

Lancashire Elementary School

Wilmington, Delaware



SCHOOL SETTING, DEMOGRAPHICS, AND DATA

Although it is located on a busy street only a few miles from urban Philadelphia, Lancashire Elementary Schools is surrounded by trees and well-maintained open space. Inside, bright signs hang from the ceiling, steering visitors to the front office, and student work covers the walls. A giant graph of “good choices—great rewards” tracks points students have earned for good behavior.

Greeting children by name, the principal exchanges a few a quick hugs or pats a child gently on the back and asks about his siblings or parents or how a recent test went.

Part of the Brandywine School District in Wilmington, Delaware, Lancashire serves about 350 students in Kindergarten through third grade. The school roughly reflects the community’s demographics: According to 2000 U.S. Census data, Wilmington’s population is 10% Hispanic, 32% White, and 56% African American. The median household income in Wilmington is \$35,116, more than \$12,000 lower than the state average. Wilmington is not growing, and Lancashire pulls students from low-income



Not far from urban Philadelphia, the Lancashire campus is one of trees and open space.

Student Demographics

Lancashire Elementary School
 Wilmington, Delaware
www.k12.de.us/lancashire
 347 students, K-3

White	51%
African American	34%
Hispanic	4%
Asian/Pacific Islander	11%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1%
Students eligible for free/ reduced price meals	40%
Students with Limited English Proficiency	10%
Special Education Students	9%
Student/Teacher Ratio	20:1

areas to the north and east. In response to local need, Lancashire includes a Title 1 extended Kindergarten program for nearly half the entering students. With the extended program, specialists, volunteers, and other supports, the program works to even the playing field for all children in the school.

In addition to Principal Peter Barry, Lancashire has 17 classroom teachers, three full-time and eight part-time special resource teachers/specialists, four para-professionals, and three support staff. Teacher turnover is very low. In addition to the faculty and staff, Lancashire has an active volunteer force. Volunteers include parents, retired community members and others; administrators estimated that Lancashire has volunteers about 40% of the time. Every volunteer participates in an hour-long training course. Of particular note is the strong connection to retired citizens in the community through Retired and Senior Volunteer Program and Toward a Better Society volunteer tutors.



Staff members regard Principal Peter Barry as "extremely accessible."

Lancashire Elementary is a choice school under No Child Left Behind, meaning that parents may choose it for their children over a neighborhood elementary school. Several Lancashire teachers have chosen to have their own children attend the school, a testament to the quality of instruction. It is clear that all school staff are expected to get to know the students in order to understand and teach them better, to make them feel cared about, and to anticipate a lot in terms of good behavior, effort, and accountability.

SCHOOL CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

While there is no official definition of school culture, a visitor senses it on first walking through a school's doors. Is the school culture collaborative? Is it dogmatic? Is this a competitive environment? Is it friendly? Lancashire's principal, described by several teachers as "extremely accessible," greets faculty and staff warmly. Students walk in orderly lines, their voices low but their energy high. They smile and easily accept the principal's greetings.

The school building, now more than 40 years old, was built according to an open plan design, with grade-level classrooms clustered around a centrum, or open area for small groups, specialists, and storage. Construction is beginning on a new building on space next to the school in Spring 2008, and while teachers and staff voiced some regret about losing the open centrum area, they were pleased that the new, larger building will accommodate students from kindergarten through 5th grade, giving them two more years with students before middle school.

Lancashire uses a multi-faceted, team approach to create a positive and healthy learning environment and culture of caring. A key element is the PBS (Positive Behavior Program), which applies across the board at Lancashire—to students, teachers, and staff members. Using a point-based reward system, the PBS program is an incentive for teamwork. Classes earn class compliments that translate into class rewards; students can earn individual compliments, known as PAW bucks, which they can turn in for personal rewards. PAWS is an acronym for Practice kindness, Act safely, Work responsibly, and Show respects, which are the four schoolwide expectations. Students are given clear expectations about behavior and are taught what good behavior looks like. Parents noted that their children talk about the rewards and that they “really want to earn it.”

