



## **HILLTOP ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

**Dillonvale, OH**  
**Principal: Sue Ferrelli**  
[www.mfcsd.k12.oh.us/Elem](http://www.mfcsd.k12.oh.us/Elem)

**Martins Ferry Local School District**  
**Martins Ferry, Ohio**  
**Superintendent: Nick Stankovich**

Shortly after the bell rings each morning at Hilltop Elementary School, teachers can be heard asking, "Why are you here today?" Students reply, "To learn." Then teachers ask, "Who is responsible for your learning and behavior?" Students answer, "I am." This focus on student learning and responsibility captures the essence of the Quality Change Process that is being implemented throughout the Martins Ferry Local School District.

Since implementing the Quality Change Process, Hilltop Elementary School, a pre-K through fourth grade building housing 147 students, has seen a significant increase in student achievement and received numerous awards recognizing academic successes. Banners announcing these awards are displayed proudly in the main hallway of the building:

- 2004 Blue Ribbon School
- School of Promise for both the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years
- Title I Distinguished School (one of two Ohio schools designated as such in 2005)
- School of Distinction award for the 2004-2005 school year.

### **The Quality Change Process**

The entire Hilltop school community attributes the success of their school to the Quality Change Process that was implemented during the 2001-2002 school year under the direction of Nick Stankovich, superintendent, who was simultaneously serving as principal at Hilltop during that time. The key

components of the process include creation of school-wide and classroom mission statements, setting school, grade-level, classroom and individual academic and behavioral goals, administering short-cycle assessments to measure progress, and tracking student achievement through individual, student-developed data folders that are initiated at the preschool level.

The Quality Change Process is evident throughout the school. Mission statements and goals that coincide with the district's Continuous Improvement Plan are posted in the halls and classrooms.

***Mission Statement  
The Hilltop Community working  
together to be responsible,  
respectful and to learn.***

Physical education and cafeteria goals are posted in the gym/lunch room. A goal to reduce noise in the lunchroom is monitored by the Yacker Tracker, a sound meter.

The gym is home for the Goal Gallery and the Quality Tool Gallery. Monthly classroom goals are geared towards specific content areas and based on the academic content standards. The work of the students is recognized when the goals they have met are stamped "retired," placed on the wall in the gym, announced over the PA system, and applauded by everyone in the school.

The Quality Tool Gallery names tools that are implemented throughout the building by teachers and students. Plus/Delta/Rx charts, used at the end of each day, allow students to offer feedback on positive as well as negative aspects of the daily instruction. Teachers and students then provide a prescription to remedy areas in need of improvement. This student input enables the teacher to plan instructional methods useful for follow-up lessons. PDSA (Plan, Do, Study and Adjust) is the approach used for teaching. Instruction is continuously being adjusted to meet the needs of the students. If students do not understand what is being taught, they may put a note in the Issues Bin. This information may be used to develop individual and/or classroom goals. Brainstorming, another quality tool, is employed by teachers and students to create action plans for student-set goals.

## Data

Everywhere you look there is data! Mr. Stankovich maintains that the data folders are the most important component of the Quality Change Process, and Sue Ferrelli, the principal, refers to the folders as the “meat” of Quality Change. Student data related to classroom or individual goals, homework, behavior and the required nightly reading are recorded daily in the data folders along with the school and class mission statements and the student’s best work. The folders are sent home with the interim reports and the report cards, and parents and family members are invited to a Data Folder Night twice a year to celebrate the students’ progress toward meeting their goals. Students are eager to share their folders with visitors to Hilltop and to explain the building and classroom mission statements; the building, classroom, and individual goals; and the charts depicting their progress. Students use their data folders in leading parent conferences during the spring. One teacher assistant commented, “The folders create openness with the teachers. Students are not shy or backward about asking if they have a question or do not understand.”

Short-cycle-assessment results and goal lines are prominently displayed in the front hall, and scatter grams are used to report this information in the classrooms. Teachers developed the short cycle assessments that are administered four times a year in reading, writing and math (the “rocks” of the curriculum). Teachers use data from these assessments and the students’ folders to determine who may be in need of intervention or an enriched curriculum.

