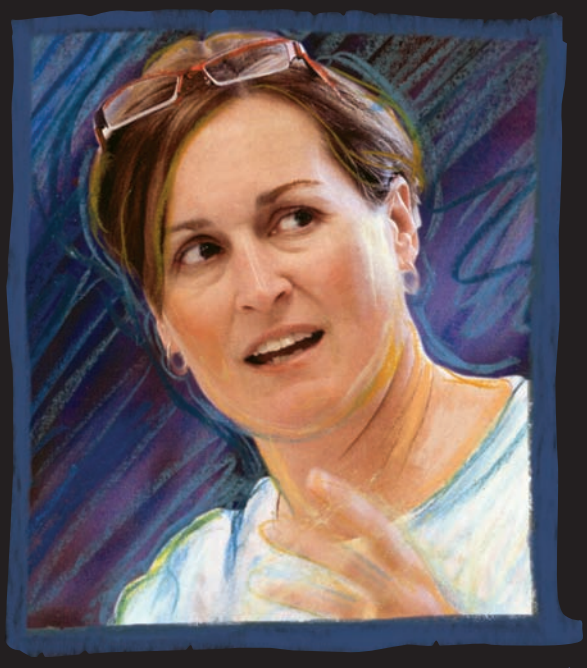

Most Likely to Succeed

Real-life stories of progress in five redesigned urban high schools

KnowledgeWorks Foundation

Rethinking Education

The world is changing faster and in more ways than any of us could have imagined even a few years ago. Technology is revolutionizing everything from how we communicate and learn to how we make friends, what our jobs are like and where we live. Environmental changes threaten our health and resources; increasingly diverse and fragmented societies both enrich and divide us; and a global economy is demanding new and different skills.

This is the world our children inherit, yet our public schools have been among the slowest institutions to change. Even as the imperative grows for the next generation to become adept at critical thinking, collaboration, decision-making and problem-solving, the public education system largely has remained mired in strategies from the industrial age. In our hardest-hit areas — the urban core — some schools are ill equipped to teach children even those outdated skills.

At KnowledgeWorks Foundation, we believe the time has come to rethink education — to reimagine what and how we teach, including everything from what a classroom is to what a teacher's role should be. We are actively involved in helping educators, policymakers, business leaders and the public anticipate and prepare our schools for a future that is already beginning to take shape.

One thing is certain: Tomorrow's adults will need more education to succeed. It is no longer adequate for students to enter the workforce with nothing more than a high school diploma — and it is intolerable that we allow large numbers to drop out before graduating.

The new high schools profiled in this publication are pioneering innovative ways to reach teenagers. They are smaller, more personal and more demanding. They offer students material that is relevant for their lives, connect ideas and skills across subject areas, and give students hands-on, real-world experiences.

Even these first steps toward a radically different education system are remarkably difficult, given the scale and complexity of the problems. But they are first steps, and they are essential to our progress. We applaud these educators and students, and all those who support them, as they move bravely into the future.

Chad P. Wick, President & CEO
KnowledgeWorks Foundation

On the cover, from top:

Danny Giannetto, Renaissance School at Cleveland Heights High

Jennifer Stepleton, Progressive Academy at Lima Senior High

Ruth Jones, Legacy School at Brookhaven High

Real-life stories of progress in five redesigned urban high schools

Most Likely to Succeed

Most Likely to Succeed

In their third year, new small schools are changing both culture and practice

The core idea behind small schools is to once again conduct education on a scale where people are the biggest influence on what and how students learn.

What is at the heart of an effective high school?

Almost anyone who has ever been in a classroom answers that basic question the same way: the interactions between teachers and students. Before high-tech computers and modern labs, before a huge range of advanced or specialized course offerings, before winning sports teams or career-launching internship programs – effective teaching is what people identify as the key ingredient in a successful high school education.

And that's what the small schools movement is all about: clearing the way for teachers and students to have stimulating, demanding and engaging educational experiences. The core idea is to once again conduct education on a scale where people – not facilities, equipment, test results or disciplinary codes – are the biggest influence on what and how students learn.

The method is deceptively simple. The small schools model divides large, anonymous high schools into more intimate learning environments of no more than 400 students. It calls for each school to have a clear and specific focus, for its leaders to have the freedom to make decisions independently and for teachers to collaborate across disciplines.

In Ohio, KnowledgeWorks Foundation is leading work to introduce and sustain small schools through its Ohio High School Transformation Initiative (OHSTI). The foundation is collaborating with education leaders in nine urban districts to transform large, underperforming high schools serving 15,000 students into 44 effective small schools.

The effort is a massive one. The initiative, funded in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and others, is investing $70 million in Ohio's small schools. At a national level, the Gates foundation has invested more than $1.7 billion to improve high schools, supporting more than 1,800 schools in 47 states and the District of Columbia.

The work in Ohio began in 2003, when the first districts began planning to convert large high schools. Under the initiative, each large campus was divided into three to six schools. Each small school was given its own name, staff and area of specialization, whether it is a career area or an instructional philosophy.

The new schools opened in 2004-05. Most were designed to 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.

More important than the physical design, though, was the philosophy. The OHSTI schools are asked to adopt educational elements that separate them from traditional high schools. They 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 in the small schools are given extensive professional development opportunities to guide them in moving beyond traditional instructional practices.

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. While the redesigned schools have been operating for just three years – and remain very much a work in progress, with numerous challenges still to be addressed – a few early signs of success are emerging.

Within the first two years, 85 percent of the campuses in the initiative increased their state ratings, some jumping as many as three levels.

What's more, the new small schools began to realize changes in school culture that herald a new age.

According to a three-year evaluation by a consultant, many staff members and students agree that the small schools contribute to them developing closer relationships. Teachers and parents report that their children have a good rapport with their teachers, and many students say they like their teachers and have someone to turn to when in need.

As the transformation progresses, the changes reach beyond relationships and climate into instructional approaches.

As the transformation progresses, the changes reach beyond relationships and climate into instructional approaches. Teachers report being more focused on improving literacy and writing and using techniques that allow for a wide range of learning styles. They speak of relating instructional content to real-life situations and helping students explore topics in depth. They also say they have bigger roles in decision-making.

Behind those changes are the experiences of the students, teachers, administrators and families: a passionate art teacher who convinces her entire small school to try an arts-based approach to curriculum as a way to engage students, a team of teachers who initiate daily reading time across all core subjects to boost students' literacy skills, a young man who is trying to turn himself around after being expelled twice, a charismatic student leader who is milking his small school for everything he can.

Their stories go straight to the heart of what high school was meant to be.

Lima Senior High School Lima, Ohio

Many buzz words are associated with small school reform — relationships, autonomy, shared governance, relevance. But the staff of the three small schools on the Lima campus took these bywords of the movement to heart. When they began the transformation in 2003, they worked hard to develop their own identities through separate educational philosophies. Teachers worked alongside principals to create literacy projects, interest-based advisories and service-learning opportunities.

Yet despite successes, one small school suffered an identity problem. Its name, the Progressive Academy, did not help the community understand its project-based curriculum. Many of the faculty wondered how they could redefine their school and promote its unique approach. They began to talk. Soon a small group of teachers took action.

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Art and Voice

Project-based learning supports unconventional student's drive for self-expression

Art instructor Sally Windle thinks some educators don't understand the power of art in the classroom. "It's the term 'art' that may need to be changed," she says. "When people hear it, they think they need the ability to draw. It's really about imagination and creativity. It's what experts in the business say is needed in shaping a modern economy."

Using Art to Deepen Learning

Teacher who engages students through art says, "When you see the light come on, it's intoxicating"

By Peggie Cypher

When art teacher Sally Windle drives around Lima, she sees concrete proof of her students' successes. Passing by the courthouse, she remembers the public tours they've given. At the Children's Garden are the signs they designed. Driving by an elementary school, she remembers the health fair the students put on. Seeing the Allen County Health Department, she thinks of the web pages they created. And when Windle arrives at Lima Senior High School, she eyes those bushes out front that the students pruned into LHS.

All are results of projects in the Progressive Academy, one of three small schools on the Lima campus.

Once in her classroom, Windle shifts her focus to a project-in-making. Students are huddled at the far end of a long table, supplies scattered about. One is fashioning popsicle-sized sticks into a flat five-sided house shape. Another is gluing the flat strips into a triangle. Windle leans over the student. "The pointed roof looks too churchy," she tells her. "Try a flat one."

The class is called Global Issues in Contemporary Art. The students aren't constructing the shapes as a lesson on composition, perspective or Pop Art. These students are designing a maquette, a small model, of a monument they hope to build on the school grounds. Lima, like most cities, has suffered a changing landscape. Schools have been torn down. Whole neighborhoods razed. Even the school building they now sit in is a mere three years old. The Global Issues students are tapping into ways people honor loss and then using them to find a way to honor the loss of their local landscape.

The shapes they are fashioning are symbolic: teepees, homes, a schoolhouse and the structure that looks "too churchy," Memorial Hospital. In conjunction with the carpentry class, the students plan to build the structures and erect them behind the school, itself a reflection of the changing landscape.

"Monuments are to honor people and events," Windle tells her students. "Native Americans lived on this land. Where Lima Senior is now there was an active neighborhood. There was a hospital whose third floor was so infected with TB, they had to tear it off."

She passes out photos of the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C., and *The Gates* project by Christo in Central Park. "You're giving the past a visual form. We need a simple design that can be repeated. What colors would work? Red, like schoolhouses? Green, like the land? White, like ghosts? Some people want exact representation. There is *another* way. Visually and emotionally."

As instructor in the project-based Progressive Academy, Windle's mission is to get kids to think about the past, about public art, social commentary. With a small class in a small school, the ideas are large. Deep. They link the past to the present. The public to the personal.

Instructor Sally Windle works with Progressive Academy student Kelsey Justus on folding a zine, a small booklet, usually raw in appearance. Students will exchange their zines with students from the University of Oregon.

In a time when many teachers focus on state-mandated objectives, this teacher strives to teach "another way." A way that is interdisciplinary and relevant and still meets the state standards. One that unleashes the creative spirit and searches for a deeper meaning, for both students and teachers. And because Windle holds firm to this philosophy, she has a larger mission as well: to implement such an arts-based curriculum across all content areas in the Progressive Academy.

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Sally Windle works with student Lauren Herrel on an art project. She hopes an arts-based curriculum can help her school strengthen its identity and reach more students.

Sally Windle is a soft-spoken woman with a fierce passion for getting kids to communicate meaning through artistic expression. "It's been a steady philosophy of mine," says Windle, a painter and veteran teacher of 27 years. "It was never art for itself, for the technique. It had to apply, make sense. It had to have a place in the community."

This is precisely why the monument project holds meaning for Windle. She's what she calls "Lima people," born and raised here. After graduating from the University of Dayton, Windle returned, hesitant at first, but now grateful. "The whole Lima area has so many visionaries. There are some great minds in and out of the schools setting. When I go away to conferences and others see what we're doing here, they're always amazed."

Back in class, Windle pulls down a screen and flips through slides. Click: a field of bouquets. Click: the AIDS quilt. Click: the Vietnam Wall.

"People naturally respond to grief," Windle tells her students. "There are organized ways and unorganized." Click: a guy with the names of the 9/11 victims tattooed on his back. Click: a student wearing a T-shirt with a picture of deceased friend. A Lima student.

Students look on with curiosity.

Windle continues. "Why is it important to memorialize absence?"

A junior girl responds. "It helps you realize what happens and get through it."

"We want to establish that people came here and gave up land for us," says Windle. So in the field behind the school – in the place where arrowheads were found dating back 3000 years, where there was a brewery, where people walked to the corner store – students will erect their monuments in a pattern resembling headstones in a cemetery.

The monument project grew out of a shrine project that Windle participated in last year with the other art teachers in Lima. With various grants and in-kind services donated by school and community groups, students throughout the district erected giant cylinders on 12 sites where schools once stood. Windle remembers those schools. She attended two of them herself.

"When you see the light come on, it's intoxicating," she says about students who participated in the shrine project. "You can't wait to do it again. The English teachers were amazed at the students' writing. The former Global Issues students come back to visit taking pride in what they did. It's too exciting. I can't not do it again."

So this year, it's monuments with her art students. And next year something larger: an arts-based curriculum throughout their small school.

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Last fall Windle had a conversation with English teacher Jennifer Stepleton. The Progressive Academy had an image problem. The community, unaware of the different instructional methods of the three small schools, assumed they were separated by level. Because of the Progressive Academy's higher percentage of at-risk and special-education kids, it was perceived as the "dummy" school. Also, there was general confusion as to what a project-based curriculum is. How could they redefine their school?

Windle had a similar conversation with Chuck Schierloh, social studies curriculum team leader. Little by little the three of them hatched a plan – an arts-based curriculum. "It's a proven statistic nationally," says Windle, "the arts are where the brightest kids are and it's the way many learn best. Even in industrial towns. Research shows that this is where success lies. Business people say they want creative thinkers." Windle, having previously taught at the arts magnet school, knows firsthand of the successes. "Look at small children," she says. "Their whole world is about creating. If you can allow that to continue through the arts, you're meeting their basic instinct."

For Windle, the arts aren't a luxury. "From what I've seen, it's the way kids learn best."

A few weeks later, Windle, Stepleton and Schierloh approached principal Judy Shisler, who was immediately on board.

Teacher Jennifer Stepleton says, "As small schools evolve, we evolve."

"We had projects all over the place," says Shisler. "An arts focus helps clarify and integrate the projects across the curriculum."

In an odd coincidence, Mike Huffman, director of Arts and Magnet Programs for Lima City Schools, had a fall meeting with administrators about a similar plan to perhaps create an arts collaborative on the high school campus. A misunderstanding occurred. Many thought the plan would mean taking the arts out of two of the three small schools, thereby skimming some of the best students. The idea was put on hold, giving Windle and others time to regroup.

In reality, Windle and her colleagues never intended for the Progressive Academy to be an arts magnet school. The plan was to use the arts to further an understanding of each subject. Much the way Windle does with the monument project. That means linking the past to the present by researching land titles and taking oral histories. It also means integrating reading and writing. The students have read *The Monument* by Gary Paulsen, for example, and regularly write personal essays in response to the process of creating the monuments.

Rather than separating the arts from other areas of study, Windle says, arts education would meld content and process in every area of study, math, science, and social studies.

Once the misconception is cleared, Windle goes to work. Over winter break, she meets with Superintendent Karel Oxley to discuss the arts-based curriculum plan she worked on with Stepleton and Schierloh. The superintendent is positive. When school resumes, the team presents the idea to the Progressive staff. They like what they hear and give the green light to begin in the fall.

"We're not diving right in," says Shisler. "The process will be slow." The three team members, she says, will work with the faculty while Shisler works at the district level. One of her goals is to secure a half-time dance teacher to aid the staff with incorporating art and creative movement into their lessons.

Principal Judy Shisler was immediately on board with the arts direction the teachers wanted.

"The three of them are leading the way," Shisler says of Windle, Stepleton and Schierloh. "It's a teacher-driven process. The teachers have complete ownership. I'm working alongside of them. That's what makes it small schools."

"The fact that we have the freedom to do this," Windle responds. "It's more than input. This is direction. It's not top down. There's a beauty to what we've been able to do."

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The classroom houses a variety of posters, from Langston Hughes to Shakespeare to Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young. The desks are in a circle with teacher Jennifer Stepleton sitting in one of them. "Does anyone want to volunteer to lead the discussion on Gatsby," she asks her students, "or shall I use the playing cards?"

In addition to teaching English and helping plan for an arts-based

"As a class, we're relating by **interacting** every day. We're one big *family*."

– Jennifer Stepleton, teacher

curriculum, Stepleton teaches journalism and is the half-time coach for the Progressive Academy, a position created by the Lima school board for all schools so that someone is available to mentor new teachers and coordinate meetings, retreats, grant writing and senior projects.

A few years ago the Lima Board of Education adopted senior projects as an additional graduation requirement. Each student now has to have a research paper plus a portfolio with things such as sample writing, achievement awards and artwork. The Progressive Academy added a service-learning component where people from the community lend their expertise and, in turn, receive some sort of donated project or service.

Stepleton's main role with the projects is to help students refine their focus and connect them to the community. She's aided Jamie Dixon, who is in the Progressive Academy's food management program. Last week he put together a dinner and gospel concert featuring a group from Cleveland. Jamie worked with the school district's communications person on public relations; he ordered the food and cooked it, even folded the napkins.

"Some kids have different types of learning," he says. "They need hands-on projects. One of the reasons I'm glad I stayed in this small school is there are different styles for everyone. You have a lot of teacher support. They understand your goals. You understand what is expected."

Another student, Anton, is building a ramp for a local handicapped resident.

The Progressive Academy's Amber Boyd, Kayla Hyde, teacher Jennifer Stepleton and Jamie Dixon collaborate in an Advanced Placement English class.

He works with a professional engineer and writes letters to get donations for the wood.

In addition to the individual projects, the Progressive Academy has adopted a schoolwide project of creating a tolerance garden, a place of contemplation on the school grounds. With the help of two grants, the garden will have historic artifacts from the region, a landscaped area to provide natural habitat and perhaps a wheel or millstone to circulate water.

Senior projects and campus initiatives such as the tolerance garden lend themselves to an arts-based curriculum, Stepleton says. "As small schools evolve, we evolve. If you look at the kinds of projects we're doing, we've been moving in this direction organically. Our projects have always taken on a collaborative and arts-based focus. And the projects have been extremely successful."

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They are a bit eerie to look at – the anonymous plaster of Paris masks. The art students take them carefully from a bag and begin placing them throughout the town square. A pair of students affixes a mask to a fire hydrant,

one holding it in place while the other winds clear tape around it. Once it is secure, they attached a thin white strip of paper: "Protect the child. Child Abuse Prevention Awareness Month."

The monument project has been put on hold, as construction students who were scheduled to help with it are currently making a dugout for the new baseball diamond. So Windle's Global Issues students, along with others from her classes, have begun a new project. In honor of Child Abuse Prevention month, students made masks and are placing them in the plaza to bring awareness to the issue.

