



Schools of Promise **Case Study Report**



Meigs High School
Pomeroy, Ohio

Meigs High School Pomeroy, Ohio

Meigs High School in Pomeroy, Ohio, was selected as a *School of Promise* in reading for 2004-2005. Table 1 summarizes the school and district characteristics for Meigs High School and the Meigs Local School District.

Table 1. School and district characteristics

	Meigs High School 2004-2005	Defiance Local School District, 2004-2005
Percent Minority	2%	2.7%
Percent Poverty	51%	60.5%
Years as a School of Promise (Reading)	1	
District Typology		Rural/agricultural
Student Enrollment	643	2,010
Attendance—all students	94.2%	93.9%
Attendance —Economically disadvantaged students	93.7%	93.1%
Attendance —Minority students (Hispanic)	--	93.7%
Attendance —Minority students (Multiracial)	--	96.3%
Student mobility: Students in building less than one year	12.1%	12.0%
Number of teachers	50	153
Average teacher salary	\$37,568	\$37,496

Source: Ohio Department of Education.

School History

Meigs High School is a rural school located in southeast Ohio. In the 1960's three small school districts across Meigs County were consolidated into one district. In 1968, the first class graduated from Meigs High School. Ever since that time enrollment in the district has gradually declined. This is due in part to the decline of the mining industry in the area and the loss of many jobs.

Meigs High School is also a comprehensive career center, offering vocational high school classes in addition to academic courses. The vocational classes offered include agricultural science, automotive technology, career-based intervention, carpentry technology, cosmetology, electronics, family consumer science, health technology, horticulture, industrial manufacturing, information technology, marketing, medical office management, and welding.

In 2002-2003, Meigs High school was rated in Academic Emergency by ODE. Since then their focus has been on improvement by aligning their curriculum to the content standards and identifying and assisting students who are deficient.

School Mission Statement

It is the mission of Meigs High School to implement a curriculum that advances the physical, academic, and emotional development of all students with the commitment of parents and community.

Table 2. School and district performance on state indicators

State Indicators 2004-05 State requirement is 75%		
	Meigs High School	Meigs Local School District
Reading	84.1%	84.1%
Writing	81.1%	81.1%
Mathematics	75.0%	75.0%
Science	62.1%	62.1%
Social Studies	69.2%	69.2%
Attendance (<i>State requirement is 93%</i>)	94.2%	93.9%
Graduation rate (<i>State requirement is 90%</i>)	84.6%	84.6%
Number and percent of state indicators met	4 out of 7	7 out of 23
Rating	Continuous Improvement	Continuous Improvement

Source: Ohio Department of Education, School Building Report Card 2004-05

Teacher Characteristics

Meigs High School has 50 teachers. About half are female, and almost all are Caucasian. Half of teachers have a master's degree. On average the staff has 22 years experience teaching, and 15 years experience at Meigs. According to responses to the teacher survey, four teachers are certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, another four teachers have advanced teaching certificates, and more than three-quarters of teachers are Highly Qualified.

Schools of Promise Case Study Methodology

On February 13, 2006, a four-person research team conducted a one-day site visit to Meigs High School. Activities conducted during the day were as follows:

Classroom observations

Seven classes from Meigs high school were observed, each for 30 minutes: three mathematics classes (mixed-grade Algebra II and advanced mathematics, and a Title I mathematics class), and three English classes (ninth/tenth-grade college English, tenth-grade English, and a twelfth-grade Special Education English).

Classrooms were randomly selected by SRG from a list of teachers and class times provided by school administrators using a random number generator. After sample selection, SRG consulted with school administrators and teachers to ensure that the observation period was valid, the selected teacher would be teaching at that time, and that observations would not interfere with examinations, quizzes, or other planned activities that day. In the event of a conflict, a different class period was selected by SRG. Each observation lasted 30 minutes. Two trained researchers conducted observations simultaneously, and their ratings were compared to determine inter-rater reliability for observation protocols. Inter-rater reliability across the six classrooms was determined to be 93 percent.

Observers used a subset of measures from the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS—Pianta, LaParo, and Hamre, 2005) to record qualitative observations and make quantitative ratings on climate (positive and negative, teacher sensitivity, productivity, behavior management, and concept development). Following each observation, teachers were asked via a one-page questionnaire about the particular class that was observed to determine if anything that happened during the observation period was unusual or remarkable; this information was taken into consideration during data analysis.

Teacher interviews

Individual and group interviews were conducted with 13 teachers (the six teachers who were observed plus an additional seven teachers who teach English and mathematics). Interviews lasted between 15-25 minutes, and followed a pre-determined discussion guide. Topics discussed included curriculum and instruction, professional development, school climate, policy and procedures, and characteristics of effective teachers.

