

REDESIGNING TWO HIGH NEEDS MIDDLE SCHOOLS: WHAT MATTERS MOST?

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ABSTRACT

In 2006, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) audited and made recommendations for two middle schools in Jefferson County that had not made adequate academic progress within the Kentucky's accountability system. Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) responded to the audit report by providing the following to each school:

- Embedded Professional Development via Master Teachers (began 07-08)
- Enhanced Technology (began 07-08)
- Reduced Class Size (began 07-08)
- Extended Days for staff (began 07-08)
- Extra and Co-Curricular Involvement (began 07-08)
- Single-Sex Schools (began 08-09)
- CARE for Kids (began 08-09)

Evaluation of the initiative addresses the following question: *Which components of the school reconfiguration account for most of the educational success at the school level?* While a student level analysis is forthcoming, this evaluation is limited to school-level data which provides a preliminary look into outcomes for major measures of academics, behavior, and school satisfaction during the last two years.

Measures of climate, behavior, and school satisfaction showed gains for students and teachers across several measures while gains in academics were less consistent. It seems reasonable that changes in school climate would lay the foundation for academic improvements and these preliminary data point to positive changes in school climate for both students and teachers. So, the answer to the question of "What matters most?" may be partly answered by building a school culture that promotes learning. Future work is needed to address the long-term academic benefits of the initiatives taking place at these two schools. Future analyses will yield important information for researchers and practitioners to consider when reviewing school turn-around approaches (for a review see Kowal & Hassel, 2005).

METHODS

The number of students included in the evaluation varied each year due to changes in enrollment (i.e., total enrollment 2007 = 1310; 2008 = 1359; 2009 = 1446). Data were collected at each grade level (i.e., grades 6, 7, and 8) at both schools. Each school was reconfigured as a same sex school for the 2008-2009 school year. In 2008-2009, Olmsted North (boys) had 62 full-time teachers and Olmsted South (girls) had 58 full-time teachers.

Student performance measures gauged changes in enrollment, attendance, suspension, school/district satisfaction, and academic performance on the statewide assessment in reading and math. The data reported are for the 2006-2007 (baseline) through the 2008-2009 (Year 2) school years. The statewide assessment is a criterion-referenced test with reading and math assessed at the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade levels each spring. Student satisfaction was measured using items from the JCPS Comprehensive Survey which is administered district-wide each spring. Teacher satisfaction was also measured using items from the JCPS Comprehensive Survey and a survey designed specifically for the two Olmsted schools which was administered each fall and spring. Items representing satisfaction with infrastructure improvements, school climate, and academic progress were analyzed using data from the spring 2009 Olmsted teacher survey.

RESULTS

Attendance and enrollment data showed nearly a 2% increase in attendance from 2006-2007 (89.04%) to 2008-2009 (90.7%) and a decline in enrollment of two students for Olmsted North. Olmsted South had a slight increase in attendance from 2006-2007 (92.46%) to 2008-2009 (92.5%) and an increase in enrollment of 138 students.

State assessment results for reading showed two-year gains for ECE students at Olmsted North. Gains between 2008 and 2009 represent the time period when the two schools became single sex. Olmsted South students showed one-year gains during this time period for all NCLB student groups in reading except ECE.

COMMONWEALTH ACCOUNTABILITY TESTING SYSTEM NCLB % PROFICIENT/DISTINGUISHED READING							
Olmsted North	2007	2008	2009	Olmsted South	2007	2008	2009
All	31.52	32.41	26.36	All	44.3	39.93	42.65
White	33.84	33.33	29.06	White	48.9	45.16	46.86
African American	26.5	27.2	22.85	African American	36.97	32.41	36.31
Latino	*NA	NA	NA	Latino	NA	NA	59.42
Asian	NA	NA	*NA	Asian	NA	NA	NA
F/R Lunch	31.63	32.47	24.87	F/R Lunch	42.37	36.46	40.70
LEP	NA	NA	15.12	LEP	NA	NA	24.69
ECE	7.27	8.18	16.96	ECE	14.74	NA	8.45

* Enrollment of students in this demographic did not meet the minimum requirements specified under NCLB

State assessment results for math showed two-year gains for all NCLB groups at Olmsted North. Olmsted South students showed two-year gains for ECE students in math. Olmsted North students showed one-year 2008-2009 gains for all NCLB groups.

