



Schools of Promise **Case Study Report**

**Withrow University High School
Cincinnati, Ohio**



Withrow University High School Cincinnati, Ohio

Withrow University High School in Cincinnati, Ohio was selected as a *School of Promise* in Reading for the 2004-2005 academic year. Table 1 summarizes the school and district characteristics for Withrow University High School and the Cincinnati Public School District.

Table 1. School and district characteristics

	Withrow University High School, 2004-2005	Cincinnati Public School District, 2004-2005
Percent Minority	93.9%	77.8%
Percent Poverty	49.0%	64.5%
Years as a School of Promise (Reading)	1	
District Typology		Major Urban
Student Enrollment	571	35,839
Attendance—all students	96.2%	94.4%
Attendance —Economically disadvantaged students	96.2%	93.8%
Attendance —Minority students	96.4%	94.3%
Student mobility: Students in building less than one year	13.2%	6.9%
Student promotion		
Ninth grade	100%	99.7%
Tenth grade	99.5%	99.7%
Eleventh grade	100%	99.7%
Number of teachers	50	2,575
Average teacher salary	\$44,871	\$58,362

Source: Ohio Department of Education

Withrow University High School Mission Statement

We will empower students to be life-long learners by promoting high expectations, rigorous instruction, Cincinnati Public Schools academic standards, community service, and family support within a safe and disciplined environment. No excuses.

School History

Withrow University High School was established in 2002, one of three new schools on the historic Withrow High School campus. With funds from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the KnowledgeWorks Foundation, Cincinnati Public Schools were able to transform the original large (and low-performing) Withrow High School into three smaller, more specialized schools.¹ The goal of the reorganization was to create an environment in which teachers were better able to reach and “engage students in meaningful ways.”²

All Cincinnati Public Schools are “Schools of Choice.” At the secondary level, there are no school assignments based on geography/residence; instead, students select from a variety of high-school programs. Students and parents select Withrow University High School as their primary choice, and then a lottery system is employed to enroll students. Thus, the student population at Withrow is a subpopulation of the Cincinnati Public School system who self-selects this school.³

When the school was established in 2002, only freshmen were admitted; the school has expanded one grade level each consecutive year. As of the 2005-2006 school year, ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade levels are served by the school. The class of 2006 will be the first class to graduate from Withrow University High School. At the time of this case study, over 80 percent of students were registered to take either the SAT or ACT, an important initial hurdle in the college application process. Graduation rates are anticipated to be above 90 percent. Comparatively, the graduation rate in the district is 72 percent. Table 2 summarizes school and district performance on state indicators.

Table 2. School and district performance on state indicators

State Indicators 2004-2005 (tenth Grade Ohio Graduation Test) <i>State requirement is 75%</i>		
	Withrow University HS	Cincinnati Public Schools
Reading	94.5%	86.3%
Writing	89.1%	77.7%
Mathematics	87.9%	72.4%
Science	69.7%	52.9%
Social Studies	78.2%	68.4%
Attendance (<i>State requirement is 93%</i>)	96.2%	94.4%
Graduation Rate (<i>State requirement is 90%</i>)	N/A	72.1%
Number of state indicators met	5 out of 6	3 out of 23
Rating	Effective	Continuous Improvement

Source: Ohio Department of Education

¹ Withrow International High School, which shares the same facilities, is also a *School of Promise* in Reading. The third school is Withrow Traditional High School. More information on the three schools is available at <http://withrow.cps-k12.org/>

² Mrozowski, J. (2002). City opens high schools within schools. *Cincinnati Enquirer*. Cincinnati, Ohio.

³ Source: Cincinnati Public Schools website, <http://www.cps-k12.org/Schools/schools.htm>, April 2006.

Teacher characteristics

According to Withrow University HS, there are eight teachers in each grade level. Each grade level has two English teachers and two mathematics teachers. Between five to eight teachers in each grade level are considered highly qualified (HQT), with 67 percent of teachers overall considered HQT. Only three teachers have less than three years experience. Based on responses to the teacher survey, 58 percent of Withrow's teachers are female, and 58 percent are African-American. Fifty-six percent have a master's or higher degree.

Average student: teacher ratio: 1/25

Additional teaching staff (part-time or specialized): 20

Additional school staff/administrators: 11

Schools of Promise Case Study Methodology

On December 8, 2005, a four-person research team conducted a one-day site visit to Withrow University High School. Activities conducted during the day were as follows:

Classroom observations

On the day of the site visit, six classes were observed, each for 30 minutes: three math classes (ninth and a tenth-grade algebra and twelfth-grade calculus) and three English classes (eleventh-grade English, twelfth-grade English, and tenth-grade newspaper class). With the exception of the class for the school newspaper, all classes were divided by gender (a school policy). The ninth-grade algebra and twelfth-grade calculus classes were all female, while tenth-grade algebra and both traditional English classes were all male.

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 6 classrooms was determined to be **89 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. 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 interviews were conducted with four teachers from the English department and three teachers from the mathematics departments. 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. Teachers whose classrooms were selected for observations were interviewed, as well as one additional teacher.

Administrator interview

Two individual interviews were conducted with school administrators, including the school principal, Ms. Sharon Johnson, and the vice-principal, Dr. Jonathon Futch. Each interview lasted between 30-50 minutes. 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' demographics, their background and training, professional development activities, school climate and culture, as well as perceived characteristics of effective teachers and a series of questions about their school environment. A total of 43 surveys were received, representing a response rate of **86 percent**.

Student focus groups

To gather feedback from students, two student focus groups were conducted. 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. One focus group was conducted in the morning and one in the afternoon. The morning group of nine students consisted of a mix of students in the ninth and tenth-grades. The afternoon group (11 students) consisted of students in eleventh and twelfth-grades. Both group sessions lasted approximately 25 minutes. Student gender was mixed in both groups

Parent interviews

After the site visit, SRG conducted 20 telephone interviews with parents. Interviewees were randomly selected from lists provided by school administrators. Each interview followed a prepared survey instrument and was conducted by phone at a time convenient for the participant. 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. Withrow University High School shows evidence of all these components.

