

Salem Elementary Salem School District

School Context

Salem School District is located in the north central part of Arkansas and serves a student population of just over 300 students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. For the 2003-2004 school year, Salem School District was recognized by the Arkansas Department of Education as one of the top ten districts in the state. Salem Elementary is the only elementary school in Salem School District, and serves a population of approximately 100 students in kindergarten through sixth grade. The mission of Salem School District is to “educate all students in a safe environment” providing a “challenging curriculum promoting higher-order thinking skills, technology skills, and problem-solving abilities through relevant and engaging activities.” The district also pledges to “provide the experiences necessary for all students to become responsible citizens.”

As reported below, the district and the elementary differ significantly from the state as a whole. The student population of Salem School District and Salem Elementary are primarily white, with only a few African-American and Hispanic students. The number of students that participate in Free and Reduced Lunch in the Salem School District is comparable to the state of Arkansas. The number of students participating in Free and Reduced Lunch at Salem Elementary is slightly higher than both the district and the state.

In 2003 and 2004, Salem 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 and 6th grade state averages on Math and Literacy Benchmark exams in 2003 and 2004.

Student Demographics: (2004) *The Salem Elementary and Salem School District are notably less diverse than the state as a whole.*

	Salem Elementary	Salem School District	Arkansas
% White	97.5	97.5	70.1
% African-American	1.7	1.3	22.9
% Hispanic	0.3	1.0	5.3
% Other	0.6	0.4	1.7

School Support Services: (2004) *The Salem School District and Salem Elementary serve comparable numbers of students through Free and Reduced Lunch and Special Education as compared to the state. The district and school report no English as a Second Language learners or migrant students.*

	Salem Elementary	Salem School District	Arkansas
% Free and Reduced Lunch	60.2	55.2	44.2
% English as a Second Language	n/a	n/a	2.8
% Special Education	13.0	11.9	11.3
% Migrant	n/a	n/a	1.5

Fourth Grade Assessments: *Salem Elementary has shown continued improvement in Reading and Math proficiency, improving Math proficiency in 2002 from 85.5% to 88.0% and Literacy proficiency from 83.6% in 2002 to 86.0% in 2004.*

		Salem Elementary	Arkansas
Literacy % Proficient	2002	85.5	57.9
	2003	88.2	62.0
	2004	88.0	69.3
Math % Proficient	2002	83.6	49.2
	2003	84.3	61.0
	2004	86.0	65.2

Sixth Grade Assessments: *Salem Elementary has shown continued improvement in Literacy and Math proficiency.*

		Salem Elementary	Arkansas
Literacy % Proficient	2002	40.3	57.8
	2003	56.3	61.9
	2004	67.9	69.2
Math % Proficient	2002	64.5	49.2
	2003	56.3	61.0
	2004	67.9	65.2

Curriculum and Academic Goals

Salem School District has strived to align curriculum with state standards. School personnel have worked to ensure that the curriculum and goals support the ASCIP plan (Arkansas School Consolidated Improvement Process) developed by the district and meet state requirements. Vertical curriculum alignment has been mandated and horizontal curriculum alignment has been encouraged by the district to ensure that a unified and coordinated plan exists throughout the district. School board policies have been developed that address student performance and academic requirements. Textbooks and other curricular materials are selected that support the entire district's plan. The primary responsibility of a principal in Salem School District is curriculum guidance.

The Salem School District involves the entire community in curriculum development and implementation. Although teachers have the most influence on curriculum development and implementation, input and support is solicited from the administration, school board and parents. The district has involved all of the stakeholders in the process of curriculum development.

Salem Elementary has processes in place to ensure that curriculum is coherent and aligned. Textbook adoption is completed school-wide, with each grade level adopting the same series. Teachers are free to supplement as they deem necessary, but supplemental materials are shared both within and across grade levels. Teachers in the same grade level are expected to collaborate on issues of timing and assessment. Areas of weakness that are identified are strengthened by adding new programs that align with current programs. Teachers are encouraged to integrate subjects across the curriculum to help students develop an understanding of how content areas relate to each other. Curriculum revision is an ongoing process, with staff development days set aside so that teachers and principals can meet to discuss curriculum issues.

Staff Selection and Capacity Building

There is a commitment to acquiring and retaining strong faculty members. Efforts are made to select the strongest instructional leaders from the pool of applicants. The reputation of the school and high salaries for the area provide incentive for applicants to the district, so recruitment procedures are not necessary. To encourage the further development of the educational leadership of teachers, extra compensation is provided for those who meet National Board Certification. Administrators are typically promoted from within. Salem School District has consistently focused on hiring teachers that are certified for what they will teach, so NCLB's requirement of "highly qualified" teachers will not be as difficult for Salem School District as it will be for other districts. Candidates for open positions are evaluated on the strength of their instructional leadership skills. Though no formal procedures are in place for retaining quality teachers and administrators, the support system of the district is strong which makes people want to stay in the school system.