Administrator interview

An individual interview was conducted with school Principal Dennis Eichinger. The interview lasted approximately one hour. Interview topics included general school history and background, curriculum and instruction, characteristics of effective teachers, professional development, partnerships, school climate, policies and procedures and teacher recruitment and hiring.

Teacher survey

A teacher survey was distributed to all classroom teachers (n= 50) approximately one week before the site visit. The survey was self-administered and asked questions about the teachers' background and training, professional development activities, school climate and culture, as well as perceived characteristics of effective teachers. A total of 49 surveys were received, representing a response rate of 98 percent.

Student focus groups

To gather feedback from students, two student focus groups were conducted with eight students in each group. Each group included a mix of students in all grades; each group lasted approximately 25 minutes. Students were recruited by school administrators from classrooms observed during the site visit. Topics discussed included school background, perceived teacher support, learning opportunities, and what students like best about their school and teachers.

Parent interviews

After the site visit, SRG conducted 20 telephone interviews of parents. Interviewees were selected from lists provided by school administrators. Eighty percent of the respondents were female. Each interview followed a prepared survey instrument and was conducted by phone at a time convenient for the participants. Topics included curriculum and instruction, teacher relationships, and opportunities for student achievement. Interviews lasted between 11-17 minutes.

Results

This report is organized using the “Five Lessons Learned” identified in earlier *Schools of Promise* research. These lessons emphasize the importance of providing rigorous instruction aligned with state standards, instituting strong leadership, designing instruction to ensure student success, engaging parents and the community to support student success, and establishing a school culture that values individual students. Meigs High School shows evidence of all these components.

In addition to investigating ODE’s “Five Lessons Learned from Successful Schools” and how Meigs High School demonstrates these characteristics, a particular focus of the current research is on teacher quality and the role of the teacher in high-performing schools. Specifically, the present case study inquired as to how teachers, administrators, students, and parents define teacher quality. What teacher characteristics are perceived as most important by each of these stakeholder groups? With these questions in mind, the present research also examines issues related to teacher quality in these schools and key stakeholders’ beliefs and expectations regarding teacher quality.

Several characteristics of effective teachers repeatedly emerge. Meigs’ principal, district administrators, teachers, students, and parents consider effective teachers to share some common characteristics:

- Teachers must be knowledgeable in the subject area being taught.
- Teachers should have a positive attitude toward teaching and enjoy working with students.
- Teachers must possess effective classroom management skills.
- Teachers must differentiate instruction to meet the needs of students with different learning styles and apply varied instructional techniques.
- Teachers should create opportunities for students to apply and use information beyond memorizing facts.

These themes are recurrent throughout the following Five Lessons.

1. The school delivers rigorous instruction aligned to the standards.

Meigs High School has aligned its curriculum to state standards in a process that began about seven years ago. The standards are fully integrated into teachers' classrooms now, and teachers interviewed feel comfortable and confident in the way their lessons map to the standards. In 2002-2003, the school was rated in Academic Emergency by the state of Ohio. Within a year, they increased their rating to "Effective." When asked how the school accomplished this change, the principal said, "I think we just buckled down and did what we were supposed to do."

An important change was for all staff to feel a sense of shared responsibility for student success on the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) "I think we started talking more," the principal said, "I think we started sharing responsibility." When the state transitioned from proficiency tests to the OGT, teachers at Meigs began to realize that the responsibility for student success on the test was shared by all grade levels. The problem wasn't just in the ninth and tenth grades, all grades mattered. This prompted staff to work towards vertical integration of the curriculum. At the same time, the principal noted that a number of new teachers joined the staff. The principal said there was an effort to hire teachers who would bring innovative teaching strategies to Meigs:

When we think about the hiring process, these are priorities. If you're going to come in here, we look for creative teaching. Don't be afraid to do something different...I use the term innovative teaching strategies. I think hands-on [experience] is important.

The principal created common lunchtimes and common planning periods by matching/pairing staff in mathematics and science to facilitate horizontal alignment. Teachers collaborate within subject areas, but the school is not organized into departments *per se*. The principal believes this structure encourages the staff to work as a team. As he said, "It's all together and I think that it's important that we do it that way."

Meigs supports an approach to teaching called Applied Academics, which emphasizes how the information students are learning in school will be useful to them. Applied Academics is an approach to learning in secondary education that focuses on motivating and challenging students to connect what they learn with their personal experiences and interests. Defined, Applied Academics is "the presentation of subject matter in a way that integrates a particular academic discipline (such as mathematics, science, or English) with personal work-force applications (hands on laboratories dealing with practical equipment and devices)."¹ The basic premise is that if academic content is made relevant and participatory, students will pay greater attention, retain more, and apply what they learn to their own lives. Teachers use "hands-on" innovative teaching methods and emphasize the reasons students need to learn the subject matter so that students learn more than content; they acquire problem-solving skills.²

Research has found that an Applied Academic tech prep curriculum improves students' attitudes toward school and towards themselves, and can positively impact student learning.³ An Applied Academic curriculum enables students to transfer academic content knowledge to technical applications and from school to the workplace.

