

J.F. BURNS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



Principal: Cheryl L. Montag

[https://www.Edline.net/pages/J F Burns Elementary School](https://www.Edline.net/pages/J_F_Burns_Elementary_School)

Kings Local School District
Kings Mills, Ohio
Superintendent: Charles D. Mason

J.F. Burns Elementary, for preschool through fourth grade, has received an “Excellent” rating on their Local Report Card for four consecutive years. In the past the spotlight has also shown on their commitment to educational

excellence, as when they received the nationally coveted Blue Ribbon Award and the Ohio BEST Practices Award. Once again they are being honored, this time with their designation as a School

When I read about this award in the paper, I was so excited because now everybody will know what we’ve known about our school for a long time.

A Parent

of Distinction. The state superintendent’s Schools of Distinction program recognizes schools that are realizing high achievement for all students, including students with disabilities.

When asked about factors that contribute to J.F. Burns’s academic success, the principal, teachers, and parents all talk about collaboration, communication, and support. A philosophy of “whatever it takes” prevails, from the superintendent, Charles Mason, down to the building level. Mason believes that “it’s important to meet kids where they are and take them as far as you can get them.” One of the goals of J.F. Burns Elementary School, “We are committed to believing all children can learn and that we will adapt our instruction to accommodate different learning styles.”

Leadership

Parents and teachers say the principal, Cheryl Montag, contributes greatly to the success of J.F. Burns Elementary. One parent describes her as “the heart and soul of the school.” Teachers credit her open-minded leadership style and the supportive, collaborative environment she creates as critical to their success. When Ms. Montag talks about her role, she stresses the importance of being an

instructional leader. Based on her experiences, she believes management issues become less important and demand less time of the building administrator when the priority is ensuring that all students have opportunities to achieve at high levels. Teachers and parents interviewed confirmed that the priority at J.F. Burns is the children and that all decisions made are based on students' learning.

It's all about the children. As long as we make them the priority, then the other things get managed.

Cheryl Montag, Principal

Leadership is a shared responsibility in the Kings Mills Local School District. Teacher leaders are selected from each grade in the elementary buildings and for the content areas in grades 5-12. These teachers collaborate with their peers and other teacher leaders throughout the district to provide leadership for implementing the Academic Content Standards and strengthening instruction. They also assist with professional development activities that take place during Early Release, a weekly one-hour early dismissal time for students that provides additional collaboration time for the staff. Such sessions may include best practice discussions led by one of the teaching staff.

Professional development is data-driven. Once test data is analyzed and areas in need of improvement are identified, planning for staff development incorporates opportunities for teachers to participate in sessions that provide them with content knowledge (for example, math) and instructional strategies they can implement in their classrooms. Teachers also mentioned that they use their common lunch period for planning time and report that their working together has resulted in truly "dynamic units and plans."

Ms. Montag and Ms. Wilson, the assistant principal, both expressed their need to keep current on the newest research and to continually improve their own professional practice. Both set goals for the year and engage in professional development opportunities that address these goals. They both rely on the Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators (OAESA) for keeping them informed and for making principals' development activities available.

Curriculum

The curriculum in the Kings Local School District is aligned to Ohio's Academic Content Standards. To assist teachers in developing lesson plans, the district has adopted a code to help identify each benchmark and grade-level indicator. The code, which consists of three or four digits, is a timesaver for teachers who no longer need to write out the entire benchmark and/or grade level indicators.

Ms. Montag meets on a regular basis with principals from the other three elementary schools in the district. These principals work together to ensure cross-district alignment of the curriculum. Additionally, teachers have developed pacing guides in math and other content areas that identify when during the school year specific indicators will be introduced and taught.

Parents and students at J.F. Burns know all about the Academic Content Standards. Teachers review and explain the standards and curriculum with parents at the beginning of the school year during the Parent Orientation, a parents-only session. One of the parents interviewed by the project team commented that she found the standards to be "very confusing, but the teachers explain them well in parent terms." Additionally, parents are provided with a copy of the standards that pertain to their child's grade level. Teachers discuss with students what they are expected to know and to be able to do. Often rubrics are used to help students guide their own learning.

If you don't raise the bar, you won't jump over it.

Cheryl Montag, Principal

Reading is emphasized through Ms. Montag's annual Laps for Literacy Program. Students, including kindergarteners, are challenged to read at least 10 minutes for 25 nights each month from January to April. During Right to Read Week in May, Ms. Montag walks one lap around Landen Lake, directly across from the school, for every 150,000 minutes read by the students and staff. Monthly reports listing the total minutes read by the top classes and the top readers in each class are published in the "J.F. Burns Parent Newsletter," and a picture of top readers for each grade level is included in a district press release.

