

WHAT SCHOOLS NEED TO SUCCEED

A LOOK AT THREE SCHOOLS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Poverty has a negative and lasting impact on a student's education. Research tells us that poverty can physically impact a child's developing brain and his future ability to learn. Interventions can reverse that harm. But schools are limited in the tools to address these needs. Models such as Community Schools, Harlem Children's Zone, and Whole Child, Whole Community are beginning to meet these needs.

Here, we look at three schools: Marvell-Elaine Elementary, Anna Strong Intermediate, and Jones Elementary. Selected data for the schools are presented. Focus is directed toward the communities these schools operate in and the resources they have access to outside the state and federal school funding distributed to all schools.

Here are five things we want you to remember after you read these stories.

1. Poverty negatively impacts learning.
2. Our state adequacy resources don't provide needed support services and programs for low-income children as they are now being used.
3. All schools don't have equal access to the same level of public and private support that helps some schools to be successful.
4. A community's support for its schools can be an important contributor to the success of the school and its students.
5. Philanthropy is also important to the success of schools with high percentages of low-income students. This is particularly true when the community served by the school is also impoverished.



All of our students, regardless of their zip code, deserve the highest quality classroom resources and high quality supports and opportunities outside the classroom that further support their learning. It will require the best strategies from all school leaders, policy makers, and private funding sources to meet these big challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty has a negative and lasting impact on a student's education. When kids live in poverty they come to school hungry and unhealthy. In the winter, they come without coats. Some show up tired because they ride a rural bus route for an hour and a half to get to school. Some schools have more support and can do more for these students than others.

Arkansas guarantees schools a certain amount of funding per student. This "foundation funding" provides each student with resources, but sometimes it's not enough. Poor students need more funding and support to catch up. Beyond state funding, some schools have private, community, or philanthropic support. This kind of help can make all the difference for poorer schools. But it's not always available.

Through the adequacy process, Arkansas funds all students equally. Every student in the state is assured the same amount of foundation funding regardless of zip code. The state also provides additional funding to districts for students with special needs, such as low-income or English learner students. But not all schools with high percentages of low-income students have the same access to outside supports. The successes that schools have are affected by and dependent on assistance from community, local businesses, and public or private grant funding.

This report tells the story of three schools: Marvell-Elaine Elementary, Anna Strong Intermediate, and Jones Elementary. Each one has a high percentage of poor students. But their similarities end there. The schools have varying levels of support from their communities, and have experienced varied levels of success as a result.

The Marvell-Elaine school district has a high percentage of poor students. It is in an area of the Delta with declining population and high poverty. The Elaine school district consolidated with Marvell in 2006 against its will. Parts of the district still struggle. But this particular elementary school seems to have turned a corner. The school has strong superintendent and principal leadership. It gets outside support from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation. It is part of the statewide Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. The school also works with the local Boys, Girls, and Adults Community Development Center.

Anna Strong Intermediate School in Marianna also has a high percentage of low-income students. It is part of the Lee County school district. The school district was recently released from state takeover. The school is showing signs of progress after extensive state and external provider investment. The district is no longer in academic distress, but financial issues remain. It is still on accreditation probation. The community is struggling from a limited tax base and declining population. But community voices are hopeful that schools in Lee County are gaining ground.

Students at Jones Elementary in Springdale are almost all low-income and English learners. Many have parents who speak no English at all. But the district is well-managed. It enjoys financial resources and support from the community. Even with this support, helping every child achieve is an ongoing battle.

The stories of the schools are told through data, site visits, local news, historical references, and interviews with school leaders and community members. The schools are comparable in their percentage of low-income students but different in many other ways



including race or ethnicity. Students in Springdale are largely Latino and Marshallese at Jones Elementary, and in Marvell–Elaine and Lee County, most students are black.

POVERTY AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Education efforts on behalf of students living in poverty often address only academic needs, ignoring the health and security concerns poverty brings. The exception is state NSLA categorical funding (often called poverty funding) and federal Title I funding.

A lack of prenatal care, poor nutrition, and stress can negatively affect a child’s learning potential.¹ How and where a child grows up has a huge learning impact. Some schools still experience the vestiges of segregation. Schools in rural parts of the state are struggling with declining enrollment, which lowers their student funding. The school itself may be in fiscal distress. A school with a high percentage of low-income students may be located in a district and community that is relatively wealthy or in a district and community that is economically depressed. Schools with low-income students located within a larger district and more advantaged community may be able to draw on the support of community leaders and businesses. Those types of resources may be limited in low-income areas of the state.

Recent research shows a child’s academic success depends on what’s going on outside the classroom as well. A recent study in New York found 18 factors in a child’s school and neighborhood that predicted student success. These factors included students who are eligible for free lunch, principal turnover, involvement with Children’s Services, and adult education levels.² In Chicago, studies show unemployment and neighborhood crime make a big difference in whether a school is considered stable or severely disadvantaged. Disadvantaged schools typically have few neighborhood supports.³

Some state-level programs are beginning to address these needs. Arkansas’s “No Kid Hungry Campaign” is expanding. The state now supports the federal Community Eligibility Program for districts to provide free lunch to all students. Community Schools form partnerships between schools and outside community resources. One example is a school health clinic operated by a community health provider. These schools work to connect students and families with social services and youth programs. Schools become community centers that are open summers, evenings, and weekends for community use.⁴ The Harlem Children’s Zone provides wrap-around services to support students. The term wrap-around services includes health care, mental health, and family supports like service referrals and parent classes in child development.⁵ ASCD and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention developed the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model. The model includes the coordinated school health effort and efforts to improve family engagement and community involvement.⁶

In Arkansas, some local school districts are developing their own strategies to meet non-academic needs of children in poverty. They work with private non-profits, business supporters, grant funders, and other resources unique to their communities. The stories shared here will focus on these efforts.

WHAT THE NUMBERS TELL US

More than 90 percent of the students in each of the schools studied here are eligible for free and reduced lunch. Enrollment at Jones Elementary is greater than the number of students at Anna Strong and Marvell–Elaine added together. More than 80 percent of the enrollment of each school is made up of minority students. The majority of students at Jones Elementary are Hispanic and Marshallese. Black students make up the majority of the enrollment in Anna Strong (Lee County) and Marvell–Elaine.



Student Demographics	Anna Strong Intermediate	Jones Elementary	Marvell-Elaine Elementary
Grades	3-6	K-5	K-5
Enrollment	242	565	202
Percent NSLA	100%	97%	98%
Percent White	9%	9%	13%
Percent Black	90%	1%	81%
Percent Hispanic	1%	80%	4%
Percent Pacific Islander	0%	10%	0%

Source: Data is from the ADE Data Center school report cards for 2013-14.

The districts that support these schools differ more than the individual schools. The district enrollment of Lee County is almost double the size of Marvell-Elaine but Springdale is more than twenty times larger than Lee County. Expenditures per student reflect economies of scale in the districts. Springdale has the lowest cost per student with Lee County more than \$2,000 above that. Marvell-Elaine, the smallest of the three, has more than double the per-student expenditures of Springdale. Yet Springdale's teacher salaries are far higher than the other two. It is important to note in the following table that while Jones Elementary is a poor school, the Springdale District as a whole has a far lower percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunches.

School District Finances	Lee County	Springdale	Marvell-Elaine
3 Quarter Prior Year Average Daily Membership	912	19,971	448
Assessment	\$119,579,181	\$1,501,909,361	\$57,164,785
Total Mills	28.3	40.50	33
Per Pupil Expenditures	\$11,994	\$9,289	\$18,632
K-12 Licensed Classroom FTE	76.6	1,272.5	42.5
Average Teacher Salary	\$41,609	\$58,896	\$49,287
Percent Free & Reduced Lunch Students	91.3%	67.8%	98.0%
Net Legal Fund Balance per student	\$402.69	\$829.78	\$5,688.49

Source: Data is from the 2013-14 Annual Statistical Report published online by ADE. NSLA percent is from the State Aid Data report published online by ADE.



All school districts receive a baseline amount of funding per student; this is known as adequacy or foundation funding. Foundation funding provides for the educational needs of a typical student. In addition to that, schools receive funding for students with more needs than a traditional student—low-income students, English learners, and students in alternative learning environments. However, selected school districts may receive additional state and federal funding for programs that not all districts choose to use or are not eligible to receive. In some cases, district staff may lack knowledge about these options or how to apply for them. A few selected programs are shown in the tables that follow to illustrate.

State Grants to Districts	Lee County	Springdale	Marvell-Elaine
AR Better Chance (Pre-K)	\$473,850	\$3,131,784	\$140,940
Nat'l. Bd. Of Professional Teaching Standards	\$0	\$3,668	\$0
School Facility Joint Use Support	\$0	\$104,000	\$0
High Priority District Teacher Recruit. & Retent	\$200,436	Not Eligible	\$125,172

Federal Grants to Districts	Lee County	Springdale	Marvell-Elaine
21 st Century Comm. Learning Grants	\$0	\$770,000	\$105,000

These grants are passed through the Arkansas Department of Education to the districts. Other grants and services provided by private funders are not recorded in the audit document.

