



## OTTAWA HILLS HIGH SCHOOL

Principal: Katharine A. Hurst  
[www.ohschools.k12.oh.us/schools/ohhs](http://www.ohschools.k12.oh.us/schools/ohhs)

Ottawa Hills Local School District  
Toledo, Ohio  
Superintendent: Dr. Gail Mirrow

The Ottawa Hills High School is nestled in the small, affluent suburban village of Ottawa Hills, a village graced with winding streets, acres of parkland, and natural settings. Homes range from the larger residence typical of the estate section, to condominium living, to the moderately priced home alive with the echoes of growing children.

The high school was built in 1939, with renovations in 1954, 1961, and 1997, and serves as an example of the community's well-maintained traditional architectural style. Ottawa Hills is a purely residential community, and the school system its only community-wide institution. The district, among the smallest public school districts in the state, consistently draws strength from this intimate, more personal scale. The community places a high value on education, with parents often choosing to reside there because of the excellent reputation of its schools. There is considerable emphasis on achievement, and students are expected to achieve above and beyond the content standards and minimum core curriculum.

A continuum of special education services supports an inclusive setting for all students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs), who attend their neighborhood school and are held to similarly high expectations. This service delivery system has evolved over time

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***"The schools are why we live here!"***  
***Parent of student with IEP***

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and can be attributed in large part to the expectations that parents have for their children to attend the neighborhood schools and participate actively in school/community activities. A movement toward the goal of inclusion began in the early 1990s, during a time when students with more intensive needs were

transported to adjacent school districts for appropriate services. With the active support of administrators and teachers, the high school successfully transformed its culture to one that believes in working together to ensure that ALL children achieve at high levels in an inclusionary setting.

## **Leadership**

The Ottawa Hills Local Schools' mission statement is posted in every classroom: Our mission is to challenge each student to develop his or her academic, social, creative, and physical abilities; to instill an appreciation for learning as a lifelong process; and to increase awareness of and responsibility to the local and world community.

An operational vision statement supports this mission by providing a framework for best practices that correlates with effective schools research:

*Our vision is to provide a learning community with a clear, focused mission; a climate of high expectations; opportunities for all children to learn; systematic monitoring of student growth and progress; strong instructional leadership; a safe, orderly environment; and valued parent/community involvement.*

The district is in its fifth year of a five-year strategic plan. Next year the collaborative planning process will again be initiated, beginning with surveys of parents, community, teachers, support staff, alumni, and students. In preparation there will be a review of the survey instruments used in the past (addressing issues related to teaching and learning, student assessment, professional development, student services, facilities and environment, governance, finance, family/community involvement), and a parent/staff focus group will be facilitated to talk about the overall process. It is anticipated that the Zoomerang Web tool will be incorporated for the first time this next year. As Gail Mirrow, the superintendent, explains, "The *Village Voice*, our community newspaper, is really wonderful about sharing information with the community about the long-range planning process, and they will help us communicate about using a web-based

survey. Our questions are basically open-ended, and we want to consider everyone's comments. Some people fill the page, and others are less extensive. We will survey our stakeholders, analyze the results, form a representative committee of about 20 people, then we will work through the process of developing goals for the next five years.”,

Every year the staff decides which goals from the five-year plan will be prioritized, and a person is assigned to take the lead for each of the goals. Progress is reported monthly. In the words of the Administrative Team, “We’re very goal oriented and planning oriented; this culture is a big part of why we’re so successful. We develop our goals based on what our community is telling us and on what we believe. Then we work the plan. It doesn’t just sit on the shelf!”

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***Administrative Team***

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The organizational structure of the administration is remarkably flat, free of the hierarchy and red tape that can stymie innovation and thwart a drive for excellence. As the principal puts it, “Instructional leadership is shared—truly.” The principal is completing her third year in this role but has worked in the district for 24 years. “I don’t have to initiate a lot,” she adds, “because everybody communicates constantly.” And students are engaged, too! Students comprise a Principal’s Advisory Board that meets regularly with the administration to

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engage in collective inquiry and reflection about issues facing students at Ottawa Hills.

