Burlington Elementary

South Point School District

South Point, Ohio
Superintendent: Kenneth Cook
Principal: Mark Christian

http://www.southpoint.k12.oh.us/burlington/burlstaff.htm

Burlington Elementary, an all-day kindergarten through fifth grade school with 300 students in southern Ohio, has been named an Ohio School of Promise for both the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years, and a Distinguished Title I school for 2004.

Mark Christian, the principal, credits the academic success to "a conscientious and caring staff that is willing to go that extra mile to get the job done." He also notes that Burlington is "fortunate to have a supportive superintendent and a district curriculum director who works long hours to make success at

Burlington possible." But the bottom line he emphasizes is that "It's about the kids. We are all here to help them do well. We do whatever it takes, and we use incentives and rewards liberally."

SCHOOL PROFILE		
2003-2004 Building Rating	Excellent	
Enrollment	272	
Grade Levels	K-5	
Economically Disadvantaged Students	56.8%	
Students with Disabilities	23.4%	
Black Students	9.5%	
White Students	89.5%	

SOUTH POINT DISTRICT PROFILE	
2003-2004 District Rating	Continuous Improvement
District Enrollment	1,810

Curriculum Alignment

The curriculum at Burlington Elementary is dictated primarily by the requirements in the Ohio Academic Content Standards. Curriculum alignment was completed a few years ago, and the teachers at each grade level have a specific and sequential format to follow. Based on professional development training they received, teachers developed short cycle assessments, with a question for every indicator, which they are administering four times a year to pinpoint specific areas of weakness for each student. Teachers then concentrate on those areas, either in the classroom or during intervention times. They believe that the abundance of intervention and test readiness opportunities at Burlington is their "most important and valuable instructional asset" as they work to help each student, 56.8% who are economically disadvantaged, progress.

Instructional strategies are modified based on student data from various sources. Teachers had been using only students' efforts on taking old proficiency tests to determine how to adjust instructional methods to prepare students for the state assessments. In 2004-2005, Study Island, a web-based program that includes lessons and practice proficiency tests based on the standards, was added to their arsenal of tools. It has been a big hit with the students, who now can use Study Island either at school or at home, with the program automatically keeping track of students' results. Once students complete four of the tests, the scores are charted to keep track of where the students are having difficulties by subject area and grade. Teachers get an item

analysis by student and then target-teach to the areas that need strengthening. This target teaching can take place during regular instruction in the classroom or during intervention that is provided for at-risk students, including students with disabilities, during school hours. Before- and after-school tutoring and homework classes are also available for students needing the extra support.

Mr. Christian reports that departmentalization works better at Burlington, in part because not all teachers were comfortable with teaching math, resulting in low math scores. He notes that while some people think that elementary students are too young for departmentalization, it does work at Burlington. He tries to group teachers with balance in the specialty areas.

Intervention Specialists

The intervention specialists were team teaching with the regular education teachers prior to the 2004-2005 school year. However, due to scheduling, that is no longer the case. Intervention specialists now focus on providing their extra support out of the regular education classroom. All students with disabilities are included in classes for social studies and science with help from the intervention specialists when the need arises.

When at-risk students, including students with disabilities, are pulled out, the intervention specialists report that they may not use the exact instructional materials used in the regular classroom. One intervention specialist notes, "For instance, in reading I may not teach the same novel as the regular education teacher. I will choose one at a lower level but on the same theme. We provide supplements to the novels including cassettes and reading aloud. If there is a movie based on the novel, we usually let the students watch it afterward." It was reported that the reading teacher has a new reading series, the Harcourt (Trophies) Series, with an intervention component that is a lot easier for the younger kids.

Common Planning Time

Teachers report that having common planning times by grade level is very valuable, especially the time to collaborate with the intervention specialists on accommodations and modifications. While the at-risk students, including students with disabilities, are "mostly doing what the others are doing, and doing it well," according to a teacher, "some need accommodations like adjusting the vocabulary that will be on tests and modifications like shorter assignments and extended time." Other adaptations include partner reading, extra time on vocabulary, and peer tutoring. Other than the learning-disabilities teacher's grouping students by the number of spelling words they can manage, there is no special grouping.

Curriculum Director

Burlington Elementary teachers credit Debbie York, the curriculum director funded by the district, with keeping them apprised of the instructional materials available and with helping them determine which are best suited for their needs as related to the content standards. Options are discussed at staff meetings, and teachers vote on those they like best. They believe they are fortunate because they have never been turned down regarding their requests for materials.

