

Leetonia High School

Leetonia Exempted Village School District
Leetonia, OH

Superintendent: Thomas Inchak

Principal: Michael Ferguson

<http://www.leetonia.k12.oh.us/High School/High School.htm>

A NO EXCUSES campaign pervades the culture of this recently built high school in the small rural village of Leetonia. The large, distinctive building housing the K-12 campus impresses visitors

with its modern brick exterior and large, spacious hallways and classrooms. The architecture seems in sharp contrast to the small-town atmosphere of Leetonia, with its mature neighborhoods and storefronts limited to just a

SCHOOL PROFILE	
2003-2004 Building Rating	Continuous Improvement
Enrollment	255
Grade Levels	9-12
Economically Disadvantaged Students	33.6%
Students with Disabilities	9.9%
White Students	99.7%

few established main street businesses and community centers. An obvious source of pride for this community, the school is the center of an achievement-oriented culture for its youth. Principal Michael Ferguson states, "High expectations are held for all of the students of Leetonia High School—and there are NO EXCUSES for not meeting standards of performance."

A variety of strategies support the NO EXCUSES campaign. An extra 30-minute intervention period at the end of the day is available for any student needing extra attention. Students are aware that not knowing about the homework, not having time to complete an assignment, or not

LEETONIA EV DISTRICT PROFILE	
2003-2004 District Rating	Effective
District Enrollment	845

understanding an assignment won't fly as excuses. Parents have no reason to take excuses regarding why homework was not completed. In addition, each teacher hosts a website via TeacherWeb.com. Students and their families can access the site for homework assignments and general information on student progress. For those without Internet service, the village library is close by. Twenty-four-hour access to school information means there are no excuses for not knowing what is expected.

School Climate

There is an obvious student-centered orientation within this learning-centered school community. A rapport of mutual respect and caring is evidenced between teachers and students. For example, one math teacher collects individual resumes from each student to learn all she can about the students personally.

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Michael Ferguson, principal

"I can bring some of those experiences into the math lessons. I share information about

myself, too. They know about my kids and my family. I also try to always have a sense of humor.” Another resource room teacher facilitates group excursions to support both learning and motivation and reward opportunities—dinners, camping, mentoring. Photo albums of community projects are compiled each year. “The kids have given me more than I could ever give them. There’s a passion that comes with not being the most popular student, as I experienced personally. As you get older, you take your shortcomings and turn them to your advantage. One of the things I remember most about high school is how many teachers told me I wouldn’t be anybody. My goal is to help my students turn all of their experiences into opportunities.”

The goal is for ALL students to have an equal opportunity to learn. Differentiated instructional priorities determine where, what, and how instruction is provided. The math teacher, for instance, has a first period class where 50% of the students have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and 10% of students in each of the day’s remaining classes have IEPs. “We use constant repetitions—trying to find two or three ways of explaining things—this works for all kids. We try to get them where they should be in math, and to reinforce basic math and algebra skills. Relating to real life is important. I have a range of classes. My sixth period is my most advanced class—honors class—pre-calculus. “

Alignment of Curriculum and Instruction

The Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) sets the standard for curriculum and instructional alignment. With test data broken into strands, student performance is analyzed to determine priority areas of need.

Teachers select priority instructional areas aligned with the curriculum standards, and then work on those areas with each student. Working in partnership with students is a continuous process of asking, “What do you think you’re good at? What do you think you need help with?” The kids are very honest about what they need help with and what they don’t need help with, and each can tell you how they learn best.

Teachers use the IEP to help identify skill levels. Students are grouped heterogeneously for instruction so that a range of abilities exists within each group. Regular education teachers are actively involved in IEP meetings. The resource room teacher maintains weekly goal sheets summarizing accomplishments and strategies for student and teacher improvement.

“Although no one pretends that it’s easy, there is a shared commitment to making it happen.”
Resource Room Teacher

According to the resource room teacher, “Although no one pretends that it’s easy, there is a shared commitment to making it happen.” She describes the experience with her class, “We did all of this together. We decided that we all were going to pass the proficiency tests, and we did it together. We got angry together, we cried together and we figured it out together,” and results on the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) are proof that they did figure it out! During the 2003-2004 school year 70% of Leetonia’s students with disabilities passed the mathematics section of the OGT and 100% passed the reading section.

Student Engagement

There are 256 students enrolled in this school, and classes are limited to 24-25 per class. So, as Mr. Ferguson shares, “It’s not too hard to keep track of how kids are doing.” If repeating a course is necessary, a different teacher is usually assigned the second time around. Correspondence courses also provide an alternative for some students. In terms of dropping out, of the students who attend for the entire four years, the drop-out rate is less than half a percent. “What we lose track of,” according to the principal, “is kids who decide to leave and go to other online virtual schools—sometimes they take other options just to stay away from the law.”

