

**National Center for  
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# Just for the Kids, Arkansas

## Middle School Best Practice Study, 2004-05

Barton Junior High School, El Dorado School District  
Cabot Middle School South, Cabot School District  
Hamburg Junior High School, Hamburg School District  
Harrison Middle School, Harrison School District  
L.A. Chaffin Junior High School, Fort Smith Public Schools  
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Nettleton Intermediate Center, Nettleton Public Schools  
Southwest Middle School, Searcy School District  
Westside Middle School, Westside Consolidated School District  
Woodland Junior High School, Fayetteville Public Schools

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## Just for the Kids, Arkansas

### Middle School Best Practice Study, 2004-2005

#### The Study

The Arkansas Middle School Best Practice Study was part of a larger national research study to investigate the practices of schools that consistently outperform their peers. Research teams studied schools in 20 states to identify key practices of consistently higher performing schools in a variety of policy contexts.

In Arkansas, research teams investigated 10 consistently higher performing and five average-performing middle schools to determine the differences in practices between higher and average-performing middle schools. Schools were identified through an in-depth analysis of academic achievement developed by the National Center for Educational Accountability (NCEA) using data publicly available from the state.

Conducted by NORMES (National Office for Research, Measurement and Evaluation Systems) at the University of Arkansas, the 2004-2005 Arkansas Middle School Best Practice Study received funding from the Arkansas Department of Education and The Broad Foundation. JFTK-Arkansas (JFTK-AR) is a collaboration of the Arkansas Chamber of Commerce, the Arkansas Department of Education, Arkansas Parent Teacher Association, and the National Center for Educational Accountability.

Researchers used site-based interviews and observations, as well as the analysis of supportive documentation, to investigate the practices of each of the 15 schools in the study. District-, school-, and classroom-level practices were studied in the five themes of NCEA's Best Practice Framework: Curriculum and Academic Goals; Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building; Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements; Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data; and Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment.

#### The Summary

Researchers wrote individual case studies about each studied school. This report presents summary findings across the cases. Major findings from each case are presented first to provide a brief picture of each higher performing school studied. A composite picture of Best Practice Findings in Arkansas, based on differences detected between higher and average-performing schools, follows with examples from individual schools.

This report is a synthesis of findings that includes direct quotes and summary information drawn from case studies written by researchers from NORMES at the University of Arkansas. The JFTK Best Practice Framework, developed by NCEA, provides the structure for the findings. Information from the NORMES case studies that does not relate to any of the five themes of the JFTK Best Practice Framework is not presented in this report. **Boldfaced** attributes listed in the "Findings" section of this report represent inferences made by NCEA researchers during the evaluation of the case studies. Those attributes may not necessarily coincide with those inferred by the NORMES researchers.



## Just for the Kids, Arkansas

### Middle School Best Practice Study, 2004-2005

#### The School Identification Process

To study the practices of consistently higher performing schools, one must first identify those schools and compare their practices with those in a group of average-performing schools with similar demographics. The contrast between the practices in the two groups of schools is the focus of this study.

NCEA used publicly available student achievement data from the Arkansas Department of Education to identify schools that consistently outperformed other schools with similar demographics in mathematics and literacy in the 2001-02, 2002-03, and 2003-04 school years. The analysis included data from the sixth- and eighth-grade Benchmark Exams.

To identify the schools, NCEA conducted a separate analysis for each subject (mathematics and literacy) and year (2002, 2003, and 2004) to learn which schools outperformed their demographic peers on the percentage of students meeting the “Proficient” standard on the state exam. NCEA used a Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analysis to compare each school’s percent of students meeting the standard with the percent that would be “predicted” or “typical” for a school in the state with the same demographics. The demographic and other variables used in this analysis were each school’s percentage of low-income, African American, and Asian students; the size of the school; and the percentage of students tested in the subject and year in question. Normally, NCEA also prefers to take students’ prior year test scores and length of enrollment in the same school into account, but that longitudinal information was not available in Arkansas.

NCEA ranked each school against the middle schools in the rest of the state based on the extent to which it outperformed its “predicted” percent of students meeting the standard. For example, a school that outperformed 95% of the schools in “performance relative to predicted” in eighth-grade literacy in 2004 would receive a percentile rank of 95 for that subject and year. These ranks were averaged separately for mathematics and literacy across the three years to produce an overall average performance rank by subject. To be selected as higher performing for the purposes of this study, schools had to have overall average percentile ranks at or above 66.6 in both mathematics and literacy.



# Just for the Kids, Arkansas

## Middle School Best Practice Study, 2004-2005

### The Higher Performing Schools Studied

School	District	2004 Enrollment		2004 School-Wide Demographics						
		Grade Span	No. of Students	African American	Hispanic	White	Asian	Other	Low Income	ELL
Barton Junior High School	El Dorado School District	7-8	678	56.8%	3.4%	39.0%	0.7%	0.1%	55.8%	N/A
Cabot Middle School South	Cabot School District	5-6	592	0.4%	1.1%	96.8%	1.7%	0.0%	24.3%	N/A
Hamburg Junior High School	Hamburg School District	7-9	393	37.1%	6.1%	56.6%	0.3%	0.0%	69.2%	N/A
Harrison Middle School	Harrison School District	5-6	445	0.0%	0.9%	98.2%	0.2%	0.7%	43.1%	N/A
L.A. Chaffin Junior High School	Fort Smith Public Schools	7-9	696	6.0%	4.1%	82.1%	5.7%	2.1%	18.2%	N/A
Lakeside Junior High School	Lakeside School District	8-9	463	4.6%	2.8%	90.2%	2.4%	0.0%	22.9%	N/A
Nettleton Intermediate Center	Nettleton Public Schools	5-6	418	17.2%	3.0%	78.7%	1.1%	0.0%	39.7%	N/A
Southwest Middle School	Searcy School District	5-6	589	10.4%	3.5%	85.3%	0.7%	0.1%	38.7%	N/A
Westside Middle School	Westside Consolidated School District	5-7	434	0.2%	1.7%	98.1%	0.0	0.0%	42.6%	N/A
Woodland Junior High School	Fayetteville Public Schools	8-9	619	2.8%	2.8%	91.4%	2.3%	0.7%	18.1%	N/A

Student enrollment and demographic data are taken from the Just for the Kids-AR 2004 website. Site visits were conducted in Spring and Fall 2005.



# Barton Junior High School El Dorado School District

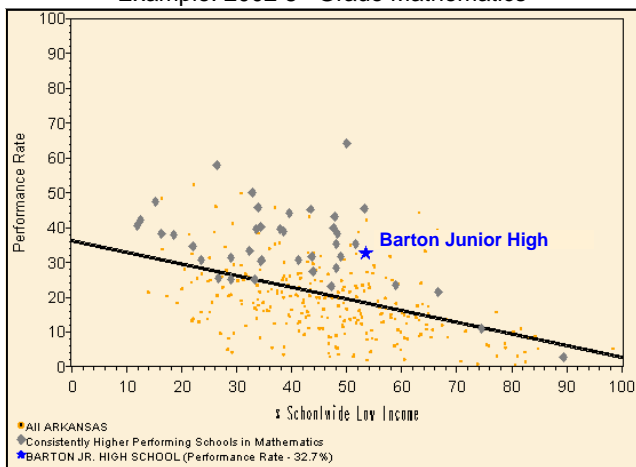
## Just for the Kids, Arkansas NCEA Executive Summary

### The School

Barton Junior High School, which serves 678 seventh- and eighth-grade students,\* is one of two middle schools in El Dorado School District (4,565 students). Barton’s student population is 56.8% African American, 39.0% White, 3.4% Hispanic, 0.7% Asian, and 0.1% other. Within this student population, 55.8% receive free or reduced lunch services.

\*Barton Junior High School served sixth through eighth grades until the 2002-2003 school year, when its grade configuration changed to include only seventh and eighth grades.

Example: 2002 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Mathematics



### Consistent Higher Performance

Barton Junior High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics and literacy in an analysis that included all sixth- and eighth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004.\*\* According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Barton Junior High School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 81.1 in mathematics and 84.2 in literacy.

\*\*Sixth-grade data were only gathered for the 2001-2002 school year, as that was the last year in which the school served sixth-grade students.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002 Percentile Rank		2003 Percentile Rank	2004 Percentile Rank	Overall Avg. Rank*** 2002-2004
Grade	6	8	8	8	
Mathematics	68	99	66	93	81.1
Literacy	54	90	85	95	84.2

\*\*\*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights. For detailed information on individual and overall average performance ranks for Barton Junior High School, please visit [www.just4kids.org](http://www.just4kids.org).

