Building a Blueprint for Innovative Change Final Report for Grant # 9-1323

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Contact Person: Denise Airola, Ph.D. dairola@uark.edu

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Executive Summary

The vision of the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) is to provide an innovative, comprehensive education system focused on outcomes that ensure every student in Arkansas is prepared to succeed in post-secondary education and careers (ADE, 2012). Achieving this vision in the complexity of the 21st century educational system is a challenging task, particularly for schools struggling to meet the needs of their students. *Building a Blueprint for Innovative Change* is a research project conducted by the Office of Innovation for Education (OIE) with a two-fold purpose: (1) conduct an external assessment of Priority Schools' collective needs and (2) research and recommend innovative practices for systems-level changes to address collective needs.

Analysis, Results, and Findings

Priority School performance was analyzed to look for patterns in student performance that might inform professional development and support needs across all Priority Schools with regards to specific academic content areas. Qualitative data were collected through focus groups to add context to the quantitative analyses. The quantitative and qualitative results underscore the challenges encountered by students, teachers, and leaders in Priority Schools.

The quantitative results are summarized on pages 17 through 41. The results confirm that Priority Schools were among the persistently lowest performing schools in Arkansas when designated in 2011 and the gap in performance continued through 2013. Modest progress was made to close the performance gap with non-Priority schools since 2013, particularly in literacy, yet common student achievement challenges in math, literacy, and science remain. Frequency analysis of academic interventions listed in Priority Improvement Plans (PIPs) indicated more than half of the Priority Schools interventions were to improve performance on OR items, as well as specific content strands, passage types, and writing domains where students' scores were lowest (Table 10). The PIP academic interventions appear to target confirmed needs across the Priority Schools. However, these interventions are likely to have limited, short term impacts on student performance because they address a symptom of a deeper problem, inconsistent delivery of curriculum, instruction, and assessment at rigorous, grade- and course-appropriate levels.

Qualitative findings are summarized on pages 42 through 63. Several themes emerged from the qualitative analyses that added context to the quantitative results and informed the conclusions and recommendations. This external assessment of quantitative and qualitative factors across all Priority Schools revealed the need for a systemic approach to improving outcomes for students. A long-term commitment to systemic changes in key components of Priority Schools' local education systems will need to be coupled with the creation of innovative programs for students and parents to access expanded learning opportunities on a smaller scale in an immediate timeframe.

Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

When taken collectively, the patterns, trends, and themes found across Priority Schools in achievement, Scholastic Audit scores, PIP analysis, as well as the qualitative findings, confirm a systemic need for assistance and support among all Priority Schools in several areas. These areas are addressed through the following recommendations.

Comprehensive Systems. Comprehensive, local Instruction and Assessment Systems (IAS) are recommended to ensure that all students can access high quality core instruction and assessment aligned with the content standards as specified in Arkansas statute (CCSS and Arkansas Learning Standards). For the numerous students who struggle to access grade level content, the local IAS should include a clearly defined system of high quality support and intervention that assists students in accessing grade level standards. Intervention and support should supplement, rather than supplant core instruction for the grade level or course. Further, the IAS should provide students who demonstrate attainment of grade level and course expectations at the appropriate levels of rigor/depth of knowledge (DOK) to expand learning opportunities through acceleration or enrichment. Priority Schools' ACSIP and PIP documents from 2013 indicate staff are in varied stages of activity to accomplish some of the aforementioned actions. However, the quality, depth, and breadth of this work, as well as long term sustainability, are at risk. The recommended actions require long term investment in changing foundational structures within the existing local systems.

Clear, centralized vision. A clear, centralized vision for expected change may help Priority Schools and their districts develop aligned local plans for change, and reduce the ambiguity and inconsistency of guidance from external agents at all levels of the educational system (Figure 21.) This will help increase clarity and consistency, which may decrease the threat rigidity response of teachers and leaders as they navigate enforced changes (pages 46 – 50).

Turnaround Leaders. Teacher and leader recruitment, development, and retention are concerns that impact Priority Schools' chances at successful change. This is a difficult topic that has historic precedents in policy efforts to staff hard-to-staff schools in rural and densely urban communities. The success of a school turnaround starts with the right leader. Turning around a failing school is very different from leading a school through incremental improvement (CII, 2007). The literature on the successful school turnaround efforts describes specific actions taken by leaders to achieve a fast-cycle of change (Figure 24).

Recruiting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers. Priority Schools in Arkansas face a historic challenge in staffing persistently low performing schools in rural areas, and retaining these staff in urban, persistently low performing schools. Solutions to the recruitment and retention issues must be addressed at all levels of the system with local school and district leaders collaborating with state leaders and policy makers to identify immediate and long term strategies to address this issue.

Developing teachers to be effective in turnaround schools is a pressing need. A comprehensive IAS results from effective teachers working collaboratively to achieve a clear vision for a quality learning experience for students. Teachers in Priority Schools will require access to centralized, high quality professional development and guidance. Principals will need flexibility to address differentiated needs of teachers. The Teacher Excellence and Support System provides a policy structure to aid in this effort.

The aforementioned conclusions and recommendations address issues that require a longterm commitment to systemic changes and actions with a high likelihood of changing the outcomes for students in Priority Schools. However, there are more immediate needs for students within Priority Schools that may be met through an innovative approach to expanding students' learning opportunities and increasing students' and parents' voices and choices within their public schools.

OIE staff researched a number of innovative programs with the potential of helping Priority Schools meet the needs of students, parents, and communities they serve. An innovative solution emerged from the synthesis of the quantitative and qualitative findings.

Regional Innovation Centers. OIE staff have begun working with ADE leaders and rural and urban stakeholders to design regional solutions that capitalize on existing resources and structures—the creation of regional *Centers of Innovation for College and Career Readiness and Retention (CIC²R²).* Consortia would be formed among Priority Schools, community organizations, career and technical centers, post-secondary institutions, the ADE, and other stakeholder organizations within a particular region. Members of the consortia would collaborate to develop regionally located, blended learning programs with the goal of improving students' college and career readiness, and improving students' retention in postsecondary education and careers.

OIE staff found a model program in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This is an ideal time to develop and personalize a program similar to this model for Arkansas. The OIE staff are prepared to connect Arkansas leaders, policy makers, and stakeholders with resources and expertise to inform and begin the processes of planning, implementing, and evaluating regional CIC²R². The Little Rock urban area and eastern Arkansas are two regions with a density of Priority Schools where this program may help meet the immediate needs of students and families. OIE staff see the potential for these centers to offer students and parents a regional hub for accessing expanded secondary learning opportunities, college and career counseling, and continued support to enhance retention in postsecondary school and employment.

Initial discussions with ADE leaders and several policy-makers have been favorable. This is a feasible, innovative idea that supports Arkansas's vision to provide an innovative, comprehensive education system focused on outcomes that ensure every student in Arkansas is prepared to succeed in post-secondary education and careers.

Project Overview

The purpose of the project, Building a Blueprint for Innovative Change, is to promote innovative practices supporting 21st Century education in Arkansas's highest priority schools. To achieve this purpose the Office of Innovation for Education (OIE) collected and analyzed quantitative and qualitative data to determine convergent needs of Arkansas's designated Priority Schools. These analyses were intended to inform systems-level targets for innovative efforts to develop blueprints for innovative change with a high likelihood of improving outcomes for students in Priority Schools.

Background

The vision of the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) is to provide an innovative, comprehensive education system focused on outcomes that ensure every student in Arkansas is prepared to succeed in post-secondary education and careers (ADE, 2012). Arkansas's schools vary in geography and size with concomitant diversity in local community needs as well as the resources to meet those needs. Arkansas's schools are increasingly limited in local resources by the rise in poverty in recent years. Arkansas's Free/Reduced Meal rate rose from 55.9 to 60.3 percent from 2011 through 2013, nearly twice the increase compared to the increase in the national rate over the same period (ADE, 2013).

One challenge for the ADE has been its capacity to pursue the vision of innovation to support an increasing diversity of schools in their efforts to improve instruction and achievement for all students. Although access to innovative and evidence-based strategies has increased, the economic, geographic and technological barriers that may be present in Priority Schools' may make it difficult to support innovation. The traditional routes for supporting innovation to solve local problems may not be feasible for all communities, particularly densely urban and more rural communities. This project will lead to specific plans to further the vision to provide innovative opportunities for students in Priority Schools.

Grant Activities Planned

The project included a series of activities designed to provide a rich data set for integrated analyses of Priority Schools' academic achievement trends, scholastic audit profiles of learning environment and organizational efficiency, as well as the Priority Schools' students', parents', teachers', and leaders' perceptions of the challenges and solutions to innovative and transformational change within their school systems. The project included the following planned activities.

- 1. Interview students, parents, and community members to identify perceptions regarding solutions and challenges to innovative and transformational change.
- 2. Meet with Priority School leadership team members and ADE school improvement specialists to identify barriers to innovative and transformational changes to inform policy and system structures.

- 3. Research and prioritize innovative practices with potential to address needs of Arkansas's Priority Schools.
- 4. Analyze qualitative and quantitative data sources for trends and patterns to determine the common needs of Priority Schools that can be addressed through larger systems level initiatives.
- 5. Collaborate with ADE to integrate their findings into a plan of action for addressing the needs of Priority Schools through systemic support for innovative change.
- 6. Develop a blueprint for proposals to request funding for innovative and transformative solutions.

Grant Activities Completed

Activities 1 and 2: Focus Group Meetings

The OIE scheduled six regional opportunities for focus group discussions. Each regional opportunity was designed to include at least one 90 minute focus group meeting with teachers and leaders from Priority Schools. The six meetings were scheduled at regional cooperatives across Arkansas in order to allow for scheduling of separate focus group discussions with students at their local school sites, and parents and community members at convenient locations in the region. School principals and district superintendents were asked to assist OIE in the scheduling of student and parent/community focus group meetings convenient to their school schedules. The scheduled meetings teachers and leaders and the dates for scheduling student and parent focus group meetings are listed in Table 1.

Location	Teacher/Leader	Offer to Schedule	Offer to Schedule
	Focus Groups	Student Focus	Parent/Community
	Scheduled	Groups	Focus Groups
Southeast Education Service	August 27, 2013	August 26, 27,	August 26, 27, &/or
Cooperative (SAESC)		&/or 28, 2013	28, 2013
Great Rivers Education Service	September 5,	September 4, 5	September 4, 5 &/or
Cooperative (GRESC)	2013	&/or 6, 2013	6, 2013
Southwest Education Service	September 10,	September 9, 10	September 9, 10
Cooperative (SWESC)	2013	&/or 11, 2013	&/or 11, 2013
South-central Arkansas	September 16,	September 16,	September 16, 2013
	2013	2013	
Little Rock, North Little Rock, and	September 17,	September 17	September 17 &/or
Pulaski County Special School	2013	&/or 18, 2013	18, 2013
District			
Arkansas River Education Service	September 19,	September 18, 19,	September 18, 19,
Cooperative (ARESC)	2013	&/or 20, 2013	&/or 20, 2013
Crowley's Ridge Education Service	September 24,	September 23, 24,	September 23, 24,
Cooperative (CRESC)	2013	&/or 25, 2013	&/or 25, 2013
Northwest Arkansas	November 20,	November 20,	November 20, 2013
	2013	2013	
Arkansas Department of Education	December 17,	Not applicable	Not applicable
School Improvement Specialists	2013		

Table 1. Scheduled Focus Group Meetings

On August 1, 2013 invitations were emailed directly to principals and superintendents and sent through the United States Postal Services to Priority School principals and superintendents of the districts with Priority Schools. The emails and letters notified district and school leaders of the opportunity to participate in regional focus group meetings, and invited them to join OIE staff to generate and discuss ideas for innovative education and to identify opportunities for innovation, as well as the challenges/barriers to

those opportunities specific to Priority Schools. A copy of the letter is included in Appendix A. The invitations offered reimbursement for mileage and substitute teachers to enable schools to send teacher representatives to the meetings. The invitations also requested an opportunity to work with the school to schedule separate student focus groups and parent/community focus groups at their school site.

Among the schools receiving invitations, several principals offered to help OIE schedule, advertise, invite, and hold parent and community meetings, or to organize student focus groups to meet with OIE at the school site.

In addition to contacting and communicating with principals, OIE sent 10,000 flyers to a random sample of parents in all the Priority Schools indicating OIE staff would be visiting their area in September. OIE used the flyer to generate awareness about the upcoming opportunities to attend focus group discussions. OIE scheduled parent meetings in collaboration with principals who volunteered to provide a site for parent and community focus group meetings. When the location and time were set for each meeting, OIE sent 500 invitations to randomly selected parents in each school inviting them to OIE for a free meal and focus group discussions. The flyer and invitation are included in Appendix A.

Initially, very few principals responded that they would be available to attend the focus group meetings or send teacher representatives. Contact information for principals and superintendents was reviewed. It was discovered that there were numerous changes in school principals and district superintendents among the Priority Schools. The contact information was revised based on the changes in school and district leaders. New Priority school principals and new district leaders were mailed and emailed the invitations.

Follow up emails were sent to principals who did not respond to the initial invitation in an effort to include all Priority Schools in focus groups. In the follow-up emails the OIE staff offered to hold the focus group discussions at school sites in order to minimize travel and time out of class for teachers and leaders. Additionally, OIE staff contacted principals by phone if a response was not received from the follow up emails.

Several districts and their Priority Schools elected not to participate in the opportunities provided through the focus groups. Most principals declining the invitations indicated they were overwhelmed in September and October with beginning of the school year logistics, and a number of meetings with external agencies, and reporting deadlines. Thus, they were unable to attend or send staff to the meeting.

Activity 3: Research and Prioritize Practices to Address Needs of Arkansas's Priority Schools

OIE staff investigated innovative practices and programs using a variety of sources including general web search engines (Google, Bing, Yahoo, etc.), university accessed databases for scholarly literature (Google Scholar, Ebsco, ProQuest, JSTOR), emerging research syntheses and practice guides from national and regional organizations

supporting education innovation, researcher and practitioner conferences on innovative programs and practices, and site visits to innovation schools. Recommendations for integrating these practices based on the findings from this project will be presented in the Conclusions and Recommendations section of the report. An annotated listing of resources on innovative programs and practices is included in Appendix B to facilitate sharing of the information.

Activity 4: Analyze Quantitative and Qualitative Data Sources Common Needs of Priority Schools

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed for the project. The purpose of these analyses was to uncover trends and patterns that may exist across most Priority Schools, and thus inform and assist the ADE's efforts in providing support and intervention in an efficient and effective manner aligned to scale and context.

Quantitative Data Collection

Quantitative data were collected from the ADE to support these analyses. The data collected and used included the following.

- Archival student assessment data from Arkansas's Comprehensive Testing, Assessment and Accountability Program (ACTAAP) Benchmark Exams (ABE) in Grades 3 8, Grade 11, and End of Course Exams (EOC) in algebra, geometry and biology. Data were available from 2009 through 2013.
- Scholastic Audit school scores and aggregated reports for 26 Priority Schools and 14 non-Priority schools.
- Archival Arkansas, District and School Performance Reports.
- Arkansas Consolidated School Improvement Plans (ACSIP) and Priority Improvement Plans (PIP) were provided by the ADE for document analysis.

Quantitative Data Analyses

Results for Arkansas's criterion-referenced assessments are provided to schools in a variety of reports produced by the test vendor under contract with the ADE. Schools receive general performance profiles, school roster reports, item-by-item analysis reports, and individual student reports. The school roster reports provide student and group scores for math strands, reading passages, and writing domains. These scores are further broken down by the type of item: multiple choice (MC) or open response (OR). Schools may use these reports to analyze their overall performance and performance by group within each content area. Also, schools may review content area performance by item type (MC and OR) and by subtotals of the raw scores for math strands, literacy passages, and writing domains. These analyses are included in all schools' ACSIP plans and are intended to inform schools' interventions for school improvement (ADE, 2014a). These analyses are expected of Priority Schools and their findings are expected to inform the development of their Priority Improvement Plans (PIPs) for school turnaround (ADE, 2012).

Student Assessment Score Analyses

Priority School performance was analyzed over time and disaggregated by subtests in order to look for patterns in student performance that might inform professional development and support needs across all Priority Schools with regards to specific academic content areas.

Simple descriptive analyses were conducted to review multi-year trends in mathematics, literacy and science achievement scores among Priority Schools as compared to other schools in Arkansas.

- Multi-year percentages of students at each performance level (Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced) were calculated for Priority Schools and non-Priority Schools.
- Multi-year percentages of students meeting annual growth-to-standard expectations and median Student Growth Percentiles (SGP) were calculated to compare growth in academic achievement for Priority School students to growth for non-Priority school students.
- Strand-level scores were analyzed for multi-year trends to inform potential needs among all Priority Schools in terms of curriculum and instructional alignment.

ACSIP and PIP Analysis. OIE reviewed Priority Schools' ACSIP and PIP plans for commonalities in areas of interventions to determine where convergent needs might exist among Priority Schools. The frequencies of common interventions in ACSIP/PIP were analyzed relative to the content area strengths and concerns identified in the multi-year trend analyses.

Scholastic Audit Score Analysis. Forty schools' scores were included in the Scholastic Audit data set received from the ADE. Of the 40 schools, 26 were Priority Schools. This allowed for the comparison of Scholastic Audit scores for Priority Schools to non-Priority Schools. The schools in the data set represent the total population of schools in Arkansas receiving a Scholastic Audit for 2012-2013. These schools were selected to receive a Scholastic Audit due to their status as Priority and/or their low student performance.

Average Scholastic Audit Scores for each standard were compared to determine whether Priority Schools and non-Priority schools differed significantly from each other for any of the nine Scholastic Audit Standards. The non-parametric Exact Wilcoxon Two-Sample Test was used to test for significant differences between mean scores for each standard, the mean of all standards, and school proficiency rates.

