



★ OHIO IMPROVEMENT PROCESS PAYS OFF FOR NORTH RIDGEVILLE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT



The Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) is a strategy for ensuring a systematic and coherent approach for building the capacity of all Ohio districts and schools. According to the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), the methods will allow districts to improve instructional practice on a district-wide basis, and help improve student performance.

At the heart of the OIP philosophy is the belief that improvement is everyone's responsibility – at all levels of the district and in all districts, but especially those in corrective action or improvement status.

OHIO IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

For the past four years, the research-based OIP has had a positive effect on schools throughout the state. Larry Melia is one of the Region 2 SST consultants responsible for getting information out to districts to help them complete the OIP. He identifies and explains the four OIP stages:

1. Data Collection and Analysis - A critical, web-based tool developed within the process is called the Decision Framework. Every district and school within a district has access to view the data generated from Ohio Achievement Tests and Ohio Graduation Tests. In addition, this tool provides data on attendance, graduation, dropout and discipline rates. Not only is the information compiled for a district as a whole, it is broken down by grade levels within each district and by 10 subgroups (special needs, ethnicity, etc.)

2. Focused Planning - Each district is encouraged to write two or three focused goals with strategies to accomplish them. Adult and student indicators help measure these strategies. Action steps to actually accomplish each strategy are included within the goal.

3. Implementation and Monitoring of Plans

- Once the plan is outlined, measures are put in place to ensure that the plan is uniformly implemented across the districts. "If we just have a plan and don't monitor it, then nothing is going to change," says Melia.

4. Evaluation Stage - On a yearly basis, districts evaluate their SMART goals, which are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely.

"Usually, a goal in the OIP process is written for a three-year time period," Melia explains. "The major summative evaluation takes place after those goals have been implemented. But, there is a smaller evaluation that occurs every year, to make sure we're heading in the right direction."

The Ohio Leadership Advisory Council (OLAC) is the umbrella under which the OIP was developed.

AT THE HEART
OF THE OIP
PHILOSOPHY IS
THE BELIEF THAT
IMPROVEMENT
IS EVERYONE'S
RESPONSIBILITY.

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UPCOMING EVENT

UPGRADING YOUR CURRICULUM!

Presenter: Heidi Hayes Jacobs & Dr. Ann Johnson

Dates: March 8th, 2011
Preconference Curriculum Mapping 101
March 9th - 10th, 2011
Mapping to the Core: Integrating the Common Core into Your K-12 School Curriculum

Location: Sawmill Creek Resort
400 Sawmill Creek
Huron, Ohio 44839

Registration: <http://www.curriculum21.com/conferences>

Accommodations: <http://www.sawmillcreek.com>

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OHIO IMPROVEMENT PROCESS PAYS OFF FOR NORTH RIDGEVILLE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

“Research indicates that we are doing the right things by having this process in place,” says Melia. “The OLAC framework talks about sharing the leadership -- that’s the main foundation piece. It is not just saying that the superintendent of the district is solely responsible for providing leadership within the district; Leadership must be shared within the district.”

This same philosophy is true at the building level. Contrary to some beliefs, the principal is not the only person responsible for leadership in a school. Leadership must be shared with other school stakeholders: teachers, parent leadership groups, etc.

In keeping with this shared leadership practice, a District Leadership Team (DLT) is formed. It includes the superintendent and representation from the staff, building administration, teachers, community, and board of education. The DLT is responsible for evaluating data and identifying the critical needs of the district. Likewise, at the building level, another shared leadership group -- the Building Leadership Team (BLT) – is formed to evaluate and ensure success of work, goals and strategies.

NORTH RIDGEVILLE DISTRICT PAVES THE OIP WAY

When the OIP was initially formed four years ago, a state grant allowed State Support Teams to choose one district from each of the 16 regions as pilot districts, or cohorts. The North Ridgeville City School District, Region 2 SST’s pilot school, was named Cohort 1.

“Cohorts have been on the OIP journey the longest,” says Melia. “They assisted us as we created this program and helped us implement it. Through the experiences of the cohorts, we (State Support Teams) saw what things were working and what needed more fine-tuning.”

Superintendent Craig Phillips, Ed.D., was truly an advocate for this shared leadership process, continues Melia. Phillips did an excellent job of supporting this process throughout North Ridgeville’s four-year journey. The District Leadership Team went to Columbus with 16 other districts for professional development on what it meant to be a DLT: responsibilities, how to analyze data, identifying critical needs, and goal-/strategy- writing methods.

“They’ve done an excellent job in helping themselves with this process but also helping to better formulate the Ohio Improvement Process,” Melia adds.

Since starting its OIP journey, the North Ridgeville City School District has generated impressive results.

With an active DLT that meets each month, the team takes time to evaluate data from each building. Having a teacher and principal representative from each building on the DLT fosters excellent communication from the district level back down to the building level. In addition, every building has an active Building Leadership Team that sets in motion the action and plan for the building. The BLT evaluates specific data based on formative and summative assessments given at the building level and then report back to the DLT.

