

"For many of our kids, having someone to come to is essential."



## Getting to Know You

The role of relationships in the first four years  
of a transformation to small schools

**Libbey  
High School**

Toledo, Ohio

# The Ohio High School Transformation Initiative

Launched in 2002 by KnowledgeWorks Foundation, the Ohio High School Transformation Initiative (OHSTI) is changing high schools across Ohio – moving them from outdated factory-model schools to agile learning organizations for the 21st century.

At the heart of the transformation are small, personal learning environments where students can build close relationships with teachers and where teachers can engage students with demanding, pertinent studies.

A partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and others, OHSTI has divided large, anonymous high schools in some of the state's most challenged urban districts into campuses of small schools with about 400 students each, the number research shows to be most effective. Under the KnowledgeWorks model, each small school has authority for its resources, staffing, curriculum development and instructional strategies and involves staff, students, parents and community members in making decisions about these critical areas.

For the majority of the schools targeted by this reform, long-term economic, social and safety challenges in the communities place added strain on efforts to sustain high school improvement. On average, only 32 percent of their students enter high school on grade level in reading and 24 percent in math.

In the midst of these challenging conditions, however, early signs of success are emerging. The schools are doing a good job of ensuring their students graduate, the first hurdle young people must cross on the way to success in a global economy. When the initiative started, the gap in graduation rates between OHSTI sites and their statewide counterparts was about 20 percentage points. The most recent graduation data shows that the gap has narrowed to about 6 points. Five sites have surpassed the state graduation requirement of 90 percent and one more is within a percentage point of the target.

These new schools – most of which opened their doors in 2004 – also are showing improvement in getting students to school. The gap between the state average for attendance and OHSTI has been reduced by more than half.

With a strong focus on individual student success, the OHSTI schools are using diagnostic data to intensify academic supports and research-based instruction, aiming to increase student knowledge and skills at a rapid pace. Even as they work to close performance gaps, these schools are making strides toward the vision of educating all students so that they graduate ready for success at college or work.

## On the cover:

Even though her job as co-leader of a small school includes many administrative tasks, Kathy Stone always tries to make time for students.

# Libbey High School

*When Libbey High School in Toledo was divided into small schools in 2004, leaders were working to reverse years of poor performance. In 2002-03, Libbey had a graduation rate of just 65.6 percent and a state ranking of academic emergency, having met just two of 12 indicators.*

*Under the new model, students could choose to attend one of four academies: The Cowboy Academy of Business (CAB), The Humanities School, The Academy of Science, Math and Related Technologies (SMART) or The Gateway Academy of Health.*

*The obstacles to making such an enormous transition were many, from adapting the historic building for a new school structure to learning how to manage with four offices instead of one. But once those obstacles were cleared, early results indicated some success – the graduation rate increased to 89.5 percent and test scores showed gains in some areas – and progress continued toward more personalized, rigorous and hands-on instruction.*

*Perhaps more importantly, the emphasis on developing relationships allowed many students to form bonds with their educators. While those bonds may not immediately show up on a test score, they have been critical in such things as keeping a student coming to class, encouraging another to complete a graduation requirement and helping a third discover areas where she can shine.*

*Here are the stories of three dedicated educators, each with a different style of relating to students.*



# Getting to Know You

The role of relationships in the first four years of a transformation to small schools

By Peggie Cypher

It's 6:30 a.m. and English teacher Eric Pilcher is in a good mood. He's dressed — his hair in its usual samurai knot, his shirt impeccably ironed — and on his way to pick up his students. At one student's home, he sits in his Jeep Cherokee and honks. He waits. He honks again, then calls on his cell phone. The student doesn't show. He drives on to Renata's house, and then picks up Robert, the third student.



The three of them listen to sports radio on their way to the downtown police station. Pilcher is taking them there for a job-shadowing project. It is one of the good things about his small school, Science, Math and Related Technologies (SMART). The program gives students a chance to shadow a professional in a career area that interests them. A social worker, real estate agent and architect are also involved. It is a pilot program and Pilcher is coordinating it.

The students are excited to get a close-up look at the police station and hear about the program, which has been used with criminal justice students at the University of Toledo. A lieutenant introduces himself and talks about the course. The students fill out paperwork while the police officer leaves to run standard background checks. When the officer returns, he informs Renata that she has a bench warrant for unpaid parking tickets. The matter is settled and Pilcher escorts his students out of the precinct, paperwork in hand. He's glad to have the ball rolling.

Three minutes later, Pilcher's cell phone rings. "Do you still have Robert with you?" the lieutenant asks urgently. "Could you bring him back right away?"

Pilcher turns the Jeep around. Robert is terrified, but Pilcher reassures him. "Don't worry," Pilcher says. "If you didn't do

"I was trying to do something good, something positive."

— Teacher Eric Pilcher

anything wrong, we'll straighten it out." They meet the officer in the entranceway. His face is stern. "Robert, we have a warrant for breaking and entering. We'll have to place you under arrest."

The officer handcuffs Robert and – *click* – takes a mug shot.

A mug shot. A blank stare. A frightened kid.

It's difficult to get a comprehensive picture of today's urban high school. The mug shot, like a school photo, might show a blank expression, or a smile or smirk. It won't show Robert living with his grandparents because his folks are divorced, and it won't show him high-fiving his brother just released from jail. The snapshot also won't show Pilcher buying Renata breakfast at Burger King before returning to school with just one student.

### Eric Pilcher: Trying to Do Something Positive

Eric Pilcher, 34, is known for his cool-headedness, his almost stoic ability to brush off adversity. On this day, that coolness is tested. He has trouble reaching Robert's father and isn't looking forward to being the bearer of bad news. As he teaches a unit on poetry, he tries not to think about his student at the police station.

Later, Robert strolls into the classroom, lifts his arms in the air and announces, "I'm free." It turned out the arrest warrant was for his older brother. Not Robert. Robert takes his seat, seemingly unfazed. Pilcher continues to stroll around the classroom like he always does, exhibiting his usual humor, using strange voices while reciting poetry. He slips in rap lyrics and sports metaphors where he can. He imitates a jazz trumpeter.

Pilcher is glad Robert is back. Despite appearing calm, he's also learned something about himself.

"I put to test my silly notions that when faced with an emotionally charged situation, we can remain clear-headed and calm," Pilcher says later.

He wasn't scared or upset that morning, he recalls. Rather, he was frustrated. "I was trying to do something good, something positive." But of the three students who signed up, one didn't show, one had an outstanding warrant and one was mistakenly arrested.



