# Schools of Promise: Schools with High Performance in Reading

# **Cross-Site Report**

Institutional Research Consultants (IRC) randomly selected eight schools recognized by *Schools of Promise* in 2003-2004 for detailed case studies.<sup>1</sup> Of the 102 *Schools of Promise*, 73 were eligible to participate in the IRC case study project; the 29 omitted schools were either part of other research projects or previously had been a case study site. The selected elementary schools are Essex Elementary (Akron City School District), Jackson Elementary (Jackson City School District), Kyle Elementary (Troy City School District) and William C. Bryant (Cleveland Municipal School District). The case study high schools are Alliance High School (Alliance City School District), Bucyrus High School (Bucyrus City School District), Dawson-Bryant High School (Dawson-Bryant Local School District) and New Lexington High School (New Lexington City School District). This report presents cross-site findings for the elementary schools and the high schools, and ends with an overall summary of characteristics common to all of the schools.

IRC's focus on Reading/Language Arts required that the schools met the *Schools of Promise* criteria for reading. Although none of the schools met the math requirements in 2003-2004, IRC also included coverage of the schools' math instruction. IRC researchers conducted two-day site visits that included classroom observations; interviews with the principal, teachers and parents; focus group interviews with students; and surveys with each of these groups. Table 1 summarizes the data collection activities by school.

Table 1: IRC	Case Studies -	Summary of	Research	<b>Activities</b>
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	High Sch	ools	Elemen						
	Alliance	Bucyrus	Dawson- Bryant	New Lexington	Essex	Jackson	Kyle	W. C. Bryant	TOTAL
Total Interviews	31	29	31	31	32	22	39	33	248
Teacher Interviews	12	8	9	8	13	6	14	13	83
Teachers Observed	13	8	10	11	13	8	14	13	90
Teacher Surveys	11	14	11	9	15	7	16	14	97

Each of the eight case study reports is organized using the "Five Lessons Learned" identified in earlier *Schools of Promise* case study research<sup>2</sup> which emphasize the importance of: providing rigorous instruction aligned with the standards; providing strong leadership that results in continuance improvement of instruction; designing instruction to ensure student success; engaging parents and the community to support student success; and, establishing a school culture that values individual students. This cross-site report is ordered by these themes and summarizes the schools' characteristics, focusing on those that contribute most to the five *Schools of Promise* lessons.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See the *Schools of Promise* Web page <u>www.ode.state.oh.us/achievement\_gaps/schools\_of\_promise</u> for additional information.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>The *Five Lessons Learned* emerged from the case study research conducted by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) in 2001-02 (<a href="http://www.ode.state.oh.us/achievement\_gaps/Schools\_of\_Promise/5lessons.asp">http://www.ode.state.oh.us/achievement\_gaps/Schools\_of\_Promise/5lessons.asp</a>). 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 <a href="http://www.ode.state.oh.us/achievement\_gaps/schools\_of\_promise/FOP.asp">http://www.ode.state.oh.us/achievement\_gaps/schools\_of\_promise/FOP.asp</a>).

# **Elementary School Case Studies**

There are a total of 68 *Schools of Promise* in 2003-2004 serving elementary grades and 45 could have been included in the IRC selection process. The four elementary case study schools represent a wide variety of districts and locations. Two of the schools are in urban areas, Essex in Akron and William C. Bryant in Cleveland. Kyle is in the modestly sized town of Troy, north of Dayton. Jackson is in a rural area of southern Ohio between Chillicothe and Athens. Both of the urban districts have a 2003-2004 rating of Academic Watch (although Akron progressed to Continuous Improvement in 2004-2005). Jackson is rated Continuous Improvement, and Troy City is Effective. The student enrollments range from 127 students at Jackson to 358 at William C. Bryant. Essex in Akron is the most ethnically diverse, with more than 63 percent of its students African-American. Both urban schools have 100 percent of their student bodies classified as economically disadvantaged. Jackson has the most students with disabilities (25 percent). All schools serve grades kindergarten through five, but Kyle also includes the sixth grade and William C. Bryant has a program for pre-school children with disabilities. Table 2 provides an overview of the schools' characteristics.

Table 2: IRC Elementary Case Studies - City/Town, District and School Characteristics

	Es	sex	Jacl	cson	Ky	/le	W. C.	Bryant	
County	Sur	nmit	Jack	kson	Mia	ami	Cuyahoga		
City/Town Population	217	,000	6,0	000	22,	000	478,403		
School grade levels	K	K-5		-5	K	-6	K	-5	
Average Expenditure per Pupil 2003-2004	\$9,	\$9,710		\$3,093		774	\$7,877		
District	Akron City		Jackso	on City	Troy	City	Cleveland Municipal		
	2003- 2004	2004- 2005	2003- 2004	2004- 2005	2003- 2004	2004- 2005	2003- 2004	2004- 2005	
District Rating *	AW	CI	CI	CI	EF	EF	AW	AE	
District Enrollment	28,097	27,166	2,638	2,724	4,348	4,405	66,532	62,542	
School Rating <sup>*</sup>	CI	CI	EF	CI	EX	EX	EF	EF	
School Enrollment	274	255	129	127	260	259	366	358	
Low-Income percentage	47.8%	100.0%	55.6%	54.1%	47.6%	52.9%	69.5%**	100%	
Percent racial/ethnic minority	73.9%	73.3%	5.2%	5.4%	15.2%	17.6%	17.0%	20.8%	
Students with Disabilities	13.4%	12.1%	20.2%	24.8%	11.0% 11.5%		14.1%	15.7%	
Student Attendance Rate	95.8%	95.9%	95.4%	95.4%	96.1% 95.6%		99.1%	98.8%	

<sup>\*</sup>The school and district ratings from highest to lowest are: EX = Excellent, EF = Effective, CI = Continuous Improvement, AW = Academic Watch, and AE = Academic Emergency.