COMMONWEALTH ACCOUNTABILITY TESTING SYSTEM NCLB % PROFICIENT/DISTINGUISHED MATH							
Olmsted North	2007	2008	2009	Olmsted South	2007	2008	2009
All	17.8	14.68	25.91	All	29.09	28.8	27.37
White	19.01	19.37	29.91	White	32.35	31.45	31.80
African American	12.93	10.2	19.21	African American	29.59	20.37	19.75
Latino	*NA	NA	NA	Latino	NA	NA	43.48
Asian	NA	NA	NA	Asian	NA	NA	NA
F/R Lunch	17.96	14.61	26.09	F/R Lunch	26.91	27.72	26.80
LEP	NA	NA	29.07	LEP	NA	NA	20.99
ECE	5.45	7.27	16.07	ECE	4.21	NA	5.63

* Enrollment of students in this demographic did not meet minimum requirements specified under NCLB

Nonacademic data showed a sizeable decline in out-of-school and in-school suspensions that began during the first year of school enhancements and continued during Year 2.

SUSPENSION COUNTS				
Olmsted Academy North	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	%Change
In-School Adjustment Program		1040	373	64%
Out of School Suspensions	381	315	253	34%
Olmsted Academy South				
In-School Adjustment Program		384	277	28%
Out of School Suspensions	322	303	156	52%