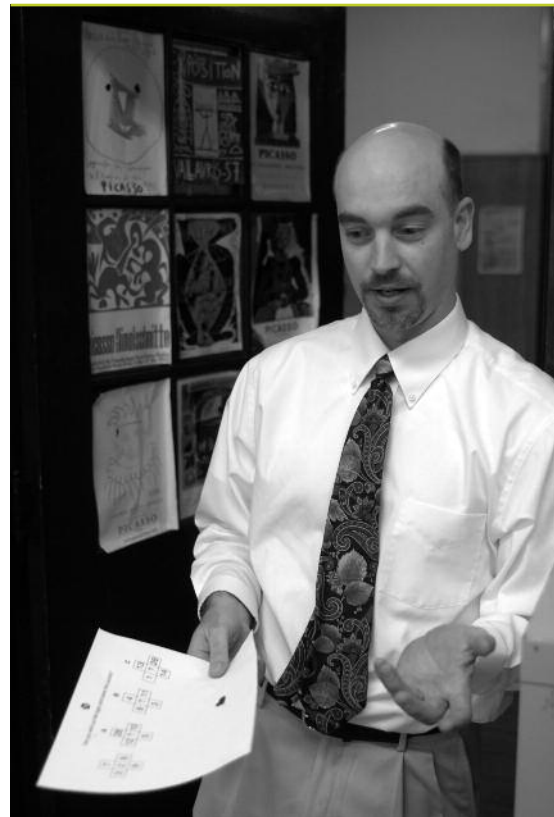
The morning's events remind Pilcher of the difficulties inherent in reforming an urban school. In 2003, the year before Libbey High School was divided into four small schools, its rating on the Ohio report card was academic emergency, the lowest.

That's why educators at Libbey supported the small school transformation. Under the new model, the focus would be on rigor, relevance and relationships. The rigor and relevance, they thought, would be effective if they could get the kids to school, get them there on time and get them to stay there.

How would they do that? For Pilcher and others, the relationship piece might just be the key. Having a smaller number of students – 250 – in the school would mean teaching those same students year after year, knowing their names, their families, their learning styles, their personal issues.

Three years later, Pilcher can still see the potential of the reform – he's had many of the same students for all three years and knows them well. He and other staff members have the freedom to put together programs such as the job shadowing.

But the emotional drain of mornings like this one leaves him wondering whether relationships will be enough. And whether, with the focus on relationships added to their already increased workload, teachers will be able to sustain the effort.



Scott Walter, co-leader for the SMART school, visits Eric Pilcher's classroom.

### Kathy Stone: Taking on Something New

In her 30-some years of teaching, business teacher Kathy Stone was always drawn to developing close relationships with students. But by the fall of 2002, with 150 different students – some who had transferred into Libbey and then out again, others who were perpetually on the suspension list – she found it harder and harder to reach them. And the results, in terms of performance, were beginning to show.

When Stone, then Libbey's union representative, heard about small schools she was immediately drawn to many of the concepts: teacher collaboration, service learning and the idea that each school would have the autonomy to do its own scheduling and institute its own rules.

Most of all, though, the focus on building strong relationships with students intrigued her. "Many of our kids lack



**Kathy Stone helped plan the transition to small schools and became co-leader at the Cowboy Academy of Business. After 30 years of teaching, she was drawn in by the emphasis on teacher collaboration, service learning and the idea that each school could institute its own rules and procedures.**

relationships,” she says. “Having personal relationships where they have someone to come to is essential.”

This, Stone thought, just might help turn around student performance. “Our report card at the time was atrocious,” she recalls. “We knew we needed to change.”

She could not have anticipated the amount of work it would take to convert to small schools, or the resistance and power struggles she would face.



**B**y midsummer 2004, with planning well under way, Stone finds herself chained to her computer with barely time to eat. She has taken on the job of co-leader at the Cowboy Academy of Business (CAB), a position designed to bring teachers into the school’s leadership structure. As the four schools struggle to establish themselves, she is absorbed by issues of space, scheduling and structure.

Stone works so late those summer evenings at school that she buys her husband a dog, Kozmo. A gift to combat the loneliness he feels during her absence.



**A**fter the four small schools open a few weeks later, a campus-wide conflict erupts. During a staff meeting in the cafeteria, a few teachers raise questions about inconsistencies in the various school discipline policies. One of them had been attacked by a student the day before. *Why can’t we return to the old way: one office, one dean?*, they say. Soon they storm out of the meeting.

Stone looks around at the empty seats in dismay. Why haven’t my colleagues bought into the small school concept, she wonders. Teachers are supposed to have input in their schools, and the issues the teachers raised should have been addressed. Yet small schools also are

Planners could not have anticipated the amount of work it would take to convert to small schools.

supposed to have autonomy. Each one is supposed to have the freedom to do things its own way.

The freedom to try out unconventional methods of discipline, for example. This is crucial for Stone. Handling discipline issues in new ways is the key, she believes, to understanding students' behavior. The key to building relationships.



**Gayle Schaber shares leadership duties at CAB with Kathy Stone. Small schools are designed to give those closest to the classrooms a voice in how their schools operate.**

When students get in trouble, Stone often sits down with them and listens to their side of the story. She meets with parents to discuss students' behavior. While other leaders rely on the in-school suspension program, Stone sometimes will ask students to apologize for the offense. The reason is simple: She wants the students in class.

With a single discipline office, Stone fears, her students could get lost in red tape. This is not why she has worked all summer and now still each night until 10 or 11. A student getting lost in red tape is not an option. But can she hold strong against the rising tide of disgruntled staff?

### Janet Beening: Taking Students Under Her Wing

It's spring break and Humanities math teacher Janet Beening is working overtime. She and Jyrell, a student in her small school, walk into the gym. Once settled, she plugs in the boom box and her student puts on his jazz shoes. Shoes she paid for.

The boy begins rehearsing his routine immediately. In one week he and eight others from the Humanities school will compete in the NAACP's National ACT-SO competition.

Each day during the break, Beening rehearses with Jyrell. She has helped Jyrell choose the music, and she paid for his jazz pants as well.

This is Beening being Beening.

Her approach to building relationships with students is often to take them under her wing. In a cotton fuchsia tunic, capris and sandals, Beening, 60, looks more like a 50-year-old and has the energy of someone even younger. She's the one with the classroom where 35 kids congregate each morning. The one with photos of her students plastered on the cabinets, their artwork lining her walls. The one who'll take a student out to Applebee's as a reward for making a certain grade.

While some question whether teachers should maintain such close ties to their students, Beening brushes off those concerns. "My students are part of my

family. Some years ago, I'd regularly take two students home to keep them out of trouble. I made sure their moms knew. They played with my kids, they helped me clean house. I was always their teacher, never their friend." And, Beening says, she's still in touch with them. One of them, now 33, recently bought her roses on her birthday.

