

"We started doing things because they're the right thing to do for our kids."



Learning to be Leaders

Principal and teachers adjust to expanded roles that give them a greater voice in shaping their small school.

**Cleveland Heights
High School**

Cleveland Heights, 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the Ohio High School Transformation Initiative (OHSTI) is changing high schools across Ohio – moving them from outdated factory-model schools to agile learning organizations for the 21st century.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:

Principal Marc Engoglia of the Legacy School has forged strong relationships with students. Here he shares a lunch-time laugh with Harry Clark (seated) and Lauren Durham.

Cleveland Heights High School

*A*fter more than 100 years of serving a community anchored by its cultural institutions and a university, Cleveland Heights High School needed to change. Recognizing that the old comprehensive model wasn't able to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body, in 2003 the Cleveland Heights-University Heights School District started a journey toward a new kind of high school.

The beginning was challenging as a small cadre of educators worked to convince the community, students, parents and teachers that dividing the campus into small schools would allow them to provide more personalized and demanding studies for all students.

Each year, as educators became more comfortable with change and students adapted to a more intimate learning environment, progress was made. Each of the new small schools began to establish its own identity. Community organizations partnered with the school to support change. The graduation rate rose and overall student performance improved.

But even as the first three small schools graduated their charter classes in 2008, challenges remained. Student achievement had fluctuated over time and gains were not equal across all schools. Discipline problems remained an impediment to instruction.

One key to meeting these challenges was leadership. The small schools model gives teachers a greater voice in their schools' futures and calls on more educators to step up to lead. As with any aspect of change, the need to learn new roles created both conflict and opportunity.

This is the story of how leadership evolved in one small school.



Principal Marc Engoglia and Teacher Leader Karen Kastor (background) lead the way as staff and students develop an identity and climate for the new Legacy School.

Learning to be Leaders

Principal and teachers adjust to expanded roles that give them a greater voice in shaping their small school.



"We stopped doing things because we liked them or because we always did them and we started doing things because they're the right thing to do for our kids."

– Marc Engoglia

By Wendy A. Hoke

On a brisk Saturday in October 2006, Principal Marc Engoglia sits at home, struggling to compose an e-mail to his teaching staff at Legacy School. He's supposed to be helping his wife, Darlene, prepare for their annual Halloween bash, but instead he's irritated by the teacher response to a memo he distributed two days earlier.

He first types a response that shows his frustration. Then, working on his laptop in the kitchen while Darlene bustles about the house and their two children run in and out, he calms himself enough to compose a response that will reinforce his expectations without inflaming his staff further.

Engoglia knows this disagreement could undo the recent progress he's made in earning teachers' trust. Young for an administrator at age 35, Engoglia got off to a rocky start when the small school at Cleveland Heights High opened the year before. He was excited about the school's potential to reach struggling students and the chance to do things differently, but his enthusiasm sometimes led him to push too hard for change.

In his second year, he is learning to check his impatience and to not respond defensively to every criticism.

Now a memo he distributed letting teachers know about a literacy seminar threatens that progress. Already carrying full loads with little chance to catch their breath during the day, some teachers object to Engoglia saying he expects them to attend the seminar during lunch – an uninterrupted time protected by their contract. Their union representative distributed an e-mail in response saying, "All lunchtime meetings ARE VOLUNTARY! PERIOD!"

Frustrated that teachers seem to be resisting his efforts to move instruction forward, Engoglia crafts an explanation. “As far as the memo goes, I know I can’t ‘force’ anyone to attend,” he types. “But again, expectations are and always will be that ALL teachers, not just a portion, continue to find ways to grow as educators and to continue to find ways to meet the needs of our students.”

By Monday, the controversy seems to have resolved. A second memo from the union rep is conciliatory. “Our educational philosophies are harmonious.... It is my true belief that administrators and teachers work best supporting each other.” Engoglia’s attention is pulled to other pressing issues at the school.

Two days later, Engoglia walks into his office on the third floor after a meeting at

the board office. He picks up a document lying on his chair and scans it, then sits down, angry. The staff has filed a grievance. It charges that he violated their guaranteed 50 minutes of uninterrupted lunch when his memo used the word *expectation*, which to them implied attendance was mandatory.

Engoglia sits with his head in his hands, sighs and runs his fingers through his hair in frustration. Not only does the grievance undermine his effectiveness, but it also raises troubling questions for a principal committed to the small schools model.

Will he be able to regain the confidence of his teaching staff? Will they embrace the new roles he sees for them? Can they accept that he wants them to be proactive in making changes that will impact students’ achievement? And, if not,

can they realize the vision of Legacy as a school that lifts some of the most troubled students in Cleveland Heights to happier, more productive futures?

Year One: Starting Off at a Disadvantage

Like Engoglia’s relationship with the teachers, the school itself gets off to a rocky start. When it opens in 2005, it is one of the last two small schools on the Cleveland Heights campus, launching with The Mosaic Experience a year later than Renaissance, REAL and P.R.I.D.E.

Because it starts a year later, Legacy begins with fewer teachers on board with the idea of small schools and more of the teachers who wonder if the small schools effort could be a passing fancy, like some reform efforts of the past. Legacy’s staff is made up of those teachers who didn’t *choose* a small school and who are largely used to teaching juniors and seniors.

It also includes students who didn’t choose a small school, many of whom are not especially drawn to Legacy’s mission of problem-based learning. The Mosaic Experience finds it easier to attract students because it promises to engage them through integrated technology and the arts.

As the school with the lowest enrollment, Legacy is most likely to receive transfer students as the year progresses. Those students often arrive without paperwork to indicate credits earned, their achievement or passage of the Ohio Graduation Tests, making it tough to place them in appropriate classes.

These factors combine to make it difficult for Legacy to meet students’ needs. They are why from the very start Engoglia pushes his staff so hard. But his commitment to improving performance and his eagerness for change could backfire if he alienates the very people who will have to carry out the change.



Social studies teacher Mary Kay McDade works with sophomores Devonte Finley (left) and Tyrone Hilton on a project about the Holocaust.

A Leader and Staff at Odds

As the 2005-06 school year begins, Engoglia is determined to prove to his staff that he's capable of leading through change, of encouraging good classroom teaching and of reaching the students who haven't been achieving. He is eager to show that he's ready for this job despite having left the classroom early in his career, a criticism some on the staff level.