Student certificates that include gold stickers for perfect attendance, perfect behavior, perfect homework, all A’s and B’s as well as improvement also line the hallways. Charts posted in the front hall and classrooms reflect participation in the B.E.A.R. (Be Excited about Reading) Program that requires each student to read nightly.

## **Instruction**

At Hilltop Elementary, emphasis is placed on meeting the academic needs of all students. A philosophy prevails that “all kids can learn if you give them the opportunity.” By fourth grade most students with disabilities are fully included in the regular education classroom. Some of the younger students receive their instruction in self-contained special education classrooms where the focus is on mastering the basic skills needed to be successful in the regular education classroom. The regular education curriculum, aligned to Ohio’s Academic Content Standards, is implemented throughout the building, including the special education classrooms, with classroom and individual goals based on mastering the indicators and benchmarks. Teachers report that the Quality Change Process has facilitated collaboration between the intervention specialists and the classroom teachers, and students are accomplishing their IEP goals at a faster rate than before this process was implemented.

The district’s curriculum director works closely with the teachers to align curriculum, instruction and assessment and to select instructional materials.

Teachers employ a myriad of instructional strategies, including hands-on activities and discovery/inquiry learning, as they strive to address the individual needs of their students. Students may be grouped for instruction based on their needs. It is not unusual for the classroom teacher, an assistant and the Title 1 teacher to be simultaneously providing instruction in a given classroom.

Students also participate in computer-assisted programs that develop skills necessary to become proficient in math and reading. Either at school or at home, students can access Study Island, a Web-based program based on the standards that is used to reinforce math and reading skills. A wireless response system with handheld response pads and a receiver unit is used in all areas of the curriculum. With this Classroom Performance System (CPS), teachers and students receive instant feedback from responses to teachers’ pre-programmed questions. Both students and teachers were observed to respond enthusiastically to this technology.

The teaching staff for this pre-k through fourth grade building totals 16 and includes two intervention specialists, one Junior First classroom teacher, two Title 1 teachers, a Title II Class Size Reduction teacher and five teacher assistants. Sue Ferrell, the principal, states that the assistants are “respected as teachers, not just as aides.” The preschool and kindergarten programs are both all-day, with the preschool day an hour shorter. The Junior First class is a transitional class for students who have completed kindergarten but are not yet ready for first grade. During the 2005-2006 school year, seven students were enrolled in this classroom, all with the consent of their parents.

## **Leadership**

The superintendent insists that the building principals be instructional leaders and not just managers. He does not accept “struggling with the balance” between leading and managing as an excuse for not being an instructional leader.

It was the teachers from Hilltop Elementary School who went to the Martins Ferry Board of Education in 2002 and requested that the Quality Change Process be adopted.

Hilltop staff members serve on one of two committees - Process Management or Student Achievement - that are considered to be the “backbone” of the Quality Change Process. The Process Management Committee oversees the PDSA Cycle to monitor student data-folders and to improve school processes. The Student Achievement Committee has developed short-cycle assessments that are administered four times a year. Additionally, they are responsible for monitoring building and classroom progress, student recognition activities, and parent and community involvement.

A third committee, Student/Stakeholder, is part of the Quality Change Process. However, since Hilltop Elementary has a relatively small staff, the functions of this committee have been incorporated into the work of the Process Management and Student Achievement committees.

## Professional Development

“Teachers are learning from teachers in the Quality Change Process.” The Quality Change process involves teachers in ongoing learning. Daily conversations among staff center on instruction and student achievement. Teachers are involved in “Museum Walks” throughout the year, going into classrooms to observe and to share ideas and successful instructional strategies that have resulted in increased student achievement.

Participation in the bimonthly meetings of the Process Management and Student Achievement committees contributes to the professional growth of the teachers. One member from each of these committees meets monthly with teachers from the other two elementary buildings in the district to share ideas. The district also holds all-day grade-level meetings twice a year during which time teachers may share ideas and coordinate curriculum. Substitutes are employed to cover the classrooms.

Martins Ferry Local School District encourages their administrators, teachers and assistants to attend off-site Quality Academies and other workshops that are appropriate for their grade levels and/or areas of specialization. The district provides funding for these sessions.

Additionally, the Hilltop teachers relate that talking with visitors who come to observe the Quality Change Process in action has been a learning experience.

