

Sidney Deener Elementary Searcy School District

School Context

Searcy is located in the Central Region of Arkansas, in White County, and has a population of approximately 18,900 people. Searcy School District serves approximately 3,700 students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. Sidney Deener Elementary is one of three elementary schools in the district and serves approximately 430 students in kindergarten through fourth grade. The Searcy School District seeks “to prepare responsible, productive citizens in schools where the abilities of every child are understood, nurtured, and developed.”

As reported below, the district population differs from the state, and the elementary population is different from the district. With respect to ethnicity, the district and school are less diverse than the state as a whole. The number of students that participate in the Free and Reduced Lunch program and Special Education services in the Searcy School District are less than the state. The percentage eligible for these programs at Sidney Deener is similar to the state averages. Sidney Deener serves a higher percentage of migrant students than the district and state as a whole.

In 2003 and 2004, Sidney Deener 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 district and school population is notably less diverse than the state, 89.1 % of the students in the district are white.*

	Sidney Deener Elementary	Searcy School District	Arkansas
% White	79.0	87.9	70.1
% African-American	17.7	9.4	22.9
% Hispanic	3.1	2.1	5.3
% Other	0.2	0.5	1.7

School Support Services: (2004) *Sidney Deener serves slightly more students through the Free and Reduced Lunch Program, 54.4%, than the state, 44.2%. Sidney Deener serves a higher percentage of migrant students, 4.5%, than the district, 2.1%, and state 1.5%.*

	Sidney Deener Elementary	Searcy School District	Arkansas
% Free and Reduced Lunch	54.4	34.1	44.2
% English as a Second Language	3.8	0.8	2.8
% Special Education	15.8	10.7	11.3
% Migrant	4.5	2.1	1.5

Assessments by Grade: *The Searcy School District and Sidney Deener continue to exceed 4th grade state proficiency averages for Benchmark exams. Both the district and the school show outstanding growth.*

	Sidney Deener Elementary	Searcy School District	Arkansas
% Reading 2002	66.2	74.2	57.9
2003	85.9	86.9	62.0
2004	83.8	88.7	69.3
% Math 2002	56.1	68.3	49.2
2003	88.5	86.5	61.0
2004	82.4	85.7	65.2

Curriculum and Academic Goals

Searcy School District’s curriculum is driven by state standards and development is a district wide process. Curriculum alignment and formation was done at the district level by forming a committee of grade level representatives from each elementary school. Curriculum was reviewed and compared with state standards and then outlined at each building and for every grade level in building meetings. Guidelines were then distributed to all teachers. Currently there is no routine revision process in place for the district. Some gaps are present in the curriculum and these are being addressed.

Sidney Deener curriculum is fine-tuned on campus by teachers and an increase in student achievement is a positive outcome. After receiving district curriculum, teachers at Sidney Deener work to make standards specific enough for classroom use. State standards are good quality, the principal reports, but vague. Grade levels at Sidney Deener meet twice a week to discuss curriculum. The school has been working on a calendar-based curriculum so that teachers in the same grade level are teaching the same material during the same time frame. All stakeholders are made aware of curriculum plans at the elementary. “With more effective implementation of the curriculum, we’re seeing kids being better prepared from grade to grade.”

Staff Selection and Capacity Building

Searcy School District and Sidney Deener select candidates with strong instructional experience. Although there is currently no formal recruitment process in place, the district and school seek and hire teachers with instructional expertise, especially in literacy. Teachers with assessment experience and those who are willing to be a part of assessment teams are preferred. District teachers are not involved in the selection of new teachers. Starting salaries exceed state minimums and the district and the school have not had difficulty hiring new teachers.

Searcy School District bases professional development needs on data with the help of a committee. Using data, professional development activities are targeted that will meet teacher needs and improve student achievement. For example, recent professional development training in effective literacy has been shown to increase student test scores. To assist in professional development needs, a committee surveys teachers, which helps determine offered activities. Teachers within the district often exceed the state requirement of 36 annual professional development hours by 15-20 hours. Teachers' schedules are adjusted by the district and school to help meet professional development needs. Ongoing programs, rather than one time sessions, are the preferred development of choice.

A collaborative atmosphere is very important for Sidney Deener Teachers. Although collaboration is currently not done across the district, it is an important component within Sidney Deener. Grade level meetings are held every other week, with meeting times arranged by teachers, and minutes of the meeting kept on file. Teachers at the school are actively involved in teacher organizations that focus on discussing and reviewing current educational literature, ideas, and strategies. Sidney Deener's principal is also active in keeping teachers informed of educational trends.

