



FROM THE RESEARCH

An Executive Summary Of What The Research Tells Us: 2002–2007

*Provided by Jean Hendrickson, Executive Director
Oklahoma A+ Schools®*

Volume 1 - Composite Narratives

Volume 2 - History and Foundational Literature

Volume 3 - Quantitative Measures

Volume 4 - Qualitative Data Analysis

Volume 5 - Recognizably Different



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Oklahoma A+ Schools: What the Research Tells Us 2002 – 2007
Executive Summary, Volumes 1 – 5
Jean Hendrickson, Executive Director
February 2010

Oklahoma A+ Schools® is a statewide network of 60 schools with a mission to nurture creativity in every learner. Located at the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond, OK A+ Schools provides ongoing professional development, an intricate network of support, and an active research component conducted by university professors. Spanning the state and growing every year, the network represents public, private, and charter schools from early childhood through high school, in urban, suburban, and rural Oklahoma.

Schools commit to a set of eight A+ Essentials™ which they learn about during the initial Summer Institute. Creativity is nurtured through each of the eight Essentials so that the adult learner begins to understand: the powerful role of the arts to unlock new ways of knowing and imaginative strategies to make connections within the curriculum. They also learn how to employ experiential learning, open multiple learning pathways for students, and provide enriched assessment strategies that more robustly capture what students know and are able to do. Students then become the beneficiaries of energetic and empowered adult professionals who commit to working together, using all of their abundant resources to assure student learning. Ongoing professional development is provided by a highly-qualified, innovative group of teachers and artists from all disciplines known as A+ Fellows. The network enables schools to take advantage of years of grass roots experience, leadership training, arts and general education resources, hours of consultation time and advocacy for whole school change.

A+ Essentials™: A Set of Commitments			
Arts	Curriculum	Experiential Learning	Multiple Intelligences
Enriched Assessment	Collaboration	Infrastructure	Climate

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With great pleasure, I introduce the long awaited five-year research report on Phase One of the Oklahoma A+ Schools initiative. Our intention has been to describe the initiative’s history and origin, the process of implementation in Oklahoma and some of the results of our work during this initial period. Deliberately emergent in its design, we had no preconceived notions about what the process might uncover, and the challenge has been



to design a set of reports that would, when taken together, provide a coherent picture of our experience and the implications of some of the lessons we learned in the process.

The five volumes included are:

- Volume 1: Composite Narratives
- Volume 2: History and Foundational Literature
- Volume 3: Quantitative Measures
- Volume 4: Qualitative Data Analysis
- Volume 5: Recognizably Different: A Meta-Analysis

Each of these reports uses different formative methods and perspective to provide detailed and extensive information on how the initiative began, how it has grown, and what we have learned in its first five years. We include literature reviews to substantiate our research assumptions and clear descriptions of the methods we used to gather and analyze our data.

This body of research documents the success of schools when they become highly engaged in the ongoing Oklahoma A+ Schools' process. The following are among the many strengths of OK A+ outlined in this five-volume research report:

**Higher student achievement,
Better attendance of students and teachers,
Decreased discipline problems,
Stronger parent and community involvement, and
A more creative and joyful school climate**

Significantly, as we have organized the findings and many of the questions that arose during the inquiry, we have managed to distill a very clear and focused direction for the next phase of our work. We have determined that quality, clarity and access will be watchwords for our next important steps, and we hope to develop benchmarks along a generous continuum that portrays the growth and development of an Oklahoma A+ school. We envision each school determining its own position on the continuum depending on the ever-changing demands of school development. In other words, this set of reports serves as a marker of our urgent beginnings. It merely introduces and sets the stage for the real work to come. I invite your participation in this work, enthusiastically acknowledging the impressive colleagues and partners that have brought this initiative to life and have brought life to this stage of our complex initiative.



A Few Thoughts as you Begin to Read

The complex nature of school change demands an organized approach from researchers who are working in the “emergent” mode in order to discover and describe the school practices that actually help us create optimum learning environments for students. Past efforts in educational research to simplify the important educational questions have left us stunningly short on answers to daunting questions of how to address basic inequities, drop-out rates, student achievement, and student preparedness for their future.

From its inception, the role of research in the Oklahoma A+ Schools’ story has been central, ongoing and multifaceted. We start with a few assumptions: namely, that our schools desire to provide their students with the most complete and effective education they possibly can. We assume that schools desire to get better over time and not worse, and that the arts have a significant but not solitary or exclusive role in that improvement process. We started from the position that the arts, like literacy and numeracy, have value to the learning process.

All students in all communities are entitled to a full, effective and rich educational experience that prepares them to be successful along the continuum of lifelong learning. There is nothing in that mandate that requires that all schools, communities, or children look the same. In fact, to be successful in our task, we must embrace the value in the unique contributions inherent within schools, communities and children. Further, we must connect learning to life, and we must acknowledge the value that all disciplines bring to the learning process, be they arts, humanities, mathematics or the sciences.

