Cleveland Elementary School

Hamilton City School District

Hamilton, Ohio
Superintendent: Janet Baker
Principal: Terri R. Fitton

www.hamiltoncityschools.com/schools/Cleveland/index.cfm

The School of Promise visit to Cleveland Elementary began with a gathering of about a dozen experienced teachers, both regular and special education, sitting around a conference table in the library, ready for open dialogue about the school's philosophy

of teaching and learning in an inclusive setting. The teachers are enthusiastic, their "esprit de corps" readily apparent. They are very pleased to be named a School of Promise but don't believe that they are doing anything extraordinary. Eager to help all students succeed, the teachers state that there has always been openness at Cleveland Elementary for accepting all special education students.

SCHOOL PROFILE	
2003-2004 Building Rating	Effective
Enrollment	419
Grade Levels	K-6
Economically Disadvantaged Students	46.5%
Students with Disabilities	17.9%
Black Students	4.9%
Multi-racial Students	5.%
White Students	88.7%

In their own words, the teachers talk about the Cleveland Elementary culture of inclusion:

"The special education kids realize early on that there are no excuses; the expectations are the same for everyone."

HAMILTON CITY DISTRICT PROFILE	
2003-2004 District Rating	Continuous Improvement
District Enrollment	9,225

"The teachers go out of their way to make modifications for all children."

"None of our special education rooms seems like THAT room; sometimes the regular kids want to go to the special room."

"All the kids are totally accepting; they don't see any differences."

A wide range of learning needs exists among the blind, visually impaired, hearing impaired, cognitively disabled, emotionally disturbed and learning disabled special education students enrolled at Cleveland. Successful inclusion is accomplished through a continuous process of collaborative teamwork. All teachers use laminated placemats of the state standards that are distributed by the Hamilton City District to help keep a sharp focus on each grade's requirements for all students. They design appropriate accommodations and modifications as an integrated component of the school's curriculum and instructional program. Inclusion works because a solid rapport has been established among the Cleveland teachers, the kind that allows for communication in less time than would typically be needed among other professionals working together. During the day, for example, it's common for quick notes to be written on the run and dropped in mailboxes that are located outside many classrooms.

The teachers share that it comes down to things that are just common sense to them but point out that their principal's leadership is key. They state that Mrs. Fitton has

moved them forward. They also note that a former superintendent had a slogan, *What's Best for the Kids*. Even though that was 15 years ago, they have taken it to heart. One teacher reported, "It influenced our culture; everything is child-centered here."

Others are trying to learn from the school's successful inclusion practices. Mrs. Fitton has been asked to train a group of principals next year.

PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL CHILDREN TO ACHIEVE

"With all of the supports that we have, we're doing the very best that we can for our kids," shares Mrs. Fitton. Now finishing her second year as principal of this K-6

building located in the heart of an urban/suburban district, Mrs. Fitton acknowledges that the prior principal did a great job and that it was a great school when

"With all of the supports that we have, we're doing the very best that we can for our kids." Terri Fitton, principal

she walked in. She is concentrating on being an instructional leader as requested by the teachers.

Specially designed instruction and related services are provided within a continuum of pullout and inclusive settings. "A lot of our special education teachers move into the regular classrooms much of the time, often team teaching," shared one teacher. "When they do pull kids out, often they bring regular kids with them along with the special education kids. Our Title I teachers are all team teaching." Attention is paid to issues of dependency. Teachers and assistants work on giving kids what they need, 46.5% who are economically disadvantaged, then stepping away and allowing them to work independently.

Walking in and out of classrooms and talking with teachers gives visitors a sense of the daily routine. Students with vision and hearing disabilities are participating fully in regular classroom activities. The blind students have assistance from individual

learning assistants. Regular and special education teachers are working through accommodations and modifications needed for upcoming curricular priorities. Some special education students are working

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independently or in small groups within their assigned resource rooms. Intervention specialists work with each other's students through flexible grouping. Students with emotional disabilities are working through emotional issues that surface on any given day. According to one teacher, "The fact that there is an openness of people in this building is what really helps here. The aides work with the teachers to do whatever is needed. It is absolutely collaborative. Our speech pathologist is so good about working with groups in the classrooms and really good about integrating curricular content in the speech work."