<sup>\*\*</sup>The percentage of low-income students as reported in the CCIP system

#### **ELEMENTARY: Providing Rigorous Instruction Aligned to Standards**

Teachers at the four schools are well aware of the state standards. Their districts have provided extensive professional development and other resources to facilitate curricular alignment. Kyle and William C. Bryant teachers have found the district's pacing charts helpful in ensuring that they cover each benchmark for their grade according to the state's recommended timeframe. All of the teachers engage in ongoing professional development sessions on-site at staff meetings. Teachers regularly share best practices. At Essex and Kyle, this extends to observing teachers. Essex staff is encouraged to visit master teachers' within the district. Kyle benefits from having a district Academic Coach assigned to the school several days a week who provides ongoing professional development in Language Arts; the school is planning to extend coaching by adding the function to the responsibilities of two teachers.

Jackson and William C. Bryant have tutoring programs specifically focused on preparing students for the state's third-grade achievement and fourth-grade proficiency tests. Essex and Kyle include state test results in their overall analysis of test performance but did not appear to have a major push or tutoring blitz specifically to prepare students for state tests. For the most part, the schools have made changes in instructional processes designed to improve students' performance on a continuing basis throughout the school year. The crux of the efforts is small group instruction, facilitated by pullouts or intervention teachers in classrooms. As a result of closely monitoring students' progress in these schools, teachers are able to identify children for intervention or tutoring as early as possible.

## **ELEMENTARY: Providing Leadership that Results in Continuous Improvement**

All four elementary schools have experienced, caring staff. At Essex, Jackson and Kyle, there was a core of teachers who have been at their respective schools long-term. This was less evident at William C. Bryant, as there has been some movement in the Cleveland Municipal School District due to layoffs. Nonetheless, at 10 years, this school's principal has the longest tenure of principals in the study.

The schools have strong principals who are able to motivate staff and work with them collaboratively. In two of the four schools (Essex and Jackson), the principals are new to the schools (although not new to the district), but they have been able to build upon the progress made by their predecessors. All of the principals currently live in the community served by the schools or have previously lived in the area; all had long-term connections and high levels of familiarity with the school, district or town. They care deeply about the students and want to help them academically as well as ensure their basic needs such as food, clothing and safety.

Each of the four schools has made a concerted effort in recent years to improve student performance. All schools have increased the focus on reading. OhioReads grants helped three schools (Essex, Jackson and Kyle) expand their reading resources and teacher professional development. Essex and Kyle also recruited volunteers to do one-on-one reading with at-risk children as part of the OhioReads program. Although staff members at these schools view this grant as an important factor in their progress, the schools also have introduced a variety of changes (including additional improvements to their reading programs, common planning time and increased intervention with at-risk students) over the past five to 10 years, which were not specifically part of any grant. As schools implemented practices that appeared effective with their staff and students, they retained and built upon those improvements. Table 3 summarizes teachers' characteristics.

Table 3: IRC Elementary Case Studies: Summary of Teacher Characteristics

	Ess	sex	Jack	cson	Ky	/le	W. C.	Bryant
	2003- 2004	2004- 2005	2003- 2004	2004- 2005	2003- 2004	2004- 2005	2003- 2004	2004- 2005
Teachers	21	21	9	8	15	17	23	17
Average Teacher Salary	\$54,797	\$54,994	\$42,451	\$46,768	\$48,371	\$50,196	\$51,673	\$56,359
Percent of Courses Taught by Certified Licensed Teachers	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	98.7%	98.7%
Teacher Attendance Rate	94.8%	94.9%	96.3%	91.0%	96.4%	95.1%	91.7%	88.7%
Average Years of Experience	17	20	14	18	14	16	12	14

#### **ELEMENTARY: DESIGNING INSTRUCTION TO ENSURE EVERY STUDENT'S SUCCESS**

Three of the four schools (Essex, Kyle and William C. Bryant) are introducing new reading programs, driven by new textbook adoptions in the respective districts. Essex and William C. Bryant use the *Harcourt* series, Kyle *Houghton Mifflin*, and Jackson *McGraw-Hill*. All of the schools supplement with additional resources. School staff often expressed that supplementary resources can have as much, if not more, importance than the school's overall reading program. Jackson attributes some of its success to the *Accelerated Reader Program* and Essex claims the *100 Book Challenge* is making a difference for its students. Both are leveled reading programs and include incentives for children to complete books. Although all the schools have relatively strong reading programs, the Cleveland district is developing modules that will supplement the basal reader. Consequently, at the time of the case study, William C. Bryant's reading program was in a state of flux.

Staff at all four schools included math as among the skills they wanted to improve, but Kyle was the only one specifically making changes in its math program. Kyle increased the math block to 90 minutes, encouraged staff to challenge students with activities that go beyond grade level (e.g., fifth-graders were introduced to Algebra), and tested the math knowledge of fifth- and sixth-graders weekly using the *Yearly Progress Probe*, a 15-minute timed test.

In the four schools, students regularly work in small flexible groups. In three of the four (Essex, Kyle and William C. Bryant), children in grades kindergarten through two rotate through a variety of activities in work centers. All four schools have strategies in place to reduce the size of reading classes and provide individualized attention to at-risk students. At three of the four (Essex, Jackson and William C. Bryant), special education students and those who are reading below level are pulled out to work with intervention teachers. Over the past few years, Kyle has moved all special education and Title I teachers into regular classrooms. Initially, Kyle's teachers were resistant to such an inclusion approach, as they were not accustomed to having additional adults or doing differentiated instruction in regular classes. The change, however, had an immediate positive impact on student performance and behavior. Kyle now encourages team-teaching and, with specialists and student teachers, it is not unusual for classes to have up to five adults supervising three to five student groups. Teachers are available to help students as needed and all of the schools offer disadvantaged students some form of tutoring, before, after or during school. Jackson and William C. Bryant provide tutoring specific to the state assessment testing. At the other schools, assignment to tutoring is available throughout the year and is based on students' academic performance. As a result of district budget cuts, tutoring resources at William C. Bryant may be reduced in the upcoming year. Kyle staff is

concerned about how the reduction in the OhioReads grant may impact tutoring provided by volunteers.