¹ Hull, D., & Parnell, D. (Eds.) (1991). *Tech prep associate degree: A win/win experience*. Waco, TX: Center for Occupational Research and Development.

² For more information, see <http://www.hocking.edu/~aaffairs/APPLACAD.HTML>

³ Dare, D. E. (2002). Revisiting Applied Academics: A Review of a Decade of Selected Literature. *Journal of Vocational Education Research*, 25.

At Meigs High School, there is an emphasis on preparing students to be successful beyond graduation. The reality for students in their community is that many students do not go on to college. According to the school, just 43 percent of seniors take the ACT or SAT, and about half of the school's graduates enter college. Like most schools, Meigs offers a college prep track. In addition, Meigs integrates academic and career education, and includes a comprehensive career center in its facilities to retain students who otherwise might lose interest in the education process and to help them transition directly into career paths. Many vocational students participate in academic classes while academic students take vocational classes. Teachers in the academic and vocational programs sometimes collaborate in presenting lessons to students. One teacher had students in a pre-calculus class visit an electronics course so they could see a demonstration on how waves (which the pre-calculus group was studying) affect working situations. A mathematics teacher described the collaboration:

I've gone to the auto mechanics before with things on carburetors that we were talking about in physics and I've also gone down to see the electronics teacher. You know, there are so many things you can do there to get some new ideas and how things are applied, how your math is applied, how they're going to use it. It's a unique selection.

The principal's philosophy is that it is important to make academic subjects relevant to students. Integrating application of the subject matter helps students understand how the material matters to their future. As for the students, they seem to enjoy the elective vocational classes and they mentioned how popular Meigs' vocational program is with students in the local area. During focus groups, students described their vocational classes favorably, and believe the skills they gain through those classes are practical and important. Some have experimented with PowerPoint in a computer media design class, and others have developed carpentry skills or gained experience in agricultural sciences.

To help students prepare for the OGT, the school provides practice tests. Students practice in their classrooms as well as in the gym, where they will take the official state test. These large group assessment tests identify students who help and give students necessary practice in taking the tests

In interviews, parents were asked about their overall rating of the school. Half of all parents interviewed said the school was "excellent" (15 percent) or "above average" (35 percent). When asked why they rated the school positively, many mentioned the strong curriculum, specifically citing the college preparatory and vocational courses. Parents also appreciate the teachers' knowledge, experience, and concern about the students. Still, about 40 percent of parents interviewed rated the school "average."

Teachers said they are careful to make sure all instruction is tied to the standards. "We know what the standard is every day we teach, I think, and different benchmarks and indicators," one teacher said. "We may not hit the indicators every day, but we are on a standard of some sort." Teachers include that information on lesson plans they prepare each week; they turn in a copy to the principal and keep a copy for their own records. Still, on the teacher survey, one teacher observed that although standards are important, they are not the *most* important consideration for teachers. In addition to having a command of the subject area, the teacher suggested instructors need to set higher standards for themselves as models for their students, and reinforce those standards for those in training. "It's a sad commentary on the status of education when the so-called 'Ohio Academic Content Standards' are more valued and important than standards that teachers should be setting for their students," the teacher wrote.

2. The school provides leadership that results in continuous improvement of instruction.

The principal is a former athletic coach, and he draws on his coaching skills in his role as principal. He formerly taught physical education and driver's education and has 16 years' experience as a teacher himself. The principal directs and provides suggestions but says he trusts the teachers to be responsible for their own teaching. He strongly believes in leading by example and provides teachers in the school a fair amount of autonomy. He said:

I want them to be able to run their classroom as they see fit; that's my purpose. If they need something to do that, then I'll help them. If they need help with discipline, if they need help with management, if they need resources then I can do that. I'll also make suggestions if I need to. But hardly ever do I ever tell anybody what to do.

Teachers say Meigs has strong leadership and the principal provides both support and encouragement. Teachers also feel the principal values their opinions, informs them about professional development, and encourages good staff morale. One teacher said, "He does anything he can to ensure that teachers are less burdened with extra work. He takes on a lot of it himself, I think." He also makes teachers feel as if they have a say in school decisions. Teachers have autonomy in their classrooms, and the principal seeks their input in decisions at the school level as well. "If they have an idea for the OGT, show me how it works then let's go," the principal said. "We always ask for opinions." He says teachers contribute to the school's discipline policies, dress code policies, and generate new teaching strategies. Teachers share its vision and focus on being an effective school. An English teacher remarked:

I think our principal is very determined that we become an effective school and he makes that clear. And he reinforces that by constantly encouraging us and informing us of professional development.

