

Site Visit Findings: El Dorado School District Barton Junior High School

Site Visit Overview

El Dorado School District is located in Union County in Southern Arkansas. During the 2004-2005 school year, the district served 4,276 students in grades kindergarten through twelve. The district is committed to “preparing our children for life.” According to the district website, “emphasis is placed on basic skills while at the same time, workforce preparation and advanced preparation for students is offered in a wide range of disciplines.”

Barton Junior High School served 678 students in seven and eighth grades in 2004-2005. The school is committed to providing “each student the opportunity to show continuing progress toward and beyond grade-appropriate proficiency in math and literacy as measured by state and national standards.”

Student Demographics: (2004) *The district and school serve notably more African-American students than the state as a whole.*

	Barton Junior High School	El Dorado School District	Arkansas
% White	41.7	41.1	70.1
% African-American	55.6	56.9	22.9
% Hispanic	1.6	1.4	5.3
% Other	1.0	0.6	1.7

School Support Services: (2004) *The district and school serve more FRLP students than the state.*

	Barton Junior High School	El Dorado School District	Arkansas
% Free and Reduced Lunch	55.8	56.2	44.2
% English as a Second Language	1.5	1.0	2.8
% Special Education	9.0	9.3	11.3

Assessments by Grade: *Barton Junior High School has shown consistent growth in literacy from 2002-2004.*

		Barton Junior High School	Arkansas
Literacy % Proficient (8 th Grade)	2002	35.3	32.0
	2003	38.3	42.0
	2004	48.9	52.0
Math % Proficient (8 th Grade)	2002	31.2	21.0
	2003	16.4	22.0
	2004	30.1	32.0

Curriculum and Academic Goals

- ✓ The Arkansas frameworks provide a foundation for the district curriculum. Curriculum maps are aligned from kindergarten through twelfth grade and are centralized around mathematics and literacy. Books and materials are chosen based on how well they align with the state standards.
- ✓ Curriculum development is an ongoing process that 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. Collaborative work between teachers, staff, administration, and school board members is the backbone to creating and revising a curriculum that will meet the state standards while providing opportunities for the teachers to improve the overall learning and performance of the students. The district's curriculum goals focus on utilizing assessments and attaining higher levels of performance for every student each year.

Curriculum and Academic Goal Comments

We use Arkansas frameworks and build our curriculum based on the frameworks. Each of the classes looks at their own department frameworks and then collaboratively we look together at what our goals are for those frameworks.

Experienced Teacher

We look at test scores, and we see where our weaknesses are, and we try to build from there.

Experienced Teacher

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

- ✓ Hiring of principals is an extensive process. Candidates are evaluated by their background, education, teaching experience, program participation, discipline philosophy, past administrative responsibilities, and how they handle parent interactions. Principal's salaries are competitive with the rest of the state.
- ✓ Quality teachers are difficult to recruit. Teacher pay in El Dorado is not competitive with Central and North Arkansas. There are no incentives available because of a lack of funds. Despite the low teacher pay, teacher turnover in the district is only about a 10% each year. The process for hiring teachers is very involved. The assistant superintendent and principal check applicant's references, and determine applicant's strengths and weaknesses prior to a possible hire. Qualified teachers are then interviewed by the principal.
- ✓ Professional development is an ongoing process throughout the district for teachers and staff. The district takes pride in their mentoring program which is provided to all new teachers and principals. Besides district- and school-wide in-service workshops, teachers are encouraged to go to state and regional meetings, national conferences, and the Arkansas Leadership Academy. The Murphy Foundation provides money for the teachers to attend conferences.

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building Comments

If you do not have good classroom management then it will not matter if you have the knowledge base.

Experienced Administrator

I think our district realizes that when you go out and you have the opportunity to see new things and talk to other people, it gets you excited. And you need teachers who are excited about what they are doing.

Experienced Administrator

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

- ✓ State standards greatly influences instructional practices by mandating that schools focus on math and reading. Principals and assistant principals work with teachers to determine what is and is not working before considering new programs. New instructional programs are rigorously researched and reviewed for effectiveness and utility prior to implementation. Once a new program has been chosen, outside consultants are brought in 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.
- ✓ The textbook adoption process involves a variety of stakeholders. Before adopting a textbook, a committee made up of parents, teachers, and other individuals in the community reviews each textbook for appropriateness. The committee then makes a recommendation to the district administrators.
- ✓ A strong tutoring program is in place at Barton Junior High School to help any student who may need help. Co-teaching is used in many of the classrooms to allow special needs students to remain in the classroom. Pull-outs are used when teachers deem them necessary. Pre-AP and AP programs in science, mathematics, and English are available for academically advanced and gifted and talented students.

