

# Kyle Elementary School

Superintendent David A. Dolph

Principal Kimbe L. Lange

## Case Study Report Highlights: Kyle Elementary School

### PROVIDING LEADERSHIP THAT RESULTS IN CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

- **Strong and Experienced Leadership** - The principal has been at the school four years and has successfully worked with teachers to develop more specific school goals, establish common planning time, move special education and Title I teachers into regular classes, use data to more systematically inform instruction, bring in more intervention teachers and academic coaches and introduce all-day kindergarten.
- **Experienced, Collaborative and Flexible Teachers** - Teachers have an average of 14 years of experience, two are nationally board certified, 67 percent hold a Master's degree, and 47 percent had been at the school for 20 years or more. Teachers work closely together, especially since the intervention teachers provide instruction in regular classrooms. The fourth- and sixth-grade teachers team-teach. Teachers are open to new strategies.

### CREATING A CULTURE WHERE EACH INDIVIDUAL FEELS VALUED

- **Committed Teachers** - Teachers are aware of the hardships faced by many of their students. They care about the children, enjoy the challenge of producing results, and involve other staff in efforts to meet students' needs.
- **Efforts to Address Needs of All Students** - Classrooms have two to five adults available to work with students. Intervention and Title I teachers are in the regular classrooms. The school offers after-school tutoring ("Homework Helper"). Volunteers do one-on-one reading (OhioReads) and mentoring ("lunch buddies").
- **High Expectations** - All grades have homework. Teachers develop individualized handbooks by grade level that outline expectations for students and parents. Teachers regularly do timed tests and set goals for performance.
- **Male Role Models** - Four of six teachers in grades 4-6 and the music teacher are male.
- **Arts Program** - The music teacher is on-site three days a week and works with all grades. The school brings in several arts-related programs throughout the year, including The MUSE Machine from Dayton.
- **Sixth-grade Trip to Washington, D.C.** - Sixth-graders raise money for an annual education trip to the capital.

### DESIGNING INSTRUCTION TO ENSURE EVERY STUDENT'S SUCCESS

- **Reading Program** - Kyle began using the district-adopted Houghton Mifflin reading series in 2003-2004. Most teachers are continuing to supplement with various resources. The reading block is 90 minutes.
- **Math Program** - The math block has been increased to 90 minutes. Fifth-graders are introduced to Algebra.
- **Overall Educational Approach** - Teachers are encouraged to challenge students with material that may be slightly above their grade level. Younger grades constantly revisit concepts and some K-2 classes have students rotating through centers. Almost all classes use group work, which is aided by having several adults in each class.
- **Teacher Differentiation** - In grades K-3, there are two teachers for each grade and each has a distinctive teaching style. One is highly active and the other is more traditional. This setup helps to meet diverse student needs.
- **Use of Data to Target Instruction** - Kyle uses STAR Reading (a computer program) and *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills* (DIBELS) to test students' reading skills. Teachers use the *Yearly Progress Pro* each week to monitor math progress of fifth- and sixth-graders. Students also track their own performance.
- **Intervention** - The school's Learning Assistance Team reviews the cases of students having academic or behavioral issues. Three Title I teachers assist students working below level within their regular classroom and all special education students are in regular classes. Additional one-on-one pullout assistance is provided as needed.

### PROVIDING RIGOROUS INSTRUCTION ALIGNED TO STANDARDS

- **Attention to Standards** - Teachers are well aware of the standards and many check weekly that they are appropriately covering all benchmarks for their grade level. District pacing charts have been helpful.
- **Professional Development** - There is ongoing professional development led by several teachers and the district academic coach. Teachers also learn about new strategies at waiver days and the school's annual retreats.
- **Grants** - OhioReads has been the school's major grant. It has provided additional materials and a coordinator to recruit volunteers for one-on-one reading.

### ENGAGING PARENTS AND COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS

- **Parent Communication and Involvement** - Teachers have ongoing communication with parents, including having parents sign their child's progress report weekly. Parent involvement is somewhat mixed, but the school has an active Parent Teacher Organization and numerous activities.
- **Business and Community Involvement** - The business community funds a program that provides ongoing support, including after-school tutoring and mentoring, to 15 needy students (five each at fourth through sixth grade) at each school through college graduation. The business community pays for a teacher to tutor each night.

## INTRODUCTION

Kyle Elementary School is located in the city of Troy in Miami County. Located about 20 miles north of Dayton, Troy has a population of 22,000. In many ways, Troy represents a microcosm of the state of Ohio, as its socio-economic characteristics are consistent with the state averages. For example, its 1999 median family income of \$46,889 is 94 percent of the state median of \$50,037. A third of all employment is in managerial positions and a quarter is in sales and production each. Demographically, the city is 75 percent white, 12 percent African-American and 12 percent Hispanic. The city's poverty rate for families with children under age 18 is 10 percent.

Like the state, Troy has pockets of poverty. Kyle Elementary is located in one of the poorest areas of town, and 53 percent of students are classified as low-income. Kyle is an older school that serves an established neighborhood within walking distance to downtown. Since the district does not bus students, many walk to school. Kyle offers open enrollment, which adds to its diversity, as some families choose to send their children to the school.

<b>Troy City Schools District Profile</b>		
	<b>2003-2004</b>	<b>2004-2005</b>
<b>District Rating</b>	Effective (14 out of 18 indicators met)	Effective (19 out of 23 indicators met)
<b>District Enrollment</b>	4,348	4,405
<b>Schools</b>	Elementary Schools: 6 Middle Schools: 1 High Schools: 1	

<b>Kyle Elementary School Profile</b>		
	<b>2003-2004</b>	<b>2004-2005</b>
<b>School Rating</b>	Excellent (11 out of 12 indicators met)	Excellent (13 out of 14 indicators met)
<b>Enrollment</b>	260	259
<b>Grade Levels</b>	K-6	K-6
<b>Average Expenditure per Pupil</b>	\$7,774	NA
<b>Low-Income percentage</b>	47.6%	52.9%
<b>Percent racial/ethnic minority</b>	15.2%	17.6%
<b>Students with Disabilities</b>	11.0%	11.5%
<b>Student Attendance Rate</b>	96.1%	95.6%



<b>Kyle Elementary School Teacher Profile</b>		
	<b>2003-04</b>	<b>2004-05</b>
<b>Teachers</b>	15	17
<b>Average Teacher Salary</b>	\$48,371	\$50,196
<b>Percent of Courses Taught by Certified Licensed Teachers</b>	100%	100%
<b>Teacher Attendance Rate</b>	96.4%	95.1%
<b>Average Years of Experience</b>	14	16

# SCHOOLS OF PROMISE AND THE CASE STUDY RESEARCH PROCESS

Kyle Elementary initially became a *School of Promise* based on students’ reading performance in 2003-2004 and it retained this honor in 2004-2005. The fourth and sixth grades demonstrated huge gains on the proficiency tests in reading between 2002-2003 and 2003-2004, and the third grade also did well on the new reading achievement test. All students similarly exceeded the state’s minimum requirement of 75 percent passing in reading in 2004-2005. Students also had a strong performance in math (all grades met the state standard of 75 percent proficient) in 2003-2004 and 2004-2005. Unfortunately, the school did not meet other *Schools of Promise* conditions with respect to math, so Kyle has not yet achieved recognition for students’ math performance.

