



## Harold R. Walker Elementary School

Canton Local School District

Canton, Ohio

Principal: Mrs. Gay E. Welker

<http://www.cantonlocal.org/education>

Canton's Harold R. Walker Elementary School is a high poverty, high performing elementary school that explicitly uses Ohio's academic standards in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics to plan, deliver and evaluate curriculum and instruction and assess student work. As a result, in 2004-2005, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) rated Walker as an "Excellent" school, meeting nine out of nine indicators. Only 25 percent of all public schools in Ohio received the Excellent designation.

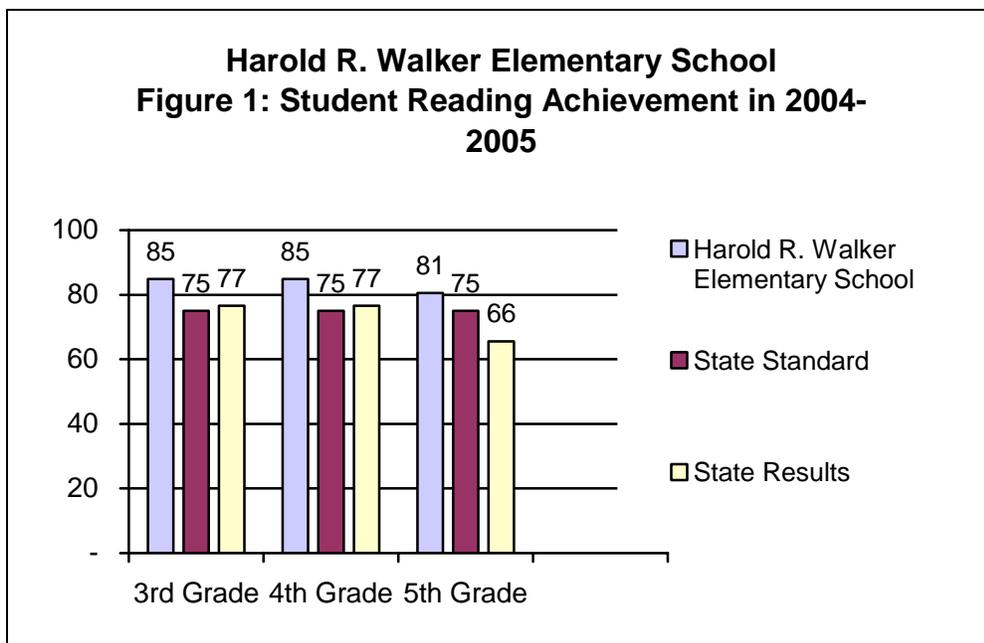
ODE recognized Walker Elementary, a Title I targeted assistance school, as a *School of Promise (SOP)* in reading and mathematics for 2003-2004 and 2004-2005. To meet the criteria for *Schools of Promise*, Walker Elementary had to enroll at least 40 percent or more of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and meet or exceed the State standard of 75 percent passage in reading and/or mathematics (overall and for each racial/ethnic subgroup). In 2004-

2004-2005 Walker Elementary School Profile	
2004-2005 Building Rating	Excellent
Student enrollment	500
Grade Levels	K-5
Economically Disadvantaged Students	55.2%
White Students	79.5%
African American Students	12.8%
Multi-racial Students	6.2%
Students with Disabilities	20.3%
Source: Ohio Department of Education, 2004-2005 School Year Report Card for Walker Elementary School	

2005, over 80 percent of Walker's students scored proficient or above at each grade level (third through fifth grades) on the Ohio Achievement or Proficiency Tests in reading and mathematics, as shown in the following figures.