All four schools are testing students more frequently. Essex, Kyle and William C. Bryant have begun much more thorough and systematic analysis of test results. Staff members at these schools have participated in professional development to facilitate their use of data. At Kyle and William C. Bryant, the principal and teachers compile and analyze the data. At Essex, the school psychologist takes the lead, and the speech pathologist and Kent State University students assist with data analysis activities. Kyle has introduced data tracking techniques to fifth- and sixth-graders, empowering students by showing them how to monitor their own performance. This is possibly another factor benefiting students' math skills, as they have learned to do data entry and graph the results. Similarly, upper elementary students at William C. Bryant have been taught to use a rubric to evaluate their own writing.

There is modest use of technology by students at Essex, Jackson and Kyle. In these three schools, students complete timed tests using computers. One fifth-grade teacher at Essex received grant funding for the purchase of a classroom set of palm pilots. Kyle has students in grade 3 and above using individual white boards. At William C. Bryant, computer use is non-existent, as the school's computer system needs repair and upgrading. Support, however, is not available due to the district's dire financial situation.

Three of the four schools (Essex, Jackson and William C. Bryant) give incentives to students. Teachers at these schools provide small treats to encourage good student behavior and to reward performance. Essex rewards students for completing reading goals associated with the 100 Book Challenge. Essex students who read 400 lines by year's end are rewarded with a pizza party and those passing all parts on the fourth-grade proficiency test are taken out for a special lunch. Similarly, Jackson provides incentives related to students' performance on the Accelerated Reader Program.

## **ELEMENTARY: ENGAGING PARENTS AND COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS**

All four schools attempt to engage parents through extensive communication efforts including telephone calls, newsletters, notes sent home, e-mail and in-person contact. William C. Bryant has the highest level of parent involvement. The school explicitly made a commitment to developing this aspect about 10 years ago. Its process includes having each student, parent and teacher sign a compact that outlines expectations for academics, attendance and homework. William C. Bryant also requires parents to come to the school for report card pick-up twice a year. Essex encourages parents to actively participate in its 100 Book Challenge program and provides training to help them appropriately monitor their children's reading. At least once a week, Essex and Kyle teachers send home materials that must be signed by parents.

Kyle and William C. Bryant have notably strong business and community support. At William C. Bryant, several businesses have school-related activities in which they donate supplies or monies. Troy City Schools, which includes Kyle Elementary, receives significant support from an organization established by the Chamber of Commerce and local businesses. This group sponsors 15 disadvantaged students from each district elementary school from the fourth grade through high school completion. Upon high school graduation, students who continue to meet requirements are guaranteed a free college or vocational school education. In addition, the program matches each child in the program to a "lunch buddy," a mentor who has lunch at the school with the child twice a month. The group pays for after-school homework support for all

district elementary schools. Essex and Jackson also have at least one business providing inkind support or volunteers.

#### **ELEMENTARY: CREATING A CULTURE WHERE EACH INDIVIDUAL FEELS VALUED**

Staff members at the elementary schools are aware of hardships experienced by many of the children. They have a great deal of compassion and want to help them. At the same time, staff maintains high expectations for their students. All four schools emphasize homework and have strong disciplinary measures in place. Essex and William C. Bryant have specific schoolwide behavioral programs. The four schools make an effort to expose the children to cultural experiences that can broaden their horizons and make them well-rounded. Kyle and William C. Bryant bring in numerous activities through their strong community and parent partnerships. Jackson has field trips. Essex is a foreign language school and also offers after-school enrichment activities.

Jackson and Kyle have introduced common planning time for teachers daily. William C. Bryant also has common planning time, as part of monthly sessions with the principal; the time for joint planning is often limited due to other scheduled activities such as professional development. Kyle and William C. Bryant, however, have introduced more comprehensive planning processes in the past few years in which staff have set specific goals for students. At Kyle, the principal and teachers worked through this process on their waiver days and annual retreat. William C. Bryant's Academic Achievement Plan has been influenced by the school's involvement in the *Institute for Learning's Principles for Learning* (Lauren Resnic's research at the University of Pittsburgh) <a href="https://www.instituteforlearning.org/about.html">http://www.instituteforlearning.org/about.html</a>. As a result, changes implemented by Kyle and William C. Bryant are somewhat broader, and both of these schools experienced notable improvements in math scores in recent years.

All four schools are relatively small, with Jackson having the lowest enrollment. Essex and William C. Bryant are considered small schools for their large urban districts. Staff at Kyle similarly described it as small. These characteristics result in a "family-like" atmosphere at these schools. Teachers and principals know the names of all students. The downside is that school size has put three of these four schools at risk of closing. Jackson was closed at the end of the 2004-2005 school year. Essex is tentatively scheduled to be closed within the next two years, as the district cannot use state monies for renovations because it has fewer than 350 students. As a result of Cleveland's budget cuts, William C. Bryant was at risk of being one of the schools closed at the end of the 2004-2005 school year. The school was not on the final school closing list, but like all other elementary schools in the district, it will expand from kindergarten through fifth grade to kindergarten through eighth grade in 2005-2006. Although staff members at these schools view their smallness as a factor that helps students feel connected and valued as individuals, they realize that being small threatens their existence, as small schools are viewed as less cost-effective.

