

Bucyrus High School

Superintendent Paul Johnson

Principal James Oyster

Case Study Report Highlights: Bucyrus High School

PROVIDING LEADERSHIP THAT RESULTS IN CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

- **Likeable, Strong and Creative Leadership** - Students, teachers and parents especially seemed to like the principal. He was similarly enthusiastic about them. The principal is creative in the way he hires new teachers, and as part of expanding schoolwide inclusion, he has begun recruiting teachers who have a background in special education as well as strong content expertise in either math or reading.
- **Collaborative Planning Process** - The administrative team involves teachers in the planning process. Decisions are made quickly, but the principal remains open to ongoing modification as staff learns what works.
- **Daily Positive Message** - The principal set a positive tone for students each day by saying the "Pledge of the Allegiance" and "It is a great day to be alive!" as part of morning announcements.

CREATING A CULTURE WHERE EACH INDIVIDUAL FEELS VALUED

- **Block Scheduling** - Classes of 83 minutes were introduced several years ago. A weeklong staff retreat and planning for block scheduling resulted in teachers making "meeting the needs of individual students" an institutional priority. Block scheduling facilitates movement between "essential" and "college prep" programs.
- **Intervention Classes** - The school offers half-hour intervention classes for students during lunchtime. From September through March, students who have not yet passed the proficiency test are required to participate in these classes and they are open to any students who want additional assistance. Teachers also are available before and after school to work one-on-one with students. In addition, there are after-school intervention classes for athletes, those with a high number of absences, or who need to improve their performance.

DESIGNING INSTRUCTION TO ENSURE EVERY STUDENT'S SUCCESS

- **Two Major Programs** - The "essential" and "college prep" programs allow teachers to more readily meet individual student needs. Relatively easy movement between programs is a critical and desirable feature, resulting in students not feeling stuck in a program if they are ready for a greater challenge or are overwhelmed. The major difference between the two programs appeared to be the "pace" rather than the content, another feature facilitating movement between the programs.
- **Special Education Inclusion** - Most special education students are placed in mainstreamed classes and then the special education teacher or aide assists the classroom teacher. In the English inclusion class, the two teachers work well together and often team-teach. The teacher of Multiple Handicapped (MH) students similarly is teaming with a science teacher and succeeded in finding funding for collaborative work that includes MH students in regular science labs for the first time and in joint field trips. The school also has begun maintaining a three-ring binder in the office that includes each student's Individual Education Plan (IEP); only teachers and administrators have access to this document and they can make ongoing notations regarding how much assistance these students need.
- **Opportunities for College-bound Students** - The school offers college courses to more advanced students through Marion Technical College. Students are encouraged to take a summer ACT Prep class offered to students free of charge through the Crawford College Connection. The school offers Advanced Placement (AP) classes in math and science; students are encouraged to take AP exams. Teachers provide tutoring for ACT and AP exams.

PROVIDING RIGOROUS INSTRUCTION ALIGNED TO STANDARDS

- **Increased Focus on Standards and Testing** - Teachers are familiar with the district standards. The principal requires teachers to submit lesson plans and tests. He reviews them to ensure they are covering the standards and meeting the corresponding benchmarks. Teachers are more systematically in line with the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT). They use the proficiency test data to identify students' weaknesses. Teachers are testing more frequently and there is either preparation for a test, administration of a test, or review of a test in almost every class daily. The district provides test data analyses.
- **Use of Incentives** - The school has an elaborate system of student rewards tied to passing the proficiency test that will be extended to the OGT.

ENGAGING PARENTS AND COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS

- **Community Meetings** - The principal has begun having open meetings at local restaurants to encourage greater community input and involvement, especially as parent involvement has been one of the school's weakest aspects.
- **Parent Call Log** - Teachers keep a record of calls made to parents.
- **"Progress Book" Software** - The software program is used for posting grades online and has positively affected parent involvement.

INTRODUCTION

Bucyrus is a small town located in Crawford County in north central Ohio, between Columbus and Cleveland. The population of approximately 13,000 has been relatively stable in recent years. The town is 15 miles from the closest major highway and is primarily rural. More than a third of employment is in manufacturing. The 1999 median family income was \$40,120, which is 20 percent below that for the state overall (\$50,037 in 1999). The high school serves a high percentage (42 percent) of students who are classified as low income. Bucyrus High School (BHS) is located within a mile of downtown Bucyrus; the surrounding neighborhood consists of modest wood frame and brick homes.

Bucyrus School District Profile		
	2003-2004	2004-2005
District Rating	Effective (11 out of 18 indicators met)	Effective (16 out of 23 indicators met)
District Enrollment	1,639	1,585
Schools	Elementary Schools: 4 Middle Schools: 1 High Schools: 1	Elementary Schools: 4 Middle Schools: 1 High Schools: 1

Bucyrus High School Profile		
	2003-2004	2004-2005
School Rating	Effective (6 out of 7 indicators met)	Effective (6 out of 7 indicators met)
Enrollment	524	498
Grade Levels	9-12	9-12
Average Expenditure per Pupil	\$7,173	NA
Low-Income percentage	42.4%	42.1%
Percent racial/ethnic minority	2.2%	2.5%
Students with Disabilities	18.5%	15.9%
Student Attendance Rate	93.1%	94.6%

The high school is a contemporary red brick two-story building that serves 500 students. The most noticeable feature upon arrival at the school is the parking lot that is filled to capacity with an adjacent unpaved area for overflow cars. The school no longer buses students due to budget cuts, so most students drive to school. Upon entering the school, one is struck by a student poster that exclaims, "We Love You Mr. Oyster!" This sentiment symbolized the good feeling that the students had about the principal as well as the rest of staff.



Bucyrus High School Teacher Profile		
	2003-04	2004-05
Teachers	33	33
Average Teacher Salary	\$40,469	\$42,266
Percent of Courses Taught by Certified Licensed Teachers	100%	100%
Teacher Attendance Rate	96.9%	95.7%
Average Years of Experience	13	15

Building relationships with students and serving all students based on their individual needs were key aspects practiced at the high school. Lunchtime intervention, after-school study halls and tutoring were offered to students, many of whom were required to participate in these activities based on their grades or proficiency test performance. For example, one student pointed out that anyone who plays sports has to maintain a 1.5 Grade Point Average (GPA). When an athlete drops below a 2.0 GPA, he or she must attend an after-school study hall. The school also uses incentives to reward individual student achievement. Also, the school has made inclusion of special education students an important part of their efforts. Over the past few years, teachers have modified their curriculum and assessments to bring them in greater alignment with state standards and testing requirements.

