

Dardanelle High School Dardanelle School District

Dardanelle School District is located in Yell County in central Arkansas. Dardanelle School District served approximately 1,820 students in kindergarten through twelfth grade during the 2006-2007 school year. Dardanelle High School served 535 students ninth through twelfth grades during the 2006-2007 school year. Dardanelle High School was recently named a Silver Medalist in U.S. News and World Report's 2008 Nation's Best High Schools report. The school "was one of the nation's seventeen original Renaissance schools" and is the "originator of the high school advisory program in Arkansas and one of the first Arkansas schools to implement the interdisciplinary teaching block." The school has historically been recognized as a progressive and successful high school.

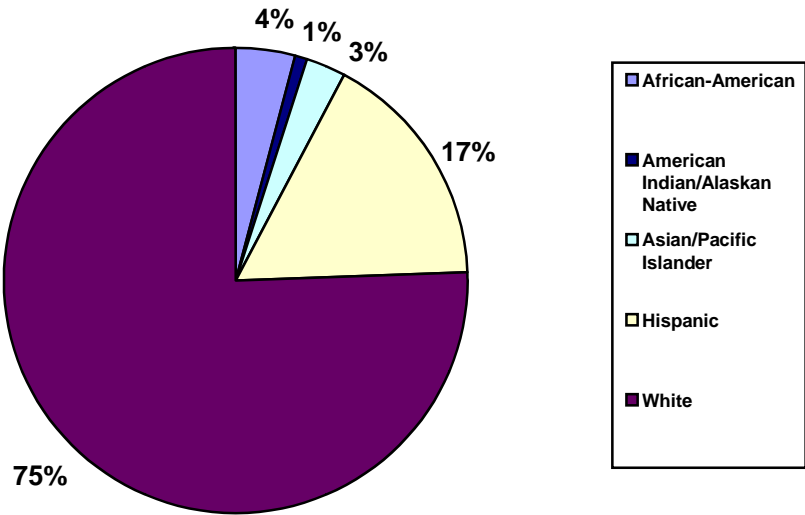
In 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007, Dardanelle High School met adequate yearly progress (AYP), as required by No Child Left Behind. In Arkansas, schools must make AYP on the state-mandated Benchmark exams, which are criterion-referenced tests administered in mathematics and literacy. Students are administered the literacy assessment in the eleventh grade as an End of Course exam. Math proficiency is calculated from the End of Course Geometry exam. Arkansas' annual AYP goals are determined by the Arkansas Department of Education (<http://www.arkansased.org/nclb/ayp.html>), and are part of the state's plan. Dardanelle High School has consistently outperformed state and district proficiency averages in literacy and math (see Figure 2).

Table 1.

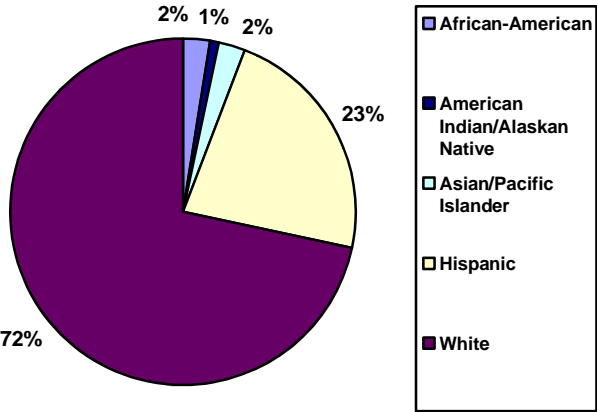
School Characteristics: (2007) The district and school serve a similar percentage of students through the Free and Reduced Lunch Program as the state. The district and school serve more students through ESL services than the state, on average.

| | Dardanelle High School | Dardanelle School District | Arkansas |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|----------|
| % Free and Reduced Lunch | 48.2 | 60.0 | 54.2 |
| % English as a Second Language | 12.5 | 20.6 | 11.0 |
| % Special Education | 4.9 | 8.9 | 12.6 |
| % Attendance | 92.0 | 95.2 | 94.3 |
| % Graduation Rate | 87.0 | 87.4 | 76.0 |
| % Dropout Rate | 3.0 | 2.1 | 3.6 |

Student Demographics by School



Student Demographics by District



Student Demographics by State

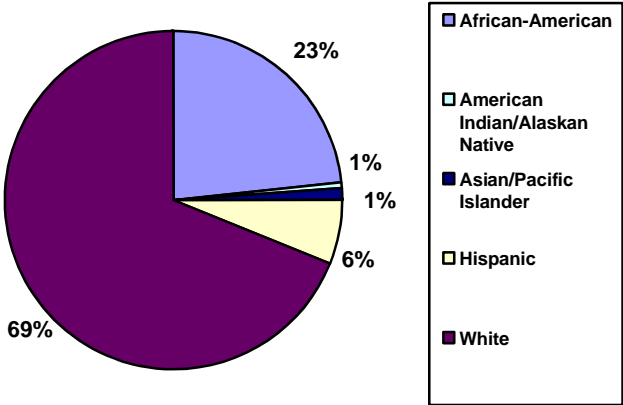


Figure 1. Student demographics by school, district, and state (2006).

