

# Oxford | Noble

## News From Reaching Heights



Oxford fifth grade students Selena Vidal, Jasmyn Smith and Richard Kalamajka (L to R) play the game Selena created for Sean Sullivan's Math Carnival.

## Math Carnival a Rich Learning Experience

by Florence D'Emilia

At Oxford's Fifth Grade Math Carnival, students had fun while carefully recording data and solving problems with a refreshing and inspiring enthusiasm. The Carnival, an annual event in Sean Sullivan's classroom, culminated a unit on mean, median, mode and range.

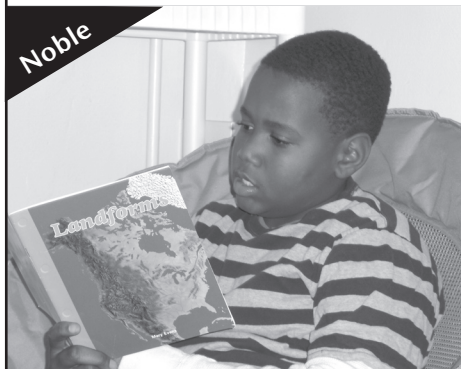
"Kids devised their own games, came up with ideas, worked on them at home and occasionally talked to me to make sure they were going in the right direction," explained Mr. Sullivan. "By the time they've created the game, taught it to their classmates, and figured out averages four different ways for each game player, the math really sticks with them."

On carnival day, the students set up their games, taught others how to play them, took notes on a data collection sheet as students played the game, then calculated various kinds of averages. They placed numbers in numerical order, to

more easily figure out the median — the middle value in a range, which they found by subtracting the difference between minimum and maximum values. They added all scores and divided by the number of scores to get the mean. Finally, they note which score appeared most often to find the mode.

The carnival included games of skill and chance, all requiring data collection and problem solving. Selena created an entire board game, complete with handmade paper dice. She instructed players to select a card and solve a problem as they moved around the board. Players of Keandre's "Did You Make the Goal?" tossed a paper football at a goalpost, winning points for accuracy.

Fifth graders' contagious enthusiasm for math spread when fourth graders attended the carnival. According to Mr. Sullivan, "it's all about getting and keeping kids excited about math." 📖



Fifth grade student Jayson Perry enjoys reading non-fiction in Mrs. Riley's book area, complete with bean bag chairs and lots of books

by Florence D'Emilia

There's a pattern to learning in Sharon Riley's fifth grade class, and her student Mallea Simmons can describe it. "First, we see Mrs. Riley do the work, then we do the work and talk about it with each other." Talking and thinking about the work is important.

This was clear when four of Mrs.

## Talking Plus Thinking Equals Learning

Riley's students were at the Smartboard, an interactive white board. Students took turns reading paragraphs and then as a group chose one of three answers that identified the topic sentence of the paragraph. This requires understanding and analysis of the text.

It's tempting to rush and guess at answers, touching the screen and watching the cool graphics — especially when each correct answer earns another piece of the word puzzle. But a quick reminder from Mrs. Riley puts the four back in thinking mode. "We really need to slow down and talk about the answers first," says one student.

And they do. They exchange ideas about why one option might be right, listen to each other and rebut a suggestion with a reading from the text. They agree on an answer and are rewarded with another clue to solve the word puzzle. This thinking and talking makes learning fun

and lasting.

Building a classroom environment of idea exchange and cooperative learning takes work. Everyone has to know and trust each other. "I tell students that they don't have to love each other but they do have to work together, and be professional," says Mrs. Riley. "Learning and school is their job right now and just like any job, they need to be professional and work, talk and think with anyone and everyone in the class."

This attitude reflects the whole school's focus on two civility rules: Speak Kindly and Respect Personal Space. According to Thomas Adams, another student, "That means we talk nicely to each other and are polite." Naila Jackson also sees it connected to the learning. "We help each other think about the right answers, it is good for our brain to do it that way." 📖

# REACHING HEIGHTS

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## From the Executive Director:

This, the first of four Neighborhood Newsletters for 2009-10, focuses on teaching and learning at Noble and Oxford elementary schools. Our goal: to describe the teaching process and share stories about the work going on in our classrooms. How do teachers teach? This newsletter provides a few of the many answers to that simple question. We also want to describe students' classroom experiences by looking at some of what they do on the path to learning.

