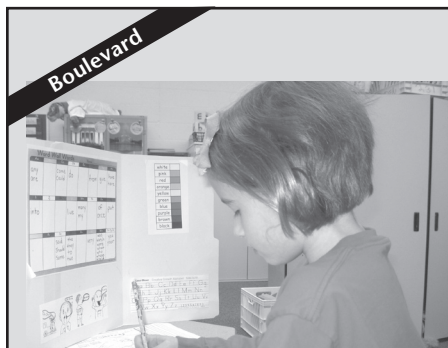


News From Reaching Heights



First grader Jessie Titas is in her mini office, working on her story.

Honing Emerging Writers' Skills by Florence D'Emilia

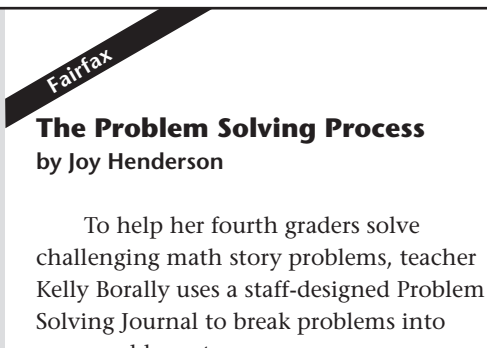
Anyone who's been stumped writing a story, business letter, or report would have benefited from starting out as first graders in Christine Snowden's class.

On a recent morning, students' joy of writing was palpable and their focus enlightening. Students gathered around Ms. Snowden as she prepared them to work on stories they'd started the day before. She reminded them that stories have a beginning, middle, and end. She handed each student a tall, tri-fold manila folder that they placed upright on their desk, creating a private space that blocked potential distractions.

She suggested that one student work on his beginning, and urged another to add drawings to serve as cues during the writing process. As students began their work, Ms. Snowden talked with individual students.

When one student revealed she couldn't think of anything to write, she and Mrs. Snowden looked at the student's beautifully detailed drawing. Mrs. Snowden asked, "What happened at the beginning of your story?" The student described children having a snowball fight. Mrs. Snowden asked who was there. What did they do? Why did that happen? Details emerged and a logical story narrative developed.

"Now I am going to leave you alone to write those sentences," said Mrs. Snowden. The student picked up her pencil and began writing. 📏



The Problem Solving Process by Joy Henderson

To help her fourth graders solve challenging math story problems, teacher Kelly Borally uses a staff-designed Problem Solving Journal to break problems into manageable parts.

"To solve a complex problem, kids need to analyze the problem and devise an appropriate strategy," said Ms. Borally. "Once kids see the parts of a bigger problem, it seems manageable."

The journal guides students through five steps, starting with identifying the question. Students then choose a strategy and identify the operation needed. Wall charts illustrate problem-solving tools.

Early in the school year, Ms. Borally walked students through the process, prompting and guiding their thinking. By January, students need less support. By June, most students know the process.

"I want students to see that there may



Fourth graders Brittany Napoleon, Jamya Terry and Arman Sullivan (L-R) calculate the cost of multiple items in a money counting lesson.

be different strategies to get the correct answer," said Ms. Borally. "Having math conversations is an important part of the work, and helps students internalize the skills."

She also encourages math conversations during math center time. Small groups of students practice counting money and making change from \$5.00, while discussing their math thinking. "This work is about making connections – to each other and to the math process," said Ms. Borally. 📏



Grace Chen often incorporates sign language as she teaches kindergarten and first grade students Mandarin.

Mandarin Spoken Here by Florence D'Emilia

First graders entering Grace Chen's classroom could almost be in China. Little English is spoken. They bow to their teacher respectfully, respond to their Chinese nicknames, and listen carefully to and repeat the new language's unique tones.

The Mandarin Chinese class is in its first year at Roxboro. Children in kindergarten and first grade attend 35 minute sessions four days a week. Other grades have monthly cultural immersion classes.

Using Chinese sign language, songs, and games, Ms. Chen engages students in simple conversations to build vocabulary. Mostly speaking Mandarin, Ms. Chen occasionally speaks English to help students master the language's nuances. To distinguish hong (red) from huang (yellow), she tells them to "touch your nose to feel the vibration."