The class from each grade level that reads the most and the student in each grade level who reads the most walk a lap with the principal. Superintendent Charles Mason even got involved last year with a few laps around the lake!

The importance of reading is reinforced through the Family Literacy Center and the PTO Birthday Book Celebrations. Materials in the literacy center, organized by reading levels, are available for teachers and parents to check out. The PTO invites students to a monthly birthday celebration; students attend the event for their special month and in turn give books to the school library. The success of this program is seen in the many new books that are added to the library shelves each year.

Design Instruction to Ensure All Students Succeed

When asked about instruction, Ms. Montag replied, “We’re all about intervention and doing whatever it takes.” Everything at J.F. Burns confirms this statement: staff, use of data, a variety of services and supports.

The Staff

The staff at J.F. Burns includes a teacher for the gifted program, a preschool intervention specialist, a teacher of the Kinderfirst Class (a transition class from kindergarten to first that serves students who are not socially mature), a guidance counselor, a

psychologist, a nurse, two speech and language pathologists, three intervention specialists, and five

aides. There is much flexibility in the

roles these professionals fill. Depending on the needs of the students, the psychologist may be found reading with students, and one of the intervention specialists may be with students in the motor room, a space equipped with mats, bikes, balls, a specialized swing and other equipment.

***All teachers are willing to go above and beyond.
A Parent***

Flexibility is also seen in classroom instruction that is differentiated to meet the individual needs of the students. Technology is being used throughout the building, with one class piloting the use of PC tablets and an LCD projector.

PC tablets permit these students to make handwritten notes directly on the screen, showing the class how they solved a problem. Their examples can be converted into a PDF document and posted on Edline, a software program that allows students and parents online access to course information, grades and school activities. Posting examples of student work and worksheets used during instruction has been especially helpful to absentees and to parents helping with homework. Information posted can be accessed from a home computer and printed out for reference.

The Kings Local School District has a mentoring program for new teachers that has been in existence for several years. Trained teachers serve as mentors observe and assist in the classrooms. Administrators also play a key role, with their approach being to help the new teacher succeed. All teachers in the building also provide support. One of the more recently employed intervention specialists sang the praises of her mentor and another teacher, saying, “Nothing really prepared me for the real life setting. I had to learn so many things.”

It is very important to have a staff that works collegially together and our staff does that very well.

Cheryl Montag, Principal

Use of Data

Ms. Montag says she and the teachers know what to expect when the achievement test results are released. There are no surprises! For several years J.F. Burns has implemented an intervention-based assessment process for individual students in need of more intensive instruction. Mastery of the benchmarks and indicators is measured throughout the year through classroom assessments and Pro Ohio, a diagnostic tool designed to help teachers prepare students for success in the Ohio Achievement Tests.

“We spend a lot of time analyzing the data,” according to Ms. Montag. The staff at J.F. Burns uses data to assess student performance, identify areas in need of improvement, design instruction, make decisions about the school’s goals, and determine the focus of professional development. Teacher Leaders review the achievement test data to see how the school, grades, classes and

individuals performed. Analysis includes the students' performances on strands and specific items. Information is reviewed with the staff during Early Release sessions when building goals are also developed to be incorporated into the district's strategic plan. Also, grade level teams develop their own plans based on the areas identified as needing improvement.

All teachers in the Kings Local School District have access to DASL (Data Analysis for Student Learning). This data analysis and reporting tool enables teachers to access student information, including testing data, from their individual desktops.

Services and Supports

Starting with the preschool program, there is a team approach at J.F. Burns to serving children with disabilities. There are two sessions of preschool, each including up to eight students with disabilities along with four typically developing children whose parents pay tuition to have their children participate in the preschool. Once the children transition to kindergarten, the majority of the students with disabilities are served in the regular classroom where the intervention specialist often co-teaches. Additional small-group and individual pull-out sessions are provided if more intensive intervention is needed. A philosophy of "we're in this together" exists among the staff. "It has never been 'my kids and your kids' in this building." This attitude of collaboration is seen in the resource room, where the speech and language pathologist is co-teaching with the intervention specialist; in the third grade classroom, where the reading intervention specialist is co-teaching; and in small group instruction where the guidance counselor and reading intervention specialist work as a team.