Two weeks ago, Kitt Horn from the YWCA teen pregnancy prevention center raised their awareness of the issue. She told them that 652 cases of abuse were reported in the county surrounding Lima. Students were astounded: 652 in their county? In conjunction with the YWCA, students batiked pinwheel shapes — the symbol of the child — onto silk flags. The flags were auctioned off at a benefit and then displayed on the walkway of the Civic Center.

The mask installation grew out of that project and is a perfect example of using art to deepen a learning experience with students. "I never realized how high the numbers are in Lima," says one art student. "I can't fathom how someone could do that to their child. Now I want the community to be aware of it, too."

In the city square, gentle rain begins to fall. A pair of students debates whether to place a mask on a tree. "Let's tape one to this electrical box instead," says a girl with long straight hair. They place it under some spray-painted graffiti. When they back up to assess it, the girl with the long hair points out a word in graffiti – "Lost."

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Chuck Schierloh, social studies curriculum team leader, pulls a green ball out of a bag. "Being a teacher is like being a juggler," he tells the Progressive staff. "This ball is the OGT (Ohio Graduation Test) standards." He tosses the ball to a teacher. "Keep the ball moving. If you drop it, we stay an extra two minutes."

It's May and the arts-based curriculum team holds its last meeting of the year. "This ball," he says, pulling out an orange one, "is project-based instruction." He tosses that one into the group, and as in a game of hot potato, teachers keep it moving.

He pulls out a third ball, advisory council, and a fourth, the newly suggested arts focus.

Balls whirl throughout the room as teachers laugh and lunge, determined to keep them afloat. After a few minutes, Schierloh pulls out a large beach ball. "Wouldn't it be easier," he says, tossing it to a teacher, "if we had just one big ball to bounce around the room? One ball and one theme to drive it. And that theme could be tolerance."

Concerned that individual projects would be unrelated, the arts-based curriculum team believes a unifying theme will make the focus cleaner and crisper. They have chosen tolerance because it ties into the schoolwide tolerance garden already underway.

Once the balls are collected, Windle describes what an arts-based tolerance curriculum might look like. In history, for example, tolerance study could focus on power and conflict. In science, students could study chemistry and atomic warfare. In English, students can read *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Windle passes out a lesson plan template and teachers divide by content areas to fill it out. "We've taken work you've already done," she assures the staff. "This is not something new."

But to a tired and frustrated staff, it feels like something new. At a nearby table science and math teachers vent their frustration. The OGT results have come out and only 38 percent of Progressive's students passed the science test. One-fifth did not demonstrate proficiency in math. And 77 percent read at the sixth-grade level or below.

"How can I add this idea when my students are missing what needs to be covered?" says a relatively new teacher. Another agrees. "We need to go back to the basics. We need the meat and potatoes, not this glitter."

Students in the Global Issues in Contemporary Art class use anonymous white masks placed in the city square to raise awareness of child abuse prevention. "I never realized how high the numbers are in Lima," one student says.

"Once the kids **trust** you…, they'll come along."

– Sally Windle, teacher

Teacher Sally Windle says of young people, "Their whole world is about creating. If you can allow that to continue through the arts, you're meeting their basic instinct."

Science teacher Justin Richardson likes the arts focus but concurs with his colleagues. "I see the potential in it, which is why I get so frustrated. It could be great if a step were taken to solve these major issues."

After the meeting he and Stepleton chat. "Our kids are not getting the meat and potatoes. There are too many distractions," he tells her. "We need to get them in the classroom. Get them on time. Get them learning and passing the OGT."

"But you've seen our kids who visited the Ohio State stone lab,"she says, reminding him of a recent field trip. "They were so engaged."

"Once the kids got back, they failed the project," he says.

Stepleton thinks for a moment and responds. "Once the kids trust you, trust that you can take them to that place of success, they'll come along. I see this comprehensive process as more conducive to students who come from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds." She adds, "They may not have certain skills, and learning in the traditional manner did not work. We need another vehicle to give them success and confidence."

For Stepleton, Windle and Schierloh, that vehicle is driven by the theme of tolerance. But as they close up the meeting room, they admit that not everyone sees it that way.

"In my opinion, the tolerance theme may have gone a step too far for the faculty." Schierloh confesses. "We should go back to the arts focus."

The team decides to slow down and better define its plan.

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In June, Windle accepts an appointment on the State Committee for the Arts and Innovative Thinking for the Ohio Department of Education, which adopted Fine Arts academic content standards in 2003. Its mission is to strengthen the arts in Ohio schools and to facilitate arts experiences for all Ohio children.

A week later, Windle attends a district retreat for teachers. One workshop, led by Mike Huffman, the district's director for arts and magnet programs, is on arts-based education. Participants are asked to tell a personal story to a partner, who creates a movement to enhance the story. After the presentations, Huffman ties the components of the activity to the levels of synthesis and analysis on Bloom's Taxonomy.

The workshop is just the inspiration Windle needs. "It was illuminating and powerful," she says. She hopes that the other Progressive teachers who attended the workshop found it just as powerful. "One experience of understanding can open the door to others."

To open more doors, Windle knows she has further work to do. "It's clear that Chuck and Jennifer and I have to do research on art-education practices for math and science for our retreat in August," she says. As for the theme of tolerance? The team still hopes to incorporate it into the curriculum this fall. "The theme gives people an opening to do their own thing in their own area," says Windle. "The projects don't have to be huge or extensive or yearlong. But the theme will give cohesiveness."

Windle will spend the next few months preparing for the August retreat. "It's the greatest freedom to do this," she says of the work ahead. "But it's also the greatest responsibility."

Art and Voice

Project-based learning supports unconventional student's drive for self-expression

By Peggie Cypher

It's a makeup compact. But it isn't. Not everything is as it appears.

And that's the message.

Check out the front cover and you'll find a black-and-white photo of Marilyn Monroe. When you open it, you notice the mirror has "stereotypes" splashed across it in oil pastels resembling lipstick. Flip through the folding pages, and you'll see pictures with statements about stereotypes.

It's called a zine. Typically a small booklet that is raw in appearance, its aim is to get a point across. Students in Lima High School's Progressive Academy art classes make zines as part of a cultural exchange project with students from the University of Oregon.

"My zine is about stereotypes," writes junior Kayla Holdgreve. "I chose the topic because I feel that it is growing into a big problem in society. A lot of people follow the typical stereotype and judge people by appearance and I wanted to show people that stereotypes usually don't fit everyone."

At first glance, Kayla herself might be easy to stereotype. With her straight blond hair and '50s pointed glasses. The vintage sweater. The jeans with a studded belt. And those zebra-striped shoes with pink bows.

Even the collage-plastered notebook she never goes without makes a statement – a skull sticker across the front, the word "Punk" on the diagonal. Yet the notebook also has a picture of Lucy and Ricky on the cover. And a pink bunny button. Talk to Kayla, and you find out she's a member of the school choir and two drama groups.

In fact, she's currently appearing in two shows back to back. On the school stage, Kayla sits cross-legged among the scattered scripts and Dr Pepper cans. The cast is rehearsing Thoroughly Modern Millie. Really rehearsing.

"It's not about singing loud," says an exasperated accompanist. "It's about being understood. Sing your consonants loud." Kayla, unfazed about having to do it again, sings all out, mimicking "pencil lining your brow" each time.

"Put more sound on the first note," barks the accompanist. "Give me a hard ch. Ch-Ch-Check your personality."

Kayla Holdgreve shows her zine about stereotypes. "I wanted to show people that stereotypes usually don't fit everyone," Kayla says.

The ensemble repeats the phrase again and again, Kayla laughing and smiling each time. You can bet she'll still be smiling later as she gathers her backpack and races across town to perform in a community theater's production of Alice in Wonderland.

"I love the whole idea of theater, whether I'm in front of the stage or behind it, Kayla confesses. "But," she adds, "I have more of a love of art."

Lucky for her with the project-based focus of the Progressive Academy, Kayla is able to use that art to get her messages out.

In class two weeks later, Kayla opens her notebook and begins to sketch. The notebook is one of eight she keeps in her batik bag with the Army patch on it. All have collages of images on the cover and words splashed across, some random, some not-so-random. On the inside: drawings, journal entries, quotes, and Kayla's poems and song lyrics. "I write things down that come to my head," she says. "I get ideas for paintings."

"Kayla is always doing something," says art teacher Sally Windle. "She can't help herself. She has her notebooks and her camera with her all the time. She's very creative and open to whatever she sees."

Kayla closes her notebook as Windle passes out white paper to the students. "Today we'll be doing a 'Me' zine," Windle tells the class. "Usually a zine is reflective or deals with issues. A 'Me' zine is literal. Give five fast facts about yourself. Cut out words, pictures. Add poetry."

Terran Washington and Kayla Holdgreve prepare for a fashion show of Terran's line of recycled plastic apparel. The line debuted at the Progressive Academy's Spring Showcase.

Students fold their papers as instructed and begin flipping through the mound of magazines on the table. Kayla snips triangles of printed text for a geometric design. This will be Kayla's second zine, and this one will be sent to students at the University of Oregon as part of an exchange with a professor there. Students will look over each other's zines and critique them.

"Zines are a good way to put out a statement through art," says Kayla. "It sparks a lot of people's interest. And it's fun to do."

Students begin constructing their five fast facts. One student glues a head shot of herself partially under a brown cut-out pocket and then places a strip across the top, "Patch of insecurity." Another includes phrases such as "paint stains my clothes" and "I'm a very bad speller."

Kayla is unsure of which facts to include. She could tell the university students that her favorite artist is Barbara Kruger, whose montages of words and images that play on cultural stereotypes have greatly influenced her.

She could paste the words "art curator" on her zine as she's recently completed a show at a private gallery. Or Kayla could even write that she's participated in her first public art installation, in conjunction with Child Abuse Prevention Month. "I like doing art in the community," says Kayla. "It lets people see a message through art and it makes the message more meaningful, more interesting."

Because they are small schools, Windle has had Kayla for three years. "I've seen her grow tremendously," she says. "But Kayla had enormous potential to start with. And because of her skills and her practice, she's developed into a fine technical artist."

It's this talent that has gotten her work accepted into juried shows across the state. Kayla has even sold several pieces, the most recent bringing in $297 to help fund a school trip to Chicago in the summer.

Ciara Cannon, Nyisha Morris and their classmates were so captivated with the novel *The Color Purple* that they decided to make a quilt reflecting its themes of sisterhood and diversity. The quilt was later auctioned off to help fund a summer trip to Chicago to see the play based on the novel.

Working on zines, art installations, or going to Chicago, these are some of things that can happen in a project-based small school, and Kayla says she absolutely wouldn't want to attend any place else. Her art class, along with her Advanced Placement (AP) English class, will spend three days in Chicago with the highlight being the play, *The Color Purple*. After finishing the novel in class, the AP students were captivated with its themes of sisterhood and adversity. They decided to make their own quilt with each student contributing a 17 x 17-inch square representing something personal.

"As a class, we're related by interacting every day. We're one big family," says English teacher Jennifer Stepleton. Once students found out the play was showing in Chicago, says Stepleton, someone joked they should go. Before they knew it, the quilt was auctioned off and other fundraisers planned for the trip.

Kayla is especially psyched. Besides allowing her to see the play, the trip will enable her to visit three colleges and get a tour from an art therapist in a hospital setting. Being a junior, she hopes these visits will help clarify her direction in art. "Kayla's unique perspective gives her a special quality," says Windle. "She's got the right components that will allow her to do whatever she wants to do." As of now, Kayla hopes to attend Ohio Northern University and perhaps combine her love of theater and art by studying theater design. That's something else she could use for one of her five fast facts.

But then there is always her love of jazz. As one of the few juniors in AP English, Kayla is getting a head start on her senior project. She's chosen to research the local jazz and bluesman Pickle. One day before lunch, Kayla conferences with Stepleton about the project. They open the gray notebook of photos, articles and an interview with Pickle. Included is a CD in the pocket so readers can listen as they read. Though the package is impressive, Stepleton thinks Kayla has to dig deeper.

"This is surface level," she tells her, paging through the notebook. "You need to tell us how powerful jazz and blues were in Lima. What makes Lima unique so that the music could thrive here? I'd like to see more depth."

The project as it stands is acceptable for a junior. But if Kayla decides to continue it for her final senior project, she will need to add another layer. Students must have a research component with an annotated bibliography and complete a service-learning project. "The service learning takes the content standards and applies them in a purposeful way," says Stepleton. "It takes what they're doing in class to yet another step."

For Kayla's service requirement, she's considering helping Pickle with the Blues Extravaganza next March, or perhaps designing the T-shirt or program for it.

As for her research, she needs to synthesize and analyze the information. "Why did jazz take off here?" Stepleton challenges. "In the 1960s, Ford employed people from the South," the teacher continues. "There was a southern migration. Lima, like Cleveland and Cincinnati, has a diverse group of people," she tells Kayla. "Could you tap into some newspaper archives at the library and museum? The project is all about revising."

Kayla agrees. "There is so much more information I'm starting to find out. If I continue with this project I'll include that information and also research why jazz grew in Lima."

In the art class, students continue with their zines. Kayla works a design of red and black triangles, but still hasn't started on her fast facts. The student across from her has the phrase "I love eating…" followed by a label from Lucky Charms cereal. Kayla could write that she loves cereal too. Or Ella Fitzgerald. Maybe she could say, "My favorite musical is Chicago."

Or perhaps she'll reveal one of her favorite hobbies, indeed the one she plans on doing in Chicago during the class trip, the hobby that will enhance her future art projects: "I go dumpster-diving." It's difficult to know which facts she'll use. Not being easy to stereotype.

Kayla finishes her background design and begins to snip individual letters for her fast facts. As it turns out, they include: I like B &W photography. I drive a 1963 Corvair. Vinyl is the best. And a quote from her idol, Lucille Ball: "Love yourself first and everything else falls into line."

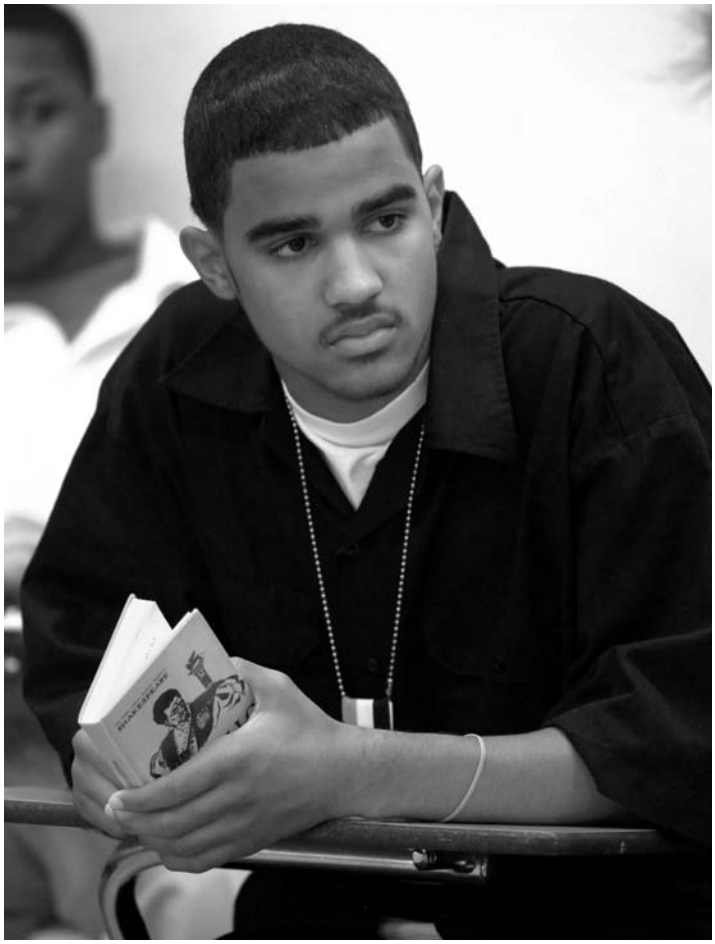
About the storyteller

Peggie Cypher is an award-winning writer who specializes in health and education. A resident of Toledo, her publications include *Ladies Home Journal*, *Woman's Day* and *Mothering*. She is currently working on a book about developmental disorders.

Libbey High School Toledo, Ohio

In 2004 Libbey High School opened its doors to four small schools within the building. From the start, the campus faced the physical challenge of adapting an old building to the new school structure as well as the psychological challenge of the threat of the school closing due to budgetary concerns.

Still, the faculty forged ahead. True to the small schools model, each school created its own identity, formed partnerships within the community and designed new courses. More important, teachers worked hard to develop relationships with students and to engage them in learning. Whether students are petting a snake in a zoology class, designing a brochure in visual communications or reading a poem in English, teachers know that real change happens inside the classroom.



SMART student James Douglas III listens to a discussion in Eric Pilcher's English class.

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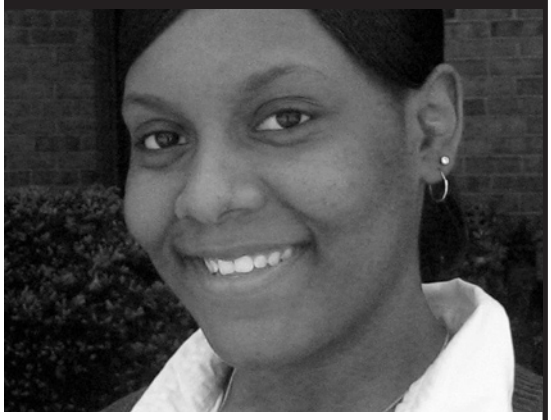


Shadow of a Chance

Internship program gives students glimpse into the world of work

No Dreams Deferred

English teacher aims to teach students to think, and he won't settle for less

By Peggie Cypher

A sound is coming from room 245. A different sound from the usual sounds you hear in the hallways at Libbey High School: the racket of energetic students blowing off steam during class change or a hall monitor's stern reprimand, "Tuck that shirt in." This a soft sound. The drone of violins in harmony. And then the teacher's voice, smooth, confident, DJ-like in its delivery. "What do you notice about the music?" he asks his students.