Student performance scores were merged with schools' Scholastic Audit scores to determine whether a nested, two-level model would be appropriate for analysis of student achievement and Scholastic Audit scores. Student-level scores were converted to z scores based on statewide grade level means and standard deviations to allow student level scores for all grades and exams to be included in the analyses. The z scores were used as the dependent variable in random effects Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The random effects ANOVA was run to calculate the IntraClass Correlation (ICC) for math and literacy z scores

to determine whether Scholastic Audit scores should be analyzed using a two-level nested model. The ICCs were 0.06 for math and 0.05 for literacy supporting the use of a one-level model using school averages, rather than a two-level model using students nested within schools.

A multiple linear regression was considered to investigate the amount of variance in schools' literacy and math proficiency rates. School proficiency rates were calculated and transformed for analysis as is appropriate with variables that represent a proportion. Assumptions of normality were tested and found to be tenable for the transformed scores for literacy and not tenable for the transformed math scores due to negative kurtosis ($\gamma = -1.91$) of the transformed math scores for the non-Priority schools. The tests for normality for the transformed math scores produced mixed results (W = 0.86, p = 0.03, D = 0.22, p = 0.06).

Therefore, a logistic regression was used to regress Priority School status on schools' Scholastic Audit scores. Logistic regression provides information about the likelihood of a particular discrete outcome, Priority or non-Priority status, based on the predictor variable, the average of all Scholastic Audit standards' scores for each school. The average of all standards was used in place of the average score for each of Standards 1 through 9 when high collinearity among schools' average scores for each of Standards 1 through 9 was found. When variables that are highly correlated are used in regression the standard errors of the coefficients may get large, and obtaining estimates of their distinct effects is difficult (Allison, 1999).

Qualitative Data Collection

Focus Group Meetings

OIE conducted focus group discussions to collect qualitative data for analysis. OIE staff had to cancel a few scheduled focus group meetings after follow up phone calls with principals indicated there would not be sufficient participation to hold the meetings as originally scheduled. A follow up email was sent to reschedule the meetings. See the sample follow up email in Appendix A. The completed focus group meetings, type of group, and number of participants are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Focus Groups Conducted

	Date	Groups	Number of Participants
Eastern Arkansas	September 4-5,	Teacher/Leader	11
	2013	Student (2 groups)	12
		Parent/Community	4
Central/Southwest	September 16, 2013	Teacher/Leader (2	14
Arkansas		groups)	
		Student	3
Little Rock	September 17, 2013	Teacher/Leader	9
Metropolitan Area		Parent/Community	0
Northwest Arkansas	November 20, 2013	Teacher/Leader	7
		Students	9
Southeast Arkansas	February 14, 2014	Superintendents	10
Southwest Arkansas	March 12, 2014	Superintendents	12

Focus Group Protocols

Qualitative data were collected through focus group meetings using a semi-structured protocol for the discussions. The protocol and questions are provided in Appendix A. Each group discussion began with general introductions, a brief description of OIE and the project, a brief statement of the purpose of the discussion, and confirmation of consent. For student focus groups, consent forms were required prior to participation in the focus group.

Introductions were followed by a discussion of the participants' perceptions of their schools' strengths and opportunities, followed by perceived challenges and concerns about their schools. For the teacher/leader groups and parent group, participants were asked to categorize the strengths, opportunities, challenges and concerns as 'within their ability to control', 'within their ability to influence', or 'within their circle of concern'. Finally, each group was shown a video on the Colorado Legacy Foundation's Expanded Learning Opportunities. The video explores what would happen to learning if schools and learning experiences were redesigned and expanded beyond traditional practices in the classroom (Colorado Legacy Foundation, 2013). After viewing the video participants were asked to share any opportunities for innovative practices that they hadn't thought of prior to seeing the video, and then to identify if/whether they perceived particular barriers to these innovations.

Due to the semi-structured nature of the discussions, some groups may not have responded to all of the questions or prompts in the protocols. If a group's dialogue delved more deeply into a particular question and its responses, then these deeper conversations were encouraged and facilitated. All focus group meetings with teachers, leaders, and students were recorded and the audio recordings were sent for transcription. In accordance with the approved research protocol, teachers and leaders provided informed consent to participate in the recorded meetings. Students were required to provide written parental consent and written student assent to participate in the focus group meetings. High school students 18 years of age or older were required to provide written consent prior to participation.

ADE school improvement specialists were invited to participate in a focus group discussion on December 17, 2013 to provide information from their perspectives on their work supporting and intervening in Priority Schools. The discussion was semi-structured and followed a protocol modified from the protocol used with teachers and leaders. The protocol is provided in Appendix A.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Methodology

OIE researchers used a grounded theory approach to analyze transcripts and synthesize findings from the focus group discussions. Separately, readers used an inductive approach to generate substantive coding of categories grounded in the transcripts. Two readers coded each transcript. Once separate coding was complete, the codes generated by the two readers were discussed, referencing the transcripts as needed to sort, compare, and further define the emerging categories among the transcripts. Categories were generated deductively as codes were grouped, sorted, regrouped, and resorted to analyze patterns and the magnitude of these patterns in the analysis.

Categories were discussed to identify general themes represented by the categories. These themes were considered in light of relevant literature through both deductive and inductive processes. Through this analytic process, findings were synthesized and explicated from among the themes and extant literature.

Activities 5 and 6: Collaborate with ADE to integrate Findings and Develop a Blueprint for Proposals to Request Funding for Innovative and Transformative Solutions

OIE staff collaborated with ADE throughout the data collection and analysis process to facilitate an informed analysis and to provide critical information for mid-course corrections where appropriate. The Assistant Commissioner of the Learning Services Division invited the OIE Director to participate in weekly Common Core State Standards Steering Committee meetings and Division of Learning Services (DLS) meetings. The DLS meetings involved internal ADE directors, including the School Improvement, Curriculum and Assessment, Federal Programs, and Alternate Learning Program Directors, among others.

The weekly meetings provided a continuous context for learning the opportunities and challenges in which ADE leaders were engaged from a systems-level perspective. These weekly meetings also provided context for revealing the numerous facets of ADE work, as well as the interdependencies among those facets in supporting a Statewide System of Support for all schools, and particularly Priority and Focus Schools.

The weekly steering committee and DLS meetings also provided OIE with regular opportunities to disseminate informal findings from the Blueprint project that were of particular and timely relevance to ADE leadership. This enabled ADE leaders to be informed of findings as they occurred and to act on these findings to address immediate needs where possible.

The OIE Director met with ADE school improvement specialists in December 2013 for a focus group discussion to elicit their input concerning strengths, concerns, opportunities, and challenges in providing a system of support to Priority Schools. The results of this discussion were synthesized to provide specialists and ADE leaders with information about the commonalities among the schools with which they work to inform implementation decisions. During the December 2013 meeting the OIE Director provided the ADE school improvement specialists with a summary of the quantitative findings from the overall and strand performance analyses and the Scholastic Audit analysis. The performance summaries, coupled with the Scholastic Audit analysis, and examination of Priority School PIPs gave ADE specialists additional information to guide schools in planning and implementing academic interventions for their students.

A follow up meeting was held with ADE specialists to discuss the findings from the teacher/leader focus groups and the student focus groups. The findings were shared in terms of the commonalities across teachers and leaders and the commonalities across the student groups. Confidentiality of teachers, leaders, and students was maintained by sharing the categories and themes at an aggregated level as described in the Qualitative Findings section of this report.

Results and Findings

Quantitative Results

The quantitative results underscore the achievement challenges encountered by students in Priority Schools. Priority Schools were designated in June of 2012 based on exhibiting performance levels among the lowest five percent of all schools in the state in mathematics and literacy from 2009 through 2011. Table 3 includes demographic statistics for the Priority Schools. At the end of the 2012-13 school year, 41 schools remained designated as Priority Schools. These schools served 4 percent of the students enrolled in Arkansas public schools including public charter schools during 2013.

	Priority Schools	Non-Priority Schools
School Enrollment		
Average School Enrollment	456	445
Median School Enrollment	359	389
Smallest School Enrollment	58	20
Largest School Enrollment	1190	3900
Gender		
Percent Males	52	51
Percent Females	48	49
Minority		
Average School Percent Minority	78.9	21.6
Average School Percent Non-Minority	21.1	78.4
Socio-economic Status		
Average School Poverty Rate	84.3	60.0
Special Education		
Average School Percent Special Ed	12.7	10.9
English Language Learners		
Average School Percent English Learners	5.6	7.3
Gifted and Talented		
Average School Percent Gifted Learners	11.1	9.7

 Table 3. Priority School Demographic Statistics.

Priority Schools share many of the characteristics of all other schools in Arkansas except in a few critical demographics. Note that Priority School size is similar, on average, compared to all other schools—the median Priority School enrollment is approximately one classroom smaller than other schools in Arkansas. Priority Schools range in enrollment size as shown in Table 3. The range in school enrollment size for non-Priority Schools is three times the magnitude of the range for Priority Schools' enrollment. On average, Priority Schools serve three and half times the percentage of minority students when compared to non-Priority Schools, almost a quarter more socio-economically disadvantaged students, and proportionately fewer English Learners (EL). Priority Schools serve a higher percentage of students identified as gifted and talented (GT) and students with disabilities (SWD).

As expected, summary descriptive statistics for Priority School academic indicators illustrate the lower academic outcomes associated with the designation of Priority School status. This is expected because Priority Schools were designated based on having the persistently lowest performance of all schools in Arkansas as defined in the ESEA Flexibility Plan (ADE, 2012). Arkansas's approved ESEA Flexibility plan describes Priority Schools as those schools whose added ranks among all schools in Arkansas in math and literacy performance from 2009, 2010, and 2011 placed them in the lowest five percent in academic performance.

Priority Schools were significantly lower than non-Priority Schools in academic performance indicators in 2013 with the exception of attendance rate. The difference in attendance rate was not significant in 2013 (t = 1.80, p = 0.07). The gaps in performance round to 31 points in math and 28 points in literacy in 2013 comparing the percentage of student proficient in Priority and non-Priority schools. The three-year average proficiency rates indicate Priority Schools have improved since 2011 in literacy, whereas non-Priority schools maintained their performance. In mathematics Priority Schools and non-Priority schools have declined by 2 percentage points since 2011.

	Priority Schools	Non- Priority Schools
Attendance Rate		
Average School Attendance Rate 2013	94.7	96.2
Graduation Rate		
Average School Graduation Rate 2012	70.0	86.1
Average School Three-Year Graduation Rate	66.8	83.5
Literacy Proficiency		
Average School Proficiency Rate 2013	52.1	79.6
Average School 3 Year Proficiency Rate	48.8	79.1
Average School TAGG Proficiency Rate 2013	50.5	72.0
Mathematics Proficiency		
Average School Proficiency Rate 2013	45.9	77.7
Average School 3 Year Proficiency Rate	47.2	79.2
Average School TAGG Proficiency Rate 2013	44.7	70.3
Literacy Growth to Standard		
Average School Percent Meeting Growth 2013	58.6	78.9
Average School Percent TAGG Meeting Growth	57.6	72.5
2013		
Mathematics Growth to Standard		
Average School Percent Meeting Growth 2013	41.0	61.7
Average School Percent TAGG Meeting Growth	40.0	53.7

Table 4. Priority School Descriptive Statistics for Performance Indicators 2013.

Another way to view student performance in 2013 across all grades is to look at the distribution of students' standardized scores for math and literacy. Students' scale scores for 2013 were standardized within grade level by subject. This allows the scores to be analyzed regardless of differences in the score scales for the Benchmark and EOC Exams. Figures 1 and 2 are boxplots of students' standardized scores (*z* scores). The boxplots illustrate the range of student performance scores in 2013 for non-Priority schools and Priority Schools in standard units.



Figure 1. *The distribution of students' standardized scores in math across all grades and courses.*

The standardized scores help with interpretation of these figures. The red horizontal line represents the standardized score of 0, which is the average scale score for all students in Arkansas for a particular Benchmark Exam grade level or EOC Exam. The box represents the range of scores for students in the middle two quartiles. The blue line dissecting the box is the median for the group and the plus sign is the mean for the group. In math more than 50 percent of non-priority school students (the left hand boxplot in each figure) had

above average scores compared to all students in Arkansas, whereas more than 75 percent of students in Priority Schools were had just below or well below the average scores. Although many more Priority School students score below the state average in math, the figure indicates that 25 percent of students are scoring just above to 2.5 standard deviations above average in math.

The boxplots for literacy follow a similar pattern for Priority School students with a few notable differences. Average performance for Priority School students in literacy is higher than in mathematics compared to all students in Arkansas, and the highest performing 25 percent of students range from just above the average score to almost five standard deviations above the state average in literacy. This range is very similar to the full range for students in non-Priority schools.



Figure 2. The distribution of students' standardized scores in literacy across all grades.

Priority School Trends in Math and Literacy Performance and Growth

Although students in Priority Schools demonstrate significantly lower performance than students in non-Priority schools, there have been improvements in performance since 2011, particularly in literacy. Students enrolled in Priority Schools exhibited a smaller achievement gap with non-Priority Schools in 2013 as than in 2011, the year of designation as a Priority School. The gap reduced 2.1 percentage points in math and 4.9 percentage points in literacy since 2011. Table 5 indicates the size of the proficiency gaps between Priority and non-Priority schools, and Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the trends in the percentage of students proficient over five years.

Proficiency Gaps					
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Math	38.5	35.4	33.4	30.8	31.3
Literacy	34.5	31.5	32.9	28.9	28

Table 5. Proficiency Gaps for Priority and Non-Priority Schools

The general trend for Priority School students is similar to the trend for students in non-Priority Schools with the percentage of students scoring Proficient or Advanced increasing between 2009 through 2012 and falling slightly in 2013. This is true for math and literacy, although the dip in literacy is less than that in math in 2013. The reduced proficiency gap is evident in the narrowing of the space between the Priority and non-Priority trend lines in both figures.



Figure 3. Percentage of students proficient in math for Priority and non-Priority schools.



Figure 4. Percentage of students proficient in literacy for Priority and non-Priority schools.

The percentage of students in Priority Schools meeting their annual expected growth in math exhibited little variation with only a percentage point increase from 2009 to 2011 and a drop of 3 percentage points from 2011 to 2013 (see Figures 5 and 6 on the following page). During the same time period students in non-Priority Schools exhibited flat percentages followed by a steeper decline from 2011 to 2013. Thus, the decrease in the Growth-to-Standard gap indicated in Table 6 may be explained by the large decrease in the percentage of students in non-Priority schools meeting their annual expected growth.

Growth-to-Standard Gaps					
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Math	27.6	28.3	27.2	24.7	21.3
Literacy	31.6	25.8	27.3	21.3	20.7

Table 6. Growth-to-Standard Gaps for Priority and Non-Priority Schools

The difference in the trends in literacy and math for the percentage of students meeting annual expectations for Growth-to-Standard are notable. Non-Priority schools exhibited a decline in math beginning in 2011 (Figure 5). In 2013 the decrease in percentage of students meeting annual Growth-to-Standard expectations was twice the size of the decrease for Priority schools. In contrast, the literacy trends are similar for Priority and Non-Priority schools (Figure 6). Both sets of students demonstrated increased percentages of students meeting their literacy annual expected growth from 2009 through 2012 followed by a decline from 2012 and 2013. The gap between Priority and non-Priority Schools in the percentage of students meeting annual expected growth for literacy decreased during the time of increased percentages of students meeting annual growth expectations in literacy. The decrease in 2013 was of the same magnitude for Priority and

non-Priority students. By 2013, the Priority Schools exhibited a smaller gap in the percentage of students meeting annual growth in literacy as compared to 2011 when these schools were first designated.



Figure 5. Percentage of students meeting annual expected growth in math for Priority and non-Priority schools.



Figure 6. Percentage of students meeting annual expected growth in literacy for Priority and non-Priority schools.

Another way to view student growth is using student growth percentiles (SGP). The SGP provides information about how a student performed in the current year compared to students with similar performance the prior year. The median SGP of students in Priority Schools indicates that students in these schools are making less relative growth when compared to the median for students in non-Priority schools (Figures 7 and 8).



Figure 7. Median student SGP in math for Priority and non-Priority schools.



Figure 8. Median student SGP in literacy for Priority and non-Priority schools.

The results illustrated in Figures 7 and 8 make sense given that the SGP is a relative measure of student growth. The USDE required states to identify schools as Priority from among the bottom five percent of all schools in performance over multiple years. In 2011 Priority Schools were among the persistently lowest performing schools in the state based on annual rankings for three years. It is not-surprising that a growth method which ranks students' current year performance based on similar performance in the prior year would indicate lower relative growth among Priority School students. What is notable is that at the high level of aggregation (all Priority School students compared to all non-Priority school students), the increase in the median SGP for Priority Schools from 2011 to 2013 for math and literacy may be a meaningful increase.

Priority Schools have a higher percentage of students with academic risk factors associated with poverty and disability. The research literature documents a number of academic risks associated with students whose families are economically disadvantaged, students receiving English Learner services, and/or students receiving special education services. Figures 9 and 10 illustrate the performance trends for Priority School students, the majority of whom belong to one or more of these risk groups, as compared to the performance trends for students in the same risk groups in non-Priority schools.



Figure 9. Comparison of math performance among all Priority School students and non-Priority school students in academic risk groups.

