



Wells Academy

School in Steubenville, Ohio Beats Academic Odds Year after Year

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Few other areas in the state have felt the impact of the economy more than Steubenville, Ohio. Steubenville is in Jefferson County, which has one of Ohio’s highest unemployment rates (8.2%), as of November 2008. Sixty-one percent of Steubenville students are economically disadvantaged. However, the impact of poverty has not stifled learning in the district, which received a rating of *Effective (B)* on the 2008 state report card.

Instead, as demonstrated by Wells Academy in this report, Steubenville students have remained on top academically. In 2008, 100 percent of Wells’ third and fourth graders passed the state-level math test and 100 percent of students passed the state-level reading, science and social studies tests (See Table 1).

Only three other Ohio elementary schools* did better—and Wells did it with a student body that faces significant challenges. Sixty-five percent of Wells’ students are economically disadvantaged and 47 percent belong to a minority group (See Table 2, page 2).

**Based on the 2008 state test results of schools testing grades 3-5: Longfellow Elementary, Westerville; Lorain Academy for Gifted Students, Lorain; Mary Emma Bailey Elementary, Dublin.*

Table 1

Wells Academy

Ohio Achievement Test: % Passing

3rd Grade Reading	100%
3rd Grade Math	100%
4th Grade Reading	100%
4th Grade Math	100%
4th Grade Writing	93%
5th Grade Reading	100%
5th Grade Math	83%
5th Grade Science	100%
5th Grade Social Studies	100%
Academic Rating	Excellent

Source: Ohio Dept. of Education, 2008.

Where is Steubenville, Ohio?



Table 2

Wells Academy Students

	Wells	State Avg.
African American*	31%	16%
Multi-racial	16%	3%
Caucasian	53%	76%
Economically Disadvantaged	65%	38%
Students with Disabilities	5%	15%
Total Enrollment	214	1,751,511

Source: Ohio Dept. of Education, 2008.

*African American, Multi-racial and Caucasian were the only ethnic subgroups reported by Wells.

Wells has experienced academic success like this for several years. Not surprisingly, the school has been recognized for its outstanding impact on the lives of students. Most recently, Wells was recognized with Education Trust's *Dispelling the Myth Award*. This national award is given to schools that exhibit high levels of success in educating low-income and minority students. Wells' other awards during this decade include *National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence* (2004 and 2005) and *Ohio School of Promise* (2003 to 2007).

When asked to what Wells attributes its success, school leadership answers with endearing humility. Principal Melinda Young says that she was initially stunned by the national attention their work garnered, because she thought all schools were doing what Wells does—strategically helping all students succeed. Then, the staff took a step back to document their strategy. They soon realized what sets Wells apart. In part, they attribute success to Steubenville's district-wide coordination that lessens the impact of student mobility from school-to-school. Given the district's mobility rate during the 2008 school year (13%), district-wide consistency is particularly important. Each

Steubenville school is on the same schedule and uses the same curricula. For instance, a student could leave one Steubenville school on Monday, enroll in another Steubenville school on Tuesday and her new math class would be on the same page in the same textbook as her previous school. This reduces the need for remediation and helps students settle into a new school more effectively. Consistency among schools has proven successful beyond Wells, which received an A rating on the 2008 state report card. All but one of Steubenville's six rated schools received an A or B. The key to sustained success, according to Principal Melinda Young, is to have: 1) a system based on sound research, 2) system buy-in from the staff, 3) consistency, 4) the teaching and utilization of learning strategies and 5) ongoing high quality professional development for teachers and school leadership. Wells presented their findings at Education Trust's 2008 national conference.

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In sum, Wells Academy is strategically beating the academic odds— even though two in every three students are economically disadvantaged. In the heart of the Ohio Valley, where many families are feeling the full impact of the recession, Wells is outperforming most Ohio elementary schools that have far fewer disadvantaged students. The consistent strategy used by Wells to succeed with disadvantaged students is a national model for success. To learn more about the strategy used by Wells Academy and Steubenville City Schools, visit www.omeresa.net/schools/steubenville/district.

