

**2008 Blue Ribbon Schools Ceremony**  
**Summary of Panel Presentations and Discussions**  
**October 2008**

To download the PowerPoint presentations and handouts, [click HERE](#).

### **High School Panel**

**Title:** *Closing the Gap in Math and Language Arts*

**Presenters:** George Steyer, Principal and Ed Kramer, Teacher, Solon High School, Solon, OH

Solon High School is a suburban school with an increasing number of students attending from outside the district. Having recognized that students who are functioning below grade level in math and language arts, the school instituted double-block ninth grade math and language arts classes. The program gave students an extra year of education in those areas, while still allowing them to gain all the credits needed to graduate with their peers. The classes cover the same curriculum as regular classes in the corresponding grade level, but provide the instructional support these students need in order to excel. Teacher strategies include emphasizing student engagement through group work, repetition, application, and use of power indicators, among other strategies. A range of formative assessment strategies allows teachers to pace the work to student learning. Solon High School administrators consider the program a success. Not only have 100% of the students in the double-block passed the relevant Ohio standardized grade level test, but they note attitudinal changes as well. The audience asked a range of questions, including how the classes are paid for. Presenters responded that there is only one additional teacher salary, since each class is staffed by a regular and special education teacher. Next steps include providing necessary support for these children as they enter the 10th grade, and possibly expanding the double-block program to social studies.

**Title:** *Peering into Science*

**Presenters:** Corey Mullins, Science Teacher and Cindy Gajus, Special Education/Life Skills Teacher, Turpin High School, Cincinnati, OH

Turpin High School teachers, Corey Mullins (Science) and Cindy Gajus (Special Education/Life Skills), created a program enriching the science experience and social opportunities of two unique and relatively isolated populations within the school. The program brings together AP biology students and Life Skills students--the latter being a class for students with disabilities that prepare them for independent living and employment. Meetings occur once a week for the Life Skills students, and alternate weeks for each of two AP Biology classes. The students follow a curriculum that expands the communication and teaching skills of each group. In the first half of the year, AP students design and teach a series of hands-on biology lessons to the Life Skills students. During the second half of the year, Life Skills students do presentations (last year on endangered species, and this year on their own disabilities) for the AP students. Each group gives assignments to the other as part of the teaching experience. Teachers at Turpin High School have found that the two groups of students are initially shy with one

another, but build close bonds throughout the year that extend beyond the classroom. The disabled students improve their communication skills through both the formal presentations, and the opportunities for interactions with students in their peer group. For the second year of the program, they have received outside funding to take students for a culminating activity – an overnight trip to the Cincinnati Zoo.

## Middle School Panel

**Title:** *Transforming a Learning Community*

**Presenters:** LeAnne Timpson, Administrator/Principal and Nancy Dockstader, Fifth Grade Teacher, Masada Charter School, Inc., Centennial Park, AZ

"Transforming a Learning Community" was the title of a colorful and stimulating presentation by LeAnne Timpson, principal and Mary Timpson, teacher and co-founder of the Masada Charter School. The presenters explained that, as a rural school, Masada had a tremendous challenge in providing high quality staff development that met the needs of its teachers. An Action Research model addressed this challenge by providing a Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) circular cycle of inquiry. Life Long Learning and Associates provided support and development around the components necessary to implement the model. Audience members were specifically interested in learning more about the financial awards provided to participating teachers and how the many days of professional development were worked into the school's schedule.

**Title:** *Scheduling for Success*

**Presenters:** Rick Foust, Former Principal and Jane Mastro, Teacher, Homer-Center Junior/Senior High School, Homer City, PA

**Description:** Former Principal Rick Foust and teacher Jane Mastro of the Homer-Center Junior/Senior High School in Homer City, Pa. gave a well-structured and organized presentation on "Scheduling for Success". The presentation was an account of their successful efforts to use the school's daily schedule as a flexible tool to foster school improvement while maintaining the integrity of the school's curriculum. This was accomplished, they explained, through several initiatives such as a free breakfast for all students, teaching homerooms, and a novel school wide reading program. Questions from the audience centered on the relationship the school administration had with the teachers' union, and funding for the breakfast and reading initiatives.

## Elementary School Panel 1

**Title:** *Inquiring, Exploring, Contributing: the Course of Study and Primary Years Programme Connection*

**Presenters:** Rachel Poovey, Principal, and Karissa Lang, Fourth Grade Teacher, Leon Sheffield Magnet Elementary School, Decatur, AL

Guided by The Primary Years Programme (PYP), an international educational framework, teachers at Leon Sheffield Elementary Magnet School use inquiry-based learning in all grades and all subjects to focus on the heart as well as the mind. The PYP emphasizes the essential elements of the curriculum: concepts, knowledge, skills, attitudes and action. Teachers strive for a balance between the acquisition of essential knowledge and skills, and understanding based on personal experience. A detailed six-week Program of Inquiry Planners is developed to guide teachers in instructional activities and assessments. The presenters related how learners respond to and generate questions, seek their own answers, and contribute to the world around them. Students at Leon Sheffield Elementary School are motivated to take charge of their own learning and succeed, as evidenced by their high academic achievement.