Completing the cycle of leadership sharing is the Teacher Based Team (TBT.) TBT’s may include teachers of the same grade, subject area or department. Teams may be formed according to department. TBTs look at student work and make decisions on classroom strategies to ensure student improvement.

Currently, the North Ridgeville district has the full OIP cycle in place, actively using DLTs, BLTs and TLTs, and monitoring at all levels. Because the district has been involved in the OIP for four years, its entire cycle is up and running.

“I sit on North Ridgeville’s DLT and see what a good job they are doing in implementing the district plan and monitoring it through the use of data,” Melia says. “At the start of the OIP process, North Ridgeville’s state report card designation was ‘Continuous Improvement.’ Three years later, it has an ‘Excellent’ designation. Superintendent Phillips credits this Ohio Improvement Process with helping his district improved its designation.”

Melia credits the great work of building administrators and teachers in bringing the district to an ‘Excellent’ designation. Of course, along with rewards came some interesting challenges. As the first group to tackle the OIP criteria, North Ridgeville had to implement a complex process that was not yet completely documented.

“They were flying the airplane while it was being built,” says Melia. “They had to be very flexible and realize that some of the things we were doing would be changed later.”

For example, the Decision Framework started off as a rudimentary pencil-and-paper tool and evolved into an Excel spreadsheet format. Now a web-based tool, it has grown into a much more sophisticated means of data analysis.

“Much of what has happened in the past three to four years has been that way,” adds Melia. “North Ridgeville had to be flexible and work with us. They did a great job in doing that.”

So far, the teachers involved in the OIP are favorable toward the process. Through DLT teacher representatives from every building, Melia continually hears positive feedback about the focus of the work and how the district is using data to zero in on the needs of students.

“The North Ridgeville district has been a true partner with the Ohio Department of Education as they proceeded through this OIP process,” Melia says. “The support of their upper administration, Dr. Craig Phillips and Dr. Jim Powell, director of curriculum and instruction, led this process.”

“The hard work of the North Ridgeville’s DLT, BLT and teachers is showing a great deal of growth,” he concludes. “They are aspiring to even higher levels than Excellent: the Excellent with Distinction level. We are very proud of their work.” ☺

Source: Ohio Department of Education www.ode.state.oh.us/





LORAIN COUNTY ESC/REGION 2 SST LAUNCHES DRAMATIC NEW WEBSITE!



WWW.LORAINCOUNTYESC.ORG

The Educational Service Center of Lorain County/Region 2 State Support Team launched a dramatic new website this fall. It provides visitors with a powerful, flexible, easy-to-use tool for immediate access to information about programs, services and events being offered in Lorain, Erie and Huron counties through the Lorain County ESC/Region 2 SST.

Visitors will immediately notice that the website's look and feel reflect the "branding" introduced last year – a native American motif that embraces the region's heritage. A user-friendly navigation system enables visitors one-click access to resources, staff directory, professional development, links to each Region 2 school district's website home page, and much more. Additionally, guests to the site can click on one of the native American icons for immediate access to their area of interest.

Through this exciting website, school administrators, educators, and parents have immediate access to educational tools, programs and other resources that will ultimately help raise the performance of students in the classroom. The website provides a direct link to the Ohio Department of Education and Ed Resources Ohio websites, STARS for online event registration, and the ability to register and pay online for local events listed in the Lorain County ESC/Region 2 SST Calendar of Events.

Website visitors will appreciate the numerous links to other popular education sites including video clips. Also posted on this website are electronic PDFs of the Lorain County ESC/Region 2 bi-annual Catalog of Events and Legacy newsletters. By posting these publications online, the Lorain County ESC/Region 2 SST can print less copies of these publications, thus aiding in the Go Green sustainable development initiative!


"The website offers an attractive layout and a positive, fun experience for website browsers," says Debbie Shannon, website manager and photographer at Lorain ESC/Region 2 SST. "I really enjoy the challenge of this new position and believe this new website offers a 'one-stop shop' for people looking for information, training, tools and answers." Guests can also request materials, ask questions or leave comments at info@esclc.org.

Another extremely useful tool on this website is Google Analytics. Google Analytics generates detailed statistics about visitors to the website, enabling the staff of the ESC/Region 2 SST to measure how many people visit the site, where they are coming from, and the most popular items on the site. "From this information, we will be able to tailor programs and services to meet the evolving needs of our region," explains Sharon Rybak, Executive Director of Regional School Improvement. "The web statistics tracking system will allow us to isolate and analyze subsets of traffic. In addition, we will be able to compare historical data and gauge our effectiveness going forward."

According to data generated in September, 743 pages were viewed a total of 16,552 times. The most popular sites include "about us/staff-resources," Calendar of Events, and employment opportunities.

The website buzz already generated has been extremely positive.

"My name is Denise. I'm doing a split internship with two middle school guidance departments, and I've been asked to put together a listing of disability awareness and information websites. I found your great family resources page at <http://www.loraincountyesc.org/parents/family-resources> in my Google results, and it's been a great help! I just wanted to say thanks! Again, thank you very much, and have a great day!"

