



## COLUMBUS ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL

Principal: Sherry Badger-Powell  
[www.columbus.k12.oh.us/cahs](http://www.columbus.k12.oh.us/cahs)

Columbus City School District  
Superintendent: Gene Harris

Located in a typical urban neighborhood within the Columbus City School District, the Columbus Alternative High School (CAHS) was established 1978 as a magnet school designed to serve the needs of academically oriented students. A high standard of excellence permeates the halls and classrooms of this older traditional two-story brick building. There is a tradition for students to paint the classroom doors every year, and each portrays a unique canvas reflecting a spirit of vibrant creativity through the many layers of brightly colored paint. Students are highly focused and mature in their ability to articulate their goals and aspirations. And the faculty is equally motivated, not only to provide the best possible educational experience for their students, but also to perform as a highly effective cadre of professionals.

Acceptance to CAHS is determined through a lottery system so this college preparatory alternative school is an option for all ninth grade students enrolled in the district that are interested in signing up for the lottery. Students enter the lottery because they are seeking to learn the critical thinking skills that will prepare them to do well in college. Around 200 new students are added each year to the total school enrollment of 625. Once accepted, students are immediately assimilated into this high performing culture through an Introduction to Humanities summer program required

of all incoming freshman. This team-taught humanities course that combines English and history curricula and introduces students to project-based assessment is described by staff

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***'The kids here understand that there's something in it for them, if they choose to participate.'***  
***Parent of a CAHS student and Title I Parent Consultant***

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members as critical for establishing the foundation of cooperation and high expectations that define the CAHS experience.

Continuously rotating photos of students in action on the school's Web site capture the power of this rich and dynamic school environment where ALL students have an Equal Opportunity to experience success. Sherry Badger-Powell, principal, shares, "Kids are here because they want to be here, and they know that they have to work hard." In the words of a parent of one of the students, "The kids here understand that there's something in it for them, if they choose to participate."

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***Sherry Powell, Principal***

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## **Leadership**

This mission statement provides the foundation for leadership in this school: *We believe that the primary mission of the Columbus Alternative High School, a college preparatory school, is to create a truly alternative and rigorous educational experience that will prepare students to be contributing citizens of the global community.*

When asked the most critical piece of advice she would have for her counterparts, the principal shares, "The most success comes from having a common vision and common goals. These must be a driving force for the critical mass. If the faculty cannot come together in agreement and push forward for an initiative, it won't go anywhere. There must be a site-based vision and desire."

The principal reveals that she considers being an instructional leader to be her main priority, but she is extremely aware of how easily managerial tasks can take over the day of even the most well-intentioned administrator. Her strategy to

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stay focused on the factors involved in instruction is to be continuously aware of how easily the day can slip away. She notes that it is very important to have a

strong support system that for her includes the assistant principals and the office staff team who are able to attend to about 90% of the standard managerial tasks.

## **Curriculum and Instruction**

The state standards and the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) are considered minimum standards at CAHS, and the teachers proudly explain that they have always met or exceeded them. Staff members implement a challenging curriculum that emphasizes critical thinking, problem solving, and project-based assessment. The goal is for all students to go on to college, and college pennants and posters that are prominently displayed throughout the building promote that goal. This is not to say, however, that success has come easily. Like other high performing schools, faculty and students have worked very hard to meet their goal.

At the high school level there are multiple sources of data — from the Ohio Department of Education, about gifted and talented programs and special education programs, from colleges/universities, from the board of regents, etc. — that must be checked. “It’s important to wade through what is important and germane to your school,” Sherry Bader-Powell explains. “With the OGT we are aware of what needs special attention. The primary focus of our data analysis is strand analysis, by department and whole school. Advanced placement scores determine college admission, and we believe all of our kids should be prepared for access to upper level courses and college placement.” As a tangible measure of the success of the students at CAHS, literally millions of dollars are awarded in the form of scholarships each year.

## **Providing Opportunities for All Children to Achieve**

The continuum of special education options at CAHS includes the services of a tutor, speech therapist, hearing-impaired specialist, and two multi-handicapped units (newly established this year). When this magnet school was established more than 25 years ago, the philosophy of a unique setting for all students, including those with disabilities, was inherent within its charter. With

the exception of students enrolled in the multiple handicapped program, all students with disabilities are educated in regular education, college-preparatory classes.

The common thread shared by faculty and staff alike is to prepare students for college. The faculty and staff members exhibit a strong sense of collaborative teamwork, and team teaching between both regular and special education teachers is the norm. Teachers are dedicated to providing support and accommodating various learning styles to enable all students to meet high expectations. Tutors help students with organizational and study skills. When a student is not being successful, it is important to understand why. Through a group effort, the teachers, a counselor, an assistant principal, core subject area teachers, parents, and the student analyze all of the aspects of the student's challenges. In addition, staff members analyze the OGT data to determine areas in need of improvement so they can be addressed with freshmen during block time on Wednesdays, when upperclassmen participate in internship activities throughout the city.

This extensive Internship Program, spearheaded and supervised by \_\_\_\_\_, is organized for all 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> graders. Each year students use a database of hundreds of internship sites to prioritize their selection(s) for the following year; upcoming seniors have first choice, then juniors and sophomores. Each year's internship begins in September and extends through the end of the school year; students are out on their assignments every Wednesday for five and one-half hours. Attendance at the internships is mandatory, and city bus passes are provided as needed. While students are encouraged to stay with the same assignment for the entire year, mid-course adjustments are made as needed. Popular sites reported by students this year include the Ohio House of Representatives, County Juvenile Court, the Ohio State University (OSU) Pharmaceutical Department, OSU Biochemistry Department, OSU Veterinary Clinic, Adult Services at the Department of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, and the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Riverside Hospital. Through this career oriented experience, students learn the those

lessons that can only come from real world experience as well as the importance of regular attendance and being on time and how to resolve job-related issues.