"The Intervention Assistance Team (IAT) is an integral part of our life here," shares Mrs. Fitton. "We really use it as intended. This is where a teacher can come and say, 'This is what I've done and I don't know where to go next with this child." The counselor and psychologist lead the IAT that includes grade level teachers, Title I teachers, special education teachers, the principal and parents.

As summed up by the principal, "The challenge really is this: How do you work on getting higher test scores, and still educate the whole child? Expectations are a double-edged sword. We need the higher expectations, but we can also drive a child into the ground if we're not careful."

Many of the school's overall programmatic initiatives focus on the importance of early prevention and intervention, as well as on opportunities to practice basic reading and math skills. These include the following:

- Coordinating with district and community-run early childhood programs that serve many Cleveland children prior to entering kindergarten;
- o Introducing a new summer program for pre-kindergarten students last year;
- Offering an all-day kindergarten program to get students off to a "Smart Start";
- Providing more opportunities for children to practice reading through an Ohio Reads community volunteer program;
- Scheduling weekly visits to the school library for Accelerated Reading;
- o Individualizing math skill development with computer lab software;
- Operating a Summer School to focus on reading and math with special emphasis on basic skills; and
- Sponsoring a Summer Vacation Program with workbooks for daily 20-minute practice intended to retain basic skills mastered during the year. The workbook cost is minimal and the purchase of an accompanying computer program is optional.

Cleveland teachers work hard to prepare the students for the Ohio Proficiency Test (OPT). They review the data from the previous results on the OPT, sort it by classes and strands and review it at staff meetings to determine what is needed to incorporate into their lesson plans. From November through March, students are tutored to prepare for the OPT and test results reflect these efforts. During the 2003-2004 school year, 82.7% of all fourth graders and 86.7% of all sixth graders scored proficient or above on the mathematics section of the Ohio Proficiency Test. These passage rates have progressively increased since the 2001-2002 school year as depicted in the bar graphs at the end of this report.

Students with disabilities scores on the mathematics section of the test have also continued to improve, with 77.8% of the fourth graders scoring proficient or above during the 2003-2004 school year, an increase of 44.5% since the 2001-2002 school year (see bar graph at the end of this report).

Special events promote a sense of fun and excitement about learning and motivate even the most reluctant learners. For example, this year's Right to Read Week, themed Reading is a Treasure, was complete with treasure chests, pirates, ocean life, and Sponge Bob Square Pants—all serving as background for celebrating the joy of reading. There was also a visiting author assembly and, interesting to note, invited guests included the guide dogs that accompany students who are visually disabled. Then there's Pajama Day, the day before spring break, when students are encouraged to wear pajamas and be comfortable (but must wear regular shoes) and read their favorite books all day. As the year winds to a close, children look forward to the school's Talent Show and Field Day.

There is also a focus on integrating the arts into the curriculum. For instance, songs relating to social studies and the multiplication tables are used.

BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT

"The school was in Continuous Improvement for awhile," explains Mrs. Fitton, "and the staff wanted a principal to move them forward. One thing we worked on was our discipline policy." A graduated Second Chance program was instituted that for starters uses cross-grade time out as an initial step when a student misbehaves. Students hate to go to another class where it is obvious to all that they are out of place. The second step is the in-school suspension, monitored by the librarian. At the third level, students are referred to the principal. Also instituted to monitor and track daily behavior is a standard green, yellow, and red coding system where students keep track of their own behavioral trends.

An incentive program was implemented as added encouragement for students to do their very best:

The Rocket Award is given every Monday to one student in each classroom for academic excellence or great academic improvement. This sets the tone for the week with a focus on achievement.

The Thumbs-up Awards are given once a week to students who behave in a way that shows they understand and practice the "value of the month" (e.g., responsibility, individuality, cooperation, compassion, discipline, friendship, honesty, courtesy, or learning).

Gotcha Cards, given by teachers to students throughout the week for "doing something good," are put into a box. Every Friday, prizes are awarded to students whose cards are drawn.