The website address is www.loraincountyesc.org. Please visit it today! 





MODERNIZING THE CLASSROOM



David Miller, Senior Director of Technology and Innovation at the Northern Ohio Research & Training Technology Hub (NORTH)

The iPad and iPod Touch are also response devices. By using Poll Everywhere or another app like iResponse, students can be polled as instruction takes place. The Ipad Touch/Ipad enable students to vote and can supplement or replace existing response devices.

Student engagement in the classroom – there’s an app for that! In fact, there are apps for every subject at every stage of learning that can be downloaded wirelessly to Apple’s iPod Touch, iPad and iPhone. Welcome to today’s on-the-go learning technology!

The Lorain County ESC/NORTH are piloting the use of some of today’s whiz bang technology – iPods and iPads – in local classrooms as part of an ongoing initiative to utilize technology to further engage student involvement and enhance the classroom learning experience. This project is utilizing emerging technology that motivates students and enhances learning.

The districts of Vermilion, Wellington, Midview and the Lorain County JVS are participating in this pilot. Each school purchased classroom bundles that included 30 iPod Touch devices, an iPod Roll Cart (which charges and syncs up to 40 devices), a MacBook to sync apps and a day of training through NORTH. Upcoming classroom iPad bundles will include 20 to 30 iPads, a Roll Cart, MacBook and a day of training through NORTH.

“Students are digital natives and have had access to technology all their lives. Through the use of apps the iPod Touch and iPad are a natural way for students to learn,” suggests Dave Miller, Senior Director of Technology and Innovation at the Northern Ohio Research & Training Technology Hub (NORTH). “With so many apps available, students have access to thousands of apps that provide interactive learning, act as reference materials, provide eBooks and enhance student learning.

There are thousands of free or low-cost downloadable apps available for these devices in vital content areas such as news, the arts, history, science and business. For example, PBS for the iPad is designed for viewing full episodes including Frontline, Nature, Nova, PBS NewsHour and History Detectives.

How else are these iPad and iPod Touch devices being used in local classrooms? One example is podcasting. Podcasts are “pushed” to each student’s device for playback – podcasts like CNN Student News, Grammar Girl, Coffee Break French, 60 Second Civics and English as a Second Language. “Students can also create their own podcasts using the iPod Touch or iPad for other students,” explains Miller enthusiastically.



“It’s all about the apps,” says Miller. “There are more than 250,000 apps and thousands of educational apps. For instance, iBooks represents a snapshot of the future. Students will have their textbooks loaded on a slim Wi-Fi mobile device. Eventually, as consumers and educators embrace these devices on a wider scale, textbook companies will create textbooks that can be customized for classroom instruction. An instructor will be able to modify the textbook by adding additional local or class-specific content.” Students will also have the ability to highlight, take notes, and communicate with the instructor via their devices.

Benefits of Apple’s iPad and iPod Touch include:

- Handheld – less cumbersome than laptops
- Portability
- Light weight (the iPad weighs only 1.5 lbs.)
- Flexibility
- Easy to use
- Long battery life (up to eight hours)
- Apps are “pushed” to devices
- Great screen resolution
- Combination of 3G and Wi-Fi (iPad)
- Relatively inexpensive
- Able to use anywhere

According to developers, creating apps is not difficult for these devices. In fact, many educators are creating their own apps to teach, engage and even collect data. Many of these innovative teachers offer their apps for free.

Accessibility to students with disabilities is possible to a surprising degree with these devices. There are numerous apps for children with cognitive disabilities that have been created by fellow educators. For example, the app ProLinqGo, under \$200, gives the iPad the functionality of a standalone device which special education teachers have been purchasing for over \$5,000! Not only does it have the functionality of the previous device, students with disabilities feel cool using the device! There are also built-in accessibility tools such as zoom, high-contrast display and a voice over screen reader built into the iPad’s operating system.

The Ipad and Ipod touch represent a new field of growth in education. They are not perfect devices, but with so many apps to choose from and so much functionality built into each device, educators and consumers are beginning to get a glimpse into the foreseeable future. Welcome to the modern classroom! ☺



LEADERS OF LEARNING: iOBSERVATION INSTITUTE

The highly anticipated six-day course, “*Leaders of Learning: iObservation Institute*”, is currently underway at the Lorain County Educational Service Center/Region 2 SST. This program is based on Dr. Marzano’s meta analysis that resulted in his book, *The Art and Science of Teaching*. Through this course district principals and teachers will learn how school districts can support and monitor the development of highly effective teachers in every classroom.

This course began on October 25 with subsequent course dates of November 10 (or Nov. 12), December 1, 2010, online/self-paced (day 4 and day 6), and January 26. The institute will conclude with a wrap-up celebration for participants on April 15, 2011.

Participants will learn and apply 41 key strategies in the following segments: **Routines** – communicating learning goals, tracking student progress, celebrating success, and establishing and maintaining classroom rules and procedures; **Content** – lessons involving new content, practicing deepening content that was previously addressed, and lessons involving cognitively complex tasks; and **Behaviors that are enacted on the spot** – engaging students, recognizing adherence and lack of adherence to classroom rules and procedures, maintaining effective relationships with students, and communicating high expectations.