The audience asked how the school accommodates teachers' need to cross-plan. The principal has scheduled a weekly forty-five minute period for all grade level teams. Teachers also need to find time within the classroom to confer and plan with students. In response to questions about how the program meets the needs of students who might be learning disabled or unmotivated, the presenters said that the program can meet students at all levels through the inquiry method. Teachers report that this strategy works well for students who are performing below and above grade expectations, because inquiry is generated by the students' themselves.

**Title:** *Integrating Social Justice into Cross-Curricular Units of Study*

**Presenters:** Carolyn Dimick, Principal and Linda Hanson, Curriculum Coordinator/K-8 Teacher, St. Aloysius Academy, Bryn Mawr, PA

**Description:** St. Aloysius Academy, an all-boys K-8 Catholic school, demonstrates how moral and ethical standards of justice can be taught from 1st through 8th grade through role-playing, simulation, research and service projects. The presenters described a flexible curricular framework and identified resources for teaching social justice concepts through experiential learning in social science, writing, music, art, science, language arts and math. Students in the primary grades celebrate the dignity of all persons, practice peace making, and study concepts of community and the common good. Students in the middle grades focus on disability awareness, stewardship of the earth, and solidarity with people across the globe. In the 7th and 8th grade, students learn of workers' dignity and rights, and confront poverty and discrimination through capstone projects.

Participants asked about the effects of these experiences on students. Presenters responded with anecdotes of graduates who attribute character growth and understanding to what they did as students in the social justice curriculum. After several years of implementation, the grade-level experiences, such as the 2nd grade PAWS unit

and the 8th grade experience in simulating poverty, have become a school tradition that students look forward to and recall fondly. Parents, in general, are supportive and appreciate the life lessons that their children are learning.

## Elementary School Panel 2

**Title:** *Adapting Instruction for Diverse Learners*

**Presenters:** Cynthia Young, Principal and Faith Hardison, Teacher, Carver Elementary School, Florence, SC

A fourth-grade math teacher and the district technology specialist, Faith Hardison, accompanied Dr. Cynthia Young, principal of Carver. Young and Hardison outlined the Carver approach as differentiation by content, process, product, and environment, and went on to describe and show examples of each. Tiered instruction, flexible grouping, peer tutoring, and the early and intense use of Thinking Maps™ allow Carver teachers to target instructional content. Technology, team learning, and varied levels of conceptual questioning are some Carver tools for differentiating by process. Permitting students to choose different (and sometimes open-ended) projects, using different rubrics, and varying homework assignments are used to differentiate student learning by product. And different environments, for working solo, in teams, in quiet and stillness, or in the middle of movement and activity, let Carver students work according to their own preferences.

In the question and answer period, Young was careful to note that Carver, now in its fourth year of differentiating instruction, is still at the process' beginning. She shared examples of Thinking Maps and other tools they use.

**Title:** *Professional Learning Communities: From a Focus on Teaching to a Focus on Learning*

**Presenters:** Pam Camarata, Assistant Principal and Vickie Morrison, Teacher, Bivins Elementary School, Amarillo, TX

Pam Camarata, assistant principal of Bivins, presented a slide show on Amarillo's culture and Texas's connection to the U.S. space program as a way of introducing the schools "failure is not an option" action steps. The introduction of Professional Learning Communities became a way to shift the school's culture. Camarata described how the school moved, for example, from locating student failure in the student to locating it in the teacher; from faculty complaints to faculty commitment; from a focus on issues external to the school to a focus on things the school could control; and from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning. In her presentation, she gave eight ground rules for professional conversations and four crucial questions about student learning professional learning communities.

### Elementary School Panel 3

**Title:** *Success for Each Child: Tracking Individual Student Performance and Personal Goals in Elementary Physical Education*

**Presenter:** David Grabowski, Teacher, Ledgeview Elementary School, Clarence, and NY

Early in his career of teaching physical education, David Grabowski of Ledgeview Elementary School discovered that the current PE curriculum was lacking. The way students were tested for physical fitness, by using the Presidential Fitness Test, meant most students felt like failures because they could not achieve at the 85th percentile in each fitness category. So instead of measuring each student against a difficult-to-reach national norm, Grabowski developed a plan that assessed students based on their effort and improvement over time. For example, students are tested on the number of laps they can run for 10 minutes in third grade. In fourth grade, students are expected to be able to run for 12 minutes. In this way, students gradually build their cardiovascular health over time, and can run at their own pace. Grabowski also created activity cards to track student progress across the years, and has continually been modifying them.

Audience members were curious about how the fitness goals were designed for students, and whether students' attitudes toward physical fitness have improved. Grabowski explained that goals are chosen with students, and are based on their averages and general tendencies from previous years. He helps students choose reasonable increments for improvement, and encourages students not to compare themselves to each other. Part of the curriculum involves teaching students about different body types and the strengths and weaknesses of each type. Students' attitudes about fitness have improved at Ledgeview.