In addition to investigating ODE’s “Five Lessons Learned from Successful Schools” and how Withrow University 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. Withrow’s principal, administrators, teachers, students, and parents consider effective teachers to share some common characteristics:

- Teachers should be self-reflective, open to change, and willing to collaborate.
- Teachers must be empathetic toward the students but hold them to high standards for achievement and accountability.
- Teachers must be knowledgeable in their subject area.
- Teachers should possess strong classroom management skills.
- Teachers should build and cultivate personal connections with their students and be able to develop a rapport with students.
- Teachers should differentiate instruction to meet the needs of students with various learning styles
- Teachers must know the Ohio content standards and align instruction to the standards

These themes are recurrent throughout the following Five Lessons.

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

Alignment of curriculum to the state standards

Withrow has aligned its curriculum to the standards set by the state of Ohio. Teachers set objectives each day and focus on the content standards in their lessons. If a topic or activity does not relate to the standards, teachers eliminate it or allocate it as a lower priority. As one teacher said, “There might be an activity that I just think is wonderful, but if it doesn’t align to the standards it’s wasting time because we already don’t have enough time in the school year.”

With strong encouragement by Principal Sharon Johnson, Withrow’s teachers frequently collaborate with each other to ensure they are focusing on the same standards in the same time frame. Teachers collaborate vertically (across grade levels), horizontally (within grade levels) and within teams (interdisciplinary groups of teachers). Collaboration occurs formally during planning periods built into the school day, and informally after school and on weekends.

Emphasis on collaboration

Principal Johnson continuously stresses that the school's staff and students are a family. She encourages collaboration on every level by pointing out that everyone's input improves students' performances. "You've got to have people working together," she explained. "When the tenth-grade teachers pull it off, everybody has had a stake in it."

Teachers use a district-wide curriculum which they supplement with materials they develop together or on their own. Working with state standards and the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) guidelines, teachers in each department say they often share material or ideas with each other in order to enhance the curriculum and syllabus. One tenth-grade English teacher commented that she works very closely with the other tenth-grade English teacher. "We plan everything together and it's good to have someone that I can communicate with, to run ideas back off of."

Withrow's teachers say their goal goes beyond teaching the students to pass the test. They follow the lead of Principal Johnson, who believes that students will retain the concepts, information and skills and bring those lessons with them to the next grade if the school aligns the curriculum with the standards. As one teacher said:

The question is do they retain what they acquired to pass that test? If they retain it then you're doing your job. If all you provide is a quick fix, your school passes the test but down the road you're not really building that foundation.

Clear communication of standards and expectations

Teachers and administrators clearly communicate the standards to students and parents. Supporting evidence from classroom observations revealed that all observed classes began with the teacher outlining the plan for the day's lesson and identified which standard was being addressed. This ensured that the students always knew what was expected of them and that the class had clearly defined goals that were to be accomplished before the end of the period.

Consistent with the school's emphasis on standards, more than half of the interviewed parents said they were familiar with Ohio's academic content standards. Most said they learned about them through the school and information provided by teachers or sent home in the form of a letter, packets, or newsletter.

Clear communication begins at the top with school administration. In fact, on the teacher survey, 88 percent of teachers agreed school leadership effectively communicates state, local, and national educational policies and initiatives.

High expectations and a college focus

The school's structure is designed to help students achieve beyond graduation. Withrow splits grades into what it calls lower and upper houses: the lower house consists of ninth and tenth grades while the eleventh and twelfth grades form the upper house. The focus for the lower house is preparation for the Ohio Graduation Test while the upper house prepares students for college admission/college success. The school has two counselors—one guidance counselor and one college-coordinator. If funding were available, Principal Johnson would prefer that the school have a counselor for each grade (a total of four counselors), believing it would be

particularly helpful for students whose families have no experience with applying to college. As the principal said,

There's nothing like the counselor calling them in and saying, 'Okay, this is what your transcript is looking like first quarter,' and getting into their heads about how important it is to keep a good GPA starting as a freshman.

Withdraw helps keep students focused on college in various ways. An array of college banners hang throughout the school's hallways and other prominent locations and in areas outside the main office. In addition, the school's two college counselors are located in a central location at the school in a hallway just outside the main office.

The school paper is another vehicle by which information about college—and success in college—is conveyed to students. Each issue of the school paper includes a section on “Senior Achievers” where top students are named along with their rank. A section called “Life After Withdraw” focuses on each student's future plans for college and aspirations beyond. Another section, “College Spotlight”, presents facts about colleges. The paper provides students with information about the colleges' average SAT scores of freshmen admitted, estimated expenses for attending that school, the number of students enrolled, and the university web site so students can find out more about the colleges. The paper also features a section in which seniors offer advice to lower classmen about how to be successful at Withdraw.

Throughout the year, teachers put an emphasis on developing skills needed both at college and in the workplace. Some worry that although some students want to attend college, they don't understand how important their grades and transcripts are to college admissions. Teachers try to make sure students understand that they will not have the luxury of retaking tests as college students. Teachers frequently convey what will be expected of the students once they are in college and try to prepare them for the academic realities which could include more stringent requirements. Many teachers say they enjoy the process of preparing students both for the test and college while building their self-esteem.

Students mentioned receiving support in preparing for college and spoke of how the staff encouraged them to work to their potential.

I'm a senior right now and they're making sure we get our applications filled out everything done, you know, finished. What are your goals, what colleges are you looking at, what type colleges are you applying to? You know, career wise, major wise, stuff like that. So I can pretty much tell you they do want to listen to your goals.

Parents say they appreciate Withdraw's focus on college and college readiness skills. The staff helps students with college applications and questions on financial aid. The school also provides college tours and college prep classes, which help the students make decisions.

Principal Johnson's interpersonal philosophy is based on building partnerships—partnerships with teachers, partnerships with parents, and partnerships within the academic community of Cincinnati. For example, her efforts resulted in the “Bridge” summer program, collaboration between Withdraw and Xavier University that assists students with the transition between middle and high school. Incoming freshmen attend a five-week program during June and July at Xavier where they meet five days a week from 8 a.m. – 12 p.m. They participate in assessments in mathematics, science, and English, become acclimated to Withdraw's college-bound culture, and learn about school policies and expectations for students. Students also get a taste of other aspects of the college experience by using Xavier's auditorium, break room, library and

classrooms. They receive a uniform from Xavier (two polo shirts) also are granted a college ID card. During this summer program, teachers take the opportunity to assess students' academic skills and group them according to performance level for freshman year.