The following districts are participating:

- Clearview - 3 teams
- Bellevue - 1 team
- Elyria - 3 teams
- Sheffield/Sheffield Lake - 4 teams
- Oberlin - 1 team
- Sandusky - 4 teams
- Lorain Preparatory Academy

Moira Erwine, Regional School Improvement Coordinator, Lorain County ESC/Region 2 SST, says, “This high-quality professional development course will assist principals in improving their instructional leadership skills and build teacher leaders by developing instructional pedagogy.”

Erwine defines pedagogy as everything one might think as intuitive in teaching – from how to engage students, to how to set up a nurturing space where students can take risks, to effective content delivery. She says teams attending the institute are from buildings currently involved in the Ohio School Improvement Process.

“This is not your one day ‘sit and get’ program. This instructional course will make a difference in every classroom,” Erwine enthusiastically insists. “It demonstrates Lorain County Educational Service Center’s long-term commitment to closing the achievement gap throughout our region.”

Basically, iObservation assists districts in:

- Establishing a common understanding of effective instruction
- Creating a singular focus on enhancing teaching to increase student learning
- Developing trust with teachers through a focused and fair walkthrough and observation process
- Engaging in reflection and collaboration within virtual professional learning communities
- Saving time and money by eliminating ineffective professional development programs
- Connecting teacher learning to student learning
- Helping principals and administrators monitor and support effective teaching
- Building capacity and sustainability

“Observation and feedback protocols allow teachers to self-assess personal levels of instruction and set personal learning goals,” notes Erwine. Participants are organized into groups with each group comprised of a principal and five teacher leaders.

Erwine continues, “This research-based professional development program provides hands-on practice using Dr. Marzano’s observation and feedback protocol through iObservation, the electronic professional growth platform. The institute will help establish a common language of instruction that becomes embedded through professional development.”

Dr. Marzano says, “Leadership with a singular focus on instruction gets results. Those districts that have the best results focus on very few initiatives... There is too much going on, but this is the one area not to skip on – improving the pedagogical skills of your teachers.”

He continues, “We stand at a unique time. I think we know the major components of great teaching. Our science of teaching puts these components together, explaining how they interact in the particular context where they are best used to improve teacher skills in the classroom.”

“Feedback should be a natural part of this profession – any profession,” he concludes. “Specific and robust feedback. Technology provides that!”



“Leadership with a singular focus on instruction gets results.”





LIFE SCHOOL PROGRAM PREPS STUDENTS FOR LIFE



Located in Oberlin, The Lorain County Academy (LCA) works to support the social, emotional and academic needs of students in grades six through nine. Students may be referred to LCA if they need services beyond those provided in a traditional school setting.

LCA's goal: to prepare each student for a healthy, productive and successful transition back to his/her home school and into adulthood.

“WHEN YOU KEEP
GIVING KIDS
PRACTICE, THEY
GET BETTER AT
COMMUNICATING.”

“We are trying to stabilize academic and emotional issues,” says Bill Hamilton, program coordinator of Lorain County Academy. (Hamilton serves as LCA's principal, but uses the title of program coordinator. For some students, the title “principal” may not invoke a positive response.) “We try to meet student needs through an individualized approach, which involves many different

agencies and instructional programming from our staff and paraprofessionals.”

LCA is an alternative school collaboration involving the Educational Service Center of Lorain County, 12 Lorain County school districts, the Lorain County Joint Vocational School, the County Juvenile Justice System, and 17 human service agencies.

One LCA program receiving high marks from students and parents alike is “Life School.” The program is conducted at Common Ground - The Cindy Nord Center for Renewal, a nonprofit organization that provides innovative, holistic educational experiences for individuals and organizations. Nestled on 21 scenic acres in the heart of the Vermilion River Valley near Oberlin, the Center's programming fosters the development of human potential via body, mind and spirit.

Through experiential outdoor initiatives, expressive arts, and nature exploration, Common Ground educational programs build personal character, self-esteem, and leadership skills.

“The grounds are absolutely beautiful,” says Hamilton of the Center. “We were out there in October. The leaves were changing, it was sunny – it was spectacular. This program is a test run for Life School. We are fortunate to be in it.”

The program, which is geared toward ninth graders, focuses on life skills that students need to succeed as adolescents and adults. Conducted in an outdoor setting, Life School promotes trust building, communication skills, cooperation, and accountability. The program is run by Common Ground's Rick Grahovac, M.A., executive director; Harry Pepper, Ph.D., adult program coordinator; and Kenneth Fraelich, M.Ed., youth program coordinator.

Life School culminates at year end with a high ropes course. Leading up to this time, students learn to interact, be reflective listeners, and explain their feelings and emotions. For many adolescents and teens, self expression does not come easy.

“When you keep allowing kids to practice, they get better at communicating,” says Hamilton. “Sometimes, kids get tongue-tied, but the more they practice, the better they get at expressing themselves. That, in itself, starts to empty the plate that seems so full when they first come into our building.”