SCHOOLS OF PROMISE AND THE CASE STUDY RESEARCH PROCESS

BHS was selected for recognition by *Schools of Promise* based on students' high academic achievement in reading in 2003-2004. Student performance on the ninth-grade proficiency reading test increased from 88.7 percent in 2001-2002 to 98.3 percent in 2003-2004, a nearly 10-percentage point improvement. A similar gain of 9 percentage points was achieved in mathematics, which increased from 80.9 percent in 2001-2002 to 90.0 percent in 2002-2003. Although the school overall demonstrated strong math skills overall, this was not true of all subgroups of students, resulting in BHS not meeting the *Schools of Promise* criteria in math.

BHS is one of four high schools randomly selected by Institutional Research Consultants (IRC) from the 34 high schools identified among the 2003-2004 *Schools of Promise*. The focus in this case study is the school's Reading/Language Arts program, but the research team also observed math classes and interviewed math teachers. As part of the two-day case study visit, researchers observed all of the Language Arts teachers and math faculty. They also interviewed these teachers as well as the principal, two special education teachers, the teacher of MH students, a science teacher and a counselor.

In addition, the team conducted two single-sex focus groups with students, six males and six females. Finally, one of the researchers completed telephone interviews with three parents. A total of 29 people participated in interviews. The three Language Arts teachers and five math teachers who taught during the site visit were observed. Fourteen teachers returned completed surveys (teachers regardless of discipline area could participate in the survey). The table on the following page outlines all research activities.

This report uses the "Five Lessons Learned" identified in earlier *Schools of Promise* case study research to organize the findings.¹ The lessons emphasize the importance of instituting strong leadership, establishing a school culture that values individual students, designing instruction to ensure student success, providing rigorous instruction aligned with the standards, and engaging parents and the community to support student success. BHS staff members' activities and approach included elements identified by earlier research efforts. This case study highlights their successes and identifies aspects that may be applicable and helpful to other schools.

¹The *Five Lessons Learned* emerged from the case study research conducted by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) in 2001-2002 (see http://www.ode.state.oh.us/achievement_gaps/Schools_of_Promise/5lessons.asp) There is also evidence of the use of practices that corresponds to the Framework of Practice that ties the *Five Lessons* to research on effective schools (see http://www.ode.state.oh.us/achievement_gaps/schools_of_promise/FOP.asp).

Bucyrus High School: Case Study Research Coverage*

	TOTAL		Interviewed		Observed		Returned Survey	
	N		N	%	N	%	N	%
Teachers								
Language Arts Teachers	3		3	100.0	3	100.0	3	100.0
Math Teachers	5		5	100.0	5	100.0	5	100.0
Other Interviews and Surveys								
Principal							1	
Parents							3	
Students (Two Focus Groups)							12	
Other Interviews								
Science Teacher							1	
Special Education							2	
Multiple Handicapped Teacher							1	
Counselor							1	
TOTAL INTERVIEWS							29	
TOTAL TEACHERS OBSERVED							8	
TOTAL TEACHER SURVEYS							14	

*Total count is of teachers who were present during the two-day visit. One Language Arts teacher was absent both days.

PROVIDING LEADERSHIP THAT RESULTS IN CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Jim Oyster is in his second year as the principal at BHS. Despite his relatively brief tenure, it is clear that he has made a good impression on staff, students and parents. His experiences as a Vietnam veteran and former director of a nearby career center, as well as his educational background in special education, are important influences in how he interacts with staff and students. He joked about being somewhat autocratic, explaining that, "When I interviewed for the job, they said they wanted someone who is going to make decisions." Since coming on board, he has implemented numerous changes designed to improve the educational experience for students. He has included other staff throughout the decision-making process. In addition, he is willing to continually review and adjust, as needed, any implemented changes. He described the school's decision-making process as follows:

The Assistant Principal, the counselors, the Athletic Director and I are the administrative team. Even though the counselors are not officially part of administration, we involve them a lot. I usually run things by that group of people, then I will bring in "movers and shakers" of my staff. These are people that I know care and are in positions to be positive or negative with the rest of the staff. I bring those people in and ask what they think, and I am really, really willing to listen, but you may have today and tomorrow to think about it, and then the decision will be made. I don't put things off. I believe in hitting the ground running and tweaking as you go. We don't spend six months thinking about something and then try it.

He said that although it would be ideal if he and the Assistant Principal could meet weekly, their schedules and responsibilities tend to get in the way, but if something needs immediate attention, he calls a meeting. The management approach is active, if not overly proactive, and the principal-led team appears to act as quickly as possible when a situation requiring action arises. Since coming on board, Oyster has implemented the following strategies:

- Established a collaborative working relationship with staff
- Directed a morning message to students, setting a positive tone for the day
- Included special education students and teachers into the regular classes
- Offered intervention classes during the lunch period
- Required teachers to submit lesson plans and assessments to him for review
- Encouraged staff professionalism
- Held community meetings at local fast-food restaurants

A brief description of each of these activities follows.

Collaborative Working Relationship with Staff

The teaching staff spoke warmly of Oyster. They appreciate his management style, describing it as fair and productive. They view the principal as being supportive and open to their input. Teachers and students also said that they like the school's relaxed, somewhat laid-back, environment, but one where there is a consistent message of high expectations. This may seem contradictory, but one of the students added clarity when he explained:

I think that if they nag at you when you are trying to do your best, it gets frustrating. If you start out the first semester doing really well, and then you are floundering the second semester, they will talk to you and say that maybe you should try harder. They try to give you a little boost up. They encourage you.

The students also readily indicated that they like the principal as well as the teachers. Both student focus groups described the staff as one of the best things about the school. Students had the following to say:

It's a great school!

I wouldn't want to go anywhere else. Everybody's nice to you.

It's a real friendly environment.

One important characteristic of the staff is their stability. The average years of teaching experience for all teachers at the school is 15 years. Of those responding to the case study survey, 79 percent have taught at least 11 years and 64 percent have been at BHS at least six years. Students also emphasized their appreciation of the consistency and low staff turnover at the school.