Withrow University HS is less than a mile away from Xavier University. When President Michael Graham took office in 2001, he set goals for the University to increase its partnerships with the surrounding community and local neighborhoods. Also, Principal Johnson received her certificate in educational administration from Xavier in 2002, which helped the two organizations to establish a connection. The Bridge program is in line with both organizations' missions. The program is part of Xavier's Community Building Collaborative program, and helps Withrow students to gain valuable experience on a college campus.

At first, Gates funds helped to pay for the summer Bridge program, but Withrow is currently at the end of the Gates grant. Funding for the summer program is not available from the Cincinnati Board of Education, so, according to administrators, "We have to make do with funds from a variety of sources—General, Gifted, and Special Education. But we think it is so important that we don't mind pulling in so many different funding sources and combine them."

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

Strong leadership

Teachers uniformly said that Withrow's principal Sharon Johnson is a strong, dynamic leader who implements innovative strategies and fosters a school culture based on open communication. Principal Johnson has made it clear that she has high expectations for both her staff and students and a commitment to student success that goes beyond passing the OGT. Teachers say they value her strong leadership, and on the teacher survey, 91 percent of teachers agreed the principal is an effective leader. A school administrator said:

I think one of the things that she does well is have frank conversations. I think everyone understands that [constructive criticism is] not about personal attacks, but it's about how we can do a better job at whatever the issue is. Those discussions are not always easy to facilitate, but she does it well. It's about the kids and the structure of the school and making the school and the kids better.

Principal Johnson draws on experience from her corporate background in her current role as educator. School policies emphasize the school's mission statement and a mantra that says "No Excuses." In fact, the school's mission statement is clearly posted outside every classroom at Withrow. Believing there are unique challenges in working in an urban environment, she has placed a strong emphasis on discipline and structure.

Principal Johnson's relationship with teachers and other administrators is described as "collaborative." She works hard to foster trust and open dialogue among her staff. She is nothing less than passionate about the school, students, and staff: As she puts it:

This is my passion, this is my ministry, this is my calling. I love what I do. I love my staff and I tell them that. You need to express how you feel and if you're disappointed about something, you need to express that. But I love my staff, I love my students and it's very powerful. We have tears, we laugh, we cry.

Withrow administrators—Principal Johnson and Assistant Principals Dr. Futch and Ms. Hahn—are a cohesive team. The assistant principals are closely involved in all

executive decisions. They support Ms. Johnson and assist in communication and accountability at every level. "It is a genuine group effort," she said.

Open communication

Withrow's administration seeks open communication with teachers, and encourages collaboration among teachers and collaboration between students and teachers (see Lesson One for more discussion of teacher collaboration). In an effort to hold the staff accountable, the three administrators frequently observe the teachers and conduct spontaneous classroom visits. During classroom visits, administrators take note of what the students are doing and talk to them about that day's lesson. Because teachers post goals and objectives daily, as well as which standard is addressed in the lesson, administrators are able to ask students questions to determine if they've grasped the lesson and can explain the objectives back to them.

The culture at Withrow is one of open communication and accountability at every level, and there was a high degree of consensus around this point. Ninety-one percent of the teachers surveyed agreed that the principal communicates her expectations to faculty and staff. The same percentage agreed that teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction. For example, student performance data (OGT data) are analyzed at the teacher level. During staff meetings, student performance data for each teacher are openly shared via overheads and charts and discussed among the staff. Thus, the staff learns how each teacher and each team is performing and they discuss ways in which they can improve on every level. Although such a process can be stressful at times, Principal Johnson says the practice encourages "friendly" competition and provides the initiative for each team and teacher to improve.

Teachers' reactions to the collaborative leadership are positive. On the teacher survey, 84 percent agreed that "the principal consistently supports me when I need it," 83 percent agreed the faculty and staff have a shared vision, and 79 percent agreed that there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect at this school.

In an effort to improve student performance and teaching strategies, teams work in collaboration horizontally and vertically. Teachers share materials and spend time during the day, when some teachers have common planning times. Teachers also say they spend time collaborating outside school time; one teacher said that she is often on the telephone with another teacher in her grade level Sunday night to discuss lesson plans for the week ahead. Teachers say the process has improved their relationship with students as well as their love for teaching. Others are comforted by the thought of being with like-minded colleagues who want the student body to do well and share the goal of sending their students to college. They say the process has encouraged their creativity and given them new perspective. One English teacher said:

One of the things that I can say is that before I came to Withrow University High School, I was more of a teacher, who came in, gave instructions, and that was it. Working with other teachers has enlightened creativity in me that I didn't know existed.

To model the same kind of collaboration and self-reflection she expects from her staff, Principal Johnson regularly solicits feedback from teachers on her own performance. Teachers' responses are shared back at staff meetings on an overhead projector. Principal Johnson and other administrators use the feedback to strengthen their various skills particularly in communication with staff and students. Principal Johnson feels the approach makes it easier for teachers to accept constructive criticism from the administrators.

Principal Johnson encourages the teachers to use their free periods and after school time to assist students and other teachers in preparing for the OGT. She does so because she feels it would be unfair for the tenth-grade teachers to shoulder the “burden” of student performance on the OGT when the whole school is invested and affected by the students’ performance. “If you have a bell that’s freed up, we expect you to help out,” she stated. There is an expectation that teachers will help others in their content areas. “Go help out because when we look bad, everybody looks bad. It doesn’t matter what grade you’re teaching.”

In interviews, parents commented favorably on the strong leadership at Withrow and believe it is something that sets this school apart from others in the district. One parent, when asked what makes the school unique, said, “I believe it’s the leadership and the staff, they have the concern needed for the kids. They volunteer to help and stay after if needed, it’s not about the teachers’ needs it’s about the kids’ needs.”

Innovative use of resources

A significant factor in the transformation at Withrow has been a grant from the Gates foundation. The Cincinnati Public School district received three million dollars over three years which enabled them to restructure several large schools in the district.⁴ At Withrow University High School, the administration was effectively able to re-build from the ground up. According to administrators, the only stipulations on funds provided by the Gates foundation were that funds had to be allocated for staff development or to self-sustaining sources such as materials. A small portion was designated for parent involvement and student academic incentives.