# **ELEMENTARY: STUDENT PERFORMANCE**

All four schools experienced increased student performance in reading in the 2003-2004 school year, resulting in their meeting the *Schools of Promise* criteria in reading. None of the schools, however, met the math requirement. Kyle is the only school to have at least 75 percent of students in all grades pass the math test in 2003-2004 and 2004-2005. Table 4 presents students' third-, fourth- and fifth-grade achievement/proficiency test results in reading and math at each school for the past four years.

The schools cite the following attributes as instrumental to increased achievement: reducing student group size; applying results from the analysis of student test data more systematically; providing immediate and ongoing intervention; and increasing the alignment of curriculum with standards. The four schools have a number of characteristics likely to have a positive impact on student learning. They have caring, experienced and committed staff members willing to work with students beyond regular class time. Staff is open to learning and applying lessons learned from professional development and have a great deal of flexibility and determination to keep trying if initial efforts do not work.

Table 4: IRC Elementary School Case Studies - Reading and Math Performance<sup>3</sup>

	Essex	Jackson	Kyle	W. C. Bryant	State
Thind One de Ask	.! <b>T</b>				
Third-Grade Ach	nievement l'est				
Reading			T	T	
2003-2004	82.0%	88.9%	100%	89.4%	78.2%
2004-2005	81.1%	71.4%	96.2%	82.9%	77.3%
Math					
2004-2005	56.8%	76.2%	96.2%	85.4%	70.4%
Farmille Oranda Du	oficion on Tool				
Fourth-Grade Pr	oficiency rest				
Reading			T	T	
2001-2002	77.6%	57.1%	74.5%	68.5%	67.7%
2002-2003	65.9%	88.9%	57.1%	67.7%	66.3%
2003-2004	82.6%	100.0%	79.5%	84.8%	70.8%
2004-2005	79.6%	68.0%	88.5%	87.5%	76.6%
Math					
2001-2002	56.1%	47.6%	75.0%	72.5%	62.9%
2002-2003	59.1%	64.7%	54.3%	68.3%	58.6%
2003-2004	65.2%	65.0%	87.2%	75.8%	65.8%
2004-2005	63.3%	52.0%	80.8%	69.1%	65.5%
Fifth One de Anhi					
Fifth-Grade Achi	ievement i est				
Reading			ı		
2004-2005	77.5%	77.3%	93.0%	77.8%	76.9%

All four schools faced a number of challenges. Jackson was closed at the end of the 2004-2005 school year. Essex may have a similar fate. Both schools also lost *Schools of Promise* recognition. Jackson's scores dropped significantly and changes associated with the upcoming school closing may have been a factor. Two of Essex's fifth-grade subgroups (African-American and males) had less than 75 percent pass the reading test, but the school's overall scores met state minimum requirements. William C. Bryant is facing numerous district budget cuts and will extend its services to kindergarten through eighth grade. Kyle will no longer teach sixth-graders. While these changes will likely impact school dynamics, with planning, the schools should be able to retain and apply many of the effective practices highlighted by the case study research.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Data Source: School and State Report Cards

# **High School Case Studies**

There are a total of 34 *Schools of Promise* high schools and 28 were eligible for the IRC project. Table 2 provides basic information about the schools. All four of the case study high schools are located in small towns, although there is variation in their location and type of town. Also, each district has a different 2003-2004 district rating, ranging from Academic Watch for the Alliance City School District to an Excellent rating for the Dawson-Bryant Local School District.

Alliance High School is located in Alliance, about 15 minutes east of Canton in northeast Ohio. Its closeness to a large city gives Alliance more characteristics of an urban school than the other sites included in the project. Alliance is one of the largest and more ethnically diverse among the high schools recognized by *Schools of Promise* in 2003-2004. Although the *Schools of Promise* high schools average 23.5 percent minority representation, the median is 0 percent, as 21 of the 34 high schools reported having only white students. In 2004-2005, Alliance had an enrollment of 944 and 21 percent were non-white. Bucyrus High School in Bucyrus is in north central Ohio between Columbus and Cleveland. Both Dawson-Bryant High School in Coal Grove and New Lexington High School in New Lexington are in Appalachia, although they are in different counties and parts of the state. Dawson-Bryant is south near the Kentucky and West Virginia state lines. New Lexington is southeast of Zanesville. All four schools serve student populations in which 40 percent or more are disadvantaged. All schools serve grades 9 through 12. Table 5 highlights the schools' similarities and differences.

Table 5: IRC High School Case Studies - City/Town, District and School Characteristics

	Alliance Bucyrus Bryant				ew ngton				
County	Sta	ark	Crav	vford	Lawr	ence	Pe	rry	
City/Town Population	23,000		13,	000	2,0	000	5,000		
School grade levels	9-12		9-	12	9-	12	9-	12	
Average Expenditure per Pupil 2003-2004	\$7,	078	\$7,	173	\$7,	991	\$7,	064	
	2003- 2004	2004- 2005	2003- 2004	2004- 2005	2003- 2004	2004- 2005	2003- 2004	2004- 2005	
District Rating*	AW	AW	EF	EF	EX	EF	CI	CI	
District Enrollment	3,119	3,152	1,639	1,585	1,304	1,269	1,932	1,904	
School Rating <sup>*</sup>	CI	CI	EF	EF	EF	EF	CI	EF	
School Enrollment	928	944	524	498	412	424	582	556	
Low-income percentage	45.6%	49.9%	42.4%	42.1%	46.8%**	42.4%	45.0%**	40.3%	
Percent racial/ethnic minority	19.0%	21.2%	2.2%	2.5%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	
Students with Disabilities	16.9%	17.3%	18.5%	15.9%	17.3%	20.2%	15.6%	14.7%	
Student Attendance Rate	91.4%	91.7%	93.1%	94.6%	92.9% 93.6%		91.4%	90.9%	

The school and district ratings from highest to lowest are: EX = Excellent, EF = Effective, CI = Continuous Improvement, AW = Academic Watch, and AE = Academic Emergency.

