

SMALL MOMENTS, BIG DREAMS

Real-life stories from five redesigned urban high schools



Pushing Change Forward

The challenge is enormous: Reinventing one of our country's oldest and most revered institutions, the American high school. Yet it is a challenge we at KnowledgeWorks Foundation

welcome. We believe that a rigorous and relevant education is not only every student's right, but also the only sure path to a brighter future for us all. We are convinced that achieving a responsive, inclusive and effective educational system is a goal that lies within our grasp.

That's why we invest our resources in initiatives with the potential to change the way education works. One of those initiatives is the creation of small, personalized high schools where students build close relationships with the adults around them. From Los Angeles to Houston, Chicago, Baltimore, New York and beyond, small schools have engaged students and revitalized teaching.

Even so, we recognize that change on this scale is hard won. On the front lines, where teachers, students and those who support them struggle to create new ways of learning, the battle for change is fierce. Some of the obstacles they face are always moving – the constant shifting of funding priorities, legislative mandates, public support and societal needs. Others may seem immovable — the brick wall of entrenched habits, values and expectations. It is a battle against almost insurmountable odds.

But the remarkable truth is that even in the face of all these obstacles, a contingent of heroic pioneers is pushing change forward. These hard-working, visionary and stubborn few are defying the odds. They are reinventing high school.

These are the stories of those pioneers. They are glimpses into the thousands of moments, hundreds of decisions and countless interactions that are change in progress. Even more powerfully than the statistics already showing improvements in graduation and attendance rates on these campuses, these human stories tell us that change is happening. They show us that these new schools and the people within them have already begun to touch children's lives, and that a future is on its way where every student can lay claim to a legacy of success.



Chad P. Wick, President & CEO
KnowledgeWorks Foundation

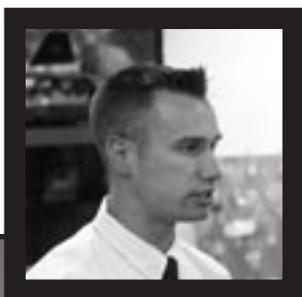


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SMALL MOMENTS BIG DREAMS



Steps to the Leadership Institute at Brookhaven High School.

New Schools Gain Ground, One Step at a Time

The idea that America’s high schools — particularly its large urban high schools — are failing our children is no longer new. We all know their faces:

The graduate who can’t keep up in college.

The dropout who seems surprised that he can’t find a job.

The junior who quits out of boredom, the sophomore who is hiding an unexpected pregnancy, the freshman who is working at half his potential.

Even the rush to save these youngsters is not new. Educators, politicians, parents and business leaders have proposed and tried countless solutions. Some have helped, some have fallen short. Some may have even made matters worse.

Small schools have begun to rescue children at risk of dropping out and reinvigorate educators in danger of giving up.

The Promise of Small Schools

From all the turmoil and debate, a few promising new models have emerged to successfully prepare students for life beyond high school.

One that is offering hope for schools around the country is, in some ways, very simple. At its heart are small, personal learning environments in which students can build close relationships with teachers and teachers can engage students with demanding, pertinent studies.

The thinking behind this small schools approach defies much of what has been standard practice for American education in recent decades. Based on a solid body of research, it calls for each school to have a clear and specific focus, for its leaders to have the freedom to make decisions about teaching and learning within their schools and for teachers to collaborate across traditional disciplines.

With these and other innovations behind them, small schools in cities across the country have begun to rescue children at risk of dropping out and reinvigorate educators in danger of giving up.

Ohio’s High School Redesigns

In Ohio, an ambitious effort is under way to introduce the small schools model in cities where it is desperately needed.

KnowledgeWorks Foundation’s Ohio High School Transformation Initiative (OHSTI), funded in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and others, has invested more than \$50 million in a sweeping reformation of the state’s decades-old education system. Education leaders in 10 urban districts are working to transform 15 large, underperforming high schools serving 25,000 students into 55 effective small schools.

Under the initiative, each large high school was divided into several schools with no more than 400 students each. Each small school has its own name, its own staff and its own area of specialization, whether it is a career area such as

business technology or an instructional philosophy such as Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences theory.

The new schools operate within the original school building, usually with each school occupying its own wing or floor and sharing facilities such as the gym or auditorium.



Libbey High School student David Long.

More important, though, is that they adopt educational elements that separate them from traditional high schools. These new schools generate excitement for learning by incorporating real-world learning opportunities into core subjects, encourage deep thinking through longer class periods, and provide hands-on learning through innovative student projects and off-campus experiences.

In addition, teachers are given extensive professional development opportunities so that they, like the schools, move beyond traditional practice. Communities are active partners in the transformations, with each district having a local organization as a Center of Strength to provide input and resources.

As one of the largest concentrations of high school reform anywhere, the Ohio initiative serves as a proving ground for the small schools movement nationwide.

Year One: Chaos by Design

After several years of planning, the first small schools created under OHSTI opened in 2004–05 with high expectations and a blank slate. The future of small schools in Ohio was theirs to shape.

Many of the first challenges were ones of logistics — finding ways to manage three, four or even as many as six separate schools within one building. Software programs couldn’t handle the complicated scheduling requirements, class bells marking the end of a period for one school interrupted classes in another. Coaches had to field teams of athletes attending different schools, and no one knew who was in charge when a water pipe broke.

Beyond the logistics were questions of attitude. As teachers, students, parents and members of the community were introduced to the new schools that replaced the traditional high schools they had known, each one had to find his or her own comfort level with a new set of priorities: trading a wide array of classes for fewer but more relevant choices; focusing on academic achievement for all students, sometimes at the expense of extracurricular activities; and reordering top-down hierarchy to involve those at all levels in setting the school’s course.

Change has been described as chaos by design, and change on this scale brought plenty of chaos. Yet the small schools’ first year was marked by far more than disruption. The planners’ goal for that year was to effect change in school climate — to move markers in areas such as attendance, satisfaction levels and student-teacher relationships — and on those fronts, significant gains were realized.

Change has been described as chaos by design, and change on this scale brought plenty of chaos. Yet the small schools’ first year was marked by far more than disruption.

Year Two: Taking Shape

The progress small schools made during their first year was evident from the first day of the 2005–06 school year. On campus after campus, hallways that had been crowded and confused on the previous opening day this year were orderly and quiet.

But the work to form fully functioning new schools was far from complete. Schools not only had to integrate a second wave of students and, in some cases, teachers, but they needed to move beyond improvements in school climate to see real growth in teaching practice and student achievement.

They also faced many new challenges. After exhaustingly long hours spent engineering their schools' redesigns, many of the original leaders were nearing burnout. Districts buffeted by forces unrelated to school redesign enacted changes that compromised the small schools model. And administrators worried that outsiders would have unrealistic expectations about how quickly this new approach could turn around decades of ineffective teaching.

As the schools' external partner, KnowledgeWorks Foundation noted important advances. In addition to teachers interacting more, communities feeling more comfortable and students' perceptions of their schools growing more positive, a few districts took steps toward permanently integrating the small schools approach. Toledo Public Schools became the first to apply for separate state identification numbers, allowing it to track each school's performance on state achievement tests. Other districts moved to do the same.



Mosaic Principal Terrance Menefee and student Louisa Catalano.

From inside the classrooms and hallways, though, progress often seemed uneven. In one school, bullying became a problem. In another, student leaders grew disillusioned when a budget committee wouldn't fund a project. At one campus, the neighborhood residents seemed uncomfortable with the students' presence. On another, a veteran teacher was physically threatened for the first time in her career.

And yet ...

And yet courageous and committed teachers pushed on. Students overcame difficult home lives for the sake of their studies. Principals called students by name and knew how often they'd been tardy and what grades they'd earned on recent tests. One group of students found a creative approach to tackle the problem of

bullying. Another organized a rally to raise money for the district school levy campaign.

In the second year of the Ohio high school initiative, as in the first, it was the people on the ground, those living the transformation day to day, who would deliver on the small schools promise.

These are their stories.

How do you pour your heart and soul into building your school's future when you know its head may be on the chopping block?

That was the question for those working to create a new and improved Libbey High School. Even as they put long, grueling hours into getting the four small schools at Libbey up and running, the Toledo Board of Education was considering a cost-cutting plan that called for Libbey to be closed.

Not only was the school's future uncertain, but leaders were working to reverse years of poor performance. In 2002-03, Libbey had a graduation rate of just 65.6 percent and was listed by the Ohio Department of Education as being in academic emergency, having met just two of the 12 state indicators.

All that, plus struggling to meet demands that ranged from adapting an existing building for a new school structure to meeting myriad grant requirements to trying to sustain its community partnership, added up to an enormous load for teachers and leaders.

Even with some early success — in its first academic year, the new Libbey moved from the lowest to the middle ranking on the state report card and was listed as “high performing” — those demands took their toll.

But for all those who worked for and cared about Libbey High School, making small schools a success was key to ensuring the school had a future.

In its first academic year, the new Libbey moved from the lowest to the middle ranking on the state report card and was listed as "high performing."



Latecia Villarreal is one of the students working to ensure a future for the small schools at Libbey High.

TWO SCHOOLS, TWO FRIENDS ONE HOPE FOR THE FUTURE



Small School Leader Kathy Stone and student Shalynn Taylor take a moment to smile during Student Leadership Institute at the Cowboy Academy of Business.

By Peggie Cypher

This is the story of an old school and a new school. A large school and a small school. This is also the story of Kathy Stone and Marsha Dunaway. A story of two friends. Ultimately, it's a story of hope and despair. This is the story of Libbey for the future.

Winter 2005

Kathy Stone is known for her huge smile. But today she is not smiling.

Co-leader of one of the new small schools on Toledo's Libbey High School campus, Kathy has just received disappointing news: her colleague Marsha Dunaway is retiring. Normally this might be a cause for celebration. A potluck lunch. A small gift. But Marsha is more than a colleague. She is Kathy's cohort in change. She is Kathy's friend.

In 2002, the friends embarked upon transforming Libbey into four small academies, each with a unique theme. Marsha would help lead the School for Humanities and the Arts, and Kathy, the Cowboy Academy of Business (CAB)—named after the school's mascot.

Their goal was simple: to stop the school's downward spiral and make Libbey a place of hope.

But it's not easy reforming a public high school. Kathy knows this. The difficulties in adopting a small schools structure — issues of space and scheduling, internal power struggles — can be a tremendous drain on your time and energy. You find yourself waking up in the middle of the night wondering if you moved biology to the right place on the schedule. You cringe at the thought of which disgruntled teachers may storm out of the next staff meeting.

With 30-plus years at Libbey, Kathy's had flickers of longing for retirement as well. Considering the

extra hours she now works as a small school leader, she is actually taking a cut in pay. Yet through the headaches and heartaches, Kathy's had Marsha. Her cohort, her friend. Together they brainstormed, they vented, they smiled.

The goal was simple: to stop the school's downward spiral and make Libbey a place of hope.

At the moment Kathy is not smiling. And she's not the only one.

With reduced state funding, the pressures of mandatory testing and the looming retirement of dedicated staff, how can reformers at Libbey make sure their high school has a future?

Built in 1923, Libbey High School was named for Edward Drummond Libbey, father of the glass industry in Toledo and founder of the Toledo Museum of Art. Surrounded by a tidy south Toledo neighborhood, Libbey is a majestic building with arched hallways and marble walls. Throughout the years the school graduated now-prestigious students and racked up numerous sports trophies, including several state titles.

But times change.

The neighborhood surrounding Libbey is now run down and hosts a large number of transients. For many of its students, education is not the main thing on their minds. It's not uncommon for a student's parent to be in jail or have a restraining order on the other. The school nurse often provides students with clean clothing and secretaries give them money for lunch. A math teacher keeps a jar of peanut butter and a loaf of bread



Lakia Clark listens to a speaker at the Student Leadership Institute, which covers topics such as self esteem, peer mediation and presentation skills.

in her cabinet and at least 15 kids drift in each day to make themselves sandwiches. One family, she says, eats all three meals in her classroom.

Translate this in terms of student achievement and in 2002, when Libbey's leaders began to think about small schools, you get an attendance rate of 80.1 percent, a graduation rate of 67.6 percent and the number of seniors passing all sections of the Ohio Ninth Grade Proficiency Test, a mere 37 percent.

Teacher Kathy Stone could see that the old Libbey was not working. "We had to do something," she says. That *something* would be small schools redesign and it would include her friend, English teacher Marsha Dunaway.

Marsha Dunaway has brown hair and a quiet demeanor. Kathy Stone has blond hair and is a go-getter. Marsha taught English;



Student David Long of the Cowboy Academy of Business.

Kathy, business. Marsha kept to herself. Kathy was the union rep. In the fall of 2002 when Kathy heard about an East Coast conference on

small schools, she pulled Marsha into it. "She asked if I wanted to go to Baltimore and I jumped at the chance," Marsha says, laughing. "I guess I should have asked her why."

The small schools focus on building relationships between students and teachers drew them in. It was just what Libbey students needed. Not long after the conference in Baltimore the two friends, along with other Libbey staff, started working furiously to apply for a grant that could let them try the approach at Libbey — 30-some days, weeknights till 10 P.M., weekends. "I began to take ownership," Marsha says. "I wanted to make sure my baby got off the ground."

Marsha's baby did get off the ground. Libbey received the grant and the team invested a year in planning for the redesign. Yet in midst of the launch, Marsha's father had a stroke and eventually died. Her husband also suffered health problems.

Kathy was spending so much time away from her husband that she bought him a dog — a Wheaton terrier, named Kozmo.

Through it all the two friends



Antoinette Lewis at the Leadership Institute, which is attended by 9th, 10th and 11th graders of all academic levels.

remained steadfast.

Kathy sought to raise Libbey's academic standing. But Marsha's mission was more personal; her mother was a graduate of Libbey. The old Libbey. "In those days, Libbey was a building of pride, of hope," she says softly. "These days our school is looked down upon. Our students have so little. We need to give them some hope."

The two self-appointed cheerleaders for small schools, along with other Libbey staff, worked through the summer of 2004 to do just that — to make Libbey a place of hope.

In late August, after a friendly fight over who got the microwave (Marsha), they moved into their new small schools offices and were good to go.

2004-2005

At least in theory. The first day of school is chaos. The first week, the first month, the first trimester is chaos.

Kathy and Marsha know chaos. It is no stranger in a typical urban high school. Yet in the midst of the usual, expected chaos, there is usually one principal presiding over one unified school campus. Assistant principals, counselors, deans and secretaries have their designated jobs. Change to four new small schools with four separate offices and eight new leaders, throw in foreign administrative duties such as enrollment, scheduling and expulsion hearings, and watch the chaos build.