Winner of the 2009 Distinguished Chinese Language Teacher Award from the Confucius Institute of Cleveland State University, Ms. Chen's classroom is rich with teaching materials. Walls feature pictures of Chinese calligraphy and the phonetic equivalent in English. Daily homework folders and weekly letters to parents outline classroom activities and offer ways to help with homework. Ms. Chen provides flashcards and a CD for each student. Each day, a language and culture half a world away become less foreign to her students. 📏

REACHING HEIGHTS

Our Passion: Excellent Public Education

From the Executive Director:

This, the second of four Neighborhood Newsletters for 2009-10, focuses on teaching and learning at Boulevard, Fairfax and Roxboro elementary schools. Our goal: to describe the teaching process and share stories about the work going on in our classrooms. How do teachers teach? You'll find a few of the many answers to that simple question. We also want to describe students' classroom experiences.

Shedding light on both teaching and learning (while intertwined, they're distinct) offers parents and community members an inside view of some of the work going on in our Cleveland Heights - University Heights schools. My thanks go to the team that wrote these stories: Reaching Heights Assistant Director Joy Henderson, lead writer Florence D'Emilia and community writer Tricia Springstubb, and to our great teachers and students, for all their work.

Contact Reaching Heights at rh@reachingheights.org or 216-932-5110.



Patrick Mullen
patrick@reachingheights.org

Learning Outside the Classroom @ Boulevard

Here are some of the exciting learning opportunities offered outside the classroom at Boulevard Elementary School:

Spanish Club: Students in all grades enjoy afterschool songs, colorful visuals and conversation as they learn a new language and culture.

Chess Club: Chess for Success - an afterschool program offers chess instruction and competition.

Poetry Club: Lunch time activity for third, fourth and fifth grade students. Students read and write poetry that culminates with a Poetry Slam.

Sports Clubs: Fall football, winter basketball before school for fifth grade students.

Math Mentorships: Fourth and fifth grade students solve math problems, guided by Progressive Insurance actuaries.

Scrabble Club: Fourth and fifth grade students meet before school to play this word game.

Boulevard Elementary

Bringing What Works to Scale

By Joy Henderson

When Boulevard Elementary principal Lawrence Swoope talks about teaching, he cites best practices inside and outside Boulevard and says, "We are working on taking proven methodologies and moving them to scale."

One success at Boulevard is seen in the results of the third grade team's math strategy. Last year the team piloted a system of assessing students and using the information to address students needs the same day.

After the third grade teachers taught their morning math lesson, they gave a formative assessment—a short quiz that tells the teacher if the student learned what the teacher taught. Later that morning, the three teachers reviewed the assessment information and decided which students should be grouped together for the afternoon lesson and what they should be taught.

Each third grade teachers leads a group of students who need to work on similar skills. The groups change because students




Third graders get some help from teacher Tamika Bradley as they use inference to answer questions about a story.

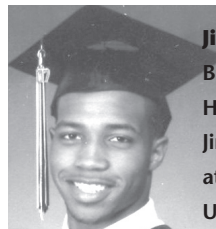
learn different skills at different rates.

This year, the third grade team of Tameka Bradley, Rekyta Carr and Toni Dilillo are using a similar model for reading instruction.

Each teacher gives formative assessments on Fridays. Intervention groups are formed and re-formed, and lessons are adapted that meet students' strengths and weaknesses.

"Our goal is to take a successful instruction model and bring it to scale, in the grade level and the building," said Mr. Swoope. 

Interview with Jimmie Hicks III, CHHS '07



Jimmie Hicks
Boulevard '00
Heights High '07
Jimmie is currently a junior
at Bowling Green State
University.

What's your major?

Public relations.

How about your dream job after graduation?

I'd like to represent the Walt Disney Company, doing community relations.

Do you have a favorite memory or two from Boulevard Elementary?

My third grade teacher Mrs. Axner made me think of Mrs. Frizzle from the Magic School Bus books. She turned science and history into great adventures. When I was in fifth grade, I got to go to France for two weeks in Boulevard's foreign exchange program. That was amazing.

What did you learn at Heights High that prepared you for college?


I loved being in the small schools. Mine was R.E.A.L. and I got great real life experiences,

including interning with an anchorwoman from Channel 3 News, and working in the school district's PR department. I made a video about Heights High that still gets shown on cable. Those experiences shaped my career goals. I also had lots of tough courses—one college science class duplicated what I'd learned in my senior biology class year.

What did you enjoy most at Heights?

We had teachers and administrators who listened to us. We held a peaceful demonstration to support our favorite counselor Ms. Blockson, who was being let go due to the budget. Not only did the school board decide to retain her, but they reformed some things in the guidance department. It was great to know our voices were heard! I was also senior class president, and got to make a speech at graduation.

What advice would you give current Heights High students?

