# Felicity Franklin High School: Case Study Report

**Executive Summary** 

This case study provides insights into school improvement at Felicity Franklin High School. Located in Clermont County, the high school is part of the Felicity Franklin Local School District, which also includes an elementary and middle school. All levels of the school district are contained in one building complex. Several years ago, the high school was challenged with low performance on state tests.

From 2000 to 2004, the high school's scores improved dramatically. This case study, based on interviews, observations, and document analysis completed in the spring of 2005, identified several important contributors to the school's success. The study also suggested possible concerns.

# Promising Practices

- A multi-faceted Continuous Improvement Plan that serves as the foundation for the reform efforts undertaken by all three schools in the district
- Administrative leadership that models teamwork and emphasizes a collegial approach to improving students' academic performance
- Strong curriculum leadership provided by an administrator whose portfolio includes districtwide oversight of and support for reform initiatives focused on curriculum and pedagogy
- Administrative support for educators that engages teachers' concerns and provides them resources and insights regarding their students' academic development
- Attention to "barriers to learning" for some students and to improving relationships between these students and their teachers

## Possible Concerns

- Reconciling pressures to prepare students for tests with the need to adopt instructional methods that focus on meaningful learning
- Mathematics curriculum and instruction that may not go far enough in addressing significant achievement gaps across student groups

## **Profile**

Felicity Franklin High School is located in the northern end of the district's school complex. To the left of the entrance, sit the main administrative office and career help center. Display cases with student work line the hallway leading to a small rotunda where the library is located to the right. Hallways lead from the rotunda to classrooms in two directions. The high school has two floors of classrooms plus a large workshop for agriculture education and industrial arts.

The facility is clean, new and brightly lit. Students negotiate the halls smiling and laughing, making friendly eye contact even with visitors. The teachers stand outside their classrooms, chatting with one another and greeting students. The atmosphere is relaxed but orderly and

organized, and when the first bell rings, all students are in classrooms. Student work is displayed in many corridors.

The school is rated Continuous Improvement by the Ohio Department of Education for the 2004-2005 school year. Additional current information about the school, its students and teachers is provided in Table 1. Information about the characteristics of the district is provided in Table 2.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 1: Felicity Franklin High School Profile** 

School	Average Daily Enrollment	394
	Grade Levels	9-12
	Attendance Rate	92.7%
Students	Percent Minority	2.5%
	Percent Disabilities	14.7%
	Percent Disadvantaged	28.1%
Teachers	Number of Teachers	19
	Percent with at Least a	52.6%
	Master's Degree	
	Average Years of Experience	12
	Average Salary	\$47,334

**Table 2: Felicity Franklin Local School District Profile** 

ODE District Rating	Effective
District Enrollment	1214
Total Per Pupil Expenditure <sup>2</sup>	\$9,341
Median Family Income <sup>3</sup>	\$39,643

Six-year achievement trends (measured as passage rates) for 1999-2000 through 2004-2005 appear in Table 3. Passage rates for 2004-2005 reflect performance on the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT), rather than on the Ohio Proficiency Test, so comparisons with passage rates from previous years ought to be made with extreme caution.

\_

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise specified, data come from the 2004-2005 interactive report cards available on the Web site of the Ohio Department of Education.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Source: 2003-2004 *Common Core of Data*, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Source: Census 2000 School District Demographics Project, accessible through NCES.

Table 3: 10th Grade Passage Rates in Reading and **Mathematics** 95.1 94.7 100 89.3 87.9 86.7 86.7 85.1 81.5 79.7 80 69.1 69.7 Percent 60 40 20 0 2004-2005 2003-2004 2002-2003 2001-2002 2000-2001 1999-2000

Table 3: 10<sup>th</sup> Grade Passage Rates in Reading and Mathematics

Inspection of Table 3 shows that reading passage rates on the Ohio Proficiency Test were consistently high (above 88 percent) between 1999-2000 and 2003-2004. However, passage rates went up 16 percentage points in mathematics during that time period. Passage rates on the 2004-2005 Ohio Graduation Test were lower, and the School Year Report Card showed that performance was not as high as it was in schools in similar districts.

■ Mathematics ■ Reading

The implementation of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), whose provisions require that separate test scores be reported for key subgroups of students, permits a finer grained performance summary for 2004-2005. Table 4 provides some of the relevant data.