Since alcohol and drug abuse is an issue for some LCA kids, students are tested on a regular basis to determine if certain behaviors are the result of self-medication. The Lorain County Alcohol & Drug Abuse Services (LCADA) is an important resource for LCA.

“We try to get kids to develop the skills to be able to say ‘no’ and not get involved in the drug culture,” says Hamilton. Many LCA students have difficult family life situations – from alcohol and drug abuse to poverty. Eighty-five percent are on a free or reduced lunch program. Of that population, nearly 50 percent have parents who are unemployed.

“That becomes a very rugged dynamic to overcome,” adds Hamilton. “That's why we keep talking about developing these emotional skills because a lot of kids have developed ‘learned helplessness.’ Our goal is to show them that they can succeed. We help our students develop the necessary skills to be successful people in this world.”

NATURE NURTURES LCA TEENS

Deb Dohner, LCA career-based intervention counselor, works closely with the academy's ninth graders. She notes that, after completing the first two Life School sessions at Common Ground, students were inquisitive, yet a bit insecure in applying the experience to their own lives.

“Our big challenge is helping kids buy into the philosophy of making changes in their behavior and attitudes, and improving their self esteem in relationships,” says Dohner. “For the most part, the response to Life School has been, ‘This can help me. I'm really trying to make a change this year.’”

Most students are very excited about being able to go to Common Ground once a month, she continues. Its' rural location offers a retreat setting with a serene atmosphere.





“We want students to be active members of society and have lives that are meaningful,” says Foreman.



PAVING THE WAY FOR SMOOTH TRANSITIONS PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

“It takes them totally away from the regular school environment,” Dohner describes. “When we say, ‘Life School,’ the kids respond, ‘school?’”

In addition to the once-per-month time spent outdoors, Dohner brings bridge activities back to LCA to build on what students learn and talk about. Doing so extends student learning to the next outdoor session. One highlight of the program occurs when ninth graders tackle a low-ropes challenge course, crossing ropes between trees while focusing on their personal goals.

“The course was difficult, but when they got to the end, the kids felt good about finishing it,” recalls Dohner. “Most kids thought, ‘I am not going to get across!’ Even the reluctant students did it.”


Another program activity was a hike around the Common Grounds wooded property. When the group reached a clearing, students were asked to remain quiet for one minute. This was a great feat for those students challenged with attention issues. Taking advantage of their peaceful surroundings, instructors had the kids journal.

“They wrote reflections on what they thought, saw, heard, and smelled during the hike,” says Dohner. “Some kids wrote poetry – wow! Their classmates were very impressed and encouraging.”

What do parents think about their kids’ positive response to the Life School program? Recently, Dohner called a parent to tell her that her son’s behavior and performance were improving a lot, and that he was excited about the new outdoor program. After hanging up her phone, the parent cried.

“No one ever called this parent in recent years to tell her something positive about her son,” explains Dohner.

Inspiring – albeit heartbreaking – stories like this one fuel the efforts of Lorain County Academy faculty and staff. With each individual achievement, no matter how small, LCA students are encouraged to move forward and accomplish even more.

“It’s amazing how a child can build on one success,” says Dohner. 

LINKS:

Common Ground – The Cindy Nord Center for Renewal
www.commongroundcenter.org/cms/

Lorain County Alcohol & Drug Abuse Services (LCADA)
www.lcada.com

Traumatic or tranquil, transitions are part of life for everyone.

Nevertheless, change can be particularly challenging for preschool-age children faced with leaving the comfort and security of home.

Betty Lord, Coordinator of Early Learning and School Readiness with ESCLC/Region 2 SST, says there are programs in place that make the transition a more positive experience for these young children and their parents.

Help Me Grow is one such program that aids in a child’s transition into preschool and kindergarten. This Ohio program is designed for expectant parents, newborns, infants and toddlers and provides health and developmental services so children can start school healthy and ready to learn.

Still, if a child has disabilities, it’s a whole different transition. Each move requires a change from one set of support providers to another. What makes the situation more complicated is new state and federal requirements at the preschool level.

The Lorain County Educational Service Center/Region 2 SST staff is here to help, offering quality professional development on the subject of transitions for families, school administrators, educators, parent mentors, other school personnel.

When a child with disabilities is ready to enter school, a transition team is formed. This team is comprised of the child, family, school personnel (including an intervention specialist, general education teacher and any related specialists). The transition team develops an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for each student who has a disability. The IEP is designed to bridge the gap between where the student is functioning at that point and where he/she wants to be.

“For a very long time, the thought was that children need to be ready to come to school and whatever is going on in the community is someone else’s responsibility,” Lord explains. “Everybody needs to work together, share information, and discuss potential barriers so we all are on the same page, and the transition for each child will be successful.”

Putting systems in place that will ensure a smooth transitions throughout a child’s school years is pivotal.

“Like a preschooler entering the more structured setting of a kindergarten classroom, a kindergartener advancing to first grade or a child moving from one building to another can cause anxiety. Communicating and additional planning with the child, family, teacher and support providers is often necessary,” Lord explains.