Note the significantly lower performance of Priority School students as compared to the academically at risk student groups in non-Priority schools. The gaps in math and literacy performance between all students in Priority Schools and students with economic disadvantages in non-Priority schools decreased two percentage points from 2011 to 2013. These reduced gaps appear to be associated with the larger magnitude of Priority School

increases in performance from 2011 to 2012 compared to students in risk categories in non-Priority schools followed by similar declines among all students in Priority Schools and academically at risk students in non-Priority schools from 2012 to 2013.



Figure 10. Comparison of literacy performance among all Priority School students and non-Priority school students in academic risk groups.

Priority School Trends in Performance on Multiple Choice (MC) Items and Open Response (OR) Items

Priority School students' raw scores by item type were calculated for each of the previous five years to determine if patterns of strengths or weaknesses were associated with students' responses to a particular item type. The statistics calculated were the average percentage of raw points earned. The percentage was determined by calculating the average raw points earned and dividing by the total points possible. The percentages were disaggregated by Priority School and non-Priority School students.

It is important to note that raw scores on ACTAAP assessments are not equated from year to year, or within or across strands, passage types, or domains within each year. Thus, it is difficult to know to what extent differences in percentages of points earned from year to year are due to differences in difficulty of items or true differences in student achievement. Statewide average percentages of points earned provide an informal reference for the difficulty level of the item types within each content area.

Multiple years of raw score percentages are provided to illustrate possible trends and to ensure year-to-year changes that may be attributed to differences in the difficulty of items are viewed within the context of the limitations of these raw scores. This is particularly true for the OR items because of the ratio of the number of items to points possible as indicated in Table 7. It is particularly important to interpret the performance of students within the context of multiple years for OR items because only a few items account for the number of possible points. For example, in the math OR raw score, 20 percent of the points possible are earned by responding to a single item. For reading OR raw score, 33.34 percent of the points possible are earned by responding to a single item. In contrast, each MC item is worth a single point. Raw score totals for MC items represent a large number of items in each content area exam.

		MC	OR
		# Items/Points	# Items/Points
		Possible	Possible
Benchmark Exams	Math	40/40	5/40
	Reading	24/24	3/24
	Writing	8/8	2 prompts/40
	Science	40/40	5/40
Grade 11 Literacy	Reading	48/48	6/48
ý	Writing	16/16	2 prompts/80
End of Course Exams	Algebra	60/60	5/40
	Geometry	60/60	5/40
	Biology	60/60	5/40

Table 7. Points Possible for MC and OR ACTAAP Exams

Inferences drawn from unequated, raw scores should be used cautiously as a starting point for further investigation and confirmation through additional evidence at the local level, particularly when based on a small number of items.

Figures 11 through 18 illustrate the five year trends for performance by content area and item type.



Figure 11. Benchmark Exam percentages of points earned in math by item type.

Benchmark Math

Priority Schools' five year trends in math for the total raw score, MC and OR are similar to the trend for non-Priority schools, increasing and decreasing the same years. The raw scores are not adjusted (equated) from one year to the next to allow for direct raw score comparisons. Thus, it is possible the dips may be related, in part, to differences in the difficulty of the collective set of MC and OR items each year.

The trend in raw score totals indicate that on average Priority Schools have earned 35 to 38 percent of the possible points in math, whereas non-Priority schools have earned 53 to 57 percent of the points possible for the total raw score. Both groups earned their highest raw scores in 2012 in math with a decline in 2013. Non-Priority school students earned 64 to 67 percent of the points possible in MC compared to a range of 44 to 50 percent of MC points for students in Priority Schools. Non-Priority Schools earned twice the number of points for OR items as Priority Schools. Although students in Priority Schools earned

almost twice the number of points through MC items as they earned on OR items, it is important to note that for both item types, on average, students were unable to earn greater than 50 percent of the points possible in math.

Algebra and Geometry EOCs

The trend lines in Figure 12 exhibit more year to year variation for the Algebra End of Course Exam (EOC) as compared to Benchmark Math. The pattern of significantly lower performance of Priority School students relative to non-Priority school students is similar to the pattern found in Benchmark Math. On average, Priority School students earned from 32 to 43 percent of possible points and non-Priority school students earned from 50 to 60 percent of the possible points. The pattern for MC points earned compared to OR points earned is similar to Benchmark Math as well. However, the MC-OR disparity in algebra is greater for both Priority school and non-Priority school students when compared to Benchmark Math. In particular, Algebra EOC OR items appear to be challenging for most students in Arkansas. The difficulty of the five OR items appears to vary more from year to year than Benchmark Math or Geometry EOC.

On average for the Geometry EOC, Priority School students earned from 34 to 45 percent of possible points and non-Priority school students earned from 54 to 61 percent of possible points (Figure 12). Overall, the Geometry EOC scores indicate an upward trend for all students with a slight decline in 2013. The year to year variation in the percentage of points earned for OR items may be due to differences in difficulty of the five items from year to year. Note that non-Priority school students earn no more than 41 percent of the possible points in any given year, and Priority school students earn no more than 24 percent of the possible points.

Literacy

Three components are presented for the Literacy results: Literacy Total, Reading Total, MC, and OR; and Writing MC and OR. Grades 3 through 8 Benchmark Literacy results are presented in Figures 13 and 14. Grade 11 Literacy results are presented in Figures 15 and 16.

Several patterns are evident across the literacy results. In general, students earn a higher percentage of points in Literacy compared to Math, and within Literacy students earn a higher percentage of points in Writing compared to Reading. Similar to math, a large disparity is evident between the points earned by Priority School students and non-Priority school students in Literacy, particularly for Reading MC and OR, and Writing MC, particularly for Grades 3 through 8. The disparity is smaller between Priority School students and non-Priority students for Writing OR for Grades 3 through 8 and Grade 11.





Figure 12. Algebra and Geometry End of Course Exam percentages of points earned by item type.

Benchmark Reading and Writing

A flat trend for 2009 through 2011 is followed by improvement in Reading Total, MC, and OR in 2012 and 2013. These results are congruent with the improvement trend for percentage of students proficient in Literacy for Priority and non-Priority schools (see Figure 2). Writing scores exhibit a different pattern. For Writing OR, all students earned a higher percentage of points in 2011 and maintained this higher percentage in 2012 and 2013. In Writing MC items for Benchmark the percentages vary each year, and the pattern is similar for Priority School and non-Priority school students.



Figure 13. Benchmark Exam percentages of points earned in reading by item type.



Figure 14. Benchmark Exam percentages of points earned in writing by item type.

Grade 11 Literacy

The pattern for Literacy Total reflects three years of rather flat performance as measured by the percentage of points earned, followed by an increase in 2012 that is maintained, for the most part, in 2013. This pattern appears to due to steady increases in Reading MC and Writing OR as indicated in Figures 15 and 16. Students in Priority Schools consistently earned smaller percentages of points in Reading and Writing. In Writing OR Priority School students have the smallest disparity in percentage of points earned compared to non-Priority school students. A consistent trend is not visible in Reading OR and Writing.



Figure 15. Grade 11 Literacy Exam percentages of points earned in reading by item type.



Figure 16. Grade 11 Literacy Exam percentages of points earned in writing by item type.

Benchmark Science and Biology EOC

The general pattern for math, reading and writing—Priority School students earning lower percentages of points compared to non-Priority school students—is repeated in the Benchmark Science and Biology EOC results (Figures 17 and 18). Additionally, the pattern of significantly lower OR percentages compared to MC percentages that was evident in Benchmark Math, Algebra and Geometry EOC, and Benchmark Literacy is evident for Benchmark Science. Similar to math, Priority School students consistently earn less than 50 percent of the possible points for MC and OR item types, and percentages for OR items are much smaller than percentages for MC items. These results, collectively, lead to conclusions about Priority Schools' collective academic strengths and weaknesses. Further, these results lead to recommendations for interventions that may be critical to improving performance in Priority Schools.





Figure 17. Benchmark Exam percentages of points earned in Grades 5 and 7 science by item type.



Figure 18. Biology End of Course Exam percentages of points earned by item type.

Priority School Trends in Math Strand, Reading Passage, Writing Domain Performance

Priority School performance was analyzed at the math strand, reading passage, and writing domain levels in order to look for patterns in student performance that might inform professional development and support needs across all Priority Schools with regards to specific academic content areas. Figures were created to illustrate patterns and trends for the math strands, reading passage types, writing domains, and science strands. The titles of the strands, passage types, and writing domains are listed in Table 8. Results are provided separately by item type: MC and OR for each math and science strand, reading passage type, and writing domain. Due to large number of figures generated through this disaggregation, the figures are presented in Appendix C and not duplicated in this section of the report.
Content Area	Strand/Passage Type/Domain
Literacy-Reading	Literary
	Content
	Practical
Literacy-Writing	Content
	Style
	Sentence Formation
	Usage
	Mechanics
Benchmark Math	Number and Operations
	Algebra
	Geometry
	Measurement
	Data Analysis
Algebra EOC	Language of Algebra
	Solve Equations and Inequalities
	Linear Functions
	Non-Linear Functions
	Data Interpretation and Probability
Geometry EOC	Language of Geometry
	Triangles
	Measurement
	Dimensional Relationships
	Coordinate Geometry
Benchmark Science	Nature of Science
	Life Sciences
	Physical Science
	Earth and Space Science
Biology	Molecules and Cells
	Heredity and Evolution
	Classification of Life
	Ecology and Behavioral Relationships
	Nature of Science

 Table 8. Titles of Reading Passage Types, Writing Domains, Math and Science Strands

A review of the charts in Appendix C confirms the consistent pattern of significantly lower performance for Priority Schools at the deeper sublevels of performance in math, reading, and writing.

Benchmark Reading (Figures C4-C9, Appendix C)

Students in Priority Schools exhibited their strongest performance over the years in responding to MC literary passage questions. These students earned more than 50 percent of the points in literary passage MC items in all years except 2011. Students in Priority Schools demonstrated similar improvement trends for content and literary passages in MC and OR

items with large increases from 2011 to 2012. The 2013 scores dip, but remain above the 2011 percentages. These improvement trends follow three years of consistently earning less than 50 percent of the possible MC and OR points. Non-Priority schools were consistently earning more than 50 percent of the possible MC and OR points in reading and demonstrated a similar improvement trend.

Benchmark Writing (Figures C10-C17, Appendix C)

The pattern of lower performance of Priority School students as compared to non-Priority school students is evident for the five writing domains. Priority School students have earned less than 50% of the points possible for MC writing. These students have demonstrated improved performance in the Content and Style domains, closing the gap with non-Priority school students by two percentage points by 2013. Priority School students and non-Priority school students have the most similar performance in the Mechanics domain.

Grade 11 Reading (Figures C47-C52, Appendix C)

The Priority School performance trends are similar to the non-Priority school trends, and the pattern of lower performance is consistent for Grade 11 Literacy. Unlike Benchmark Literacy, at Grade 11 Priority School students earned just over 50 percent of the points in Reading MC and OR exhibiting a gradual improvement trend from 2009 to 2013 in MC and more variable performance in reading OR. This improvement trend is most evident in students' scores for Content passage types for MC and OR. The trends for Literary and Practical passages are more varied. Points earned on the Grade 11 reading passages are the smallest MC-OR disparity among all exams. This is different from Benchmark reading.

Grade 11 Writing (Figures C56-C60, Appendix C)

The results for writing MC reflect the lowest points earned for Priority School students, consistently less than 50 percent of points possible. Improvement trends are visible for all writing domains with, students earning the highest percentage of points in Sentence Formation, Usage and Mechanics.

Benchmark Math (Figures C22-C31, Appendix C)

A consistent pattern for math is the significantly lower percentage of points earned for OR items compared to MC items. This is consistent across all Benchmark math strands. This lower performance on OR items exists for non-Priority schools as well as Priority Schools. Priority School students were modestly above 50 percent of points in three strands in recent years, Number and Operations in 2011 through 2013, and Algebra in 2012 and 2013, and Data Analysis in 2013. This represents an improvement over performance prior to 2011 when these schools were designated. When MC and OR scores are combined, Priority School students appear to have their lowest math performance in Number and Operations, Geometry, and particularly Measurement.

Algebra and Geometry (Figures C64-C73 & C77-C86, Appendix C)

Students in Priority Schools demonstrated consistently lower performance compared to non-Priority school students with the gap in geometry points earned slightly larger than the gap in algebra points earned. A three year improvement trend for MC in all algebra strands

(except Solve Equations and Inequalities) was followed by a dip in 2012 scores followed by a small recovery. Students' MC strand scores were the lowest and exhibited the most variation in the algebra strand titled Solve Equations and Inequalities. The OR trends reflect year to year variation, potentially due to differences in difficulty among items. In geometry, students' MC scores reflected a general improvement trend for the strands titled Language of Geometry, Triangles, Measurement, and Coordinate Geometry. The strand Dimensional Relationships exhibited the lowest scores. OR trends in Geometry EOC are similar to the trend in the Algebra EOC, very low percentages of points earned and variation from year to year.

Benchmark Science (Figures C35-C42, Appendix C)

Priority School students earned significantly less points on the science exam at Grades 5 and 7. The gap in points earned compared to non-Priority school students is largest for the strand Nature of Science. The lowest performance for Priority School students was in the Physical Science strand where students earned 40 percent or less of the possible points all five years. The pattern of significantly less points earned for OR items is present for science as well as math.

Biology EOC (Figures C90-C99, Appendix C)

The pattern of consistently low performance is evident in the Biology EOC strand results for Priority School students. Students earned less than 50% of possible points for all strands, and significantly less points for OR items compared to MC items. The exception to this pattern is for the strand titled Ecology and Behavioral Relationships. Students earned more than 50 percent of points for 3 of the five years. The only strand to reflect a small, though consistent, improvement trend is titled Classification of Life.

Scholastic Audit Analyses

Scholastic Audit Scores were analyzed to determine whether Priority Schools exhibited patterns within or across indicators that may inform ADE in their efforts to provide a statewide system of support. The data provided by ADE included scores for 26 Priority Schools and 14 non-Priority schools. These data were used to investigate whether the schools receiving a Scholastic Audit earned significantly different scores on any indicators based on Priority and non-Priority status. The results of the one-sided Wilcoxon Two-Sample Tests indicated *Standard 1: Curriculum* and *Standard 3: Instruction* were the only standards for which Priority Schools that received a Scholastic Audit in the 2012-2013 school year (See Table 9). The group of 40 schools earned less than 50 percent of the points for all indicators. The Scholastic Audit scores for Priority and non-Priority schools are summarized in Table 9. The minimum score a school may receive is a 1 and the maximum is a score of 4.

The results of the logistic regression of Priority School status on the mean of all standards indicated that the school-level mean of all Scholastic Audit standards is not a significant predictor of a school's status as Priority or non-Priority (Wald Chi-Square = 0.10, p = 0.74). The odds ratio is a measure of the predicted likelihood of receiving Priority School status

based on the mean of all Scholastic Audit standards. The odds ratio indicates a 1 unit increase in the mean score for all standards is associated with a 49% change in the odds of *not* receiving a Priority School status. Confidence in the odds ratio of likely change in status is low given it was found to be not significant as a predictor.

Table 9. Average Scores by Standard and Average Proficiency Rates for Priority and Non-Priority Schools

	Priority Schools	Non-Priority
	(N = 25)	Schools
	Mean (SD)	(N=14)
		Mean (SD)
Standard 1: Curriculum	1.46 (0.32)*	1.75 (0.50)*
Standard 2: Classroom Evaluation/Assessment	1.43 (0.23)	1.63 (0.53)
Standard 3: Instruction	1.32 (0.28)*	1.57 (0.49)*
Standard 4: School Culture	1.57 (0.39)	1.45 (0.30)
Standard 5: Student, Family and Community Support	1.88 (0.38)	1.83 (0.33)
Standard 6: Professional Growth, Development, and	1.44 (0.39)	1.44 (0.32)
Evaluation		
Standard 7: Leadership	1.61 (0.42)	1.50 (0.38)
Standard 8: Organizational Structure and Resources	1.59 (0.34)	1.49 (0.31)
Standard 9: Comprehensive and Effective Planning	1.49 (0.40)	1.42 (0.30)
All Standards	1.53 (0.26)	1.56 (0.28)
Literacy Proficiency 2013	49.04 (11.37)	68.17 (10.67)
Math Proficiency 2013	42.53 (11.18)	64.07 (14.75)

* The difference between these two means is significant (S = 347.5, p = 0.04 and S = 343.5, p = 0.05 for Standard 1 and Standard 3, respectively).

Analysis of PIP Interventions

Priority Schools completed PIPs following internal needs assessments of their strengths and weaknesses in academic and nonacademic factors. PIPs were reviewed to tally the frequency of academic interventions selected for improving student performance. A frequency analysis of interventions related to literacy and math strands and item types is presented in Table 10.

More than half of the Priority Schools listed at least one intervention focused on improving students' performance on Open Response items. In Benchmark math, schools' interventions were spread across the strands with most schools including interventions in Geometry and Measurement strands. One fourth of Priority Schools targeted one or more reading passage types and Content and Style writing domains for Benchmark literacy.

Almost half of the Priority Schools targeted one or more strands for the Algebra and/or Geometry EOC. The least targeted area of academic content was Grade 11 Literacy for reading or writing. For the most part, these frequencies align with the trend analyses for content strand, passage type, and writing domain, as well as the trend analyses for item types. There are several caveats that will be addressed in the Conclusions and Recommendations regarding these results.

