



Successful Schools Case Studies

This brief addresses the following areas: (1) case study school selection and characteristics of the schools and (2) key takeaways from case studies in specific areas.

Case Study School Selection and Characteristics of the Schools

The selection of case study schools was a three-step approach. First, the study team identified the highest ranked schools that outperformed expectations. Second, the study team filtered the schools based on three criteria: (1) whether they had a letter grade of A, B, or C, (2) if they improved from 2018 to 2019, and (3) had a higher than average lower-income student percentage (above 63 percent) or a higher than average English learner (EL) student percentage (above 8 percent). The highest-ranking elementary school, middle school, and high school was selected from each region.

- **Northwest Region:** Lamar Elementary School, Helen Tyson Middle School, Jasper High School
- **Southwest Region:** Oscar Hamilton Elementary School, Mena Middle School, Lafayette High School
- **Central Region:** Theodore Jones Elementary School, Lisa Academy North Middle School, Lisa Academy North High School
- **Northeast Region:** Weiner Elementary School, Paragould Junior High School, Riverview High School
- **Southeast Region:** Des Ark Elementary School, Crossett Middle School, Lakeside High School

The average enrollment in case study schools was 361 students. The percentage of students (economically disadvantaged) ranged from 64 percent to 88 percent. The percentage of English Learners ranged from 0 to 29 percent. Two of the fifteen case study schools are innovation schools and two are charter schools.

Key Takeaways from Case Studies in Specific Areas

The study team conducted interviews with each of the schools to better understand what factors contribute to the school's success. Interview questions fell into eight main topic areas: school staffing, school schedule, curriculum and instructional programs, assessments and data, extra support strategies for struggling students, professional development, additional monetary and non-monetary supports, and school culture and leadership.

School staffing: case study schools tended to be smaller overall and have smaller class sizes, but otherwise the study team found that there was no one “best” way to staff schools. Some schools relied on instructional facilitators, while others utilized paraprofessional or specialist teachers to provide interventions. Many schools also reported a low turnover of key staff; however, this was not true for all.

School schedule: all of the schools had embedded time for intervention, and often enrichment, within the school day with a strong focus on Response to Intervention (RTI) support. Approaches to integration varied: many schools had daily blocks of core instruction up to 90 minutes or more, with others included specific “flex” time periods or days in their schedule to provide personalized instruction. In most circumstances, common planning time was built into the schedule. At the elementary level common

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planning time tended to be by grade whereas at the secondary level it tended to be by content area. It is important to note that common planning was much harder to implement smaller schools.

Curriculum and instructional program: curriculum and instructional programs varied between case study schools, with each school using the model and instructional resources that best met the unique needs of their students and schools. Case study schools emphasized the whole child and student-centered learning to ensure students are receiving all of the supports they need. There is also a strong focus on soft skills and character development across all grades and schools. Further, many of schools use community colleges and CTE courses to provide career and college coursework, as well as Virtual Arkansas to provide courses that would not be offered in smaller settings.

Assessments and data: overall, case study schools were very data driven, using various assessments, both summative and interim, to inform practice. All of the schools use data to identify struggling students and the areas that they need instructional support, as well as monitor their progress. Teachers also rely on data to adjust instruction and target support for students within the classroom, including a focus on addressing skill gaps, often through targeted drills.

Extra support strategies for struggling students: there were a variety of programs in the place to support struggling students across the case study schools. Generally, all case study schools had a strong focus on RTI support, with tiered interventions (small group, on-on-one, extended learning time) for students based upon their need, while building strong personal relationships and setting high expectations of all students. Many schools used before and after school programs, and work to make sure the schedule is convenient for families and by providing transportation. However, some schools were unable to provide before and after school programming because of transportation challenges.

Professional development: in all case study schools, there was a high level of collaboration between teachers, and between teachers and school administration. Teachers had common planning time and in some case study schools, embedded professional development through the professional learning communities (PLC) model. Teachers in many schools were allowed to pick PD that aligns with their growth needs and in many schools teachers will lead professional development. In addition to the PLC approach, the RISE trainings were stressed as particularly helpful to their staff.

Student support services: many schools have instituted social emotional supports to meet students' needs. Some schools have rooms where students can go to decompress, utilize specific social emotional curriculum such as Capturing Kids Hearts, and have counselors who meet with small groups of kids throughout the year. Many schools provide mental health support through partnerships with community-based therapists, who bill through Medicaid. A few case study schools also reported having a health clinic to serve students at school helping increase student attendance.

Additional monetary and non-monetary support: most of the case study schools have strong community support. Many are located in close knit, multigenerational communities. Community members volunteer in the schools, especially at the elementary level. The local clubs, churches, families and businesses donate to the schools and the schools form partnerships with businesses and local colleges to provide additional course offerings and career experiences.

School culture and leadership: in each school there was a strong school culture, with close relationships between staff, students and families. Case study schools often had a distributed leadership model where teachers are treated as professionals and principals give them autonomy and include them in decision-making. Staff are also willing to pitch in and wear multiple hats. Additionally, in many of the smaller schools there are very visible superintendents assisting in the school's success.

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