

Park Layne Elementary School

Tecumseh Local School District

New Carlisle, Ohio

Superintendent: Jim Gay

Principal: Greg Baker

<http://www.tecumseh.k12.oh.us/>

Park Layne Elementary, a building-wide Title I school, is totally inclusive. The kindergarten-to-fifth-grade school has a welcoming, open-door policy for parents, students and staff. All staff members team together with parents to insure that all students learn in the general education classes. A school-wide Baldrige framework using the Five Big Ideas

(phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, fluency with text, vocabulary and comprehension) and Balanced Literacy supports the assessment and instruction for all students, 41% who meet low-income criteria.

Ongoing monitoring of progress, revising of instruction, using differentiated instruction and providing intervention in "flexi"

intervention coaching groups have shown great results in reading and math scores at Park Layne. As a result of demonstrating high achievement in reading, Park Layne was recognized as a 2003-2004 School of Promise with special recognition being given for improving the performance of students with disabilities. During the 2003-2004 school

year, 89% of the third graders and 76.6% of the fourth graders demonstrated proficiency on the reading tests (third grade achievement and fourth grade

proficiency tests). Contributing to the fourth grade passage rates were students with disabilities. Eighty percent of these students scored proficient or above, a significant increase from the previous school year. (See bar graphs at the end of this report.)

| SCHOOL PROFILE | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 2003-2004 Building Rating | Continuous Improvement |
| Enrollment | 3914 |
| Grade Levels | 1-5 |
| Economically Disadvantaged Students | 41.0% |
| Students with Disabilities | 11.7% |
| Multi-racial Students | 3.8% |
| Hispanic Students | 2.6% |
| White Students | 91.68% |

| TECUMSEH LOCAL DISTRICT PROFILE | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| 2003-2004 District Rating | Continuous Improvement |
| District Enrollment | 3,532 |

District Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP)

The Tecumseh Local School District Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP) provides direction for each district school building in four areas: Student Achievement; Employee, Parent and Community Satisfaction; Safe, Orderly and Caring Environment; and Effective Operations and Financial Responsibility. Data is used to evaluate the success of the plan, and quality systems checks are conducted to determine how each building is meeting the goals of the CIP. Building staff members know when they are meeting the standards because of the ongoing assessments they conduct.

Baldrige

The district provides guidelines for improvement, and the teams at Park Layne determine what needs to be done to carry out the goals at the building level. All staff members, including both certificated staff (classroom teachers, intervention personnel, psychologist) and non-certificated staff (secretaries, custodians, kitchen staff), participate in one of the four School Improvement Teams (SIT): Student Achievement; Employee, Parent and Community Satisfaction; Safe, Orderly and Caring Environment; and Effective Operations and Financial Responsibility.

The primary tool for reform that is used by Greg Baker, principal, and the staff members at Park Layne is the PDSA (Plan, Do, Study, Act) model from Baldrige. All staff members, including the non-certificated staff, have been trained in the program. A Baldrige quality assurance system check determines what is working and what needs attention, and staff members spend a lot of time discussing the results.

Designing Instruction to Ensure every Student's Success

Park Layne's success in designing instruction to ensure every student's success is due, in large part, to

- The belief that classroom teachers are responsible for all students;
- The use of flexi coaching groups;
- Teachers' knowledge of the standards;
- The use of research-based programs;
- Instruction based on ongoing data collection;
- Rigorous planning.

All-inclusive school

At Park Layne, teachers never say "This is not my student; this is your student." Because students are valued equally, all students, including those at risk and with disabilities, are in the general education classes at all times, and all use the same academic textbook. The staff members at Park Layne say it is important for special education students to participate in the general education curriculum in the general education classroom because they believe all students need to be exposed to the same material and instruction.

Designing and implementing a program that supports each child takes a great deal of planning. During the school year, all staff members, including the intervention specialists, have a common planning time built into their schedules. In addition to regularly scheduled grade level team meetings, teachers also communicate student information and needs across grade levels. Planning also takes place over the summer.

While all Park Layne teachers are trained in the instruction of all students, staff members arrange to place special education students in only two different classrooms at each grade level. This allows the intervention specialists to get into each of the classrooms more frequently for longer periods of time. Typically, there are no more than five special education students placed in a classroom. Each year there are usually between 40 and 50 students with disabilities, not counting speech-disabled only,

enrolled in the school. At the end of each school year, teacher assignments for the next year are made based the needs of their special education students.