<sup>\*\*</sup>The percentage of low-income students as reported in the CCIP system

#### HIGH SCHOOLS: Providing Rigorous Instruction Aligned to Standards

Teachers at the four high schools emphasized that they started the process of aligning their lessons with the state standards over the past five or six years. Three of the four – Alliance, Dawson-Bryant and New Lexington – have participated in numerous professional development activities provided as part of their involvement in major education reform grants. Staff at these schools also have taken advantage of various training provided by the state and associated groups. Alliance and New Lexington have a good relationship with the Educational Services Center (ESC) in their areas and often take advantage of its workshops and other services. Bucyrus has not been as active in grant-funded projects. Instead, the district office has provided Bucyrus staff with materials and training on the standards and curriculum alignment.

All four high schools are looking more systematically at test data to inform their instruction. In addition, Dawson-Bryant and New Lexington are specifically using short-cycle assessment. Both schools also have participated in Project SOAR (Battelle for Kids) in which staff learned how to do detailed analyses on test data. Dawson-Bryant is primarily using a Scantron program and New Lexington is using the Literacy Curriculum Alignment Project (LCAP) assessments. All four schools are using data from Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) practice tests and teachers' regular classroom tests. The four schools did a great deal during the 2004-2005 school year to prepare students for the OGT. During the interviews, staff and students expressed a fair amount of anxiety about the new test and how well their schools would do.

Two of the four high schools, Alliance and New Lexington, have recently introduced Common Planning Time. Teachers conduct data analysis and curriculum alignment during these planning sessions. Both individual and group planning activities take place during the common time. New Lexington has monthly meetings, and Alliance has built in daily Common Planning Time during its Zero Hour Planning Period so that data and curriculum are specifically covered at least one day each week.

#### HIGH SCHOOLS: Providing Leadership that Results in Continuous Improvement

All four high schools have highly experienced, caring staff with a core of teachers who have been at their respective schools long-term. The schools also had strong principals able to motivate and work collaboratively with staff. The principals similarly expressed a deep commitment to students. In schools where the principals were relatively new, they were able to build upon the progress made by their predecessors. Each of the schools has made a definite commitment to educational improvement, most within the past five to six years. In three high schools, a major grant – to the school, county or region – was an impetus behind the staff's investment in professional development activities and corresponding enhanced attention to state standards. For Bucyrus High School, the push for instructional change and increased alignment to the standards came as part of the school's move to block scheduling several years ago. Table 6 provides a summary of teacher characteristics.

Table 6: IRC High School Case Studies - Summary of Teacher Characteristics

	Allia	ance	Buc	yrus		son- ant	New Lexington			
	2003- 2004	2004- 2005			2003- 2004	2004- 2005				
Teachers	64	60	33	33	25	27	35	36		
Average Teacher Salary	\$45,889	\$45,608	\$40,469	\$42,266	\$37,298	\$39,529	\$47,026	\$49,954		
Percent of Courses Taught by Certified Licensed Teachers	95.5%	98.7%	100%	100%	93.7%	97.7%	92.7%	93.3%		
Teacher Attendance Rate	96.4%	97.0%	96.9%	95.7%	95.2%	94.9%	94.7%	94.7%		
Average Years of Experience	16	16	13	15	15	16	19	20		

#### HIGH SCHOOLS: DESIGNING INSTRUCTION TO ENSURE EVERY STUDENT'S SUCCESS

All four schools had two major program areas. All had College Preparatory classes. The other program area went by various names such as "Essential," "Basic," "Vocational" and "School-to-Work." Staff and students verified that students could move into College Preparatory classes if they made the effort. Such changes are most likely prior to the junior year. Block scheduling appears to be especially conducive to such movement as students do not have to wait a full year before they can make a change. Teachers emphasized that the main difference between the program areas is the pacing – students in the College Prep courses cover material more quickly and have more projects. Teachers also noted they sometimes recommended that failing students opt out of College Prep. If they were planning to attend college and had sufficient motivation, teachers would work with such students one-on-one to help them succeed. Staff recognized that not all students would pursue college. They view the non-College Prep options as providing students with a strong educational preparation geared to helping them become employable immediately following graduation. All four schools have vocational programs; Alliance's and Dawson-Bryant's are particularly prominent.

Three of the four schools, Bucyrus, Alliance and New Lexington, have notably strong English departments. Instruction ranges from highly traditional in which students were primarily reading textbooks, completing worksheets, or listening to lectures, to ones where students were conducting research on computers, designing PowerPoint presentations and working cooperatively in group projects. New Lexington was unique in the way it had introduced two schoolwide language arts programs: Schoolwide Reading, in which the entire school reads the same book over a three-to-four-week period, and the Word-a-Day Program in which students have daily exposure to new vocabulary. These activities are designed to raise students' interest in reading and are well integrated with other discipline areas such as social studies. New Lexington introduced schoolwide changes in their efforts to bring about improvements across the board.

All four schools also have made major changes in their math departments in recent years, including expanding the number of available math classes. Alliance benefited from an infusion of technology and several math reform grants, one of which provided for two math coaches. Alliance has introduced a new beginning algebra course that stretches the course over a two-year period for struggling students. Dawson-Bryant similarly extended the time for math courses from one block to a full year. Alliance now requires students to pass course mastery and semester tests before they progress to a higher-level math course. Bucyrus has incorporated

ACT Prep materials into their classes. Dawson-Bryant discouraged the middle school from offering algebra so that all incoming freshman take the course at the same time. New Lexington math teachers had the opposite reaction and were excited that the middle school had begun to offer algebra. New Lexington has introduced what teachers are referring to as "applied" math courses which are more closely aligned with skills needed for success on the OGT.