Beening is the kind of teacher who would go the extra mile for students under any school structure, large or small. But having a core group of students for more than one year has made it easier.

Now in her 33rd year at Libbey, Beening was one of the few teachers on board with small schools from the beginning. Being a drama teacher and a math teacher who uses drama to teach, she found the Humanities school the right fit. "More kids want to be here because they're with other Humanities kids. When kids are stuck here just for a grade, it's hard to teach.

"The Humanities kids don't seem to fit anywhere else," says Beening. "If a kid dresses in a toilet paper turban, that's where he is that day. Having raised an artist and a dancer, I know. The arts people are weird."

She adds, "And you can't teach these kids in a straight arrow." She moves her hands in a geometric pattern on the desk. "You have to go this way, that way, and then come back this way.

"If I'm spinning around on my heels to demonstrate axis rotation, the Humanities kids get me," says Beening. "It's a lot easier to get down on the floor and crawl with them."

Spinning, crawling, lying down on a desk, Beening is not above (or below) doing what it takes to get a concept across. Getting a concept across is easier, she says,



**Janet Beening helps Javier Montez. Beening has a baby photo of Javier in her classroom – a gift from his mother, whom the veteran teacher also taught.**

in classes with only Humanities kids. The Humanities students have gelled; they help each other a lot more and have fewer discipline problems.

One of those students benefiting from the Humanities school, Beening says, is Jyrell. “He hasn’t succeeded academically,” she discloses. “But he’s a great dancer.”

“If this were a big school,” says Beening, “his involvement in ACT-SO wouldn’t have happened. Our small school leader, Pat Lewinski, knows the kids, talks to them, nurtures them. She chose them to participate.”

The Humanities school sends nine students to the ACT-SO competition at the University of Toledo, where they compete against the most prestigious private schools in the area.

Of the 18 students who place in the competition, four are from Humanities. One student wins a gold medal in drawing and a trip to Washington, D.C.

Jyrell, after weeks of intense practice, dances flawlessly. The audience is taken by his gracefulness and his sheer strength. He finishes in a dramatic pose, and the audience stands on the seats, clapping wildly.

Jyrell places second. He walks off stage beaming.

### **Kathy Stone: An Uncertain Future for Libbey**

Reporters and administrators crowd the entrance to the majestic Libbey building. It is the first day of the 2005-06 school year, the second year of small schools, and the superintendent is preparing to speak.

Last year Stone worked to bring people along with the idea of small school autonomy and independent discipline procedures. By the end of the year, the conflicts had cooled to a simmer.

Now another potential crisis is on the horizon. With the district’s declining enrollment and tight fiscal budget, Libbey faces the threat that it could be closed. Even so, the superintendent vows to keep the school open “for as long as I remain superintendent.” He urges supporters to join a Libbey for the Future committee.



Stone has been recruited for the committee. She knew there would be challenges in the reform, but she did not plan to spend her afternoons in meetings about how to keep the school from closing. Libbey's existence, she assumed, was a given.

For the rest of the second year, Stone and the other committee members brainstorm ways to boost Libbey's attendance. In the third quarter the staff is informed that the campus will incorporate a class of eighth graders next year while a nearby junior high is rebuilt.

The added enrollment seems to forestall the threat of closing. But how can leaders protect the small schools model into the future? Stone worries that so much uncertainty will undo all she's worked for. "The threat of the campus closing puts a damper on everyone's morale – the teachers and the students," she says.

In the spring, the superintendent who vowed to keep Libbey open for as long as he is superintendent announces he is leaving for a job in a larger district.

### Eric Pilcher: Speaking Their Language

In the world of a typical Libbey student, *beastie* means sweeeet or coool. *Trippin* means acting crazy or losing your temper. *Real talk* is when someone is speaking from the heart.

Educators, as well, have their terminology: literacy initiative, scaffolding, differentiated instruction.

Eric Pilcher, now in his fourth year of teaching, knows both vocabularies. One cold January morning, a student who has been expelled for poor attendance appears and asks for a job reference.

"Are you dropping clean?" Pilcher asks, catching the kid off guard. The student assures Pilcher that he would pass a drug test.

"You know what I'm going to tell them. I'm going to say that you're a bright kid who can do whatever you set your mind to. But if you don't set your mind to doing it, it's all over."

They continue to talk about the student's options. The young man is not sure he wants to return to school. "Go talk to the counselor about that," Pilcher advises. "But only if your head is in it. Otherwise, you might consider the Phoenix (an online academy)."

He hands the kid his address and phone number and wishes him luck.

While some teachers build relationships with students by nurturing them, Pilcher feels his role is to tell them the right thing to do. In his classroom, he demands strict adherence to school rules, taking tardy and dress code violations seriously, and he's a stickler on cursing.

But being a role model can demand a lot. One day it can mean talking straight about a student's choices. Another day, it

can mean letting a smart aleck save face.

In sophomore English, Pilcher recites a poem in a Scottish accent. A student fusses at his desk.

*Do you need anything?* Pilcher asks calmly.

*I need money,* the student replies.

*I can give you an education, which will lead to so much money you won't know what to do with it.*

*I don't need no f...ing education,* the student says casually. He leans back at his desk, his long legs outstretched.

*That's 25 cents.* Pilcher indicates the can where he collects fines for cursing.

*Twenty-five cents! Oh s..t!* The kid takes out a dollar.

The game is on.

*That's 50 cents.*

*Okay. M...fer,* he taunts.

"I try to be a role model. I think many students are missing structure and discipline at home."

– Eric Pilcher



Construction arts teacher Fred Schermbeck and Krystopher Sizemore work on a project. Because small schools focus on different areas of interest, students have a range of options.

Kathy Stone believes deeply in the potential of the reform she helped bring about. With the school's future uncertain, she says she's worked too hard to return to the old way.

*That's 75 cents,* retorts Pilcher.

*Son of a b...ch.*

*That's a dollar.*

Smirking, the student gets up and saunters to the front desk to stuff a crumpled dollar in the can. Pilcher smirks as well.

"I'm a notorious curser at home playing the Play Station," he tells the students, circulating the room. "But not at school. I'm trying to 'train' us to respond appropriately to situations."

Later Pilcher says, "I try to be a role model. I think many students are missing structure and discipline at home. If I let the little things go, then the rules that do matter lose their emphasis."

So far, his style seems to cement his relationship with his students. The kids take him seriously, and few dare to curse.

Pilcher is careful that his hard-line approach doesn't set off students with anger-control problems.

