



# Valleyview Elementary School

Columbus, OH

Principal: **Dewayne Davis**

Superintendent: **Gene Harris**

School type: **District**

Grades served: **K-5**

**364** Student enrollment

**86.3** Percent economically disadvantaged

**33.1** Percent non-white

**5.1** Percent Limited English Proficient

**11.3** Percent of students with disabilities

**14** Teachers' average years of experience

**\$65,302** Average teacher salary

**\$10,159** Total expenditure per pupil

## *Maxim: The Five "Bs"*

Valleyview Elementary's nondescript and tired facility, encased by numerous modular units, hides a culture of high expectations for students and teachers alike. The school gets its name from the community on the near west side of downtown Columbus where it is located. The school benefits from the presence of a core of families that reside in the neighborhood surrounding the school and enjoy the opportunity to have their children enrolled at Valleyview.

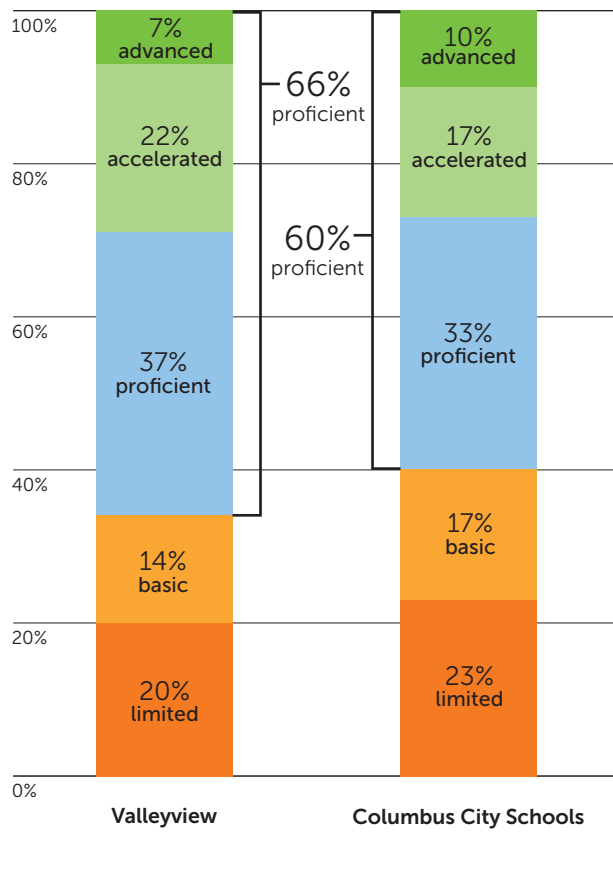
Permeating the school's routines and daily activity is the school's mantra, known as the "five Bs," which was displayed on posters throughout the school:

**BE: here, responsible, respectful, focused, and caring**

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

There was plenty of evidence that these “Bs” are alive and well at Valleyview. An up-and-coming, first-time principal named Dewayne Davis leads the school, bolstered by parent “consultants,” whose daily presence provides a positive ethos for staff and students alike. A tight-knit faculty teaches more than 350 students who are making steady academic progress. Eighty-six percent of Valleyview students are economically disadvantaged, but as in all Needles schools, this does not prevent them from achieving far above their peers. Sixty-six percent of Valleyview students achieved proficiency in reading that year, while 72 percent did so in math. This compares to

### Reading



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



60 percent of district students scoring proficient in reading in 2009, and 58 percent scoring proficient in math.

Struggling through a period marked by a revolving door of principals—five in six years—Mr. Davis arrived four years ago fresh from participation in the Columbus City Schools’ principal internship program. Although he was prepared informally by his mother’s example of serving as a school administrator, Davis clearly had no honeymoon period, because the staff had deteriorated into exclusive cliques that frequently butted heads with each other. Some teachers preferred being independent while others sought extensive partnerships. Thankfully, parents and teachers say, Mr. Davis has been able to affect a growing core group of teachers for whom teamwork and the kids’ best interests combine to make a powerful influence on the daily school culture.