The five volumes of research on Oklahoma A+ Schools’ “Phase One” journey will provide detailed information on its growth. Each tells about the implementation from a different perspective so that researchers, educators, parents, and all stakeholders can draw their own coherent and complete picture of how the unique factors present in every school contribute to the level of success of this initiative. To provide some insight as you begin to read, I have summarized the kinds of information within each of the five volumes. This research, as always, will continue to inform and improve our next steps, just as any assessment process should do.



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Oklahoma A+ Schools are rooted in eight essentials:

- ~ Arts ~ Curriculum ~ Experiential Learning ~ Multiple Intelligences
- ~ Enriched Assessment ~ Collaboration ~ Infrastructure ~ Climate



~ ARTS ~

The pictures throughout this document represent original art of Oklahoma A+ Fellows
“A Visual Interpretation of the A+ Essentials”

Created by

Laneta Going, A+ Fellow
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With collaborative support from grandsons Gage and Zach



Volume 1 – Composite Narratives

Dr. Bryan Duke employed a rigorous and comprehensive analysis of five years' worth of field notes, research reports, quantitative analysis, interviews and surveys and constructed three composite school sites as they go through the implementation process of becoming an A+ School. By drawing from actual observations and interviews, Volume 1 enables the reader to experience authentic conditions in schools that impact the level of success that a school has in becoming highly engaged and successful as an Oklahoma A+ School member. The outcome of this work is that the reader is able to put school context and understanding to the other volumes in the study as well as to the implementation process itself. Further, the composite narratives identify a set of characteristics and behaviors that were determined from the research to be present at three different levels of engagement in the process, from minimally engaged to highly engaged, along with the conditions in the schools themselves that led to the engagement level.

Volume 1 helps us to understand the fluid nature of school improvement and the fact that school change is a process and not an event. Rarely, if ever, can a school be categorized as being at a particular "level of engagement" in a real and permanent sense. The nature of schooling is simply too complex to be reduced to such descriptions. It is possible, however, to identify characteristics and behaviors in schools that either advance or impede the ability of the school to effectively address the challenges that it encounters and to deliberately cultivate positive behaviors.

Three fictitious composite schools, Scissortail, a highly engaged school, Rose Rock, a moderately engaged school, and Mountain Boomer, a minimally engaged school comprise the narrative that takes the schools through an academic year. With this process, others can identify those characteristics and behaviors within their school community, determine whether or not they are satisfied with where they are, and plan deliberate and informed steps to move from where they are to where they want to be.

Volume 1 also contains a helpful Glossary of Terms with words that recur throughout the research study, enabling the reader to understand the shared vocabulary that is central to the Oklahoma A+ Schools' process and connects the state to other A+ initiatives such as its originator, North Carolina A+ Schools.

Volume 1, then, sets the stage for the reading of the subsequent volumes, allowing educators to "see themselves" in the stories and understand how external and internal factors intersect and combine with schools' improvement efforts. The level at which the schools engage in the work can then be more clearly understood and supported. Table 1 provides examples of behaviors as they relate to the eight A+ Essentials™ within each of the levels of engagement. It describes a continuum of commitment and engagement that meets schools' needs in different ways over time as their own circumstance dictate.



Table 1: Engagement Levels as Characterized by the A+ Essentials™

<p>In a School Minimally Engaged in the A+ Process</p>	<p>In a School Moderately Engaged in the A+ Process</p>	<p>In a School Highly Engaged in the A+ Process</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure—resources are utilized “as is,” there is a lack of follow-through regarding changes to infrastructure • Climate—differences between individuals are obvious and often divisive resulting in unsettled feelings • Curriculum—content and lessons are somewhat isolated, and A+ approaches are utilized infrequently if at all • Experiential Learning—lessons rely mainly on direct instruction and “reproducibles” • Arts—there is a lack of interest in arts and/or integrating the arts • Multiple Intelligences—the instruction is somewhat teacher-centered • Enriched Assessment—learning is assessed in a somewhat traditional and teacher-centered fashion • Collaboration—the faculty is on different “pages,” and there are obvious challenges in communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure—schools persevere on their limited resources and the lack of strategies for using available resources; progress is hindered by focusing on what they do NOT have rather than by contemplating what could be done with what they DO have • Climate—differences between individuals are somewhat recognized, and positive relations are desirable but not seemingly a priority for all • Curriculum—lessons are somewhat integrated and somewhat isolated with attempts to include meaningful approaches • Experiential Learning—lessons are somewhat hands-on and somewhat delivered through direct instruction • Arts—the arts are integrated on occasion, but mostly one-way and typically superficially • Multiple Intelligences—there is a belief in teaching to students’ multiple intelligences but there are minimal efforts to this end reflected in practice • Enriched Assessment—there are occasional attempts to utilize creative, authentic and multiple pathways for assessing assessment of learning • Collaboration—cooperative efforts are mostly within “pockets” of teachers or are dominated by “key players” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure—resources are utilized creatively and deliberately • Climate—differences between individuals are respected, and positive relations and affect are encouraged • Curriculum—lessons are integrated, relevant, and “rich” in meaning • Experiential Learning—lessons engage students in meaningful learning and “deep” processing • Arts—the arts are integrated daily for context, to enhance other curricular content and for arts’ sake • Multiple Intelligences—differentiated instruction and multiple approaches are used as a “tool” for learning and efficacy • Enriched Assessment—creative and multiple pathways are utilized for assessment of learning • Collaboration—cooperative faculty and students efforts are evidenced widely and results in empowered teaching and learning, as well as open, two-way and widespread communication