"I'm kind of grimy," he says. "I would never seriously attempt to resolve a conflict in the classroom. The student would be showing off for his friends – it would reflect him trying to save face and he might make a bad decision. I'll allow them to appear to have won. When the bell rings, I'll make sure they spend the next class in the BIC (in-school suspension). I point out at the next day's class that there's an empty seat. I let them know that I'm the Grime King – I don't have to play fair."

The cursing contest ended, the class turns to Langston Hughes. This time, as is appropriate to the poem, Pilcher reads in the voice of a rambling drunk.

### Kathy Stone: Staying Afloat

It's the third year of small schools and the hallways at Libbey are louder, more crowded as eighth graders join the mix. Yet Kathy Stone feels positive about the year. New courses have been created, such as CAB's business graphics and the SMART school's zoology course. In conjunction with the Toledo Museum of Art, the Humanities school is offering glass blowing. With the autonomy to add courses and fine-tune each school's curriculum, Libbey may be able to draw in students who might otherwise go to charter schools.

By the end of the year, though, uncertainty sets in. The board of education and the union have yet to sign an agreement to continue with the present set-up of small schools. This leaves small school leaders uncertain of their positions for next year. Stone could end up back in the classroom.

*Could.* But won't. Stone maintains that if the campus returns to one big high school, she is gone. "It's costing me to work here," she says. The extra hours she puts in as a small school leader plus working over the summer actually amount to a pay cut for Stone. She does it because she believes deeply in the potential of the reform. She's worked too hard to return to the old way.

As it turns out, Stone doesn't have to make that decision. Small schools continue into the fourth year, minus the eighth-grade class *and* minus one of the four small schools – the Gateway School of Health Technologies. Declining enrollment has forced the decision to

reduce to three small schools, and Gateway was selected for elimination by teachers in a secret ballot.



On the first day of the fourth year, administrators for all three schools stand at the entrance checking dress code. A girl is sent home for wearing two-toned shoes, a boy for a striped polo. Another because he's missing a belt. Kids argue, but the administrators hold firm.

After the concerns in past years over discipline not being consistent, the small school leaders have joined forces and agreed to be tough on issues like the dress code from day one. Despite her call for schools to remain independent, Stone thinks the cooperation is a good thing. She feels strong. "This year *we're* taking over."

### Eric Pilcher: Getting Students Graduated

In fall 2007, a few weeks into the fourth year of small schools, Eric Pilcher sits at his desk looking over essays. A tall junior named Juan straightens up the textbooks in Pilcher's room. Juan has been put out of math class for a dress code violation. Pilcher, having had Juan now for the third year in a row, asked a small school leader if Juan could come to Pilcher's room and tidy up instead of reporting to the main office.

As Pilcher attempts to work, he spots one of his football players in the hallway and yells at him to come into the room. The student should be in cooking class.

"Where are you supposed to be?" the teacher asks.

"I'm not allowed in class."

“If you’re not allowed in class, where are you supposed to be? Your teacher came up to talk to me about you. You know what’s right. You’re a reflection of the football team. Here’s the reality – go to the office.”

The student slinks away.

“These kids don’t need a friend,” Pilcher says emphatically. “They need someone to make demands of them. My job is not one of sharing but of role-modeling behavior.”

Pilcher sips coffee and adds, “I’m probably not doing a good thing harboring Juan.”

Because Juan is frequently put out of class for goofing off, Pilcher explains, reporting to the office could land him a suspension.

“Yes, he doesn’t have the right shoes,” says Pilcher. “But I’m just trying to get him graduated.”

Trying to get Juan graduated hasn’t been easy. Pilcher first met Juan in his freshman English class three years ago. Juan and his cousin would talk and disrupt the class. Pilcher decided to call a conference with Juan’s grandmother. Two days later, in an attempt to embarrass him, she showed up in the classroom and took a seat beside Juan.

Juan’s behavior did change a bit but still interfered with his academics. Juan ended up taking English I twice. Currently he’s taking English II with Pilcher for the second time as well as English III. He continues to struggle, but his closeness with Pilcher keeps him coming to class.

Pilcher turns to Juan. “I guess I’m teaching you, Juan, that there are not real consequences.”

“But it’s petty,” Juan replies. “What did

I do to be in the office? I didn’t cuss anyone out.”

Tall, with large brown eyes and the charm of a talk show host, Juan admits his mouth does get him into trouble. “My freshman year, I didn’t care, for real. And I couldn’t stand Pilcher ’cause he was telling me all the right things to do. But we started clicking the end of sophomore year.”

Now a junior at 18, Juan is the kind of student small schools were made for. His mother died suddenly from a heart defect when Juan was in eighth grade and his father is in prison. Currently Juan lives with his older cousin. “I live life to the fullest every day. You never know when your time is coming.”

Juan says he’s always been outgoing and that his tendency to talk a lot in class has earned him a bad reputation. Pilcher describes Juan’s behavior as silly and says



Terry Jackson, co-leader of The Humanities School, and other small school leaders interact during breaks in the school day.



**Ann Koch-West, SMART science teacher, and student Brian Nealy prepare for an experiment on gravity. She says learning about students' home lives helps her understand students – and motivate them.**

that because not all teachers can tolerate it, it gets him in trouble. Juan has a tendency to push back when he thinks a teacher is being unreasonable, which gets him into more trouble.

Juan knows only small schools, but can see where they work well. “If you have the same teacher, you know what the teachers are looking for. I have good relationships with Ms. Koch-West and Pilcher.”

Ann Koch-West, a science teacher in SMART, has had Juan for two of the four years. She also remembers Juan and his cousin acting out. “They were pistols,” she says, “never disrespectful, but definitely handfuls.”

When Koch-West found out about Juan's background – how he was shuffled from house to house after his mother died – she became more sympathetic. And it's worked.

“Juan has taken to me. We've bonded. He will do everything I ask. He never gives me any lip. And though I don't have him this year, a day doesn't go by when he doesn't come by and say hello. And not a week goes by,” she adds, smiling, “that I don't put my arm around him and say, ‘Now, could you have done this a little differently?’”

Juan finishes tidying up and asks permission to watch sports on a cable channel.

Pilcher nods. He's pleased about Juan's progress since that first year. “In class, it's not all about Juan. He's much calmer. He can participate without being one of the focal points.” He wonders, though, if Juan keeps getting put out of class for dress code violations or being mouthy, if he can graduate on time.



**Teacher Janet Beening works with student Vernon Laffartha. She says dealing with things such as dress codes and tardies saps her energy. “It takes a lot of stamina. It’s not the kids. It’s all this other silly stuff.”**

### Janet Beening: Fatigue Sets In

The bell has rung and students in Janet Beening’s algebra class are making themselves sandwiches with the Kroger Value peanut butter and jelly she keeps in her cabinet. Jerrette, a tall student with short-cropped hair, hums a tune.