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangement Comments

There is a citizen's textbook committee to look at the textbooks. Their job isn't to look at content, but to look for anything that might be derogatory to any one particular group.

Experienced Administrator

Programs outside of textbooks normally come to us as a recommendation. We discuss it and then we usually research them by going and seeing them in use somewhere else. Then if it looks like its going to be viable to us, we try to find some way to implement them.

Experienced Administrator

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

- ✓ Student data are monitored at the district level and data are interpreted by Instructional Resource Teachers (IRTs) for teachers at the individual schools. The district monitors grades, state Academic Improvement Plans (AIPS) and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

percentages regularly to ensure that the students are performing to expectations. District-wide common assessments, called “chunk tests,” allow teachers to track student progress.

- ✓ Teachers are monitored and informally evaluated on a weekly basis by classroom walk-throughs, informative sessions, and by observations at various times during the day. Teachers also have a formal evaluation in which the principal meets with the teacher before and after the evaluation.
- ✓ Teachers record student ITBS and Benchmark scores in their grade books so that the teachers will have immediate access 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 student’s progress. Teachers are encouraged to meet with students individually and go over the students’ scores so that students also understand their strengths and weaknesses.

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data Comments

I believe that if I can help my students become better readers and better writers then I’ve done my job.

Experienced Teacher

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.

Experienced Administrator

I look at all the chunk tests; I get our IRT’s to give me a print out 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.

Experienced Administrator

Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustments

- ✓ The district tries to continuously recognize students for outstanding academic achievement. The Murphy Foundation provides a monetary award to students who have outstanding scores on the Benchmark, ITBS, ACT, SAT, and AP tests. The local newspaper prints and acknowledges honor roll students within the district. High school seniors who miss less than five days throughout their high school career are eligible for a drawing for a new car.
- ✓ 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 award which comes with monetary compensation. Administrators are not recognized for performance and achievement like teachers are; however, the district is working on a way to recognize those outstanding administrators.
- ✓ Barton Junior High sponsors a gentlemen’s club and a lady’s club. Participants include students identified as at risk in term of behavior, academics, and attendance. Students go to meetings once or twice a week and set goals that address attendance, behavior and academics. The program involves school personnel and community members.
- ✓ The district is continuously monitoring school performance. Low performing schools receive personalized intervention plans. Throughout the district, a focus time is used everyday in

each classroom between 8 am and 8:15 am for the students to work on reading, writing, and math skills.

Influential Factors

- ✓ The school board is very supportive of administrators and teachers throughout the district. School board members all have a vested interest in the success of the schools and students, and work hand-in-hand with the superintendent, assistant superintendent, and principals. School board members all have an open door policy and are readily available.
- ✓ Barton Junior High has a dedicated staff whose priority is the students. Teachers and staff are always looking for ways to help the students achieve and prepare them for post-high school opportunities. Parental involvement is always an issue and a challenge for the schools. The district sponsors a parents' night and teachers spend a lot of time contacting parents over the phone.
- ✓ The El Dorado Educational Foundation provides for grants throughout the year to bring additional money into the district. The district has been given \$100,000 that has been earmarked for improving instructional programs. The district works with groups throughout the community such as local churches to provide funding or outside school experiences for teachers and students. Teachers are awarded grants for "innovative educational projects." The foundation is an independent charity formed to "promote core academic excellence within the El Dorado Public Schools" and the foundation's primary goal is to "help build El Dorado's public school system into one of the best in the state."

Influential Comments

If you're not in this business to help out the students, then you're in it for the wrong reasons.
Experienced Administrator

Parental involvement is probably the biggest challenge. If you can get parents involved you can reach students.

Experienced Administrator

If I were to rate our school board, I have to give them an 8 or a 9. They are very supportive.
Experienced Administrator

I think our community's very receptive. This summer, a local church sponsored a math camp that one of our math teachers taught. It was a huge success.

Experienced Administrator