

Waldron Elementary School Honored as School of Innovation

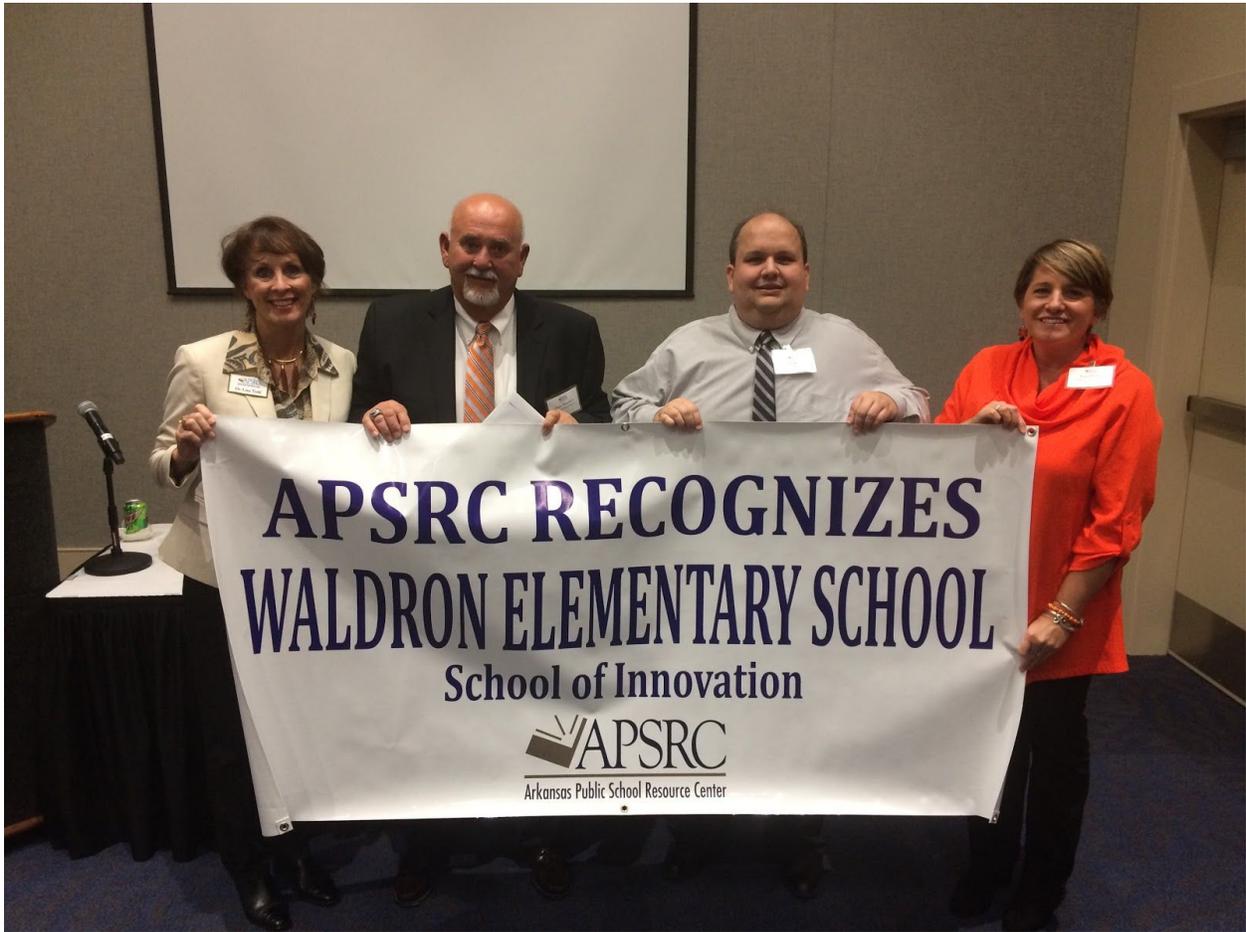
By Toni Dozier

Waldron Elementary School is one of 18 schools designated as a 2017-2018 School of Innovation by the Arkansas Department of Education. This designation is given to schools that are open to designing new and creative alternatives to existing instructional and administrative practices intended to improve academic performance and learning for all students. This is a four year program in which WES will establish goals to build on existing innovations. In 2016, the elementary school was transformed into six Communities of Learning, each having a kindergarten through fourth grade classroom. Students remain in the same community for their entire elementary experience, forming stronger relationships between students, teachers and parents. This year, each community has a similar schedule in order for students to be able to transition to another grade level for small group math or literacy instruction. Other innovations at Waldron Elementary include a STEAM class where students experience hands-on integrated science, technology, engineering, art, and math exploration; music incorporating keyboarding/piano and drum experiences; a 30 minute intervention time set aside to work on targeted reading and math skills; computer keyboarding and coding for all students; and a media center Makerspace area where students can create and explore. The elementary school is also one-to-one in technology with each student having access to a computer.

As a School of Innovation, Waldron Elementary School was given the opportunity to apply for a grant from the Arkansas Public School Resource Center (APSRC) and was awarded \$28,000 at the APSRC Conference on October 17th. This grant will allow the school to fund technology for the STEAM class, purchase new community t-shirts for all students and staff, and support other activities that will allow WES to continue innovative practices that are beneficial to students.

Waldron Elementary has also been able to share its innovative ideas with others. School visits have been made by Stacey Smith, Assistant Commissioner of the Arkansas Department of Education; APSRC; and several school districts. After visiting the school last year, Prescott Elementary has implemented a similar community of learning model at their school. WES has also conducted presentations on their ideas at the A+ Educators Effective Schools Conference in Phoenix, Arizona and the APSRC Conference in Hot Springs. The Office of Innovation for Education at the University of Arkansas will be touring the school later this year to learn about the great things going on at Waldron Elementary.

Mr. Gary Wayman, Superintendent of Waldron School District, stated, "I am extremely proud of the way our staff has embraced the program in order to do what's best for our kids."



Left to right are Dr. Lisa Todd, Director of Education at APSRC; Gary Wayman, Superintendent of Waldron School District; Ryan Walker, Waldron Elementary School Principal; and Toni Dozier, District Instructional Improvement Administrator.

