

Instructional *Leader* Instructional *Leader*

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Sharing
BEST
Practices

al *Leader*
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Arkansas Association
of Educational Administrators



Instructional *Leader*



Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.

In the



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WHAT IS THE Instructional *Leader* ?

- Quarterly publication of the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators (AAEA)
- Designed for lead administrators to share successful practices
- Published to raise the level of awareness and support for Association members and educators on issues affecting education in Arkansas
- Contains state and national information pertaining to curriculum, instruction, assessment, and accountability issues
- Articles are contributed by state instructional leaders (superintendents, principals, central office administrators, graduate students pursuing administrative degrees, and lead teachers)
- May also contain summaries of state and national articles of interest and current research information



Capturing Kids' Hearts

Ryan M. Jones, Ed.S., Bryant School District

Based on academic performance, Bryant is among the best in the state at challenging and educating our students. As a school counselor, I know learning success results when we engage students' minds; lifelong personal success comes when we also capture their hearts.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) goes hand-in-hand with our district mission, Creating Opportunities for Academic and Personal Success. We believe strengthening social and emotional skills will lead to personal success. Over the summer, administrators, faculty, and staff members were trained in the processes presented through *Capturing Kids' Hearts*, a coordinating framework for implementing our SEL program.

Capturing Kids' Hearts (CKH) isn't simply a boxed program that comes equipped with prefabricated lesson plans and tools for teaching. Rather, it's a paradigm shift in which maximum levels of

engagement, personal interactions, teacher effectiveness, and student outcomes can be achieved.

District personnel are learning to interact with students and each other in ways to promote positive behavior. With increased positive student/teacher and teacher/teacher connections, both students and teachers become more engaged in the learning experience. Increased engagement promotes improved achievement academically, personally, and professionally. When students and teachers are connected, there is a significant, positive transformational effect on school performance such as decreased discipline referrals, increased student achievement, increased attendance rates, increased graduation rates, and increased teacher satisfaction. The Bryant School District has adopted these processes to remain in front of changes occurring in our society and culture. The implementation will strengthen relationships and improve safe learning environments.



The Capturing Kids' Hearts process has the capacity to create an atmospheric change, not just within Bryant Schools, but also in the surrounding community. It's not the design of the program that will determine its effectiveness, but how it is implemented in the classroom. The CKH practice will have short and long term impacts on students, leading up to and following graduation.

The way public schools educate young people is changing; districts are looking toward new and innovative ways to keep students connected and engaged. CKH processes encourage teachers to interact with students and other faculty members on a more personal and grounded level. Bryant Schools

has some of the very best teachers in the state. What makes them the very best is their interest in the students and their willingness to embrace innovation. This commitment will ensure and expand teachers' continued effectiveness.

With the district-wide adoption of Capturing Kids' Hearts grades K-12, Bryant Public Schools will undoubtedly be able to provide a more wholesome educational experience for its students but, more importantly, the district will be at the forefront of reaching students in ways that promote continuous student growth throughout their academic careers and beyond.



STEM Starters+

Aaron Randolph, Cabot School District



As you progress along your career in public school administration, you learn that there are certain individuals or organizations that always deserve an audience. For example, if you get a call from Governor Hutchinson's office, you are going to take that call regardless of the situation you might be in. A little over three years ago, I received a call from an individual who, although she is not as politically powerful as our honorable governor, still demands the respect of those in education. Dr. Ann Robinson is the Director of the Jodie Mahony Center for Gifted Education at UA Little Rock and is an international renowned expert in her field. Dr. Robinson and the Jodie Mahony Center have played a huge part in the development of gifted education in our state and also been an asset to me in my career; therefore, when she calls, you answer.

Dr. Robinson was calling to ask if Cabot would be interested in taking part in the STEM Starters+ Grant Initiative. This program is "a research and demonstration project funded through the Jacob K. Javits Gifted Students Program (U.S. Department of Education) and designed by researchers at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, provided engineering curricula in four Arkansas school districts in schools serving high proportions of culturally diverse and low-income children" (Robinson et al, 2016).