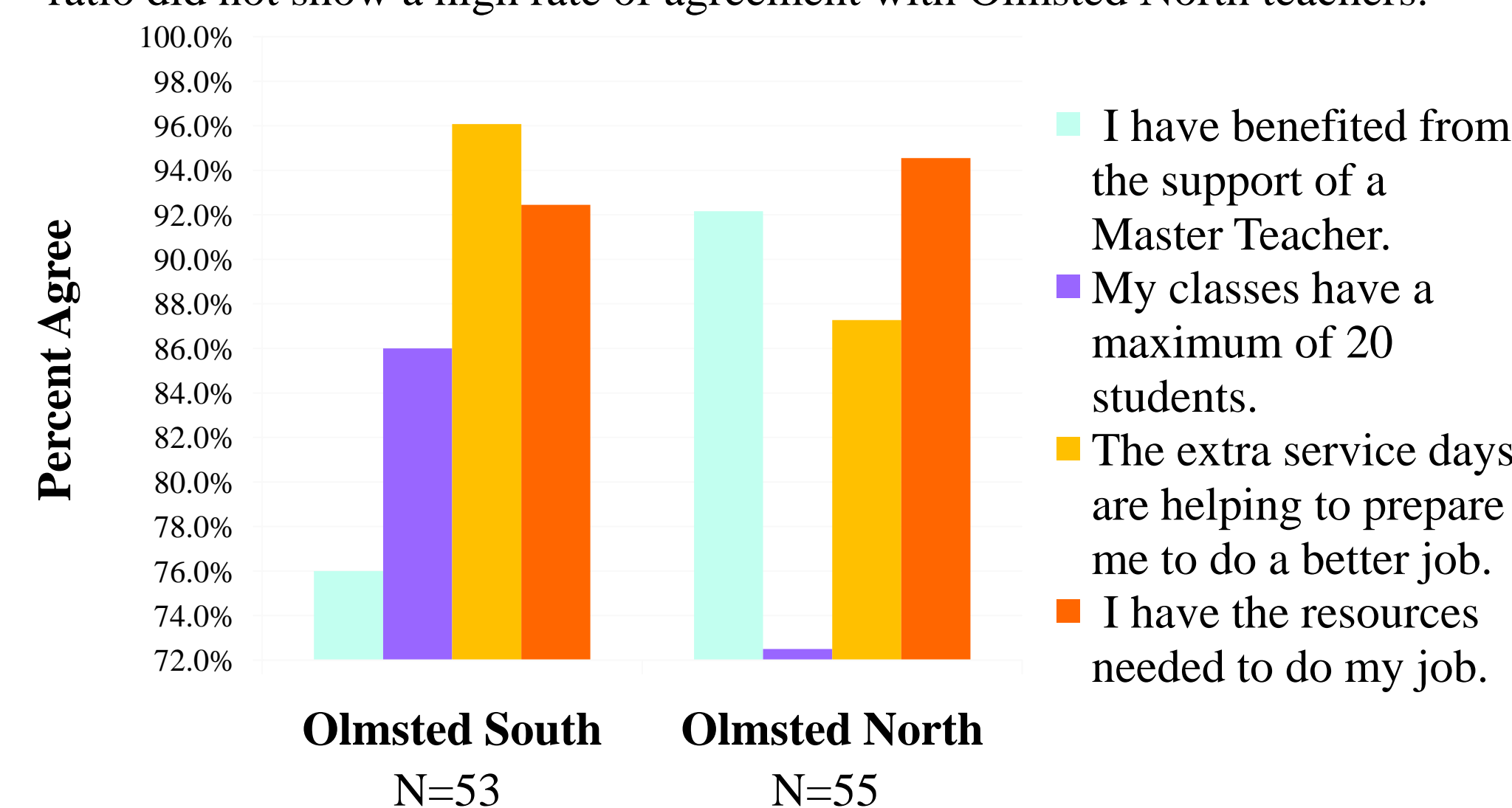
RESULTS

An analysis of student and teacher responses on JCPS Comprehensive Survey items focused on school climate showed both schools outperforming the district average gain for most items related to school satisfaction, principal leadership, curriculum, and teaching effectiveness.

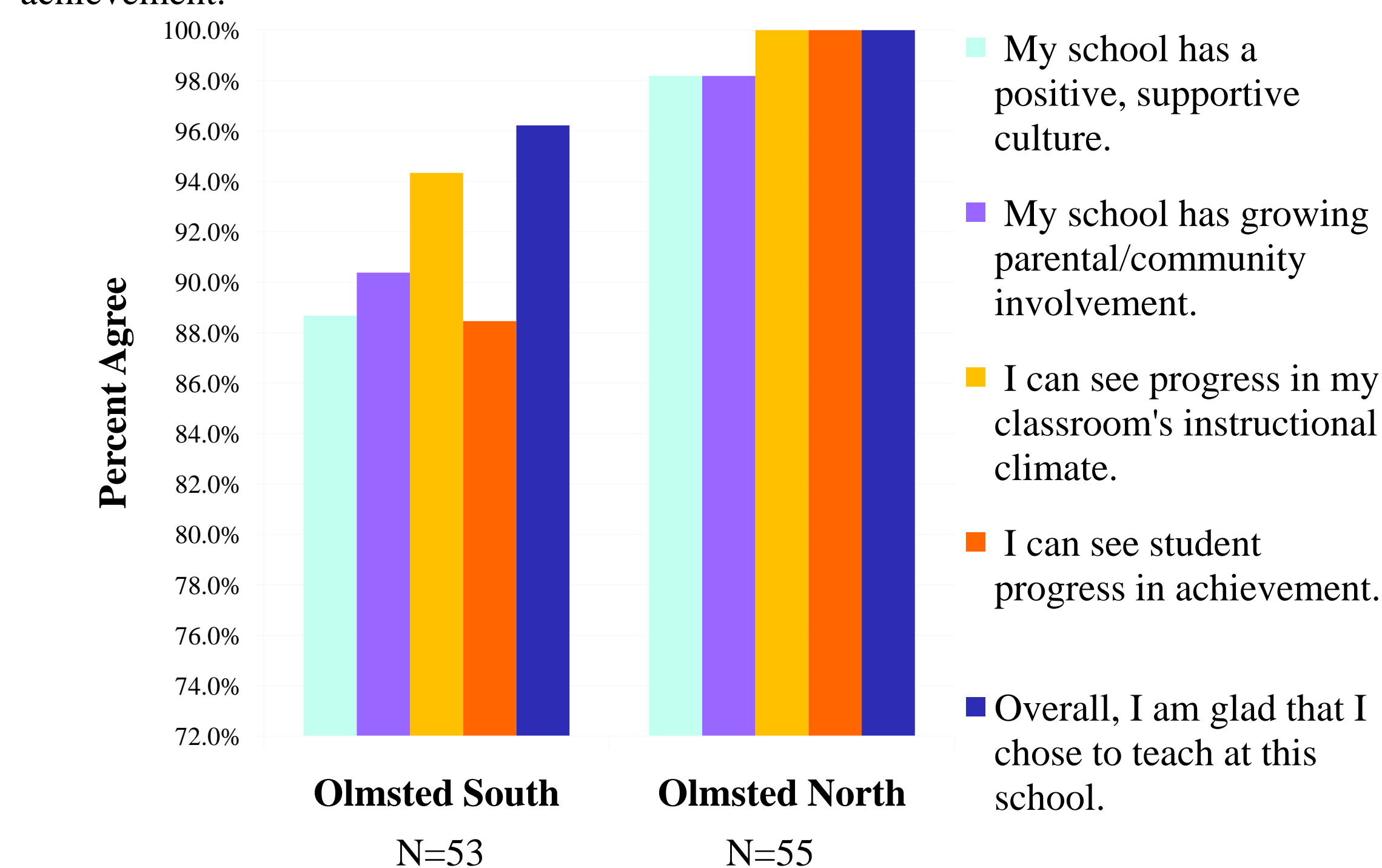
Selected 2009 JCPS Comprehensive Survey* Results					
	Olmsted North %Agree (N=475)	1 Year Change	Olmsted South %Agree (N=670)	1 Year Change	District 1 Year Change (N=17,419)
Students					
I am very satisfied with my school	53.6	5.74	50.75	0.18	3.16
I am very satisfied with JCPS	74.94	5.96	80.03	6.07	4.63
My principal provides effective leadership at my school	82.6	17.52	77.19	13.11	5.75
My teachers provide academically challenging content	77.62	8.94	82.6	8.31	3.84
Teachers at my school provide effective teaching	82.64	13.87	84.72	7.81	4.05
Certified Staff					
My principal provides effective leadership	98.41	16.6	92.31	4.56	1.66
My school is effectively implementing a plan to close the achievement gap	93.65	18.65	96.15	2.27	.46
Teachers at my school provide effective instruction	100	4.65	100	2.05	.27