### Major Findings

In El Dorado School District, kindergarten through twelfth-grade teachers align curriculum maps that are centered on mathematics and literacy. Collaborative work among teachers, staff, administrators, and board members is the backbone to creating and revising the curriculum. The district monitors progress toward curriculum goals through student performance data, focusing on higher levels of performance for every student every year. The district takes pride in the mentoring program it provides to all new teachers and principals. In addition to district- and school-wide in-service workshops, teachers attend state and regional meetings, national conferences, and the Arkansas Leadership Academy. Co-teaching is used to allow students with special needs to remain in the general education classroom. Student data are monitored at the district level, and Instructional Resource Teachers (IRTs) interpret data for teachers at individual schools. A strong tutoring program is in place for students who need additional assistance.

The entire case study may be viewed at [http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study\\_framework.cfm?study=Arkansas](http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=Arkansas).



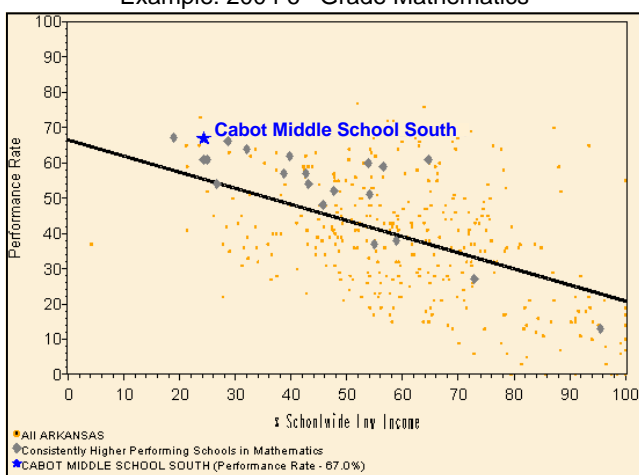
# Cabot Middle School South Cabot School District

## Just for the Kids, Arkansas NCEA Executive Summary

### The School

Cabot Middle School South, which serves 592 fifth- and sixth-grade students, is one of two middle schools in Cabot School District (8,048 students). Cabot’s student population is 96.8% White, 1.7% Asian, 1.1% Hispanic, and 0.4% African American. Within this student population, 24.3% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Mathematics



### Consistent Higher Performance

Cabot Middle School South is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics and literacy in an analysis that included all sixth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Cabot Middle School South demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 82.6 in mathematics and 78.8 in literacy.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002 Percentile Rank	2003 Percentile Rank	2004 Percentile Rank	Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
Grade	6	6	6	
Mathematics	76	78	93	82.6
Literacy	91	97	51	78.8

\*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights. For detailed information on individual and overall average performance ranks for Cabot Middle School South, please visit [www.just4kids.org](http://www.just4kids.org).

### Major Findings

District-wide vertical teams of teachers develop the district curriculum and pacing guides based on state standards and testing data. While weekly subject-specific meetings provide time for teachers to discuss curriculum issues, teacher teams meet annually to formally revise the curriculum. The district “grows its own” principals by promoting leadership training and participation in the master principal program. Staff members receive \$500 for obtaining 90 or more hours of professional development each year. In place of site-based teams, district-wide teams select instructional programs and establish schedules to ensure more accountability for program use and core instruction time. Faculty teams align instructional programs across schools in the district. Principals demonstrate a higher awareness of program quality, best practices, and supporting research as a result of implementing No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements. Superintendents, principals, academic coaches, and central staff conduct walk-through observations to monitor alignment and consistency of expectations. Low-performing schools receive assistance in obtaining grants and additional resources to address learning needs.

The entire case study may be viewed at [http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study\\_framework.cfm?study=Arkansas](http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=Arkansas).



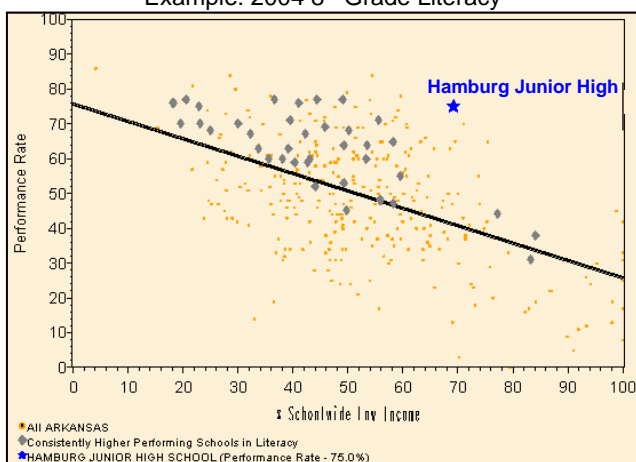
# Hamburg Junior High School Hamburg School District

## Just for the Kids, Arkansas NCEA Executive Summary

### The School

Hamburg Junior High School, which serves 393 seventh- through ninth-grade students, is the only junior high school in Hamburg School District (1,787 students). Hamburg's student population is 56.6% White, 37.1% African American, 6.1% Hispanic, and 0.3% Asian. Within this student population, 69.2% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Literacy



### Consistent Higher Performance

Hamburg Junior High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics and literacy in an analysis that included all eighth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Hamburg Junior High School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 89.4 in mathematics and 97.7 in literacy.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002 Percentile Rank	2003 Percentile Rank	2004 Percentile Rank	Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
Grade	8	8	8	
Mathematics	89	86	93	89.4
Literacy	97	98	98	97.7

\*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights. For detailed information on individual and overall average performance ranks for Hamburg Junior High School, please visit [www.just4kids.org](http://www.just4kids.org).

### Major Findings

Teachers meet with teachers of other grades—and district wide—within their subject areas to ensure vertical and horizontal alignment of academic expectations. Teachers in the school have common planning time by grade level. Teachers receive a great deal of “hands-on” training made possible by a grant through the Foundation for the Mid South. Through this same grant, teachers receive time and tools for developing common quarterly assessments. Rather than rely on one particular program or textbook, teachers use a wide variety of instructional programs and materials to meet student needs. Students with special needs spend a portion of the day in regular classrooms. Mathematics and literacy coaches assist teachers in monitoring, compiling, and analyzing student performance data. The district offers tutoring throughout the school day—as well as before and after school—for students in need of additional assistance. The district also hires additional teachers, so students can “double-up,” getting extra instructional time in their weaker subjects.



# Harrison Middle School Harrison School District

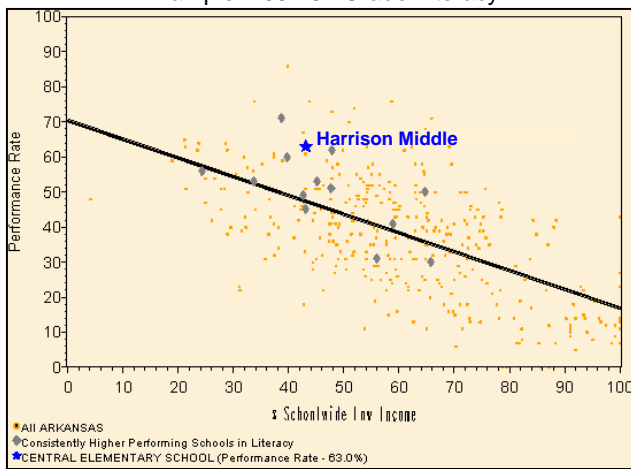
## Just for the Kids, Arkansas NCEA Executive Summary

### The School

Harrison Middle School, which serves 445 fifth- and sixth-grade students, is the only middle school in Harrison School District (2,784 students). Harrison’s student population is 98.2% White, 0.9% Hispanic, 0.2% Asian, and 0.7% other. Within this student population, 43.1% receive free or reduced lunch services.

\* Harrison Middle School changed its name from Central Elementary School during the course of this study.

Example: 2004 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Literacy



### Consistent Higher Performance

Harrison Middle School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics and literacy in an analysis that included all sixth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Harrison Middle School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 82.9 in mathematics and 98.1 in literacy.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002 Percentile Rank	2003 Percentile Rank	2004 Percentile Rank	Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
Grade	6	6	6	
Mathematics	83	89	78	82.9
Literacy	98	97	99	98.1

\*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights. For detailed information on individual and overall average performance ranks for Harrison Middle School, please visit [www.just4kids.org](http://www.just4kids.org).

### Major Findings

Staff members address the breadth of state standards by working together to identify what they call “power standards.” The school defines power standards as those that are most likely to have measurable effect on a child’s achievement. Teachers have common planning meetings every day that are guided by instructional agendas. The agendas include such activities as reviewing lesson plans, examining student data, discussing teaching strategies, and considering opportunities for content integration. Teachers strive for “high-quality” instruction in standards-based lessons that are marked by student engagement, differentiated instruction, and relevant assessment. District, school, and classroom leaders try to “improve what is working and fix what is wrong by looking at the data.” Educators identify students for remediation primarily based on performance on state benchmark exams. The school provides intervention classes 30 minutes per day for these students. In addition, each student in the intervention class has an improvement plan that delineates the roles and responsibilities of the student, parents, and staff in increasing student performance.

