

Ida Burns Elementary Conway School District

School Context

Conway School District is located in central Arkansas, 30 miles north of Little Rock. For the 2003-2004 school year, the district served approximately 8,400 students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. The Conway School District is “dedicated to the total personal development of each student to the limits of his or her abilities and interests in a sequentially ordered curriculum which allows for individual differences.” Their mission is “to prepare the student to live successfully in a world of rapid change and unforeseeable demands.”

As reported below, the district and school student population are similar to the state as a whole. The number of students that participate in the Free and Reduced Lunch program is considerably less for the district than the state. The number of students that participate in the Free and Reduced Lunch program at Ida Burns is also less than the state as a whole. The percentage of students participating in Special Education Services at Ida Burns is higher than the district and the state.

In 2003 and 2004, Ida Burns 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) *With respect to ethnicity, the district and school population are similar to the state as a whole--the district serves 75.1% white students and the state serves 70.1%.*

	Ida Burns Elementary	Conway School District	Arkansas
% White	75.1	74.4	70.1
% African-American	19.6	20.9	22.9
% Hispanic	3.6	3.5	5.3
% Other	1.7	1.2	1.7

School Support Services: (2004) *The Conway School District serves considerably fewer students through the Free and Reduced Lunch program, 31.8%, than the state, 44.2%. Ida Burns serves more students through Special Education services, 15.3%, than the state, 11.3%.*

	Ida Burns Elementary	Conway School District	Arkansas
% Free and Reduced Lunch	43.2	31.8	44.2
% English as a Second Language	1.9	1.5	2.8
% Special Education	15.3	14.5	11.3
% Migrant	0.2	0.2	1.5

Assessments by Grade: *The Conway School District and Ida Burns continue to exceed 4th grade state proficiency averages for Benchmark exams. Both the district and the school show consistent growth.*

		Ida Burns Elementary	Conway School District	Arkansas
Literacy % Proficient	2002	72.8	61.0	57.9
	2003	78.5	74.4	62.0
	2004	82.3	74.7	69.3
Math % Proficient	2002	63.4	67.7	49.2
	2003	77.2	73.0	61.0
	2004	78.5	77.3	65.2

Curriculum and Academic Goals

Conway School District’s curriculum is driven by state standards and curriculum development is a district wide process. Each grade level across the district has timeline defined expectations that are aligned with state standards. The district strives to ensure equal access for all students through departmental and cross grade level meetings. Curriculum is vertically and horizontally aligned and overseen by an elementary and secondary curriculum director and by building principals.

The Conway School District has clear academic goals that are communicated to the staff. District goals were recently redeveloped by the superintendent. The goals were approved by the school board and dispersed to all school systems. Additionally, the school goals are shared at the beginning of every school year with new and existing faculty.

Ida Burn’s curriculum is tied to state and district standards, with a heavy emphasis on literacy. Although the staff of Ida Burns follows the district and state curriculum, as determined by the ACSIP (Arkansas Consolidated School Improvement Planning) process, they organize their school around literacy integration across the curriculum. Printed across the wall in the foyer of Ida Burns is the following quote, “Language is not a subject. It is the means by which all other

subjects are pursued.” Literacy drives the curriculum at Ida Burns, and this pursuit is evident in student achievement.

Ida Burns has clear academic goals for all students. The goals of Ida Burns for the 2003-2004 school year were to: improve student achievement for all students in the areas of math and literacy, provide a safe and pleasant atmosphere that helps maximize learning for all students, recognize needs, and make changes that will meet the needs of a culturally diverse school community.

Character education is an important part of the curriculum at Ida Burns. Recently, a local private organization asked the school to pilot a character education program. The school had the entire faculty, staff, and administration vote on integrating the program. The program was approved, and the school proceeded to train every school employee on the program specifics. Character education is now an important addition to Ida Burn’s curriculum.

Staff Selection and Capacity Building

The Conway School District has a rigorous teacher selection process. Teachers interested in teaching within the district must have good references and are required to complete a total team interview with district principals. Part of the interview is teaching a mini-lesson. After completing this process, teachers are given a score and ranked according to qualifications, and then their information is placed into a database. Teachers are then chosen from this database by school building principals as vacancies open. District personnel also travel to teacher job fairs around the state to recruit high quality teachers.

The Conway School District and Ida Burns retain high quality teachers. A positive atmosphere and high academic achievement makes teachers want to work within this district. Mentor teachers trained in Pathwise assist new teachers and teachers feel a great deal of support from other teachers. The district also offers one of the highest teacher salary pay scales in the state.

Internal growth is important to the Conway School District and Ida Burns. Within the district, there is a lot of encouragement for internal candidates to apply for principal positions. Teachers who are interested in moving into administration are encouraged to do so. Recently, new assistant principal positions were added to assist building principals and the district. Ida Burns focuses on teacher growth, and is able to do this through a grant program which allows teachers to meet at least one entire day each month. Teachers, administrators, and local university faculty members also gather to visit model schools around the country to observe “exemplary language arts programs.”