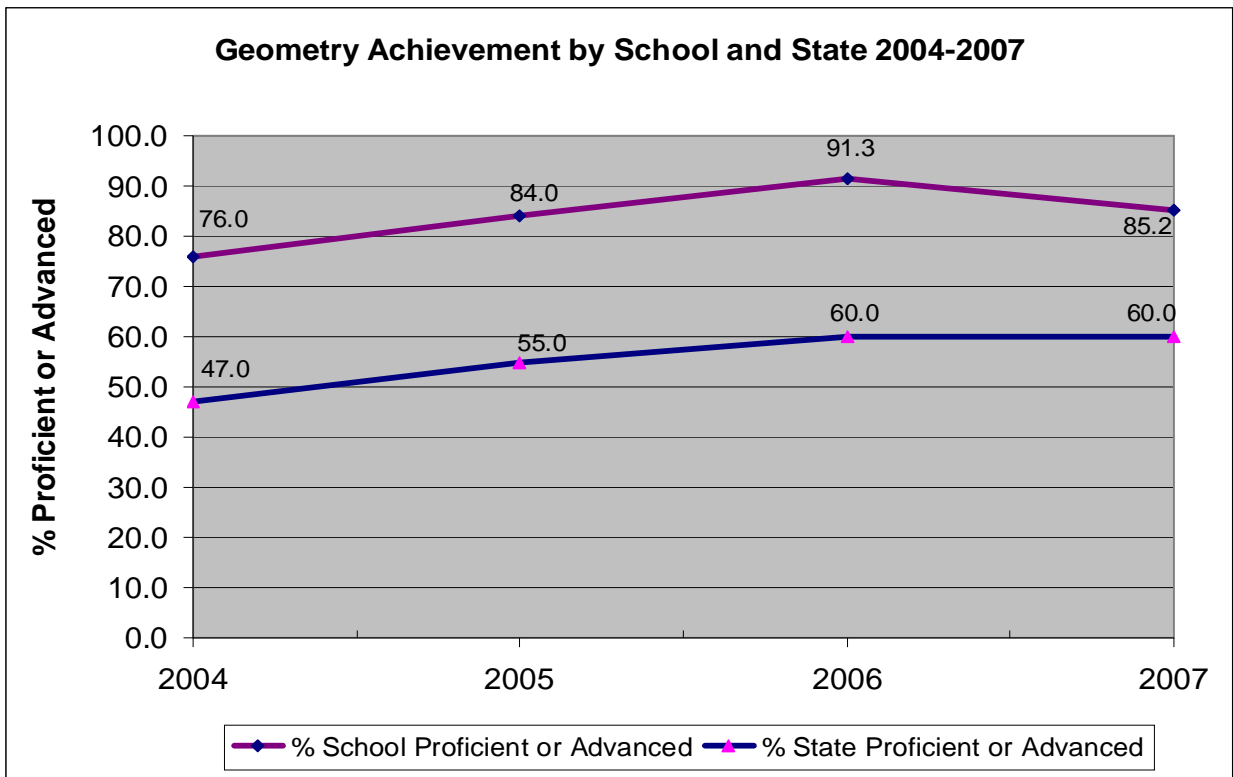
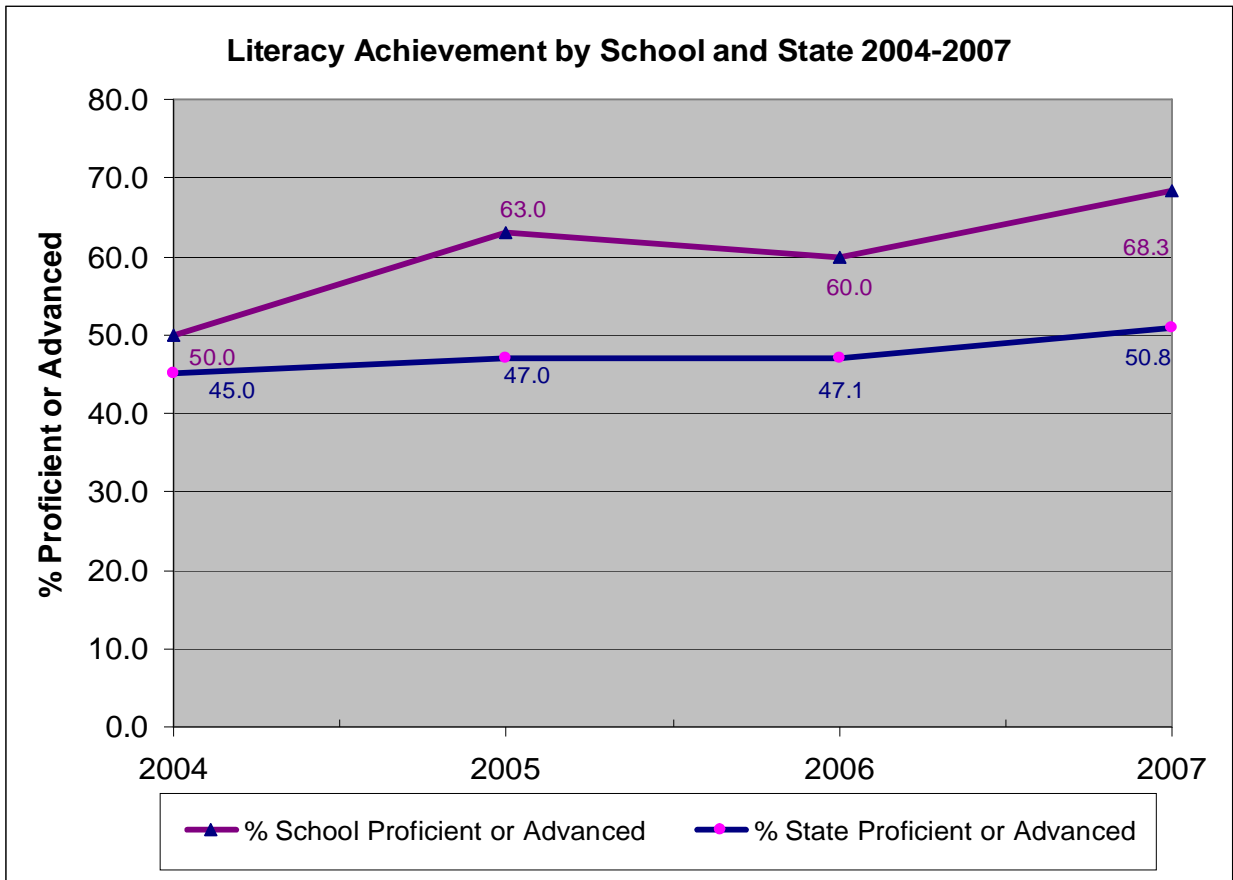