The entire case study may be viewed at [http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study\\_framework.cfm?study=Arkansas](http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=Arkansas).



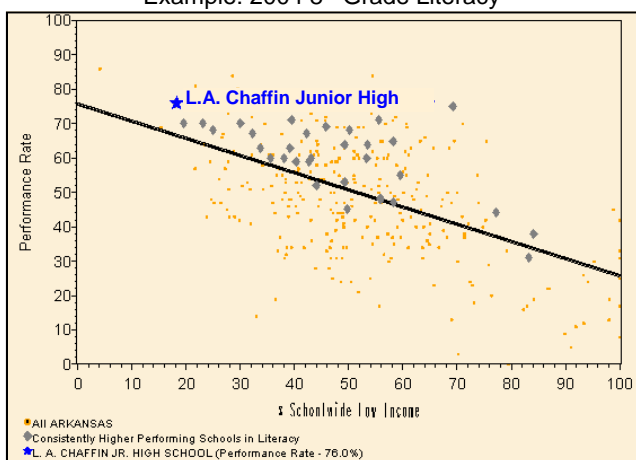
# L.A. Chaffin Junior High School Fort Smith Public Schools

## Just for the Kids, Arkansas NCEA Executive Summary

### The School

L.A. Chaffin Junior High School, which serves 696 seventh- through ninth-grade students, is one of four junior high schools in Fort Smith Public Schools (12,917 students). L.A. Chaffin’s student population is 82.1% White, 6.0% African American, 5.7% Asian, 4.1% Hispanic, and 2.1% other. Within this student population, 18.2% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Literacy



### Consistent Higher Performance

L.A. Chaffin Junior High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics and literacy in an analysis that included all eighth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, L.A. Chaffin Junior High School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 90.4 in mathematics and 82.1 in literacy.

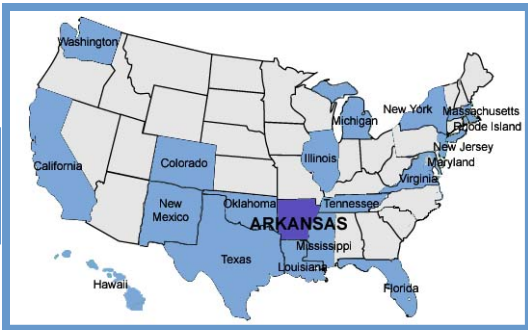
Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002 Percentile Rank	2003 Percentile Rank	2004 Percentile Rank	Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
Grade	8	8	8	
Mathematics	83	95	93	90.4
Literacy	71	83	91	82.1

\*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights. For detailed information on individual and overall average performance ranks for L.A. Chaffin Junior High School, please visit [www.just4kids.org](http://www.just4kids.org).

### Major Findings

The district designed student learning expectations based on the Arkansas curriculum frameworks, and these expectations are organized into quarterly pacing guides. The district works hard to groom internal candidates for administrative positions, encouraging interested teachers who show instructional leadership in the classroom to consider assistant principal positions and continue their studies. A “rigorous curriculum” is the goal of Fort Smith Public Schools, and one way the district attains this goal is through heavy investment in the Pre-Advanced and Advanced Placement models of the College Board. The district has an “Office of Student Achievement,” which is responsible for managing and evaluating student data. Staff in this office pay particular attention to the performance of student subgroups and to identifying content weaknesses. Every school in the district develops an individual school plan for using student data. Different activities offered to students include remediation time scheduled during the school day as well as before- and after-school assistance. Some schools in the district use extended learning days, and others have reconfigured their schedules to provide remediation during regular school hours.



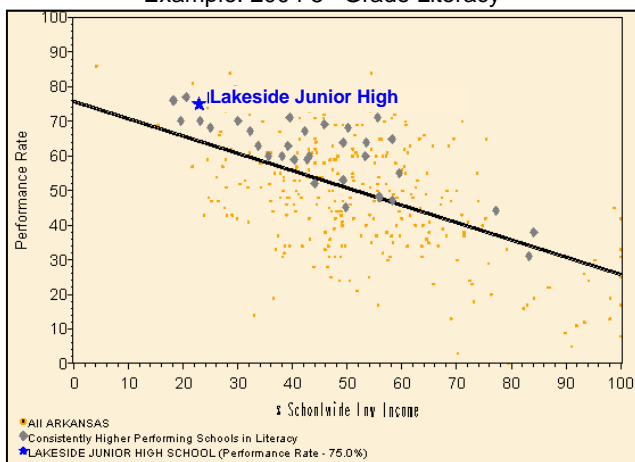
# Lakeside Junior High School Lakeside School District

## Just for the Kids, Arkansas NCEA Executive Summary

### The School

Lakeside Junior High School, which serves 463 eighth- and ninth-grade students, is the only junior high school in Lakeside School District (2,557 students). Lakeside's student population is 90.2% White, 4.6% African American, 2.8% Hispanic, and 2.4% Asian. Within this student population, 22.9% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Literacy



### Consistent Higher Performance

Lakeside Junior High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics and literacy in an analysis that included all eighth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Lakeside Junior High School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 86.5 in mathematics and 92.9 in literacy.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002 Percentile Rank	2003 Percentile Rank	2004 Percentile Rank	Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
Grade	8	8	8	
Mathematics	85	89	86	86.5
Literacy	97	89	92	92.9

\*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights. For detailed information on individual and overall average performance ranks for Lakeside Junior High School, please visit [www.just4kids.org](http://www.just4kids.org).

### Major Findings

Data analysis is a large part of the district's and school's goal-setting process, which is based on pinpointing strengths and weaknesses. Teachers and district facilitators develop pacing guides, discuss teaching strategies, and plan common assessments. Planning among teachers takes place both vertically and horizontally. Teacher collaboration time is a priority at the school. The district expects teachers to collaborate and compensates them for their time. Instructional programs must be research-based, and teachers are a part of the selection process. Teachers do not see these programs as complete solutions for student learning needs, but as adaptable tools for teaching. Teachers collaborate to create common nine-week assessments that are made from released Arkansas end-of-course examination items. Teams write individualized remediation plans for students who do not receive "proficient" scores on the state assessment. The school offers remediation time after school, and the school provides transportation for students who participate. Retention is a potential consequence for students who choose not to participate.



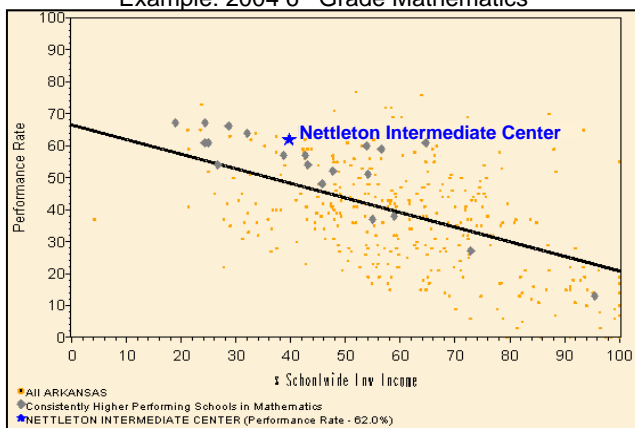
# Nettleton Intermediate Center Nettleton Public Schools

## Just for the Kids, Arkansas NCEA Executive Summary

### The School

Nettleton Intermediate Center, which serves 418 fifth- and sixth-grade students, is the only junior high school in Nettleton Public Schools (2,845 students). Nettleton's student population is 78.7% White, 17.2% African American, 3.0% Hispanic, and 1.1% Asian. Within this student population, 39.7% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Mathematics



### Consistent Higher Performance

Nettleton Intermediate Center is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics and literacy in an analysis that included all sixth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Nettleton Intermediate Center demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 95.3 in mathematics and 78.3 in literacy.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002 Percentile Rank	2003 Percentile Rank	2004 Percentile Rank	Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
Grade	6	6	6	
Mathematics	96	93	97	95.3
Literacy	51	89	91	78.3

\*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights. For detailed information on individual and overall average performance ranks for Nettleton Intermediate Center, please visit [www.just4kids.org](http://www.just4kids.org).

### Major Findings

The district began aligning its curriculum several years ago with the introduction of the Arkansas State Standards. The standards, which at first were fairly vague, drove the district to focus on intense mapping and vertical alignment. With the state now developing its standards into more specific grade-level requirements in core subjects, the district is shifting its focus to analyzing and documenting standards-based instruction at the classroom level. Teachers benefit from daily common planning times, during which they discuss student needs or coordinate lesson plans. The district “pays special attention” to the selection of special education teachers and uses creative ideas to increase the pool of candidates. For example, regular education teachers who show interest are given opportunities to work in special education classrooms to explore that interest. Several district-level personnel trained in data analysis are available to assist principals as needed. According to one administrator, the district believes that “the central office works for the building principal and not that the building principal works for the superintendent or central office staff.” The district works to meet the needs of all students by offering before- and after-school programs, social work services, mental health services, family resource centers, and health care services.

