



SPRINGDALE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

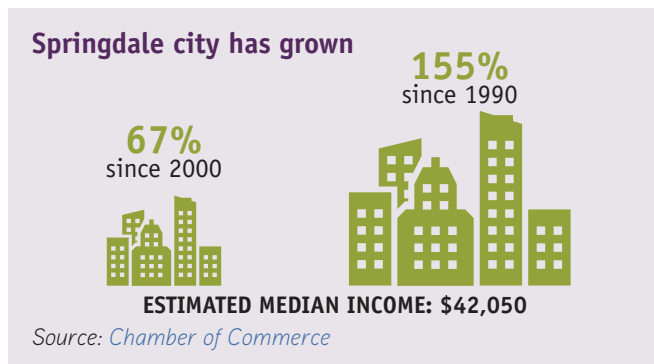
Teach Them All



Springdale Public Schools, a fast-growing rural school district in the northwest corner of Arkansas, offers a compelling case for how strong leadership and a willingness to change when faced with sweeping demographic changes can help all students thrive.

Springdale County has been a magnet for immigrants, drawn to jobs at Tyson Foods, Walmart and businesses related to those giants. Nearly half the 21,000 students in the school district are Latino, about a third are white, and about 10 percent are either from the Marshall Islands (located more than 6,000 miles away from Arkansas) or born to parents from the Marshall Islands. More than two-thirds are low income.

But Springdale didn't always look this way. When School Superintendent Jim Rollins assumed his post 33 years ago, the district was much smaller and virtually all white. Changing demographics reflect new global economic and migration trends, and the school district has embraced these changes with its motto of "teach them all."



Recognizing that the community's changing demographics required new approaches to teaching and learning, district leaders, educators and the school board embraced reforms like higher teacher pay, job-embedded professional learning communities for educators, personalized learning for students, content-rich English language learner (ELL) programs, technology to support learning and more.

These efforts appear to be paying off. Students in Springdale outperformed the state on the most recent public accountability report card. Graduation rates are rising, and more students are taking and passing college-prep classes. And Springdale outperformed the state averages on the tougher new Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments in grades 6–8 mathematics and Algebra 1.

Springdale Public Schools

Rural District
2014–15



DISTRICT PROFILE



30 SCHOOLS

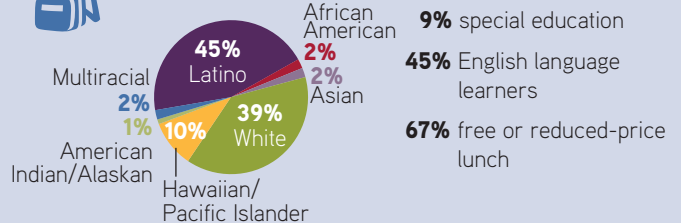
1 early childhood center 17 elementary
8 middle/junior high 4 high



1,630 TEACHERS 30 PRINCIPALS



21,000 STUDENTS



- Superintendent Jim Rollins has led the district for 33 years.
- Springdale has the highest teacher salaries in Arkansas.
- District won \$26 million Race to the Top-District award in 2013.

Sources: *State report card and Springdale Public Schools*



Personalizing learning

Springdale administrators say that meeting the needs of the district's diverse population requires a strong focus on personalized learning. With the help of a Race to the Top-District award, Springdale has established a 1:1 technology device-to-student ratio. It uses technology to monitor student performance, analyze related data and promote information sharing. The technology also is helping with instructional improvements, including promoting more student research, analysis and collaborative work.

In 2014, the district opened a School of Innovation devoted to personalized learning. It currently serves 386 8th and 9th graders. In the 2016–17 school year, enrollment is expected to exceed 600 and ultimately will expand to include all high school grades. The state waived its seat-time rules for the school, so students can move from one subject to the next when they demonstrate mastery instead of sitting for an entire year in a course required for high school graduation. The district is partnering with the higher education community so that students accelerating through the required subjects will be able to take college courses and possibly earn an associate degree in addition to a high school diploma by the end of their senior year. To allow for even greater flexibility, the district is seeking approval to operate the school as a public charter.