Instructional Programs, Practices, & Arrangements

Sidney Deener focuses on teaching the curriculum, instead of relying on a particular program. In the last three years some emphasis has been placed on literacy programs such as ELLA (Early Literacy Learning in Arkansas) and Effective Literacy, but even these programs, according to the school, can not meet all needs, therefore supplementation by teachers is needed. Teachers actively seek programs that will increase student achievement but focus on content first, as directed by the curriculum.

Sidney Deener integrates curriculum to provide maximum exposure to reading and writing. Currently, Sidney Deener is devoting over 2 hours per day to literacy instruction. Science and Social Studies are integrated with the reading and writing curriculum to maximize instructional time for literacy. The school is not departmentalized because this led to a decrease in instructional time in the past.

Students at Sidney Deener are ready for advancement. Sidney Deener teachers focus on making sure students are prepared for the next grade level. This reduces time needed to

review past material and increases instructional time for new material. Teachers use new strategies that are research based to increase student learning. Students are not kept in one ability group, but are moved around as they make progress. The goal at Sidney Deener is individual achievement characterized by creative and critical thinking, not “norming” of students.

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, & Use of Data

Searcy School District monitors student performance throughout the district. Teacher created quarterly performance assessments are used throughout the school district to help monitor and increase student achievement. Teachers are taught to set goals that are outcome based and measurable, and then design data collection techniques to monitor student progress. A Kindergarten Readiness Indicator Checklist (KRIC) helps assess new students and student weaknesses are indicated by grade levels.

Sidney Deener tracks student achievement. Sidney Deener’s principal is extremely involved in data analysis. Data from the state is verified and later analyzed and disseminated to teachers in understandable form. Student academic achievement folders are kept, and class work and test scores are kept up to date and follow each student as they progress through the school. Reading assessments are done at all levels, and the SAT-9 is given in grade levels not already assessed. STAR reading is also used to help monitor student reading progress. STAR Reading helps determine the reading level of each student, and measures individual and class growth.

Recognition, Intervention, & Adjustments

Students are recognized and rewarded for achievement at Sidney Deener. Accelerated Reader parties honor students quarterly for academic achievement. Perfect attendance and good behavior are awarded at monthly assemblies. Each classroom also has its own reward system developed by teachers.

Intervention and adjustment are an integral part of student achievement. Students that are not proficient in math and literacy are invited to summer school and/or after school tutoring. After school tutoring takes place three times a week during 90 minute sessions. Students may also be sent to other grade level teachers for differentiated instruction. Weekly checklists are utilized as needed to inform students and parents of academic and behavioral issues. Intervention is an ongoing process at Sidney Deener, “we’re not waiting until we get the test results to wait and see how the kids are doing.”

Other Factors Influencing Practices

Local Influences, Relationships, and Communication

Parental involvement is improving at Sidney Deener, but is not yet at goal level. The school PTA involvement is progressing, but the school would like to see more. A new parental involvement program called “First Day Celebration” welcomes parents on the first day of school with their child. During this time parents and students are introduced to curriculum

and behavioral expectations and procedures. To improve parental attendance for this function, Sidney Deener's principal contacted local employers as needed to request work release. School Math and Literacy Nights also provide an opportunity for parents to get involved and learn about curriculum and monitoring. Sidney Deener believes that parents need to be educated on school expectations and school objectives.

The community is involved and local businesses have offered their support. A "Friends Program" through the local university offers a program similar to Big Brothers/Big Sisters, and it focuses on getting children familiar with secondary education and college and helps students set goals. Children are referred by teachers, parents, or themselves and the program has been successful in improving parental involvement. Other businesses are also interested in working with the school and have offered support, but presently the school is still working on ways to get them involved. One way thus far has been a "Look to the Future" night in which local businesses come in and students can ask questions about careers.

Core Beliefs about Teaching and Learning

Sidney Deener believes all children can learn. Varying learning differences exist among students, but students must be accountable for learning. The staff at Sidney Deener are very caring, nurturing, and supportive, but also have an attitude of "no excuses" for everyone on campus. The students have to be the most important aspect of school for the teachers. If teachers do not believe in students, then the students will not believe in themselves. Teachers promote trust and want students to feel safe. The atmosphere of the school is very positive, high expectations are transferred from staff to students, which makes learning very valuable to students.