One innovative use of resources provided by the Gates foundation was the ability to conduct site visits to other urban schools to study their best practices. The principal and entire staff, including custodians and cafeteria workers, participated in site visits to investigate effective strategies employed at other high-performing urban schools around the country. Past trips have included visits to schools in New York City, Florida and New Orleans. The trips have resulted in direct modifications to Withrow’s operations and policies. For example, the college counseling area for seniors was set up in a similar manner to the model they observed in New York. Withrow’s interview process for new teachers was developed after visiting Fredrick Douglas High School in New York City.

The teacher interview process at Withrow is creative and extremely thorough. A five-person committee conducts interviews with potential candidates. In addition to asking the candidate questions, both the candidate and committee engage in role playing during the interview to see how the candidate responds. For example, a teacher may “act up” like a student in class and the candidate demonstrates how he or she would handle that situation. The candidate is also expected to interview the principal and committee. “It’s not a one-way interview,” says Principal Johnson adding that the committee looks for candidates who buy into Withrow’s culture and are willing to “go to the next level and work hard. If you’re not ready to work hard, this is not the school for you.” The principal says she looks for a teacher’s willingness to change and respond to feedback in the interview process.

Time is of the essence and so we’re looking for top notch teachers coming in the door; now do we feel that teachers are trainable? Yes we do. Do we feel that teachers are open to reaching another level? You can tell that in an interview—how much are you willing to stretch?

⁴ For more information see the CPS website, <http://www.cpsboe.k12.oh.us/general/reform/hsrestruct/Gates.html>

Professional Development

According to Principal Johnson, the most important consideration about professional development at Withrow is how it will be used in the classroom. She did not feel professional development was valuable unless it was directly implemented in teachers' classrooms. As she said, "we can PD you all the time professionally, but how much of it are you actually going to use? If we spend money to get you PD, we want you to take that PD and do something with it."

All staff at Withrow University High School participates in an annual staff trip to a high performing school. Additionally, all staff participates in Standards in Practice training four times a year and complete four district in-services on computer and web site development. All staff participate in long-term instruction on using data to drive instruction four times a year. Twice a year, teachers are required to complete professional development on classroom management and reading in the teacher's content area.

The principal stresses that classroom management is important, and teachers agree on the importance of structure and discipline in the school culture. On the teacher survey, 38 percent of teachers identified effective classroom management as one of the top characteristics of an effective teacher. In interviews, teachers mentioned the emphasis on classroom management. One teacher said, "If there is a concern from the administrators they will always come to you and say, 'you know I think that maybe we should look into getting [the teacher into a] class to have better classroom management or better planning skills.'" "However, other teachers mentioned that no course or training is as helpful as direct experience gained from time in the classroom. As one English teacher put it:

One of my greatest strengths I believe is management. It's hard for me to designate it to any one course, I believe it just comes from experience. Over time I have learned that if you do not manage your time wisely, if you do not manage the discipline in your classroom wisely, ultimately it can lead to disaster. I can't tell you a specific class or course that I took that has contributed to that, I just think that it's experience.

On the teacher survey, teachers were asked to identify the primary focus of their professional development activities in the previous year. Next, teachers were asked what other (secondary) areas also applied to them. Consistent with the aforementioned school focus on collaboration, more than half of the teacher respondents reported their professional development activities involved collaboration. More than half also participated in professional development regarding instructional strategies to meet diverse student needs.

The survey results confirmed what teachers and administrators said in interviews. Nearly half of teachers, 45 percent, participated in in-depth study in their content area. Overall the teaching staff at Withrow demonstrates high levels of skill and mastery in their content areas; 67 percent are Highly Qualified Teachers (HQTs). Teachers strongly agreed that knowledge in the subject area taught was a critical factor in being an effective teacher. In fact, on the teacher survey 43 percent of teachers chose knowledge in the subject area being taught as among the top characteristics of an effective teacher.

Also consistent with teacher and administrators' comments, teachers report an emphasis in their professional development on understanding state standards. Fifty percent completed professional development related to understanding or applying Ohio content standards, and for a quarter of teachers this was a primary focus. Nearly half (45 percent) completed professional

development regarding their academic content areas; for 28 percent this was a primary focus (see Table 3).

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?
In depth study of the academic content of the subject(s) you teach	45.2%	27.9%
Understanding and applying Ohio content standards to student instruction	50.0%	25.6%
Instructional strategies to meet the learning needs of diverse groups of students with different learning styles	52.4%	18.6%
Collaboration for improving instruction	54.8%	14.0%
Using research results for decision making	28.6%	4.7%
Using assessments to gauge student mastery of Ohio content standards	40.5%	2.3%
Strategies for engaging stakeholders as active members of school communities	7.1%	2.3%
Strategies for creating and maintaining safe and orderly classrooms and schools	33.3%	--
Strategies for engaging parents and families	31.0%	--

Recommendations for new teacher preparation

On the survey, teachers were asked what recommendations they had for training and preparing future teachers to be effective in schools like theirs. The dominant theme among teachers was “more experience in schools.” Teachers said experience helped them build rapport with students, understand student needs, learn about school policies, and gain needed insight into student culture.

Teachers said novice teachers should gain experience in all grade levels and in public schools. One teacher said, “Get them into the classrooms ASAP. They need to know what they’re getting into.” Some suggested extending teacher training to a five year program with the last year used as an internship in which the intern teaches all day, all year.

Consistent with the school’s emphasis on discipline and structure, teachers emphasized the importance of classroom management. Many said experience was the best possible preparation in this area. They commented that college training in classroom management should be “more realistic and hands-on.” As one teacher said, “If a teacher is weak on management, everything else suffers.” Sensitivity training on family dynamics was also recommended, with the goal being to produce more empathetic teachers.

⁵ Results from the SRG teacher survey. Response options were adapted from the Maryland Survey of Teacher Participation in High Quality Professional Development, 2003-04, Maryland State Department of Education

Teachers who had prior exposure to working with adolescents and teenagers outside the high school classroom also had an easier adjustment when they first began teaching. Some mentioned volunteering, tutoring, and working in the community as ways they learned to connect with students.

Knowledge of the teacher's content area was viewed as important, so an increased focus on content education is recommended, as well as special education training for all teachers, even those not planning on working directly in special education. Teachers commented it can be helpful in understanding various student learning styles.