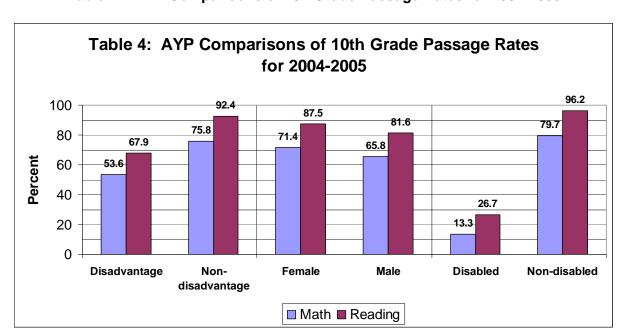


Table 4: AYP Comparisons of 10<sup>th</sup> Grade Passage Rates for 2004-2005

As Table 4 reveals, there are large discrepancies in passage rates between disabled and non-disabled students, and moderate discrepancies between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students. Females also outperform males in both reading and math, but the differences are less evident than those between other comparison groups.

#### Methods

Two project researchers conducted individual semi-structured interviews with members of the school community. Interviewees included 10 teachers, the principal, the district curriculum director, the district superintendent and three non-parent community members. In addition, the researchers conducted two focus group interviews – one with five ninth- and tenth-graders and the other with five eleventh- and twelfth-graders. Interviews lasted from 30 to 90 minutes each. The researchers also conducted observations in 10 classrooms and reviewed relevant documents such as teacher-made tests, lesson plans, school handbooks, worksheets, and Continuous Improvement Plans.

Researchers transcribed all interviews, and transcripts, observation forms and documents were collected in an electronic data base. Data coding and analysis was accomplished through the use of the software program Atlas-TI. Initial coding of data involved classifying the data in relationship to 48 *a priori* codes that identified a wide range of school policies and practices. Conceptually related codes were then combined to create broader categories. The final step involved the review of categorized data to identify emergent themes with potential explanatory power.

To develop the case study, the researchers drew on the data relating to four salient categories: leadership, academic focus, school structures and culture, and parent and community engagement.

#### Leadership

Leadership plays an important role in school improvement at Felicity Franklin High School. Two elements of the leadership tradition seem most salient: first, the established and developing role of the principal as cultural and instructional leader; and, second, the new and emerging voice of the districtwide leadership team.

Principal as Cultural and Instructional Leader

Principal Chris Allen is in his first year at the high school, where he took the place of Jeff Weir, the current superintendent. Weir recruited Allen to the position during the summer of 2004, a time of administrative change for the district. Weir and Allen appear to understand and appreciate one another's perspectives on education. They both strike people as reflective, committed and personable educators, despite differences in style and demeanor. Students had particularly positive views of the new principal. Said one, "I think he has a high standard to come up to. He's very involved. I think he's doing a good job, for being new. I really like him." Another offered this opinion: "Mr. Allen, he's everywhere. Really, he is. And it's really awesome because you get a sense of security."

Allen describes himself as a "relational" leader. Both the school and a community embrace strong norms – for respectful behavior, for academic striving, and for a stable sense of curriculum and instruction. In describing his approach to leadership, Allen discussed the way he might go about initiating a peer mediation program at the school. He noted that key staff members have not been receptive, but he needs their buy-in to be effective. Allen said:

Well, I'd much rather persuade than be directive. Let's say I pushed that peer mediation through, over the objections of the guidance officer here, who doesn't have buy-in on it. Then, she has no real incentive to make that work because she has no skin in the game. And my approach is to try to get the parties that I depend on in the front line to implement policies or programs to have some skin in the game.

# Building the Felicity Franklin Leadership Team

At Felicity Franklin, change in leadership occurred systemically, spurred a few years ago by low proficiency test scores and the resulting accountability label of Academic Emergency. The school system and the community alike viewed the performance level and the state's judgment as a threat to their status and well-being. Significant, systemic changes took place in leadership as a first step toward improvement. These changes involved allocation of substantial new resources. Weir describes the change:

The spring before I arrived was the first time they had ever had four administrators. There used to be a superintendent and two principals, K-6 and 7-12. There were three administrators. We have six now, because in the spring of '98, they created the middle school.

