

South Point Elementary School

South Point Local School District

South Point, OH

Superintendent: Kenneth Cook

Principal: Chris Mathes

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

South Point Elementary School is one of two elementary schools that feed into one middle and one high school in the small rural South Point School District located in southern Ohio. The two elementary principals enjoy a close working relationship, meeting biweekly to plan, and each school has been recognized as a School of Promise for 2003-2004. Chris Mathes,

principal at South Point, has been in this role for two years, following the previous principal of ten years. One of the youngest principals in the area, Mathes was an assistant principal for one year, a classroom teacher for seven. "I was born and raised in South Point," shares Mr. Mathes. "I never wanted to live

anywhere else but in South Point. This is where I belong."

This strong sense of community connection is evident also from the comments shared by both teachers and parents who themselves attended school here. As noted by one teachers, "We are one community, we go to church together, there is a small town feel here, a strong sense of community support."

PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL CHILDREN TO ACHIEVE

A commitment to getting students off to an early start is evidenced by full-day kindergarten programs, as well as by the support of an Early Childhood Center in nearby Sheridan that houses programs for both typically developing children and those with special needs.

The South Point Elementary staff includes four intervention specialists: two serving students with learning disabilities; one serving students with cognitive disabilities; one serving students with emotional disturbances, several of whom come to South Point from other districts in the area. In addition, twelve instructional aides, all certified as paraprofessionals, are available to assist students throughout the school day based on their learning needs.

Students with IEPs receive instruction in both the regular education classroom and the resource room, depending on their individual needs. The principal encourages collaboration between the regular education teachers and the intervention specialists, and the staff continues to focus on providing a more inclusive environment through the use of differentiated instruction. The intervention specialists work with the regular

SCHOOL PROFILE	
2003-2004 Building Rating	Excellent
Enrollment	551
Grade Levels	K-5
Economically Disadvantaged Students	48.2%
Students with Disabilities	19.0%
Black Students	4.8%
Multi-racial Students	2.8%
White Students	91.7%

SOUTH POINT DISTRICT PROFILE	
2003-2004 District Rating	Continuous Improvement
District Enrollment	1,810

education teachers to implement the accommodations and modifications that have been identified in the students' IEPs.

South Point Elementary offers students, 48.2% of whom meet low-income criteria, several opportunities to participate in intervention programs. An eight week After-School Proficiency Intervention Program is offered to all third, fourth, and fifth grade students. The purpose of these one-hour classes, which are held on four days each week, is to prepare for the achievement and proficiency tests. The school provides transportation home after these classes and rewards students who attend and miss no more than three sessions. These classes are well-attended, and students report that they are helpful in getting ready for the tests.

Additionally, the district recently purchased Study Island, a web-based computerized program that includes lessons and practice tests based solely on the academic content standards. This program, specifically designed to prepare students for the state assessments, can be used at school or at home. Teachers report this is a "great program," and the students "love it."

Data is used from various sources to identify learning needs and target specific interventions. Intervention is provided through a morning intervention program, funded through a grant, to a limited number of students. Students also may receive assistance during their lunch period from teachers who are scheduled on a rotating basis to work with students during that time. A summer intervention program is also offered to students. Previously, the summer program was funded under the 21st Century Grant and made available to all students. Since that grant has ended, the program is only offered to students who are in the lowest quartile of their class.

Homework is an important part of what is expected of every student, and a second bus run is available for students who must stay after school to complete any remaining assignments. A study hall will be added next year for grades two through five to provide assistance during school hours.

"Getting the right intervention is the key. It doesn't do any good to do it if you're not doing the right thing."

Chris Mathes, principal

Test results from the 2003-2004 school year indicate that interventions being provided are effective with 93.1% of all fourth graders scoring proficient or above on the mathematics section of the Ohio Proficiency Test. This represents an increase of 16.6% of students earning passing scores since the 2001-2002 school year.

Students with disabilities have scored progressively higher on both the reading and math sections of the Ohio Proficiency Test since the 2001-2002 school year. During the 2003-2004 school year 78.6% of the students with disabilities demonstrated proficiency on the both the reading and math sections of the test, representing a significant increase in scores over a three-year period. (See bar graphs at end of this case study.)

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

In response to questions regarding the curriculum, both Mr. Mathes and the teachers praise their district curriculum director, Debbie York. Also responsible for supervising work on federal programs, Ms. York is described as "outstanding."

The curriculum at South Point Schools is aligned to the academic content standards, and curriculum mapping has been completed for grades K-12, and also across districts the county. As there is a significant transient population in the county, it is important that the curriculum be aligned across districts. Contributing to the implementation of a well-aligned curriculum at South Point Elementary is a common daily planning period for all grade level teachers and the departmentalization of the fourth and fifth grades.

