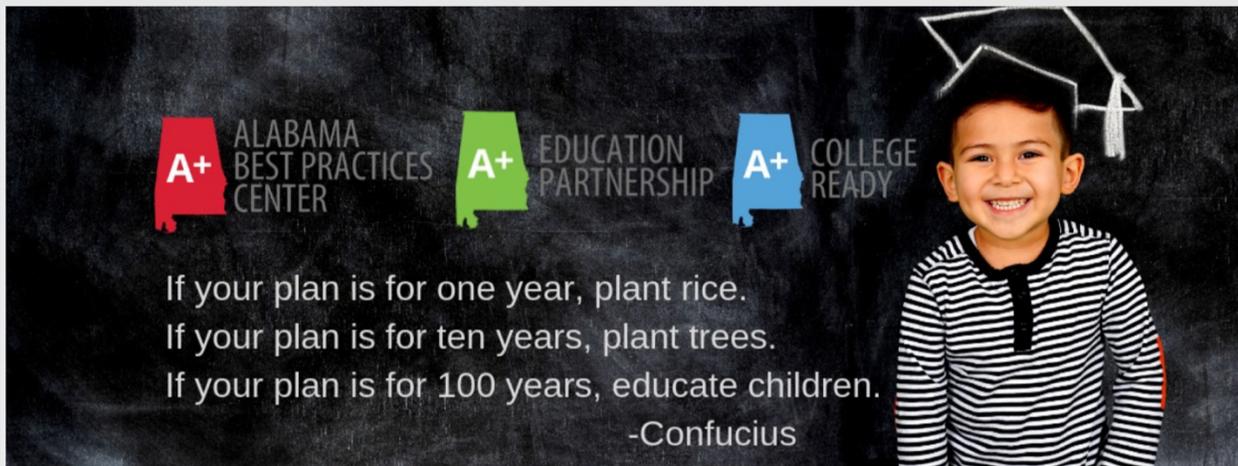


ALABAMA BEST PRACTICES CENTER EVALUATION



Karin Samii Shore, Andrea
Hutson, & Lindsay Lamb

Shore Research/Agile Analytics
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ALABAMA BEST PRACTICES CENTER EVALUATION



Saraland City School District Case Study

Learning From Everyone

The image is a composite graphic. On the left, three logos are displayed on a dark, chalkboard-like background. Each logo consists of a colored outline of the state of Alabama with 'A+' written inside, followed by the text: a red logo for 'ALABAMA BEST PRACTICES CENTER', a green logo for 'EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP', and a blue logo for 'COLLEGE READY'. To the right of these logos is a photograph of a young boy with a joyful expression, wearing a black and white striped shirt and a white graduation cap with a tassel. Below the logos and photo, white text on the chalkboard background reads: 'If your plan is for one year, plant rice. If your plan is for ten years, plant trees. If your plan is for 100 years, educate children. -Confucius'.

A+ ALABAMA BEST PRACTICES CENTER

A+ EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

A+ COLLEGE READY

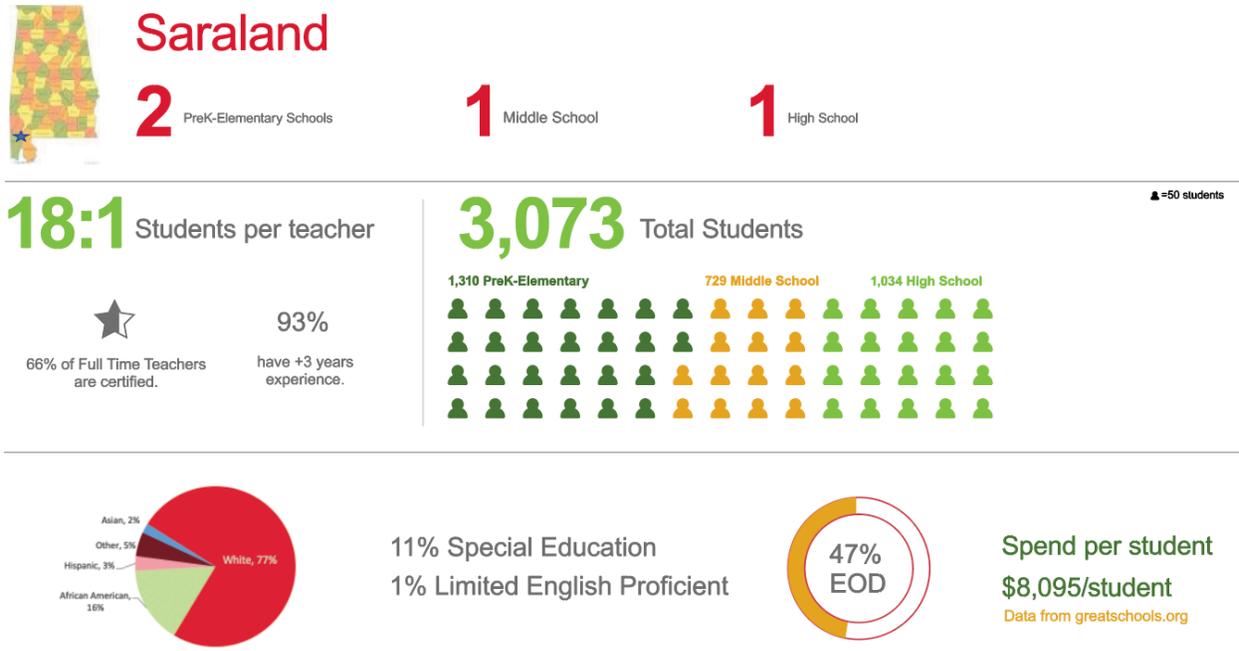
If your plan is for one year, plant rice.
If your plan is for ten years, plant trees.
If your plan is for 100 years, educate children.
-Confucius

About Saraland City School District

Located in southern Alabama just north of the Mobile coast, Saraland City schools district is a relatively new district that separated from the Mobile City District in 2008. The district is comprised of just over 3,000 students in four schools (Pre-K through 12th grade).