“You have five minutes to get yourselves together,” Beening announces. Students scatter to get white boards and markers, then take their seats and focus on the blackboard. Beening has posted a chart with regular pay, overtime and hourly pay for the students to work out the taxation rate. “I’m giving you \$18 hourly pay because I want you to think big. When you get out of college or get your associate’s

degree, you might make this amount.”

As the students work out the problems, Beening circulates. She settles a quibble between two girls, tells a student at the

window to sit down, jokes with one girl about what she affectionately refers to as her “ghetto behavior,” deals with a latecomer.

After 33 years of teaching, Beening makes it look easy. But in truth, this fourth year into small schools, she is tired. Bone tired. No longer does she do drama, no longer does she coach quiz bowl, no longer does she pay for kids to take dance classes or oversee ACT-SO rehearsals.

Beening firmly believes in the extra effort she gives her students. Her fatigue, she says, is from other factors. “Just this morning I got yelled at in the office for allowing my students to make sandwiches. People are so negative, I can’t take it.”

While she loves her small Humanities school, that kind of attitude, plus the continuous discipline and tardy problems, has her worn out. The school’s policy of suspending a student for three tardies, she thinks, is ridiculous. “In my heart, I can’t let a kid get suspended for a total of three minutes of lateness,” she says. Monitoring dress code violations is also a chore because, as Beening says, she doesn’t have time to notice the color of everyone’s shoelaces.

“It takes a lot of stamina,” she says. “It’s not the kids. It’s all this other silly stuff.”

Perhaps the largest headache for Beening is the push in the wake of the No Child Left Behind law to hold all kids to the same standards. “Pressure is on the small school leader to put kids in Algebra I. Some are taking it for the sixth time. When it gets hard, they stop showing up. Why are we torturing people and pushing them out?”

Veteran teacher Janet Beening worries about the pressure to hold all students to the same standards. She asks, “why not focus on a student’s strengths?”

Contrary to the movement to ensure all kids succeed in math and science, Beening believes that some kids just aren't good in math. She questions how much math those students should be required to take. "I have one student who has failed algebra several times, but he's an excellent artist. Why not focus on a student's strengths?"

be given opportunities to shine.

Beening writes equations on the board, and Jerrette eagerly volunteers to solve one. He finishes it quickly and begins to sing "Feliz Navidad." A few girls begin singing as well, while a boy throws erasers at them.

When the bell rings, Beening releases a sigh. "I love these kids," she says. "But at times they zap my energy."

Sometimes she wonders how long she can sustain it.

### Kathy Stone: Dress Code, Tardy Slips and Literacy

A string of white lights runs across the windows of the Cowboy Academy of Business office and a snowman sits on the counter. Winter break is almost here and the CAB staff holds its monthly meeting. For the first three years of the transformation, the entire faculty continued to meet once a month. This fourth year, they have decided to separate by school – a move that could bolster the schools' independent identities.

The meeting begins with a shared literacy lesson and progresses to a discussion of a CAB activity on the Friday before break. When official business is finished, an open forum allows staff to discuss their issues.

"I'd like to know when zippered jackets became dress code," says one teacher.

"And how can we control the do-rags?" says another "I've collected 15 million of them."

Other teachers are worried about tardies. "I had 13 students late to my third hour," one says. "The policy of putting them into BIC is not working."

Kathy Stone tells the teachers she's doing the best she can. "We get pressure from you to suspend the kids, and we get pressure from the district to keep them in school."

Noting the accusatory tone of staff members, administrative leader Gayle Schaber adds, "This concerns me more than the dress code. Teens will push against us. We're going to push back.



**Pat Lewinski, co-leader for the Humanities school, knows the students and has helped get them involved in activities like the ACT-SO competition.**

Jerrette, for example, has lots of strengths. One is singing, and Beening is urging him to compete in the ACT-SO competition. Although Beening has only had Jerrette for one year, the two have a special bond. He loaned her the book *Battle of Jericho* by Sharon Draper and then she bought him *November Blues*, the next in the series. Because she enjoys musicals, Beening has loaned him several DVDs, including *Moulin Rouge*.

"Mrs. Beening is the best teacher in the school," Jerrette says. "She takes the time to help us out. She'll give us second and third chances. And she's weird. That's what makes her fun."

Jerrette is also a whiz at math. But Beening knows that students like Jerrette, those who are shy or have eccentric interests, can get lost in the crowd and not

We have to stay united. We can't turn on one another."

Stone leaves the meeting in frustration. Three and a half years into the reform, she's still spending most of her time on issues other than education.

She does manage to maintain regular contact with students, though. Handling discipline referrals has given her a chance to know them and seek appropriate ways of helping them succeed.

One of those students is a junior named Alfred. "Alfred is charming and friendly," says Stone, "but he's going through some personal crisis. I'm trying to keep him focused." She adds, "His mom and dad are not together. He has a car and cleans rooms 11-7 at night at Owens College. He's passed all his OGTs [Ohio Graduation Tests], but still needs some credits."

As busy as she is with administrative work, Stone decides to do an independent study in English with Alfred so he can earn more credits. She also offers a few other students who are on track to graduate an independent study. One is a junior named Amber.

"Mrs. Stone is one of the nicest people in the school. She likes to help people," says Amber, who plans to attend Owens for courses in real estate. "I only needed two credits ... I'm so glad I get to graduate earlier."

Stone is glad to help students, especially those in trouble. "I hate to see students get this far and fail," Stone says. "Thank God I have a license to teach English."

### Eric Pilcher: For Once, Overmatched

As a new semester begins, Pilcher stands at his classroom door at the end of the day, keeping an eye on the dismissed students. Across the way he overhears a student talking about blowing up the second floor. The kid, a football player from last year, looks straight at Pilcher and says, "Man, you better get in the classroom and close the door."

Pilcher immediately files a report. The



Eric Pilcher, SMART English teacher, listens as a student asks a question about the romantic poets.

next day, when he and the student's mother meet in the small school leader's office, Pilcher is unprepared for her response. Their exchange is charged.

*He was talking about his cell phone exploding, the mother says. I'm tired of everyone picking on him. I'm always getting phone calls about him. She pauses. What business is it of yours anyway?*

*It's my job. Imagine if I'd heard him make the threat and it happened and I didn't say anything.*

*He was talking about his cell phone exploding, the mom insists.*

Another student is brought in and verifies what Pilcher heard. The mother is taken aback and begins to cry. *I don't know why he'd say anything like that.*

But when the small school leader informs them he will file an expulsion hearing, both mother and son begin screaming the decision is not fair, insisting the remark was about the cell phone.