Volume 2 – History and Foundational Literature

Dr. Charlene Dell sets the stage for the historical and foundational context of the Oklahoma A+ Schools' process. Dr. Dell connects the initiative to its origins in the North Carolina A+ Schools Program and traces the growth over time in Oklahoma. The DaVinci Institute, a non-profit consortium of higher education institutions in Oklahoma, took ownership of the process and incubated the idea of piloting a more creative, effective model of schooling for Oklahoma's students.

History: 1998 – 2003

Initiated by Susan McCalmont, Executive Director for the Kirkpatrick Foundation in Oklahoma City and hosted by the Kirkpatrick Foundation, a community meeting of interested participants was held in the year 2000 leading to an investigative process by community members, educators and higher education faculty to determine the suitability of pursuing a relationship to bring the North Carolina A+ Schools' model to Oklahoma.

This process culminated in 2002 with the initial Summer Institute, five-day training for the group of fifteen schools selected as the first cadre of Oklahoma A+ Schools. (As of this writing, there are currently sixty schools identified with the network, spanning the state and incorporating schools from early childhood through high school.)

The following table summarizes the initial steps in the early years of implementation in Oklahoma from the first meeting in 1998 to the hiring of a fulltime director in 2003.

When	What
1998	Meetings of Faculty and administrators from college and universities to discuss the role of higher education could have on impacting K-12 education
2000	Kirkpatrick undertook and developed a strategic planning process from which the Da Vinci Institute was formed.
2000	Joint research team from OU and OSU spend one year researching the most successful education reforms in country and discover the NC A+ Schools
Sept 19, 2000	Letter of Invitation distributed for an Informational Breakfast regarding education reform and utilizing the arts as a reform vehicle
Oct 5, 2000	Breakfast meeting
Oct 2000 - June 2001	Information-gathering; identification of likely partners
April 8 - 11, 2001	Gerry Howell, Program Director for North Carolina A+ Schools, visits OK for school tours and meetings
July 2001	Oklahoma teams to North Carolina for Summer Institutes



When	What
Aug 2001	Follow-up for OK summer participants in NC
Sept 2001	Strategy meetings with Vincent Marron, Exec. Director of NC A+ Schools
Fall 2001	Executive Director and Program Coordinator hired; mailings sent to all schools
Fall 2001	Brochures developed and sent to every public school in OKC
Fall 2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informational meetings for schools across the state • Regional information meetings held in Ardmore, Bartlesville, Norman, Tulsa, and Woodward. (Individual school meetings were held based upon request)
November 2001	Strategy meeting with partner groups (Core Knowledge, Great Expectations, OSU Science Center, and others)
January 13 -16	Visits to North Carolina A+ Schools
January 30, 2002	Meeting of Advisory Committee
January 30, 2002	Meeting with Da Vinci Education Committee
January 31, 2002	Meeting with Potential Fellows
February 2002	20 Oklahoma Shadow faculty selected
March 2002	Schools notified of placement in OK A+ Schools
March 2002	Rosalynn Wade hired as New Coordinator of Programs and Professional Development
March 7-10, 2002	Three-day retreat
April 9 -11, 2002	Three one-day pre-institutes
May 6, 2002	Announcement of first Oklahoma A+ Schools:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briarwood Elementary • Cleveland Elementary • Flower Mound • Freedom Elementary • Garfield Academy • Grissom Elementary • Jackson Elementary • Jefferson Elementary • Linwood Elementary • Mark Twain Elementary • Monroe Elementary • Russell Dougherty • Sadler Arts Academy • Sequoyah Elementary • Western Village Academy
May 3-7, 2002	Planning for Summer Institute
June 2002	Oklahoma A+ Schools and Da Vinci are trademarked
July 2002	Summer Institutes
Fall 2002	OK A+ network is formed
Fall 2002	OK A+ receives continued support from the Kirkpatrick Foundation and the Windgate Charitable Foundation
Fall 2002	Recruitment of new faculty mailings sent to award-winning teachers in the state
Sept 24-25, 2002	Mini-Institute and Retreats (site coordinators and principals)
Oct 2002	Regional Meetings



