



King Elementary School

Akron, OH

Principal: **Mary Dean**

Superintendent: **David James**

School type: **District**

Grades served: **K-5**

377 Student enrollment

100.0* Percent economically disadvantaged

39.9 Percent non-white

4.3 Percent of students with disabilities

28 Teachers' average years of experience

\$69,612 Average teacher salary

\$8,704 Total expenditure per pupil

King Elementary School, located on the west side of Akron, has a long history of academic success. It handily outperforms other schools in the Akron Public School district, with the vast majority of students scoring at or above the state proficiency bar of 75 percent. In 2009, 93 percent of King's students scored proficient or above in reading on state achievement tests, while 85 percent scored proficient in math. Compare that to the district's 2009 averages of 65 percent proficiency for reading, and 58 percent proficiency for math, and King's success becomes glaringly apparent.

King's historic brick building sits among some of the more affluent, even majestic, homes in the city. This might lead some to expect a group of similarly affluent students populating its class-

SOURCE FOR CHARTS: Ohio Department of Education interactive Local Report Card, 2008-09; reading and math calculations performed by Fordham Institute, see endnote 11.

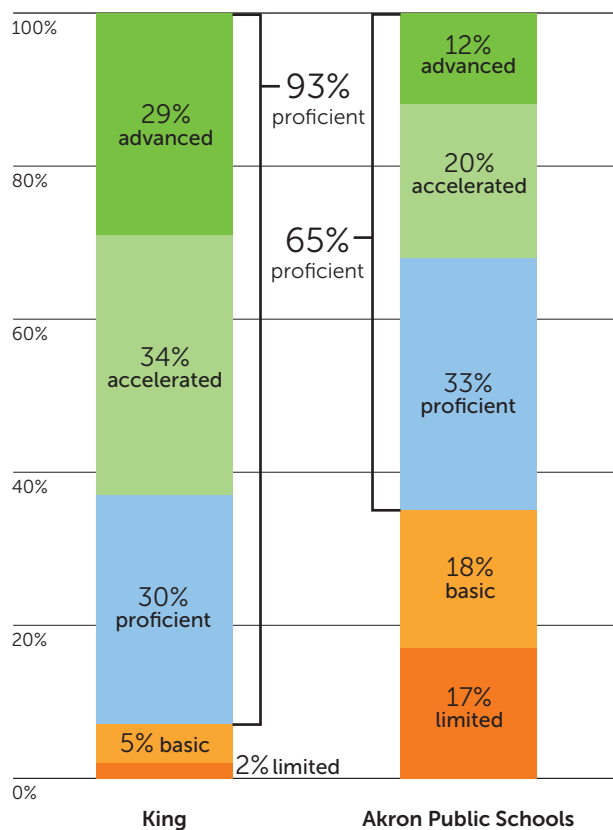
* See endnote 14.

rooms. Yet a closer look inside reveals that King is surprisingly diverse—almost half of its students (45 percent) enroll through the district-wide open enrollment policy. The result is a diverse population of students that defies the neighborhood school tradition. Even so, tradition is readily apparent at King. Though students hail from across the city, the staff and leadership have remained stable. Teacher turnover is very low.

“Like Family”

Talk to enough people about King and a common theme emerges: “It’s like family here.” In practical

Reading



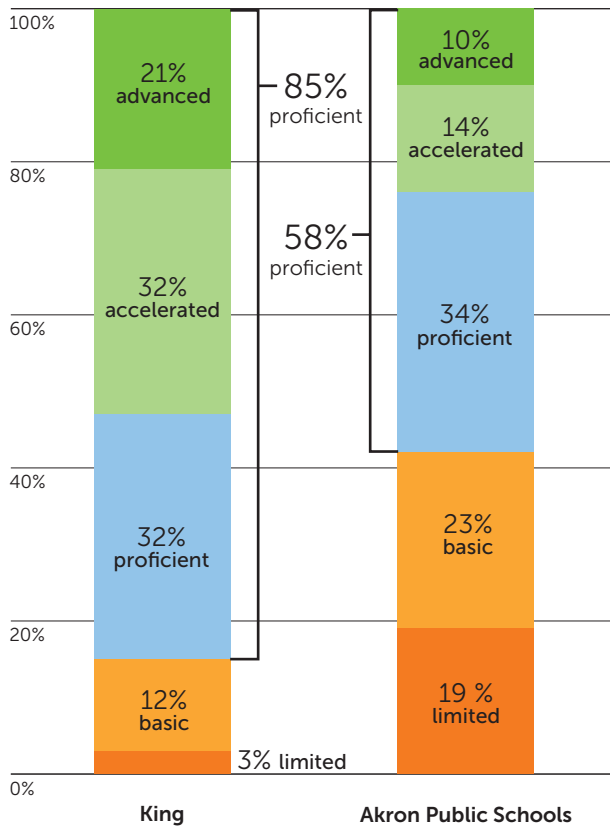
Percent of students by reading proficiency level, 2008-09 (King vs. district)



