



# Exceeding Expectations

Paul T. Wright Elementary School  
2005 Annual Report



*A District 428-Northern Illinois University Partnership School*

## Exceeding Expectations – Welcome to Wright Elementary School!



Experts from across the country tell us that Wright School is an exemplary model of a school-university partnership. We can tell you that partnerships are a lot of work. Both District 428 and NIU have worked diligently since we began planning in September, 2003 to ensure amicable relationships, share talent and creativity, and stay focused on raising the quality of education across the district - starting at Wright. We are proud to share with you this first annual report. We think you'll agree that Wright has made an impressive start on ambitious goals.

*Dr. Anne Kaplan*  
Vice-President, Administration  
and University Outreach

*Dr. Paul Beilfuss*  
Superintendent, District 428

### **2004** In Wright School's Kick-Off Year

School opened: 265 K-5  
students and 32 staff

Student mix reflected  
district demographics

Math mattered:  
97% of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders met  
state math standards

Arts and technology raised  
student achievement

Families volunteered:  
152 for 46 openings in  
Fall, 2005

District 428 resources were  
the same as other buildings

Successes happened:  
other schools are sharing  
new practices

**Students made progress toward the goal of 100% meeting standards in nine areas.**

- 88% of students met standards on state tests, second highest in the district.
- 97% of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders met standards on the state mathematics test.
- 96% of kindergartners are on track for success in first grade.
- Baseline data collection in 2004-5 will help track progress in meeting standards.

**Faculty and staff learned new ways to teach.**

- Faculty and staff worked together in summer training sessions in DeKalb in 2004 and at Yale in 2005 to learn innovative ways to teach their students.
- An NIU faculty member helped classroom teachers integrate technology into instruction, and a District 428 art specialist assisted them in integrating fine arts into language arts instruction.
- Baseline data will help to track teachers' technology skills and progress in integrating fine arts, technology, and individualized instruction.

**NIU's teacher education students worked in Wright classrooms.**

- 32 NIU students spent mornings with Wright teachers and students, took education courses at Wright in the afternoon, and often stayed after school to assist with activities.
- NIU faculty fine-tuned teacher preparation in literacy and classroom technology.

**Other District 428 schools are sharing new practices that succeeded at Wright.**

- Integration of technology across the curriculum began at Malta Elementary.
- Speech and language help for at-risk kindergartners was expanded to Littlejohn and Malta.

## Student Success is the First Priority at Wright

The highest levels of achievement - 100% of students meeting standards in nine subjects by 2009 - that's what Wright School seeks for every student. In 2004-5, the partners launched a five-year plan by introducing innovations that have been proven successful elsewhere and by gathering information about students' performance in the following: reading, mathematics, writing, science, social sciences, fine arts, technology, health, physical fitness, and citizenship.

**Wright School GOAL 1: All students enjoy learning and - Meet or exceed state standards in reading, mathematics, writing, science, and social science**

- 88% of Wright students met or exceeded standards in reading, math, and science, placing it second in the district among elementary schools in 2005.
- 97% of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders met or exceeded standards in mathematics.
- The race/ethnicity "achievement gap" is minimal at 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and non-existent on 5<sup>th</sup> grade state tests.

**Meet or exceed national standards for learning with technology**

Proficiency with technology dramatically expands students' ways of learning and their skills for the 21st century. To prepare students to meet standards, teachers incorporate everything from digital cameras to Palm Pilots into everyday learning.

NIU extended NIUNet's high speed broadband service to Wright and added a second cart of laptops to those provided by District 428, plus 30 computers for classroom use. Lara Luetkehans, NIU faculty liaison in technology, helped teachers integrate technology into all subjects. A technology assessment designed for third through 5<sup>th</sup> graders measured baseline skills against standards developed by an international organization.

**Meet or exceed state standards in fine arts**

Enabling students to learn through the arts, such as learning mathematics in drawing class, helps address the different ways that students learn. District 428 art teacher Christine Edlund devises visual arts activities that aid learning of difficult concepts in reading. She and Luetkehans are creating electronic portfolios to show each students' progress in meeting the fine arts standards.