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 their work.

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Noble

# The Path to Literacy

By Joy Henderson

Children enter school at different points on the pathway to literacy. The challenge for teachers is to help students crack the reading code and become competent readers.

Noble teachers have been successful—last year all third grade students passed the reading portion of the Ohio Achievement Test. That success is partly due to work done last summer, when Noble teachers reviewed each incoming student's reading assessments and set specific grade level goals. The first grade goal: 83% of all students would read at or above grade level by the end of this school year.


Once teachers identified each student's reading skills and challenges, interventions were developed for students performing below, at, and above grade level.

"Our goal is to design each student's day to include extra reading time whenever possible," said Principal Julie Beers. Older students read to younger ones while they share lunch, senior citizens read with students, and teachers work with small groups of students to address specific skill needs.

Second grade students who are reading above grade level spend time with enrichment teacher Mrs. Dawson. In one activity, eight students wrote stories about animal characteristics, based on the style of "How the Camel Got its Hump." Then each student read their story and received input from the

class. "Maybe you could add some talking," suggested a student. Mrs. Dawson noted that this technique, called dialogue, adds detail to a story and makes it more exciting.

Meanwhile, first grade teacher Mrs. Schramo was working with her below grade level readers. The seven students looked at word cards and listened as she read the words aloud. The children pointed to each distinct letter and made its sound. When Mrs. Schramo said "last," six students repeated the word but one child said *land*, unable to differentiate between *n* and *d* sounds – until the third try. When he got it, his classmates erupted in clapping and a round of "Yeah!"

While the activities for these two groups of children are different, the goal is the same: using the knowledge of each student's needs to make sure every child learns. 



Second graders Daisha Gardner and Skylah Houston (L to R) wrote "How the Bear Became Brown" in Michelle Dawson's enrichment reading class.

Oxford



Lawrence Williams and Hakim Benjamin (L to R) in Joi Curry's third grade reading group.

By Florence D'Emilia

It's not by chance that all third graders at Oxford Elementary passed the reading portion of the Ohio Achievement Test. How did teachers successfully teach a class that included students reading below, at,

## Teaching Reading and Thinking

and above grade level?


It began in the summer of 2008. Working with Oxford principal Stacy Stuhldreher, teachers created a color-coded chart with every student's reading level over two years and determined how best to move each student forward. The school day was reorganized to include a 90-minute literary period that allowed classroom teachers to work with a Title 1 Reading Specialist.

They decided to slow the pace of instruction, allowing for more in-depth learning, developed strategies to meet each student's needs, set an annual goal for each student, and regularly assessed their progress.

Last summer, teachers and principal met to fine tune their plan for this year's students, including third graders. On a recent fall morning, evidence of the plan could be

seen when six third-grade students gathered around Joi Curry's table for a lesson on vocabulary and comprehension, using a book about animals in Antarctica. They discussed words used in the book. While huddle was used to describe penguins cluster behavior, students noted that it also describes the clustering behavior of football players.

As students prepared to move to the next activity, one asked Mrs. Curry if blue whales have eyes. She responded with a number of questions to prompt the boy to think more deeply about what he had read.

Teaching students to read is not the only goal. Being able to read is just the beginning. "We also want to promote critical thinking skills by asking higher level questions that require more than yes or no responses," said Mrs. Curry. 

## Learning Outside the Classroom

# at Oxford

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

**Art Club:** Interested students meet with the art teacher after school to draw, paint and create original art.

**Green Team:** Students collect paper from each classroom for a recycling program.

**Young Men & Women of Oxford:** Fourth and fifth grade students with at least a 3.0 grade point average and good citizenship are invited to join these groups to reinforce and encourage academic achievement and citizenship.

**Mother/Son & Father/Daughter Dance:** Special dress-up evenings with music, dance and refreshments.

**Principal's Book Club:** Principal Stacy Stuhldreher hosts a lunch time book club. 📖

## Learning Outside the Classroom

# at Noble

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

**Young Men & Young Ladies of Noble:** Students with at least a 3.0 grade point average and good citizenship are invited to join these groups to reinforce and encourage academic achievement.

**Student Employment:** Students can complete an application to apply for volunteer jobs as helpers in the cafeteria, library, office, gym or student store. More than 70 students participate, learning the value of work.