Engoglia's interest in administration began when he was teaching in the West Geauga School District, where Cleveland Heights-University Heights Superintendent Deborah Delisle was assistant superintendent. He got his first chance at leadership there, joining a Professional Learning Community (PLC), a small group of teachers who foster collaboration in an effort to achieve measurable results. The PLC was able to influence professional development in the district, partly because of Delisle's leadership.

"Working with her at West G helped me in terms of wanting to go into administration," says Engoglia.

That experience helped to shape his views on teachers as professionals. "It was all about making teachers better and about helping kids."

By his third year of teaching, Engoglia was vice president of the teachers' union, a much different position than his current one on the administration's negotiating team.

He brings those high expectations for professionalism, student achievement and leadership to Legacy School. But Engoglia's approach continuously bumps up against the established practices of his mostly veteran teaching staff, often with painful results.

What's more, his leadership style can be confrontational. Engoglia's youthful energy and occasional defensiveness fuel teachers' qualms as he takes on the new job.

His initial meeting with teachers is a disaster. The staff, used to teaching the brightest honors and AP students, is struggling to adjust to the demands of a more diverse student body, some of whom

are disengaged from learning or unprepared for the rigor.

Engoglia talks about how important it is to teach all the kids, regardless of their background. But when the conversation turns to questions of whether a young white guy from the high-achieving community of West Geauga is qualified to lead Legacy, the comments feel personal. They do not know, or do not remember, that he student-taught at Cleveland Heights High School in 1993-94 and understands the challenges that the school faces every day. Engoglia lashes back, and the encounter turns ugly, wounding relations between him and his staff.

Complicating matters, Engoglia and the person chosen by the staff as teacher leader have very different styles. The teacher leader position is designed to bridge the divide between teachers and administration, and during transitions teacher leaders often encourage staff through the many changes needed to make a new school work. Legacy's teacher leader first runs decisions by the union leadership,

feels he can't talk to me, I can't reach him. The same is true for teachers and administrators. An administrator can't do an effective job of leading if the staff doesn't trust him."

Year Two: Slow Progress Toward Trust

As the school moves into its second year in fall 2006, a few more of the ingredients for success are falling into place. The staff has changed, with many of the most vocal critics having retired and been replaced by newcomers open to the new model. The teacher leader still proceeds with caution, but Engoglia begins to rely on another teacher who is more allied with his vision.

But in October the differing views over Engoglia's expectations boil over. The grievance over his memo about the literacy seminar is filed on behalf of the entire Legacy staff. Engoglia is troubled both by the grievance and by the fact that no one on the staff tried to talk to him before filing it.

"If I have a kid in my class who feels he can't talk to me, I can't reach him. The same is true for teachers and administrators."

— David Stewart

causing what Engoglia sees as endless delays that hinder meaningful progress.

The news isn't all bad, however. While some staff members are critical or undecided, others embrace the new vision. David Stewart, who teaches the popular American Sign Language class, opted for Legacy. "I chose to come here because of Marc," says Stewart. "He is approachable and accessible, and I don't feel as if I have to walk on eggshells when I talk to him."

"Marc listens and that's vital," says Stewart. "If I have a kid in my class who

After the grievance hearing, Engoglia is told to write a letter of apology to the staff. He does, but his letter is not so much an apology as a clarification of his expectation and does little to soothe hard feelings. Teachers, still uncertain whether their principal understands their concerns, consider writing a rebuttal, but don't.

More than a year later, Engoglia remains resolute about his standards for the teachers. "I was not going to write a letter to staff refuting high expectations."



Despite his conviction, the grievance rocks Engoglia. Uncertain whether he will ever gain teachers' trust enough to be able to lead effectively, he considers leaving. He is offered the chance to return to West Geauga, where he lives and where the schools are generally excellent.

The offer presents not only the chance to escape the frustrations at Legacy, but also a tempting career opportunity. Since Engoglia has his superintendent's certificate, it could be a stepping-stone to the top job.

Even so, Engoglia decides not to leave.

"I stayed for many reasons, but mostly I enjoy the people I'm working with and I enjoy what I'm doing," he says later. "It's challenging, but I see success. I see my juniors ... and they are doing well."

For now, he'll remain in his spacious office with the large bay window that looks out onto the campus courtyard. Propped against the window are his credentials – a bachelor's degree from

Purdue University, where he also was a walk-on outfielder on the baseball team; a master's degree from John Carroll University; and a certificate from Cleveland State University's Leadership Academy for administrators committed to working in urban environments.

A former middle school English teacher, he has shelves of books on leadership, education, literature. On his desk are some of the books he reads late at night: *What Great Principals Do Differently* and *On Common Ground: The Power of Professional Learning Communities*.

He also keeps a stash of Costco goodies – penny pretzel sticks, fruit snacks, granola bars, pistachios and candy – in his credenza. With its almost-always open door, his office is a frequent stop for hungry teachers and students. Engoglia hopes that as time goes on his efforts at creating an inviting atmosphere will help more of his staff feel welcome there.

David Stewart teaches American Sign Language, a popular elective. He chose to work in Legacy School in part because he found principal Marc Engoglia to be approachable.



Teacher Leader Karen Kastor greets students and staff with a smile. As intended under the small schools model, she and Principal Marc Engoglia share leadership responsibilities within Legacy.

A Partner in Change

As the year comes to a close, Engoglia gets a reason for optimism. It is time for teachers to choose a new teacher leader, and in May they select math teacher Karen Kastor. Engoglia has been working with Kastor informally and is pleased to have an ally in a leadership position.

A product of Catholic schools, Kastor has been teaching at Heights since 1998. She had moved to the middle school, but volunteered to come back to the high school when she heard about the small schools initiative.

Though she commutes from a far eastern suburb, she doesn't mind because she says the kids at Legacy need her more than kids at a more affluent school. With a husband and four young children at home, she has developed a nurturing, jovial and sometimes stern personality that helps her reach urban students.

"Once you get to know our kids, you feel obligated to help them succeed. They don't have many people who care about them. But we do," she says.

With a teacher leader well suited to help bridge the gap with staff, Engoglia could finally begin to see faster progress. Privately, though, he worries that the clipped, no-nonsense tone they share could turn off some.

Legacy can't afford many more missteps. At the end of its second year, the school meets just two of 13 indicators on the state report card, the least of any of the schools at Cleveland Heights High, and has the highest number of teacher-initiated discipline referrals.