"It repeats itself," says one.

"It changes in volume," says another.

The teacher continues to pace the room. "What instruments do you hear?"

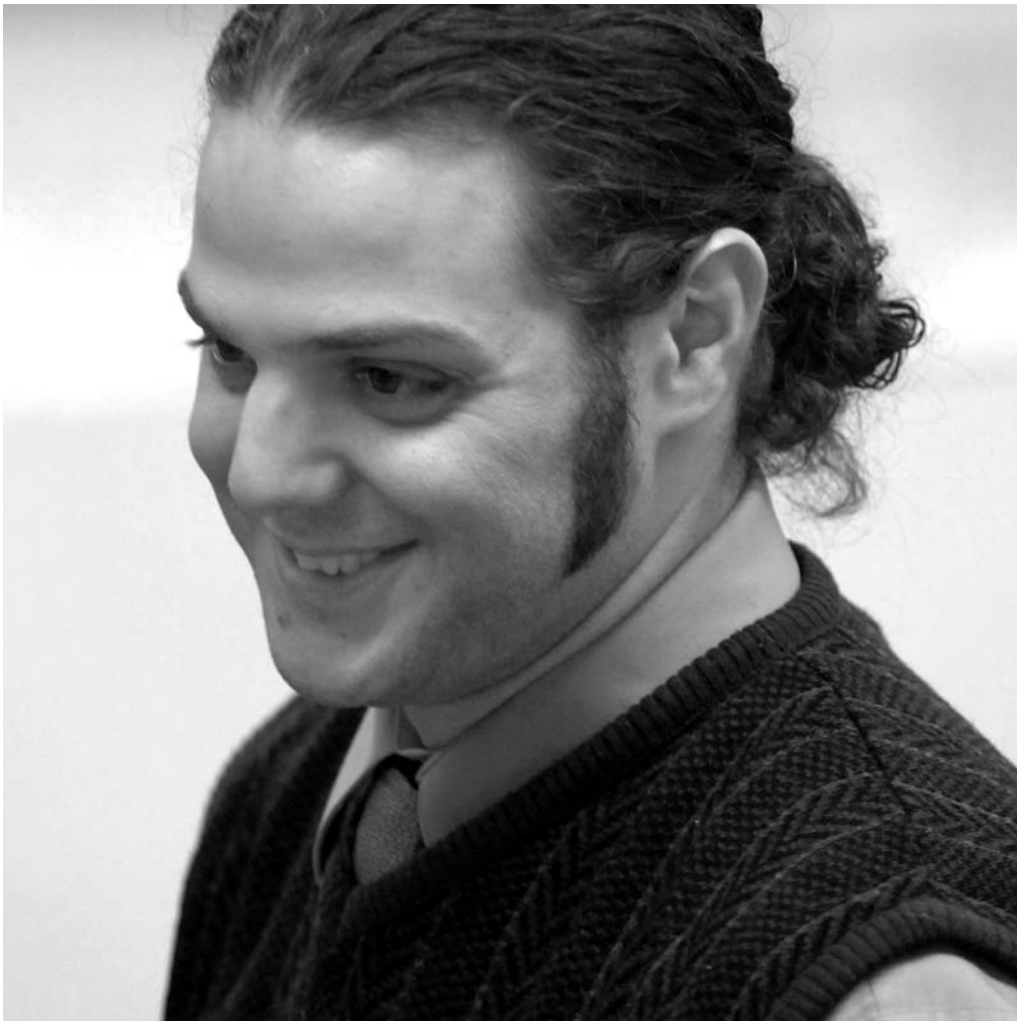
"Strings."

"The harp."

"Rapper Naz sampled this," he jokes, making his way to the floor-to-ceiling map at the back of the room. The students turn their heads as the teacher points out Russia and Italy. "As Americans developed their own culture," he tells the class, "they wanted to get away from the stale culture of Europe. From this classical music. Black Americans said, 'We're unique. Let's create our own music.' Do you know what music I'm talking about?"

"Rock?"

The teacher shakes his head and then slips another disc into the boom box. The sound of trombones, deep and long. Then a piano, quick and tinny. "I'm talking about jazz." He says it the jive way – jazzzz.



SMART school English instructor Eric Pilcher maintains that he's in teaching for purely selfish reasons. "It's great fun. I amuse myself every day. And I learn a lot more from the students than they do from me."

"To hell with the old, stale music," he cries out.

Students look at one another, eyebrows furrowed. Why are we listening to music in English class?

The teacher gathers a stack of stapled papers and passes them out. "What happens to a dream deferred?" he recites. "Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? Or fester like a sore — and then run?"

Students flip through the packet of poems, *Montage of a Dream Deferred*.

The teacher explains: "At the same time Black Americans developed their own musical style, so did the writers. This is known as the Harlem Renaissance. And the forerunner of this self-expression movement is poet Langston Hughes."

What happens to a dream deferred?

Teacher Eric Pilcher is not about to find out. He comes to work every day in Libbey's SMART school (Science, Math and Related Technologies) determined, in spite of the fights, the dress code violations, the complaints of teachers not on board with the small school reform, to help students take small steps toward reaching their own dreams.

• • •

He's called Mr. P. by his students. Pilcher by his colleagues. One co-worker has called him a "young punk teacher." One has called him "too honest" at staff meetings. Like the knotted ponytail at the back of his head, Eric Pilcher wears the hats well. And he makes no apologies. Not for the tin can that holds their quarters each time they curse. Not for excusing kids from class to sell pizzas. Not for the poetry whose scenes of partying and poverty resemble today's hip hop music. Not for his students, who relate to its themes of love versus money and black versus white, students who like the stanzas describing street scenes, bars, crap shooting, police brutality. And those Oop-pop-a-da Skee Daddle-de dos. Who wouldn't like those Skee Daddle-de dos?

Pilcher recites a poem first, a bit of twang in his voice, and then he asks a volunteer to read it. "Do it without breathing until you hit the colon," he tells him. "You see, he's trying to imitate jazz music, crazy and all over the place." Pilcher circulates the room, pointing out the similes and onomatopoeia. He asks another student to recite the poem. And then another. Poetry, like music, must be heard.

Pilcher also wants to give students a visual image of the Harlem Renaissance. Two weeks later he arranges a field trip to the Toledo Museum of Art to see the Jacob Lawrence exhibit. The students, many of whom have never been to the museum, are taken with the bright colors, the hard edges. Like jazz, like poetry, there's movement in them.

The kids identify the actions in the lithographs — people getting haircuts, riding the subway, voting. They note the symbol of the builder that Lawrence uses throughout. Mr. P. confesses to them his love of art, of Lawrence in particular. Sharing himself is his way of connecting with students. His kids are well aware of his many loves. Football. Video games. Kurt Vonnegut.

One they may not realize is his love of teaching. "I've always known I wanted to be a teacher," says Pilcher. "Or at least by the fourth grade when I knew I wasn't going to fly fighter jets. Day-to-day interactions with adolescents who are starving for stimulation — it's great fun."

The youngest of nine children, Eric did the usual activities as a kid, his mother says. He played basketball, skateboarded, terrorized his siblings. But one activity stayed with him. "Eric has always loved to read," she says. At 3, he loved Dr. Seuss. By high school it was Stephen King. "And he wrote so graphically," she says, "that during a parent-teacher conference, a counselor asked me if we had problems at home."

"It was a big moment," says Pilcher of the incident. "I realized I could have an impact on other people's thinking."

His mom adds that Pilcher has a talent for remembering what he reads and is always reciting quotes. One that Pilcher is especially fond of repeating is from Confucius: "Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work another day in your life."

Pilcher says he's found that job. And he from the beginning he dove right in. Besides being senior class adviser,

D'vontay Robinson studies a photograph at the Toledo Museum of Art during a field trip to see a Jacob Lawrence exhibit. The students, many of whom had never been to the museum, were learning about the Harlem Renaissance.

Eric Pilcher officiates during a dodge ball game at the SMART school's field day. In addition to his many other roles at the school, Pilcher is assistant coach of football and baseball and took over the girls' basketball team when the coach resigned.

facilitator of the SMART school's job mentoring project and coordinator of a student video journal, Pilcher is assistant coach of football and baseball.

He stepped up last fall to take over the girls' basketball team when the coach resigned. "Pilcher had my back," says John Snyder, athletic director and close friend. "We needed a coach in a day. He volunteered. He saved a season. That's one reason I have so much respect for him."

With only three years of experience, Pilcher, like most of his students, knows only small schools. The single greatest advantage, he says, is having many of the same students for those three years. "You can learn a lot about one another. The focus on discipline and procedural stuff is so much less. Students already know the teacher's expectations."

The big perk is the relationships he's developed with a small group of kids. "One of them often calls on weekends asking about an assignment. The fact that he's home on a Sunday asking about an assignment for me is a definite positive."

But, Pilcher admits, there are problems. Because the four small schools are housed in a large traditional building, they are not entirely separated physically. Students from other schools traipse through the hallways during lunch periods, disrupting classes and often ignoring the reproofs of teachers outside of their particular small school. "I think we need to spend significant money to change the physical structure on campus so the schools are separate. We've already doodled the floor plan at the bar after school."

Pilcher also questions the commitment of some of the faculty, emphasizing that they need to present a united front. "There is too much pettiness and too many power struggles among the staff." This, he believes, interferes with the small school process.

Athletic director John Snyder agrees with that assessment. "The younger generation at Libbey has disagreements with the older staff …. They've been teaching so long, they're conditioned to a certain style. There's friction because of that."

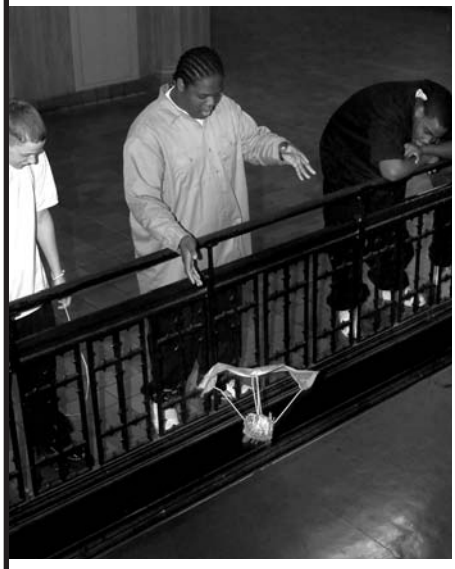
Perhaps even more immediate for Pilcher is his concern over the fate of small schools. Because of declining enrollment, the Board of Education has considered closing Libbey each of the last three years. The most recent cuts closed the local junior high and required the Libbey campus to incorporate an eighth-grade class this fall. For now, the solution is less drastic. One of the four small schools will fold into the others next year, leaving only three. Voting by secret ballot, school leaders choose to close Gateway Academy.

In spite of differences among staff and the uncertain future, Pilcher is adamant that there is nowhere else he'd rather be. Having grown up in the neighborhood surrounding Libbey, Pilcher feels like he belongs here. He had desperately wanted to attend Libbey with his friends, but his Catholic parents insisted he attend a parochial high school. After finishing his degree and landing the job at Libbey, he often tells his mother, "Ha. Ha. I ended up here anyway."

He staunchly defends the students at Libbey, many of whom are considered

"at risk." Pilcher argues that they want to be challenged just as much as kids elsewhere. And he's glad to oblige. He has them read *Night* by Elie Wiesel and Shakespeare's *Othello*. He's a stickler for correct grammar and will accept nothing short of a perfect score for an online criterion essay. "My way of stressing that good writers revise."

"It's because of his commitment to his students, he won't settle," says Eric Henderson, special education teacher. "He's a hard teacher; that's what they need. When they find out they can do something, they love him for it." Henderson admits he doesn't even bother to stop in Pilcher's room for a chat because he's always teaching. "There are no days off in Pilcher's class. I walk by his class and the kids are in dress code with belts on and shirts tucked in and they're reading Shakespeare. It's unlike other classrooms."



Science teacher Ann Koch-West and student Brian Nealy engage in an experiment on gravity. The students dropped eggs protected by various constructions from a height of 15 feet, then checked to see which ones survived the fall intact.

Students agree it's unlike other classrooms. "Mr. P. knows how to teach in a way we can understand," says one senior. "He helps us paraphrase Shakespeare and put it into our own words."

Reaching their dreams, Pilcher knows, will require his students to pass the state-mandated Ohio Graduation Test (OGT). So three months prior, every day for the first 10 minutes of class he and the students go over problems from the practice tests. He models test-taking strategies – try skipping the passage and go straight for the questions, guess, take the time to read, go back.

And then, of course, he challenges them with the poetry.

Children's Rhymes
(from *Montage of a Dream Deferred*)

By what sends
the white kids
I ain't sent:
I know I can't
be President.

"There's something deep going on in this poem," Pilcher says, slouching in a student desk, leg on knee.

"He's talking about racism," answers a kid in a desk against the wall.

"What kind of person is saying the lines at the margin?"

"Sounds like an old dude."

"That's right. Kids can't sit back and think about children's games." Pilcher goes into old person voice and recites the stanza.

"What about the indented lines? 'I know I can't be President.'"

"A black kid."

"My personal goal," says Pilcher later, "is that I want students to be able to think after they get out of here. The world is looking to pay them as little as possible. When presented with information, students need to look carefully and recognize they have a valid interpretation of that information regardless of what other people tell them."

Back in class, Pilcher stands up. "What about the poem's reference 'And Justice For All?'"

"It's the Pledge of Allegiance," a girl says quietly.

"Oh," pipes in another student. "I thought it was from *The Three Musketeers*. I guess that was 'all for one and one for all.'"

Pilcher smiles a gentle smile.

• • •

It's a cool March afternoon and the sound coming from room 245 is one long sigh. "I had a bad teaching day," Pilcher says, leaning back in his chair, shoes off. "Everything I tried failed. They were off. I was off. Of course, I still thought I was hilariously funny," he adds. The he's serious again. "I even had to kick two students out of class. That never happens. I'm a firm believer that you get what you put out."

This morning Pilcher took four students to a downtown police office for a SMART job-shadowing project he coordinates. He came back with only three. When the police did routine background checks on the students, it turned out that one had an outstanding warrant for theft. "I was there to do a positive thing," he says. "I could feel the gray hair just fighting right out of my head."

There have also been a series of fights

"Mr. P knows how to **teach** in a way we can *understand*."

– *Senior student*

lately, one of which Pilcher broke up, and another where he has been served a subpoena to appear as a witness in juvenile court.

The following day a different sound pours from the classroom, the same sound that is announced throughout the school. "Attention, all teachers and students. This is a Level 3 lockdown! I repeat, this is a Level 3 lockdown!"

Pilcher quickly locks the door and his students huddle in a far corner. Though this lockdown drill is state mandated in these post-Columbine days, the students at Libbey have had real lockdowns. One happened two years ago when a bomb threat was called in. One last took place last spring when a youth was spotted on the premises brandishing a weapon. It is incidents such as these, along with the daily discipline that prompt some instructors to transfer out of Libbey. Yet Pilcher remains committed to the campus. "Our kids already have a sense of abandonment," he says. "I want to show them that one person is genuinely invested in them."

The drill continues and the students remain quiet. For three minutes. Six minutes. Eight minutes. A policeman checks to see if the door is locked. A few minutes later the "all clear" is given and the sound of poetry seeps out from under the door.

Eric Pilcher works with students James Douglas III and Bryan Montie. "Our kids already have a sense of abandonment," Pilcher says. "I want to show them that one person is genuinely invested in them."

Students Adrian Rudolph and Nikki Phinney work on an assignment to paraphrase a passage from Shakespeare.

Motto
(from *Montage of a Dream Deferred*)

I play it cool
And dig all jive
That's the reason
I stay alive.
My motto,
As I live and learn,
is:
Dig and Be dug
In Return.

What's *dig*? What's *jive*? Pilcher asks the students, twirling his lanyard. "Have you ever seen the movie *Airplane*?" He breaks into the jive-talking dude on the plane, the one where the subtitles on the screen translate his dialogue.

He reads the poem again.

"I play it cool and dig all jive."

"This is really the predecessor for rap." He reads the lines again.

"That's the reason I stay alive."

"Here is your mission," he tells the class. "Langston Hughes has given you his motto. Write your motto and explain it. Tell how it helps you survive."

Pilcher rattles off examples: "Basketball player LeBron James might say 'Obey your thirst.' Or there's, "Stay the course,' 'Live on the edge,' 'Push it to the limit.'"

He pauses and then comments. "That song is lame. I mean, it's a *lame*," he says imitating his students' slang. "I forgot. We use the word *lame* as a noun not an adjective. That song's a *lame*.

"And we have a motto on our football team. What is it?"

A boy in red Nikes answers, "'We all we got.'"

"Yes, 'we all we got.'" Pilcher continues, "Do you guys remember *Animal Farm*?"

A few nods.

"What was the horse's motto?"

A female student answers. "'I will work harder.'"

"Yes, 'I will work harder.'"

I will work harder. This could be the motto of staff at Libbey's small schools. While faculty voted in favor of the conversion four years ago, once the redesign got under way, a small group of staff has been vocally opposed. One main complaint is that discipline is inconsistent among the schools. Since each school has the autonomy to instate its own discipline code, a student from one small school may get a slap on the wrist for his infraction while another may get sent home for the same infraction. The problem is made worse by crossover among the schools. Because of limited course offerings and a high percentage of students repeating class, classes have never been pure. Thus one teacher may have students from all four small schools in the classroom.

Teachers also complain that small school leaders often display a "he's not my student" attitude, refusing to deal with the dress code violations of students from a school outside their own. In turn, students may not respond to the reprimands of a small school leader they do not know. The result is often a chaotic learning environment.

Recently, a survey was sent to area families asking if they thought Libbey should return to a comprehensive high school. No one seems to know who sent the survey but Pilcher feels it represents a quitter's mentality. "Research says that children do better in small learning communities and personalized courses of study," Pilcher states. "But you can't evaluate small schools fairly in three years. You need seven to 10, at least three graduating classes." He adds, "Quitting is the wrong approach. Like writing an essay and not getting it right the first time. You revise."