**Chess Club:** Students meet after school to learn and play chess.

**Recycling:** Students receiving special education services collect and recycle juice boxes.

**Buddy Reading:** Selected third, fourth, and fifth grade students are trained to read with younger students. 📖

## Spotlight on Heights High Graduates



**Damara Davis**  
Noble '00  
Heights High '07  
Damara is currently a junior at Youngstown State University.

**What's your major?**  
Psychology.

**How about your dream job after graduation?**

I want to be a therapist or counselor, or work with a non-profit on behalf of animal welfare.

**Do you have a favorite memory from Noble Elementary?**

I loved my kindergarten and second grade teachers. I enjoyed show 'n' tell, because we could bring in pets, and art and music.

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

I took AP classes and got used to working hard. In some ways college is easier, because the work load is more spread out. The diversity at Heights taught me how

to talk to people from different cultures with different viewpoints. Talking to other Youngstown students about their experiences, I've discovered how much Heights offered. People are surprised when I describe things like AFS, all the sports, and the music program. That range of activities taught me how to find things I want to do.

**What did you enjoy most at Heights?**

I loved the music program. I was in Singers and Choir. I especially loved one of my English classes. We had good discussions and expressed ourselves in different media, including video and writing. And I was a swimmer. That was hard work. We were always so hungry!

**What advice would you give current Heights High students?**

Don't be lazy! College seems far away, but it's not. Think about your grades, and start looking at schools early. Be your own person. Don't try to be someone you're not, just to make other people like you. Heights is big—make that bigness work for you. 📖



**Bryan Loretz**  
Oxford '00  
Heights High '07  
Bryan is currently a junior at Hiram College.

**What's your major?**

Business management, with minors in political science and economics.

**How about your dream job after graduation?**

I want to go to law school and have my own private practice. I'd also enjoy working in international marketing.

**Do you have a favorite memory from Oxford Elementary?**

That seems like a long time ago! So many teachers helped me. Playing soccer with Mr. Sullivan, my third grade teacher, was fun and got me interested in sports. My fourth and fifth grade teachers helped get me ready for middle school. Mr. Wells showed us so many cool ways of approaching math.

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

Many influential people helped me get where I am today. Teachers cared about where I was headed and what I did next. It was a productive environment. I especially liked it after small schools started in tenth grade. Before that I sometimes felt like a number.

**What did you enjoy most at Heights?**

Being on the football team taught me leadership, discipline, and how to be a team player. We always said we were only as strong as our weakest player. I learned how to get along with all kinds of people and attitudes. Here at Hiram, I played football at first, but now I'm concentrating on my grades and other activities. I'm treasurer of the Speech and Debate Club, chairman of African American Students United, and a member of Kennedy Center Program Board. I'm also in Gospel Choir.

**What advice would you give current Heights High students?**

Stop playing! Get your work done! Heights was fun — I miss it, though the work load was so heavy it was ridiculous. 📖

## Future Poets Find and Project Their Voices

By Florence D'Emilia

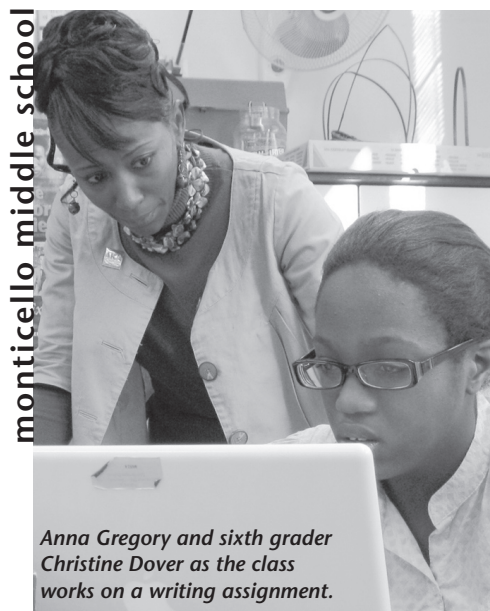
Anna Gregory's sixth grade English Language Arts students are developing into poets, readers, writers and critical thinkers.

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. 📖



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

## High Achievers at Heights High: Three Stories

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.

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

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



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

Heights High Coordinator of Advanced Studies Joel Gulko and the guidance staff provide support for AP students and those taking college courses.

For more information about the advanced programs at Heights High, contact Joel Gulko, J\_Gulko@chuh.org or 320-3123. 📖