The achievement results of these inputs can be seen in the following table. Perhaps unexpected is the better performance of Marvell-Elaine Elementary than its bigger and somewhat more advantaged peer Jones Elementary. By way of comparison, KIPP Delta Elementary Literacy Academy received a “D” letter grade.

Student Achievement	Anna Strong Intermediate	Jones Elementary	Marvell-Elaine Elementary
ESEA Status Overall	Needs Improvement Priority	Needs Improvement	Achieving
Literacy Percentage	50.23	67.38	74.74
Math Percentage	46.15	71.67	84.21
State Letter Grade Assignment	F	D	A

Source: ADE Website ESEA Accountability Status 2014.



You can't talk about resources and student needs without talking about health outcomes and socio-economic factors. In the report, "No School Alone," researchers examined community dynamics and found that the social environment matters in terms of how kids are doing in schools.⁷ The Adverse Childhood Experiences study confirmed that traumatic childhood events like abuse and neglect can create so much toxic stress that healthy brain development is harmed. The result is long-term effects on learning, behavior, and health.⁸

Poverty and poor health are linked. Poor health contributes to poor academic outcomes. Poor prenatal care and child health issues, such as chronic asthma and poor nutrition, can have a real impact on achievement.⁹

The chart below shows four measures from the Annual County Health Rankings. The fifth measure is from census data. In all areas, Washington County is one of the leading counties in the state. At the other end of the spectrum, Phillips and Lee Counties vie for some of the lowest ranking.

Health, Poverty, and Education	Lee County Anna Strong Intermediate	Washington County Jones Elementary	Phillips County Marvell-Elaine Elementary
Rank of Overall Health Outcomes by County	70	2	74
Rank of Social and Economic Factors by County	75	5	74
Children in Poverty	52%	26%	53%
Households with some college	32.6%	57.6%	47.7%
Residents with a Bachelor's Degree	6.4%	28.7%	12.0%

Note: Rankings are among Arkansas Counties

MARVELL - ELAINE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL MARVELL-ELAINE SCHOOL DISTRICT: GRADES K-5

The Marvell-Elaine School District is located in Phillips County, East of Helena-West Helena. The city of Marvell was founded in 1876 as a railroad town. Throughout the early 1800s, the small community was surrounded by cotton farms existing on slave labor until the Civil War. By 1860, 8,941 of the 14,877 residents were slaves.¹⁰ Many former slaves remained on these farms as tenant farmers. The population is now 62.4 percent black and 35.5 percent white, according to the 2010 census.¹¹

The city of Elaine is possibly most known as the site of the Elaine Race Riot of 1919. After an incident in which one white police officer was killed and another injured, whites took up arms and killed hundreds of blacks. Five whites were also killed. Following the riot, 77 blacks were arrested and tried with twelve being sentenced to death. No whites were tried. Scipio Jones, an African-American attorney, was able to overturn the death sentences of the Elaine Twelve.¹²



EDUCATION HISTORY

In the 1950's after *Brown v. Board of Education* and the desegregation of Little Rock's Central High School, school districts changed from policies of "separate but equal" to "freedom of choice." The result was still segregated schools. In 1970, when federal courts pressed for true desegregation, private white segregation academies were formed. Marvell's school district was desegregated in 1965. The next year, a private school named Marvell Academy was opened. Today it remains predominantly white.¹³

The Elaine School district south of Marvell was consolidated into the Marvell district in 2006 but not without a fight.¹⁴ In June of 2006, a court challenge was filed to prevent the annexation into the Marvell district. The Elaine High School was closed immediately and the elementary school closed three years later. In January of 2008 the final appeal to the case was dismissed.¹⁵

DEMOGRAPHICS

The population of Phillips County peaked in 1950 at 46,254. It has since dwindled to less than half that number at 21,757. The white percentage of the population is 35 percent. More than 63 percent of the county is African American. Hispanics make up just slightly over one percent. The median household income is \$26,737 compared to the state median at \$40,768.¹⁶ More than one-third of this small population lives below the poverty line.

EDUCATION CHALLENGES

School Choice

School choice was allowed through legislation passed in 2013. It allows students to attend any district they wish if the receiving district will accept them and the home district does not lose more than a specified number of students a year. In the past, students could only attend the district where they resided and paid property taxes. Marvell-Elaine declared itself exempt from school choice in 2013-14 and 2014-15. They did not declare an exemption for 2015-16. In a report on school choice to the State Board of Education in August of 2014, the district reported losing three white students but no black students.¹⁷ The district previously had 40 white students and therefore lost eight percent of its white enrollment.

Declining Enrollment

The enrollment continues to decline each year. The table below illustrates recent losses.

Year	Enrollment	Decline	Percent Decline
2014-15	375	27	7.2%
2013-14	402	49	12.2%
2012-13	451	Consolidated with Elaine	0
2011-12	418	43	10.3%

Source: ADE Data Center

Marvell-Elaine is rapidly approaching the 350 number that formerly required consolidation and still triggers it if the district is on accreditation probation, or is considered to be academically or fiscally distressed. A decline equal to this year's number, 27, would set that evaluation in action. The rate of decline is actually faster than that of Lee County.



Academic Distress and School Improvement

In 2014, Marvell-Elaine Elementary School became an achieving school overall. Almost 75 percent of its students are proficient in literacy and 84 percent in math. These were significant improvements over past years. In 2012, the district was a needs improvement—focus school. At that time 68 percent of the students were proficient in literature and 78 percent were proficient in math. Students in upper grades are still struggling.¹⁸

Marvell-Elaine Elementary is celebrating its “A” letter grade rating. Their grade outpaced the chief rival in the county, KIPP Delta Elementary. The letter grade for KIPP Delta was “D.”¹⁹

The one-year college remediation rate²⁰ for the Marvell-Elaine School District in 2013 was 66.7 percent. This rate reflects students that require remediation in at least one subject area. Marvell-Elaine’s rate is much higher than the overall state remediation rate of 40 percent.²¹

TEACHERS

Marvell-Elaine points to Response to Intervention (RtI) as the approach that improved their teaching success. RtI uses data-based decision making, screening, progress monitoring, and multi-level prevention systems to support daily teaching strategies. RtI is a three-tiered approach. The first tier is high-quality core instruction meeting the needs of most students. For children not succeeding at that level, tier 2 provides research-based intervention to address learning or behavioral challenges of most at-risk students. Tier 3 is for students who are not responding to the increased supports in tier 2. It is a more intensive and individualized intervention for each student.

The district’s average teacher salary for 2014 was \$49,287 which was slightly higher than the state average of \$48,060.²² Perhaps even more important is the district’s minimum salary, which impacts the ability to attract the best qualified teachers in the state. The minimum or entry level salary for MESD was \$36,500 in 2014 when the state minimum was \$29,244.²³ That year the district ranked 31st out of the state’s 239 school districts in the minimum or starting salary level.

NON-ACADEMIC DISTRICT NEEDS

Transportation

The district covers 605 square miles. It is one of the top 10 districts in size in the state.²⁴ Marvell-Elaine has one of the state’s longer bus rides for students. The state average for bus rides one-way is just under 50 minutes.²⁵ The ride from Snow Lake (south of Elaine) to Marvell is 90 minutes one-way. The first child is put on the bus at 6:00 a.m.²⁶ Children as young as five could be riding a bus for 3 hours of their school day. Long bus rides are unavoidable for a sparsely populated district serving 375 students spread over 605 square miles.

Facilities

The elementary school facility at Marvell-Elaine was constructed in 2001 with 47,618 square feet. It has 70 percent depreciated building value. A physical education space was added in 2008 with 4,300 square feet. That building is at 84 percent depreciated value.²⁷

SCHOOL CLIMATE

Chronic Absence

According to records for 2013, chronic absence in Marvell-Elaine for K-3 was 18 percent compared to the state average of about 10 percent. Chronic absence is a measure that indicates the percent of children missing more than 10 percent of the school year, for any reason (about 18 days).²⁸ Marvell-Elaine has been working on its chronic absence issue with the Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading in a program known as Make Every Day Count. They have succeeded in lowering their rate to 8 percent in grades K-5.

School Discipline

The data on school discipline for the Marvell-Elaine district show:²⁹

Disciplinary Action	Three Year Average
In-School Suspension	2.5%
Out-of-School Suspension	18.3%
Expulsion	1.5%
Corporal Punishment	0.0%

Special Needs Students

In the Marvell-Elaine school district, 17 percent of the children are designated as special education students. The statewide percentage is almost 12 percent.³⁰ The percentage in Marvell-Elaine is nearly 1.5 times that of the state as a whole. One additional measure of high need students is included here: children placed in therapeutic foster care. Phillips County ranks second highest in the state in the number of children in therapeutic foster care settings despite their ranking as 35th in county population. They serve 12 percent of the state's total population of children in therapeutic foster care.³¹ The small districts in Phillips County are strained to meet the exceptional needs for these children.