Figure 2. Students scoring advanced or proficient in literacy and mathematics by school and state for 2004-2007. Data referenced are from <http://normes.uark.edu/>.

Curriculum and Academic Goals

Curriculum development takes place at the district level and is driven by the Arkansas State Frameworks. Teachers meet in subject level groups to develop curriculum, create pacing guides, and select instructional materials that are tied to the frameworks. During the fall of 2007, the district scheduled time to work on curricular alignment for kindergarten through twelfth grade with the local educational service cooperative.

Dardanelle High School has a long history of being progressive and standards-driven. The high school was one of the first in the state to develop a standards-driven approach and moved to a more rigorous curriculum almost a decade ago. The district works with local colleges and the community to ensure their curriculum and academic based decisions are on target with the expectations of post-secondary institutions and the community at large.

Dardanelle has a growing number of students living in poverty and many children who, at the time they enroll in the district, do not speak English. The district and high school developed a system several years ago, when they first recognized their demographics were changing, and designed their school improvement plans with these students in mind. One of their main goals was to acculturate these students to a rigorous core curriculum showing students, parents, and teachers that all students can be successful. The district and school strongly believe in setting high academic expectations and then providing the supports that allow teachers and students to meet those expectations.

Curriculum and Academic Goals Comments

We follow the state standards. As far as materials, basal books, supplemental materials, everything has to be tied to the standards.

Experienced Administrator

Probably about ten or eleven years ago, in our school improvement plan, we saw that our community was changing. We wanted to add structure to our curriculum, we wanted to get more rigorous, and we wanted to cut out a lot of the fluff.

Experienced Administrator

The absolute priority for us is academic success for our students.

Experienced Administrator

The main thing we did this year was targeting vertical integration, making sure our students were getting everything—that there were no gaps from middle school to high school.

Experienced Teacher

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

Teachers at Dardanelle High School work together, by content area, during common planning times. The common planning time is used by teachers primarily to ensure horizontal alignment. Teachers also work together on daily lesson planning and curriculum revisions. In science, for example, teachers have used the common planning time develop a standardized lab format.

Teachers recently began cross-curricular meetings in addition to their departmental meetings. Using the Professional Learning Community (PLC) model, teachers meet weekly to set goals to improve teaching and learning. Teachers enjoy the formal time to collaborate and feel that it is creating more unity within and across disciplines.

