



Highlighted Project Arkansas

SC3 Support Leads to Teacher and Student Success in Arkansas

The South Central Comprehensive Center (SC3) at the University of Oklahoma provided assistance to the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) and North Little Rock School District (NLRSD) to launch a pilot of Opportunity Culture at the district's middle school for the 2017-18 school year. Through existing relationships with ADE, SC3 learned NLRSD needed additional expertise and support for this pilot. In response, SC3 facilitated early conversations, helped form partnerships, and introduced ADE and NLRSD to Public Impact (the developer of Opportunity Culture) and its partner, the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders (GTL Center). SC3 brokered relationships and built connections with ADE, NLRSD, and Public Impact, which ultimately led to improved student outcomes at the pilot school.

The Opportunity Culture model includes structural changes within class schedules and teacher-student assignments. The pilot school now has multi-classroom leaders (expert teachers) who lead small teaching teams and provide guidance and coaching. Leaders are accountable for the results of all students in the team. This equity-focused structure provides students with greater access to teachers who get better-than-average results, and provides less experienced teachers with embedded professional development and mentorship. More teachers have leadership roles and advancement opportunities, which research indicates will improve career retention rates.

This structure has improved the everyday teaching and learning experiences at the pilot school. More students have daily interactions with excellent educators and individualized supports leading to increased achievement and other student outcomes. Student successes have bolstered support from families and the community; therefore, the NLRSD board of education has adopted policies and practices to leverage federal, state, and local funds to secure continued implementation of Opportunity Culture. NLRSD's experience mirrors the research on [Opportunity Culture](#) in North Carolina and New York districts.

"...Opportunity Culture has greatly impacted student learning at North Little Rock Middle School. Discipline has decreased, and student achievement has increased on the interims for ACT Aspire. Through [SC3], all of this has come together. Tonight, we presented again at a school board workshop, and we have their total support. This is the first initiative in a long time that truly is making a difference," said NLRSD Director of Human Resources Karli Saracini.

ADE included a 10-school Opportunity Culture pilot as a strategy in its ESSA State Plan. SC3 and GTL Center are partnering to build ADE's leadership capacity to replicate this strategy. Districts participating in the upcoming pilot will use 2018-19 as a planning year and 2019-20 as the first year of implementation. As ADE scales up this model, Public Impact is facilitating the State Design Team process. SC3 serves on this team and continues to provide thought partnership and coaching feedback to connect to ADE's other strategic planning projects. Both Centers will assist ADE with aligning the Opportunity Culture grants with state teacher leader licensure, local equity labs, and other teacher leadership opportunities.