Continuous training of teachers and administration is important to Conway School District. The district provides 9½ days of professional development for teachers during the school year. Monthly grade level meetings and early dismissals on Wednesdays allow for increased staff collaboration and development. Recently, district staff was trained on working with exceptional children and children living in poverty. The district rewards National Certified Board teachers by paying them an additional \$1,000 a year for ten years. Additionally, teachers are provided with training necessary for state programs, such as SmartStart and SmartStep. Administrators are also trained in the Classroom Walk-Through model and data analysis.

Instructional Programs, Practices, & Arrangements

The Conway School District provides direction to schools for selection of instructional programs and textbooks. The district uses adoption committees to select instructional programs and textbooks, but schools are not required to adopt selected materials. However, teachers are required to show that their programs improve student achievement if they choose not to use district-recommended programs.

Ida Burns uses innovative arrangements to increase student learning. The school integrates reading and writing into all curriculum and approaches curriculum with a literacy focus. One of the most unique features of Ida Burns is their multi-age grouping “buddy” strategy, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. Every class at Ida Burns has a “buddy class” in which “primary and intermediate classes are paired.” Students from these classes meet weekly to read, write, share, think, and work together. Placement of students is based on student achievement, but students are always free to move into higher groups if they pass school assessments.

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, & Use of Data

Student report cards and assessments are tied to state Benchmark testing. New report cards were developed to better reflect learner expectations and incorporate Benchmark terminology (advanced, proficient, basic, below basic). Performance assessments were developed by the district and are aligned with state testing assessments. Additionally, reading assessments and end of grade level assessments are used to monitor student progress.

Results of state benchmark testing are used to monitor school performance. Specialists work for the district to help analyze and disseminate state testing data. Recent data analysis has led the district to hire additional math and reading coaches to target deficiencies. The district is also in the process of creating more detailed subtests to help monitor student achievement.

Teachers and administrators are consistently evaluated. The Conway School District uses a rubric checklist to formally assess teachers and administrators. Teachers are assessed on several aspects of their teaching. Some areas assessed include their ability to accurately and effectively communicate content to students, to obtain feedback and establish student rapport to enhance learning, and to encourage student involvement, responsibility and critical thinking. Administrators are assessed on their abilities and skills in areas such as management, instructional leadership, evaluation, and communication/interpersonal relationships.

Recognition, Intervention, & Adjustment

Student recognition is the responsibility of the schools. Currently, the district does not offer any district wide student recognition program. Instead, student recognition is organized and implemented by each school. For example, many schools use the Renaissance Program for student recognition.

Ida Burns offers several intervention programs to improve student achievement. High school students help tutor struggling students and the school also offers Title I classes for

remediation in reading and math. Special education services are also offered for speech and language therapy and to assist in meeting students' IEP needs. A Gifted and Talented Program offers creative activities for students who are academically advanced.

Factors Influencing Educational Practices

Local Influences, Relationships, & Communications

The Conway School District and Ida Burns are surrounded by supportive local businesses, community members, and parents. The district reports that it has outstanding parental support and helpful local businesses. All schools in the district have been adopted by one or more local businesses and the district is working to develop a more solid relationship with the local university. Parent nights are held throughout the school year, and time is set aside to explain state testing and monitoring procedures. Teachers are involved with students and parents outside of school through religious activities, summer field trips, and holiday gatherings. The district also reports that their school board is supportive and professional.

The Conway School District maintains an informative website for all stakeholders. A variety of information can be obtained about the district and Ida Burns by visiting www.conwayschools.afsc.k12.ar.us. The website contains district and individual school information, special programs, news and announcements, school menus and a school calendar, and employee resources.

Core Beliefs About Teaching & Learning and Organizational Knowledge

Poverty, mobility, and motivation are challenges described by Ida Burns. Although Ida Burns faces these challenges, it continues to be successful. The school accomplishes this by recognizing needs and being proactive. The school has adapted to its high level of socioeconomic students by using innovative programs and showing a true concern for the whole child. The school tries to meet all the needs of students, academically, socially, emotionally, and physically. Students in need are provided with backpacks full of food for the weekend, and holiday meals are made available. The school realizes parent motivation improves student motivation, and increases in both are targeted. Ida Burns' overall concern for each child shows in the staffs' caring nature and student achievement.

The faculty and staff at Ida Burns strive to meet the social and emotional needs of all children. At Ida Burns, the faculty and staff are constantly observing students to identify unmet needs. Once a need is identified, brainstorming is done to determine how best to meet the need. One example is student conduct at lunchtime. Lunchroom monitors noticed that many students did not know how to properly conduct themselves while eating. The need was met by installing a sound system in the lunchroom and having a staff member to instruct the students on how to eat properly, including which utensils to use and what to do with their lunch trays when they are finished.