Kyle is one of four elementary schools randomly selected by Institutional Research Consultants (IRC) from the 68 elementary schools identified among the 2003-2004 *Schools of Promise*. The focus in this case study is the school’s reading program, but the research team also observed math classes and asked teachers about their math instruction. During the two-day case study visit, the researchers observed and interviewed all 14 kindergarten through fifth-grade teachers. The team also interviewed the principal, special education and intervention teachers and all instructional support staff. In addition, researchers conducted two single-sex focus groups with students, six males and six females. Finally, the team completed in-person interviews with two parents. A total of 39 people were interviewed, 14 teachers were observed and 16 teachers completed the case study survey. The table below outlines all research activities.

**Kyle Elementary School: Case Study Research Coverage**

	TOTAL	Interviewed		Observed		Returned Survey	
	N	N	N	N	%	N	%
<b>Teachers</b>							
K – Grade 6	14	14	100.0	14	100.0	10	83.3
<b>Other Interviews</b>							
Principal						1	
Special Education Teachers						2	
Title I Teachers						3	
Academic Coach						1	
OhioReads Coordinator						1	
School Psychologist						1	
School Counselor						1	
Music Teacher						1	
Parents						2	
Students (Two Focus Groups)						12	
<b>Other Observations</b>							
Dance Assembly						1	
<b>TOTAL INTERVIEWS</b>						<b>39</b>	
<b>TOTAL TEACHERS OBSERVED</b>						<b>14</b>	
<b>TOTAL TEACHER SURVEYS</b>						<b>16</b>	

This report is organized using the “Five Lessons Learned” identified in earlier *Schools of Promise* case study research.<sup>1</sup> These 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. Kyle Elementary evidenced many of these components. This report describes key characteristics of Kyle Elementary School and the numerous changes that staff has implemented in recent years as part of the efforts to improve student learning. Many of the strategies and activities may have relevance for other schools.

## **PROVIDING LEADERSHIP THAT RESULTS IN CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

Kimbe Lange has been principal at Kyle Elementary for four years. Prior to becoming principal at Kyle, she had been involved with almost every aspect of school administration, including special education, Title I and gifted education. Her background and high expectations set the tone at the school. The teachers agreed that Lange has been the impetus behind many of the changes that have positively impacted student learning. Comments included:

Our principal is a fabulous person. She has a vision. She is organized and scheduled. She makes the most of every day.

[The principal] has made a big difference as far as academics go. She has a ‘Can do’ attitude. It’s quiet, but it’s firm.

The principal has been a real cause of this change. She shows real leadership. In dealing with problems she lets the staff discuss it. They figure out the problem and decide on a solution. Then they own it.

In the past few years, the school has been impacted by the following changes (several were initiated by the school but others were district-level decisions):

- setting specific school goals
- introducing common planning time
- reconfiguring the special education and Title I programs
- more systematic use of data to inform instruction
- creative hiring that brought in more intervention teachers and an Academic Coach
- full-day kindergarten

Staff mentioned each of these factors when they explained the reasons behind Kyle’s success with students. When the principal was considering these changes, she obtained teachers’ input so that each became a “building decision.” Each of these factors will be discussed briefly in this section and then revisited throughout the report where applicable.

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<sup>1</sup>The *Five Lessons Learned* emerged from the case study research conducted by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) in 2001-02 (see [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) ). 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](http://www.ode.state.oh.us/achievement_gaps/schools_of_promise/FOP.asp)).

### Setting Specific School Goals

Lange spent her first year at Kyle gathering information about school needs from school and community members. She elaborated on how the changes came about:

When I came here, the schedule was not efficient. The teachers did not have common planning time, and we didn't have enough academic time with the kids. I thought we had a lot of wasted time during the day. For the first year, my superintendent said to sit back and watch, observe and try to decide how you can make things better, but don't change anything the first year. That was probably very wise advice because they got used to me and I got used to them, and the respect grew.

At the beginning of the second year, I pulled them together and asked what it was they needed to do and what I could do to help make this a better school so kids achieve more – because our kids were at the bottom. I knew they worked hard. I knew they were excellent teachers, and I could see no reason why our students could not be performing.

During waiver days (professional development) in her first school year, Lange talked to teachers about their goals for language arts, math and overall school procedures. Teachers formed groups based on their interests. Ms. Lange encouraged them to brainstorm and then she documented all suggestions on large-format paper. Staff began to put all these ideas together at the summer retreat at the end of Lange's first year at the school. They continue to revisit and refine the goals every waiver day and at the following annual summer retreat. Several teachers pointed out that it was a big boost in self-confidence for them to see their use of specific school goals making a difference with students.

### Introducing Common Planning Time

The principal revised the school schedule to give teachers more planning time throughout the day. Several days a week, teachers now have common planning periods. If needed, Lange brings in substitutes to cover classes. Lunch schedules were rearranged so teachers in each grade level group (grades K-1, 2-3, 4-5, and 6 respectively) overlapped. In addition, teachers have opportunities to meet before children arrive, as the school day begins at 7:55 a.m., but students do not arrive until 8:45.

### Reconfiguring Special Education and Title I Programs

The existing pullout program was not serving the needs of special education students. The school had a lot of discipline problems, which staff hypothesized was mainly due to special education students being embarrassed and not fitting in with their peers. The principal asked staff to experiment with moving special education teachers into the regular classroom to provide additional support. She explained that the strategy she had always used upon introducing anything new was to say, "Just try it for two months or a quarter, and if it doesn't work, we will rethink it."

It was a painful process for teachers, as they were not accustomed to having someone in their classrooms or differentiating instruction for special education students within the regular class. Fortunately, teachers could see immediate benefits, especially with respect to student behavior. A few special education students have also demonstrated greater independence as a result of receiving assistance within the classroom rather than being pulled out. As teachers have become increasingly comfortable with having a peer in the classroom, they have experienced additional benefits including greater sharing of instructional strategies, joint planning and team-teaching. One intervention teacher elaborated on the process:

We slowly introduced inclusion. We did a “secret test” of it. We started doing it and then started charting the growth of students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs). We went from there, bringing teachers on board by grade level, one at a time. At first, we were a little bit worried about doing it, because team-teaching had not been done here. It has been really successful – the team-teaching, the communication that we have, and just learning as teachers have really been good.

Once special education was fully entrenched in the regular classroom, the principal began to do the same thing with the Title I teachers. The end result is that each classroom has more than one adult at least part of the time during reading and math instruction and many small group activities. The intervention teachers continue to do some pullout activities, but the school no longer has a separate special education classroom. The principal summarized Kyle’s approach, “The model we use is to keep those people in the classroom as much as possible, but for a portion of language arts time, they can pull out students and do additional work to reach some of those skills.”

A striking feature of Kyle Elementary is the sheer number of adults in most classrooms. There is at least one intervention teacher in every classroom at some point during the day. The regular teachers of fourth- and sixth-grade classes team-teach, so with intervention, student teachers, volunteers and other specialists, there are often four or five adults in each class. This arrangement enables the classes to have up to five student groups working simultaneously with direct adult supervision. Although the other grades (K-3 and 5) do not have teachers explicitly team-teaching, there is a great deal of collaboration and sharing of information. Moreover, all classes have special education or intervention teachers and other, additional adults moving in and out throughout the day providing needed assistance to the children. Grades K-3 are self-contained classrooms. The grade 4 teachers team-teach the entire fourth grade but each teacher takes the lead for specific subjects. Grade 5 students change classes (one teacher specializes in language arts and the other has all students for math). The set-up for grade 6 is similar to grade 4.