The two administrators added to the leadership team are the curriculum director (Glenn Moore) and the dean of students (Chris Smith). These administrative positions play a significant strategic role in fostering improvement efforts, each reinforcing the strength of the other.

The dean of students is like the typical assistant principal in a large high school – the staff member responsible for discipline. At Felicity Franklin, however, the difference from that role is twofold. First, the dean of students is a districtwide position, although Smith's chief responsibilities for behavior are at the middle and high schools. Second, the dean of students is one of the Continuous Improvement Plan's three "component" managers.

The superintendent views the role of the dean of students as one that allows building principals more time for planning and professional development. Principals usually have to spend 90 percent of their time, with only 10 percent of the students who exhibit behavior difficulties, he said.

The decision to create the position of the dean of students left principals free to improve the quality of the kids' education. The first years I worked here, we didn't have a dean, didn't have a curriculum director. And you dealt almost exclusively with problems, not on planning, not on professional development.

In addition, the dean of students has a visible role in the school improvement process as manager of the component "barriers to learning." This responsibility keeps the role focused on contributions to the big picture – helping difficult students, rather than merely disciplining them. The concept of barriers to learning fits with a districtwide focus on problem solving. In Allen's concept of relational management, problem solving includes facilitating the improvement of difficult relationships between students and faculty.

The addition of the curriculum director's position also was critical to reform. From what the research team could gather via interviews with educators and with the incumbent, Glenn Moore, this addition is the single most strategic improvement decision taken at that time. A majority of educators interviewed in all of the Felicity Franklin schools cited Moore's influence as critical.

Moore came to the district with experience as one of Kentucky's cadre of highly skilled educators under the Kentucky Education Reform Act, where his role was to improve the state's most academically troubled districts.

Nearly everyone acknowledged that Moore's leadership has generated district improvement on a number of fronts. The superintendent said, "Glenn Moore is unbelievably invaluable to what we do here." He added that, at the time the decision was taken, "It was a very undervalued move," which the district is only now beginning to acknowledge. Teachers also praised Moore:

The first couple of years we kind of wondered about him, because generally from a teacher's standpoint, when a new administrator is hired, it's kind of bad news. Because what's a new administrator going to do but find new work for the teachers to do, to just to justify their job. But it hasn't been that way at all with him. He really has provided some great leadership and has found a lot of resources for us. He has really been a big, big help, and is willing to do just about anything you ask him to do. Plus, he's visible with the kids. He's in and out of the classrooms; he knows a lot of kids on a first name basis.

My main observation as to why this school is excelling is Mr. Moore. He has done a great job in marshalling the resources and the attention of the school district along the lines of the continuous improvement plan.

Mr. Moore is the numbers guy; he comes to a lot of our staff meetings to show us where the kids are and how far they've come. So, he helps us know which way we should make our daily instruction work to help the kids.

He's just been real helpful. As I said, I questioned him too, when he first came, but he's the kind of a guy that's a couple years ahead of the game.

Moore's influence depended upon the cooperation and appreciation of others in the district. He fit the functions associated with his position into the work of the leadership team as a whole by articulating a vision of the work that is needed, giving support for this work, and providing resources and insights.

Leadership in the district also improved as a result of employment decisions made in the summer of 2004. Because of those changes, only Moore retained his incumbency in a position. All principalships and the superintendency changed hands, and three new staff were recruited to established positions – the elementary principal, dean of students, and the high school principal.

The visible improvements to academic performance and the addition of administrators all took place under the leadership of the former superintendent, whose manner of operation reportedly differed considerably from present leadership. The previous superintendent was reportedly less oriented to relationships and more authoritative. One interviewee observed, "The previous superintendent we had here thought that all you had to do was call all the principals together in the building and say, 'This is what I want done, and I want it done tomorrow,' and that's how change occurred."

By contrast, Weir offers a very different picture of what leadership should look like. When asked what he would look for in a principal, if he had the opportunity to recruit one, he responded.

The value on relationships, the service-oriented approach to the job, an openness to examine their own pedagogical grounding, not someone just set in their ways, because things are changing all the time. Someone who knows himself or herself.

In fact, all the administrators in the district seem to subscribe to this view, and their behavior, evident even to casual observers, reflects this outlook.