## Comparison of Walker’s Aggregated Student Performance to State Standards and Results for 2004-2005

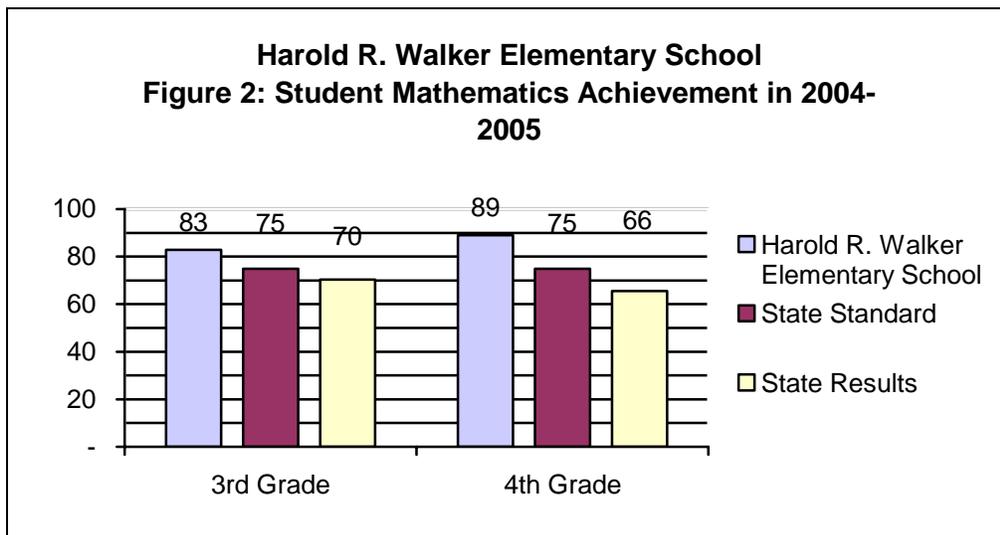
Figure 1 graphically displays the aggregated percentages of Walker’s third, fourth, and 5th grade students scoring proficient or above on the OAT in reading and compared to the state standard of 75 percent and state results. On the third grade OAT, 85 percent of Walker’s students scored proficient or above compared to the state results of 77 percent. On the fourth grade OAT, 85 percent of Walker’s students scored proficient or above compared to state results of 77 percent. Walker’s fifth grade students performed approximately fifteen percent higher than the state average of sixty-six percent, and six percent higher than the state standard of 75 percent.



Sources: Ohio Department of Education, 2004-2005 School Year Report Card for Walker Elementary School; Ohio Department of Education, 2004-2005 Annual Report on Educational Progress in Ohio

Figure 2 graphically displays the aggregated percentages of Walker’s third and fourth-grade students scoring proficient or above on the OAT in mathematics compared to the state standard of 75 percent and state results. On the third-grade OAT in mathematics, 83 percent of

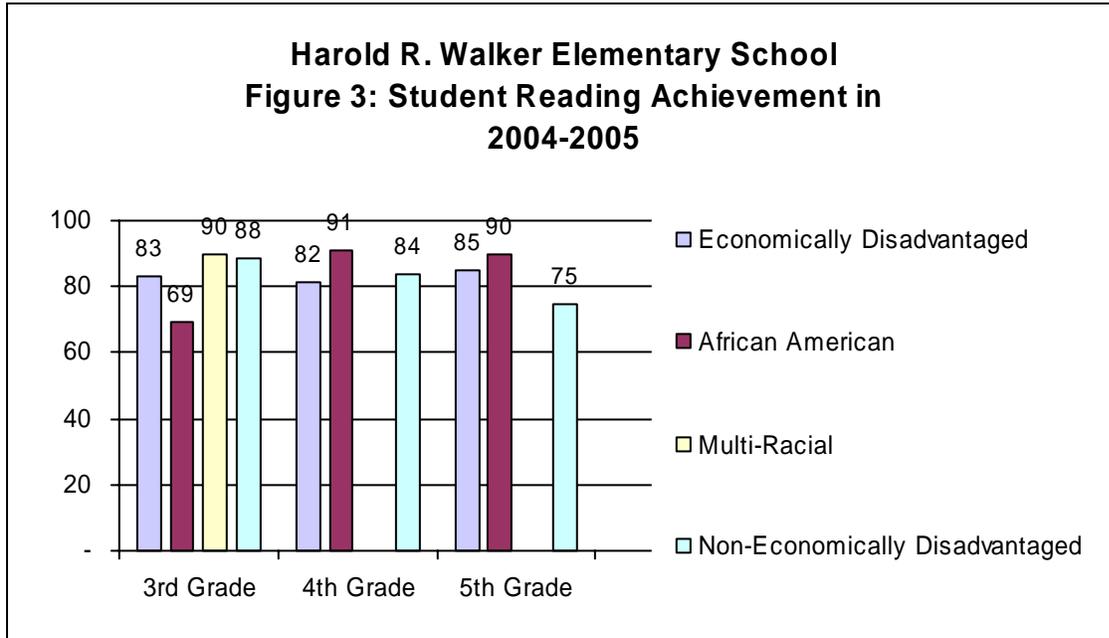
Walker's students scored proficient or above in comparison to the state results of 70 percent. On the fourth-grade OPT in mathematics, 89 percent of Walker's students scored proficient or above in comparison to the state results of 66 percent.