Opening up classrooms to intervention did not come easily for teachers, but most of the staff members attributed the shift as having a positive impact on student learning. For example, teachers mentioned that placing more teachers in the classroom has especially benefited the school’s large transient population. As one noted, “The kids who were here from kindergarten have a base, but we are getting all these other kids.” The additional adults in the class help these students catch up without disrupting learning of other students or making those needing assistance feel different.

#### More Systematic Use of Data to Inform Instruction

Once the intervention specialists began to work in classrooms, staff fully appreciated the need to more systematically monitor students’ performance. At a school retreat, teachers developed a plan and provided staff development. The principal explained that starting with the state proficiency test results they introduced teachers to item analyses, and now the teachers have taken ownership of this process:

We started with our test results from the state (proficiency and now achievement). They had never seen an item analysis report, so we showed them how to do that. We got the old tests out, and asked, for example, ‘Why did everyone miss #2? Is it stated a certain way, did we teach it, what’s going on there?’ They now beg for the item analysis to see how they did and if they reached the kids. This is a big shift I’ve seen in education overall. Instead of just

administrators looking over data, now we give it to the teachers, and they know how to look at it, how to adjust to it and how to plan for it.

Teachers are now better able to determine which students need additional assistance and in what areas. They also have empowered upper elementary students by showing them how to monitor their own progress. Students now maintain folders documenting their progress.

### Creative Hiring

The principal has been able to retain a reading specialist through the creative shifting of district personnel funds. The district superintendent was supportive of this request, with the stipulation that Kyle must share the reading specialist with another Title I school. Principal Lange emphasized, "I think human resources are better than tangible resources any day and I'll take those human resources if they are good." She is willing to give up supplies and other resources to retain effective staff. The district also added an academic coach who models best practices for teachers in language arts. She works with Kyle and other district schools. Kyle now has plans to extend the academic coaching activities by also having two in-house teachers take on this responsibility.

Other aspects of Kyle's strong leadership stemmed from the teachers themselves. Specifically, they were an experienced group that worked well together and were notably flexible.

### Highly Experienced Staff Committed to School

Teachers at Kyle average 14 years of classroom experience. Two (one regular teacher and one intervention specialist) have national board certification. More than half (67 percent) have master's degrees. There is minimal teacher turnover at the school. The principal explained that she looks for people who are highly committed to children and are likely to stay:

You have to have a passion to do this, and if you don't, then you need to find a different school. There are all kinds of opportunities out there where you don't have to be this involved with the kids, but with this population of kids, you have to, you need to. If it's not there, then they are not going to learn. I look for that when we hire people.

Nearly half (47 percent) of the teachers that responded to the case study survey had taught at Kyle for at least 20 years. Teachers are highly committed and work well with the principal.

### Collaborative Working Relationships

The placement of the special education and Title I teachers in regular classrooms has encouraged a more open and collaborative instructional relationship between teachers. Teachers have primary or intermediate grade level meetings weekly. The academic coach described how the ongoing team work benefits students:

What I like best about being in this building is the creativity of the staff in bringing the teachers together, the teamwork in getting the kids to where they need to be. I'm in two other buildings as well, but I see this building as more advanced in what they are willing to do to move the children forward. They are eager to work as a team. They have done a lot to implement the guided reading process. They write down and use data to drive instruction.

Several teachers team-teach and others see themselves as working with a partner. In addition to informal sharing, several regularly provide professional development presentations in their area of expertise and have observers in their classes.

For the most part, the teachers have a strong camaraderie. Teachers get along with each other despite having very different instructional styles and personalities. They emphasized that their commitment to the children unites them. The collaborative atmosphere is enhanced because most of the newer teachers had a connection with Kyle before coming on board. Several completed their student teacher practicum at Kyle. Two had been long-term substitutes at the school before taking full-time positions. Another attended Kyle as a child and was taught by teachers who are now his colleagues. However, one teacher expressed that she missed a former grade level partner and had not been able to establish the same closeness with the replacement. In addition, a newer teacher was uncomfortable about the close staff connections.

### Flexibility

The teachers are adaptable and open to trying new strategies. In the past few years, the school has completely changed its reading program and the manner in which they address needs of at-risk students. The teachers agreed that they are encouraged to try new things and that they feel supported by the principal as well as other teachers.

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

Kyle Elementary has a friendly, nurturing environment. The school has a welcoming energy combined with an underlying calmness. The school counselor said:

There's a certain kind of energy here and we are a *high need* school. The environment here has a kind of warmth and the staff truly embraces each and every child. The principal has been absolutely fabulous. We have policies and rules we have to follow, but because of the situations and environments our kids are coming from, we can't just take one rule and not look at the situation. So we give what's needed at the time. No two kids' needs are the same, so we base it on the individual's needs.

Staff members emphasized that Lange plays a huge role in modeling care and commitment. They gave numerous examples of her activities, including driving students to mental health appointments or to the doctor's office (as some parents do not have cars); attending every Learning Assistance Team meeting; and helping to create IEPs for special education students. The principal said she tries to infuse respect for everyone in the school and keep the focus on the children. She said they talk about the importance of the "affective" and how that is a big piece of what makes the school successful. They care about the kids and go above and beyond to make sure everybody is safe, happy and learning. A sixth-grade teacher described the school's overall nurturing environment: "I don't think there is one person here who isn't willing to just say hi to kids, ask them about their weekend, or if there is anything they would like to talk about. From the janitor to the cook, everybody is very open and nurturing to all of these kids."

### Staff Committed to Students

Teachers said they have come to realize that they enjoy the challenge of working with students who have problems but are able to demonstrate substantial growth. They also like the camaraderie established by teachers working toward a common goal and the way the principal "steps out of her role as principal" to meet the children's needs. Staff members make efforts to get to know the children. One intervention aide explained:

I think it is important to know a little bit more about the kid other than he struggles in math. I think it's nice to know his brother's name is Joe and he plays soccer etc. It's easier to talk to them in a way that can help them if you know a little bit more about them. We are encouraged to talk to the kids, to get to know them.

You get the feeling when you're talking to another adult in the building about a certain kid, they really do know the kid, especially as the kids get to be older – not because the kids have been in a lot of trouble, but because they've been around. It's not a very big school, so you really do get to know all the kids and the kids know us.

During observations, teachers called students by name frequently and offered encouragement such as, "You are doing awesome!" Input is also sought from relevant staff any time an issue arises with a child. The principal, teachers, specialists, aides and others talk and e-mail each other daily, discussing academic and behavioral concerns.

### Specific Efforts to Address Needs of All Students

The main way Kyle meets the needs of students is by having more than one adult in the classroom throughout the day. The additional adults include two special education teachers, three Title I teachers, five intervention aides and other specialists (ESL, gifted and talented, and academic coach). The outcome of having these staff members, along with volunteers and student teachers, in the classroom is that students have more direct supervision by adults and more opportunities for small group activities. Class size ranged from 13 to 45. The self-contained K-3 classes averaged 18 children and the upper elementary classes had an average of 30 students. In most classes, students typically worked in groups of two to six, with an adult supervising their activities. The OhioReads program in which students read one-on-one with a community volunteer and the "lunch buddy" program in which students are paired with an adult mentor are further ways students are nurtured and given individualized attention. In addition, Homework Helper, funded by the local business community, provides after-school tutoring for students.

### High Expectations

Children in all grades, including kindergarten, have homework. Teachers prepare individual handbooks for each grade level so students and parents know the expectations. In addition to preparing students to do well on the proficiency test, teachers said they set goals for timed tests and encourage students "to beat the test."