The entire case study may be viewed at [http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study\\_framework.cfm?study=Arkansas](http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=Arkansas).



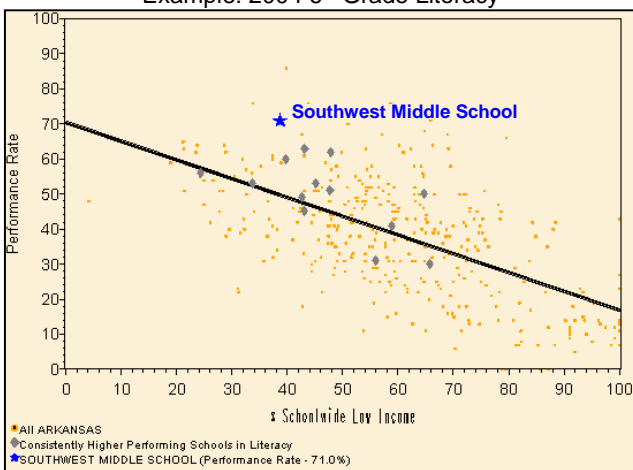
# Southwest Middle School Searcy School District

## Just for the Kids, Arkansas NCEA Executive Summary

### The School

Southwest Middle School, which serves 589 fifth- and sixth-grade students, is the only middle school in Searcy School District (3,695 students). Southwest's student population is 85.3% White, 10.4% African American, 3.5% Hispanic, 0.7% Asian, and 0.1% other. Within this student population, 38.7% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Literacy



### Consistent Higher Performance

Southwest Middle School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics and literacy in an analysis that included all sixth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Southwest Middle School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 83.1 in mathematics and 85.0 in literacy.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002 Percentile Rank	2003 Percentile Rank	2004 Percentile Rank	Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
Grade	6	6	6	
Mathematics	87	72	89	83.1
Literacy	82	74	97	85.0

\*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights. For detailed information on individual and overall average performance ranks for Southwest Middle School, please visit [www.just4kids.org](http://www.just4kids.org).

### Major Findings

Teams of teachers and facilitators review and develop curriculum on an on-going basis, with vertical and horizontal alignment as key goals. All teachers are involved in the curriculum development and revision processes. There is a team approach to instruction at the school. Common preparation time is in place for sharing teaching strategies and teacher-created instructional materials. Teachers visit each other's classrooms, and support specialists are in place to provide assistance for them. The school pilots research-based instructional programs before adoption. Teachers supplement selected programs with additional materials as needed to meet individual student needs. The school monitors student progress with a variety of data, including SAT-9, ITBS, and other data from the National Office for Research, Measurement and Evaluation Systems (NORMES). The school recognizes academic achievement in a student assembly, and the top two students receive special recognition. The school awards medals to students who earn all As and Bs.

The entire case study may be viewed at [http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study\\_framework.cfm?study=Arkansas](http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=Arkansas).



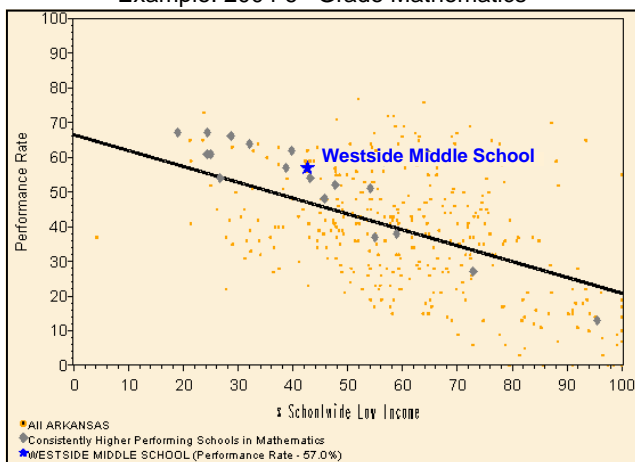
# Westside Middle School Westside Consolidated School District

## Just for the Kids, Arkansas NCEA Executive Summary

### The School

Westside Middle School, which serves 434 fifth- through seventh-grade students, is the only middle school in Westside Consolidated School District (1,670 students). Westside's student population is 98.1% White, 1.7% Hispanic, and 0.2% African American. Within this student population, 42.6% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Mathematics



### Consistent Higher Performance

Westside Middle School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics and literacy in an analysis that included all sixth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Westside Middle School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 74.4 in mathematics and 67.8 in literacy.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002 Percentile Rank	2003 Percentile Rank	2004 Percentile Rank	Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
Grade	6	6	6	
Mathematics	81	61	82	74.4
Literacy	93	61	52	67.8

\*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights. For detailed information on individual and overall average performance ranks for Westside Middle School, please visit [www.just4kids.org](http://www.just4kids.org).

### Major Findings

State frameworks guide the district curriculum. Each year, teachers compare previous district frameworks and pacing guides with state standards in order to further refine or revamp the curriculum. Westside Middle School emphasizes quality professional development during every staff meeting. Staff development also takes place in small group meetings during common grade-level planning times, after-school meetings, and curriculum development gatherings. The district focuses on consistently offering programs that support its mission to become a leader in education. Gifted and talented programs, *Title I Math*, *Title I Reading*, ELLA (*Early Literacy Learning in Arkansas*), and *Literacy Lab* offer students the opportunities they need to achieve academically. Teacher evaluators ask students to teach them the same way their teachers have been teaching, allowing students to demonstrate how and what they have learned as a result of the teachers' skills. One administrator added, "The ultimate evaluation is going to be student achievement." Formal programs like *Pathwise* (from Educational Testing Service) and informal mentoring programs allow teachers to feel supported and encouraged during difficult school years.

The entire case study may be viewed at [http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study\\_framework.cfm?study=Arkansas](http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=Arkansas).



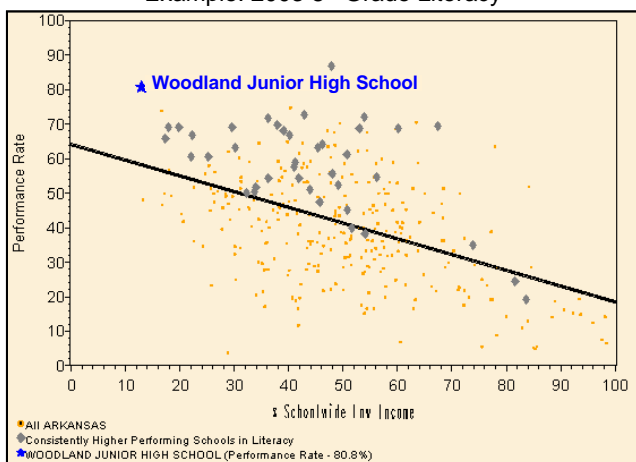
# Woodland Junior High School Fayetteville School District

## Just for the Kids, Arkansas NCEA Executive Summary

### The School

Woodland Junior High School, which serves 619 eighth- and ninth-grade students, is one of two junior high schools in Fayetteville Public Schools (8,212 students). Woodland's student population is 91.4% White, 2.8% African American, 2.8% Hispanic, 2.3% Asian, and 0.7% other. Within this student population, 18.1% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2003 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Literacy



### Consistent Higher Performance

Woodland Junior High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in mathematics and literacy in an analysis that included all eighth-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Woodland Junior High School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 98.3 in mathematics and 98.0 in literacy.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data, with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002 Percentile Rank	2003 Percentile Rank	2004 Percentile Rank	Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
Grade	8	8	8	
Mathematics	99	98	98	98.3
Literacy	99	98	97	98.0

\*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights. For detailed information on individual and overall average performance ranks for Woodland Junior High School, please visit [www.just4kids.org](http://www.just4kids.org).

### Major Findings

Several years ago, the district restructured its organizational chart to create an assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. Having one person oversee the curriculum from kindergarten through twelfth grade allows for better vertical and horizontal curriculum alignment. An assistant superintendent both supervises and mentors principals. The Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Accountability team looks to teachers, appropriate literature, and reviews of successful programs at schools across the nation to help select instructional programs. The district benchmarks other high-performing schools and brings their best practices into the district. The district is using the Performance Growth Index (PGI), which is a value-added measure developed for use with standardized tests. The PGI and the reporting procedures present results that teachers, parents, and other educational stakeholders can readily understand. A district administrator adds that all district administrators are “really focusing on getting principals to understand the value of spending time interpreting scores so that they can assist teachers in improving instruction.” Woodland Junior High engages in “point-in-time” remediation in the classroom—teachers reserve the last portion of every class for independent work and remediation.

The entire case study may be viewed at [http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study\\_framework.cfm?study=Arkansas](http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=Arkansas).



# Arkansas Middle School Best Practice Study: Findings

*Based on the Themes of The JFTK Framework*

Five organizing themes provided the structure for studying the practices of consistently higher performing schools. The themes are listed below.