**Title:** *How Bad do You Want It? Doing Whatever It Takes to Achieve Excellence*

**Presenter:** Diane Parks, Principal and Bess Matthys, Math Facilitator, Taylor Ray Elementary School, Rosenberg, TX

Three years ago, Taylor Ray Elementary School missed achieving the top testing rating in Texas by one student, in one subgroup, on one test. Disappointed, Principal Diane Parks realized the school needed to do a better job of reaching all students, and the school worked on a comprehensive plan to do so. The first step focused on school climate with a goal of making sure everyone felt like they belong, from beginning the day with a handshake or a hug to providing school supplies to students whose families could not afford them. Taylor Ray also worked on setting high expectations for all students and staff. Rewards and positive reinforcement are used to encourage good behaviors. Vertical teams, CORE teams, and administrative teams were also put in place, and an extra emphasis was put on using data to enrich decision-making. Also, creative motivational tools, such as beaded lanyards, are used to motivate students.

The discussion centered on two questions: how do you move students from proficient to advanced, and what makes students work harder? Parks explained that at Taylor Ray teachers rely heavily on motivational tools for the students, including goal setting and

rewarding them for their success. They also teach that failure is not an option. The school offers a range of resources so students always have the means to help themselves improve.

## Elementary School Panel 4

**Title:** *Good, But Not Quite Good Enough!*

**Presenters:** Kelly Maki, Principal and Ruth Uecker, Assistant Superintendent, Meadow Lark Elementary School, Great Falls, MT

Although the majority of Meadow Lark's students score at a proficient or advanced level on state-mandated tests, the school's challenge is how to help the 2%-8% of students who are scoring less than proficient. Four techniques are used to encourage student improvement: professional development, the PTA, MAP assessments, and Response to Intervention (RTI). Meadow Lark has strong district support for professional development. There is planning every Wednesday afternoon at the schools or District-wide grade level meetings. Teachers are required to earn 18 hours of professional development credits, and the district has a 3-year program for new teachers (either new or new to district). The PTA also works closely with staff at Meadow Lark, supports curriculum, and maintains an extensive volunteer base. The leadership team helps with community and school-wide projects, and parents run academic centers as well as bake sales. Meadow Lark looks to data to improve proficiency levels. The MAP Assessment, a computerized tool that is aligned with the curriculum, helps teachers know what individual students need to learn. The school uses the MAP Assessment as its benchmark for reading, language, and math, testing three times a year. Finally, RTI is the next level of support, offering approximately 5% of students focused intervention. Classroom teachers and families collaborate to implement intervention strategies.

**Title:** *Yes, There Really is a Magic Bullet: Data Driven Decision-Making*

**Presenters:** Lauren Campsen, Principal and Tamar Moyler, Math Specialist, Ocean View Elementary School, Norfolk, VA

As Principal of Ocean View since the summer of 2001, Lauren Campsen saw how the school's test scores remained flat. Teachers began to track their own strategies related to student assessments, and it became apparent that high achievement of some student groups was hiding the lower achievement of other groups. The intervention process involved creating a week-by-week roadmap of content instruction, and then using Form A assessments created by content area specialists. Today, analysis of assessment results occurs by grade level, subject, and class mastery. Spreadsheets determine which questions students found difficult. Intervention is woven within current class content, and grade level teams meet to determine needs across the grade. For example, teachers realized many students were having trouble with reading graphs so they began a graph "question of the week" program. Members of the data team work one-on-one with students and teachers to aid the intervention process. Students who don't perform well on Form A take Form B after the intervention process is completed. The expectation is that each grade level will improve. The process begins new the next month focusing on a new goal.

Since instituting the program, 93% of grades 3-4 and 97% grade 4 were proficient in math. The gap between white and black students closed, and a negative gap for 5th graders appeared. Interestingly, advanced data has revealed a new challenge. The white/black

achievement gap has reappeared at the advance level. The new challenge is to achieve higher-level proficiency for all students.

In the discussion, audience members asked how to help Special Education achieve the standard. At Ocean View, the Special Education (SPED) students are mainstreamed and given the same materials as other students, but offered more classroom support. Additionally, the school offers a 90-minute reading program with pull out programs as needed. With much of the day dedicated to reading, SPED students have experienced a proficiency gain in the subject.

Another question addressed how the school scores A and B Assessments. The assessments were hand scored the first year, but the district has purchased scoring software that creates monthly charts. Specialists make the monthly summary graphs and work with teams to design and implement interventions. A teacher can identify a child's problem areas by looking at the actual questions on the Form A and Form B tests.

The presenters also mentioned several resources. *Beyond the Bake Sale*, by Anne Henderson is about parent involvement. Doug Reeves at the Center for Learning and Leading does workshops on the data driven team approach. At one of his session, he suggested that the best way to improve writing is via instructional rewrites. Steps involve displaying rubrics on the overhead and training the students to identify what to look for so that when they're work is returned, they can compare it to the rubric. This technique has proven successful at Ocean View.