The Impetus for Change

Just before it started the small schools transformation, Cleveland Heights High School was a much different place. While it had always met the needs of exceptional students, more students had entered the district from disadvantaged backgrounds. They sometimes lacked the home support and stable lives that assist student achievement. As a result, Heights

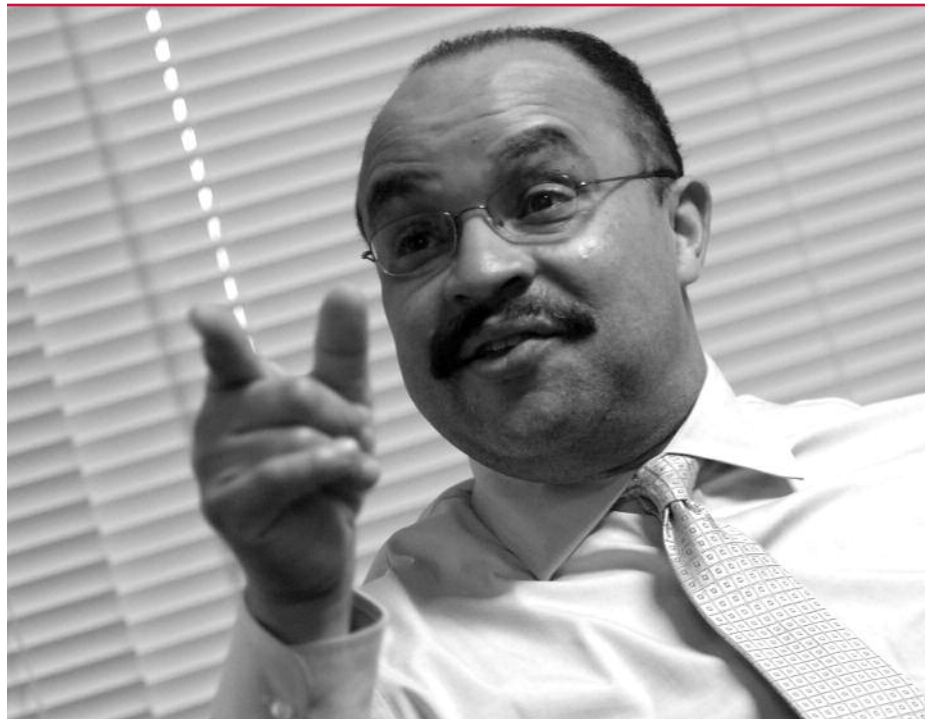
High was no longer able to meet the needs of many students.

The school's sheer size made matters worse. Because of administrative cuts a year earlier, Principal James Reed and Administrative Principal Darcel Williams each were responsible for 1,000 students.

"I didn't get into the classrooms and, therefore, I didn't know a lot of the 1,000 kids. I knew maybe 150 of them and those were probably the most troublesome ones," Reed says.

That was one reason he welcomed the idea of dividing into small schools. "With this transformation, I'd be able to know the kids – see them, hear their conversations, know who their friends are. The only reason why you're here is contact with the kids. That's why I got into this," Reed said.

Williams was handling curriculum and proficiency tests when talk of transformation began. "When I really began to look at data, it was very surprising to me. I did not know that we



Renaissance Principal James Reed has been a mentor and sounding board for Legacy Principal Marc Engoglia. With five small schools in the building, leaders can easily turn to their peers for advice and ideas.

"Once you get to know our kids, you feel obligated to help them succeed. They don't have many people who care about them. But we do."

– Karen Kastor

had such a large majority of kids that we were not reaching. I don't think I had ever talked about what our GPA was or how many kids were failing because we tend to take our successes and kind of revel in that. I really never took the time to diagnose what the whole school looked like," she says.

The district was accepted into KnowledgeWorks Foundation's Ohio High School Transformation Initiative (OHSTI), and Cleveland Heights High joined schools in urban districts across the state in adopting the small schools model.

Three small schools were planned initially, with two others to follow. Reed was joined by Janet Tribble and Marc Aden as principals. Along with three newly appointed teacher leaders, they were given a year away from other responsibilities for planning, something they say contributed to the ultimate success of the transformation.

Planning for and launching the transformation was a long, painful, passionate – and often surprising – struggle.

The struggle began with the very concept of how the small schools would be defined. While some small schools are

based on career options, Heights leaders surveyed the community and opted for a more difficult distinction. Students also shared concerns that a career model would limit their options as students.

"We had to put our arms around an abstract idea like an instructional model and make it live so people could understand it," says Crystal Maclin, who was a teacher leader at the time.

The first three schools became Renaissance, which focuses on independent exploration, cooperation and collaboration; P.R.I.D.E., which focuses on personal instruction geared toward individual students; and REAL School, which focuses on experiential instruction.

The planners underestimated how emotional teachers, students, parents and community members would be about the change. Looking back, they all believe they could have prepared themselves better. When asked where the resistance was coming from they respond in unison: "Everywhere!"

Teacher Leader Karen Kastor, also a math teacher, takes time from her to-do list to help Arianna Hamilton with her homework.



“We didn’t have a firm understanding of the change process,” explains Maclin. “In hindsight, all those people were responding to the fact that we were changing their environment.”

Aden says it was “one of the first times in my life when I had to face passion on that level and to have it directed towards you as if you are doing something wrong.”

And it felt personal, says Williams. “In your head you knew logically it wasn’t personal, but it felt personal. It was because people cared so deeply about what they felt you were taking away from them,” she says.

Williams says part of the problem is that teachers are not necessarily trained to create change. “They were clamoring for something concrete – ‘Just tell me what you want me to do. What’s the task?’” Maclin says of the teachers’ mindset.

Meanwhile, Engoglia was serving as a principal under the old comprehensive Heights structure, responsible for the senior class. He and other planners who would design the second round of schools

waited for their turn. “It was easier for us because the timeline had been set and there were ground rules to follow,” he says.

As time went on, the small schools model showed some early signs of success. For all small schools combined, the graduation rate increased from 91.5 percent in 2003-04 to 96.4 percent in 2005-06, outpacing the state average. Scores on the Ohio Graduation Tests made dramatic leaps in math and reading from 2003-04 to 2004-05 and were among the highest in the OHSTI cohort. The state rating jumped to effective and stayed there, compared to lower grades of academic watch or continuous improvement each of the prior three years.

With the 2007-08 school year approaching, the uneven starts for the five small schools had begun to level out. For Marc Engoglia, it was time to learn whether high expectations and a better relationship with the staff would be enough to realize his vision for Legacy School.

Year Three: Sharing a Focus on Students

The Legacy office overflows with tardy students on a day at the beginning of the 2007-08 school year. Comfortable with the students and always ready to deal with issues hands on, principal Marc Engoglia tries to sort out the cause.