Assessment	Intervention Target by Strand/Passage	Frequency
	Type/Domain	
Any Level	Open Response Items	26
Math/Literacy		
Benchmark	Reading Literary Passages	11
	Reading Content Passages	13
	Reading Practical Passages	12
	Writing Content Domain	10
	Writing Style Domain	9
	Writing All Domains	4
	Number and Operations	14
	Algebra	15
	Geometry	20
	Measurement	20
	Data and Probability	11
Algebra/Geometry EOC	1 or more strands	18
Grade 11 Literacy	1 or more passage types of writing domains	8
Any Math	Multiple Choice Items	7
Assessment	-	
	Open Response Items	7
Any Literacy	Multiple Choice Items	7
Assessment	-	
	Open Response Items	6

Table 10. Frequency of Interventions Focused on Content Across Priority School PIPs

Qualitative Findings

Teacher and Leader Focus Groups

Responses were classified into five substantive categories based on coding and analysis process. Several informative themes emerged from the categories regarding teachers' and leaders' perceptions of the strengths, opportunities, challenges, and concerns in their schools. Discussions were deepened, and themes were enriched as participants were asked to reflect on their sense of control, influence and concern relative to their schools' strengths, opportunities, challenges, and concerns. Finally, teachers and leaders also exhibited several patterns of response to the presentation of innovative ideas and the perceived barriers to innovation. The categories are indicated and briefly described below, followed by a synthesis of the themes within the context of the relevant literature.

Themes from Teacher Leader Focus Groups

The most commonly noted strengths, opportunities, challenges and concerns that emerged from the different groups were classified into five dominant categories. These categories formed the basis for five emergent themes listed in Table 11.

Theme Title	Theme Description
Navigating Enforced Change	Teachers and leaders perceive several common
	opportunities and challenges emerging from externally
	enforced organizational changes required by schools with
	Priority designation.
External Agents	Teachers and leaders perceive they have an overabundance
	of involvement in their organizational and instructional
	processes by agents that are external to the school itself.
Recruitment and Retention	Priority Schools are struggling with recruitment and
	retention of highly trained, highly effective teachers and
	leaders in their schools, in part, they believe, due to being
	labeled as failing.
Community Contexts	Teachers and leaders identified common concerns and
	challenges associated with communities within which
	schools were located.
Priority School Culture	Priority Schools exhibit some common characteristics based
	on identified strengths, concerns, opportunities and
	challenges.

Table 11. Themes from Teacher and Leader Focus Groups

Participants' discussions of their schools' strengths were intermingled with concerns or challenges that they perceived impeded the success of their efforts. As a result of being labeled a Priority School, teachers and leaders acknowledged their schools were in varied stages of organizational change, and were dealing with the sanctions associated with this accountability label. They conveyed mixed feelings about the impact and potential benefit of the enforced sanctions. Regardless of locale, all focus group participants expressed feelings

of being overwhelmed by the variety of external agents working within their schools, and they felt bewildered when conflicting messages and directions were given by these agents.

Consistently, discussions about leaders' efforts to develop the skills of their teachers were accompanied by concerns about retention. Leaders' expressed frustration about losing teachers leaders after investing heavily in their development. According to the teachers and leaders, recruitment and retention concerns were further exacerbated by the challenges associated with the contexts of their schools' communities and the labeling of their schools as 'failing'.

Participants emphasized the unique contexts of their schools and communities as both a strength and a challenge. Participants described the sense of family among staff and the commitment of staff in caring for their students as strengths within their schools, yet a collateral concern was the burden of providing social services to the students in their communities. Geographic isolation and lack of resources were perceived concerns shared by the rural Priority Schools. Urban schools communicated a sense of isolation from the other schools in their district as well as a perceived lack of resources allotted from the district to address their unique challenges.

Priority School Context

In order to connect the themes to relevant literature it is imperative to understand how Priority Schools earned this label, and the accountability consequences associated with the label. Priority Schools are in a unique position of opportunity and challenge. Priority Schools are among the schools with the persistently lowest performance of all schools in Arkansas as defined in the ESEA Flexibility Plan (ADE, 2012). As a result of their designation as Priority Schools, these schools have a specific set of actions with which they must comply, as well as consequences for non-compliance. In year 1 of designation, Priority Schools must conduct an internal needs assessment and develop a Priority Improvement Plan (PIP) to address the needs identified through their internal assessment. In their PIPs, Priority Schools must adhere to seven Turnaround Principles as required by the United States Department of Education (USDE) through Arkansas's ESEA Flexibility Plan. The Turnaround Principles are meant to ensure "meaningful interventions designed to improve academic achievement of students" will be employed by local education leaders (USDE, 2012). The seven Turnaround Principles are listed below.

- 1. **Providing Strong Leadership by:** (1) reviewing the performance of the current principal; (2) either replacing the principal if such a change is necessary to ensure strong and effective leadership; or demonstrating to the SEA that the current principal has a track record in improving achievement and had the ability to lead the turnaround effort; and (3) providing the principal with operational flexibility in the areas of scheduling, staff, curriculum, and budget.
- **2. Ensuring that teachers are effective and able to improve instruction by:** (1) reviewing the quality of all staff and retaining only those who are determined to be effective and have the ability to be successful in the turnaround effort; (2) preventing ineffective teachers from transferring to these schools; and (3) providing job-

embedded, ongoing professional development informed by the teacher evaluation and support systems and tied to teacher and student needs.

- **3.** Redesigning the school day, week, or year to include additional time for student learning and teacher collaboration.
- **4. Strengthening the school's instructional program** based on student needs and ensuring that the instructional program is research-based, rigorous, and aligned with State academic content standards.
- **5.** Using data to inform instruction for continuous improvement, by providing time for collaboration on the use of data.
- 6. Establishing a school environment that improves school safety and discipline and addressing other non-academic factors that impact student achievement, such as students' social, emotional, and health needs.
- **7.** Providing ongoing mechanisms for family and community engagement (USDE, 2012, p.7).

Hypothetically, the Turnaround Principles support the notion of engaging Priority Schools in sweeping and innovative changes. The USDE created the four Turnaround Models to illustrate the extent to which schools are expected to change organizationally and operationally (Kutash, Nico, Gorin, Rahmatullah, & Tallant, 2010). The Turnaround models are (1) Turnarounds, (2) Restarts, (3) Transformations, and (4) School Closures. Kutash et al. (2010) noted that significant debate surrounds the feasibility of 'turnaround' given the variations in "cost, human capital, provider capacity, and political will necessary for implementation" (p. 5).

The aforementioned requirements for Priority Schools are coupled with a series of consequences for noncompliance and/or lack of improvement in student academic outcomes. Each school and associated district are required to hire external providers of support services to help them plan and engage in turnaround activities as written into each school's PIP.

Synthesis of Themes with Relevant Research

It is within the context of the requirements and consequences for Priority Schools, as well as the relevant research literature that explanations may be synthesized for the five themes emerging from the focus groups. Strategic leadership and change management theory provide a framework for synthesizing the findings from the perspective of organizational change. The concept of Threat Rigidity and Bandura's (1986, 2001) triadic reciprocal causation theory provide a helpful framework for synthesizing the findings from the findings from the perspective of the individuals' responses to the challenges and concerns shared in the transcripts.

Navigating Enforced Change and External Agents. These two themes were dominant across all focus groups. Strategic planning and organizational change research provide a framework to understand these themes at the school level, to explain why these themes are prevalent among Priority Schools, and to outline implications for supporting innovative change in Priority Schools from the evidence base in the literature.

In his fourth edition of *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations: A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement*, Bryson (2013) noted the importance of helping organizations weave together their understandings and actions to enhance their performance.

To respond effectively to changes in their environments, public...organizations...must understand the external and internal contexts within which they find themselves, so that they can develop effective strategies to link the two in such a way that significant and long lasting public value is created (Bryson, 2013, p. 150).

Priority Schools have completed required internal needs assessments and developed Priority Improvement Plans. However, a more complete understanding of common external factors facing Priority Schools may be critical to effective improvement within the complex system that is education. Change within one component of the system may result in unpredictable results somewhere else in a system. Furthermore, strategic issues "typically concern how the organization (what is inside) relates to the larger environment it inhabits (what is outside)" (Bryson, 2013, p. 152). Development of effective strategies to improve an organization will build on strengths and take advantage of opportunities while overcoming concerns and removing or buffering challenges or barriers. Weick and Sutcliffe (2007) suggested strategic planning that follows the assessment of internal and external environmental organizational factors helps an organization develop "mindfulness" (p. 72). This mindfulness facilitates the organization's response to external events, helping the organization to learn, act and respond more effectively.

In teachers' and leaders' discussions of how they were navigating the enforced organizational changes required by the mandates in ESEA Flexibility, teachers and leaders referred to internal and external "agents" that were impacting their ability to respond to required change. A predominant challenge expressed by the participants was the perception of an overabundance of external agents involved in Priority Schools' internal school processes. These agents included one or more external providers as required by ESEA Flexibility, district leaders, district specialists, ADE school improvement specialists, ADE specialty team members, and ADE leaders, among others. Teachers' and leaders' perceived that part of their struggle in navigating enforced change was complicated by the real and perceived roles of the various external agents involved in their schools.

This is not unique to Arkansas's Priority Schools. Kutash et al. (2010) identified Turnaround Actors in their publication, *The School Turnaround Field Guide*. Similar to the external agents identified by the Priority Schools, the actors they identified included

- federal, state, and district governing bodies who impact policy and funding;
- unions and/or teacher professional associations; external school operators and management organizations;
- supporting partners such as external providers, professional development providers, district and school specialists, and integrated service providers;
- community-based organizations;

- research and capacity-building organizations; and,
- philanthropic funders.

From teachers' and leaders' comments it was evident they viewed the external agents operating within their schools as serving one of two roles—external authority or provider of support. According to the participants, the demands of the external agents were not well-coordinated and appeared as incoherent efforts to change operations or instruction. Conflicting guidance and direction from external agents were cited as predominant challenges for teachers and leaders. One teacher's statement about feeling overwhelmed by external agents, and how this influenced her subsequent actions, illustrates the general sentiment of the participants.

You've got to do this because this person's coming. [Another] person's coming so you've got to do this, and oh yeah, next week, this person's coming so do this like this. You're just always trying to appease 900 different people...You've got people pulling you different ways...you don't know what to do which day (Focus group participant).

Intended or not, teachers and leaders expressed a sense of capriciousness in the decisions and directions associated with external agents they viewed as authority. Teachers and leaders expressed more open attitudes toward external agents they viewed as supportive. These findings are reinforced by the emerging Turnaround literature. Several challenges exist in engaging and working with external agents (Kutash et al., 2010). Specifically, the "number and capacity of proven operators and providers…is still inadequate to meet demand" (p. 7). Further, new agents are emerging who have a wide range of demonstrated success and/or experience in turnaround efforts.

External providers were engaged by Priority Schools prior to the start of the 2013-2014 school year following needs assessments. This represents a tight timeline for conducting thorough internal needs assessments, creating PIPs aligned to the seven Turnaround Principles, and reviewing and selecting external providers to support the turnaround work specified in the PIPs. In general the responses of the teachers and leaders to external agents reflected a compliance mindset that appeared to be focused on personal concerns and organizational challenges. Teachers and leaders expressed more pessimism than optimism in the discussion of strengths and opportunities. Optimism was present, yet this tone turned more pessimistic once participants were asked to reflect on their sense of control, influence and concern relative to these issues.

Teachers and leaders responses make sense when considered in the context of organizational change literature. Their responses may be characterized as a "threat rigidity" response. When an organization perceives itself as under threat or stress from an external source, members of the organization often exhibit a pattern of response that is narrow and focused, falling back on their previous habits or dominant responses, which leads to unchanging operations (Staw, Sandelands, and Dutton, 1981). Threat rigidity in a school context may result in a lack of open communication, a decrease in innovative thought, and an absence of collaboration between building leaders and district office leaders (Daly, Der-

Martirosian, Ong-Dean, Park, and Wishard-Guerra, 2011 as cited in Airola, Bengtson, Davis, and Peer, in press). One teacher's comment illustrates this threat rigidity response.

Ok, yeah, you're going to come in and tell me what you're going to tell me. But when you leave, I'm going to put it in the drawer and I'm going back to what works (Focus group participant).

Another teacher referred to "beaucoup and beaucoup of programs still in shrink wrap" as an example of teachers' responses to external mandates for instructional change. One leader described this effect in senior teachers.

I've seen teachers who have been in the game a long time. They are close to retirement and they are like, "I'm not learning how to do this. This has been working for me for years. I'm not going to do [it]." That's a challenge in itself (Focus group participant).

The threat rigidity response is exacerbated in schools where prior improvement efforts have not been successful. Daly et al. (2011) concluded that persistent failure to improve may impact leaders' belief in his/her ability to lead change, impacting potential effectiveness of the leader's efforts.

The possibility that teachers and leaders are responding in a threat rigidity manner may be understood within another framework from the literature that focuses on individuals' agency and their sense of efficacy for completing specific tasks. Triadic reciprocal causation, which originates from social cognitive theory, provides a useful framework to understand the themes Navigating Enforced Change and External Agents, and significantly, the framework helps establish a premise for potential solutions.

To understand this theory it is helpful to define two seminal terms: agency and self-efficacy. A sense of agency refers to a person's awareness of his/her influence and control over his/her own actions (Duggins, 2011). Self-efficacy is defined as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (Bandura, 1998, p. 421).

According to Bandura (1986, 2001), an individuals' sense of agency and self-efficacy are influenced by the interaction of behavior, environment, and personal factors in a relationship described as triadic reciprocal causation.

The capacity to exercise control over one's own thought processes, motivation, and action is a distinctively human characteristic. Because judgments and actions are partly self-determined, people can effect change in themselves and their situations through their own efforts (Bandura, 1989, page 1175).

Although individuals' actions are partly self-determined, environmental conditions interact differentially with an individual's sense of agency. In turn, this may impact motivation and

behavior. The influence of any one of these factors over the others is situational, or contextdependent (Airola et al., in press). The Priority Schools have an abundance of external, imposed factors that are associated with Priority School designation. These external factors represent one component of the triad and may exert more pressure, thus predominantly influencing personal and behavioral factors in a negatively reinforcing manner. Figure 19 illustrates triadic reciprocal causation where imposed environmental factors exert the predominant forces. Notice the darker arrows represent the strength of the impact of the environmental factors on teachers' and leaders' sense of agency which impacts their behavior leading to rigid responses, lack of innovation and lack of development. This rigid response reinforces a low sense of agency. In contrast, the triad in Figure 20 represents the interactions when a high sense of agency and self-efficacy exert the dominant forces. Again, notice the darker arrows indicate the personal factors (agency and self-efficacy) exert the stronger forces within the triad.



Figure 19. Triadic reciprocal causation where imposed environmental factors exert the predominant forces (adapted from Figures in Airola, et al., in press).



Figure 20. Triadic reciprocal causation where a high sense of agency and self-efficacy exert the predominant forces (adapted from Figures in Airola, et al., in press).

In the context of Priority Schools, teachers and leaders appear to be exhibiting a threat rigidity response to what they perceive as unpredictable external forces in their work environment as illustrated in Figure 21.



Figure 21. Triadic reciprocal causation representation for teachers and leaders working in the context of Priority School designation.

The perceived number and variety of external factors and their impact on personal and behavioral factors of teachers and leaders is illustrated by the sizes, colors, and direction of the arrows in Figure 21.

Teacher Recruitment, Development, and Retention. Teachers and leaders expressed explicit frustration with the challenge of recruiting, developing, and retaining teachers and leaders within their schools, particularly given the school label that they felt gave them the stigma associated with a failing school. The most frequently cited challenges were recruiting qualified teachers to rural and urban Priority Schools, retaining teachers over longer periods of time-particularly after investing in their development, and the lack of preparation among pre-service teachers for the challenges encountered in Priority Schools.

Priority schools typically experienced difficulty recruiting and hiring the teachers they wanted. In the urban Priority Schools where leaders have access to a denser pool of potential teachers, promising teachers who interviewed at Priority Schools tended to accept positions

in more advantaged parts of town as soon as openings were available. Leaders who participated in the focus groups indicated new hires tended to be first-year teachers whose inexperience posed challenges for leaders in ensuring adequate time and support were available to assess and develop their skill sets, particularly for teaching within the Priority School context.

High teacher turnover emerged as a subcategory within this theme. District and school leaders expressed concern that the time and resource investment schools made in teacher training and professional development was lost when a promising or novice teacher left for another school within the district or another district. At the same time, teachers saw that high turnover led to an abundance of first-year teachers, which proved a challenge as described above. According to the focus group participants, teachers who proved effective tended to leave for more advantaged schools when an opportunity presented. "You can have any teacher you want, but why are you taking this little teacher that I have put all this work in?" (Focus group participant).

Teachers expressed the concern that this difficulty was compounded by what they perceived as inadequate preparation new teachers received in pre-service programs for the unique challenges faced by these schools.

School culture, community context and student characteristics. The concerns and challenges expressed by focus group teachers and leaders are associated with the unique contexts within which Priority Schools operate. The interplay between school culture, community and student characteristics, and recruiting and retaining highly effective teachers is found in several places in the literature.

Teachers with the least preparation are predominantly assigned to schools with the most educational risk (Darling-Hammond and DuCommun, 2011). That risk may be due to location (urbanicity or rurality of a school), poverty, minority status, special needs, and language minority status. Further, the conditions under which these teachers perform their work differ from the conditions under which teachers work in more affluent communities in areas such as class size, support and development, and resources. Darling-Hammond and DuCommon assert that working conditions are strongly tied to retention of teachers. These conditions include administrative support, strong colleagues, and "tangible teaching conditions and salaries" (p. 2). They quantify the average cost of teacher attrition at \$15,000 per recruit, an amount that may be challenging for already impoverished systems.

