

Newcomerstown High School

Newcomerstown Exempted Village School District

Newcomerstown, Ohio
Superintendent: Jeff Staggs
Principal: Randy Addy

<http://www.nct.k12.oh.us/HighSchool/index.htm>

Central to the purposeful activity of Newcomerstown High School is the goal that all students will graduate and go on to a successful post-secondary experience—employment, technical school, college, military service or another productive option—and pass the ACT college entrance exam.

Located in a rural Appalachian community, the school sets high standards for its students and, over time, has successfully instituted a culture of high expectations by building on the successes of each former class. Now all students expect themselves to go on to the next step! During the high school graduation ceremony, student names are read along with a statement describing what each of them will be doing after graduation.

SCHOOL PROFILE	
2003-2004 Building Rating	Excellent
Grade Levels	9-12
Enrollment	404
Economically Disadvantaged Students	24.3%
Students with Disabilities	18.7%
White Students	97.1%

A particularly impressive commitment to state-of-the-art technology is evident as visitors tour the well-kept building that has grown from its original plan when it was constructed in 1967. Five classrooms were added in 1989, seven new classrooms and a computer lab in 2002. Among the school's technology assets are three large computer labs, a distance-learning lab (13-school consortium), a media production room, a low-power radio station, a computer-aided design room and a technology exploration room (funded through a School to Work grant). The latter has been designed in partnership with the school/business alliance to focus on knowledge needed for today's competitive employment positions, and exploring technology is a requirement for all juniors.

NEWCOMERSTOWN DISTRICT PROFILE	
2003-2004 District Rating	Continuous Improvement
District Enrollment	1,317

An unwavering focus on high standards is expressed by the school's vision statement, setting the standard for "Effective and Beyond" level of performance. In addition, the mission statement sets the standard for excellence in curricular offerings, enrichment and remediation, and extracurricular programs, as well as guidance, food service, custodial, and secretarial support programs.

A number of awards have been earned. The Career and Post Secondary Exploration Program received the "Ohio Best" award, and Randy Addy, the principal, received the 2003 High School Principal of the Year Award from the Ohio Association of Secondary School Administrators (OASSA). In addition, the former superintendent received the Outstanding Administrator of the Year Award from the Ohio Appalachian Center for Higher Education (OACHE).

A personal story of dedication to the culture of this school community is that of Mr. Addy and his family. He was in the first class to graduate from the original new high school building in 1967 and after graduation from college, started his career in the district as an elementary physical education teacher. Mr. Addy has worked at the high school for twelve years, ten years as the principal. Mr. Addy's entire family is dedicated to education. His wife was honored with the district's educator of the year award. His son is a teacher, and his daughter, who graduated with a degree in chemical engineering, decided to retrain and is now also a teacher.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL STUDENTS TO ACHIEVE

The value of intervention is stressed at Newcomerstown, and the option to participate in it begins the day the students enter the school. Based on eighth-grade information received by the high school, students take a practice test in the ninth grade. The intervention specialist grades all the tests and determines those students, both with and without IEPs, who need intervention in various areas. She passes on information on the areas in the test that need to be addressed for each student to both the regular and special education teachers. Teachers then talk to each student individually to help the students understand what they need to work on, and those areas become a focal point of the intervention support.

Invitations to be involved in the intervention program are also sent directly to parents whose students have a 'D' or 'F' in a subject. At the beginning of the senior year, a letter is sent to parents of students who have not been getting good grades or who may not have sufficient credits to graduate. The letter informs parents that their student may not be graduating, and offers the intervention program.

The school's intervention program also includes focused assistance with the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) and the ACT college entrance exam. The sophomore class of 2004-05, the first class that will have to pass the OGT to graduate, had their first chance to pass the test in March. The previous spring they took a practice test in all five tested areas—reading, writing, social studies, math, and science—and teachers worked with students whose test results showed areas of concern. Teachers went back to the basics with the students and then brought them up to speed.