When	What
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10/14- 15 -Norman and Pauls Valley• 10/21-23 McAlester, Sapulpa, and Wetherford
Nov15, 2002	Meeting for Potential Fellows
Winter/Spring 2003	Partnerships developed with Business Circle for the arts, Oklahoma Arts Council, Alliance for Arts Education, Very Special Arts, and Oklahoma Arts Institute
Dec 2, 2002-Jan 28, 2003	Application and selection of new schools New schools notified of their selection
Feb 3, 2003	
Feb 7-9, 2003	New OK Faculty Training
March 28-29, 2003	Mini-Institute and Retreats
April 4-6, 2003	Spring Fellows Retreat
April 8-10, 2003	Pre-Institute I
April 26, 2003	New schools announced publicly
May 3-6, 2003	OK/NC Fellows retreat to plan Summer Institutes
May 6-8, 2003	Pre-Institute II
June 9-20, 2003	Returning Schools Conferences
Summer 2003	New schools begin institutes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Britton Elementary, OKC• Millwood Elementary, OKC• Madison Elementary, Norman• Oologah Lower Elementary, Oologah• Lee Elementary, Pauls Valley
Fall 2003	OK A+ Schools become an official part of UCO
December 1, 2003	Jean Hendrickson assumes role of fulltime Director of OK A+ Schools



~ COLLABORATION ~



Foundational Literature Review

An examination of the foundational literature reveals the challenges encountered when organizations adopt a whole school perspective on reform rather than one that is issue-specific (i.e., literacy focus, numeracy focus, etc.). Schools do not exist in a vacuum and most school reform initiatives do not account for the myriad of interactions that are present within any school environment, nor are they capable of doing so. Studying the literature does reveal common components that assist in successful implementation, including a school's preparation for reform, willingness and capacity to change, and available resources, according to Desimone's research (2002).

Volume 2 reveals the importance of relevant and accessible professional development that allows teachers and principals time to use new skills, come back with questions and comments, and receive continuing feedback. The following statements illustrate the major components of effective professional development, all of them found within the A+ Schools' model.

As part of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind Act), the Eisenhower Professional Development Program provided funding to assist schools in providing professional development to meet the changing needs of education. Results from the national evaluation of this program indicated professional development was more likely to bring about change if it had several qualities. Accordingly, the professional development must accomplish the following:

- take place over time,
- foster collective participation among its members,
- utilize active learning in which teachers are engaged through discussion, common planning, and practice,
- fit in with the federal, state, and local expectations, and
- be content focused
- incorporate observation by and of others, and
- utilize instruction which bridges the gap between initial introduction and classroom implementation (Garet et al., 2001; Porter, Garet, Desimone, Yoon, & Birman, 2003).

Volume 2 highlights the role of the A+ Essentials™ in assisting each school to truly examine their whole school and allow each school to choose its own path toward change. It reiterates the need for successful school reform models to take into account the beliefs and expertise of each of its stakeholders, in addition to the wishes and expectations of its parents, school boards, and state education department. This must all be done while meeting the educational and personal needs of the children.



Volume 3 – Quantitative Measures

Authored by Dr. Nancy Barry, this volume of the report offers detailed descriptions of methods, procedures, results and implications accumulated from five years of research and data collection. The quantitative impact and benefit of Oklahoma A+ Schools on students, teachers, professional development providers and the community at large are presented. Oklahoma State Department of Education School performance data were analyzed along with the results of four major surveys which included: My Class Activities Student Survey (N=6,042, 2003-07), Teacher Opinion Survey (N=1728, 2003-06), A+ Faculty/Fellow Survey (N=97, 2006-07), and The Arts Education Perception Survey (N=12,061, 2005-06). Taken together, these tools provided descriptive insight into the A+ story.

This comprehensive study reveals statistically significant empirical evidence which demonstrates that Oklahoma A+ Schools consistently outperform their counterparts within their district and the state on the Academic Performance Index. Survey results show A+ students have positive attitudes about their classroom activities. Teachers in A+ schools hold favorable attitudes about art in education, arts integration and teacher collaboration. Faculty and Fellows believe that A+ provides an effective model of professional development that positively impacts the lives of children through actively supporting and improving the skills and practice of their teacher colleagues. Analysis of data from community members reveals a more positive perception of arts education expressed by respondents affiliated with A+ Schools. This suggests that a more favorable climate for arts education exists within A+ Schools and their surrounding communities. This investigation highlights a need and desire for deeper and broader access to the rich framework provided by Oklahoma A+ Schools as well as continued evidence based research for reflection and improvement.

Data Source	Total Number of Responses (combined across years of administration)
My Class Activities Student Survey	6,042
Teacher Opinion Survey	1,728
Faculty/Fellows Survey	96
The Arts Education Perception Survey	12,061
Total Responses Included in Data Analysis	19,927

Oklahoma's Academic Performance Index (API) was created in law to measure the performance and progress of a school or district based on several factors, primarily state assessment scores, which contribute to overall educational success. The possible scores



range from 0 to 1,500. The factors used in the calculation of an API score include the following:

- Oklahoma School Testing Program (OSTP)
- School completion—including attendance, dropout, and graduation rates.
- Academic excellence—includes ACT scores and participation, Advanced Placement (AP) credit, and college remediation rates in reading and mathematics.