There is one social worker and one counselor for the district serving all 448 students. Private companies providing mental health services come into the building to meet individually with student/clients.³²

PROGRAMS, GRANTS AND COMMUNITY

Parent Engagement

The district's social worker and the K-12 counselor both serve as parent coordinators. Principal Moore says their parent engagement is good but could be better. Parents like to attend events if their children are performing. They are able to reach parents by phone and schedule appointments when needed.³³ Mr. Louis Bennett of the Boys, Girls, and Adults Community Development Center works with the students and parents at Marvell-Elaine Elementary School. He says that the school does communicate well with parents and contacts them directly whenever necessary. However, parents are reluctant to come to the school for activities. This is something the school is working on through a program called Marvell-Elaine Reads which is part of the Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading.³⁴

Hunger

Marvell-Elaine Elementary school participates in these programs administered by Arkansas Department of Education's Child Nutrition Unit: School Lunch Program, Breakfast Program, and the After-School Snack Program. They do not participate in the Seamless Summer program.³⁵ The school provides a summer breakfast and lunch program through other school resources.



Pre-K

Data from the Arkansas Research Center indicates the number of low-income children who participated in the Arkansas Better Chance Program (ABC) and their outcomes with the number of children unserved by ABC.

Marvell-Elaine		Qualls Early Learning Inventory Student Development Areas					
		General Knowledge	Oral Communication	Written Language	Math Concepts	Work Habits	Attentive Behavior
2012	# of Students						
Max Score		13	24	20	25	21	21
ABC Avg. Score	13	8.2	18.9	6.0	14.6	16.4	17.2
ABC % Developed		30.8%	46.2%	23.1%	46.2%	30.8%	53.9%
No Program Indicated Score	11	5.8	12.6	3.2	9.5	12.5	13.5
NPI % Developed		18.2%	18.2%	9.1%	9.1%	18.2%	27.3%
ABC State % Developed Free Lunch	8927	49.3%	45.9%	47.9%	54.2%	49.4%	44.0%

Source: Arkansas Research Center.³⁶ Percent developed is an indicator of the percent of students that have met an identified benchmark for achieving the desired level of development in an area.

The ABC program is helping low-income children get ready for Kindergarten. About 31 percent of children completing the ABC program were developed in the General Knowledge category. Just more than half that many (18.2 percent) were developed when no pre-K program was indicated. This is less than the statewide percentage of students who score developed.

Good 2 Great

The Good 2 Great program combines the efforts of organizations, local community leaders, and educators to develop and put in place strategies that will improve the quality of early education in Arkansas.³⁷ The initiative focuses its efforts in two communities: Marvell-Elaine and Prescott. In each area, community advisory committees are formed to give direction for Good 2 Great’s efforts. The Kellogg Foundation is the funding source for this program.

In Marvell-Elaine, community leaders’ and residents’ views guide the approach Good 2 Great will take in efforts to improve early childhood education. These views were developed through surveys within Marvell and Elaine. The Good 2 Great initiative also worked with the Clinton School of Public Service to bring in Dr. Joan Lombardi, a national expert in early education, to offer perspective and recommendations on how Arkansas can advance its early educational programs and policies. Dr. Lombardi visited Marvell-Elaine early childhood centers to talk to children and providers. Community residents, parents, and a legislator shared their experiences and views with Dr. Lombardi over lunch at the local community center.



Following the meetings and information given by Marvell-Elaine's community leaders, the core team of organizations (Arkansas State University's Early Childhood Services, the Arkansas Public Policy Panel, and Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families) provides professional support, collects pertinent data and tracks the progress of the communities. The goal is to develop a model that will be valuable for the entire state, but for now access to this level of expertise is a great resource for Marvell-Elaine.

AR-GLR Community Solutions Initiative

The Marvell-Elaine School District participates in the Community Solutions Initiative (CSI).³⁸ The Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation is funding the work in five sites in Arkansas. Each community is required to develop local solutions to meet grade-level reading challenges. Some examples of the work being done at Marvell-Elaine:

- Strengthening parent and community engagement through accessible and welcoming public school leadership.
- Providing one-on-one and small group tutoring to Marvell-Elaine Elementary School children during the school year.
- Developing a framework to assess outcomes.

The Boys, Girls, and Adults Community Development Center (BGACDC) and the Marvell-Elaine School District are working together on a unique summer program. This partnership is making a difference for children and families during the summer months through intensive literacy instruction, character development, and academic support.

Nearly 40 years ago, a group of parents in Marvell, led by Beatrice Shelby, opened the BGACDC in response to the need for positive youth development opportunities. To connect students with their African American history, BGACDC adopted the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom School model. These organizations have partnered to offer Freedom School to Marvell-Elaine students since 2007, providing summer learning opportunities to more than 500 children.

In 2012, BGACDC and the Marvell-Elaine School District developed a partnership that combined the school district's summer school with BGACDC's Freedom School

into a full-day summer camp. In 2013 the camp ran for six weeks from mid-June until the end of July. Two hours of each day is devoted to literacy activities. Transportation is provided so children are able to get to the school. It ended July 24 this year, about three weeks before school started again. They operate their programs on the school campus through a joint use agreement.

The program added a pre-K component in 2014. Twenty children entering kindergarten participated in a month-long summer camp during June. This joint effort combines district resources (teachers, buildings, and support functions such as cooks, drivers, and custodians) with resources BGACDC has raised for Freedom School so that eligible students in the district have access to an extended quality summer learning opportunity.³⁹ For a video on the program, visit <http://www.ar-qlr.net/solutions/bright-spots/stopping-summer-learning-loss-in-marvell/>

Also as part of the initiative, the school is also participating in the Make Every Day Count effort led by AR-GLR and Attendance Works, a national organization working to reduce chronic absenteeism in schools. The first year in the program is already producing results. Chronic absenteeism went from 18 percent to 8 percent.

More Hopeful Futures Initiative

In June 2015 Marvell-Elaine Reads was selected for the More Hopeful Futures (MHF) initiative, a partnership of the Clinton Global Initiative and the national Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. Marvell-Elaine Reads was one of 40 communities across the nation selected because of leadership in the grade-level reading improvements and their work to mobilize Marvell and Elaine residents to share in the grade-level reading efforts.⁴⁰

Great River Promise

The Great River Promise offers to provide free college tuition and mandatory fees for students in Arkansas and Phillips counties for Phillips Community College. While the program focuses on high school students and has set performance and behavior criteria for students, the program is promoted on banners at the elementary school. Great River Promise lets kids know that low-income does not have to keep them from attending college. It helps the school promote a college-going culture even in a very low-income setting.⁴¹



COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND NEEDS

Unemployment

The Phillips County unemployment rate for July 2015 is 8.8 percent according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.⁴² That is more than double the rate in Washington County. The unemployment rate is the percentage of the total labor force that is unemployed but actively seeking employment and willing to work.⁴³

Business Environment

The area's economy is struggling. Cotton has been replaced by other crops on many surrounding farms. Cotton farming requires a larger business infrastructure such as gins, and large farm equipment businesses like John Deere, that is no longer supported. Some smaller scale farm support businesses remain to support other crops such as the Discount Ag Center.⁴⁴

INTERVIEWS

Louis Bennett, Youth and Family Programs Coordinator, Boys, Girls, and Adults Community Development Center⁴⁵

Mr. Bennett coordinates the Freedom School Summer Program. He shared his thoughts on school and community needs. A school-based health clinic is a big need for the school. He felt it would help with high absenteeism in the district due in many cases to health problems. The elementary is working on reducing chronic absenteeism and has good success to bring it down closer to statewide averages. Another need he mentioned is broadband access for both the school and the community. Most homes don't have broadband access, according to Mr. Bennett.

He also says parent engagement could be improved. He reports that the school communicates with parents well but parents have been reluctant to actually come to activities at the school.

Mr. Bennett was at Elaine when they were consolidated into the Marvell District under much disagreement. He believes not very many of the children who attended Elaine are at Marvell now. Many of them went to Barton-Lexa and to KIPP schools in Helena-West Helena.

He stated that the school has had support from the community. He is scheduled to meet with a new company that just bought the Conoco Convenience stores in the area. The business, Double Quick, is a big supporter of education programs. Mr. Bennett believes they could be a big help to the BGACDC and the school as well.