The STEM Starters+ program goals aligned with its objectives are to:

- Scale up the STEM Starters model (STEM Starters+) to include an additional grade level (Grade 1) in additional schools serving high proportions of underrepresented students.
- Increase nomination, identification, and participation of underrepresented students in gifted and talented programs and services.
- Increase teacher content knowledge, skill, and efficacy in teaching science and engineering design as defined by the Next Generation Science Standards.
- Increase student learning gains and engagement in science content, process skills, and engineering design.
- Enhance STEM Starters curriculum materials and their delivery through technology.
- Conduct research on short-term and longitudinal student and educator gains.

Cabot Public School District is one of four districts in our state to partner with UA Little Rock on this program. The other districts are Little Rock, Pulaski County Special, and El Dorado. Through our district's participation, teachers of 1st grade students along with G/T Specialists at Westside Elementary, Southside Elementary, Magness Creek Elementary, and Cabot Middle School South received training in implementing the Engineering is Elementary (EiE) curriculum units. In addition, they received STEM Starter+ units, which include a biography of an engineer, inventor, or scientist whose ideas are linked to the EiE units. Teachers are provided with a guide, *Blueprints for Biography*, which includes discussion questions, enrichment activities, and a classic science experiment or engineering design challenge.

Mrs. Kristy Kidd and Dr. Christine Deitz, along with other staff from the Mahony Center, have hosted a number of trainings for our teachers. Mrs. Kidd has also come to our district and provided multiple half-day and full-day workshops for our staff. In addition to trainings, the UA Little Rock staff measured the knowledge of and comfort level with various content areas of our students and staff by pre- and post-assessments.

These units were developed by the Museum of Science in Boston, MA, and take a cross disciplinary and hands-on approach to presenting students with the engineering design process. The level of engagement from our students, while using these units has been remarkable. Due to the success we've had implementing this curricula into our five targeted schools, our G/T program will be implementing one EiE unit per grade level for the 2018-2019 school year. Some of the curriculum units include:

- The "Attraction is Obvious" unit, which deals with magnetism and culminates with the construction of a MagLev train.
- The "To Get to the Other Side" unit, which includes the construction of and testing of an actual bridge in class.
- The "Go Fish" unit, which presents scenarios to students involving prosthetic limbs for humans and animals. Students will complete this unit by designing a prosthetic tail for a fish.

From an administrative side, I should add that the EiE Units and supplies are much cheaper and easier to use in the classroom environment than some others which we've tried.



We've also had a lot of great feedback from our stakeholders on this program. Joyce Dalton, G/T Specialist at Southside Elementary, said "STEM Starters+ is the whole package for my students! I love the structure and flow of the lessons. My students love the content and hands-on experiences. From discovering how real scientists look, to learning about what engineers do and don't do, to meeting a real engineer, I see my students making progress in so many ways. They come to think of themselves as engineers, because they are thinking like engineers. I see excitement as they build the projects and test them, and I see impressive science scores on the state test."

When Lindsey Smith, first grade teacher at Magness Creek Elementary, observed her students taking part in a unit on acoustics in nature, she felt they "were truly engaged and had great conversations with each other and as a class." She went on to say that her students "truly grasped the concepts and were able to apply their learning to new contexts." One first grade teacher at Westside Elementary, Taylor Pettie, expressed that she was "amazed" by everything the students learned with the curriculum unit. She told me, "the lessons were very engaging, but it was more than that. The level of questioning was amazing."

We are very grateful as a district that we've had the opportunity to take part in this program. Furthermore, our G/T Specialists are extremely excited to put our new units into action this year. I would encourage anyone who wants to learn more about the curriculum to visit the Engineering is Elementary website at <http://www.eie.org>. If any school or district leaders are interested in learning more about the Blueprints in Biography curricula or the services and trainings offered through the Jodie Mahony Center, you can reach them by phone at 501-569-3410 or online at <http://www.ualr.edu/gifted>. Dr. Robinson and her staff are currently planning on hosting a dissemination conference this school year, at which interested schools and districts can learn more about the program and get guidance for replicating it in their own schools. Information relating to that will be released as soon as it is finalized. You can also see the STEM Starters+ program in action and hear Arkansas administrators and teachers talk about it in a short National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) film, at <https://youtu.be/cLMrbHsRkC4>.