## Culture

“It’s all about the kids.” “Students feel good about coming to school.” “Everyone feels they’re important, and each of us is taking part in supporting children’s academic futures.” “It’s such a positive place to be.” While the focus of this school is on student learning and improving achievement, these statements reveal that a positive learning environment has been established.

### **Hilltop Goals**

- **To increase reading and math scores**
- **To increase positive behavior**
- **To increase writing skills**

Kids' pictures are seen throughout the building. Each student has a set of "Me Stickers" (a picture of the student) that are used for various purposes. For example, students select and post their best work on hall bulletin boards. The "Me Stickers" are placed on the work to identify the owner of the item being displayed.

Staff members and parents have high expectations for all students, and students are responsible and held accountable for their achievement and behavior. As noted earlier, students are reminded daily of the school's mission and goals and that they are responsible for their learning and behavior.

"We don't tolerate misbehavior," relates Mr. Stankovich, "but we approach behavior from a positive perspective." A colored card coding system is employed to track behavior, with the goal to "stay on green." Teachers have found this system to be an "immediate and effective" way to deter problems. A parent interviewed during the project team visit shared that this card system "really works," so she has implemented it at home. Students who have perfect behavior for nine weeks and have completed all their homework become members of the Thumbs Up Club. Each Thumbs Up student receives a blinking button that is worn with pride, and the names of those students are posted on the bulletin board in the gym.

Adding to the creation of this positive climate at Hilltop are the Success Assemblies held every nine weeks where students receive certificates for earning all A's and B's, for academic improvement, for completing homework, and for having perfect attendance and/or behavior. Goals that have been met are published in the Hilltop Newsletter, identifying the class and/or student and the date upon which the goal was accomplished. And, as noted earlier, when a class or an individual goal has been met, it is announced over the P.A. system, and cheers and clapping can be heard throughout the building.

## **Engaging Parents and the Community**

The Martins Ferry School District welcomes the involvement of parents and community members as evidenced in the development of the district's Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP). School personnel, parents, personnel from business, industry, government agencies, and civic organizations as well as other citizens analyzed the educational program and made recommendations they believed would lead to improvements in instruction and learning. This plan that incorporates a list of "Quality Steps" is now being implemented throughout the district

This involvement of parents and community is also reflected in Hilltop Elementary School's mission statement, which speaks to the Hilltop Community embracing the philosophy of partnerships with not only the community at large but specifically with parents. Community members and student leaders from the high school are invited to tour the school and to listen to the students explain their goals and charts as they discuss their data folders.

Parents are encouraged and expected to be active participants in their children's education. Parents are kept informed about their children's progress through daily communications regarding homework and behavior, the data folders, the principal's quarterly newsletter, and the Data Folder Nights that update parents on student goals and progress. A Homework Hotline is also available to parents should they want to check on assignments.

Parents support the educational process by reading with their children nightly (the B.E.A.R. Program), reviewing the data folders with their children, and using Web-based programs that measure and develop reading and math skills. Many parents participate in the PTO, described by teachers as "wonderful." When asked about parent involvement, teachers responded, "We have a lot of parent involvement in this school." Parents are quick to volunteer and assist with class parties and field trips.

Parents are surveyed twice a year to obtain their input on the Quality Change Process. Parents interviewed credit the school's success to the caring

staff and to the Quality Change Process. Specifically, they cited the tracking of student progress through the data folders to be an effective means of keeping them informed and empowering their child to take ownership of his or her own learning and behavior.

## Conclusion

The superintendent, Nick Stankovich, describes the Quality Change Process as “not an extra, it is part of what we do every day. It’s all about continuous improvement.” He credits the staff at Hilltop Elementary for the successful implementation of the process. Both the superintendent and the teachers acknowledge difficulty at first and the need to proceed slowly. However, today the teachers say that they wouldn’t want to go back to teaching without the Quality Process. It has revolutionized the school’s climate and resulted in academic success that is accompanied by a community-wide commitment to high expectations and educational excellence.

## Hilltop Data

SCHOOL PROFILE	
2004-2005 Building Rating	Excellent
Enrollment	147
Grade Levels	K-4
Economically Disadvantaged Students	46.9%
Students with Disabilities	16.2%
White Students	97.3%

MARTINS FERRY CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT PROFILE	
2004-2005 District Rating	Effective
District Enrollment	1552

## **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.