1. Curriculum and Academic Goals
2. Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building
3. Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements
4. Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data
5. Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment

These themes are used below to summarize the findings of this study. The themes represent the broad topics that connect best practices across different school system levels—district, school, and classroom. Together, these themes capture the primary instructional activities undertaken by school systems and represent the major content areas in which practices of higher performing school systems differ from their average-performing counterparts.

The first theme described in The JFTK Best Practice Framework forms the foundation of The Framework. Each of the other four themes rests upon the assumption that there is absolute clarity about what is to be taught and learned by grade level—pre-K-12. Therefore, Curriculum and Academic Goals forms the base of The Framework. Building upon that base, higher performing schools are deliberate about selecting and developing their human resources (Theme Two: Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building) and equipping all staff with evidence-based tools and strategies to deliver the curriculum (Theme Three: Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements). With people, tools, and strategies in place, higher performing schools regularly monitor student progress (Theme Four: Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data). Finally, higher performing schools are quick to respond to student achievement data—recognizing success and intervening or adjusting when necessary to ensure all students reach the stated standards (Theme Five: Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment).



## Theme One: Curriculum and Academic Goals

*"What is Taught and Learned"*

This theme focuses on the learning target. What is it that we expect all students to know and be able to do by grade and subject? Consistently higher performing school systems have clear academic targets from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Principals and teachers understand the learning goals and understand that these goals are for all students and are non-negotiable.

### Specific Arkansas Findings: Curriculum and Academic Goals

- **Districts build upon the state standards to create more rigorous district curricula. Teacher teams contribute to the curriculum development process by creating clarifying support materials, such as curriculum maps, lesson plans, and scope and sequence documents.**
  - The curriculum is evaluated and updated regularly. The district curriculum is flexible so that it can be updated to include the most current changes to state frameworks. According to

one teacher, “We use Arkansas frameworks and build our curriculum based on the frameworks.” (Barton Junior High School, El Dorado School District)

- In El Dorado School District, kindergarten through twelfth-grade teachers align centralized curriculum maps that focus on mathematics and literacy. Teachers, staff, administration, and school board members work collaboratively to create and revise a district curriculum that addresses the state standards while providing students with opportunities to excel beyond minimum standards. (Barton Junior High School, El Dorado School District)
- District-wide vertical teams of teachers develop the curriculum based on state standards and testing data. Teacher teams meet annually to revise the curriculum. One administrator explained, “I think we always want to keep that revision ongoing. We revisit it every year, analyze the data, and look for gaps.” (Cabot Middle School South, Cabot School District)
- Staff members address the breadth and flexibility of state standards by working together to identify what they call “power standards.” The school defines power standards as the standards that are most likely to have a measurable effect on a child’s achievement. One administrator said, “The curriculum ties the standards together in a process that allows for meaningful instruction that can be measured in student success.” (Harrison Middle School, Harrison School District)
- The district’s director of curriculum development works with principals, subject-level liaisons, and teachers in vertical and horizontal teams to establish academic goals and timelines. Teachers at Harrison Middle School attended a training session for *Curriculum Mapper* with the district curriculum coordinator, which enabled them to both learn about and create curriculum maps. Teachers credit the session with allowing them to see where important content is missing in their curriculum and where topics overlap. This process allows them to streamline the curriculum. (Harrison Middle School, Harrison School District)
- The district bases student learning objectives on the state frameworks, and organizes these objectives quarterly pacing guides. (L.A. Chaffin Junior High School, Fort Smith Public Schools)
- Through committee work, teachers and district facilitators develop pacing guides, discuss teaching strategies, and plan common assessments. The school and district closely monitor changes to state frameworks and make adjustments to align their curriculum with current state standards. (Lakeside Junior High School, Lakeside School District)
- The district began aligning its curriculum several years ago with the introduction of the Arkansas State Standards. The standards, which at first were fairly vague, drove the district to focus on intense mapping and vertical alignment. With the state now developing its standards into more specific grade-level requirements in core subjects, the district is shifting its focus to analyzing and documenting standards-based instruction at the classroom level. (Nettleton Intermediate Center, Nettleton Public Schools)
- The district has a comprehensive curriculum guide that it updates as needed to reflect state and national standards. One district administrator noted, “We’re constantly checking and making sure that we know if there are any changes being made in the state frameworks.” (Southwest Middle School, Searcy School District)
- All teachers are involved in the curriculum revision process. Groups of teachers meet to review a particular content area and to modify curriculum guides as needed. One administrator attributes much of the school’s success to teachers’ use of the curriculum guides: “We’ve had phenomenal growth, and it all centers on the teachers knowing how and what to teach and then doing it.” (Southwest Middle School, Searcy School District)
- State frameworks guide the district curriculum. Each year, teachers compare previous district frameworks and pacing guides with state standards in order to further refine or revamp the curriculum. Curriculum maps are available on the district website. (Westside Middle School, Westside Consolidated School District)

- An assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction oversees the ongoing curriculum revision process. Teacher input, changing state requirements, and state frameworks are all prominent parts of the revision process. (Woodland Junior High School, Fayetteville Public Schools)
- **School systems ensure instructional continuity for highly mobile student populations in kindergarten through twelfth grade by using both grade-level and vertical curriculum alignment.**
  - One teacher explained, “Last year in Language Arts, there was an across-the-district meeting, and we were able to meet with the fourth-grade teachers and the seventh- and eighth-grade teachers. This allowed for the least amount of grade slippage and repetition possible. We were able to align our curriculum, and it was great to have that conversation with other educators.” (Cabot Middle School South, Cabot School District)
  - Teachers meet with instructors of other grades and—district wide—within their subject areas to ensure vertical and horizontal alignment of student expectations. (Hamburg Junior High School, Hamburg School District)
  - One teacher noted the value of horizontal curriculum coordination: “The district hired a curriculum coordinator last year, and I think that has really helped us to come together. We know that in sixth-grade language arts, all sixth-grade teachers are on the same page. They all have the same student learning expectations, and they’re able to share ideas of how to create curriculum maps.” (Harrison Middle School, Harrison School District)
  - The district employs a literacy and mathematics task force for kindergarten through twelfth grade. “Theoretically,” according to one teacher, “every eighth-grade teacher should be covering the same material at the same time, and we just have it broken down: ‘In this month, you’re going to cover this material.’ And then we cross-reference what SLEs [student learning expectations] are addressed at that time.” (L.A. Chaffin Junior High School, Fort Smith Public Schools)
  - Curriculum development and instructional planning are coordinated both vertically and horizontally. As an administrator pointed out, “I think one of the best things we did in curriculum development was to have kindergarten teachers talk about what that [standard] meant in their classrooms and have high school teachers listen to that. When our kindergarten teachers or elementary teachers would hear what the students were actually having to do with those concepts or skills in high school, it would make sense.” (Lakeside Junior High School, Lakeside School District)
  - One teacher said, “When we’re doing the curriculum mapping, you’ll usually have about three grade levels work together, so that we know that we’re making the connections between grade levels.” (Nettleton Intermediate Center, Nettleton Public Schools)
  - Curriculum review and development is ongoing, with vertical and horizontal alignment as key goals. (Southwest Middle School, Searcy School District)
  - Mathematics and literacy teachers meet regularly to plan instruction, in order to maintain vertical and horizontal curriculum alignment. A teacher explained, “You can get on the website and look to see what the previous teacher has done and what the one ahead of you is doing, so you can be prepared.” (Westside Middle School, Westside Consolidated School District)
  - Several years ago, the district restructured its organizational chart to create an assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. Having one person oversee the curriculum from kindergarten through twelfth grade allows for better vertical and horizontal curriculum alignment. (Woodland Junior High School, Fayetteville Public Schools)



## Theme Two: Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

### *"Selecting and Developing Leaders and Teachers"*

This second theme focuses on the selection and development of a school system's most precious commodity—people. Once the academic goals of the system are clear, the leaders and teachers are selected and given professional development opportunities to make these goals a reality for every learner in the system.