MUTT-I-GREES

An Authentic and Engaging Curriculum for Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Deb Swink, Clinton School District



The Clinton School District piloted the Mutt-i-grees Curriculum for social emotional learning (SEL) during the 2009-2010 school year. The pilot was extremely successful resulting in the district adopting the curriculum for Pre- K- Grade 12 for SEL instruction. The district has consistently been using Mutt-i-grees for the past eight years. The Mutt-i-grees Curriculum promotes calm, confident, and caring kids through the use of humane education. Guided by the research on resiliency, social and emotional learning, and human-animal interaction, the Mutt-i-grees Curriculum includes lesson plans and strategies to actively engage

students and promote social and emotional competence, academic achievement, and awareness of the needs of shelter pets, also known as Mutt-i-grees. The Mutt-i-grees Curriculum aligns with all the Arkansas Early Learning Standards for Social Emotional Learning. (SE1, SE2, and SE3) and has recently been recognized in a Harvard University research study, *Navigating SEL from the Inside Out: Looking Inside & Across 25 Leading SEL Programs* as one of the 25 most impactful programs to teach social and emotional skills. [file:///localhost/\(https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-](https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/navigating-social-and-emotional-learning-from-the-inside-out.aspx)

[center/pages/navigating-social-and-emotional-learning-from-the-inside-out.aspx](https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/navigating-social-and-emotional-learning-from-the-inside-out.aspx))

The Mutt-i-grees Curriculum has also been recognized by *hundreED 2017 Global Education Innovations* as a revolutionary education program that needs to be shared with the world. It was selected from almost 1,000 international entrants for its unique groundbreaking efforts to enhance the social and emotional competence of children. International researchers and educators rigorously evaluated programs for their originality, impact, and ability to be expanded to a global scale to teach children in many different cultures. <https://hundred.org/en/about>

In a series of easily implemented lessons organized around five themes which reflect key principles of social and emotional learning and resiliency, students learn critical skills that support self and social awareness, problem solving abilities, and teamwork. Lessons have a dual focus on children and animals; each lesson plan includes objectives and activities that feature principles in child development and humane education.





The Curriculum is based on the Resiliency Model. The research on resiliency has shown the importance of providing families with support services as well as increasing families' skills to enable them to cope during times of stress. Children, too, need to be equipped with effective skills, strategies, and resources to deal with stressors or challenges they may encounter. One aspect of resiliency is the ability to recognize when we need help and where and how to succeed in obtaining help. Mutt-i-grees fosters resiliency by helping children identify their strengths, skills, and talents, as well as areas they need to improve and where they may need help. Children learn how and when to seek help, strategies for self-talk, and ways to encourage themselves and challenge self-doubt and criticism.

Emotional Intelligence and Social Emotional Learning is at the core of the Mutt-i-grees Curriculum. Emotional Intelligence refers to the ability to identify and manage emotions and understand how the way we feel can affect not only our own, but others' actions. Social-emotional competence requires self and social awareness and enables children and adults to engage in positive relationships, make ethical and responsible decisions, and avoid high-risk and negative choices and behaviors. Children who experience nurturing relationships are more likely to develop compassion and confidence. Throughout the Curriculum, strategies and activities help teachers and parents engage children and model and encourage empathetic behavior.

Clinton Elementary Receives Reading Grant to Prevent Summer Slide

Each year, many children — particularly those from low-income backgrounds — lose as much as three months of reading skills during the summer. Known as the “summer slide,” this learning loss is cumulative and can leave some children up to three years behind their peers by the end of fifth grade. The [Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading](#) joined forces with the [Arkansas Community Foundation](#) to provide grants to high quality applicants for the **Summer Learning Initiative**, which supported innovative summer learning programs to increase reading proficiency.





The Clinton Elementary School, a longtime Mutt-i-grees campus, was the recipient of one of these highly competitive grants. The grant, written by Glenda Stagg, Federal Program Coordinator for the Clinton School District, focused on a new summer program, *Paws for Reading*, which integrated social-emotional learning components of the Mutt-i-grees Curriculum with intensive reading instruction. The program emphasized literature about shelter pets and gave students an opportunity to read to a visiting dog that participated in the program on a daily basis. There were also events focusing on parents and the community, highlighting the benefits of the program and bringing awareness to shelter animals. Preliminary analysis of reading scores through DIBELS indicates that students gained in reading proficiency.

Mutt-i-grees® At Home

The newest addition to the Mutt-i-grees materials is Mutt-i-grees® At Home: a resource for families who want their children to grow up to be caring and compassionate. It is part of the Mutt-i-grees initiative — a collaboration of North Shore Animal League America and Yale University's *School of the 21st Century* (Yale 21C).