Academic Year	A+ Schools Average*	District Average**	OK State Average
2002-03	1109 (N = 22)	975	1046
2003-04	1135 (N = 22)	1049	1086
2004-05	1261 (N = 26)	1137	1159
2005-06	1308 (N = 28)	1170	1180
2006-07	1332 (N = 33)	1196	1252
2007-08	1346 (N = 34)	1210	1279

*API Data are not available for some A+ Schools (e.g., private schools, early childhood centers)

**The A+ Schools were included in the State Department of Education's calculation of District Average.

General outcomes noted for the Oklahoma A+ Schools' cadre include:

- **Higher** achievement
- **Better** attendance for students and teachers
- **Decreased** disciplinary problems in schools
- **Happier**, more effective educators
- **Joyful**, engaged students
- **More** parent and community involvement
- **Creative**, focused instruction

It is noteworthy that these outcomes are present even though the cadre of Oklahoma A+ schools in the study, when compared to the schools in the state of Oklahoma as a whole:

- Serve a greater proportion of economically disadvantaged students (per State Report Card Data),
- Serve a greater proportion of ethnic minorities (per State Report Card Data).

Other differences are noted in the full report of Volume 3.

In addition to noting that there are distinct differences between Oklahoma A+ schools and other schools in the state, between-school differences within the OK A+ cadre were

present as well. School communities differ in size, configuration, curriculum, and location. Results differ as well. Outcome differences in terms of student achievement, teacher attitude, and implementation of the eight A+ Essentials™ are described as they relate to a particular school's level of engagement. In other words, as in every reform endeavor, the rate of change and the positive outcomes from change depend upon the degree to which the teachers and school leaders actually engage in the practices. The statistical information was gathered to describe the demographics of the schools as a whole and to compare readily-available outcomes from within the OK A+ cadre to the state's outcomes. Attitudes impact teaching and learning and can be shaped and directed positively by the manner in which teachers are supported. Most of the statistical information deals with averages. While the averages give us snapshots as to the general viability of the initiative, the important between-school differences need to be further delineated by descriptions of the characteristics and behaviors uncovered by the school observations so that, indeed, the numbers have meaning beyond a set of charts and graphs.

~ CURRICULUM ~



~ ENRICHED ASSESSMENT ~



Volume 4 – Qualitative Data Analysis: Organizational Role Transition Among Schools

Under the authorship of Drs. Mike Raiber and Diane Jackson, Volume 4 examines the data collected over the five year period, describing the process of the development of the organization, the types of professional development and delivery mechanisms, and the relationships between the home office, the schools, higher education and the community.

The authors viewed each school as a unique unit, respecting the symbiotic relationship between the school and its environment. Use of the open systems model enabled the researchers to view each school as unique while providing a way to organize the information in order to better represent a generalized picture of these highly complex interactions and relationships. The study identifies factors that contribute to the level of success that a particular school experiences regarding role transition in the change process, including:

- School community members' identities
- Infrastructure support for the full school community
- Perception of the regulatory nature of the A+ framework
- Principal leadership
- Participation and role of the arts specialists
- Presence of additional school initiatives
- School mission

Volume 4 reiterates the importance of teacher empowerment in successfully changing school practices and notes the need to provide a network of support and relevant professional development during the change process. Effective professional development facilitates internalizing new approaches by mastering new skills and ways of thinking. Teachers learn new strategies and insights with the support of skilled A+ Fellows, supported by a network of colleagues and peers.

The entire Oklahoma A+ Schools' network, from the work done in the individual schools, to the program development, to the A+ Fellows' training process, to the office management itself, is shown to mirror the framework of the eight A+ Essentials and shows evidence of the importance of ongoing assessment and utilizing research-based information for continued improvement. Also noted as components of successful role transition are the use of a common language (through the A+ Essentials™) and the expectation of regular reflection on one's professional practices.

Regarding the evolution of the professional development process itself, Volume 4 describes the numerous opportunities that network schools have to engage in new learning. Oklahoma A+ Schools® provides summer institutes, mini-institutes during the school year, on-site professional development, school exchanges, special projects offered through partnering organizations, and the annual statewide conference. Not all schools take advantage of the full range of opportunities, and in those who take advantage of them, the reasons for their engagement vary. Some schools use the network's resources as their primary provider of professional development, and other schools choose particular components as they "fit" within other circumstances on their campuses.

Challenges and questions ahead:

Oklahoma A+ has demonstrated considerable resiliency since its inception, evidenced by the number of schools joining the network, the diversity of schools in the network (public, private, charter, PreK-12, faith-based), and the degree of support from both private and public sources. With success comes positive publicity and that in turn invites more interest and growth of the network. Challenges include maintaining high-quality professional development and elasticity to meet a larger number of diverse schools' unique interests, increasing the capacity to provide such development (staff, Faculty, & Fellows), and acquiring funding. An additional challenge includes varying the levels of training provided to schools along their Oklahoma A+ Schools' trajectories. Inquiries and requests from other states for assistance in developing a similar professional development network have increased, and these raise new questions and possibilities for Oklahoma A+ Schools:

- What is exportable about the network?
- How can other states' initial efforts be supported as they struggle to tailor the philosophy to meet their own unique needs?
- Since A+ is not a —one-size-fits-all program, how can Oklahoma A+ Schools® support and not supplant additional variations on its theme?

