

Instructional

LEADER

Sharing BEST Practices

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IZARD COUNTY
SHERIFF
DEPARTMENT
SUB-STATION



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Arkansas Association of
Educational Administrators

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WHAT IS THE Instructional LEADER ?

- Quarterly publication of the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators (AAEA)
- Designed for lead administrators to share successful practices
- Published to raise the level of awareness and support for Association members and educators on issues affecting education in Arkansas
- Contains state and national information pertaining to curriculum, instruction, assessment, and accountability issues
- Articles are contributed by state instructional leaders (superintendents, principals, central office administrators, graduate students pursuing administrative degrees, and lead teachers)
- May also contain summaries of state and national articles of interest and current research information

WHERE DO WE TAKE IT FROM HERE?



Contributor: Jon Collins, Superintendent,
West Memphis School District

Recently, we all had the opportunity to hear Bill Daggett speak about being future-focused at the AAEA fall conference. He talked about a variety of topics, but the one that stuck out to me the most was the term *Disruptive Innovation*. Basically, taking the idea and changing the system versus inserting the idea into the same old system. He asked "What are you currently doing that is not going to help us get to the future of what we need?"

This time of year in the Delta brings about a sense of urgency that you just have to experience and witness to understand – harvest season. Harvest season operates in a world of disruptive innovation. It always makes me realize farmers and educators operate in a similar world on so many fronts.

It is not uncommon to pass a parade of grain haulers loaded down and headed to the river port all day every day. It is also not uncommon to see a field full of combines or baler cotton pickers working from can until can't as long as mother nature allows.

There are so many variables in the world of agriculture that can't be controlled this time of year: crop prices, fuel prices, rain, lack of rain, global economy, ground moisture, parts and labor, time, etc.

I often ponder at how many jobs are needed and connected on a daily basis to make a farmer's day successful. When you stop and count every single task I think you would be surprised. There are many on the front lines, many behind the scenes, and many unsung heroes.

Much like in our industry of education...how many jobs are needed and connected on a daily basis to make education successful? And, make no mistake it is an industry. From the federal mandates and appropriations to all fifty states' responses and even down to the local demands and sometimes the pressures can make you go a little crazy with thought, approaches, and ideas.

Five years ago, most thought we were a little crazy. A school district in the Delta is going to pursue a conversion charter partnership with a local community college to expand workforce training opportunities like

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Five years ago, we re-tooled our approach. We didn't apologize for it then and still don't today. We want every child to have "a plan after diploma" and due to our workforce development emphasis, we want every child to have "an unfair advantage," because they've had progressive opportunities at The Academies of West Memphis High School. In fact, we encourage all school leaders to approach their day-to-day with the same student-focused education and

personalization. Many of you have visited our model and are now following suit in a variety of ways that have enhanced your local communities as well. Good for you!

Since the origin of our partnership with Arkansas State – Mid South Community College, our student success stories continue to grow. And,

as they grow, so does our workforce and economic development opportunities here at home. Currently, we have just over \$400 million worth of new business expansions in our community. The transformation of new industry requires skilled labor from beginning to end. The old saying that you can't have a good economy without a good education system and you can't have a good education system without a good economy is so true.

If you want a humbling experience, take a visit to your local economic development office and have them give you a run-down of all the criteria any potential new business or industry expects about your community, before making a decision to locate there. As you know skilled labor and, more importantly, training skilled labor is not cheap. We argue that it is so worth the return on investment.

We have produced more welders, more certified nursing assistants, more pharmacy techs, more diesel mechanics,

nobody else? Workforce training opportunities? Really? Who does that? What are y'all going to do in public education to continue to address all the other somewhat insane ideology we face as educators? Our answer was pretty simple... call us crazy, but we are going to continue to try to do that too.

Granted, it is easy to get bogged down with assessments, letter grades, graduation rates, interventions, ACT scores, college acceptance stats, the best new way to count to five, etc. There has also been a lot of talk around adequacy in our state as there should be. For us, it was a pretty simple deal – we refused to get bogged down any longer. *While we agree all those issues are important, we do not agree that they should all take precedence over the ultimate standard for educational adequacy – obtaining a good job, one capable of providing a family-sustaining wage.* The Delta knows about poverty and all that stems from such. You want to change generational poverty? Give young people a skillset to actually go to work and contribute to society.



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more hospitality and management opportunities, more culinary training, and more concurrent credit in general than ever before.