Slightly under half of the students are economically disadvantaged (47%) and just over 10% qualify for special education services. The majority (77%) of students in Saraland district are white 16% are African American and less than 5% are Hispanic, Asian, or multi-ethnic.

Figure 1. Saraland City School District Demographics



Sources: Alabama State Department of Education Enrollment Data, 2019; Greatschools.org data, 2019

Saraland City School District's Journey with ABPC

Saraland City school district began their journey with the ABPC Networks in 2013 by attending both the Superintendent Leadership Network (SLN) and the Key Leaders Network (KLN). Later in 2013, the superintendent brought a small group to the Powerful Conversations Network (PCN). **With early buy-in from Saraland City School district superintendent and school leaders, staff were committed to the long-term changes promoted by the ABPC Networks.**

"The district is like an ocean liner. You can't turn a ship like that quickly or it will capsize. So, we have to apply slow steady pressure, turn it slowly so we stay on course and move in the right direction."

~ Saraland City schools district Superintendent

A critical component contributing to effective implementation of ABPC in the Saraland City school district was working within the existing climate and culture.

At Saraland City school district, principals and district leaders embrace a healthy, competitive work ethic; they always want the best for their students. The superintendent used this knowledge in his plan to ensure all Saraland City school district principals were on board prior to implementation of any new practices.

He designed an annual two-day retreat that tapped into their motivation to provide students with the best possible education. To gain perspective the first activity was a data presentation showing school and district administrators how Saraland City school district students were performing compared to the rest of the state. Next, he had principals from other districts participating in ABPC Networks discuss how the concepts learned from their participation in the ABPC networks helped them improve outcomes at their schools.

"Despite being competitive with other districts, we appreciate collaboration – sharing our experiences, information, and skills in hopes of benefiting others. Working with other districts, we all learn from one another through sharing best practices where all students are the ultimate winners!"

~ Saraland City school district IP

Finally, the superintendent presented the Saraland City School district principals with a challenge: he told them that if other schools could make the necessary changes to implement ABPC best practices, surely Saraland could as well (and probably better!) **Knowing his people, he was able to build a strong and committed team.**

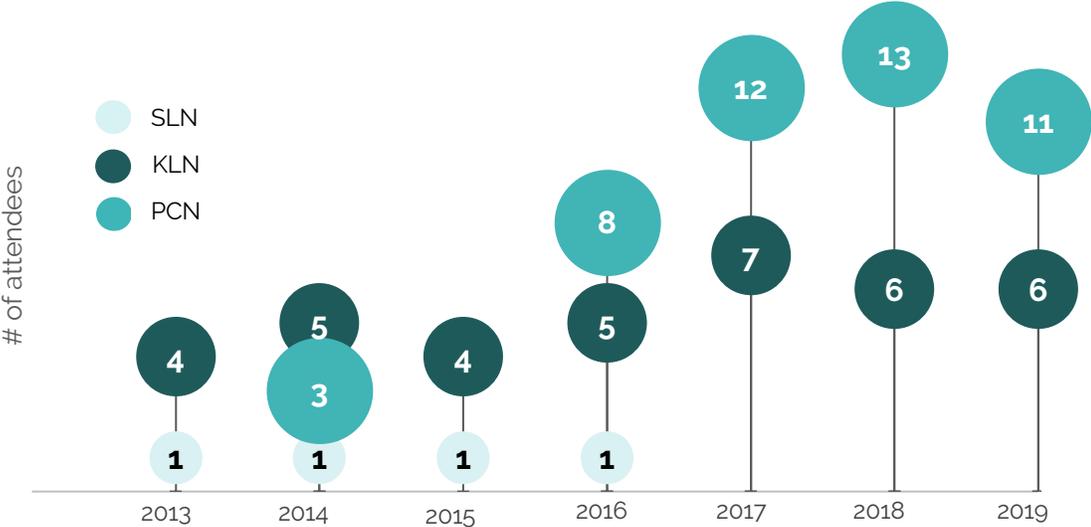
The Saraland City school district has a slow and steady laser focus. Each year, teams from Saraland City school district attend the ABPC Networks offered and continue to host the annual administrative retreat.

Saraland was able to intentionally build a slow but steady commitment to long-term change necessary to implement ABPC best practices. This intentionality coupled with staff's

determination to provide students with an exemplary education is pervasive in their implementation of the best practices and strategies.