Priority Schools in Arkansas are located in urban centers or rural communities for the most part. Both locations have associated challenges. Ingersoll (2001) considered inadequate salaries, student motivation, and student discipline to be particularly problematic in teacher retention in both settings. Further, he found concerns about safety, as well as lack of advancement opportunities as factors that made high poverty urban schools difficult to staff (as cited in Bracey and Molnar, 2003). Focus group participants shared the concerns and challenges they felt impacted their ability to recruit and retain teachers and leaders. Teachers and leaders expressed the belief that these challenges were particular to their communities and the students they served. In addition, they expressed a sense of powerlessness or lack of influence over outcomes due to these challenges which included: generational poverty and illiteracy, disengaged parents, and peers and families placing a low priority on education.

Learned helplessness theory is a phenomenon described in psychology literature that may help describe this sense of powerlessness and how it develops (Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale, 1978). Learned helplessness occurs when individuals feel helpless to avoid negative outcomes. This helplessness is more common when individuals perceive an outcome is attributed to factors external to their control and that their efforts will not have an impact. Given the persistence of low achievement in Priority Schools, teachers and leaders may feel they are unable to change these outcomes. They may perceive that the overwhelming environmental factors have more power over outcomes than their actions reinforcing a lower sense of agency. Improving teachers' and leaders sense of agency and their self-efficacy for their role-related tasks may help them improve outcomes and continue to do so when external agents are no longer present within their schools.

School culture at the student level was described as challenging as well. For example, teachers described students as well below grade level year after year. Further, teachers and leaders perceived that these students had low expectations for themselves. Another challenge they communicated was the frequency with which students arrived at school tired or under-fed. Student populations in urban and rural Priority Schools were described as having high absenteeism and mobility. Students were described as having unclear goals and unclear pathways to attaining goals beyond high school with many students prioritizing jobs, children, and other things above their educational goals.

Rural areas have some unique concerns. Monk (2007) found that schools in rural areas tend to have a smaller proportion of well-trained teachers compared to other areas. He attributed this to a combination of factors associated with rural communities. Rural communities' tend to have lower compensation for teachers, more teacher turnover, and students with more challenging educational risks such as more students with special needs, language minority status, or migrant status. The general impoverishment of many rural communities exacerbates these challenges, particularly where communities' characteristics include aging populations and job loss. Monk points to several characteristics of rural communities that may be advantageous when considering public policy to support improvements in education. These will be addressed in the Recommendations section of this report.

Alternate Learning Environments(ALEs). A final theme that emerged from the teacher and leader transcripts was associated with the type of school: ALE or traditional. ALE teachers and leaders shared many of the same challenges and concerns as teachers in the traditional Priority Schools, including navigating enforced change, overwhelming presence of external agents, recruiting and retaining teachers, community and school culture. However, teachers expressed more optimistic views of these challenges and attributed their job satisfaction to

smaller schools, smaller classes, the nature of the students served in ALEs, and their collective commitment to improving outcomes for ALE students.

ALE teachers and leaders were more pessimistic when discussing the accountability mandates and the impact of external agents on their day to day work. Similar to the teachers and leaders in traditional schools, frustration was expressed regarding mixed messages from the accountability designation. Students served by ALEs qualify for this service based on factors that lead to a concentration of students below grade level or behind in credits accompanied by other risk factors that are used in ALE placement. Teachers and leaders expressed concerns about the potential to work their way out of Priority School designation given the existing methods for identifying Priority Schools.

Innovations: Opportunities and Challenges

Teachers and leaders expressed a number of ideas when asked to respond to opportunities for innovation. Most of the responses were shared in the context of solutions to the concerns and challenges shared earlier in the discussions. The ideas that were shared included the topics of student motivation, instruction, parent and community engagement, and the potential to use technology to increase opportunities for students. The specifics that were shared are detailed in Table 12.

Topic	Ideas
Increase student motivation	Set high expectations
	Build students' confidence
Increase instructional	Longer class periods
opportunities	Smaller class sizes
	Supplement course work (tutoring and/or counseling)
	increase college credit opportunities
Change instructional strategies	Use more engaging instructional strategies
	Increase flexibility of instruction
	For ALEs—find alternate strategies, improve preparation
	for ALE students, balance ALE students' outside
	commitments
	Differentiate instruction for students' instructional levels
Increase parent/community	Have a bilingual facilitator
engagement	Encourage inclusion of foster parents in email and Facebook
	communication
	Encourage parent/community engagement in building a vision
	Promote consortium based efforts for parent/community
	engagement
Recruitment & Retention	Recruit, interview, and offer contracts earlier in the calendar
	year
Technology and Blended	Increase access and modernize technology
Learning	Increase technology usage

Table 12. Teachers and Leaders Ideas for Innovative Change

Teachers and leaders gave a range of responses when asked what barriers existed to implementing these ideas. The barriers identified were aligned with the five themes that emerged and have been previously discussed.

Summary of Teacher and Leader Focus Group Findings

The analysis of focus group transcripts uncovered a number of common themes among Priority Schools that are helpful to understand the unique strengths, opportunities, challenges, and concerns of these schools. These themes lead to implications for recommendations of standard and innovative practices to assist these schools in improving outcomes for staff and students. These practices will be addressed in the Conclusions and Recommendations section of the report.

Student Focus Groups

Students' focus group responses were classified into substantive categories based on the coding and analysis process. Five informative themes emerged from the categories regarding students' perceptions of the strengths, opportunities, challenges, and concerns in their schools. Discussions were deepened, and themes were enriched as students were asked to reflect on their sense of control, influence and concern relative to their schools' strengths, opportunities, challenges, and concerns. Finally, students were very specific in their response to the presentation of innovative ideas and the perceived barriers to participating in innovative programs. The categories are indicated and briefly described below, followed by a synthesis of the themes within the context of the relevant literature.

Themes From Student Focus Groups

The most commonly noted strengths, opportunities, challenges and concerns that emerged from the different student focus groups were classified into categories. These categories formed the basis for five emergent themes listed in Table 13.

Theme Title	Theme Description
My Future	Students' thoughts and plans for their futures beyond high
	school. Desire for more opportunities.
Teachers and Instruction	Students' thoughts about their relationships with teachers,
	classroom instruction and motivation to learn.
Motivation	Students' sources of motivation to learn, motivation to
	complete high school, and motivation to plan and prepare for
	college and careers.
External Contexts	Students' perceptions about their schools and the
	communities within which they live.
Innovation	Students' response to potential opportunities: benefits and
Opportunities	barriers.

Table 13. Themes from Student Focus Groups

There were noticeable differences in students' responses based on whether students were enrolled in an ALE or in a traditional setting. These differences are described within the context of each theme.

Students' were asked to describe their understanding of what it meant to be "college and career ready". This opened dialogue for the students to discuss their plans for the future, how they intended to achieve their plans, and how their school experiences may or may not be preparing them for those future plans. Generally, students' responses on what it meant to be college and career ready reflected uncertainty. College and career ready was a phrase they had heard, an abstract concept to them, and not something that they had spent time personalizing and making concrete. In other words, they knew further education was important, but did not know how to become college or career ready.

When asked about their plans beyond high school, most students indicated they planned to attend college. This was true for the students in ALEs or traditional high schools. When asked to elaborate on their reasons for planning to attend college the responses were predominantly focused on what they had been told was the reason they should earn a college education: higher earning potential for themselves and their families. Students' responses indicated they were unsure of how to achieve their post high school plans. Students' uncertainty was associated with comments about their communities' lack of opportunities beyond high school.

Students' in the ALE focus groups expressed mostly positive views of their teachers, instruction, and teacher support. Students in traditional high schools expressed mixed views of their teachers, instruction, and teacher support. Students in the ALEs expressed gratitude for assistance of their teachers and counselors in helping them complete their school requirements. The traditional high school students spoke of those teachers they felt were helpful, those teachers they felt were good instructors, and those teachers they felt were not teaching well or not providing support for their learning.

When traditional and ALE students were asked what motivated them to come to school each day they were able to talk about a family member, their child(ren), or a significant adult that helped them stay in school and committed to completing their high school diplomas. In the ALE focus groups, students noted three additional motivators for staying engaged in school: smaller class sizes, more caring relationships with teachers, and the opportunity to volunteer in their communities.

Students in the more traditional settings described their schools as disorderly, lacking in opportunities, overly focused on dress codes rather than discipline, and for the most part, not challenging. They indicated their motivation was rooted in their relationship with a family member, and the value that family member placed on education. In a few cases these students were motivated by the need to provide for their own children. Figure 22 illustrates how students' described themselves and their perception of the external contexts impacting their motivation.



Figure 22. Students' perceptions of the factors impacting their future and motivation to seek a particular future.

Synthesis of Themes with Relevant Research

Recent research publications illuminate the context for students' perceptions of their schools strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges. The first of these publications helps define the rural context that exists for more than half of Arkansas's Priority Schools. The second publication addresses student engagement in school, a characteristic that students' communicated they felt was lacking in their experiences whether in rural, urban or suburban contexts. Finally, the theory of self-determination provides a context for understanding the challenges for Priority School students at the individual level.

Rural Community Contexts. Roughly half of Priority Schools are located in rural communities. Issues prevalent in rural communities may explain the context of students' discussions.

Students in rural Priority Schools expressed a negative perception of the opportunities in their communities. Petrin, Schafft, and Meece (2014) investigated how schools and educators in rural areas may contribute to "outmigration" of students from rural communities, which may help explain students' comments. Declining economic opportunities may lead to selective outmigration of communities' "better educated and more highly trained" adults (p. 295), thus, changing local demographics and increasing local disadvantage. Corbett (2007) and Woodrum (2004) asserted these demographic changes may lead to local ambivalence about education, as well as education's role and value within the community.

Isolation and connectedness are two co-existing characteristics of many rural communities. Children in rural communities are raised within a system that values self-reliance, as well as personal connections and relationships as part of individuals' rural identities (Burnell, 2003 as cited in Petrin, et al., 2014). Attaining postsecondary degree completion and economic mobility require rural students to leave their communities. As a result, they experience conflicting values associated with their rural identities (Hektner, 1995 as cited in Petrin, et al., 2014). Leaving their rural community is seen as necessary for professional and economic mobility, while living close to their home and family is seen as equally important (Hektner, 1995 as cited in Petrin, et al., 2014). Hektner found that these conflicting values were inversely related to academic aspirations among rural youth, in other words, the higher the perceived conflict, the lower the academic aspirations of these students. Priority School students' remarks reflected a high value for their connection to family, as well as concerns about the lack of local opportunities. The conflict Hektner (1995) found may be experienced by rural Priority School students.

Petrin, et al. (2014) investigated the role of educators and schools in shaping the college and career aspirations of rural students. The authors found that "contact with teachers and other school personnel about career or future plans tends...to be associated with student aspirations to remain in rural communities." (p. 322). The authors found economic opportunity was among the strongest predictors of whether students aspired to leave their communities, and that this was true regardless of whether the students were academic achievers or struggling to achieve.

These recent findings provide an important context for understanding the Priority School student focus group themes. A recurrent theme among students in all the focus groups was their lack of perceived opportunities within their communities. Students commented they "can't wait to leave" and that they are "just ready to leave". One student said, in summary, "It's mostly just getting out of [here]". Petrin et al. (2014) findings suggest that engaging students in achieving better outcomes may involve more than turning around the local schools. Local, and perhaps regional economic development may play a significant role in improving outcomes for Priority School students, particularly in rural schools.

Student Engagement. Another publication that illuminates the themes that emerged from student focus groups is particularly relevant to students' discussions about their school and classroom contexts. The 2013 Gallup Student Poll Overall U.S. Report released April 2014

assessed non-cognitive factors that are associated with academic success of students among U.S. public schools. The 20-question survey, administered nationally to students in Grades 5 through 12 since 2009, assessed three non-cognitive factors: hope, engagement and well-being. Gallup, Incorporated defines each of the terms as follows.

- Hope-The ideas and energy we have for the future drives effort, academic achievement, credits earned, and retention of students of all ages.
- Engagement-The involvement in and enthusiasm for school reflects how well students are known and how often they get to do what they do best.
- Well-Being-How we think about and experience our lives tells us how students are doing today and predicts their success In the future.

The results of the 2013 provide a context for comparison with the tone of students' discussions in the Priority School focus groups. In the U.S. overall, 54 percent of students described themselves as hopeful, rather than stuck or discouraged. In contrast, "stuck and discouraged" was typical of the comments of students in the Priority School Focus groups.

Fifty-five percent of students described themselves as engaged compared to 17 percent who described themselves as actively disengaged, and 20 percent who described themselves as not engaged. Again, the majority of the comments from Priority School students in traditional schools reflected a lack of engagement. Engagement is important. Gallop, Inc. researchers suggested that emotional engagement is a noncognitive factor that most directly correlates to student achievement.

Comparison of the perceptions of Priority School students regarding their schools and classrooms (Figure 22) with the results for the Hope, Engagement, and Well-being results from the Gallup Poll suggests students' sense of engagement may be low in many Priority Schools. Students from the traditional high schools spoke of those teachers they felt were helpful, those teachers they felt were good instructors, and those teachers they felt were not teaching well or not providing support for their learning. One student participant stated the following.

The first two weeks of school, you're figuring out how that teacher is, how they're going to treat you, how you need to act in order to get treated a certain way, and pretty much, once you've got that down, you know how to get through the year.

Another student stated, ""I hate getting up in the mornings. I'm ready to get the day over with." There was a desire among students for a strong, relational connection with teachers, but they felt this desire was not met. One student wished the teachers were more parental, remarking,

I'd rather for a teacher to be a mama...some kids don't get no meal in the daytime, some kids don't got no mama. Some kids living with their auntie or something like that.

Another student remarked that "The teachers don't really care. They be like, they done got their education...they've got the job, don't care what we do." Some believed that teachers were "just coming for their check." The desire for teachers to be more relatable and parental was also coupled with students' comments about a lack of academic challenge in many of their classrooms.

A concern among students was that the curriculum they worked through in class was too repetitive, to the point of students getting bored. "That's what we're saying. The book gets bigger. It'd be a repeat every year." This individual remark was affirmed by several other students. Students phrased this in other ways as well, saying that pacing "is just so slow right here" [referring to the non-AP track] and that, outside of AP courses, "you usually don't get challenged".

Generally, students' remarks described low engagement with their teachers and schools. There were a few exceptions to these general comments. Some students spoke of how Teach for America (TFA) teachers "engage students" and "teach completely differently". At the same time, the students indicated the TFA teachers "come and go" and were more comfortable with academic support and less available for emotional support.

Students' in the ALE focus groups expressed more positive views of their teachers, including more engaging instruction and closer relationships with teachers when they needed emotional support. These feelings were in contrast to how they felt in their previous high schools which were described as "miserable" and "like a pit in your stomach." ALE students described their school environment as having "more opportunities" for success despite their personal chances.

Self-determination Theory. This theory provides a framework for understanding Priority School students' self-perceptions of motivation and their aspirations at the individual level. This theory addresses the individual context of students' motivation. Self-determination theory provides a model of learners' motivation in which they move from being amotivated to being externally motivated, and then, they move through forms of external motivation until they become internally motivated as illustrated in Figure 23 (Ryan and Deci, 2000).



Figure 23. Self-determination theory as illustrated by Ryan and Deci (2000).

An amotivated student lacks any motivation. In this theory, the levels of external motivation are presented in the following ascending order: external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation. Full external regulation reflects traditional behavioral theory in which one is motivated solely by rewards and punishments. Thus, an externally regulated student may study for a math test because they want to make the necessary grade to play a sport. An externally motivated student with introjected regulation is motivated to appear a certain way. Thus, if a student feels that it is uncool to look smart, the student may purposefully do poorly on an exam. However, if they are in a context where showing intelligence is beneficial, the student may be motivated to try harder.

Students from the traditional focus groups described an environment of external rewards and punishments and appeared to be mostly externally motivated or amotivated. Students from the ALE focus groups described an environment that encouraged self-regulation. Their comments reflected that they may be moving from somewhat external to somewhat internal causality (Figure 23).

Self-determination theory may be useful in determining helpful solutions and interventions for amotivated students. When a student manifests regulation through identification, it indicates that they now have consciously begun to value others goals and view them as personally important. However, the goals are not fully integrated in the individual's sense of self. For example, a student may begin to value a college education, but they would not be able to fully explain why it matters or how to achieve that goal. Thus, the student's motivation is weaker, and he/she will need more support to reach the goal. Priority School students may need more guidance and support to move to fully integrated regulation.

Fully integrated regulation, while still considered a level of external motivation, shares many qualities with internal motivation. When a student reaches this level, the student will have fully accepted and entwined external goals as personally relevant but they are engaging in behaviors to meet a goal, not for the enjoyment of the behavior. With integrated regulation a student may be motivated to take a college entrance exam preparatory course and speak with a school counselor about applying for college. Supporting the growth of students non-cognitive abilities such as motivation and self-regulation may play an equally important role in improving academic outcomes as improving learning opportunities in Priority Schools.

Innovation Opportunities. Students participating in the focus groups were shown a video depicting a wide variety of innovative ways to learn. Students were asked whether they felt they would be more engaged if the opportunities they had for learning were expanded through new choices that may involve the use of technology, as well as the use of proficiency or competency-based completion of graduation requirements. Students expressed excitement over the potential these opportunities would providing noting that in some cases, students in ALE settings were already benefiting from these expanded opportunities for credit recovery. Several students expressed a desire to have options to complete coursework online or through blended and competency-based programs while

also noting they may have motivation and self-discipline problems without support for regulating their path and pace through the curriculum requirements.

ADE School Improvement Specialists (SIS) Focus Group

ADE SIS were asked to reflect on their work with Priority School leaders and teachers to develop a collective sense of the strengths, concerns, opportunities and challenges in their work in providing a statewide system of support. Collectively, ADE SIS indicated Priority Schools were learning to use their data to drive decisions, some leaders were learning to identify strengths among faculty members, some schools were developing emerging leaders, and some schools were developing leadership teams. Conversations about schools' openness to change and receptivity to coaching and development were mixed. The ADE SIS comments make sense in light of the earlier findings among teachers and leaders of the threat rigidity response. Relationships with leaders and emerging leaders were noted as critical to supporting change.