Ongoing collaboration with LCESC/Region 2 SST, the school district, the Office of School Readiness, and families continues to ensure a smooth transition for these young people as they progress from grade to grade.

“We are working in each community and district – coming together as a community of professionals respecting each and working together,” Lord acknowledges.

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Can adjusting the height of a poster in a preschool classroom make a difference in the education of a preschool child?

According to Nancy Osko, Early Literacy Specialist ESCLC/ Region 2 SST, the answer is **“yes”** because research shows that a child’s physical environment impacts learning.

“If we’re looking at the physical environment of a busy classroom, the teacher can remove some posters or lower them to eye level to better fit the needs of the children,” she says.

Whether it’s simple changes in the physical environment or improvements in play, oral language development, early reading or early writing, Osko has taught strategies for these improvements for Lorain County Community Action Agency (LCCAA) Head Start teachers. She is instructing assistant teachers this year through a program called the Preschool Core for Literacy.

The Preschool Core is a 10-session, comprehensive, early-literacy curriculum for early childhood educators and administrators. This series assists early childhood educators in understanding ways they can provide quality learning experiences and intentional teaching strategies that support literacy development of young children. The statewide professional development program helps teachers “connect the dots” among Ohio’s Early Learning Standards, Get it, Got It, Go!, Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Tool (ELLCO) and research-based practices as they document their own professional growth. The program has been in place for more than five years and has expanded to each SST region in Ohio.

ESCLC/ Region 2 SST provides professional development for the Preschool Core to Lorain County Head Start educators in collaboration with The Ohio State University’s Early Childhood Quality Network. Head Start is well known for providing comprehensive child development services to economically disadvantaged children and families, with a special focus on helping preschoolers develop the early reading and math skills they need to be successful in school.

Osko uses a reflection tool that asks for teacher input in four areas:

- 1) three points to ponder
- 2) two ideas that I will implement
- 3) one new insight I now have
- 4) additional comments or suggestions

The goal is to engage and document the teachers’ learning through activities and discussions via an additive reflective component called “Into Practice.”

“This type of professional development gives teachers the opportunity to reflect upon their own teaching strategies and make adjustments based on the core content,” Osko

emphasizes. “The changes made in their classrooms cause them to critically think about ways to improve literacy strategies.”

Does this “drill down” make a difference?

Twenty-four, Head Start lead teachers participated in The Preschool Core for Literacy professional development last year. Because it was so well received and highly effective, LCCAA asked that the 22, assistant teachers from all three Head Start locations (Hopkins/Locke in Lorain, Hamilton in Elyria and the Oberlin site) take part this year.

“From the evidence I’ve seen, there are positive physical changes in the classroom and changes in instructional strategies,” confirms Osko.

A case in point is feedback from one Head Start teacher who took the Preschool Core last spring . She says she is more purposeful when reading to her class. Another Head Start teacher told Osko that she implements more purposeful questioning during the stories she reads to the children and includes more writing materials and opportunities throughout her classroom. Yet, another teacher realizes how important it is to teach to the child’s needs by not providing too much or too little.

The Preschool Core is one of several valuable initiatives ESCLC/ Region 2 SST uses to assist Lorain County Head Start. Another is the Teacher Leader Project, wherein a teacher-leader coaches a protégé based on the content core.

Furthermore, measures are in place to determine if these programs are successful in their goal to better prepare preschoolers for kindergarten. The APPLE:Ohio (Assessing Preschool Professionals’ Learning Experiences) research project, started in August 2010, will collect data for the next five years to help measure how well these programs are improving literacy. It is designed to help improve educational experiences at a key point in children’s lives by documenting the extent to which the professional development is impacting teachers’ knowledge, classroom practices and children’s learning. ☺





MEMORIAL GARDEN CELEBRATES THE LEGACY OF JANICE KESSINGER



Janice Kessinger (left) and her friend with puppets.

On October 22, 2010, the staff of the Lorain County Educational Service Center and Region 2 State Support Team planted and dedicated the Janice Kessinger Memorial Garden. Jan, who passed away on Easter Sunday, April 4, 2010, was on

the Support Staff (i.e. secretary) team of Northern Ohio Special Education Regional Resource Center, now known as the SST.

In a heartfelt tribute to their dear friend and coworker, ESC and SST staff members purchased spring bulbs to plant on the office grounds. Sharon Rybak, Ph.D., executive director of Regional School Improvement, donated the engraved stone that memorializes the garden.

“We planted the bulbs at the ESC office in October because they will bloom around Easter, which is the day Jan passed away,” says SST School Improvement/Professional Development Coordinator Moira Erwine. “The flowers will help us remember Jan’s colorful personality and legacy.”

“‘Performance, Legacy and Achievement’ is our motto,” Erwine adds. “One of Jan’s legacies is her work as a puppeteer for The Kids on the Block.”

For seven years, Jan brought joy and understanding to a countless number of children through her creative work as a puppet performer for Kids on the Block (KOTB.) Jan and former SST librarian Judy Morgan took the initiative to be trained in order to perform the show for children in the Erie, Huron and Lorain County school districts.