*The JCPS Comprehensive Survey changed substantially for the 2007-2008 school year, preventing comparisons to the baseline year.

Spring 2009 Olmsted Teacher survey data shows teacher agreement ratings to items addressing school infrastructure improvements. In general, teachers at both schools reported having adequate resources but differed in their level of agreement concerning the benefit of Master Teachers. The achievement of a 20:1 student-teacher classroom ratio did not show a high rate of agreement with Olmsted North teachers.



Teachers had high agreement rates to survey items related to culture, climate, and student achievement. Olmsted North teachers (100%) and Olmsted South teachers (96%) overwhelmingly agreed that they were glad that they choose to teach at their school. All Olmsted North teachers reported seeing progress in instructional climate and student achievement.



SUMMARY

Olmsted North and Olmsted South Middle schools are in the third year of a reconfiguration plan that began with major changes in teaching staff and instructional support. Year 2 continued those enhancements and reconfigured the two schools into one all boys (Olmsted North) and one all girls (Olmsted South) school. Year 2 also featured the school-wide addition of a relationship-based program designed to improve the social and emotional climate of schools (Crawford, 2008). This report provides descriptive data related to academics, behavior, and school satisfaction.

- **Academics:** Olmsted North made substantial progress since becoming an all boys school in increasing the number of proficient/distinguished students in math. In contrast, reading scores showed improvement only for ECE students. Nearly the exact reverse occurred at Olmsted South which increased the number of proficient/distinguished girls in reading for every NCLB group. Math scores grew minimally only for white students since the school became all-girls.
- **Behavior:** Both in-school and out-of-school suspensions decreased considerably since the reconfiguration plan began for both schools; Olmsted North out-of-school suspensions decreased by 34% while Olmsted South out-of-school suspensions decreased by 52%.
- **Student and Teacher Satisfaction:** Student responses on the JCPS Comprehensive Survey indicated that students at the two schools showed gains in satisfaction for the following: (a) school satisfaction, (b) principal effectiveness, (c) challenge of instruction, and (c) teacher effectiveness. One-year gains for all but one of these items exceeded district average gains. Teacher ratings on the JCPS Comprehensive Survey showed gains for the following: (a) principal leadership, (b) effectiveness in addressing achievement gaps, and (c) teachers effectiveness. Teacher data on the Olmsted survey items that addressed enhancements was mixed (especially for Master Teachers and the establishment of 20:1 student-teacher classroom ratios). There was an amendment to the 20:1 plan during Year 2, with the new goal being a school-wide 20:1 student-teacher ratio in core content classes. All teachers had relatively high agreement rates for items related to culture, climate, and seeing progress in student achievement.

All findings should be reviewed with the understanding that the two schools are still in the very early stages of implementing major educational changes (i.e. two years for enhancements; one year for single sex schools). Overall, measures of climate, behavior, and school satisfaction show gains for students and teachers across several measures while academic gains are less consistent. It seems reasonable that changes in school climate would precede academic progress. One to two years is most likely an insufficient amount of time to expect major academic improvements especially when cultural differences may provide obstacles in learning (Fashola, 2005). Therefore, it appears that at least one part of the answer to the question of "What matters most?" may be setting the stage for academic improvements by building a school culture that promotes learning for all students.

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