An understanding and more tolerant approach to discipline has proven to be effective in reducing issues of problem behavior. This shift in philosophy was due, in part, to the elimination of in-school suspension as a cost-cutting measure. Also, the principal and staff members participated in a summer workshop that focused on more proactive and understanding methods for addressing student emotional needs (not just intellectual needs). There is now an emphasis on trying to help kids understand better ways of dealing with situations—helping kids to see a different perspective on their behavior and how it impacts other people, and heightening awareness that there are different ways of looking at things. This philosophy of greater tolerance and mutual respect has paid off in terms of a substantial decrease in discipline problems.

Administrative Leadership

Mr. Ferguson, in his second year as principal of Leetonia High School, has cumulative experience of ten years as a building principal. Upon coming to Leetonia, he focused on structural and scheduling issues that would have a major impact on success. An intervention period was added to the end of the day, allowing 30 extra minutes for students to receive individual help. The buses don’t leave until the end of the intervention period. A major goal was to focus on the NO EXCUSES theme. When someone says there’s not enough time for homework, for instance, Mr. Ferguson reports, “We look at how many times the student has attended the extra intervention period. Teachers all agree adding the intervention period has been a good strategy.”

Mr. Ferguson notes, “It’s up to the teacher as to how they teach. Some are very hands-on, some prefer lecture.” The principal’s main concern is that kids be able to get the information and process it. And, as long as that’s happening, that’s fine. Peer tutoring has been used as a successful strategy.

Mr. Ferguson monitors all lesson plans with an eye to alignment to the standards. He emphasizes that the teachers of special education students hold them to the same standards. If anything, according to Mr.

Ferguson, “The students with IEPs are pushed a little harder because they need extra help.” He notes that all staff members work to help and motivate all the students in school. This includes the guidance counselors and the full-time nurse, and staff members also reach out to get social agencies involved as needed. The curriculum director (available through the Columbiana Education Service Center or ESC) helps with the selection of curricular materials and resources, but the final decisions are

“Keeping kids who don’t understand with those who do is always better than grouping the kids who don’t and the kids who do understand.”

Michael Ferguson, principal

largely left to the teachers, who have great latitude to determine what's best for their kids. There is no shortage of materials; teachers can get what they need.

Professional Development

The K-12 campus arrangement facilitates teachers' working together, especially on projects with elementary and middle school teachers. The staff is a cohesive group that works well as a team. There is a good balance of newer and more experienced teachers as well as a variety of areas of skill and expertise. Teachers talk about the students, share their problems, and work together on solutions. Mentoring has proven to be an effective strategy for new teachers and/or teachers new to the building.

Release days for professional development are designated. Building priorities are driven by specific needs. A Professional Development Plan coordinated through the ESC provides three courses a year for all staff members. In addition, the school district is financially able to provide funding for professional development, and the district superintendent encourages teachers to take professional development courses to meet their needs. Few requests are denied.

During the 2004-2005 school year, teachers took advantage of a variety of offerings such as a workshop on teaching through technology offered by Texas Instruments, and they participated in the annual State Technology Conference. The interest in technology has paid off, as the staff was awarded an \$80,000 School Net grant in cooperation with WVIZ Cleveland.

Other professional development activities are also taking place. The special education resource room teacher is in the process of attaining highly qualified status in every subject area. The principal participated in a workshop on walk-through evaluations. Staff members found very effective and useful a presentation from a staff person from the Ohio Department of Education, Office for Exceptional Children, who explained the standards and helped teachers understand how they can make a difference with students with disabilities.

Partnerships with Parents/Families/Communities

In this rural community, where an estimated 60% live below poverty, parents are very interested in the education of their children. Residents generally know each other, and this sense of familiarity is reflected in an open attitude toward school visitations. In fact, as stated by the principal, the attitude is so open that a reminder of appropriate visitation protocol is sometimes needed to ensure uninterrupted learning.

The claim that "Our biggest asset is the parents" is also made by the resource room teacher. "Parents bought into the testing program. We had a school-wide literacy program and, as we were working with the kids, the parents were also learning. It allowed them to work with the kids at home."

Teachers emphasize the importance of communication with parents. In addition to nine-week progress reports and parent-teacher conferences, an open line of communication is maintained between home and school. Internet exchange is available through the school website and teachers' individual websites (TeacherWeb.com). In a

"Our biggest asset is the parents"
Resource Room Teacher

small town like Leetonia, it's not uncommon for school-related conversations to occur at Wal Mart or somewhere else in the community.

Staff members, many of whom live in the community, are also actively involved in community projects such as Habitat for Humanity and cleaning up the greenway.

A Personal Success Story

The importance of all students having access to the general education curriculum is illustrated by a personal success story at Leetonia. Ann (not her real name) tells the story of being grouped with her special education peers in a lower grade under a sign "Vegetable Patch." The students were not given academic work to do because the teacher believed they were incapable of learning. Ann saw no reason to even go to school. However, Ann has proven that teacher to be very wrong. Once she was presented with the opportunity to actually participate in the classroom and to learn the material in the general education curriculum, she made great progress. "Someone believing in me made the difference. Having someone I can lean on. I like coming to school now. I have a medical excuse for asthma that effects my attendance but, other than that, my attendance is perfect!" Ann was recently inducted into the National Honor Society. She now has aspirations to attend college and become a teacher.

What does the data say?