So how did such a transformation of faculty occur these past four years? The short answer is by raising expectations for teachers. Some teachers who did not want to work in the more rigorous environment created by Mr. Davis left. These vacancies provided an opportunity for him and his leadership team to interview and hire replacements that were receptive to the culture of high expectations they were building. In addition, Mr. Davis hosted a summer retreat to help build staff cohesion. He gave teachers more authority to determine how to most effectively teach their students. An extensive discipline program has helped to create an environment in which teachers can prepare effective lessons. The resulting school culture of camaraderie, respect, and high expectations has turned a troubled school into one on the rise.

### *Of Purple Lines, Stars, and Valleyview Bucks*

Discipline is one element of Valleyview that Mr. Davis scrutinizes. Essential to the school-wide discipline policy is an extensive reward system for students “caught being good.” Students earn “bucks” that can be cashed in at the school’s “store” to purchase school supplies. In addition, stars are coveted rewards for good group behavior that, once amassed, will turn into the “price” of admission to pizza and popcorn parties and can earn students monthly recognition.

The most visible strategy addressing student behavior is the narrow purple lines on the hallway floors intended to guide students to pass through in an

orderly fashion. This hallway order is reinforced by a staff-wide emphasis on curbing students' inappropriate language, ensuring that children keep their hands to themselves, and paying attention to practices that ensure a safe and orderly environment. Indeed, staying on the purple lines is symbolic of the broader focus on positive behavior at Valleyview.

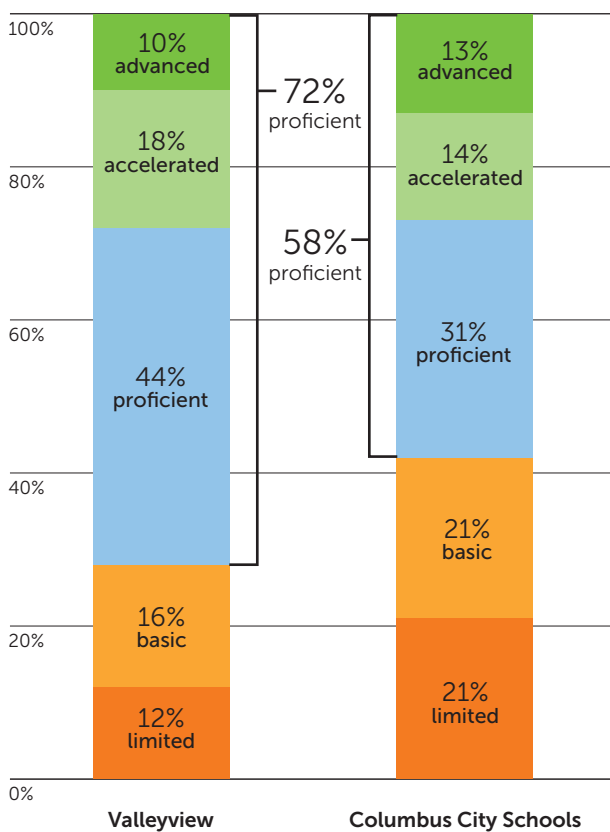
—● *The goal to raise student scores well beyond the minimal passage rate for each subject tested explains why the staff has agreed to use differentiated instruction.*

This emphasis on a consistent standard of behavior is especially necessary considering that while many students hail from the Valleyview neighborhood, a significant number of students travel to the school each day from across the district. Much like the comprehensive effort to transform the staff into a highly effective team, the geographic and ethnic variety of students requires very structured, unrelenting standards for student interaction.

## Current Results Aren't Enough

Given that Valleyview is on a very short list of Ohio's schools included in this study, one would think that teachers would be satisfied with a job well done in recent years and rest on their laurels. According to students who were asked what they would change if they were "Principal for a Day," it is no surprise that fifth grader Juliana said, "I don't think the school can get better than it already is. It's a great place to go to school." Others nodded in agreement. Yet that is not what the school's teachers and administrators say. Their goal is to raise student scores well beyond the minimal passage rate for each subject tested, which explains why the staff has agreed to use differentiated instruction more thoroughly this year. In their

## Math



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

classrooms the teachers are unrelenting in focus and lose very little time in instructional transitions.

## Looming Challenges

Teachers described a primary concern that as the district closes nine more schools, students will be redistributed among those left open. News of the school closures broke on the front page of *The Columbus Dispatch*<sup>15</sup> on the first day of our visit. Because Valleyview is already considered overcrowded and the district wants to cut costs by eliminating its modular units, it is likely that about 50 Valleyview students will be sent to other schools in the 2010-11 school year.