Sources: Ohio Department of Education, 2004-2005 School Year Report Card for Walker Elementary School; Ohio Department of Education, 2004-2005 Annual Report on Educational Progress in Ohio

### Walker's Disaggregated Performance by Student Groups in 2004-2005

Figure 3 graphically displays the percentages of Walker's third-grade students who scored proficient or above on the third, fourth, and fifth grade OAT in reading by student groups as required by the *No Child Left Behind Act*. It is evident from the graph that all of the economically disadvantaged and non-economically disadvantaged students scored above the state standard for proficient at each third, fourth, and fifth grade level. Third grade African American students scored 69 percent, or below the state standard of 75 percent. However, all African American students in fourth grade and fifth grade, at 91 percent and 90 percent respectively, scored above the state standard of 75 percent. Third grade multi-racial students scored at ninety percent, well above the state standard.



Sources: Ohio Department of Education, 2004-2005 School Year Report Card for Walker Elementary School

## Methodology

The purpose of the Schools of Promise Multiple Case Study is to highlight and document effective research-based strategies used by selected urban schools according to the research-based *SOP Framework of Practice* (a review of research and literature organized around five themes) and the *SOP Implementation Inventory*. The study focused on the schools piloting the *SOP Implementation Inventory*, which is a tool designed to help a school examine and document its practices using the *SOP Framework of Practice*.

The Ohio Department of Education selected six urban schools for the study based on student performance on state assessments in either, or both, English Language Arts or mathematics.

Once a school agreed to participate in the study, a researcher from RMC Research Corporation visited each site and trained the principal and school team in the use of the *SOP*

*Framework of Practice* and the *SOP Implementation Inventory*. The school principal and a team s/he appointed completed the *SOP Implementation Inventory* and submitted the completed Inventory with supporting documentation to RMC Research. Additional records were obtained from the Ohio Department of Education Web site, the district's Web site, and the school's Web site. The researchers reviewed and analyzed the completed inventory and documentation according to each theme and sub-theme of the *SOP Framework of Practice*. They identified additional questions to be asked during validation site visits in February, 2006. Two researchers conducted a two-day validation site visit in February 2006 that included: 11 classroom observations and one-hour individual interviews with the principal and assistant principal, 14 teachers, two literacy coaches, and a parent coordinator. The researchers collected data on the classroom observations using a standard protocol. The interview questions were open-ended and specific to Walker Elementary school based on the review of the submitted *SOP Implementation Inventory*.

The researchers reviewed and qualitatively analyzed all collected data using the five themes and sub-themes of *SOP Framework of Practice*. RMC prepared and submitted draft case study reports to the school principal for initial review and comment. Based on the principal's feedback, final corrections to the draft case study was made by the researchers. The draft case studies were submitted to ODE for review. Based on ODE feedback, the researchers obtained additional clarifications from the school and revised the case studies.

## **Re-Organization of School in 2005-2006**

For the 2005-2006 school year, Canton Local School District converted Walker Elementary School from a neighborhood Kindergarten through fifth grade school to a district-wide school with grades three through five. Restructuring the three district elementary schools allowed 20 positions to be absorbed at no loss of programming or service to students. In difficult financial times, it saved the district funding and allowed for better collaboration opportunities.

After the conversion, Walker's instructional staff is organized into two or three member grade level teams who share the same students. For example, at the third grade, one teacher teaches ELA and social studies while the other teaches mathematics and science. By teaching one or two subjects rather than all core academic areas, teachers feel their expectations for students are higher. In addition, teachers can see where and how students are successful in respective subject areas. The grade level teams meet each day from 7:30-8 a.m. during the common planning time for all staff. A major challenge for teams is the lack of sufficient time for collaboration and instruction. In addition to the morning grade level time, teachers have individual planning time during the school day while students are participating in music, art, and physical education.

