

Site Visit Findings: Nettleton School District Nettleton Intermediate School

Site Visit Overview

Nettleton School District is located in Craighead County in Northeastern Arkansas. As of 2004-2005, the district served 2,753 students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. The district is committed to providing “an environment conducive to learning that prepares students to become lifelong learners and problem solvers.” Nettleton Intermediate School, as of 2004-2005, served 418 students in fifth and sixth grades.

Nettleton Intermediate School has effectively implemented state requirements and views accountability as crucial to consistent growth. Students are the obvious priority at the school, and the staff works together to meet their needs. The environment of the school is progressive, focused, friendly, and fun.

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

	Nettleton Intermediate School	Nettleton School District	Arkansas
% White	78.0	76.6	70.1
% African-American	16.5	19.1	22.9
% Hispanic	3.6	2.8	5.3
% Other	1.9	1.5	1.7

School Support Services: (2004) *The school and district served slightly fewer students through Free and Reduced Lunch and more students through special education than the state as a whole..*

	Nettleton Intermediate School	Nettleton School District	Arkansas
% Free and Reduced Lunch	39.7	41.5	44.2
% English as a Second Language	1.4	1.2	2.8
% Special Education	13.9	13.8	11.3

Assessments by Grade: *The school has consistently outperformed the state on 6th grade literacy and math assessments. The school shows outstanding and consistent growth in literacy.*

		Nettleton Intermediate School	Arkansas
Literacy % Proficient	2002	32.6	26.0
	2003	45.0	27.0
	2004	61.1	42.0
Math % Proficient	2002	58.2	31.0

2003	53.5	36.0
2004	65.3	41.0

Curriculum and Academic Goals

- ✓ The district began curriculum mapping several years ago with the onset of the Arkansas State Standards. The standards, which at first were fairly vague, drove the district to focus on intense mapping and vertical alignment. With the state standards now developing into more specific grade level requirements in core subjects, the district is moving its focus to analyzing and documenting standards-based instruction at the classroom level.
- ✓ The district uses test data to form goals while also recognizing individual school needs. For example, a lower socio-economic school in the district needed and requested supplements to increase their students’ vocabulary. The district provided this noting “that’s a school goal that may or may not be adopted by other buildings based on their specific needs.” Teachers are encouraged to look at their scores in relationship to others’ but also form their own specific goals based on their students.
- ✓ School staff work together to develop Arkansas Consolidated School Improvement Plan (ACSIP) goals. They submit their plans to the district which in turn assesses each schools’ plan and bases staff development on these plans. Nettleton Intermediate School views the process as a collaborative effort between administrators, teachers, students, and parents.

Curriculum and Academic Goal Comments

Every building will work specifically on analyzing test data, what their school goals are, and what they’re going to be looking at during the school year.

Experienced Administrator

When we’re doing the curriculum mapping, you’ll usually have about three grade levels work together so that we know that we’re making the connections between grade levels.

Experienced Teacher

In developing academic goals, we look at data assessment, the children’s needs, the ACSIP plan, the grades, and standardized test scores.

Experienced Teacher

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

- ✓ The process of staff selection occurs at both the school and district level. Principal candidates are screened, interviewed by a committee, and then interviewed again, possibly with a different group. The interview groups look for a consensus decision for re-interviews and recommendations and follow a rigorous standardized process. Committees for teacher selection may include other teachers, administrators, community members, or students. Over 50% of the teachers within the school district have a master’s degree or above.

- ✓ The district is always looking for promising internal candidates for administrative positions. Teachers who display administrative potential are encouraged and motivated by the district and school. These individuals are often given the opportunity to practice leadership roles within the district and building.
- ✓ Effective teachers are retained through a competitive salary schedule, professional development opportunities, good working conditions, and support. The principal of Nettleton Intermediate strives to provide an environment where teachers can focus on teaching and learning.
- ✓ The district surveys teachers in the spring to identify development opportunities that the teachers would like the district to offer in upcoming training sessions. The local co-op is reported as another great resource for professional development.
- ✓ Principals are given autonomy in the school district. The district does not micromanage; instead it allows principals to make choices which inspires creativity and progressiveness.
- ✓ Teachers at Nettleton Intermediate benefit from daily common planning times, using this time to meet to discuss student needs or coordinate lesson plans. They also use this time to vertically and horizontally align curriculum.

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building Comments

We are a district that has a very high level of professionalism in our staff. We have more Nationally Board Certified teachers than any district in the state.

Experienced Administrator

Our central office sends out e-mails with lots of opportunities and things that we might be interested in doing. We're encouraged to do professional development.