Lancashire has very few discipline issues. “Teachers are trained on how to handle [discipline problems], so only very serious issues are sent to me,” explained Principal Barry. Teachers are supported through training (for example, through the YMCA anti-bullying program) and by the guidance counselor, who goes into each classroom every other month to reinforce PAWS, the anti-bullying and conflict resolution program. Some students are referred by teachers or parents to work with the counselor more intensely on a temporary basis. A parent noted that Mr. Barry addresses issues immediately and uses a teaching approach to problems rather than punishment.

The Lancashire pledge, which students recite every morning following the Pledge of the Allegiance to the flag, reinforces the school’s positive message:

Today I pledge to be
the best possible me!
I will practice Kindness,
act Safely,
work Responsibly,
and show Respect.
No matter what I do,
I know I can become better.
I pledge to believe in me!

Less formally, teachers promote good classroom behavior through reinforcing statements. Several teachers throughout the building were often heard offering students specific praise through “I like the way you…” statements, such as, “I like the way you used your math strategy to find the answer” and “I like the way your class is quietly walking down the hall.” This approach to specifying what was going right was systematic. Compliments were never a vague, “good job,” but were always specific—“good job on your paper, Jane!”

Lancashire has a simple dress code—solid colored shirts and pants or skirts but no jeans. While not a strictly enforced (some students were slightly off), it is a valuable practice, said Principal Barry, and neither students nor parents have every voiced concern over the dress code. Uniforms also make it easy to supply economically constrained students with needed clothes, he added. The school has a supply of school shirts and pants that can be

passed along to families and other kids don't notice the difference. Principal Barry attributes the dress code to helping students stay focused on school work, noting that "there is a definite change when we have had schoolwide dress-down days." Because students were a little more restless, he has decreased the number of dress-down days.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

In most cases, students at Lancashire Elementary have been progressing and in some years excelling on the Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP) in reading, writing, and math. Teachers, the principal, and parents attribute these positive moves to the school's focus on quality instruction, clear curricular goals, a spirit of collaboration and team effort, and a strong sense of community, both inside and outside the school.

Mr. Barry believes a key factor is Lancashire's strong emphasis on accountability, because early identification and intervention are essential to improving or adapting instructional practice to meet students' learning needs. Several accountability forces are in play at Lancashire, including tracking student progress across assessments; using formative and ongoing assessments to gauge each student's progress towards meeting grade-level expectations in reading, math, writing, and science; and monitoring the fidelity of curriculum and instruction implementation.

Teachers, parents, and Principal Barry were careful to explain that at Lancashire assessment and testing provided teachers with the clues they need to alter and adapt instruction according to individual student's needs. Lancashire's technology coordinator tracks information on a spreadsheet after teachers submit student data at every marking period. Assessment tools in use at Lancashire include benchmark assessments to determine students' progress in reading fluency, end-of-unit tests to assess growth in vocabulary and language development, and text-based writing prompts to help gauge students' responses to text. Student proficiency in elaborating their writing with detail is tracked through their grades as a part of the standards-based grade-reporting system.

In math, Lancashire developed one-on-one assessments based on the Delaware Grade Level Expectations for number sense and computation, augmented by district-created assessments to determine competency in problem-solving and mathematical communication. These assessments in particular are tied to small increments of learning that allow teachers to determine whether students have mastered a skill and who may need re-teaching of a skill or strategy. All these assessments are ongoing and are used for goal-setting and instructional differentiation by the Instructional Support Team, grade-level teams, and by each teacher.

In addition to customized instruction for each child, prior year test scores influence which class children are placed the next year. Test scores are disaggregated by subgroups to help the principal look at how subgroup learning gaps are closing. For example, a dip in the DSTP math score for one subgroup prompted further investigation, and led to the finding that there was a disconnect between the district pacing guide and assessments

when the new edition of the math textbook was introduced. Teachers and the principal will be tracking progress carefully for all students now that the program is fully implemented and revisions to the assessments and pacing guides are in place.

Mr. Barry described the use of data as a team effort. During an Instructional Support Team meeting he engaged teachers in a conversation about the data and empowered them to direct the conversation to a discussion of interventions and solutions. The next day, Instructional Support Team members then took the strategies to grade-level meetings for further discussion.