### Specific Arkansas Findings: Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

- **Districts actively develop internal candidates for leadership positions.**
  - The district made the decision to “grow its own” principals by promoting leadership training and participation in the master principal program. (Cabot Middle School South, Cabot School District)
  - The district works hard to develop internal candidates for administrative positions. The district encourages interested teachers who show instructional leadership in the classroom to consider assistant principal positions and continue their studies. One administrator explained, “Developing leaders is a matter of trying to facilitate effective communications, having the opportunity to grow to use their skills, and trying to provide opportunities for them to present at state and national meetings.” (L.A. Chaffin Junior High School, Fort Smith Public Schools)
  - The district is always looking for promising internal candidates for administrative positions. The district and the school encourage teachers who display administrative potential to accept opportunities to engage in leadership activities. (Nettleton Intermediate Center, Nettleton Public Schools)
- **Mentors provide support to new principals and teachers.**
  - The district takes pride in the mentoring program it provides to all new teachers and principals. (Barton Junior High School, El Dorado School District)
  - Teachers visit other classes for ideas and to share professional development materials. Additionally, support specialists are in place to provide assistance for the teachers. (Southwest Middle School, Searcy School District)
  - Typically, more time is devoted to supporting new principals, but all principals meet district wide monthly and receive the full support of the district. One school administrator noted, “My immediate supervisor spent a great deal of time coming to my building and talking to me. We talked on the phone at least daily.” (Woodland Junior High School, Fayetteville Public Schools)
- **Professional development activities are ongoing and practice-oriented. Districts and schools actively encourage their staffs to grow professionally.**
  - In addition to district- and school-wide in-service workshops, teachers attend state and regional meetings, national conferences, and the Arkansas Leadership Academy. A foundation provides money for teachers to attend conferences. One administrator explained the benefit of teachers attending conferences: “I think our district realizes that, when you go out and have the opportunity to see new things and talk to other people, it gets you excited. You need teachers who are excited about what they are doing.” (Barton Junior High School, El Dorado School District)
  - Staff members receive an incentive of \$500 for earning 90 hours or more of professional development each year. One teacher noted, “The incentives for training are probably one

of the outstanding practices we have as far as professional development.” (Cabot Middle School South, Cabot School District)

- The district has obtained a grant through the Foundation for the Mid South. This grant provides teachers with training and tools for working with low-income students and developing common quarterly assessments. The grant also allows teachers to attend national conferences and to visit schools with similar student needs. (Hamburg Junior High School, Hamburg School District)
- Although teachers make their own selections for professional development upon meeting state requirements, the district requests that teachers follow a conceptual path for their professional development, so that they can specialize in their areas. (L.A. Chaffin Junior High, Fort Smith Public Schools)
- Westside emphasizes quality professional development during all staff meetings. Staff development takes place in small group meetings during grade-level common planning times, after-school meetings, and curriculum development gatherings. (Westside Middle School, Westside Consolidated School District)

▪ **The school schedule accommodates teacher collaboration and planning activities. School administrators ensure that teachers use the allotted time appropriately.**

- Weekly subject-specific meetings provide time for teachers to discuss curriculum issues. (Cabot Middle School South, Cabot School District)
- All teachers have common planning time by grade level. This time is spent developing interdisciplinary units, meeting with parents, discussing individual student needs, and coordinating curriculum. (Hamburg Junior High School, Hamburg School District)
- Interviewees viewed their strong horizontal teaming approach as a major factor in their success. One administrator noted, “Without teams, middle schools are going to flounder. With teams that do not function, they may not be any better, so the key is teaming.” The principal stated, “You’ve got to have that collegiality. You’ve got to have people working together towards a common goal.” According to one teacher, “We’ve never been turned down when we asked to work together as a team.” (Harrison Middle School, Harrison School District)
- Teachers have scheduled, daily meetings that are guided by an agenda that includes activities such as reviewing lesson plans, examining student data, discussing teaching strategies, and considering opportunities for content integration. The principal noted that collaboration extends into the classroom as well. (Harrison Middle School, Harrison School District)
- Teacher collaboration is a priority at Lakeside Junior High. Teachers are expected to collaborate and are compensated for their time. This collaboration results in coordinated instruction, as one teacher explained: “We each do the same lessons. We have the same student learning expectations. For example, if you were to walk in[to] [another teacher’s] room today and into mine, you would see us teaching the same student learning expectation. We give the same tests. We work together. We are in contact with each other daily.” (Lakeside Junior High School, Lakeside School District)
- Teachers benefit from daily common planning times, during which they discuss student needs or coordinate lesson plans. (Nettleton Intermediate Center, Nettleton Public Schools)
- Departments hold weekly meetings to share teaching strategies. Common preparation time is in place for sharing ideas, documents, and teacher-created materials. One teacher explained, “We share resources; we share teacher-created documents. At all times, we are moving toward the same goal and trying to meet the same expectations.” Another teacher said, “To be able to work with other teachers and learn from them, to help make my own teaching stronger and better, has really been rewarding.” (Southwest Middle School, Searcy School District)



## Theme Three: Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

### *"The Right Stuff—Time and Tools"*

This theme focuses on the "things" that higher performing school systems use—the arrangement of time, the instructional resources and materials, technology, etc. Strong instructional leaders and highly qualified teachers need evidence-based tools and resources to reach high standards with every learner.

### Specific Arkansas Findings: Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

- **District staff select instructional programs based on achievement test results and student needs. Adopted programs are based on scientific research and are closely aligned with state standards and district curricula.**
  - Educators rigorously research and review the effectiveness and utility of potential instructional programs prior to implementation. Upon choosing a new program, the district hires outside consultants to train the teachers and staff on the program. The school evaluates the effectiveness of programs by examining benchmark and ITBS scores, as well as by examining data provided by the teachers. (Barton Junior High School, El Dorado School District)
  - In place of site-based teams, district-wide teams select instructional programs and establish schedules, ensuring more accountability for program use and core instruction time. Faculty teams work to align these programs across schools in the district. (Cabot Middle School South, Cabot School District)
  - Selection of instructional programs and materials is based on need and must meet the district criteria for a "rigorous curriculum." The district invests heavily in the Pre-Advanced and Advanced Placement model and has seen success with the College Board program. (L.A. Chaffin Junior High School, Fort Smith Public Schools)
  - Potential instructional programs must be research-based to be considered for adoption, and teachers must be part of the selection process. Instructional programs are not concrete solutions for student needs, but rather adaptable tools for teaching. (Lakeside Junior High School, Lakeside School District)
  - The school pilots research-based instructional programs before adoption. Still, according to an administrator, "Every program and every textbook are just tools. They're not our curriculum." (Southwest Middle School, Searcy School District)
  - The district focuses on consistently offering programs that support its mission to become a leader in education. Gifted and talented programs, *Title I Math*, *Title I Reading*, *Early Literacy Learning in Arkansas*, and *Literacy Lab* offer students the opportunities they need to achieve academically. (Westside Middle School, Westside Consolidated School District)
  - The Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Accountability team looks to teachers, appropriate literature, and reviews of successful programs at schools across the nation to help select instructional programs. The district benchmarks other high-performing schools and brings their best practices into the district. (Woodland Junior High School, Fayetteville Public Schools)
- **Teachers use differentiated instructional strategies and flexible grouping arrangements to effectively meet students' needs and ensure that all students work at their ability levels.**
  - Each classroom has a focus time every day from 8:00 AM to 8:15 AM for students to work on reading, writing, and mathematics skills. Co-teaching allows students with special needs to remain in the general education classroom. (Barton Junior High School, El Dorado School District)

- Special education teachers accompany students with special needs in general education classrooms. (Hamburg Junior High School, Hamburg School District)
  - The school uses flexible grouping arrangements to meet the needs of students. For example, all students enter Algebra I at the appropriate grade level. Those who perform very well over the course of the first nine weeks and are proficient on the state assessments move into advanced Algebra courses. (Hamburg Junior High School, Hamburg School District)
  - Classrooms are as heterogeneous as possible. This arrangement helps the teams and the administrator evaluate student performance across the school, to determine what is working and what is not. (Harrison Middle School, Harrison School District)
  - Four schools utilize *Literacy Lab*. Through the state-based program, classrooms become communities of learners using a workshop instructional approach. The program emphasizes strategic reading, with comprehension instruction, writing instruction, vocabulary instruction, word study, and assessment. (Harrison Middle School, Harrison School District; L.A. Chaffin Junior High, Fort Smith Public Schools; Nettleton Intermediate Center, Nettleton Public Schools; Westside Middle School, Westside Consolidated School District)
  - General education teachers work closely with special education teachers in and out of the classroom to provide modifications and improve instructional strategies. (Lakeside Junior High School, Lakeside School District)
  - Various programs are in place to meet the needs of students, including special education, gifted and talented programs, enrichment activities, and pull-out resources. Components of these programs include extra-curricular activities, hands-on projects, and alternative assessments. (Southwest Middle School, Searcy School District)
- **Teachers tailor their instruction and instructional materials to the needs of their students, viewing instructional programs as being tools of instruction, not as being the curriculum itself.**
- Teachers utilize Bloom's (1956) *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* and Marzano's (2001) *Classroom Instruction that Works* to better inform practice in the classroom. The principal said, "When students are fully engaged, they're learning, so that makes high-quality instruction. We're training our teachers in more of the Marzano high-yield strategies to help them learn how to get their students engaged." (Cabot Middle School South, Cabot School District)
  - Rather than relying on one particular program or textbook, teachers pull from a variety of instructional programs and materials to meet student needs. (Hamburg Junior High School, Hamburg School District)
  - Teachers strive for high-quality instruction that engages students, meets curricular objectives and frameworks, challenges students at the appropriate level of difficulty, and uses relevant assessments. The school views state and national accountability as having a positive impact on instruction by expecting higher levels of professionalism from teachers and improving instruction overall. One administrator said, "Accountability has ratcheted up the focus on instruction in an unbelievable manner." A teacher commented, "I think the administrator of the school is really good at always challenging us to look at new ways to teach, encouraging us to use best practices." (Harrison Middle School, Harrison School District)
  - An administrator commented, "It started out as being *their* [the publisher's] writing program and ended up being *our* writing program, because most of the programs we bring in, our teachers tear apart. So what you hope you can do is get them the resources for them to develop their own program, because our kids are pretty unique." (Lakeside Junior High School, Lakeside School District)
  - High-quality instruction involves students overtly meeting learning objectives. Teachers must be able to gauge students' intake of new information and adjust instruction accordingly. (Lakeside Junior High School, Lakeside School District)