#### **Academic Focus**

What we had was a very teacher-centered environment in our schools – in all three schools. It was a really decent place for people to work, but it just wasn't as good a place as it should have been for kids. It was very traditional, and we were asking teachers to branch out, but they didn't immediately see the need to do that.

This observation from Weir is particularly applicable to the high school. For many reasons – tracking of students, academic specialization of faculty and problems of motivation and discipline – academic focus remains a major battleground in most high schools. This section of the report examines two features of this struggle at Felicity Franklin High School: the struggle for pedagogy and the struggle for content.

*The Struggle for Pedagogy* 

Superintendent Weir's interview suggests why pedagogy is so important:

We've had to build our teachers' skills and knowledge on how to design and deliver the material before we can ever worry about the material itself, because their content knowledge was at least adequate. When you're in a classroom, what you don't know, you learn. So, yes, we can always strengthen the content knowledge, but first things first.

Although this priority also applies to the elementary level, the pedagogical challenge at the high school is acknowledged to be the sharpest in the district. The following admission from a teacher illustrates this:

Our lesson plans have to be turned in every week. The administrators expect to see the Ohio content standards there. Before it was required, I wasn't paying a whole lot of attention to the standards. Mr. Weir was then the principal, and he called me in and embarrassed me for not doing it. He certainly straightened me out on that, and in a proper way.

How much has teaching practice actually altered at the high school? The research team observed few inductive activities. One teacher's comments seem to suggest the possibility that use of the standards as a lever to change pedagogy may, ironically, reinforce lecture and exercise formats.

As far as my role, it's a little bit scarier for me, especially now because I feel I need to get the kids ready for their tenth-grade test. So I have made a lot of changes as far as what I make sure that I go over the whole year that they're with me, because they have a whole year with me before they take the test.

At several points in his interview, Weir observed that changes so far may be subtle, but pedagogical adaptations are underway:

It's not always a real radical departure, and it doesn't always look a lot different. But a lot of it is the mindset that the teacher takes into every class period – just that attitude that they care whether the kids are getting it. Before, the focus was, 'I'm going to cover this.'

The superintendent said some of the resistance to change may have been teachers' insecurity about their level of pedagogical knowledge:

As long as we didn't delve into new things, they wouldn't be put in the position of having to pretend they know what they didn't know, which, frankly, a lot of us in education do periodically. And we put them in that position, which made them unhappy.

Much remains to be done at the high school, and teacher interviews tend to support the assessments offered by Weir and Moore. Despite the work ahead, Moore maintains a systemic hope for "torquing" further improvement. He suggests that the students who are coming up through the system who have been exposed to varied instructional formats, inquiry-based methods, and varied questioning regimes, may actually be the ones who bring about pedagogical change at the high school:

There is this bubble of kids we started with at the lower grades who are doing things that are activities in the CIP, and if the high school isn't ready for these kids when they get there, their arrival is going to change things a bit. I would describe the elementary as moving off of the lecture and exercise format. There's a lot of cooperative learning going on in the middle school. But when these kids get up there that are used to getting up and moving around and doing stuff, and they are expected to sit and listen and copy notes, it's not going to work.

This prediction, however, may depend on the continuation of a stable leadership team across the district, a team that keeps instructional leadership and academic focus clearly in view. Moore, in fact, seems to be concerned about the issue of sustainability:

I have to think, 'I'm not always going to be here. What kind of things can I put in place that will endure even with me not being here?' Because one of the things that we found when I worked with this stuff in Kentucky is that improvement happens and then key people leave. Then the school regresses again because they don't have the structures in place for maintaining that and keeping it going.

The Struggle for Content (Illustrated through Mathematics)

At Felicity Franklin High School, how teachers view the teaching of mathematics can create change in content.

The high school has a traditional approach to the teaching of mathematics. But administrators have a more reformed approach in mind for the future. Moore says: "I think math is an organized way of thinking about something, so that if you understand numbers and number signs, there are patterns that emerge. It's how the world operates."

Moore also distinguishes between an algorithmic (i.e., traditional) and a conceptual (i.e., reform) approach to learning and teaching mathematics. He explains that unlike traditional pedagogy, which relies on memorizing rules and definitions, a more conceptual version of pedagogy relies on thinking about patterns and manipulating ideas.