### Male Role Models

Kyle has a higher than average number of male teachers for an elementary school. In grades 4-6, four of the six teachers are men, and the music teacher is also male. Since many of the children come from single parent households, teachers view having a male role model and seeing men and women working well together to be good for the students. Since the principal and all grade K-3 teachers are female, several of whom described themselves as "mother hens," they thought the men helped provide a healthy balance for the students.

### Arts Programs

Kyle hired a retired band director to teach music. He works with all grades and is at school three days a week. His main objective is to encourage students to enjoy music, and beginning in the third grade, learn to play recorders that the school provides. The music class reinforces reading in numerous ways, such as singing songs and learning to read music. For sixth-grade students, he shares music magazines that include biographies of musicians and detailed descriptions of instruments. The music class reinforces math skills as students learn about the importance of fractions in counting rhythm and encourages students to believe in themselves. The music teacher explained, "Kids are sometimes afraid to express themselves, and I try to take that fear away, tell them it's okay to sound different than everybody else because you have your own voice that's yours." The school brings in a number of arts-related educational programs and performances throughout the year. One of the parent volunteers has been instrumental in

establishing a connection with The MUSE Machine in Dayton which has brought ballet and orchestral music to the school.

#### Sixth-grade Trip to Washington, D.C.

The sixth-grade class has an annual trip to Washington D.C. Students read books and do activities throughout the year related to planning for this trip. The entire experience is intended to be educational. Students conduct various fund-raisers for scholarships that will pay trip expenses. Much of the funding comes from parents and the business community.

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

The school's discipline-specific goals have helped staff focus on the steps needed to improve student achievement and performance on state tests. The main goals for reading are to improve reading fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary and improve ability in written expression. For math, the goals are to improve recall and word-problem skills. Additional goals stated by teachers include: becoming independent and responsible for their learning, and learning to be good citizens. Several teachers mentioned the importance of character education and self control. Intervention teachers especially wanted to see the students fit in with their peers.

The school recently increased the math block from one hour to one and a half hours a day and added 15 minutes to the language arts blocks, resulting in both blocks being 90 minutes each. All classrooms regularly have students working in small groups, facilitated by having more than one adult in classes available to supervise activities. Many teachers have advanced training in reading instruction and several teachers were particularly strong in math. Teachers often do activities that go beyond the standards for the grade level being taught. They enjoy challenging the children and are pleased that most students are able to handle the material. Classrooms are well-equipped with books and other resources. Teachers mentioned they intentionally wanted to have a wide variety of books and resources available to the children, noting their need for something above or below grade level. Children are permitted to take home some of the classroom books overnight.

In the 2004-2005 school year, Kyle began using the Houghton Mifflin reading series [http://www.hmco.com/products/products\\_elementary.html](http://www.hmco.com/products/products_elementary.html) adopted by the district. Some teachers were involved in the textbook selection process and a few noted they piloted the series in the classroom a year earlier. All language arts teachers meet once a quarter and the classroom teachers also meet by grade level to discuss the reading program and share strategies that they have found most useful. Teachers acknowledged that although the series met most of their expectations and the state standards were explicitly addressed, most still found themselves requiring supplemental resources in order to provide the level of depth and repetition needed by their students. Teachers working with struggling readers especially seemed to need supplemental resources.

In grades K-3, Kyle has two distinctly different types of teachers for each grade level. One tends to be highly energetic with lots of activity in the classroom, whereas the counterpart appears to be calmer and somewhat more traditional in her approach. Both types of teachers have additional adults in the room, but the *high energy* teachers tend to have more adults, with each supervising a student group. The more traditional teachers tend to do more whole class activities with an intervention aide assisting students as needed. The principal explained this setup helps the school meet student needs, as students can be placed with a teacher most likely to be an appropriate match with the child's personality and needs. There is less apparent distinction between teacher styles in grades 4-6. The classroom teachers in fourth and sixth grades team-teach.

In the following descriptions, more detail is given on the more active classrooms, simply because more was going on. This does not imply that these classrooms are better than the more traditional classes. Effective instruction was observed in both types of environments and staff emphasized that both approaches are valued.

### Kindergarten

Kyle began offering all-day kindergarten three years ago and staff agrees it has helped students tremendously. One first-grade teacher described the impact: "Having these kids come up ready to go makes the biggest difference to us – jumpstarting kids and getting them going. The kids who came in with half-day kindergarten were nowhere near the kids who had the whole day kindergarten." The principal was able to convince the district to limit Kyle's kindergarten classes to 22 students (the school had been averaging 25-27), as data demonstrated that Kyle's students came in with less preparation. The kindergarten classes have been at full capacity since the school moved to the all-day schedule. The principal noted that they are now seeing more than a year of progress with the students and they are much better prepared for first grade.

The kindergarten teachers generally work with the students in small groups. One teacher provided a description of the usual organization:

I work with a Title I teacher who comes in the classroom everyday. We break into three groups, four days a week. I also have an aide that comes in, so that's how we get three groups of six students. We change the groups every quarter. We pull out some of the lower kids and work one-on-one with them as often as we can. The Title I teacher pulls them out. I also have two aides, one in language arts and one math, who can pull them out.

In the other kindergarten classroom, they were observed doing the *Blitz*:

Five adults were in the room. Each adult was working with a small group of children. A grandmother volunteer assisted three students who were working on a phonics worksheet. The classroom teacher led two students through an interactive phonics activity. The intervention teacher supervised six students completing a writing activity. The Title I teacher was reading with seven students. The intervention aide was helping a group of five students write their letters. They were separated enough so that discussion from one group did not disrupt any of the other groups. The teachers and students were completely engaged.

Students were writing letters, reading, doing phonics and writing stories. During the *Blitz*, the teacher often works with students having difficulty. Additionally, she has a sign-up sheet for children who think they need extra help, which she offers during recess time. This teacher almost always has students sign up for help, thereby missing their recess.

### First Grade

One of the first-grade teachers emphasized how she revisits concepts to reinforce children's learning: "It's a lot of repetition, everything from math to reading to phonics. For everything we do, we just never let it go. We always come back to it." In addition, this teacher created rhythmic routines she found helpful in teaching students about sounds, letters, and numbers. She named it the *Phonics Dance* <http://www.phonicsdance.com/> and regularly conducts workshops on this method, having trained nearly 4,000 teachers. Kyle's K-3 teachers utilize elements of this program in their classes. She explained how this program came about:

About nine years ago, when I went back to first grade from third grade, we were kind of at the tail end of whole language in the district and there was not a lot of phonics instruction. I noticed that the kids needed to have a better sense of sounds, letters and letter combinations, so I started developing the program called the *Phonics Dance*. It's basically my version of Four-Blocks and Literacy Collaborative.

The first-grade teachers have students write daily and stressed that writing is as important as reading. They also do a lot of differentiated instruction. They strive to bring lower students up to grade level while continuing to challenge top students. One teacher explained that she has introduced students to division with remainders and rounding to the nearest 100. Her class works for 20 minutes in the morning with their *Math Mania* book. During language arts, there are four adults in the room working with four student groups. The teacher highlighted the benefits:

The beauty of it is I don't have to plan any centers. I don't have to plan any busy work to keep the majority of the class under control while I'm trying to run a group. Everyone is in a group and is busy printing and reading at the same time. My planning is just so easy and everybody is just so involved. We keep saying "Gosh, this should be the model in all classrooms." I love it – this is the best part of guided reading for me. This is the second year we've done it, and it's a dream, it is just a dream.