Clark Hall, Mayor, City of Marvell

Mayor Clark Hall noted that Marvell has much to be proud of these days. In addition to its progressive views on civil rights of all people, the Marvell-Elaine Elementary School has been ranked the best in Phillips County. The city council has voted to help pay for billboards to publicize the good performance of the public schools in the community. Marvell has some other efforts underway to improve the outlook for the town. The city recently bought the high school home of Levon Helm and plans to start a festival later this year.⁴⁶

In a telephone interview,⁴⁷ Mayor Hall again repeated his praise for all involved with the improvements in Marvell-Elaine Schools. He said the entire community, whether black, white, rich or poor, was proud of the letter grade, "A", that the elementary school received. He credited the leadership in the district, the school and the teachers saying the work to make Marvell-Elaine better is an example of what can be accomplished in a small rural community. The success had been building for many years and now has its recognition. He added that the Elementary School was the bright spot but the middle and high school were going to be next.

When asked about support for the school in the community, he mentioned the Discount Ag Center as a business example. Most of the supporters are community organizations such as the Marvell Civic Club and the Boys, Girls, and Adults Community Development Center.

He ended the conversation by saying these small communities need recognition for their accomplishments. They have the ability to do what's needed. He is looking ahead to more good news coming for the community.



Program or Service	Resource
Early childhood education	Good 2 Great, Kellogg Foundation
Summer programs-Freedom School	AR-GLR, Children’s Defense Fund, BGACDC
Parent engagement, summer programs, tutoring, and school attendance	Community Solutions Initiative, WRF
Screenings, school readiness, school attendance, and summer learning	More Hopeful Futures, National Campaign for Grade Level Reading, Clinton Global Initiative

SUMMARY

The table above compiles the selected resources discussed in this narrative and the programs/services they provide.

ANNA STRONG INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL LEE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT: GRADES 3-6

Anna Strong Intermediate School is located in Marianna, Arkansas, which is the county seat for Lee County. Lee County is the only county-wide school district in the state. It is located on the Mississippi River—south of Forrest City and North of Helena-West Helena. The resources and needs of Anna Strong Intermediate School cannot be examined without a look at conditions in Lee County.

Lee County has a rich history. The southwest corner of the county is located at the intersection of the BaseLine and the Fifth Principle Meridian set in 1815. That is the point used to survey the lands acquired through the Louisiana Purchase.⁴⁸ Settlers arriving in the area in the second half of the 19th century used slaves to work cotton fields.

Lee County itself was formed in 1873. It was a time following the Civil War under carpetbag rule. The county suffered through the Great Flood of 1927. In the early 1970s racial strife broke out with Governor Bumpers sending in the National Guard and ordering a curfew. Race continues to impact the education of students in this part of the state.

Like most of the Arkansas Delta, Lee County has experienced a decline in population with the mechanization in agriculture. The population peaked in 1920 at 28,852. Census records indicate that in 2010 the county’s population was less than half that at 10,424.⁴⁹

EDUCATION HISTORY

The first school for black students was led by G.P.A. Brown. Later the school, Lee County Training School, was replaced by Moton High School in 1926. Ms. Anna Strong was principal of that school. Ms. Strong was nationally recognized for her efforts to educate black children. Moton High School was renamed as Anna Strong High School in 1962.⁵⁰

The county school board had adopted a “freedom of choice plan” that kept the schools segregated in practice. In the fall of 1970, federal court orders to end segregation brought change and integration was adopted. Following that action, Lee Academy was organized by a group of white parents. Land north of the city limits was donated, and in 1972, a metal building housed the first students in the school’s permanent location.⁵¹ The school continues to function as an all-white private school.⁵²

DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE COUNTY AND THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

In 2010, the Lee County population was composed of 42 percent whites and 55.3 percent African Americans. The Latino population is only 1.6 percent. The median household income is \$25,034 compared to the state median at \$40,768.⁵³ More than 40 percent of this small population lives below the poverty line.

The 2014-2015 application for a school improvement grant listed these social characteristics. A fourth of Marianna households are headed by single females and nearly one-third of these single females have never been married. Nearly 87 percent of Lee County children are being raised by their grandparents. Thirty-seven percent of the housing units in the area are government housing.⁵⁴



EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES

School Choice

School choice was allowed through legislation passed in 2013. It allows students to attend any district they wish if the receiving district will accept them and the home district does not lose more than a specified number of students a year. In the past students could only attend the district where they resided and paid property taxes. In a report on school choice to the State Board of Education August 2014, the district reported no loss of black students but a loss of fourteen white students. The district previously had 59 white students and therefore lost 24 percent of its white enrollment.⁵⁵

The few white students that remain in the Lee County School District are very poor. Superintendent Murdoch reported that many white students in the county attend Lee Academy, a private school. Other white students go to Barton-Lexa, about 14 miles south, where there is a white majority. Its enrollment is about 60 percent white with white teachers filling the majority of teaching slots.⁵⁶ Both black and white students are attending KIPP Delta, 35 miles away in Helena-West Helena.

Declining Enrollment

The enrollment continues to decline each year. The table below illustrates recent losses.

Year	Enrollment	Decline	Percent Decline
2014-15	827	54	6.5%
2013-14	881	39	4.4%
2012-13	920	31	3.4%
2011-12	951	44	4.6%

Source: ADE Data Center

Achievement Status

In 2014, Anna Strong Intermediate School remained a Needs Improvement-Priority school overall. In 2014, just 50 percent of its students were proficient in literacy and even fewer, 46 percent, were proficient in math. The school has made slight progress. In 2012, the scores were 51 percent proficient in literacy and a startling 38 percent proficient in math. The school’s letter grade “F” reflected these concerns.

The one-year college remediation rate for the Lee County School District in 2013 was 67.6 percent.⁵⁷ This rate includes students that require remediation in at least one subject area. Lee County’s rate is much higher than the overall state remediation rate of 40 percent.⁵⁸

State Takeover

On April 9, 2014, the school district was placed in academic distress. The State Board of Education voted 5-2 to remove the school board but to keep the Superintendent. The district also had financial troubles.⁵⁹ Problems in the district other than low student achievement include teacher resistance to change, school board failure to remove ineffective teachers, lack of curriculum, and the number of seniors who do not have the credits needed to graduate from high school.⁶⁰

In testimony on April 6, 2014, to a subcommittee of the State Board of Education, Lee County representatives and those working with the district met to consider all the details. At the time, Lee County was in the process of implementing a myriad of new activities to improve the school. There were so many interventions going on at the school with so many groups that one of the state board members asked if there was a flow chart of who was doing what and who’s in charge. The district reported that at times,

teachers were receiving conflicting instructions on practices to implement. The ADE Division of Accountability and Office of Intensive Support were both working with the district as well as an external school turnaround provider funded with the school's Title I funding.⁶¹

The external provider for school improvement services was a firm led by Ray Simon, former U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education. The firm had worked with Lee County for three years.⁶² In testimony before the State Board of Education, Simon described the students as eager to learn and as the most polite children he's met in a half-century as an educator. He further commented that the district did not have "a critical mass of effective teachers."⁶³ In closing, he noted the school board tolerated incompetence because they operated as a big family.

The district had already replaced the principals in all three schools. The district uses Teach for America participants as teachers to fill its frequent turnover. Also the district approved a property tax increase. Possibly most significant is that the district has had three administrators in the past few years.

In February of 2015, Lee County was removed from the academic distress classification. The State Board of Education voted March 2015 to remove Lee County from state takeover as soon as a local school board is elected and receives the required school board training.⁶⁴

In documentation presented to the State Board of Education in April of 2014, the Accreditation status showed Whitten Elementary as Cited, Anna Strong Intermediate as Accredited, and Lee High School as Probationary.⁶⁵

Other priority districts have received large (typical award is over \$1 million) federal grants to undertake school improvement. But Lee County hasn't applied until this year for the large school improvement grant (SIG 1003g). They were not funded this year. They have received smaller (SIG 1003a) grants. In 2011-12 they received approximately \$150,000, \$321,000 the next year, and \$161,000 in 2013-14.⁶⁶

Some of the text from the SIG 1003g application describing

conditions at the school is included here:

- In a survey, only 22 percent of teachers responding felt that order and discipline are maintained at the school. Fifty percent of students thought they were safe in the school.
- The school administrators had low expectations for the students. They stated that outside community factors prevented high academic achievement.
- Teacher absenteeism is a major concern at Anna Strong Intermediate School. Two or more teachers are absent each day of the week. The district contracts with SubTeach USA to obtain substitute teachers. They reported 143 substitute teacher days for 2.5 months in the fall of 2013. From December 12, 2013 to February 24, 2014 there were 124 teacher days to fill with substitutes.⁶⁷

TEACHERS

The district's average teacher salary for 2014 was \$41,609 which was lower than the state average of \$48,060.⁶⁸ Perhaps even more important is the district's minimum salary, which impacts the ability to attract the best qualified teachers in the state. The minimum or entry level salary for LCSD was \$33,000 in 2014 when the state minimum was \$29,244.⁶⁹ That year the district ranked 85th in the state out of 239 school districts. Ms. Murdock said that it is difficult for the district to attract and retain teachers. Turnover and teacher absenteeism are problems within the district.

