

Chalkboard

By

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This Chalkboard is the final article of a five part series. The first four were written by Gentry's school principals. If you have read the previous articles, then today's piece will be the final stroke of this portrait.

First let me say that I appreciate the opportunity to provide the information contained in this week's "Chalkboard" to the parents and patrons of the Gentry School District. I am proud to be a part of the Gentry District and consider it an honor to be able to work with the outstanding young people and the highly qualified and professional staff. In this week's article, I will try to illustrate how the information shared in the previous four weeks translates into a district plan for improvement.

Two major initiatives, one at the state level and one at the federal level, have come together to create the process that we know as the Arkansas Consolidated School Improvement Planning (ACSIP) process. This is the process that each district in the state will use to plan for improved academic success for the students they serve. These initiatives, Arkansas Comprehensive Testing, Assessment and Accountability (ACTAAP) at the state level and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) at the federal level, have shaped and influenced our efforts at the local district level.

Each of these initiatives has similar goals and fit together well as we implement the various components of our building and district level school improvement plans. The areas that must be addressed are: Standards, Assessment, Accountability, and Professional Development. As you have read in the previous week's articles, each building is addressing those components in their ACSIP to make sure that students have a well-aligned curriculum, effective instruction, and maximum opportunity at academic success. Our teaching staff is also provided for in the school improvement planning process by making sure that they are provided with professional development opportunities that further enhance their instructional skills.

All of these efforts have one common objective; to improve student achievement. In order to evaluate how well we are doing in accomplishing that objective, we must look at the results of the assessments that we administer to the students here in Gentry. The State of Arkansas mandates that each district test students in 5th, 7th, and 10th grade with the Stanford Achievement Test – 9th edition or SAT-9, a nationally norm referenced achievement test. In addition, Gentry School District tests students in all grades from 1st through 10th. The state also requires that students in 4th, 6th, and 8th grade take benchmark exams, criterion referenced tests, based on the state developed curriculum frameworks. This represents what students in Arkansas should know and be able to do after being exposed to instruction aligned with the state standards. High school students take end of course exams in literacy at 11th grade and in math in Algebra I and Geometry.

While a complete review of all test results for the district would require more space than this article will allow, I do feel it is important to bring some highlights to your

attention. In the past five years, on the SAT-9, students in 1st and 2nd grade have had an average gain of 34 percentile points in reading and an average gain of 32.5 percentile points in math. Students in 5th grade have improved by 7 percentile points in reading and by 22 percentile points in math. Students in 6th grade improved by 22 percentile points in reading and by 39 percentile points in math over the same period. These results are indicative of the improvements occurring across the district.

On the primary benchmark exam in 4th grade we have seen an increase of 38% in the number of students scoring proficient or above in literacy and an increase of 30% in the number of students scoring proficient and above in math. At the middle level, there was an increase of 19% in the number of students in 6th grade scoring proficient or above in literacy and an increase of 7% in those scoring proficient or above in math. At the high school, we now have 5% more of our students scoring proficient or above on the end of course exam in literacy. High school improvements have been even more significant in math. On the Algebra I end of course exam we have 17% more students scoring proficient or above and on the Geometry exam we have 10% more of our students scoring proficient or above. Based on the improvements in student performance on both types of assessments, we feel that our school improvement efforts are beginning to show significant positive results.

The Gentry School District will continue to show progress as we implement those components of our improvement plans and we expect to see more and more students scoring proficient and above on the assessments that we administer. The ultimate goal will be to have 100% of our students scoring at those levels within the next 10 years. While I readily admit it is a lofty goal, it is one that is well within our grasp.