*Do you think your son is doing wrong?* Pilcher asks.

*He's my son and I'll help him.*

*Even if he's wrong?*

*Right or wrong, I'll defend him.*

Walking out of the meeting, Pilcher can't stop thinking of the lack of respect the mother is passing down to her son. He is reminded of the plaque behind his desk: "I always try to meet the parents because it helps me to forgive their children."

"It's one thing to read it and giggle," Pilcher says later. "It's another when faced with the reality of parents aligned with students. I was down all day. There's no way I can do any good faced with these circumstances."

The usually irrepressible Pilcher is subdued. "It was the first time I felt overmatched."

### Beening: Heading up a Unit of Misfits

"Emanuel, Robert, go to your own class," Janet Beening yells while shooing out the two boys and welcoming her second hour. And then, looking at

"I'm their cheering section and their family. They're My family. We are the home they don't have."

— Ann Koch-West

their shirts, she reminds them, "Tuck, tuck, tuck."

Two freshmen make themselves sandwiches, and Jerrette passes out white boards. Once again Beening is on. In a floral skirt and purple scoop-neck blouse, she looks refreshed. Last week she was tired. This week she can't help being pulled in. She may have cut back on extracurricular activities, but she's not holding back in the classroom.

Today's lesson is on binomials.

"Bisexual?" one girl shouts out. No one pays attention. Beening hands out a practice quiz and students get busy. One student shouts that the sound of Beening's shoes on the hardwood floor disturbs her. Beening takes her shoes off and tiptoes around the room.

Jerrette finishes first and asks to get some cookies from the cabinet. A girl named Terica calls out to Beening that she needs the teacher to stand by her or she won't be able to concentrate.

"We function as a unit of misfits," Beening says warmly. "Terica needs constant attention. The boy, Vernon, over there. He likes to quack. He does it so much, it drives Terica crazy. He was quacking so much one day that Terica shouted out, 'Shut the f... up.'" Beening told Terica she couldn't say that word, and the girl asked if she could say "fudge."

The two students got into a verbal tug-of-war that Beening had to put a stop to — only to have them chase each other around the room, writing the words on chalk boards.

"These kids can't do block classes for 95 minutes," says Beening. She adds that

at times she can only keep Terica's attention by being playful with her. "Sometimes I don't have the energy." Today, however, Beening does. She walks to the back of the room and stands next to Terica's desk while she works.

She also has the energy to order Jerrette a Ruben Studdard CD so he can begin practicing his routine for ACT-SO. As usual, she pays. "How else was he going to get the money to pay for it?"

### Eric Pilcher: Get a Bucket of Water

It's between classes and the hallways are crowded as usual. A student stops quickly at her locker, grabs a notebook and makes her way to biology. As she passes the drinking fountain, she faints and lands flat on the marble floor. Students crowd around. Teachers step into the hall.

Juan strolls by and freaks. It's his sister. He bends down to check on her, but is shooed away by a faculty member. He refuses to move. Like Juan's mother, his sister has a heart defect. Seeing her on the ground, Juan insists he needs to make sure she's okay. He gets into an argument with the teacher and refuses to go to class.

A few minutes later, his sister gets up, but Juan is sent to the office. His punishment: suspension.

When Koch-West hears about this, she marches to the office and informs the small school leader about Juan's background. "It was his sister!" she says emphatically. "Which one of us wouldn't have done the same thing?"

Juan's suspension is revoked and he goes back to class. Koch-West returns to her





own class, resolved more than ever that the kids in this building need small schools.

“Juan is not alone in having a screwed-up family life. If only everyone would buy into small schools. We have so many kids who don’t go home after school or who are here at the crack of dawn because they have no home life. They need structure and an environment where they can develop relationships with teachers. To be a successful teacher in a building like this, you have to be able to have a relationship outside of the textbook. Parents here don’t come to sporting events. They don’t even pick their kids up from the games,” she says.

“I’m their cheering section and their family. They’re my family. We are the home they don’t have. It makes me sad we’re not as successful as we should be because not everyone will embrace small schools.”

Two days later, Juan is a no show for Pilcher’s class. The next day as well. Pilcher inquires. Juan was caught in the hallways instead of class. John Preston, the new SMART administrative leader, has a no tolerance policy. Juan is suspended.

Pilcher worries. With missing so much school, will Juan earn his academic credits?

Across the campus, student absences, suspensions and tardies are a deterrent to students’ academic success. The small school emphasis on developing relationships with students and engaging them in the classroom is designed to motivate them to attend. But how can teachers get kids into class to engage them?

SMART school leaders respond to the tardiness problem with mandatory lockouts. When the second bell rings, teachers lock their doors and anyone who is

**Jerrette Bradley in algebra class. He says he enjoys Janet Beening’s class because she is “weird” and fun.**



**Kathy Stone and students Amber Barnes and Shalese Johnson discuss a homework assignment. Despite her administrative responsibilities, Stone sometimes offers independent study work for students who need extra credit.**

not in class has to report to a lockout room. Three tardies earn the student a suspension.

One day Pilcher does duty in the lockout room. Spending a planning period watching students is an issue for some teachers, but Pilcher is happy to help out. He wants to find a solution to the problem.

Pilcher notices the same students are in the lockout room each day. Are they using it as a hangout? Unlike Beening, he thinks it is imperative to follow through on the rule that three tardies will result in a suspension.

He calls school teacher leader Scott Walter and tells him, “I want to volunteer my time to find out who is chronically locked out. Can you bring me up the records, and I’ll tally the totals for each student?”

The small school leader reports to the lockout room and hands Pilcher the records. “This seems to be a kicking place,” he tells Walter. “If we’re not suspending kids like the rules dictate, we’re failing them.”

Pilcher recalls the first year of small schools. Students had been told to clean out their lockers before custodians had a chance to place garbage bins in the hallways. Consequently, the halls were littered with papers, trash and water bottles. Teachers stood at their doorways complaining about the mess while Pilcher grabbed a few bins from his classroom.

“We can either stand in the hallway and yell ‘fire’ or we can go and get a bucket of water. The same thing with lockouts,” he says.

Pilcher continues his paperwork and notices one student sitting next to her buddy, who has been in lockout four times in two weeks.

He turns to her, “I’m trying to get you a day off.”

“Can we make a deal?” she replies. “I promise I won’t be late anymore this week.”

“It’s Friday,” he says.

“Please, can we make a deal?”

“Okay. Get your mom on the phone.”

“No. I’m gonna get in so much trouble. Pleeceasse.”

