

LINCOLN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



Principal: Erin Simpson

www.wadsworth.k12.oh.us/lincoln/index.htm

Wadsworth City School District

Wadsworth, Ohio

Superintendent: Dale Fortner

High academic and behavioral expectations within a positive, supportive learning environment are the hallmarks of Lincoln Elementary School in Wadsworth, Ohio, and the secret to the success of the students there. Also integral to the students' high achievement are the quality and dedication of the teachers. According to Dale Fortner, superintendent, "Both the research and practical experience tell us that the single most important ingredient in student success is the teacher." Based on that knowledge, Mr. Fortner states that the Wadsworth City School District has "a very extensive and careful hiring process to put the best possible professionals with our kids."

The district nurtures their quality professionals by encouraging them to share their expertise with other teachers in the district. This in-district professional development, called the "Red Book," centers on teachers leading various classes scheduled after school. While the administration helps guide the process, much credence is placed on what the teachers indicate they need, hence the program is grassroots and geared toward instruction. These classes are meaningful to teachers and are very well attended. A class on autism taught by a preschool teacher was "sold out." Teachers must participate in eight hours of professional development yearly; they have the option of attending workshops provided out of the district but most choose this in-district option.

Located in the city of Wadsworth in Medina County, Lincoln Elementary has an enrollment of 274 students in kindergarten through fourth grade. Students with disabilities make up 17.1% of the population. Both the school and the Wadsworth City School District, which has an enrollment of 4,760, have earned an "Excellent" rating based on test results and annual yearly progress for 2004-2005.

Lincoln Elementary has been named a School of Distinction for 2005-2006 because at least 75 percent of all of their students, including their students with disabilities, scored proficient or above on a combination of all proficiency and achievement tests administered during the past three years. To be designated a School of Distinction, a school must have enrolled at least five students with disabilities in the grades taking all proficiency and achievement tests and must have served students in at least three disability categories. The school must also have earned a combined Performance Index score of 100 or more out of 120 for the most recent reporting period.

Instruction Aligned to Standards

The content standards take center stage for what is being taught at Lincoln Elementary. Visitors and students see them posted in all the classrooms. In the second grade, the teachers explain what standard they will be working on by discussing one task at a time so the students will not be overwhelmed. The fourth grade teachers put up signs that address the different types of content standards such as "beginning," "developing," or "secure," and they find that the students are reassured by knowing what is expected.

At Lincoln the lesson plans, resources, and assessments are aligned to the content standards. The teachers report that they went into "panic mode" when the state's standards were first implemented, but they have learned to really appreciate them. They credit the use of standards, along with using data to identify which standards or indicators need more emphasis, with the progress being made by their students. It is the belief of the teachers that their alignment of their local curriculum to the state standards have given their students the best opportunity to do well on the tests because they believe when standards and indicators are taught, the achievement tests will take care of themselves. As one teacher emphasized, "When we are designing our lesson plans, we are always looking at the standards, and our assessments reflect the standards."

The teachers give their lesson plans to the Title I and intervention teachers, as well as to the speech therapist, so everyone working with the students is focusing on the same standards and reinforcing the skills for the

students. The speech therapist believes the standards provide an order of development for the students.

The aim at Lincoln Elementary is for consistency across grade levels. The school-wide Every Day Math Series provides pacing guides aligned to the standards and indicators that is used by each grade level team. For the other content areas, grade level teams work together to develop pacing guides. For example, literacy pacing involves pulling the indicators into each unit, and each grade level team develops the pacing for that grade level. The teachers report that they consider textbooks only as supplements to the curriculum while relying extensively on information from the Internet to help with their lesson plans.

Instructional Design Ensures Success for All

“Every student has the right and the opportunity to succeed in the Wadsworth School District,” emphasizes Mr. Fortner. He states that the district has reached new heights by raising the bar for students with disabilities and incorporating them into the regular education curriculum. The belief is that when the bar is raised and the focus is on educating *all* students, *all* kids -- whether special education students or high achieving honors students -- do better than they thought they could. At the beginning of each year, the teachers at Lincoln Elementary tell students that they all have to take the achievement test and they are all going to pass. They find that having very high expectations for students results in the students having high expectations for themselves.

Students with disabilities are served through a combination of inclusion and small group pull-out instruction, with the focus always being on access to the general education curriculum. In the classrooms, co-teaching is prevalent. Teachers also alternate ability groupings with the tutor, sometimes taking over the class while the classroom teacher works one on one with students.

The Specific Learning Disability (SLD) instructor, Maria Daull, stays in a classroom for math in the morning and pulls students out for reading in the afternoon. She notes that because a student with a reading disability can become overwhelmed when taking any test that involves reading, it is vital to provide accommodations for those students, as specified in each student's

Individual Education Plan (IEP), to allow them to complete tests more accurately. Based on each student's need, such accommodations could be having additional time to complete tests, taking tests in a small group, or having the tests read aloud. Ms. Daull states that students are very aware of their accommodations and understand their importance. Because accommodations help reduce the amount of stress and anxiety during tests, the students perform better on standardized tests as well as on classroom content area tests.

Teachers use assessments to determine how students are performing and to provide intervention and support as needed. Team members of the Intervention Assistance Team (IAT) also use assessments to identify where students need support, to collaborate on the actions to implement the interventions needed, and to involve parents in the process. Reading difficulties are diagnosed with the help of a computer.