Another major impact is on the students – all but one has met the district reading goal for first-graders. The other first-grade classroom is more traditional and quieter; an intervention aide comes in to work with two students during language arts.

### Second Grade

The 21 students in the more active classroom were working in groups at the word center, the writing center and the listening center. All seemed to know what they were doing and were on task. When they finished work at one center they moved to another one – sometimes with a teacher's guidance and at other times without. Three adults were working with them: classroom teacher, literacy coach and Title I teacher. The group at the listening station was listening to a taped story with the teacher. Every so often she would stop the tape and ask them questions. A second group was reading a play with the teacher's guidance. Every child had a reading folder. The teacher made notes in her notebook as students read. She used a running record to keep track of students' mistakes. The room was abuzz with learning as the students were learning to be fluent readers.

In the more conventional class, an intervention aide normally works with two or three students or moves around the room helping students as needed during the language arts block. As scheduling allows, a few students will work one-on-one for 15-30 minutes with either a special education or Title I teacher during the day.

### Third Grade

During classroom observations conducted by the case study team, both third-grade classrooms had students working in small groups and both had a Title I teacher in their classes during language arts. In one class, the teacher was working through a Houghton Mifflin basal reader story with one group, another group was in the lunch area acting out a play on their own, two students were working with a Title I teacher, and two other students were reading independently on their own. This teacher is pleased with the new series, saying, "I think that the reading series we're working with right now, Houghton Mifflin, goes perfectly with the reading test and the

standards, so I think we should do fine.” This teacher mentioned that when they do math, her students especially enjoy doing their work on individual white boards.

The other class had organized the children into two groups. One of the groups worked with the Title I teacher and the other with the classroom teacher, practicing their fluency by reading a play based on a folktale from Vietnam. They practiced it twice, allowing students to read different roles. The classroom teacher asked students to raise their hands when they heard a vocabulary word from the story. The classroom teacher had many manipulatives for students: flashcards, a script and a riddle. She sat with them on the carpet. Students practiced fluency and were given several attempts to do so, improving each time. Each time they read the play the teacher said, “Let’s see if we can read it better this time.” And they did. They read aloud, seemed to comprehend, and laughed appropriately at the story line. The teacher explained how she tries to teach all subjects like she teaches reading, “I use vocabulary words, guided reading and buddy readings.”

#### Fourth Grade

The two classroom teachers team-teach. One takes the lead on language arts and social studies while the other has responsibility for math and science. During the language arts class, an intervention teacher and a reading specialist are also in the room, resulting in at least four teachers in the room available to assist students. The teacher explained that testing revealed that reading levels range from grades 1 to 11, so they do a lot of teaming and group work. She described her usual approach:

To introduce a story, I do whole group. We do vocabulary and the teachers monitor and walk around and work with all students. Sometimes we split into level reading so teachers have a more homogeneous group. Sometimes we just mix them all up. We do a two-week rotation. We take a week to get through the story then we use the little readers or we do writer’s workshop. That’s only 45 minutes a day. The rest of the time it is whole group. Before we begin the 45-minute period, I spend about 15 minutes doing a grammar paper. Then they spend a nice chunk of time doing independent reading because a lot of these kids have a hard time reading. I do ask parents to sign daily that their kids have read.

During the observation, there were a total of five adults in the classroom (two fourth-grade teachers, a student teacher, an intervention teacher and a reading specialist). The classroom teacher gave a short introduction to the lesson using the overhead projector. She gave lots of examples and stimulated student interaction and discussion. She asked students to write an introductory paragraph to a personal narrative. The other adults in the room walked around helping individual students write their paragraphs. The teacher explained the goal at the beginning of the class: “Today we are going to work on exciting introductions in stories.” She read four different beginning paragraphs and then asked which was better. She had students explain why.

These teachers seemed to work well together. They knew what the lesson was about and they worked with students to achieve the best from them.

#### Fifth Grade

The fifth-grade language arts class included a Title I teacher who worked with a small group while the regular teacher directed the larger group. Students in both groups were to do the tasks listed on the board: “Select a discussion director, a researcher, an illustrator and a connector

(person assigned to help connect students' ideas together) as you begin your discussion." The Title I teacher encouraged the students to be inquiry-based by building their own understandings and questioning each other.

During the observed math class, the other fifth-grade teacher introduced the students to algebra problems. He used the overhead projector while the two other adults (an intervention teacher and intervention aide) walked around the room offering assistance as needed. This was the first day for algebra. Students had prepared the previous week using manipulatives (charts and dice). The classroom teacher had been trained in *Hands-on Algebra* several years ago and has implemented that training in his classroom ever since. The 21 students in the class sat in clusters of five. The teacher used lots of math manipulatives and said his students have a good background in algebra by the end of fifth grade. The teacher listed an algebraic problem on the overhead asking students to go through the steps in solving it. He walked through the steps with them. They were expected to work the problem at their desks. Although algebra is not usually covered at the fifth-grade level, the students seemed able to do the work, and were all actively engaged.

### Sixth Grade

The sixth-grade teachers team-teach. During the reading block, there are usually five adults in the room (two classroom teachers, an intervention teacher, an intervention aide and a student teacher). Students are organized into three groups. On the day of the site visit, the teacher was reading the book *Johnny Tremain* to students in preparation for the upcoming trip to Washington, D.C. All 36 students were crowded into a single classroom, sitting in five different clusters. Adults were sitting surrounded by the students and worked with them. The teacher periodically stopped reading and asked questions. The adults commented as well as the students. Students were then asked to complete a worksheet on the reading. The classroom was very crowded; it is used only for large group instruction. When the class does group work, students split into groups and some go to another room. A bulletin board and table had books and reading material for the upcoming trip to D.C. This reading class is combined with the social studies class; they are learning about history in preparation for their trip.

The language arts teacher, generally with the highest level group, explained that he has gifted students and uses various strategies to challenge them:

They spend the morning reading on their own. We came up with "book talks" using novels. It's been absolutely wonderful. We've had really great discussions from it. That is one thing I'm able to use that I don't think would quite fit with the other groups because I don't think they would comprehend as well and be able to have the discussion-type setting.

For math, the teacher set a goal for students. They must score at least 80 percent on timed tests by the fourth nine-week period. If they do not, they must work with him during lunch to earn extra credit. He explained he tries to present this requirement in a positive way.

### Use of Data to Target Instruction

Focus on testing has increased. The school uses STAR Reading (a computer program) and the *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills* (DIBELS) to test students' reading skills. In grades 5 and 6, the teachers use the *Yearly Progress Pro* (YPP), a 15-minute timed test, each week to monitor math progress. Kyle also provides teachers with item analyses on students' state proficiency and achievement results.

One teacher and the academic coach have conducted classes before school for grade K-3 teachers on how to keep “running records” on student reading performance. Teachers collect and use data to drive instruction. One Title I teacher compiles the information collected by teachers and enters it into charts. The charts help teachers see areas on which students need additional review. They maintain a data file for each child. Next year there will be training for facilitators in each district building so they can train teachers at the upper grade levels to use the running records technique.

At one of the annual retreats, the teachers learned about how to empower students by showing them how to keep track of their own test data. The teachers were concerned that it might be overwhelming to the students, but they found that the older children enjoy learning how to manage information and create graphs.

### Intervention

The Learning Assistance Team meets to discuss ways to provide support to students that are having problems. The team involves the principal, school counselor, intervention specialists, the classroom teacher, the Title teacher, the speech teacher and psychologist. Parents are invited to the meeting. If necessary, testing is done. If the child needs only modifications, those are done. By the end of the year, if the problems have not been resolved, the team discusses the student’s placement for the upcoming school year.