• • •

It's spring and a raucous sound is coming from the gym. The four small schools are hosting a student-teacher basketball game. Pilcher, donning a blue and gold jersey, races up and down the court. When a teammates scores he pats his hat vigorously. Today everyone seems jovial. The student announcer cracks up the crowd with his interruptions from fake sponsors. The teacher cheerleaders, in pigtails face off with student cheerleaders. There is playful pushing. The dance team performs.

Math teacher Luke Murphy, who played for the Washington Generals, leads the teacher team to victory. But no

one seems to care. Today they are one big school.

Much the way some faculty prefer. Today, they've put aside their power struggles and focused their competitiveness on the court.

The remainder of the school year is filled with similar cheer. Pilcher continues to don a variety of hats: a chef hat for the senior picnic, his emcee hat for the senior breakfast and a pie in the face for the SMART school field day. The poetry in his classroom now is coming from his seniors as they work on portfolios—haiku, sonnet, free verse.

Yet lingering amid the excitement is dismay. With the Gateway school folding and its teachers being absorbed into the other three schools, those with seniority get first dibs on classes. The result is that Pilcher can no longer teach English II and English IV. Because Pilcher has seen positive results of his OGT practice in class, he decides to keep sophomore English.

Pilcher knows how important it is for students to pass the test. A few days ago, after OGT scores for Toledo Public Schools revealed that 147 districtwide will not be walking at graduation, students from various schools staged a protest. At the Libbey campus, a total of 17 (four from SMART) didn't pass and will not be able to walk at the graduation ceremony. "I've never been a believer in teaching to the test, but the reality of the moment is that's how students are measured and they have to graduate," Pilcher says.

Still, giving up senior English with the students he's had for two years is not easy. "We've grown up together," he says. "I have been molding these kids. They're active learners. They have high expectations. I thought small schools was about teaching the same students for three or four years."

A greater concern is the fact that the school improvement committee, made up of the Board of Education and teachers' and administrators' unions, has not signed an agreement to continue with the small schools. "When kids see the lack of commitment from the leadership, it sends the wrong message," says Pilcher. "You start something, you finish it out."

This uncertain future leads some small school leaders to consider retirement or new jobs. SMART school co-leader Daphne Derden leaves SMART for a job at another campus. The other co-leader, Scott Walter, finishes the year not knowing if he'll be back. Having been in on planning for small schools, Walter has gone to the workshops and in-service training, he's read up on small schools, worked on literacy initiatives and job mentoring. Small schools are his vision, and Walter must now end the year wondering about their fate.

What happens to a dream deferred?
Maybe it just sags like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

• • •

This June afternoon a recording of "Pomp and Circumstance" rings out of the gym as graduates from the four small schools, in blue gowns, file in and take their seats. Many teachers, too, sport gowns, but Pilcher alone wears his hair in pigtails with one blue hair tie and one gold.

A host of speakers take the podium, but perhaps the most poignant message, the most useful, is read by valedictorian Brittany Funches. It is a poem called *Mother to Son* by Langston Hughes, as it turns out. A poem whose message of not giving up holds potential wisdom for students and the small school faculty alike.

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor —
Bare.
But all the time
I'se been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.

The guests finish their speeches and the graduates are called to receive their diplomas. Pilcher, with altar-boy posture, stands at the side of the stage to usher the students down. Slowly, carefully, they descend and take his hand. They are the students he's had for three years. The students who've heard his sports metaphors, his recitations of Ice T's rap, the poetry of Langston Hughes.

Down steps his student who'll attend the University of Toledo. Down steps the one who plans to finish up automotive training at a technical institution. Next is the one who'll go to two-year college and transfer to a four-year for pre-med.

In a small way Pilcher's helped these kids reach the next step of their journey, the road to their dreams.

So, boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps.
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now—
For I'se still goin', honey,
I'se still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

As students continue down the steps. Pilcher hugs a few of them, high fives a few more.

His job for them is finished. He is silent.

Shadow of a Chance

Internship program gives students glimpse into the world of work

By Peggie Cypher

Senior Chayla Overton has a packed schedule. She has to read a chapter in chemistry, study for a test in Algebra II and make a 1:30 meeting with a local company to discuss its United Way campaign kickoff.

At a small desk in a corner office, Chayla reviews the company file before the meeting. Her eyebrows furrow and she turns to her mentor. "What's the difference between a pledge and an e-pledge?" Thankfully, the answer will not be on a test. This is not like your traditional high school class. Chayla is participating in a career internship program in Libbey's SMART school. Instead of taking senior English, Chayla takes a bus downtown and shadows Robin Reeves, resource developer for the United Way.

"The main reason for the career internships," says SMART co-leader Scott Walter, "is that (otherwise) our kids don't get opportunities to see the real jobs or what professionals really do. Students can see the perks and find out if they're interested in that field or if it's not for them."

Another reason is that career internships are designed to give students a reason to embrace the academic curriculum. For Chayla, that reason is social work. Because her mother is a social worker, Chayla has long had an interest in it. This unique opportunity has helped Chayla affirm her interest by giving her a look at the many aspects of the job, from answering the phones for the 211 help line to the fund raising that supports the charities.

The program, which stemmed from the mentoring that the CAD (Computer Aided Drafting) students did with a local firm, requires students to be on site for 90 hours for .5 credit. Walter says school leaders purposely started the program on a small scale (10 kids) to keep it manageable. After the kinks are worked out, they'll expand it for next year. So far, they've partnered with the Toledo police department, the United Way, a mechanic and a local realtor.

"Students get to see what the job is really like," says Walter. "It's hands-on experience."

No one knows this better than Chayla. At the United Way offices, she types into Mapquest the address for the upcoming meeting and then punches numbers into the phone to tell the clients they are on the way. "Speak loud and clear," Reeves reminds her. "Hello, may I speak to …." Chayla looks over at Reeves and whispers, "Should I say my name?"

United Way employee Robin Reeves and student Chayla Overton from the SMART school consult the afternoon schedule. Reeves mentors Chayla in the small school's job-shadowing program, which lets students try out different occupations.

"Students get to see what the job is really like. It's *hands-on* experience."

– Scott Walter, SMART co-leader

After Chayla leaves a brief message, she and Reeves further review the folder on the company. "I see they had a football theme last year," Reeves points out to Chayla. "This tells me the company likes to have fun. I need to go into the meeting with ideas. How was last year's campaign? What can we do it make it better? It's about relationships," Reeves stresses. "My first impression is going to make a difference."

And Reeves has made a strong impression on Chayla. "She does a lot of work," says Chayla. "She has research on everything, every event. If you're asking for money, you need to know something about the organization.

Chayla Overton takes part in a race during her school's field day.

"Working with Robin, I've seen what Toledo is like," says Chayla. "And it needs a lot of help. People call the help line needing assistance. One lady with a baby called and needed food. I've seen how needed the United Way is."

Reeves, in turn, sees Chayla's potential. "Chayla was instrumental in confirming agency heads to the database. She also helped figure out the title for the United Way campaign kickoff, *Turn It Up*. I think it's a good idea to see this end of social work," Reeves says. "The social workers are depending on donor dollars for programs in the community."

A half hour later, Chayla and Reeves arrive at the business. "I'm going to introduce myself with my business card in hand," Reeves says under her breath as they enter. Once seated in a meeting room, Reeves and the staff members discuss the fall campaign and a possible presentation to employees. The clients throw a few surprise questions Reeves' way about donating to the United Way as opposed to the individual charities directly. Chayla quietly observes, notebook in hand.

After the meeting ends, Reeves reinforces to Chayla the need to take notes, to know your stuff, to develop relationships. A few weeks later, Reeves will give Chayla a final exam, which includes writing a proposal.

Note-taking? Exam? OK. Maybe it is a bit like a traditional class.

Scott Walter, co-leader of the SMART school

About the storyteller

Peggie Cypher is an award-winning writer who specializes in health and education. A resident of Toledo, her publications include *Ladies Home Journal*, *Woman's Day* and *Mothering*. She is currently working on a book about developmental disorders.

Brookhaven High School Columbus, Ohio

Brookhaven teachers Michelle Stone and Jerolyn Griffith listen intently during a literacy team meeting.

In 2002, Brookhaven High School was troubled. Its test scores and graduation rates routinely came in at the bottom of Columbus Public's nearly 20 high schools, although it managed to rack up athletic honors. In an effort to bring the school's academic performance up to the standards of its athletic ability, a group of administrators and teachers restructured the building into three small schools: the Leadership Institute of Student Development, the North Star School of Exploration and Legacy, a school centered on the philosophy of Habits of Mind. In 2004, the freshman and sophomore classes were initiated into the new model, phasing in the process.

The 2006-07 school year was the first in which all four grades were separated into small schools, and for the first time the graduating class would be one that had spent the majority of high school within the small school model.

But it was also a year that began with major challenges. The previous spring, nine of the staff members who had spent many hours in professional development meant to help them carry the small school reform process left the building or the district because of massive budget cuts. Some positions were eliminated altogether, and some were filled with teachers who had more seniority.

The cuts threatened the integrity of the small school model. Some teachers had to instruct students from small schools outside of their own because there was an uneven number of teachers in core subjects.

Still, there were areas of growth. Student advisories, sessions set aside to allow for close interactions with teachers, became a routine part of the schedule for the first time. Students ready to graduate reported that small schools had benefited them. And several of the teachers who had been on board with small schools since the beginning worked on a literacy team that became so creative and efficient, peers around the state began to take notice.

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Smaller is Better

For two seniors, close relationships with teachers and counselors may tip the balance toward success

By Hook or By Book

Teachers in all core subjects share one strategy: making time for students to read every day

By Tracy Zollinger Turner

Three young men approach a lectern at the center of the auditorium stage. One rests his hands on it while the others sit in chairs to his side. With the cover of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* illuminated on a screen overhead, he delivers part of one of Malcolm X's speeches.

"We have been chained," he says emphatically. "We have been bamboozled."

The two students portraying spectators nod and clap.

A moment later, the boys push the lectern to the back of the stage. One stays in the center, where he is confronted by a girl. The slide changes to the cover of Toni Morrison's book *Sula*.

"You sleep with my best friend, now you come in here and expect me to forgive you?" she yells. There is applause and encouragement from the audience, sophomores from all three of Brookhaven High School's small schools.

Last, three boys are on stage again, with the image of Nathan McCall's *Makes Me Wanna Holler: A Young Black Man in America* above. One boy tries to convince the others to stop committing other crimes by admitting to his mistakes.

"I think we don't love ourselves," he tells them, earnestly.

Summer vacation is fast approaching. The teachers who make up Brookhaven's literacy team enlisted the school's "Drama Cats" to pique their peers' interest in the three books. The sophomores are required to read one of the three for English class before fall. They are also required to keep a "dialectical journal," a notebook in which they record quotes from the book and the reasons they think the quotes interesting or meaningful.

Students will talk, write and think about an "essential question" as it relates to each of the books. Each class has

English teacher Joleata Howell leads Brookhaven's literacy team, which includes teachers in several core subjects from each of the campus' three small schools.

Members of the literacy team routinely participate in professional development and literacy training sessions, then brainstorm together to find the best ways to employ strategies they have learned in the classroom.

its own selection of books and its own essential question, which students will continue to use as a way to think about every subject, from math to drama, until they graduate. For the class of 2008, the question is: "Is freedom dangerous?"

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By the first day of school in late August, the wall in front of English teacher Joleata Howell's room has two questions taped onto the glass: "Is freedom dangerous?" and "What does it mean to be enslaved?"

The head of the building's English department, Howell also became the leader of the literacy team last year. Teaching kids the basic skills of reading, writing and thinking is something she's passionate about.

"We have had no intervention plan for a kid reading on a second-grade level, and the (Ohio Graduation Test) just stops them," she says. "I feel so bad – when you can't read and I can't do anything to help you, it hurts."

Howell is right for the job. She worked on other literacy initiatives in the district before coming to Brookhaven to be part of the small schools transformation in 2005. But mostly, she was just the person most willing and able to take on the responsibility.

Howell decided to become a teacher when she was working as an assistant to detectives in the Crimes Against People unit of the Columbus Police Department.

"There was one boy who killed another boy. Here, one boy was dead, but when the family of the boy who killed him came in, they were crying like he was dead, too," she says. "I thought, 'Two lives were lost here.'

"I saw so many people get caught up in that lifestyle, and the common thread seemed to be that they had so little education."

Literacy is a key component of KnowledgeWorks' small schools initiative. Each small school is charged with improving "students' ability to read, write, speak and listen," and given funding to help achieve that goal. Involved teachers, who meet once or twice a week after school, are paid for their time, like athletic coaches. For Brookhaven's team, the ultimate goal is to come up with ways for teachers to increase literacy across the curriculum, designed and provided by teachers.

For Brookhaven's students, literacy is not a given. Of the ninth- and 10th-grade students who took an assessment test in fall 2006, only 33 percent were at or above a ninth-grade reading level. The largest portion (46 percent) read at

a fourth- to eighth-grade reading level, and 21 percent were below a third-grade reading level.

Howell, herself a product of Columbus Public Schools, worries about today's students' low expectations for themselves. "Our culture here is failure. Kids are more likely to admit F's than A's," she says.

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As the third year of the small schools transformation begins, a whole new set of challenges faces the teachers on Brookhaven's literacy team, as well as the school overall. Budget cuts last year caused layoffs throughout the school district and seven staff positions at Brookhaven were eliminated. Several enthusiastic teachers were laid off. As new staff members who weren't necessarily invested in or familiar with small school reform joined the building, they attended one mandatory summer retreat.

But that amount of time paled in comparison to the hours the original teachers had spent in professional development, teambuilding and curriculum development. The new teachers had to learn the instructional model and mission of the three schools on the fly.

The teaching concepts that the literacy team researched and shared with their peers the year before also go out the door with the departed teachers. While some teachers carry on using the dialectical journals and essential questions, there is simply not enough time to bring all of the new teachers up to speed.

For Howell, the year also has its personal challenges. The kind of teacher who helps students buy prom dresses, gets called when they suffer heartbreak and is sometimes even the first person that students call when they are in the hospital, she feels the need to "pull back emotionally" this year.

"This isn't a job you can stay in if you care too much," she says. "You will not survive."

The mother of two boys and a stepmother to two more, the emotional demands of the job, let alone the high level of professional demand she places on herself, have worn her out. Her oldest boy graduated from high school in spring 2006.

"I started to realize that I had given more to the students here than I had to my own child. I decided that would not happen again. I'm not going to allow my work to get in the way of my youngest son."

Legacy English teacher and fellow member of the literacy team Carla Hegyi is also struggling to find the best way to reach students. She is teaching only senior English this year and, because classes had to be combined after the layoffs, three of her classes include students from the other two small schools.

"This is a very different class, as I have never had North Star or Leadership students before, so it's going to take me a little while to learn your names," she tells the group on the first day. She hands out index cards and asks them to write their names and contact information.

"Can we put our middle name on here?" one student asks.

"You may if you like," she says. "Then I can call you all three when I'm mad at you."

They will be keeping an interactive notebook all year, where they will keep assignments, class notes and journals about reading that will be checked twice per quarter, she tells them. After going over class rules, she asks them to turn in their dialectical journals from their summer reading.

Only four of the twenty-odd students have the assignment. A couple complain that they just finished the reading.

"My sympathy for those of you who didn't get it done in three months is nil," she says. Tomorrow they will be tested, and in just over a week, they must complete a project about the book.

For the project, they can sculpt a character; write a song that delivers a synopsis of the book; create a newspaper with obits, editorials and articles about the characters; or write a letter from one character to another, among other choices. The 10 possibilities give students a variety of ways to engage with the characters and plot of the book, a strategy aimed at reaching kids who have difficulty writing.

Whatever they do, students must make a three-minute presentation to the class. Students negotiate a couple of extra days to prepare.

When they do their presentations, they come in all forms. Some perform monologues, some burn CDs with the songs they would use to score the book if it was a film, others write letters or create travel brochures for the cities where the books take place.

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The importance of literacy is emphasized in every subject, not just the traditional domain of English class. Sophomore Taylia Dixon learns about microscopy in the science lab.

As the year settles into routine, some of the new teachers join the literacy team, which is populated with several of the strongest proponents of school reform from all three small schools. It quickly becomes a place where members share the teaching struggles they face. Soon they begin to rediscover the sense of personal and professional camaraderie some felt they lost with the shakeup of their small school teams.

In January, the group brainstorms strategies to help students at all reading levels improve vocabulary, increase reading, think critically, organize their thoughts and — perhaps the most difficult challenge — work independently.

Howell is feeling the frustration of trying to accomplish that last goal: developing students' ability to think and act independently in the classroom.

Science teacher Linda Duellman, who helps her colleagues understand and analyze student literacy assessment test scores, assists sophomore Lamont Edwards with lab work.

Surprisingly, the problem is particularly acute for some of the very students who have the easiest time reading. "We have some of the most gifted troublemakers," one teacher says.

Science teacher Linda Duellman says that one of her students "has these moments of brilliance in between the times when he is verbally abusing you and starting fights with other kids in the classroom."

"How do you get some of these kids, even some of these advanced kids, to just sit down and do it?" Howell asks her colleagues. "How do we build their confidence so that they can write?"

After several minutes of brainstorming, the teachers turn to a larger question: What one single thing can they do to encourage literacy in every classroom at Brookhaven?

Someone brings up the concept of Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), which is classroom time devoted to reading. Staff members have researched the approach and attended professional development sessions on it; the idea seems to hold promise. Teachers discuss how to implement it at Brookhaven: They could create a schedule where all core classes devote 20 minutes a week to SSR, with the reading time rotating from English one day to social studies the next, and so forth. Basically, every student would spend 20 minutes a day reading somewhere along the line.

"We could implement that for the next semester," says Hegyi. Howell agrees.

"It's not a monster for teachers. I like that," one teacher offers.

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"Reading is the single most important social factor in American life today," Howell announces to the staff of all three small schools at a buildingwide meeting a couple of weeks later.

She tries to get her peers to understand how much a simple act — in this case, having students spend 20 minutes a day

"The more kids see other kids reading, the *more* they will buy into it."