Marsha and Kathy hold it together, but find themselves working late hours and nearly falling asleep at traffic lights on the way home. Not only must they deal with new duties, but they must also plan for Ohio Graduation Test preparation and satisfy myriad KnowledgeWorks Foundation grant requirements,

everything from forming governance committees to answering detailed surveys.

One crisp day in October, Marsha sits with a KnowledgeWorks coach

“Why can’t I sit at your desk?” the girl demands. Marsha ignores this and continues to read: *What new instructional approaches are staff employing?* Just then a two-way radio



Teacher Janet Beening and students in the School for the Humanities work on math problems.

in her office. He hands her a lengthy questionnaire. “We want to gauge the start of small schools and the various benchmarks toward progress,” he says, crossing his legs. Marsha glances at the questionnaire; she does not look happy.

Meanwhile, in the outer office an administrator returns to his desk and finds a girl eating chicken. He tells her to move away from the desk.

interrupts: A large group congregating on the first floor should be dispersed. The nearby administrator once more asks the student to move. “I want to call my people,” the girl insists. Marsha struggles to concentrate: *Is staff sharing resources?* The two-way radio continues to sound, first about the kids in the halls and then about the lack of soap in the girls’ restroom. Drowning it out, the administrator threatens to send the girl to in-school suspension, called BIC. “You can’t do that,” she yells. “I ain’t going to f---ing BIC.”

Just then another student enters his office shouting, “I don’t know why I’m here. Ain’t nobody gonna tell me when I got to go to the bathroom.” Marsha grabs a pen: *Do staff members have a high level of commitment to the vision, mission and goals of small schools?* She has lots of work to do.

It is a blustery December morning. But inside the high school, things are calmer. At last.



CAB student Brad Burton listens to a point made by visiting speaker Janet Smith of the Visionary Leaders Institute.

Kathy, in a knit sweater, sits on a stool behind the CAB counter issuing tardy notices. “Anthony, you’re tardy,” she says, writing the student a pass. “And someone as smart as you! I saw you got an A in English.” She hands him the pass and smiles.

Kathy’s strength is in relating to her students. Even the most domestic of chores becomes another opportunity to chat with kids, to let them know she cares.

With a reduced number of students — 250 — she is familiar with the kids and freely tries out unconventional methods of discipline. For Kathy, this is the beauty of small schools

Her greatest challenge is a growing movement of teachers who would like a central discipline office. Many think this would simplify things. But that was part of the old Libbey, the large Libbey. With a central office, Kathy fears, one of her students could get “lost” in the red tape. For Kathy, this is not an option.

In the face of the opposition, one consolation is her friend Marsha. They talk every day, bouncing ideas off each other. They also engage in a healthy rivalry. At the beginning of the year, Marsha one-upped Kathy and the other small school leaders by having T-shirts made for the Humanities school. Not to be outdone, Kathy soon ordered CAB shirts, “but with collars,” she says, smirking.

Marsha’s strength is creating a small school culture. Each trimester Marsha and the other Humanities administrators plan an activity to boost the identity of their school. In the fall it was a hotdog party and last week a winter hoedown dance. Slowly the kids begin to bond. They

Even the most domestic of chores becomes another opportunity for Kathy Stone to chat with kids, to let them know she cares.

bond with Marsha as well. Each day, a few wander into the Humanities office to give their leader a hug.

Marsha finds that the hugs are greatly needed.

One challenge she and the other administrators face is combating rumors that the Libbey campus will be closing. Their population is down and the school district’s budget is

tight. But it’s difficult to close a school that has accepted grant money. These new small schools may have saved the large school. For a time. Still, in the building hope is diminishing.

Another challenge, however, is one Marsha must face without Kathy: trying to bring her staff on board with the small schools model. Teachers have been asked to switch classrooms and lunch groups, add interdisciplinary lessons to their curriculum and adopt new rules and policies. Not surprisingly, they grumble.

Over the years, Marsha’s heard a lot of grumbling. But this

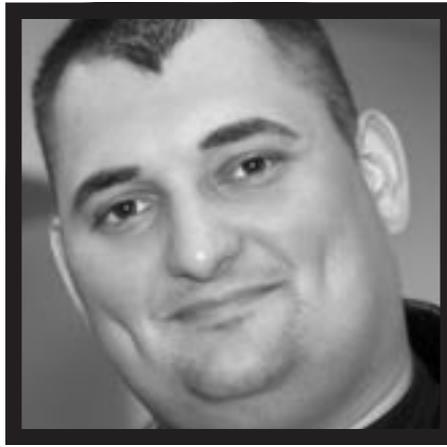
time the grumbling is in opposition to her vision for the small school. Combine that with the overtime and the rumors of the school closing and by early winter, she grows weary. She makes the difficult decision to retire.

“I have mixed feelings,” Marsha says, head down. “I’m walking out on my baby who is still struggling to walk. I’ve had 33 years in the classroom. But this year, it’s like I’m a beginning teacher. I’ve had to define myself all over again. And I don’t have another five to seven years to devote to this school. They’re already calling us the Golden Girls down here.”

Golden Girls versus New Kids on



Student Victoria Sherman responds to information presented during the Leadership Institute.



Each of the four small schools on the Libbey campus has its own leadership and personality. Howard Brown (above, left) is co-leader of the Gateway Academy and Bob Yenrick (above, right) is co-leader at the School for the Humanities. Scott Walters (right), co-leader of Smart Academy, takes a pie in the face during a school rally. The fourth school is the Cowboy Academy of Business that Kathy Stone helps lead.

the Block. Maintaining continuity is a challenge in many urban schools. Younger teachers and administrators have the energy but often lack experience. Veteran teachers have the wisdom and experience but may be prone to burnout.

Marsha wants to spend more time with her husband, who is retired. Who can blame her? But people talk. They wonder if she is also leaving because her coworkers have been slow to come on board with the small schools.

Marsha plans one last activity — an interdisciplinary unit for Memorial Day, culminating in an outdoor ceremony. On a warm spring day, cottonwood in the air, Humanities students walk single file onto the football field. Silent. Respectful. Army recruiters in fatigues march in

place as the flag is raised. They salute. A short girl with rhinestones in her hair belts out “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Students listen. They are not the same students who filled the halls with rap at the beginning of the year.

Marsha, standing alongside them, looks into their faces and remembers: the musical, the Humanities Festival of the Arts, the student helpers in the office. She remembers and is quiet.

Now Kathy, having read the e-mail announcing Marsha’s retirement, is quiet, too.

Her friend is leaving. She is staying. But for how long?

Fall 2005

A giant lawn-sized Ohio State Brutus mascot partly blocks the doorway of what used to be Marsha’s office. But the chair where Marsha used to sit is empty. At the front desk, in the cafeteria, the hallways, is Bob Yenrick, the new Humanities co-leader.

Young, tall, athletic, Bob Yenrick is everywhere in this school.

And he hopes it stays that way. At the beginning of the school year Bob, Kathy and other small school leaders are recruited for the Libbey for the Future committee. Superintendent Eugene Sanders visits the campus on a special mission: to keep Libbey’s schools open. Talk still circulates that the board of education is closing the school, or at the very least, reducing the number of small schools from four to three.

Thus the formation of the Libbey for the Future committee. At a press conference in front of the building the superintendent makes a dramatic promise: he will fight to keep the Libbey campus open for as long as he remains superintendent.

Group advisories, cross-curricular lessons, teacher design committees — these are the things a small school

The students are getting on more smoothly. Now in their second year, they know the rules and expectations.

leader should be thinking about. Not ways to keep the Libbey campus open. Still, throughout each day Kathy smiles and Bob smiles and both are hopeful the schools will stay open — at least for as long as Sanders remains superintendent.

In spite of rumors of closing, the fall goes smoothly for both the Humanities and CAB schools. The eight small school leaders are working together better, says Kathy. “We’ve noticed we laugh more as a group. Last year we were so stressed, there was no room for laughter.”

The students, too, are getting on more smoothly. Now in their second year, half of them know only the

small schools model. They know the rules, the expectations. They know their small school leaders and their leaders know them. And the restructuring seems to be paying off — more students are on the honor roll and there is a greater interest in Advanced Placement courses.

But Kathy knows that small schools are about more than academic grades.

In her never-ending quest to interact with students, Kathy invites a few to fill in from time to time for the secretary in the CAB office. One student Kathy took out of a Spanish class where she wasn’t successful and gave her 1/4 service credit for

The focus on the personal attracted the two teachers to the small schools model.

helping out. “It not only gave the girl more confidence,” says Kathy. “It gave us more contact with her. We got to know her better. And see that she was a great worker. She got to see a different side of a job she’d be good at.” It was this kind of focus on the personal that attracted Kathy and Marsha to the small schools model. The kind of small interactions that both women thought could lead to big results.

Does Kathy miss her friend Marsha? Yes. After nearly three years of working toward a goal — small schools, big results — most definitely yes.

But Marsha does seem to have a behind-the-scenes presence. Her number is still on Kathy’s phone. The friends e-mail each other every day. And Marsha even stops in to say hello, give advice and check up on her baby.

Still, it would be nice, Kathy says, to have Marsha just an office away. Not only is she Kathy’s friend and cohort, Marsha was the local computer expert. “I wish she were around so I could ask her the command on the mainframe to enter classes,” Kathy says, smiling sadly.

Winter

The cafeteria is lined with long tables displaying student art: pins made out of bottle caps, ceramic necklaces, fabric gift bags. So close to the holidays,



Small schools foster close relationships between teachers and students by allowing them to work together in small groups.

this year's Humanities Festival of the Arts offers inexpensive gifts in addition to live performances. More important, it offers a variety of talent not measured on standardized tests.

People filter in and out. A few students, a few parents, some ladies from the Red Hat Society. Audience members gather round as two students dust the floor with powder to present a hip hop routine they've choreographed. The viewers hoot and cheer them along. Bob Yenrick and the other Humanities leaders pile the

system intends to close schools to save money.

The winter break has ended, and there's lots to do: visits to the junior high, scheduling for next year, Libbey for the Future meetings, the impending proficiency tests, and of course all those daily domestic chores like hall duty.

For Kathy, hall duty has always been a time to chat with students. How's your new job? Is your grandmother feeling better?

One day she notices a student walk by wearing a hat. She gingerly approaches and asks him to take it off. No problem. The student lifts it two inches off his head, pauses and then replaces it. Kathy asks again. And again he takes it off and puts it right back on. Finally, Kathy grabs it, hides it behind her and playfully starts to walk backward. Before she knows what's happening, a giant force rushes her, bangs itself against her and she is on the floor. Flat.

The world of small schools looks different from down on the floor.

"I was shocked,"

she says, now sitting peacefully in her office. "In 30-plus years, that has never happened."

Kathy was not physically hurt. Just shaken. In the days afterward, teachers tell Kathy they, too, have had problems with that particular student. Kathy now feels enormous stress.

For new students, the high school just could be the place of pride, of hope that Kathy and Marsha dreamed of.

Not fear for herself, but pressure from her teachers to ensure the kid is expelled. If the hearing doesn't grant the student's removal, Kathy will feel she's let her staff down. Safety of her teaching staff — another responsibility of the small school leader.

When Kathy started the ball rolling on small schools nearly four years ago, she took certain things for granted. Personal safety, longevity of the Libbey campus. Yes, the world of small schools, of any school for that matter, looks different from down on the floor. And yes, Kathy admits, one of the things that went through her mind was retiring and joining her friend Marsha on a cruise. That would be so easy. So nice.

To stay or to go?

The answer, she later decides, will depend on the outcome of the expulsion hearing. If the student is not expelled, Kathy will leave. She will have failed her staff. If the hearing goes her way and the student is expelled, she will remain co-leader of the CAB school. She will see the reform through, at least until the first class graduates from the Cowboy Academy of Business.

Some weeks later, the hearing takes place. The ruling is in her favor. Yet Kathy still plans to join Marsha. For lunch next week. She is eager to hear all about Marsha's cruise to Hawaii.



Humanities art student Kari Chevalier at work.

leftover chili mac on takeout plates, hopeful they can do this again next year.

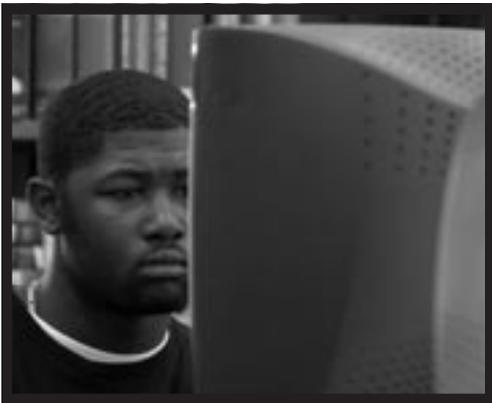
Two weeks after the festival, Superintendent Sanders announces he's resigning from the system.

Five days after that, an article in the *Toledo Blade* states that the

Spring 2006

Teachers, administrators and a few students gather at round tables in the cafeteria. The small schools approach strongly encourages collaborative meetings like this. Yet this meeting is not about governance committees or community jobs shadowing... It's Libbey for the Future.

The school closings have been announced and Libbey has been spared. However, the junior high school that feeds into Libbey is scheduled to close. The latest plan is for an eighth-grade class to be added to Libbey's existing structure.



William Watkins, CAB student, does computer research in the library.

Whether to integrate them into the small schools will be up to the school board.

Marsha Dunaway is not at the meeting. Yet her presence is felt. Upon hearing the possibility of integrating eighth graders into small schools, she drafted a long e-mail to Kathy outlining possible benefits. It's an extensive list, with points Kathy hadn't considered.

In the cafeteria, the committees make their reports. Free discussions

flow. With an eighth-grade class in the building, block scheduling will be difficult. The bus schedule a nightmare. And will there be enough gym time?

Still, small schools can offer eighth graders a lot, all agree. They can be a pilot program of sorts. Students could audition for the Humanities dance class, or perhaps sign up for the CAB's new two-year block of business and visual communications.

But what about the following year? Will incoming eighth graders choose to come to Libbey or to the new junior high being built? Will the first year's group of eighth graders choose to remain at Libbey?

So much depends on them.

The teachers discuss ways to welcome these future students. Kathy reports that CAB passed out Libbey dog tags at their junior high recruitment a few days ago. And they plan to attend the eighth-grade graduation and pass out Libbey yard signs. But what else? So much depends on them. If the eighth-grade program works out, it could keep Libbey's enrollment up and keep it viable.

Still, special-education teacher Michele Bobo feels frustrated. "What would be nice is to guarantee a future instead of riding the Titanic," she says.