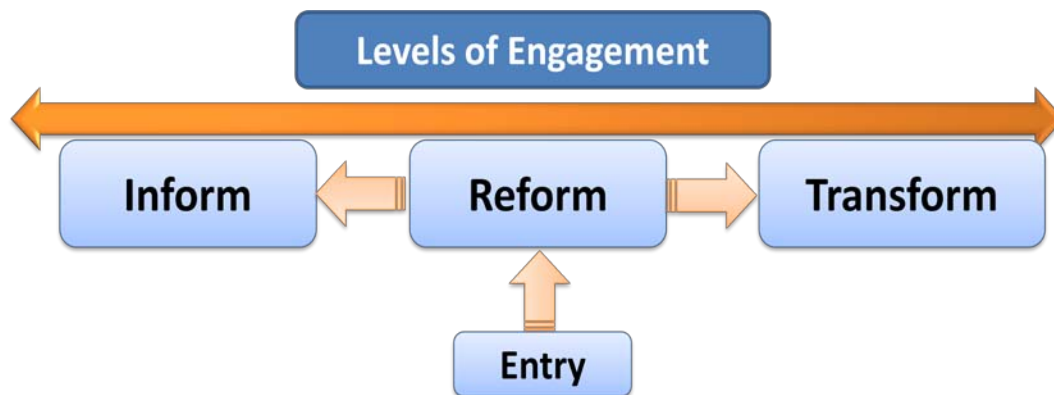


~ EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING ~

Volume 5 – Recognizably Different: A Meta-Analysis of the Framework of Implementation

Authored by all five members of the primary research team, Drs. Raiber, Duke, Barry, Dell, and Jackson collaborated in true A+ fashion to compile the summaries and findings from the entire process, effectively addressing the most important question for practitioners desiring transformative educational environments, namely, *so what?*

Emerging from the meta-analysis, primary findings led to the development of a continuum to describe the process for a school’s entry and its movement along the way from being “reform-minded” (moderate engagement) to either an “inform-minded” (minimal engagement) or “transform-minded” (high engagement) culture within the school, as illustrated in the figure below.



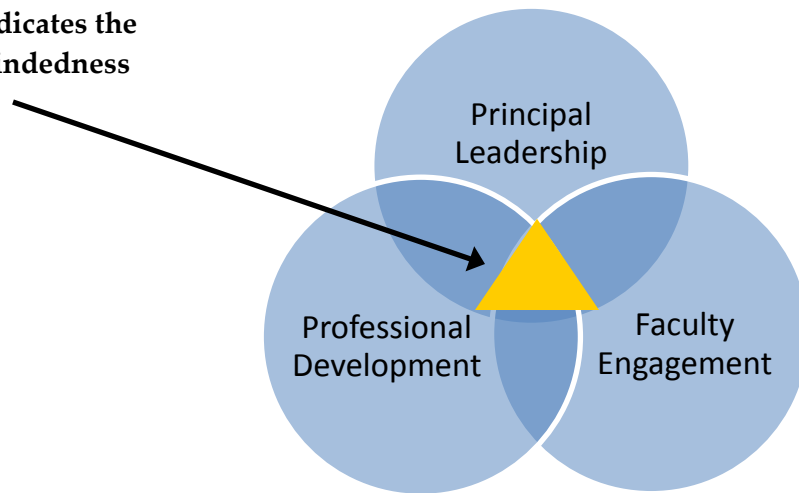
Schools enter the process, typically, at the “reform” level of engagement. That is, there is a wish for *change* of something at their school. There are many reasons that schools wish for change, including everything from a need to provide for every child, to a need to improve student achievement, to a need to add the “next step” of enrichment. Following the initial engagement, schools then tend to move toward one end or the other of the continuum, either by taking the information and “adding it” on as they see fit, or by using the ongoing process to transform their school, effectively engaging at a deep and transformative level.

There are also three very powerful “drivers” that propel the school and empower the success of the transition. They are as follows:

- 1) Principal leadership
- 2) Faculty engagement
- 3) Professional development

The degree to which these drivers are effective in moving the school toward transformation is dependent upon the levels of coherence, commitment, and cooperation present within each. This relationship is illustrated in the following figure; however, it is important to understand that each of the drivers can differ in their size and in their relationship to the other drivers.

This area of overlap indicates the degree of transform-mindedness within the school.



Further, from the evidence collected, the researchers have identified five *indicators of engagement* that assist the journey. They are listed as:

- 1) Resiliency
- 2) Sustainability
- 3) Flexibility
- 4) Ownership
- 5) Empowerment

From this collection of data come the criteria to provide schools and communities with an assessment tool to implement the practices and strategies designed to get the highest and most productive outcomes, effectively charting a path towards the goal of becoming a highly engaged, transform-minded Oklahoma A+ School. The tables that follow provide descriptions of the characteristics and behaviors for each indicator.



RESILIENCY

Resiliency is the overall capacity of a school community to adjust successfully to change.

