

2022 Update: Teacher Incentive Fund Grant Cross County School District, Arkansas

Cross County School District, located in Cherry Valley, Arkansas, is a small, rural school district that serves about 600 students, over 70% of whom are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. In the fall of 2016, Cross County School District was awarded a five-year Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant to support efforts for strengthening instruction and creating opportunities for teachers to grow as leaders. In the spring of 2021, progress during the first three years of the grant was reported in the research brief "[Elevating Teacher Effectiveness in a Rural Community](#)". This document highlights updates on teacher and student outcomes through the fifth year of the TIF grant.

The TIF grant aims to increase teacher effectiveness and student achievement through instituting a sustainable performance-based compensation system and human capital management system that includes evaluation and support for teachers. Cross County School District is using funds from this grant to further improve their implementation of the TAP System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP System). Through the TAP System, Cross County School District has created a sustainable collaboration structure that builds teachers' instructional skills and addresses the educational inequities and challenges of serving a rural community. This foundation for supporting teachers, which was embedded during the first three years of the TIF grant, helped the district to weather the disruptions of the pandemic better than most districts in Arkansas.

The improvement in teacher quality observed during the first three years of the grant continued through the pandemic (Figure 1). "This past school year, all teachers were rated effective or higher," said Stephen Prince, principal at Cross County High School. "Their instruction is top notch." In 2020-21, 100% of Cross County School District teachers were rated effective or above, an increase of 6 percentage points from the year before the pandemic (2018-19) and 25 percentage points from the year before the TIF grant (2015-16).

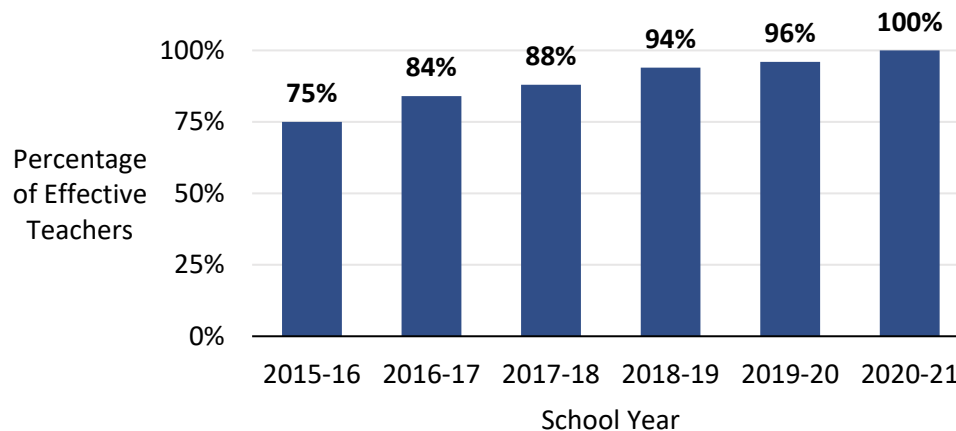


Figure 1. Percentage of effective teachers, 2015-16 to 2020-21.

Improved teacher effectiveness has resulted in Cross County School District students having better performance relative to students statewide. In 2021, Cross County School District student performance on state assessments in all subjects exceeded the statewide percentage of students passing the state assessment (Figure 2).

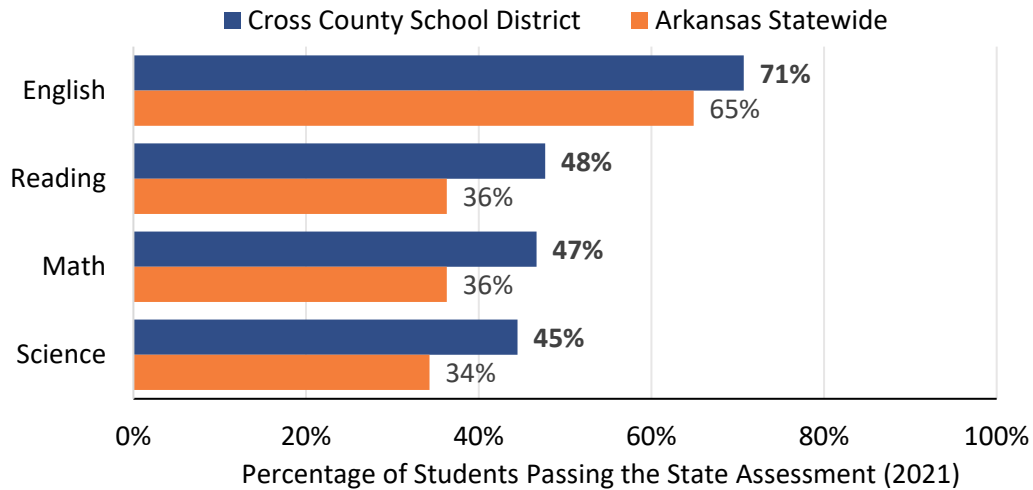


Figure 2. Percentage of students passing the state assessment, Cross County School District and Arkansas Statewide, 2021.

Note: ACT Aspire is Arkansas’s statewide assessment. For the ACT Aspire assessments, “passing” means meeting the benchmark for college and career readiness.

Conclusion

The catalyst of a federal Teacher Incentive Fund grant helped Cross County School District strengthen the teacher workforce through a coherent and integrated set of strategies that are rooted in a common vision for instructional excellence. Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, Cross County School District has maintained its momentum in increasing educator effectiveness and has kept its students competitive with Arkansas students statewide. Cross County School District has created a highly sustainable structure to strengthen and align the systems that support improvements in classroom teaching and student learning.