## **Organization of Case Study**

The case study report is organized according to the five *Schools of Promise* themes. The first SOP theme is that *SOPs* deliver rigorous instruction aligned to the state's academic content standards. Leadership that leads to continuous improvement is the second *SOP* theme. The third *SOP* theme is *SOPs* design instruction to ensure every student succeeds. Engagement of parents and the community in supporting student success is the fourth *SOP* theme. The fifth *SOP* theme is that *SOPs* create cultures where each individual feels valued.

## **Rigorous Curriculum and Instruction Aligned to State Standards**

The first of five *SOP* themes is: *Schools of Promise* delivers rigorous instruction aligned to the State's academic content standards. Walker Elementary School provides examples of how state standards can drive a school's curriculum, instruction, and assessments. Working with the district's Curriculum Department, school staff made the state academic content standards teacher, student, and parent friendly. Teachers met after school and during the summer to "unpack" standards. The district aligned their reading and mathematics approaches and textbooks to Ohio's academic content standards. According to interviewed staff, the "state standards are our curriculum." All lesson plans were coded by state standards. In addition, the district and school created nine-week pacing charts that identify the state standards that are to be taught for each grading period. The pacing charts ensure that all grade level standards are taught during the school year. Also, district and school level teams have created common grade level assessment questions based on state standards for each of the nine-week assessments.

To increase students' knowledge and understanding of state standards and to track their progress, the district and school created "I CAN" statements based on state standards. The "I CAN" statements were created to ensure students, the most important assessment users, understood what they were trying to learn. For example, the adult statement of a third grade Ohio ELA standard which read, "Use letter sound knowledge and structural analysis to decode words," was transformed into a student "I CAN" statement: "I CAN use what I know about letters and sounds to identify words," which is much easier for a nine year old to understand and be able to talk about. An adult statement for a third-grade Ohio ELA standard for "reading text using fluid and automatic decoding skills" became "I CAN read fluently with changes in tone, voice, timing, and expressions to show understanding."

Instructionally, the school allots 75 to 90 minutes daily to English Language Arts. Students rotate through a variety of instructional activities, including small group instruction with a teacher, stations or centers, and individual student assignments. In most cases, teachers

have reading support from an interventionist for each ELA class for 45 minutes twice a week.

Aides support the work of social studies and science teachers.

All students are assessed individually in ELA at the beginning and end of the school year with some students having additional assessments mid-year. The school assessments include: *RIC (Reading Inventory for the Classroom)*, STAR assessments (which are aligned with *Accelerated Reader*), *homeroom.com* pre-assessments, and local nine-week pretests/posttests. In addition to district-wide nine-week assessments, all students are assessed weekly on “I CAN” quizzes. Then grade level teams group students for instruction in ELA based on the assessments of students’ reading skills or levels. Weekly, teams review ongoing assessment data, create common assessments, and discuss how to equalize the pacing of instruction across classes. Teachers also use the assessment data to guide instruction by analyzing student responses on items. Teachers use assessment data to determine when and where students may need differentiated instruction and interventions.

For mathematics instruction, the school uses a research-based mathematics approach, *Everyday Mathematics*, which is aligned with Ohio’s mathematics standards. Interviewed teachers reported that the use of this program has contributed to improved student performance. The teachers particularly liked the program’s cycles which address beginning, developing, and securing skills of students. Mathematics instruction is scheduled daily for 75 to 90 minutes. The approach includes time for whole-group instruction as well as small group, partner or individual activities. It provides numerous opportunities for students to practice and review mathematics skills.