The special education intervention specialists provide the general education teachers a short IEP noting objectives for each student, and the general education teachers have learned to do needed adaptations naturally. If a student struggles, even with the adaptations by the classroom teachers, the intervention specialists will make additional modifications and bring additional support materials into the classroom. Under those circumstances, the intervention specialist could also teach one or more classes to demonstrate different instructional strategies.

For a few years, total inclusion was implemented only in the first, second and third grades at Park Layne. It was such a success that it was implemented in the fourth and fifth grades. Initially, it was difficult to convince the upper level teachers of the value of inclusion because they were concerned about the wider span of differences in student ability and about the greater requirements in those grades. However, now all Park Layne teachers believe in the value of inclusion, and they also like the support all students receive from the intervention specialists.

“Inclusive education is just part of our culture now.”

A teacher

Students at every grade level receive four blocks of instruction at their grade level and also receive intervention at their individual ability level to increase their skills.

The kindergarten at Park Layne is all day, and an English as a Second Language (ESL) Spanish tutor is available to be in the classrooms half a day, every day.

Flexi Groups

All students receive both grade level instruction and instruction on increasing skills at their instructional level. They are also in flexible coaching groups (flexi groups) where teachers work with students in small groups, at the students’ level, which can be below, at or above grade level. Students who need additional support receive help on specific skills, and advanced students are pushed with more advanced material. The students practice and learn skills at their flexi level and then apply these skills at their grade level. The teachers use ongoing assessments as they regroup the students frequently.

Flexi grouping, which began in the older grades, was introduced in the primary grades in the 2004-2005 school year. At the primary level, flexi grouping is done for half an hour each day. Students are placed in groups/stations to address their learning needs. Groups are held on fluency, vocabulary, phonics and comprehension, and the students move easily from station to station or classroom to classroom. In a show of commitment for the importance of early literacy, the intervention teacher for the fourth and fifth grades assists in leading a group for the primary grades.

“Everybody has to pull the cart in one direction. We are all using the same assessments and the same language, and we are sharing ideas. The kids know where they are and where they are going, and they have the same language too.”

A teacher

In the fourth and fifth grades, the flexi groups are one hour long. The students are divided into three groups, with the groups changing throughout the year. The

highest group is taught by one teacher, the middle group has a classroom teacher and a Title I aide, and the lowest readers have four different people working with them. On Fridays, the Specials (art, physical education and music) teachers also work with students in coaching groups. Student grades are obtained by averaging scores of grade level assessments and flexi group assessments.

Intervention support

Intervention support is also available. A homework intervention room is held on two days a week (Monday and Wednesday) for 30 minutes. All students are welcome to attend and work on studies for the next day. After-school intervention time for all grade levels runs from January to March. First and second graders meet twice a week for 30 minutes, and third, fourth and fifth graders meet twice a week for one hour. The district also provides free summer school for students wanting or needing to attend.

Ongoing data collection used to design instruction

Park Layne teachers are very knowledgeable of the state standards as evidenced by their well-worn, frequently-used standards books. They know what they need to do to help their students learn so they meet the standards. Within each grading period, the expectations have been mapped out, and lessons have been designed to align with the standards.

Great effort is put into strategies to support the development of independent thinkers and learners. The staff strongly believes in using **research-based programs**. Whether it is Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), SIRI, Phonic Pathways, Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI) or another research-based program, the teachers use programs that assess individual needs and then provide instruction that matches the learning styles and needs of the students.

Using the Five Big Ideas, Park Layne staff developed assessments that are used for all of the students. Additionally, the four blocks of balanced literacy (writing, guided reading, self-selection, and working with words) are used by all of the teachers. Social studies and science are built into the guided reading groups. All books are on tape and are available for students to take home.

Authentic Assessment is used at Park Layne so special education teachers do not have to conduct any special evaluations. Each classroom teacher conducts ongoing assessments of all children. For example, in the primary grades the teachers use the DIBELS to evaluate individual student development in readiness and early reading skills as well as to provide grade-level feedback on instructional objectives. The DRA is also used for individual assessment. Charts and graphs with benchmarks on expectations as well as class and individual profiles are created. The staff and students celebrate each time a child moves up, even when the student does not achieve the benchmark.

The **students get involved with tracking achievements**, too. They know the expectations, where they are in relation to the benchmarks, and what they are striving for. The students keep track of their Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA level) as well as their behavior. They also use an editor's checklist to monitor their own work. These strategies help students to function independently. An observation of classrooms shows students moving freely to stations, to the restroom or to get something they need from their book-bag without disrupting the instruction.

