



## **FAIRVIEW HIGH SCHOOL**

**Principal: Cary D. Willgren**  
[www.fairviewparkschools.org/live/schools/High\\_School](http://www.fairviewparkschools.org/live/schools/High_School)

**Fairview Park City School District**  
**Fairview Park, Ohio**  
**Superintendent: Brion E. Deitsch**

Fairview High School, located in a residential suburban community just a few miles west of downtown Cleveland, is considered an "inner-ring" school, along with 13 other suburban schools located around the edge of this large urban environment. Cary Willgren, principal, collaborates regularly with a group of inner-ring school district leaders on issues stemming from this adjacent urban influence. The population of Fairview Park is about 19,000, and the community is generally comprised of middle to above-average income families. The comprehensive four-year high school has an enrollment of about 700 students and serves as the single high school setting for the Fairview Park School District that includes just one building for each developmental level—Coffinberry Early Education Center, Garnett Elementary School, Fairview Intermediate School, LFM Middle School, and Fairview High School. Fairview Park is described as a stable community where many parents, teachers, and administrators attended Fairview High School themselves.

The Fairview Park City Schools are committed to providing superior services and academic programs that challenge the mind and instill the joy of lifelong learning and responsible citizenship (district mission statement). In the words of Mr. Willgren, "We prepare our students for next steps in life and for life itself!" He shares that one of his primary goals relates to what students say when they reflect about their high school experience. "When our graduates are out on their own and involved in whatever they've decided to do next, I want them to be able to say that they loved their high school." Mr. Willgren himself attended high school here and to this day is able to say that he loved his high school.

## Leadership

Leadership is shared through the school's Professional Learning Community (PLC), described as a "philosophy" (not a program)—and "tight on vision" (loose on methodology). The inspiration for the PLC came from a workshop attended by

district representatives in September of 2000.

Titled "Building the Foundation of a

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Professional Learning Community," it was presented by Dr. Richard DuFour, author of "Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement." A core group of teachers was formed in 2000-01 to advance the PLC philosophy at the high school in 2001-2002 during which time three major concepts were identified for implementation: pyramid of interventions, collaborative time, and curricular programs/orientation. In 2002-03, four sub-committees were

formed: curriculum and the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT), freshman transition, at-risk students and alternative

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*Fairview Park High School's Guiding Philosophy:*

*Professional Learning Communities.  
A Community of Learners Making a Difference!*

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schooling, and public relations. The sub-committees evolved into standing teacher-led teams with **SMART** Goals—the goals are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**esults-oriented, and **T**ime Based. The goals are accompanied by plan(s) of action, measurements and frequency of measurements (baseline data), and anticipated timelines for goal achievement. The Professional Learning Communities are clearly "A Community of Learners Making a Difference!"

## Instructional Leadership

"The primary role of the principal is that of instructional visionary," shares Mr. Willgren, who seeks to maintain a balanced focus on management, supervision, and leadership activities. "The pie is only so big and you must divide your time accordingly. If management is all you do, then you'll be doing things right, but not doing the right things. I'm an organized person, and I work really hard to balance my focus. We have a staff that is awesome, and the department chairs are great. Grooming those leaders who 'step up' in the building is important," he continues. "You have to identify those staff members that have leadership qualities and delegate, especially in special education."

The high school has a Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP), even though it's not required for

schools not technically in  
"continuous  
improvement" as defined

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by state standards. Funding and federal programs are aligned with the CIP. The principal maintains close communication with the business community through the Business Advisory Council, or the BAC, which is helpful in representing the business point of view within the CIP.

As is the case with many school districts, Fairview Park City Schools has been challenged by reductions in tax revenue and budget deficits resulting in significant reductions in staff. Understanding the impact on students, the principal prioritized regular and ongoing communication with students on these budget-related issues as they evolved. As a result, students are not only able to articulate specifics related to the "what and why" of the changes that impact their lives, but are also able to talk intelligently about the challenges facing schools and the tough choices that are often necessary.

## **Curriculum and Instruction**

Three basic questions frame the Professional Learning Community's approach to curriculum and instruction:

- What is it the students should be learning? (Answer: Standards)
- How do we know if students are not learning? (Answer: Assessments)
- What do we do if students are not learning? (Answer: Interventions)

To date, there have been no students not graduating due to failure to pass the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT). "We celebrate because we're excellent every time," Mr. Willgren shares when speaking to the issue of OGT results.

## **Providing Opportunities for All Children to Achieve**

Special education services at Fairview High School include tutors and intervention specialists working with students in the regular classroom setting, direct instruction being provided in learning resource centers, and services from aides in the regular classroom. Additional support services are available from a speech and language pathologist, a psychologist, and a counselor. An Intervention Assistance Team (IAT) is used for interdisciplinary dialogue around specific student issues; a director of student services provides leadership and direction.

"Even the more involved special education students are for the most part included in the regular classroom where they see and learn appropriate behavior," one special education teacher describes the school's inclusionary practices. "But the content is designed for their level by narrowing down key concepts in the same sort of way as you would construct an alternate assessment." A group of teachers describe the dialogue between regular and special education teachers as continuous. The aides travel with students into the regular classrooms and maintain ongoing communication between the regular

and special teachers. These paraprofessionals are a vital component in the continuum of services, providing dedicated support aligned with and integrated into the instructional program.