In addition to in-school intervention, after-school help is offered two weeks prior to the test, with eight one-hour sessions. Using Title I money, participating teachers are paid an hourly wage for each session. Local food vendors donate pop and pizza for the participating students. An incentive program with rewards for participating in the intervention sessions and for passing the OGT includes the following:

- One day out of school for attending all after school intervention sessions.
- One day out of school for arriving on time and taking all five tests;
- One day out of school for each subject passed;
- Exemption from final exam if passing the class, with an automatic A;
- Trip to the movies and lunch for students passing all five tests;
- Gift certificate for \$100 at the mall for top two students by cumulative raw score, and passing all five tests;
- Free homework or bonus homework as designated by a teacher.

After the March testing, OGT intervention is discontinued until the fall. In the interval, help is provided for students preparing for the ACT in the form of one-on-one tutoring in test preparation.

“Our intervention program is the heart and soul of our success here,” shares Mr. Addy. “I found an extraordinary intervention specialist, Mrs. McFadden, who, in turn, recruited two retired teachers for the after-school intervention.” Mrs. McFadden noted, “Retired teachers don’t often volunteer for this type of work, and it has worked out very well.” Initially students were not pleased with having to participate in the intervention. However, that attitude has changed.

“Our intervention program is the heart and soul of our success here.” Randy Addy, principal

As one special education student puts it, “They make it really easy to learn. If they can help us, they do. And if they can’t, they’ll find someone who can help us.” Another student with an IEP shares, “I studied for my test really hard, and I look back on my tests and good grades and I feel good about myself.” This quote reflects how students with disabilities, as a subgroup, are achieving at Newcomerstown High School. Results on the 2003-2004 OGT provide evidence that the intervention program is effective with 84.6% of the students passing mathematics and 91.7% passing reading.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Teachers share that they “saw the OGT coming” and have worked very hard to align curriculum and instruction. “We’re scared to death about this graduation test, we really are,” they share candidly. Subject area classrooms are located near each other to support communication and teamwork. Although a designated collaborative planning period was eliminated due to lack of funds, teachers make it a point to work together as often as possible, since they all want to do the best they can for their students.

When the academic content standards were issued, vertical team meetings were held to review them and to determine how they could be incorporated into lessons. Teachers were reminded that they had to delete any lessons that did not relate to the standards. The process was helped when the district developed a computerized program so each teacher’s lesson plans could be tied to the standards, benchmarks, and indicators via computer. Teachers now complete all of their lesson plans on the computer program, with their plans accessible by the superintendent and the principal for review. The teachers report that they are finding the use of student data to be very effective as they work with their students, but they think it is also important that each of them continues to teach in their individual style.

“They make it really easy to learn. If they can help us, they do. And if they can’t, they’ll find someone that can help us.” Freshman Student with an IEP

“I studied for my test really hard, and I look back on my tests and good grades and I feel good about myself.” Sophomore Student with an IEP

All mathematics courses are earmarked for the OGT. The teachers worked to expose freshmen to all the topics. After they went through the content standards, the math teachers looked at new textbooks. Using the selected textbook, they developed

an integrated Algebra I class that included more reinforcement. The intervention specialist selects corresponding workbooks specific to the standards.

Teachers report that the lower-functioning students are doing better. They found that they had to teach reading skills to the students as they moved through the material, and the students are responding very well. Teachers put new vocabulary on note cards. Students are working on their organization skills by keeping their vocabulary note cards and their worksheets in a notebook.

The special education program will move to a more inclusive model the coming school year. Students had been receiving specialized instruction in a resource room and were integrated into regular classes as specified on their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). The intervention specialist strongly supports inclusion strategies. She explains, "Lack of knowledge of how to take a test is most often what keeps kids from passing, not lack of knowledge." Intervention focuses on how to take a test, but students need to be exposed to the material in the general education curriculum. As a success story, she reports that this year's Algebra I Award went to a student with an IEP. Mrs. McFadden interacts with the students beyond the classroom. She leads a theatre club that is very popular with many of the students, including some students with IEPs.