In summarizing the training necessary to be an effective teacher, one teacher put it this way:

Effective teaching in my school or any other requires three things: Knowledge of a wide variety of content relevant to the students you teach, knowledge of a wide variety of flexible classroom management strategies adaptable to your particular students, and an ability to establish rapport and build relationships with students. The first two can be addressed in college coursework, the latter comes with time.

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

Instructional collaboration and intervention

In keeping with the "family" atmosphere at Withrow, teachers frequently help struggling students by working with them during the day or providing extra support after school. Teachers and administrators collaborate with each other in developing instructional strategies. This helps increase creativity. As the principal said, "If one teacher is having problems with a child, he or she can ask other teachers what they're doing if they're being successful. Then we come up with something different."

For students who have missed a class or need extra support in a subject, teachers may collaborate and request that a student be "pulled out" of another subject for one "bell" or class period to work with the teacher or an intervention specialist. Teachers also regularly stay after school to provide tutoring.

In focus groups, students said teachers are there when they need help or are having trouble with a subject or with homework. Students noted if they were struggling, they would ask teachers for help and felt they could approach the teacher before, during or after school. "They are willing to stay," explained one student. "Some people will stay until like five, six o'clock after school just to make sure you get the information that you need."

Instructional strategies support student success

Further evidence of teachers' sensitivity to student needs comes from classroom observations. The teachers were attentive to the students and were always available during the class to answer questions. This was best noted in classes where the students were working on an activity on their own or in small groups. In many of the classrooms observed, the teacher constantly moved about the room, addressing students' problems and providing individual help. Additionally, the students seemed comfortable asking for help and answering the teachers' questions. Another technique observers noted was that teachers often explained important concepts several different ways to ensure that students fully understood the lessons.

From the students' perspective, teachers' positive attitudes are also important. Students described their favorite teachers as enthusiastic, energetic and interested in the subject that they teach. The students say their favorite teachers also explain their subjects clearly, answer questions and help students learn. One student said of a favorite teacher:

I like him the best because he doesn't just present information, he also gets us involved. If he's teaching us something, he asks us our opinion on it and we have class discussions.

In focus groups, students spoke of how teachers made sure that the whole class understood the topic. If the class was confused, the teacher delayed their next lesson, sometimes postponing a test, in order to make sure the class understood. The students appreciated that teachers cared enough about them to help everyone master the material.

There were similar findings during discussions with parents. Many said that teachers offer their children help before and after school. Some parents noted that the teachers adapt assessments to meet the needs of struggling students. For example, one math teacher commented that one of her students struggles with pencil and paper assessments, but if she puts problems on the board, he has no difficulty answering questions correctly.

Classroom observers also noted how concept development and scaffolding were utilized in the classrooms to engage students. Teachers integrated the observed lesson's concepts with ones learned previously. For example, in a math class, the teacher began with a magic trick that required students to perform some simple computations. Afterward, the teacher showed how the trick could be explained using the principles of algebra. In an English class, the students worked in small groups to edit and comment on stories that their classmates had written. Similarly, in a school newspaper class, students had to edit the most recent edition and decide which aspects of the paper they liked best and why.

The school-wide emphasis on meeting students' individual needs was also evident in teachers' responses on the teacher survey. Several teachers commented that working with special education coordinators can be helpful in reaching students with different learning styles. On the survey and in interviews, teachers commented that all new teachers would benefit from training on how to address the issues and academic needs of special needs students. Teachers say it is important to learn how to adapt instruction toward the students' academic needs and understand that students with special needs can learn through change.

The staff also reaches out to the students' families to ensure student success. Working with the parents, teachers say they try to determine if the student is experiencing any outside problems that may affect his or her schoolwork. If further action is needed, teachers may also have a one-on-one talk with the student or may consult the special education department for support.

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

In keeping with an emphasis on cultivating a "family" atmosphere, Withrow teachers contact parents early to engage their help when a student experiences difficulty or falls behind. Parents are contacted when any student misbehavior occurs, even a student's violation of the school uniform policy (see Table 4). The teachers communicate with parents through phone calls, e-mail, or correspondence sent home with students. Although administrators say parents generally respond when the school contacts them, they do not characterize parental involvement as extremely high.

Although very few of the parents interviewed had volunteered at Withrow, parents generally agreed teachers encouraged parents to communicate with them and to become involved in the school.

Parents can access their children's performance data at any time through a program called "Parent Connect." Once parents have a password, they can easily and frequently monitor students' daily routines and progress. The school sends e-mails to parents when new grades are entered, and they can keep track of all current student performance data including grades, homework, discipline and attendance. One math teacher commented favorably about the program:

I think that has helped a lot of parents to stay on top of their kids. You know, I get the occasional phone call, 'I see that my son just got a 12 percent on a quiz.' So I think that has helped a lot of parents to become more aware of what is going on.

Parents say the school's teachers, who may sometimes provide their home phone numbers, respond quickly to inquiries. Parents say they are comfortable when they visit the school, and many teachers work with them in finding solutions to problems.

Collaboration with community organizations

The "Families Forward" program gives additional support to Withrow's staff and students. The program, which is funded through the United Way, provides two counselors on site for social services and support to students. Teachers may also refer students to the counselors as part of the disciplinary procedures.

As discussed previously, Principal Johnson has cultivated a relationship with Xavier University. Because the president of Xavier is committed to outreach in the local area, the partnership provides for a summer orientation for incoming freshmen as well as collaboration between math and science teachers at Withrow and faculty at Xavier. Xavier received a grant from the Ashland Oil Foundation for staff development in science and math. This helps to fund materials such as calculators for teachers and also pays for Xavier math and science college classes that Withrow's teachers can take. In fact, Xavier offers tuition reduction for any teacher who wants to attend the university.

Another local partnership involves Convergys, a financial services company in Norwood, Ohio. They contribute bus tokens for students to attend the Bridges summer program so that there are "no excuses" as to why students cannot attend. All students receive a bus token to get from home to Xavier from Xavier to home. Convergys also partially sponsors the Play it Smart program. This program is also partially sponsored through the National Football League to tutor and support all athletes on campus (including Study Tables).

Principal Johnson also initiated a partnership with the University of Cincinnati through the Upward Bound and Gear Up programs, both federal programs sponsored through UC. Gear Up helps students from certain economically disadvantaged neighborhoods to prepare for college during the school year and also during the summer, and Upward Bound provides intensive tutoring with students after school and during the summer.