Jan voiced three puppet characters, including Mark Riley, the first puppet created by KOTB. Through the character of Mark, who represents a child with cerebral palsy, children learned about the disease and how it affects kids’ everyday lives. The interactive show created a positive, encouraging environment in which children could ask Mark questions.

The Kids on the Block originated in 1977 as a direct response from US Public Law 94-142 which required children with disabilities to be educated within the least restrictive

environment. For many children, this meant being included in classrooms with non-disabled peers. Today, thousands of KOTB troupes perform disability-awareness programs worldwide.


Often, children with disabilities have difficulty connecting with their peers. KOTB performances focus on disability awareness, which helps dispel peer confusion, misunderstanding and stereotypes that may hinder social acceptance and friendship. KOTB characters show children that everyone has differences, but those differences make us unique. Jan’s work touched the lives of many children and adults in the region.

“This was a major legacy for a support staff person to have the opportunity to contribute to our region and share the talents of all children with special needs,” says Erwine. “Jan’s contributions are really worthy of a celebration.”

Though the LCESC/Region 2 SST continues to serve students and parents of children with disabilities, The Kids on the Block program is no longer available through the center. The puppets were donated to Murray Ridge School, in Elyria.

Besides her incredible work with KOTB and disability awareness, Jan shared her talents at Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish, in Lorain, where she was active in the choir. A member of Circus Fans of America and the Black River Historical Society, Jan is remembered for her upbeat personality, creativity, and kindness toward others.

“Jan was the creative force behind all of the professional development events throughout her employment as a secretary,” adds Betty Lord, SST coordinator of early learning and school readiness. “She was always a hospitable person, making sure that people were comfortable and well-taken care of.”

Jan’s family members attended the memorial garden dedication in October. The Kessinger Family continues Jan’s legacy of giving by establishing a library, housed in a Lorain church, for those in need. 

LINKS:

The Kids on the Block, Inc. – www.kotb.com

“THE FLOWERS WILL HELP US REMEMBER JAN’S COLORFUL PERSONALITY AND LEGACY.”



The Kids on the Block, Inc. originated in 1977 in direct response to US Public Law 94-142, which required that children with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment. For many children, this meant being included in a classroom with their non-disabled peers. Mark Riley, who represents a child with cerebral palsy, was the first puppet character created to fill the need of children with disabilities to have their non-disabled peers understand and accept them. Through Mark Riley, the children learned about cerebral palsy and began asking questions directly to Mark. The Kids on the Block, Inc. was launched because of this enthusiastic response from the children.



GIFTED STUDENTS THRIVE AT ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING FAIR

To be continuous learners, gifted children require differentiated educational programs and services well beyond those normally provided by regular school programs. The Lorain County ESC Gifted Consortium provides special events and programs to meet student needs.

The consortium is responsible for the planning, implementation, ongoing development and evaluation of programs and services for identified gifted students in Lorain County.

For two days this fall, the Gifted Consortium presented the Environmental Learning Fair at Lorain County Metro Parks French Creek Reservation. On September 24, 124 gifted fourth, fifth and sixth graders from four school districts attended the fair, while 150 third, fourth and fifth graders from three districts attended the October 1st sessions.

In keeping with the spirit of this year's fair theme, "Leaving a Legacy," the main teaching objectives inspired activities that fostered an awareness of the need to preserve both the quality of the environment and the habitats of all living creatures.

Through several one-hour learning sessions, students heard first-hand accounts and historical perspectives of events that shaped our current world. Interdisciplinary learning activities incorporated social studies and science connections with the language arts curriculum.



Carol Froehlich

CAROL FROEHLICH JOINS GIFTED CONSORTIUM

The Lorain County ESC Gifted Consortium welcomes Carol A. Froehlich to the gifted team. Carol's passion for learning and collaborating with others to create positive educational opportunities for children will serve her well in her new role as gifted supervisor.

Carol comes to LCESC with extensive experience as a classroom teacher and administrator in the Parma City School District. She earned her master's degree in curriculum and instruction from Baldwin Wallace College, Berea. Carol holds licensure with gifted validation and principal's licensure. An avid gardener and traveler, Carol resides in Avon Lake with her husband, Charles. The Froehlichs have two grown sons.

Mona Rutger, director of Back to the Wild wildlife rehabilitation and nature center, hosted an educational session at the French Creek Nature Center. Back to the Wild, located in Castalia, OH, is a volunteer, non-profit organization that rehabilitates and ultimately releases injured, orphaned, and displaced wildlife. In 2006, Rutger was named Animal Planet's Hero of the Year for her incredible work with animals. Needless to say, her presentation was a hit with students.

"She did an hour-long presentation with the kids," says Mary Lou Kaminski, LCESC Gifted supervisor. "They were enthralled with her."

During the Back to the Wild session, Rutger's extensive knowledge of endangered species captivated students. They learned about life histories of hawks, owls, Bald Eagles, and other wildlife and the importance of protecting habitats. Habitat loss, the food chain, adaptations, behavior, camouflage, defense mechanisms, human impact on the environment, and our own inter-connection with all living things were explored.