Newcomerstown staff members want to do the best job possible to prepare students for their futures, but roadblocks have surfaced. A community group was organized against tax increases, and issues have arisen because of the funding changes. Mr. Addy states, "Money has kept us from doing all we could do, kept us from fully pursuing our vision." The designated collaborative planning period for teachers and in-school suspension were eliminated due to lack of funds, as was instruction in Japanese, Latin, and Russian that had been available through the distance-learning lab. Plans for a career center were also put on hold.

PARENT COMMUNICATION

Newcomerstown believes in the value of ongoing communication with parents. In addition to his monthly newsletter, the principal maintains the school's website so parents can keep abreast of the activities. The school also operates a local radio station and has plans for a TV channel. In addition to holding parent-teacher conferences at school, Mr. Addy believes that students doing something of genuine interest to the parents will bring them to the school. Hence, in addition to a yearly open house, the school hosts a science fair and a winter arts fair. Parents are also involved with the athletic and music programs as boosters.

Parents are also invited to participate in other school activities, such as the Awards Assembly. Each teacher determines the students he or she will recognize and the category for recognition. Students are honored for classroom participation and for improvement, as well as for grades, so more students have the opportunity to receive awards. There are also a yearly honors banquet and a scholarship banquet where a variety of scholarships are presented such as those from the Chamber of Commerce and the Business Women's Organization. The home economics teacher organizes a yearly mother-daughter banquet.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The philosophy of the school is that all professional development activities must be channeled to the standards or they are not considered worthwhile. The Director of Special Education found the training put on by the East Central Ohio Special Education Regional Resource Center (SERRC) to be effective.

In keeping with the technology focus of the school, Technology Thursdays are offered once a month. Tech Thursday is a training session for teachers and staff members who elect to attend the after-school meeting that is designed to help them better understand and use technology. Through the professional development opportunities provided by this program, Newcomerstown schools hope to enhance teacher productivity and student learning. It is their philosophy that technology should be an asset and not a burden to the classroom teacher.

The school also belongs to United Streaming, a service that offers short videos for teachers on a variety of topics.

Teachers identify “the most helpful professional development activity we’ve participated in” as the *Teachers of a Banner Year* event sponsored each year by the Zanesville campus of The Ohio State University (OSU). In addition to celebrating a banner year, the focus of the event is for teachers to get together and share ideas. Ohio’s Teacher of the Year attends and joins in the conversation.

SCHOOL/BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS

This high school, in partnership with the Newcomerstown Business Alliance, is proud of its Plan for Excellence that sets high standards for supporting students as they plan for life beyond high school. The characteristics of Appalachian culture can sometimes interfere with students believing that they can or should go to college, a fact that is widely recognized by community leaders. So the community leaders met with the administrators, school staff members, and students to determine what students need to make a decision to continue their education. They determined that students need a good idea of what careers are available, and someone to believe that they can achieve their dream. That knowledge became the basis of the four major goals of the Plan for Excellence:

- Expose students and teachers to as many businesses and industries as possible in four years;
- Provide students opportunities for applied learning and technology during high school;
- Develop a pool of trained future employees with a good work ethic; and
- Match up a teacher and a business in order to provide a class of students the opportunity to work in-class and onsite on real world problems.

Addy believes in a very hands-on approach to help students prepare for life beyond high school. He regularly surveys businesses to determine the skills that will be needed by graduates and works to have those skills incorporated into the curriculum. This practical approach extends to a standard four-year routine for student field trips. After Jeff Staggs, superintendent, Mr. Addy, and the guidance counselors make initial contacts with the businesses and organizations, freshmen visit surrounding businesses,

and sophomores visit sites outside the county. Juniors visit colleges, and seniors work on preparing resumes to stress their job skills. Mr. Addy shares, “When businesses move into the area, they ask me to come and talk about our schools, and when our kids look for jobs I welcome the employer to call me for a reference.”

What does the data say?