## **Curriculum and Instruction**

The school's curriculum is strongly oriented toward college preparation and, on average, at least 95% of graduates enroll in four-year or two-year colleges. The students know they are there to learn, and preparing for a rigorous college experience is almost everyone's goal. Students have an eight-period schedule, but only six class periods meet each day on a rotating basis. Each period is devoted entirely to classroom learning. In an attempt to place each student into the most challenging curriculum possible, students are grouped into achievement levels called tracks. In grades nine through twelve, the tracks are called Honors (HR) and/or Advanced Placement (AP) for the highest track, Accelerated (AC) for the middle track, and College Preparatory (CP) for the basic track. Math has all three levels available in most grades, while English, science, and social studies have two available tracks—honors and accelerated. Instructional practices, aligned with current pedagogy, stress active engagement with educational experiences and materials as well as interdisciplinary approaches to complex material. Teachers make every attempt to individually tailor their teaching to each student's learning style.

The school makes a number of options available for gifted and advanced students. Under the Postsecondary Enrollment Options program, students may earn college and/or high school graduation credit through courses provided through the nearby University of Toledo and Medical College of Ohio. Educational Options classes are also available to create opportunities for specialized student interests not otherwise provided for in the curriculum. These may take the form of independent studies, mentor programs, or tutorials.

The school has an abundance of media services available to both teachers and students. There are 35 computers in the library media center, all of which are connected to the Internet and various online subscription tools such as the Encyclopedia Britannica, Groliers Online, Best Poetry, and the Electric Library (a periodicals database). Students use these and numerous classroom computers to create PowerPoint presentations, which are then shared with other

students. The library is open continuously from 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM, allowing students to come in before school, after school, and during lunch period. Each classroom in the school is wired for data, voice, and video, allowing students access to a wealth of electronic resources as part of their everyday learning experience. Students are required to take a computer applications course (generally as freshmen). Many teachers have been certified as Novices and Practitioners through Ohio SchoolNet (currently known as etech Ohio).

Individual student test results are analyzed by grade level in the elementary school and by department at the high school. The curriculum director prepares the folders, complete with item analyses, graphs, and charts so that data is more easily understood. The curriculum director has worked in the district for many years and has gained respect and trust from the staff, and the teachers embrace her support. From the curriculum director's perspective, "There is a

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***"There is a high level of accountability here, and everyone knows it—everyone, including the support staff."***

***Curriculum Director***

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high level of accountability here, and everyone knows it—everyone, including the support staff." From the superintendent's perspective, "Data is a part of our culture. I've worked in larger districts, and I understand that handling data is

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***Gail Mirrow, Superintendent***

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High priority is placed on the Ohio Graduation Test, and so far only two students have scored below the proficient level in science. As one teacher explains, "The test doesn't ask for anything more than what we do every day."

Extensive norm reference test data are also analyzed to understand how individual students and groups of students are performing. Targeted students are identified for improvement, and their performance is analyzed based on actual test results. For students identified as special needs, the IEPs are used to determine what specific modifications and accommodations are needed. Special education teachers coordinate this process.

Nearly 90% of the students are involved in at least one extracurricular activity, and most are involved in more than one. This high participation rate is evidence that nearly every student has found some way to relieve the accumulated academic pressures of the day. As homework begins, some students gather at computer workstations in the library, while others meet after class with their teachers, many of whom give students their home and cell phone numbers, so academic help is close by. Homework and extracurricular activities fill the afternoons and evenings of most students. During the open lunch hour students can attend their favorite extracurricular activity or just socialize with their friends.

AGORA week is offered every other year. During this week, high school classes are suspended to allow for a variety of special learning activities such as curriculum-based trips, including language trips to France and Spain; art and history trips to Italy; cultural and historical trips to the British Isles; and theatre trips to New York City. Students also may use this time for job shadowing or individual study opportunities. Community service has also become an important part of AGORA, with one day set aside for work on a local project such as planting wildflowers, working in food banks, working with pre-schoolers at the Toledo Day Nursery, cleaning up area parks, and working in the yards of senior citizens.