In early May eighth graders visit the Libbey campus. They pile out of the auditorium and tumble down the hallways, giggling and talking a bit too loudly. They are wearing the same sports jerseys and hoodies as the upperclassmen. The difference is the excitement in their voices.

Kathy smiles as she watches them make their way to the cafeteria. For



Teacher Christina Fletcher of CAB (standing) works with student Porchia Banks in the library.

them, the high school just could be that place of pride, of hope that she and Marsha dreamed of. The junior high kids smile and laugh and dance down the hallways. They don't know that next month the board will vote on a revised proposal that could close five more schools in four years, Libbey among them.

For these students who strut and dance and rap down the hallways, the future of Libbey is a given. For Kathy Stone, dedicated, big-hearted, hardworking and ever hopeful, the future of Libbey — and her place in it as a small school leader — is a given, too.

About the storyteller

Peggie Cypher is an award-winning freelance writer from Toledo, Ohio. A mother of three and former educator, her publications include *Ladies Home Journal*, *Woman's Day* and *Mothering*. Her novel, *Lucy in the Sky With Piecharts*, is currently seeking a home in New York City.

Brookhaven High School always had a lot working against it. The inner-city school long ranked near the bottom of the 18 high schools in the Columbus Public School District in student performance. With more than 1,000 students, its low attendance and high dropout rates signaled a school in distress.



Brookhaven student Michaela Williams takes pride in the school identity.

Even after Brookhaven divided into three small schools, leaders had to contend with serious difficulties. The school district faced a \$28 million budget shortfall, which left some teachers worried about job security. The school's juniors and seniors, who weren't directly part of the reform effort, seemed lost in the shuffle. And changes in leadership, which came about for a variety of unrelated reasons, disrupted the continuity of vision.

On the other side of the ledger was a cadre of committed, talented teachers and school leaders, many of whom had put hundreds of extra hours into planning for and implementing the new structure. Leaders ironed out scheduling, the physical layout of offices, the best use for study periods and advisories, and communication between the schools. Teachers put energy into teaching, got to know their students and even took part in external programs to help kids build self-esteem. Students improved their performance enough to move up two rankings on the state report card.

Even with so much working against it, Brookhaven High School had a lot going for it.

Even after Brookhaven divided into three small schools, leaders had to contend with serious difficulties. The school district faced a \$28 million budget shortfall, which left some teachers worried about job security. The school's juniors and seniors, who weren't directly part of the reform effort, seemed lost in the shuffle. And changes in leadership, which came about for a variety of unrelated reasons, disrupted the continuity of vision.

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With committed, talented teachers, leaders and students, Brookhaven has a lot going for it.

REACHING STUDENTS, TEACHING STUDENTS



Legacy English teacher **Carla Hegyi** captures the attention of student **Tiara Counts**.

By Tracy Zollinger Turner

Freshmen boys straggle into Carla Hegyi's seventh-period English class on the first day of school, pouring themselves into chairs like wet concrete. Even without girls in the room, their gazes are stuck to their desks with the kind of awkward self-consciousness found in any ninth-grade classroom.

Hegyzi seasons her proper English with a little bit of slang and uses more casual terms of endearment than a waitress at Denny's: "hon," "sister," "cousin," "sweetheart," "brother." She is no shrinking violet when she stands in front of 17 teenage boys who look irritated about having to shake off the freedoms of summer.

"Okay, we are going to take seven minutes to write a minimum of seven sentences," she says. "Please do the best you can and answer the following prompts."

On the blackboard, she has written the questions, "What were some mistakes you made last year? What did you learn from those mistakes? What challenges do you currently face? (Things you know you need to work on.)"

Hegyzi is hopeful that she can avoid repeating at least one mistake she made last year — when she's asked to help out, she doesn't know how to say no. She's a believer in small schools and the nonsense personal philosophy that if you don't step up to the plate and do what you can, you have no room to complain if things fall apart. But by last spring, her neck and head were paying the price for all the extra after-school meetings and tough daily work of trying to win the trust of skeptical teenagers.

This year, she'll face new tensions. Trying to close a \$28 million deficit, the Columbus Public School district may be forced to cut some staff and teaching positions, which puts a

third-year teacher like Hegyzi at risk. While everyone knows Brookhaven won't be immune, some teachers hope the high profile of small schools reform might lead the district to spare them.

As the new year at the Legacy school begins, though, Hegyzi is focused on her students. This year



Entry to the Legacy central hallway.

she has only freshmen in her classes, and teaching in the personalized way demanded by small schools is that much more challenging when a teacher and the majority of her students are new to each other. Today, she is setting the tone for the year.

"Let me tell you some things about the way we're going to work together this year," she tells the group. "For

example: let's talk about homework.

"I like to make phone calls home. I like to make *nice* phone calls home: 'Your son came in with all of his materials today.' If you haven't brought your homework in for three days, I may need to make another kind of phone call. But I promise you, I will not only make the calls when there is a problem." She punctuates key words with controlled hand gestures and folds her arms at the end of a thought.

Legacy's curriculum model is Habits of Mind, created by Arthur L. Costa and Bena Kallick. It is based on teaching students 16 habits, such as "managing impulsivity," "taking responsible risks," "gathering data through all of the senses" and "thinking about thinking." It has proven more complicated to explain than the curriculum models of Brookhaven's other two small schools. The Leadership Institute is based on Sean Covey's "Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens" and the North Star School of Exploration's expeditionary learning is readily compared to the Outward Bound program.

Hegyzi and some of her colleagues have worked hard to make Legacy's mission more accessible to the kids, to the colleagues who don't seem to get it yet and to the world outside that's tracking their progress. The week before classes started, she, along with another teacher and student, painted "the le • ga • cy way" above the lockers in the central hallway, followed by the phrases "Be

trustworthy and truthful,” “Be active listeners,” “Show respect to others,” “Show respect to yourself” and “Change the world.”

“I want you to be active listeners in my classroom. Use your eyes, your ears and your heart,” Hegyi tells her freshmen boys. “I ask that you be trustworthy. What does it say up here?”

She points to the wall above the blackboard, where three words have been stenciled in black paint.

“Keep it real,” one boy answers.

“That’s right,” she says. “The bottom line is, show respect, keep it real, come in every day on time.”

The Exit Plan

Hegyi isn’t the only teacher working hard despite the clouds on the horizon.

On a steamy late September day, English teacher Jared Moore and social studies teacher Byrd Prillerman combine their advisory groups. The students fan themselves with their notebooks, drowsy with the humid end of the day but fairly attentive.

Advisories like this one seek to give every student his or her own coach — someone who will

guide each kid toward success, or sometimes plain survival. It’s built into the design of small schools as a prime opportunity to build relationships and make education relevant to students’ lives. Some teachers take advantage of the time for relationship-building exercises, while others use it to help advisees with homework.

Moore and Prillerman, both of whom grew up in Columbus, began teaching in Brookhaven’s Leadership Institute school one year earlier. They’ve joined advisories today to talk to students about motivation.

Moore walks up to the blackboard and faces the group. “How many of you live or have lived in a place others would consider the ’hood?”

Most of the students raise their hands.

“How many of you feel you have the skills on your block to survive there?”

This time about six kids raise their hands.

Moore takes a piece of chalk and makes a minuscule dot on the black-

board. “This is your block,” he says. “This blackboard is the rest of the world....”

“How many of you want to stay on the block where you live for the rest of your life?”

The room is quiet and no one raises a hand.

“The codes on your block do not apply anywhere else. If you come to school and you yell at your teacher, ‘You ain’t telling me nothing!’ well ... that’s true. We can’t teach you about



Leadership English teacher Jared Moore uses his own experiences growing up in Columbus to connect with students.



Social studies teacher Byrd Prillerman talks with Alesia Capers, small school leader of the Leadership Institute school.

your block. But if you continue doing what everyone on the block does, you will never, ever get out.”

The students keep fanning themselves, listening quietly. There’s no backtalk.

“Too many people come out of Brookhaven High School and go back to the block because they don’t think they have a chance. I can help you see what else is out there. I want it to be a choice. I hear too many intelligent people say, ‘I can’t go to college’ — I don’t want you to feel like that.

“You have just begun your life,” Moore says. “Ask yourself — are you

afraid to leave the block? I already got two people signed up on the exit plan. I’ll get you out. But if you figure out how to get out, you go back, grab somebody else’s hand and pull them out.”

Hard Choices

Gene Barrett, who also teaches English at Legacy, walks around his classroom, coaching his students as they write. A big enough man to be intimidating, his voice rarely strays from a gentle tone, even when he means to be firm.

“Journal #4: How do you want to

By sharing their pasts, these Brookhaven teachers open ways for students to connect with them and increase their authority.

be remembered?” is written on the blackboard.

“If you’re having a hard time with that question, think about your funeral,” he tells the class. Unlike Hegyi’s class, which is experimenting with single-sex groups as a way to create a more productive learning environment, Barrett’s class is coed. “What are some of the things you would like people to say about you in the end?”

When five minutes are up, he picks students to read what they wrote.

“For being me: a polite person who never caused any problems,” one boy reads.

“Okay. A peaceful man,” Barrett says, nodding.

“The drawings I make, the movies I make, the way I cook,” reads a student named Pat. “But number one, a humble person who is willing to help a person in need.”

“What you’ve just done is looked at the end from the beginning,” says Barrett. “Last night I asked you to brainstorm and come up with a narrative. It can come from a personal experience or something you create.”

On a large sheet of paper, he writes the words “what, when, where, why, who, how” along the corners and edges. In the center, he writes and circles the words “HARD CHOICES.” Students draw the same diagram in their notebooks.



Gene Barrett, English teacher at the Legacy school, tries to help students see themselves in literature.

“Let me give you an example,” he says. Under the word “what,” Barrett writes, “A young middle school boy has to pay the rent on his own.”

A moment passes while pencils scratch, and he adds, “Just a little history for you: that’s a true story. That’s my experience, but it wasn’t one month — it was three months.”

“What? For real?” one girl asks, disbelief in her voice.

“Yes. It happened. I don’t know if you can understand the road I traveled to get through those three months.”

One boy nods and grins a little. “I do,” he says softly.

“I’m talking about show me, don’t tell me,” Barrett tells the class, and gives them the last 15 minutes to brainstorm or begin writing. He walks around the front of the room and keeps coaching, answering questions and doling out bits of advice.

He looks at what students are writing, then announces: “Guess what you’ll have tomorrow when you walk in? A rough draft.”

The Teacher-Student Bond

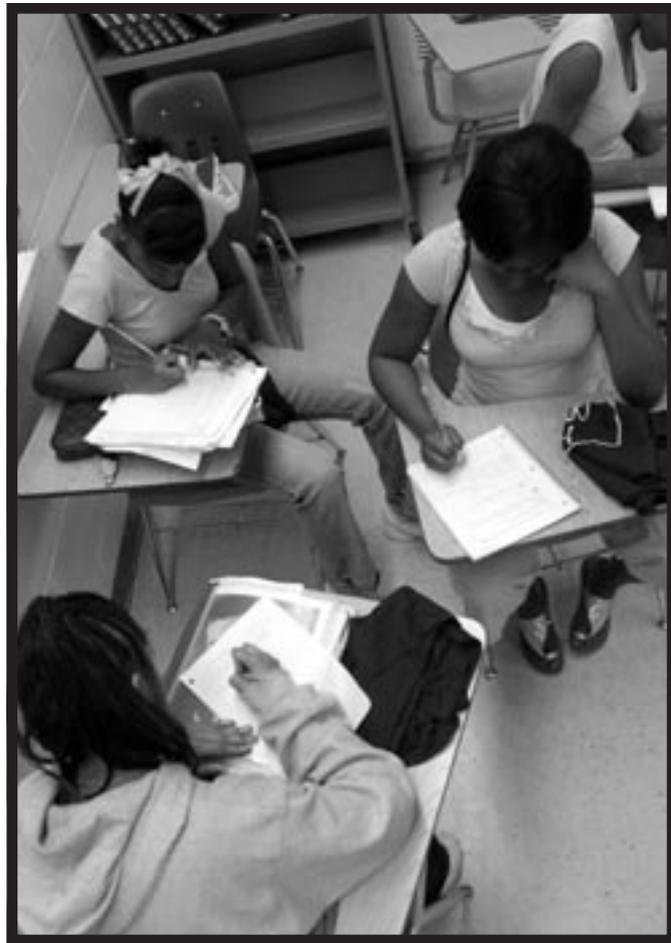
Winning students’ trust by sharing a little of themselves is something Barrett, Hegyi and Moore all do. Other teachers in Brookhaven’s schools build relationships with students in their own ways, but no matter how they reach out to the kids, they all know that connecting with adults at school has been shown to increase students’ odds of staying in school and doing well. Along with relevance and rigor, relationship is one of the Three R’s that are key to the high school reform effort.

By sharing their pasts, the Brookhaven teachers not only open up ways for students to connect with them, but in some cases they also increase their authority. “I kill a lot of excuses because of my background,” Barrett says. “If you want to say you didn’t have something to eat so you can’t do something, I was there. I know you can.”

For Hegyi, personal sharing often comes out with a German accent — known as “the mom voice” to her students. She keeps photos of her American and German grandfathers on her desk and tells students how they fought on opposing sides during World War II. Her parents met when her father was stationed in Germany with the air force, and she had to make a new group of friends every time her family moved — a story that some of the kids who ping-pong from one school to another can relate to.

She always starts the year by getting her students to write a personal narrative.

“I tell them that everyone’s life is interesting. I’m nobody special, but I’m me,” she says. “I tell my kids, ‘I made a girl step on a bee when I was six.’ And ask, ‘What did you do?’”



Students spend time writing at the beginning of each period in Carla Hegyi’s English class.

Both Barrett and Hegyi also look for ways to help kids see themselves in literature. Last year, Barrett got one of his classes to devour Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* by talking about the monster as a child without a father.

For his part, Moore works to keep his advisees close even as testing schedules and other conflicts derail the schoolwide advisory throughout the year. If one of them is sent to the office for disciplinary reasons, that student has the right to see him first. Sometimes just the act of being heard by a known ally in the school cools a heated temper.

Moore thinks that simple things

Pushing Forward: Brookhaven Successes

In the Small Schools

The Leadership Institute

The Teen Leadership Institute worked on literacy projects while the school held its second successful Leadership Lecture series. Over the course of the year, three local professionals featured in “Who’s Who in Black Columbus” gave talks at the school. Students requested that they be able to give their own brief addresses as an opening for next year’s speakers.

North Star School of Exploration

A “book buddies” program let ninth graders make a monthly expedition to a nearby elementary school, where they taught first graders to read. Students also made regular expeditions to college campuses. A move to increase parental involvement resulted in adding extra parents’ nights and sending out invitations in English, Spanish and Somali.