During our observations, **the Superintendent frequently emphasized how critical it was to their success to “know your people,”** and understand pacing stating, “This is a marathon not a sprint.” In terms of how staff from Saraland City school district implemented best practices, they collectively focused on pacing. They described how they spent a year studying each concept prior to implementation and then strategizing how best to integrate it into the schools. For example, they spent two years on learning targets before fully implementing them.

Figure 2. Participation in ABPC network meetings slowly increased over time then remained fairly constant from 2017-19.



Source. Alabama Best Practices Centers attendance data
SLN = Superintendent Learning Network; KLN = Key Leaders Network; PCN = Powerful Conversations Network

Key Practices, Successes, & Opportunities

The following were identified as key practices, successes and opportunities for growth among Saraland City Schools.

Key Practices

Data gathered from the site visit suggests that staff from all schools within the Saraland City school district were effectively engaging in the following practices. These practices have helped drive effective implementation of ABPC best practices at Saraland City school district:

"Communication is key. They let us know ahead of time what they are looking for and then focus on positive observations."
~ Saraland City School district middle school teacher, on Learning Walks



Saraland City school district staff regularly implement internal Instructional Rounds (IRs) which are led by their Instructional Partners using ABPC's model to analyze and synthesize data.



Saraland City school district staff regularly take teams on Instructional Rounds (IRs) outside of their own district and host others at their district's IRs as well.



Saraland City School district leaders regularly host book studies to learn and plan for ongoing ABPC implementation.



All elementary teachers have collaborative planning times. Elementary school principals pay for substitute teachers to create this time. The master schedule at the middle school is designed with common planning periods for core content area teachers.

Other Key Strategies

During our site visit, four additional strategies were observed that are likely contributing to high levels of program success:



The Saraland City school district annual two-day **administration retreat**.



Networking with other districts, both during and outside of ABPC Network meetings.



Data analysis and synthesis of Instructional Rounds observations.



The widespread **integration of learning targets** (LTs).

Detailed Results: Saraland City School District's Site Visit

Saraland City school district implemented ABPC strategies by drawing on the existing competitive spirit to provide the best educational experience. This section of the report describes results from the two-day site visit which brought into focus key implementation strategies used among Saraland City school district staff.

The two-day site visit was arranged to better understand the ways in which the procedures, systems, pedagogy and mindsets learned from ABPC network gatherings manifested in Saraland City school district's daily practices.

Evaluators visited three of the four schools in the district, spoke with elementary and middle school teachers, Instructional Partners, district, and campus administrators. We also attended Learning Walks at the pre-k and elementary schools, attended two Learning Walk debriefing sessions and observed a high school book study.

Instructional Rounds

Saraland City school district regularly implements Instructional Rounds which are led by Instructional Partners. They use ABPC's model for how to analyze and synthesize data (See Figure 3). There is a strong and regular focus on data analysis. Teachers categorize and synthesize the evidence they gathered during the observations. The data analysis focuses on the positive practices that can be emulated by other teachers. Initially, the administration was concerned about teachers' reactions to the strategy, but teachers appreciated the way the observations were presented and processed.

The way the data analysis is approached (e.g., sharing and learning from each other, focusing on positive practices) makes it psychologically safe to want or need help, and teachers also gain ideas from the ways in which other teachers approach a particular pedagogical technique or skill. Over the course of the site visit several different staff said, "The knowledge is in the building," and described how this made it acceptable for teachers to visit other. "They [administration] let us know ahead of time what they are



What skills and mindsets did staff from Saraland City school district implement?

Saraland City school district's strong learning network, competitive spirit, and commitment to student engagement were observed during our site visit. The ABPC skills and mindsets we observed were:



Instructional Rounds



Data analysis and learning targets



Student engagement



Book studies



Annual administrative retreat



Planning time



Networking

looking for and then focus on positive observations," said one middle school teacher. She described how the observation process was helpful and not a 'gotcha!'

Saraland City school district leaders regularly take teams on Instructional Rounds (IR) both in and out of the district to learn and network. During the site visit, principals and district administrators from other districts in Alabama were attending an IR focused on Saraland's new phonics curriculum. Saraland City school teachers described how much they learn from IRs, in fact, teachers who do not attend IRs learn from others who participated. Learning from each other is a key practice at Saraland City school district. Teachers also described how beneficial it was to network with other teachers.