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Additionally, an intervention specialist reports she has a daily planning period that facilitates her working with the regular classroom teachers to plan for accommodations and to coordinate instruction. When asked about standards-based education, one teacher replied, “I think kids are more accountable now, as are the parents and the teachers. It defines exactly what my priorities are, what you should be doing as a teacher. I think it’s a plus!” An intervention specialist noted that the standards have been helpful to her in developing IEPs and said, “If you are not doing what you should be doing, there’s no excuse.”

The district administration and the teachers use data from various sources to evaluate the curriculum and inform instruction. “The problem with data is not getting the data, but using it,” shares Mr.

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Mathes. The proficiency and achievement tests results are disaggregated and reviewed. This information has pinpointed a drop in scores at the middle school that is attributed to some gaps in the curriculum. A review of the third grade achievement tests revealed that some of the students were not scoring well on the reading informational text standard. To work toward addressing that concern, “Pair-It” books, fiction and nonfiction books on the same topic, were purchased and are being used.

Teachers in kindergarten and first grade use the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skill (DIBELS) to identify which students are at risk for reading failure, to guide instructional intervention decisions and to monitor progress. The disaggregated results from the third-grade practice achievement test were reviewed and discussed during a professional development day that included the staff from both the South Point and Burlington buildings. Students’ strengths and weaknesses were noted, and instructional materials, if needed to target specific areas, were purchased. Classroom teachers and the intervention specialists collect data through informal and formal methods. The fourth grade math teacher reports that she has the students demonstrate in multiple ways what they know, in order for her to understand more fully what the students are really internalizing.

Teachers from Lawrence County, including South Point and Burlington, have developed short cycle assessments, aligned to the indicators, that they administer four times a year. Students are responsible for monitoring their progress on these assessments. The staff is working to figure out the best way to organize and use this data. A portfolio-type system is being considered to track each student through the grades and to follow the student should he or she transfer to another district.

One of the programs implemented through the curriculum at South Point is the Accelerated Reader Program, a reading management software program that monitors guided reading practice. A list of books coded for reading levels is posted on South Point's web page, and books are available in the classrooms, the school library, and the South Point Public Library. There is strong student participation in the program not only because students are able to monitor their reading progress but also because they can select rewards for the points they earn for reading the books.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A significant financial investment has been made to support professional development (PD) activities. Under contract, teachers have two professional development days each year. In order to participate in self-selected workshops or conferences, teachers must complete a request form that requires three or four signatures from other teachers with whom the teacher will share information following attendance at the activity, once approved.

An example of the district's commitment to PD is the opportunity that was made available to the district's aides to meet the certification requirements under No Child Left Behind. The curriculum director provided tutoring for the aides to prepare for the required assessment, and the district paid the application fee.

Teachers frequently attend sessions sponsored by the Ohio University Southern Campus and learn about upcoming professional development activities through the *Southern Outreach*, a newsletter published by the campus. The intervention specialists often participate in sessions conducted by the Pilaso-Ross Special Education Regional Resource Center (SERRC).

Mr. Mathes spoke highly of the Schools of Promise Forum, an exchange of ideas for improving student achievement. He described the day that brought visitors from Canton and Brown County to South Point as "very productive." "It is really helpful to talk with other districts," said Mathes. "We're all dealing with the same kids really. We can learn from what others are doing." Following the visit, some of the South Point staff have exchanged e-mail with the visitors.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH PARENTS/FAMILIES/COMMUNITY

The South Point School District encourages parents to participate in school activities in a variety of ways. They are announced on the local cable channel, posted on the web page, and promoted through letters of invitation. The school year is kicked off with the Back-to-School Cookout held in mid-August and eagerly anticipated by everyone in the community. Throughout the year, the district's parent coordinator works to recruit volunteers for each of the four buildings in the district and collaborates with the curriculum director to plan and host family nights. Parents, grandparents, and guardians are invited to join teachers from South Point and Burlington for an evening of family math activities that demonstrates to parents what they can do with their child at home to reinforce what is being taught at school. A similar night is set aside for science.

South Point Elementary has a very active Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) that "works really hard for the school and helps out tremendously," according to Mr. Mathes. The PTO sponsors the Fall Festival, another popular event that families look

forward to each year. Though this activity and others, the PTO raises funds for such incentives as pizza parties and field trips, as well as equipment for classrooms such as TVs and VCRs.

Parents report that they appreciate the introduction of the content standards, as it is now easier for parents to know what their kids are supposed to be doing. There is also a secure feeling that parents report relative to the school. One parent of a student with a disability shared, "It's great to know when you come into the school everyone knows who you are. It comes with a smaller school." Another shared, "It's a good feeling to know that when I'm not with my son, there are other adults around him who care as much about him as I do."

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A parent of a student with disabilities

It is evident that the work the teachers at South Point are doing to encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning is making a difference. When a fifth-grade special education student was asked what the teachers had done to help him pass the proficiency test the previous year, he proudly replied, "They didn't do it. I did."

What does the data say?

