in demand, partially explains the 40 percent of the students who are open-enrolled. The remainder of the open-enrolled population is comprised of many children whose parents attended this school.

Various intervention programs based on research that show evidence of student learning are in place and are made available to students based on their individual needs: Accelerated Reading, Accelerated Math, Fast ForWord (funded through a grant), Title 1, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), Early Reading Intervention (ERI), and Ohio Reads.

Curriculum and Instruction

Aligning curriculum with Ohio’s Academic Content Standards is an ongoing process for the teachers at Lincoln Elementary School. Teachers meet with their grade-level colleagues from the other four elementary schools in the district to discuss

instruction and assessment and work closely with their intervention specialist and Title I teacher. Also, teachers communicate intra-building and district by phone (each classroom is furnished with a phone purchased through Venture Capital Funds) and via e-mail. Pacing charts are used to ensure that instruction is consistent throughout the district, as the student population is highly mobile.

Data is used to inform instruction. Data from achievement tests and proficiency tests are analyzed with the assistance of the district's curriculum director and areas in need of improvement are identified and addressed. Various types of assessments, both formal and informal, are used throughout the year to continuously monitor student progress including DIBELS, the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and Star Reading, which is administered twice a year. Math "mini-tests" are administered two or three times a week in grades two through five. The Title 1 teacher creates spreadsheets displaying student progress and shares them with the classroom teachers to assist them in identifying students who may need individual assistance and to establish flexible instructional groups.

During the Schools of Promise visit, fourth grade teachers were observed team-teaching a math class. The give and take between the teachers provided students with a variety of instructional strategies and a fast-moving pace. The students, totally engaged, responded enthusiastically to the lesson. "At-promise" students were included in this class and later on were seen in the resource room working with the instructional aide to review information presented in the fourth grade classroom.

The intervention specialist and instructional aide provide services to students in the resource room through a pull-out model and work closely with the regular education teachers to coordinate the curriculum and instruction. Instructional support is also available for students through Title 1 reading and math, the after-school reading program at the YMCA, tutoring provided by Tiffin University students and parent volunteers, summer school and summer kindergarten.

Students' academic achievements are recognized in many ways. The Wall of Fame, located just off the main entrance of the building, includes the names of student who have done exceptional work. Criteria for this award are based on the individual student's performance, not on performance relative to other students. The Accelerated Reading (AR) Award, also prominently posted, includes the names of the 20 students who have earned the most points to date. Student interviews reveal that both of these awards are coveted by the students, with one student saying, "I finally got on the Hall of Fame!" Additionally, "Good News from School" postcards are sent to parents, and student work related to the academic content areas is prominently displayed throughout the building. Students who do well on the proficiency test are rewarded with a pizza party if they pass three of the five tests, a movie pass for passing four and a trip to Cedar Point if they pass all five tests.

A new standards-based report card that contains both letter grades and a scale to report progress toward mastering the listed indicators was developed by teachers and implemented during the 2004-2005 school year. The card was presented and explained to parents during a parent-teacher conference. That was a pilot year for the card, which will be reviewed to determine if it can be made more parent-friendly.

Professional Development

In past years, funds were not readily available for professional development opportunities. However, this did not prevent the Lincoln Elementary staff from suggesting and participating in a book read. During the 2003-2004 school year, teachers selected, read, and discussed two books—*The Essential 55* and *Star Teachers of Children of Poverty*. Teachers report that this experience, as well as observing each other teach, strengthened collaboration among the staff and provided them with opportunities to identify and implement effective instructional strategies.

The district administration strongly believes that teachers must have opportunities for continuous learning in order to meet the diverse needs of their students and achieve the goals set forth in their Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP). The principal reports that a concerted effort has been made to set aside funds for this purpose, and additional opportunities are being made available to staff.

Engaging Parents and the Community

When asked about parent involvement, Mr. Boes responded, “Our parent support is phenomenal.” He went on to elaborate by reporting that the school had “an army” of volunteers that give generously of their time and a Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) that provides generous fiscal assistance that has been used to purchase books, phonic ear systems and manipulatives, and to pay for field trips. Teachers reply, “The PTO is very responsive to our needs.” The PTO raises money for the school through Bakery Bingo and Autumnfest, both popular with families in the community and both well-attended. The PTO executive board meets monthly with the principal and staff members. During some of those meetings, the PTO provided feedback on the recent revision of Lincoln Elementary’s Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP), and their suggestions were incorporated into the plan.

In addition to serving as volunteers and participating in PTO functions, parents can become involved by attending one of the many activities scheduled throughout the school year: Back to School Night, Family Math, and Reading Night, and parent-teacher conferences held twice a year. Parent attendance at these conferences, which may be scheduled after hours or in the home, has been a remarkable 100 percent.

Community/business partners also give generously of their time and resources to support the educational program. Partnerships have been established with Heidelberg College and Tiffin University. Heidelberg places student teachers at Lincoln Elementary, and both of these institutions of higher education recruit students to serve as volunteer tutors. Businesses collaborate with teachers through the Junior Achievement Program, introducing students to economic and workforce issues, and Fifth Third Bank employees work with the fifth grade students to operate their own Lincoln Branch. The YMCA provides water safety classes for fourth graders and an after-school latchkey program that is housed in the school. Police and firemen partner with the school to offer the DARE and safety programs.

Parents and community members are kept informed through a bi-monthly newsletter, the district’s web site and frequent articles in the local newspaper. The principal’s bi-monthly newsletter is sent home accompanied by a letter from each of the teachers reporting information that is specific to their classrooms. Teachers frequently

communicate with parents via phone (having phones in each room has been most helpful in facilitating timely contacts) and through assignment notebooks.

Culture/Environment

The following facts confirm that Lincoln Elementary is indeed a “place where people want to be”:

- Several of the teachers in the building attended this school as students.
- The teaching staff has an average of 19 ½ years of experience.
- Other teachers in the district request to be assigned to this school.
- Forty percent of the student population is open-enrolled.
- Students, teachers, families and the principal all describe their school in positive terms with “friendly” often being used.

Contributing to the sense of family and mutual respect that prevails in this school is the establishment of the Student Council. Both the teachers and Mr. Boes report that the council has provided “a big morale boost.” “It helps to make the building more family-friendly and installs responsibility with the students.” After a lively campaign, classmates elect one boy and one girl from each grade in grades two through five. The Council meets twice a month over lunch to organize activities that benefit the school and the community. A penny drive raised over \$400 for the Red Cross; a holiday food drive was conducted with the Salvation Army, and a coat drive provided garments to needy persons in the community. The Council also has worked on improving the physical appearance of their school, coordinating school activities including a Reading Night for families, and serving as greeters for various school functions.

Another example of students being respected is the structured morning exercise break for grades three through five. This was the result of a petition developed by the fifth graders and filed with the principal citing “the need for physical activity to stimulate academic performance.”

Students at Lincoln Elementary know what is expected of them and behave accordingly. A school-wide Green Card Behavior System is in place. Students who show exemplary behavior each month are recognized with the Golden Behavior Award. A certificate acknowledging the award is sent to the students’ parents, and the award-winning students receive an ice cream treat. This program has been so successful that over 50% of the student population is recognized on a monthly basis.

Conclusion

When Mr. Boes assumed the position of principal four years ago (he previously was a teacher), he told his staff that his goal was “To be the **best school** in Tiffin, to be the **best school** in the county, to be the **best school** in the northwest region, and to be the **best school** in Ohio.” This goal is reflected in Mr. Boes’ “we can do it” attitude. Under his leadership, the Lincoln Elementary School community continues to strive to do their best to meet the needs of each of their earners.

What does the data say?