Professional Development

Ms. York is also credited with keeping the principal and the teachers informed about the professional development opportunities that are available to meet their needs. The teachers report that the training they received on the short cycle assessments have had the biggest impact for them. They also had good things to say about Activities Integrating Math and Science (AIMS) and the workshop on the six traits of good writing.

When teachers make a request to participate in a professional development activity, there is \$150 cap. However, if they are asked to go to particular meetings or workshops, the entire cost is paid, and they are expected to come back to the school and share. Teachers have participated in inclusion conferences, in workshops on differentiating instruction provided by Ms. York, and in the SIRI program. Aides at Burlington have participated in autism training teams and are working on skills they need to be certified as paraprofessionals.

One of the many grant proposals Ms. York has written on behalf of Burlington Elementary resulted in a \$50,000 grant to study inclusive practices for elementary schools. With a portion of the money, Mr. Christian contracted with a company to provide four days of inclusion training that focused on helping regular education teachers include all students in their classrooms as well as how to grade students with disabilities when they are in the regular education classrooms. Teachers found the training very useful.

New teachers go through the Praxis Series: Professional Assessments for Beginning Teachers, a set of rigorous and carefully validated assessments that provides accurate, reliable information for use by state education agencies in making licensing decisions. They also are assigned a mentor and are also included when teachers meet on a regular basis.

Intervention and Test Readiness

As noted earlier, Burlington staff members are very proud of the intervention and test readiness opportunities they offer their students. Those whose assessment results are in the bottom 25% are required to take part in the intervention program. Every other week they have an intervention period during lunch or art, music or physical education classes. Teachers who volunteer to provide the intervention needed are given an incentive. Every time a teacher facilitates 20 minutes of intervention (individually or to groups of three or four students), the name of the teacher is written on a slip of paper and put in a jar. Those teachers whose names are drawn are pleased to receive rewards of \$20.

Students in the third grade who are experiencing difficulties are marked for additional intervention. In the 2004-2005 school year, the third grade students were the focus when Burlington had a grant to support one teacher to come in strictly to do intervention.

To prepare for the achievement and proficiency tests in March, students are offered eight weeks of after-school proficiency preparation. Parent permission is requested, and transportation home is provided. Teachers are paid for their time, and students are encouraged to participate through the use of incentives such as a bowling, lasar tag, and pizza party in a nearby town. Also, the names of students who pass all

five sections of the proficiency tests are put in a jar, with drawings for bikes and other prizes. Student participation is very high.

The Literacy Team developed a mandatory intervention program to support students experiencing reading difficulties. The team members check the school's Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP) after getting the proficiency scores to prepare support for appropriate students where needed. Also, the Team initiated a Reading Worm program.

Burlington is lucky to have five parent volunteers who work with individual children on areas where extra support is needed. The district parent coordinator takes the parents through the "Together We Can" program, arranges to have them go through the BDI finger print check, and coordinates their support activities with the teachers.

There is also a summer intervention program. In the past, the program was open to all students because the school had funding under a Twentieth Century grant. With the funding over, the 2005 summer program was limited to the students in the lowest 25%.

Supports and Incentives to Perform Well

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. Kindergarteners, and first and second graders take home books and activity cards to practice with their parents. The computer lab teacher uses A-Math, Academy of Reading, Failure-Free Reading and Accelerated Reader.

A variety of incentive programs are used to help students perform well. An example is the Accelerated Reader (AR) Incentive Plan for the first through fifth graders. As students accumulate points for reading, they can become Proud Pups at the first red level and get an AR bookmark, AR pencil and their name on the AR Wall of Fame bulletin board in the front hall of the school. As they move up to the white Cool K-9 Crew, they get an AR ribbon, their name advanced on the Wall of Fame, and their name announced on a school broadcast. The blue Pointer Pack level results in a dog tag necklace, their name advanced on the Wall of Fame, a certificate, and their name announced on a school broadcast. At the gold Top Dog level, students receive a T-shirt, their picture on the Wall of Fame, their picture on Channel 39, a certificate, and an introduction by Mr. Christian on the morning broadcast. The first classroom in each grade level to reach 100 points by the end of each nine-week period wins a pizza party.

Student Performance

A dedicated staff, an aligned curriculum, a variety of instructional materials, numerous opportunities for intervention, test readiness opportunities and

a variety of incentives for students all contribute to the progressively higher test scores at Burlington Elementary. Eighty-six percent of all fourth graders scored proficient or above on the reading section of the Ohio Proficiency Test during the 2003-2004 school year, an increase of 33.5% since the 2001-2002 school year, and 90.7% of the fourth graders scored proficient or above on the mathematics section, an increase of 51.7%

over three school years. The third grade reading achievement test scores were equally impressive with 83.7% of the students scoring proficient or above.