Every student receives a daily assignment sheet with homework, additional practice activities, school news, and a report on whether the student met the school’s behavior policies. Parents must sign off on the student assignment sheets. The assignment sheet is part of a building-wide discipline plan that connects learning and behavior with student incentives and good communication. Teachers use “I CAN” checklists and “I CAN” weekly quizzes on state

standards to monitor student progress. Every student graphs their progress on “I CAN” quizzes and stores them in a data folder. The main purpose of student data folders is to help students be responsible for their own learning. Students track their progress toward mastery of each standard in their student data folder. The data folder also includes: a copy of the class mission statement, nine-week reading goals, attendance, graphed behavior records, *Accelerated Reader* performance results, and short-answer extended responses. The student data folders are used during parent conferences to provide evidence of student progress. Student progress on standards are shared with parents every nine weeks. The data folders are also a great sharing tool with parents as a take home share or during a parent-student-teacher conference.

Interviewed teachers reported that students know the State standards because of the “I CAN” statements, ongoing assessments, and the data collected in students’ data folders. Students are able to very specifically identify what they learned each day, and if assessed, how close they are to mastery of standards.

### **Providing Leadership that Leads to Continuous Improvement**

The second *SOP* theme is: *Schools of Promise* have leadership that leads to the continuous improvement of the school. Interviewed staff described the Principal, Mrs. Gay Welker, as a driven leader with clear, high expectations. She is well read on the most recent literature on instructional practice in reading, assessment practices, and relationship building. She provides three to four articles throughout the year on a particular topic for discussion at weekly staff meetings. In addition to administrative responsibilities, the Assistant Principal, Danita Berry, supervises the after-school tutoring sessions, after-school programs (e.g., MadScience, Writing Club, and Chess Club), and the summer tutoring program.

The school’s Continuous Improvement Committee (CIP Team) is open to all staff with mandatory grade level representation. The CIP includes goals, action steps/evidence, responsibilities, and dates accomplished. CIP meeting notes are distributed to all staff

members. The CIP committee is a problem solving committee. The committee develops action plans for changes such as instruction, climate, and management. The guiding principles for the CIP work is to identify “what is best for students” and “what data supports this decision.” In addition to the CIP team, there are monthly vertical grade level team meetings that focus on identifying and closing vertical curriculum gaps.

The two literacy coaches model and support ELA instruction and work one-on-one with classroom teachers. For example, the coaches teach a strategy and introduce new materials to teachers. This professional development training may occur during the 7:30 a.m. common planning time and during the day with substitute coverage (two hour training windows) as grant funding permits. The coaches provide materials to classroom teachers and help teachers set up centers in classrooms. Centers are designed to differentiate instruction for content area skills and are changed by the teacher as appropriate. The coaches model the lessons and demonstrate how students can work on skills. They support teachers as they begin to implement these strategies. In addition, the literacy coaches created bins of leveled books of fiction and non-fiction in the library. They created “Strand Folders” also called “Strategy Files” for teachers to add to and check out. The Strand Folders are organized for small group strategic skills into the following categories: author and purpose, compare and contrast, and genres. Within the folders, there are games and activities tied to strands and assessments.

## **Providing Instruction to Ensure the Success of Every Student**

Theme three of *SOP* is: *Schools of Promise* design instruction to ensure every student’s success. Walker’s goal is that all children meet or exceed grade level benchmarks, particularly in ELA and mathematics. The school defines student learning as a journey to mastery. Staff believe that if every step of the mastery process is celebrated, student motivation remains high, student confidence is built, and increased student learning is the result

The building's continuous improvement plan reflects grade level goals in reading and mathematics that are checked every nine weeks. Grade level teams set grade level and student level reading and mathematics goals based on student performance data. Grade level teams meet quarterly with their learner data to see if benchmarks have been met and if action plans need to be adjusted.

To ensure every student is reading well, the school developed a common intervention time in reading at the end of the day for all grade levels. The intervention provides students time for practice, enrichment, or remediation activities. Some students are flexibly grouped for intervention time based on assessment data. The other students, who are not flexibly grouped during the Intervention time, participate in the *Accelerated Reader (AR)* program. The *AR* program is an individualized computer-assisted assessment of student comprehension of books. The *AR* program allows all students to be engaged in at-level learning. The *AR* computer program scores students' responses to reading comprehension tests, awards the student points based on the results, and keeps records. Students may also engage in the *AR* program after completing work in all subjects.