“Are we all late?” Engoglia asks. He asks each student for a reason.

“The bus,” says one boy, with his head down.

“The RTA bus?” asks Engoglia

“Yeah.”

“How late?”

“Like 20 minutes late,” he says.

“Mr. Richardson, how are you this morning?” He turns to another student. “Anyone else have a good excuse for being late besides the bus?”

“My cab,” jokes another.

In through the door, coffee in hand

and all smiles, walks teacher leader Karen Kastor. “Wow! We have a lot of people in here,” she says. “Hi, Amir. Lorenzo. Terrell, what are you doing here today? Is it a holiday or something?”

As she makes her way toward her office, she leans in conspiratorially to secretary Stacey Warner. “It’s a good thing our kids have a sense of humor.”

A few minutes later, superintendent Deborah Delisle arrives with Brian Loretz, head of security, and a Cleveland Heights police officer. The easygoing handling of tardies gives way to a much more serious issue.

A freshman student has written an English paper making threats against Engoglia and a teacher. Engoglia doesn’t think the threats are real. “I think it was a cry for help,” he explains. “I asked if he didn’t like me and he said, ‘Oh no, Mr. Engoglia, I think you’re cool.’”

But standard protocol is to treat the

threat seriously. Engoglia is hopeful that all will end well for the boy, but the matter is now out of his hands. There will be an expulsion hearing to determine the boy’s fate. By year’s end, he and his family will have moved away.

For now, Engoglia shakes off his worries and turns his attention to matters he can control.

Changes in the Classroom

As the year gets under way, Engoglia sees some hopeful signs.

Though the small schools model calls for weekly advisory sessions where students meet with teachers in small groups to discuss student-driven issues, the concept never took root at the Heights campus. So this year that time is devoted to collaboration. Every Tuesday, students are dismissed early and teachers meet as teams to work together across content areas.



Legacy teachers Bill LeBlanc, Paul Ernst and Hillary Hurst discuss grading policy. Every Tuesday, students are dismissed early and teachers meet as teams to work together across content areas as a way to increase collaboration.



Science teacher Joel Mulder works on a lab project with students Ryan Stewart (seated) and Steven Torres.

Teachers have indicated that they want this time, and Engoglia believes it will allow them to formulate research-based models to help improve classroom instruction.

In addition, Kastor has quickly settled into the teacher leader position. Teachers see Kastor as their ally, and she often serves as the go-between on sensitive issues that involve asking more from the staff.

Engoglia relies on Kastor to share the workload and support.

“The principal shouldn’t have to do everything. I try to anticipate staff complaints, and I used to jump on them right away. I’ve learned not to let the negative ones take up all the energy,” he says.

“Karen and I work well together. The staff likes her, too, and that helps.”

By mid-October Engoglia is still

spending a lot of time dealing with the minority of students who have personal or behavior issues that threaten their education. One is pregnant and, despite being a good student, at risk of dropping out because home support is lacking. A boy left the PSAT college entrance exam high. A female student has had a run-in with police.

Engoglia is heartened by the scores of students who never require his intervention. The local news media is reporting that one Legacy student achieved a perfect score on the ACT (he will become valedictorian of his class). Other top students have emerged not only as academic scholars, but also as Legacy School leaders.

He’s proudest, however, of how instrumental Legacy’s staff has been in

nurturing students to turn their lives around. On this day, a junior named Mariah pops in to say hello. “Mariah, are you behaving?” he asks.

She laughs as Engoglia talks about her propensity to get into fights as a freshman.

“I was a boxer. I like to defend myself,” she corrects him. “I have a tendency to go astray, but I’m trying to make better choices,” she says, pointing to her head.

Next Engoglia welcomes a master’s student who wants to interview him for a class. He talks about his veteran teaching staff who are “very strong in their content area.” If he’s anxious about the time this is taking, he doesn’t show it.

While this morning is shot, on other days Engoglia enjoys visiting classrooms

and is developing good relationships with students by joining them in learning. “I like to know what they’re doing in class. I ask what books they’re reading, I’ll join in science labs and take math quizzes.”

The strategy, and the relative calm of the third year, allows Engoglia to engage with students more fully. “When we first started, I only knew the bad kids,” he says. “Now I know almost all our kids.”

He’s relieved to feel less like a lone ranger. “The first year I was fighting for all the kids,” he says. “[Now] the teachers are doing it, too.”

Engoglia also is pleased with other changes that his staff has embraced.

One example is the use of Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) testing, which

allows teachers to get real-time data on how and what students are learning. Last year’s testing was fraught with complications. Now teachers seem to be recognizing that the testing will help them know whether students are learning.

“There’s better classroom teaching going on now,” Engoglia says. “We stopped doing things because we liked them or because we always did them and we started doing things because it’s the right thing to do for our kids.”

A Clash Over Discipline

By early November 2007, the pace has yet to slow. Kastor sits across from Engoglia and pulls out their to-do notebook (it’s way more than a list). “C’mon, we’ve got a half hour. Let’s get something done,” Kastor says.