The district provides support through a variety of professional development opportunities. Teachers are provided with professional development through the cooperative, district, school and on-line events. Primary foci include: training on the effective use of curriculum, enhanced

teaching practices, distance learning, and technology. All of the training provided is tied to ACTAAP. Most staff development is provided by the cooperative, but the principals have input on what topics will be offered. Teachers may find their own professional development activities, but they must be related to their teaching area, or the district will not support them.

To further enhance professional development, collaboration among the teachers at Salem Elementary is encouraged. Teachers within each grade level have the same planning periods so that collaboration can occur. A system has been developed so that each year, each teacher will observe two other teachers in the building which helps to foster collaboration and sharing of effective teaching strategies. Teacher aides are provided to assist teachers in the classroom. The teacher collaboration has led to reduced stress among teachers because teachers no longer feel isolated.

Instructional Programs, Practices, & Arrangements

Salem Elementary utilizes specific instructional programs to meet the needs of students. Textbooks and curricular materials are selected that address the state frameworks, can be used by the entire school staff, and focus on hands-on, active learning. A committee of teachers and the principals research instructional programs to be adopted, and final program selection is done by the entire faculty. Instructional programs are evaluated on a regular basis to ensure that they are being successfully implemented and that they are producing the desired results. The school has been committed to providing the materials needed to make instructional programs successful. Teachers are free to modify materials to more closely resemble the state frameworks and Benchmark style.

All instructional practices at Salem Elementary are aimed at increasing student achievement. Classes are arranged so that high, average, and low performing students are distributed across the classes at each grade level. Grouping within the classroom is deliberate, with teachers carefully pairing higher- and lower-achieving students together. Teachers are required to submit a plan of instructional time before the school year begins to ensure that appropriate time is devoted to each instructional area. Any non-curriculum oriented activities must be pre-approved by the principal. Teachers utilize a variety of instructional strategies, including cooperative learning, role playing, learning centers, peer tutoring, peer editing, lecture, class interaction, and hands-on activities.

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, & Use of Data

The Salem School District uses data to identify potential weaknesses in the curriculum. Every grade is tested each year in Salem School District. For the grades that are not required to take state benchmark exams, the SAT-9 is given to the students. The data collected from these assessments guides school staff in the identification of possible weaknesses in the curriculum. The superintendent and school board break down the results for this analysis. The results are presented to the teachers for individual use. In a public meeting, parents are presented with data. The input from all groups is used to make any necessary adjustments to the curriculum.

Discussion from the data analysis meetings is used to guide development of goals for the next school year.

Salem Elementary participates in continuous monitoring of student progress. Teachers use teacher-developed assessments, portfolios, and purchased programs (i.e., Accelerated Reader) to monitor student progress. The principal generates reports on a quarterly basis for teachers. A major goal at Salem Elementary is to break down data as quickly as possible and distribute results to teachers in a timely manner.

Recognition, Intervention, & Adjustments

Recognition is used at Salem Elementary to enhance learning for students. The school regularly recognizes student achievement, behavior and citizenship through its' Renaissance program. Ceremonies and awards are provided for these students. Students are recognized not only for high achievement in school and proficiency on state tests, but also for perfect attendance and showing improvement. The faculty at Salem Elementary believes that all students should be eligible for recognition, not just the high-achieving students.

Teachers at Salem Elementary strive to provide additional learning opportunities for struggling students. A program is in place for older students to work with younger students with reading difficulties. Tutoring is provided to help older students with academic needs. The need for interventions is determined early so that students do not fall so far behind that it is not possible for them to catch up quickly. Daily communication journals are used to provide information about student performance to parents. Furthermore, teachers, counselors and administrators give additional reports and/or calls to parents to enhance communication. A school-wide discipline policy is in place, and administrators and the school board for teachers provide the support needed to adhere to the plan.

Other Factors Influencing Practices

Local Influences, Relationships, & Communication

Schools must form partnerships with parents. Communication between teachers, administrators, and parents is vital to the success of students. Teachers and administrators have the responsibility of showing parents the importance of student mastery. Parents should be involved in their child's education as much as possible and should be invited into the classroom so that they can see what and how their child is learning.

The Salem School District maintains an informative website for parents, students, teachers, and the community. On the website information such as a school calendar, faculty listings, sports activities, administration information, lunch menus, testing dates, counselor's corner, and student recognition can be accessed. The website also provides links to the elementary and high school.

Core Beliefs About Teaching & Learning

The success of a school system is measured in how well the students from that school function in society. Since Salem School District is a small district in a small town, keeping track of the success of their students is easier. The main goal of the district is to provide competent, productive citizens.

Teachers must stay focused on what works in order for students to succeed. High expectations and strict use of instructional time are key factors in student achievement. Teachers must care about students, both in and out of school, in order for students to reach their true potential.