

# Chalkboard

By

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There are few things more exciting (and challenging) in the life of a teacher or administrator than the beginning of a school year. There is so much to do and so little time to do it! Teachers and administrators are busy preparing buildings, coordinating academic programs, and engaging in professional development in order to be well prepared for that moment when the children arrive and the bell rings.

This preparation process does not end when school starts in August. It does not end when the children are dismissed in May for the summer. Teachers and administrators are constantly participating in reflective activities. They are asking, "What went well this past year? Where can we improve next year?" This reflective process leads to improvements in each school's academic programming. It results in specific, targeted professional development that aids each teacher and administrator in professional self improvement.

Academic programs receive a thorough review each school year. We do this through a process called the Arkansas Consolidated School Improvement Plan (ACSIP). Each school has various committees of teachers and parents who examine how to improve the teaching-learning process. The main focus is what can each school do to meet the educational needs of each child? Each school's ACSIP plan is an academic blueprint of what that school will do for the upcoming school year to provide an outstanding educational experience for each child.

Gentry Public Schools is implementing several curriculum improvement initiatives this school year. Total Instructional Alignment (TIA) is one such program being implemented this year that we are excited about. This project is a result of an ongoing process begun in January 2007 in conjunction with the Northwest Arkansas Educational Service Cooperative (NWAESC) and the 16 school districts in northwest Arkansas. TIA is a process that vertically and horizontally aligns curriculum and instruction in Literacy and Mathematics from kindergarten through grade twelve. It is a comprehensive, teacher created approach to improve instructional effectiveness and curriculum accuracy.

In addition to TIA, we will be collecting student assessment data through the administration of Targeted Assessments (TA) each quarter in grades 3-11 in Literacy and Mathematics. At the time of this article, we have completed the pre-test administration of the Targeted Assessments. We will administer a TA each quarter and a post-test assessment late next spring. We will use these timely student assessments each quarter to identify those areas each student needs additional help and will provide the needed academic assistance. We will also use these student assessments to identify areas of academic strength for each child and will move those students more aggressively toward academic challenge and enrichment.

I am looking forward to the academic successes of our students this school year through TIA and the Targeted Assessments. I have never seen a more comprehensive curriculum, instructional, and assessment plan in my 26 years as an educator.

If you attended the Annual Report to the Public on September 10, you would have heard me discuss the federal and state funds Gentry Public Schools receives. I will briefly review the federal funds (first) and state categorical grants (second):

**Title I:** Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged. These funds are used to provide supplemental teachers in the Primary and Intermediate schools who work with children who need additional academic support.

**Title II, Part A:** Teacher and Principal Training and Recruitment. Some of these funds are transferred to Title I and Title IV, Part A. The remaining funds are used to provide a Dean of Students/Affairs in the Middle and High Schools. The Dean of Students/Affairs works with student attendance, student academic performance with regard to Academic Improvement Plans (AIPs), parent communication, and as a liaison between the community and the school district regarding school/community activities.

**Title III, Part A:** Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students. These funds are used to provide a paraprofessional in the Primary school. This person assists children (whose first language is not English) in developing their English speaking, reading and writing skills.

**Title IV, Part A:** Safe and Drug Free Schools. The school district uses these funds, in partnership with the city of Gentry, in providing a School Resource Officer (SRO) for the school district. The SRO provides drug/alcohol abuse lessons, conflict resolution, safety training, and serves as a resource person to students, teachers and parents.

**Title V, Part A:** Innovation Education Programs. These funds are used to provide technology and creative educational programming resources.

**National School Lunch Act (NSLA):** These funds are used for improving instruction and academic achievement of students. We have transferred some of these funds to meet the needs of our Alternative Learning Environment (ALE) and English Language Learner (ELL) programs. The remaining balance of those funds are used to purchase technology, health and wellness resources, dictionaries, calculators, instructional software, etc. We also use these funds to hire a district curriculum coordinator, supplemental math teacher in the middle school, and a supplemental Title I teacher in the Intermediate school.

**Alternative Learning Environment (ALE):** These funds will be used to contract with the Siloam Springs School District to pay tuition for our students to attend the Alternative Learning Center in Siloam Springs.

**Professional Development (PD):** These funds will be used to support the activities required to meet the minimum 60 hours of state mandated professional development for each teacher and administrator. In addition to this, funds will be used to provide resources for professional development libraries, technology, workshop fees and travel expenses related to professional development.

**English Language Learners (ELL):** These funds will be used to hire personnel to serve ELL students in the Intermediate, Middle and High schools. These teachers will provide small group instructional assistance to students whose native language is not English.