Teacher issues were in the news when a teacher strike took place in January 2007 for better pay. The strike began January 29 and lasted until February 15. Both teachers and other district employees such as cafeteria workers and bus drivers were on strike. The teachers did not receive any salary raises or bonuses. They were promised that the district would try to increase salaries the following year.⁷⁰

Much of the discussion concerning improved achievement in Lee County has centered on the need to remove teachers that are not performing. This was discussed in the State Board meeting to decide whether the state would take over the district.⁷¹ It was also the main topic of an earlier conversation in a November 2013 Lee County School Board meeting with ADE's leader of the Office of Intensive Support, Andrew Tolbert.⁷²



On a more positive note, ADE recently featured a Lee County teacher in their Profiles in Teacher Leadership series.⁷³ Jaclyn Dean is a high-school English teacher at Lee County High School. She came to Lee County as part of Teach for America. Ms. Dean designed a program to build character and leadership potential in her students. The program provides test preparation, scholarship application assistance, a book study on the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, and brown bag lunches with community leaders. Students also go to the Clinton School and the State Capitol. The final piece of the program is for each student to develop their own unique project to meet community needs. She described her students as her inspiration. ADE has a video featuring Ms. Dean at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7921ANgv5IE>

The district has many resources for mental health support – MidSouth, Life Strategies, and Kids with a Future. They have had a social worker for eight years who is paid through a grant. Superintendent Murdoch noted that there is only one in a county where there is so much to deal with.

NON-ACADEMIC DISTRICT NEEDS

Transportation

The district is 624 square miles. It is one of the top 10 biggest districts in the state. The state average for one-way bus rides is just under 50 minutes.⁷⁴ The ride from Moro and its surroundings to Marianna is 70 minutes one-way. The first child is put on the bus at 6:08 a.m.⁷⁵ This may result in five-year-olds and older children riding a bus for 2.3 hours of their school day. They use buses for after-school and summer programs because without transportation, students couldn't come.

Facilities

Anna Strong Intermediate School was constructed in 1962 and is 53,325 square feet. The building has a depreciated value of -8 percent. There is a multipurpose building and a music/band building with the school. The multipurpose building was added in 1970 and has 8 percent depreciated value. The music/band building was built in 1938 and has a depreciated building value of -56 percent.⁷⁶

Fiscal Distress

In November of 2013, the district was able to pass a millage for maintenance and operations.⁷⁷ However, in May of 2014, the district was declared to be in fiscal distress. It remains there today.⁷⁸

SCHOOL CLIMATE

Chronic Absence

According to records for 2013, chronic absence in Lee County for K-3 was 20 percent compared to the state average of about 10 percent. Chronic absence is a measure that indicates the percent of children missing more than 10 percent of the school year, for any reason (about 18 days).⁷⁹

School Discipline

The data on school discipline for Lee County School District show:⁸⁰

Disciplinary Action	Three Year Average
In-School Suspension	6.5%
Out-of-School Suspension	8.9%
Expulsion	0.0%
Corporal Punishment	2.8%

The out-of-school suspension rate is less than half that of the Marvell-Elaine district but still far higher than Springdale (1.7 percent).

Special Needs Children

In Lee County, 15.36 percent of the children are designated as special education students. The statewide percentage is 11.8 percent.⁸¹ One additional measure of high need students is included here, children placed in therapeutic foster care. Lee County ranks sixth highest in the state in the number of children in therapeutic foster care settings despite their ranking as 64th in county population.⁸² The county serves four percent of the state's total population of children in therapeutic foster care. This struggling school district is strained to meet the exceptional needs of these children.

PROGRAMS, GRANTS AND COMMUNITY

Parent Engagement

Superintendent Murdock says that parent engagement has improved. It's better in the elementary school. She has hired a parent coordinator. As required, there is a parent facilitator in a parent center at each school building, but that was just one of their many duties. The coordinator works to get parents to come to meetings and goes on home visits.

Hunger

Counselors work with the food pantry and a local agency to get backpacks with food for students to take home after school as part of the After-School Snack Program. Lee County does a summer food program at one site where most folks need it. It's walking distance for most of them. There is no transportation for the program. However, the Anna Strong Intermediate School is not listed as participating in the Seamless Summer Program. The school does participate in the school lunch and breakfast programs administered by ADE's Child Nutrition Unit.⁸³

Pre-K

Data from the Arkansas Research Center indicates the number of low-income children who participated in the Arkansas Better Chance Program and their outcomes with the number of children unserved by ABC.

Lee County		Qualls Early Learning Inventory Student Development Areas					
2012	# of Students	General Knowledge	2012	# of Students	General Knowledge	2012	# of Students
Max Score		13	24	20	25	21	21
ABC Avg. Score	51	7.4	15.0	4.3	11.9	14.6	14.9
ABC % Developed		13.7%	20.0%	8.0%	14.3%	37.3%	39.2%
No Program Indicated Score	0						
NPI % Developed							
ABC State % Developed	8927	49.3%	45.9%	47.9%	54.2%	49.4%	44.0%

Source: Arkansas Research Center.⁸⁴ Percent developed is an indicator of the percent of students that have met an identified benchmark for achieving the desired level of development in an area.



The percentage of children scoring as developed in Lee County on the general knowledge section of the test is far lower than the statewide percentage for the ABC program. The statewide percentage of children considered developed was more than 3.5 times the percentage in Lee County. More than double the percentage of students in Marvell-Elaine were considered developed just one county away. The data did not indicate any children except those in the ABC program, which is likely an error.

After-school and Summer Programs

As part of the efforts to improve achievement in 2013, the Lee County School Board approved an after-school program targeting at-risk students. Board members indicated that the data showed poor attendance of eighth and eleventh grade students targeted because of benchmark and end-of-course testing performance. The curriculum coordinator confirmed the poor attendance and poor testing outcomes. The program was much more successful for seventh grade students.⁸⁵

Lee County does not have a Boys' and Girls' Club like Helena. Nor does it have a similar program to provide outside support for after school programs.

College Advising Program

The Walton Family Foundation gave \$500,000 for a two year program to KIPP Delta Schools to share its "KIPP Through College" program with the high schools in the Helena-West Helena and Lee County districts. It will pay for two full-time college advisers to work with students in the two traditional school districts.⁸⁶

Regional Alternative Learning School Vocational Center Supt. Murdoch spoke of support from the Delta Regional Authority for the STRIVE Institute of Technology. The support would fund repairs to the former Anna Strong Elementary School in Marianna for use as a specialized vocational education center for at-risk youth. The program would also provide a career and technical skills development program for students in Lee County and other Delta areas.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND NEEDS

Unemployment

The unemployment rate in July 2015 is 8.1, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, which is slightly

lower than neighboring Phillips County to the south at 8.8 percent.⁸⁷ The unemployment rate is the percentage of the total labor force that is unemployed but actively seeking employment and willing to work.⁸⁸ Community leaders indicated a lack of industry in the county. The largest employers for the area are the school district, the state prison at Brickeys, and the federal prison in Forrest City. The mechanization of agriculture has resulted in out-migration throughout the Delta areas of the state that historically thrived as a result of agriculture.

Business Environment

Supt. Murdoch is working on building business support for the school district. While there are no large employers or manufacturing plants in the community, there are many local businesses. The founder of Edwards Food Giant lives in Marianna, starting the expanding grocery chain there. Examples of other businesses include Lee County Tire & Lube, Southern Mattress and More, Simmons Eye Center, Mahan & Burkett Seed & Feed, and Marianna Greenhouse and Nursery. Despite the presence of these businesses, a drive around the town square and its immediate surroundings shows numerous empty store fronts. It's obvious that the town is not what it once was.

Arkansas's newest state park, the Mississippi River Park, has recently opened. The park visitor center is on Arkansas Highway 44, three miles southeast of Marianna. Other park facilities are located in the Bear Creek Lake Recreational area.

Health

There are no hospitals or pediatricians in Lee County. The nearest hospitals are in Forrest City or Helena. The lack of basic health services contributes to the county's poor health ranking, 70th of 75 counties. There is a clinic in Marianna, the Lee County Cooperative Clinic. The clinic has both doctors and dentists. The clinic works with the nurses at the schools.

INTERVIEWS

Ms. Willie Murdoch, Superintendent Lee County Schools

Ms. Murdoch grew up in Marianna. She attended college at the University of Arkansas and then moved out of state, never anticipating returning. Then she returned as a non-



traditional teacher, was promoted to principal and finally to Superintendent. She was interviewed at the district on December 3, 2013.

She said the schools must change the perception, the culture, and the reality that students from Lee County Schools will be successful. She mentioned opportunities that Lee County students need to see the bigger world and know what is possible. As an example, she mentioned that KIPP kids go on a trip every year to Washington, DC or a similar location. Marianna can't afford that.

