

Alliance High School

Alliance City School District (Stark)



School Profile 2003-2004	
<i>2003-2004 School of Promise in Reading</i>	
School Rating	Continuous Improvement
Enrollment	928
Grade Levels	9-12
Percent Economically Disadvantaged	45.6%
Percent Racial/Ethnic Minority	19%

District Profile 2003-2004	
District Rating	Academic Watch
District Enrollment	3,119

Lesson 1: Providing Rigorous Instruction Aligned to Standards

Alignment to Standards: In 2003-2004, Alliance High School (AHS) departments began doing a systematic review of the alignment between what they were doing and the standards. Departments developed pacing charts that outline the standards by time period to help ensure that all teachers are addressing the standards within the year at about the same point in time. The lessons may vary, but there is increased departmental consistency about goals and coverage of the standards.

“I Can” Statements: Each teacher posts in his or her classroom specific “I Can” statements – material that students have mastered in connection to the state content standards. This technique readily shows students how what they are learning meets state requirements.

Grants: External funding through grants has provided the school with additional professional development opportunities, technology and reforms to the math program. Major grants include the Math Vision Process (MVP) which enabled the school to purchase Smart Boards, and the Math and Science Partnership (MSP) which covers costs of two math coaches.

Lesson 2: Providing Leadership That Results in Continuous Improvement

Zero Hour Planning Period: A major initiative introduced in the 2003-2004 academic year is the school's addition of a “zero period” (7:20-8:00 a.m.) in which teachers focus on a different essential activity each morning before students arrive. The zero hour planning time sets the tone for all that AHS has identified as a high priority: data collection, parent/student communication, student tutoring, faculty communication, department collaboration and the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT).

Collaborative and Highly Experienced Staff: The principal values team-building exercises and emphasizes the importance of having fun in the workplace. Besides the teachers speaking highly of the principal's efforts to promote intra- and inter-departmental collegiality, teachers viewed their departments as cohesive with a willingness to try new approaches and technologies, adopting those that were most effective with students. AHS has a higher than average teacher retention rate. Of teachers surveyed, 73 percent have taught at AHS for at least 20 years.

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

Math Classes and Course Completion Tests: The math department has implemented changes the past few years to ensure that students are sufficiently prepared. For instance, it began offering

Algebra 1 over a two-year period to students who demonstrate difficulties. Students are required to demonstrate mastery in their math classes by passing both the semester exam and the course mastery test before they can enroll in a higher level math class.

Advanced Technology and Equipment: Teachers seem to be especially motivated by the technology available to them to help students (four computer labs, six SMART Boards, scanners and video equipment for student announcements). In addition, a technology resource teacher provides technical assistance and support to the school and a special education teacher is assigned to one of the computer labs.

Review Prior to OGT: The school requires students who have not passed the OGT or proficiency test to participate in a two and one-half week review during study hall period, before school or after school. Teachers donate their time to teach this special class which is offered a few weeks prior to the test.

Lesson 4: Engaging Parents and Community to Support Student Success

Record-keeping Software and Telephones in Each Teacher's Room: Teachers are given Monday during zero hour to keep their records accurate and up-to-date. They then maintain students' grades and attendance online; students and parents can access grades from home. With telephones in every teacher's room, it is easier for teachers to send and receive calls from parents, and parents can leave voice messages for the teachers. Teachers have found e-mail to be an especially good way to communicate with parents and deal with issues immediately.

Parent Communication: The zero hour planning period designates Tuesdays for all teachers to focus on communications with parents. Each teacher calls five parents weekly and is prepared to give a summary of the calls to the office. In addition, the school has two parent-teacher conferences each year and sends quarterly newsletters to parents.

Lesson 5: Creating a Culture Where Each Individual Feels Valued

Student and Teacher Communication: Teachers feel good about the school and the students and make efforts to share their sense of well being with students. During class changes, teachers stand at their doors with a smile which helps to encourage good student behavior. This fairly simple act appears to keep discipline problems to a minimum and enhance traffic flow in the hallways.

Small Class Size: Even though AHS is a large high school, students have opportunities for one-on-one interaction with teachers due to small class sizes. During the researchers' observations, classes averaged 16 students in English and 15 in math.

Unique Opportunities to Pursue Individual Interests: There are more extensive course offerings and extracurricular activities at AHS than in many schools in comparable settings, including courses generally available only at more specialized vocational or career center high schools. Students also have opportunities for student leadership activities and educational trips in the U.S. and overseas.

Challenges

Alliance High School is an example of a school doing a lot of the right things to create a learning environment conducive to high student achievement. Nonetheless, like many schools, it continues to struggle with ensuring that all students are learning. The school did not maintain its status as a School of Promise in 2004-2005 because it lost ground in reading. Case study findings may provide insight into factors that may be affecting students' ability to demonstrate consistently strong performances over time. These include:

- Intensive focus on preparing students for the OGT occurs just a few weeks prior to the test at AHS; some case study schools required intervention classes beginning in September.
- The 2004-2005 test results suggest that further action needs to be taken to engage minority students. While the proportion of minority and disadvantaged students increased at the school between 2003-2004 and 2004-2005, of the 13 teachers observed, all were Caucasian with the exception of one Hispanic teacher.

- The high school did not meet state requirements for attendance. This indicates that more students than average are not actively participating in class and taking advantage of educational opportunities.