The program builds on what children are already learning in schools through the Mutt-i-grees Curriculum. It is unique in its focus on both the child and the adult in the family. That is, there are activities for parents to do with the child, and activities designed to help the parents. The reality is, social and emotional learning is not only for children, but for adults as well. The program acknowledges the time constraints many of us - especially parents -

face each day and includes activities to do during daily routines: bed time, at breakfast or dinner, in the car, or on the way to school.

Clinton Pre-K recently received an Innovation Grant from Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) to initiate the Mutt-i-grees Curriculum and Mutt-i-grees-at-Home in five Pre-K classrooms during the 2018-19 school year. The grant will assist Pre-K educators in their effort to increase family engagement in a positive and prosocial manner. The grant initiative began with a one-day training and make-and-take for Pre-K teachers and Para-educators during the week of staff development. Tails are wagging!

Would you like more information on the Mutt-i-grees Curriculum?

**Please contact Deb Swink at swinkd@clintonsd.org or visit the Mutt-i-grees website at: [https://
education.muttigrees.org/](https://education.muttigrees.org/)**



Year 1 Lessons

Keri Rathbun, Fort Smith School District

A little over a year ago, I began my first year as a high school principal. Almost immediately I went to work, meeting with the outgoing principal and trying to learn enough in a few short weeks to at least appear to know what I was doing. There wasn't much time to be nervous or scared, which was probably a good thing. Now a year later, I am reflecting on what I learned last year...the good and the bad.

Listen: I tried to do a lot of listening last year. This was not always easy for me because I tended to start listening and then immediately my mind started thinking about what I was going to respond or how I was supposed to solve their problem. What I learned from this is that, for the most part, when people would come to my office, whether it was an upset teacher or an angry parent, they really weren't looking for me to solve their problem; they just needed someone to listen to them.

Ask for help: I'm not sure anyone really likes to ask for help if we are honest with ourselves. Asking for help, however, was something that I learned early in the year that I needed to do. What I found out was that people want to help and want you to ask. I was fortunate enough to have a great team of teachers and administrators who had my back. I also had a great team of principals that I could reach out to for questions and guidance and sometimes to just be that shoulder to lean on when things got tough.

A lot of things you don't learn in college: One thing I like about being in education and working in schools is that every day is a new day. No two days are the same, which means that there will be many things that will happen throughout the school year that were not in a textbook or graduate class. I learned that you have to "stay calm and carry on." Everyone is looking at you to see how you will react and respond. Todd Whitaker says, "When the principal sneezes, the whole building catches a cold" is true.

Don't get stuck in your office: This one was hard for me to learn. Each time I would have great intentions to get in four classrooms before lunch, one phone call or one unexpected parent would alter my morning plans and sometimes my whole day. What I learned is that I must protect my time.

Give yourself time to rest: Take time for yourself. It's okay to close your door and just breathe. As administrators, we are typically the first ones in the building and the last ones to leave. Many of us do not take care of ourselves. It's hard to help others when you are run down and tired. Our teachers and students deserve to see us at our best.

Enjoy the moments: The year goes by so fast...you need to make sure that you find time to enjoy the moments. It's easy to get caught up in the day-to-day race, but, every once in a while, just stop and enjoy the moment. One of my favorite things to do is to go to the band room and sit in on a rehearsal. I'm not there to evaluate but just to enjoy the music and watch students excel at something they didn't even know they could do a few years ago. Being an administrator is a great job. I hope you take time to enjoy each moment. Have a great school year.