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

The continuum of special education services includes a resource room, academic support outside the regular classroom setting, and academic support/inclusion with team teaching. Home-based instruction is also available

and, in one case, the school even arranged for a Web cam in the classroom so that a student who was homebound wouldn't miss anything! Students have access to this full array of program options from the elementary grades through high school. (The district's education system consists of one elementary and one junior/senior high school.)

A long-standing partnership with the Lucas County Education Service Center (ESC) makes it possible to provide a variety of options within this small district setting. Special education teachers, employed by the ESC, are part of a comprehensive special education service support system coordinated by the ESC for its client districts. The special education staff includes a director of special education, school psychologist, occupational therapist, speech language pathologist, and seven special needs teachers.

The IEP team is headed by the director of special education and includes parents, the principal, teachers, specialists, and Lucas County Education Service Center (ESC) personnel. "Our special education teachers are wonderful about collaborating with general education teachers," shares the special education director. "It's really this connection that bridges that gap between special and regular education teachers." A 55-minute common lunchtime built into the school schedule makes daily collaboration possible. The special education team uses a scheduling strategy that starts with plotting students' special learning needs on a grid—what they will need, where, and with whom. A master schedule is then created to ensure that available staff is used as effectively and efficiently as possible. The staff also maps out what is needed for students in terms of accommodations and modifications for the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT), including oral translators for LEP (limited English speaking) students.

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***Special Education Director***

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The school's Student Assistance Team (SAT) meets monthly to discuss personal, family, and academic issues as they surface throughout the year. The guidance counselor plays a primary role in identifying students to bring to this collaborative dialogue. A student assistance program coordinator is available to counsel students about personal and health problems, including drug and alcohol abuse and eating disorders.

To help guide sixth graders through the transition from the elementary building to the junior and senior high, a buddy/mentoring program pairs entering seventh graders with students one year older. A peer tutoring program is also available to help students in need of academic assistance; the tutors are teacher-recommended students who are proficient in a specified subject.

Like all junior and senior high schools, Ottawa Hills faces the traditional challenges posed by adolescence as well as the contemporary problems that permeate our culture. The school copes with these issues in ways that emphasize the connections between freedom and responsibility and between home and school. Students are held to high disciplinary standards, though the school recognizes that consequences alone are not a solution to many teenage problems.

A community group, OHPAC (Ottawa Hills Prevention Advisory Council), sponsors various seminars, workshops, and rap sessions for parents as they grapple with adolescent issues. OHPAC also brings recent graduates back to the school to speak with students about drug- and alcohol-related matters.

## **Professional Development**

"We call teachers our million-dollar investment," shares the superintendent, "because our teachers typically stay throughout their career!" Teacher selection is a multi-step process that begins with targeted advertising through venues such as JOBS L and university advertising. The district typically receives many applications for a very limited number of openings. A paper screening process follows. "We look for and like experience in the teachers we

hire,” the superintendent adds. The most important task the principal has as the school’s instructional leader is assembling a superior teaching staff, and it is her responsibility to assign teachers. She begins by screening a select number using such methods as the Teacher Perceiver (an instrument consisting of a series of questions in categories that have been identified through research as being important to all successful teachers). Next, a committee of applicable grade level and subject area teachers, parents, and administrators interview a pool of about six to eight candidates. The top three candidates are identified, and each is asked to teach a sample micro-lesson with a willing group of about ten students who then brief the selection committee on their perceptions of the candidates’ strengths and weaknesses. Only after this intensive selection process is an offer extended to a candidate who is judged to be the best fit for the job. Mentors are assigned for entry year teachers, as well as all experienced teachers new to the district. Teacher assignment is also taken very seriously, and the key ingredient to making scheduling decisions is student class selection. In other words, student priorities contribute to determining these decisions. Every effort is made to provide an adequate number of classes to accommodate student requests.

The principal is responsible for the teacher evaluation process that begins with a pre-observation meeting to discuss personal goals, followed by two 30-minute observations and a post-observation meeting. The principal also offers to teach each of the teacher’s classes for one day every year.

Some teachers tackle projects as part of their personal goals. For example, one teacher designed a systematic way to track IEP goals. The teacher evaluation process is organized around PRAXIS domains.