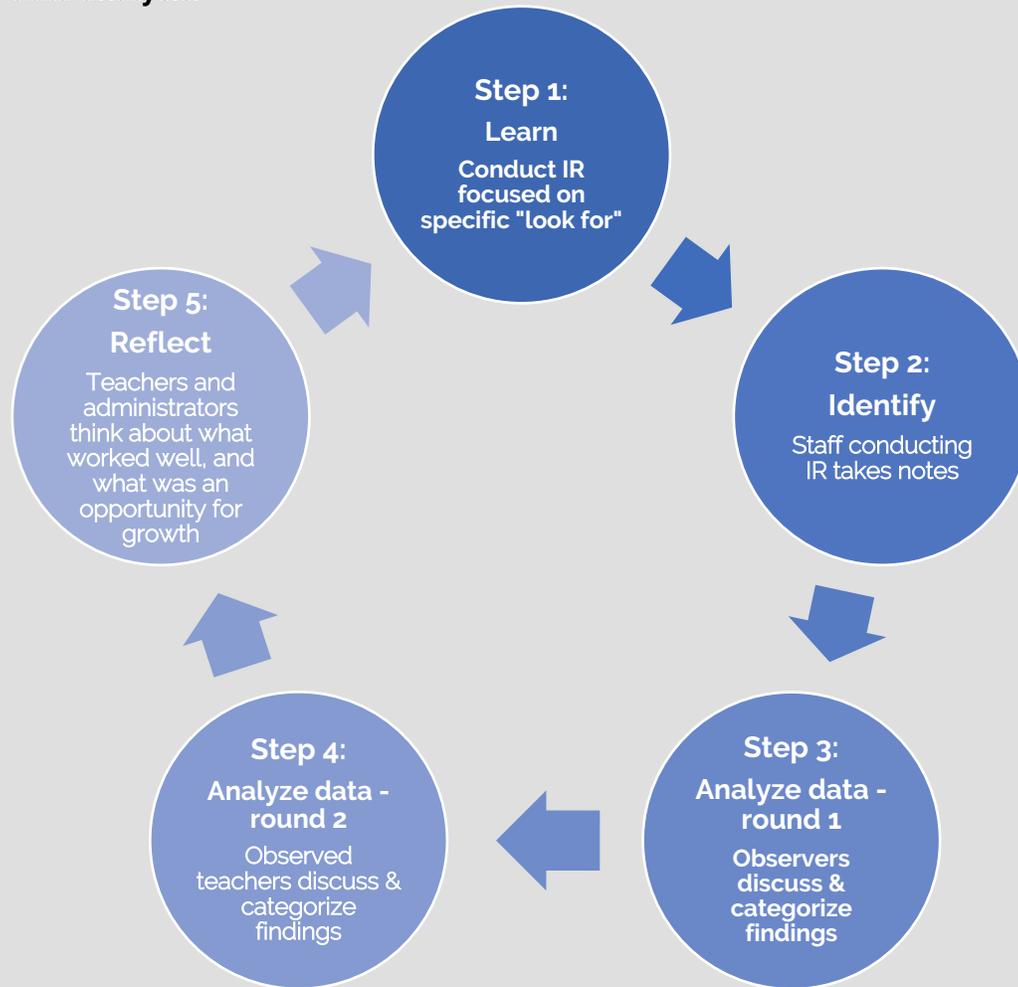


Highlighted Promising Practice: Instructional Rounds and Data Analysis Workshop

Instructional Rounds (IR) and data analysis workshop overview. Saraland City school district staff follow a thorough, informative and important IR process (see Figure 3). During our observations and in conversations with teachers, staff described the ways Instructional Rounds were held at the schools.

Several times a year, teachers participate in internal IRs at their schools and Instructional Partners host learning walks (similar to but less formal than IR process) for other Instructional Partners in the district. Each one has its own "look for," or a specific practice the school is focused on implementing. During an IR, teachers visit three to five classes for about 5 to 10 minutes each, taking notes on the contexts in which they observed the "look for." After completing the IRs, teachers then met to analyze the data in two rounds. In the first round, the teachers who conducted the observations debrief about what they observed and discuss the data. In the second round, the teachers who were observed debrief about the process and discuss the data. This process is thorough and inclusive, taking a full school day with each teacher committing a half day of their time.

Figure 3. Saraland City school district staff use a deliberate method for implementing IRs and data analysis.



The meetings. As detailed in Figure 3, following the observations, staff who conducted the observations gathered to analyze and summarize the practices they observed. Once teachers completed their observations, they transcribed their notes onto colored post-its (one color per class). Teachers divided into groups to discuss what they saw, categorize their notes into themes, and post these notes together onto a large poster. Throughout the process, teachers were instructed by the Instructional Partner to group 'like things' into categories and name each category. After the post-it notes were grouped and categories were named, teachers engaged in a gallery walk, moving from poster to poster to read what the other groups synthesized. During their gallery walk, teachers re-categorized the post-it notes until all themes and posters were processed. Posters with one or few post-it notes were re-examined to determine if the observations were miscategorized.

Figure 4. Using ABPC guidelines, Saraland City school district staff set a clear agenda to analyze and reflect on data gathered during the Instructional Rounds.

Instructional Round #1
Tuesday, October 8, 2019
Schedule

8:30 – 9:15	Welcome Training/Whole Group Focus
9:15 – 10:15	Classroom Visits
10:15 – 10:30	Break
10:30 – 10:45	Individual Review of Notes, Identifying Descriptive Evidence
10:45 – 12:15	Affinity Mapping, Paired Team Work, Patterns of Practice, and Commitment Forms
12:15 – 12:45	Lunch
12:45 – 1:00	Switch
1:00 – 2:00	Share with faculty/classes observed, Patterns of Practice, and Commitment Forms
2:00 – 3:00	Teachers Planning (Subs can leave at 3:00.)

Time	9:15 – 9:30	9:30 – 9:45	9:45 – 10:00	10:00 – 10:15
Team 1 Crane Day Reding Wyatt Lomax	Green Room: G6 Subject: Reading	Prater Room: G4 Subject: Reading	Wallace Room: R12 Subject: Reading	Pinkney Room: G7 Subject: Reading
Team 2 Campbell Cox Travis K. West Nolfe	Smith Room: R9 Subject: Reading	Rhoads Room: B5 Subject: Reading	Scoggins Room: R4 Subject: Reading	C. West Room: B2 Subject: Reading
Team 3 Cost Peacock Hudson Patterson K. Williams	Garner Room: R8 Subject: Reading	Wilson Room: B5 Subject: Math	R. Williams Room: G3 Subject: Reading	

Figure 5. Participating Saraland City school district staff use color-coded post-it notes and poster paper to categorize observations.