Located in the heart of the Mid-South and in the shadows of Memphis, TN, we had to be responsive to our greater region's needs. Between the demand for welders on dry ground as well as the Mississippi River aquatic industry – we've supplied for the need. We have a new hospital but also live 6 miles from the largest medical community in Mid-America – we've supplied for the need. The Interstate 55 / Interstate 40 exchange sees almost 80,000 vehicles pass through our corridor daily. We are the trucking capitol of North America which demands mechanic and distribution skills – we've supplied for the need. Delaware-North has a \$250 million expansion going on at Southland. This is the single largest investment in the tourism industry in the history of our great state – we've supplied for the need.

Law enforcement agencies may have a greater shortage than the teaching profession. A few years ago, we held meetings with the Arkansas State Police, the WMPD, and the Crittenden County Sheriff's Association about the challenges of finding applicants to enter the field. All said that foundational knowledge and exposure earlier would help in the recruitment of qualified applicants. Our high school installed a Criminal Justice course, and it reached enrollment capacity on day one. The very next year we expanded to open a Criminal Justice II course to give our students additional exposure, access and opportunities to foundational knowledge in this field. It makes us proud to see our former students serving and protecting in our local community. We responded to the issue and supplied for the need.

Recently, our high school was recognized for its work in Cyber Security. We installed the first high school cyber lab in the state a few years ago. Last year, Governor Hutchinson visited twice to explore the curriculum as well as tout our lab on his spring coding tour. We asked the question locally of our industry partners and sat back



and listened. They were desperately needing help in a rapidly growing field of protection: cyber security. There are two types of people in this world – those who have been hacked and compromised and those who will be hacked and compromised. Companies from small businesses to Fortune 500 companies are battling cyber attacks on identity theft, financial theft, and overall security breaches almost every second. This may be the fastest growing demand of our present day. How do we protect our information? We responded with the installation of Cyber Security and began preparing students for the potential of entry level jobs as they graduate from high school.

The best business quote I heard was about seven years ago when we started exploring the career and technical road with such great emphasis... "All of what you do in education is important. Some of it is just not as important in the big scheme of things as others. For instance, I don't care what the best new way to count to five is today. **What I want to know is this** – can you perform the skillset to impact my bottom line? Can you pass a drug test? Can you commit to being at work on time every day and staying until the job gets done? Can you continue to learn?"

So... I have said all of that to say this. Be encouraged! It is an exciting time to be in public education in our great state. Don't get bogged down with the flaws of what some might say is an unjust system. Do your thing

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and do it the best you can for the kids under your care. Graduation day is coming for every student in our K-12 systems. We should be using interventions, we should be worried about foundational skills, we should be concerned with literacy, math, and science progressions. ACT scores are important. Graduation rates, ESSA scores, etc... all important. But, above all of that we better be giving kids the skillsets to become tax producers versus tax consumers. Sometimes that means we have to get outside the box with crazy ideas. Sometimes that means we have to go against the traditional grain. Sometimes that means listening and responding to what our local or regional business and industry needs actually are and then addressing them systematically with an action plan.

The future of our state needs farmers and educators and needs both groups to be successful.

Educators and farmers are all a little crazy anyway. We spend each year cultivating and growing everything around us. Some years are better than others. Sometimes, we try new things. Other times we revert back to tried and trusted practices.

Much like farming – education has certainly changed and is certain to progress over the next 25 years as well. Farmers don't practice the same way they did 25 years ago for the most part. Varieties changes, pigweed emerged, applications are amended, gumbo soil continues to defy science. As Waylon once said "Where do we take it from here?"



WiFi Available to Bus Riders in PCSSD

Contributor: Jessica Duff,
Executive Director of Communications, Pulaski County Special School District

Many Pulaski County Special School District (PCSSD) students have the opportunity to expand their access to WiFi while riding on school buses this year.

"With students who don't have WiFi at their homes, I think it will give them an added advantage to complete their homework," said Operations Specialist Charles Anderson.

"It gives them time to occupy their minds, to engage

their minds, and continue to learn. I think it's much needed, I think it will help out a whole lot."

PCSSD students are assigned a Chromebook each year, which automatically connect to the routers on the buses. Nearly 20 buses are available with routers.

Some students have long commutes, up to 45 minutes. WiFi will also be available on school buses as students travel for athletics, extra curricular activities or field trips.

Calico Rock School District Welcomes Izard County Sheriff's Sub-Station

Contributor: Jerry Skidmore, Superintendent,
Calico Rock School District



The city council and the patrons of Calico Rock saw a need in the community and in May, 2018, the city of Calico Rock passed a one-cent Safety and Security sales tax which would generate funds to provide full-time deputies for the city. The Izard County sheriff's office is located 21 miles away thus creating a need for a sub-station for the city of Calico Rock.