This sentiment is common one; the teacher survey revealed a high level of consensus around the effectiveness of school leadership. Almost all teachers agreed the principal communicates his or her expectations to faculty and staff, and over 90 percent agreed he effectively communicates state, local and national policies and initiatives. Teachers also believe he communicates well with students and parents and he makes an effort to address teacher concerns. "As far as we're concerned Mr. Eichinger has never bucked us on anything we've wanted to do. He's encouraged us," one teacher said. Another commented on the positive climate that results from his leadership:

It's a low-stress atmosphere. He's real good to work for and he's easy to work with without getting stressed out. He stops in and visits every once in awhile, just pokes his head in to see how things are going. He's very encouraging to his staff.

Collaboration among teachers is encouraged at Meigs. While teachers are encouraged to act as leaders in their own classroom and make independent decisions about their instruction, the principal promotes the importance of working together. The principal has tried some innovative methods to get teachers together so they can talk about teaching strategies. For example, the school pays teachers extra money to get together and grade the practice assessment tests. He believes the process and conversation that ensues about student performance encourages teachers to share best practices. One English teacher agreed that reviewing student performance on the sample OGT with colleagues is beneficial:

We talk among ourselves, 'What did you do that works, and what did you do?' And I think that helps as well. And we share papers. The papers I ran off today

and these are the ones for tomorrow, we'll share. So I think that works. And I think you have to be open.

In terms of structured meetings, the principal holds regular staff meetings with teachers, and he also holds meetings with career education teachers and asks academic teachers to attend. To encourage collaboration, the principal structures the daily schedule so all teachers in one subject area (e.g., mathematics, reading, science) have the same planning time. Teachers use each other as support system and those in the same area meet on waiver days. The teachers appreciate the support of their peers, as one veteran English teacher commented, when describing the transition to the OGT:

I consider myself a grammar and a literature teacher, I graduated from college in 1972 and this has been a drastic change, this material. But the English department, we look out for each other and support each other and share information and that's just invaluable to me. So I think that's a real strength.

According to teachers, the most effective collaboration is informal interaction. As one described, "We're always talking with each other about the OGT...something that went on in the classroom. Just sharing ideas."

Professional development

Meigs has a large federal Carl Perkins grant that is used for professional development and to also purchase state-of-the-art technology. The goal of the Carl Perkins Act Grant program is improvement of vocational and technical education programs. The school has a technical director who supports the school's state-of-the-art technology, including new Smart Boards, and new computers. The school bought five Smart Boards last year and trained teachers how to use them. Smart Boards are interactive whiteboards connected to a computer and a data projector. Once the computer image is projected on the board, the Smart Board can be used as a computer with access to several interactive sites with mathematics and interactive activities.

Teachers who used the funds to attend training and conferences say the professional development has been beneficial. Teachers are encouraged and supported to attend trainings and conferences out of the district at local universities or the SEOVEC (Southeastern Ohio Voluntary Education Cooperative)⁴. One teacher said administration is very accommodating, "They'll bend over backwards to let us go to conferences during school day." Teachers have attended training on dealing with emotionally disturbed students. Others have been trained in tools such as Study Island, a web-based program for students which is seen as helpful preparation for the OGT. The principal says teachers integrate technology into their instruction. He noted, "Lately the teachers are really, totally engaged in that and they use it every day in some form or fashion."

Several teachers commented that they are pursuing a master's degree, and the process has been very valuable, as one teacher commented, "Well the master's degree just turned me around in my teaching. It is life changing." However, others commented that they prefer not to attend training during the school day because they don't like losing the time with their students. Others felt that the training they have been receiving on the OGT is getting a little repetitive. Many of the school's four in-service days have been devoted to OGT preparation. As one teacher noted, "Our principal has done a good job of making sure that there have been in-service days, or we could attend professional development concerning the OGT. We're to the point, now, we feel like we're bombarded with it."

⁴ For more information, see www.seovec.org/.

Teachers were asked about the focus of their professional development activities in the previous year. Fifty percent of the teachers at Meigs participated in professional development related to understanding/applying Ohio content standards, for 35 percent this was a primary focus. Forty percent of teachers participated in professional development regarding differentiated instruction, for 22 percent this was a primary focus. More than one-third of teachers participated in professional development involving collaboration and using assessments.