After categories were agreed upon, teachers examined all the posters together, tallying the 'trends' (e.g., when a specific category appeared in 75% or more observed classes) and 'contrast' (e.g., when the category appeared in 25% or fewer observed classes). As a large group, teachers discussed why the contrasts were observed in few classes. One teacher offered, "Maybe it's there, but we just were not in class when it happened?"

Figure 6. Participating Saraland City school district staff engage in a gallery walk to learn what colleagues observed and recategorize any misaligned notes.



Next, teachers discussed the trend patterns and the quality of the 'look fors.' For example, teachers discussed the difference between two observed categories: 'teaching the targets' and 'having the target posted.' One teacher asked, "Is it enough to just have [targets] posted?" Teachers discussed the significance of this and what constituted a quality learning target. Teachers finished their meeting by reflecting on what they learned (see Figure 3).

Next, the teachers who were observed were invited into the meeting space to hold their post-observation discussion. To start their meeting, those teachers who were observed conducted a gallery walk of the posters created in the morning session. They then engaged in a similar process using the existing post-it notes and recategorizing themes when necessary. During this part of the meeting, the Instructional Partner, principal and lead teacher joined different groups to facilitate the conversation. Group participants processed the information from the morning session, identifying their own patterns and contrasts in the evidence. For example, some groups reframed the information, other groups recategorized post-it notes, and some groups processed the observations and speculated on what they could do better or how they might learn from each other.

 **Key takeaways.** The data analysis process followed by Saraland City school district is an example of a high-quality data analysis procedure that provides a safe learning environment for all teachers regardless of role (e.g., those teachers conducting observations of classes and those teachers being observed). During this process, teachers focused on what is being done right, highlighting these as best practices so that teachers did not fixate on negative behaviors. In doing so, teachers feel comfortable asking each other for help when they need to improve upon a skill or develop new practices. In our observation, we noticed how teachers moved from cursory discussions of what they saw in their observations to deep discussions on ways to improve teaching. At the center of these discussions was a focus on what students were learning in the observed 'look for.'



Using Data to Improve Student Engagement

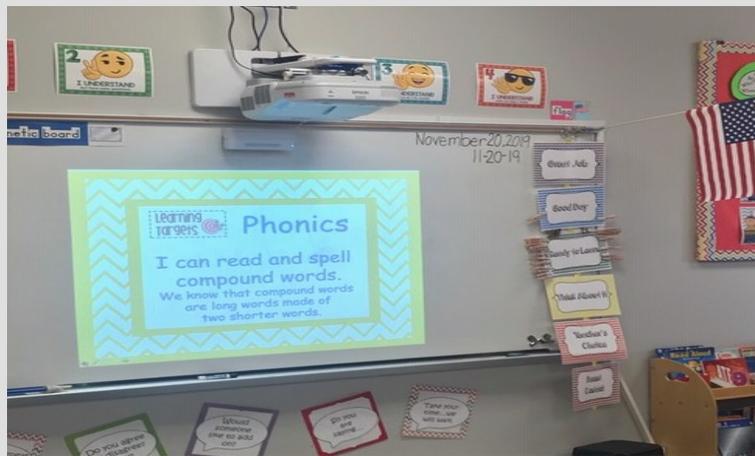
Another best practice Saraland City school district staff engaged in with the help of ABPC was to improve student engagement in the classroom. Since participating in ABPC Networks, Saraland City school district staff have been intensively studying ways to improve student engagement. Observations and interviews documented widespread use of the following practices:

 **Questioning and discussion practices** that help teachers formatively assess student knowledge and encourage student engagement with the material.

 **Learning targets** that communicate the purpose of the lesson written in a language that is student friendly and also includes content specific vocabulary (Figure 7).

 **Student self-assessments** of their own learning. During focus groups with Saraland City school district staff, they described how they made a concerted effort this academic year to embed students' self-assessment into classrooms. Importantly, we observed several instances of students' self-assessments in teachers' classrooms.

Figure 7. Students can easily see the learning targets and self-assess their progress



"Right now, every teacher has learning targets and we do peer observations and we are asking the kids to be sure it's schoolwide [and to] be in charge of their own learning. They are supposed to know it. We see what we think is the most important and then we focus on that. And some are very detailed and some are broad. The expectation is right now just that we have one [learning target] that includes all students in the class."

~ Saraland City school district teacher describing learning targets

Notably, Saraland City school district administrators were observed modeling these practices in meetings and group settings with teachers. For example, the evaluation team observed administrators using these skills during collaborative meetings wherein teachers were provided with an agenda clearly stating the purpose of the meeting and any targeted outcomes. Similar to observations conducted in other ABPC districts, when staff disagreed on how to approach a problem or questioned the meaning of student data, staff often asked, "What's best for students?" Asking this question brought staff back together to collaborate and problem solve as a group focused on their primary outcome.