Nevertheless, despite Moore's vision, traditional college-preparatory mathematics is still given the highest status at the high school. In fact, the structure of the entire curriculum – with its clear demarcation between general and college preparatory mathematics – embeds traditional ideas about mathematics learning. Under this structure, the general sequence seems to consist of two courses: *Integrated Math*, typically taken in the ninth grade; and *Applied Math*, typically taken in the tenth grade as preparation for entry into either college-prep math or vocational school. Some departure from tradition is evident, however, in the belief by the mathematics teachers at Felicity Franklin that algebra is a valuable part of the curriculum for all students, even if many students do not take it.

Perhaps one explanation for a changing perspective on the part of the mathematics department is that the school's three math teachers maintain different outlooks on the nature of mathematics. Although they have not yet negotiated a shared view of what mathematics learning and teaching represent, they seem to be opening up the kinds of conversations that might eventually lead to agreed-upon changes.

Of the three math teachers, one was identified as teaching the "upper" mathematics courses (*Algebra Two, Trigonometry, Calculus*). This teacher also teaches some tenth-grade general students (the *Applied Math* course, a sort of pre-vocational school class that includes relevant concepts from algebra, geometry, and probability). The second teacher, a former vocational-school English teacher, has responsibility for what might be called "low to middle math" (specifically, this year, *Integrated Math, Algebra One*, and *Geometry*). The third teacher was newly hired this year, several weeks into the first semester, on the recommendation of Principal Allen, to provide a smaller student-teacher ratio for students in the general track. This teacher apparently specializes in the "low math," but also teaches one elementary algebra class.

The following excerpts highlight the three teachers' perspectives on mathematics content and pedagogy:

#### Teacher A

They do practice in class. I try to encourage them to practice, practice, practice. The more you do, the better you are. I use this basic algebra book. What I like are the problems – there are a lot of problems.

#### Teacher B

I like doing things project-style. Today we're working on probability. We're actually surveying people, so we're going to go down to the kindergarten. They've set up questions and they're going down there, collecting their own data.

The kids seem so stuck on teaching to the test and things like that I have drawn back some from projects, and we might do a test one week and then do a project the next week. So hopefully, next year if I get more of them I'll be able to do more projects.

#### Teacher C

Realistically, I would say that math is just a sense of numbers, how they work and what they can be used for. I think the perception of math for a long time for many is that it's this thing that's hard. Occasionally, you'll hear someone say they don't like to read, but you never hear, "Ah, history. I just don't grasp history. 'It's almost like they

feel that with math it's okay to just say, "Yeah, I'm just not good at it.' And I think a lot of it is just the logic. Because I think a lot of people don't approach things with the kind of logic that perhaps a systematic series of steps could help them with.

# **Structure and Culture at the High School**

The research team found that several evolving structures seem to have an important influence on the high school's culture: the school improvement system, student-centered instruction, and varied and positive discipline strategies.

## School Improvement System

Over the course of the last five years, the Felicity Franklin Local School District has been making a conscious effort to improve its academic and community standing. This effort is articulated in the implementation of a rigorous and multi-faceted Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP). The plan requires all teachers to keep and turn in notebooks to the administration on a regular basis. Among other things, these notebooks include records of work that classes complete, activities that show the teacher connects and communicates with the community, and evidence of how required standards and benchmarks are addressed.

This CIP was adopted before Curriculum Director Moore was hired, but it was fully implemented by Moore. He has "tweaked" rather than re-done the original plan, he said. This continuity provides a stable framework for improvement efforts and communicates the dedication of leadership to an ideal that has proven workable. The following passages illustrate teacher engagement and satisfaction with the plan and its implementation:

It is a great tool. Because what it does is ensures that every quarter we cover those things we need to cover. For example, for me I need to do at least four extended responses for each class per quarter; I need to do at least four essays per year; and we are required to display student work. Once we got the plan in place, we really focused on improving, not only what we do in front of the kids and with the kids, with our best-practices instruction, trying to get those things lined up and improve our craft, but also in our community relations...

#### Student-Centered Instruction

Teachers and administrators at Felicity Franklin High School speak of instructional practice as an evolving process that connects to teachers' continuous improvement. A view of instruction as student-centered, active, and perhaps even interdisciplinary is a relatively new development at the high school, but it is clearly represented in the thinking of some teachers:

We're going to be interviewing World War II veterans, and I'm going to expand that next year. And then, in the spring, we visit the Felicity Cemetery and we do walks around town, and we look at different things.