Three of the four high schools (Alliance, Dawson-Bryant and New Lexington) recently upgraded their technological resources. Grant funding paid for most of the improvements. Two of the schools are in relatively new buildings and Alliance has undergone major renovations in the past few years. Alliance teachers are especially excited by the introduction of Smart Boards. Dawson-Bryant's vocational students, especially those in business and WECEP (computer repair and networking program for at-risk students), have benefited from a substantial infusion of new equipment and technological training. New Lexington teachers are frequent users of the school's new computer labs and have been able to incorporate technology into their classes. For example, New Lexington required that students' Career Passport submissions be on a CD-Rom and include video and other interactive presentations.

Alliance, Bucyrus and Dawson-Bryant have developed extensive intervention programs focused on addressing the needs of individual students who demonstrate specific weaknesses, either on the OGT or in class work. These schools require students to participate in either intervention or tutoring classes. Bucyrus assigns some of its most talented teachers to teach 30-minute intervention classes in all OGT subjects during lunch. Dawson-Bryant has a separate tutoring class that is taught by a long-term substitute. Depending on the severity of an individual student's problem, the student is taken out of his or her regular class to work with the tutor for either a short period of time or for the duration of the class. If a longer-term intervention is required, then the regular teacher coordinates assignments with the tutor. Alliance hires local college students on a part-time basis to tutor students as needed. New Lexington also has an intervention program, but teachers admitted that it needed refinement as it was too easy for students not to take it seriously; the school is planning to introduce intervention directed to students that do not pass the OGT. Overall, New Lexington appears to have spent less energy than the other case study high schools on targeting individual students for intervention and more on making overall programmatic changes that have the potential of positively impacting the entire student body.

All four high schools have special education inclusion, meaning that students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are placed in regular classrooms if at all possible. Special education teachers at Bucyrus and New Lexington have established strong collaborative relationships with regular teachers. Of the four high schools, Bucyrus has developed the most elaborate support system for students with IEPs. Bucyrus piloted the establishment of one inclusion English, math, science, and social studies class. A special education teacher was placed in each of these classes to support the regular teacher; in several, a true team-teaching situation emerged. In the other three case study schools, students with IEPs in inclusion classes went to special education teachers or tutors for additional assistance as needed. This was also true for Bucyrus classes that were not shared with a special education teacher. At New Lexington, special education teachers especially worked closely with math teachers; specifically, the special education teachers asked math teachers for assistance with the content, participated in departmental meetings and attended math-related professional development. At Bucyrus, effective partnerships occurred in English, math and science.

Three of the four high schools (Bucyrus, Dawson-Bryant and New Lexington) give incentives to students to encourage them to achieve in their classes and do well on state tests. These schools have a wide variety of rewards for students, including pizza parties, coupons for local

fast foods, a free day off and field trips. Bucyrus has developed a detailed system that recognizes students for passing one or more parts of the state proficiency tests. New Lexington gives prizes to students who participate in schoolwide reading activities and it does not allow failing students to go on field trips. At Dawson-Bryant, students who pass all parts of state tests do not have to pay to take driver's education.

All four high schools have introduced ways to enhance the preparation of college-bound students. Several have added higher-level math courses in recent years. The schools also encourage students to take Advanced Placement (AP) tests and the schools pay the associated costs for low-income students. All the schools have arrangements with local colleges that allow high achieving students to take at least one college-level course while still in high school. Dawson-Bryant offers a Teacher Academy in which students participate in various hands-on activities that prepare them to major in education. New Lexington is involved in a grant that encourages students from the region to complete college. Its senior class has been active in this project since seventh grade and has had opportunities such as visits to local colleges.

# HIGH SCHOOLS: ENGAGING PARENTS AND COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS

Staff at the four high schools acknowledged that parental involvement was not as prominent as desired. Alliance and Dawson-Bryant have the strongest levels of parent activity. Both schools have non-academic events in which parents are highly active. Alliance has a senior class all-night party for which parents raised more than \$10,000. At Dawson-Bryant, the prom is a major community event that includes parents and other relatives. Both schools have a high level of support for levies. At Alliance, parents went door-to-door in the community to explain the school's need for additional funding during the last levy. Alliance also specifies one day each week for parent interaction in its Zero Hour Planning Period; teachers are having increasing success using e-mail and the school's Web page to communicate with parents.

Dawson-Bryant and Alliance also are actively making an effort to encourage students to participate in activities that benefit the community. Dawson-Bryant teachers have established several student clubs with a community service component. In the past year, Alliance placed 250 students in community service projects such as cleaning parks and painting equipment in public areas. The Bucyrus principal started hosting community meetings at local fast food establishments to encourage greater parent and community input into high school planning. Bucyrus and New Lexington's modest levels of parent involvement suggest that this aspect is less essential for high schools, as both of these schools demonstrated high levels of student achievement. Nonetheless, both schools have taken steps to increase active involvement by parent and community members.

## HIGH SCHOOLS: CREATING A CULTURE WHERE EACH INDIVIDUAL FEELS VALUED

Staff members at the four high schools demonstrated in various ways their belief in students and desire to help them succeed. They have high expectations but were cognizant of obstacles faced by many students. Consequently, teachers are often careful to encourage students without appearing to be overly pushy. Students appreciated teachers who showed them compassion and ways they could improve rather than putting them down. Students often said that the school staff is one of the best things about the school.

At the four high schools, teachers were available to help students with academic issues, either before or after school and during the lunch period. In addition, there were several teachers whom the students trusted deeply and felt comfortable asking for help with personal issues. At

Dawson-Bryant High School, staff goes further by making sure that disadvantaged students have appropriate clothing and by intervening with social service agencies on their behalf.

