

Story of Success

CROSS COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT | CHERRY VALLEY, ARKANSAS



A Cross County Elementary School student and her teacher review an assignment.

Cross County School District is located in Cherry Valley, Arkansas, in the northeastern corner of the state. Across two campuses, Cross County serves a rural community of over 600 students, the majority of whom are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. For more than a decade, Cross County has partnered with NIET to strengthen instruction and create opportunities for teachers to grow as leaders.

Cross County has struggled with many of the challenges facing rural schools across the nation, including retaining effective teachers, the need for educators

to serve multiple roles, lower teacher salaries, and large percentages of students from low-income backgrounds.

Through the TAP System, Cross County School District created and sustained a performance-based compensation and human capital management system that provides high-impact support for educators.

The high level of support for improvement has addressed the challenges facing this rural district and made positive impacts on school culture, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement.

CROSS COUNTY'S STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

With the structures in place from the TAP System, Cross County created a multiyear improvement plan. One important early decision was to set aside time each week for teacher collaboration and classroom follow-up by teacher leaders. This allowed teachers to more deeply understand high-quality instructional materials and practices. In addition, school leadership teams improved their use of student data and student work to identify and close learning gaps.

“For our small school and our small community, the partnership with NIET came around at the best moment because we were looking to reform our school, support our teachers more, make them even more effective, grow our students, and help them achieve more.”

STEPHEN PRINCE
MASTER TEACHER
CROSS COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL



Provide Time for Educators to Collaborate

One of the most important investments the district made was to set aside time each week for teams of teachers to collaborate to address student needs and strengthen teacher practices. Through weekly professional learning meetings and high-quality observation and feedback, teacher leaders work with classroom teachers to identify specific areas where they can help students access grade-level learning and meet challenging academic goals.

Deepen Understanding of a High-Quality Literacy Curriculum

Having collaborative learning structures and weekly meetings for teacher and school leaders in place provides the space for gaining a deeper understanding of how instructional materials can be used to support individual students. Cross County High School adopted a new literacy curriculum in the summer of 2021 to better support students in reaching the depth of knowledge required by grade-level standards. The professional

learning meetings and teacher coaching structures were essential as teachers worked to adjust their strategies and practices to implement high-quality instructional materials in literacy.

Set Instructional Goals Based on Student Work

In Cross County, building-level instructional leadership teams analyze student data and set goals that drive professional learning over the course of the year. The district convenes these teams during the summer to analyze student data and plan professional learning, creating a foundation

for addressing learning gaps. During this time, staff members dig into data and student work to understand specific student needs and identify strategies to address them. Master teachers then play a key role once the school year starts by field-testing the strategies in classrooms and bringing results back to the instructional leadership team. The leadership team then shares effective practices across

the faculty and helps refine instructional goals.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Cross County's investment in educator effectiveness has had a significant impact on student achievement growth. The district was one of only a few districts in Arkansas to increase student performance from 2019 to 2021 in reading, and in 2023,

Cross County School District outperformed students statewide in English, math, reading, and science. With the help of the TAP System structures, Cross County School District has increased the retention rate of effective teachers from 75% to 92%. Cross County is continuously raising teacher excellence and student achievement. ●