Table 3. Focus of teachers’ professional development

Thinking about all your professional development activities last year, what was the focus of the activities you selected? ⁵	Which areas apply to you?	Which <u>one</u> area was your primary focus?
Understanding and applying Ohio content standards to student instruction	50.0%	34.7%
Instructional strategies to meet the learning needs of diverse groups of students or students with different learning styles	39.6%	22.4%
Collaboration for improving instruction	37.5%	16.3%
Using assessments to gauge student mastery of Ohio content standards	35.4%	--
In depth study of the academic content of the subjects I teach	31.3%	12.2%
Strategies for creating and maintaining safe and orderly classrooms and schools	22.9%	--
Strategies for engaging parents and families	22.9%	--
Strategies for engaging stakeholders as active members of the school communities	22.9%	--
Using research results for decision making	10.4%	--

Recommendations for new teacher preparation

Teachers were asked, “How well-prepared were you to teach this population of students when you first started working at this school?” Nearly 60 percent reported they felt “prepared” (35 percent) or “very well prepared” (25 percent). Explaining their answers, many teachers mentioned previous teaching experiences either in general, as a student teacher, or in another school with a similar population of students. Many mentioned their college courses or a good undergraduate program as helpful to their preparation. Others mentioned having an in depth knowledge of the subject area that they teach; living or growing up in southeast Ohio and having an understanding of the local culture. One teacher stated:

⁵ These response options were adapted from the Maryland Survey of Teacher Participation in High Quality Professional Development, 2003-04, Maryland State Department of Education

I was prepared because I had spent three and a half years at our junior high and had experience with the students. Also being a native, I have a cultural connection to the students, which helps me relate to them.

For their preparation for working at Meigs, teachers spoke of the importance of student teaching and previous teaching experience with a similar population. Substitute teaching was also good preparation for their current job. A teacher said:

[The] time I spent teaching eighth grade is what best prepared me. It gave me a thorough, working knowledge of the school environment that freshmen are coming from. It enables me to ease the transition pains that occur as students move from middle to high school.

Many teachers also cited training in their college program as good preparation. Many said they had strong college programs and took methods courses as well as courses in their subject. Many teachers also obtained their masters degree.

Teachers believe student teachers should concentrate less on theory and more on classroom management and discipline. They believe that future educators should be aware that there are different learning styles and be sensitive to the students and community's culture. A teacher explained the need for in-class experience:

[We need to] show them that 80 percent of all people are hands-on learners. Mostly teachers are book smart. We need appropriate curriculum for [students'] styles, not the teacher.

3. The school designs instruction to ensure every student's success.

Career and technical studies receive significant attention at Meigs. Students in the school's technical program are learning higher-level academic and career skills today than they did in the past. The principal said, "That's been our main purpose... to prepare students academically and also to choose a career, vocationally." It is his opinion that both are important and he emphasizes the value of merging academic and technical skills.

The school has eight "tech prep" programs. Students in the "college prep" track are encouraged to take tech prep courses as well as academic courses; the principal believes such integration is important, as he explained:

A lot of kids don't think they're college prep because of their attitude and work ethic, but if they get into these [tech] programs like programming and gaming and all those different types of things, they're finding out that in order to be successful, they're going to have to have the math and it's specific what math they need. So working with these different people, different programs, I think it's helped.

Meigs has a Title I program for students struggling in mathematics. At the end of every school year, the school identifies students who have not passed the OGT or who have taken another form of assessment and scored low. Students are identified for intervention based on their mathematics grades from the previous year and their current and prior test scores. A letter is sent to parents giving them the opportunity to decline Title I services. Some parents may decline. The principal said, "Like any special program, as it's viewed, some don't want that. And we find out that when they go into a higher level math, they really struggle and they have to

repeat.” The Title I instruction is offered for students in grades nine, ten, and eleven and focuses on skills students need to pass the OGT.

The school has also adopted Accelerated Reader,⁶ a web-based reading program and reading management software. Accelerated Reader provides teachers with a way to monitor students’ guided reading practice. Students choose their own books then complete assessments on the computer specific to the book they read. The program has helped improve reading skills among the school’s Career and Technical students, in particular, as the principal explained:

I’ve always had the problem with the career and technical [students], teachers would come to me and say, ‘The kids can’t read, I can’t get them to do anything because they can’t read.’ They were focused on going down, changing the tires, changing the oil, and getting greasy. All that stuff is technician stuff now, you wear a white coat and you use manuals. We had a large area of special need kids heading in that direction. At the career and technical leadership conferences that I’ve attended the last three years, they’ve really pounded academics. So we listened and we bought into Accelerated reader and we found out that our kids, several of our kids at all levels were below grade level, even our college prep kids. And it’s not that they didn’t read, but when we tested them [reading levels weren’t] that good. So this Accelerated Reader, in cooperation with the librarian and the teachers who bought into this, I think has helped that. Because kids are reading, all kids are reading... and at different levels. The kids read the book, they take the test, you see their score, and we start to see the grade level come up.

To prepare students for the OGT, teachers use Study Island,⁷ a web-based state assessment preparation program and standards-based learning program. Teachers and administrators feel the program is engaging for students. The school also purchases special OGT books to help students prepare for the test, and offers a summer program to help students focus on specific areas of the test.