Opportunities for staff development can be customized to the needs of individuals and small groups due to the size of staff and the level of financial resources. Teachers develop personal plans for in-depth study, site visits, research, and pilot projects, and earn Ottawa Hills Educational Activity Points that can be converted to Continuing Education Units (CEUs) necessary for

certification renewal. Collegial support and professional development opportunities for staff related to special education that are positioned throughout the county service area are provided by the ESC.

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

Ottawa Hills High School is tightly tied into the community. There is one parent volunteer for every three students—these volunteers put in dozens of hours operating the lunch program, coaching athletics, and assisting with school plays and musical productions. The school, in turn, gives much back to the Village through community education classes, offering the availability of its athletic facilities and physical plant, and providing a technology program for adult citizens (Adult Tech). The lunch program is organized and staffed by the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) and involves a rotating list of volunteers who contribute about 1250 hours per year. The Mothers Support Group (MSG) sponsors an annual Artist-in-Residence program that gives students experiences in areas such as photography, quilting, bookmaking, and sculpture.

The district uses many opportunities to share information and report progress to its residents. The Annual Report to the Community (including the annual PTO meeting schedule) takes the form of a calendar that can be displayed and used throughout the year. As a personal touch, students deliver the calendars to each home in the community. Monthly newsletters and the local *Village Voice* are also used to share information. An annual open board meeting is facilitated during which all testing data are presented and discussed. Creative marketing strategies are used to engage the community. One example is the high school brochure that was developed by asking teachers to provide descriptions of why they think the district is so special. These comments were analyzed and pulled together by a teacher team to form the text for the brochure.

The community really believes that education is a top priority and is committed to making decisions based on how student achievement can be improved. There is an overriding culture of high expectations and a belief that all students can learn no matter what their situation. A philosophy of shared

decision-making is evidenced by the active involvement of parents on committees such as a School Technology Advisory Committee, a School Climate Committee, a Finance Committee, and a Facilities Committee.

Regular and ongoing communication is maintained with parents regarding student progress. Every teacher has individual voicemail and e-mail accounts. A number of teachers send student progress emails home to parents weekly. Phones are in every classroom, and a voice mail system allows parents to communicate directly with teachers. Some teachers also have individual web sites where assignments, notices of upcoming tests, and links to other resources are posted.

### **Culture of the School**

Ottawa Hills identifies two factors that have contributed more than any others to the overall success of the school. The first is the focus and emphasis on academic excellence. There is a strong tradition of excellence embedded in the culture, and high expectations are held for ALL students. In the words of teachers: Success is part of the culture – this is a place where you’re going to find your niche through success! The school is proud of its distinction as a Blue Ribbon Award winner for three consecutive years (2002, 2003, and 2004) and, according to the award criteria, must wait five years before applying again.

The second factor is the high level of support the school receives from students’ families and the community. Members of the community demand good schools, and are generally willing to make sacrifices to assure that the schools have the resources to do what is needed so that ALL children can learn. This unusual degree of community consensus allows the schools to concentrate on how best to achieve excellence.

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***Teachers***

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This culture of excellence and high expectations is reflected in the self-reported experiences of students with IEPs. One student, for example, plans to attend college and major in communications. “I really like editing film and I really like talking with people,” shares another student, adding “I did so well in video productions that the teacher asked me to help her teach the class. I also have my own little business. A few parents wanted their kids to go to college and play field hockey, so I made video clips for them.” Another student describes a successful lawn business. “I have four other kids who work with me and we have 14 lawn customers weekly. I want to be a landscape architect so I’ll attend classes at the vocational school and also a post secondary enrollment class at the university.” One more student shares plans to pursue filmmaking and cartoon making. Students attribute their success to the faculty. In the words of one of the students, “The faculty in general is just great here—everyone wants you to succeed, and we think the school reflects that.”

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***Student with an IEP***

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## Ottawa Hills Data

<b>SCHOOL PROFILE</b>	
2004-2005 Building Rating	Excellent
Enrollment	477
Grade Levels	7-12
Students with Disabilities	10.4%
Asian or Pacific Islander Students	6.7%
White Students	90.8%

<b>OTTAWA HILLS LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT PROFILE</b>	
2004-2005 District Rating	Excellent
District Enrollment	967

## **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.