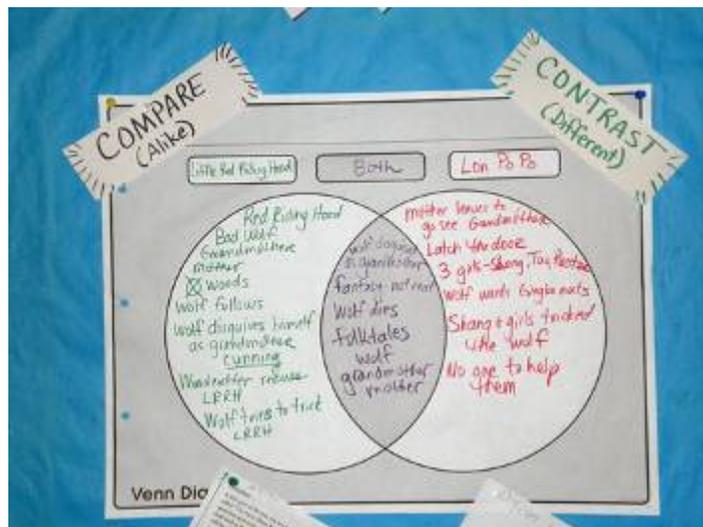
Teachers have grade-level meetings twice a month, in the morning before students arrive. Additional meeting time is provided when the principal takes the whole school to the gym for monthly assemblies and teaches students about American heroes.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

The Lancashire Elementary School takes a schoolwide approach to curricular and instructional initiatives. While many of the initiatives may not be unique as stand-alone programs, what makes the Lancashire effort so strong is the building-wide buy-in and support for the initiatives by faculty and staff. The principal, teachers, specialists, support staff, students and parents clearly embrace the spirit of the initiatives.

During the 2005-2006 school year, Lancashire implemented the Instructional Support Team (IST). Made up of teachers and support staff, the IST uses a collaborative problem-solving process to focus on enhancing, improving, and increasing student and staff performance. The goal of IST is to improve teacher instruction and student performance, and IST members are trained in a problem-solving process intended to support teacher instruction and create appropriate instructional matches for referred students. The collaborative, team approach offers teachers the opportunity to work with colleagues to problem-solve and create learning success for all students.

The IST process begins when a teacher completes a confidential request for assistance for a student. Request forms are placed in the IST mailbox and a case manager from the team responds to the referral within a



Students use Venn diagrams to analyze similarities and differences in folk tales.

week, setting up a time to meet. Together the case manager and teacher begin a problem-solving process that includes: 1) identifying specific and observable concerns, 2) assessing instructional conditions, 3) prioritizing and targeting concerns, 4) collecting baseline data, 5) writing specific and measurable goals, 6) designing and implementing strategies to help the student, 7) graphing data, 8), evaluating the strategies or interventions implemented, and 9) redesign or closure. Typically, this process takes about 12 weeks. During the 2006-2007 school year, 20 students participated in the IST process.

An Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) made up of the principal, reading specialist, guidance counselor, special educator, and one teacher from each grade meets monthly to review data, share information and plan. Working from an agenda, the team meets for approximately 45 minutes. In a recent meeting, a teacher shared a strategy she was using with her students in math that involved graphing each student's test scores over time and then analyzing them with the student. "Kids are taking ownership [of their test scores] and see trends and ask questions like 'why did I not do well on that one?'" the teacher explained. Principal Barry had the other teachers look at some graphs and discuss the strategy. Some teachers were hesitant to try it across disciplines, and the principal suggested they "just try it in one area to start." The ILT group serves multiple purposes, among them cross-colleague professional development and guidance. In



A classroom reading area is warm and inviting.

another instance, a discussion of a new spelling program elicited agreement from the 2nd- and 3rd-grade teachers to use the first 100 words on the word wall for consistency across classrooms.

Lancashire teachers are currently pilot testing a new edition of a math textbook, and discussed about how they felt about it, how it differed from the earlier edition, and how it worked in the classroom, noting that it was "much more user-friendly" and that they valued its use of multiple methods to solve problems and its highly visual, interactive nature. The level of conversation suggested that teachers were not just implementing the new edition in a rote manner, they were making it their own.