Students cite the internship program and choice in scheduling as critical factors for their success. As one student summarizes, “The internship plays a big part in knowing what you want to do. Sometimes you only see the glamour side of a profession and not the underside, until you actually have the experience.”

On the topic of discipline, the principal smiles when she says, “We’ve got teenagers so we’ve got drama.” For the most part, issues are resolved by talking things through with an adult.

“About 90% of the time,” the principal

continues, “most of the school doesn’t even know that the drama occurred.”

Conflict resolution is used most often as the strategy for addressing discipline related issues. Peer pressure is also effective within this high performing school culture. The most frequently occurring violation relates to getting to class on time, and attendance is also a reoccurring issue.

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**CAHS Student**

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## **Professional Development**

. The district supports the walk through evaluation strategy, and the principal reports that she spends much of her time walking through the building in her tennis shoes as she checks out what is taking place in the classrooms and speaking with the students in the halls. The International Bachelaureate program, which offers a particularly rigorous curriculum that is student-driven and linked thematically across multiple subject areas, has been one focus of professional development, and teachers have attended related workshops across the country. There is also an emphasis on Math and Science with the Urban Systemic Initiative.

As one teacher explains, “The expectation of the teachers when they come here is set out pretty clearly — step up to the idea that you will do a lot more than has ever been required of you before. If you don’t buy into that you won’t last long, because the

expectation is that you will do these things.” Job embedded professional development is the norm here. The core element of success, however, is

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**CAHS Teacher**

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an unparalleled commitment to high performance. As one teacher put it, “The professionalism and morale here are unmatched anywhere else. I really believe that teachers here would do this without pay.”

## **Partnerships with Parents/Families/Community**

Regularly scheduled parent/teacher communication is maintained through interim reports, report cards, parent teacher conferences, and a September Open House. In addition, two Title I Parent Consultants work in the school to increase connections between home and school. Each averaging three half days each week the Parent Consultant serve as a direct pipeline to parents through face-to-face contact, phone, email, etc.

Perhaps the strongest testimonial to a strong sense of parent satisfaction comes from the words of one student who shares, “Our parents don’t worry about us because they know we’re in a good school — and this allows us to be more independent!” In a similar vein, one parent talks candidly about the experience with her daughters. “This

is a place where it’s really safe to be ‘academic.’ My girls embrace that instead of running away from it.

Academic success is celebrated! And

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***“Our parents don’t worry about us because they know we’re in a good school—and this allows us to be more independent.”***  
**CAHS Student**

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there is none of that mean girl stuff here. This is just a very open environment.”

## **Culture of the School**

A positive culture has been established upon the principles of acceptance, motivation, cooperation, and a love of learning. Students and staff alike aspire to be “CAHSmic” scholars and maintain the tradition of high achievement.

When asked about the factors that contribute to success here at CAHS, three dominant themes are emblematic of the culture of this school emerge:

- Students choose to come here so they’ve made a commitment to be here and do their best.
- The faculty sets a high bar and expects high performance and achievement.
- Everyone works very hard to support kids with whatever they need to be successful.

There is an equal opportunity here for ALL students to succeed at high levels. “The fact that kids may not come exactly as we would like,” one teacher shares, “is never an excuse for us to lower our expectations.” Two signs appearing side by side on the wall of one classroom might sum up this balance of high expectations and supportive environment.

The first reads, I don’t give out grades, YOU EARN THEM.

And the second one reads. Need Help with Math?

MATH TUTORING every Tuesday and Thursday

from 2:45-4:00 in Room 214.

The core of this dynamic school culture is maintained by the excellent faculty that continues working together as graduating students move on, and as new students are accepted and assimilated through the rigorous Introduction to Humanities Class that shows them the challenging road ahead. The connections

that CAHS students make during their high school years are long lasting and supported, in part, by an active Alumni Network maintained to continue the tradition of support beyond their formal high school years.

### **Columbus Alternative High School Data**

<b>SCHOOL PROFILE</b>	
2004-2005 Building Rating	Excellent
Enrollment	610
Grade Levels	9-12
Economically Disadvantaged Students	43.1%
Limited English Proficient Students	5.1%
Students with Disabilities	4.4%
African-American Students	59.9%
Asian or Pacific Islander Students	4.3%
Hispanic Students	2.6%
White Students	33.1%

<b>COLUMBUS PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT PROFILE</b>	
2004-2005 District Rating	Academic Watch
District Enrollment	59754

## **Schools of Distinction**

The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) named 21 schools to the first (2004 – 2005) list of Schools of Distinction, celebrating high-achieving schools that have significant numbers of students with disabilities. To make the cut, schools must:

Have at least 75 percent of students with and without disabilities score proficient or above on a combination of all proficiency, achievement, and Ohio Graduation Tests administered during the past three years;

Have at least four percent of their students identified as having a disability;

Serve students of varying disabilities;

Earn a combined performance index score of 100 or more out of 120 for the most recent reporting period;

Meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirements for the last school year; and

Not be involved in any investigation that would call their test scores into question.

The 21 schools earning the award during 2004-2005 included nine elementary buildings, one middle school, one junior/senior high school, and 10 high schools located in both large urban and small town settings. At 13 schools, students with disabilities made up 10 percent or more of the student population.