The Slice of Life session allowed students to participate in a group problem-solving activity that focused on understanding the order of events of the settlement of Ohio, Lorain County, and the Northwest Ordinance territories.

Geology featured hands-on investigations of the rock-cycle formation, and explored the five kinds of rocks and their locations. Students discovered how rocks and fossils tell the story of Earth's continual change over centuries. It's Easy Being Green stressed environmental awareness and the importance of protecting our planet. Based on the positive reaction of students, the Nature Center at French Creek proved the perfect venue for the day's topics.

"The personnel at French Creek go out of their way to give kids lessons outside of their classrooms," says Kaminski. "I always refer to it as taking down the classroom walls and taking them into the field. I think that's the most important part of education: letting students have hands-on experiences with the experts."

After the sessions at the Nature Center, students and teachers visited the Burrell Homestead, one of the last stops on the Underground Railroad. Intrigued by the incredible history of the house, students learned about the founding families of Sheffield Village. The home was once the residence of abolitionist Robbins Burrell (1799-1887), who hid runaway slaves before helping them sail up the Black River and cross

"I THINK THAT'S THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF EDUCATION: LETTING STUDENTS HAVE HANDS-ON EXPERIENCES WITH THE EXPERTS."



Mary Lou Kaminski

Lake Erie to freedom in Canada. In addition, students engaged in a simulation with Benjamin Bacon to learn about Native Americans that once lived in the area.

Thanks to the French Creek Reservation staff and generosity of supporters, the Environmental Learning Fair was a success. Kaminski and the LCESC staff are especially grateful to Solid Waste Inc., Elyria.

“We are fortunate to have Solid Waste Inc. support our programs,” she says. “Every year, they are generous enough to provide transportation for teachers and students to leave their districts. So, these trips are made possible at no cost to the school districts.”

From wildlife to rocks to the Underground Railroad, this year’s Environmental Learning Fair met its goal of being interdisciplinary, combining language arts, science, and social studies.

“We make sure that the programs tie to academic standards,” says Kaminski. “These are not just fun field trips—though they do turn out to be fun. We make sure they are relevant to kids’ learning.”

LINKS:

The Gifted Consortium Educational Learning Center of Lorain County

<http://www.loraincountyesc.org/programs/gifted-talented/gifted-and-talented-programs>

Lorain County French Creek Reservation Metro Parks

<http://www.metroparks.cc/reservation-french-creek.php>

Burrell Homestead - <http://range17.tripod.com/burrell18o.html>

Back to the Wild - <http://backtothewild.com/>

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PAVING THE WAY FOR SMOOTH TRANSITIONS

As a child progresses through the school system, he/she becomes more involved in his/her own transition to the next level. “Even young children can benefit greatly from looking at the big picture – of what their lives will look like in the future,” encourages Lord.

TRANSITIONING FROM HIGH SCHOOL

Kari Foreman, Post Secondary Transition Specialist at LCESC/Region 2 SST, coordinates the transition from high school to work or college for students with disabilities. Her responsibilities include helping school districts comply with state and federal requirements related to students with disabilities as they move beyond high school.

“While schools are not responsible for students actually reaching their goal, they must provide services that can help toward achieving their individual goals,” the experienced educator explains.

“By law, planning for this transition beyond high school begins by age 14 for students who have disabilities. This involves designing the course of study needed to reach future goals as well as lining up transition services. The course of study is outlined in an individualized IEP. By age 16, a full transition plan is in place, and the transition team must know the student’s post-secondary plan,” Foreman says. “The student is part of this next planning process by the time they are in high school, representing a change in focus – from family and teacher focus to individual focus.”

Students’ skills, preferences and needs are ever-changing. Transition planning includes identifying these skills, preferences and needs so they will make excellent employees after graduation.

“The transition process is changing as more information becomes available. Transition planning continues to become more individualized and specific, evolving over a student’s school career,” Foreman says.

CONCLUSION

Although Lord and Foreman do not have direct responsibility for writing an IEP or making child decisions, they serve students in a crucial role by providing technical assistance to schools, including providing professional development training and meeting with districts to discuss trends.

“We want students to be active members of society and have lives that are meaningful,” says Foreman.

“We want every child to have the same opportunities as our own children and grandchildren. We try to help parents, school administrators, teachers and other building personnel who are directly working with the children to get that quality of life. At an early age, it’s about transitioning the preschoolers from early-education programs to school. For older students, it’s about transitioning students to work,” concurs Lord.

For both of these outstanding educational professionals who work with children at both ends of the educational spectrum, it’s imperative to keep the end result in mind.

“What we are doing now will dramatically impact the quality of lives of our students. We keep this our focus as we design programs and supports for educators and parents,” exclaims Lord.





Educational Service Center of Lorain County
Region 2 State Support Team

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*Lorain County ESC Superintendent
Dr. Thomas Rockwell (center) cuts the ribbon
in celebration of the opening of a new shelter
at the Early Learning Center this November.*



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