The computer program utilized by IAT and in all grades one to four is Yearly Progress Pro. This program helps target areas of difficulty for students and measures their growth and performance as aligned with the standards for that grade level. Students are assessed weekly in reading, writing, and math.

Leadership Focused on Improvement

Erin Simpson, the principal, believes that her number one responsibility is to be an instructional leader. She notes that building principals must wear many hats, one of them being management (time management, money management, organizational structure). It is her philosophy that with strong instructional leadership, management issues become less of a problem. She thinks it is important to have high expectations for your staff, for your staff to have high expectations for the students, and for the community to have high expectations for the school.

Ms. Simpson initiated her first year (2005-2006) as principal at Lincoln Elementary by establishing open communication with the teachers and putting a great deal of effort into sharing research-based practices with them. She was thrilled with the professionalism and support of the entire staff. She also made it a point to participate in open dialogue with the other principals in the district.

Data-Driven Decisions

Data is the foundation for decision-making in the Wadsworth City School District. The central office staff provides great resources for data analysis by putting the data into user-friendly templates in an Accountability Notebook provided to each principal, who then shares the information with teachers. Together they celebrate strengths, determine areas that need improvement, and examine the gaps. Action steps are then determined. “Our decisions regarding instruction are based on our analysis of the data on our students,” according to the principal.

In addition, the superintendent notes that the district has high expectations for all staff to maximize the use of technology, especially as a tool for instruction, data collection, and assessment. He said that technology is embedded in the district’s society, and adds, “We are known as a district emphasizing technology software.”

Data also helps with parent communication regarding the need for student improvement, according to the teachers. They are able to use data to point out areas that need strengthening and then suggest strategies that parents might want to use with their students.

Engaging Parents and the Community

Lincoln parents are considered partners in the education of their children. In addition to providing parents with strategies to use with the children at home, teachers keep parents abreast of what is taking place in the classrooms in a number of ways. They utilize an online program to post progress reports and grades and to send messages to parents in addition to sending home weekly newsletters. The principal posts monthly newsletters to the school Web site.

Parents are always welcome at Lincoln, and they respond to this receptive atmosphere by participating in school functions in very high numbers. One parent noted, “You better get there early if you want to sit down at any school function.” Parents also go out of their way to help teachers meet the needs of their students. Parents volunteer at each grade level and provide reading and math intervention and enrichment. They also read with students though Ohio

Reads/Oasis. A highly involved parent organization, Wadsworth, Home, Youth, School (WHYS), coordinates clubs and activities, provides volunteers for various activities, and raises funds for resources and materials.

Partnerships have also been established with the local library, local safety forces, and non-profit organizations as a way of maximizing resources for the benefit of their students. The staff at Lincoln Elementary has community involvement as a goal of their continuous improvement plan since they believe such involvement is essential for education today. Because they want their students to visit the library often, their partnership with the local library involves having every student getting a library card. The librarians are very student-oriented and make every effort to help the students feel welcome and to support their requests.

Creating a Culture Where Each Individual Feels Valued

The culture at Lincoln Elementary is one of community. The principal and teachers consider themselves members of the Lincoln family and are always looking for ways to support their school family. High academic and behavioral expectations are embedded in a positive, supportive learning environment. One way the teachers at Lincoln Elementary create a culture where each student feels valued is to involve the students in the development of behavior plans for the classrooms. The students determine the rules for expected behavior in the classroom, establish the consequences that will result if the rules are violated, and create a system of rewards for students who abide by the rules. Because the students are invested in the rules, they have high expectations for themselves and for each other. The end result is a very low level of misbehavior.

The principal makes “Principal Proud” calls to parents of students who make good choices. Additional recognition efforts include Student of the Month (who gets to eat lunch with the principal), Bringing Up Grades, and PAW Awards that can be individual specific or grade level/class level. Proud PAWs are awarded to highlight student, staff, and parent success and are displayed on a bulletin board located in the cafeteria where students can see them on a daily basis.

Welcome from a Fourth Grader

On the day of the School of Distinction visit to Lincoln Elementary, Ashley Smith, a fourth grader, read her verse of welcome during morning announcements:

Welcome Ohio Professors,
We hope you like our school,
And our specials are great,
And our teachers are really cool.
We learn math and reading,
Gym and music and art,
Social studies and health,
All subjects that make us smart.
Our principal is Mrs. Simpson,
Says, "Make it a great day, the choice is yours,"
Every morning on the PA,
To help us learn more and more.
Every student here has a talent,
We can show them in many ways,
In the clubs the school has and
The talent show,
In the things we love to do, we get A's.
We take field trips and have a field day,
Where we hardly do any work,
And everyone can have fun on that Day,
You don't know where fun things Lurk!
And this you see,
Is why Lincoln,
Is a School of Distinction!

Lincoln Data

SCHOOL PROFILE	
2004-2005 Building Rating	Excellent
Enrollment	274
Grade Levels	K-4
Economically Disadvantaged Students	7.5%
Students with Disabilities	17.1%
White Students	97.8%

WADSWORTH CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT PROFILE	
2004-2005 District Rating	Excellent
District Enrollment	4760

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.