But Engoglia’s office door is nearly always open, an invitation for students

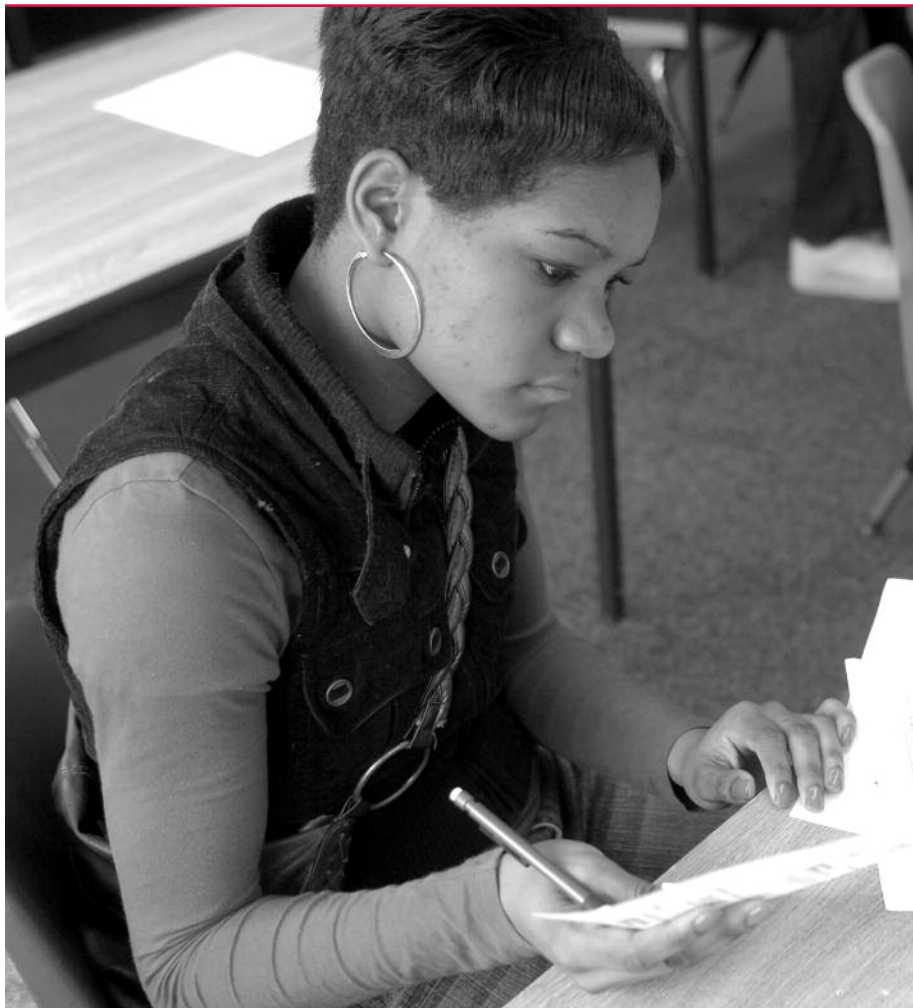
“The first year I was fighting for all the kids. Now the teachers are doing it too.”

– Marc Engoglia

and staff to walk in. And just then, someone does.

“Oh look, here’s Corey ‘I play my Gameboy in science class,’” says Kastor. She’s pulling her hair out with this freshman who has trouble with his medication for attention problems. If they increase the dose, it makes him tired. If he doesn’t take it, he becomes disruptive.

Corey, who lives with his grandmother and has siblings who attend different schools throughout Cleveland, is one example of the discipline problems that are reaching a critical point at Legacy.



Tieranie Evans is all business in Freshman Seminar, a new class Legacy leaders introduced to help all freshmen with organization and time management skills and to set behavior expectations.



Teacher Hillary Hurst reads with a student. A push to improve literacy helped boost the school's reading scores.

Despite their different tactics, teachers are also thinking of students. Accountable for classroom instruction, they focus on the needs of the group. Sometimes removing one disruptive student means they can address the needs of the rest of the class.

One approach to heading off discipline problems gains support from all sides. Noting that 1,000 of the 1,600 discipline referrals in the

2006-07 school year were freshmen, Kastor has started a Freshman Seminar. Every freshman takes the class and learns study

habits, organization, behavior expectations in class and how to be successful in high school.

The class has worked so well that the other small schools are going to make it a part of their schedule in the 2008-09 school year.

Now Kastor and Engoglia are planning to add a new component: upper classmen who have been trained to serve as mentors for freshmen.

No sooner do they start discussing the plans for mentors than they are interrupted with another discipline problem.

Kastor closes up her files and leaves the to-do list. "I've got to go to class."

Engoglia sighs. He wants to get back into the classrooms to help with instruction, but discipline issues continue

Unfortunately, the handling of those issues is another area where Engoglia and his staff differ. Teachers must focus on the needs of the whole class and often opt to remove disruptive students from the classroom, recommending that Engoglia suspend them. The principal prefers to keep students in class.

In mid-December, the faculty files another grievance against Engoglia, citing two cases where he didn't follow teachers' recommendations to suspend.

"The one girl has been in foster care all her life. If I suspend her, she's not coming back. We have one boy who is a junior now. Karen, where would he be if I did what teachers wanted with him?" asks Engoglia.

"A mess. Always in trouble. Immature stuff," Kastor responds.

"Half the staff wanted to hang him, but he's had no referrals since a year ago. He's not an honors student, but he's better," Engoglia says.

"Marc always takes the time to listen to their (students') side of the story. He is genuinely interested in their lives and what may be going on outside of school that may be affecting their behaviors in school," Kastor says.

"My reasoning with discipline is always around the student," he says.



Teacher Leader Karen Kastor talks to Shadaya Brooks about why it's important to arrive on time for classes.

"Marc is genuinely interested in (students') lives and what may be going on outside of school that may be affecting their behaviors in school."

– Karen Kastor

to monopolize his time. These distractions, he knows, are taking away from working on student achievement.

Failing Students

Shortly before winter break, 25 kids are hanging around in the Legacy School office. Engoglia walks in and surveys the crowd.



"Raise your hand if you're on the honor roll," he says. No hands are raised.

With her hands on her hips, one girl responds, "Mr. Engoglia, why you gotta be so nasty?"

"I'm not being nasty, but all of my honors kids are in class," he says. "The bell rings in five minutes and I expect all of you in class."

He walks into teacher leader Kastor's office. They are anticipating a tense day. They and leaders of the other four schools plan to introduce a discussion with staff about changing to an eight-period day. The extra period wouldn't lengthen the teachers' school day, but would require them to spend more of their day teaching.

Why? In Legacy School alone, 200 students have a grade-point average of less than 2.0. All but 65 of the 329 Legacy students qualify for special help, meaning they have at least one D or F.

Heights leaders want to find ways to help struggling students. While all the schools offer help at the end of the school day, few students take advantage of it. The eight-period day would allow them to build in mandatory help sessions throughout the day.

All five teacher leaders feel that despite the added work for teachers, it is a necessary step for student achievement.

Two days later, they gather to review teacher feedback on their proposal. Renaissance teacher leader Jane Simeri and Kastor are dismayed by some of the responses.

"I already have a full plate; I do not need more student contact time."

"Teachers are losing planning and lunch time."

"Requiring teachers to conduct a study hall puts them in front of students for an extra period every day. Is that fair?"

"I'm interested, but only with students I know."

Engoglia is also frustrated by the response. "On the first day of school, kids are in class and ready to learn. What happens to change that? If kids aren't coming to class, you have to ask yourself why. What are you doing or not doing to keep kids engaged?" he says.

He thinks teachers should take more responsibility for students' academic progress. He's willing to help, but wants them to do more on their own.

Most teachers already put in long hours and still can't get to everything that needs attention. They worry the extra period will stretch them even thinner. Many also believe it will be a scheduling nightmare and have an adverse effect on electives, which already are squeezed by the small school structure.

Once again, the perspectives on what will help students most are starkly different.