Make friends! I have a network of people I keep in touch with. We give each other tips on jobs. Be goal-oriented, but don't let that stand in the way of getting to know lots of different people. High school is a sweet time. Enjoy it! 

Fairfax Elementary

Focused Teaching, Improved Learning

By Joy Henderson

"All our teachers own all of our kids," said Fairfax Principal Jacky Brown. This philosophy creates a flexible approach to instruction that provides targeted instruction to struggling and achieving students.

The third grade team's 30-minute daily intervention period is a practice that reflects this philosophy. The process starts when teachers look at information from each student's achievement in second grade. This offers general baseline of how to teach a concept. After the concept is taught in each classroom, teachers assess each student's learning to see who learned what. Based on that information, intervention groups are formed. One teacher takes students who need intensive support, one takes students who would benefit from a little strategic support and a third teacher takes students who have mastered the material. This "achieving group" is usually the largest.

Chris Iannone, T.J. Schmidt, and Stephanie Petty have adjacent classrooms, so student transfer is easy and quick. "A student might be in the intensive support group for multiplying two digit numbers but in the achieving group for telling time," said Stephanie Petty. "That is the beauty of this process. Students are grouped by their need in each skill."

Intervention activities reflect students' needs. In the achieving group, students play a fast paced game of time bingo. In the strategic group, students help each other with drawing hands on clocks for the times called out by the teacher. In the intensive group, students discuss how to tell the difference between the second, minute, and hour hands.

Results are encouraging. After the classroom instruction on telling time, 80%



Third graders Jackson Herschman, Gregory Marlin, and Dana Meriweather (L-R) just finished working on their clock-reading skills.

of the third grade students could accurately tell time on analog and digital clocks. After two weeks of intervention, 88% of the students had mastered the skill.

Seeing improvement is important to the team but improving their teaching is also important. "We share strategies and materials, our end goal is to improve our teaching so more students learn the material," said Mrs. Petty. 📖

Interview with Jordan Zirm, CHHS '07



Jordan Zirm

Fairfax '00

Heights High '07

Jordan is a junior at the University of Missouri in Columbia

What's your major?
Journalism.

How about your dream job after graduation?

I'd love to write for a music publication. I'm especially interested in hip hop music and culture, and I'd like to review releases and write artist profiles. It'd be great to discover and introduce new music to a wide audience.

Do you have a favorite memory or two from Fairfax Elementary?

That seems like a long time ago! I remember in kindergarten or first grade, I got the lead in the class play "Cock-a-Doodle Dandy." I was the rooster who had to wake up the barnyard. And I loved that playground. At recess we had huge soccer and football games, with everyone running around.

What did you learn at Heights High that prepared you for college?

The city of Cleveland Heights is all about diversity, and the high school embodies that. Going to a college so far from home, I've met people from all over, with all kinds of backgrounds, and it's been easy for me to feel comfortable and make friends. Heights prepared me academically, too. I had lots of outstanding teachers, and the transition into college work was pretty smooth, no surprises.

What did you enjoy most at Heights?

My senior year I covered sports for The Black and Gold, and that gave me valuable experience for college journalism. I was in Singers for three years, and was president my senior year. Those were some good times, involving lots of great people.

What advice would you give current Heights High students?

Make sure you finish strong. Focus is really important in college—the work load requires it. 📖

All college interviews conducted by Tricia Springstubb.

Did You Know...
80% of Heights High students are successful in college compared to a national average of 45%.

Learning Outside the Classroom @ Boulevard

Here are some of the exciting learning opportunities offered outside the classroom at Fairfax Elementary School:

Student Council: Fourth and fifth grade students elect classroom representatives that plan service and social activities.

Safety Patrol: Fifth grade students help adults keep students safe in the outside areas of the school.

Lunch Bunch Book Clubs: Fourth and fifth grade students read and discuss books with adult volunteers.

Tennis and Tumbling: PTA-sponsored afterschool activities offered to all students.

Challenge Choir: Fifth grade students audition for this performance choir.

Roxboro Elementary

A Strategy For Success



Third grader Zenzele Pelligree says the short “a” sound and pantomimes eating an apple.

By Florence D’Emilia

How do teachers ensure that at least 75% of third grade students pass the Ohio Achievement Test in the spring?

Roxboro Principal Tara Grove and third grade teachers answer that question by focusing on teaching, learning and extras. Their strategy includes the collection of data during the teaching and learning cycle, careful planning of instruction, and an emphasis on the richness that ensures every child experiences significant growth—even those who can pass the exam when they enter third grade. Their strategy worked last year

Learning Outside the Classroom @ Roxboro

Here are some of the exciting learning opportunities offered outside the classroom at Roxboro Elementary School:

Art Club: Aspiring artists meet with the art teacher during lunch to draw, paint and sculpt.