Legacy

In September, students volunteered at an American Red Cross service center for evacuees of Hurricane Katrina and helped to organize two school-wide fundraisers.

As part of the school’s message of good citizenship, a campaign for safety and disaster preparation awareness continued all year. Tenth graders were given Community Emergency Response Team training during the second half of the year, culminating in a large, successful drill in May.

Campus-wide

The Winter Academy

Nearly 100 students attended Saturday sessions for eight weeks of extra preparation for the Ohio Graduation Test. Preliminary results indicate that Brookhaven reached its state-determined goals for the tests.

Friday symposiums

Through the winter and spring, students participated in day-long symposiums by grade and gender about topics such as resolving conflicts and fostering self-respect.

Peer Mediation

After a student survey found that 86 percent felt that they needed peer mediation in the schools, two teachers and five students in each small school were trained to become certified mediators. Participants will have their own office in the fall.

Student Leadership & Governance

In the spring, each of the three small schools identified several sophomores and juniors with leadership potential to take a day-long trip to Columbus City Hall, the Ohio Statehouse and the Columbus Foundation. They met with Mayor Michael Coleman, City Council Member Kevin Boyce, nonprofit agency leaders and an aide to a state senator about the qualities of good citizenship and leadership. School leaders hope the trip established a core group of students who can serve on governance teams next year.

about the small school structure, such as seeing the same kids in the Leadership Institute hallway three and four times a day, have helped him connect with many of them and make a difference in their lives.

“A lot of teachers, as far as English content, can teach me under the table, but I can get farther with some of these kids because of the rapport we have,” he says. “Some of them get to the point where they don’t want to work, but they’ll work for me. I want them to do that for themselves, but it’s a start.”

Spring Brakes

In mid-March, the threat hanging over the three English teachers and the rest of the Brookhaven staff all year becomes real. Seven individuals are told privately on a Friday afternoon that their positions are being eliminated. Although all seven expect to be able to relocate within the district, the loss of the positions has a big impact on Brookhaven. Not only do they lose colleagues, but some teachers will have to teach classes in other small schools next year. The tighter student-to-teacher ratio, so central to the small school model, also will be compromised.

An oppressive mix of anger, frustration and genuine sadness permeates the building as everyone struggles to come to terms with the cuts. Having gone through hours and hours of professional development and team-building to create the curriculum and culture of their own small schools, some find the idea that they must teach a Cliffs Notes’ version of another school’s philosophy upsetting. Others speculate that their



Adorea Harris, small school leader of the North Star School of Exploration, walks into school in the morning with students Reyna Scales, Denise Dennison and Tambry Cortledge.

dedication, work and drive have gone unnoticed. District officials are quoted in local media as saying they support the small schools approach but needed to distribute staff cuts fairly. Despite those reassurances of the district's commitment, some teachers worry that the district sees them as interchangeable "factory model" teachers rather than unique contributors to the architecture of a new school climate.

Hegy's tension headaches return in force, one month earlier than they came on in the previous school year. Before the staff reduction, she was worried about a traumatized student whose boyfriend accidentally shot

himself in the head and is likely brain dead. For a few days, the girl showed up at Hegyi's classroom door during every period she had free. Hegyi let her curl up in a blue chair to read or watch her teach.

"I think it made her feel better just to be near me, only because I knew what she was going through and she didn't want to tell anyone else," Hegyi says.

She took another student to the grocery store after finding out she never had food in her home. She had been teaching students in preparation for the Ohio Graduation Test on Saturday mornings at the school's first Winter Academy. Knowing how worried, even scared, that many of the kids about to take the test were, she put together little pick-me-up gifts for several of them to let them know she believed in them.

Legacy's small school leader position has shifted for the fourth time. With each shift, the new leader has turned to Hegyi to help with disci-

pline problems because so many students listen to her.

She's also struggling with her classes of freshmen boys. "Some days my boys are just off the hook and we don't get anything done," she says.

Now, with the building cuts, her peers are coming to bend her ear. She's daydreaming about being cloned.

"I'm not a good teacher right now, based on what I know I can do," she says. "I'm being watered down. And I'm exhausted. I'm 36 years old and I fall asleep by eight o'clock. I'm asleep before my *Miami Vice* reruns come on."

Legacy's staff meets as the week before spring break begins. People are starting to rebound a little, even joke again. Several teachers, including Hegyi and Barrett, are given substitutes for a day so they can work on goals for the school. Some in the group question how the goals are possible with the cuts, such as the effect on advisories. The ideal is 12–15 students per teacher and they already

Teachers see themselves as unique contributors to the architecture of a new school climate.

The No-Principal Principle

Talisa Dixon is thoroughly committed to small schools and to the idea that each school should be independent and able to make its own rules. That's why the role of building principal isn't part of the small schools design — and why she's doing her best to work herself out of a job.

As an assistant principal at Brookhaven five years ago, Dixon marshaled a group of staff and teachers to work on the small schools design team. Last year, she served as the small school leader of the Leadership Institute school. In no small part because of the success of her efforts there, before the year was out she was promoted to building principal, a position the district wanted to continue to ease coordination during the small schools conversion.

On a daily basis, she sets her sights on reconciling the changes Brookhaven needs to preserve its small school with both the traditions and the financial struggles of the district. She keeps her eye on details in the building to grease the wheels of change, from creating lunch periods specific to each small school to managing foot traffic in the building to help the three schools foster their individual senses of identity.

Soon, she'll turn the traditional building principal's office into a conference room and move herself to a smaller room in back, in hopes that the small schools can operate as independently as possible during the 2006–07 school year.

When the time comes to move on, she says, "Hopefully I'll be blessed with another opportunity."



Principal Talisa Dixon

"I've been really proud of the work and the energy that's been here this year."

– Talisa Dixon, principal

content area they teach. More than 100 veteran teachers agree to limited separation plans, but more than 300 others lose their jobs.

Unlike those whose positions were eliminated in the first round of staff reductions, pink-slipped teachers will have to look for jobs outside Columbus Public Schools. Some were among the most enthusiastic proponents of small schools.

One of them is Jared Moore.

He's surprisingly upbeat, confident that he could be called back to the district next year, but clearly sad that he won't be part of small schools anymore. "It's just disappointing that I won't be here," he says.

Moore and the others will be replaced with more senior teachers from the district, but they could be teachers who have no background in the small schools approach.

Had the cuts gone one year deeper, into English teachers hired in the 2003–04 school year, Hegyi would be without a job. With another \$20 million in cuts looming in the coming school year, she may have only one year left at Brookhaven. Barrett, hired in 2002, could also be at risk.

Blindsided by the closeness of the district knife, Hegyi promises herself that next year she'll have her résumé ready, just in case. It will be harder to ignore the dark clouds to focus on her teaching.

Still, figuring out her boundaries

have 17.

One teacher offers perspective. "I think we need to move forward without perfect-world expectations and adapt to realities as they come."

"That's right," Barrett says. Hegyi nods her amen.

The Cuts Deepen

As April closes, Brookhaven is hit with another round of losses. This time, in its ongoing fight to close the budget deficit, the district pink-slips 450 teachers on the basis of seniority and the

eludes her. “There are days that I really feel that I’m carrying Legacy. I told myself: ‘Next year, you’ll be attached to two things.’ But when I sit down and look at the list of the things I’m involved in, it’s hard for me to let go, even though I know these tension headaches come from this insane need to be a part of everything.”

“And I know that I could do all of this and next year I’ll still have to be worried about my job.”

Barrett had a more guarded view from the beginning, so he seems less



Student Ashley Jones enjoys a light moment in class.

surprised than Hegyi.

“I don’t know if Brookhaven will ever go back to being one whole school,” he says. “But the truth is that the true vision of these three small schools may not be realized either. It seems we may be always caught somewhere in the middle between what the small schools are really supposed to be like and going back to one whole school.”

“Ultimately, budget controls everything. I believe that if the money was there, then we could make anything happen.”

Soldiering On

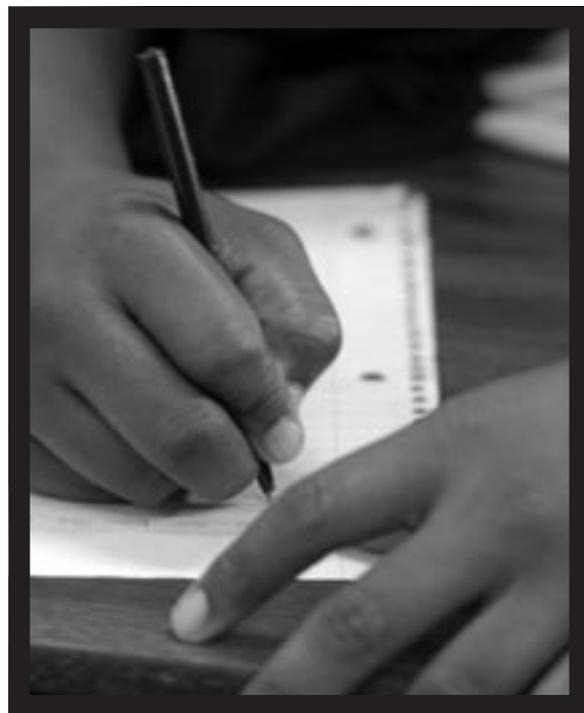
Slowly, the mood of the building seems to recover.

Those who support small schools count a number of victories. Teachers vote to preserve a lunch schedule that gives them just 30 minutes even though their contract allows them 50 minutes, because it helps keep the schools separate and distinct.

Although the district is switching to a seven-period day for high schools as another cost-cutting measure, Brookhaven is able to protect its advisory, building in two periods a month for the whole school. Two teachers from each of the small schools have been trained in how to make advisories more effective and will help other teachers understand their purpose. To that end, a custodial space is being converted for professional development. Another room will be transformed into a space for peer mediation.

Building Principal Talisa Dixon admits it’s been tough, but she sees important progress at Brookhaven’s schools. “I’ve been really proud of the work and the energy that’s been here this year,” she says. “I believe that students are starting to believe that Brookhaven can be a top academic school and that teachers have really begun to believe in our students.”

For Carla Hegyi, the year isn’t without its recognitions either. Several girls who refer to themselves as Hegyi’s “daughters” pool their resources for a Mother’s Day gift. Knowing that she likes stargazer lil-



ies, they buy her a massive arrangement full of them and other fragrant tropical flowers.

She is also selected as Legacy’s teacher of the year.

“If I end up gone after next year, I’ll be really sad, because regardless of the craziness, I feel like I make a difference because I’m needed,” she says. “Even though I look at this place some days and think, ‘This is one hell of a mess,’ I also think that good karma brought me to the right place.... I know I have one more year to make good change.”

About the storyteller

Tracy Zollinger Turner is a freelance writer and editor who lives in Columbus with her husband and their young son. Her work has appeared in the *Columbus Dispatch*, *Columbus Alive* and *Ohio Magazine*, among other publications, as well as on public radio and multiple national websites.

When it comes to dividing large schools into smaller, more personal environments, the formula at Euclid High School could almost be considered higher math.

The school outside Cleveland had nearly 2,000 students before it divided into six independent schools in the fall of 2004. With more schools on one campus than any other in the Ohio High School Transformation Initiative, Euclid had a larger share of issues surrounding how to share space and coordinate separate, and sometimes competing, agendas.

Confusion quickly arose over such questions as who controlled shared services like security and maintenance and how to coordinate discipline policies among six different school offices. What's more, administrators differed on how to apply the small schools approach and schools found themselves competing to attract students.

In the midst of the start-up chaos, each school worked to establish its own identity, including an inclusive decision-making process. The small schools model emphasizes shared leadership involving not only administrators, teachers and parents but also students. The Business and Communications School took that goal to heart and established a student leadership team to provide input on discipline, teacher morale, community interactions, academics and more. Other schools followed, and students formed not only their own leadership teams but an important element along with

adult leaders on campuswide teams.

As the idea of shared leadership took hold, students came to have a strong voice in the transformation that was shaping their education and their futures. They were proving to be prime factors in finding the answers for Euclid High School.

Students came to have a strong voice in the transformation that was shaping their futures.

Euclid students get inspiration from a mural depicting a symbol of their focus



STEPPING UP AS STUDENT LEADERS



Junior Cameron Cofield and other members of the Student Leadership Team help make decisions on everything from dress code to lanyard colors.

By Jill Miller Zimon

As five Euclid Business and Communications School juniors climb the school's switchback stairs, their angry voices echo upwards. "No one ever *deserves* to go!" says D'Angela, known as DD. She jumps onto another step.

"Nobody helped raise money." She lands with another stomp.

"Only a few kids help raise money all year — the same every time," another student joins in, slapping a hand down onto the railing for emphasis.

"We don't have the money because people don't want to help. I've asked and asked and I don't get no response," DD says. All the while, she continues to jaunt up the steps, her feet landing in cadence with her words.

The five students — DD, Ashley, Pam, Cameron and Henri — have just emerged from a meeting of their school's Student Leadership Team (SLT) and



Jim Poulson, leader of Euclid's Business and Communications School, has known the five juniors on its Student Leadership Team since he was principal at the middle school they attended.

they are more frustrated than at any time since the group began two years before. Along with other members of the SLT, they've learned that they may not be able to deliver on a promise they made at the beginning of the school year when they publicized that all seniors and all students who did not receive disciplinary referrals would be eligible for an all-paid day at the Cedar Point amusement park.

But the reality is that they lack the funds to make good on this promise.

"The budget committee turned down our request. We must pay it on our own," Small School Leader Jim Poulson told the group moments before, his nearly yard-wide shoulders slumping over the conference table. "They said, 'If we approve this for BCS, we have to approve it for all six schools' and they don't want to do that."

That decision is why the teenagers are venting their aggravation in the stairwell. Yet this challenge is no dif-

ferent than hundreds of others they have faced since they started helping run their school. As ninth graders, they entered Euclid High School in its last year as a unified facility, which was also a year of planning. They were sophomores when the campus opened as six separate small schools in August 2004. Since then, through every-other-week Student Leadership Team meetings, these five, along with five students from each of the other three grades, have managed everything from dress code conflicts and lanyard colors to discipline and teacher apathy. One agenda item at a time, they've pushed, pulled and celebrated the steps they've taken as one small school.

Now, as they reach the landing before the last flight of stairs, what is perhaps their most tangible accomplishment comes into view: the beginnings of a football field length mural of New York's financial district. From the first days of the Business and Communications School, they envisioned the painting as a dramatic symbol of their focus, but they had to overcome teacher and student apathy to get the project under way.