terms this means that the leadership and staff are united in purpose and unabashedly open about their desire to see all students succeed. “Students are successful when everyone’s on the same page,” explained Debbie Hendryx, who taught for 24 years at King and now is a regular substitute teacher. That goes for the school’s culture, too. When new students arrive at the school, they are assimilated quickly into its culture. And roughly half of all King’s fifth-grade students did not start at King in kindergarten. “Peer pressure here is a positive thing,” said first-grade teacher Laura Howard.

— “Students are successful when everyone’s on the same page.” - Debbie Hendryx, former teacher and current substitute teacher

Math



Percent of students by math proficiency level, 2008-09 (King vs. district)

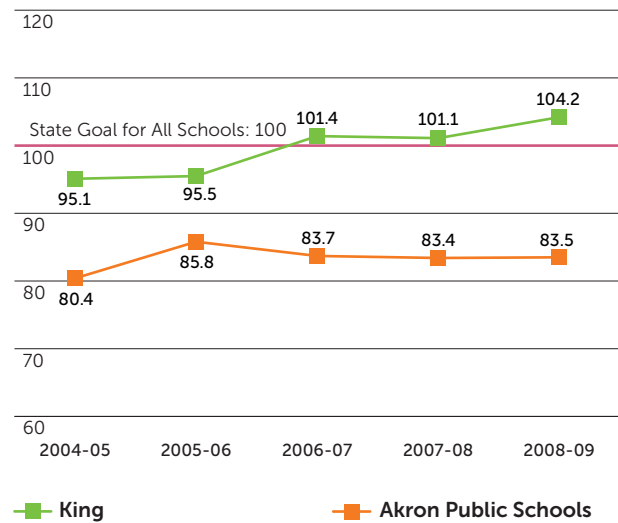
The same can be said for faculty. New teachers quickly realize that the expectations are high at King, but the leadership is extremely supportive of teachers and support staff. Principal Dean, who seems omnipresent to staff and students, provides regular feedback to teachers about what she's seen. "Ms. Dean is constantly in classrooms," said first-grade teacher Julie Buzzi, "and she works hard to build relationships." Another veteran teacher remarked, "[Principal Dean] is my colleague, not my boss." But Principal Dean explained that there is "a lot of pressure to do well [at King]...and that helps teachers work with students to perform."

Among the teachers, fourth- and fifth-grade teams are one example of collaboration at King. While teachers at many urban schools function as "independent contractors," King's team approach across grades provides time for collaboration among the math, reading, science, and social studies teachers.


Deeper Content Knowledge

An advantage of the team mindset is that the intermediate grades are structured so that teachers are able to focus on the grade-to-grade progress of both the curriculum and the students. In other words, fourth- and fifth-grade teachers "loop" with their students in the academic subjects. Principal Dean noted that this arrangement was a choice made jointly by the teachers and herself, and that the result has been greater ownership of subject-area knowledge.

Performance Index



Performance index scores over time (King vs. district)



—● *The move to departmentalize has allowed teachers to narrow their focus and develop expertise in their content areas.*

Fourth-grade math teacher James Adkins agreed. The move to departmentalize with Principal Dean’s support “has allowed us to narrow our focus and develop expertise in our content areas.” For Mr. Adkins, that means delving deeper into the state standards and creating lessons that bridge the often considerable gap between what the standards expect and what most textbooks provide. Fourth- and fifth-grade science teacher Deb Deidrick echoed this, adding that it allowed her to turn her initial strengths in science into real expertise.

For students, the benefit of teachers’ increased subject-area expertise is instruction that is both engaging and relevant. For instance, the school’s PTA president Valerie Stutler noted that her daughter, a fourth grader, had been playing a game of “Life” that asks students to use math in a real-world context. “For her, that makes the class so much more interesting,” she added. Likewise, Ms. Deidrick has incorporated hand-held computers into her science class. Her fifth graders use technology to learn about and chart the different phases of the moon. In both cases, the teachers’ subject-matter knowledge enabled them to offer students another “way in” to the content that was both challenging and engaging.