Oyster described the apprehension that he had about the staff's maturity, fearing that it might be an obstacle to implementing any changes, but he was pleased to find that the teachers and other staff were able to work well with him and each other. They particularly were open to implementing modifications that could positively affect student performance.

Teachers confirmed that the working environment and communication at the school are good. They noted that there is a spirit of cooperation between staff and administration. Department meetings, which are held several times a year, provide teachers an opportunity to share and discuss the curriculum and other essential issues. Observations and interviews revealed that

teachers use a wide range of teaching styles and instructional strategies. They stated that to some extent they use methods with which they personally feel most comfortable, but that staff members have a high level of agreement about the subject matter and the importance given to specific learning objectives.

There also seemed to be a willingness to learn from each other. Oyster verified this: "I think I am learning every day how to deal with people with whom I don't necessarily agree. I am learning how to let go a bit with respect to the curriculum and letting them make decisions. I don't force it on them, but I am getting more input. I am learning constantly." Similar to the staff's approach with students, the principal's leadership style is to encourage and model without putting a great deal of pressure on people to do what he wants.

Positive Morning Message

On most mornings, Principal Oyster starts the school day by saying the "Pledge of the Allegiance" and "It is a great day to be alive!" He explained that he began saying the latter because, "You can't say that to a person, especially a kid, without them smiling, so that adds to what we are trying to do here in terms of adding to morale. It sets a tone for the day of 'positiveness,' and I think some have come to expect it." The principal and staff strongly emphasized that they want to establish an environment where the students feel comfortable and valued, and setting a "positive tone" for the day was part of this.

Special Education Inclusion

Prior to Oyster's arrival at the school, all special education students were in self-contained classes. Based on his background in special education, he introduced a major change in how the school addressed the needs of the students. Beginning with the 2004-2005 school year, BHS began to include the majority of the special education students in regular education classes for at least part of their day. Additional information on how this process was implemented and is working is included in the *Designing Instruction to Ensure Every Student's Success* section.

The school has also recently begun to encourage teachers to document their experiences with special education students on an ongoing basis so that more informed decisions can be made about students' placement in either a self-contained special education-only room, an inclusion room (which has a special education teacher or aide), or a regular classroom. The office maintains a three-ring binder that includes each student's Individual Education Plan (IEP). Only teachers and administrators have access to this document and they can make ongoing notations regarding how much assistance these students need.

Intervention Classes

Another change made early on by the principal was to modify the lunch schedule so that different grade levels would go to lunch at different times. He elaborated on the initial problem: "All 550 kids went to lunch at the same hour. We had kids eating everywhere! When you put kids into a free area like this for an hour, it can really cause problems. They would finish their meal in 20 minutes but continue to sit, so others could not get in to eat. Now junior and seniors go to lunch first, and then in a half hour, we switch." The new lunch schedule also meant that fewer teachers were needed to supervise the lunch period. Teachers instead were assigned to do intervention labs in English, math, writing, science and citizenship to help prepare students for success on the OGT. These sessions began in the fall and continued up to the administration of the OGT in March. Some students were required to participate based on their prior test performance, but all students who needed assistance were encouraged to take advantage of this tutoring opportunity. The school's intervention activities are also mentioned in the section entitled, *Designing Instruction to Ensure Every Student's Success*.

Lesson Plans and Review of Assessments

Oyster explained that when he first came to BHS, he found that teachers did not prepare daily lesson plans. To ensure that lessons and assessments are aligned with state standards, he required teachers to write daily plans. In addition, beginning in the second year, he asked staff to submit their actual classroom assessments every Friday. The principal reviews both the format and content of the tests. He explained: "This way, I can help evaluate what kind of assessments we are doing. Our focus has got to remain on the OGT. That is how we are evaluated and how students get high school diplomas." One Language Arts teacher explained that the principal carefully reviews all their tests and, "He will ask questions or make comments. He is encouraging teachers to include OGT prep with some thought questions and everybody is having the students write."

Staff Professionalism

Although the principal has no plans to implement a staff dress code, he does regularly emphasize that students respond more respectfully to staff who are professionally dressed. The research team noticed that the majority of the male staff wore dress shirts and ties. Furthermore, the principal requires that staff wear caps and gowns to the graduation ceremony, which he thinks "adds to their sense of professionalism."

Community Meetings

As part of Oyster's efforts to establish more community/parent awareness and input into the high school, he began setting up informal meetings at local fast food establishments. He is already beginning to see some results from this new activity. More details are in the *Engaging Parents and Community to Support Student Success* section.

All of the changes described above are consistent with the principal and staff's efforts to establish a school environment in which all students are important and get assistance as needed. The good working relationship of the principal and staff also help them direct their focus on students. The leadership is strong but not overbearing. Moreover, the principal and staff actually seem to like each other.

CREATING A CULTURE WHERE EACH INDIVIDUAL FEELS VALUED

Another prominent aspect of BHS is that the school staff genuinely seemed to care about the students. We asked if this had always been part of the teacher culture at Bucyrus. The principal's response was, "I know I came in with that attitude, and looking around, I think everyone on staff feels that way. The kids are why we are here." The teachers expressed their agreement with this and that it was one of the things that they liked best about the school. A teacher noted, "I like the people who I work with – they are dedicated and very interested in the kids."

Hiring and Nurturing Staff Committed to Students

The principal emphasized that "liking kids" is one of the main reasons that anyone should be working in education. It appears that the high school has successfully retained and continues to recruit teachers who have a deep commitment to young people, resulting in a particularly nurturing school environment. For instance, one teacher explained that she lived in the community and has known many of the students since they were very young. Teachers repeatedly stressed how they like and enjoy working with students. They also described the students as being somewhat humble and lacking pretensions, which tended to encourage the teachers to want to provide any kind of help that they could. Staff members also indicated that they liked the economic diversity of the community.