There are three Title I teachers who work with students who have been identified as below grade level in reading. Two are full-time and the half-time teacher works with grades 3 and 4. Principal Lange noted, “If we have a class that’s real heavy with at-risk kids, we definitely try to get them in there.” As noted, these teachers go into the regular classes to work with students, but they also do pullout groups, focused on the individual needs of the children. Tutoring through Homework Helper and OhioReads are additional ways of providing one-on-one instruction to students needing assistance.

### Special Education

All special education is now inclusion and the school no longer has a self-contained resource room. Three years ago, the school had only one full-time intervention teacher. There are now two intervention teachers and five intervention aides. For the most part, the special education teachers and aides go into the classroom to work with students with IEPs. Since moving into the classrooms, they have seen substantial growth in special education students. Within the classroom, they often work with mixed groups of students including those on IEPs, those at-risk and those who are average students. The groups are fluid and change daily. The principal noted that they “don’t want students to think they only work with the lower group.”

Some of the students will also leave the regular classroom for additional one-on-one work with an intervention teacher or aide for 15-30 minutes on their specific reading difficulties such as comprehension, phonics, and responding in complete sentences. IEPs are developed with reference to the curriculum, the benchmarks and the standards, as well as students’ needs.

### Other Services

Additional support staff includes a school counselor, a speech pathologist, a school psychologist, a gifted/talented teacher, and an ESL teacher. The social worker is at the school two and a half days a week but does not work at other schools. The other positions provide services throughout the district.

The school counselor acts as an advocate for the child in any kind of conflict situation, working with both parents and staff. She directs families to the appropriate services to get the help they

need. There are about 15 students that she sees on a monthly basis and then another 20-30 come in during a month. She also conducts guidance lessons teaching the children social skills on various topics such as friendship skills, empathy and identifying feelings. In addition, she coordinates the “lunch buddy” program in which adults from the community volunteer to be mentors to children.

### Retention

The school does retain students. Teachers said they discuss their recommendations with parents, and they have a letter parents can sign if they disagree. They would prefer to retain students early on before they risk being automatically retained if they do not pass the third-grade achievement test.<sup>2</sup> The IEP team reviews the cases of students being considered for retention. Most students with IEPs are promoted, but the school retained one last year who was substantially behind. He is making greater progress this year.

## **PROVIDING RIGOROUS INSTRUCTION ALIGNED TO STANDARDS**

All teachers confirmed their attention to the state standards in everything they do. At the minimum, they do weekly monitoring to ensure their compliance, and several mentioned constantly referencing the guidelines and benchmarks. Most have participated in workshops on curriculum alignment provided by the district. Kyle’s teachers use district-created packets with a pacing guide that breaks down the standards by grade level and provides additional guidance regarding timelines.

One teacher summarized her evolving understanding of the standards, “Every year I’ve definitely changed, learning more about how children learn and becoming more familiar with state standards. We learned it in college, but I’m becoming more familiar even now. I think when you teach you really learn more. I look at my state standards often.” Teachers view the standards as driving instruction, but feel comfortable bringing in thematic units or using other “fun ways” to make their classes as engaging as possible. The principal reviews lesson plans to ensure teachers are doing the things needed. She also checks on alignment as part of her regular walk-through.

### Professional Development

Kyle’s teachers have participated in numerous professional development experiences and several were active workshop leaders. Teachers’ professional development experiences included exposure to the following national and state programs that provide teachers with a variety of strategies for engaging students in reading and math:

#### *Reading*

- Four-Blocks [www.four-blocks.com](http://www.four-blocks.com) - A multilevel, balanced literacy framework that incorporates four different approaches (guided reading, self-selected reading, writing, and working with words) each day
- Literacy Collaborative <http://www.lcosu.org> - A long-term professional development program designed to provide a comprehensive, schoolwide approach to literacy instruction in the primary and intermediate grades and raise the level of achievement for all students
- Reading Recovery <http://www.readingrecovery.org> - A staff development program for first-grade teachers that provides strategies for children with the goal of making them proficient readers and writers by the end of first grade.

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<sup>2</sup> Automatic retention of students who do not pass the third-grade achievement test is state law.

- Summer Institute on Reading Intervention (SIRI) <http://www.ohioreads.org/educators/educators.asp> - A state staff development program affiliated with OhioReads that provides training and materials to elementary school teachers to help develop appropriate interventions with the goal of fourth-graders are reading at grade level.

#### *Math*

- Hands-on Algebra [www.borenson.com/index5.htm](http://www.borenson.com/index5.htm) - Uses manipulatives to introduce algebraic concepts to students as early as grade 3
- Discovery - Funded by the National Science Foundation in the early 1990s, Ohio's Statewide Systemic Initiative modeled inquiry-based instruction for math and science teachers. Universities and regional professional development centers throughout the state offered in-service training promoting inquiry and hands-on activities as a result of this program. This grant also influenced state policy and standards, as the Ohio Department of Education and the Board of Regents were partners with Miami University and The Ohio State University in its implementation.

In addition, teachers said that they found workshops on DIBELS, brain research and how to work with children in poverty highly applicable. One teacher enjoys attending the Second-grade Conference for Ohio Teachers (directed by the Staff Development for Educators (SDE) <http://www.sde.com>), as she finds professional development specific to her grade level to be most beneficial. A sixth-grade teacher appreciated an Ohio State University in-service that gave him ideas on how to incorporate novels along with the use of a basal reader.

Teachers regularly share their knowledge with colleagues at meetings before or after school. Several Kyle teachers are active regional presenters. In the upcoming year, two teachers will serve as the school's "on-site literacy coaches" and provide additional ongoing professional development support. Teachers emphasized that Kyle's annual retreats provide essential opportunities for in-service training and team building.

#### Grants

One of the school's major grants has been OhioReads, which paid for the purchase of leveled reading books, a part-time program coordinator and professional development, including the school's annual retreat. In addition to managing the OhioReads resource room, the coordinator recruits and schedules the community volunteers who work one-on-one with the children, mainly listening as they read stories and providing encouragement. Many volunteers are retired teachers who already have the training and expertise; they also play a mentoring role with the children. The school's OhioReads funding will be reduced in the coming year. At the time of this report, the principal was trying to identify additional grant or community-based funding that would cover the salary of the coordinator, as this position is seen as critical to the continuation of the program.

#### Student Performance

Kyle students did exceptionally well on the third-grade reading achievement test in the 2003-2004 school year, as 100 percent passed. In addition, fourth- and sixth-graders demonstrated gains in reading. Specifically, 79.5 percent of fourth-graders passed in reading (a 22 percent improvement over 2002-2003), and 89.4 percent of sixth-graders passed (a 23 percent improvement over 2002-2003). It is not clear why the fourth-grade scores went down between 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school years, but fourth-graders had remarkable growth in 2003-2004.