Pilcher won’t budge. He looks at the girl’s friend. “People around you may try to drag you down,” he tells the girl. “But ultimately they won’t be there for you in 10 years.”

## Kathy Stone: Advocating for Students

No matter what else is going on, Kathy Stone makes time to work with students. Stone's biggest gift as an educator is her ability to feel for the students and their issues, and that gift often leads her to get involved in their problems.

Alfred, for example, one of the students in her independent study, is struggling in his other classes. Stone believes this may be due to his working late at night. She calls his mother. "What's more important," Stone says to her, "working or getting his diploma?" She says later, "I've known his mom since he was a freshman. I realize they may have some problems at home, but his future is more important."

Stone also goes to bat for a student with anger issues. After a public disagreement with a teacher over misuse of a computer and the resulting punishment, the student came to school with a paring knife, threatening to cut the teacher's tires.

The student was expelled.

Stone has dealt with the boy and his mother often, and usually can talk him down when he gets upset. But that day, Stone was absent. Stone refuses to believe the student would have followed through on his threat. "He was angry. But he had the wood part of the knife showing out of his pocket. He wasn't trying to hide it. I just had to give him another chance."

Before his expulsion hearing, Stone asks administrative leader Gayle Schaber, who attends the hearings, to plead for leniency. Stone says, "Their minds at this age aren't mature. They don't make good judgments."

Schaber, trusting Stone's relationship with the student, successfully argues for the student to be allowed to return in time to take his exams.

Stone is relieved. "He's worth it. He's been so successful. I didn't want that success to end. And I do think he's learned a serious lesson. He did have to stand up and confess at church."

No matter what else is going on,  
Kathy Stone makes time to  
work with students.

## Eric Pilcher: Crossing the Line

One month remains in the year. Pilcher begins the play *Death of a Salesman* with his junior class. Juan will not be participating. Two days after he returned from his suspension, he got put out of class again for mouthing off. He is suspended once more.

As Pilcher assigns parts of the play, a disagreement breaks out between two students. PJ, with short hair and diamond studs in his ears, stands up and walks toward the other student in a threatening manner. The rest of the students shrink, ready for a fight.

Pilcher tells the class to relax; the guys aren't going to do anything. PJ sits down. Pilcher compliments the other student on keeping his cool.

Soon the bell rings and the students depart. Thirty seconds later, a student runs back into the classroom and reports that the two students are in the hallway, ready to fight. Pilcher tells her not to worry, that PJ is a "ho," meaning he is too chicken to fight.

The boys don't fight. But word of the "ho" remark gets back to PJ, who reports it to a small school counselor. PJ stops coming to class, and his buddies in Pilcher's class stage a work stoppage.

"I definitely crossed a line. Absolutely," Pilcher later admits. The following day Pilcher has a discussion with the class. "I admitted I was wrong in using that term to describe PJ," he says. But he pointed out that by not coming to class, PJ was hurting himself. "You can resent me for what I said. But don't stop doing your work."

As with Juan, Pilcher has an established relationship with PJ. He's had PJ in class for three years and coached him on the football team. This, Pilcher feels, gives him

room to be more relaxed – and occasionally leads him to say things he might not say otherwise.

Sometimes that gets him in trouble.

Two years ago, Pilcher was in the office running off copies, when a few kids started rapping about him. In the spirit of a rap-off, Pilcher began his own song, which included several digs about the boys. An administrator overheard and issued him a green slip – an official conduct warning.

"In a suburban district, they probably would have fired me," Pilcher reflects. "Here, the kids know I'm crazy and they're drawn to it. Crossing the line refreshes them. It makes them realize my humanity. And the kids who hate me ... they're the ones coming in here each morning to shake my hand."

Will PJ be one of those students?

For two days PJ doesn't show up for class. Pilcher approaches him in the hall and asks if he'd like to return to class. PJ declines.

## Janet Beening: A Good Run

It's a warm Sunday morning at the botanical gardens. In a small building near the herb garden, the Humanities school holds its annual art fair. The room is wall to wall in student work: paintings, prints, textiles, jewelry and found-objects sculptures. The choir and orchestra are set to perform and just outside on the patio, four students prepare to dance. The students start with a tap dance, then do a number combining traditional African steps with hip-hop.

Janet Beening is there to cheer them on. "I hope they keep me on the mailing list for next year," she says. "I'd love to see how they progress."



**Stephanie Davis and other students in Eric Pilcher's classes study the play *Death of a Salesman*, the poetry of Langston Hughes and other literature.**

Next year, Beening has decided, she won't return. It's time to retire. She's had a good run at Libbey, and after having observed some of the younger teachers, feels the students are in good hands. "When I was watching some of the younger teachers working with the kids on the bus to the state basketball championship, I thought 'I can leave now.'"

Beening's decision is hard for some of her students and colleagues. Jerrette, the student who shares books and DVDs, says, "I don't like that she's leaving. We're used to her, and now we have to readjust to a new teacher."

Tim Best, who has taught with Beening for 15 years, agrees. "It's going to be a sad subtraction for the Libbey High School community because she's such a nurturing educator."

He laughs. "I've saved her life many

times when she tried to take stuff away from kids who wanted to fight her. She is a nurturer, but she made students follow the program."

### **Eric Pilcher: One Size Does Not Fit All**

The bell rings and a student races into Pilcher's room, slaps her books on the desk and announces, "I want to be Willy."

"Yes, good morning," says Pilcher, placing a copy of *Death of a Salesman* on each desk.

It is two weeks before the end of the school year and Pilcher continues with the play. Soon other students file in and when Pilcher asks who would like a reading part, a dozen hands shoot into the air.

"I'll be Miss Forsythe," says one student.

"I'll be Stanley," says another. "Wait. Stanley only has one line."

"I want to be Willy," the initial girl repeats.

Another student chimes in. "Then you gotta talk like a dude."

"I want to be Willy," she says in a gruff voice.

It's junior English. These excited students are the same ones who held a work boycott two weeks earlier. And one of them is PJ.

"I didn't want to come back to class," PJ says. "I was still mad at Pilcher." After PJ rebuffed offers to meet with Pilcher, a school counselor talked him into returning to class. "When I heard that Pilcher apologized, I thought it was the manly thing to settle the situation," he says.

With some time for reflection, PJ says, "I had to deal with Pilcher before and now and every year. It's a good thing. It's part of life. You learn to deal with people you need to deal with." He admits, "I like Pilcher. He's tough, but fair. And once you get to know him and his expectations, he's pretty cool."

Pilcher is glad PJ has returned. Yet he knows that not all problems will end in success. For Juan, the verdict is still out.