The district recently began surveying teachers to better assess their professional development needs. The district is trying to ensure the time that teachers spend in professional development is relevant and applicable. Teachers may request alternative or additional professional development through district administrators, which teachers feel are very supportive of their needs and requests.

Dardanelle School District worked with local school districts to develop a common school calendar. By having the same days scheduled for in-service and holiday breaks, the district is able to coordinate large scale professional development consortiums. When the districts work together, they are able to increase the variety and depth of options available to teachers.

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building Comments

The weekly meetings are bringing more uniformity to our departments and to our school as a whole. It's allowing us to have time to meet with each other to have collegial time and that's very beneficial.

Experienced Teacher

The feedback from our teacher survey indicated what professional development we needed.

Experienced Administrator

Our staff development has become more meaningful.

Experienced Administrator

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

Students at Dardanelle High School are required to choose either a career pathway with a major of four credits in a job specific area or a college preparation pathway. Students begin testing and planning in the eighth grade, with the assistance of their counselors.

Teachers are expected to keep students engaged from “bell to bell.” The school helps teachers stay on task by strictly limiting classroom interruptions. Pep rallies and other school day interruptions are kept to a minimum. By setting this expectation, teachers and students are aware that the focus of the school is academic.

Dardanelle High School teaches reading and writing across the curriculum. Teachers attend workshops to help them embed literacy strategies in their daily lessons. Students are required to read twenty books a year and the school frequently assesses their reading and writing skills.

Teachers within the Dardanelle School District typically drive the instructional program selection process. On occasion, the district will make a top-down selection if the research has pointed them in that direction, but the majority of the program and material selection takes place by teacher committees.

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements Comments

The teacher is the most important element when it comes right down to it.

Experienced Administrator

The one thing that's kind of universal at the high school is that we really work hard on the reading strategies. Especially with our ESL kids, we develop a strong reading foundation.

Experienced Teacher

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

In addition to state mandated tests, Dardanelle High School administers “focus tests” in core subject areas throughout the school year. The tests are developed in conjunction with the local educational service cooperative using the district’s curriculum maps and are given to students quarterly. Test scores are stored electronically in a format accessible to all teachers. Teachers are able to access real-time test data and then provide point-in-time remediation and intervention. Teachers are also expected to use the testing data to inform instruction.

Students at Dardanelle High School meet with an advisory group on a daily basis. Students meet with a peer group of about twenty-five students and one teacher throughout their high school career to address school and non-school related issues. Students are with this teacher and group of students in a homeroom type setting for fifteen minutes a day. All grades and discipline referrals are handled by the advisory teachers and students are encouraged to meet with their advisory teacher when they are having academic or social difficulties. The advisory program has helped students have a point of contact within the school for the entire time they are at the high school and has helped address drop-out and absenteeism issues. Students’ preparation for graduation and college is also tracked through the advisory program.

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data Comments

It is important that we have several mock examinations throughout the course of the year. It better prepares our students for what the real test is actually going to be like.

Experienced Teacher

Advisory, I think is our key thing, because you've got that personal relationship with the student.

Experienced Teacher

Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustments

The district developed a Cultural and Language Inclusion program (CLIFF) to better served the needs of students learning English as a foreign language. Students w who are new to the district and do not speak English are enrolled in the program and are taught language acquisition skills.

Students learning English are also taught about American culture and school expectations. By their second year many of these students perform almost as well as native speakers, and many achieve test scores above the national *ITBS* average.

Any student needing additional help may attend tutoring sessions after school two to three times per week. Remediation is also offered during the school day for students who do not pass End of Course examinations. Students needing help with homework and brief interventions may also meet with teachers during the advisory period. Students that fail the Benchmark are placed in labs which provide remediation targeting their area of weakness.

Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustments Comments

We have students who come to our district that may be eleven years old and have never attended school. Some students are not literate in Spanish or English.

Experienced Administrator

If a student scores below proficient on their ACTAAP, they need remediation. Any time a student is failing or close to failing, we're going to provide some kind of tutoring for them.

Experienced Administrator

Influential Factors

The district and school expect high levels of success from all students. The district is progressive and faces challenges with innovations, proactive planning, and decision making. The district offers a high level of support to its teachers and understands that this ultimately impacts students. The district has been in a constant state of evaluation, hoping to better meet the needs of its students. Even though the school population has changed, both culturally and economically, over the last several years, the expectations of the district have remained high.

The school board and superintendent have a strong working relationship. The school board is kept informed by the superintendent in order to make the best decisions for the district and is very supportive of the district's academic endeavors. The board is well-educated and knowledgeable of educational issues and many have been members for more than a decade.

Influential Factors Comments

Don't teach in a school you would not send your child to.

Experienced Administrator

I think the key is expectations. Have everybody on the same page and have the same mindset. I think that is probably the key to success.

Experienced Administrator