

Site Visit Findings: Cabot School District Cabot Middle School South

Site Visit Overview

Cabot School District is located in Lonoke County in Central Arkansas and is the ninth largest school district in the state. Established in 1875, Cabot Public School District is “committed to educating all students to be responsible citizens who value learning, treat others with dignity and respect, and successfully adapt to the demands of a rapidly changing society.”

As of 2003-2004 the district served 7,772 students in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade, growing to 8,048 in the 2004-2005 school year. The district is comprised of 12 schools: 7 elementary (K-4), 2 middle level (5-6), 2 junior high (7-9), and 1 high school (10-12). Cabot Middle School South served 592 students in grades five and six in 2003-2004, and 632 students in the 2004-2005 school year.

Student Demographics: (2004) *The school and district are notably less diverse than the state.*

	Cabot Middle School South	Cabot School District	Arkansas
% White	96.0	96.2	70.1
% African-American	1.0	0.7	22.9
% Hispanic	2.0	1.7	5.3
% Other	1.0	1.4	1.7

School Support Services: (2004) *The school and district serve fewer students through Free and Reduced Lunch than the state, but more students through Special Education services.*

	Cabot Middle School South	Cabot School District	Arkansas
% Free and Reduced Lunch	24.3	24.3	44.2
% English as a Second Language	0.5	0.5	2.8
% Special Education	14.9	14.6	11.3

Assessments by Grade: : *The school has consistently outperformed state averages in 6th grade literacy and math assessments.*

		Cabot Middle School South	Arkansas
Literacy % Proficient (6 th Grade)	2002	46.0	26.0
	2003	52.0	27.0
	2004	56.0	42.0
Math % Proficient (6 th Grade)	2002	52.0	31.0
	2003	56.6	36.0

Curriculum and Academic Goals

- ✓ Curriculum is based on state standards and testing data, and is developed through teacher teams across buildings and grade levels. Teacher teams meet annually to revise the curriculum.
- ✓ The generation of pacing guides is also completed by teachers through a process that promotes continual revision. Weekly subject specific meetings provide time for teachers to discuss curriculum issues. Teacher buy-in is the key to the success of this process.
- ✓ Academic goals are developed through the Arkansas Consolidated School Improvement Plan (ACSIP) by examining strengths and weaknesses found in a broad range of data. Ownership of school ACSIP plans was achieved by the district through teacher brainstorming sessions designed to identify needs and solutions.

Curriculum and Academic Goal Comments

I think we always want to keep that revision ongoing. We revisit it every year, analyze the data, and look for gaps.

Experienced Administrator

Last year in Language Arts there was an across-the-district meeting, and we were able to meet with the 4th grade teachers and the 7th and 8th grade teachers. This allowed for the least amount of grade slippage and repetition as possible. We were able to align our curriculum, and it was great to have that conversation with other educators

Experienced Teacher

We attended two half-day professional development days in the springtime. As a whole building faculty we sat down and looked at where we were with our benchmark scores, what areas we needed to do work, and what we needed to revise in our ACSIP plan.

Experienced Teacher

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

- ✓ Effective principals are retained through district support, mentoring, team building, professional development and the master principal program. Staff members receive an incentive of \$500 for obtaining 90 hours or more of professional development each year. The district made the decision to “grow our own” principals by promoting leadership training and participation in the master principal program.
- ✓ Professional development offered by the district is heavily technology based. The district goes above and beyond state standards in terms of the amount of professional development that is offered to teachers. Teachers can sign up for professional development online which streamlines the process.

- ✓ Teachers are involved in the process of hiring teachers and principals, which creates unity and helps build teams within buildings. Teachers are involved in school decisions and are constantly sharing ideas and collaborating during team meetings, pooling their time and resources.

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building Comments

The incentives for training are probably one of the outstanding practices we have as far as professional development.

Experienced Teacher

We have ongoing training. We have administrative meetings on a weekly basis, and also training on any type of new programs that the district is looking at that might be helpful within a building. Usually the principals are trained first to get feedback from the principals to see if it is something they feel their teachers would be interested in.

Experienced Administrator

Through the process of interviewing candidates we are able to create a stronger team because you can identify areas in which you are weak and hire someone that is strong in that area.