**Demonstrate competency in health and wellness and demonstrate physical fitness**

Although PE equipment was limited to only 26 soccer balls for the first six weeks, students participated in energetic, standards-based lessons. Baseline data will be used to measure students' progress toward physical fitness.

**Prepare for their future roles as citizens in a democracy**

Wright teachers adopted a character-building program based on high expectations for playground, lunchroom and bus line behavior. An assessment tool has not been selected for measuring growth in citizenship.



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### Wright's Technology

NIUNet highspeed broadband (NIU)  
Laptops on portable carts (428 and NIU)  
Palm Pilots (NIU)  
30 computers for classrooms (NIU)  
Digital cameras



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*"We are establishing a national model of arts integration to improve academic performance."*

Harold Kafer, Dean of NIU's College of Visual and Performing Arts.

## **Wright makes sure that teachers and soon-to-be teachers are state of the art instructors.**



### **Wright School GOAL 2:**

Educators increase their professional knowledge and skills through academic study; collegial inquiry and research; dialogue with university faculty; use of technology in ways that meet Illinois professional teaching standards; and work with university observers, interns and student teachers.

At Wright, all faculty meetings include professional development. NIU faculty helped teachers integrate arts and technology in their classroom.

Personnel from Yale University spent a week in DeKalb working with Wright teachers in summer 2004 to create lesson plans using an instructional model developed by Dr. Robert Sternberg. The model emphasizes analytical, practical and creative thinking as an approach to meeting the differing learning needs of students.

New principal Gina Greenwald, classroom teachers, and NIU faculty liaison in literacy, Susan L'Allier, traveled to Yale in summer 2005. There, faculty developed lesson plans that are now in use in classrooms along with other Sternberg-model lessons created in 2004.

An NIU master's degree program in Elementary Education is offered on-site for Wright teachers and other district staff.

### **Wright School GOAL 3:**

**Teacher candidates study in a real-life setting where they can practice professional skills.**

Wright's unique setup gives future teachers early exposure to the realities of schools and provides Wright students with additional individual attention where it matters most - in the classroom. District 428 and NIU believe that spending an extended time in classrooms early in their academic programs allows clinical students to see how students progress in acquiring literacy and other skills.

"The clinical piece is where our students have an opportunity to observe the theory being implemented," said Margaret Bridge, NIU College of Education's director of clinical experiences. Under the guidance of professional and experienced supervisors, students receive immediate feedback and opportunities to grow and strengthen their skills, she added.

Last year, 32 junior-level NIU students worked in classrooms each morning for nine weeks, as opposed to the usual 3 week cycle, and took their semester-long university courses at Wright each afternoon. They were involved in the entire school experience, including open houses, parent-teacher conferences, and after school programming.

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*"I really got a better understanding of what teaching will be like, thanks to a great cooperating teacher who let me teach and participate every day."*

NIU student Karen Graden, working in Marion Beguin's kindergarten class.

## Successes at Wright will benefit all students in the district.

### Wright School GOAL 4:

Innovations tested and proven at Wright School will be adopted by other schools in the district, presented at professional meetings, and described in professional publications.

### All-day kindergarten - an innovation that works!

All-day kindergarten provided students with more time to master skills and concepts. Extra help came from NIU's College of Health and Human Sciences faculty who worked with students at risk for problems in learning to read. At the end of the year, results showed that 96% of Wright kindergarteners were prepared to succeed in first grade, by far the best results in the district. These language assessments and interventions are now helping students at Littlejohn and Cheseboro.

According to Superintendent Paul Beilfuss, this innovation is a great success and should be available for all kindergartners in DeKalb. The barrier is lack of space to house the program in District 428's overcrowded schools.

### Arts and technology across the curriculum - ready to share!

Kindergarten teacher Tracy Paszotta says, "The children use songs and movement to learn, reinforce, and remember new concepts. Creating art helps them express their ideas." Kindergarten students also used the Palm Pilots for spelling games and sequencing activities.