- Approximately seven years ago, the school dramatically changed its approach to social studies. Instead of using a standard social studies textbook, teachers now use mostly teacher-made materials and supplements. This has greatly improved student interest. (Nettleton Intermediate Center, Nettleton Public Schools)
- The school enjoys the freedom to select and develop instructional programs and materials to best meet the needs of students. Teachers can select the teaching methods that are best for them and their students and are free to supplement instructional programs with additional materials. One administrator said, “The philosophy here is that [teachers] take from any program they want to, but then use what best fits their teaching style and the needs of their students.” (Southwest Middle School, Searcy School District)
- Administrators, teachers, and staff at Westside believe that high-quality classroom instruction occurs in an interactive atmosphere. The district emphasizes this even further by stressing hand-on, exploratory activities in all classes. The classrooms at Westside Middle School are constantly buzzing with “learning noise and dialogue.” The principal stated, “I consider an active classroom one where activities are going on. Kids should be involved beyond the superficial level. Use their knowledge and the facts and develop an activity to really get them involved and make them feel like a part of the learning.” (Westside Middle School, Westside Consolidated School District)



### Theme Four: Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

*"Knowing the Learners and the Numbers"*

After clearly identifying what is to be taught and learned by grade and subject and ensuring that the schools are equipped with the staff and the tools to successfully deliver the curriculum, the school system then asks and answers an important question: "How are we going to know if students learned what we said they would learn?"

### Specific Arkansas Findings: Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

- **School administrators use multiple observations (formal and informal) and student achievement data to inform teacher evaluations.**
  - The principal monitors and informally evaluates teachers on a weekly basis via classroom walk-throughs, informative sessions, and observations at various times during the day. Each teacher also has a formal evaluation, and the principal meets with the teacher before and after that evaluation. (Barton Junior High School, El Dorado School District)
  - One administrator described how he uses formative assessment data to monitor instruction: "I look at all the chunk tests; I get our Instructional Resource Teachers (IRTs) to give me a printout of what all students did. I look at what teachers' percentage of proficiency rates are, and we use that as a tool to evaluate teachers." (Barton Junior High School, El Dorado School District)
  - Classroom walk-throughs have become an important element in monitoring teacher performance. Principals record information in Palm Pilots and use the information to guide discussions in administrative meetings. Superintendents, principals, academic coaches, and central office staff all conduct walk-throughs to ensure alignment and consistency. One administrator explained, "Our goal is to be in every classroom within a two-week period. The superintendent did 80 classroom walk-throughs last year." (Cabot Middle School South, Cabot School District)

- Teacher evaluators ask students to teach them the same way their teachers have been teaching, allowing students to demonstrate how and what they have learned as a result of the teachers' skills. As an administrator pointed out, however, "The ultimate evaluation [of instruction] is going to be student achievement." One teacher noted the impact of regular, informal walk-through observations: "The principal is very visible. He's everywhere. He's in the halls three, four, five times a day." (Westside Middle School, Westside Consolidated School District)
- **Educators monitor student learning and identify students' needs through varied and ongoing district and classroom assessments.**
  - Teachers record ITBS and benchmark scores in their grade books, so they have immediate access to those data for reference. This allows the teachers to consistently focus on the needs of students. Teachers also use the *Step Up to Writing* system to track students' progress. Teachers meet with students to review their scores, so students also understand their strengths and weaknesses. District-wide common assessments called "chunk tests" allow teachers and administrators to track student progress. One administrator noted, "The chunk test is a tool we use to prepare kids for the benchmark. It also allows us to look at our curriculum to make sure that we're in place in terms of meeting student needs." (Barton Junior High School, El Dorado School District)
  - The district is implementing common assessments developed by teams of teachers across the district based on released benchmark items. One administrator stated, "The teachers are developing common assessments, and the district is working on a common assessment in math right now. Students also work on a program in their computer lab called *SuccessMaker*, which is assessing them all the time to see what level they are on." (Cabot Middle School South, Cabot School District)
  - The district supports "landmark" (formative) testing throughout its schools. Teachers within each school develop these landmark tests, which are common core-subject quarterly assessments, with the help of the Foundation for the Mid South. These assessments allow nimble monitoring and remediation. (Hamburg Junior High, Hamburg School District)
  - The district monitors goals primarily through curriculum and instructional program assessment, student test scores, and archival data. (Harrison Middle School, Harrison School District)
  - At the district level, the mathematics and literacy task forces design quarterly assessments. A teacher explained, "The taskforces' assignment is to design end-of-quarter assessments. Those assessments pretty much mirror the [Arkansas Benchmark Assessments]." (L.A. Chaffin Junior High School, Fort Smith Public Schools)
  - Teachers at Lakeside Junior High work together to create common nine-weeks assessments. According to one teacher, "We make our tests from the Arkansas end-of-course examination released items\*." (Lakeside Junior High School, Lakeside School District)
  - The school monitors student progress with a variety of data, including SAT-9, ITBS, and data from the National Office for Research, Measurement and Evaluation Systems. (Southwest Middle School, Searcy School District)
- **Schools and teachers receive adequate student data to inform instructional practices. Item analysis of test questions allows teachers to pinpoint their instructional adjustments.**
  - District-level Instructional Resource Teachers (IRTs) interpret data for teachers at individual schools. (Barton Junior High School, El Dorado School District)
  - A teacher noted, "The academic coach ... took benchmark scores from last year, compiled the data by team, and was able to bring us that data. For the first time, we have hands-on data of the students we have, and we can see their strengths and weaknesses in each of the strands." (Cabot Middle School South, Cabot School District)

\*Released items include those questions from the formal state assessment that are made public following the administration of the examination. Most educators agree that access to actual state assessment items promotes a much deeper understanding of the way in which particular standards will be assessed.

- Teachers receive assistance in monitoring, compiling, and analyzing test data from mathematics and literacy coaches. One teacher remarked, “It helps me to look at the data before [the school year begins] and know pretty much where my students stand.” (Hamburg Junior High School, Hamburg School District)
- The school tries to provide teachers information in a format that is readily available and easy to use. An administrator said, “We try to get as much information into the teachers’ hands as we can.” (Harrison Middle School, Harrison School District)
- The district utilizes an “Office of Student Achievement,” which is responsible for managing and evaluating student data. Every school in the district develops an individual school plan for using student data. (L.A. Chaffin Junior High School, Fort Smith Public Schools)
- Several district-level personnel trained in data analysis are available to assist principals as needed. The focus on data extends to teachers as well. One teacher confirmed this accessibility by stating, “We really analyze the test data.” (Nettleton Intermediate Center, Nettleton Public Schools)
- Teachers develop targets for their instruction based on the use of data. These data come from end-of-year student evaluations, which are comprised of test data, grades, formative evaluations, teacher-made tests, and benchmark exams. One teacher noted, “We have a lot of data available to us, provided by the principal and school district. We know particular weaknesses, and we look at data at the student level.” Another teacher said, “I start monitoring by identifying particular goals: ‘What’s the first thing I want this child to do on the next essay?’ Then, I’m constantly targeting.” (Southwest Middle School, Searcy School District)
- The district is using the Performance Growth Index (PGI), which is a value-added measure developed for use with standardized tests. The PGI and the reporting procedures present results that teachers, parents, and other educational stakeholders can readily understand. (Woodland Junior High School, Fayetteville Public Schools)



## Theme Five: Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment

### *“Ensuring All Children Learn”*

The most important question of all follows the monitoring of student performance: “What are we going to do if students do not learn the knowledge and skills we said they would learn?” Higher performing school systems have *pyramids of intervention* that provide immediate and intense intervention at multiple levels when learning is interrupted.

