

Portland Elementary School; Portland, AR

About the School:

Grades:	PreK-6
Number of Students:	170
Test(s):	AR Benchmark
Reduced Price Lunch:	76%

About the Students:

African American:	12%
Caucasian:	80%
Hispanic:	8%
Asian:	-
Other:	-
ELL	-



Test Scores Transform Troubled School into National Model

The town of Portland, AR, (population: 552) is home to an elementary school with a reading achievement success story so big it has attracted national attention. In 2000, only 45% of Grade 4 students scored at or above proficiency on the Arkansas Benchmark Reading and Writing Literacy Exam. By 2004, that percentage doubled to 90, compared to 77% at top comparable schools and 68% statewide.

Principal Ernest Smith said Portland Grade 4 students had the highest scores in the district in both 2003 and 2004. That wasn't the case in the mid-1990s, however. *Reading Mastery* was instrumental in bringing about the school's turnaround.

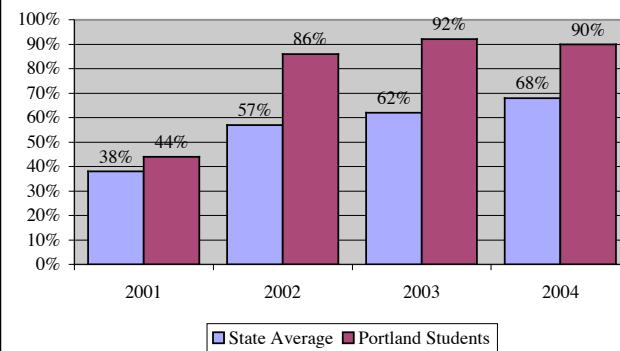
A Turning Point

After observing a nearby school using the Direct Instruction strategy, Smith said he became a convert. He and fellow educators adopted it in Grades K-6 in 1995 and worked with outside consultants from J/P Associates to learn effective methods of delivering lessons.

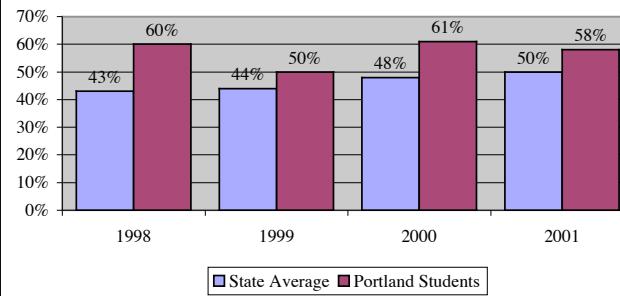
The school gained 5 percentile points each year and led the district average within four years. By 1998, Portland was consistently outscoring the rest of the state on the SAT/9 test. The success has continued ever since, with fifth graders scoring a mean national percentile of 63 in 2003, seven points higher than the rest of the state.

Almost the entire student body now reads at grade level or higher. *Reading Mastery* is used in Grades K-6 and *Language for Learning* is used in Grades K-3. "No one could ever convince me to use something other than Direct Instruction in Grades K-3 to ensure children are reading on grade level," Smith explained. "We continue with the program through Grade 6 and also use it with our special education students school-wide."

Percentage of Grade 4 Students Scoring At or Above Proficiency on the Arkansas Benchmark Reading and Writing Literacy Exam



Grade 5 Percentile Scores SAT/9 Compared to Statewide Scores





Hope for the Future

When Portland Elementary School is compared to similar schools in the state with regard to Grade 4 literacy scores, it outshines the others. Almost one out of every five students (19%) scored at the Advanced level on the 2004 Arkansas Benchmark Reading and Writing Literacy Exam compared to 8.2% of students at top comparable schools.

"For an extremely rural part of Arkansas that has a high poverty rate, Portland should be very proud of its elementary school students," said Smith. "These children are achieving academic greatness that has been acknowledged on the district, state, and national level."

Notable Achievements

The Heritage Foundation included Portland Elementary School in a national study of high-performing high poverty schools in 2000. (It was one of only 21 schools honored.) By 2004, the school had hosted more than 125 visiting teams of educators and administrators from multiple states to observe its success. "I tell our visitors that I can't sell them on Direct Instruction, but my students can," Smith said.

About Portland Elementary School

Located about 150 miles south of Little Rock, Portland Elementary School serves roughly 170 students in Grades Pre-K-6. Its student population is 80% Caucasian, 12% African American, and 8% Hispanic. Seventy-six percent of the children are eligible for free or reduced price lunches. For more information, visit se.sesc.k12.ar.us/hamburg/PORTLAND/portlandelem.htm.

For More Information

If you would like to learn more about success with Direct Instruction programs in your school or district, please contact us today at **1-888-SRA-4543**.