The principal and teachers believe a large part of their ability to reach students comes from a positive attitude. The principal believes although teachers’ education and experience is important, teachers have to care about their subject matter and the students they teach. One teacher said, “If I’m willing to set down and work on their level, and scoot my chair up next to them and bring them up to the board, and make them feel that that stuff’s important to me, then they’ll generally feel it’s important to them too.” Teachers feel the example they set is very important. “We’re teaching attitudes,” one teacher said, “And that’s tough. Although we might not personally like parts of this or what we’re doing, we have to project its importance and quality attitude toward it. And I think we work hard at that.”

Classroom observers noted a high level of teacher sensitivity. In most classes the students seemed comfortable asking questions or for assistance. They shared comments freely during class discussions. Teachers monitored the students throughout the period in order to provide help or assistance. One teacher used her extra time to work with a student who had joined the class late in the year helping her catch up. In another class, students worked in small groups to complete a set of mathematics problems. Students were also observed helping each other when the teacher was busy assisting another student. One teacher in particular was very enthusiastic and tried to make students excited about the lesson.

⁶ For more information, see <http://www.renlearn.com/ar/>

⁷ For more information, see <http://www.studyisland.com/>

Students at Meigs thought very highly of their teachers and had nothing but positive things to say about them. Students said their teachers were good at what they do and enthusiastic in their job. One said, “We’ve got a few teachers that are really excited about what they can do for you.” Students felt they could get help on any subject at any time during the day, and teachers were a helpful resource. As one student said of his favorite teachers, “If I ever have any problems or something, I can go to them and I can talk to them about anything.”

Parents felt it’s important for teachers to be dedicated, willing to help students, and know their subjects well—these things help motivate students and make them want to learn. As one mother said, of a teacher, “He has an ability to draw the best out of the kids; he doesn’t expect anything less than he knows they can do.”

Parents appreciate teachers’ willingness to help their children succeed: “I know it’s tough to worry about 30 kids at a time but I do know that there are teachers that go above and beyond.” Parents also want teachers to treat students as “a whole person,” which means considering what might be going on in the student’s life beyond the classroom, and understanding the community.

4. The school engages parents and the community to support student success.

Although the principal and teachers make themselves available to parents, parental involvement is characterized as low. Parent-teacher conferences are held four times a year but are sparsely attended, despite efforts to schedule the conferences at convenient times. According to the principal, “You’ll have parent teacher conferences and we try to do it at times when people can come in and we don’t get a lot of people.” He has also tried to schedule OGT awareness programs for parents. Although promoted through newsletters and fliers, such events are attended by few parents. Despite the school’s efforts to communicate with parents about the standards, few parents interviewed were familiar with academic content standards.

Teachers encourage parent involvement, but some say they may only have one or two parents come in at conference time. Other teachers feel they are hearing more from parents now than they did a few years ago, but often they have a hard time reaching parents of at-risk students. Teachers send midterm progress reports and schedule telephone conferences as needed, but generally feel that some parents are “uncomfortable” coming in to school. As one teacher explained:

I think that they just feel uncomfortable with someone they think may have a little more education than they do. They may not know how to communicate with us. We’re not intimidating at all; it’s just getting over that initial fear of coming in.

Teachers feel an additional sense of responsibility for working with students because often parents do not support their efforts at home. As one teacher said, “I can’t count on parents being there to pressure them, like you can in other places. I can’t depend upon parents being able to help them. We’ve got to provide a lot of that here.”

When asked about their level of involvement at Meigs, most parents had not volunteered at the school in the past year. The majority of parents agreed that teachers and the school encouraged parents to communicate with them and to be involved. Almost all parents interviewed agreed that the teachers care about the students, but few parents said that they were involved.

Meigs has a strong partnership with Washington State Community College (WSCC) in Marietta. The principal said last year he was approached by college staff:

They asked me what I needed and I said that one of the things that I wanted to do was to focus on math within our career and technical environment. I want them to do more skill or career specific math. At the beginning of the year, we had a workshop and Washington State was able to provide every one of our math teachers and career and technical teachers with a tub full of manipulatives, little things they could use to create lessons.

Several teachers commented that they received and use the materials, and noted the lesson plans and information can be quite helpful, although some teachers acknowledged that they perhaps could use the material more often than they actually do.

The school participates in the Washington-Morgan-Meigs College Tech Prep Consortium, a partnership between Meigs and Morgan high schools, Washington County Career Center, and Washington State that combines college prep academics with solid career technical training beginning in high school and extending through college.⁸ The programs are intended to help students enter an advanced skills technical associate degree program at a community or technical college, secure a job or apprenticeship, or enroll in a bachelor's degree program. Through an articulated agreement with Washington State, students enter the "tech prep" program while attending Meigs. After graduation, if they enroll at Washington State, they may take a proficiency test in that area which enables them to earn credit.