– Carla Hegyi, teacher

reading in silence — can yield. She tells them it can help students master not just English, but also the problem-solving, analytical and writing abilities they need to succeed in any subject.

During Sustained Silent Reading, students can read materials related to the class they are in, do homework reading or read for leisure. What matters most is that teachers nurture the habit of reading.

"I won't have anything to give them in my class," one math teacher says. "How am I going to keep them from just staring into space?"

"This is not going to be easy," chimes in Hegyi, who suggests that newspapers and magazines can create an easy library in any classroom. "But the more kids see other kids reading, the more they will buy into it. So few of them understand the concept of reading for pleasure, but when I asked kids to bring things they liked to read to class, you'd be amazed how much they brought, what they brought and how much they enjoyed it. Give them a chance to surprise you."

Schedules for SSR go up in the teachers' lounge a few days later, and it works for a couple of weeks. But Ohio Graduation Test preparation frantically kicks in, and SSR is put off.

When the OGT is over, some teachers return to the SSR schedule and others don't. Still, there are a few converts. One social studies teacher who had complained that SSR was stealing precious classroom time started to change his mind.

"I still don't like losing the class time," he says. "But I'm seeing the kids change when it comes to reading – not only the bookworms, but the kids who don't usually read, so I think it's making a positive impact."

Some of the students are also sold.

"My students yelled at me for stopping too early today," one teacher shares at a May literacy meeting. "I told them that SSR would improve their reading levels. Now they're interested; they want to know what their reading levels are."

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Hegyi, like Howell, has a hard time knowing when to stop when it comes to helping students. She's given up about $200 to help buy prom dresses this spring.

She was always part of the pulse of her small school last year, but teaching seniors in all three schools has moved her focus to the whole building. Legacy meetings are rare and her collaboration with the literacy team has been the most rewarding. While the idea for small schools is that each one retain its separate identity, Hegyi reaches back to her childhood to find a bright side to working with students and teachers from other schools.

"I grew up in a house with three floors," Hegyi says. "My grandparents, my family and my aunt's family all lived separately under the same roof, but we all also benefited from being so close together.

English teacher Carla Hegyi encourages her students to use music, visual art, poetry or a simple letter to get them to engage with characters in the books they read. She is pictured here with senior Casey Lowery.

"Where there's relationship growth, there's going to be educational growth. I actually see it as a positive thing that we're blurring the lines and working more hand in hand. Our students all

Building principal and the catalyst for creating small schools at Brookhaven, Talisa Dixon celebrates with seniors at a spring picnic. The class of 2007 is the first to spend most of high school in the small school structure.

need the same things, so if Leadership or North Star are doing something right, by God, the rest of us should do it, too."

For Howell, "this is has been the most difficult year of my teaching career."

Between literacy, working on the district's textbook selection committee and working on her master's in administration at Ashland University, she has been busy and professionally challenged and yet able to get some of the emotional space she had hoped for. But even as she felt a sense of growth for herself and many of her students, as well as satisfaction in the literary team's progress, it was hard not to be haunted by the kids she couldn't reach. This year, one class in particular made it hard on her.

"I never got through to them," she says, shaking her head. "I tried layered curriculum, doing more work on computers with them. I gave them open-book tests and they were failing the open-book tests – they can't read. I spent a lot of class time just reading to them. Nothing worked."

Her small school is also re-examining its mission and structure, which have been impacted by limited resources and several changes in leadership. Howell and others also find that students sometimes have trouble grasping the three schools' different curriculum models. North Star uses expeditionary learning that was originally compared to the Outward Bound program and Legacy is based on Habits of Mind, both of which have proven less accessible than the Leadership Institute's approach from Sean Covey's "Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens."

"North Star is supposed to be about experiential learning, but the curriculum isn't designed that way," Howell says. "I wish our concept of small schools was more of a service to the student."

Overhearing her, a student in her classroom chimes in. "They told us we were supposed to take field trips all the time," he says. "We don't go anywhere."

Even as the school year slips away, the literacy team members continue to hone their focus, garnering respect and kudos from colleagues around the state. At the end of the year, they begin Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) testing to find out more about students' literacy levels.

The team determines to simplify its strategy for the summer reading homework. Two years ago, they assigned classic literature and got very little response. Last year, they chose books with subjects and plotlines that they hoped hold greater appeal for their students, but perhaps there were too many choices. This year, everyone will read the same book, one that the literacy team hopes that students will relate to.

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A bed with a lantern, a flowered chair and a table are at the center of the auditorium stage. Someone turns the lights off and students start shrieking, so they come right back on.

"Don't lose your mind when the lights go off," Howell says into a microphone. "That's what happens in theaters."

The room settles when she threatens to send everyone back to class with work. The image of the book *And Still We Rise: The Trials and Triumphs of Twelve Inner City Students* by Miles Corwin is projected onto a screen.

"This is a true story," Howell tells the group of juniors, going on to explain that the summer reading is mandatory. "If you do not do it, the highest grade you will be able to achieve is 75 percent."

Included in that equation is another dialectical journal.

"You are having a conversation with the book …" she says.

"Of course we know – or at least my students know – that the highest form of thinking is writing."

Smaller is Better

For two seniors, close relationships with teachers and counselors may tip the balance toward success

A motivated learner at heart, Ruth Jones feels that three years of experience in her small school helped her to thrive.

By Tracy Zollinger Turner

On most days, Ruth Jones wears her aspirations and personal philosophies on T-shirts. One of her favorites is navy blue, emblazoned with letters that simply say COLLEGE in white. Another is orange, with the jibe, "If you don't KNOW what you're talking about, your lips shouldn't be MOVING."

But on this day in early January, her hometown Ohio State University football team is playing for the national championship, so she dutifully dons Buckeye scarlet and gray. With a face free of makeup, her hair tied back in a ponytail, Ruth sits on a stool in front of her Advanced Placement senior English class and glances over a paper loaded with notes on both sides. Her partner, Zack, has just presented on author John Steinbeck's life. Now it's up to her to summarize *The Grapes of Wrath*.

"The protagonist is Tom Joad," says Ruth. "He's just been released from jail, where he was because he killed a man in self-defense. He meets a preacher on his way home…"

Ruth barely glances at her notes as she delivers her synopsis with photographic detail. She remembers the names of minor characters, every turn in the plot, the theme of man's inhumanity to man, the symbols of life and death and hope and faith. As she describes the final scene, where Rose of Sharon brings a starving man to her breast, students erupt into gasps, looks of horror and cries of "no way!"

Ruth reads the passage out loud. Students shake their heads — uncomfortable fascination has been replaced with sympathetic sadness.

"Awww!" cries Starr Scott, Ruth's best friend and the mother of a 3-year-old boy. "She misses her baby! That is so sad!"

"It is a really great book," Ruth tells the group, with the kind of conviction most of her peers reserve for movies and music.

Ruth takes a seat next to Starr while the class buzzes with side conversations.

"You see that with teachers here a lot – they *care* when something happens."

– *Starr Scott, student*

Student Starr Scott hopes to go to college at Columbus State.

Brookhaven High School's seniors of 2007 will be the first class to graduate as three separate small schools. As freshmen, they entered a school that was readying itself for change. The school needed to find a way to reach its student population, more than 80 percent of which is considered economically disadvantaged by the state. Leaders hoped to pull the school out of academic emergency by dividing it into three small schools.

As sophomores, these students led the phase-in. Their single class of about 300 was broken into three classes of 100 – the Leadership Institute of Student Development, the North Star School of Exploration and Legacy, based on the Habits of Mind curriculum model.

As a member of the first class to be divided, Ruth is the kind of student who seems sure to thrive in the intimate small schools environment. Self-assured, yet extremely approachable, she smiles and laughs easily. Her family raised her and her siblings with the belief that learning is important. Her mother was always a reader, so she became one too. She lives in an apartment with her mother, her older sister and her younger sister. Two older brothers have moved out of the house, including one who graduated from Brookhaven in 2006 and joined the military.

Her mother, who works in the transportation department of Columbus Public Schools, is also currently pursuing a college degree in sports and fitness management.

"We did grow up in the inner city, but we still had a foundation at home," Ruth says. "We had a standard – a love of God and a fear of God."

Her father, although not currently part of her home life, is still part of hers.

"He's more of a politics guy, so that's what we talk about. He always has his head in a newspaper."

For Ruth, there is no question that she is going to college; it's simply a matter of where. On some days as she investigates possible colleges, she wants one as far away as possible, while on others she can't fathom moving away from her family.

Her teachers worry that if she stays in town, she will feel pulled between family and college commitments instead of getting her chance to shine.

Ruth understands their concern. She often cares for her 11-year-old sister, whom she loves dearly, and works at Dairy Queen to earn extra cash.

Despite her dedication to the family, she's thinking of applying to every college possible, from Ohio State to Harvard "just to see what happens."

"I want to go wherever they give me the most scholarship money," she says, matter-of-factly. She's loved taking Spanish since the sixth grade and wants to combine it with the study of psychology to become a bilingual family counselor.

Ruth's best friend Starr has college in her sights as well. She wants to be a pediatric nurse and is leaning toward a mental health field. Starr, who transferred to Brookhaven halfway through freshman year after having a son, is quick to point out that being a teenage mother hasn't kept her from fully participating at school, even joining the drama club.

"My family gave me the leeway to do what I needed to do," she says.

Ruth and Starr chose to attend Legacy, not because they understood the Habits of Mind teaching model but because they wanted to stay with the teachers they liked most: English teacher Carla Hegyi and social studies teacher Phil Hayes.

The first year was exceptional, according to both girls. They had a block schedule where English and history were taught in tandem by their two favorite

teachers, smaller classes and a growing sense that they were cared about.

"You could tell it reduced the stress on the teachers," says Starr. "Everybody had a closer bond."

In the first two years, every teacher embraced the Habits of Mind, according to Ruth and Starr. The two describe the Legacy students and teachers as community-minded, open, respectful, communicative and persistent. The Habits of Mind were everywhere, things like "gathering data through all the senses" and "thinking about thinking."

The community also was marked by compassion.

"My 11th-grade year, my family couldn't afford Christmas," says Ruth. "Teachers gave us gifts just to let us know we were important. That meant a lot to us."

"You see that with teachers here a lot – they care when something happens. They don't just ignore your personal problems," says Starr. "And there are some kids here that have it tough. One guy literally carried around soap in his pocket every day because he never knew where he was gonna be sleeping that night. He did not have a stable home."

Some things about Legacy have changed for their senior year. A massive budget crunch in the district meant some teachers left or were laid off, introducing new staff members who were unfamiliar with the Habits of Mind. And some students now take classes alongside kids in other small schools.

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In February, Hegyi is working with North Star seniors, most of whom she's never taught before this year.

She has paired off students to work on chapter summaries for Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. In addition to putting the who, what, where, when and whys on a poster board, she has asked them to write a rap describing what happened in their particular chapter.

"I'm sorry, my rhyme is weak," one student apologizes before he begins.

"Nobody's rhymes are gonna be hot. They're all about *Wuthering Heights*," says Darius Strider, grinning.

"No disclaimers!" one girl scolds.

Darius, a handsome 18-year-old who records and performs rap under the name D*Stride, is a bit of a social star among his peers. When his turn to present comes, he pulls up a riff on the computer and delivers the story of the love triangle:

Heathcliff, appeared at da Grange
to take a young girl home, Catherine's her name
Linton's on punishment for helping her escape
He's in love and Catherine feels da same
As I get ready to switch up da page
Because of Lint and Catherine,
Healthcliff's in a rage…

Student, rapper and young father Darius Strider wants to earn his high school diploma and continue his education.

While Ruth is the kind of student whose hunger for knowledge is better sated in the small school setting, Darius is the kind small schools most hope to reach. He has been suspended from school twice. The latest time, this fall, he brought a 9-inch butterfly knife onto school grounds, earning him three months off the premises.

"I keep it with me because I don't trust some people," he says. "But I didn't mean to bring it to school. It just stayed in my coat, and I put it on on one of those days where it got cold all of a sudden."

He takes care of his two daughters every other weekend. Between their care, working at Wendy's three or four days a week, his music and school, his chances of finishing high school with his peers seem slim.

Darius lives with his mother and two younger sisters.

"My mom, she works for the state. I barely see her because when she gets home, I'm usually working or out someplace. We never get to talk except for on, like Saturday," he says. "She just says, 'Do whatever you gotta do to graduate,' even it takes me to 2011."

Student Darius Strider works hard to make up work when his job or family obligations cause him to miss school.

Darius seems to take that advice to heart. During his expulsion, he attended the district's school for students who have been suspended because he wants a diploma, not a GED. He wants to go to college.

"Darius cares," says Hegyi. "He comes and tells the truth about what's going on with him and does the work."

Even though he misses school — for doctor's appointments, appointments for governmental food and health care assistance, and sometimes when his "babymama" (she is no longer his girlfriend) has to work and needs him to care for the girls — he works hard to make up for his absences.

"I'll try anything," he says. "If I miss a day, if I miss five days, I make up that work. It started with my kids. I think I need to for them.

"I want to be an architect when I grow up," he adds. "I want to design and build my own houses. It just came to me one day. I was doing community service and saw other people building houses. I thought 'I can do this.'"

Once he gets his diploma, he wants to attend Columbus State Community College, then apply to a four-year school.

"Ohio Wesleyan, that's where I want to go. I don't know how I'm going to get there."

Darius doesn't have much to say about whether attending North Star has helped him pursue that goal. In his view, small schools have become a social barrier that keeps him from being able to make as many friends.

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As the year winds down, Ruth finds herself increasingly drawn outside the Legacy community.

She still identifies strongly with Legacy, but joins students from other Brookhaven schools in traditional senior activities and mentoring students at a nearby middle school. She receives her own mentoring from local business leaders every week in the Chase Leadership Academy.

When asked, she steps up to defend the individuality of the three schools. Voted in as a delegate by her peers in the founding of a citywide Student Congress, she participated in drafting a Constitution and Bill of Rights for Columbus Public School students. In the process, she helped convince the congress that Brookhaven deserved to have delegates from all three small schools.

"Each school building has two representatives," she told her citizenship class. "I argued that Brookhaven should have six because we have three separate and distinct small schools."

The group eventually allowed Brookhaven three representatives — one from each school, although they may only be allowed two votes on district issues.

When it came time for Ruth to push through her college applications, she narrowed her choices down to Ohio schools.

"I know there are some who wished for me to go farther away for the experience, but I decided this is better for me for undergraduate," she says. "I won't be shocked when I get there."

By spring, her life is bursting with good news.

She is elected "Most Likely to Succeed" by the classes of all three schools.

She is accepted at Denison University and given ample scholarship money — a place far enough away from home for her to taste independent life, but not so far that she can't return home for church every Sunday. The decision was difficult, since she was also accepted at OSU, but she based her choice on a factor that well may have been influenced by her experience in small schools: She was convinced by the ease with which she was able to reach people at Denison

when she had questions.

"I decided to be a neighbor, not a number," she says. "And it's the most beautiful place I've ever seen — the buildings, the landscaping, it's all so gorgeous. And Columbus is so big compared to Granville. I always wondered what it would be like to live in a small town."

She is also going to be the valedictorian for Legacy.

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Meanwhile, Darius is slipping, missing school, barely hanging on in Hegyi's class. With 14 hours to make up, he won't be able to graduate, even by the end of summer. The three-month expulsion wasn't something he could recover from.

Hegyi is getting concerned. She looks into the option of virtual high school, then approaches the guidance counselor. After some discussion, everyone, including Darius and the North Star small school leader, decide it's the best option.

"With virtual high school, it's your choice," Darius says. "You get signed up, you get in, it's up to you to finish. If I don't make August, I'm definitely going to make December."

He still dreams that he can finish high school, spend two years at community college, then pursue architecture or industrial design at Ohio Wesleyan.

"I want to start my own house business, like Dominion homes, only, like, Strider Homes," he says, smiling.

Darius isn't alone in missing out on graduation. This is the first group of seniors statewide who must pass all sections of the Ohio Graduation Test to receive their diplomas. Of the 40 students within the three schools who still needed to pass the science portion, only nine make it. The other 31 must take four-week intensive tutoring over the summer and retake the test.

There are tears throughout the school

Starr Scott and Ruth Jones chose Legacy as their small school because they wanted to keep learning from their two favorite teachers.

— including from students who are graduating and are sad that their friends won't be there with them. And while teachers fear that many of the students will just give up, the promise of a summer graduation ceremony encourages some to stay.

• • •

Graduations for several Columbus Public high schools are scheduled all day long at Nationwide Arena. Brookhaven's is the first, at 8:30 on one of the world's perfect June mornings. Ruth sits on the dais with the administrators and the valedictorians from the other two small schools.

Seniors file in by small school, wearing stoles that bear the insignia of their small schools. They will receive their diplomas from their own small school leader. Hegyi summons up her show choir past and opens the ceremony by singing the national anthem.

After a few more formalities, Ruth takes the podium and delivers an eloquent speech, ending it with, "I ask you one last question: What will your reality be?

"I hope that we will constantly surround ourselves with positive people and thoughts, so that during our next years of self-growth and self-discovery, we will create for ourselves a positive and inspiring reality. I admonish this class of 2007 to live life to its fullest potential, learning all we can learn, loving unconditionally and discovering everything that can be discovered."

About the storyteller

Tracy Zollinger Turner is a freelance writer and editor from Columbus, Ohio. Her work has appeared in *Columbus Alive*, the *Columbus Dispatch*, several regional publications, including *Ohio Magazine*, on multiple national websites and public radio. She also blogs at tinymantras.com.

Lorain Southview High School Lorain, Ohio

Southview High School, constructed on a pastoral, 44-acre wooded site, opened in 1969 to 1,100 students, one of the last schools ever built by the Lorain school district. Its history has been a tumultuous one.

Through the Vietnam War, recessions and social upheaval, the school's fortunes shifted along with the city's. Large steel companies and automakers left the area, lowering the city's tax base and the school's finances. Workers who once struggled to achieve the American dream in Lorain's bustling industries found themselves facing poverty, and Southview's student body reflected the changes within the community. The population of Hispanic and African American students grew, as did the number of students from families that were quickly sliding down the socioeconomic ladder.