A variety of supports are available to all students. These include an Intervention Assistance Team (IAT).

For several years this team has been assisting staff in planning interventions for students with learning problems and in monitoring their progress.

***All children can learn and succeed!
We really believe that. We do
whatever it takes to meet high
expectations.***

Cheryl Montag, Principal

Parents are involved from day one as team members. All alternatives are explored before referring a child for special education testing.

Guidance Services: A counselor is available to work with students, parents and/or teachers three days a week. The counselor meets with students individually and in groups or classroom settings. Students may refer themselves to the counselor or be referred by a teacher, the principal, or their parent.

“Brain Gym” activities that use physical movement to enhance learning are implemented throughout the school in both the classrooms and the hallways. Classes may be seen doing Brain Gym movements prior to a lesson to stimulate both left and right brain activity. Figure eights and straight lines that are taped on the floors in the hall are available for students to follow as they move from one area of the building to another. Parents interviewed reported their children have benefited positively from these activities; specifically, their children have become more focused. One parent shared that her son uses an activity when he is feeling agitated because “it makes him feel better.”

Special learning spaces: Instruction takes place not only in the classroom but in the computer lab, the science lab and the motor room, which supports the school’s philosophy that movement facilitates learning. Classes have specific times in the motor room, but also, students may go there to remove themselves from frustrating or undesirable situations.

Ohio Reads: Ms. Montag reports this program, staffed by parent and community volunteers, “has been a real success for us. It is a vital part of our program.” Students are provided a half-hour of tutoring weekly through this program.

The Youth Educational Success (YES) Program, an after-school program staffed by high school honor students, assists third and fourth grade students with their homework. Ms. Wilson, the assistant principal, and Ms. Fries, a first grade teacher, monitor and supervise this program that meets twice a week at J.F. Burns. High school students who volunteer their time to mentor and tutor receive community service hours. Ms. Fries reports, “The program can help

alleviate tension between parents and their children because it is often difficult for parents to explain the homework.”

Before and After-School Childcare Programs (school age and kindergarten programs): These are play programs that complement and extend experiences children have at school and home.

After-school enrichment programs: A variety of learning experiences are offered to students are coordinated by the J.F. Burns PTO. Parents and community members teach the courses that have included art enrichment, hands-on science, DestiNation ImagiNation, Spanish, basketball, karate, tumbling, and dance.

Mentoring Program: Parents and community members volunteer as mentors for students. The district uses the 40 Developmental Assets that focus on positive youth development in working with students and considers the mentors to be asset builders for Kings Local students.

Engaging Family and Community

Parent and Community Involvement

J. F. Burns welcomes and encourages the involvement of parents and the community. Principal Montag says, “It is important for parents to know they play a vital role. We rely on them and need them in our problem-solving.” On any given day, 30 to 40 parents may be in the building for a variety of reasons: tutoring students, assisting teachers through the PTO’s Helping Hands Program, attending a Parent Council Meeting, assisting with special grade level programs, serving as a room mother or as mentor. According to one parent, “They can’t keep us out of here!”

A review of several issues of *The Knightly News*, the PTO newsletter, and interviews with parents reveal that the J.F. Burns PTO is a dynamic organization that plays a very important role in the operation of the school. This organization, working “to enhance our children’s education and support our wonderful staff,” does so by providing fiscal and people resources. Funds are raised through

several activities coordinated by PTO members, including a monthly market day, a holiday workshop, and their annual Krazy Karnival.

The PTO coordinates the Helping Hands Program, volunteers who assist classroom teachers, and the after-school Enrichment Programs; provides educational programs for the students such as the Star Lab: Planetarium on Wheels; and approves funding proposals from classroom teachers. Members of the PTO are apprised of school activities through the "Montag Minute," a brief and informative update presented by Ms. Montag at each monthly meeting.

The school supports many organizations in the community through collecting "Pennies" for various projects. Pennies for Patients raised \$1269 and benefited the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society.

Communication

Parents and school personnel identify the communication between parents, teachers and students as well as the collaboration between the staff and the community as key factors contributing to the success of J.F. Burns. The school has an open-door policy and that includes:

The *Electronic Black Board News*, published monthly by the school district, and the *J.F. Burns Parent Newsletter*, issued biweekly by Ms. Montag and Ms. Wilson. Both publications are posted on the district's Web site that contains extensive information regarding the district and each of the schools.