Although to some extent these characteristics are unique to small town life, the principal pointed out that teachers' willingness to build relationships with students is one of the most important criteria in selecting staff and that this attribute regularly was nurtured. New hires tended to have similar attitudes about the students, and those that did not were unlikely to be retained. The principal explained that he regularly worked with teachers who needed assistance in strengthening their connection with students. He has brought in a specialist in "family-friendly schools" who did a professional development session with teachers on how to build relationships with students. According to the principal, "...without that, you are not going to get the job done." Teachers emphasized their efforts to build rapport and establish respectful relationships with students. Several mentioned making themselves available and being nonjudgmental when students chose to share problems that went beyond academics. One teacher described his efforts to find a balance:

I just have to find the balance of what works, be relaxed about some things in order to be able to push them in others. I used to be real demanding but I realized that being very rigid just didn't work...I try to be as positive as I can towards them, show interest whenever I can...such as with after-school activities.

The principal pointed out that his expectations for new hires have expanded as part of introducing schoolwide inclusion. He acknowledged that he needs to hire additional special education teachers, but for them to effectively partner with existing staff, he has come to realize they also need to have a strong content background in at least one of the core discipline areas. Thus, he now recruits staff who have a special education background as well as expertise in math or reading content. Nonetheless, the overriding selection criterion continues to be their ability to relate to the students. Below is an outline of school strategies that appear to have further contributed to the school's culture and focus on individual students.

Block scheduling

The school moved to block scheduling, in which class periods are 83 minutes long, a few years ago. Staff said that the benefits of the block include having more time within a class to cover the subject area thoroughly, a more relaxed pace, and more opportunities to truly get to know the students. Teachers believe that the block scheduling has facilitated their ability to nurture relationships with students. Teachers and staff spent a lot of time together while planning for the block-schedule implementation, including a one-week retreat during which they looked very closely and critically at their teaching and the curriculum. They noted that this process ultimately resulted in becoming more deliberate in their efforts to connect with students. Teachers elaborated on the block scheduling implementation and its advantages:

When we first switched to the block, we had a weeklong professional development opportunity that was related directly to block scheduling, changes in teaching style, and changes in teaching attitudes. That was a really productive week. We got a lot done. I have to say that I was one that was very active in the change to block scheduling. When I first got to this school, we were on 41-minute periods. For a mathematics teacher, you can hardly do anything but grade homework and take attendance. You have maybe 20 minutes to introduce a new topic. It became very frustrating.

I love it. I didn't expect to love it, because I was used to the traditional eight- or nine-period day, but we have so much time to go in-depth with the subjects and the kids have time to practice.

Those of us who are veteran teachers were very nervous about going to the block and maintaining student interest for such a long period of time. We had a marvelous conference down in Columbus where people talked about managing blocks. I think that English is easy to do on the block, because we do some grammar and some literature or discussion about the literature and we have some application whether it's writing or it's another activity. I can also vary mine with vocabulary, so mine is already broken up into little chunks. Now when we have a delay, and we have a 50-minute period, we look at each other and ask how we ever got anything done. It's much more relaxed, three periods and a conference.

Specific Efforts to Address Needs of All Students

The school's inclusion of special education students is having a positive impact on these students' overall participation in school life and is resulting in improved academic performance. Staff noted that special education students' assessment results have improved during this period. Although only 45.8 percent of students with disabilities passed the 2004-2005 OGT reading test and 20.8 percent were proficient on the math test, the percent passing represents a nearly 20 percent gain in reading and 12 percent increase in math compared to the 2003-2004 results. BHS also offers several Advanced Placement (AP) classes and college-level courses to challenge high performing students. These types of activities facilitate student engagement.

After-school Activities

Another opportunity for students to interact with teachers and other students is through participation in after-school clubs, sports, band and theatrical productions. During focus groups, students emphasized that almost every student participates in some kind of after-school activity. The principal verified that the school has many organized activities and that 75 percent to 80 percent of all students are involved in at least one at some point during the school year. When asked if this was promoted, he explained:

I think the community encourages it. Being on a team, in band, or in the musical that we put on every year, that is viewed as "really cool." Those things are appreciated and respected by the community. We have our own community theatre group in Bucyrus, so those things are important. It is not just parents; all sorts of people from the community attend our events.

Oyster had previously been the principal at the nearby career center, and one of the benefits that he noted about being at the high school is the opportunity to connect with students at extracurricular events. He urges staff members to attend at least one after-school event so that the teacher can say to students that they saw them in an activity and express interest in something that is obviously important for students. He has a chart posted in his office entitled, "150 Ways to Show Kids You Care." The first three ways listed are: 1) Love them, no matter what; 2) Show up at their concerts, games, events; and 3) Surprise them. After-school activities are a way for students to pursue their individual interests, feel appreciation from the community, and further connect with the school and its staff.

Having committed staff, block scheduling, specific opportunities tailored to the needs of both low (inclusion and intervention) and high performing (AP courses and college-level classes) students, and ample after-school activities contribute to the students' sense that they are valued. These aspects are related to the school's ability to provide effective instruction, specifically as they tend to enhance student engagement and receptiveness to learning.

DESIGNING INSTRUCTION TO ENSURE EVERY STUDENT'S SUCCESS

This section describes the school's overall instructional program and strategies being implemented to address the needs of special education students and high performing students.

Two Major Program Areas

The high school has two major program areas, "Essential" and "College Prep" (CP). According to school staff, most of the same type of material is covered in both Essential and CP classes. They stressed that the major difference is the pacing. One Language Arts teacher further clarified:

The goal in College Prep is not OGT prep, we expect those kids to score in the upper range without any instruction. Our Essential track is dealing with students who need more basic instruction with their writing and composition, their ability to summarize and synthesize and apply. There are many, many students who are not really readers at all, about 75 percent of my students. The ones who are readers are generally in Essential because either they are lazy or I should say not motivated. Some are working full-time jobs and don't have the time for the College Prep track, which requires much more outside work. All of my classes are Essential track. That's by choice, a few years ago when our head English teacher retired I took over. I really like these kids... the more basic level. I guess because I feel that I have more of an impact.

Her counterpart who taught only CP classes explained how her expectations were different, "My focus is always on making assignments for which my students are responsible, asking them comprehension, inferential and analysis type questions."

Staff emphasized that there is movement between the two program areas, and the principal verified that he did not "think anyone should be locked into a track." He further explained that previously students who only received a C in "Integrated Math I" (the Essential program), would not be allowed to take Algebra, but his perspective is, "why not let them try." The school will not deny students the opportunity to enroll in CP courses; if students take the course and fail, they can either retake the course or move back into the Essential program.

