

Elm Tree Elementary Bentonville School District

School Context

Bentonville School District is located in a growing community in Northwest Arkansas, and serves approximately 9,200 students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. Teachers and administrators are acutely aware of the impact of local companies on the student population. Elm Tree Elementary is one of two schools in the Bentonville School District that operates on a continuous learning calendar. Faculty and staff at Elm Tree Elementary believe that the year-round calendar makes a significant impact on both students and teachers, and attribute improved test scores directly to the continuous calendar schedule. Elm Tree has a total school enrollment of approximately 690 students in kindergarten through fourth grade. The mission statement for Elm Tree Elementary is “to create high expectations for education which will nurture, encourage, challenge, and inspire every student, on a continuous learning calendar.” Parental support is a key component of Elm Tree’s success, and communication between school and home is of utmost importance.

As reported below, both the Bentonville School District and Elm Tree Elementary School populations are notably less diverse than the state as a whole. With respect to ethnicity, the Bentonville School District and Elm Tree Elementary serve substantially fewer African-American students than the state average. The percentage of students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch is also considerably lower in Bentonville School District than throughout the rest of the state. In addition, Bentonville School District serves fewer students with exceptionalities than the state as a whole.

In 2003 and 2004, Elm Tree Elementary met adequate yearly progress (AYP), as required by No Child Left Behind. In Arkansas, schools must make AYP on the state-mandated Benchmark exams, which are criterion-referenced tests in mathematics and literacy. In 2003 and 2004, the elementary level Benchmark exams were administered in grades 4, 6, and 8. Beginning in 2005, the Benchmark exams in math and literacy were administered in grades 3 through 8. Arkansas’ annual AYP goals are determined by the Arkansas Department of Education (arkedu.state.ar.us/nochild/ayp_improvement.html), and are part of the state’s plan, which has been approved by the U. S. Department of Education. The district and the school outperformed 4th grade state averages on Math and Literacy Benchmark exams in 2003 and 2004.

Student Demographics: (2004) *Elm Tree Elementary serves a population that is very similar to Bentonville School District in terms of ethnicity. The Bentonville School District serves 88.4% white students and Elm Tree serves 89.0 %, compared to the state average of 70.1%.*

	Elm Tree Elementary	Bentonville District	Arkansas
% White	89.0	88.4	70.1
% African-American	1.2	1.4	22.9
% Hispanic	5.6	6.6	5.3
% Other	4.1	3.6	1.7

School Support Services: (2004) *Both Elm Tree Elementary and Bentonville School District have a lower population of students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch than the state. They also serve a lower percentage of Special Education students.*

	Elm Tree Elementary	Bentonville District	Arkansas
% Free and Reduced Lunch	12.1	24.2	44.2
% English as a Second Language	1.7	2.9	2.8
% Special Education	7.2	11.7	11.3
% Migrant	N/A	1.1	1.5

Assessments by Grade: *Elm Tree Elementary and the Bentonville School District continue to exceed 4th grade state proficiency averages for Benchmark exams. Elm Tree Elementary has shown consistent improvement in Literacy, averaging 85.6% proficient in 2002 and 91.2% proficient in 2004.*

		Elm Tree Elementary	Bentonville School District	Arkansas
Literacy % Proficient	2002	85.6	76.4	57.9
	2003	86.6	81.3	62.0
	2004	91.2	87.2	69.3
Math % Proficient	2002	91.0	76.6	49.2
	2003	86.6	80.6	61.0
	2004	89.1	83.8	65.2

Curriculum and Academic Goals

The Bentonville School District has invested a significant amount of time and effort in the development and monitoring of curriculum. Every year, one major subject area (K-12) is reviewed by the district. The entire review process takes approximately a year and a half to complete. Curriculum goals are developed through a simultaneous top-down and bottom-up approach, to produce a unified and usable whole. For each subject area, three or four major goals are in place, and are supplemented by related sub-goals. In addition, the curriculum is directly aligned with the state frameworks. Curriculum development is focused on designing a continuous learning process so that students are able to connect topics both within and across subjects. Throughout the curriculum development process, the district addresses not only what is being taught, but also what is missing so that teachers and administrators are aware of what is lacking in the curriculum and how the different parts of the curriculum merge to form a coherent whole. The district has focused on establishing common curriculum among schools. One major goal of the district is to increase the number of students involved in school activities, as extra-curricular activities are viewed by the administration as positive influences on student behavior.