• • •

Engoglia can't believe he overslept today. It's the start of the second semester and he's showing signs of exhaustion. Seated on a stack of textbooks in Kastor's office, he holds his face in his hands and then looks up at Kastor, with the previous semester GPAs in his hand.

"How do I share this with the staff without being the enemy?" asks Engoglia.

She spins around in her chair to look at him. "Keep it structured, not a free-for-all. Present the data and then keep it about what we all can do to help."



Social studies teacher Mary Kay McDade brings experience teaching in small schools in New York City to the Legacy team.

Kastor and Engoglia had hoped their efforts with Freshman Seminar would lead to higher GPAs for the second quarter. But they did not rise. The school's overall GPA is 1.9 – less than a C.

The low numbers are a result of many things: poor attendance, lack of home support, discipline issues. But Engoglia suspects part of the problem is instructional.

He shakes his head again. "It's my fault and I know it. I've got to be in more classrooms."

Engoglia notes that the number of discipline referrals is down and attributes the drop to his stubborn insistence that teachers find new ways to deal with problem students. "I've been a jerk about it," he says. "I haven't done that with grades. A lot of the reason why these GPAs are so low is the way we grade."

To address grading, he has recently handed out a Repair Kit for Grading. Among its 16 tenets are: "Don't consider attendance in grade determination; report absences separately," and "Don't reduce marks on 'work' submitted late; provide support for the learner."

Through handouts and many other methods, Engoglia repeatedly pushes his staff to think differently about education. It isn't always welcome. Teachers who have refined their practices over years in the classroom often rely most heavily on what their own experience has taught them.

Engoglia respects that experience, but thinks methods that have been successful in the past may not be effective with the added demands on today's students. "Teachers say the kids don't do homework. So you keep giving it to them? Find out why they don't do it. Do they have a job? Do they understand the material? Why aren't they doing the homework?"

He adds, "There aren't enough teachers talking to individual students and finding out what's going on in their lives."

Suspension Disbelief

Engoglia's discipline challenges continue throughout the year. Despite some improvement in the referral rate, suspension remains the default discipline. As he analyzes four years of data on suspensions, he concludes that there is not one case of a student turning his or her behavior around as a result of being suspended. In fact, suspensions seem to beget more suspensions.

The first step in discipline has always been a teacher referral to be handled by the principal. "It's an archaic way of doing discipline and I'm working hard to change that. What we're doing is not working.... I believe the punishment for missing school and work should be school and work," he says.

Engoglia thinks teachers should do more to address discipline in the classroom. He and the other small schools' principals and central district staff have developed a new behavior plan that calls for no suspensions of freshmen. They reason that freshmen adjusting to the demands of high school need room to make mistakes without hurting their academic achievement.

Concerned that the change will allow disruptive students to remain in classrooms to the detriment of student learning, the union has yet to endorse the plan.

While he waits to be able to enact the new plan, Engoglia handles each behavior case with as much patience as he can muster.

This time, Corey is back – again, pulling up his pants that hang from his thin frame. He takes a seat at the conference table.

From behind his desk, Engoglia asks Corey how things are going in Jim Voytas' math class. "Mr. Voytas is cool. We have our differences, but he's cool."

"Then you better get out of this office and back to class before Mrs. Kastor gets back, or she will lose her mind," he says.

No sooner has Corey left than a security guard walks in with another student. "We're a monk today, Mr. Engoglia," the guard says as he marches in



Even with the press of administrative duties, Principal Marc Engoglia tries to make time to be in the classroom, where he joins students in science labs or takes math quizzes with them.

"What we're doing is not working.... I believe the punishment for missing school and work should be school and work."

– Mark Engoglia

a student who has his hoodie pulled far over his head.

Engoglia moves to the front of his desk, leans in and tries to make eye contact with the boy, who keeps his gaze on the floor. The student is behind because of poor attendance, and Engoglia encourages him to get a fresh start when the new quarter begins the following week.

A Conversation Begins

Cleveland Heights High School is in a much better place than it was five years ago, Engoglia and others believe. Each year, the staff gets more comfortable with the idea of change and the need for broad change lessens just a bit. The building is a

calmer place now. Small school leaders work together to create innovative programs to help student achievement, but they also come back to their individual school strengths. Each of the five small schools has created a strong identity, one that students seem proud to share.

But certain impediments remain. For one thing, Heights is still tied to a traditional master school schedule, making it difficult for each school to create its own bell schedule based on its instructional model and its students' needs.

Changing the master schedule is not likely, though, so Engoglia and Kastor choose to work on changes they can effect – namely, improvements in classroom instruction.



Union leader Paul Ernst helps get the conversation started on improving overall student achievement for Legacy School.

They plan a professional development day. Teachers will be assigned new Professional Learning Communities, and each PLC will be given a topic to research and to make recommendations on for the following school year.

“We discussed homework, grading policies, practical behavior issues. Anything else?” asks Engoglia.

“How about classroom management and involving parents?” Kastor responds.

Though he was disappointed at the semester GPAs, Engoglia is buoyed by staff response to the challenge. The presentation of GPA data went better than expected.

Kastor and Engoglia say learning that even honors kids are failing in some areas definitely got the teachers’ attention.

Other data surprised the teachers as well. “A lot of kids are close to passing OGT [the Ohio Graduation Tests]. Attendance is not as big an issue as they thought it was. Four percent of our students are tardy; 55 students are here all the time and still have under a 2.0,” Engoglia says.

For once, the administration and

faculty agree. At the meeting, union leader Paul Ernst told the staff that way too many kids are not doing well. “The conversation was started on the issue,” says Engoglia.

One Student at a Time

Engoglia is encouraged by his staff’s willingness to listen and feels optimistic that the seeds have been planted for improvements. Meanwhile, he continues to deal with students who need his help – both those with behavior problems and those without.

Mikol, an office regular, walks into Engoglia’s office and asks to use the phone to call his mom.

With his hand on his forehead, pushing back his hair, Engoglia tries to be patient.

Mikol has earned a reputation as a thief, even having taken a pizza from the staff lounge earlier in the year. Engoglia

can’t get your cap and gown until you pay for it.”

“I’ll pay for it,” he says, and Engoglia hands him the phone.

A little later, Engoglia tries to get two girls to mediate a dispute and brings one into his office.

“Marissa, what did I tell you about confronting people, even in a nice way?” he asks.

“Not to do it.”

“Why?”

“Because with all the people around it escalates,” she says.

“It escalates. Next time walk away.”