Additionally, teachers and administrators often discussed data during their meetings. In these meetings, staff analyzed and disaggregated data, determining which strategies and resources achieved the biggest gains. Again, similar to observations in other ABPC districts, when administrators modeled desired behaviors, it signaled the importance of that behavior, further embedding best practices into daily activities. Additionally, administrators modeled the importance of creating an environment where staff and students alike felt comfortable asking questions and discussing information, particularly as it related to students' learning goals.

During our classroom observations, we saw evidence of teachers encouraging their students to use the questioning practices when students were asked to explain their thinking or a concept they were working on to other students. We also observed teachers using 'think time' which gave students time to formulate answers and the opportunity to 'phone a friend' if they needed additional information to answer the question. During the Instructional Rounds, students were frequently asked to explain what their learning target was, and to self-assess where they thought they were with regard to attaining the learning target.

To assess where their students were on their learning targets, teachers used a four-level scale where a 1 indicated that a student still needed help with the target, and a 4 indicated the student was able to complete the target, and could teach/explain it to a friend. Teachers frequently asked students to self-assess their learning using a variety of reporting methods (e.g., a show of fingers where they were on the scale, marking the number on a page, or reporting out to their groups). Teachers informally monitored student progress during class time to assess when they could move on to more complex material and bring the data from their assessments to teacher planning meetings. During a teacher planning meeting we attended, teachers used the data collected from students' self-assessments to gauge whole class progression towards a specific learning target. Central to this activity was the question: "How do we get from students practicing the target and self-assessing their learning to explaining the target to a friend?"

In addition to these more formative assessments, Saraland students also maintained data binders using them to conduct student-led teacher and parent conferences where they showed evidence of progress toward both formative and summative goals (Figure 8). In this way, students truly were in charge of their own learning.

Figure 8. Students used binders to engage and monitor their growth in specific learning targets.

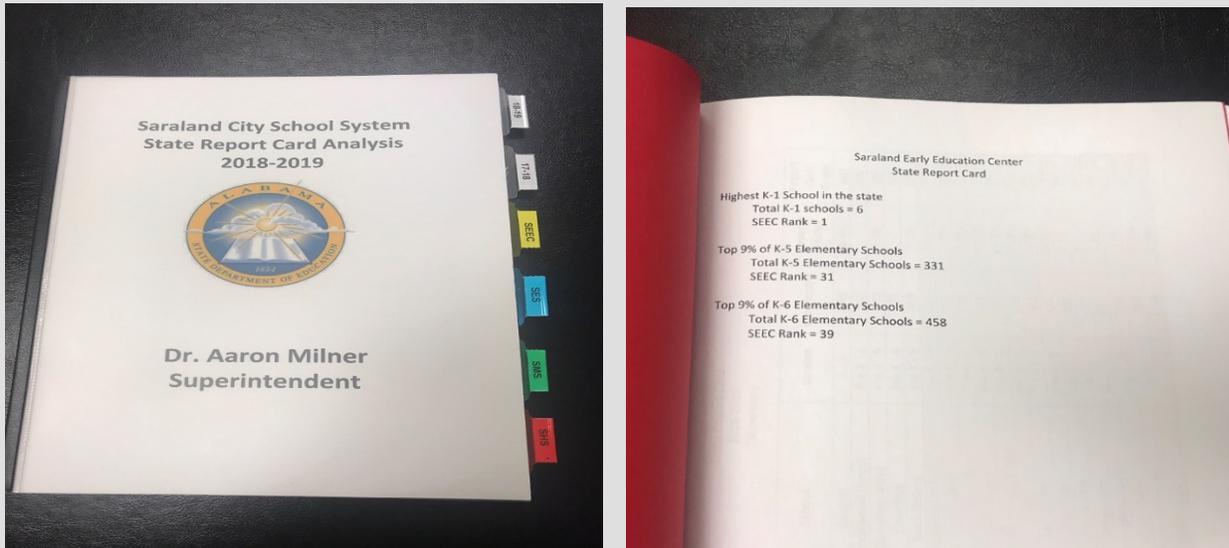


Saraland City School District Annual Administrative Retreat

The Saraland Annual Administrative Retreat began as a way to provide professional learning about the benefits of the ABPC Network best practices and what implementing those practices could do in terms of student learning and achievement. They have an annual multi-day administration retreat where they look at data, collaborate through team building exercises, provide professional development from experts, and plan for how to get better next year.

The Superintendent invited district administration first and then principals were included to improve buy in. The retreat affords several continuing benefits. First, the Superintendent tailors the approach to the participant's needs for information and brings targeted data from both Saraland City school district and other comparable districts. Additionally, the Superintendent has invited speakers from other Alabama districts who are not only knowledgeable about the ABPC approach and its benefits, but also 'in the trenches' like the principals and administrators attending the retreat. Each year, school district staff examine their student data and compare it to other similar districts to determine how well their best practices are working. This comparison is important to the Saraland City school district staff. They are competitive in the best meaning of the word- "We are focused on being the best district in Alabama- that's the win for us and a big win for our students" says the superintendent. Saraland staff appreciate this approach. One administrator said, "He knows his people and how to motivate them. It wouldn't work for everybody, but for us, it lit a fire!"

Figure 9. During the annual retreat, staff are provided data tailored to their specific school and student needs.