Like the mural, the five students' work and hopes for their school remain unfinished. Whether they'll be able to complete what they've begun is yet to be seen.

One agenda item at a time, the students have pushed, pulled and celebrated the steps they've taken as one small school.

Ashley: Spirit and Enthusiasm

In mid-July 2005, the student leadership group gathers to devise a plan for how to make newcomers feel comfortable when they arrive in five weeks.

Characteristically utilizing every moment of team time, while in the midst of students sliding thin slices of pizza onto even thinner paper plates,

Poulson pauses to tout a recent success of two second-year SLT members.

“Do you know that these two girls, Ashley and DD, went to the Ohio Business Week at Youngstown State College and represented the school?” Poulson’s voice gushes with pride. “These girls were unchaperoned, had a great time and learned how to do a business plan! How to write it, imple-

ment it. Just fantastic.”

Ashley Jones wastes no time putting that learning into action.

“Lockers, Mr. Poulson. We need to figure out placement for each grade,” she says. “We’ll have a night for each grade to come in and pick their lockers. Sometime in August.”

The sweat-inducing temperatures of a July morning fail to wilt Ashley’s enthusiasm for improving the school

experience. The frequent flash of her smile and sound of her giggle confirm the fact that she’s a cheerleader for Euclid — both figuratively and literally. When Poulson prods the team members for ideas, Ashley often re-frames the request for her colleagues. Her words tumble out in a quick pace.

Ashley leads the group through their agenda items like a soccer mom through her to-do list: fall dance or pep rally; color and style decisions for identification badges and the lanyards from which the IDs will hang; design and ordering of business cards for the students on SLT; creation and implementation of a SLT newsletter.

Then she translates the goals into something that will hit close to home for her teammates: “When we apply to college, what do we want to put down, you guys?”

Even as they dedicate themselves to making improvements at BCS, the juniors, appropriately enough, are beginning to look beyond high school.



Ashley Jones is a cheerleader for Euclid — both figuratively and literally.

Pam: Drive and Focus

On a mid-autumn day, less than three weeks before the residents of Euclid are to vote on a levy to raise operating funds, Euclid High School's gymnasium throbs with the sounds of an all-percussion ensemble called a drumline. Hip-hop rhythms emanate from large speakers and echo off cin-

derblock walls. Throngs of teenagers stream through the doors and vault into place on bleachers.

After weeks of planning, the SLT expects this rally to net nearly \$1,000 in support of the district's levy campaign. Their efforts even persuade a teacher to buy tickets for the entire football team.

But as the more than 700 students drift into the rally, happy to swap

the last class of the day for a raucous hour of friendly class competition, the consequences of a levy failure weigh heavy.

"The students absolutely know what they'll lose if they don't pass the levy. Busing, all sports. It's bad," junior Pam Dimo shouts almost breathlessly over the rising din.

Like a bee that flies the same path repeatedly, Pam, a second-year member of the SLT, strides from corner to corner to help her classmates oversee the gathering. She climbs into the stands, two bleacher rows at a time, and makes certain that students sit by grade. Her below-shoulder-length black hair sways with her swift movements as she briskly directs some students and calls instructions to others.

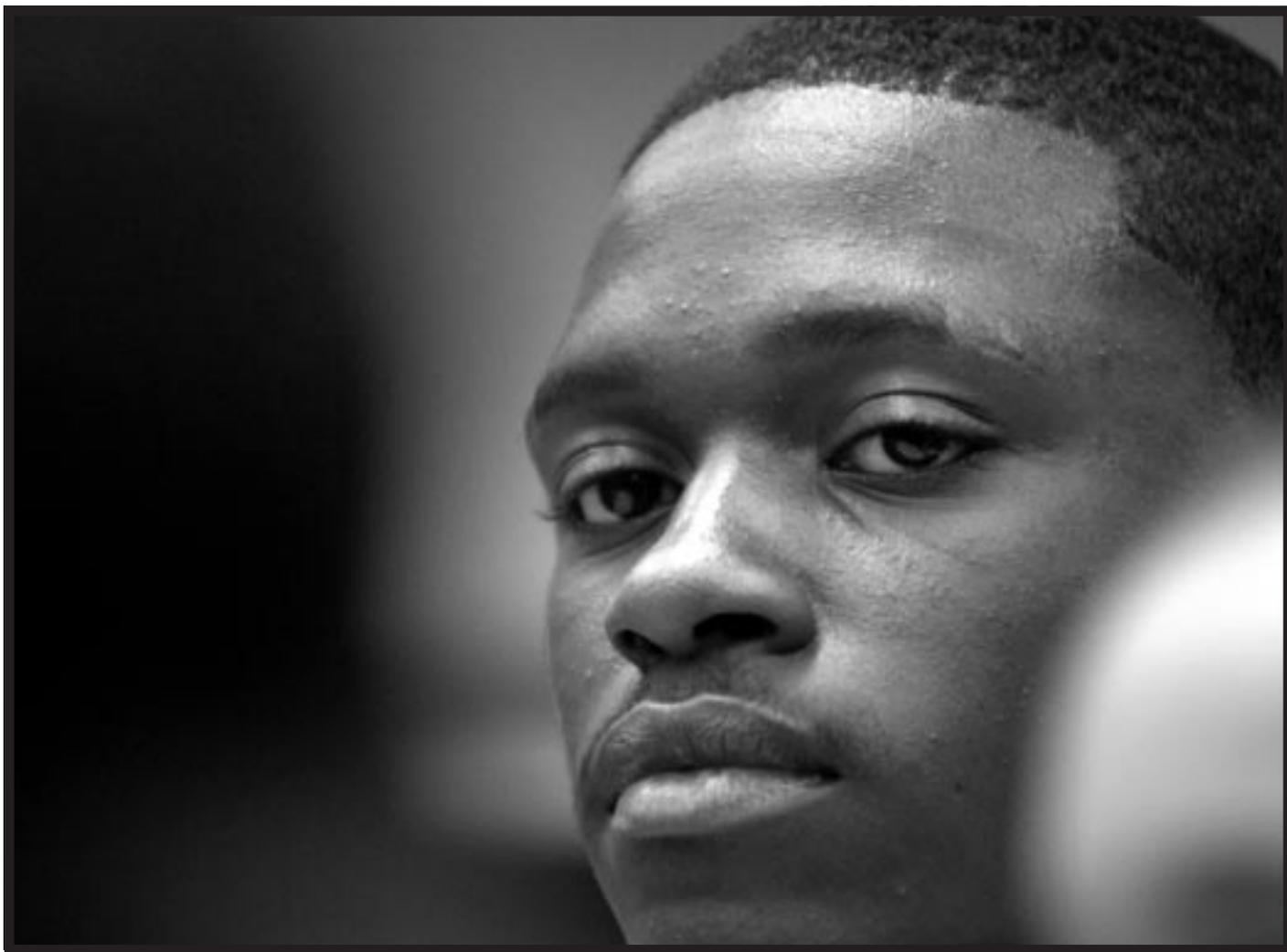
So obvious is her drive that, at a SLT meeting 10 days after the rally, Poulson uses Pam as an example of how pressure affects people when they strive to reach goals. "Pam got bossy before the pep rally. But she was under pressure to get things done. Sometimes you end up like that to get things done."

The success of the rally becomes a lesson in more than the difficulties of leadership when the levy passes, though by a slim margin of 35 votes.

The narrow victory doesn't blunt the satisfaction Pam takes in their achievement. "Being in the



Raising money to support a school levy is just one of the projects Pam Dimo has taken on.



After working with the design team to plan the school, junior Henri Buford now helps run it.

SLT is an accomplishment in itself, but one thing I'm really proud about is pulling off the pep rally and putting the funds towards the levy campaign," she says.

Having immigrated from Albania, Pam and her parents appreciate the opportunities she's been given at BCS. Her parents readily list the qualities that make Pam an effective leader: "Pam is a good student, she works hard, she's a good person in general, she's respectful, and she has so much drive and fight when she's working towards achieving something.... When she goes to college

she's going to be able to take care of herself and just fight till she gets to where she wants to be. That's basically all we can ask of and want for our children."

The determination Pam's parents describe shows. By the SLT's mid-November meeting, Pam is ready to move on to other issues. She has set her sights on establishing programs such as mentorships facilitated by teachers and senior projects, as suggested by another SLT member. "I think we need more improvement with teacher-student relationships," she says.

Henri: Calm and Reason

The students of Euclid's Business and Communications School mill about in the front of a suburban hotel conference room. They appear professional, if somewhat unnatural, in their suits and ties or skirts and heels as they begin a presentation about student leadership. No empty chairs remain and more than 50 teenagers and adults stand against the back wall of the square, windowless room.

Midway through the program, Henri Buford, the only SLT member

who also worked with the design team to plan BCS, walks to the podium. The gracefulness of his basketball-player height and slightness conforms with his quiet yet poignant speech.

“What we have to share with you is a different approach to running your school,” he tells the crowd. “It involves leadership by everyone. It’s not my school. And teachers are finally buying in that it’s not their school. But when you give up power, people will feel threatened.”

Henri presents his part as though he’s embarrassed to be talking. He shifts from side to side, looking down at his notes and speaking quietly.

But the gentle manner he exhibits — respectfully offering handouts to participants and nodding politely when people say thank you — belies the rowdiness others say was his hallmark before he got involved with the leadership team. Before small schools, they say, Henri was more likely to interrupt, not listen or share, and not work with a group.

Now, wearing a tie with the striped shirt that he fills out like an athlete who is more comfortable in cotton jersey gym tops and shorts, he preaches convincingly to his audience about the importance of including everyone in the planning of small schools.

“Students get an equal voice,” he tells them.

Henri describes how the SLT meet-

ings don’t always run smoothly and gives numerous specific examples of how students help the school run. He also tells the audience that leadership is work.

At the end of the hour, the presentation finishes with a question, and an answer, for the audience. It is one that Henri has been asking and answering for nearly three years: “How do we make things better? Change.”

they’ve reached out to the community for help.

“We’re getting tired of the banners [that identify the school],” says Cameron Cofield, one of the five juniors. “Let’s start with that wall.”

Quickly, they run into the familiar turf problem as they discuss how far the mural can reach.

“The stairs aren’t ours,” DD shoots back.



Cameron Cofield brings an even-tempered style and thoughtfulness to the leadership team.

Cameron: Stability and Dependability

In the first week of March 2006, the members of the SLT meet with two local independent artists they located through the internet. The students were stymied in earlier efforts to adorn their corridors with a mural of Wall Street — none of the high school art teachers would assist and few students volunteered — so

Poulson nudges them toward action. “Then get permission,” he says.

The team works through a rapid-fire succession of questions and answers. How many hours will it take to paint the mural and who will paint it? Can incoming eighth graders do some of the work during the summer? What hours during the day can they paint? Who will supervise the painting? Will any of the faculty or

staff assist?

After 25 minutes, the students have developed a plan that will at last get the mural project under way with the help of the local artists.

Next they turn to an issue that is as much an emblem of their school as replicating Wall Street in their hallways. The best and the brightest Euclid eighth graders aren't attracted to BCS when they choose which of the six schools to attend. The student leaders are bothered by this fact.

"Tell us why the students at Forest Park [one of the underperforming middle schools] bid into our school, Cam," says Poulson.

Cameron is as compact and solid as Henri is tall and liling, and his presence in the SLT meetings provides a parallel stability to the group's processes. His thoughtful, usually thorough answers on almost any topic contrast with the more dramatic and emotional responses of his classmates. He speaks softly and swiftly, and it's easy to see how his even-tempered style is an asset to the school's sports teams on which he plays.

"Because of the name," Cameron says. "They think it's an easy way out. All the big names [used by the other schools] — the kids are intimidated by the words: 'academy,' 'rigor.'" He uses steady hand gestures to make his points.

The full room is silent. The students sit back in their chairs, straight up.

"We get all the bad kids," says one team member.

"We get the least 3.0-and-up students of all the schools, guys. And we get the most 0- to .75-GPA students of all the schools." Sobering facts. Poulson tells the students the faculty

Wall Street

From the first days of the Business and Communications School, students envisioned a mural of New York's financial district as a symbol of their focus. By year's end, the painting was coming to life in the hallways.



thinks the word "communications" in the school name may mislead potential students and have voted to change the name to the Academy of Business and Technology.

The students react with silence and sighs. They've spent two

years working to build an identity around the name Business and Communications School and seem uncertain of their stance on such a big change.

They are relieved they don't have to decide until the next meeting.

DD: Fire and Diplomacy

Outspoken and demonstrative, with an acute sense of justice, DD Lavender is perhaps more easily disillusioned than her fellow juniors. In the early days of the SLT, she might leap to her feet or lean across the table in the heat of discussion. But this year, as the team's projects encountered difficulties and athletic interests demanded more time, DD appeared to disengage. She attended meetings faithfully, but often with her MP3 player in hand.

As spring arrives, though, DD is back. With summer nearing, she is pushing the mural project forward. "We need more people to prime the walls," she announces at a SLT meeting. She presses her classmates to make a commitment, especially during the summer when one of the local artists will be working.

Later the discussion turns to fundraisers. The team is exasperated to learn that they may not be allowed to sell pizza as they have in previous years because of new district rules prohibiting junk food in schools. Ashley, who has met with the superintendent on the issue, agrees to seek clarification, and students brainstorm other ideas.

When a younger team member suggests a rally with the other five schools, DD's frustration with such campuswide activities rushes to the surface. She leans forward as though ready to pounce on the idea. But she waits for the student to finish.

In a calm voice, she explains why she sees joint events as lose-lose propositions.

"We do two and a half months of work, for what? \$100? The other



D'Angela Lavender, known as DD, balances her outspoken nature with a tactful approach as she advocates for fairness.

schools got more because they didn't pay out the money, but we paid expenses upfront. They just come, but we do all the work."

DD caps her cool-headed discussion by praising the younger student

who made the suggestion for speaking up, a sharp contrast to the one-sided fire and fight more typical of her when she was just a sophomore learning her own way.

A Team of Leaders

After nearly two years of leadership, the SLT members can name several successes: They presented a training session at a national conference — and survived first-time air travel as well as rooming together. They created a shadowing program that matched up high school students with eighth graders to help orient the younger students to the large E-shaped building. They raised hundreds of dollars for school activities through pizza sales.

What's more, they have grown into their roles as leaders. They now run meetings smoothly on their own, moving through agendas without relying on Poulson for ideas. The five juniors, who have known one another and Poulson since middle school, are a well integrated team, able to anticipate each other and work together without the kind of friction and disruption that so often characterizes teenage friendships.

