

# **ARKANSAS DIAMOND SCHOOLS TO WATCH PROGRAM**



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**Arkansas Association of Middle Level Education  
Arkansas Association of Middle Level Administrators  
Arkansas Department of Education  
Arkansas Southern Forum  
*in collaboration with*  
National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform**

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**Arkansas Diamond Schools to Watch Program**  
in collaboration with  
*The National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform*



## Program Description

The Arkansas Association of Middle Level Education, the Arkansas Association for Middle Level Administrators, and the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform recognize that effective middle schools differ significantly from elementary and secondary schools in terms of curriculum and instruction, preparation of teachers and administrators, and organization of time and space. In this era of educational reform and rising expectations, we are seeking schools to serve as “Diamond Schools to Watch” in the state of Arkansas—those that are aspiring to raise student achievement by implementing fully the middle school concept. Unlike other recognition programs, this independent program is long-term, continuous, and is conducted by practicing professionals who understand the middle school concept. Schools selected will be highlighted in publications and programs on both state and national levels.

## What Is A Diamond School to Watch?

A Diamond School to Watch is a school that is conscientiously moving to meet fully the nationally endorsed criteria for high performing middle schools—a school that has made marked progress in meeting all of these criteria, including measurable gains in the academic achievement of all students over time. Such schools will serve as models and mentors for other schools seeking to improve, even as they continue their own efforts as a Diamond School to Watch.



## **Arkansas Diamond Schools to Watch Program**

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*Deadline for submission: Applications must be postmarked no later than October 5, 2009.*

### **General Instructions**

1. A leadership team should be assembled to read the application carefully and assist in its preparation. This team may wish to visit the National Forum Schools to Watch website ([www.mgforum.org](http://www.mgforum.org)) to tour the four national schools to watch.
2. Use the Criteria and Indicators Self-Assessment with the faculty. This is the same instrument that will be used by evaluators when reviewing a school's written application and assessing a school during a site visit. Involve all stakeholders in the school during the application process to provide an honest assessment of the school. The extent to which your school engages in the practices listed on this scale may lead you to decide to delay submitting an application and to use the scale as a professional improvement guide.
3. Complete the demographic and suspension information in the charts provided.
4. The major portion of the application is comprised of your school's description of how it meets the indicators within the five criteria areas:

*High academic achievement  
A shared vision  
Commitment to young adolescents  
A positive school climate  
Family and community partnerships*

*The self-study assessment compiled by the school should be the guiding force of the narrative. Provide explanations of specific practices and/or programs reflecting each of the five areas and supporting indicators. It is important for your application to provide evidence that shows the criteria are being implemented in each of the areas.*

Responses for this portion of the application should be stated in narrative form, should not exceed ten pages, should not include exhibits or appendices, and must be in 11 point or larger type.

5. Behind the last page of this application, attach the *last three years* of school scores on the following tests:
  - Arkansas Benchmark Exam
  - ITBS (Iowa Test of Basic Skills)
  - Any other standardized test results

*\*\*Disaggregated data is important when submitting these scores.*

6. **The final application should be numbered consecutively with the school's name as a header on each page. Please submit in the following order:**

- Cover Sheet**
- Vision statement/Demographic information**
- Suspension data**
- Plan to address suspension data**
- Absentee data**
- Mobility data and statement**
- School strategic plan**
- AYP information**
- Permission form**
- Narrative—High Academic Achievement**
- Narrative-A Shared Vision**
- Narrative-Commitment to Young Adolescents**
- Narrative-A Positive School Climate**
- Narrative-Family and Community Partnerships**
- Special information about your school**

7. **Fill out the attached cover sheet and place it at the front of the application.**
8. **Prepare seven copies of the full application and mail to the Arkansas Diamond Schools to Watch program.**
9. **It is suggested strongly that if any of the following are true for your school you should *delay* application for one year:**
  - a principal new to the school**
  - a major change in program, student body, or grade configuration**
  - recent test scores that do not reflect an upward trajectory**
  - the school is less than three years old**

***Applications prepared by external grant writers or paid consultants will not be accepted.***

Each application will be read by six or seven trained evaluators to determine if the school indicates sufficient progress in meeting the criteria to warrant a site visit. Schools selected for site visits will be assessed further through interviews with administrators, faculty, parents, and students, review of various records, and classroom visits.