One teacher explained that block scheduling helped to facilitate such movement:

What is beautiful about the block is if the student is not successful in CP English, we recommend that they go to Career English and with the block, they can make that up very easily. They don't fall behind for graduation as they did under the old program when English was an entire year.

The block schedule facilitates the movement because the timeframe for courses is a half-year rather than a full year. Students are spending more class time per day in each class, so a new set of courses become available at mid-term. Although students may lose a semester, they do not lose a full year if they have to change tracks. BHS seemed to have substantial flexibility with respect to allowing students to move between the two program tracks. Although it is unlikely that there is a great deal of movement back and forth, staff suggested that they were willing to work with students on an individual basis to place them in the program that best met their needs. This also meant that students could be in different programs for math and language arts.

One focus group student confirmed that such movement was possible, noting that he had transferred to Essential from CP, as he played sports and had difficulty with the fast pace of CP.

Although teachers said that they encourage all students planning to attend college to take the CP classes, it is ultimately the decision of students in conjunction with their parents. Students also view the school as having high expectations for them, but they appreciate the lack of pressure to take CP courses. Student comments included:

[Teachers expect us to] Get good grades and stay involved in activities.

Do the best you can do.

I think they want us to work hard now so that we won't have to work so hard later on in life.

I think it is good that you can take college courses here that will count toward college.

Have to have A or B grades in eighth grade to come into CP. Then if you get placed in Essential and your grades are good, the teachers will ask you if you want to move into CP. She will ask a couple of times, and if you still don't want to, they won't make you. There's no pressure.

They expect you to try your hardest, but they don't expect everybody to have a 4.0 GPA. They let you go at your own pace.

The teachers always help you if you ask for help. If you are struggling, they will ask you if you want help. Some teachers will go out of their way to help you. I was surprised by this. I didn't expect that they would want to help you or be so open, but they were.

Special Education Inclusion

Beginning with the 2004-2005 school year, most special education students were placed in "Essential" classes with the other students. In addition, some special education students take CP classes. For example, one of the math teachers explained that she had a few students in her Algebra classes who had IEPs, but since math was not a major problem for them, they were able to do the work required in the higher-level math classes. Although special accommodations are provided for some students as outlined by their IEPs, teachers emphasized that efforts are made not to treat them differently from other students. In the classes where a large number of special education students have been placed, a special education teacher or aide teams with the regular teacher.

Initially, the school scheduled four regular classes covering four different subject areas to be the inclusion classes. A special education teacher was assigned to each of these and would be available to assist the regular teacher. The implementation of this change has been mixed. Inclusion has especially been successful in Reading/Language Arts. One math teacher and the special education teacher were also observed to work well. In addition, the teacher with Multiple Handicapped (MH) students began partnering with a science teacher this year, which resulted in her students having their first experience in a science laboratory and on field trips; grant funding to cover the cost of these activities was pursued by the MH teacher. The critical factor in the success of these classes is that the teachers involved have been able to work effectively as a teaching team. The success of inclusion in some other areas has been more mixed, mainly because the staff involved was not completely comfortable working as a team, and the school lost two of its special education teachers. The principal has plans to continue to use the

Reading/Languages Arts team as a model and to hire additional staff with special education backgrounds. Teachers noted how inclusion had impacted students' lives:

It came from the principal, as I recall, but it's just a wonderful thing. Prior to inclusion, the special ed kids would all eat together, they didn't mix in with the regular kids, you would walk in the commons at lunchtime, and you could see them sitting at separate tables. They would just segregate themselves. Now, you see kids sitting at every place and talking to everyone in the commons. Their behavior is so much better. It's amazing.

A lot of times with special ed kids, the behavior is poor. They get into the regular classroom and they feel like they are isolated. They see other positive social performing kids, and they don't want to act out as much. It also puts the kids in a more normal educational setting. They are getting the regular instead of the special instruction. A lot of times those kids are forced to be held back. We've seen special ed results with our kids passing the proficiency test, more so than in previous years.

We share responsibilities. Usually I do a lot of the instruction. He [special education teacher] does some. He usually walks around and puts his hand on their shoulder to make sure they're paying attention. That's some of their problem – attention deficit. He makes sure they keep on task. We're going to get into geometry here pretty soon. He's pretty good at that and he'll probably take over, and then I'll be the guy that walks around.

The teachers worked together and did not say anything about the inclusion to students. One teacher explained: "We just presented ourselves as two teachers in the classroom who didn't differentiate between ourselves. I didn't say that I was a special ed teacher. I work with the regular kids as well as the special ed kids, and they all ask me for help."

The principal noted that they have had other educators visit to observe the Reading/Language Arts inclusion classes and that the middle school is now applying a similar approach. He pointed out, however, that, "Instead of doing it by subject, they have a special ed teacher who works with all teachers within a grade." Where the inclusion approach did not work well, specifically in classes where the regular teacher did not feel comfortable having an additional person in the class, they will no longer be doing the inclusion. This is an example of when something did not work, the principal adjusted accordingly. He is, nonetheless, committed to continuing inclusion and has plans to bring in additional special education teachers in the upcoming school year.

Intervention Classes

Students who have not passed the proficiency test or who have been identified as needing to improve their performance are required to participate in intervention classes. A 30-minute intervention class is offered during lunch. After-school classes are available and teachers also do one-on-one tutoring. The staff realized that a more targeted effort was needed to increase the scores of struggling students. All agreed that the intervention program has helped students and that each year they move that process forward.

Opportunities for College-bound Students

The school offers college courses to their more advanced students through Marion Technical College. The principal noted that one college-bound student had already completed 11 college credits, nearly a full semester, through this program. A math teacher also indicated that she teaches ACT Prep in the summer and consequently has modified her curriculum to ensure that

everything emphasized in those classes is now included in her high school classes. She said that she has been pleased to have quite a few students scoring 30 or above on the ACT. She encourages students to participate in her ACT course; the Crawford College Connection, a non-profit organization established in 2000 designed to help students in the county attend college, pays for the course and textbooks. More than 50 students at a time have taken part in these one-week sessions.