Later that summer, while at the Rural Education Conference in Hot Springs I picked up on an idea from Governor Hutchinson. He was talking about another school that had provided a room on their campus for deputies to work in an effort to have more law enforcement presence on their campus. I couldn't wait to get back and discuss the idea with Sheriff Jack Yancey and Chief Deputy Earnie Blackley. They were eager to listen, because they also wanted a workplace for their deputies in Calico Rock. We agreed to place a Sub-Station for the Sheriffs' Office on the elementary campus.

Calico Rock is a small rural school that has only one resource officer (SRO) attempting to cover both the high school campus and the elementary campus approximately one mile away. The opportunity to have extra law enforcement close by is beneficial to the school district. Parents, students, and school personnel feel at ease and comfortable knowing deputies are only

moments away. The community benefits by knowing deputies are available in town and enjoy a much shorter response time when needed. The deputies working on this side of the county now have access to an office in the city limits of Calico Rock day or night as needed.



I would like to thank Sheriff Jack Yancey and Earnie Blackley for agreeing to this idea and the city council and patrons of Calico Rock for passing the Safety and Security sales tax. Mr. Earnie Blackley is now sheriff, and the agreement still stands and is working for everyone involved.

ELKINS SCHOOL DISTRICT:

A Professional Learning Community



Contributor: Jeremy Mangrum, Superintendent, Elkins School District

There are many buzzwords that come and go in the world of K-12 education. I have seen many of these burn bright for a period of time only to flame out a short time later. One popular acronym that has withstood the test of time thus far is PLC. The Professional Learning Community concept became moderately known in the late 1990s when Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker published their work in the book *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement*.

The concept was slow to take off in some areas around the nation, but it has picked up a lot of steam in the past decade, seemingly catching fire in Arkansas in recent years. Regardless of the history of the Professional Learning Community model, it is safe to say that we are ALL IN on PLC's at Elkins School District. What began as

a concept has become our way of life, and it drives what we do on a daily basis to effectively educate our students. Our teachers understand that they work better together. Second grade teacher Brandi Morgan said, "PLC's help me to be a better teacher through the interaction and communication among colleagues...In order to effectively meet the needs of the students, we need to collaborate and share ideas with each other." That is not to say that it has been an easy journey. There have been many hurdles to clear, obstacles to navigate, and even some walls to knock down along the way. After years of hard work, the journey is still not finished, but we are starting to see some of the fruits of our labor.

The fruit came in the form of our school letter grades that were released last month by the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education of the Arkansas

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Department of Education. All four schools in our district earned a "B" grade for 2019. This is huge progress when factoring in the 2018 letter grades (three C's and one B). Three of our four schools improved an entire letter grade. No matter how you look at it, this was an awesome achievement, and our staff, students, and community are excited about what the future holds. The progress was made possible by an outstanding group of teachers, principals, and support staff who bought into the PLC model and worked extremely hard each and every day to do what was best for their students.

We did not get to this point overnight. It has taken a few years to get to where we are now, which is to truly say that we have built a working professional learning community. Though it has been an adventure at times, we certainly would never go back. Fifth grade teacher

Angie Keller shared this about PLC's: "PLC's have proven to be extremely valuable in the Elementary. We have learned a lot over the years, and worked to make our PLC what it is today. Today we are able to look at data, see where our students need the most help and use this to make

them successful." We are believers in PLC's at Elkins and thought it might be helpful to offer a few tips from our own experience to the readers who might be considering taking the first step or the next step in their own PLC trek. So here goes...

Make the Time

In order to have an effective PLC, you must have a designated time to meet. There are different theories on exactly who should be part of the meetings at which time. Some schools like the teachers of a particular

grade level to be a part of a specific PLC while others prefer subject-specific PLC groups. Both theories have merit, and there is not necessarily any wrong way. The essential first step is to make the time...period. This means that the school leadership must make a priority when designing the master schedule to build time in for regular PLC meetings that can be attended by the appropriate personnel. This is always a logistical challenge when undertaken for the first time, but it is possible nonetheless. The meetings must take place consistently, and they have to be a priority. The school leaders in our district have done a masterful job of building this time into their respective schedules.

Identify Your Learning Targets

Different school districts use varying terminology for learning targets. Over the years, I have heard schools call them essential standards, high priority standards, critical learning targets, and power standards. What you call them is not important, but having them identified is critical to the process. Teachers are the content-area experts, as such, they should work together to identify the essential standards for each specific subject area. A key point to remember is **not everything is essential**. Some of the more spirited debates we encountered in this process revolved around whether or not a standard would make the list of essentials. There is no magic number of essential standards for a subject, but we like to have no more than 15 standards listed as essential.