Luxottica, the parent company of LensCrafters, Sunglass Hut, Watch Station, and EyeMed Vision Care, provides a mentoring program at Withrow. The LUX-TIGERS Mentoring program was established in 2001 to provide a way for associates to combine their personal experiences with career-related knowledge to enrich the lives of young adults at Withrow High School. Forty-eight students are bussed to the Luxottica Retail corporate office in Mason, Ohio once a

month (October – April) for about two hours of interaction with their mentors. The sessions are scheduled around lunchtime; meaning only a lunch period out of the mentor’s work day is required. The program brings students into a corporate environment to learn more about the workplace, and mentors challenge student’s critical thinking skills and organizational skills.

Teachers and administrators say Principal Johnson is instrumental in developing and cultivating relationships with community partners, but once the relationship is established other school personnel take an active role in maintaining and coordinating the partnership, creating ownership on multiple levels within the school.

Of course, the school’s most important support has come from the Gates Foundation, whose three million dollars of support have allowed school administrators to rebuild the school from the ground up. Administrators and teachers agree this financial resource has been invaluable.

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

High expectations in a supportive environment

While they are sensitive to their students’ home situations and cognizant of the difficulties of working in an urban environment, Withrow’s administrators and staff are adamant in their refusal to accept excuses for poor work and lower standards. Principal Johnson has emphasized that her teachers should not pity the students and insists that they maintain their standards. “You have to motivate them to go to that higher level because a lot of them don’t have that type of encouragement at home,” said an English teacher. “They don’t have a positive role model in their lives, so teachers are role models to them as well.”

Principal Johnson maintains open lines of communication with teachers and students by developing and cultivating personal relationships. She holds regular staff meetings, frequently visits classrooms and talks with students about that day’s lesson. She also encourages feedback from teachers about the effectiveness of Withrow’s administration. In turn, teachers are encouraged to cultivate personal relationships with their students, to provide the necessary support students may need.

Teachers said in interviews and survey responses that it is important to show a willingness to develop personal connections and relationships with students. As one teacher said:

You have to have people that not only want to teach the content. You have to also be able to relate to the kids because it doesn’t really matter how much content knowledge you have if you can’t get it across to the students.

Students commented on the supportive environment, and how their teachers as well as the principal set high expectations and help them achieve. One student said:

I could say one thing, Ms. Johnson really tries to help the people that do not want to learn, I mean teachers and everyone really will stay on you, stay with you, and do all your work, sit with you, ask “What do you not understand? I’m not going to get up until you tell me.”

Parents believe that the staff provides a good atmosphere and demonstrates excellence. In interviews, parents said the teachers at Withrow are well trained, take a lot of time with each child and try to bring out the most in students. Others note that the staff goes out of their way to make sure a child understand the lessons. Parents often mentioned caring, dedicated teachers

who expect excellence and work with students as an important aspect of Withrow's success. Parents say teachers are willing to "go beyond the call of duty." Withrow's teachers care about the students, respect them, and are willing to develop personal relationships.

Although the first priority at Withrow is learning fundamentals and passing the OGT, students, teachers, and counselors consider the ultimate goals to be success in college and life beyond college graduation. Teachers hold high expectations for students. They provide constant feedback to students to encourage them to increase their levels of achievement. Students are encouraged to strive for A's and B's. Teachers remind them that C's are not sufficient enough to get into college and frequently reinforce why the students are learning certain skills and material.

A sense of "family"

Principal Johnson, as well as her teachers, believes that her school's students require understanding, flexibility and caring. A math teacher notes that students frequently speak of tensions at home with parents who have difficulty making ends meet. The students themselves may work two jobs or be responsible for caring for younger siblings. In certain situations, teachers demonstrate the value placed on flexibility by giving students extra time to complete the work. A math teacher said:

Students are dealing with things at home that you would just never imagine that would be going on and still getting to school. It's difficult if you're struggling at home. You have to be the type of teacher that they can come to you and tell you 'Can I have an extra day?' You have to be somewhat flexible.

Principal Johnson encourages a "family" atmosphere to convey caring and deep concern for students' well-being. As a result, administrators and staff sometimes use unconventional means to convey high expectations and encourage the students to work toward their goals. Teachers recall how during the first year, Principal Johnson rented a movie theater and took the entire freshman class to see the movie, *Drum Line*. She encouraged the students to be inspired by the main character's struggle and subsequent triumph. "It was cool, very cool," said a teacher.

In focus groups, students stated that they felt as if the teachers and the principal treated them like family. A number of students mentioned Mrs. Johnson by name, and spoke positively of connections they have with teachers. Students also mentioned that teachers reach out to students who appear to need help and support. They said that sometimes a teacher would notice if students appeared to have something on their mind and asked them if they needed to talk.

Students' and teachers' comments about the positive climate at Withrow were supported by evidence from classroom observations. In all classes that were observed, there was clear evidence of strong relationships between the teachers and the students.

The positive climate was demonstrated by the frequent instances of social conversations prior to the beginning of class. During transitional times, several teachers joked with the students. On one occasion, a teacher inquired about the well being of a student when she noticed that the student seemed troubled. Once the lesson for the class began, the teachers' demeanor often became professional and focused on the class content, while remaining respectful of the students. Teachers often provided the students with materials and handouts that allowed them to both save time on instruction and easily keep students on task. The transitions from one

activity to the next were highly efficient. The net result was an atmosphere that was very supportive and conducive to learning.

Teachers and administrators consider providing emotional support and developing personal relationships as critical factors in ensuring their students' academic success. Teachers are aware that some students may lack a sufficient support system at home or live with parents or guardians who did not finish high school or college. They impress upon the children that with support and determination they can succeed despite difficult circumstances. Teachers tell the students that others in similar situations have overcome the obstacles. "Those factors have an effect but it has to do with how much you want to succeed. If you want it, I am going to do everything I can to help you get it," said a math teacher.

In interviews, parents also commented on the "family" atmosphere. Parents believe the small class sizes, gender-based classes, and caring and concerned teachers contribute to this sense of family at the school.