This predominant theme of collaboration is supported by FLEX scheduling, providing time every Thursday morning for professional development as well as for a variety of special activities for students. The purpose for professionals is to work collaboratively to enhance student learning, and the time is generally used for development as a faculty, departmentally, cross-departmentally, or individually. Specific activities include curriculum development, alignment with state standards, analysis of student learning styles, work on common assessments, cross-curricular lesson and thematic unit development, and vertical transitioning. Student activities include completing make-up work, make-up tests, and quizzes in the test center; access to the computer lab, library, gymnasium, pool, weight room, and cafeteria; and participating in student group work, student research, and tutoring by appointment. Sometimes required activities are scheduled during this time for class meetings, seminars, and assemblies. While the FLEX period is considered a privilege for students, it is seen as a major asset by the professionals who understand the value of scheduled time to work together.

— “GET INVOLVED” is the motto of the Student Activities/Athletic Director, Tom Faska, who encourages students to be active and to participate in extracurricular activities and athletics. Clubs and organizations include Academic Challenge Team, Band (marching, symphonic, jazz, and pep), Broadcast Club (local television production), Cheerleading, Chorale, Drama, Drill (flag and dance performance), Ecology (leading environmental action), Footprints (literary magazine), French, Key (community service, National Honor Society), Orchestra, SADD (students against destructive decisions), Ski, Spanish, Student Council, Synchronettes (aquatics), Yearbook, and Interscholastic Sports.

A Renaissance Program has been established as a student reward program where teachers and staff are also recognized. This activity has evolved

into a substantial motivation strategy, and celebrations are held regularly in the form of school-wide assemblies.

Discipline is not much of an issue at Fairview High School. "During my whole time here there has only been one fight!" shares one student. A strict code of conduct is spelled out for high school students who generally respect the parameters. A tiered discipline ladder corresponds to levels of violation. At the first tier are teachers who are expected to handle general classroom violations. The second tier involves the principal. Major violations always go directly to the assistant principal or principal.

### **Professional Development**

Professional development begins with the careful selection of staff. "My philosophy has changed with respect to staff selection," shares Mr. Willgren. "The first thing I look for is personality. It used to be that students were expected to respect teachers; nowadays teachers are expected to earn that respect. It is critical that there is a good fit between teachers and students in terms of temperament and personality." Ongoing professional development activities are scheduled for staff, and each year two days are set aside for this purpose. Professional development is generally embedded through the work of the Professional Learning Communities.

### **Partnerships with Parents/Families/Community**

Parents are very involved with their children and school activities in this community where families are generally described as stable. The special education staff is in constant communication with parents who are encouraged to contact them at any time, and who have their school, home, and cell numbers to ensure access. Online communication is also maintained through email and posting of homework and grades with password access. The community's small-town feel is what draws many parents here from larger school districts. As one parent of a student in an Individual Education Plan (IEP) shares, "This school is very conscious, aware, caring, student-oriented, and compassionate."

The Fairview Park Council PTA is committed to its children, schools, and community. The PTA objectives are similar to those of the National and Ohio PTA.

*"This school is very conscious, aware, caring, student-oriented, and compassionate."*

*Parent of Student with IEP*

- To promote the welfare of children and youth in the home, school, community and place of worship;
- To raise the standards of home life;
- To secure adequate laws for the care and protection of children and youth;
- To bring into closer relation the home and the school, that parents and teachers may cooperate intelligently in the education of children and youth;
- To develop between educators and the general public such united efforts as will secure for all children and youth the highest advantages in physical, mental, and spiritual education.

### **Culture of the School**

Fairview High School, as a Professional Learning Community (PLC) has a culture unlike any school of the past, when each teacher's classroom was a separate and individual entity. Rather, at Fairview, all pull together for the good of each student. A visit to the school's Web site makes clear that this highly successful school works hard to exemplify the six characteristics of a PLC:

- Shared mission, vision, and values
- Collective inquiry
- Collaborative teams
- Action orientation and experimentation
- Continuous Improvement
- Results orientation

Staff must maintain enthusiasm for this complex plan that demands continual upkeep and an ongoing commitment from all.

The school's culture of success is reflected in the way that students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) describe their future career plans. "I plan to attend the Pittsburg Culinary School," shares one student. "My uncle is a chef, and he got me interested in cooking during our summer vacations in North Carolina." Another student plans to attend the Polaris Career Center for one year and then train to become a marine biologist. Another was inspired by receiving recognition for helping students with Downs Syndrome through a peer support program and now wants to become a special education teacher. And still another student shares plans to pursue a military career by enrolling in the ROTC program at Kent State University. According to these students, their success can be attributed primarily to the teachers. As one student put it, "We have good teachers, and that's what counts!"

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***"We have good teachers, and  
that's what counts!"***  
***Student with IEP***

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## Fairview Data

SCHOOL PROFILE	
2004-2005 Building Rating	Excellent
Enrollment	689
Grade Levels	9-12
Economically Disadvantaged Students	15.4%
Students with Disabilities	9.4%
Asian or Pacific Islander Students	2.5%
Hispanic Students	1.7%
White Students	94.3%

FAIRVIEW PARK CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT PROFILE	
2004-2005 District Rating	Effective
District Enrollment	1758

## **Schools of Distinction**

The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) named 21 schools to the first (2004 – 2005) list of Schools of Distinction, celebrating high-achieving schools that have significant numbers of students with disabilities. To make the cut, schools must:

- Have at least 75 percent of students with and without disabilities score proficient or above on a combination of all proficiency, achievement, and Ohio Graduation Tests administered during the past three years;
- Have at least four percent of their students identified as having a disability;
- Serve students of varying disabilities;
- Earn a combined performance index score of 100 or more out of 120 for the most recent reporting period;
- Meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirements for the last school year; and
- Not be involved in any investigation that would call their test scores into question.

The 21 schools earning the award during 2004-2005 included nine elementary buildings, one middle school, one junior/senior high school, and 10 high schools located in both large urban and small town settings. At 13 schools, students with disabilities made up 10 percent or more of the student population.