Individual schools within the Saraland City school district host regular book studies to learn and plan for implementation and to extend their knowledge addressing issues unique to their campus contexts or school levels. These book studies are particularly important because not all staff can attend ABPC Network gatherings and directly learn about the best practices they will implement. Used as turn-around training material, ABPC book studies drive professional development sessions, providing a district-wide shared vocabulary and vision of effective teaching.

In our observation of a book study meeting at Saraland High School, staff were studying *Differentiated Instructional Strategies for the Block Schedule*. Using the book as a guide, teachers discussed how to make time-adjustable assignments for students (e.g., time adjustable so that teachers can determine which part of the assignment to give during the time in the block).

During the book study, teachers discussed: *"What would we see if we applied this? And if the [students] did it, what would we see next?"*

~ Saraland City school district teacher

To create a collaborative learning environment in the book study, teachers were grouped into pairs, read specific sections of the book and then presented a summary of those sections to the rest of the group. The high school book study had about 20 participants including the Instructional Partner and the principal. After presenting, teachers discussed the book, sharing what they learned and how they could apply it in their own schools or classroom. In addition to

"The admin is different. They really have my back and are supportive."

~ Saraland City school district teacher

reading *Differentiated Instructional Strategies for the Block Schedule*, staff also studied *Leaders of their own Learning*. Staff appreciated reading this book as it was “where we learned about vertical alignment and how to implement Learning Targets.” These two books were critical to effective ABPC program implementation.

Figure 10. Book studies have a clear agenda designed to engage staff in learning material critical to effective ABPC implementation strategies.

Saraland High School Book Study #1 (October - November 2019)

Book Title: *Differentiated Instructional Strategies for the Block Schedule* by Gayle H. Gregory & Lynne E. Herndon

As part of a grant from The University of South Alabama, Saraland High School will conduct a book study in the fall semester, allowing participating teachers to complete professional development while earning continuing education units. PD sessions have been entered in Power School with tentative dates. When sign-in sheets are submitted from SHS, SARIC will issue the PD credit. SARIC will enter one CEU for each meeting. One additional CEU will be given to teachers who attend the faculty meeting(s) where a summary of content will be discussed. Teachers will present their assigned section during weekly meetings. Meetings will occur twice a week during the book study window. Presentations may take 30 minutes or so, depending on the length and density of the material. Be prepared to share key ideas and take-aways at a later faculty meeting.

Print in attendance @ BS - always?

<p style="text-align: center;">***1st Block Planning*** (Croley)</p> <p>Teachers: Skidmore, Munday, McDuffie, Z. Steele</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tues 10/29 - Chapter 2 (pages 7-27) Tues 11/12 - Chapter 6 (pages 115-162) <p>Teachers: Holmes, J. Steele, Beasley, Edwards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mon 11/4 - Chapter 3 (pages 28-52) Thur 11/14 - Chapter 7 (pages 163-201) <p>Teachers: Moyer, Smith, Malone, McKinley</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tues 11/5 - Chapter 4 (pages 53-77) Wed 11/20 - Chapter 8 (pages 202-241) <p>Teachers: Crane, T. Williams, Cozad, Grogan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thur 11/7 - Chapter 5 (pages 78-114) Thur 11/21 - Chapter 10 (pages 264-279) 	<p style="text-align: center;">***2nd Block Planning*** (McCollum)</p> <p>Teachers: Hall, Spradlin</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tues 10/29 - Chapter 2 (pages 7-27) Tues 11/12 - Chapter 6 (pages 115-162) <p>Teachers: Lange, Willard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mon 11/4 - Chapter 3 (pages 28-52) Thur 11/14 - Chapter 7 (pages 163-201) <p>Teachers: Carmichael, McNellage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tues 11/5 - Chapter 4 (pages 53-77) Wed 11/20 - Chapter 8 (pages 202-241) <p>Teachers: Braun, Prater</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thur 11/7 - Chapter 5 (pages 78-114) Thur 11/21 - Chapter 10 (pages 264-279)
<p style="text-align: center;">***3rd Block Planning*** (Spondike)</p> <p>Teachers: Ingram, Randle, J. Williams</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tues 10/29 - Chapter 2 (pages 7-27) Tues 11/12 - Chapter 6 (pages 115-162) <p>Teachers: Whitlock, Edge, Driver</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mon 11/4 - Chapter 3 (pages 28-52) Thur 11/14 - Chapter 7 (pages 163-201) <p>Teachers: Dedrick, Wilkerson, Mason</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tues 11/5 - Chapter 4 (pages 53-77) Wed 11/20 - Chapter 8 (pages 202-241) <p>Teachers: Corley, Cunningham, Mahone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thur 11/7 - Chapter 5 (pages 78-114) Thur 11/21 - Chapter 10 (pages 264-279) 	<p style="text-align: center;">***4th Block Planning*** (Ward)</p> <p>Teachers: Dearmon, R. Williams, Mitchell</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tues 10/29 - Chapter 2 (pages 7-27) Tues 11/12 - Chapter 6 (pages 115-162) <p>Teachers: West, Williamson, Henry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mon 11/4 - Chapter 3 (pages 28-52) Thur 11/14 - Chapter 7 (pages 163-201) <p>Teachers: Easley, Little, Vickrey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tues 11/5 - Chapter 4 (pages 53-77) Wed 11/20 - Chapter 8 (pages 202-241) <p>Teachers: Byrd, McDowell, Scott</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thur 11/7 - Chapter 5 (pages 78-114) Thur 11/21 - Chapter 10 (pages 264-279)

Revised 10/28/19



Scheduled Collaborative Planning Time

Incorporating consistent collaborative planning time for teachers was another strategy that has positively influenced effective ABPC implementation for Saraland City school district. Saraland City School district’s campuses have varied, but regular collaborative planning times for elementary and middle school teachers. To ensure staff have time in their schedule to plan together, all elementary principals and one middle school principal have allocated funds such that each teacher can have a substitute teacher for five hours per month.