In 1984 the entire school district underwent a contentious integration process ordered by a federal judge. In 1985 Southview became a magnet school for the arts, but the school was plagued by problems with drugs and violence. By 2001-02, Southview was rated in "academic emergency," the lowest state rating.

In 2003 it looked as though help might be on the way. The district began discussions with KnowledgeWorks Foundation to explore the possibility of dividing Southview's large student body into small schools that would have unique focuses and allow for closer relationships between students and teachers. The campus opened as three small schools for the 2004-05 school year. Over the period of planning and implementing small schools, Southview moved up three levels on the state rating system.

Southview students in the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps take part in a ceremony before the opening of a Lorain City Schools board meeting.

Despite those gains, Southview still struggles. More than 80 percent of its students qualify for free and reduced lunches and just more than half pass all sections of the state-mandated graduation test. District budget cuts and high staff turnover have made fully implementing the small schools model difficult. It was against that backdrop and with high hopes for turning the tide that Lorain Southview approached the 2006-07 school year.

In the Service of Students

Teacher leader wages war on two fronts, battling for higher test scores and more service-learning projects

By Kathleen Murphy Colan

Carol Wagner jumps out of her squeaky office chair as the intrusive blare of public announcements fills her office. The Lorain Southview instructional teacher leader stands, as if at attention, with her hand over her heart and recites the Pledge of Allegiance. "I don't care who sees me," she says.

At nearly 6 feet tall in heels, she cuts a commanding silhouette. Despite her no-nonsense appearance – her standard uniform is a skirt suit or a dress – most mornings when she arrives at school a couple of students linger near her office door. One student might offer a good-morning hug. Another has questions about an upcoming field trip to a Cleveland Indians baseball game.

Inside Wagner's cramped office, at the center of the Leadership School, the space is filled with American flags and newspaper articles about the military. Alongside her three diplomas – affixed prominently near the door – stands a life-sized cutout of a military cadet.

To say she has a reverence for those who serve is an understatement. Her father served in World War II and her son, one of three siblings adopted from Korea, is serving in Iraq. "My biggest regret is not serving in the military myself," she sighs.

Wagner's love of public service is instead directed at a battle close to home. She leads one of three new small schools created within Lorain Southview

From a family with a history of military service, Carol Wagner fulfills her sense of public duty at Leadership School.

High School three years ago. Wagner's Leadership school, along with the Pride School and School of the Arts, make up the new Southview.

The transformation began as a way to turn around Southview's difficult history marked by high dropout rates, poor performance and violence.

Today, even with the promising new model in place, Wagner and other leaders face a daily struggle against dwindling resources, a lack of control over decisions

that influence their respective schools and a teaching staff that isn't quite on board with the small schools' overall vision for the future.

Perhaps the biggest challenge Wagner faces is increasing scores on the Ohio Graduate Test (OGT), something that directly affects the future of every student. Not only is this the first year that students must pass all five portions of the test to graduate, but poor OGT results also could mean low marks on the state ratings. If OGT scores don't improve, Wagner worries, the forward movement of the small schools initiative – albeit slow – will stall.

Freshmen Bianca Rodriguez and Jesena Jiminez are among the dozens of students teacher leader Carol Wagner calls "my kids."

At an even deeper level, in Wagner's mind, is whether the Leadership school can adequately prepare its students for a productive life after high school. "I want them to be prepared for life. I want them to be better people, and if that transfers to tests, that is icing on the cake," she asserts.

This is a war she volunteered for and one she insists on leading from the front lines. She lives within walking distance of the school so that she can feel closer to her students.

Her strategies for preparing students come in the form of coordinating OGT boot camps, baking cheesecakes for Leadership School students who pass the tests, lending money to seniors for prom, serving as a counselor to troubled kids, acting as de facto photographer for school activities and serving as surrogate mom to the JROTC cadets.

Her official duties as the instructional teacher leader (ITL) include assisting with school discipline, working with the counselor's office, coordinating extracurricular activities, facilitating professional development for teachers, assisting teacher teams in developing and implementing integrated curricula along with documenting overall student development, attendance, test scores and graduation rates.

School coach Hank Harsar, who helps the campus implement the small schools model, says she is "like the stereotypical girl Friday. She is always taking on odd jobs and she never says no."

Her commitment to Southview also comes out at home. Brett Williams, a senior in the Pride School, lives across the street from Wagner. Williams tells how he and Wagner worked together to shovel and clear the snow from "four or five driveways on our street during the last big snowstorm." He credits Wagner with encouraging him academically. "If she hadn't motivated me I probably would have dropped out," he says.

Williams is part of a large fan club. In fact, seven out of 10 students use the same word to describe Wagner.

Motivation.

"She is always motivating me. We had one long talk and that's all it took. She pulled me aside and told me what would happen if I didn't shape up and get my grades up to par," says Pride School senior Robert Perkins.

The kids keep Wagner smiling. She has as much, or more, affection for them as they do for her. "THESE ARE MY KIDS, I AM MOM," she affirms as she stands up from her wobbling office chair and pounds her fist on the desk. Suddenly even more passionate, Wagner gets tears in her eyes. "How can I make you understand that these are my kids? These are all my kids!"

It is for these kids that she strenuously plots multiple courses of action to improve OGT scores. But, "We don't have the staffing to do it right," Wagner says.

Unfortunately in 2004, just as small schools were being implemented, the district dealt with serious budget shortfalls by cutting back on staff, electives and vocational programs. She estimates that Lorain Southview has had nine principals since 2000.

"The timing was really bad. A lot of people, especially students, think all of the electives and vocational stuff went away because of small schools and that's just not true," Wagner says.

Wagner, the two other ITL's and three school principals think developing individual identities for each school, a key aspect of the small schools approach, is being hampered by the lack of staffing and the inability to run each school independently. They all agree: There is too much crossover between the schools.

"When I first heard the word

'autonomy' I had big plans," Wagner says. "I thought we could hire the teachers we wanted. I thought we, meaning me, (principal) Sam Newsome and the Leadership School teachers, would be in charge of the budget. I thought we would have more flexibility in scheduling that would allow us to be an independent small school. None of this could happen because the general funds weren't there. We just don't have the money to have enough staff."

Another problem in moving the small school approach along is that the monthly two-hour professional development seminars for teachers also fell victim to budget cuts, hurting efforts to present teachers with new material in a non-stressful environment.

Even with those obstacles, Wagner arrives smiling every day, ready for battle. Much of her effort goes toward making the service-learning model more accepted and effective.

Service learning, another key component of the small schools initiative, is an education strategy that involves students in meaningful service to their communities and connects that service to academic standards being taught in the classes. During service-learning projects, students meet actual community needs and use newly acquired academic knowledge and skills in real-life settings.

"Service learning, and learning in general, directly affects what happens in

Student Kevin Justice, a member of the JROTC, discusses a poetry project with Carol Wagner.

"Service learning... directly affects what *happens* in your life."

– *Carol Wagner, teacher leader*

your life," she says. "I absolutely believe that," she adds. "If I had my way, a service-learning component would be necessary for everyone to graduate."

This year, the Leadership School incorporated two service-learning projects. The freshman English classes raised money selling muffins and organized and participated in a walk-a-thon for the Make-A-Wish Foundation. Their combined efforts raised $7,700 to send a young girl with leukemia to Disney World.

The senior English classes came up with individual service projects that they each completed during the course of the school year.

English teacher Mary Jo Soroka Ferguson has taken the small schools ways to heart. "Hondele, hondele!" she shouts as her students make their way to her classroom. Ferguson, as well as many of Southview's teachers, has mastered the basics of Spanish as many students at Southview are Hispanic.

Ferguson commands respect immediately. Her tone, volume and seriousness combine with a heartfelt caring that students respond to. In this third year of small schools, she is the only teacher in the Leadership School to implement leadership strategies into her curriculum.

"The team-teaching time has been a big help and Carol's help has been immeasurable," she says.

Design students Maria Garnica and Rita Castro learn how to use a printing press in the graphic arts studio.

Ferguson and Wagner both hope more teachers will get on the service-learning bandwagon next year. "It's difficult to convince teachers to change their methods," Ferguson says.

Leadership School principal Sam Newsome agrees, and he applauds Wagner's efforts. "Her ability to multi-task really lets me keep the peace here and get more involved with students, parents and teachers."

Newsome, an imposing figure who looks more like a linebacker than a high school principal, is in perpetual motion. He taps his foot constantly and seemingly instinctively. He moves through the halls with lightning speed. "Every half hour on the half hour it seems I've got to handle a discipline issue," he says. "If I didn't have to handle the discipline, I would definitely spend more time observing in classrooms."

• • •

In early January Wagner and her two ITL colleagues, Dave Wood from the Pride School and Linda Pritchett from the School of the Arts, huddle in the school library with stacks of files and paperwork. They spend a week drawing up a game plan to identify every student who needs help to pass the OGT and scheduling tutors and teachers for one-on-one and group refresher sessions. They begin with a giant schedule board, plugging in and matching up students with study sessions. "It's like the NFL draft," Wagner explains.

Some students have to be dragged or cajoled in for the individual meetings. They are the chronic skippers, unmotivated youngsters who need oversight.

Most at risk are juniors and seniors who haven't yet passed all sections the test. Wagner meets with every one of the Leadership school students to find out where their scores need improvement. Wood and Pritchett do the same with their students.

As an extra tactic, Wagner produces neon-orange business cards with helpful website resources that she hands out to students during lunch hours.

These tutoring sessions that Wagner and her colleagues so laboriously planned occupy the team-time portion of the day for five weeks straight, but teachers worry that they're not enough.

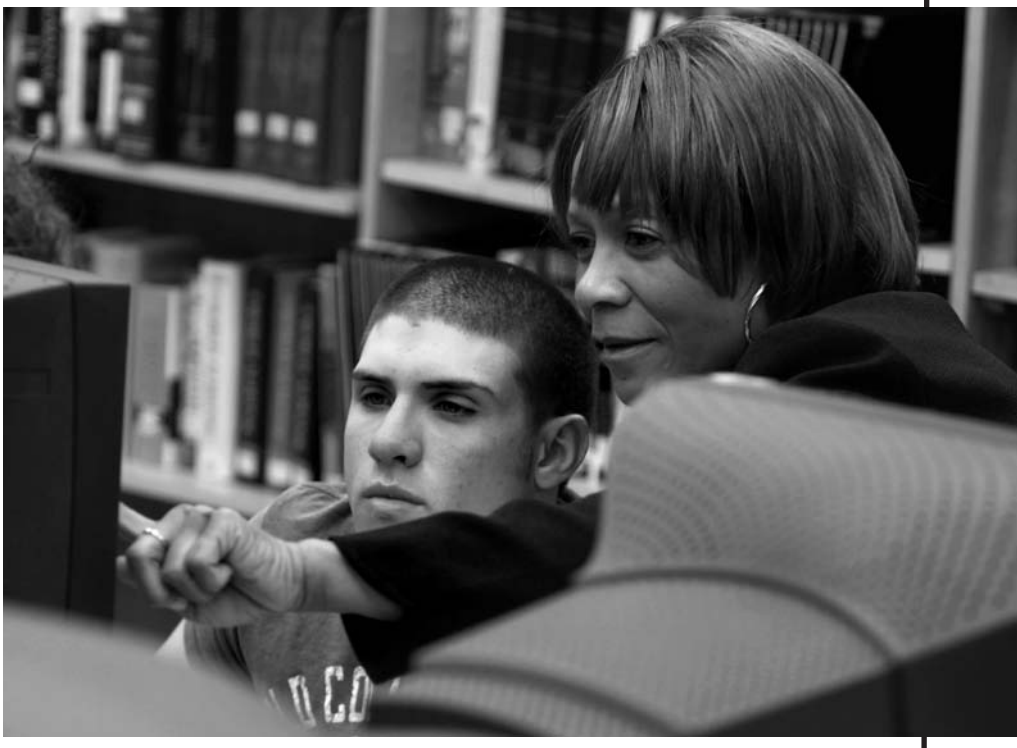
In February, another tactic comes into play. On a freezing Saturday at 8 a.m., Wagner abandons her buttoned-up appearance for jeans and a T-shirt. Wearing no makeup, she cheerfully greets a hundred or so bleary-eyed students who shuffle into the cafeteria for the first of four sessions of OGT boot camp, a last-ditch effort to review as much material as possible before the all-important test. Passing out juice boxes and doughnuts to the students, Wagner says, "This is Dave Wood's baby. I am just here for moral support."

Wood has been planning boot camp for weeks. He has designed signage, talked to students one on one, met with teachers to find out who needs help, called parents and corralled teachers to sign up to teach the review sessions. In constant motion, he waits at the front door for stragglers and checks off names as students arrive. "We've got to get 100. We have just got to get them here," he says.

At 8:45 a.m., Wood emerges from the front office. He has just finished making a quick round of last-minute phone calls to parents to sweet-talk them into getting their kids to school for the boot camp. The papers in his arms detail his system for tracking individual student attendance against test results as well as room assignments for the day.

As the 9 a.m. official start of boot camp arrives, his shoulders sag in defeat. "I don't think we're going to get 100 here today. We're short about five students," he says.

The bell rings as everyone rises from the cafeteria to find their assigned rooms and boot camp begins. In Rick Ramirez's social studies class, one student sleeps in the back of the room. Another arrives late and asks to use the restroom. Another lopes in with coffee and sandwich in hand. Ramirez presses on as he tries to convey the concept of interest rates.



Librarian Marchyco Harrell helps student Cameron Bryant navigate the internet.

After a 45-minute session giving real-world examples of credit card debt and home loans, Ramirez isn't hopeful. "They are glazed over," he says.

In addition to increasing their chances of passing the OGT later in the month, the students compete for another prize. Anyone who attends all four boot camp sessions receives a $25 gift certificate to Wal-Mart.

One month later, after the last boot camp, Wagner makes good on the promise to 12 Leadership School students. She holds court in her office for the little ceremony.

Sophomore Brianna Fenderson arrives. "What did you do?" a scowling Wagner asks with a serious face. Brianna looks perplexed and nervous.

"What are you talking about?" she asks.

"You know why you're here. You know

"I want them to be better people, and if that translates to *tests*, that is icing on the cake."

– *Carol Wagner, teacher leader*

Southview student Savannah Barnette concentrates on classroom work.

why I called you here," Wagner continues in a threatening way.

Brianna looks afraid and Wagner lets her in on the joke.

"You attended all four OGT boot camps, and you get a $25 gift certificate to Wal-Mart!" Wagner finally reveals with a huge smile and burst of energy.

"Oh, OK, great," Brianna says and smiles before going back to class.

The scene repeats itself 11 more times as the winners come by Wagner's office. "This is what I really miss about being in the classroom every day, getting close to the kids," she says.

In between students arriving to pick up their prizes, data entry specialist and scheduler Christina Herschberger pops in to discuss class-scheduling procedures for next year. The two sigh over the complicated process.

Another student comes in. "Can you check something for me? I've been here every day, and the office keeps calling my house to say I'm absent," sophomore Tony Miller asks. Wagner drops what she is doing to get to the bottom of his dilemma.

Finally, the last of the 12 prize winners arrives. Sophomore Melissa Pearson has the most exuberant reaction. "Oh, I feel so special and lucky," she exclaims. "Do we still get cheesecakes if we pass all five parts of the OGT?" she asks Wagner.

"Sure do," says Wagner. Each year she bakes cheesecakes for students who pass all portions of the OGT.

"WOOHOO!" Miller shouts, as he and Pearson quickly exit for their next class.

The bell rings and the day ends. Wagner heads back to her office to start unraveling the class scheduling for next year.

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In late May, the warm spring winds blow their magic into the freshman English class. Students and teachers, most wearing bright blue Make-A-Wish T-shirts, gather to celebrate their accomplishments in raising money for the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

Cheers, hoots and hollers resound as Ferguson announces the students raised more than $7,700. "Why do we do this as a service-learning project? To help all of you as high school students to realize you can make a difference. You can change the negative attitudes many people have about high school students," Ferguson booms. Because of their work, a 6-year-old girl from Elyria, Ohio, who is suffering from leukemia will go to Disney World with her family to fulfill her dream of meeting the Disney princesses.

"You make me proud to say that, 'My kids did that!'" Ferguson announces.

Then she passes out certificates of participation to each student. She encourages them to start a portfolio of certificates to keep a record of their accomplishments.

On the same day, Carol Wagner isn't feeling well. The OGT results have arrived early. Of 87 Leadership School students who took the test, only 45 passed all five sections. The numbers are

Wagner conferences with Josh Green about his service learning project.

exactly the same as last year. But this year there is a difference. Twelve seniors will not graduate because they have not passed the test. "It keeps me up at night thinking about the ones who didn't make it," Wagner says.

Additionally, only nine students signed up for the 12th-grade service learning English class Wagner had planned to teach for the 2007-08 school year. Consequently, the class is canceled.

On the last day of school rumors swirl. The Lorain school district will shortly announce layoffs. Wagner and her colleagues have been told to expect 75 jobs to be cut. They can deal with that.

But when the news comes, it is worse than they expected. "I think I'm going to be sick," Wagner laments as she hears the numbers. The district is getting rid of 247 teachers. At the high school level, administrators have eliminated most of the elective programs including band, choir, drama and art. "We have a School of the Arts here. What are they thinking?"

Wagner isn't worried for herself. She has tenure and 18 years in the district. She is worried about the fate of small schools. She is worried about working with a whole new team of teachers. She is worried about what will happen to the kids.

"I couldn't sleep last night," she says the next day. "I'm getting sick just thinking about this …. This is the beginning of the end for the kids. There is no way we can operate effectively in this environment."

For Wagner, the cuts mean she will have to work harder with new staff members to get them on board with the small schools initiative. It means she is going to have to get creative to schedule students in the classes they want and need.

These setbacks won't stop Wagner. "I'm still going to do what it takes to achieve success." She is planning on using a week of her own time during summer vacation to help teach a summer boot camp for the OGT.