The school also encourages all students to take four years of math and more than half of the student body does so. One math teacher added: "For the last 10 years, every one of the kids who has gone through the Calculus program has taken the AP exam and received some type of credit. It's been very successful. Last year I had two individuals receive a five on the AP exam which is the highest grade you can get." Students agreed that they received a strong preparation for college. Their only complaint was that they would like the opportunity to have more high level science offerings such as AP Biology.

Efforts to Make Instruction Engaging

Teachers indicated that they are continually adapting and making efforts to improve instruction. For example, one explained:

Every year I make up new lesson plans. I make up new tests based on the students I have. I try to base my teaching on the group that I have. I want them to feel that it's not just a cookie cutter class. I want them to feel when they don't understand it that we may spend three days on it.

They also use a variety of approaches in their efforts to engage students. Said one:

The instruction method I use is class discussion. In the old days we used to call it lecture. I don't think I lecture. I always tell the kids that if I talk at you we're not getting anywhere. If I put something on the board, we talk. I ask them what they know about it already. I tell them something maybe new. We talk a little more about it. This is what I like about the block. We have time to practice. I can give them a worksheet and they can work. If it's a good group and they are productive, they can work with a partner, and then we have more class discussion. I can tie things together that I could never tie together before. You know, this is related to that and now that you can do that, let's move it a step further.

Students confirmed teachers' efforts to "Keep fun in education" as they called it. They agreed that the math classes in particular used a variety of things—blocks, dry erase boards, manipulatives, and the class set of graphing calculators. The block schedule also was viewed as facilitating the use of the graphing calculators.

Poor Attendance and Failing Students

Teachers viewed poor attendance as the major reason for students failing classes. Students who do not fulfill course requirements receive a failing grade and must repeat the class before they can graduate. Teachers emphasized that they did what they could through intervention and tutoring to help students succeed, but if the students did not attend, there was not a great deal that they could do. One special education teacher added that, "As long as the student is trying their best, we don't give them a failing grade. They may receive a D, but if they make poor choices and they do not choose to do the work, then they might fail. Most of the kids who have failed class, have failed to attend. They miss too many days and don't follow the attendance policy."

Teachers also indicated that they failed students in CP classes. Those who were planning to attend college must repeat any failed CP classes, but for students not planning to pursue college, they are encouraged to move into the Essential program. At the same time, several teachers noted that they give students numerous chances to get extra points or opportunities to do “rework” One math teacher explained, “It works really well for kids to understand that it’s not just a one-time deal. That learning is a continuous process. One of the best things you can learn is that you can learn from failure.”

Planning for the Future

Planning for the future is something that the principal urges students to be continually thinking about during their stay. Oyster said, “We’ve placed a great emphasis on, ‘Where are you going to be 10 years from now?’” He elaborated:

The Assistant Principal and I met with every freshman and sophomore the first quarter. We ask this question and keep asking it. I would see these kids in the cafeteria and hallway and ask them, “How are you planning to get to this point? Are you passing your English class?”

A language arts teacher similarly emphasized the importance of getting students to look beyond high school graduation: “My first goal is always to prepare them to compete in college because I have only CP classes. Secondly, of course, I want to see them all successful. Idealistically, my wish is that they all benefit from instruction, find jobs and lead happy lives.” Students noted that although the school does an exceptional job preparing them academically, they thought that it could do more to help them prepare for the “social” aspects of adult life. The staff wants students to be successful and forward thinking, and BHS does the types of things that high schools typically do, but to ensure that students understand “life planning,” the school may need to incorporate more specific planning activities into the counseling process.

The school has put into place numerous mechanisms to help facilitate the success of all students. Nonetheless, staff admitted that they still struggle with getting all students to value daily attendance. They have implemented a policy in which students who miss more than seven days automatically fail, but they can stay after school on Thursdays and make up to three days of missed time. These efforts may be paying off, as the attendance rate increased by 1 percent and the graduation rate grew 8 percent between 2003-2004 and 2004-2005.

PROVIDING RIGOROUS INSTRUCTION ALIGNED TO STANDARDS

Teachers were very familiar with district standards. They noted that the principal’s requirement that they submit lesson plans and tests has made them take additional care to ensure that they are covering the standards and meeting the corresponding benchmarks. One math teacher explained his approach:

I measure student achievement through tests, homework and participation. I use a rubric also, usually for test assessment. I pattern my tests after the OGT now. I have multiple choice, a little bit of fill-in-the-blank, short answer and extended response. I use the rubric for short answer/extended response. They explain how they got the answer or they show how they got it.

The increased focus on testing has resulted in a system in which students in almost every class period are preparing for a test, taking a test or reviewing a test. A lot of attention is given to going over the test that students have just taken.

The principal further emphasized the changes that have been made in English classes:

I have spent a lot of time with those teachers, and the curriculum is outstanding in terms of covering what we need to cover with kids at that level – the books that we read, the papers that we write, the length of papers that we write, the words that we expect students to learn. As far as the curriculum, and what we have been able to do with the proficiency test and OGT, we have been very successful, and that tells me that our curriculum is good. I don't see any need for change there.

Everything that staff does now is related to helping students do well on the OGT, and ultimately in their lives, but this is communicated in a remarkably gentle way so that students do not feel pressured. The principal described how they refined their focus on preparing students for success on the state proficiency tests:

With respect to academic changes, we realized the importance of the proficiency tests, the OGT, for our kids. We got some information on the previous class on those that did not pass the proficiency. We started meeting with kids the first nine weeks, as soon as we switched the cafeteria around. For those kids who had not passed the proficiency, we looked at their best score, we started them in intervention working on the parts in which they definitely needed help but were reasonably close to passing (e.g., if they were only a few points away, we would go to the next thing where they were further away). We picked our best, most experienced teachers to work intervention. We put our other teachers working the cafeteria. We started that intervention right away. We felt it helped us.

Teachers similarly emphasized that they were paying more attention to the OGT. They also noted that they have come to use the district standards and benchmarks as a guide in all that they do. To facilitate their focusing in on the part of the OGT with which the students are most likely to have difficulty, a district staff member provides a detailed analysis of the high school students' performance on the proficiency test results and presents this information to the teachers. Some teachers have used this information and redirected their efforts to focus in on the areas, such as figures of speech, in which their students were having the most difficulty based on the prior *Reading Test* results. In math, teachers have had students practice taking old versions of proficiency tests. They have also focused a great deal on preparing students to respond to open-ended questions. The math teachers encourage all students to take two semesters of math their first year and one the first semester of their sophomore year so they complete critical courses before the OGT is given in March of their sophomore year. As soon as the initial materials became available for the OGT, the school began using the new pre-tests with students and modifying their instruction and intervention accordingly.