Elm Tree Elementary is involved in the curriculum development process. Vertical and horizontal alignments are used to ensure that curriculum is implemented properly. The district and the school provide time for teachers to work on the alignment procedures. Grade-level

representatives create curriculum drafts and teachers are allowed to give input before the district adopts the final version. Curriculum mapping is used by grade-level teams to tie all curriculum to the state standards and to determine when concepts are to be introduced, developed, and mastered. Curriculum development is seen as an ongoing process, not something to be done once a year. Teachers place a high value on communicating curriculum to parents, so user-friendly curriculum guides are given to the parents at the start of the school year that communicate teacher expectations and content to be covered during the school year.

Staff Selection and Capacity Building

Both Bentonville School District and Elm Tree Elementary strive to provide support for teachers through a variety of strategies. The district is committed to providing salaries and benefits that attract and keep qualified teachers in the district. The superintendent of the district interviews every potential applicant after the initial screening process has been conducted. The interview process for administrators is based on Ford Motor Company's targeted interview selection process. Once hired, new teachers are provided with a mentor. Although professional development is provided to assist all teachers, the major focus of professional development opportunities is assisting teachers in improving instructional practices in the classrooms. The administration in the district consistently observes other schools in order to acquire ideas for improvement. District administration has acknowledged a lack of funding in the area of professional development for teachers and is taking steps to improve the situation. The district has taken definitive steps toward improving student achievement, including hiring specialists to work with middle school teachers, training teachers on data management and investigation, and catering professional development activities toward classroom application.

Elm Tree teachers work together for staff development. Grade level teams meet at least every other week and provide feedback to the principal about what is being done. Teachers work as teams to ensure that all students are given equal opportunities to achieve, and that the focus is not just on test performance. A newsletter is sent to the staff from the principal on a weekly basis to keep all informed about the issues for the school and district. Networking with other schools, districts, and teachers is used to enhance the practices and strategies of the teachers at Elm Tree. Professional development activities are designed to meet the needs of individual teachers as identified by the teachers themselves or by the principal through classroom observations. Teachers are allowed to choose half of their professional development activities, while the district chooses the other half. Elm Tree Elementary teachers get excited about professional development activities, and view professional development as opportunities to become better teachers. Teachers are directly involved in the hiring of new principals for their schools. Almost half of the staff at Elm Tree Elementary have been trained in Great Expectations, and have passed along the principles of Great Expectations to the rest of the school staff.

Instructional Programs, Practices, & Arrangements

The Bentonville School District provides support for the instructional practices used by teachers. Money is available to teachers for supplemental materials and for professional development needed by the teachers to implement the instructional programs of the district and school. Additionally, central supply provides teachers with the materials that are needed on a daily basis. The district provides a calendar of instruction, with the appropriate standards on it, to assist teachers in planning and implementation of instructional programs. Teachers have the freedom to

adjust the calendar if needed. Through the curriculum revision process, missing instructional components are identified and current instructional programs are modified or replaced to match the district curriculum. Programs that have been shown to be beneficial for students are thoroughly researched before adopted by the district. The district has adopted a weighted grading system, where at the elementary level, 60% of a student's grade is based on formal assessments and 40% on other activities, and at the secondary level, 80% of the grade is based on formal assessment and 20% on other activities.

Elm Tree Elementary has developed unique strategies that fit within the district framework to meet instructional needs. The school has adopted a year-round calendar, although this is not district wide. This plan was selected to better serve the needs of the student population at Elm Tree. Student performance has increased under this schedule, and teachers believe that the continuous calendar allows both teachers and students to be more focused. The year-round schedule allows for smoother transitions between grade levels and reduces the amount of material lost over summer vacation. This continuity is seen as particularly helpful for ESL students. Throughout the school, teachers have devoted more time to reading and math as a result of identification of the needs of students at Elm Tree. The same weekly material is covered within each grade level; however, each teacher can give individual expression to the material as needed. Teachers at Elm Tree supplement instructional programs as necessary, so several programs may be used within a single content area. Unique teacher-created interventions that focus on standardized test scores, such as Camp ACTAAP, have been implemented school-wide.

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, & Use of Data

The technology department of Bentonville School District collects and disseminates all the student and district data. The district makes the collected data available to the teachers for reference. The teachers are able to access the data via computer and this information assists them in customizing instruction for their students. A variety of tests, including off-grade testing, are used in addition to the state benchmark exams. The district uses data to identify curriculum and instructional problems and makes adjustments accordingly. Each building is also responsible for the implementation of strategies based on the data that are collected. In particular, the data are used to highlight what is missing in the curriculum so that appropriate instructional practices can be implemented. The district uses the data for the formation and modification of district goals. Additionally, professional development is selected based on educational research and teacher needs identified in the district data monitoring process. Employees are evaluated each year on thirteen different performance dimensions, and attendance of administrators, teachers, and students is seen as a key to success.