Experienced Teacher

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

- ✓ No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has caused some tension, but through better education and communication it has helped to focus curriculum and hold schools accountable for all children. Principals demonstrate a higher awareness of program quality, best practices, and supporting research as a result of implementing NCLB requirements. Teachers utilize the Bloom's (1956) *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* and Marzano's (2001) *Classroom Instruction that Works* to better inform practice in the classroom.
- ✓ Both program selection and scheduling have moved away from site-based to district-wide teams to ensure more accountability for program use and core instruction time. Faculty teams work to align across schools in the district. Teachers are highly involved in material selection through book fairs, conferences, and meeting throughout the summer.
- ✓ The district has placed much emphasis on improving identification and services to special needs populations. Middle level students are served in a variety of settings with the common goal of full inclusion in regular classrooms. 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 for Gifted and Talented (GT) are also provided services through a Talented Program. Academic coaches provide wonderful support by helping to interpret test scores, modeling lessons, and presenting information gleaned from conferences.

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangement Comments

I think the good thing about No Child Left Behind is that we are accountable for all children. How do we make sure we don't leave any child out?

Experienced Administrator

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.

Experienced Administrator

The academic coach did a wonderful job. She 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 now have, and we can see their strengths and weaknesses in each of the strands.

Experienced Teacher

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

- ✓ 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 staff all take part in walk-through process to assist in alignment and consistency.
- ✓ The district analyzes all levels of testing data, including trend data to determine significant improvement among students and programs. Academic coaches also help to monitor curriculum by provided teachers with strength and weaknesses based on benchmark data and common assessments.
- ✓ The district is implementing common assessments developed by teams of teachers across the district and based on released items. The district is now following the 24-7 curriculum audit model internally to improve communication and curriculum at the classroom level. Several grants also provide evaluation components such as "High Schools that Work."

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data Comments

Our goal is to be in every classroom within a two-week period. The superintendent did 80 classroom walk-throughs last year.

Experienced Administrator

Some other assessments we do just within the building. 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 classes called Successmaker, which is assessing them all the time to see what level they are on.

Experienced Administrator

Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustments

- ✓ Students are recognized through a variety of awards for academic achievement, fitness, library, and a Strategist Award for those students that are not eligible for Honor Roll but have been doing their best.
- ✓ Principals are responsible for providing intervention plans and monitoring teachers who

are struggling. Low performing schools are assisted in obtaining grants and additional resources such as instructional programs or parental training to meet their needs.

- ✓ Parents play an important role in both student recognition and intervention by volunteering to help remediate students through the Math Whiz program and by assisting with ACSIP.

Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment Comments

We have two schools that qualified for the 21st Century Learning Center Grant, which helps to provide after-school programs and also training for parents. I don't know that they're really low performing, but it's not as high as we would like for them to be. And also, within those schools, we have two academic coaches that help to assist the teachers in improving, where the other schools have just one academic coach.

Experienced Administrator

The Strategist Award is often for someone that we know is doing their best but they're not going to be your A or B student. They're doing all they can and getting C's, but they are a wonderful student.

Experienced Teacher

We give them a pre-test on multiplication facts, and those students who score low on that pre-test participate in what we call Math Whiz. We have volunteer parents who come in to help and that has been successful.

Experienced Teacher

Influential Factors

- ✓ The district has strong parental involvement and an active Parent Teacher Association (PTA), as well as good community support and a very positive school board. District-wide priorities include improving student achievement, supporting quality teachers, and point-in-time intervention for students in need.
- ✓ At the middle school, teaming and maintaining a close knit working environment for teachers are key to keeping the focus on the whole child and improving school climate. Programs such as Reading First, Step Up to Writing, 21st Century Learning Communities, and High Schools that Work have provided excellent funding and have led to success as a district.
- ✓ Improved quality of childcare through training and a growing preschool program are credited with improved community relations and parental satisfaction with local schools.

Influential Comments

I think our system of professional development has had the greatest impact on student achievement. We're in two primary initiatives-High Schools that Work, and then pre-K under the 21 Century Network. And I think that could have the greatest impact in the long run because we have a lot of poverty, and it's school and community based. We're working to bring up the

quality of childcare providers. In every one of those, it's about professional development training I think that's a key.

Experienced Administrator

We are really trying to encourage the role of parents a whole lot. We just completed "How Parents Make a Difference Night" where we showed them what our language arts teachers are doing in the classroom, so that they'll know how they can help at home. And then we discussed test scores. That helps our parents to be involved. Parents also are willing to be volunteers in the classroom, and just students seeing their parents in the school helps our students know that parents are pleased with the school and they are encouraging the students that way.

Experienced Administrator

It's just very caring. I've worked in many buildings in the district since I've been here all these years, and Cabot has great teachers that care about one another. I've heard people even within the district comment about what a bond our teachers seem to have here.

Experienced Teacher