

Site Visit Findings: Fort Smith School District L. A. Chaffin Junior High School

Site Visit Overview

Fort Smith School District is located in Sebastian County in Western Arkansas and is home to one of the largest school districts in the state, serving more than 13,000 students annually in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade during the 2004-2005 school year. The mission of the Fort Smith School District is “to ensure academic and personal success for each student—today and in the future.” L. A. Chaffin Junior High, as of 2004-2005, served 696 students in seventh through ninth grades and the school reports that “the student is our central focus...knowing that all students can learn and achieve, the mission of Chaffin Junior High is to develop and enhance the abilities of every student.” The school creates “an environment of high expectations to advance to the total school community.”

The school system has successfully implemented state requirements and continues to consistently show student academic growth. The school’s level of success is attributed to good students, parents that value education, hard-working staff, and supportive administrators who are open to innovative ideas.

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

	L. A. Chaffin Junior High	Fort Smith School District	Arkansas
% White	82.8	59.0	70.1
% African-American	6.0	14.6	22.9
% Hispanic	4.0	16.6	5.3
% Asian/Pacific Islander	5.2	6.6	1.1
% American Indian/Alaskan Native	2.0	3.1	0.6

School Support Services: (2004) *The school serves considerably fewer students through Free and Reduced lunch and English as a Second Language services than the district and state. The district more students through Special Education than the state.*

	L. A. Chaffin Junior High	Fort Smith School District	Arkansas
% Free and Reduced Lunch	18.3	51.5	44.2
% English as a Second Language	0.9	14.1	2.8
% Special Education	12.5	14.3	11.3

Assessments by Grade: *The school continues to exceed 8th grade state and district proficiency averages for Benchmark exams. The school shows outstanding growth in both literacy and math.*

		L. A. Chaffin Junior High	Fort Smith School District	Arkansas
Literacy % Proficient (8 th Grade)	2002	49.5	40.8	32.0
	2003	65.9	44.6	42.0
	2004	76.1	53.4	52.0
Math % Proficient (8 th Grade)	2002	37.4	33.3	21.0
	2003	45.9	42.8	22.0
	2004	58.4	49.8	32.0

Curriculum and Academic Goals

- ✓ The district's curriculum development process consists of specifically looking at the Arkansas state standards, creating lessons and learning expectations that meet those standards, and setting goals to master those standards. Departmental chairs, math and literacy specialists, and principals are responsible for disseminating curriculum information and helping to implement and evaluate the curriculum.
- ✓ The district employs a literacy and math taskforce for kindergarten through twelfth grade. This taskforce is comprised of teachers and specialists from across the district who meet regularly to develop, revise, and evaluate curriculum and academic goals. Through the taskforce, the district has designed student learning expectations that are based on the Arkansas state frameworks, and has organized these expectations into quarterly pacing guides.
- ✓ The district looks to teachers and principals, administrators, parents, and community members to help set academic and overall guiding goals.

Curriculum and Academic Goal Comments

We are trying to be in a situation where our students are able to master a set of standards...

Experienced Administrator

We have a series of meetings with teachers and principals, other administrators, parents, and community members who are not parents, and try to get a big picture view of how the school fits in the community and where we should go from here.

Experienced Administrator

Theoretically every 8th 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 SLE's (student learning expectations) are addressed at that time.

Experienced Teacher

I don't look for our district to set the curriculum, the curriculum in my mind has been set by the Arkansas Benchmark, but I do look for our district to help us organize.

Experienced Teacher

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

- ✓ The district offers a variety of professional development for teachers, and allows them to make their own selections after they have met the state requirements. The district requests that teachers follow a conceptual path for their professional development so that they can specialize in their area.
- ✓ The district works hard to grow internal candidates for administrative positions. Teachers who show interest and instructional leadership in the classroom are encouraged to consider assistant principal positions and continue their education. From there, they may also move into principalship positions.
- ✓ Teachers and principals are retained through effective communication, recognition, a variety of professional opportunities for growth, and overall support from the district.
- ✓ New principals are offered a wide range of professional development opportunities, are monitored closely by the district, and are given ample support. New principals attend classroom walk-through training, the Arkansas Leadership Academy, and training in technology.