Melting Pot: Students meet with a faculty advisor during lunch to plan activities that promote cultural diversity.

Meaningful Work: Students apply for jobs to help in the office, cafeteria, and library. Students write resumes, are interviewed and evaluated.

Good Friends: Adults mentor and tutor students.

and is being used again this year.

When students return from summer vacation they take a benchmark exam that lets teachers know what skills students need to master. During weekly Professional Learning Community, PLC meetings principal and teachers review the skills students need. They then set goals and plan teaching strategies.

Third grade teacher Christina Lambert is constantly looking at the reading skills of her students. Based on this information, she creates four reading groups - two of the groups are reading below grade level, one is on grade level and the other is above grade level.

A visit to third grade classroom shows the strategy in action.

On a January afternoon, Christina Lambert sits with a small group of students at a semi-circular table. These students need to work on letter recognition. Ms. Lambert begins by showing flash cards with vowels and letter blends and the children respond by saying a sound and making a gesture.

Third grade teacher Christina Lambert is constantly looking at the reading skills of her students. Based on this information, she creates four reading groups.

They respond to the letter “a” by saying the short a sound and pantomiming picking up an apple and eating it. When they say the short “u” sound they put the knuckles of both hands together, move one hand up against the other and say “up umbrella.” Incorporating movement into the lesson is a learning technique that is grounded in cognitive neuroscience research.

Later in the lesson Ms. Lambert asks the students to write a word on their dry erase board and then use it in a super sentence. With help from Ms. Lambert, the students create complex sentences.

Again, science tells us that difficulty hearing the sounds, spelling the words, or reading isn’t connected with the ability to think or to understand complex ideas. The students are developing higher level critical thinking skills that ensure success at school and in life. 📖



Victoria Williams
Heights High ‘08

Victoria attended Roxboro Elementary School, and is currently a sophomore at Washington University in St. Louis.

What’s your major?

I have a double major in urban studies and economics, with a minor in Spanish.

What would be your dream job after graduation?

I’d like to be involved with running non-profits, maybe food banks or a shelter for battered women, and I’m interested in consulting with large corporations on their community outreach. I’m also thinking about law school or a degree in public administration.

Do you have a favorite memory or two from Roxboro Elementary?

I loved playing on the playground before school, when all the different grades ran around together. I also remember a time in fifth grade when we decided to protest a teacher we thought was unfair. We got up a petition and everyone signed it. We were so proud to make our voices heard and try to change things!

What did you learn at Heights High that prepared you for college?

The main thing I learned was how to work with peers. I took a lot of rigorous classes, and my classmates and I always helped, rather than competed against, each other.

What did you enjoy most at Heights?

I had incredibly helpful teachers. My senior year, I had a teacher who invited us over her house on weekends to get ready for our AP exam. The guidance counselors worked hard to help us apply to college. And I loved all the choice in extracurricular activities.

I was student counsel president my senior year, and our class decided to have a different kind of prom. We broke a lot of traditions, and worked hard to raise money. The whole class came together to make it happen, and it was wonderful.

What advice would you give current Heights High students?

Enjoy everything, and that includes the social side. At Heights you have the chance to get to know kids from all sorts of backgrounds. Take advantage of it! You’ll be comfortable with different types of people for the rest of your life. 📖

Grading That Measures Learning

The Homework Opportunity Club at Roxboro Middle School reflects a fundamental rethinking of what grades mean. Grades historically have reflected the completion of activities, but across our district and beyond, educators are working to have grades reflect learning. In the past, when a student did not complete an assignment, he or she received a zero. "Mathematically, a zero is a devastating mark to a student's grade because it is 60 times worse than the lowest D," said Roxboro Principal Brian Sharosky.


At Rox Middle, students receiving a D or F as a cumulative grade over a two-week period must attend the afterschool club. All core subject teachers (Math, English, Social Studies and Science) host a section. Every two weeks, families are notified if their students need to attend a session. "We don't want to wait until the five-week progress report for parents to find out if their child is failing a subject," said Mr. Sharosky.

To keep students interested in learning

and to encourage their progress, students can demonstrate their knowledge of a section of the work and re-do the work or re-take the test. Ten of Marcie Beggs' eighth grade American History students were in her classroom on a December afternoon. Most were preparing to re-take a test. They must demonstrate mastery of knowledge on incomplete or missed assignments. Then they are given credit for the work and can re-take a test.