Three of the four high schools (Alliance, Dawson-Bryant and New Lexington) had noticeably small classes. Alliance and Dawson-Bryant had an average reported class size of 15 to 16 students in English and math classes; New Lexington averaged about 18 students in each class. The state average for secondary classrooms is 24 students. The smaller class sizes encouraged teachers and students to get to know one another. Teachers knew students and regularly called on them by name. At Alliance, teachers stood in the hallway outside their classrooms and frequently greeted students as they walked by. This practice likely reinforced the individual student's sense of self, and also was a subtle way of maintaining discipline during class changes.

Teachers urged students to pursue their individual interests. At Bucyrus, a high percentage of students were active in after-school activities as well as sports, band and theater productions. Alliance and Dawson-Bryant had strong vocational education programs. Dawson-Bryant teachers established several clubs that provided students with opportunities to further develop their math strengths and to be active in community service.

At both Dawson-Bryant and Bucyrus High Schools, block scheduling appeared to contribute to the schools' efforts to value individual students. The extra class time enabled teachers to get to know their students more thoroughly and facilitated the development of good teacher/student relationships. In addition, since students had fewer classes each day, and consequently less homework preparation, the entire school atmosphere seemed more relaxed. This lack of tension seemed to encourage students to be open and cooperative

## HIGH SCHOOLS: STUDENT PERFORMANCE

The four high schools' increased focus on standards, use of data and efforts to prepare students to take state tests have likely had a positive impact on students' performance. Table 7 presents student performance on the ninth-grade proficiency test and OGT in reading and math at each school for the past four years.

To be selected as a case study, these four schools met the *Schools of Promise* criteria in reading; none of the schools met the math requirement. Based on the research team's observations, three of the four schools were viewed as having outstanding instruction in their English departments. The same number also had reasonably strong math departments.

The reading and math test results suggest that the cause and effect of instruction and student achievement is not direct. Students, of course, come into these schools with varying capabilities and levels of preparation. In addition, for the ninth-grade proficiency test, teachers generally had these students for only six or seven months before they took the state test. Beginning with the OGT, students will have been in these schools for an additional year. Student performance on the 2004-2005 OGT in reading is encouraging. Three of the four high schools retained their *Schools of Promise* status. Alliance was ineligible because it failed to meet Annual Yearly Progress. Dawson-Bryant succeeded in achieving recognition in math. Nonetheless, the state tests are just one measure of quality in the schools.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> SOURCE: <u>nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d04/tables/dt04\_068.asp.</u> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public Teacher Questionnaire," and "Charter Teacher Questionnaire," 1999-2000.

**Table 7: IRC High School Case Studies - Reading and Math Performance** 

	Alliance	Bucyrus	Dawson- Bryant	New Lexington	State
Ninth-Grade Pr	oficiency Test - 10	th grade Results			
Reading					
2001-2002	91.6%	88.7%	82.9%	92.4%	95.9%
2002-2003	86.0%	87.9%	87.2%	85.0%	93.8%
2003-2004	98.9%	98.3%	98.6%	94.8%	95.7%
Math					
2001-2002	81.5%	80.9%	71.2%	84.7%	83.4%
2002-2003	72.1%	75.8%	76.6%	66.0%	82.0%
2003-2004	70.9%	90.0%	85.1%	79.1%	84.5%
Ohio Graduatio	on Test - 10 <sup>th</sup> grade	Results**			
2003-2004	66.7%	79.9%	69.5%	76.7%	78.5%
2004-2005	80.9%	88.8%	92.4%	87.8%	92.0%
Math					
2003-2004	58.3%	65.9%	48.2%	49.6%	68.4%
2004-2005	67.0%	79.4%	84.8%	74.4%	81.6%

Data Source: School and State Report Cards

IRC's research revealed that overall these four high schools have a number of good characteristics associated with positive impacts on student learning. The key ones most likely to make a difference with students are:

- caring, experienced and committed staff members who are prepared to work with students beyond regular class time;
- staff willingness to apply new information learned from professional development; and
- staff determination to keep trying.

Teachers have an increasing number of tools and resources to draw upon in their ongoing efforts to address students' needs. Over time, it is likely student learning as well as performance on the OGT will improve.

<sup>\*\*</sup>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.

# Characteristics of the Eight IRC Case Study Schools

This section provides a summary of characteristics common across all of the studied elementary and high schools. Although every school did not have all attributes, each aspect was evident at least once in both elementary and high schools. To the extent possible, the relationship of these characteristics is linked to the five lessons of *Schools of Promise* that previous research has identified. It is notable that the emerging characteristics often relate to more than one of the previously documented lessons, highlighting their interconnectedness. A summary of the characteristics by case study school begins at the end of this document.

#### **STAFF CHARACTERISTICS**

All eight case study schools have the following staff attributes:

- Strong and collaborative principals
- Senior/experienced staff
- ➤ High staff commitment
- Caring teachers and staff
- ➤ High expectations

Principals and teachers in the eight case study schools worked well with each other. They were experienced and professional. They also cared deeply about the students. Staff provided students with appropriate support, including meeting students' social and physical needs, setting high standards and expecting them to realize a high level of achievement.

## **PRACTICES IMPACTING STAFF**

The practices that staff most often viewed as making the most difference are the use of common planning time and creative hiring practices or use of staff. Five schools demonstrated these characteristics. Both traits were somewhat more prevalent in elementary schools. Common planning time means that teachers have regularly scheduled time to talk to each other and plan collaborative activities, especially with intervention teachers. Creative hiring often resulted in additional support staff, which gave the schools flexibility in meeting the needs of students. For example, some schools hired long-term substitutes as tutors or brought in additional intervention aides to increase intervention efforts. Creative use of staff also enabled teachers to better meet needs of individual students. For example, in one elementary school, the principal scheduled staff so that as many as four or five could be in one room at the same time, reducing the teacher-student ratio and facilitating special activities.