Even with all these accomplishments to their credit, the five are in a tough spot as they near the end of their junior year. Just as they've mastered the concrete skills of running a meeting, brainstorming and following through on ideas, they have begun to realize that no matter how much they embrace leadership they must relinquish it. If they are to leave a legacy of student leadership, they must pass it on to the students who follow them.

They have begun preparing for that time and throughout the year, they've seen signs that their successors are stepping up. Several younger students speak up more often and

take the lead on some agenda items.

As they conclude the final SLT meeting for the year, team members set dates for an end-of-year teacher-pupil luncheon, a summer SLT meeting and a new freshman orientation seminar two weeks before the first day of school. They decide to attend a national conference for a third year, but this time as attendees and not as presenters.

Then they return to the issue of the school name. Poulson calls out, "Do you want to change the name? Yay – raise your hand."

Not a one.

"Nay?"

Every hand goes up. The Euclid Business and Communications School will keep its identity — an identity bolstered by the mural of Wall Street that finally is beginning to brighten their hallways.

One of the day's agenda items is follow-up on the Cedar Point trip. The team first promised the trip as a way to recognize students' hard work, a goal they didn't want to abandon.

They overcame their anger at the building budget committee for denying funding and at their classmates for not contributing to the effort and worked with Poulson to scrape together the money — even though it meant emptying the group's account.

In the end, they treated 90 students to a day of fun at the park.

"Cedar Point! Tell us what hap-



Student leaders at BCS must make time for their decision-making responsibilities as well as demanding classwork and outside activities.

pened, Pam," Poulson urges.

"At \$27 a ticket for 90 kids, it cost \$2,400. We purchased two buses at \$750 each and that cost \$1,500. So the total cost came in at \$3,900, or \$42 per person."

The students emit sighs of relief. They'll have to rebuild their finances from scratch next year, but they won't have to overcome a reputation for not delivering on their promises.

The five students who have now finished two full years as school leaders — Ashley, DD, Pam, Cameron and Henri — will become seniors in the fall of 2006. They'll have one more year to push, pull and celebrate the steps they've taken as one small school — one agenda item at a time.

About the storyteller

Jill Miller Zimon is a freelance journalist with a joint degree in law and social work. She is an award-winning columnist and contributing editor for *Cleveland Family*. Her writing has appeared in *The Plain Dealer*, *The Writer*, *Writer's Digest*, numerous regional and parenting publications, and other print and online markets.

The relationship between Cleveland Heights High School and its community is a complex one.

The school struggles to meet the expectations of highly educated, progressive middle-class parents who worry that academically gifted students will suffer under the small schools setup. A community with close ties to the city's cultural institutions and universities, Cleveland Heights-University Heights includes a large faction intent on maintaining the school's prestigious traditions even as its demographics change.

At the same time, Heights High is working to meet the needs of all its students, including a growing number from minority or low-income families. School leaders know they cannot make the changes necessary to meet those needs without the community – without its involvement, resources and voting support.

In a diverse neighborhood that embraces many different voices and ideas, Heights High has opened the door to bring community members into the school. It does this through the small school model for community engagement, partnering with the Heights Community Congress, a social justice advocacy group, as its Center of Strength. School leaders also welcome individual community members to provide insight and enrichment for the students.

Real community engagement is not always easy. The more inclusive the process, the more opinions and agendas will need to be reconciled. But leaders at Heights High recognized how community involvement can benefit its efforts and took on the challenge of incorporating the community. As a result, the community is coming to better understand what's going on inside the school and to once again identify it as a point of pride.

Evidence that the school is on the right track is beginning to be seen. The first year after the campus was divided into five small schools, academic performance on the state report card improved from “academic watch” to “effective,” a jump somewhat equivalent to going from a grade of D to B.

Bit by bit, the new Cleveland Heights High is making a new place for itself within its community

In a diverse neighborhood, Heights High has opened its doors to bring community members into the school.



The hallways of The Mosaic Experience, where rigorous academic study is infused with the arts and technology.

BUILDING BRIDGES TO REACH NEW HEIGHTS



Students from the five small schools on the Cleveland Heights High campus wait for their rides outside school after dismissal.

By Wendy A. Hoke

It's 3 P.M. at the Cleveland Heights High campus and swarms of students congregate in front of the school on Cedar Road, one of the main thoroughfares to downtown Cleveland.

Hundreds of students slap backs, bump chests, chase each other, chat on their cell phones, climb on concrete ledges and generally let loose in the little space between the school and a busy intersection. Traffic slows to a crawl as passersby approach the stoplight just yards away.

The students, caught up with their friends in the after-school mania of getting rides and waiting for buses, are oblivious to the cars going by. To keep the disruption in the neighborhood to a minimum, seasoned security officers in their Heights Black and Gold quickly move the kids along, and a green and white Cleveland Heights police cruiser regularly circles the campus.

It is just one of the measures Heights High leaders have taken to ensure



Peggy Spaeth, director of Heights Arts and an advocate for the role of the arts in education, with student James Pugh.

native New Yorker, Gonzalez booms with authority when she speaks. She counts as one of her strengths the ability to sell Heights to anyone, by demonstrating how it meets the needs of its academically strong students and those most in need. “I want to get people thinking about getting involved as volunteers,” she says.

Energetic and outspoken, she is a hard person to

good relations with the community – a community made up of many disparate elements. A block away is an Orthodox Jewish neighborhood and a half-mile to the south sit mansions and tree-lined boulevards.

The best hope for bridging the gap between Heights High and the Cleveland Heights-University Heights communities, many believe, is the school’s redesign into five small schools. They believe that by engaging the community in the school’s transformation and its operation, they can counter misperceptions and increase understanding of the school.

Two community members who believed in the transformation to small schools were among the first to raise their hand, saying, “I can help.”

Lita Gonzalez has been active in Heights schools for many years. Her two daughters graduated from Heights and she believes they were better prepared socially, academically

and emotionally for college than many of their peers from private schools. She wants more students to have similar experiences at the school.

“I know this district does what it says it’s going to do and I owe it to the district and the community to share my experience,” she says. “I have a strong sense of loyalty and when I said yes to this effort I took it on full force.”

Full force is something of an understatement. With a closely shorn crop of blond hair and the accent of a

tell no.

In fact, that’s how Peggy Spaeth first got involved. Director of Heights Arts, a community arts organization dedicated to cultivating a diverse and collaborative arts community in Cleveland Heights, she found herself agreeing to join Gonzalez in supporting The Mosaic Experience school, whose mission is to infuse a rigorous academic study with the arts and technology.

“My daughter was too young and my son had already graduated. I didn’t want to get involved,” Spaeth says. “But Lita called. She knows what buttons to push and invited me to a planning meeting for Mosaic. They sucked me in with the idea of engaging students academically through the arts.”

Despite strikingly different personal styles, over the course of the year the two women came to share a devotion to Mosaic – and a mission

“I owe it to the district and the community to share my experience.”

– Lita Gonzalez, community representative to The Mosaic Experience school

to improve how the school and its community came together. When the campus forms Shared Governance Teams for each of its five schools at the beginning of the 2005-06 school year, both jump at the chance to join the Mosaic SGT.

The two were excited that the school was offering a structured way for them to be involved. "I've been trying to support arts education for years through Heights Arts," Spaeth says. "This was the first time a door opened through the school system."

Community Involvement in Action

A tough day for Mosaic Principal Terrance Menefee is just ending. During eighth period, several girls got into a heated shouting match in the hallway just outside his office door. This came after he had spent a few minutes

meeting with Cleveland Heights police officers about a problem student.

Despite the day's challenges, Menefee does his best to bring his optimism, along with the infectious Eddie Murphy laugh that makes everyone around him smile, to the table as he joins the SGT members straggling in to a Mosaic classroom.

He'll need that sense of optimism, as will other members of the team. Incorporating community feedback into schools' traditionally autocratic decision-making process isn't simple, and both sides have had to make adjustments as they learn to work together.

Today one issue is what role the SGT will play in the process for electing small school leaders.

When the new schools were created, the teacher leader selection process and responsibilities were established by a letter of agreement

"I've been trying to support arts education for years.... This was the first time a door opened through the school system."

– Peggy Spaeth, community representative to The Mosaic Experience school

between the district administration and teachers union, who worked together to choose the first leaders.

With the leaders' three-year terms nearing their end, many among Mosaic's teachers and community representatives would like to establish a new process that would allow others to have a voice in the selection.

This issue brings several key questions about the small schools transformation into the spotlight: Should



Mosaic Teacher Leader John Stephens and Principal Terrance Menefee work closely with the community and each other.

each school control its own teacher leader selection, or should processes be uniform for all the schools? What tact should school leaders take in pursuing autonomy? Who should be involved in choosing a school's leader?

And, for at least some SGT members, it raises the question of how much influence community representatives will have in planning the school's direction.

Gonzalez, for one, strongly supports the idea that each school should be free to make its own decision. "If we're going to talk about autonomy, we've got to stick to our guns," she says.

But she also questions whether the community, parent and student reps are being taken seriously. The proposed process for teacher leader selection would give teachers greater say in who is elected, and she thinks

this slights the community representatives. "We should be the most important part of this process."

Teacher Leader John Stephens, who still has another year in his term, explains that the teachers' decision is weighted because they have to live with the teacher leader selection. Some of those who may run for the position could be popular with parents, but lack leadership skills imperative for the job.

Spaeth has been sitting and processing the conversation. A quieter person by nature, it's clear she has something to say. "That attitude undermines our group process. We sit here for a reason. We thought the doors were being opened to join in the collective group process," she says, glancing around at the team members for some response.

Stephens, who is a veteran teacher, acknowledges the problems, but also

The shared governance process "has to be about more than words. We must be willing to take risks."

– Lita Gonzalez

sees the importance of maintaining good relationships with the other schools, the district and union leaders. "If we push too hard, the process will stop," he says.

Gonzalez jumps in: "I don't know what 'too hard' is. I believe if we *don't* push it will stop because that attitude will cause you to lose your community, parents and student reps."

Menefee audibly sighs and tries to put the two sides into perspective. "We're trying to pick our battles carefully," he says.



After school, students gather for an impromptu jam session in the school's basement recording studio. Alex Taylor (left) provides a beat for Elliot Nash and David Tufts (above). Mosaic's emphasis on the arts and technology aims to develop lifelong learners who use creative thinking to adapt to a challenging global society.

But that’s not enough for Gonzalez. “This [SGT] process has to be about more than words. We must be willing to take risks,” she says.

Shared governance is about sharing power and voice among everyone involved with the schools. Balancing so many perspectives and concerns can be difficult, but an important step toward finding that balance has been accomplished — everyone has come together around the table. The next step is building trust, and trust can be built only over time.

But time, in this case, appears to be straining the collaboration. Despite careful planning and a detailed guidebook for

Balancing so many perspectives can be difficult, but an important step has been accomplished — everyone has come together around the table.

the SGTs, Gonzalez thinks the group failed to reach a clear understanding early in the year. “We went into the Shared Governance Team process too quickly,” explains Gonzalez. “We never discussed what we meant by parent involvement, autonomy or



Kasey Greer is executive director of Heights Community Congress, which serves as the school’s community partner, known as a Center of Strength.

student voice. These discussions take time and should have happened early on. We will lose community members who don’t have that kind of time to sit for two hours and be reported to.”

Spaeth is disillusioned with the inefficiency. She’s willing to put her energies toward the transformation effort so long as she feels her presence is aiding progress. At the last SGT meeting a discussion of the role of the arts in Mosaic was second on the agenda. In a two-hour meeting, they never got to the second item.

Connecting the Dots

Spaeth’s belief in the importance of the arts at Mosaic is just one of myriad concerns

that community members bring to discussions about the future of Heights High, but it’s a goal that she puts considerable energy into realizing.

She’s passionate about how the arts can reach students who are thwarted by the traditional academic track because that’s what happened to her as a child. Eventually she became a quiltmaker, using hand-dyed fabrics to create original works of art.

She isn’t content to wait for SGT to move ahead. She advocates for bringing in the community’s artists every chance she gets.

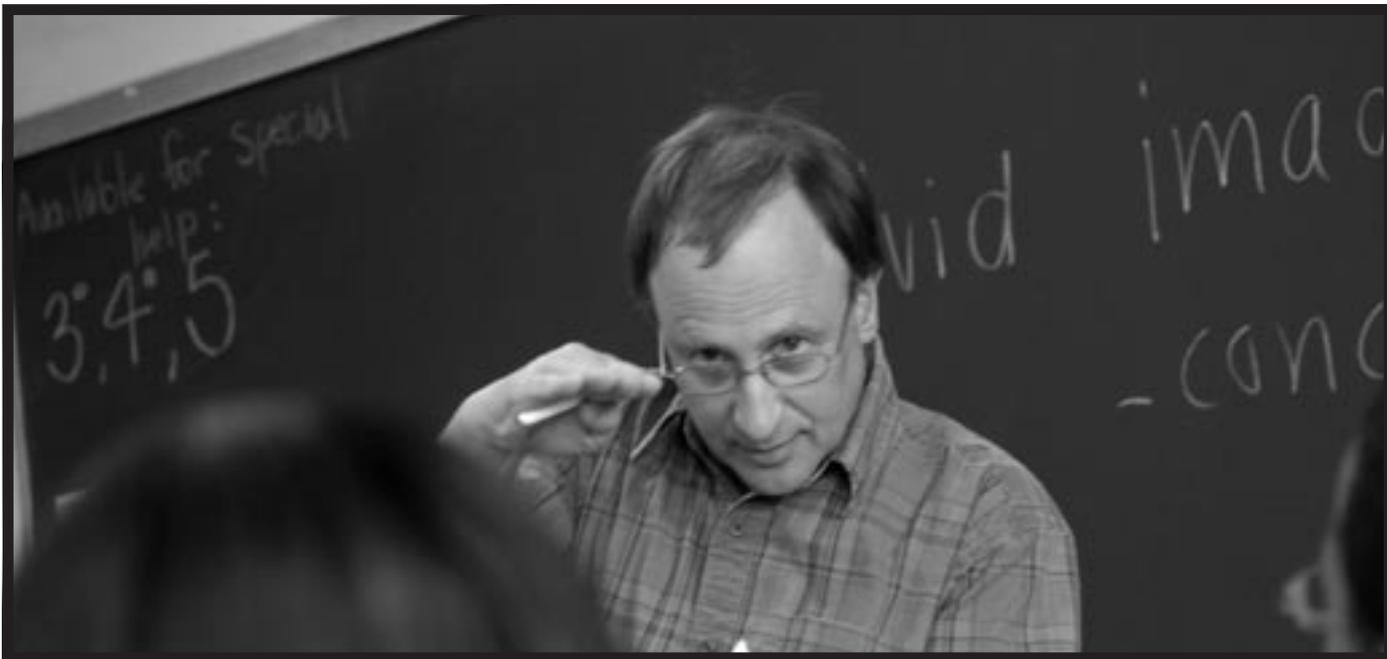
One such chance comes about after Spaeth, working through Heights Arts, applies for a grant from

the Ohio Arts Council. As a result, Inlet Dance Co. works with students at Mosaic for several weeks to put on a dazzling dance performance – a performance captured in a five-column

Community, local businesses, artists and colleges.