STEM GIRLS Paying it Forward

Lakeside Middle School

by Jamie Preston, LMS Principal

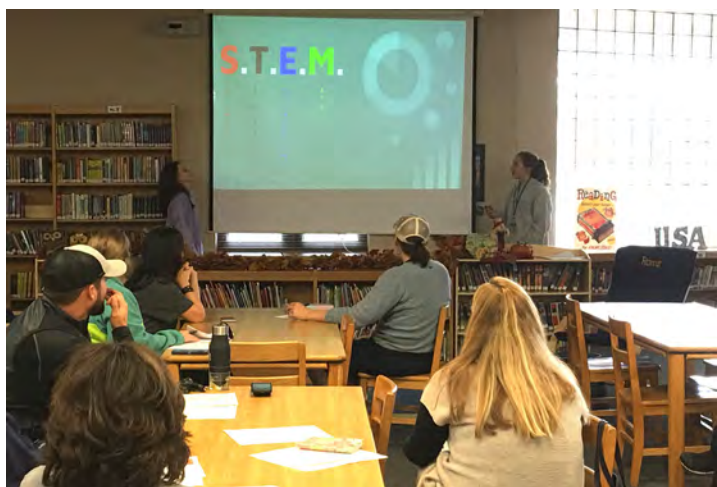


EAST® (Environmental and Spatial Technology, Inc.) is a project-based, service-learning oriented program that provides students with high-end technology available in the most progressive fields in the world. Lakeside Middle School just completed year two of EAST. One very impressive service-learning project that 7th graders, Riley Orr and Claire Graham, implemented was "STEM GIRLS."

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This project began with the girls researching the disparity between men and women in the workforce and the numbers of women involved in fields that are primarily science and math related. The girls' research showed that there are significantly fewer women in these fields and that women still make less money in these areas compared to men. Thus, Orr and Graham decided to begin educating young girls early about options in the fields of math, science and technology.



After sharing their research and then presenting their ideas to Mr. Hawkins (Principal at Lakeside Intermediate) and me (Principal at Lakeside Middle School), the girls sent out a survey to

female 4th grade students from our feeder school, Lakeside Intermediate, regarding interest in coming to an after-school program. Boy did they get a surprise! Twice the number of 4th graders that Orr and Graham had predicted expressed an interest and gained parental permission to come to the middle school on Tuesdays for "STEM GIRLS"! Because the numbers of interested students exceeded their original plan, Orr and Graham had to revise their plan to accommodate those students.

They decided to offer bi-monthly classes allowing twice as many 4th graders the opportunity to participate. The girls then contacted the transportation director and made arrangements for the 4th grade students to be bused to the middle school campus. Next, they began meeting with science and math teachers and studying previous lessons that they had enjoyed in their own classes. They took those lesson plans from various teachers and developed lessons that were applicable, interesting and engaging to 4th grade girls. There were four weeks of lessons with



approximately eleven 4th grade girls in each session. The lessons that Orr and Graham taught included Introduction to Technology (Hololens, Sphere, and Design Software), The Science Behind Slime, Boat Building (Learning how to build a boat with limited materials and then testing buoyancy and weight limits,) and Disease Study with a recap of using the technology learned about in the first lesson. These lessons incorporated much of the technology that is available in our EAST lab. Additionally, each lesson also had a team building component to it.

Each Tuesday afternoon, Orr and Graham would wait at the bus stop, walk the 4th graders to the EAST lab, teach them their lessons, and then wait with them until the younger girls' parents picked them up. Of course, our EAST facilitator, Mrs. Ellis, was involved with this project throughout the process.

In addition to the science and math content that the EAST students taught their "STEM GIRLS" in class on Tuesdays, relationships were formed between girls that are entering middle school and those that are leaving and heading to high school. In his book, Future Driven, David Geurin writes, "Your school's success is largely determined by the quality



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of relationships in your school.” Orr and Graham became positive mentors for the younger girls. They modeled strong academic skills while at the same time, being kind, well-mannered, young ladies for the younger girls to look to emulate. When reflecting on the project, Orr stated, “The project sharpened my skills and helped me become a better leader. I really liked just talking to the girls about EAST and future projects they wanted to achieve! Overall the project was one of the best semesters I’ve ever had.”

In previous years, 7th grade students have given Lakeside Middle School some type of parting gift as they leave our building. The “STEM GIRLS” project was a new idea on a gift that will leave a lasting legacy for at least three years as these younger girls grow and learn at Lakeside Middle School. Hopefully, the younger girls will seek ways to pay this endeavor forward. It is also very promising to anticipate what the future will hold for girls like Riley Orr and Claire Graham who are already passionate and willing to work through volunteer efforts in order to help make even more improvements for the next generation!



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Thank You!



Special thanks to the contributing writers who provided informative articles about their schools/districts!

It brings us joy to spread *instructional* news of *best practices* from our districts in Arkansas.

Thank you to all subscribing districts.

Let other administrators know about the successful practices in your school/district. Contact Miranda Gibson, AAEA Communications Specialist, at m.gibson@theaaea.org, to share your best practices.