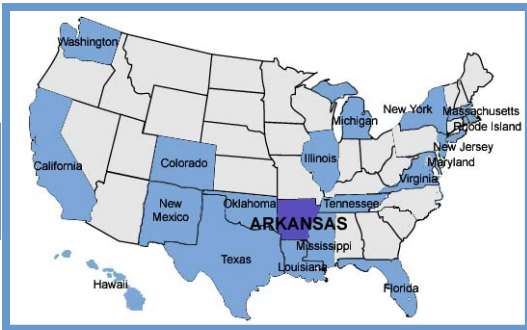
### Specific Arkansas Findings: Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment

- **Districts and schools provide numerous opportunities to recognize the successes of both students and their teachers.**
  - The local newspaper prints the names of honor roll students within the district. The Murphy Foundation provides a monetary award to students who have outstanding scores on ITBS, ACT, SAT, and AP tests. Seniors in the district who miss fewer than five days throughout their high school career are eligible for a drawing to win a new car. (Barton Junior High School, El Dorado School District)
  - The district recognizes outstanding teachers at each school and grade level. Each year, one teacher in the district is selected as the teacher of the year, an honor that comes with a monetary award. (Barton Junior High School, El Dorado School District)

- The school recognizes academic achievement in a student assembly, and the top two students receive special recognition. The school awards medals to students who earn all As and Bs. (Southwest Middle School, Searcy School District)
  - The guidance counselor hosts an awards assembly every nine weeks and acknowledges students with good attendance, high grades, most improvement, and most commitment. (Westside Middle School, Westside Consolidated School District)
  - The district recognizes students, parents, teachers, and principals. Awards may also be televised live over local education channels. (Woodland Junior High School, Fayetteville Public Schools)
- **Struggling schools and teachers receive various forms of assistance.**
    - The district assists low-performing schools in obtaining grants and additional resources, such as instructional programs or parental training, to meet their needs. (Cabot Middle School South, Cabot School District)
    - The district's approach to intervening with low-performing schools is to provide intense support for struggling students. As one district administrator explained, "School improvement is geared towards those low-performing students [who] make up the low-performing school." (L.A. Chaffin Junior High School, Fort Smith Public Schools)
    - The district employs specialized mathematics and literacy academic coaches who assist new and/or struggling teachers in meeting curricular needs. They assist new and/or struggling teachers. These academic coaches do not hold administrative positions; therefore, they are able to work closely with teachers and provide assistance without formally evaluating performance. As one administrator said, "Sometimes you can have a teacher that's struggling, and you can assign a coach to them for a three-week period of time—[a time] of intense, everyday help." (Lakeside Junior High School, Lakeside School District)
    - Formal programs like *Pathwise* (from Educational Testing Service) and informal mentoring programs provide teachers with support and encouragement during difficult school years. (Westside Middle School, Westside Consolidated School District)
  - **Schools provide students with appropriately leveled intervention opportunities both within and outside the traditional school day.**
    - A strong tutoring program is in place to help any student who needs help. Pre-AP and AP programs in science, mathematics, and English are available for academically advanced and gifted and talented students. (Barton Junior High School, El Dorado School District)
    - Any student needing remediation also has an opportunity for enhancement during extra time provided before, during, and after the school day. High-achieving students who are not identified as being eligible for the Gifted and Talented Program are provided services through another advanced program. (Cabot Middle School South, Cabot School District)
    - The district offers tutoring throughout the school day—as well as before and after school—for students in need of additional assistance. The district also hires additional teachers, so students can "double-up," getting extra instructional time in their weaker subjects. (Hamburg Junior High School, Hamburg School District)
    - Educators identify students for remediation primarily based on performance on state benchmark exams. The school provides intervention classes 30 minutes per day for these students. In addition, each student in the intervention class has an improvement plan that delineates the roles and responsibilities of the student, parents, and staff in increasing student performance. (Harrison Middle School, Harrison School District)
    - Teacher teams work with parents to develop academic improvement plans to prevent retaining students who are not meeting performance standards. If a child fails a course over a nine-week period, teachers are required to meet with parents to determine possible causes and develop a plan for intervention. The principal explained, "For student

interventions, we meet with the parents and do an improvement plan to list what the teacher can do, [what] the child can do, and [what] the parents can do.” (Harrison Middle School, Harrison School District)

- The school offers a host of different activities to address students’ learning needs, including remediation time scheduled during the school day and before- and after-school assistance. Some schools in the district use extended learning days, and others have reconfigured their daily schedules to provide remediation during regular class hours. A teacher at L.A. Chaffin explained the collective responsibility that the staff share for student learning: “The whole school takes some ownership, because there isn’t, ‘That’s math and English, and I don’t have to worry about it.’” (L.A. Chaffin Junior High School, Fort Smith Public Schools)
- The school employs a PLATO lab instructor who designs individual remediation plans for students who score below “proficient” on the state’s benchmark assessment. Remediation plans are flexible. Some students may come to the lab for a few brief lessons; others may come for an entire semester. Each teacher is responsible for monitoring the progress of six students from the remediation group and maintaining regular contact with parents. Students can have additional remediation time after school, and the school provides transportation. (Lakeside Junior High School, Lakeside School District)
- The district works to meet the needs of all students by offering before-school and after-school programs, social workers, mental health services, family resource centers, and health care services. (Nettleton Intermediate Center, Nettleton Public Schools)
- Westside has pull-out Title I programs that place students in activity classes that function as enhanced study halls. In these classes, students receive the extra tutoring they need. Additionally, Westside offers after-school tutoring twice a week to any student who is interested. According to a teacher, “There’s one really big thing that helps me, and that’s the Title I math [teachers]. I give them my lesson plans a few days ahead of time, and then they make lessons that go along with what I’m doing. They actually teach the skills before I teach them, and those students come in here able to answer questions and feel good about themselves. It has really helped a lot. I love that.” (Westside Middle School, Westside Consolidated School District)
- The school offers students who are behind in algebra an additional hour of instruction per day in a mathematics lab setting. The school piloted the program in 2000 with positive results. The district and the state approved the mathematics lab as a standard course. The district recently completed a similar pilot to evaluate and ultimately add a reading workshop course. (Woodland Junior High School, Fayetteville Public Schools)
- Woodland Junior High engages in remediation in the classroom. Teachers reserve the last portion of their classes for independent work and remediation. Students with Academic Improvement Plans (AIPs) receive additional assistance. (Woodland Junior High School, Fayetteville Public Schools)



## Arkansas Middle School Best Practice Study: Conclusion

*Based on the Themes of The JFTK Framework*

Researchers conducted site visits to 15 middle schools in Arkansas, identified through the NCEA analysis. Summaries of the findings of those practices that appeared to distinguish consistently higher performing middle schools from average-performing ones are presented below by theme.

### The Findings

#### **Curriculum and Academic Goals**

*Districts built upon state standards to create more rigorous district curricula. Teacher teams created clarifying support materials, such as lesson plans and unit plans, scope and sequence documents, and pacing guides. Through both horizontal and vertical alignment, districts and schools ensured that instruction was aligned with the standards across all classrooms in all grade levels.*

#### **Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building**

*Districts actively sought to develop potential leaders from within the schools. Principals ensured that teachers had time to collaborate by working formal meeting times into the daily schedule. Specialists in mathematics and literacy were available in order to model effective lessons, guide teachers, or help develop lesson plans.*

#### **Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements**

*Instructional programs, selected based on assessment data, teacher input, and other identified needs, were primarily mandated at the district level. Nonetheless, district and school leaders encouraged teachers to supplement the adopted programs with appropriate classroom materials. Teachers differentiated instruction and used flexible grouping arrangements to effectively meet students' learning needs.*

#### **Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data**

*Educators at all levels regularly reviewed assessment data and monitored student learning. Districts and schools administered formative assessments to monitor student progress throughout the year. Districts returned assessment data to the schools quickly, and teachers adjusted their instruction to meet student needs according to those data.*

#### **Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment**

*Students and teachers alike were recognized for their successes. Celebrations of student achievements took many forms, including awards, special assemblies, and—in one school—the announcement of achievements on local television. Academic coaches and mentors provided support for struggling and new teachers. Students in need of instructional support benefited from additional learning time through before- and after-school programs, pull-out programs, and tutoring in mathematics labs.*

## Next Steps

NCEA's state-study protocol assumes that the state framework of best practices will be built based on a three-year study of consistently higher performing and average-performing schools at the elementary-school level (Year One), middle-school level (Year Two), and high-school level (Year Three). Based on this protocol, JFTK-Arkansas's next step will be to build upon these findings at the middle school level by conducting the study of 15 consistently higher performing and average-performing high schools, using the same framework of best practices.

*One of the dangers of studying consistently higher performing schools is drawing conclusions based on a single school example. To avoid this danger, the conclusions for the JFTK-Arkansas Middle School Best Practice Study, 2004-05, focus on a description of the practices that are most consistent across the higher performing schools in this study and that can be distinguished in quantity or quality from the same practices in average-performing schools of the study. While any individual case study may cite different factors or practices than those noted above, we highlight those practices that are found to be systematically different between the higher performing schools as a group and the average-performing schools as a group. Finally, the practices highlighted in the conclusion of this study have also been informed by the findings from a much larger body of schools studied (300+ across five years and 20 states) to help determine meaning in the context of Arkansas.*