Overall, the instruction observed at BHS was fairly traditional. For the most part, classes had good interaction and students were engaged, but methods consisted primarily of teachers reviewing specific activities with the students, either with the teacher at the front of the room or with the teacher moving around to individual students to check progress. In math classes, students were primarily working out math problems on the board. The algebra and pre-calculus classes were using graphing calculators, and the algebra class moved at a noticeably quick pace. Overall, however, the teachers were not doing anything perceived as “cutting edge” or beyond the abilities or resources of the average school.

The administration has developed a detailed incentive system to reward individual success on the proficiency test, which will be adapted for the OGT. Oyster explained that they do many incentives with students. He said the specific incentives for passing the test are:

Pass all five parts, and you get a day off from school. All juniors get the Monday after prom or if you request a free day, it won't count against you. If you get four parts, you get to go out to lunch one day, and we have a pizza party. If you pass one part, there is an incentive. We also have incentives for special education students if they show improvement. We know that they may not be able to pass, but if they can show improvement, two things happen. First, we want them to feel better about themselves, which is the most important thing. Secondly, it brings up the school's score.

The principal covers any expenses for such incentives from his own pocket or from the principal's fund (a modest amount of district funding allocated to the school to cover expenditures at the discretion of the principal).

The teachers stressed that although they did a lot to ensure that the students would be prepared for the OGT, they intended to move students beyond just being prepared for the state proficiency. Teachers mentioned the following goals in their efforts to prepare students:

- organizational skills
- exposure to new ideas
- reading to understand
- writing to communicate clearly
- discipline and work ethic
- enjoyment of math
- appreciation of lifelong learning

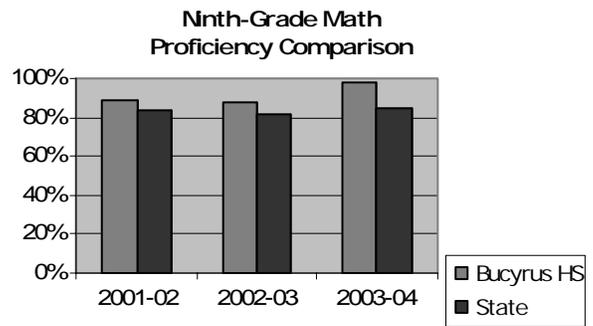
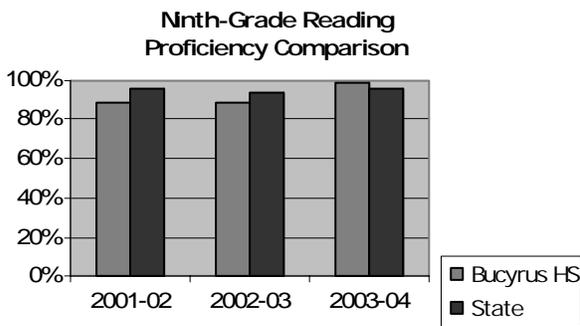
There was evidence of these during observations and students' comments confirmed emphasis on these areas.

Student Performance

The result from all of these activities is that BHS students' performance on the reading and math sections of the state proficiency tests has shown a gain in the past four years; however, there was a drop in the 2002-2003 Proficiency Test scores and in the OGT. Nonetheless, on the 2004-2005 OGT, 88.8 percent of students passed reading and 79.4 percent succeeded on the math section. The school met the *Schools of Promise* criteria for reading but missed designation for math because only 69.4 percent of economically disadvantaged students passed the math portion.

**Bucyrus High School vs. Ohio²
Ninth-Grade Proficiency – 10th Grade Results³**

	Reading		Math	
	Bucyrus HS	State	Bucyrus HS	State
2001-2002	88.7%	95.9%	80.9%	83.4%
2002-2003	87.9%	93.8%	75.8%	82.0%
2003-2004	98.3%	95.7%	90.0%	84.5%



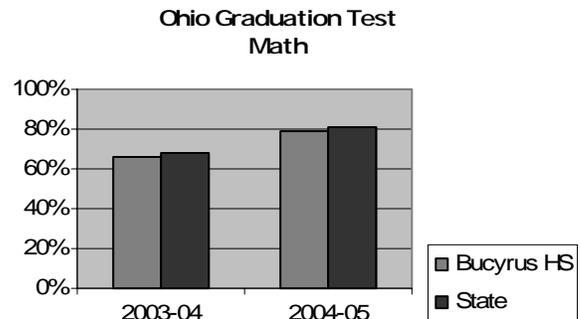
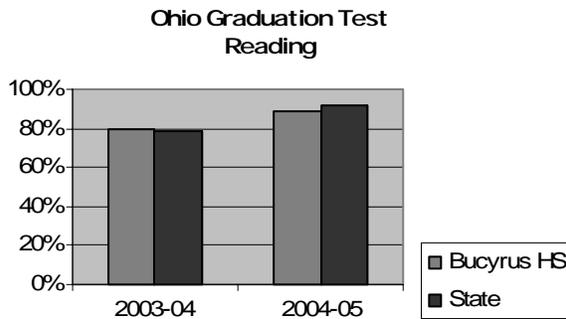
**Bucyrus High School vs. Ohio²
Ohio Graduation Test – 10th Grade Results⁴**

	Reading		Math	
	Bucyrus HS	State	Bucyrus HS	State
2003-2004	79.9%	78.5%	65.9%	68.4%
2004-2005	88.8%	92.0%	79.4%	81.6%

² Data Source: School and State Report Cards.

³ Tenth grade results reflect performance of 9th and 10th graders on the Ninth Grade Proficiency Tests.

⁴ Tenth grade results reflect performance on the new Ohio Graduation Test. The state administered pre-tests in reading and math in 2003-2004. Thus, one year of trend data are available for this test.