Even in the early grades in Springdale, students play an active role in personalizing their education. Students in grades 3–7, for example, typically lead parent-teacher conferences, discussing their personal learning goals while teachers serve as facilitators. Parents who want more traditional parent-teacher conferences can ask for that as well, but the district promotes the student-led conferences as a way to get children to take ownership of their learning, set and achieve goals, and practice their speaking and presentation skills.

By middle school and high school, students also meet with advisers to talk about their individual education paths and make plans toward meeting college and career goals. Springdale also has expanded its career academy programs for high school students interested in further study in specific fields, including agriculture and food science, technology, health care, engineering, and law and public safety.

The 45 percent: Focusing on English language learners

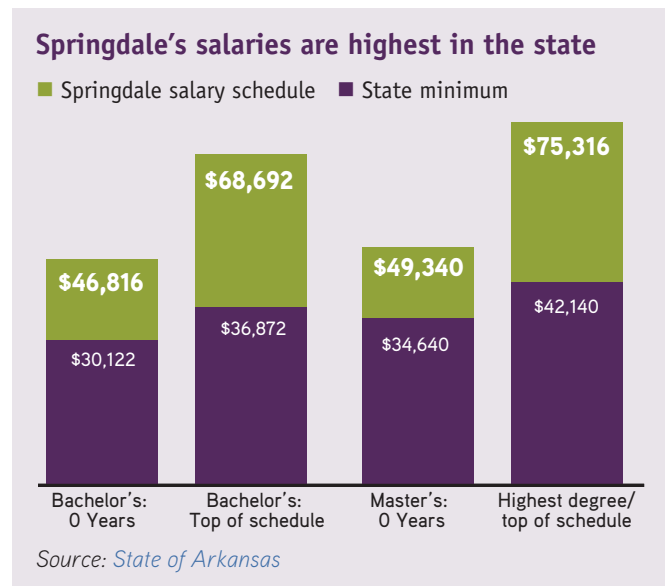
District leaders say personalized learning is especially critical for the district's ELLs, who now make up nearly half of the student population. They receive targeted language development instruction designed to meet their individual needs daily. The district is in its second year of using a systematic approach, [English Language Development](#). The goal is to move students along based on their individual progress. Teachers are trained to emphasize the structure of language, so any gaps in understanding grammar, for example, are addressed.

"A lot of our focus is training teachers," says Mary Bridgforth, the district's English to speakers of other languages (ESOL) program coordinator. "Traditional teaching does not always work with our students. They often need something different."

More teachers also are receiving training in an approach called [Constructing Meaning](#), which provides educators with strategies to weave explicit language instruction into key content areas. In addition, a third of the district's teachers have received an English as a Second Language (ESL) endorsement, meaning they have taken additional coursework on ESL education and passed a related exam.

Investing in teachers

District leaders emphasize teacher recruitment, and the district offers teachers the [highest salaries](#) in the state. While the pay is still based on the traditional approach of years and degrees, teacher compensation is generous. In Springdale, a first-year teacher with a bachelor's degree earns over \$46,800 per year compared to the statewide average of about \$30,000. At the top end of the scale, teachers can make more than \$75,000 in Springdale, which also is higher than most other districts in Arkansas.



Springdale lies just north of the University of Arkansas. District administrators and the university's school of education created an internship program that allows pre-service teachers to get a year's worth of on-the-job training as student teachers in Springdale schools—modeling the “teacher residencies” now growing in popularity in urban school systems. The district recognizes this prep work as a year's worth of experience on its pay scale, allowing new hires to earn a salary bump from day one. Springdale administrators also have begun to focus on recruiting more minority teachers to better reflect its student population.

“We now know who the best teaching candidates are from that University of Arkansas program, and we do all we can to encourage them to look at our district as a place to continue working,” Superintendent Rollins says. “We will never be any better than the educators we have in the classroom and no better than the principals we have leading buildings.”