I use a lot of peer editing. I just call the kids up there, and nobody knows what it's about and just sit down with them and make them go through the process of "how could this sound better?"

For example, in English, we do a writing portfolio. Every year, when they get their folders back, they go through and look at their writing, and they pick a piece to rewrite. It's so funny to hear the kids say, 'I can't believe I wrote that last year.'

Comments from students, moreover, suggest that in some classes they are experiencing an active, project-oriented approach to instruction.

We do experiments. He doesn't always do them. You know, he lets us come up in front of the class and see, and we do it a lot. Our teacher is very repetitive, which I think can help sometimes.

We have one teacher, who jumps on desks and throws paper at you to get you more into the class. It's real awesome.

There's always some certain classes that really are hands-on.

One student, asked about project-based learning, responded with a statement that reflects Superintendent Weir's earlier comment about the importance of the teacher's mindset in ensuring that "the kids are getting it." The student said,

That's a priority in this school, to have an open class. It's really like, they really have a lot of involvement; they're not just going to teach you.

Researchers found that although the pedagogy may not have changed dramatically, a change in attitude from teaching-centered to learning-centered seems to be underway.

# Discipline

The shift from teaching-centered to learning-centered seems to be reflected in the high school's discipline structures. Felicity Franklin High School uses many strategies to keep order. Educators maintain written policies at all levels of the organization: district, school and classroom. Each student receives a copy of discipline policies, and so do parents. More importantly, the high school also deploys a progressive system of discipline – meting out disciplinary measures by degrees. There is a half-hour after-school detention and a daily lunch detention. Friday school is a third option.

For more persistent problems, the school also operates Temporary Alternative Placement (TAP). This arrangement is a within-school alternative placement. Typically, students are assigned to TAP for one or two days for infractions, such as skipping school or major classroom disruption. Teachers use this opportunity to help TAP students catch up with overdue assignments and to stay on top of continuing class work. Teachers and administrators offered some comments about TAP:

How it usually works out is the kids who end up in there are the kids who don't have good attendance, the kids who are academically falling behind. So we send whatever makeup work they owe, too. I've had some students in TAP for two or three days who have given me 20 assignments. They've been able to make things up.

We send their work to them. And then there's a teacher – the monitor for that program is wonderful – because she makes sure that they do what they need to do. She communicates to us if they need extra worksheets, if they need a certain textbook, if they need whatever, and works with them and follows up.

TAP is staffed by a full-time teacher, whose job is to work with whatever students show up each day. This arrangement – which is a substitute provision for suspension – permits

students to complete assignments that ordinary suspension typically disallows. In addition, as the first passage above suggests, some students actually work better in the TAP classroom. Nevertheless, TAP is conceived as a temporary arrangement. Its function is to help students return to regular classrooms in short order, and according to school administrators, they usually do. TAP, then, is a planned arrangement through which the school takes responsibility for its most challenging students. The full scope of the strategy for TAP is disclosed by Allen in the following words:

We still have five paid-for seats in the alternative center in Williamsburg, which puts kids on the bus for half an hour or 40 minutes every morning, and it's a long-term placement. We're doing away with that. We're going to bring them back in the building.

The researchers found that Felicity Franklin High School seems to be an organization that is both fair and humane. When walking through the school, researchers sensed an overall culture that is highly structured yet supportive. Students and teachers know what is expected of them, and they seem comfortable and capable of meeting these expectations. Moreover, the discipline practices used to handle misbehavior work to reinforce the norms of the school culture, inviting students to become responsible participants, rather than excluding those who transgress.

# **Community and Parent Engagement**

Felicity Franklin High School engages parents and the community in a variety of ways. The school's educators make systematic efforts to contact and involve parents and community members, open the school for parent and community-oriented events, and work to build a revitalized sense of school as integral to and active in the community.

## Systematic Efforts

Among the most organized efforts are those undertaken as part of the school's Continuous Improvement Plan, where teachers are required to contact parents a certain number of times over the course of a quarter via newsletters, interim report cards, "Cardinal Cards," memos and invitations to school events. The district also operates a website for communicating with parents.