Elm Tree Elementary teachers use data to make daily decisions. Each teacher is trained to read and interpret test score reports. When the state testing scores are made available, the district schedules an in-service day so that each school can have time to evaluate test results and identify reforms and future goals. Because the data are easily accessible to teachers, they can use test scores to pinpoint an individual student's weakness and adjust instruction to meet the needs of each student. Elm Tree uses teacher-created tests in addition to standardized testing programs to monitor student performance. Consistent monitoring of student progress allows teachers to evaluate when students have mastered content and to identify missing components in the curriculum. Each year, teachers develop professional growth plans which are based on test score data. Teacher evaluations are based on progress toward the goals set in the professional growth plan. The teacher evaluations

include portfolios and summative evaluations for experienced teachers and more frequent classroom observations for novice teachers.

Recognition, Intervention, & Adjustments

Bentonville School District recognizes the performance of staff members. The main focus of the district has been on improving the performance of lower-achieving students rather than focusing on high-achieving students. The district recognizes how people outside of the educational setting can significantly impact student achievement. Therefore, outside adults are utilized to address issues of student achievement and behavior problems. The district administration maintains that interventions need to be district-wide and that teachers and administrators must have a vested interest in interventions in order for them to be successful. The district strives to meet the needs of all students. In an effort to meet student needs, the district has created a new center for ELL students and revamped the Gifted and Talented program. Student achievement is recognized in a variety of ways, including instructional program rewards and silver and gold cards that provide discounts within the community. Incentives are provided to teachers for the completion of professional development activities, and extra money is available for those that wish to complete professional development activities beyond the required amount. Funds are available for merit pay to the principals. The Bentonville superintendent believes it is his job to highlight the accomplishments of his teachers and students, and that he is an ambassador for each of his schools.

Elm Tree Elementary uses various approaches to help students with needs and reward top performance. Students with low performance are identified and receive special interventions to help improve performance. Teachers modify classroom instructional strategies to meet student needs. Inclusion, pullout resources, and Reading Recovery are some of the additional strategies used. After-school sessions are provided, and teachers receive extra compensation for their involvement. Since changing to the year-round calendar, summer schools funds have been used for teaching during intercession breaks. Teachers that provide remediation are given additional training to widen their repertoire of teaching methods, so that students have a greater variety of educational experiences. Top performing students are identified and recognized as well. A school-wide assembly is held every Monday to showcase class and student achievements. An awards ceremony is held every nine weeks to recognize academic and behavior performance, which includes recognition for students that were “caught with character,” students that have good attendance, “Rising Star” awards for students that have most improved their grades, and “Student of the Week.” The principal at Elm Tree strives to be easily accessible to teachers and is frequently in the classrooms to offer assistance if needed. Teachers are given an incentive for perfect attendance during the school year.

Other Factors Influencing Practices

Local Influences, Relationships, & Communication

Parents and community are key factors at Elm Tree Elementary. Parents are necessary in helping to prevent and correct behavioral problems in school. Elm Tree Elementary has a strong volunteer network, and teachers and administrators believe that clear communication between student, parent, and teacher creates a positive educational environment.

Local companies are a strong influence. Northwest Arkansas is the home of several major companies, which impacts not only the monetary resources, but also significantly influences the number of mobile students within the district. In addition, the large amount of growth in the area

has presented the problem of overcrowding in the schools and is an issue that must be addressed by the district.

The Bentonville School District supports an informative and appealing website for all stakeholders. The website provides a wealth of information for parents, students, teachers, and the community. Information such as current district news, school board meeting agendas, employment opportunities, discussion forums, email services, and salary schedules are only some of the services provided. Links to schools within the district are also provided and the site can be reached at www.bentonville.k12.ar.us .

Core Beliefs About Teaching & Learning

Students should be involved in their schools. One goal of the district is to increase student involvement in extra-curricular activities. Currently, approximately 65% of students in grades 8-12 are involved in at least one extracurricular activity, which teachers and administrators believe leads to improved commitment to education and fewer behavior problems.

The administrator of a school has to set the tone for education. In addition to being a strong instructional leader, the principal has a responsibility for establishing a safe, positive, caring atmosphere for both students and teachers. This type of environment will contribute to the success of all students and increase teacher satisfaction.

Resource Allocation

When additional resources are needed, teachers and administrators seek out grant money. Everyone in the district is encouraged to apply for grants. The district administration is supportive in allowing teachers to use funds where they see fit as long as a research-based rationale is presented.