Pam Bybee, 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, connects content with technology and the arts in a unit on the Titanic. Students learn about life in 1912 by doing website research about the passengers and theories on the sinking, taking black and white photographs in art, and playing old-fashioned games in PE.

In 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Chris Perkovich's students mastered geometry terms using technology and art. Student teams located examples of geometric terms by alphabet letter (I is for Isosceles) and photographed them with a digital camera. Then, they illustrated power point presentations with the photos and definitions of the terms.

Successes with integration of technology at Wright are being shared at Malta Elementary, where NIU's College of Education has placed computer hardware. An NIU faculty liaison is providing special training and support for Malta teachers in classroom uses of technology.

### Extending the school day with after-school programming - a proven success!

Wright After School provides a multitude of after-school classes that expand experiences with arts and technology, increase skills in the nine goal areas, and bring parents and community groups into the school. Student demand far exceeds the availability of these programs. NIU faculty joined Wright teachers in offering extended-day activities.



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*"The evidence is in. All-day kindergarten makes a huge difference."*

Paul Beilfuss, Superintendent



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*"Technology provides a 'hands-on' approach to learning. Children are extremely motivated by the computer."*

Pam Bybee, Teacher

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### National attention!

District and university personnel made presentations about Wright Elementary School at professional conferences nationwide last year. Audiences find Wright unique and exciting. School personnel from as far away as California have asked to visit the school.

## **Wright experienced its share of challenges in the first year, but the future looks bright.**

### **Buildings and Equipment**

Construction crews who were converting the old Malta High School into Wright Elementary ran into obstacles, so the faculty was unable to get into the building until two days before the first open house. And students' desks arrived three weeks into the year, so tables had to be used in the meantime. Teachers reported that many worked into the wee hours of the night – or actually the next morning – before school opened. This dedication continued throughout the first year.

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*“The fact that we’ve come through these transitions so well confirms the strength of the partnership.”*

Sharon Smaldino, Director, College of Education Partnership Office

### **Staff Cohesion**

Many members of Wright’s staff were among the 60 educators and citizens who designed Wright School in 2003-4. The new staff began meeting in July to plan together for the first year. Building on the experience of the core group, faculty quickly developed a shared vision even though they came from schools all over the district. PE Teacher Steve Bell credits administrators with the smooth start. “The staff and administration were extremely helpful and took time to make sure we were comfortable with the curriculum and the innovative methods of instruction,” he said.

### **New Leadership**

In addition to a new school building, new vision, and new methods, teachers also experienced changes at the district level. The district welcomed a new superintendent in fall 2004, plus a new assistant superintendent for human resources and a new Wright principal for the 2005-06 school year.



### **Future Directions**

- Completion of 120 literacy lessons that incorporate fine arts, technology, and individualized instruction
- Expansion of collaborative planning time for Wright teachers to develop integrated lessons
- Integration of fine arts and technology into mathematics
- Increased emphasis on physical development, health, and citizenship
- Expansion of Wright After School
- Dissemination of Wright innovations to more District 428 schools
- Dissemination of Wright innovations as a national model

Gina Greenwald summed up the future for Wright School: “We want to see that our students are doing their best, and we are dedicated to helping them exceed everyone’s expectations.”

## Inside Wright's Successes

### Students

Wright's energetic, enthusiastic students come from all across the district. Percentages of low-income, minority, and special education students are similar to those in other district schools.

### Parents

Having chosen Wright for their students, families participated actively in homework, conferences, and evening activities.

### Faculty and Staff

A Whirlwind. Exciting. Challenging. Busy. Creative. Fun. Those are just some of the words one Wright teacher used to describe the school's first year in operation.

"The experience of being a teacher at Wright has been wonderful!" Paszotta said. "It is truly a joy to come to work each day and work with such wonderful children, families, and colleagues. The greatest rewards certainly come from the children - their excitement and enthusiasm for learning keep me young and energized."