A Parent Council initiated by Mr. Mason has been an effective communication tool: two parents from each of the buildings in the district meet with the superintendent monthly. These two parents also serve on the building council whose membership is comprised of a parent representative for each grade level. The J.F. Burns Parent Council meets with Ms. Montag once every six weeks. One of their tasks is to review input from the parents' survey that is conducted annually.

Teachers at J.F. Burns communicate with parents through a variety of means. The preschool teacher pays home visits. Teachers of older students are available to meet with parents during the four scheduled evening conferences each year. They also are available to meet before and after school and during

daily planning periods. Each teacher has a phone in the classroom that is equipped with voice mail, an e-mail account and a page on Edline where they may post classroom newsletters,

assignments and the students' grades.

We love Edline. It's a wonderful tool! A teacher

Many teachers send e-mail alerts to

parents notifying them when new information and grades have been added.

Assignment books are used by third and fourth graders and by some teachers.

Friday Folders containing each student's work and other school communications are sent home weekly. Interim reports are sent every four weeks and progress reports quarterly.

Culture

One of J.F. Burns's goals states "We are committed to striving to create a positive climate for students characterized by high expectations and appreciation for academic excellence, mutual respect, caring, and personal support."

Students, parents and staff all use similar words - positive, caring, warm, friendly and safe environment - to describe J.F. Burns, confirming the commitment to this goal.

Ms. Montag emphasizes the high expectations for administrators, teachers, and students. Teachers talk about high expectations for both academics and behavior. Even the preschool teacher comments, "I push the envelope even with my four- and five-year-olds. I have to see how much they can do independently. Can they self-monitor? How much will they need as they move on to school-age programs?"

Assertive Discipline is used throughout the building. Although the implementation of Assertive Discipline varies from teacher to teacher, each classroom has a plan that includes rules, consequences, and a rewards system (e.g., verbal praise) for good school behavior. Students assist in the development of these plans and the determination of consequences.

Each teacher uses some system for dealing with infractions of rules. A color-coded card system starts students off with a green card every day; students flip their cards to yellow, blue or red if their behavior is not their best. Regardless

of the system used, the staff strives to be as positive as possible in dealing with all students and frequently employs problem solving techniques to resolve issues. Social stories are also used to teach and reinforce desired behaviors.

Character counts at J.F. Burns, where students recite a character pledge and are recognized for exemplifying the trait of the month. The Kings Local School District identifies the traits to be highlighted on a monthly basis. Each trait (e.g., sensitivity, enthusiasm) is defined and

Because students are so aware of the expectations—they help set goals and consequences—behavior issues are greatly reduced. A Teacher

discussed with students in a manner that is age-appropriate, announced over the PA system, featured on a hall bulletin board, and published in the “J.F. Burns Parent Newsletter.” Teachers identify students who should receive an award, and the names of those students are listed in the biweekly newsletter.

The monthly district-wide Kings Celebration ceremony recognizes students for a variety of reasons, including exemplary behavior, academic accomplishments, and improvement. Those recognized through the Students of the Quarter program receive certificates of commendation at the ceremony; notification postcards are sent to parents, and PTO members post “You’ve been Knighted” signs in the students’ yards. Additionally, students’ behavior and work is recognized through Happy Grams, given out by the teachers and acknowledged by Ms. Montag, and through the Wall of Excellence, a bulletin board that features students’ work.

Students can share their many talents with the community through the annual Kings Fine Arts Festival held each spring. This all-day event displays work from students in grades K-12 in the areas of the visual arts, music, physical education, woodworking, poetry, and more.

The Kings Local School District also recognizes outstanding students, staff and community volunteers three times a year through a Kings Celebration. This celebration is held in the evenings and celebrates achievements and contributions. Staff members at J.F. Burns receive special recognition during Staff Appreciation Week. In addition to activities coordinated by the PTO, many

special “thank yous” are given such as the single rose presented by a student’s father to each of the staff members.

When purchasing a home, families look for properties to purchase in the Kings Local District. A student from J.F. Burns describes why this may be: “It’s a really good place to go because you learn a lot of things, because the teachers make it really easy to understand.”

J.F. Burns Data

SCHOOL PROFILE	
2004-2005 Building Rating	Excellent
Enrollment	579
Grade Levels	K-4
Economically Disadvantaged Students	9.0%
Limited English Proficient Students	2.2%
Students with Disabilities	11.0%
Asian or Pacific Islander Students	3.7%
Hispanic Students	2.3%
Multi-Racial Students	3.9%
White Students	88.5%

KINGS LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT PROFILE	
2004-2005 District Rating	Excellent
District Enrollment	3625

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.