Regulars like Mikol and Marissa suck Engoglia’s time, but he stays focused on improving student achievement. After Marissa leaves, he and Kastor start to compare notes on their visits to Adlai Stevenson High School outside of Chicago, hoping to learn from how the school uses professional learning communities.

“Knock, knock. Any y’all good at government?” asks Gerald.

“Bring it in here, whatcha got?” says Engoglia.

Engoglia reads: “‘The execution of the laws is more important than the making of them.’ Thomas Jefferson. What does execution mean?”

The conversation is serious and focused on helping students ... the kind of conversation small schools are meant to foster.

has tried to talk to Mikol’s parents about the thievery, with no results. He brings up Mikol’s obligation to make up for the theft whenever the boy is in the office, just to let him know he hasn’t forgotten.

“When are you going to pay your fee to me for the stolen pizza?” he says. “You owe me \$16, but now it’s up to \$20. You

“I don’t know. Beat you up?”

“When you watch a football game and the announcer says the play was executed perfectly, what does he mean?”

“Oh, that they did the play good. Yeah, I get it. Thanks.”

Maybe it was Engoglia’s help, maybe not. But toward the end of the year,

Gerald gets a free Chipotle lunch in Engoglia's office for bringing his government grade up from an F to a B. He is joined by Elizabeth, who brought her math grade from an F (13 percent) to an A.

Mikol, on the other hand, is caught on security videotape stealing a laptop and expelled.

Looking for Solutions

It's a dreary, rainy day in early March and the staff of Legacy School is gathered in a third-floor classroom to begin the small school portion of their professional development day.

Divided into five teams that will become the new PLCs, they are reviewing student work, journals and essays about books. They have just learned that the work they are reviewing is that of fourth and fifth graders. Many had believed it could be from their own classes.

The conversation is serious and focused on helping students, and the principal, teacher leader and a number of teachers take part. It is the kind of conversation small schools are meant to foster.

"What do we do? Go back to basics? Identify common errors? We need to up our standards and not accept something just because they wrote a lot," says Hillary Hurst, an English teacher. "Kids will use IM and text language, but we need to put in directions that spelling and grammar matter."

"We can't resort to going down to their level. If you don't give them the opportunity to write versus Scantron tests, they are not going to improve," says Stephanie Loncar, a science and Freshman Seminar teacher.

"Do they use any method for writing? Do they use the five-paragraph structure? If students are afraid to write, have them start with something simple. An 'I Am' poem. Have them just answer five questions and see how that goes," suggests Loncar.

After lunch, teachers watch a video on how PLCs work at Adlai Stevenson High

School. Although it's a comprehensive high school, it has nine different bell schedules and has been using PLCs for 30 years.

"It takes a lot of flexibility by everyone in the building to operate on multiple bell schedules," says Engoglia. "We catch heat when we want to change the schedule by five minutes without a week's notice."

The video touches off a debate about the

small schools transformation at Heights.

"Are we ever going to be closer to small schools? When will it be just our kids?" asks Nina Santalucia, who teaches English.

The small schools model calls for students to take all their classes within their own school, but Heights students regularly cross over into other schools – an attempt to accommodate their desire for more electives.



After a rocky start, Legacy Principal Marc Engoglia has developed a good relationship with teachers. By the end of the school's third year, he is optimistic that the seeds have been planted for further improvement.



Legacy Administrative Assistant Stacey Warner and P.R.I.D.E. Principal Janet Tribble share a light moment. While the small schools at Heights High maintain separate identities – and sometimes friendly rivalries – relationships are strong across the campus.

Engoglia says the younger students are more likely to stay within Legacy. “For the most part, that’s happening in ninth and 10th grade,” he says.

The Ohio Graduation Tests, and the increased focus on test scores sparked by the No Child Left Behind Act, often find their way into discussions about how teaching has changed at Heights. Because the testing was introduced at about the same time as small schools, the two often become intertwined.

“I think education falls apart when you teach toward the test,” says math teacher Jim Voytas. “That’s what we’re doing right now. My kids are no better off than they were five years ago.”

“It’s worse in English because they’re telling us exactly what to do,” says Linda Spizak.

“Curriculum should never be driven by schedule or tests,” says Voytas.

“Do we teach to the OGT?” asks Blair

Chirdon, who teaches chemistry. “Because if we do, we stink at it.”

Everyone agrees there’s a lot still to be done, but they also are confident that they’re working in the right direction.

The goal is for the PLCs to spend the remainder of the school year researching what’s happening around the country on five key topics. “We hope to implement [solutions] next year based on what we learn, not on what we think,” says Engoglia.

A few weeks later, the PLCs report on their research. The process seems to have been instructive for everyone, and plans are put in place to implement some changes the following year, including a monthly e-mail newsletter and curriculum update, a student court to reinforce positive behavior among peers and student critiques of homework.

The teachers discuss what constitutes school culture. They debate creating a new grading policy.

Both Kastor and Engoglia are pleased. “We started the conversation,” Engoglia says. “It’s something to build on.”

Choosing Legacy

Engoglia glares at his computer. It’s OGT week and two weeks before a much-needed spring break. He and his family are heading to Naples, Fla., to visit his in-laws. First, he has to survive OGT.

“I’m not having a good couple of days,” he says. “Thirty kids didn’t show up for OGTs.”

The five tests, which seniors must pass to graduate, are as important for schools as for students. The results not only dictate a school’s standing on state report cards and for NCLB purposes, but they help shape the community’s impression of the school’s effectiveness.

Engoglia and his staff have been working to make sure as many students as possible show up for the tests and do well on them. His office is filled with boxes of calculators, drinks, granola bars and pencils.

One of the missing walks in.

“Joe? Where you been? You’re an hour

and a half late. You know we have testing going on?”

“I thought if I’m late I can’t take the test,” says Joe.

“So you might as well miss the whole day?” Engoglia replies. “You’re going to take it now. Go to your locker and get a pencil.”

This scene repeats itself over and over throughout the morning as he calls to get kids into school.

As the school year winds down, Engoglia feels that Heights campus is getting to the point where it can build stability. Contract negotiations are under way and professional expectations are part of the discussion. And a building that once seemed to have a revolving door for principals now has a solid team in place. Engoglia is hopeful.

Engoglia is also pleased with the number of eighth graders who have chosen Legacy for next year. In the past, only 20 or so asked to attend Legacy and the rest were assigned. This year, 75 chose Legacy. “That’s a good sign,” he says.