ADE SIS indicated their schools needed additional opportunities to learn to manage and use data effectively, and how to develop a theory of change, and connect it to planning specific actions, as well as planning how to monitor and evaluate the actions. Common themes in which Priority Schools have opportunity to develop include creating, developing and sustaining effective PLCs, improving instructional practice, understanding systems change, improving school culture, and improving recruiting and retention practices for teachers.

ADE SIS viewed their roles with Priority Schools as ranging from cheerleader to compliance officer. Between these two extremes, ADE SIS described their roles as advocate, interpreter, facilitator, teacher, mentor, and monitor. Individuals saw their roles as predominantly toward one end of the range or the other depending on the school and each school's perception of the ADE SIS's roles. They felt they had been able to impact the following areas during their first year working with their Priority Schools: building capacity, knowledge and understanding of accountability sanctions, building mutually respectful relationships, assisting in comprehensive needs assessment and use of data, planning and implementation of plans, and creating a focus.

Challenges and barriers were discussed. ADE SIS shared several concerns that echo those of Priority School teachers and leaders. Teacher and leader quality and annual turnover were cited most frequently. Lack of capacity, fiscal conditions, and physical conditions of the buildings were also cited frequently. Technology and infrastructure were barriers, as well as schools dependency on outside providers for serving internal functions such as leading change, developing a clear vision, and developing curriculum. Functioning as a facilitator and compliance monitor created additional challenges.

To increase their impact, ADE SIS felt that consistency and clarity in messages about requirements and consequences for Priority Schools from leaders external to the school were important. This is similar to the theme that emerged from the teachers and leaders

regarding the many and varied signals from external agents in their schools. Conflicting direction from external providers, district and/or state leadership undermined progress.

ADE capacity to meet the needs of Priority Schools was also noted as a concern. Most ADE SIS expressed concerns about being able to meet the needs of all their schools in the limited time they had to work with each school given the number of Priority and Focus Schools assigned to each of them.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Building a Blueprint for Innovative Change is a research project conducted by the OIE with a two-fold purpose: (1) conduct an external assessment of Priority Schools' collective needs and (2) research and recommend innovative practices for systems-level changes to address collective needs. Priority Schools have been described as having "persistent, systemic improvement needs that are evidenced in academic expectations and school culture, as well as instructional, leadership, and community engagement practices" (ADE, 2012, p. 88). The results and findings from the project provide evidence to support several conclusions and recommendations that may assist the ADE as the agency seeks to meet these needs through the Statewide System of Support for Priority Schools. These recommendations synthesize existing research as well as innovative, promising practices with a high likelihood of improving outcomes for students in Priority Schools.

The quantitative results confirm that Priority Schools were among the persistently lowest performing schools in Arkansas when designated in 2011 and the gap in performance continued through 2013. Modest progress was made to close the performance gap with non-Priority schools since 2013, particularly in literacy, yet common student achievement challenges in math, literacy, and science remain. Priority Schools conducted extensive internal needs assessments, carefully reviewing achievement data and other school indicators prior to developing their PIPs and ACSIP plans.

The PIP academic interventions appear to target specific needs across the Priority Schools (Table 10). For example, Priority School students exhibited a pattern of persistently lower performance on all math and science strands, reading passage types, and writing domains when compared to non-Priority students, earning roughly 20 to 50 percent of the points available for most items. Frequency analysis of academic interventions listed in PIPs indicated more than half of the Priority Schools interventions were to improve performance on OR items, as well as specific content strands, passage types, and writing domains where students' scores were lowest (Table 10). However, these interventions are likely to have limited, short term impacts on student performance because they address a symptom of a deeper problem. A long-term commitment to systemic changes in key components of these local education systems will need to be coupled with the creation of innovative programs for students and parents to access expanded learning opportunities on a smaller scale in an immediate timeframe.

The external assessment of performance across all Priority Schools revealed the need for a systemic approach to improving students' performance on assessments. When students earn fewer than 50 percent of the points possible for a single OR, it is difficult to disentangle whether the item is more difficult than items in prior years, whether students were challenged by the content in the item, or whether students were challenged with constructing a response for the item. However, when students score fewer than 50 percent of the points in MC items (given 8 items or 12 items for EOCs) then it is more plausible that the problem is students' ability to demonstrate proficiency in the content being assessed.

When students earn fewer than 50% of the points possible on MC and OR, the intervention should be more systemic, focusing on students' understanding of the concepts assessed and students' proficiency in the skills required in grade level content standards. Focusing on a single strand or item type as a primary strategy for improving student achievement will have limited impact. This assertion is supported by the collective results and findings from the project.

When taken collectively, the patterns, trends, and themes found across Priority Schools in achievement, Scholastic Audit scores, PIP analysis, as well as the qualitative findings, confirm a systemic need for assistance and support among all Priority Schools in several areas. These areas are addressed through the following recommendations.

High Quality, Comprehensive Local Instruction and Assessment Systems

Among the low performing schools receiving a Scholastic Audit in 2013, Priority and non-Priority Schools differed significantly in their mean scores on only two standards: *Standard 1: Curriculum* and *Standard 3: Instruction*, underscoring the need for a comprehensive, high quality local instruction and assessment system (IAS). This is a long term endeavor that will reap short and long term benefits for students.

A comprehensive IAS is recommended to ensure that all students can access high quality core instruction and assessment aligned with the content standards as specified in Arkansas statute (CCSS and Arkansas Learning Standards). For the numerous students who struggle to access grade level content, the local IAS should include a clearly defined system of high quality support and intervention that assists students in accessing grade level standards. Intervention and support should supplement, rather than supplant core instruction for the grade level or course. Further, the IAS should provide expand learning opportunities through acceleration or enrichment for students who demonstrate attainment of grade level and course expectations at the appropriate levels of rigor/depth of knowledge (DOK). Specifically, Priority Schools appear to need direct guidance and support to do the following:

- Align local curriculum with the expected grade level/course standards and expected cognitive rigor/DOK of the content standards.
- Align instruction and assessment practices with the expected grade level/course standards and expected cognitive rigor/DOK of the content standards.
- Provide a clear system of support and intervention for students at risk of failing to meet grade level standards, as well as a system of acceleration and enrichment for students at risk of losing Advanced and Proficient performance levels.
- Align teachers' professional development options to support instruction and assessment practices that
 - engage students,
 - improve the quality of core instruction, and
 - \circ improve the system of support, intervention, acceleration and enrichment.

• Align and/or acquire resources to support curriculum, instruction, and assessment with the expected grade level/course standards and expected cognitive rigor/DOK of the content standards.

Priority Schools' ACSIP and PIP documents from 2013 indicate staff are in varied stages of activity to accomplish some of the aforementioned actions. However, the quality, depth, and breadth of this work, as well as long term sustainability, are at risk. The recommended actions require long term investment in changing foundational structures within the existing local IASs.

Principals of Priority Schools are challenged to create changes that adhere to the seven Turnaround Principles. Research on successful turnarounds supports the following critical leader actions in a turnaround environment: "clarifying a vision of the future, involving a leadership team, acknowledging failures openly, challenging the status quo, and acting as the driving force of change" (Center on Innovation and Improvement [CII], 2007, p. 14). If schools and their communities are expected to productively persist through the expected changes, these efforts will require that school principals receive sufficient latitude and support from district and state leaders (Center on Innovation and Improvement [CII], 2007). Strong leaders may achieve turnaround results in a failing school despite larger policy/organizational constraints by working around rules (Paton and Mordaunt, 2004). However, it is important to note that authority to reassign, hire, and fire personnel was cited as a primary flexibility in effective turnarounds (CII, 2007). Principle Two of the Turnaround Principles is based on this research.

Priority Schools are part of a district instruction and assessment system. The quality of districts' vertical alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment will be critical to Priority Schools' success in improving school outcomes. Students are starting behind and staying behind in Priority Schools, and in the case of most of the secondary Priority Schools, students have been falling further behind. Centralized and coordinated district effort to improve Priority Schools must be informed by local contexts of the school. If not, one-size-fits-all solutions may have short term benefits at the cost of long term outcomes.

Principals of Priority Schools will need to "manage the borders" between their school and district. Managing the borders includes filtering, buffering, and aligning expectations, and subsequent communication to maximize the collective effectiveness of school staff (Cosner, 2011). Priority School leaders will need to finesse a balance of support and pressure on staff to encourage teachers to make connections between instructional decisions and student change (Gallimore, Ermeling, Saunders, & Goldenberg, 2009). This type of work is accomplished through effective professional learning teams which are created, developed and sustained through intentional design at the school level (Cosner, 2012).

Of the 48 schools designated Priority Schools in 2011, four schools were able to meet AMOs and annual intermediate measurable objectives and have a 2013 ESEA Flexibility status of Achieving. Four more Priority Schools met their first year exit criteria in 2013. These schools were able to accomplish rapid turnaround in student outcomes. A qualitative case-

study of the changes these schools made in their IASs and in their other administrative and operational structures may provide information on Priority School improvement that would benefit the ADE in its continued work with Priority Schools.

A Centralized Vision for Future Change: Clarity of Expectations, Processes, and Outcomes

As noted in the teacher and leader focus group findings, the overabundance of external agents and conflicting messages from within and outside of the school have left teachers and leaders feeling bewildered and overwhelmed. Clarity of expectations, processes, and outcomes is a critical component of a comprehensive IAS, and necessary to overcome the predominantly low sense of agency and efficacy operating among staff and students.

A clear centralized vision for expected change may help Priority Schools and their districts develop aligned local plans for change, and reduce the ambiguity and inconsistency of guidance from external agents at all levels of the educational system (Figure 21.) This will help increase clarity and consistency, which may decrease the threat rigidity response of teachers and leaders as they navigate enforced changes.

The ADE Division of Learning Services and Division of School Accountability, in collaboration with the Committee of Practitioners, are in a favorable position to explore ways to achieve this recommendation at the state level of policy development. The proposed amendment ADE submitted to the USDE is an example of a policy-level action with the potential to reduce the overabundance of external agents in Priority Schools. The amendment is a proposal to remove the requirement for Priority Schools to hire external providers when a school opts to hire a local School Improvement Specialist (SIS) to facilitate, coach, and coordinate efforts within the school and district (ADE, 2014b). The ADE explains in the document that the proposed change will give schools an option to provide daily, focused assistance to teachers and leaders.

It may be helpful to Priority Schools for the ADE to create guidance documents to provide concrete information integrating accountability and school improvement expectations and requirements. Guidance documents will be helpful to local leaders for use in decision-making and planning efforts. The School Improvement unit of the Division of Learning Services has held a summer conference for Priority Schools to provide professional development targeted to meet common needs identified during the school year. This is an important event for Priority Schools. This professional development opportunity provides time for Priority School staff members to work within their school teams and to network with other schools' teams. In addition to professional learning, this event provides all Priority Schools with an opportunity to receive integrated guidance information from ADE.

Another strategy for reducing inconsistency of messages is to continue the regular, timely meetings of ADE SIS to discuss Priority Schools' progress as well as barriers to their progress. It is recommended that, if not present already, meeting agendas specify a time during the meeting to clarify guidance or other communication from ADE to Priority School leaders, and that these communications are provided in a print or electronic form for

dissemination. This may help ADE SIS by ensuring a common message or instructions result from their collective work.

District and school leadership teams, developed as a required component of Priority School intervention, are in the most favorable position to assess the local structures and routines that may be contributing to the ambiguity and inconsistency of guidance for Priority Schools' staffs. These teams are charged with shepherding local improvement processes, and engaging their stakeholders in shared decision-making within their districts and schools. As illustrated in Figure 20, increasing shared decision-making and ownership of changes will lead to increased sense of agency, theoretically. Individuals with a higher sense of agency and self-efficacy will respond more strategically and innovatively, leading to locally constructed educational processes to address requirements that result from accountability sanctions. The school and district leadership teams can assist the principal in filtering, buffering, and aligning efforts within the school with the district.

Teacher and Leader Recruitment, Development, and Retention

Teacher and leader recruitment, development, and retention are concerns that impact Priority Schools' chances at successful change. This is a difficult topic that has historic precedents in policy efforts to staff hard-to-staff schools in rural and densely urban communities. The literature on this topic is very rich. The information in this report provide references to details in selected research and policy literature. This is not intended to be an exhaustive treatment of this topic.

Recruiting, Developing, and Retaining Turnaround Leaders

The success of a school turnaround starts with the right leader. Turning around a failing school is very different from leading a school through incremental improvement (CII, 2007). The literature on the successful school turnaround efforts describes specific actions taken by leaders to achieve a fast-cycle of change (Figure 24).



Figure 24. Cycle of leader actions in turnaround.

The leader actions most frequently associated with successful turnarounds listed below.

- Concentrate on achieving a few tangible wins in Year One.
- Implement practices even when they deviate from norms ["how we've always done things here"] to achieve goals.
- Analyze and problem solve.
- Drive for results.
- Influence inside and out (school staff and external stakeholders).
- Measure and report.

For more detail on each action see the publication *School Turnarounds: A Review of the Cross-Sector Evidence on Dramatic Organizational Improvement,* pages 15 through 24.

State and district leaders and support personnel working with Priority Schools may find this research helpful in selecting new leaders for placement in Priority Schools, or for developing a turnaround skill set in existing leaders in Priority Schools.

Recruiting, Developing, and Retaining Teachers in Priority Schools

Priority Schools were expected to assess the effectiveness of teachers as part of their internal needs assessments, prior to developing their PIPs. Although the Turnaround Principles require schools to review all staff and retain only those who "are determined to be effective or have the ability to be successful in the turnaround effort" (USDE, 2012, p. 7),

Priority Schools in Arkansas face a historic challenge in staffing persistently low performing schools in rural areas, and retaining these staff in urban, persistently low performing schools. Solutions to the recruitment and retention issues must be addressed at all levels of the system with local school and district leaders collaborating with state leaders and policy makers to identify immediate and long term strategies to address this issue.

Developing teachers to be effective in turnaround schools is a pressing need. A comprehensive IAS results from effective teachers working collaboratively to achieve a clear vision for a quality learning experience for students. Teachers in Priority Schools will require access to centralized, high quality professional development and guidance. At the same time, Priority School principals will need flexibility to address differentiated needs of teachers. The Teacher Excellence and Support System provides a policy structure to aid in this effort. The observations of teachers using the Framework for Teaching, coupled with the analysis of artifacts and student growth and achievement data, will inform teachers and leaders of areas for development. Geographic and perceived social isolation of teachers in many Priority Schools may appear to be a barrier to providing differentiated professional development. These barriers are coupled with the need to address development needs for different content areas and grade ranges. Access to high quality professional development opportunities, while allowing teachers to access those opportunities specific to their needs.

The long-term goal of professional development is to improve the effectiveness of teachers' practices. Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, and Birman (2001) identified six factors associated with PD resulting in significant positive effects on educators' knowledge/skills and changes in practice:

- focus on content knowledge,
- opportunities for active learning,
- coherence with other learning activities,
- collaborative study networks,
- collective participation of teachers from same school, grade/subject, and
- the duration of the activity.

Differentiated professional development, coupled with job-embedded development through professional learning teams, has a high likelihood of resulting in changes to teachers' content knowledge and skills, and particularly teachers' practices. The ADE and external providers working with Priority Schools should support the creation, development and sustainability of professional learning teams within each Priority School. Cosner's 2012 publication, *Leading the Ongoing Development of Collaborative Data Practices: Advancing a Schema for Diagnosis and Intervention*, provides an evidence-based set of recommendations that school, district, and ADE leaders and support providers may use to develop the effectiveness of professional learning teams within Priority Schools. These efforts will require schools to analyze critically how well their PIP actions align with Turnaround Principles Two through Three (pages 40 & 41), and the recommendations in Cosner's work. The aforementioned conclusions and recommendations address issues that require a longterm commitment to systemic changes and actions with a high likelihood of changing the outcomes for students in Priority Schools. However, there are more immediate needs for students within Priority Schools that may be met through an innovative approach to expanding students' learning opportunities and increasing students' and parents' voices and choices within their public schools.

Regional Innovation Centers for College and Career Readiness and Retention

One goal of the Blueprint for Innovative Change project is to provide a plan for meeting the more immediate needs of students in Priority Schools by developing a proposal for innovative and transformative solutions. OIE has traveled across Arkansas to hear the voices of students, parents, teachers and leaders in Priority Schools. The students and the parents who participated in the focus group were in consensus regarding their primary concern about their local schools—lack of opportunities.

Traditional public school systems have been meeting the needs of most students for decades. In the case of Priority Schools, students' needs are greater, and are not as well met through their traditional school systems without the deployment of rapid turnaround strategies. Even with rapid turnaround strategies, students may lack sufficient opportunities for rigorous core academic instruction, as well as academic support, intervention, acceleration and enrichment.

OIE staff researched a number of innovative programs with the potential of helping Priority Schools meet the needs of students, parents, and communities they serve. An innovative solution emerged from the synthesis of the quantitative and qualitative findings.

The qualitative findings suggest many Priority School secondary students' are externally regulated. They are amotivated, or at best, externally motivated. Their perceptions of what it means to be college or career ready are abstract. These students will need support to reach their goals of attending college or engaging in a productive career. Further, their desire to leave appears to be connected to the lack of local opportunities, rather than a desire to leave their families (admittedly their primary source of external motivation) and their community.