Two more specific needs that she mentioned were to require accountability of the leadership, and place the best teachers in front of kids each day. She mentioned concerns about ineffective teachers. She thinks a non-traditional teacher program may help.

Supt. Murdock was asked, "What is best thing about the school?" Without pause, she replied, "The kids, they are smart and well-behaved." She continued by adding that when she looks at the students, she see herself.

Lee County school district's biggest challenge is building a strong culture for teaching and learning. The district needs the best staff available. Supt. Murdock added that poor parenting made it more difficult for students to learn.

Community Volunteer

A volunteer community leader also met with us late in 2013. She provided a driving tour of the community to give context to much of the conversation. Economic development of Marianna has been a prime concern of hers for many years. As an adult literacy specialist, she built trust with whites and blacks through her work with literacy. This trust helped her to be successful coordinating the interest of both, in her economic development work. She understood the issues of both groups. She also had studied the economic conditions in the community and understood how the educational programs impacted students.

Some of the positives that she mentioned included the University of Arkansas Agricultural Research Station located four miles south of town. The Lon Mann Cotton Research Station is one of three original branch stations established in 1926. She was proud of the work of the

Marianna Historic Trust. The group was able to keep the post office downtown and not out on the highway where she said the postal service had planned to move it. The group has worked to maintain and redevelop much of the downtown square. Another bright spot she mentioned is the Mississippi River State Park, recently opened and still being developed.

Concerns shared included the decline in Marianna's population and the more rapid decline in county population. She attributed the decline to the mechanization of farming. She also mentioned Helena-West Helena's efforts to start a Boys' and Girls' Club. She said that type of leadership was needed in Marianna.

The economy has suffered because agriculture has diversified and isn't solely based on cotton any longer. Almost every business left in Marianna is built around the agricultural industry including banks, insurance, and fertilizer companies. Farming is so mechanized now that fewer employees are needed. She pointed out a large agricultural equipment distributor that ships all over the world but needs few staff.

She spoke of losing one manufacturing plant then getting another. Marianna had that plant for 10 years then lost that plant along with other very small plants. When most of the jobs left Marianna, most of the working class of the community left to follow the jobs. Consequently, too many of those left are individuals that don't work or can't work for some medical reason.

When talking about the Lee County School District, she reported concerns about teacher quality, saying some involved parents would get their kids placed with the best teacher. Other students were left with less adequate teachers. She also pointed out the private school just outside Marianna.

We asked "What would it take to get whites back to Lee County public schools." Her reply: "It will never happen." She added that it's not just race or school quality but also about socio-economic class.

We had also asked Superintendent Murdock the same question in a separate interview. She also replied, "It will never happen."



SUMMARY

The following table compiles the selected resources discussed in this narrative and the programs/services they provide.

Program or Service	Resource
College advising for high school students	KIPP Delta, Walton Family Foundation
Regional Alternative Learning Vocational Center	Delta Regional Authority
School improvement programs	Arkansas Department of Education and external providers

**JONES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
SPRINGDALE SCHOOL DISTRICT: K-5**

Springdale is located in Washington County in the Northwest corner of the state. Located along I-49 between Fayetteville and Bentonville, it is a part of the biggest economic boom going in Arkansas. Fayetteville houses the state’s original land grant college, the University of Arkansas. Bentonville is the home of Walmart’s corporate offices. Growth in the area slowed during the mid-2000s because of the housing bust but is picking up speed once again.

Springdale is the industrial center within northwest Arkansas. Springdale received its name and a post office in 1872.⁸⁹ The population has tripled between 1980 (23,458) and 2010 with a population of 69,797.⁹⁰ The area is the home of Tyson Foods and other poultry operations and hosts headquarters for several national trucking companies such as J.B. Hunt. The large number of jobs attracted the Hispanic population to Springdale. They make up 35 percent of the city’s population.⁹¹ Springdale is also host to the largest Marshallese population in the continental United States.

EDUCATION HISTORY

In 1898, the first school in the community opened. Shinn’s Academy became known as Springdale College. In 1901, the school became Springdale High School, District No. 50.⁹² Springdale is now the state’s second largest school district and continues to gain ground on the largest, the Little Rock School District. Springdale also has at least two private schools: Salem Lutheran and Shiloh Christian, which is reported to be the largest private school in the state.

Jones Elementary was opened in 1959. At the time Springdale was thriving with the fast-growing poultry industry and trucking. The school celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2009 with a video. According to the video, Harvey Jones of Jones Truck Lines, on at least one occasion, paid teacher salaries out of his own pocket when the district was unable. The school was subsequently named after him and is located in close proximity to the original campus for Jones Truck Lines facilities. The elementary school had 448 students when it opened and teachers were paid \$3,000 per year. The school has always served many of Springdale’s lower-income students. The school was located adjacent to a migrant farm labor camp.

These children would return to the school annually at harvest time. Beginning in 1964, the school added classrooms and more classroom space has been added since. The school has also added a gym and a media center wing for the library and two computer labs. The school’s relationship with Arvest Bank as Partners in Education was honored by the Springdale Chamber of Commerce. In 2008, Jones Elementary was chosen to participate in the Toyota Family Literacy Program. The award provides funding to help parents with literacy skills.⁹³



DEMOGRAPHICS

Washington County is 80 percent white with a Hispanic population of almost 16 percent. The area is only three percent African American. The Median Household Income is \$41,248, and 18.7 percent of the county is below the poverty line.⁹⁴ However the county's highest concentrations of both Hispanic population and poverty lie in Springdale.

SCHOOL CHOICE

School choice was allowed through legislation passed in 2013. It allows students to attend any district they wish if the receiving district will accept them and the home district does not lose more than a specified number of students a year. In the past, students could only attend the district where they resided and paid property taxes. In a report on school choice to the State Board of Education in August 2014, the district reported a net gain of 10 students through school choice. Only one student left the district, and seven of the eleven arriving were white, two were Hispanic.

ENROLLMENT

The district enrollment increases each year. The table below illustrates recent gains.

Year	Enrollment	Increase	Percent Increase
2014-15	21,120	578	2.7%
2013-14	20,542	401	2.0%
2012-13	20,141	765	3.8%
2011-12	19,376	566	2.9%

Source: ADE Data Center

Rapid growth does not have the financial challenge for a district that declining enrollment brings. However, it brings its own set of headaches. Facilities are always stretched to the limit. New schools are continuously being built and old schools expanded. Portable classrooms become strategies for stretching the space. Staffing is also a challenge. The district must hire additional teachers annually and equip them. Additional support staff is also needed. Gaining almost 600 students in a year is like adding more than the entire Marvell-Elaine School District at one time.

EDUCATION CHALLENGES

Achievement Status

In 2014, Jones Elementary School remained a Needs Improvement school overall. Needs Improvement is considered better than Needs Improvement-Focus or Needs Improvement-Priority but not as good as an Achieving school. Sixty-seven percent of its students are proficient in literacy and more, 72 percent, are proficient in math. In 2012, Jones was considered an achieving school with slightly higher proficiency rates of 75 percent proficient in literacy and 76 percent proficient in math. To be achieving, a school must improve on its proficiency rates. However, it should be noted that in 2007 only 29 percent of the students were proficient in literacy.⁹⁵ The current proficiency level is a notable increase.

The one-year college remediation rate for the Springdale School District in 2013 was 41.4 percent.⁹⁶ This rate reflects students that require remediation in at least one subject area. Springdale's rate is just slightly higher than the overall state remediation rate of 40 percent.⁹⁷



Supporters of the school were frustrated with its letter grade of “D” despite the majority of students being English language learners and the low-income status of the school. Arkansas Teacher of the Year for 2007 Justin Minkel cited a long list of triumphs at the school by the students and the teachers. He stated that Jones got no points for closing the gap because there is no gap in performance. In fact, because fewer than 20 students were above poverty, all students were considered to be in one classification. There was no gap.⁹⁸

Jones Elementary was the subject of a video produced by the U.S. Department of Education in a series highlighting exceptional school leaders. The school’s principal, Melissa Fink, speaks of the data teachers are using to make decisions to improve teaching and academic outcomes.⁹⁹ The data includes daily classroom information in addition to test scores. Teachers work in a collaborative environment. Teachers are trained in a method known as CGI, or Cognitively Guided Instruction for Math, based on child development research of student learning processes.¹⁰⁰ Ms. Fink discusses the culture of excellence despite student poverty.

TEACHERS

Springdale’s highest starting teacher salary in the state, \$44,570 in 2014, brings in long lists of superior applicants with every job opening, including many with a Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT-five year degree from the University of Arkansas). The district’s average teacher salary for 2014 was \$58,896, the highest in the state and far above the state average of \$48,060.¹⁰¹ In addition to these considerations, teachers looking for a place to make their homes find Northwest Arkansas a major attraction with its amenities such as the Crystal Bridges Museum and the Razorback Regional Greenway Trail.

