

Site Visit Findings: Searcy School District Southwest Middle School

Site Visit Context

The Searcy School District is located in White County. Searcy is 50 miles north of the state capitol of Little Rock. The Searcy School District serves approximately 3,663 students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. The district seeks to “prepare responsible, productive citizens in schools where the abilities of every child are understood, nurtured, and developed.” Southwest Middle School is the only middle school in the district and serves approximately 589 in grades five and six.

The Searcy School District has effectively implemented state requirements and continues to grow. Southwest Middle School received “an ‘A’ rating from the State Department of Education for meeting the guidelines and requirements from the Standards of Accreditation of Arkansas Public Schools.” Both the district and school show a real commitment to student learning and consistent student academic growth.

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

	Southwest Middle School	Searcy School District	Arkansas
% White	88.5	87.9	70.1
% African-American	8.8	9.4	22.9
% Hispanic	2.0	2.1	5.3
% Asian/Pacific Islander	0.5	0.4	1.1
% American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.2	0.1	0.6

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

	Southwest Middle School	Searcy School District	Arkansas
% Free and Reduced Lunch	38.7	34.1	44.2
% English as a Second Language	0.3	0.8	2.8
% Special Education	7.0	10.7	11.3
% Migrant	1.7	2.1	1.5

Assessments by Grade: *The school shows considerable growth in both 6th grade math and literacy. The school consistently outperforms the state in math and literacy proficiency averages.*

		Southwest Middle School	Arkansas
Literacy % Proficient (6 th Grade)	2003	39.0	27.1
	2004	73.0	42.0
	2005	81.0	57.0
Math % Proficient (6 th Grade)	2003	48.0	35.5

2004	59.0	41.0
2005	63.0	44.0

Curriculum and Academic Goals

- ✓ There is a comprehensive curriculum guide for the district that is updated as needed to reflect state and national standards. Committees meet to analyze the curriculum with new content added in connection with the state standards.
- ✓ Curriculum is reviewed and developed on an on-going basis, with vertical and horizontal alignments. All teachers are involved in the curriculum revision. Groups of teachers meet to review a particular area of the curriculum and to modify guides as needed.
- ✓ There are high expectations for students across all grade levels. There is no backing down on the expectations of students. Teachers are given state standards and local curriculum guides for consultation on planning instruction. The district curriculum guide is provided on the school website for parents as well.

Curriculum and Academic Goal Comments

We look at all the Arkansas Consolidated School Improvement Plan (ACSIP) plans and we see where the needs are.

Experienced Administrator

We're constantly checking and making sure that we know if there are any changes being made in the state frameworks.

Experienced Administrator

We've had phenomenal growth, and it all centers on the teachers knowing how and what to teach and then doing it.

Experienced Administrator

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

- ✓ Care is taken in selecting principals to lead the schools. The criteria for hiring principals include experience, past history and previous leadership roles. Teachers, board members, administrators and parents are involved in the selection process.
- ✓ Careful consideration is given for the selection and hiring of quality teachers. For teacher candidates, if the current faculty does not have knowledge of the candidate's teaching ability, the candidate must present a model lesson. Most new hires, however, have served as substitute teachers or student teachers in the district. Each school has been granted autonomy in recommending which teachers to hire.
- ✓ There is a team approach to instruction at the school. Weekly department meetings are held to share teaching strategies. Furthermore, common preparation time is in place for the sharing of ideas, documents and teacher created materials. Teachers are allowed to

visit other classes for ideas and there is sharing of professional development materials. Additionally, support specialists are in place to provide assistance for the teachers.

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building Comments

We hire very professional teachers. And we expect them to teach the curriculum.

Experienced Administrator

We share resources; we share teacher-created documents. At all times we are moving toward the same goal and trying to meet the same expectations.

Experienced Teacher

Our principal is very supportive of us. The principal has confidence in us.

Experienced Teacher

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

- ✓ The school is granted the freedom by the district to select and develop instructional programs and materials to best meet the needs of students. Each school chooses the textbooks that will be used. Teachers are allowed to select the teaching methods that are best for them and their students.
- ✓ The instructional programs chosen are research based and piloted in the school before adoption. The instructional pace is monitored and adjusted to promote student learning. Teachers are free to incorporate outside materials into existing programs.
- ✓ Programs are provided to help all students to learn, because all students are viewed as an important part of the school. Various programs are in place to meet the needs of students, including special education, gifted and talented programs, enrichment activities and pull-out resources. Components of these programs include extra-curricular activities, hands-on projects and alternative assessments.

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangement Comments

The philosophy here is that they take from any program they want to, but then use what best fits their teaching style and the needs of their students.

Experienced Administrator

Searcy is very unusual in that individual schools have complete autonomy on the programs they chose for their school.

Experienced Administrator

Every program and every textbook are just tools. They're not our curriculum.

Experienced Administrator

Benchmark testing had impacted the way we teach the curriculum.

Experienced Administrator

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

- ✓ Teachers develop targets for their instruction based on the use of data. These data come from end-of-year student evaluations which are comprised of test data, grades, formative evaluations, teacher made tests and benchmark exams. The targets vary from year to year and from team to team.
- ✓ The school makes use of a variety of data for monitoring student progress. Data are used from the National Office for Research on Measurement and Evaluation Systems (NORMES), North Central, Benchmark tests, SAT-9 and ITBS.
- ✓ There are formal and informal evaluations completed for each teacher in the school. The evaluations are comprehensive. Teachers provide yearly goals to the principal which help structure the evaluation.

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data Comments

We have a lot of data available to us, provided by the principal and school district. We know particular weaknesses and we look at data at the student level.

Experienced Teacher

I start monitoring by identifying particular goals. What's the first thing I want this child to do on the next essay? Then I'm constantly targeting.

Experienced Teacher

Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustments

- ✓ Strong academic performance is recognized in a variety of ways. Honors students are given recognition in a student assembly, with the top 2 students being given special recognition. Medals are awarded to students who get A's and B's.
- ✓ The principal brings students to the office and calls the parents to recognize good work. Additionally, student work is recognized in individual classrooms. For example, incentives are available with the Accelerated Math and Reading programs.

Influential Factors

- ✓ Top performing schools recognize the importance of parental involvement in the education of students. At Southwest Middle School, there is strong community and parental support. To encourage and foster parental involvement, there is an active PTO, parent volunteer program, parental involvement handbook, family math and reading nights. The community relations coordinator sends out a newspaper for the parents and radio spotlight of events to highlight achievements and to keep communication open.
- ✓ Faculty and staff at Southwest Middle School are all there for the students. There is a strong desire to maintain excellence and the school is proud of the success. Furthermore, the school strives for a friendly environment.

- ✓ The district maintains a budget for professional development opportunities and for classroom materials.
- ✓ There are several venues for the ascertainment of grants for the teachers to participate in professional development and for resource attainment, including funds from the Searcy Educational Foundation. The Searcy Educational Foundation awards grants directly to teachers each year so that teachers can purchase needed supplies for their classrooms.

Influential Factors Comments

We have parents who care. From the superintendent to the janitors, we're here for the kids.
Experienced Administrator

To be able to work with other teachers and learn from them to help make my own teaching stronger and better has really been rewarding.
Experienced Teacher