"We really made headway this year, until today," she says.

Epilogue

The budget crisis within Lorain City Schools resulted in more than 200 teachers being laid off after the 2006-07 school year ended. As part of the cutbacks, two teacher leader positions were eliminated and Carol Wagner returned to the classroom.

About the storyteller

Kathleen Murphy Colan writes on fashion, homes and gardens, shopping, architecture and other topics for the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, *Real Living*, *Inspirations*, *Cleveland Magazine* and *Mature Living*. She is also a correspondent for the *New York Post*. Thunder Bay will publish her book, *Architectural Wonders*, in late 2007.

Cleveland Heights High School

Cleveland Heights, Ohio

In the third of year of transformation from a large inner-ring suburban high school to five small schools, progress at Cleveland Heights High School could be felt on every level — from the security office to the main office and in every classroom and athletic field in between.

After a hectic and exhausting end last year, Cleveland Heights-University Heights Superintendent Deborah Delisle convened the entire district staff in the auditorium at Heights High just before the start of the 2006-07 year.

The Social Room on the Cleveland Heights High School campus is a hub of activity after lunch.

It was a pep rally of sorts to get district staff ready for another year of transition and constant changes.

Change is still hard, but with each adjustment the evolutionary process becomes a bit smoother.

A common language is spoken here, one that focuses on student achievement, incorporates data-driven instruction and encourages teacher collaboration.

Inside the main office rests a plaque presented to staff, students and families of Cleveland Heights High School for exemplary results on the Ohio Achievement Tests and achieving an "effective" rating by the Ohio Department of Education for the 2005-06 school year.

Despite its successes, challenges remain — with student behavior and performance, with key aspects of the small schools redesign and with the inevitable shift that comes when key personnel leave.

But progress continues as the second generation of small school leaders builds on the foundation of those who went before them to carry the Heights campus further in its quest for excellence.

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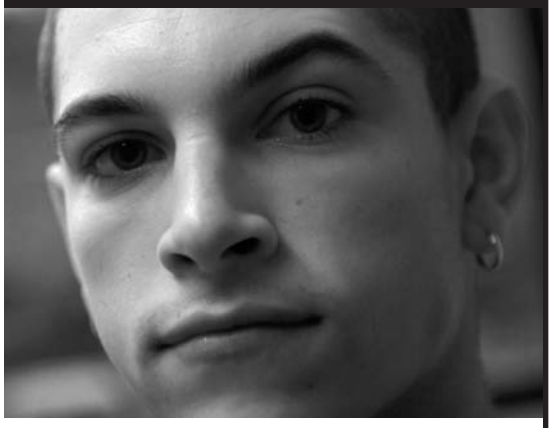


A Tale of Two Students

One reluctant, one enthusiastic – and both testing the limits of Heights schools

Building Trust in the Power to Change

One leader of a small school hopes to keep momentum by inspiring those around him

By Wendy A. Hoke

At the end of his first year as teacher leader at P.R.I.D.E. School, Bob Swaggard is tired, the kind of tired that comes from being constantly "on."

"I hope I don't have to attend one more meeting or one more function," he says, knowing full well there are more to attend in the remaining weeks of school.

Swaggard, who came to Cleveland Heights High School when it was being divided into small schools, took on a leadership role just as it began to see early evidence of significant positive changes. Test scores are up, the school's state rating is now "effective" and next year's incoming freshmen got into either their first or second choice of the five small schools. The school pride that permeates the halls, athletic fields and music department harks back to earlier times.

Despite those signs, Swaggard and his colleagues still struggle with students who bring behavior problems into the classrooms, who transfer into the district and bring with them serious impediments to learning and whose home life is anything but nurturing and safe. They also contend with teachers who have one foot in the old "big" Heights and one toe in the new small schools.

It's tough slogging at times and he pushes back against those who think it would be easier to ship problem students elsewhere or who point fingers. "We can't just ship kids out to the next port," he says.

"We have great staff with a wealth of information and resources to share. I think we need to approach change by repeating over and over that it can be done in manageable pieces," Swaggard says.

It's that nurturing manner, with an emphasis on relationships, that is earning Swaggard the trust of his colleagues and setting the tone for enabling staff and students to change — even if it's just a little.

"Bob is a great leader, and he has genuine care and concern for the kids and teachers," says Jean King-Battle, retiring P.R.I.D.E. teacher and pied piper of student leadership. "I see him doing great things."

Students agree. "I love Mr. Swaggard," says P.R.I.D.E. junior Reggie Golden. "He's a great guy who cares about and *respects* students."

Swaggard realizes that the opportunity to reach kids who didn't have a consistent educational experience before arriving at the Heights campus is his (and the school's) responsibility. He takes that very seriously and is inspired by the idea the school can be and do more.

He wants others to share in that vision.

So every kid can learn

Swaggard had a great job as an eighth-grade social studies teacher at Roxboro Middle School, teaching with

Bob Swaggard came to Heights High when it was being divided into small schools and has taken on the role of teacher leader for the P.R.I.D.E. School.

a team of colleagues whom he counted as friends.

When Heights committed to small schools, however, he chose to leave his job and become part of something bigger. Now 29, he is the youngest teacher leader in the building.

Soft-spoken by nature, he walks the P.R.I.D.E. hallways early in the year a little tentatively, more likely to offer a stern look than raise his voice. But at a meeting about parent-teacher conferences early in the year, he demonstrates why P.R.I.D.E. teachers chose him as their teacher leader.

Samantha Atkins follows along as her English class reads *Tom Sawyer*.

"Why do parents have to fight to see teachers when they have kids at different small schools?" he asks. Instead of asking parents to navigate the sprawling Heights campus to find their children's classrooms, he proposes bringing teams of teachers into the social room and cafeteria to hold conferences.

The change proves to be highly successful in terms of parental attendance and feedback — a small, but worthwhile and noticeable change.

A product of Catholic schools, Swaggard did his student teaching at Heights High. He comes from a family of educators: his dad teaches in Warrensville Heights, his mom teaches preschool and his sister teaches at John Hay High School in Cleveland.

"My dad always had a leadership position with his school and so I was always aware of reform movements. In fact, we used to have great discussions about funding, pedagogy, the difference between districts and what support looks like in other districts," he says.

He enjoyed Roxboro, but in small schools Swaggard saw an opportunity to bring the best of the middle school team teaching approach and the focus on the individual learner to the high school.

"I knew Heights was helping high achievers and moving kids on to college and all those things the community feels are important. But I also knew a lot were not being reached. I was interested in the big questions. How do you break down a large institution? How do you personalize the educational process? How do you cater content to the individual student?"

When asked if he believes all children can learn, he responds, "Absolutely! Emphatically!"

Swaggard saw gaps in the transitional period between middle school and freshman year. He believes that bringing the team teaching concept to the four core classes — math, science, English and social studies — eases that transition. P.R.I.D.E. is the only small school at Heights currently using the team approach.

"In a small environment you can break it down to help achieve more equity, where problems will have less of an impact. I felt nurtured and supported at my high school and I think there's a greater opportunity for that to happen in small schools," he says.

In class, teacher leader Bob Swaggard sometimes grabs students' attention by overreacting to their comments. When asked if he believes all children can learn, he responds, "Absolutely! Emphatically!"

State of constant evaluation

"If you look at the best nonprofits and businesses, they are always evolving, always looking for the next best thing."

Swaggard believes that in order for schools to be more successful at educating students, they, too, need to be constantly evaluating and evolving.

"What do our students need our school to be? How do we allow our school to evolve?" Swaggard sees success as a mixture of personal accountability on the students' part and a willingness to try new ideas on the teachers' part.

There are hiccups along the way.

Students moving through hallways at class change continue to be boisterous, a campuswide problem. Teacher leaders, principals and security staff encourage students to move along to class. The occasional tension erupts among staff trying to control the commotion, with some complaints of, "Those aren't *our* kids causing the disruption."

Swaggard won't pass the buck. When he sees a P.R.I.D.E. student getting loud in the hallways, he quietly approaches and says something to her. She moves along. "In the classroom she is fine," he explains. "But it's hard in the hallway. I want her to take personal responsibility for her behavior at all times."

To facilitate change, Swaggard spends a good deal of time building relationships with students, teachers and parents. Late in the year, it wears him down. "Building relationships could take eight hours every day," he says. "Sometimes I feel the need to just resolve things and move on."

As Swaggard walks down the hall with video equipment under his arm, he talks about how quickly he has to move through the Civil Rights movement in his senior government class. Teacher leaders at Heights are released from most teaching duties but continue to teach one class each.

"Senior service projects begin May 4 and that leaves me little time," he says. "This is such an important part of our history, and I don't want to shortchange the curriculum."

So he's trying to cram as much into the remaining 10 days as possible. It would be a good opportunity to collaborate with another teacher.

Lack of collaboration time, something that was promised under small schools but has been difficult to build into

"People are still **unsure** of their individual power to *change*."

– Bob Swaggard, teacher leader

Principal Janet Tribble of the P.R.I.D.E. School pauses in her day to discuss a student's progress with teacher leader Bob Swaggard.

the already packed days, is a common criticism among teachers. Officials are considering a plan for the 2007-08 school year that restructures the schedule and embeds collaboration into every week.

"Everyone understands that in a professional learning community you need collaboration," says Swaggard. "But everyone is supersensitive about time and they need to see what collaboration time looks like before they commit. But we don't have those answers. In reality, we almost need to just start somewhere and then build on what we start."

As the class gets ready to view the PBS Civil Rights documentary *Eyes on the Prize*. Swaggard tells them to keep a journal of their responses. Some boys begin to sing, "Keep your eyes on the prize and your shoulder to the wheel…"

They watch the story of Emmett Till, a 14-year-old black boy from Chicago who went to Money, Miss., to visit his uncle. While there he talked to a white woman and was beaten to death.

His mother told the press that she decided on an open casket "so all could see what they done to my boy." Photos of Emmett in the casket also ran in *Jet* magazine.

Swaggard pauses the movie and turns to the class.

"What are your impressions about what Emmett's mother did?"

"She brought the story to the public and attention to her son's case," replies one boy.

"How did the photo in *Jet* magazine make an impact?"

"Anyone could see it no matter where they live," replies another.

"Essentially Emmett Till's face became the face of racism," says Swaggard. "How about his mom? She just lost her son and decides to keep

the issue going, to make it part of a larger issue."

Swaggard personalizes the moment in history, then moves the discussion to questions raised by the fact that the boy's killers were acquitted.

"The court completely ignored what is right and legal," one boy says.

"It's sad how people will make themselves blind to fact because of what they believe in," another offers.

"That's one reason why we have to turn and face our history," explains Swaggard. "If we can admit it happened, then maybe we can begin to reconcile some of these events."

Problems without easy solutions

As he makes his way back to the P.R.I.D.E. office after class, Swaggard takes a moment to ask English teacher Judy Goral how things are going. He says being teacher leader is a lot like being a physician on hospital rounds. He tries to help the teachers, but problems are not always easily solved.

"In school we're taught to have a body of knowledge, to be experts, but no one says what to do if you don't have the answers," he says. "I don't feel particularly successful getting into the classroom and helping teachers with resources."

Goral sees it differently.

She is struggling with a student who transferred into the school midyear. He struts, has been known to shed his shirt in class and frequently mutters comments to the girls under his breath. He's disruptive and disengaged. What's more, after nearly a semester he hasn't progressed beyond page four of a reading assignment.

Goral and Legacy principal Marc Engoglia are working on the student's disciplinary problems, but Goral turns to Swaggard for help with his academic ones. Together, they decide to give him a writing assignment based on any book he chooses, hoping to spark his interest. He picks a short book for younger children, but the approach is a success on two fronts. For the first time since he arrived in Goral's class, the student completes an assignment. In addition, Goral now knows he lags far behind in reading and writing, an assessment that will help her better address his educational needs.

"Bob is good at providing resources," says Goral. "If this boy were here four years ago he would have slipped through the cracks."

• • •

May is a hectic month when various district functions and meetings often call Swaggard out of the building.

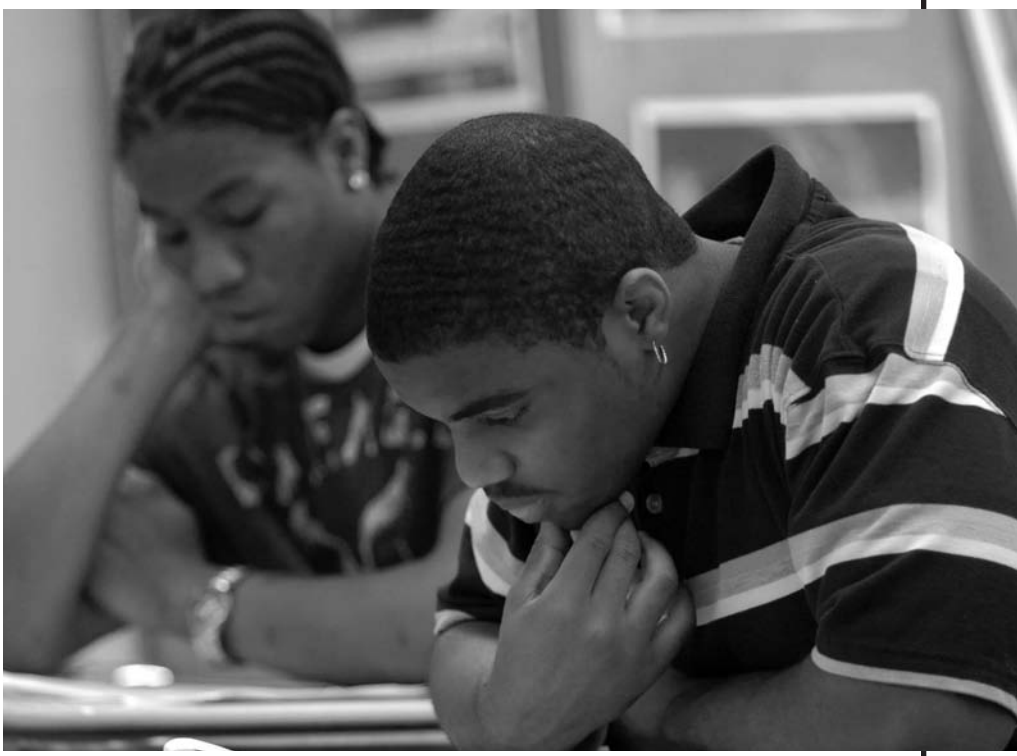
His senior government class watched the Rob Reiner movie *The American President* while he was gone and he's seeking their feedback.

"What impression did you have of lobbyists?" he asks.

"It gave them a bad name," responds one student.

"What role did the media play?" he asks, and students begin rapid-fire responses.

"Vicious."



P.R.I.D.E. junior Robert Jordan and Legacy junior Chris Creel read a passage from *Tom Sawyer*.

"They are only out to benefit themselves."

"They portray things worse than they actually are."

Swaggard explains the checks and balances on presidential powers, which was his point in showing the film.

trust — about getting to know people where they are at.

"The hard part is getting them to go on the journey with you," he says. "People are still unsure of their individual power to change."

But he sees growth in small ways.

Wael El-Halaby, junior in Renaissance School, listens as teacher Donna Dehn preps students for the AP music-theory test.

Keeping seniors focused is tough at the end of the year, especially when he is called out for so many meetings.

"Why couldn't we watch *Shrek*?" asks one boy.

"*Shrek* doesn't have the same educational value," he responds, laughing.

He changes topics and hands out an article from the morning's paper with tips on how not to end up with tons of debt upon graduating college.

Swaggard flows easily within the classroom; his students trust him and where he's going.

He wants other teachers to trust in him, to believe that they have the power to change the school. "So much of this first year (of the three-year commitment to being teacher leader) is about building

"Summer reading is about the love of reading more than about specific books. I'm excited by English teachers who see that and broaden their view of what summer reading can be. I'm excited by math teachers who are helping students to explore math concepts through projects."

He's identified a few areas he'd like to focus on for next year: an increasing role in the classroom, getting collaboration established and effective, and continuing to build relationships with students and staff.

Despite his growing laundry list of things to be done, at year's end Bob Swaggard is tired, but still smiling.

A Tale of Two Students

One reluctant, one enthusiastic – and both testing the limits of Heights schools

By Wendy A. Hoke

On a stormy June day, the mood is sunny and bright in the Allen Theatre in downtown Cleveland's historic Playhouse Square Center.

Parents, grandparents, siblings and assorted relatives dressed in their Sunday best, armed with bouquets of flowers and giant Mylar balloons, await the 100th commencement ceremony of Cleveland Heights High School. A giant gold banner with black trim and letters simply reads, "HEIGHTS."

Although it may look like graduations of old, this one is very different. The graduates are the first class from the five small schools at Heights campus and the first seniors required to pass the Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT) to graduate.

Each small school's graduates enter the theater led by a student carrying a flag bearing the small school name. And while all are decked in traditional black cap and gown, each small school has a different colored tassel.

The evening also is a turning point for two students: One who is graduating and moving on, an average kid who found inspiration and a possible career in music, and one who is assuming the mantle of leadership for next year, a charismatic leader and exceptional student. For both students, small schools provided a more enriching educational experience, whether they sought it or not.