Assess Your Essential Standards

Identifying the essential standards is great, but if those standards are not assessed to measure student mastery, then you are never going to take the next step toward having a true PLC. There are different theories on the type and timing of common assessments used for assessing essential standards. One option is for the teachers that are part of the PLC to design and create common assessments, and then to administer and grade them. Another option would be to partner with a vendor to use a computer software-based testing program. Our district made the decision to go with a

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remediation plan while those that have reached mastery need a personalized enrichment plan. Admittedly, we are still working on all the different moving parts of successful remediation and enrichment, but we can see the light at the end of the tunnel. Mrs. Keller summed it up well when she said, “Data is the driving force in a PLC. It is a tough and tedious task sometimes, but planning instruction based on individual student’s needs using data has definitely proven effective in our building. We have shown huge gains in student growth, and I believe this is due to our time put into data analysis and individualized instruction, remediation, and enrichment.”

For Remediation Activities: Designate Time and Use Small Group Instruction

The master schedule in your building needs to have built-in time for remediation each day. If you do not make time for it, it will not happen. It took some creativity but our principals were able to build in a designated time for this in each school’s schedule. A great PLC will also consider what type of remediation activities will be scheduled and how those activities will be facilitated by the teachers. It does not matter the age of your students, remediation efforts will be much more successful in a small group than in a whole group setting. Our teachers have really taken off with their use of small group instruction. They don’t just use small groups for remediation, they use effective small group instruction as part of their lesson plan almost every day, which has resulted in large growth gains for our students.

Talk About the Data with a Purpose

Nothing worth noting will get accomplished at a PLC meeting without having a specific agenda and discussing relevant data. When your common assessments are taken by students, the results need to be analyzed immediately by the PLC members. Part of the analysis should include developing a plan for each student that is based on his or her mastery or lack thereof concerning the essential standards. The students that have not mastered all of the essential standards need a specific

While we have covered a large amount of ground on our PLC journey, there is much left to do. What keeps us focused on the work and helps us push through is knowing that we are doing what is best for our students. We owe it to our students to do everything in our power to help them master the essential standards at each grade level. It is never easy, but it is important work. We have data-driven conversations that we did not have in years past, are targeted and focused in our efforts, and make sure not to just work hard but also to work smart.

Healthy Students = Better Learners

Gurdon School District's Wellness Center

Contributor: Allen Blackwell, Superintendent, Gurdon School District

Our motto in the Gurdon Wellness Center is "healthy students are better learners." We know that healthy children get better grades, have better attendance, and behavior is also better in class. The Wellness Center is a school-based health clinic located within Gurdon High School. We offer medical, dental, and behavioral health services where students are: at school. This improves our students' access to healthcare and reduces the impact of outside barriers such as lack of transportation or a parent's inability to get time off from work to take their child to an important healthcare visit. Our students were just not being taken to the doctor much less the dentist. We are committed to identifying and correcting our student's health barriers to learning. One of the major barriers that we identified in the planning stages of the Wellness Center was limited access to oral health care. The need was evident: we had high school students who had never been to a dentist who were in pain and missing school due to problems with their teeth. Additionally, a lack of familiarity with the dentist contributed to a fear of oral health care for many of our students. We saw the need in our students and made a plan to meet that need. In 2012, through a partnership with Gurdon Family Dentistry (Dr. Adam DeLee), we introduced preventative dental care (exams,



cleanings and x-rays) as an offered service to our students. We began the process of familiarizing our students with the dentist and providing dental treatment to students who were in need. In 2019 we completed a full remodel of our dental office through a \$69,359.59 enhancement grant from ADE School Health Services which allowed us to expand our services to provide restorative oral health care (fillings, extractions). Prior to the remodel the dental unit



was seeing approximately 20% of our student population. Since the remodel and the expanded services we have seen a jump in the number of students being served. Currently 35% of our students are enrolled with the number growing each week as our services expand. Investing in our student's health needs

and improving their knowledge about health now will lead to a healthier community in the future. We are excited and committed to continue to be innovative as we strive to keep our students healthy and learning. If you have questions please contact Wendy Schaffer, LPC- School Based Health Center Coordinator at 870-353-4454 ext. 122 or you can email her at schafferw@go-devils.net

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Special thanks to the contributing writers who provided informative articles about their schools/districts!

It brings us joy to spread instructional news of best practices from our districts in Arkansas.

Thank you to all subscribing districts.

Let other administrators know about the successful practices in your school/district.

Contact Amy Manning-McNabb, AAEA Communications Manager, at a.mcnabb@theaaea.org, to share your best practices.



Arkansas Association of
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The *Voice* for School Administrators