This system keeps parents informed of their children's progress and activities, and it also helps teachers recognize that parent and community involvement has implications for curriculum and pedagogy. In addition, the high school maintains a Parent-Teacher Organization, a relatively rare phenomenon among secondary schools. Some teachers spoke about the Continuous Improvement Plan, and how it requires teachers to make connections with the community:

There is a CIP requirement that we are doing things with the public. They're requiring newsletters from the teachers. There's this expectation on the CIP that we'll have some either a speaker or some kind of a program with the community, and that type of thing.

Well, especially with our Continuous Improvement Plan, we have really tried to get the community more on board with what goes on at school, school activities.

We are required to make positive communications home at least once a quarter to some parents.

Although many of those interviewed expressed misgivings about community involvement (i.e., the comparison of parental presence in high schools and elementary schools), representation of parents for academic meetings at the high school has reportedly improved.

The first year that I taught here was also the first year of a new principal, andhe sent something home with all the students. There was going to be a "meet the new principal" night and they were going to have food and presentations and all this kind of thing. Four parents from the high school showed up, and one of them was a member of the school board. Four! This would have been in the fall of 1998. And now, every conference that we have, most of the teachers are booked—if not booked solid, then certainly more than half of their slots are filled. So, we're seeing a lot more involvement.

In addition to using tools suggested by the CIP, teachers use an online system to post student grades and other indicators of progress for inspection by parents and students. Some teachers also reported their use of community representatives to connect curriculum with activities in the community:

I have a lot of speakers in – judges, law enforcement officers from the state and from the county.

We're encouraged to work with the local governments and the local library. And the bank here, our branch bank, comes in and does a lot with the students, so there is real encouragement.

Allen disclosed another strategic approach to fostering openness and engagement with the community:

We have groups involved with support of the after-prom, and we had the best turnout for after-prom ever – 80 kids out of 170. We had parents involved with that, and once we got them out and I wrote some fundraising letters they could take around to businesses on this side of Cincinnati, they saw how I worked. I wasn't going to do it for them. I wasn't going to own it. They were going to do it; and they had a really nice turnout for the kids. They want to meet next week and do "lessons learned" and see what we can do better next year and make it grow.

## Opening the School for Community Purposes

Opening school facilities for students, parents and community members to enjoy and make use of after school hours is an important part of Felicity Franklin High School's story of engagement. The location of the school complex in downtown Felicity makes the high school a central fixture in the community. Opening the schools reflects the goal of district leadership to invite citizens to view the school as a community resource, in addition to recognizing its role as a symbol of the community. The following excerpts suggest the scope of this engagement:

We do have a nice community group that meets in this very room. These are concerned people who have done a good job of identifying some folks we can help, and that's grown into a local Habitat for Humanity group.

We try to throw the doors open to as many community group meetings as possible, to get them actually in the physical building. If you set a basketball out in that gym down there, you can get 900 people in the door real quick.

# School Activity in the Community

Felicity Franklin High School faculty members are working hard to establish linkages between students and adults in the community. Teachers and students alike report feeling the energizing effects of these connections. Much of this kind of engagement seems to be centered around community service and the improvement of Felicity's landscape.

The agriculture and shop teachers spoke about student-community networks and events developed to foster engagement:

We do a lot of community service projects as an organization. I have an advisory board which works really well. I have a group of people in the community who I have faith in, where if I need something, or if they're my backers, I go to them and say, 'Hey, what do you want out of this?' or 'What do you think we could do better? 'or, 'What do you want your kids to learn?'

### **Emergent Themes**

### Smallness Makes Schooling More Personal

Researchers found that one of the reasons Felicity Franklin High School can foster a clear academic focus and demonstrate concern for disadvantaged students may involve the scale of the enterprise. Considerable research suggests that small high schools are especially favorable settings for improved academic achievement of impoverished students. The fact that the high school is small could be a contributing factor to its successful reform. This structural condition may improve high schools where instructional formats remain traditional or blend traditional practices with more innovative ones.

Several references to size at the high school seemed to reflect ambivalence. Said one interviewee, "I don't think we offer as many academic classes as some of the other schools do, but that's because we're a smaller school." Another claimed, "Because this is such a small school, it's harder, I think, to get the community involved." Other interviewees were more positive, however. For example, one teacher said:

I feel like that's where education strayed – we got away form the old-fashioned one-room schoolhouse where] the teachers knew all the kids. We're still a small school, so teachers do know a lot of the kids. To me that's one of the main things, the extra interaction that you have

Students were far less ambivalent about the small school size than teachers. One said:

At a bigger school, it'd be a whole lot harder. You want to be able to get the relationship you do with the teachers and get the help you want to get.