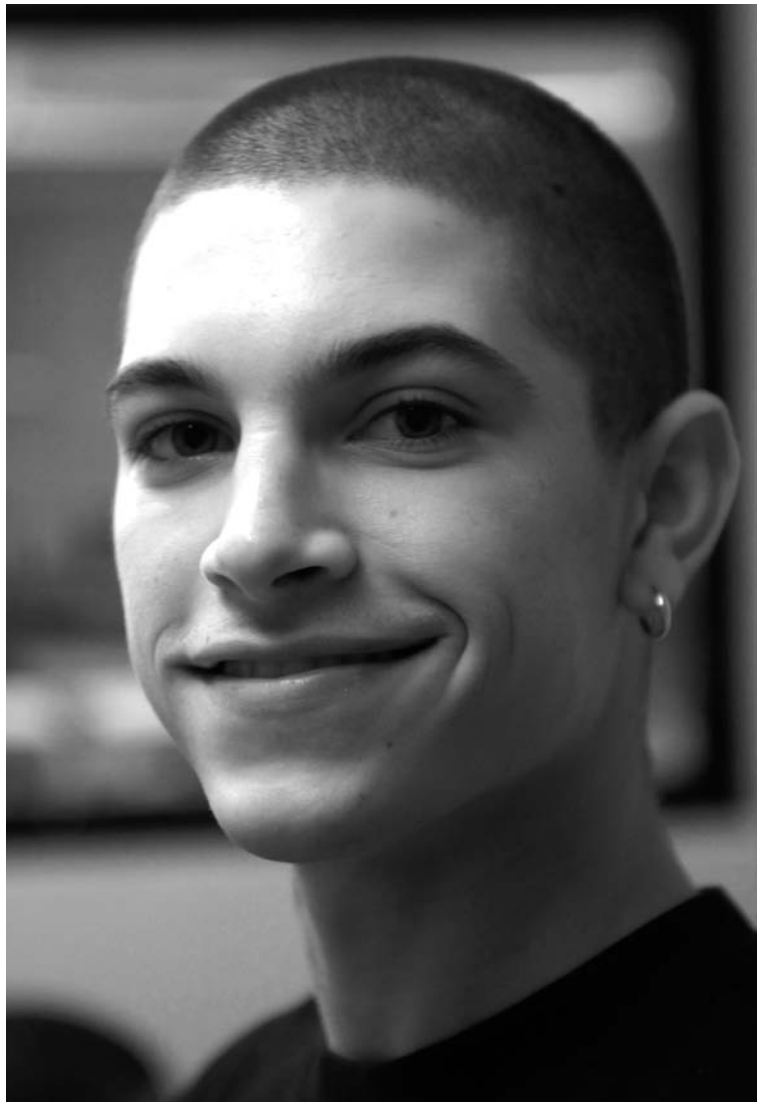
• • •

Danny Giannetto makes his way through the chaotic maze of students shouting and hanging out in the halls of Cleveland Heights High School. With his backpack slung over one shoulder, he heaves it to readjust the load. He sets his face in a grimace as he enters room 216. It's advisory day and Danny, a senior in Renaissance School, would rather be anywhere but here.

"I don't see the point in advisory. It's a waste of time," he has said.

He takes his seat and pulls out a binder to work on his real love — music theory.

Teacher Stephen Warner begins a discussion about



Renaissance School senior Danny Giannetto is willing to push himself when he is engaged by a subject.

civility, a topic that is being discussed throughout Cleveland Heights. Danny is unmoved by the discussion until one classmate suggests that a wall be built between East Cleveland and Cleveland Heights to separate the neighboring yet economically disparate cities.

"Whoa!" everyone responds. "What, like the Berlin Wall?" asks one boy.

Danny slams his binder shut and focuses on the conversation.

Warner guides the conversation back to the school. "How do you think Heights High is thought of in the community?" he asks. "Is it safe? Are students scared?"

"This year is better than last year," says Danny. "The halls aren't dangerous, just chaotic. I've got a lot of friends at (other high schools) and they have metal detectors and police dogs."

For the rest of the discussion, students debate their role (and whether they have one) in advancing civility within their school. Discussions like the one that on this day has engaged Danny are one reason for advisories, part of the model for small schools.

A quiet, good-looking kid with a contagious smile, Danny is somewhat shy and unassuming, but not afraid to say what he likes and doesn't like. He's a baseball player with an athletic build. But there's also something of the grunge in him. He plays drums in a reggae/funk band and wears small, thick gold hoops in both ears.

He's an average student and maybe could do better in some subjects, but he has to feel engaged.

Danny was supposed to go to a Catholic high school, but his dad lost his job and the family could not afford to send him to private school. Danny welcomed the opportunity to attend Heights. He made friends easily, and he's been playing shortstop on the varsity baseball team since he was a sophomore.

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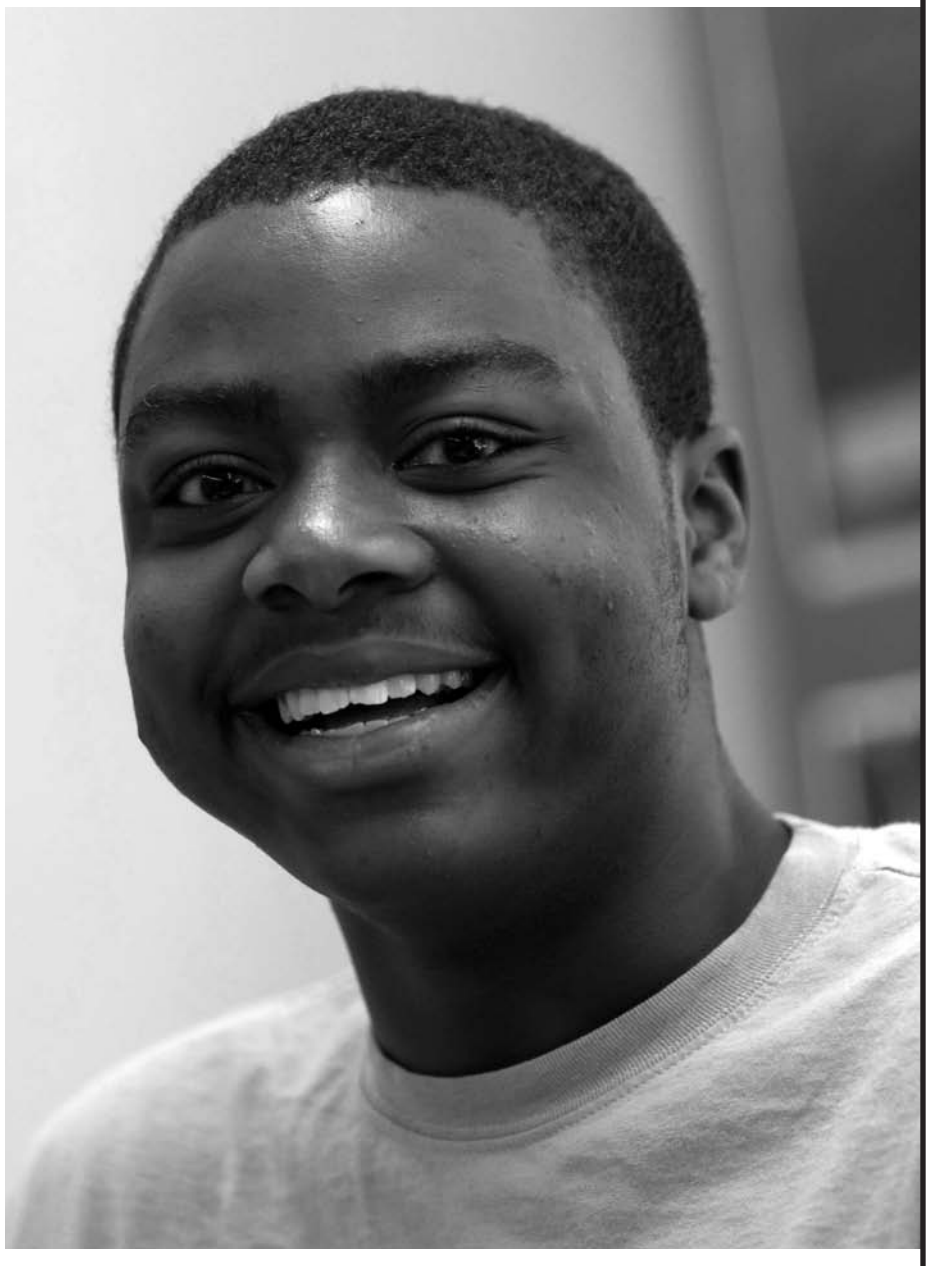

Reggie Golden, a junior in P.R.I.D.E. School, has high expectations for himself and those around him.

Reggie Golden, a junior in P.R.I.D.E. School, slides into his usual seat by the window in Jean King-Battle's pint-sized classroom. He's supposed to have lunch this period, but this is when he meets with "Leaders With P.R.I.D.E.," the school's student leadership group.

The son of a pastor and an accountant, Reggie is a natural-born leader. He has high expectations for himself and those around him.

Before the meeting to choose homecoming key chains can get under way, Reggie has to take care of a few practical items.

"Ms. King-Battle, can I get my iron out of your closet?"

He has gym during "zero period," before the official start of the school day, and doesn't have time to iron his clothes beforehand when he's running late. His friends claim that he also brings his iron to church on Sunday mornings because he's *always* running late.

He wouldn't skip this step, even though it's now midday. He believes that appearances matter.

That perfectionism can be a source of contention for Reggie. He has little patience with people who aren't willing to make positive changes in their lives. "I just want to find ways to get something done and to work together," he says.

The product of a musical family, he is always singing a tune — usually gospel. He's almost as busy outside of school as he is in school.

Even in a room full of student leaders, Reggie is the decision maker. "I like the purple number one with white imprint," he says.

End of the discussion.

• • •

Donna Dehn's Advanced Placement music-theory class is the stuff of college courses. The class is small, about 10 students. Dehn is seated cross-legged on the piano bench. As the class discusses chord intervals, she either sings them or plays them on the piano.

"OK, so check this out. I find the top note (she hums) and I can find the interval. Fun, isn't it?"

To provide clues to identifying intervals, she says, it's important to find them in your voice. "You have to make a physical connection. An octave sounds like 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow' (and she sings the opening octave). A sixth sounds like NBC (she sings again) and a third sounds like 'Do Re Mi.' "

Dehn's high energy is infectious, and her enthusiasm for theory is shared among her students, including Danny. He nods often, makes notes and sits straighter than in other classes.

He's still quiet when he answers, but in this class he offers answers.

"Danny is not a traditional AP theory student," says Dehn. He's not in choir, band or orchestra and didn't start with the knowledge that comes from taking traditional music. "I was worried about him keeping up. But he has really good ears and is able to hear things others may not," she says.

Heights educators are encouraging more AP students to take AP tests so that they'll be eligible to receive college credit for the courses. Dehn makes the test mandatory. "Everyone is taking it; that's what we're working toward," she explains.

Danny is no exception. He's willing to push himself for music theory.

• • •

Students are filing into the dimly lit Heights auditorium on a cold December afternoon. It's rehearsal day for the choral holiday concert.

Choral teacher Craig McGaughey is giving the Heights Singers one last bit of instruction before the *A Cappella* choir begins its rehearsal.

Reggie, with his infectious smile and the congenial spirit that makes everyone want to be his friend, is a constant presence in the auditorium. Dressed in button-down shirt and dress slacks, he'll serve as student director on a complicated version of "Jingle Bells" in tonight's concert.

He inhabits the role of leader with all the natural grace of one who has grown

Danny Giannetto hopes to pursue a career in music production. Center, Danny and Cory Farmer work on a compilation CD for their senior project.

up comfortable with his identity and confident in what he stands for. But he's also naturally playful, posing with friends who are snapping photos with a tiny digital camera.

When rehearsal begins, Reggie moves to the wings while McGaughey takes a seat in the middle of the auditorium. When Reggie walks to center stage to begin conducting, he is a little sluggish and slouchy.

McGaughey jumps up and walks him back to the wings, arm around his shoulder and quietly instructing him to approach center stage with purpose.

McGaughey chose Reggie to lead because he knows Reggie's peers will listen and take him seriously.

Reggie goes back off stage and tries again. This time he walks with confidence. He raises his arms, mouths a few instructions and begins conducting, his right foot keeping steady time.

When the song is over, he lowers his arms and turns toward McGaughey.

"Reggie, give them your criticism. What did you like? What didn't you like?"

Without hesitation he turns and gives specific instruction to certain sections of the choir. Sopranos got a little screechy at one point, tenors slowed the tempo, everyone needs to watch and listen to each other.

With that, he walks back to the wings to try one more run-through.

Donna Dehn, whose Advanced Placement music-theory class is the stuff of college courses, discusses techniques for finding intervals with Danny Giannetto.

"Everybody, stand up straight, chests out," he instructs. This time, the choir hears his suggestions and there's a marked improvement in tone and tempo.

• • •

"Hey, Danny. Haven't seen you in a million," says a young woman in his third-period ceramics class. Students are lethargic as they return from spring break. The weather is cold, rainy and windy, and it's been hard for Danny's baseball team to get its games in.

As his high school career is winding down, Danny is anxious to move on. He has been accepted at the University of Akron and Cleveland State University (CSU). He's chosen CSU and will live at home during his freshman year.

It's been a tough second semester. He's struggling with physics, but teacher Daniel Watkins helps him pass. His overall GPA is 2.3, but he pulls an A in AP music theory.

At almost the last minute, Danny decides to do a senior project. He's making a compilation music CD with senior Cory Farmer. He's excited about the project. It fits with his career plans, since he would like to pursue music production.

With this project, as with so many others, Danny is most successful when he is personally engaged. Because he attends a small school, the adults who work with Danny know that about him.

"Danny is an awesome kid. Sometimes I need to push him, but he's fairly responsible," says Michael Dixon, his guidance counselor.

"Small schools have helped me get to know a kid like Danny and to push him as much as possible," he says.

He adds, "Danny becomes more connected in terms of the office staff, who know when he hasn't yet gotten his college applications in or when to push him about his senior project."

• • •

Teacher Jesse Tayse and Reggie Golden confer in honors English class. "He's doing really well even though ... he's so busy with other activities," Tayse says.

Toward the end of the school year, Jesse Tayse's honors English class is busy wrapping up its studies. Reggie is not yet in class. "He's doing really well even though he hasn't been here much lately. He's so busy with other activities," Tayse says.

In addition to his school music commitments and leadership activities, Reggie also sings in a couple of church and community choirs. Today he is late because he was wrapping up a fundraiser for Student Council.

He enters class and gives Tayse a hug.

"Nice to see you, Reggie," she replies.

She takes a moment to get him caught up on the assignment.

Reggie's challenge is keeping all the balls in the air. "Reggie is involved in a lot of things, and he can get stressed out when stuff piles up at one time," says his mother, Beverly Golden.

"One thing he does do is make lists. He's very good at getting himself together when that happens," she says.

Later in the year, the "Leaders With P.R.I.D.E." are rehearsing a song in honor of Principal Janet Tribble's retirement. The impromptu rehearsal really doesn't get moving until Reggie takes the lead.

"Shut up! Can we sing in key, please?" says Reggie, somewhat exasperated.

"Let's get some note recognition going on so we can match pitch," he sings in one note.

After a few quick run-throughs most of the students disperse, leaving Reggie, good friend Bianca Vann and King-Battle in the room.

Reggie asks, or rather insists, Bianca help with a choreographed routine he's working on to audition for choreographer in show choir next year. Bianca used to choreograph dance numbers in middle school.

Bianca and Reggie argue playfully about how long they've known each other. Since 2003? No, end of seventh grade. Was that end of 2002?

"I've known her since fifth grade, but she had that bad attitude and that smart mouth," Reggie chides.

Bianca leans in to share the dish. "Actually, my boyfriend was his best friend and me and Reggie became mutual friends."

They talk daily and hang out a lot. "On Friday we went to IHOP," Bianca begins.

"No! On Friday WE went to IHOP. You weren't there," Reggie counters.

"See we have this type of relationship where we check each other," Bianca says.

"She gets checked more than I do," Reggie responds.

He turns serious then and talks of his recent efforts on behalf of Jacqueline Blockson, a guidance liaison who works with students on college applications. When it appeared that she would lose her job because the guidance department was being restructured, Reggie and senior class president Jimmie Hicks III led a group of students to "Save the Block."

The group met with Superintendent Deborah Delisle and spoke at a Board of Education meeting. Reggie sent a letter to all district staff spelling out why he thought the decision was bad for the high school and asking that she be reinstated.

As the school year ends, he is upset that their demands haven't been acted

In addition to school and leadership commitments, Reggie Golden sings in church and community choirs.

Reggie Golden and his good friend Bianca Vann work at a fundraiser for Student Council. The two talk daily and hang out, and Reggie recruited Bianca to help choreograph a routine for his show choir audition.

on. What he may not fully recognize is that his impatience may have hurt his efforts.

Because Reggie is mature and articulate, King-Battle says, it's easy to forget that he is still a kid. "He was direct and didn't understand when people were offended," she explains later. "He likes immediate action and not everything requires immediate action. Sometimes you need to stop and think things through."

Even though Blockson eventually is recalled to work as a guidance technician, the episode initially leaves Reggie feeling that adults want his input for something like a school levy, but not on issues that affect him day to day.

King-Battle, who is also retiring after 35-plus years, sympathizes with students' need to have input and understands their frustration when they perceive their voices aren't being heard. "You can't tell students they have a voice and then not listen to what they have to say," she says.

• • •

At commencement, Reggie is onstage, wearing his *A Cappella* Choir outfit of black pants, white dress shirt and gold vest. The senior class president of 2007, Jimmie Hicks III, offers words of wisdom to Reggie, who will be 2008 senior class president: "Be patient. Don't get frustrated. Always look to your members."

He turns to Reggie to ask if he will accept the role of senior class leader.

"I do," answers Reggie.

This is a night for celebrating. Though some students' names are not called because they failed to pass the OGT, the celebration is jubilant and the applause deafening.

James Reed, principal of Renaissance School and master of the evening's ceremonies, says, "Turn your tassels from the left to right." After students sing the alma mater, whoops and hollers erupt and caps fly in the air like popcorn popping.

The class of 2007 received more than $3.5 million in scholarships and had two National Merit Scholarship finalists, five National Merit Commended students, one National Achievement Scholar, one National Achievement Commended student, and one National Hispanic Scholar finalist. As Superintendent Delisle tells the class: "Who am I to tell you about inspiration when you are our inspiration?"

Outside in the drizzle with his fellow graduates, Danny Giannetto is scanning the crowd for his family. He flashes his winning smile when he finds them. When congratulations are handed out, instead of looking down bashfully, he looks up with pride and says, "Thanks."

The chance to attend Heights turned out to be a good one for him. "I really liked Heights and I have made a lot of good friends," he says. He looks eastward down Euclid Avenue where this fall he'll be a freshman at Cleveland State University.

About the storyteller

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

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