Teacher evaluation and professional development

Teachers at Park Layne are evaluated in three phases. Phase one is a typical evaluation, with observation by the principal and feedback to the teacher. In phase two, the teachers develop their own goals for teaching to share with the principal. Then, in phase three, the teachers develop and conduct a large project, either individually or as a group. For example, in 2004-2005 the third, fourth and fifth grade teachers worked together to develop a reading project.

The building plan is used to determine whether professional development opportunities support the goals of the building. Teachers select the in-service programs they are interested in attending, provide a rationale for going and request support from the principal. Mr. Baker's rule of thumb is to spread out the money among different teachers and have them share with the other teachers when they return. The building pays for the approved professional development sessions as well a portion for masters level coursework needed for licensure.

Use of volunteers to support reading

To develop a solid foundation for reading in younger students, the emphasis of the Ohio Reads program is on the first and second graders. The goal is to prepare them so they will become into strong readers in the upper grades. In addition, this focus provides an early opportunity to find and address additional problems that may affect the students' reading and understanding.

The Ohio Reads program begins in September/October and ends in May. Students are selected based on DRA and DIBELS scores, along with teachers' input and student records. After assessments are completed, school staff members explain the program to parents, at which time they are given a copy of the *Framework for Literacy*. Staff members are available to answer any questions parents may have after reading the publication.

Tutors help carry out the Ohio Reads program. Each tutor, responsible for four students, reads to each of the students for 15 minutes every day, Monday through Friday, from 1:45 to 2:45 p.m. This time frame allows the classroom teacher to plan so that tutor time does not interfere with teaching time and also allows the use of high school students.

Tutors for the program include parents, high school students and community members. A high school counselor aids in the recruiting process at the high school. The Title I Reading Specialist provides two hours of training using the Ohio Reads training manual. Once trained, the tutors are introduced to the classroom teacher and their students and begin their tutoring.

“The culture is very positive, even when there is some turmoil to work through. People want the best for kids. I can’t identify a person here who is not here for the kids, not teachers, aides, custodial or lunch staff. We’re not perfect, but we’re pretty close.”

Greg Baker, principal

At the end of each year, the program is assessed, with the results of the assessment used to plan the program for the following year. The Park Layne staff would like to increase the one-on-one opportunities for their students, but since their

Ohio Reads grant funds have been cut totally for the 2005-2006 school year, they have been brainstorming ideas on how to continue. They are researching the idea of having the high school give community service credit to student tutors on a semester basis.

Creating a Culture Where Each Individual Feels Valued

Park Layne's success in creating a culture where each individual feels valued;
An open-door policy;
Celebrating and rewarding the positive;
School-wide behavioral expectations.

Positive Environment

The Park Layne pledge follows:

Park Layne Pride Pledge:

Today is a new day!
Park Layne School is a GREAT Place to learn.

I will ...

- do my best school work
- respect others
- solve my problems without fighting
- and...

Pledge to show my Park Layne Pride

Mr. Baker's main goal is to be there for the students and staff. He does his paperwork before the students arrive and after they leave, as he likes to be out and about as much as possible to interact with teachers and students.

If a problem arises, he likes to see what is happening so he can help to identify why it is occurring and problem-solve about how to fix it. Also, he makes a point to go into classrooms frequently to observe, both so he knows what is happening and so his appearance is not disruptive to the students.

Mr. Baker believes that creating a welcoming, accepting culture is important to a positive school environment. When he first came to Park Layne, he made a special effort to address the visual appearance of the school. A park bench now serves as a welcoming spot for parents when they come into the building. Although the school is old, the interior is bright and cheery, and the custodians keep it very clean. Student work is displayed at the entry and throughout the building.

A garden planted and maintained by the students adds to the exterior attractiveness of Park Layne. One physical education teacher who is also interested in horticulture began the work and recruited students to help, and a Garden Club evolved. The club had a membership of 85 students in grades one through five in 2004-2005. The club members meet once a month to work in the building's Pride Garden during the warm months when a variety of vegetables are grown and harvested. Projects are worked on during the winter months.

Suggestions for change come from the staff. For example, Mr. Baker checked with the teachers regarding the Park Layne Teacher Recognition policy. Previously, within the building, individual teachers were recognized for their efforts. The staff reported that they did not want to select just one person to recognize. Now grade level teams are recognized instead of individuals. Mr. Baker is very open to trying new programs. He finds the end of the day as the most positive time to sit down with grade-level-teams to plan and collaborate.