Contributing to these higher test scores are those being earned by Burlington Elementary's students with disabilities. Their scores also have progressively and significantly increased since the 2001-2002 school year. During the 2003-2004 school year 84.6% of the fourth grade students with disabilities passed the reading section of the Ohio Proficiency Test and 92.31% passed the mathematics test. (See bar graphs at the end of this report.)

Rewards To Encourage Desired Behavior

The staff members at Burlington believe in the value of rewarding positive student behavior. A system of rewards is in place to give students points that have varying values when they behave appropriately. The students are able to spend their points on Friday when they can select stickers, pencils and other items that are available. Students have responded positively to the reward system, and there are few behavior problems.

When students do misbehave, teachers are responsible for issuing them time tickets (five, ten or fifteen minutes, depending on the misbehavior). This time can be served as "wall restriction" during lunch or recess. A "wall teacher" initials the ticket to verify that the time was put in. When the time ticket option does not deter a student's behavior difficulties, the student is referred to the principal who works with the individual student by either talking the situation over with the student, possibly calling the student's parents, or issuing a detention if it is warranted.

Retention

Mr. Christian reports that the issue of retention is one of his most difficult areas of decision-making. He acknowledges that there is a lot of controversy over the issue. Often it is parents who ask him to have their children retained. He admits that about 90% of the kids who are retained seem to be happier and do better by the end of the second year. Still, it is a troubling area. He is bothered because he knows that the teachers have provided the students substantial targeted instruction and a variety of interventions, and he is always concerned about whether re-doing the year will make a difference. He treats each case individually.

When talking with parents of students with disabilities, two reported that each had asked, in different years, that their child be retained. After lengthy discussion with Mr. Christian, each was retained. Both parents believed that their children had matured during the repeat year and that retention had worked for them.

Parent Involvement

Mr. Christian and the staff members at Burlington, especially the district parent coordinator, work hard to get parents involved in their children's education. They report that parents do respond to telephone calls they receive regarding their own children, but many are reluctant to get more involved in school activities. Parents do like the grade level nights for each grade level (first grade night, etc.) where the purpose is to go through a sample day. They also will attend events when students display their work, so

Burlington makes it a point to schedule events such as Science Night, Math Night and Reading Night. However, the biggest draw is still the Halloween Parade.

A small core group of active members of the school's PTO are responsible for raising much of the money that supports the incentive and reward programs that are so popular and so effective at Burlington. Mr. Christian and the staff are grateful for their efforts.

Parents of students with disabilities credit the Burlington teachers with the progress of their students. They state that they especially like the strong focus on reading. The parents believe that the after-school intervention program makes the biggest difference as far as their students passing the proficiency tests, and they are pleased that the school makes that extra effort. Parents also noted appreciation for the school's work to keep them informed about what their students are supposed to know by the end of each grade and about the proficiency tests. They feel very included in their children's education and in the school.

Students

Students are expected to complete the homework that has been assigned to them, either at home or during recess. To encourage them, they are rewarded when the homework is completed. The school purchases School Datebooks for each student that are brought home every day so homework assignments are always available and parents have an easy way to check what needs to be done. Each student also has a School/Parent Communicator folder with one side for work going home and the other for work to bring back to school.

Students report that they like attending school at Burlington. One of the things they really enjoy is a building video program where each day they are responsible for presenting the day's weather, lunch menu and announcements; the program is shown on televisions in all the classrooms and offices. They also speak highly of the reward system at the school, especially the pizza parties and the trips for bowling and laser tag. They were looking forward to a big track and field event that is held yearly in conjunction with the South Point Elementary School. They talked excitedly about 1,000 kids participating in all the events and about the 2,100 hot dogs ordered for them.

Culture of the School

Raised in South Point, Mr. Christian and his family continue to live in the area, as do most of the teachers at the school. He believes that he and his teachers have a responsibility to the students, the area and themselves to provide the best education they can for the students they serve. He describes the culture of Burlington as being focused, goal-oriented, collaborative and cooperative, yet relaxed. A personal example of the qualities he talks about is the competitive yet friendly and supportive relationship he has with Chris Mathes, the principal at South Point, another elementary school in the district that was named a 2003-2004 School of Promise. They share ideas and strategies that work between the teachers at the schools, they plan joint student activities, they counsel each other and they agree that "It's all about the kids."

What does the data say?