ENGAGING PARENTS AND COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS

The principal and teachers have regular contact with parents; however, BHS is not unlike most high schools in that parents generally do not have a highly visible presence during the school day. Teachers described a wide range of parent involvement from highly involved and responsive, to minimal, if any, contact with the school. The teacher who works with students with multiple handicaps provided one example of frequent contact with parents. She explained, “My parents come in here whenever they want. We have a pretty good relationship. We disagree sometimes. We’re like a big family. I think parents think this is a friendly place.” This group, of course, represented one end of the parent involvement continuum. Not surprisingly, parents of children with disabilities are more likely to have more contact with a school.

The school also has an Open House in the fall and two parent-teacher conferences during the year. Teachers make phone calls to parents about discipline issues and concerns about a student’s work; they systematically document all such contact. In addition, some teachers periodically send parents newsletters or progress reports. In addition, the school is using “Progress Book” software so student grades are now available on-line, which has facilitated parent involvement, particularly by those with children in CP classes. Interviewed parents mentioned that they tend to see teachers at school or community events such as band practice or at art festivals. One parent explained: “The school makes involvement available. They are open to ways to help for the most part.” (Parent of freshman, junior, and senior)

Parents viewed the school as having an “Open Door Policy” and caring about the students. In addition, all three interviewed parents attended and graduated from BHS. Their comments included:

The biggest success is the leadership. Mr. Oyster has marvelous interaction. He’s an optimist. (Parent of freshman and sophomore)

I think it is a good school. I like the principal. (Parent of graduating senior)

The parents expressed that they were pleased with what their children are learning, their children’s performance, and the school’s efforts to help their children if needed. Their positive responses applied to both Reading/Language Arts and math. One of the parents had a child with an IEP, whereas the other parents had high achieving students. It is of note that these parents agreed that the school had provided several services as part of efforts to challenge their children. Two parents agreed that the school had provided individual attention, allowed their child to do group work with other high performing students, and permitted their child to go to a higher class for one or more subjects. All also mentioned an additional way that the school had encouraged their child to achieve at a high level, including college classes, math lab, and AP

classes and mentoring. Two parents evaluated their children as performing far above grade level and expected that to continue. The parent with the child on an IEP viewed the child's performance as at grade level in math, but she expected improvement in the upcoming year. All indicated they had attended at least one meeting at the school during the year.

Teachers noted, however, that many of the parents worked on the night shift and there were students who live with relatives such as grandparents. Consequently, many of the students were viewed as not having a great deal of support at home. Another issue that teachers mentioned is that many of the parents did not have good experiences with school when they were children, so they may have negative feelings associated with any school contact. Oyster noted that he tries to have positive contact with parents, so that he is not calling them only if there is a problem. He explained:

I call them to give them good feedback (e.g., kid getting scholarship). I also like to do this at football games, basketball games, and band concerts. I like to meet with parents then because they are much more... [Relaxed?] Yeah, they don't feel like there is something wrong. It is funny when I call parents whose kid has been in trouble a lot, and I call to say something good, they are always like, "Oh yeah, I appreciate it."

Although teachers only mentioned telephoning parents when there was an academic problem, they did give examples of more relaxed interactions with students and their family members at after-school events and during more informal interactions in the community.

This past spring, the principal began a series of outreach meetings in an effort to further engage parents and the larger community. A district 21st Century Community Learning Center grant covers the associated costs. Oyster described his efforts to get more input following efforts with the superintendent to involve parents on planning committees for the building and levies. After being frustrated by their lack of success, they came up with the idea of having community meetings at local fast food restaurants. Even though he put a notice in the newspaper, no one showed up, so he spoke with the people that were there anyway, asking them, "What do you think we should be doing?" and they weren't a bit hesitant about telling me how they felt." He did an article with the local newspaper beforehand and the front-page headline was, "What do you want from your high school?" He explained that at the upcoming meeting they had 14 people show up and they wanted drug testing, split blocks (they don't want these 83-minute blocks), and some other minor things. Overall, the community meetings have gone well and the administration is utilizing the information from the sessions. They highlight the principal's proactive efforts to engage parents and the community. He plans to continue to explore ways that the school can further strengthen its connection with these groups.

Summary of "Lessons Learned" Specific to Bucyrus High School

The move to 83-minute blocks represented a turning point for the school. As part of critically reviewing their curriculum and daily activities, teachers became increasingly "student-centered." Part of having extended periods also meant that they got more time to get to know their students. Since the principal's arrival two years ago, BHS has more deliberately used test results to identify gaps in students' knowledge, especially with respect to what they needed for the OGT. In addition, the school introduced an extensive intervention program to provide students having difficulties with additional opportunities to work one-on-one or in small groups with some of their most experienced teachers. The school introduced inclusion with its special education students. These strategies have resulted in the students with IEPs improving their

test scores as well as being further integrated into school life. Finally, high-performing students have been steadily provided with challenges, including the option of taking AP classes and college courses.

These activities have helped the school achieve and maintain its *Schools of Promise* status. The following table summarizes the school's characteristics most closely associated with the "Five Lessons Learned" identified in the initial *Schools of Promise* case studies. There is some variation in all the reviewed schools. BHS clearly has put an emphasis on aspects that are most likely to have a direct impact on students.

Bucyrus HS: Summary of School Characteristics by Five Lessons Learned

Five Lessons Learned					School Characteristics
Providing leadership that results in continuous improvement	Creating a culture where each individual feels valued	Designing instruction to ensure every student's success	Providing rigorous instruction aligned to standards	Engaging parents and community to support student success	
Staff Characteristics					
X					Strong and collaborative principal
X					Senior/experienced staff
X					High staff commitment
X	X				Caring teachers and staff
X	X	X			High expectations
Practices Impacting Staff					
X					Creative hiring practices
Practices Impacting Students					
	X	X			Two major program areas (College Prep and "Essential")
	X	X	X		Tutoring at-risk students, in-school or after-school
	X	X	X		Increasingly effective at working with lower students
	X	X	X		Increasingly effective at working with top students
X		X	X		Analysis of test data to inform intervention
		X	X		Frequent testing
	X	X	X		Collaboration of intervention, special, and regular
	X				Incentives
Instructional Characteristics					
X		X	X		Strong English Department
X		X	X		Strong Math Department
			X		Change in math classes
	X	X			Block scheduling
Staff Development Characteristics					
		X	X		Attention to state standards
Parent and Community Characteristics					
				X	High percentage of parents attended the school
		X	X	X	Alliance with area colleges
				X	Community meetings