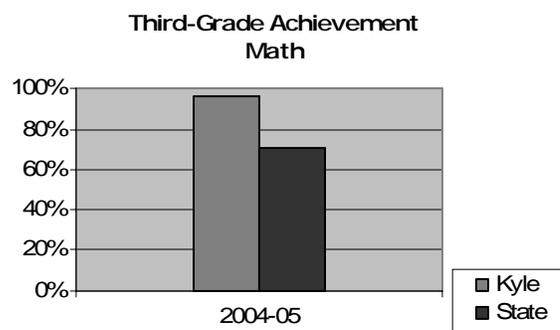
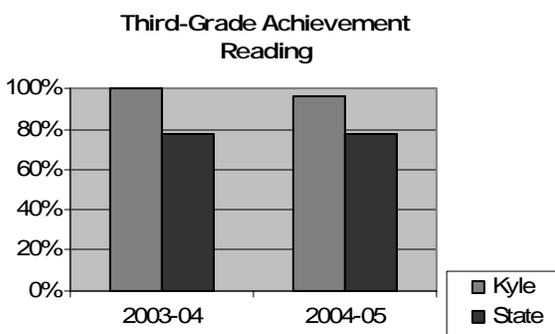
Dramatic improvements also were realized in math in 2003-2004. Fourth-graders had a 33 percent gain in math, which increased from a 54.3 percent pass rate in 2002-2003 to 87.2 percent in 2003-2004. The sixth-grade math scores skyrocketed from only one-third of students passing in 2002-2003 to 93.5 percent proficiency in 2003-2004, a 60 percent improvement. Kyle, however, did not meet the *Schools of Promise* criteria for math, as 50 percent of all groups of students did not pass the fourth-grade proficiency in math in the prior year (2001-2002).

Kyle students continued to demonstrate high achievement in 2004-2005. The school retained its *Schools of Promise* status in reading, as all grades continued to do well. All grades also met the state minimum requirement of 75 percent passing in math, but only 72.7 percent of economically disadvantaged fourth-graders were proficient, so the school failed to achieve recognition in math.

Staff attributes the student gains to the OhioReads program, inclusion, team teaching and small group work. Teachers agreed they have become more consistent as a result of more systematic use of guided reading and analysis of test results. With the new schedule, they are also focusing more on reading and math. They said that the changes have enhanced student confidence throughout the building, which has positively impacted their performance. The music teacher highlighted another difference that he has witnessed at Kyle: "They're not afraid to try to succeed. In many schools that have lower socioeconomics, it has been my experience that for a lot of them, it's 'not cool' to do well in academics, but that seems not to be the case at Kyle at all, which I think is awesome!"

### Kyle Elementary School vs. Ohio<sup>3</sup> Third-Grade Achievement Test Results

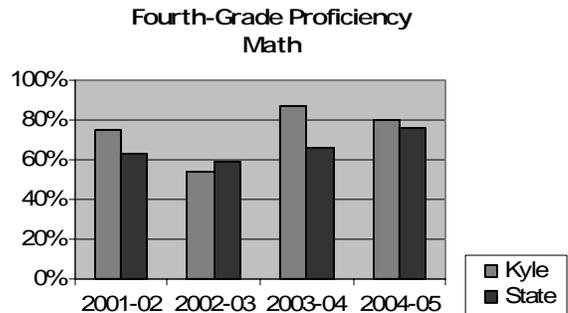
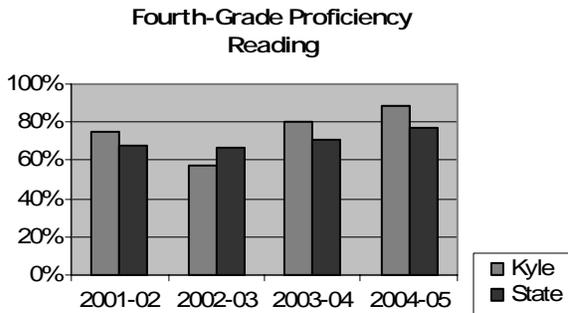
	Reading		Math	
	Kyle	State	Kyle	State
<b>2003-2004</b>	100.0%	78.2%	NA	NA
<b>2004-2005</b>	96.2%	77.3%	96.2%	70.4%



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

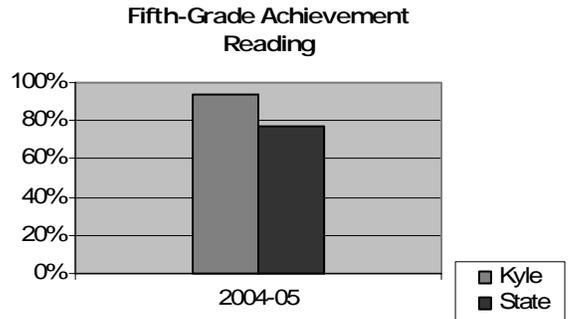
**Kyle Elementary School vs. Ohio<sup>4</sup>  
Fourth-Grade Proficiency/Achievement Test Results**

	Reading		Math	
	Kyle	State	Kyle	State
<b>2001-2002</b>	74.5%	67.7%	75.0%	62.9%
<b>2002-2003</b>	57.1%	66.3%	54.3%	58.6%
<b>2003-2004</b>	79.5%	70.8%	87.2%	65.8%
<b>2004-2005</b>	88.5%	76.6%	80.8%	65.5%



**Kyle Elementary School vs. Ohio<sup>4</sup>  
Fifth-Grade Achievement Test Results**

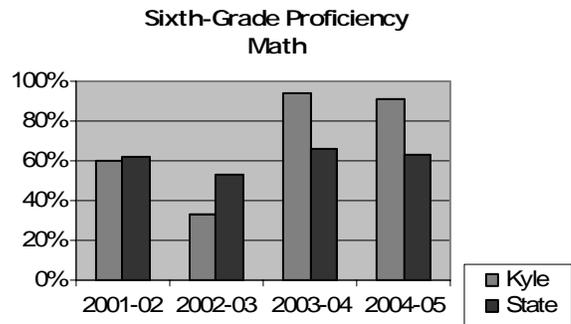
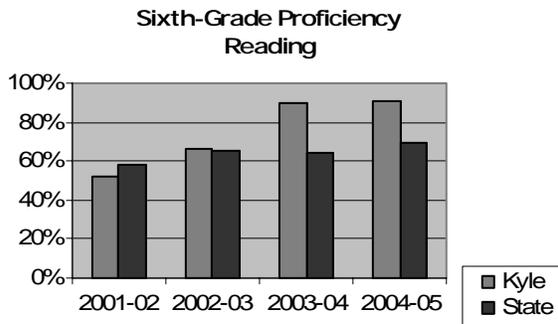
	Reading	
	Kyle	State
<b>2004-2005</b>	93.0%	76.9%



**Kyle Elementary School vs. Ohio<sup>4</sup>  
Sixth-Grade Proficiency Test Results**

	Reading		Math	
	Kyle	State	Kyle	State
<b>2001-2002</b>	52.5%	58.2%	60.0%	61.7%
<b>2002-2003</b>	66.7%	65.0%	33.3%	52.8%
<b>2003-2004</b>	89.4%	64.6%	93.6%	65.6%
<b>2004-2005</b>	91.2%	69.8%	91.2%	62.5%

<sup>4</sup> Data Source: School and State Report Cards



## ENGAGING PARENTS AND COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS

### Parent Communication and Involvement

Parent involvement at Kyle is mixed. There are some parents who are highly involved and want to do what they can to help their children as well as the school overall. Both of the parents who were interviewed emphasized Kyle's impact on their children's education. One parent of a first-grader noted: "My daughter is reading on the second- and third-grade reading level. Kids take two books home per night."

Many parents attended Kyle themselves, resulting in strong ties to the school. There are parents who volunteer to work in a classroom, assist with fundraisers or help with other school activities. The school has an active Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). Major events include Kyle Family Night, the Christmas Program and Literacy Night. There are also ongoing grade-level events to which the school invites parents and the community. For example, during the site visit, the first-graders were doing a poetry reading.

