

Essex Elementary School

Akron City School District (Summit)



School Profile 2003-2004	
<i>2003-2004 School of Promise in Reading</i>	
School Rating	Continuous Improvement
Enrollment	274
Grade Levels	K-5
Percent Economically Disadvantaged	47.8%
Percent Racial/Ethnic Minority	73.9%

District Profile 2003-2004	
District Rating	Academic Watch
District Enrollment	28,097

Lesson 1: Providing Rigorous Instruction Aligned to Standards

Attention to Standards: Teachers use a wide variety of teaching strategies and understand the standards. At the beginning of the school year, teachers meet in grade level teams and use achievement and proficiency test results, the initial assessment data for the school year and the board's curriculum guide to inform their lesson planning.

Professional Development: The district and school-based professional development have helped teachers apply the standards and enhance their classroom effectiveness. Teachers said that observing "master" teachers at Essex and other district schools has been tremendously beneficial.

Grants: The OhioReads grant has paid for additional reading materials and a coordinator. Although the school will be losing most of its OhioReads grant this year, it will be able to maintain much of the program using student activity funds collected from fundraisers. Teachers have successfully pursued small grants such as one providing Palm Pilots for a fifth grade class.

Lesson 2: Providing Leadership That Results in Continuous Improvement

Collaborative Leadership: The principal, even though in his first year at this school, has successfully established rapport with teachers by encouraging them to continue with successful practices that preceded his arrival. Teachers said the current and former principals communicated high expectations for the students, which helped encourage good student behavior. In addition, teachers attributed instructional leadership as being a key contributing factor in the staff's dedication and overall good feeling about the school.

Experienced and Collaborative Teachers: More than half of the teachers have more than 20 years of teaching experience, and 71 percent have a master's degree in education. Teachers regularly share materials and ideas, which includes informal mentoring of entry-year teachers and exchanges with colleagues teaching higher grades to ensure they are appropriately preparing their students.

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

Reading Program: Most teachers use the district selected Harcourt series as the basal series. They supplement primarily with the 100 Book Challenge, in which students do 30 minutes of independent reading at school and 30 minutes at home each day. The parents are trained how to monitor and report their children's reading. Teachers use pre- and post-tests to determine each student's reading level and progression to the next level.

Use of Data to Target Instruction: The school psychologist leads an effort to test all students with the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) as well as other measures of reading and

math fluency three times a year. The results are used to determine which students need intervention; the progress of these students is monitored weekly. Teachers primarily use the data for identifying which students to pull for Title I reading, and organizing students into reading groups based on their level.

Intervention: The Instructional/Behavior Assessment (IBAT) Committee meets weekly to discuss students that may need assistance. Essex has three part-time Title I teachers who provide students with intervention. They work closely with the classroom teachers to keep students on course and they arrange schedules so students don't miss critical instruction that they can't make up. Community volunteers do tutoring of at-risk students through the OhioReads grant. The school also has an after-school tutoring program. Students who are not at grade level by the end of the school year are required to attend summer school.

Lesson 4: Engaging Parents and Community to Support Student Success

Parent Communication and Involvement: The school has a high level of communication with parents. Teachers talk frequently with parents at parent-teacher conferences, at report card pick-up, by telephone, by e-mail and at school events. Essex has videotapes for parents to take home that explain how they can help their children succeed in school. Teachers send notes and newsletters home frequently. The school also had a session in which staff provided training on the 100 Book Challenge program. Teachers think this ongoing reading activity has helped increased parental interest and involvement.

Lesson 5: Creating a Culture Where Each Individual Feels Valued

Committed Teachers and Staff: The total staff, including principal, teachers and support staff, is expected to be actively involved in promoting the children's well-being. Teachers show an interest in students as they progress to higher grades, think about them outside of class, and do activities such as "Student of the Week" to make individual students feel important and build their self-esteem.

Small School with Foreign Language Focus: Essex is smaller than most schools in Akron. None of the classes has more than 23 students and pullouts further reduce group size. It is the only elementary in the district with foreign languages; the school requires all students to study Spanish or Japanese.

Efforts to Involve All Students: The school previously emphasized Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences. The current principal now pushes differentiated learning. All students performing below grade level are provided with intervention. Teachers regularly use flexible groups and adapt their instruction to the needs of students.

High Expectations: Principal and staff communicate high expectations to children in a variety of ways. As part of the 100 Book Challenge (<http://www.100bookchallenge.com>), children are urged to read 400 lines (15 minutes equals 1 line) each school year. Students use daily planners to stay on top of all activities, including homework and upcoming tests. Teachers regularly inform students about their performance and progress. Some teachers believe that the school's small size creates a "community feel" with all teachers knowing all students and all students knowing all teachers, and that this relationship contributes to high expectations.

Strong Discipline: Essex uses the *Quality Tools* discipline plan that clearly specifies consequences when students disrupt learning. Everyone in the building follows the plan, including the special education students, and the rules are applied consistently. Teachers use conflict resolution to help resolve disagreements between children. The *Character Counts* <http://www.charactercounts.org> conflict resolution program is used by the fourth and fifth grades. As part of this program, peer mediators help resolve student conflicts.

Challenges

Essex Elementary School is scheduled to be closed within the next two years, as its size (fewer than 350 students) makes it ineligible for state school renovation funding.