A variety of supports and rewards were instituted for the staff. A monthly staff breakfast is held with the different grade level teachers hosting. Also, there is a monthly birthday cake for staff in the office. Doughnuts are provided at meetings and at other special times. At some teacher meetings/trainings, food, money and babysitting are provided. Candy is placed in staff mailboxes at different times to give the teachers a little lift. Fun activities for staff are conducted throughout the year. For instance, staff members have secret pals at Christmas time.

Birthdays of both staff and students are announced each morning during the student news program on WPLS Channel 4, a program produced by the fourth and fifth graders and broadcast into all classrooms through the building's closed circuit system.

A theme of kindness sets the tone of the building. Students collect money to be donated to the Humane Society. At Christmas, students and staff adopt a family in need, collect money and treat the family members to a great Christmas. Students also participate in the St. Jude math-a-thon and also Jump Rope for Heart. An "I Am Special" Day is held when parents and/or grandparents come to school to celebrate. The custodial and kitchen staff are always willing to help with all kinds of special activities and to go the extra mile to assist those in need of something.

The district also supports the affirming activities occurring in the schools. Listings of "100 positives," brief descriptions of the positive things the schools in the district are doing, are included in the district newsletter, sent to all residents of the district and also posted on the district Web site.

Parents

The principal and all staff members believe in an open-door policy. Doors to classrooms and to the principal's office are kept open. Parents and staff are encouraged to come in to talk to the teachers or to the principal if there is a problem.

Parents are an important part of the learning equation at Park Layne. They are informed about grade-level expectations at the beginning of each school year, and they routinely receive information on how their child is doing academically in relation to those expectations so they can provide ongoing support to them. Notes called Panda Grams are sent home to parents to relay positive news about their children.

"We always tell the parents to call or come in if they have a question or concern. The doors are always open. We'll address the issue, whatever it is." Greg Baker, principal

Behavior System

Positive reinforcement for good work and good behavior are emphasized at Park Layne. For example, one classroom teacher uses "terrific tickets."

Discipline rules and expectations are the same for everyone in the building. The Park Layne Pledge, PRIDE (Productive, Responsible Individuals Dedicated to Education) is stressed with all students.

A process using green, yellow, red and blue cards allows the students to take responsibility for their own discipline in all classrooms. Each student must change his or her card when directed by the teacher. Often students make the change with just a look from a teacher, since the students know that they did not behave appropriately. The yellow and red cards serve as warnings; the blue card signifies that a student must go to the office with an office referral form.

Each infraction is considered distinctive. To determine the consequences for the child and also to provide support so the behavior does not occur again, Mr. Baker talks with the student about the problem, looks at past infractions and tries to identify the reason the behavior occurred. Often strategies are put in place to support the student, such as pairing the child with another student. If the student seems to be having problems at home, the principal works with the parents to determine how all can work together to support the student.

ENGAGING PARENTS AND COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS

Park Layne has a large Parent Resource Center that is similar to the school's Teacher Resource Center. In the Teacher Resource Center, teachers can check out supplemental materials for their classroom. For instance, in the 2004-2005 school year, the first and second grade teachers used the Resource Center to gather weekly book baggies with level books for their students.

The Parent Center, staffed by a Parent Coordinator, has extensive holdings that have been built up with grant money. Parents can check out reading books at their children's reading levels to help students enhance their reading skills. Materials in the center are all aligned to the curriculum and organized by topic and instructional level.

Teachers are always communicating to parents the reading level their child is working on, and they might suggest that parents go to the center to check out materials. This has been described as a prescription from the teacher for reading improvement. Even without a teacher's prescription, parents can come in and check out books and materials on their children's level. The center is open during the day on Wednesday from 8 to 11 A.M. or on Tuesday or Thursday evenings from 5 to 8 P.M.

The Parent Center Coordinator also organizes several other evening programs for all students and parents. These programs included Bingo for Books and a Holiday Fun Night.

Coordination with a Public Library Librarian

Park Layne staff members have a strong working relationship with a librarian at the public library closest to Park Layne. This cooperative librarian has the library reading books organized as they are in the Park Layne Parent Center, and she helps parents find books according their children's reading levels. In a 2003-2004 project for fourth and fifth graders, the public librarian pulled *Little House on the Prairie* books at all levels from all the libraries in the system so that every student at Park Layne could have a book at their reading intervention group level.

What does the data say?