Features of *Resiliency*

- Organizational interests are considered to a greater extent than self interests.
- There is interest in the details concerning change and why it is being implemented.
- Actors perceive themselves as architects of the change.
- Long-term leadership is present during the change.
- Conflict is expected and resolved effectively.

Evidence from the Data

Inform-minded	Reform-minded	Transform-minded
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus is on self interests. • Few references to the outcomes of change, only that it is happening • Actors view themselves as victims of change. • Status quo is protected. • Leadership changes are common. • References to lack of collaboration and poor climate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certain of the A+ Essentials™ are implemented while others are lacking either through incomplete understanding or partial implementation. • References to multiple intelligences theory and experiential learning are the most common expressions of the A+ Essentials™. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The A+ Essentials™ are viewed in total as a complete framework. • The A+ Essentials™ are used as a unifying force during conflict brought on by change. • Leadership has been stable. • References refer to <i>we</i> and <i>us</i> rather than <i>they</i> and <i>them</i>.



~ CLIMATE ~



SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is the degree to which practices are fully internalized and part of how the school community does business.

Features of *Sustainability*

- Development and maintenance of transdisciplinary models of instruction
- A distinct but evolving framework to guide problem-solving
- Solutions are many and evidence is both theoretical and empirical in nature.
- Knowledge is disseminated through, rather than after, process.
- Community is dynamic and constantly evolving.

Evidence from the Data

Inform-minded	Reform-minded	Transform-minded
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are references to the Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS objectives) as mandated curriculum that hinders integration. Examples of mass produced curriculum are present with few attempts to integrate. • A+ Essentials™ are not used in any consistent manner to guide problem solving. Other frames present in the school tend to be used more often. • There is little interest in foundations for decision making. Faculty and administration seek ready-made solutions from outside sources. • There is limited evidence of process-based learning of any kind. Most concerns are product-based. • A+ implementation has been targeted to specific areas from the beginning. Application has been compartmentalized either in the use of the A+ Essentials™ or in the inclusion of subject matter. It is not considered whole school reform. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration is present but is contrived at times or incomplete. These sites note a need for improvement. • A+ Essentials™ are used selectively to guide problem solving, but other frames present in the school are used to a similar degree. • Evidence of multiple intelligences and experiential learning are present, but enriched assessment is lacking in theoretical foundations and application. • Experiential learning activities are present but not pervasive in the culture of the entire school. • A+ implementation has not impacted all areas, but progress is evident and forthcoming. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration is two-way, purposeful and seamless. • A+ Essentials™ guide problem solving to the exclusion of most other frames present in the school • Theoretical foundations for decision making are multiple and clearly implemented by administration, faculty, and students. • A culture exists in the school that highly values experiential learning across all subjects. • Administration and faculty understand the evolving nature of A+ implementation and value the opportunity to adapt the process to their school needs.



FLEXIBILITY

***Flexibility* is the capacity of the school community to adapt to new, different or changing requirements from both external and internal forces.**

Features of Flexibility

- School responsiveness to parents’ wishes and students’ needs
- A strong sense of purpose and responsibility among teachers and administrators
- Innovation is apparent in the school environment through the design and delivery of instruction and the use of assessment.
- Schools use their resources effectively.

Evidence from the Data

Inform-minded	Reform-minded	Transform-minded
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The environment is rigid and teacher-centered. • Most instruction is teacher-centered and supplantive in nature. • Assessment is primarily test-driven and is most often used in summative fashion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental changes appear to be intermittent, often applied for short periods of time and then discarded. • Instruction is occasionally student-centered but is not pervasive in the school. Supplantive strategies are employed within certain subjects or by certain teachers to the exclusion of other approaches. • Some assessments are enriched and used formatively, but there are still a number of summative assessments that measure primarily memorization of facts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School environment reflects a many-faceted approach to classroom activities and student learning which is pervasive throughout the school. • Instruction is designed to meet the individual needs of the students, is often student centered, and is generative in nature. • Assessment is authentic and multifaceted. It is ongoing and most often formative. Teachers design ways in which enriched assessment strategies are used on a regular basis.

~ INFRASTRUCTURE ~





OWNERSHIP

***Ownership* is the degree to which decision making reflects both the written and hidden curriculum in a culture that supports all members' creativity, achievement, and accountability.**

Features of *Ownership*

- Power rests with the members in the classroom.
- Work is coordinated through shared professional knowledge.
- Control rests extensively on meeting the needs of children.
- Parents and children have a role in coordination of activities.
- Functional units in the school support the needs of teachers.
- Leaders are successful only when they are perceived as serving the teachers and the children.
- The current members have a role in the selection of new members.