Valleyview has less student churn than other district schools, and teachers are reluctant to see such a large number of students leave as they have built strong working relationships with them and their families. Some teachers expressed the concern that they themselves will be reassigned to other schools as well.

Another concern for faculty at Valleyview is that their effective approach to discipline is being undermined by the growing number of parents that seek intervention from the district office when they don't agree with the school's strict discipline policies. Teachers are noticing that it is taking much longer to remove a student from the classroom for chronically disrupting their lessons.

Ms. Ortega, the school's part-time counselor, shared another prominent concern. She noted that the more families she gets to know, the more time it takes to connect them with appropriate social services. While she made clear that this additional workload is a posi-

tive result of the school's ability to engage parents, there is pressure to extend her time at the school while current budget constraints prevent that commitment from being made.

### *“Never Seen a School Like This”*

The unique nature of Valleyview's growing success is not lost on parents. Parents Tina Wharton and Enrique Deckard (who have three students at the school) said they've never seen a school like it, or had a principal like Mr. Davis. They said everyone is a part of each other's lives at the school. Their perspective is particularly important because they have six children attending three different schools, including one child with special needs. Asked about whether such success could be reproduced elsewhere, they expressed doubts that Valleyview is easily replicable. Responses from other parents centered on wondering whether additional schools could be staffed with Valleyview-like teachers, all of whom embrace teamwork and encourage parental involvement.

—● *“Valleyview is a place where teachers and families want to come and very few ever want to leave.” – Stephanie Kidwell, parent consultant*

Teachers' attitudes on this issue varied. One teacher posited that due to the effects of intensifying poverty on their current students and families, Valleyview is constantly reinventing itself. Thus, in a way, it is already “replicating” what has worked there in order to meet the growing challenges facing its students. Yet she underscored just how important it is for staff to partner in these efforts.

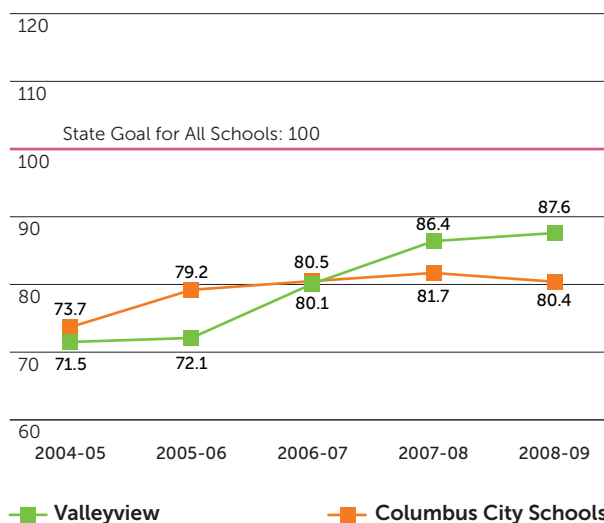
Music teacher Jennifer Cooper confirmed the latter sentiment. She works at four schools each week,

including Valleyview. Ms. Cooper appreciated that she was immediately accepted and welcomed by its staff. Unfortunately, several experiences elsewhere have not proved to be as positive. She described some schools where the “adults are constantly at each others’ throats and also contending with serious student behavior issues.” She insisted the success at Valleyview could be replicated but it would require “formation of a strong core of teachers willing to go above and beyond to establish order, respectful relationships, and enough parent involvement to make it work.”

### *Making a Difference in Students’ Lives Every Day*

As in the other Needles schools, the Valleyview staff members genuinely enjoy their work. Apryll Schweitzer, an office assistant who provides a myriad of administrative support functions, said that you can tell that its staff is “making a little bit of difference in the lives of our students every day and it makes you feel good.” One of the parent consultants, Stephanie Kidwell, said that “Valleyview is a place where teachers and families want to come and very few ever want to leave.” She added that even though most parent events at the school are well attended, the staff is not satisfied and works on strategies in hopes of attracting even more parents. The successful expansion of

### Performance Index



Performance index scores over time (Valleyview vs. district)

parent events at Valleyview has been fostered by both the principal and staff. This, she noted, is not always the case at other schools.

Regardless of the significant challenges ahead for schools like Valleyview, the staff at this school is resolved to uphold their keys to success—teamwork, parent involvement, and high expectations for student achievement and behavior.