The school identifies at-risk students by using the *RIC* and daily tracking of standards with checklists. Students who are deemed "at-risk" do not demonstrate mastery of the state's grade level standards. The school modifies the list of at-risk students throughout the year based on what students demonstrate they know. In addition, parents of at-risk students are invited to conference with school staff to create an action plan for learning for the remainder of the year. The action plan created for at-risk learners is a growth plan drafted with student-parent-teacher-principal. The action plan duration typically is February – June, but may extend into summer to maximize learning opportunities for an individual student. The home and school agree to check learning progress at specific times during the year.

The school has developed a ladder of interventions to ensure every student's success. There are seven intervention/enrichment specialists. The specialists work with the classroom

teachers at different grade levels to flexibly address the specific targeted needs of students on a weekly basis. The principal encourages instructional staff to share learners within and between grades, creating individual schedules for students as needed. Students are flexibly grouped based on data for both acceleration and intervention. Time is blocked for this grouping to occur. For example, third grade mathematics is scheduled from 8:30 a.m. – 9:45 a.m. for some classrooms so learners assigned to homerooms can be rostered into groups based on need. Some of the specialists are special education teachers and two are part-time literacy coaches. The specialists may work in classes with the classroom teachers to support instruction in ELA and mathematics. Other times, the specialists may pull students out to work in small groups on specific skills.

When students do not complete their homework for the week or their behavior interferes with learning, they participate in TASK, a learning make-up time. This time provides additional learning time or behavioral coaching to address student needs. If students did not complete their homework over the course of the week, TASK provides them additional time to finish their work. If a student's behavior interfered with their learning time, TASK returns this time to a student so additional learning can be accomplished.

Students who need additional learning opportunities in ELA and mathematics are invited to participate in an after-school program twice a week for six weeks. One after-school reading program is offered during October and November. The second after-school program is offered during the six weeks prior to state testing. A six-week summer school program is also provided to students in ELA and mathematics.

## **Engaging Parents to Support Student Performance**

The fourth *SOP* theme is: *Schools of Promise* engage parents and the community to support student success. The school sponsors a ReadyFest each year before the school year starts so that families can meet teachers and staff. The school's parent coordinator, Mrs. Jan

Wirth, is responsible for supervising all parent and volunteer activities, including the recruitment, scheduling, and training of parent volunteers. Currently, there are approximately 50 parent volunteers. The school uses volunteers to support reading initiatives, to assist teachers in meeting learner needs, and to staff special programming such as seasonal parties and end-of-the-year activities. During the year, the school provides a variety of school-wide activities to foster parent and community involvement (e.g., newsletters, parent conferences, Parent Information Night, book fairs, and musical programs). In addition, the school has concentrated on providing Reading Workshops to parents and children funded through *OhioReads*.

Walker Elementary sends the grade-level “I CAN” statements to parents at the beginning of each grading period. As a result, parents know what their children will be expected to learn during that time span. Daily, parents of all children receive assignment sheets for their children which require parent signatures. During parent conferences, children share their information from their student data folders. Recently, Canton Local School District reformatted their elementary schools’ progress reports for students and parents. The progress report changed as a result of standard based grading practices. A software program, *Pinnacle*, is used to enter assessment data by standard, and then report cards are drafted from the assessment entries. With time, parents are becoming more familiar with the information presented on the report card and are more concerned with the numbers on standards rather than the final grade by subject.

In addition to promoting the involvement of parents in Walker’s continuous improvement efforts, the school has also worked on creating a culture where all individuals are valued. The next section describes their efforts.

## **Creating a Culture Where Individuals are Valued**

The fifth *SOP* theme is: *Schools of Promise* create a culture where each individual feels valued. Walker Elementary developed a professional learning community that the principal monitors on an ongoing basis. The term professional learning community refers to a culture of

staff learning and working together. The goal is to have all teachers collaborating and developing positive, trusted relationships with teammates and other staff members. Another goal is for teachers to maximize school time, school resources, and support staff. The school's philosophy is that if students like school and their teachers, students will work hard to meet expectations. Walker focuses on finding and celebrating the potential in all students.