According to the Washington State Community College Web site, students participating in the program enroll in a state-approved College Tech Prep education program. This means the program combines at least two years of secondary education with two years of postsecondary education (in a non-duplicative, sequential course of study). The program integrates academic and technical instruction and utilizes work-based and work-site learning, when possible. College Tech Prep offers students the option of choosing from various technical fields in which they earn college credit while in high school.

Programs available at Meigs High School include automotive science, electronics, health technology, horticulture, interactive media (computer graphics), medical office management, and computer support (networking). The Consortium, along with WSCC, also provides a summer Cyber Camp for local eighth and ninth grade students to learn about computer technology and Web design. Students pay a small fee and attend a four-day program that teachers them about presentation technology, web page design, digital media, and publishing. Students play games and learn how to create them on their own.⁹

5. The school creates a culture where each individual feels valued.

Teachers are determined in their efforts to help their students. The principal says the attitudes of the teachers have been crucial in helping students learn. Teacher attitudes have been important in another area, school attendance. Efforts to overcome the school's attendance problems have largely been due to teacher efforts, as the principal said, "I think it's because of the welcoming attitude of the teachers and the cooperation of the teachers and the communication of the teachers and the students." However, at 85 percent, the school's attendance still falls short of the 90 percent state requirement.

⁸ For more information, see <http://www.wsc.edu/techprep/index.asp?section=TEPR#wmmconsortium>.

⁹ Shaner, C. (2005, May 31). Computers, Web design taught at Cyber camp. *Marietta Times*.

The school is the largest in the county with 160 students in the current graduating class, but the principal describes teachers as having developed small “learning communities” in their classrooms. Teachers care about their students, and because many are from the local community, they understand the students well. Teachers say growing up or living in southeast Ohio gave them an understanding of Appalachian culture and knowledge of the students and community. One teacher said, “From this area, I know and understand the Appalachian region. Students for the most part are limited in their skills of thinking beyond Meigs’ county.”

In interviews, many parents mentioned that teachers and staff are friendly, supportive, and care about the students. One parent commented on how teachers frequently reach out. She said, “I have teachers request conferences even if the kids are doing well. They are supportive no matter how things are going. I am proud of that school.”

The principal and teachers feel the school’s integration of career and academic classes helps all students at Meigs regardless of their interest. Balancing academic with applied information is important because it helps build student achievement and gives students the skills to succeed beyond graduation. The principal said, “Our purpose is to get them here, make them feel good about being here, and find a way that they can be successful.” The tech-prep facilities and mixed emphasis on career-technical and academics are important to help students find their strengths and be successful.

As with any school, however, Meigs occasionally deals with student behavior problems. When this occurs, Meigs’ staff quickly addresses any misbehavior and tries to prevent additional problems. The assistant principal spends significant time working with students who have been in trouble and deals with discipline issues. An English teacher noted:

The assistant principal keeps track of how many write-ups a student has and he spends his time talking to the students, sometimes to find out what happened or sometimes to prevent a student from straying any more. So that actually allows for a preemptive strike.

Teachers also commented on the importance of discipline and respect. Classroom observers noted that students in the observed classes were generally well behaved. For example, in one class students who had finished an activity early did not engage in side conversations or disrupt the students who were still working. Many classrooms had rules and procedures for the class clearly posted on the wall. Teachers effectively monitored the class and addressed students who were misbehaving or off task. The principal and staff emphasize mutual respect, as one teacher noted:

There are high morals in our staff and the kids know that. They know these are good people and they’re not hypocrites and they just gain respect. And when you’ve got the kids’ respect, then you’re able to get them to do better. If you’re a teacher they don’t respect, you’ll never get the same out of them. We’ve just got a lot of good quality people.

Teachers say they often have to combat the perception among students that people in southeast Ohio are not as smart as other regions in the state. Such attitudes create difficulties motivating students in the classroom. As an English teacher explained that it’s sometimes difficult to get students to believe in themselves. She said, “they hear so many negative things at home and they experience that a lot of times, we can be some of the few positive things they have in their lives.”

The principal, staff, students, and parents are proud of the school. They have strong values and a belief in the importance of hard work. Staff recognize that they are playing an important role in students' lives, and the students appreciate their efforts. To sum up his feelings about his school, the principal said:

I still think we're doing great, even if there are no accolades, even if there are no trophies, even if there's no *Schools of Promise*, kids are learning and I want people to know that. Our kids are learning and our teachers are teaching and our parents are concerned. This is a good, good school.

Summary

Meigs High School, a *Schools of Promise* in Pomeroy, Ohio, has been successful in raising students' academic achievement, particularly among economically disadvantaged students. Although Meigs was in academic emergency four years ago, the school has made great improvements by aligning curriculum to the content standards and identifying and assisting students who are deficient. The school's efforts to align curriculum to the standards are fully integrated in the school culture; teaching to the standards is now just a part of what teachers do every day.