Experienced Teacher

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

- ✓ The state accountability system has brought more focus to the district and teachers. The district meets regularly with teachers to review the frameworks and discuss implementation in the classroom.
- ✓ The district employs a full-time certified teacher to head their English Language Learner's Program. Additionally, there are one to two more staff members who assist with the ELL program. The district offers a traditional gifted and talented program and also a "Step-Down" program for students who did not quite qualify for the traditional gifted and talented program. Students in the traditional program are offered additional time for extension activities.
- ✓ The district pays special attention to the selection of special education teachers and uses creative ideas to increase their pool of candidates. For example, regular classroom teachers who show interest in special education may be given opportunities to work in special education classrooms so that they can decide if that is something they would be interested in

doing long term.

- ✓ The district utilizes the Literacy Lab approach. Through the program, classrooms become a community of learners using a workshop approach. Emphasis is placed on strategic reading with instruction focused on comprehension, writing, vocabulary, 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.
- ✓ Approximately seven years ago the school dramatically changed its social studies approach. Instead of using a standard textbook, teachers now use mostly teacher-made materials and supplements, which greatly improved student interest.
- ✓ Nettleton Intermediate School evaluates instructional programs and materials by looking at how well they meet standards, student achievement tests, teacher recommendations, and feedback from parents and students.

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangement Comments

The accountability system has caused the school to focus on what they're supposed to be doing. It has made us look very closely at things and ask whether we are doing what we need to be.

Experienced Administrator

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

- ✓ The district maintains data on the "big picture." Individual schools and student subgroups are monitored, but building principals focus on student level data. The district has several personnel trained in data analysis who are available to assist principals as needed. In conjunction with test scores, progress is monitored by gathering parent, student, teacher, and administrator input.
- ✓ Building principals helped create an evaluation tool that identifies their strengths and weaknesses. The superintendent meets personally with all principals and is responsible for principal evaluations. The assistant superintendent specializes in monitoring at the classroom level.
- ✓ Nettleton Intermediate teachers helped create teacher evaluation tools. They formed a committee at the district level and met with principals to discuss their views and needs. They also created tools that offered more consistency in evaluations.

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data Comments

We really analyze the test data.

Experienced Teacher

We did have an evaluation committee, we completely rewrote the evaluations tool for teachers.

Experienced Teacher

Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustments

- ✓ The district believes that student recognition is most effective at the school level. Staff is recognized for honors and achievements at the district level, but the focus for students is at the individual school.
- ✓ Students are recognized at Nettleton Intermediate with weekly, quarterly, and yearly awards. Awards are given for achievement and behavior and may include privileges such as a special place in the lunch room, swimming or bowling trips, or a year-end field trip to a nearby city such as Memphis or Little Rock.
- ✓ The district works to meet the needs of all students by offering after-school programs, pre-school programs, social workers, mental health services, family resource centers, health care services, and a summer ACT program.

Influential Factors

- ✓ The district is experiencing growth and increasing poverty and diversity. The growth is causing considerable facility challenges, especially if it continues at the current rate. The district views the growth in diversity as a welcome challenge. The district is actively meeting this challenge, in particular, by reaching out to their Spanish speaking students and parents.
- ✓ The district boasts a “great” and “progressive” school board that is supportive of the district administrators. The school board is representative of the community, with professors, business owners, and local farmers as board members. They allow the superintendent to make decisions and are financially supportive of school and district needs.
- ✓ The district reports good parental support and excellent parent-teacher conference attendance through the 12th grade. The school also operates a 40-acre farm, complete with animals, livestock, and crops, and this is a wonderful outlet for parental involvement.
- ✓ The district actively seeks grants to assist in meeting student needs. For example, some of the programs currently funded through grant programs include assistance for homeless students, an “Even Start” program, and 21st Century Community Learning Centers. The district has also obtained numerous grants to help fund instructional and material needs in the classroom.
- ✓ The school and district give the “Literacy Lab” approach credit for much of their recent success in literacy. The school also credits “Orff Music.” Orff Schulwerk Music is a program for teaching and learning music that the principal credits with increased student desire to learn about music and improved student behavior.

Influential Comments

Our district portrays the perception that the central office works for the building principal and not the building principal works for the superintendent or the central office staff.

Experienced Administrator

Our children of different nationalities are becoming an issue. It is a positive thing for us, but we are growing and we have to learn to deal with all the various different cultures that are now coming into the school district.

Experienced Administrator

Key priorities? To give each child the opportunity to maximize their ability, and hopefully that we allow them to realize and understand that each person has the potential to do something good if they just realize it.

Experienced Administrator