The school has six core rules: (1) respect yourself and others; (2) stay in your area; (3) use materials appropriately; (4) raise hand to speak; (5) work quietly; and (6) obey adults. Parents receive information on the school's discipline plan in their parent packet at the beginning of the school year. Staff are trained annually to give students clear directions and redirections. The school's discipline plan asks all students to do the job called "school." The plan has three components. If students do their homework (component one), have an adult signature on the daily assignment sheet (component two), and keep behavior choices in check (component three), students have daily privileges. Students who meet all three components are on track for the end of the week activity (earning four of five stamps with a stamp = good day). Students are assessed on rule violations for infractions. Students track behavior in their student data folder and the office tracks discipline data quarterly. Administrators work with a student, the family, and the teacher team to help students meet and exceed behavior plan goals.

Recently, the school surveyed students in grades three through five. This basic survey was used to determine the relationship status of each student to the school. Seventy-five percent of the students identified that they liked school and 89 percent liked their teachers. The survey was conducted to determine the climate of the new grade level configuration this year. The principal indicated that she is pleased with the early indicators. The end-of-the year survey will repeat the same questions, ask for additional information supporting a response, and then solicit ways the school can improve. Other indicators used at the beginning of the year to guide Walker's improvement include the review of students' reading levels, nine week assessment data, discipline referrals, and other data. The principal's belief is that the positive results on the

surveys will increase as students became more comfortable in their new environment and understand Walker's expectations.

A major focus of the school is on the recognition of high student performance. Student performance that meets school expectations is recognized weekly. The school has a weekly activity for students who completed their homework for the week, demonstrated good behavior choices, and turned in parent signatures on all assignments.

In addition to the above, there is a nine-week award assembly for students. The awards are based on: perfect attendance, good behavior, 100 percent completion of homework, academic performance on report card grades, and 80 percent or above proficiency on computerized assessments. The school also recognizes students who have most improved in a subject or in their behavior. The Principal's Award is at the discretion of the principal or assistant principal. Every nine weeks, the principal selects the criteria for this award. For example, the third nine weeks focused on the mastery of mathematics facts and superhero effort on high stakes testing. The names of the nine-week awardees are prominently displayed in the main hallway of the school.

## **Summary**

Walker Elementary School (grades three through five) is a high poverty, high performing elementary school located in Canton Local School District. In 2004-2005, the Ohio Department of Education rated the school as "Excellent" and recognized Walker as a *School of Promise* for aggregated and disaggregated student performance in reading and mathematics. Over 80 percent of Walker's students have scored proficient or above at each grade level on statewide assessments in reading and mathematics for the past two school years.

The principal of Walker Elementary is described by interviewed staff as a driven leader with clear, high expectations. The principal believes that if teachers and students like school, everyone will work hard to meet high expectations. Walker's goal is that all children meet or

exceed grade level benchmarks, particularly in ELA and mathematics. Under her leadership, school staff has created a professional learning community in which all grade level teachers have common planning time to increase collaboration and continuous learning. Literacy coaches and interventionists work with classroom teachers to address student needs.

Walker has extensively integrated the state's English language arts and mathematics standards into curriculum, instruction, and ongoing assessments. Pacing charts ensure that all state content standards are addressed during the year. The district and school have translated the state standards into standards that parents and students can understand. Students monitor their mastery of standards on a weekly basis, and the district reports student performance according to the mastery of state standards. There is daily communication with the parents of all students and the school engages in a variety of activities to involve parents in the school. Every student receives daily homework, practice activities, and a report on his/her behavior.

Walker uses a variety of formal and informal assessments to monitor student progress and mastery of standards during the school year. On a continuous basis, teachers analyze student performance on the assessments and make adjustments in instruction. Students monitor and graph their progress on mastery of standards and performance on assessments on an ongoing basis. To ensure that every student performs well, the school has created a variety of organizational structures (e.g., flexible use of intervention specialists and tutors during the school day and after-school programs) to provide a ladder of interventions to meet the needs of every student. Walker's staff believe that student motivation and confidence remains high as students are recognized for meeting the school's academic and behavioral expectations. The school recognizes and celebrates student academic and behavioral performance weekly and every nine weeks.

In conclusion, Walker Elementary School is an example of how one Title I targeted assistance school in Ohio has used research-based practices within the *Schools of Promise Framework* to raise the performance levels of all students, especially economically

disadvantaged students, on the Ohio Achievement and Ohio Proficiency Tests in reading and mathematics since 2003-2004.