Following visits to all selected schools, the Board of Directors, after reviewing and discussing the site visit reports, may designate a school as an Arkansas Diamond School to Watch should all criteria be fully met. All schools visited will be notified of their status in writing. A recognition/celebration visit will be scheduled after selection.

*Arkansas Diamond Schools to Watch* will be recognized in the media, invited to present at the AAMLE annual conference, serve as mentors to other schools, and be featured in newsletters and publications. These schools will also be featured on the AAMLE web site, the State Department of Education web site, and the web site of the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform.

# Application

**What is your school's vision/mission statement?**

## Demographic Information

*(Complete these charts by providing the figures requested for the current school year)*

Enrollment	Grade 5		Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8		Grade 9		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total # students												
African American												
Asian												
Latino/Hispanic												
Native American												
Caucasian												
Other												

ESL												
Special Education												
Gifted												

**Number of students eligible for free/reduced lunch:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Percentage of students eligible for free/reduced lunch:** \_\_\_\_\_

What was the average absentee rate (percentage of ALL students) in your school for the past three years?

2008-2009 \_\_\_\_\_

2007-2008 \_\_\_\_\_

2006-2007 \_\_\_\_\_

What was the average absentee rate (percentage of ALL teachers) in your school during the

2008-2009 school year? \_\_\_\_\_

Is student mobility a factor in your school? \_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no

If student mobility is a factor in your school, provide a paragraph that describes the mobility patterns over the last three years.

What is your current strategic plan for school improvement? Summarize it. (limit one page)

Is your school on the AYP list for No Child Left Behind? Why?

What is your plan to address this issue? (limit one page)

What is special about your school that might warrant it being designated as an Arkansas Diamond School to Watch? Are there any research projects, grant awards, articles, projects, and/or special awards of which your school has been the subject or recipient in the past five years? (limit one page)

#### Suspension Data

To provide information on the suspension rates and patterns for your school for each of the past three years, please fill out the charts on the next page. Given the data for your school, what is your plan to address this data?

## Permission Form

We give permission for the Arkansas Diamond Schools to Watch Program to publish information included in this application in order to help other schools move toward high performance. This information may also be shared with and published by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform.

We also give permission for the Arkansas Diamond Schools to Watch Program to take pictures of any students in our school with the exception of those covered by parent permission not to photograph.

We recognize that selection as an Arkansas Diamond School may result in an increase of outside visitors and publicity. We are prepared to share our knowledge and experience with others in order to accelerate middle grades reform.

***We certify that this application has not been prepared by an external grant writer or paid consultant.***

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(Principal's signature)

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(Date)

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(Superintendent's signature)

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(Date)

***Please return completed applications to:***

Arkansas Diamond Schools to Watch Program  
AAMLE  
P.O. Box 2120  
Little Rock, AR 72203  
  
Phone/Fax 501-490-1825



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**Application Cover Sheet**

*Type or print all information*

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_

School Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

School System: \_\_\_\_\_

School Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

School Web Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Total Enrollment: \_\_\_\_\_

Grades in school (circle appropriate grades): 5 6 7 8 9

Principal's name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Principal's e-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Signatures of Application Writing Team:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

***Application Deadline: October 5, 2009***

***Mail completed application to:***  
**Arkansas Diamond Schools to Watch Program**  
**P.O. Box 2120**  
**Little Rock, AR 72203**  
**Phone/Fax 501-490-1825**



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***Program Criteria and Indicators***

*The following criteria of high-performing middle schools have been nationally recognized and provide, therefore, a fair basis for assessing a middle school's status. Each criterion includes several indicators that clarify what practices might be found in a school meeting that criterion.*

**High Academic Achievement**

All students are expected to meet high academic standards.

Teachers supply students with exemplars of high quality work that meet the performance standard.