A Hero Party is held every Friday afternoon for students exhibiting excellent social behavior and work habits through the week.

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Mrs. Fitton maintains a close connection with the teachers and knows what is going on in the classrooms. Each grade-level team meets with her weekly for lunch in her office. This is a time when frank and candid conversations take place about important issues that can have an impact on student performance. Mrs. Fitton also spends much of her time in the classrooms. What happens there is always at the front of her thoughts. She shares, "The most important planning time I have is my thirty-minute drive to and from school—I take that time to think about the classrooms I've been in that day or the day before. I focus on instruction and prioritize my time."

Teachers sum up the importance of instructional leadership as follows: "Our principal is someone who stays on top and doesn't let us slide. That's what makes everything work!"

"In terms of my own professional development," explains Mrs. Fitton, "I try to

keep myself pretty familiar with the research and best practices." Last year she traveled to Texas to visit a model program. This coming year she will participate in a year-long

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Cleveland elementary teachers

academy on administrative leadership offered by the Hamilton County Education Service Center (ESC). The academy is based on the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards that center on the vision of learning; culture of teaching and learning; management of learning; integrity, fairness, and ethics in learning; and the political, social economic, legal, and cultural context of learning.

Last year the teachers undertook an after-school book study of *Classroom Instruction That Works*. Cohorts were established, the teachers presented to each other, and strategies that were discussed were implemented in the classrooms.

Administrative challenges are ever present, especially concerning finances. The school has a 46.5% free and reduced lunch count, but will lose some if its Title I dollars next year as its ranking drops in comparison to increased percentage rates in other schools within the district. This will result in the loss of some services, including the part-time Title I Reading Teacher. Cleveland Elementary and the Hamilton City District are innovative when it comes to securing needed funding, however, and according to a recent superintendent's newsletter, "The district is proud to be in its twelfth year of operation since the last operating levy was passed. In spite of being frugal, student opportunities are growing across the district thanks to an aggressive focus on securing grants."

PARTNERSHIPS

In terms of school/business partnerships, Cleveland Elementary is proud of its Adopt-A-School Program, self-described as a mutually beneficial people-to-people relationship between adopter and adoptee. Current partners include the Westover Retirement Community (offering the services of employees and residents as judges for the school's Science Fair), Key Bank (displaying some of the fine student artwork), Karen's Pizzeria (providing pizza at a reduced cost for special activities) and Interstate Warehouse (donating over \$2,000 for the purchase of needed classroom materials).

Engaging parents is a priority at Cleveland Elementary. Parent workshops are sponsored four times a year. This year's themes included Chips and Chapters, Snacks and Stories, Math Matters, and Homework Help. Each classroom sponsors a specially-designed web page featuring class descriptions and current events where parents can see students' creativity through personalized trademark identities such as Superstars (kindergarten), Clever Minds and Mighty Mathematicians (third grade) and Lab Rats (fourth grade). Parents are invited to serve as volunteers, as are retired seniors wanting to connect with the younger generation. A Spring Celebration is held each year, providing an evening of fun for the entire family with a disc jockey, face painting, balloon animals, a bake sale and much more.

Perhaps the most compelling way to understand the power of partnerships at Cleveland Elementary is through the sharing of a personal success story. One parent talked about her eight-year-old daughter's success. Karol (not her real name) was born prematurely, with dwarf syndrome, low muscle tone, and the need for a feeding tube. Currently reading on grade level, next year she will be fully included with pull-out intervention as needed. "She has definitely made so much progress," shares the mother. "Her handwriting and reading have improved. She is very strong-willed and wants to be with the rest of the kids. She is feeling very good about herself. She has made tremendous strides. I love her teacher and aide. They are doing a wonderful job!" In terms of supports, she explains, "Everything that I've asked for has been set up,

as far as my daughter's goals are concerned. Everyone is always willing to listen to me. If I have a question or concern, I don't hesitate to call."

"Everything that I've asked for has been set up, as far a my daughter's goals are concerned. Everyone is always willing to listen to me. If I have a question or concern, I don't hesitate to call." Parent of a Student with Significant Challenges

What does the data say?