Evidence from the Data

Inform-minded	Reform-minded	Transform-minded
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power structures are more vertical than horizontal with decisions being made from the top. • Curriculum mapping has not been engaged in meaningfully since its initial introduction during training. • Student needs are considered only after other concerns have been addressed. • Parent input is rarely sought. There is no formal mechanism in place for parents to give input to school officials. • A+-provided professional development is rarely used. There appears to be little value placed on these experiences by faculty and/or administration. • Leadership believes there is an approved approach to implementation, and their objectives are to help ensure the teachers and students at their schools learn how to operate in this manner. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some student choice is evident, but faculty members make many of the educational choices in the classroom. • Faculty feel supported in most decisions but question level of support when making the "really important ones." • Curriculum mapping is ongoing, but often the "specials" teachers are not engaged in the process at the same level of other teachers. • Teacher concerns or instructional design are considered before student needs in some cases. • There is some recognition that parental input is valuable, but there does not appear to be any mechanism in place for parents to be involved in educational decision making. • Faculty and administration are experimenting with collaborative planning structures but no complete solution has been found. • There is some use of A+ professional development, or faculty and administration cite only limited value from these encounters. • Selection of new members does not usually include an assessment of the prospective teacher's buy-in to the A+ framework. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are given opportunities to make meaningful educational choices. • Teacher decision-making is well supported by leadership. • Faculty are able to share their professional knowledge in what are perceived as meaningful ways. • Curriculum mapping is a living process that continues throughout the school year and includes all subjects. • Teachers and administrators refer to student needs first when talking about the impact of A+ on their school site. • Faculty and administration view parents as equal partners in the process of education and empower them to make decisions that affect both the processes at home and at the school site. • Structures for collaborative planning that address the unique needs of the faculty are implemented and valued by those involved. • Faculty and administration value and make use of professional development from Oklahoma A+ Schools®. • Faculty and administration view leadership success in terms of how well the teachers and students are supported. • Administrators take a proactive approach to selection of new members and address teacher buy-in to A+ implementation during the interview.



EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is a school’s capacity to make effective choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes.

Features of Empowerment

- A group’s capacity to make effective choices is primarily influenced by two sets of interrelated factors: agency and opportunity structure.
- Agency is a group’s ability to make purposeful choices.
- Opportunity structure is determined by the institution’s ability to establish social constraints for human interaction and choice.
- Two types of assets impact agency. Those are measured assets—grades, attendance, discipline referrals—and psychological assets that transform actors to agents.
- The degree to which the institution affects agency can impact a group’s ability to make “rational choices” over “naturalized or habitualized choices.”

Evidence from the Data

Inform-minded	Reform-minded	Transform-minded
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are generally lower levels of measured assets, although all indicators are not at lowest levels across the Oklahoma A+ Schools® population. • Arts educators and their subjects are viewed differently (not as valued) than the subjects and teachers in the “regular” classroom • Teacher agency appears to wane in a culture that continues to view Oklahoma A+ Schools® implementation as an add-on program. • Students are often not aware of their “smarts” and agency is detrimentally affected. • There is a tendency to operate from normalized choices that most often maintain the status quo. These are often so implicit actors do not know they have other choices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measured assets may be high or low. • Some belief among educators that specific arts knowledge and techniques are not necessary for meaningful art integration • Many value the foundations and approaches that Oklahoma A+ Schools® implementation brings to the school and their students. They note, however, that putting these beliefs into action is difficult. • Teachers often report that they need to make more use of multiple intelligences theory. • Personnel note that professional development is an area in which they could be more engaged. They often cite outside forces— institutional limiters—that impact decisions. • Some normalized choices affect the degree of empowerment and, therefore, the outcome. • Due to limited curriculum mapping, staff members report more instances of confusion about what is taking place in their school and about A+ implementation as a whole. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High levels of measured assets are often found in the data. • The arts are viewed as essential; arts educators’ expertise is valued in addition to that of the regular classroom teacher. • Teachers report high levels of agency with support for creative teaching. They enjoy the freedom in what they do in their classroom. They also report increased self-efficacy in relation to trying new ideas in the classroom. • Teachers often refer to multiple intelligences theory (MIT) as a difference maker in the culture of the school and a contributor to student efficacy. • Students often cite their knowledge of MIT as a source of self-actualization in both academics and in social standing. • Faculty value the ability to choose the topics for professional development at their sites. • Interaction between agency and opportunity source supports a degree of empowerment that leads to desired outcomes. • Teachers and principals often refer to curriculum mapping as the means through which important information is exchanged.

This brief overview of the five volumes that comprise the full report, *Oklahoma A+ Schools: What the Research Tells Us, 2002 – 2007*, is intended to give readers a quick look at some of the major implications from the more than 500 pages that provide depth, breadth and description. Readers are encouraged to start with the volume most meaningful to them and make connections across the material as dictated by the investigation pursued. It is intended that the reader will first address questions and needs for further detail by going from this brief overview to the full volumes themselves. The field is rich and ripe for further study. Please stay attuned to updates as Oklahoma A+ Schools® pursues its vision of education that expands imagination and stimulates creative living so that individuals are increasingly self-aware, self-motivated, and prepared to be successful along the continuum of lifelong learning.



~ MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES ~

NOTES





All five volumes of the research report can be found in full on the Oklahoma A+ Schools website:
<http://www.aplusok.org/history/reports/>

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