Once on the job, all teachers in the district are part of school-based professional learning communities that typically meet weekly to analyze student data, such as benchmark and formative assessments, and identify successes and gaps. These professional learning communities are typically led by teachers and organized by grade in elementary schools and by content area in secondary schools.

“Professional development is not something you do to teachers. You do it *with* teachers. Their voice helps identify the needs and gaps,” Rollins says.

Melissa Fink, principal of Jones Elementary School, says teachers often use this time to develop common formative assessments and student learning goals and then study related data together. Teachers whose students are making the biggest gains also help their peers. “Sometimes they’ll co-teach a lesson. Or maybe they share ideas for helping struggling learners. One teacher may also observe another teacher’s lesson or give a lesson and ask for feedback from peers,” says Fink, who adds that these kind of informal observations aren’t used for evaluative purposes but to help teachers improve.

“We will never be any better than the educators we have in the classroom and no better than the principals we have leading buildings.”

Jim Rollins, Superintendent, Springdale Public Schools

Arkansas recently adopted a mandatory teacher evaluation and support system based on the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching. Springdale piloted the program in 2011–12, and the district’s principals helped train educators and administrators in other districts. The district is in its second year of full implementation. School administrators say that the new observation and feedback methods have allowed for deeper conversations and shared ideas about what effective instruction looks like. Every teacher, principal and administrator in Springdale also works with a supervisor to develop a professional growth plan that is part of the evaluation process.

Making coursework more rigorous

To prepare students for the rigor of college and careers, the district is rolling out instructional resources aligned to the Common Core State Standards. The district tapped its most-accomplished classroom teachers to step out of the classroom for a year or more to create curricula for core subjects aligned to the new standards, starting with the elementary grades and moving up through high school. District leaders are looking for an external reviewer to evaluate the home-grown instructional material. Springdale also uses the Measures of Advanced Progress formative assessments (from the Northwest Evaluation Association) to monitor student progress and check whether the curricula are helping students meet the standards.

“What we found when we went down the Common Core road was that the publishers hadn’t caught up yet,” says Kathy Morledge, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction in grades prekindergarten through 5. “The standards were rolled out pretty quickly. But we said we can’t put our kids on hold, and we can write curriculum based on the standards. It’s been good for us. We are writing curriculum that is really in tune with the needs of our kids.”

In high schools, more students are taking Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate courses this year than in the past, and more students are passing the related exams. The College Board recently listed Springdale on its [District Honor Roll](#) for expanding access to AP courses while also improving student performance.

Strengthening family learning and community support

Many Springdale parents have not received much formal schooling themselves and have limited English-speaking skills. In response, the district has established family literacy centers at 14 of its 30 schools. Parents can spend up to 12 hours a week working on language and literacy as well as bonding with teachers and others.

“It has changed the culture of our schools,” says Bridgforth, the ESOL coordinator. “Parents feel so comfortable in their children’s schools. They know the administration. They know the teachers. And they’re learning and improving the quality of their family’s life. It’s an amazing thing.”

Springdale families have been strong advocates for the district’s decade-old prekindergarten program, which now enrolls about 1,300 students. The district assesses new kindergartners using a measure called the [Qualls Early Learning Inventory](#), and administrators say those who complete the prekindergarten program do better than those who didn’t attend preschool. “It’s the difference between daylight and dark how those children are able to transition to kindergarten,” Superintendent Rollins says. He hopes to grow the program more.