Of their own preparation to be effective in an urban school like Withrow, teachers cited direct experience in working with urban/city schools or knowledge about their school from other teachers as particularly valuable preparation for their current positions. Some gained valuable experience by student teaching (with supervision) in similar schools, thus having the opportunity to become familiar with district and school policies, demographics, and the culture of the students. As a result, teachers say they had a more realistic viewpoint when they started teaching on their own.

Discipline, structure, and accountability

Despite their successes, Withrow teachers spoke of challenges that they face as educators working with minority and low-income student populations. Some teachers voiced concern that some of their students have suffered because of a lack of exposure to rudimentary reading, writing and speaking skills that children normally receive at home. Some teachers spoke of altering their lesson plans because some of their students lacked seemingly common resources such as access to the Internet or even a place to stay. Other students may be dealing with extreme circumstances such as a parent in jail. "I think you have to be understanding of the situation that the kids are coming from without getting emotionally involved," said a math teacher. "It's very hard to get sucked into every last one of these stories. 'My mom left, or my dad's in jail. I don't have a place to go to do my homework.' "

The school's discipline and structure are perceived as crucial to support students whose home lives may be, at times, chaotic. The school has a clear discipline policy that is published in the student handbook. A grid identifies misbehaviors, examples of corresponding initial consequences and consequents for repeated offensive and chronic offenses. An excerpt is provided in Table 4.

Table 4. Excerpt from Withrow University High School Discipline Policy

Misbehavior	Initial Offense(s)	Repeated Offenses	Chronic Offenses
Uniform Violation	Upon Arrival: Student sent home, Parent contact During school day: Detention or In school suspension (ISS)	Upon Arrival: Student sent home, Parent conference During school day: Detention or ISS, Parent conference	Removal from school pending parent conference

Truancy	Refer to Families Forward Work detail Parent contact	Detention Friday or Saturday School Parent conference	Refer to Administrator Parent conference Citation to court where possible
Class cutting	Refer to Families Forward Detention/Saturday School Parent contact	Refer to Administrator Friday or Saturday School Parent conference	Refer to Administrator Parent conference Citation to court
Unprepared for class	Teacher discipline action Parent contact	Refer to Families Forward Detention Friday or Saturday School Parent conference	Refer to Administrator Detention Friday or Saturday School Parent conference

According to administrators, Withrow’s discipline policy incorporates many different elements. It begins with the Mission Statement, which emphasizes discipline and structure (see page 2). To obtain that safe and disciplined environment for ultimate student engagement and learning, Withrow staff feels they must provide clear expectations for behavior at school not only in the classroom but across the entire campus. Administrators believe no student should be prohibited from learning because of classroom distractions or unruly behavior. Because not all students have the opportunity of a disciplined environment outside of school, administrators say, “It is crucial that we stress and continue to review on a daily basis the guidelines and rules at Withrow University High School.”

The school’s emphasis on discipline begins at the summer Bridge program for ninth graders, where clear expectations and correct behavior are modeled. According to administrators, it continues on a daily basis as teachers and staff model reinforce these expectations. For example, teachers wear uniform colors on a daily basis to support the students wearing uniforms. The emphasis also continues as teachers prepare seniors for their first year of college—and for the discipline and behavior requirements needed, like time management.

Students expressed appreciation for teachers who provided structure, discipline and classroom management. The students observed that the teachers made an effort even with students who did not want to learn. In focus groups, students noted that teachers demanded the students’ attention and didn’t tolerate conversations while lessons were in session. One student said,

They want everybody to be paying attention and everybody to be able to listen. So they care about if you’re getting information because if you’re not listening then they’ll say, ‘I’m not going to teach any more until you stop talking,’ and then everybody stops talking.

Evidence from classroom observations was also consistent with teachers’ responses about the importance of classroom management and discipline. A clear sense of discipline was apparent throughout the school and all classrooms observed during the site visit. During the observations, no major behavioral problems were evident and at no time did student misbehavior take time away from the lesson or activity. Teachers often preemptively dealt with potential behavioral problems by addressing or redirecting instances of minor misbehavior, like side conversations during class. The teachers also continuously monitored and maintained eye contact with the students to keep the lesson on track.

The culture at Withrow emphasizes accountability on every level. As mentioned earlier, teachers provide up-to-date information to parents through Parent Connect (a web-based application) so parents have access to students’ grades at all times. Another strategy used to motivate and reward students is to publicly acknowledge student achievement. Administrators post the names of the school’s highest-performing students on bulletin boards in a central location

outside the main office. Some students highlight their names or circle them and are proud to see their names on the list.

Dress code policy

Another policy emphasizing structure and discipline is the school's dress code. Students are required to wear a standard uniform. They are checked at the door and not allowed in the building without the appropriate attire. Students must purchase their own uniforms. If a student arrives at school without the correct uniform, that student must either purchase the necessary attire (for example, a shirt or tie) or go home to change into the correct clothing before he or she is admitted into the school. Teachers also have a dress code, which they follow, they say, to demonstrate their respect for the students' dress code policy.

Students praised the uniform policy. "I think that helps a whole lot in terms of us learning because we don't have to worry about what he has on, what she has on." They said that they felt safer wearing uniforms because it kept gang-related issues out of the school. They realized the importance of being dressed in the appropriate attire at the door in the morning. "In the morning Mr. A will be on it when you walk in the door, make sure your uniform is okay, your pants and your shoes," says one.

In interviews, parents commented favorably on the uniform policy. They like that students can focus on their studies not what the other kids are wearing. Some feel it reduces peer pressure among the students and increases discipline, structure, and control.

Gender-based classes

Another unique strategy employed at Withrow involves gender-based classes. Students are separated into male-only or female-only classes. Teachers and administrators believe gender-divided classrooms increase discipline and are extremely effective for the students who, no longer vying for the attention of the opposite sex, seem to better focus on their classwork. Teachers believe students are also less self-conscious in a single-sex environment and participate more freely in class. "There are a lot of issues that are cut out because of the gender separation in terms of not trying to impress someone," said an English teacher. "You know, the young men have established a community amongst themselves and they may laugh and joke with each other, but there's not a whole lot of tension sexually—you know with, 'I like her, so I'm trying to impress her, I'm sending her notes in class.'"

The staff says the policy also allows them the additional benefit of being able to modify their lessons occasionally according to the interests of each gender. For example, in one English class, female students have been working on projects involving autobiographies from prominent women. An all male class worked on science fiction focusing on authors such as Ray Bradbury. The staff believes this has a significant impact on the students' interest and engagement in the subject matter and subsequent assignments.