Although the agenda and configurations of collaborative meetings vary, they typically cycle through the following meeting types: data analysis, grade level breakouts, and Response to Intervention (RTI). It is important to note that the cycle and frequency of these meetings is determined by each individual school. One elementary teacher described their meeting schedule this way, "We have data meetings once a month, and RTI meetings once a month, and then monthly grade level meetings. It sounds kind of confusing, but I put it all in my planner. [We carve it out by using] 30 minutes of PE time, and one hour of daily music or art, so it has to change times [to accommodate that]."

At the middle school level, teachers participated in daily planning meetings based on content area with grade level meetings occurring bi-weekly after school. Teachers appreciated the support that the middle school principals provided to make daily planning possible. One stated, "[The principals] promote learning from peers and having an open door. We work together to help each other now. We are much more in touch with each other and collaborate more. We borrow and share ideas and materials."

"There is lots of communication between teachers, and [we] share supplies."
~ Saraland City school district teacher

Teachers stated that these meetings have helped them share responsibility for all of their students. Additionally, teachers used Microsoft Teams to create a collaborative space to share materials and collaborate on creating content such as test questions, strategies and activities. Across levels, teachers emphasized the collegial atmosphere of these meetings, stating that it helped them to "not self-criticize" and "notice what we [are doing that is] good."

Networking

In conversations with Saraland City school district's administrators, staff and teachers, all mentioned networking – both within their schools and district, and with other participating districts - as one of the major benefits of working with ABPC. Staff engaged in networking activities during ABPC Network meetings, on their respective campuses following ABPC meetings to share resources, and between ABPC participating districts during the year. Sometimes the networking was formal, as when a principal or the superintendent might reach out to a colleague from another ABPC district to see a particular practice in action during IR. At other times, networking was less formal.

"I loved my last school ...but it was not a family. That's the big difference, we really help each other."
~ Saraland City school district teacher

In our conversations with teachers, they described using each other as a sounding board when creating new classroom content. Again, because being the best is part of Saraland's culture, staff felt comfortable seeking out those teachers and districts engaging in a practice in a more effective way to learn best strategies from them.

"Our motto is, "Expect More. Achieve More." We want to offer the best for our students. Learning from and sharing information with other districts is the secret to Spartan success."

– Saraland City school district administrator

To help identify areas of growth, Saraland City school district staff have quarterly meetings with the superintendent and the principals and Instructional Partners, and they look at their data. One administrator described it this way, "If we notice that [another district] is better [at a particular practice] we call them up and go visit to learn how they do it. There's no shame in our game." Importantly, this sharing goes both ways. Staff from Saraland City school district frequently discussed the importance of not only receiving information from other teachers and administrators, but also sharing resources and best practices with others.

Opportunities for Growth

During our conversations with various staff from Saraland City schools, they spoke candidly about their areas for improvement. These opportunities for growth included:

Add common planning times at the high school level

Currently there are no regular common planning times for high school teachers. Teacher teams are able to plan during their common lunch period, but they have not yet been able to coordinate a separate time for content area or grade level teachers to meet and plan for instruction. Additionally, teachers described the added difficulty in arranging a planning time for those teachers who also have coaching responsibilities. Unfortunately, it is not possible for these teachers to attend teacher planning meetings during their season. When professional learning occurs during a coach's season, the onus is on them to learn and practice the skills and knowledge the rest of their staff engage in throughout the year.



Adequate pacing of implementation

Another challenge that emerged during our conversations with staff was how to monitor the pacing of implementation to ensure teachers are not overwhelmed and stay engaged. To determine the pace with which to implement a new skill, Saraland City school district staff spend considerable time on each skill (two years for Learning Targets) and they build on several iterations of formative work that they study and learn from before they introduce a skill districtwide. Still, pacing is a huge undertaking. Said one administrator, "It doesn't matter how good that material is if you overload [the teachers]."

Summary

Staff from Saraland City school district are well on their way to providing a high-quality educational experience and learning environment for everyone in the district. This culture started from the top with administrators effectively modeling desired behaviors with all staff in an effort to increase teacher buy-in. Effective program implementation also resulted from the superintendent using the competitive spirit that was part of Saraland's culture as a conduit for positive change. Everyone in Saraland want to provide the best possible education for the students. Because of this, staff felt comfortable seeking out best practices from others as a means of improving their own teaching to ensure their school was the best it could be. As with the other ABPC districts we observed, staff from Saraland City school district are focused on student success and are committed to a long-term sustainable system wide change necessary to successfully implement the best practices espoused by ABPC.