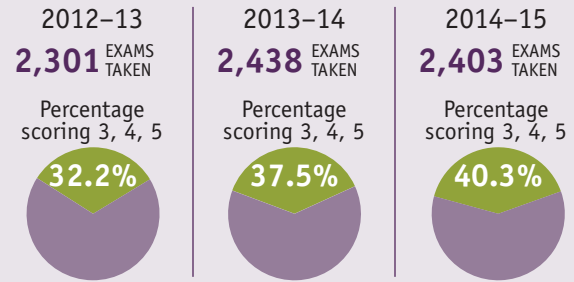


Results

Springdale's reforms are paying off:

- On 2013–14 state assessments, Springdale students outperformed state averages in math and English language arts. An initial look at spring 2015 PARCC scores shows that the district did not outperform the state in as many grades and subjects as it has previously, but Springdale did surpass state averages in grades 6–8 mathematics and Algebra 1—some of the most important grades in math.
- More Springdale students are taking and passing AP tests. The number of students taking AP exams went from 2,301 in 2012–13 to 2,403 in 2014–15. The percentage passing the tests (scoring 3, 4 or 5) jumped from 32.2 percent to 40.3 percent. The College Board recently listed Springdale on its District Honor Roll for expanding access to AP courses while also improving student performance.
- Springdale students outperformed the state on the ACT test in 2013–14 in reading, English, math and science.
- Springdale's graduation rates have steadily climbed from a four-year graduation rate of 70 percent in 2009–10 to 84 percent in 2013–14.

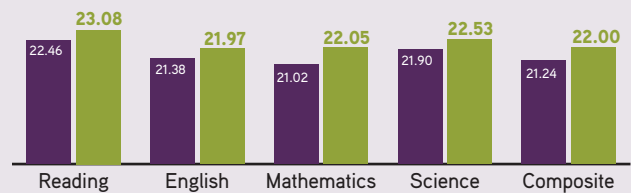
More students are taking and passing AP tests



Source: Springdale Public Schools

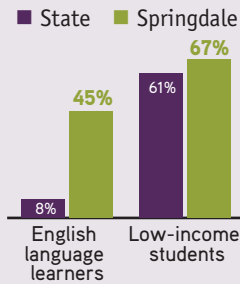
Springdale outperforms the state on the ACT, 2013–14

Average ACT scores (0–36) ■ State ■ Springdale



Source: District report card

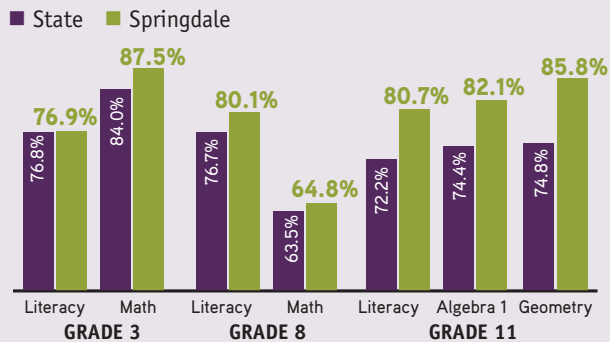
Springdale has more low-income students and English language learners than the state...



Source: University of Arkansas Office for Education Policy

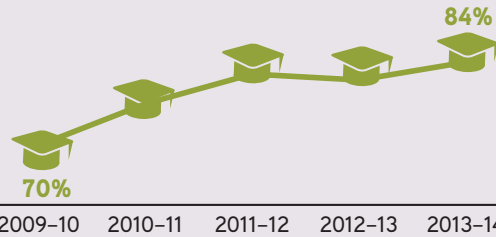
...but the district outperforms the state on end-of-year assessments

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS SCORING PROFICIENT OR ADVANCED, 2013–14



Source: State and district report cards

Graduation rates are rising



Source: University of Arkansas Office for Education Policy

Conclusion

While Springdale had been making progress with its children under the national radar, that is changing. It won a \$26-million Race to the Top-District grant. Acting Secretary of Education John King recently visited one of the district's prekindergarten classrooms. Other honors seem likely to come, though challenges remain.

Poverty is rising, district leaders want to hire minority teachers at a faster pace, and there have been some concerns over the technology initiative. For example, although the district has a 1:1 device-to-student ratio, some families don't have Internet access at home, raising access and equity issues. **Given Springdale's legacy of inclusiveness, it seems likely that the district will address these and any other challenges head on and in ways that will benefit the children it serves.**



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Photos courtesy of Springdale Public Schools