### The District 428-NIU Partnership

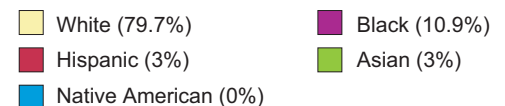
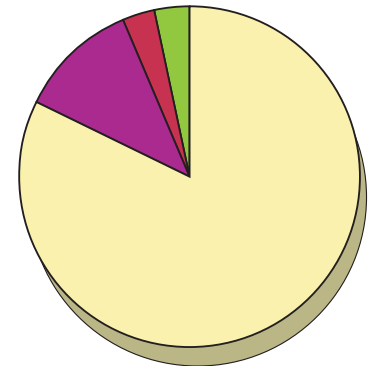
Leaders of both School District 428 and Northern Illinois University agree that Wright School is an excellent example of collaboration. "Wright is an exciting project," said Christine Sorensen, NIU's College of Education dean. "We're looking for ways to take lessons we've learned and expand them to other schools in the district and to our teacher preparation programs at the university." District 428 School Board President Andy Small adds that the partnership not only "means a new and innovative way to look at elementary education, but also a creative way to move technology and the arts forward."

As part of the partnership agreement, District 428 and NIU created a Wright Council in August 2004. The Council meets quarterly to assess what is working and ensure that the school is aligned with the partners' shared vision. The members:

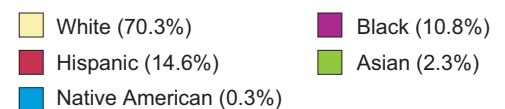
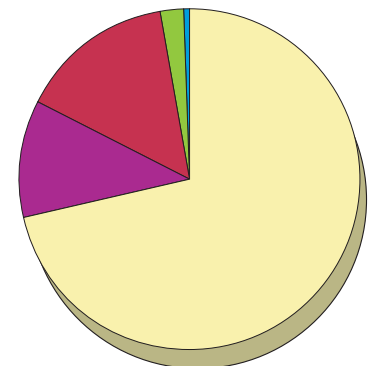
- Council Chair Anne Kaplan, NIU Vice-President of Administration and University Outreach
- Council Vice-Chair Paul Beilfuss, District 428 Superintendent
- Tim Struthers, CEO of Castle Bank
- Andy Small, District 428 School Board President
- Christine Sorensen, Dean, NIU College of Education

In a nutshell, the Council's job is a coordinating and monitoring role. It provides a way of keeping communication going between NIU and the school district. That means doing some trouble-shooting together and also celebrating successes.

### Wright Demographics



### District 428 Demographics



Source: Interactive Illinois Report Card

### Wright Faculty and Staff

**Full time:** 12 classroom teachers and one special education teacher

**Part-time:** Art and music teachers, social worker, speech and language therapist

**Gender:** 4 males and 26 females

**Average experience:** 10 years

## DeKalb District 428-NIU Partnership Activities

### Reading and Language Arts

Pre-school screening programs  
Early intervention/reading readiness surveys  
America Reads program and book clubs  
ESL-bilingual school reorganization design  
Bilingual tutoring  
Free services for hearing impaired students

### Technology

Hardware, software, and technology liaison at Malta Elementary  
Teacher training for using technology in classwork  
Principals' training in use of student test data in the interactive report card  
High speed broadband and Internet 2 connections for all schools  
Telephone service through the university switch - lower costs and better security

### Improvement of Teaching

Clinical observations by NIU students  
Student teaching by NIU students  
Credit and noncredit courses  
Middle school training for teachers  
Master's cohort in elementary education

### Facilities and Equipment

428 tennis team uses NIU courts  
NIU uses the high school running track  
NIU contributed a landing pit for high jump

### Operations

Wright Partnership School  
Affirmative action and diversity activities in 2005  
Joint purchasing to reduce costs

*For more information, please visit [www.partnershipschool.niu.edu](http://www.partnershipschool.niu.edu) or [www.dist428.dekalb.k12.il.us/wright/home.html](http://www.dist428.dekalb.k12.il.us/wright/home.html)*

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*"Our end goal is to improve the quality of education for all students in the district."*

Anne Kaplan, NIU Vice-President



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