Testing the Theory

As the year ends, teachers and administrators across the Heights campus are given cause to reflect when preliminary OGT results are released. As hard as they have been working, results are mixed. While Heights students are outperforming their counterparts in many similar districts, math and science scores across the building are disappointing.

At Legacy, there are bright spots. Scores have gone up in most subjects, with 84 percent of students passing in reading and 78 percent in writing. In social studies, 73 percent of students passed, a 20-point improvement over last year.

Engoglia attributes part of the success in social studies to Mary Kay McDade, whose classes looped, allowing her to have the same students for two consecutive years.

Kastor and Engoglia review the OGT data and prepare to share them with teachers. For Engoglia, they are further proof that he is right to keep expectations high for the faculty.

“When we push the teachers, we get the results,” says Engoglia. “And guess what? Literacy was a big push and that’s reflected in our OGT scores.”

While Legacy staff reflects on test results, three of the new schools are preparing to graduate their first classes of students who spent their entire high school careers in small schools. Together, the classes of 2008 received scholarships totaling more than \$9 million. They have accepted scholarships to attend four-year universities in the amount of \$4.1 million. In addition, seniors received more than \$114,000 in scholarships from local community organizations in Northeast Ohio.

Legacy will graduate its first class of students who spent all four years in the school in 2008-09, and Engoglia is focused on planning for the new school year. While the eight-period day was not approved, a handful of teachers have said they are willing to give up their lunch to work with students who need special help.

By summer 2008, Engoglia learns that Legacy has met an additional two and possibly three indicators for the state report card. In addition, the district gave each small school 10 stretch goals and Legacy met seven of those.

He’s also excited about the school spirit that’s developing. “The incoming junior and senior classes are really proud to be Legacy students and they have an identity with the school. I’m really proud of how hard they work and the leadership they’ve shown already,” Engoglia says.

It also helps that many of the incoming seniors are developing into leaders who could ultimately improve the school’s

culture.

Kastor has 128 juniors and seniors volunteering as mentors and tutors for next year’s freshmen. They have chosen to attend extra training sessions during the final week of school to be ready to welcome next year’s class.

Meanwhile, Engoglia’s relationship with most teachers is good. He’s encouraged by the teachers’ response to the PLCs and excited about some of their ideas for the fall.

Kastor thinks Engoglia has grown since his early days as principal.

“Marc is not afraid to share power,” she says. “He knows his own limitations and knows how to use the strengths of the people around him. He’s learned that he can’t do it alone and that success requires collaboration. He realizes that you can’t do the same thing and expect different results. He is not afraid to take risks, to walk out on a limb and try something new.”

Kastor is excited about the coming year. She’s comfortable with her leadership responsibilities now, so next year she’ll head back into the math classroom to teach one class in addition to Freshman Seminar.

Both Legacy leaders are optimistic that handling discipline will get easier. The five principals continue to work on a new behavior plan to roll out in the fall.

Some of the students who consumed Engoglia’s time this year have made headway. Corey has been expelled, but he’s enrolled in summer school and sent Engoglia a letter pledging his commitment to improve his behavior and performance.

Mariah, the student who earlier in the year claimed to be a boxer and who got into a lot of trouble as a freshman, has a

Everyone agrees there's a lot still to be done, but they are also confident they're working in the right direction.



Legacy staff planning for the year ahead include Teacher Leader Karen Kastor and teachers Joe Onk, Nina Santalucia and Joel Mulder.

3.4 GPA going into her senior year and has developed good relationships with other adults in the school that help keep her on track.

“Mariah has a good relationship with me and Karen, but she’s also found others in the building to help and that’s contributed to her success,” he says.

Engoglia knows those relationships are the key to student achievement. He’s survived the ups and downs of Legacy’s first years by focusing on the goal of helping students learn, Kastor says. “Marc never loses sight of the fact that he is there for the kids.”

As the new school moves forward, Engoglia is not alone in working toward that goal. The students of Legacy School will be supported by a team of educators who have risen to the challenge of new roles – a team of leaders. ■

Engoglia knows relationships are the key to student achievement.



About the storyteller

Wendy A. Hoke spent three years reporting from inside Cleveland Heights High Campus. She is a Cleveland-

based journalist whose work also appears regularly in the *Christian Science Monitor*, *Catalyst Ohio* magazine and *Catholic Universe Bulletin*. She writes at Creative Ink www.creativeink.blogspot.com.

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. You can also follow a particular school or campus by going to “School Stories” on the website.

2004-05

A Year of Transformation in the Lives of Ohio's Urban High School Students

Teachers and students in three urban districts struggle with sometimes overwhelming challenges during the first year of innovative high school reform.

2005-06

Small Moments, Big Dreams

Real-life stories from five redesigned urban high schools in their second year show both progress and promise yet to be realized.

Learning by Degree

Three early college high schools, each at a different stage of development, work to find the best structure to help teenagers attend high school and college at the same time.

2006-07

Most Likely to Succeed

In their third year, new small schools see change in both culture and practice – but unexpected hurdles slow progress for some.

To a Higher Degree

As teachers and administrators refine their schools, students in early college high schools defy expectations.

2007-08

From First Day to First Graduates

Educators at Brookhaven High School in Columbus fight to keep their dreams alive over four years of introducing small schools in a hard-hit urban district.

Learning to be Leaders

In Cleveland Heights, principals and teachers adjust to expanded roles that give them a greater voice during the first four years of small schools.

Getting to Know You

The role of relationships in the first four years of a small schools transformation at Libbey High School in Toledo.

A Different School of Thought

Breaking with tradition, innovative educators plan and launch Toledo Early College, which blends high school and college.

Starting from Scratch

Five years in the life of Ohio's first early college high school bring changes in structure but not in mission.

Copyright © 2008 by
KnowledgeWorks Foundation.
All rights reserved.
Printed in the United States of America.

Except as permitted under the United States Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system without prior written permission of the publisher.

To order a copy of this publication free of charge, please contact
KnowledgeWorks Foundation.

KnowledgeWorks Foundation
One West Fourth Street, Suite 200
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202
Telephone: (513) 929-4777
Toll Free: (877) 852-3863
Fax: (513) 929-1122
www.kwfdn.org

Photography by Rob Wetzler
Design by Elaine Olund
and Hillary Wood

Funded in part by the
BILL & MELINDA
GATES foundation

KnowledgeWorks Foundation

One West Fourth Street

Suite 200

Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

Telephone: (513) 929-4777

Toll Free: (877) 852-3863

Fax: (513) 929-1122

www.kwfdn.org



Empowering Communities to Improve Education™