The strong career and technical program at Meigs and the Applied Academic tech-prep focus gives students an opportunity to integrate academic and career skills and emphasizes the importance of applying academic knowledge to real-world problems. Technology is emphasized at Meigs, and teachers are encouraged to attend training and conferences to use technology most effectively in their classrooms.

Teachers feel the principal, a former coach, provides strong leadership for the school. He works hard on their behalf and takes on extra work to lessen the load for his teachers. The principal, teachers, and students communicate with one another clearly and effectively. Teachers feel supported; they appreciate the principal's trust and have a high degree of autonomy. The principal believes in providing direction and suggestions, but says he trusts the teachers to know what is most effective in the classroom.

Parents of Meigs' students expressed their appreciation of the school's strong curriculum and the quality of the teachers, but parent involvement was characterized as low. Teachers note that although they reach out to parents, the school does not have a strong base of parent participation in school events or activities. In part, this is due to the economic environment typical of an Appalachian Ohio community. Teachers noted there is also a perception that students from this region are less capable than other students, a perception they fight to dispel among their students. Teachers sometimes struggle against low self-esteem and confidence among their students and work to make the students feel good about themselves and their achievements.

The students at Meigs spoke very highly of their teachers and expressed appreciation of the extra effort their instructors put forth to motivate and help them. Many teachers also feel their background and understanding of the county's Appalachian culture helps them relate to students.

Overall, Meigs High School students and staff demonstrate strong values, a strong work ethic, and focus on gaining important skills that will help students be successful in the future, regardless of whether they choose an academic path or a career path.

“Lessons Learned” at Meigs High School

1. The school delivers rigorous instruction aligned to the standards.

- Curriculum has been aligned to state standards for several years; all instruction every day is aligned to a standard. Teachers interviewed feel comfortable and confident in the way their lessons map to the standards.
- A few years ago the school moved from Academic Emergency to Effective in one year. The principal credits teachers' sense of shared responsibility and teachers' willingness to use hands-on, applied, innovative teaching strategies. The school is not organized into departments to encourage staff to work together.
- Teachers in the vocational program often collaborate with teachers in the academic program, combining subjects like physics, mathematics, electronics, and auto mechanics. The principal supports such integration and believes it is good career preparation for all students.
- Only about half of Meigs graduates go on to college, so the school's career and tech prep focus is important preparation for the workplace after graduation.

2. The school provides leadership that results in continuous improvement of instruction.

- The principal is a former coach and his philosophy of leadership reflects his background. He directs and provides suggestions but says he trusts the teachers to be responsible for their own teaching. Teachers believe he is a strong leader and appreciate his support and hard work on their behalf.
- Collaboration is encouraged but not required. Teachers have common planning periods and common lunchtimes, but are not required to meet for collaboration purposes. The principal does provide extra pay to teachers for grading OGT practice tests, a process which encourages them to talk about student performance and how better to target student needs.
- The school has a large federal Carl Perkins grant for teachers' professional development and for funding new technology. Teachers are encouraged to obtain training and to attend conferences. However, some do not like being out of the classroom, and others feel the training may be growing repetitive, particularly training around the OGT.

3. The school designs instruction to ensure every student's success.

- Career and technical studies are an important focus at Meigs, and the school embraces an integration of applied and academic knowledge.
- The school offers eight tech prep programs, and students in the college prep track are also encouraged to take tech prep courses in addition to their academic courses.
- Meigs has a Title I program for students struggling in mathematics, and students can take the Title I course in grades nine, ten, and eleven.
- Accelerated Reader software has been effective in encouraging students in both the academic and tech prep tracks to increase reading skills.
- Teachers and the principal believe teachers' positive attitudes toward students make a critical difference in their ability to be effective.

4. *The school engages parents and the community to support student success.*

- Parent involvement at Meigs is considered to be low. Parents rarely attend parent-teacher conferences, and teachers do not feel parents' support their efforts at home. Although teachers encourage parent involvement, and parents appreciate teachers' communication with them, parents do not participate in the school.
- Meigs has a strong partnership with Washington State Community College (WSCC) in Marietta. The college supports teachers by providing manipulatives and other materials to enhance instruction.
- Meigs is part of the Washington-Morgan-Meigs College Tech Prep Consortium, and through WSCC students prepare to enter an advanced skills technical associate degree program at a community or technical college, secure a job or apprenticeship, or enroll in a bachelor's degree program.

5. *The school creates a culture where each individual feels valued.*

- Teachers project a warm, caring, communicative attitude toward students and cultivate a positive atmosphere in their classrooms and in the school.
- The school is the largest in the county, but teachers work to create connections with students in their classrooms.
- Teachers care about the students and many come from the local community, so they understand Appalachian culture.
- The staff feels the balance of career and academic classes helps all students prepare for a successful future regardless of their interests.
- The school emphasizes discipline, structure, and mutual respect.