Two-thirds (64 percent) of the Jones certified staff is ESL (English as Second Language) endorsed. This means that teachers have been successful on an additional test, “English to Speakers of Other Languages.” Jones has no staff hired solely as interpreters. They have five bilingual staff members—one of whom is located in the office for interaction with parents. The certified staff is not diverse. There is only one African-American and one Hispanic staff member out of 33 certified staff or 0.06 percent.¹⁰²

Two of the pre-K staff are also bilingual. The district is making efforts to improve diversity but at this point could not be considered successful. The long-term strategy of encouraging current students to return as teachers is not likely to pay off for many years.

Leadership at the school is strong. Principal Melissa Fink has completed the Master Principal Institute. Interns at the University of Arkansas masters in elementary education are placed with master teachers at Jones. In another example of teacher excellence, Jones Elementary is home to the 2007 Arkansas Teacher of the Year winner, Justin Minkel. He teaches second and third grade. He served in the Teach For America corps in New York City. He was also a Milken Educator for Arkansas in 2006. He was Nationally Board Certified in 2011. In 2013, he was named a Lowell Milken Center Fellow. Minkel described the discussion on July 10, 2014, at the White House as he sat down with President Barack Obama and Secretary Arne Duncan, along with three other teachers from high poverty schools.

According to Minkel, these were some of the common threads: 1) Students living in poverty bring more challenges but they are the motivation to teach. 2) There is too much of the wrong kind of testing. 3) Teachers will continue to improve with collaboration and job-embedded professional development. 4) Teachers value autonomy, collaboration and the opportunity to be innovative.¹⁰³

NON-ACADEMIC DISTRICT NEEDS

Transportation

Springdale is about in the middle for district size at 184 square miles. Also, 17 elementary schools serve this area. This many schools in a mid-sized (area) school district mean shorter transportation routes. Jones Elementary is primarily a neighborhood school. None of the school’s kids ride the bus, except at times when children are transferred to the school or out of the school because a grade is full.

Facilities

Jones Elementary was built in 1959. While the building is 56 years old, it has been well-maintained over the years. It also has had several additions to the original school building including the addition of a library/media/computer wing, gym, and a health clinic. The main building has 43,754 square feet and a depreciated building value of -14 percent.



The gym was added in 1992 and has a depreciated building value of 52 percent. The school also has used two portable classroom buildings since 1997, according to the report at School facilities, but the principal says the portables weren't there in 2004 and just arrived in 2013. Those buildings are 924 square feet each.¹⁰⁴ The outdoor play area has been turned into a neighborhood resource with the addition of tennis courts and a fitness trail.

SCHOOL CLIMATE

Chronic Absence

According to records for 2013, chronic absence for Jones Elementary K-3 was 17 percent compared to the state average of about 10 percent. Chronic absence is a measure that indicates the percent of children missing more than 10 percent of the school year, for any reason (about 18 days).¹⁰⁵ It should be noted that the rate for Pacific Islander (Marshallese) at the school was 43 percent. The Marshallese population across the school district has unusually high rates of school absenteeism.

School Discipline

The data on school discipline for the Springdale School District show:¹⁰⁶

Disciplinary Action	Three Year Average
In-School Suspension	1.7%
Out-of-School Suspension	1.7%
Expulsion	0.1%
Corporal Punishment	0.0%

The out-of-school suspension rate is very low, particularly when compared to Marvell-Elaine at 18.3 percent and Lee County at 8.9 percent.

Children with Special Needs

At Jones Elementary, 5.8 percent of the children are designated as special education students. The statewide percentage is 11.8 percent.¹⁰⁷ Jones's rate is less than half the state average and about one-third the percent in Marvell-Elaine.

One additional measure of high-need students is included here, children placed in therapeutic foster care. Washington County ranks eighth highest in the state in the number of children in therapeutic foster care settings. That is lower than their ranking as third in county population. They serve 3.7 percent of the state's total population of children in therapeutic foster care.¹⁰⁸ Despite its size, Washington County serves fewer therapeutic foster children than Lee or Phillips County.

PROGRAMS, GRANTS AND COMMUNITY

Parent Engagement

Two parent programs are in place conducted by OneCommunity, a non-profit organization that seeks to promote communities working together by improving health, education, and leadership skills.¹⁰⁹ Jones works with the Toyota Family Literacy Program, along with other schools, and has created the Parent University of Jones with free night classes covering topics such as computer literacy and gang-awareness training. Jones is also host to an adult education program.¹¹⁰ The Springdale School District received the Toyota Family Literacy Program (TFLP) in 2008 with the intention of increasing the literacy rate of Hispanics and other immigrant families. Evaluations of the program have shown that the program has helped increase parent engagement.¹¹¹

The other program is Parents Taking Leadership Action. To date 55 parents have participated in the program with more than half attending nine or more sessions. As part of the program, parents become involved through volunteering and taking a leadership role through completion of a "Legacy Project." Parents are taught about the school, report cards, school rules, and healthy lifestyles.



In November of 2014, Superintendent Jim Rollins recorded a video message to parents about the value of connecting with their children’s teachers. He touts the “power of working together” throughout the video, which is just over a minute long.¹¹² The video is indicative of the district’s efforts to use a variety of approaches to connect with parents.

The school does not have the Watch D.O.G.S. (Dads of Great Students) program which began in Springdale and has grown to a national organization. The program seeks to provide positive male role models in schools for students and supports school security. Principal Fink reports that the school has tried to start one several times but it hasn’t been successful. Outside the program, parents do volunteer on a regular basis.¹¹³

Hunger

Jones Elementary participates in the school lunch, breakfast, and Seamless Summer programs for the students. Jones participates in Breakfast in the Classroom which serves all kids in the classroom with their peers and removes some of the stigma. The Breakfast in the Classroom program is funded by the Walmart Foundation. They did not participate in the federally-funded after school snack program for SY2014-15. However, they benefit from a privately funded program. The Samaritan Community Center Snack Packs for Kids program receives regular donations from Tyson Foods. The program serves elementary students at-risk for hunger on the weekends and during the summer when school meals aren’t available. A snackpack contains 8 to 10 healthy food items. The program serves elementary schools in four Northwest Arkansas counties including Jones Elementary School.¹¹⁴

Data from the Arkansas Research Center indicates the number of low-income children who participated in the Arkansas Better Chance Program and their outcomes with the number of children unserved by ABC .

Jones Elementary	Qualls Early Learning Inventory Student Development Areas						
2012	# of Students	General Knowledge	Oral Communication	Written Language	Math Concepts	Work Habits	Attentive Behavior
Max Score		13	24	20	25	21	21
ABC Avg. Score	42	7.5	16.4	8.2	12.2	16.8	16.9
ABC % Developed		19.1%	33.3%	42.9%	26.2%	47.6%	47.6%
No Program Indicated Score	52	4.0	9.9	4.5	6.3	13.0.	13.8
NPI % Developed		1.9%	7.7%	15.4%	5.8%	21.2%	25.0%
ABC State % Developed Free Lunch	8927	49.3%	45.9%	47.9%	54.2%	49.4%	44.0%

Source: Arkansas Research Center.¹¹⁵ Percent developed is an indicator of the percent of students that have met an identified benchmark for achieving the desired level of development in an area.



Fewer children from the ABC program at Jones Elementary are considered developed on the General Knowledge section of the test than the statewide percentage for the ABC program. However, only 1.9 percent of the children where a program was not indicated were considered developed. The state percentage of children considered developed was more than 2.5 times the percentage of Jones Elementary. In 2013, the percent considered developed on general knowledge had improved to 34 percent.

After-School and Summer Programs

Other programs meet needs of students across the district. Teens After School is free to any student in grades six through nine. The program is housed in the Jones Center for Families. Bus transportation from school to the program is provided. The program is free and offered Monday through Friday during the school year. Students enrolling have access to computers, tutoring, cooking classes and mentoring. They also receive membership in the Jones Center.

OneCommunity conducts a summer program known as Feed Your Brain. It is a bilingual, family reading program. The program provides literacy training 1.5 hours each day just before the summer lunch program. The Feed Your Brain program was implemented June-August 2014 for Hispanic and Marshallese families in Springdale at four sites. In the second year of the program, 25 total sessions were held; 66 families were served and 248 children read 355 books.¹¹⁶

The school also has an afterschool program through Camp War Eagle that is sometimes free and very affordable. Camp War Eagle wrote for and was awarded a 21st Century Community Learning Center grant.¹¹⁷

Literacy

Jones Elementary teachers developed the “1,000 Books Project” to send books home to second grade students in 2010. Many students had no books in their homes. Farmers Insurance Company awarded the school \$100,000 to purchase 25,000 books for 1,000 children.¹¹⁸

Race to the Top Grant

The Springdale School District was the recipient of a \$25.88 million dollar grant over four years from the U.S. Department of Education in December of 2013.