"If I get a B on the re-test, what will my grade be?" asks one boy. He is thrilled when Mrs. Beggs tells him he will have a B in her class if he gets a B on the re-test.

"This process has encouraged many students to be more responsible for and engaged in their own learning," she said. "We are seeing more effort and less discouragement."

While the Homework Club started in October, preliminary results are encouraging. 41% of students had a 3.0-4.0 GPA in the first quarter of this school year, up from 33% a year earlier. 



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Future Poets Find and Project Their Voices



Anna Gregory and sixth grader Christine Dover as the class works on a writing assignment.

By Florence D'Emilia


Anna Gregory's sixth grade English Language Arts students are developing into poets, readers, writers and critical thinkers.

The classroom reflects a richness of teaching and learning. Posters feature the work of literary greats while others clearly and concisely train a student in stylistic techniques. Classical music plays

softly during silent reading time.

Students bring a book from home or select one from display shelves with contemporary classics and novels beloved by previous generations. A Smart Board and laptops are used to support learning, engage students, and keep them on task.

During a recent fast-paced, 90-minute class, sixth graders read silently, wrote a 10-minute quick response to the reading, then read and discussed a poem about professional basketball player Allen Iverson. After being assigned a partner, students wrote a poem about the middle school bully character in the short story they read.

The class culminated with recitation. Students projected their voices and read with expression, but more impressively, their poems reflected a nuanced understanding of the character and the stylistic techniques discussed earlier. 

High Achievement at Heights High

By Joy Henderson

Critical thinking, self-discovery and college credits are on the menu for many students at Heights High. The move to a small schools added challenging options for students who want to accept more responsibility. At Heights, more than 350 students are enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) courses, which offer college credit; 44 are enrolled in college classes. Here are three of their stories.

The Future Pharmacist: *Dominique McKee, CHHS '10, REAL School, Pharmacy Tech Program, part time at Tri-C*

"When I pass the Pharmacy certification test, I can work in a pharmacy part-time while going to college to be a pharmacist," she said.

She takes morning pharmacy and physics classes at Heights High. Four afternoons a week, she heads to Tri-C's Eastern Campus in Highland Hills for classes in English and government. On Saturday morning, she attends a statistics class. Many days after class, she returns to Heights for Student Council meetings and Gospel Choir rehearsals.

"The chemistry of drug interactions fascinates me," she said. When Dominique starts college in fall '10 (she's applied to four schools with pharmacy programs), she'll take a significant number of credits with her, and the knowledge of what it takes to succeed in college.

The Aspiring Artist:

Eric Brock, CHHS '10, Mosaic School, Artist, fulltime at Heights High

"Art teacher Mrs. Hood-Cogan has been great – giving me artistic freedom but helping me to develop skills." He describes his artistic style as technical realism and loves experimenting with color. Next year, he will attend art school to study graphic design or illustration. He has applied to three art institutes.

Seniors Erin Jackson, Dominique McKee and Eric Brock (L to R) are enrolled in three of the challenging programs at Heights High.



He is enrolled in AP art, literature, composition, statistics, and government. He also takes guitar, forensic science, and political philosophy. All that and baseball and swim teams make for a demanding schedule. "But I've learned to be organized," he said.

"I love the amazing diversity at Heights, because there are so many groups of people to know," he said. "I have friends from music, art, sports, and my neighborhood."

The Emerging Educator:

Erin Jackson, CHHS '10, Mosaic, Senior to Sophomore student, full time at Tri-C

"The Senior to Sophomore program is great," said Erin. "I'll leave Heights High with a high school diploma and enter college as a sophomore."

This semester she is taking politics, psychology, sign language and English at Tri-C. Her politics class includes older

students. "I've learned so much from them," she said, "especially about health care."

Erin has found that starting college while in high school has its advantages - she is expected to be responsible and self motivated but still has a group of adults at Heights High looking out for her. She feels she has the best of both worlds. She also plays on the Heights basketball team.

Erin will attend Bowling Green State University and will study early childhood education.

Supporting High Achievement

The guidance staff provide support for AP students and those taking college courses.

For more information about the advanced programs at Heights High, contact Kristie Cooper, K_Cooper@chuh.org, or 320-3067.

Congratulations to Natalie Wester, Gearity third grade teacher, named 2010 Ohio Teacher of the Year, and Daniel Heim, Heights High Orchestra Director, named 2009 New Teacher of the Year by the Ohio Association of String Teachers!