Delaware has developed a recommended curriculum for all content areas including, but not limited to) English/Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social studies. The standards in each content area contain the essential knowledge and skills students must attain by graduation from high school. Developed using the Understanding By

Design framework, the curriculum includes Enduring Understandings, Essential Questions, and Specific Grade Level Expectations. It was created through back mapping—starting with what students need to know and be able to do by the time they graduate high school and working backwards to develop an aligned curriculum that will give each student, from kindergarten through 12th grade, the essential skills and strategies to reach graduation.

The Brandywine School District created Pacing Guides for each grade level in each content area to create a road map teachers could follow as they implement instructional programs. The guides guarantee that students are exposed to the curriculum, while practicing and applying the skills that will lead to their meeting the grade-level expectations established by the state.

In one class, on fractions and decimals, the teacher had written a series of challenges on the board and students were eager to work out the problems. After the students tried the problems, the teacher took each challenge and worked it through all the way. When one student got the problem wrong, the teacher did not just move on to another student, but worked through the challenge with the student, while inviting others to suggest alternative strategies. When the student figured out what he did wrong, he gave the answer with enthusiasm and the whole class cheered.

Teachers, staff, and the principal noted the strength of the kindergarten program at Lancashire for preparing kids for the challenging upper grades, as an observation of a kindergarten math lesson showed. The teacher had made a 6' x 3' graph, around which students sat while the teacher explained the graph's columns and rows. One column was marked as "heads" and the other "tails." Using a large mock penny, the teacher identified which side was "heads" and which "tails," and linked the discussion to an earlier study of President Abraham Lincoln. Drawing from a pile of large paper cut-outs of pennies, each child rolled a large mock penny like a die, then marked heads or tails on the graph. Throughout, teacher prompted students to note what they were observing, encouraging them to think about the activity. At the end, the children counted up the heads and tails to determine which there were more of (in this case, it was a tie). Then students worked at tables with real pennies and worksheets, again flipped coins, noted heads and tails, and graphed their results. The teacher used this time to observe how each child understood the concepts being taught.

According to classroom teachers and Principal Barry, early intervention services and inclusion make a tremendous difference at Lancashire, helping teachers stay grounded and focused. For example, the Reading Specialist works with teachers to use common strategies and common language for phonics, reading comprehension, and beginning writing in kindergarten. Using benchmark tests and a fluency support, the Reading Specialist and teachers target special support for students who need some assistance. The goal is to identify where reading issues begin. The Reading Specialist and the teachers devised a plan to use teaching strategies from their inventory for topics such as letter sounds, blends, fluency, and comprehension. Checking in with teachers

periodically, the Reading Specialist sometimes also models classroom strategies and helps with further diagnosis. Noting that Lancashire is moving to a Response to Intervention (RTI) model next year, the Reading Specialist expressed eagerness to see how it works in their program, hopeful that the RTI will help teachers sharpen their instructional focus.

CONCLUSION

Features that set Lancashire Elementary School apart from other schools with similar demographics include the positive school culture, the use of assessment to inform instructional practice, and the strength of curriculum and instruction implementation. It is not one of these elements in isolation, but rather the embedded nature of all of these practices and more that create an environment where students can thrive. The entire faculty, administration, support staff, and community are clearly cheering for the kids at Lancashire—and not only cheering, but setting up safety nets and supports to ensure that every student has the opportunity to flourish.

The challenges Lancashire faces may be found in countless other school. What is unique to Lancashire's approach is the attention to the details of each child's learning and each teacher's teaching. It has much to do with the faculty's willingness to get on board with new practices and study what kids are learning. Lancashire has clear support from the principal, professionalism among faculty, and strong community backing.

Lancashire Elementary School Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP) % proficient and above: 3rd grade Reading				
	2004	2005	2006	2007
All	83	87	94	88
African American	71	86	86	
State Scores				81
% proficient and above: 3rd grade Math				
	2004	2005	2006	2007
All	80	83	82	84
African American	63	77	72	
State Scores				77