There were many such observations, but the most subtle comment from a high school student, who had previously attended a large high school, was this one:

I like being around here, in this small town. I guess you'd call it being in good company, but it definitely keeps you grounded as a human being.

Evidently, in this student's view the issue of scale extends beyond the school to the rural community. And in fact, many educators who grew up in Felicity Township share this student's appreciation of a rural upbringing.

# From Deep Curriculum Work to Teaching to the Test

The academic focus at the high school was considered previously in terms of pedagogical and curriculum struggle, with high-school level reform in the district taken to be more difficult than middle- or elementary-school reform. Across the district, however, all teachers interviewed, including all high school teachers, knew they were responsible for knowing and teaching to the content standards. At the high school, some teachers spoke of teaching the standards themselves (for example, by having students memorize the standards verbatim). As one teacher reported, "Every teacher has to teach from them. Some teachers quiz their kids on the standards. I myself usually have them posted."

Some observers may read the practice of quizzing students on the standards themselves as extreme – a form of literalism that is out of touch with the intention of standard-makers. Others may read the practice as truth-in-advertising: students need to know precisely the scope of knowledge for which they are being held accountable. Whatever the view, such a divided response from teachers is itself an indication of the struggle for reform that is taking place at the high school.

The interviews clarified that the high school teachers do not regard the standards as determining instructional activities in detail. As one teacher said, "I plan my lessons ... looking at those content standards, and come up with ideas as to what would be appropriate to catch them." This remark suggests a teacher for whom the standards serve as an invitation to teach inventively. Another teacher remarked:

I always include the relevant standard in the lesson plan. And again, it's something where there is a curriculum, a document where we say, here's sort of a plan, but just like on a lesson plan, there's a lot of adjusting going on.

Overall, however, there is some nervousness about the important role the standards play, partly because they represent the eye of the state and of the district leadership. Asked about use of the standards, one teacher replied:

Well, I use them every day. And actually this is one of the rare days that I didn't put up my standards on the board. I usually post these, and I assign them every day to whatever I'm teaching. And normally I post them on the board. You can see I have them all laminated here. I have those magnetic clips, and you can see where they were hanging yesterday. I put those up there so the kids actually know what we're working on every ay. And then I have these all referenced.

"Teaching to the test" is a phrase sometimes used to suggest deleterious effects on learning. Practitioners, however, often embrace the idea as part of their effort to systematize curricular and pedagogical change. Such a view could constitute a lever for reform, given appropriate scaffolding. The Felicity Franklin leadership acts in ways consistent with this possibility. Moore explains:

Why wouldn't you teach to the test? People say that like it's a bad thing, but if you know what the test is like, and you know what the questions are going to be, why

wouldn't you want to teach to that test? If you're a classroom teacher, you don't teach for two weeks and then test something else that you didn't teach! What I tell them is, you are mimicking, and you're using released items...why do you think [Ohio Department of Education] ODE makes all that stuff available to you if they don't expect you to use it to improve what's going on for kids who take the test? So, I think that's a lot of what we do.

Moore believes having standards in place and widely understood is a positive step. That is, given such common understanding, and a logically aligned system of content, pedagogy, and standards, improvement becomes not just more likely, but probable. Allen seems to have this perspective in mind, as the following passage suggests:

Finally, we've got the standards in place. That simplifies things to a great degree. The state started out down this road saying, 'You can teach them anything you want; they just have to pass this test..' Before the standards were developed, we tried to work really hard to identify what the outcomes were, and when they should know what they should know. When the state standards came out, we were finally told what they should know and when they should know it, and that makes things much more sensible.

From the perspective of Felicity Franklin administrators, then, teaching to the test becomes a reasonable strategy if the test reflects the standards and the curriculum addresses the standards. The researchers believe this argument seems logical on the surface, but it sidesteps the issues of deep curriculum development that some teachers are beginning to confront as they consider inventive methods such as inquiry-based instruction, community-based learning, and interdisciplinary projects.