All are here to learn about the five small schools' efforts at community engagement, and to learn a little more

“This community has a deep love and appreciation and support of the arts. Our schools should reflect that deep value of the arts.”



English teacher Gary Swider says a workshop with a local poet “freed our minds and enlivened our words.”

photo in a Sunday section of the local newspaper.

Another chance comes on a balmy but stormy March night, when community members, parents and students fill the multipurpose room at the Cleveland Heights Recreation Center. Mayor Edward Kelly attends, along with representatives from Cleveland Heights City Hall, Office on Aging, Judson Retirement

about how their voices can matter.

Kasey Greer, executive director of Heights Community Congress, the Center of Strength that organized the event, breathes a sigh of relief at the community interest. “I didn’t know what to expect,” she says.

Mosaic students, and those from the other four small schools, share their experience working with the community both in and out of school. But it’s Spaeth who connects the dots between what the community can offer and how the schools can benefit.

“On my street of about 100 houses, we have living among us orchestra musicians, visual artists, art institute professors, filmmakers, actors and writers,” she tells the audience.

Poets in Residence

By spring, the artistic involvement that Spaeth advocates is beginning to touch the lives of Mosaic students.

It’s a Friday morning and poet Mary Weems is buzzing about the social room at Heights in preparation for the Mosaic Experience “Coffee for the Soul” program, funded by another grant through Heights Arts. Mosaic students Elliot Nash and David Tufts have moved their morning jam session from the basement studio and are rocking the house with a little Eric Clapton.

The coffeehouse program is the culmination of weeks of collaboration between Weems and the students from Gary Swider’s freshman English

By spring, artistic involvement from the community is beginning to touch the lives of Mosaic students.

The Power of Words

These poems were written by students at The Mosaic Experience school on the Cleveland Heights High campus in a workshop with local poet Mary Weems.

Mother Eagle

By Hari Ziyad

Her claws pierce deep,
her calls are threatening
she's the authority, even in sleep
yet her embrace is gentle, incredibly.

Her feathers are soft and comforting
she protects her eggs from all and she flies,
glides, soars, her vision encompassing
big and tall.

She sees all sides from atop, she is lord.

She dominates the sky, tackling the clouds.
All American, the symbol of our country,
beautiful bald or gold.

She is strong and loving.
She is watchful and protecting.
She is exemplary and beautiful.
She is the Eagle!

Junkyard

By Janet Herrgesell

Do you ever wonder what happened to that vase?
That maybe it lies under a dirty pile of waste?
Where grown up children say their goodbyes
In the place that never dies.

Old skates and sofas have made their home here
But one day a visitor, and the next they disappear.
Like a dead language
Forgotten
It lies
In the place that never dies.

But as a pack of lads appear
The magic returns and draws them near.
Where one man's trash is another man's prize
In the place that never dies.

class. One by one, the young poets Weems has mentored get up on stage and recite their original poetry.

Their efforts are enthusiastically greeted with finger snaps instead of claps. "This ain't no Apollo Theater. We snap in here," says emcee James Pugh, encouraging the beat poets in training.

Weems is ecstatic at the students' spirit, shaking her long braids and snapping loudly. She worked once a week for a month, helping the stu-

dents fine-tune their ideas and their structure. The results are intelligent, intimate, heartbreaking, humorous, poignant, powerful and empowering.

Elizabeth Ramsey is a good example. She walks to the microphone to read her poem titled "Yellow."

"Yellow is the color they call me," she recites. "Last time I checked I am not the color the sun shines." Her body language is powerful and grows in confidence as she reaches the end of her poem.

"I am African-American who is coffee...with extra cream."

"Yes!" yells Weems, snapping her fingers enthusiastically.

After the readings, teacher Gary Swider acknowledges that many hands must be involved to create a unique experience such as the coffeehouse. He thanks Weems "who nurtured and freed our minds and enlivened our words"; the students "who responded so beautifully"; and the parents and adults "who listened,

talked, laughed, cried and carried your children to this new level.”

Soon after the coffeehouse, noted Cleveland poet George Bilgere learns about the young poets from his colleague Weems and decides to record their poems for his radio program. “This is my first time at your school,” he tells the students as he enters the conference room on the day he’ll record them reading their work. “This is very cool.”

The students nod in agreement, outwardly cool as Weems, there to coach them on their delivery, gives some last-minute advice. “Stop. Get yourself in a strong position. Annunciate and energy,” she says.

Weems has influenced them in many ways and it’s because she has credibility as a professional.

“Dr. Weems is a real poet,” says Anthony Sgro. “I don’t want to learn about iambic pentameter from a book. It’s a lot different when you’ve got a live professional helping you put it all together.”

All the students nail their poems during the recording. Bilgere is impressed. “How long have you been working on these?” he asks.

“One month,” they reply as his eyes widen.

He’s so impressed that he tells

“I don’t want to learn about iambic pentameter from a book. It’s a lot different when you’ve got a live professional helping you put it all together.”

– Anthony Sgro, student



Sandra Haynes of Heights Community Congress has been involved with the small schools initiative at Heights High since it began. She and Kasey Greer, the group's executive director, have been instrumental in pulling together community support and conversations.

the students he will explore ways to get the tape out to a wider audience. “You never know where this tape will go,” he says.

Their teacher Gary Swider is in his 16th year teaching and says this year has been a most challenging and exciting one because of the opportunities to connect with community professionals through people such as Spaeth and her colleague Cathy Posner. He credits Menefee and

Stephens with nurturing the freedom that allows the community engagement process to work.

“I’m a different teacher this year than I’ve ever been and it’s because of their leadership. They set the tone. We’re working harder than we ever have. But I give [Menefee and Stephens] credit for letting us go and play.”

Stephens is tired at the end of the year, but he is proud of the atmo-

**"I'm a different teacher
this year than I've ever
been before."**

– Gary Swider, teacher

sphere created at Mosaic. “We told our staff, ‘You know where the students are at the beginning of the year, and you know where they have to be at the end of the year. It’s up to you to figure out how to get there;’” he says.

The last week of school, however, brings the news that Spaeth has resigned her position on the Mosaic Shared Governance Team. She appreciates the school’s openness to community involvement and the invitation that first brought her into Mosaic, but decides she can contribute more by working outside the group. “Everything I did as a community partner, none of that happened as a result of or during a SGT meeting,” she says. “I decided I could be more effective by engaging parents, the community and arts people at the committee level and report to the Shared Governance Team. We had a wonderful year and really jump-started the arts at Mosaic.”

Her loss is deeply felt. “I’m really disappointed,” says Stephens. “This [transformation] is hard work and she’s been a major part.” He hopes the group will soon be able to incorporate some kind of committee structure that will allow for broader participation and keep community members like Spaeth on board, but admits it’s not yet ready.

While she understands Spaeth’s concerns, Gonzalez makes a different decision. She feels the loss of a compatriot, but will stick with the SGT. “She was the perfect community member for this position. We had her in our back pocket. I do share her frustration.... But I really want to see the Shared Governance Team work. I’m afraid if I quit that will not be fair

a flicker of hope at the last meeting of the year. “We started to dream a little to ponder what our Academic Achievement Plan would look like eventually,” she says. “It’s a benchmark and if we don’t achieve it then we have the opportunity to look at why. We shouldn’t be afraid of speaking up.”

She adds, “We’re all still learning



During a poetry workshop, student Curtis Walker composed a poem called “Who Am I?” that ended with the words, “I’m the future, different from all the rest.”

to the process,” she says.

Although Spaeth has left the SGT, she has no intention of giving up on Mosaic. It’s part of the mission of Heights Arts and her personal belief that public education is the backbone of a democracy, and she remains upbeat about the potential for the arts to reach students.

Gonzalez admits that everything that happened through Spaeth’s efforts this year could have happened without the Shared Governance Team and she knows that Spaeth is committed to helping the entire campus with its arts efforts.

But as outspoken as she has been about her frustrations, Gonzalez saw

new roles. I know this is difficult and I get a little impatient, but I’m willing to give it a little more time.”

About the storyteller

Wendy A. Hoke is a Cleveland-based freelance journalist whose work has appeared in many publications, including *The Plain Dealer*, *The Columbus Dispatch*, *Quill* magazine, *The Catholic Herald*, *Catholic Universe Bulletin*, *PAGES* magazine, *Smart Health*, *CWRU* magazine and *Cleveland Clinic Magazine*. She also writes at www.creativeink.blogspot.com.

In one way, Lima Senior High School had an edge on other small school reform sites. When its three schools opened in August 2004, they began in a gleaming new \$38.5 million building with nearly 290,000 square feet, a professional-quality auditorium, two gyms and a two-story library.

But even a spiffy new building didn't make it simple to introduce a completely new way of "doing" high school. Lima con-

fronted many of the same difficulties as converted campuses — everything from avoiding scheduling conflicts to handling union concerns to making sure that the three schools developed at a comparable pace.

It also struggled to adapt to a population base that is growing more diverse and to improve student performance. The

first year of small schools saw Lima's state report card rating rise from the lowest category to the second lowest, but school leaders continue working to boost performance.

Led by energetic educators convinced that smaller, more demanding schools can keep kids from falling between the cracks, the schools had strong relationships with the community liaison, the Lima/Allen County Chamber of Commerce, which fostered partnerships between the school and local businesses. And they empowered teachers, students and parents to take ownership of the school environment and offer solutions for improvement.

All these elements, far more than its impressive building, would give Lima Senior High School the edge it needed to make lasting changes.

Energetic educators at Lima are convinced that smaller, more demanding schools can keep kids from falling between the cracks.



Math teacher Christa Krohn meets with students working on a NASA moon buggy project.

THE POWER OF “WE”: COLLABORATION AT WORK



Jeff McClellan, principal of the School of Multiple Intelligences, encourages students, teachers and parents to contribute to the school's success.

By Peggie Cypher

It's been a busy year. Jeff McClellan sits in his office and takes a deep breath. There were the campus tours, the No Child Left Behind hearing, the new literacy lab, the school book projects — an almost dizzying array of activities.

As principal of the School of Multiple Intelligences on the Lima Senior High



Students have a say in Lima High’s small schools. The change to staggered schedules that eased congestion this year was suggested by a student.

School campus, McClellan rarely has a free moment to reflect. “Small schools are one thing in theory,” he says. “But in practice, I can start to see it’s paying off. We have more kids signed up for AP courses, our writing OGT scores have gone up more than 17 percent,” he says, referring to standard markers of achievement such as Advanced Placement courses and the Ohio Graduation Test.

“But it’s about so much more than scores,” he adds emphatically. “Over spring break, the number of students and staff here was amazing... They were eating pizza together, working on the NASA moon-buggy project. It’s a great feeling. And we’ve worked harder than we’ve ever worked.”

The key word here is “we,” as one look around his office will tell you.

More like a kindergarten classroom than an administrator’s office, the room is plastered with poems and handmade posters. Near the door hangs a paper dabbled with Post-it notes of what students think are the positive and negative aspects of their

school. The back wall houses a board covered with teacher ideas on ways to help seniors pass the proficiency tests. On the file cabinet is a student’s list of how to respond to bullying.

Above his desk are posters made by students in a college-credit program he established, called MI Ready. In bold letters, the posters list the different intelligences that are part of the school’s teaching philosophy — Body Smart, Sound Smart, Logical Smart, Self Smart. “I like looking at them,” he says, scanning the walls.

For McClellan, the posters are more than just pretty pictures; they are testament to the collaborative process necessary for a small schools approach to work.

Students, teachers, parents — McClellan encourages them all to contribute to making the school a

success. For a small school to develop the identity and independence it needs, the input of teachers, students, and the community all have to be in place. And at the MI school in Lima, the pieces are coming together.

The Leader

He’s young, early thirties, and sports a crew cut with spikes on top — someone you might expect to see playing professional sports or reporting the news. Certainly not the guy you’d think would be zigzagging through the hallways of the Lima campus greeting students by name. “How’d you do on the test, Shanika?” he says to a sophomore. “What did you write about?” He stoops to pick up trash, confiscates a student’s earphones and pulls out his cell phone to lend to a student — all without missing a beat. “Hey Robert, was the test difficult? Did the tutoring help?”

Like a local celebrity, McClellan is swamped by students who come up to shake his hand or give him high fives. He’s not just the principal. He’s the person they’ve eaten pizza with at after-school meetings, someone they’ve spent the

For a small school to develop its own identity, teachers, students and the community all have to be in place. At the MI school, the pieces are coming together.

weekend with at The Ohio State University chimp laboratory. The guy who has brainstormed with them on how to end school bullying.

McClellan, with a six-foot three-inch athletic build, towers over

most of the students in the red, gray and black hallways of the new Lima building. A marked difference from last year, he says between high fives, is that the hallways are relatively calm these days. Gone are the noise, chaos and congestion of 1,300 students jammed together

ning phase, McClellan and his staff came up with multiple intelligences as a focus for their new school. Developed by Howard Gardner, the theory identifies eight different types of intelligences, among them musical, mathematical and people smarts. “It reaffirms what everyone already

help seniors pass proficiency tests, McClellan asked teachers to rotate from room to room and respond to different scenarios. And just for fun — because one of McClellan’s mottos is “you gotta have fun” — he had teachers go to a room he called the “accountability room.” With a stern



Principal Jeff McClellan says the theory behind Multiple Intelligences is that “kids have strengths and when you tap into those strengths, they do better.”

like they were last year. The three small schools on the Lima campus have staggered their schedules, each starting and ending at different times. “We moved off the bell schedule at the suggestion of a student,” says McClellan.

The suggestion of a student?

Yes, just one of the many ideas McClellan has instituted. Even the theme of the school was by consensus. Three years ago, during its plan-

knew from teaching: that kids have strengths and when you tap into those strengths, they do better.”

McClellan does a lot of tapping — with both students and teachers. At a faculty meeting you won’t see him standing up in front going through items on an agenda. He’s likely to put teachers in groups or pass out Post-its and have them write down their ideas.

For one meeting on how to

look, he informed teachers they had to go into that room and hold each other accountable for OGT scores.