Springdale was one of five districts nationally out of more than 200 applicants to receive the award.¹¹⁹

The grant is providing funding for technology, including a laptop or tablet for every student in the district along with wireless internet in the buildings for connectivity. The district will also offer environmental and spatial technology labs at more schools. A school of innovation is planned to personalize learning. The grant will pay for four teachers to serve as technology integration specialists and assist other teachers in learning how to make the most effective use of the new equipment. The specialists are receiving two years of intensive training on effective technology use in the classroom.¹²⁰

More than \$200,000 of the grant will help the district implement personalized learning to involve students in middle and elementary schools in their education. Students have advisory classes, personalized learning plans and student led parent-teacher conferences. The advisory classes enable students to construct a personal learning plan that addresses academics, behavior, character, and personal goals.¹²¹

COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND NEEDS

Unemployment

The unemployment rate in Washington County is only 4.1 percent according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.¹²² The unemployment rate is the percentage of the total labor force that is unemployed but actively seeking employment and willing to work.¹²³ The economy in Northwest Arkansas is one of the strongest areas of the state.

Business Environment

Jones Elementary is actively engaged in efforts to connect with parents and community leaders. In the fall of 2013, the principal, Melissa Fink, reached out to community leaders to participate in a Community Focus Group to get input on the vision and mission of the school and to review the school’s strategic plan.

Springdale has a group of business leaders and professionals serving on boards for high school career academies. The Springdale Chamber of Commerce is working with the school system to connect educators and business leaders.

One example of the work Springdale does to connect with the business community is a presentation made by



Superintendent Jim Rollins to about 370 business leaders. Examples he gave were of business leaders serving as advisors for career academies at the school. The Springdale Chamber of Commerce connects with the district to share workforce goals and career education needs.¹²⁴

Health

Community Clinic in Northwest Arkansas partners with area schools, including Jones Elementary. The clinic is physically part of the school building. By having a clinic at the school, the staff is able to address child health problems with less classroom disruption and parents have to miss less work. The Health Clinic has a full-time nurse practitioner on staff, two mental-health specialists and a registered nurse.¹²⁵

Playground enhancements of a paved walking trail, Frisbee golf, tennis court, basketball court, and soccer goals were developed through partnership with the Arkansas Department of Health, Coordinated School Health, and the Springdale Parks and Recreation Department.¹²⁶

INTERVIEWS

Jim Rollins, Superintendent of Springdale Schools

Unquestionably one of the biggest challenges Springdale schools have faced is the rapid growth in enrollment and increase in English language learners as a significant portion of the student enrollment. In 1989, Springdale had about 7,700 students and 97 percent of them were white. By 2013, only 41 percent of the district's population was white. The enrollment was approaching triple that 1989 population with over 20,000 students. Jim Rollins, Superintendent of Springdale Schools, had these comments in an interview with Education Week.¹²⁷

Rollins mentioned the district's guiding philosophy of "teach them all." "Today, we have about 1,500 certified teachers, and each of those teachers has had significant training in terms of working with students from different backgrounds, different languages, etc., and about 40

percent of our teachers have gone back to school, have obtained what's referred to as an ESL endorsement from area colleges and universities."

The district is working to increase staff diversity. They are recruiting in other states with large Hispanic populations. They are having the most success in growing their own. Rollins said that students returning to the district to teach know firsthand the needs of immigrant students.

"The willingness to stretch and grow and build capacity within your team to serve children from all backgrounds is an ongoing issue. And if the commitment exists to teach all children, our public schools will find a way to do that."

Two interviews were also conducted to represent the Latino perspective on Jones Elementary.

Mireya Reith, Executive Director of the Arkansas United Community Coalition (AUCC)

Diana Gonzalez Worthen, Co-Founder and Board Chair of OneCommunity

This is a summation of their views. OneCommunity partners with Jones Elementary on several programs. Feed Your Brain, Alimenta Tu Cerebro is a weekly reading program held just before the summer lunch program. They are in the third year working with the Springdale Family Literacy Program (SFLP) which serves a small number of parents, usually about 12 to 15 at a time. Parents spend 10 hours per week in their child's school; six hours learning English, two hours with their child in their classroom with the teacher and two hours of parent time. The Parents Taking Leadership Action (PTLA) program is also in its third year. The PTLA program is taught in the native language of the parent during the parent time component of the program.

A constraint on the success of the programs is that they are held during the day. That limits the number of parents that are able to participate. Another concern is the portable



building where the classes are held. The building would be more functional if it had restrooms and access to computers [Jones staff say the building has Wi-Fi and a computer lab inside the school that the group can access].

Latino parents feel free to express their ideas and concerns in the smaller setting of Parents Taking Leadership Action. However, they are not expressing concerns outside these smaller groups in a larger setting such as AUCC. An area where Latino families would like to see improvements is in the number of faculty members that are bilingual and bicultural. Students would benefit from more access to bilingual books.

SUMMARY

The following table compiles the selected resources discussed in this narrative and the programs/services they provide.

Program or Service	Resource
Technology related improvement including personal electronic devices for all students	U.S. Dept. of Education Race to the Top for Districts
Parent classes through Parent University of Jones	U.S. Dept. of Education Race to the Top for Districts
Family literacy classes, English learning	Toyota Family Literacy Grant
Parents Taking Leadership Action and Feed Your Brain-summer literacy program	AR-Grade Level Reading Campaign, OneCommunity
1,000 books project to provide books for students to take home	Farmers Insurance Company
Low cost after-school program	Camp War Eagle and 21 st CCLC funding
Health clinic and fitness facilities	Community Clinic and Arkansas Coordinated School Health Program
Breakfast in the classroom	Walmart Foundation



FINAL OBSERVATIONS

All of the additional resources available in each of these schools are not listed in these school narratives. A summary of resources documented here was provided at the end of each school’s story. Districts also have varying state and federal resources provided through the Arkansas Department of Education. This table summarizes that funding including adequacy funding.

Grant Funds for 2014	Public School Fund	Other State Funds	Federal Funds	Miscellaneous Funds	Total per Student
Marvell-Elaine	\$2.6 M		\$2.8 M	\$7,756	\$12,170
Lee County	\$5.3 M		\$2.3 M	\$31,000	\$8,325
Springdale	\$114.8 M	\$2.9 M	\$21.8 M	\$422,896	\$7,008

CHALLENGES AND RESOURCES

The stories of three elementary schools are presented to illustrate how varied the challenges and resources can be for schools similar in student demographics. All three schools have high percentages of minority students and low-income students. The challenges, resources, and outcomes are all different.

Leadership and teacher quality are usually mentioned as the differences in school success, and that is not questioned here. This review of these three schools is undertaken to explore other factors that create challenges for leaders and teachers, and to assess resources that schools have to meet these challenges.

History is not destiny, but it can place hurdles in the path that create additional challenges. Other challenges discussed here include:

- School enrollment--both declining student counts and difficult to manage growth of a non-English speaking population.
- School choice that has created more challenges for two of these schools.
- Teacher quality issues including salaries, recruitment and retention.
- Student needs such as health services, mental health services, and social services.
- Student transportation and facilities.
- Fiscal distress.
- Chronic absence and school discipline that separates students from learning.
- Special needs students.
- Impoverished communities experiencing economic downturns.

For schools, facing most if not all of these challenges can tax the skills of even the most experienced leadership and strongest teacher corps. The additional public and private resources that each of these schools has been able to secure are helping to meet the challenges. However, not all schools are able to secure all the additional supports needed, and every school has some unmet needs in search of a solution. If Arkansas hopes to improve academic performance, as we work to improve classroom strategies, we must also look to needs and solutions beyond the classroom. Creating greater equity in access to these additional public and private resources cannot be overlooked if our most challenged schools are to become successful.

Next steps would include assessing or surveying district leadership, superintendents, and school boards in several areas. First, do district leaders understand the value of providing additional services outside the classroom to improve student achievement?



Are district leaders aware of resources to meet those needs through public and private grants? Do districts have staffing capacity to track grant application cycles and complete complex data requests needed for some grants? Is grant-writing training needed?

It is also important for education policy makers to discuss the impact these outside resources have and how to make access to them more equitable. A review of how NSLA-categorical funds and Title I funds are being used in schools would be a good start. Better use of these resources would reduce needs for separate public and private funding.

Finally, the state benefits greatly from the efforts philanthropic funders already have underway. However, these organizations may need to assess their strategies and grant-making practices. The practice of funders is often to focus on specific communities where they have established relationships and to continue to support those efforts. However, this makes it difficult for schools that are beginning to move forward to access those opportunities. Collaborative discussions among funders about how to improve access are needed.

All of our students, regardless of their zip code, deserve the highest quality classroom resources and high quality supports and opportunities outside the classroom that further support their learning. It will require the best strategies from all school leaders, policy makers, and private funding sources to meet these big challenges.

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