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building Comments

Department chairs try to help any new teacher...They are really good about helping out the new teachers.

Experienced Teacher

Anything that we come across that we think will help us, the district is really good about letting us go to it.

Experienced Teacher

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.

Experienced Administrator

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

- ✓ The district provides specialists in both math and literacy to help teachers meet curricular and instructional needs. Specialists are required to spend 50% of their contract time at schools working with teachers.
- ✓ The school utilizes “Literacy Lab.” Through the program, classrooms become a community of learners using a workshop approach. Emphasis is placed on strategic reading with comprehension instruction, writing instruction, vocabulary instruction, word study, and assessment. The program is currently being piloted and utilized throughout the state and is supported by the Arkansas Department of Education primarily through regional educational cooperatives.

- ✓ The school focuses on reading throughout the curriculum. Every class, regardless of content, requires reading.
- ✓ Selection of instructional programs and materials is based on need and must meet the district goal of a “rigorous curriculum” component. The district is heavily invested in the Pre-Advanced and Advanced Placement model and has seen success with the College Board program. Program evaluation is on-going and includes assessing how well programs meet curricular needs, student needs (especially targeted student groups), and overall progress toward district goals.

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangement Comments

We have a couple of math specialists that work over at the Parker Center that will come and work with us at the school. They’re both National Board Certified math teachers that have taught in the classroom many years.

Experienced Teacher

We address specifically how to help increase reading through the social studies or in the science room. Every class is requiring some sort of reading from their students. Reading is not just important in English.

Experienced Teacher

We bring in the research that shows these ideas work and then we suggest that they try it. In reading and writing programs, we gave a list of about twenty different ways you could put more writing into your classroom.

Experienced Teacher

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

- ✓ The math and literacy task forces, at the district level, are responsible for creating quarterly assessments within their subjects that mirror the Arkansas Benchmark assessments and directly test the student learning expectations as organized in the district pacing guides.
- ✓ The district utilizes an “Office of Student Achievement” which is responsible for managing and evaluating student data. The office’s primary objectives are to evaluate adequate yearly progress as defined by the state of Arkansas and to evaluate needs, paying special attention to student subgroups and content weaknesses. Every school in the district develops an individual school plan for using student data.

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data Comments

The taskforce’s assignment is to design end of quarter assessments. Those assessments pretty much mirror the Benchmark.

Experienced Teacher

Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustments

- ✓ Student progress is comprehensively monitored at Chaffin Junior High. Teachers use

students' Academic Improvement Plans (AIP), state benchmark data, and classroom observations to evaluate students' overall academic achievement and remediation plans.

- ✓ The district's intervention plan for low-performing schools targets low-performing students. There are a host of different activities offered to students, including remediation time scheduled during the school day, and before- and after-school assistance. Some schools use extended learning days and others have reconfigured their schedules to provide point-in-time remediation.

Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment Comments

School improvement is geared towards those low-performing students which make up the low performing schools.

Experienced Administrator

What we do here is emphasize growth and improvement in every building based on an analysis and identification of the needs in that building.

Experienced Administrator

Influential Factors

- ✓ District priorities include, in order, increasing student achievement; recruitment, training, and retention of qualified staff; being the "premier provider of educational services in the region;" maintaining safe schools; and creating an atmosphere where parents and community members feel welcome and are involved.
- ✓ Staff, students, and parents work together at Chaffin Junior High to promote a challenging learning environment with high expectations.

Influential Comments

The whole school takes some ownership, because there isn't "That's math and English and I don't have to worry about it."

Experienced Teacher

There's a combination in the building. I think that the administration expects that everybody will do what they're supposed to do and try to do a good job and really try to teach. That's why we're here and so I think that atmosphere permeates the building. The administrators are responsible for setting that tone.

Experienced Teacher

You need cooperation and communication between everybody.

Experienced Teacher

Good people. Tradition. Future focused leadership, if you will. A zest to always do better. Not be complacent. Anticipate, try to ensure that you're going to address what's coming down the road.

Experienced Administrator