Petrin, et al. (2014) found that students' perceptions of employment and economic opportunity, rather than school factors or community poverty, were the greatest factor in differentiating between those who left their rural communities and those who stayed. The authors suggest that rural youth have strong attachments to their communities and recommend policy makers investigate policies that enhance rural community capacity and sustainability. OIE staff found an innovative program that can be adapted and developed into a solution for students and families served by Priority Schools. This solution would expand local learning opportunities and intentionally connect students to concrete support to define and achieve long term goals for college and career.

OIE staff have begun working with ADE leaders and rural and urban stakeholders to design regional solutions that leverage existing resources and structures—the creation of regional *Centers of Innovation for College and Career Readiness and Retention (CIC²R²).* Consortia would be formed among Priority Schools, community organizations, career and technical centers, post-secondary institutions, the ADE, and other stakeholder organizations within a particular region. Members of the consortia would collaborate to develop regionally located blended learning programs with the goal of improving students' college and career readiness, and improving students' retention in postsecondary education and careers.

A model for this idea exists in Grand Rapids, Michigan. MySchool@Kent is a two-year old regional program that serves approximately 350 students from 20 school districts in the Grand Rapids area. The school plans to expand to meet a growing demand for its program. At MySchool@Kent, students complete high school through a personalized blended learning program that combines face-to-face instruction and online instruction. Teachers act as designers and facilitators of learning while counselors work with students to design a personalized path to high school graduation. Local high school counselors work with MySchool@Kent counselors to match students from their schools seeking more personalized choices in their education.

Students who enroll in MySchool@Kent are able to explore career and technical programs or complete early college credits, depending on their interests and future plans. MySchool@Kent has a waiver from Michigan requirements for seat-time so that students can create flexible schedules to manage their school, work, family, and extracurricular activities. Students have attendance and course completion requirements that help them self-regulate progress. The school has a system of interventions for students who are not on track with their attendance and course completion.

There are several other positive components of this model. At the student level, MySchool@Kent provides students with choices for expanded learning opportunities, while the support systems help students build their capacity for intrinsic motivation and internal regulation. A side benefit of this program is that it builds the capacity of parents to monitor their high school students' progress while helping parents reinforce students skills that foster self-regulation. At the systems level, the program operates on existing per pupil foundation funding and existing transportation routes. Districts keep a portion of the foundation funding for administrative costs, and the districts reimburse MySchool@Kent on a per student, per course enrollment basis. Students earn a local high school diploma from their high school of residence, and are able to participate in extra-curricular activities as long as they are in compliance with local policies for participation. Significantly, districts participating in MySchool@Kent have had to rethink the role of the school counselor and the role of technology and blended learning in instruction. The potential exists for longterm changes in the traditional schools as a result of their participation in the regional program.

This is an ideal time to develop and personalize a similar program for Arkansas. The OIE staff are prepared to connect Arkansas leaders, policy makers, and stakeholders with
resources and expertise to inform and begin the processes of planning, implementing, and evaluating regional CIC²R². The Little Rock urban area and eastern Arkansas are two regions with a density of Priority Schools where this program may help meet the immediate needs of students and families. OIE staff see the potential for these centers to offer students and parents a regional hub for accessing expanded secondary learning opportunities, college and career counseling, and continued support to enhance retention in postsecondary school and employment.

Initial discussions with ADE leaders and several policy-makers have been favorable. Organizations such as iNACOL and the Center on Innovation for Learning provide resources to support the planning and implementation of this effort (Appendix B). This is a feasible model that supports Arkansas's vision to provide an innovative, comprehensive education system focused on outcomes that ensure every student in Arkansas is prepared to succeed in post-secondary education and careers.

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Appendices

Appendix A

School Invitation Letter

Parent Invitation Flyer

Parent Invitation Letter

School Follow Up Invitation Email

Focus Group Protocol and Questions:

- Teacher/Leader focus groups
- Parent focus groups
- Student focus groups
- ADE School Improvement Specialists focus group



July 26, 2013



The Office of Innovation is seeking an opportunity to visit with you, your teachers, parents and students by holding focus group discussions at the Great Rivers Education Service Cooperative. We will be in your area September 5, 2013 at 1:00 pm. We are engaged in a project called Building a Blueprint for Innovation, funded in part by the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation. The purpose of this project is to generate and discuss ideas for innovative education and to identify opportunities for innovation and challenges to innovation in Priority Schools and their districts.

We hope to become a partner and a resource in promoting innovative practices in Priority Schools and their districts.

Please join us! Your input on innovative education strategies is important to us.

We invite you to join us and to bring a teacher to represent your staff. We will reimburse your mileage to and from the meeting, provide reimbursement for half day substitutes for your teacher representatives, and provide refreshments for the meeting.

In addition to meeting with you and your teacher representatives, we would like to hold focus groups with your parents, students and community members. We believe these meetings would be more successful if held at your school or in your local community. Please let us know if you would be willing to host a parent focus group meeting at your school. We will work with you to schedule these meetings within the timeframe that we are in your area. We will provide refreshments for parent and student focus group meetings and we will provide required consent forms to seek parent permission to talk with students.

Please rsvp to <u>oie@uark.edu</u> and indicate who will attend the leader and teacher focus group meetings at the cooperative on September 5, 2013. Please indicate if you will need mileage and/or half-day substitute reimbursement. If you are open to hosting the parent/student focus group meetings, please indicate this in your email and we will follow up with you to make arrangements.

We look forward to working in partnership with you to connect your school and community to some of the exciting innovative opportunties we are discovering!

Sincerely Denise T. Airola

The Office of Innovation for Education is coming to an area near you!

We want to hear from you!

We will be inviting parents and students to meetings in your area to help generate ideas for innovation in Arkansas education. We want you to help us build a Blueprint for Innovative Change that will become a resource for schools and communities. Learn about new innovations and help us identify possible opportunities and obstacles to those innovative changes.

Please join us! Your input on innovative education strategies is important to us. Look for an invitation to arrive at the beginning of the school year.



About Us

Our mission is to spearhead, support and promote the innovations in education that will strengthen our communities educationally and economically, leading to better preparation for the world as it will be and greater success in the world as it is.

Our Core Beliefs

- Lasting Value: Provide lasting value to enhance educational opportunities for students and communities in Arkansas.
- With-Not-To: Work with educators and communities, rather than doing things to or for them.
- Accessible: Strive to build mutual respect and trust in our working relationships.
- Committed to Integrity: Count on our research and activities to be
 - evidence-based or rooted in promising practices and innovations,
 - politically agnostic, and
 - realistic about limitations.
- Arkansas-Focused: Our goal is to enhance capacity in Arkansas and improve state outcomes.

The Office of Innovation for Education is a non-profit unit in the College of Education and Health Professions at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. Blueprint for Innovative Change is funded in part by a grant from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation. Office of Innovation for Education

346 N. West Ave. WAAX 15 Fayetteville, AR 72701 Phone: 479-575-4499 Fax: 479-575-7791 E-mail: oie@uark.edu



August 27, 2013

The Office of Innovation for Education is coming to your school!

We want to hear from you!

We are inviting parents/guardians to a meeting at your local school to help generate ideas for innovation in Arkansas education.

We want you to help us build a Blueprint for Innovative Change that will become a resource for schools and communities.

Learn about new innovations and help us identify possible opportunities and obstacles to those innovative changes.

Please join us! Your input on innovative education strategies is important to the future of Arkansas education.

	Invitation only
Colotonia	Limited seating
Caleteria Liska mod somed	You must RSVP to reserve a spot
Lignt meai served	<u>oie@uark.edu</u> or
	479-575-4499

About Us

Our mission is to spearhead, support and promote the innovations in education that will strengthen our communities educationally and economically, leading to better preparation for the world as it will be and greater success in the world as it is.

The Office of Innovation for Education is a non-profit unit in the College of Education and Health Professions at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. Blueprint for Innovative Change is funded in part by a grant from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.

From: Denise Tobin Airola [mailto:dairola@uark.edu] Sent: Wednesday, August 07, 2013 2:01 PM To: _______ Subject: follow up on invitation for you and your teachers Importance: High

Dear

Recently I emailed a letter inviting you and a couple of teachers to the Arkansas Activities Association Building in Little Rock at 1:00 p.m. on September 17th to participate in a unique opportunity for focus group discussions on potential opportunities for innovation. I just discovered that we had the incorrect information for your school. Please see the attached invitation.

We are hoping to meet with you and representatives from among your teachers, as well as a sample of students, parents and community members, hopefully at your school or a location convenient to your community, sometime between Monday, September 16 and Wednesday September 18th. I would welcome the opportunity to talk with you to work out details.

The Office of Innovation for Education (OIE) is working on behalf of the ADE to engage students, parents and educators from Priority Schools in discussions to identify potential opportunities and obstacles to those opportunities in meeting the needs of your students. I realize you have had a lot of people working with you from ADE, as well as from external providers. We do not want to duplicate work you have already done!

As an outside entity, OIE is uniquely positioned to help connect Priority Schools with resources and opportunities that align with your school's vision, mission and goals, yet may be outside of the possibilities you've considered to this point. To do this, we need to hear from you, your teachers, your students and your community. We have limited funding from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation to pay for half day substitutes for a limited number of teacher representatives, to pay for travel to and from the cooperative, and to provide refreshments. If traveling to the cooperative is inconvenient, we could make arrangements to meet with you and your teacher representatives at your school.

I hope to hear from you soon. Thank you for considering this opportunity.

Denise Airola

Denise T. Airola, Ph.D. Director, Office of Innovation for Education University of Arkansas WAAX 23 346 N. West Avenue Fayetteville, AR 72701

Office 479-575-6414 Cell 479-879-4266 FAX 479-575-7791

Teacher/Leader Focus Groups

Introductions

Who is in our group? Briefly introduce yourself and your school.

Why are we here? Who is OIE and why are we talking to you?

Relevant Ice-breaker

- Give three words to describe your school—either in a phrase or not.
- Give three words to identify and describe your role in your school.

Strengths/Opportunities/Challenges/Concerns

- What do you see as strengths and opportunities for your school? Think for a moment and record on large sticky note individually.
- Share strengths/opportunities with the group.
- If you were to draw a Venn diagram of these strengths and opportunities, which ones do you see as within your ability to control, to influence, or within your circle of concern?
- Does your school expect too little, too much, or just enough of students?
- What do you see as challenges and concerns for your school? Think for a moment and record on large sticky note individually.
- Share challenges and concerns with the group.
- Which ones do you see as within your ability to control, to influence, or within your circle of concern?

Innovative Approaches

View the Colorado Legacy Foundation, Expanded Learning Opportunities video and reflect on what you saw.

- What opportunities might you see that you hadn't thought of prior to viewing the video?
- What might the challenges be to realizing these opportunities?

Parent Focus Groups

Introductions

Who is in our group? Briefly introduce yourself, tell us what grade your children are in and how long they have attended.

Why are we here? Who is OIE and why are we talking to you?

Relevant Ice-breaker

- Give three words to describe your school—either in a phrase or not.
- Give three words to identify and describe your role in your school.

Strengths/Opportunities/Challenges/Concerns

- Tell us about your relationships with teachers.
- Tell us about your relationships with other parents.
- How do you perceive the school's and/or teachers' availability to help?
- What changes would you like to see in this school?
- What do you believe this school does well
- What do you believe this school does poorly?
- Do teachers expect too little, just enough, or too much?
- Are teachers able to focus on teaching?
- Tell me about the importance of test scores. Are they helpful or hindrance; useful or useless; understandable or overwhelming?

Student Focus Groups

Introductions

Who is in our group? Briefly introduce yourself and tell us your grade level, how long you've been in the school district.

Why are we here? Who is OIE and why are we talking to you?

Relevant Ice-breaker

- Give three words to describe your school—either in a phrase or not.
- Give three words to identify and describe your role in your school.

Strengths/Opportunities/Challenges/Concerns

- What does College and Career Ready mean to you?
- What do you plan to do when you finish high school?
- Everyone is talking about student engagement. What does that mean to you?
- Do you think your school has high expectations for students?
 - Would you like to see more opportunities for challenge?
 - Do you believe other students in your school are interested in challenging themselves?
- Describe your relationships with teachers. Do you find teachers supportive, caring, respectful, encouraging, etc.?
- What are some of the things in school that keep you from learning or being able to achieve what you want to achieve?

Innovative Approaches

View the Colorado Legacy Foundation, Expanded Learning Opportunities video and reflect on what you saw.

- What opportunities might you see that you hadn't thought of prior to viewing the video?
- Would you be interested in any of these ideas for your education? What would you need to be successful if you were able to learn in some of the ways you heard on the video?
- \circ Do you think your fellow students would be interested in some of these approaches?
- What challenges might you or your friends have if you were able to do some or all of your education in a blended learning or online environment?

ADE School Improvement Specialists Focus Group

Introductions

Who is in our group? Briefly introduce yourself and tell us which Priority Schools you support.

Why are we here? Who is OIE and why are we talking to you?

Relevant Ice-breaker

- Give three words to describe the schools with which you work—either in a phrase or not.
- Give three words to identify and describe what you see as your role in the Priority Schools with which you work.

Strengths/Opportunities/Challenges/Concerns

What do you see as strengths and opportunities for the schools with which you work? What have you been able to impact or influence within these schools in your work? What do you see as challenges, concerns, and barriers to improvement for the schools with which you work?

Which ones do you see as within your ability to impact or influence?

What would help you to increase what you can impact or influence in working with these schools?

Appendix B

Annotated Listing of Resources:

- Innovation centers
- Research resources
- Schools

Annotated Resources:

Centers:

Center on Innovations in Learning http://www.centeril.org/

The Center on Innovations in Learning is one of seven national content centers funded by the United States Department of Education. The Center on Innovations in Learning's mission is to (a) increase the capacity of state education agencies (SEAs) to simulate, select, implement, and scale up learning innovations in local education agencies (LEAs) and schools to improve learning outcomes for all students; and (b) increase the capacity of regional comprehensive centers (RCCs) to provide technical assistance to SEAs relative to the Center's scope of responsibility.

The Center bases its understanding of innovations on two learning levers: managing the curriculum and personalizing learning. The Center coordinates with the Institute for Disabilities (IOD) to provide technical assistance on personalized learning for students with disabilities. Teachers build in each student the capacity and desire to master the taught curriculum and to pursue personal interests beyond the scope of the curriculum. They teaching learning outside of school whether that is through social media, network drives, web-based learning, etc. Learning technology to increase a teacher's ability to identify and manage the needs of students.

Conduct webinars, have a resource database, and produce publications.

Ange leaders can create a cutture of innovation in isch the goal of continuously improving instructional active is clear, innovation is encouraged, trust is- issured, and results are rewarded. INCLESEONEESE DATABASE Bounds für leaders of clears and Engen für research, reeofts and tools Soft the innovation conversation. Check of <u>The clinit fileg</u> (and volunteer to be a guest-biogger)!
L RESOURCES DATABASE Boards for leaders of change Cok to Search Detabase anoth Engane for research, reports and tools Join the innovation conversation. Check out. <u>The clinit Bing</u> (and volunteer to be a guest-biogger)
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esearch Syntheses and Practice Guides
w Personal Competencies in Personalized Learning
w Personal Competency: A Framework
W Handbook on Innovations in Learning
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Research resources:

Clayton Christensen Institute

http://www.christenseninstitute.org/

The Clayton Christensen Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank dedicated to improving the world through disruptive innovation. Founded on the theories of Harvard professor Clayton M. Christensen, the institute offers a unique framework for understanding many of society's most pressing problems. Our mission is ambitious but clear: work to shape and elevate the conversation surrounding these issues through rigorous research and public outreach.

Two of the key concepts in regard to education are: (a) disruptive innovation – the theory of disruptive innovation describes a process by which a product or service transforms an existing market by introducing simplicity, convenience, accessibility, and affordability and (b) blended learning – K-12 blended learning is, in essence, any formal education program that combines online learning and brick-and-mortar schools. The Education Program at the Christensen Institute examines K-12 and higher education issues through the lens of disruptive innovation. Its research aims to transform monolithic, factory-model systems into student-centered designs that educate every student successfully and enable each to realize his or her fullest potential.

Produces publications, has a blog, conducts webinars, and speaks at conferences.



iNACOL http://www.inacol.org/

The mission of the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) is to ensure all students have access to a world-class education and quality blended and online learning opportunities that prepare them for a lifetime of success. iNACOL is a non-profit organization focused on research; developing policy for student-centered education to ensure equity and access; developing quality standards for emerging learning models using online, blended, and competency-based education; and supporting the ongoing professional development of classroom, school, district and state leaders for new learning models.

What they do: 1. advocacy – support activities and policies that remove barriers and support effective online and blended learning models, and competency-based education practices. 2. Research – iNACOL facilitates, conducts, and disseminates research, identifies promising practices, and develops national K-12 online learning quality standards. 3. Networking – iNACOL promotes the sharing of information, resources, and expertise across the larger education reform community to drive future directions in K-12 online and blended education. 4. Professional development – iNACOL offers PD opportunities through conferences, monthly webinar series, research, forums, and committees.



Center for Advanced Technology in Schools (CATS)

http://cats.cse.ucla.edu/index.php

The mission of the Center for Advanced Technology in Schools (CATS) is to conduct high-quality research, development, assessment, and evaluation of games and other advanced technologies intended to improve learning. Through knowledge dissemination and addressing key issues in the development and measurement of learning technologies, CATS will significantly contribute to setting the national research and development (R&D) agenda in learning games and simulation, and other advanced technology platforms to support future learning.

Focus on developing games as well as getting feedback from teachers, students, and commercial games.

Hold conferences, have publications, and question and answer forums.



New England Secondary School Consortium

http://newenglandssc.org/

THE NEW ENGLAND SECONDARY SCHOOL CONSORTIUM is a regional partnership that promotes proven, forward-thinking innovations in the design and delivery of secondary education across New England. The five partner states—Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont—work together to close persistent achievement gaps and promote greater educational equity and opportunity for all students.