When teachers, already stressed, stepped in, they discovered a slanted wooden platform with a hole in the middle. They were to hold each other accountable ... for who could get the most bean bags in the hole. “The staff had a ball,” says McClellan, “but were under instructions when they left to look

upset for the next group coming in.”

A former science teacher of five years, McClellan was drawn to the small schools model because it emphasizes relationships. “I would see kids that I’d established a relationship with make progress in my classroom. Then I’d often find out that the following year they’d dropped out of school. This reinforced the benefit of the relationship piece.”

At MI, the relationship piece happens at breakfast meetings, pizza gatherings and in his two pet projects:

MI Ready and Student Leadership. He formed MI Ready in cooperation with area universities to aid 9th and 10th graders with academic skills and allow them to earn college credit. The Student Leadership group meets weekly to address myriad issues in the school.

The relationship piece also takes place at the Friday night tailgate parties. The gatherings were designed as a positive way for parents and students to connect with staff, one that doesn’t involve discipline problems. “Plus, they’re fun,” says McClellan.

The Friday tailgate parties are a positive way for parents and students to connect with the staff. Plus, they’re fun.

“Last week we played football in the parking lot. I got to be quarterback.” He leans forward to stress his point — a commanding but not-so-commanding presence. “I never get to be quarterback.”



English teacher Lori Rose says the MI school is teacher-driven.

Teachers

It’s 10 minutes before the end of class. A clump of freshmen gather around the front board, giggling. A quick glance in the classroom might suggest the teacher has finished the lesson and given the students free time. Yet this is the classroom of Lori Rose.

Students are actually doing a “gallery walk.” They’ve just finished their presentations on a short story and are writing their responses on large papers posted around the room. “Okay. Time to switch to the next one,” Rose tells her students. “Remember to make your comments specific.”

During the MI summer retreat, teachers came up with three

goals on which to focus their efforts. These goals, or “rocks” are raising attendance, boosting literacy, and incorporating lessons using multiple intelligences into their classrooms.

It is this last — the incorporation of the multiple intelligences — that can pose the greatest challenge even for veteran teachers. Yet Lori Rose makes it look easy.

She does it using the short story *The Most Dangerous Game* by Richard Connell, about a stranded hunter in Brazil who engages in a dangerous challenge with a Russian. In response to the story, Rose had students create a series of projects. They drew a map of Ship-Trap Island using setting clues, made a plot outline with pictures and created a skit incorporating sound effects. Students had to explain or defend their projects and then present them to the class. Now, presentations finished, students rotate to critique each other’s work.

The other goals, attendance and literacy, are regularly addressed at the weekly MI staff meetings. “We are a teacher-driven school,” Rose says. “Jeff’s empowered teachers who are not strong, not involved and allowed them the opportunities to step up.”

And step up is just what they are doing. At one meeting of Critical Friends, which is a group for sharing ideas about how to improve teaching, math teacher Christa Krohn presents a dilemma. It is a dilemma the teachers say they all share. Indeed, it is one of the largest challenges of being a teacher.

“Students come into class with



English teacher Jeannine Jordan-Squire arranged for her class to meet the mayor at the suggestion of student Michelle Van-Meter, seen in the background.

gaps in knowledge,” Krohn says to her small group. “I want to work with them and support them, but also maintain the integrity of the course standards. How can I do this?” Between bites of homemade cookies,

teachers follow a protocol of clarifying, asking questions and then adding their suggestions: Mandated tutorials. A Saturday boot camp. Research how math is important. Hold regular meetings with parents. Create a “math attitude” where you have a theme on the wall, jargon, funny slogans, a tune.

Unlike meetings in the past, which were likely to turn into gripe sessions, the Critical Friends meetings allow teachers to actually get things done, Rose says. One is transforming their student advisories, an element of the small schools model designed to give students contact with one staff member, into interest-based seminars that will let teachers and students connect around a shared hobby or talent.

“The teachers came to me and told me they wanted to switch them to interest-based,” says McClellan. “So



Community member Jan Seiling (left) helps English teacher Lori Rose evaluate student book presentations in the school library.



Math teacher Christa Krohn with Mike Duncan, one of a group of students building a moon buggy to race in a NASA project.

we formed SEMINAR — Students Engaged in Multiple Intelligence and Authentic Relationships.” SEMINAR topics range from knitting to hunting and fishing, to *The Simpsons* television show and popular culture.

Teachers have also been working on strategic plans such as weekly literacy writing prompts and a school-wide book project, which includes a research paper and an oral presentation.

But perhaps more important than strategic endeavors to address their

“rocks” are efforts to make daily lessons relevant to students’ lives. English teacher Jeannine Jordan-Squire is a master at this.

One of her recent lessons started with Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* and ended with Mexican food. Jordan-Squire had no lesson plan calling for her students to have lunch with the mayor of Lima. It grew out of a discussion about the marriage of church and state in the play, which focuses on Puritan witch-hunting. The class was discussing how the average per-

son can make a difference in politics when soon-to-be-voting Michelle VanMeter quipped that it was too bad the mayor didn’t sit down and talk with regular people. A few days later, students sat down with the mayor of Lima over Mexican food and chatted about everything from the Lima prison to school uniforms.

Parents and Community

“Hello. This is Mabel Fisher of Lima Senior High’s School of Multi-

Intelligences. I’m calling on the absence of ...”

She’s there every morning for at least an hour. Not a school employee, but a parent volunteer calling the numbers on the absence list. Out of their summer meetings with McClellan — yes, he holds meetings even in the summer — parents developed a plan to call the homes of students on the absence list.

“There’s a different tone when it comes from the parents as opposed to staff,” says McClellan. “And it helps for parents to talk to the same parents over and over. They begin to network.” This approach may be responsible for fewer absences this year. Attendance is up to 90.5 percent from 85.1 last year.

Fisher is glad to help out. In fact, she can’t do enough for the MI school. She credits its approach for the success of her son, Peter, who had struggled in previous academic environments. Because he had been diagnosed with neurological problems, Fisher was committed to enrolling Peter in a school that appealed to different kinds of intelligences and allow him to pursue his interests in music and film.

She isn’t the only parent who contributes. Beth Klay, who is paid by the school to be a parent liaison, rounds up other parents to make calls about open house, bring food to tailgate parties and volunteer at the MI Expo, a showcase of the school’s lessons and activities.

Community members, too, play an integral role — from individual members such as Jane Seiling, who regularly volunteers to evaluate student book presentations, to the Community Advisory, which brings

Measuring Success, One Student at a Time

If you ask the staff at the School of Multiple Intelligences about student successes, they’re not likely to quote you test scores. Instead, they’re likely to tell you about how student Rob Siferd, when assigned to do a hands-on project in science, got so into mushrooms that he switched his plans for his study in college to include math *and* fungi.

Or Billy Owens. An invitation to take part in a state hearing on the No Child Left Behind Act sent him on a personal mission. After researching the act and the numbers behind it, Billy, a student of mixed racial ethnicity, was shocked at the disparity between literacy rates of whites and blacks. Though he hadn’t planned to speak at the hearing in Columbus, he found he couldn’t sit quietly. Borrowing a scrap of paper from his teacher, he jotted a speech down on the spot. His message to the panel was simple yet profound: You must do a better job of publicizing the importance of parents reading to their children.

Or they might show you a video created by the Student Leadership team: A boy in the cafeteria is forced to give up his cereal. Enter a student dressed as the ghost of “frustration.” The boy is pushed down in the

hallway. Add the ghost of “sadness.” The boy is whacked in the head. Add “fear.” A narrator appears on the screen. “This boy looks normal,” he says. “But these are the thoughts on his mind.” The ghosts reappear. Symphony music builds. The bullying acts replay in slow motion. “The thoughts are unpleasant,” the narrator says. “They are caused by bullying.”

Led by students Peter Fisher, Liz Hernandez and Alex Scheer, the kids produced the video in response to recurring problems with the issue in the MI school. With grant money, they plan to tweak the video and share it with the entire school next year.

Or the MI staff might tell you about the sophomores who are already earning college credit, or about the donations Christa Krohn’s kids are collecting to finance their moon buggy or . . .



Student Billy Owens found he couldn’t sit quietly at a state hearing on the No Child Left Behind Act and made an impromptu speech on the importance of parents reading to children.

in guest speakers and arranges job shadowing. The Chamber of Commerce, which serves as Lima’s Center of Strength for the transformation initiative, has secured a grant to help students prepare for the SATs. Area universities have set up a literacy lab and provided tutors for writing and OGT prep.

Students

Community groups can provide speakers, parents can make phone calls, teachers can arrange lunches with the mayor, but perhaps it is the student voice — the students’ ideas, their perspective, their sense of ownership — that ultimately makes for a successful small school.

Today McClellan’s Student Leadership kids file in for a meeting and drop their books on desks. They race up to a table and grab pizza and a pop. Some chug the soda immediately and rush back for another. Students eat greedily as McClellan passes out paper and divides them into groups of three. “Make a list of things going on in the school — good and bad,” he tells them. “We’ll discuss your lists in the large group in a few minutes.” Students get down to business; they know the drill well.

When the whole group convenes, students call out positive items from their lists: the flow of classes and the

way teachers are teaching now. They switch to negative ones: smoking in the bathrooms, the mozzarella sticks in the cafeteria, bullying.

Bullying. A month earlier a student was involved in a fight and sent to the hospital. It started with words, with one student making fun

they can translate to others how it feels to be bullied. They’ve also made the posters that hang in McClellan’s office, and are working on a video presentation that addresses bullying. Students Alex and Liz are tweaking the script. Peter, the son of parent volunteer Mabel Fisher, is in charge



When a problem with bullying arose, student leaders Alex Scheer, Peter Fisher and Liz Hernandez decided to make a video presentation on how it feels to be bullied.

of another. Since then bullying is a recurring issue in the small school

The leadership group has been role-playing bullying scenarios. Using improvisational techniques from the Playback Theatre, a national troupe that improvises the life stories of members, the leadership kids hope

of filming it.

“I’m trying to develop a culture where students have a constructive way to deal with issues like these,” says McClellan. One of the things, indeed, *the thing*, he reveres most about the small school concept is that the school’s size magnifies the

benefits of student involvement. If McClellan can reach 20 or 30 students about the consequences of bullying, and if they then can reach two or three friends, there will be a sizable impact in the MI School. This is what, he hopes, will ultimately change the culture, the atmosphere of the school.

At the meeting, students speak freely about that bloody fight. Soon they move on to others. “I saw this one fight where...” “Someone hit a teacher...” “So and so was stabbed...”

McClellan listens for a time, but soon scolds. “Nobody hit a teacher,” he says. “Nobody was stabbed. We talked about this rumor mill before. This is how these things get started. How many of you run to watch a fight?” A few students raise their hands. “Why do you do it when you know it’s wrong? What can we do about fighting?”

“Have students be automatically expelled for the first fight,” calls one student.

“Then nobody’d be at school,” a girl responds.

“If you’re able to control your temper, you won’t fight,” a boy adds.

“Sometimes it’s not your fault,” says the kid next to him.

“Don’t engage,” the boy retorts.

“From what I’ve seen,” says a girl across the room, “fights are a way to get attention. But in a negative way.”

“Why are teachers are afraid to break up fights?”

The discussion quickly disintegrates. “Why can’t we have more sports like dodge ball?”

Random bits shoot back and forth. McClellan listens patiently. While they’ve clearly wandered off topic,

students seem to need to vent, to be heard, to feel a part.

“We can end early,” he tells them, “unless you want to stay and chat?”

A tall male stands and points to his blue-and-gold jersey. “Yeah. We can stay and talk about Michigan football.” An explosion of jeers. A girl across the room gets up and jiggles her red and gray Ohio State bangle bracelets in the air. The banter flies.

McClellan laughs and lets it go. While he thrives on their input, he also has realistic expectations. Creating a culture that deals with issues takes time. For teachers, for students, McClellan can wait.

A Typical Day

The day starts out as usual. Parent volunteer Mabel Fisher makes her phone calls. Teachers teach their lessons — Lori Rose’s students write self-reflective pieces, Jeannine Jordan-Squire’s act out scenes from a play. Community member Jane Seiling sits in the library evaluating book presentations. Student Michelle VanMeter presents John Grisham’s *Bleachers* as part of a multiple-intelligences component. For the reflection portion, Michelle says the book showed her “that we all have our own heroes and skeletons. In the end, you learn how to love them.”



The MI Ready program was established in cooperation with area universities to aid 9th and 10th graders with academic skills and allow them to earn college credit.

Students in the MI Ready college-credit program participate in an experiment led by a professor from Ohio Northern University. In addition to the regular visits by professors, students are required to tour campuses monthly and attend a three-day retreat in the summer.

Soon it’s 2 P.M., dismissal. Yet, as usual, from a walk through the red-and-black hallways you wouldn’t know it. A small group of kids hang out in Christa Krohn’s room playing with the tires and spare parts they’ve collected for their moon buggy, which they’ll build and race next year in Alabama. Students Peter, Alex and Liz gather with other MI Ready students in the science lab for experiments on acids and bases.

Down the hall, teachers sit in small groups at rectangular tables. A tall, dynamic leader moves among them, passing out Post-its. He asks the teachers to discuss what is happening in SEMINAR. “It’s OK to disagree,” McClellan says. “Just don’t be disagreeable.”

The teachers talk quietly in their groups, they joke. One tells how his Hunting and Fishing SEMINAR students saved a duck the previous week by untangling the wire wrapped around it. McClellan goes up to the giant pad of paper taped to the blackboard.

The groups take turns talking about their ideas: relationships are being built, students are learning skills they wouldn’t learn in school, regular contact with parents is being maintained.

Next McClellan asks teachers to discuss the things that *are not* happening in SEMINAR. Later they will propose some changes. Now the teachers huddle; they call out their ideas and McClellan adds them to a giant list — later, it will become his



newest poster for his office. One more testament to collaboration. His ever-changing wallpaper.

Teachers call out their ideas. McClellan writes them down. And of course, because his motto is “you gotta have fun,” McClellan interrupts the task to make an announcement: “Don’t forget the pig roast at my house. It’d be great to hang out and actually *not* have to talk about school.”

After all, it’s been a busy year.

About the storyteller

Peggie Cypher is an award-winning freelance writer from Toledo, Ohio. A mother of three and former educator, her publications include *Ladies Home Journal*, *Woman’s Day* and *Mothering*. Her novel, *Lucy in the Sky With Piecharts*, is currently seeking a home in New York City.



This book is dedicated to the thousands of teachers, students, parents, school leaders and community members working to improve education. For every story we've told of courage and commitment, of difficult times and hard-won progress, hundreds more remain untold. By sharing the struggles, frustrations and triumphs of these few, we pay tribute to all who work for change in our schools.

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