In focus groups, students said that it was easier to learn in the single gender classes. Some said their focus on academics had improved because they didn't have to worry about impressing the opposite sex. "In the classroom it's all girls so we don't have to try to impress those boys," said a female student. "That's what I like about the school because we learn more than rather talking to the boys and you know whatever, whatever." Parents also felt the gender-divided classes help students focus in the classroom. The gender separated classes are perceived as making the school special and distinctive.

Summary

Withrow University High School, like other *Schools of Promise*, has been successful in raising and maintaining high levels of academic performance in math and reading, particularly among minority and economically disadvantaged students. High expectations shape interactions between administrators, teachers, and students. College success is an attainable—and expected—goal for Withrow graduates.

A significant part of the school's focus is to help students achieve success beyond graduation. Withrow's teachers and administrators keep students focused on college in almost everything they do. College banners hang throughout the school. The school paper is used to provide students information about various colleges and current seniors' college plans. In daily lessons, teachers emphasize developing skills needed both at college and in the workplace. Teachers communicate what will be expected of the students once they are in college and try to prepare them for the academic realities of college life.

Teachers, parents, and students consider Withrow's principal Sharon Johnson to be a strong leader who implements innovative strategies and encourages open communication. Principal Johnson, who draws on experience from her corporate background, has high expectations for both staff and students and a commitment to student success that goes far beyond passing the Ohio Graduation Test to success in college and ultimately a career.

Principal Johnson encourages an atmosphere that conveys caring and concern for students. The principal has developed collaborative relationships with teachers and other administrators. She is passionate about the school, students, and staff. Principal Johnson and her teachers believe that students require understanding and flexibility in a supportive atmosphere grounded in discipline and structure.

Open communication and accountability are an integral part of Withrow's culture. During staff meetings, assessment data are openly shared and discussed at the teacher level to determine how they can improve on every level. In an effort to improve student performance and teaching strategies, teachers align the curriculum in collaboration within and across grade levels. Teachers work closely, sharing materials and spending scheduled and *ad hoc* time during the day as well as outside school time in collaboration and preparation. Administrators are accountable to staff as well; they actively seek feedback from teachers and publicly report back the results at staff meetings. At every level in this school, accountability is high.

School-wide, Withrow exudes a positive climate. Relationships between the teachers and students are strong, and the administration strives to create a "family" atmosphere. Teachers and administrators believe that providing emotional support and developing personal relationships are critical factors in the academic success of students. Aware that some students may lack a sufficient support system at home, teachers stress to students that they can succeed with support and determination. The net result is a warm, supportive environment that celebrates the success of its students.

Overall, Withrow's success can be attributed to its focus on high standards, a culture of achievement beyond high school graduation, a supportive "family" environment that accepts no excuses for failure, innovative use of resources, and a network of relationships built on a foundation of structure and mutual respect.

“Lessons Learned” at Withrow University HS

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

- All instruction is aligned to the state standards.
- Teachers collaborate vertically and horizontally to align instruction to the standards; teachers collaborate in common planning time during the school day, with interdisciplinary teams, and on their own time outside of the school day.
- The school clearly communicates standards and expectations to the students and parents; students, parents, and teachers agree administrators convey standards clearly and effectively.
- At Withrow University HS, students are immersed in a college preparatory focus – teachers and administrators set high academic goals for all students. The phrase “no excuses” is a mantra for administrators, teachers, and students and is emphasized in every respect.

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

- One of the most distinctive characteristics at Withrow University HS is strong leadership – the principal is a passionate, dynamic leader sets clear expectations and holds high professional standards; she is trusted and respected by staff, students, and parents.
- Instructional leadership promotes a unified effort toward student achievement
 - Administrators foster a culture of open communication between teachers and students and teachers
 - Collaboration takes place between the principal and teachers as well as among teachers (e.g., analyzing data, discussions as a group on ways to improve instruction, and collaboration to align curriculum to the standards).
- Leadership cultivates personal relationships with students and staff.
- Empowered by significant funding from the Gates Foundation, Withrow University HS demonstrates innovative use of resources to support the instructional process, including:
 - Site visits to other high-performing schools across the country involving the entire Withrow staff
 - A complete re-structuring of the original Withrow High School, including the adoption of strategies used in other successful urban schools
 - A teacher interview process involving role-playing and the involvement of a panel of teachers to gauge candidates’ fit for the culture and climate at Withrow
- Professional development emphasizes collaboration, classroom management/discipline, content area knowledge, and use of student data to drive decisions. Still, teachers emphasize the importance of experience in the classroom over professional development in the form of classes and courses.

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

- Teachers intervene directly with students when additional support is needed, providing immediate intervention in the form of extra time during free periods and after school to tutor students;

- Teachers employ varied instructional techniques to meet students' needs. They build personal relationships and cultivate an atmosphere of trust among students and teachers.
- Teachers report that the ability to differentiate instruction is one of the most important characteristics of an effective teacher at Withrow University HS.

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

- Teachers and administrators frequently communicate with parents, involving them as soon as possible when students experience difficulty. Still, parent involvement in the school was not characterized as high.
- Students' assessment data and attendance is made available to parents through a web-based application.
- The school cultivates and maintains close collaboration with a wide range of partners and community organizations including:
 - Xavier University
 - The United Way/Families Forward program
 - Convergys
 - University of Cincinnati
 - Luxottica Corporation
- Arguably the most important partner for this school is the Gates Foundation, whose funding enabled administrators to effectively rebuild the school from the ground up.

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

- Teachers and administrators hold and communicate high expectations for success in high school, as well as beyond; students are expected to prepare for and succeed in college.
- Students are publicly recognized for success by posting their names in prominent places like main hallways and the school paper.
- The administration and teachers are united in their belief that it is critical to provide both emotional and instructional support to all students
- Students, teachers, parents, and administrators agree that the culture at Withrow is very much a "family" atmosphere
- The school has created a culture of respect based on a firm foundation of discipline and structure that allows students to better focus on academics
 - Gender-based classes reduce distraction and competition among students
 - A firm and rigidly enforced dress code policy is in place
 - Students, teachers, parents, and administrators agree discipline is a key factor in Withrow's success; it provides structure and creates respect