#### **PRACTICES IMPACTING STUDENTS**

The eight schools provided services or put into place practices that they believe have had a huge impact with students. These include:

- ➤ Tutoring at-risk students, in-school or after school (8 schools)
- Analysis of test data to inform intervention (7 schools)
- > Small class size or small reading groups for elementary students (7 schools)
- Frequent testing (7 schools)
- ➤ Collaboration between intervention and regular teachers (5 schools)
- Incentives (6 schools)

Some variation of providing one-on-one or small group tutoring to at-risk students as early as possible was present at all eight schools. Frequent testing and data analysis processes helped to identify students for intervention. Small class sizes and small reading groups for the elementary students benefited low as well as high performing students. Five of the eight schools also strengthened the connection between the intervention and regular classroom teachers to ensure students' needs were met, especially with respect to integrating special education students into the school. Full inclusion occurred in two schools and was a major transition, but staff believes that the practice has had a positive impact on student performance and behavior. Six of the eight schools also have a variety of small incentives they use to reward students.

#### INSTRUCTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Six of the eight schools in this case study project have a strong reading program or English department. Factors that contributed to this feature are the experience of staff and the quality and consistency of the materials being used. Three of the four high schools were viewed as also having strong math departments and all the high schools had implemented notable changes in the math curriculum in recent years. One elementary school made an explicit change in math instruction by expanding the amount of time for the math block to 90 minutes. This is also the only elementary school viewed by the research team as having strong math instruction. The IRC case study schools were chosen based on students' performance in reading, but the minimal attention given to math by most of the elementary schools is a concern.

#### STAFF DEVELOPMENT CHARACTERISTICS

Teachers at all eight schools were highly aware of the state standards and have done their best to align their curriculum with the benchmarks. At all eight, teachers benefited from district-provided professional development that has helped them apply the standards; two schools were in districts that had developed pacing charts. Staff at all but one of the schools has participated in extensive professional development related to standards as well as to their discipline areas. Three of the high schools have benefited substantially from grants, either through direct grants to the school or from affiliation with their district or region. Three of the elementary schools were awarded OhioReads grants, which resulted in increased reading resources, professional development and one-on-one tutoring. Three of the schools (two high schools and one elementary) are involved in a research-based professional development program.

#### PARENT AND COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

All four elementary schools and two high schools have extensive communication with parents and high levels of parent involvement. Seven of the eight schools have many parents who had attended the school. Although this was likely related to the fact that six of the schools were in rural, small towns, it was also true of two schools in more urban locations. In addition, at six schools, staff members are either graduates of the school or currently live in the community. All four high schools and two elementary schools have a close partnership with local colleges.

Table 8: IRC Cross-site of All Schools - Summary of School Characteristics by Five Lessons Learned

Five Less	ons Learne	d				Elen	nentar	у		High School			
Designing instruction to ensure every student's success	Providing rigorous instruction aligned to standards	Providing leadership that results in continuous improvement	Engaging parents and community to support student success	Creating a culture where each individual feels valued	School Characteristics		Jackson	Kyle	W.C. Bryant	Alliance	Bucyrus	Dawson-Bryant	New Lexington
					Staff Characteristics								
		Х			Strong and collaborative principals	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х
		Х			Senior/experienced staff	Х	Х	Х	Χ	Х	Х	Х	Х
		Х			High staff commitment	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х
		Х		Х	Caring teachers and staff	Χ	Х	Х	Χ	Х	Χ	Х	Х
Х		Х		Х	High expectations	Х	Х	Х	Χ	Х	Х	Х	Х
					Practices Impacting Staff		•	•					
		Х			Common planning time		Х	Х	Χ	Χ			Х
		Х			Creative hiring practices or use of staff		Х	Х	Χ		Х	Х	
					Practices Impacting Students	•				•	•	•	
Х	Х			Х	Tutoring at-risk students, in-school or after school	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х
Х	Х	Х			Analysis of test data to inform intervention	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х
Х	Х				Frequent testing	Χ	Х	Х	Х		Х	Х	Х
Х	Х			Х	Small class size (small reading groups for Elem.)	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х		Х	Х
Х	Х			Х	Collaboration of intervention, special, and regular	Х	Х	Х			Х		Х
				Х	Incentives	Х	Х		Х		Х	Х	Х

Table 8: IRC Cross-site of All Schools - Summary of School Characteristics by Five Lessons Learned —Continued—

Five Less	ons Learne	d				Elen	nentar	у		High School			
Designing instruction to ensure every student's success	Providing rigorous instruction aligned to standards	Providing leadership that results in continuous improvement	Engaging parents and community to support student success	Creating a culture where each individual feels valued	School Characteristics		Jackson	Kyle	W.C. Bryant	Alliance	Bucyrus	Dawson-Bryant	New Lexington
					Instructional Characteristics								
Х	Х	Х			Strong reading program or English Department	Х	Х	Х		Х	Х		Х
Х	Х	Х			Strong math instruction or Math Department			Х		Х	Х	Х	
	X				Change in math classes			Х		Х	Х	Х	Х
				•	Staff Development Characteristics								
Х	Х				Attention to state standards	Х	Х	Х	Χ	Х	Х	Х	Х
Х	Х	Х			Extensive professional development	Х	Х	Х	Χ	Х		Х	Х
Х	Х	Х			Grants (OhioReads for Elementary)	Х	Х	Х		Х		Х	Х
Х	Х	Х			Research-based professional development program				X			Х	Х
					Parent and Community Characteristics								
			Х		Extensive communication with parents	Х	Х	Х	Χ	Х		Х	
			Х		High level of parent involvement	Х	Х	Х	Χ	Х		Х	
			Х		High percentage of parents attended school		Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х
			X		Staff are graduates or part of community	Х	Х	Х	Χ	Х		Χ	Х
Х	Х		Х		Alliance with area colleges	Х		Х		Х	Х	Х	Х