Students revise their work based on feedback until they meet or exceed the performance standard.

Teachers use a variety of methods to assess student performance (e.g., exhibitions, long-term projects, performance tasks, incorporate technology, and maintain a collection of student work.

Students learn how to assess their own and others' work against the performance standards.

Instructional strategies include a variety of challenging and engaging activities that stretch students' minds.

The strategies are clearly related to the concepts and skills being taught.

Teachers make many connections across disciplines to help reinforce important concepts, address real-world problems, achieve relevance, and often collaborate on theme-based units.

Students have multiple opportunities to succeed academically and extra help is available in more than one form.

Students can explain the purposes of their work and have opportunities to demonstrate their learning.

## **Commitment to Young Adolescents**

**The school groups adults and students in small learning communities characterized by stable, close, mutually respectful and often long-term relationships.**

**The school provides multiple opportunities for students to explore a rich variety of topics and areas in order to develop their identity, their interests and aptitudes, and plan for their future.**

**Students' voices are solicited and utilized — posing questions, reflecting on experiences, developing rubrics, and participating in decisions about what and how to study.**

**The school provides students with opportunities to develop and demonstrate citizenship skills and serve the community and others.**

**The school provides age-appropriate co-curricular activities including sports, clubs, and performing arts.**

**The school actively adapts curriculum, instruction, assessment, and scheduling to meet its students' diverse and changing needs. Program development is on-going.**

**Professional development is of high quality, on-going, and focused on strategies known to improve student achievement.**

**The school devotes resources to content-rich professional development that is connected to reaching and sustaining the school vision.**

**Adults in the school have opportunities to plan, select, and engage in professional development aligned with nationally recognized standards and the school's vision.**

**Teams of teachers have regular opportunities to work together to deepen their knowledge and improve their practice.**

**Teachers collaborate in making decisions about rigorous curriculum and effective instructional methods.**

**Teachers discuss and analyze student work as a means of improving their own practice.**

**All students have equal access to valued knowledge and activities.**

**Groupings do not promote segregation by race, sex, or gender.**

**Reward systems value diversity, service, and good citizenship.**

**Every student has an identified adult advocate who knows him/her well.**

**Students have access to services that support their personal, social, and physical development.**

## **A Shared Vision**

**A shared vision of the school guides every facet of the school.**

**Shared and sustained leadership propels the school forward.**

**The school's administration and faculty are organized to develop and implement plans designed to improve students' learning.**

**Shared and sustained leadership preserves the institutional memory and purpose of the school.**

**The vision of the school is reviewed and revised on a continuous basis.**

**School personnel collect, analyze, and use data as a basis for making decisions.**

**The school utilizes test scores and other evaluation data to identify areas for improvement.**

**Out-of-school stakeholders have opportunities to engage in dialogue about school policies, curriculum, and related matters.**

## **A Positive School Climate**

**The administrative team of the school embraces and implements consensus building, shared decision-making, strategic planning, and continuous improvement.**

**School personnel create a personalized environment that supports each student's intellectual, ethical, social, and physical development.**

**Students have on-going opportunities to learn about and appreciate their own and others' cultures.**

**The school values knowledge from the diverse cultures represented in the school and in our nation.**

**The school welcomes and encourages the active participation of all its families.**

**The school has a well-designed discipline plan designed for student management, which includes appropriate, incremental measures and alternatives. Rules are fair and clear, and the suspension rate is low and decreasing.**

## **Family and Community Partnerships**

**The school develops alliances with families to enhance and support the well-being of their children.**

**The school takes the initiative to involve families as partners in their children's education, keeping them informed, involving them in their children's learning, and assuring their participation in relevant decisions. A school council involves both parent and business representatives.**

**The school uses the community as a classroom.**

**The community is engaged in providing human and material resources and support in the school.**

**The school enters into relationships such as networks and community partnerships that benefit students' and teachers' development and learning.**

**The school involves and informs families and community members in setting goals and supporting them for students and for improving student achievement. Teachers communicate with families in ways other than report cards.**