The goals of the consortium are to: increase 5 year graduation rates across the five states, decrease annual dropout rates, increase the percent of students enrolled in 2 and 4 year college degree programs or pursuing accredited, industry-certified postsecondary certificates, and increase the percentage of students who graduate from high school prepared to succeed in college.

The Consortium brings state leaders and educators together to pursue 3 overarching strategies: (a) policy – advancing a state-led policy agenda focused on three critical, high leverage areas of schooling in the 21st century, (b) practice – connecting and supporting practicing educators across states, and (c) public will – strengthening public understand of innovative approaches to educating today's students.

Conducts conference, webinars, and provides publications.



Re-Inventing Schools Coalition (RISC)

http://www.reinventingschools.org/

The Re-Inventing Schools Coalition (RISC) is a national nonprofit foundation established to transform education systems around the world and produce dramatically improved learning environments and achievement results for all children. We are committed to re-inventing schooling as we know it so that *all students* are successful in school and life, regardless of their background, their culture, their home life, or their previous educational experiences.

They help transition schools from a time-based structure to a performance-based system. Offer packages, distance education courses, coaching, on-site school visits, trainings, and webinars.



Spotlight School: Ingenium Schools

Ingenum Schools, located in southern California, began their journey toward a personal mastery system in 2009. Glenn Noreen attended RISC conferences in Jaska to learn more about the RISC model and before having a school. He is now President of Ingenium Schools which comprises three charter schools. They plan to add one grade level each year until they are able to serve students through high school.

Barack Obama Charter School K-6
 Ingenium Charter School K- 6
 Ingenium Charter Middle School 6-7

This link explains their learning system where they use Shared Vision, Leadership, Personal Mastery and Continuous Improvements for a learner-centered approach that ensures engagement and mastery, monitors results to continuously improve systems and empowers learners to be global leaders.

"... no one has ever helped my child learn to write. I have never ever seen him put that much on a piece of paper. Thank you so much. ... He likes it here and talks about his homework and class work. He is even reading

A Teacher's Perspective



Kelly Daugherty, a teacher at Highland Tech High in Anchorage, AK talks about the differences teaching Personal Mastery. Watch other videos on the RISC Framework here.

Products/Services

The RISC staff is available to work with teachers, schools, and entire districts to assist in any aspect of understanding and transitioning to the RISC approach. We can do this through nome visits to your organizabon, our webinars and online courses. Use the pull down menu under Services or disk choices below to learn more. Our Corporate Capabilities document will allow you to read what we have accomplished, where we have worked and how we can help your organization.



Common Core Proficiency Scales/Assessment Package

Distance Education Course ~ Creating Personal Mastery in

Arkansas Regional Innovation Hub

http://www.arhub.org/

The Arkansas Regional Innovation Hub is a nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing innovative and entrepreneurial activity in Arkansas by creating a collaborative ecosystem and pipelines that mobilize the resources, programs and educational opportunities necessary to develop, attract and retain talent and to build the state's economy.

Located in Little Rock in the Argenta Innovation Center, the Innovation Hub is home to The Launch Pad, The Silver Mine, The STEAM Lab, and Art Connections.

The Launch Pad – place for makers, tinkerers, inventors, innovators, and small and big companies looking for a cool place to try out ideas and make new things.

The Silver Mine – place for incubation, acceleration, and co-working and finding all the support you need to morph great ideas into profitable business ventures.

Art Connection – for North Little Rock teens, with studios where they can put their artistic abilities into profit mode.

The STEAM lab – incorporates elements of science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics. It's used for training, networking, and hobnobbing with other makers, doers, engineers, and artists.



Engineering is Elementary (EIE)

http://www.eie.org/

Engineering is Elementary[®] (EiE[®]) is a project of the <u>National Center for Technological</u> <u>Literacy[®]</u> (NCTL[®]) at the Museum of Science, Boston (MOS). They address America's pressing need for effective STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) education through three platforms:

- Curriculum development and dissemination
- Professional development (PD) for teachers and teacher educators
- Educational research and evaluation

EiE serves children and educators in grades K- 8 with research-based, teacher-tested curriculum materials for schools and out-of-school time programs. They also help teachers build skills and confidence in teaching engineering and technology in their professional development workshops. And through conference papers and publications, they share the knowledge they've gained with the national community of educational researchers.

Offer hands-on, project-based engineering activities for school and afterschool. Offer workshops and PD.



Michigan's Education Achievement Authority (EAA)

http://michigan.gov/eaa

The Education Achievement system (EAS) is a new statewide school system that will assume operation of the lowest 5 percent of performing schools in the state of Michigan that are not achieving satisfactory results on a redesign plan or that are under an Emergency Manager. The system will work to transform them into stable, financially responsible public schools that provide the conditions, tools, resources, support and safe learning environment under which teachers can help students make significant academic gains. The system's initial operation will be in Detroit, where Detroit Public Schools (DPS) Emergency Manager Roy Roberts will create and publish criteria that will be used to place schools in the new district. The system will expand to include low-performing schools throughout Michigan.

Developing a competency based school model that allows students credit recovery options. The teachers are able to tailor the instruction to each student based on a test they take to determine their individual level of educational achievement. It will allow students to be based on academic progress, interests, and needs.





Detroit Public Education Reform Discussion from DPS Nebteam on Vimeo.

Governor Rick Snyder unveils plans to reform Detroit Public Schools by creating the Education Achievement System. Event was broadcast Live form Renaissance High School. Detroit

Schools:

MySchool@Kent http://www.myschoolatkent.net/

MySchool@Kent is a real, local school with genuine credits and a local diploma. The school is student centered and teacher driven, and features online instruction with extensive support. It's flexible, rigorous and personalized, so students can learn at their own pace.

Located in Grand Rapids, MI, MySchool@Kent offers students options within the 20 local school districts it serves. Students are required to attend 2 face-to-face instruction sessions each week for 2 hours and 15 minutes each. Each student is issued a laptop and aircard so that the remainder of the time the students will be completing their coursework online with an online instructor for support during evenings and weekends. There is a structured pace which gives options for credit acceleration and/or credit recovery. The course/schedule options also integrate with project-based learning program and CTE program on site. For students who cannot attend MySchool@Kent, there are satellite schools located within the community.



MySchool@Kent

MySchool@Kent is a real, local school with genuine credits and a local diploma, but designed for you, by you. The school is student centered and teacher driven, and features online instruction with extensive support. It's flexible, rigorous and personalized, so you can learn at your own pace. But you're not all alone. You'll have lots of support and help when you need it.

This hybrid school offers sound education with extensive student support and loads of options. With the flexibility in your schedule, you can pursue your interests, voluntee explore careers, start college. You can even connect through MySchool@Kent back to the local high school for music, art, electives, after-school activities or sports. more

Is this school for me or my student?

SIGN UP NOW FOR OUR TWO SUMMER SESSIONS! June 16 - July 1

July 21 - August 15 FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK -

MYSCHOOL@KENT

Check out the latest issue of MiSchool News!

Innovations Early College High School

http://innovations.slcschools.org/

Located in Salt Lake City, UT, Innovations Early College High School uses blended learning options for their students. The school is open from 7 a.m. till 5 p.m. but students choose the 6 ½ hours that they want to attend. While they are there they will complete their coursework online. The teachers do not lecture but facilitate the student's progress. They meet with the students once a week to compare progress and redirect them as needed. The course work is self-paced which allows for credit acceleration and/or credit recovery. Since Innovations School partners with CTE and local community college, students will end their time at Innovations Early College High School with either 18 hours of college credit or an industry certification.



High Tech High

http://www.hightechhigh.org/

High Tech High's mission is to develop and support innovative public schools where all students develop the academic, workplace, and citizenship skills for postsecondary success.

High Tech High is a charter school located in San Diego, CA, and operates using a project based learning system. There are currently 3 elementary schools, 4 middle schools, and 5 high schools on this campus. The school runs under 4 design principles. They are: 1. personalization – students pursue their passion through projects, 2. adult world connection – field studies, community service, internships, and consultation with experts, 3. common intellectual mission – assessment is performance based. All students are required to complete an academic internship, substantial senior project, and a personal digital portfolio, and 4. teacher as designer – program and curriculum designers in interdisciplinary teams. The teachers at HTH work in teams to design integrated projects across subject areas. The teams share an office adjacent to the seminar room that they teach in.



Bricolage Academy

http://bricolagenola.org/

Located in New Orleans, LA, Bricolage Academy is an elementary school that looks at creating from a diverse range of things or tinkering with things. They have an innovation room for children to go to every afternoon. They can make, create, and invent with all sorts of materials. They have a project or challenge of some kind that uses that creativity to tie back into the lessons they are learning. By doing this the children are learning to find and develop ideas, how to problem-solve, how to collaborate and share, and how to show off what they've made.



Boston Day and Evening Academy

http://www.bacademy.org/

Boston Day and Evening Academy re-engages off-track students in their education preparing them for high school graduation, post-secondary success and meaningful participation in their community.

The BDEA is a student-centered, competency based school system that is open 10 hours a day to serve students. Students have the choice to come during the day program (9:00 a.m. – 2:45 p.m.), the evening program (12:00 p.m. – 5:45 p.m.) or the distance learning schedule that is set individually with students and teachers. The distance learning program is aimed for students whose life circumstances prevent them from attending class regularly. The school is geared toward students who are overage for grade level and have previously experienced academic failure. BDEA has partnered with three local colleges to offer dual enrollment opportunities for students.



Check out this video from the Institute of Contemporary Art featuring student Claire Maloney

Lindsay Unified School District

http://www.lindsay.k12.ca.us/

Located in (rural) Lindsay, CA the school is a winner of federal Race to the Top funds. They offer a performance based system with online learning that is available 24/7. They are one to one computing that allows students to have access to their curriculum and internet both at school and at home. Students will be working in a combination of whole group, small group, and individual instruction. Students who are 2 or more content levels below their grade level receives individualized learning plans to help them catch up to their peers. Those students are allowed to test out of certain parts of the curriculum that they may already know to speed up the process.



Incubator School

http://www.incubatorschool.org/

Located in Los Angeles, CA, the Incubator School is in its inaugural year. They are current 6-7th grade and will expand one grade per year to become a 6-12 school. The school learning pathways include technology-based learning, project-based learning, game-based learning, and socio-emotional learning. The school day is split into three (approximately) two hour periods. The first period of the day is for students to learn math and English using online content and instruction. The second period of the day is dedicated to project-based learning on science or social science projects. These projects range from 3-9 weeks. The last period of the day is known as the incubator period. It is used by teachers as a robust advisory period where they can address the whole student by exploring socio-emotional awareness via literature circles or financial literacy via creating businesses. Each student in the school has either a tablet or computer for their online instruction. The school consists of two traditional classrooms and two blended learning classrooms. The blended learning classroom has desks arranged outside of the room so the teachers can walk around the middle of the room to help students.



The Incubator School is an innovative, free, entrepreneurship-thermed LAUSD pilot school in its inaugural year. We are located on the campus of Playa Vista EL. This year we have 8th and 7th grade classes; we will expand by one grade per year until we become a 6-12 span school.

Sanborn Regional High School http://www.sau17.org/schools/high-school

Located in Kingston, NH, Sanborn Regional High School uses a competency-based grading and reporting model. They have a curriculum that offers honors and college and career preparatory courses as well as project running start, advanced placement, and dual-enrollment college courses. They also offer a variety of Seacoast School of Technology courses for a specific area of study.

Grades at Sanborn Regional High School are measured on the following levels: exceeding (90%-100%), meeting (80%-89.9%), in progress (70%-79.9%), limited progress (65%-69.9%), and no met (50%-64.9%). These are the academic grades reported on the student. In each course, a teacher reports student proficiency in meeting both course-level competencies and school-wide academic, civic, and social competencies. Each course competency receives a percent score and this percent score contributes to the overall, final grade based on the individual competency weighting established by the teacher. A GPA system is still in place to measure honor roll, class rank, and special graduation titles. In order for a student to receive credit for a course, a student must earn an overall grad of 65% or higher and pass each individual course competency with 65% or higher.



Central Falls High School

http://www.cfschools.net/

Located in Central Falls, RI, Central Falls High School requires all seniors to complete portfolios as its proficiency-based graduation requirement. It is a reflection of the student's best work over a four-year period and will demonstrate student proficiency that is consistent with the state's common core of learning. Students will submit a minimum number of entries and a written reflection for each entry. Upon completion of the portfolio, the students will be scheduled by Advisory to make a formal presentation to the Graduation Portfolio Review Committee (GPRC). Using a presentation rubric, the judges will determine if proficiency is achieved.

Students at CFHS receive alternative educational programs that provide opportunities for students to received academic credit via hands-on experimental learning. Theses Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELOs) can take place during the school day, after-school, or during the summer. Students at CFHS also have a voice. They have a student government group, with teacher-mentors that provide communication and relays student related activities and decisions school-wide. Another important component of CFHS is the family and community engagement. Parents have their own parent room at school that families can access both formally and informally. They are involved in Board of Trustee meetings, Superintendent meetings, PTSO meetings, and participate in school walkthroughs and committees. They parent volunteers work in the school on a daily basis and have regular interaction with faculty and administration. CFHS has also forged over 100 partnerships with community organizations to leverage resources, materials, and opportunities for student success.



The Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Initiative at Central Falls High School provides an opportunity for students to ge academic credit for learning that is student-centered, hands-on, and rigorous. Students that participate in ELOs work closely with teachers who are highly-qualified in the subject of the ELO and community members who provide students with the chance to apply their learning in a real-world setting.

Some forms of ELOs already take place during the school day and other ELOs take place after-school or during the summer and are driven by students' particular interests and passions. When completing an ELO, students make work as individuals c in groups. In order to complete an ELO, students complete ongoing reflections, research, create a final product, and demonstrate their learning at a final presentation.

For more information or to get involved, contact the ELO Coordinator, Elizabeth Ochs, at ochse@cfschools.net or 401-727-7710 x22032.

Here are descriptions of our Group ELOs and ELOs that take place during the school day. If you would like information about our Individual ELOs, please contact Elizabeth Ochs. Please scroll down for the schedule.



Appendix C

Figures of math and science performance by strand and literacy performance by reading passage type and writing domain.

Appendix C Strand Level Charts for Benchmark and EOC Exams

The following section of charts presents Priority School performance by math strand, reading passage type, and writing domain. These charts present the percentage of raw points earned on average out of the points possible by Priority School students, non-Priority School students, as well as the statewide average percentage of points earned.

It is important to note that raw scores on ACTAAP assessments are not equated from year to year, or within or across strands, passage types, or domains within each year. Thus, it is difficult to know to what extent differences in percentages of points earned from year to year among math strands, reading passage types or writing domains are due to differences in difficulty of items or true differences in student achievement. The charts include statewide average percentage of points earned to provide an informal reference for the difficulty level of the math strand, reading passage type, or writing domain each year.

Multiple years of raw score percentages are provided to illustrate possible trends and to ensure year-toyear changes that may be attributed to differences in difficulty of items, particularly among open response items, are viewed within the context of multi-year trends.

Caution is urged in reviewing raw score performance on any standardized test that is scaled annually to equate the overall score for the reasons noted above. Prior to making decisions based on inferences from these charts, it is recommended that multiple sources of performance data be used to explore more deeply any patterns or trends in performance found in the following charts.

The following questions may be useful in guiding your interpretation of the strand-level, passage-type and domain charts.

- Are Priority School students earning at least 50% of the points possible for the raw score total? How would you describe the trend in points earned over the five years provided? Is this trend similar or different from the statewide average? Note that the statewide average provides a context for year to year differences in the difficulty of an open-response item or a set of multiple choice items for a strand. If the state maintains average points earned, dips or increases similarly, then it is difficult to disentangle whether the differences are from achievement, difficulty, or a combination of these factors.
- Is any trend similar or different from the trend for non-Priority Schools? If so, how so?
- When multiple choice items and open response items are calculated separately, do Priority School students earn at least 50% of the points possible for multiple choice items? If not, in which areas are Priority School students earning at or below 50% of the points possible?
 - This is an important question to answer. When students earn fewer than 50% of the points possible in open response, it is unknown whether students were challenged by the content in the item or challenged with formatting a response for the item. However, when students score fewer than 50% of the points in multiple-choice (given 8 items or 12 items for EOCs) then it is more plausible that the issue is students' ability to demonstrate proficiency in the content. When students earn fewer than 50% of the points possible on multiple-choice, the interventions should not focus solely on solving open-response items even though students likely have even lower average scores on open response items for the same strand.
 - Rather, intervention should focus on assessing students more deeply to determine which areas of the content students struggled to complete correctly. This means looking at the content and cognitive demand of the set of items within a low strand creating an assessment to allow students to demonstrate their thinking and conceptual understanding

in the classroom. Once this local assessment has been given, teachers are more likely to be able to identify where particular students are struggling with the concepts or skills in a strand and teachers are more likely to target the appropriate next steps in instruction.



Figures C.1-9 Benchmark Reading, Raw Score Percentages





####


Figures C.10-17 Benchmark Writing, Raw Score Percentages



Figure C.18 Benchmark Total Literacy (Reading and Writing), Raw Score Percentages





Figures C.19-31 Benchmark Math, Raw Score Percentages

















End-of-Course (EOC) Exam Tables



Figure C. 43 Grade 11 Literacy, Raw Score Percentage









Figures C.53-60 Grade 11 Literacy – Writing, Raw Score Percentages















Figures C.61-73 Algebra, Raw Score Percentages









C.74-86 Geometry, Raw Score Percentages









C.87-99 Biology, Raw Score Percentages