Kyle serves a wide range of children in terms of families' socioeconomic diversity. Staff acknowledged that parents, due to various reasons such as long work hours, personal illness and illiteracy, were not always able to fulfill all their children's needs, and school staff would step in and help if possible. This includes teaching students basic life skills such as hygiene, and reading to the child (Title I or OhioReads). To help parents, the school prepares "home reading packets" in which they send books "at just the right level" home with students three nights a week. Teachers realize that some parents did not have good experiences with school, so they invite them to see how all children actively participate. One intervention teacher explained:

I think it is really important to have a good relationship with parents. In our building, we have a lot of parents in poverty and they struggle with their children being included, maybe because when they were younger, they did not want to be noticed. So it is important for them to come in and see how we work in the classroom. We help them understand that their children are made to feel part of the classroom.

At Open House, IEP meetings and other school activities, staff members invite parents to "Come see." And when parents ask to visit, teachers say, "Sure, come on in." They want parents to see what they do and be as comfortable as possible. The music teacher described the parent response to the school's Christmas program as "standing room only." He further noted since he has spent time in many schools, "The teachers and principal at this school really go out of their way to create a working relationship with the parents." Interviewed parents confirmed this, and one parent of a fourth-grader declared, "The thing that stands out in this school is the caring and responsiveness of teachers – it's a good balance."

Teachers have established ongoing ways of communicating with parents. In addition to daily telephone calls to parents, they ask parents to sign students' work folders, tests or some form of documentation at least once a week. Some teachers use this communication tool to write notes to parents. Likewise, parents will write teachers, asking questions or informing them of problems at home. A fifth-grade teacher noted that, "For the most part, parents are not bashful about asking for help or sharing concerns that they have." Many teachers also stay in touch with parents via e-mail if that is the parents' preference. Since Kyle does not have busing, there is an opportunity to talk to most parents at the end of the school day. The first-grade teachers send home a weekly newsletter that has bullets highlighting activities for each discipline area. The newsletter includes a raffle for low-cost household items to encourage parents to read the newsletter and ask their children about something they learned that week.

### Business and Community Involvement

Kyle benefits from a strong partnership with the community. In May, the school had a luncheon for a total of 110 volunteers that included OhioReads, business partners, parents and other individuals. A teacher pointed out, "That works out to about one volunteer for every two or three students." Parents and the community helped with the fund raising for the sixth-grade trip to Washington, D.C. Another important community connection is local universities such as Wright State University and Antioch College are placing student teachers in the building.

Troy City Schools has exceptionally strong business support, which also benefits Kyle. Every school in Troy participates in the "Future Begins Today" (FBT) program funded by the Chamber of Commerce and business partners. FBT provides ongoing support to five needy students at each grade level from the fourth grade through high school completion. Kyle has 15 slots, but since three FBT students have transferred into the school, Kyle currently has a total of 18 FBT students. Parents apply and teachers refer students. There is a waiting list for the program and FBT students are required to maintain a "B" average. Upon high school graduation, FBT guarantees the students a free college or vocational school education if they fulfill the requirements. FBT covers any higher education costs that remain after grants and scholarships for these students.

FBT also funds an after-school tutoring program called Homework Helper for an hour every night for elementary students. Teachers serve as tutors in paid supplemental positions. The 18 FBT students have first priority for Homework Helper, but the program can take up to 30 students each night. As long as FBT students maintain As and Bs, other children needing assistance can use the slots. The FBT students also are matched with a "lunch buddy" – an adult from the business community who comes to the school to have lunch with the participating child once a month. FBT students are tracked all the way through high school, but the services become less obvious at higher grade levels. They do not have Homework Helper and their lunch buddy becomes their mentor, doing activities after school with the students.

Finally, several of the staff members live in Troy. The principal explained she is originally from the local area. She and other staff have strong personal commitments to the town and the school.

## **SUMMARY OF "LESSONS LEARNED" SPECIFIC TO KYLE ELEMENTARY**

The impressively strong leadership and teaching staff that have led the school through several major changes in recent years appear to be having a substantial impact on student performance. Setting specific goals has helped the school focus on the steps needed to improve student achievement. Common planning time has made it possible for teachers to coordinate their efforts and work more closely with special education and Title I teachers. By moving these

teachers into regular classrooms, the instructional dynamics were completely shifted towards increased group work, individualized instruction for at-risk students and teacher collaboration. Together, these changes have brought about growing student confidence that is being reflected in student test scores. Systematically tracking student performance and empowering students to monitor their own grades have also contributed to these positive effects. The school's all-day kindergarten has been in place only three years, so the impact of that change can not yet be measured on state test results, but preliminary data reveal these students are better prepared for first grade, which suggests they will do well on future state tests.

Although parent involvement is somewhat mixed, there is a group of highly involved and committed parents. Kyle also has strong community support evidenced by the number of OhioReads volunteers and business support; the college preparatory program for needy students includes Homework Helper and "lunch buddies." Staff is well aware of the numerous obstacles faced by many of Kyle's students. They embrace the children as well as the challenges with compassion and determination. In the upcoming year, the school will lose part of the OhioReads grant funding, which may affect its ability to maintain the part-time volunteer coordination position instrumental in recruiting volunteers and managing the program. In addition, the school will lose two positions (a regular teacher and a Title I teacher), requiring staff to make numerous logistical adjustments to maintain the low teacher-student ratio that has been established. Finally, additional planning will be needed to address changes required as the school transitions from serving K-6 children to serving K-5 only. Kyle's sixth-graders will be moving to the district's new sixth-grade building set to open in the 2006-2007 school year.

The table on the following page summarizes the school's characteristics that are most closely associated with the "Five Lessons Learned" identified in the initial *Schools of Promise* case studies. Kyle Elementary has successfully put into place many practices that make a difference for children. The school's efforts to differentiate instruction within the classroom and stronger emphasis on quality math instruction, in particular, make it a useful model for others. It has achieved the *Schools of Promise* criteria in reading for two consecutive years and only narrowly missed achieving recognition in math.

## Kyle Elementary: 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	
<b>Staff Characteristics</b>					
X					Strong and collaborative principal
X					Strong previous principal
X					Senior/experienced staff
X					High staff commitment
X	X				Caring teachers and staff
X	X	X			High expectations
<b>Practices Impacting Staff</b>					
X					Common Planning Time
X					Creative use of staff
<b>Practices Impacting Students</b>					
	X	X	X		Tutoring of at-risk students, in-school or after-school
X		X	X		Analysis of test data to inform intervention
		X	X		Frequent testing
	X	X	X		Small reading groups
	X	X	X		Extensive use of small groups
	X	X	X		Collaboration of intervention, special, and regular
<b>Instructional Characteristics</b>					
X		X	X		Strong Reading Program
X		X	X		Strong Math Program
			X		Change in math classes
	X	X	X		Teachers with wide variety of instructional strategies
	X	X	X		Use of centers
		X			Focus on early childhood education
	X	X	X		Gifted and talented program
<b>Staff Development Characteristics</b>					
		X	X		Attention to state standards
X		X	X		Extensive professional development
X		X	X		Grants (Ohio Reads)
X		X	X		Opportunities for teachers to observe each other
<b>Parent and Community Characteristics</b>					
				X	Extensive communication with parents
				X	High level of parent involvement
				X	High percentage of parents who attended the school
				X	Staff who are graduates or part of community
				X	Strong business/community partnerships
		X	X	X	Alliance with area colleges
<b>Institutional Characteristics</b>					
				X	Open Enrollment