A few days after Juan's second suspension, he again comes on the scene

of his sister flat out on the floor. Staff members try to clear the area, and Juan refuses to get out of the way. Soon a police officer orders him to move. Again he refuses, vehemently.

Juan is taken to jail, charged with misconduct in an emergency and – *click* – a mug shot. Another photo, one that won't reveal Juan's struggles, his commitment to his sister, the teachers who tried to help him.

The next day the judge throws out the case and Juan returns to school.

When Pilcher hears the news, he shakes his head. "Juan and I have had the talk five hundred times – the one where I tell him if they're looking to get you, be sure and not give them any reason to get you."

Koch-West has a different feeling. She thinks they are failing Juan by failing to accommodate his concern over his sister's health. "I'm disgusted by the whole thing.

to her class during lunch and does the math work, which she checks.

Yet the very next day, because Juan is caught skipping the math class he feels unwelcome in, he is suspended once more.

Small schools can't provide the answers for all of Juan's problems, Pilcher says. "In my heart of hearts, I believe that while school reforms may improve the situation for some students, there is nothing any reform can do to fix a problem that isn't a direct result of the school system." He notes that many of the problems students bring to school are a product of societal factors beyond teachers' control.

Koch-West reports that the next day Juan stopped by her room and told her he has decided to go for his General Equivalency Diploma (GED). She is helping him file the papers for financial aid. "Juan's hoping to enroll in a program that combines GED classes with courses at

the Phoenix Academy to complete his coursework. Dexter passed his OGTs in the fall and enrolled in Phoenix; this spring, he finished his coursework there. The counselor tells Beening that Dexter can now walk at the Libbey graduation with his class.

"Yeah!" Beening claps. "That's great news."

In this case, Beening's support helped keep a student on the path to graduation. But the influence of a dedicated teacher doesn't always translate into academic success. Jyrell, the student who wowed the audience at ACT-SO, didn't graduate and works in a nightclub – dancing. Beening's influence on Jyrell can only be guessed.

Beening continues to clean out her room. The posters are given to another math teacher, the TV to the art department. "I'm leaving empty-handed," she says, "all except for my photos."

On the glass pane of an old wooden cabinet, she proudly points out a baby photo of a current student named Javier. "This was given to me by his mom," Beening says. "She was a student of mine, too." Beening continues to point out the generations of students and then, gently, one by one, she peels the photos off.

While Beening is taking her photos, there is one thing she is leaving: a list for Humanities teacher leader Terry Johnson. She points to kids playing cards at the table. "There are good kids here who need just as much help as the troubled kids. They don't necessarily have problems, but more of a tendency to slide with the bad ones. That student there," she says, "he's extremely bright; he's on the list. And so is Jerrette." Beening beams.

"Jerrette came in earlier and showed me his medals from the sports banquet. I told him I won't be too tired next year to come to his track meets. I won't cut myself off completely. I'll do it slowly. Four years from now, I won't know anybody."

Meanwhile, Kathy Stone is packing up her office – she, too, has decided to retire. "It's amazing how much you accumulate," she says, stacking books. "I have good news. All my independent study students

"The kids who stayed with us for four years, our core group, we have excellent relationships with those kids... It's awesome to see their emotional growth."

– Kathy Stone

It's stupid," she says. "This is the third time this year people are harassing him for wanting to be by his sister."

Later that day, Juan stops by Koch-West's classroom. She recounts, "Juan said to me, 'I can hear you and Mr. P. telling me to do the right stuff. But no matter what I do, I get in trouble.'"

One of his issues, Juan tells her, is that his math teacher is refusing to grade his work because he has missed so many days. Koch-West advises him to get the assignments to keep up with his skills and complete them in her room. Juan reports

the community college. He thinks he can be successful with a fresh start," she says.

#### Four Years and Counting

It's the last day of the 2007-08 school year. Janet Beening has no exam this hour so she rummages through her cabinets while a few kids sit nearby playing cards. A counselor walks in with news about a former student named Dexter. Last year Dexter did not pass the OGTs and quit school. Beening promised Dexter that if he passed the OGTs this year she would pay for him to enroll in



**Eric Henderson, head football coach, and Kyle Griffith watch practice with Eric Pilcher. Pilcher brings the same insistence on playing by the rules to the field and the classroom.**

came through with their work. I did have to *extract* the assignments from Alfred. But he's graduating."

He's graduating, Stone doesn't say, because of her. She took time to get to know Alfred, to work with him. As with the expelled student who was allowed to come back to take his exams, the freedom Stone had to try unconventional methods saved students from being lost in red tape, from falling through the cracks.

Stone's eyes begin to water as she reflects on the four years of small schools – the reform she helped initiate.

Before small schools, she says, "I've never had a student I've known for all four years. It's awesome to see their emotional growth. It'll be sad at graduation. The kids who stayed with us for four years, our core group, we have excellent relationships with those kids – which reminds me," she says

and turns toward her computer to check on a job she's trying to help a student get.

At 11:50 the bell rings signaling the end of the final exam. Students explode from classrooms and hit their lockers running. After a solid 30 minutes, an announcement comes on asking students to exit the building. While the students cheerfully celebrate the end of the school year, many have no place to go.

On the second floor, the SMART teachers clean up the halls. They bring carts and baskets to collect the unreturned textbooks and piles of unwanted supplies.

Pilcher is working quietly at his desk when Koch-West pops in. "You caved, didn't you?" she says teasingly. "You caved. I know you caved."

Koch-West and Pilcher had a student who skipped both of their exams but showed up for basketball practice.

Koch-West refused to let him make up the exam. Pilcher apologizes. "I only let him take it because I had promised him he could. That was before I knew he skipped your exam," he tells her, their usual nurturing/tough love roles oddly reversed.

Their conversation soon turns to an update on Juan. Koch-West reports that Juan did indeed register for the community college and is applying for financial aid.

"But to talk about him further," she says, "I think I'll need tissues."

"I think I'll need a ruler to hit him over the head," says Pilcher.

Back in their familiar roles, Pilcher and Koch-West wrap up another year. Taking inspiration from teachers like Kathy Stone and Janet Beening, they and their co-workers will

continue the extra effort to build relationships that encourage and shape students. Whatever the style – handling discipline one student at a time, nurturing young artists, being a role model who sometimes steps over the line – relationships are clearly working. ■



### 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.

# Every Student Deserves a Legacy

This series from KnowledgeWorks Foundation shares the day-to-day struggles and triumphs of educators and students working to transform underperforming large urban high schools into small personalized schools or to pioneer schools that blend high school and college learning. Previous books in the series are available at [www.kwfdn.org](http://www.kwfdn.org). You can also follow a particular school or campus by going to “School Stories” on the website.

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