Waiver Request Details

Request ID: WR-2027-009
Date Received: 09/02/2026

DISTRICT INFORMATION
District: BRINKLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT
District LEA: 4801000
School: BRINKLEY HIGH SCHOOL
School LEA: 4801003
Superintendent: Brenda Poole
Superintendent Email: bpoole@btigers.org

WAIVER CONTACT
Name: Brenda Poole
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Phone: 870-734-5105
Waiver Topic: High School Principal: Allow Superintendent to Serve as Principal/Compliance Officer
School year(s) requested: 2026-2027
Grade(s) to which the waiver will apply: 7-12

Brief overview of waiver request:
The Brinkley School District is requesting that the superintendent, Dr. Brenda Poole, be allowed to serve as the compliance officer/high school principal for Brinkley High School. The current enrollment at Brinkley High School is 140, and the district's overall enrollment is 360; running a high school with fewer than 150 students is not fiscally efficient. The Brinkley Board of Directors voted unanimously to approve a three-year distributed leadership pilot called "Project 6678" based on the "ant principle" from Proverbs Chapter 6:6-8, where there is no ruler or leader, but the work gets done.

The Brinkley School District is taking an innovative step to strengthen leadership, improve student outcomes, and build long-term sustainability by introducing a proposed three-year distributed leadership pilot at Brinkley High School.
Rather than relying on a traditional single-principal model, Project 6678 proposes a collaborative leadership structure in which trained educators and staff share leadership responsibilities through a Core Leadership Council and specialized teams focused on academics, school culture, operations, family and community engagement, and health and safety. The Superintendent will continue to serve as the District's Administrator of Record, ensuring compliance with all state laws, accreditation standards, and reporting requirements for the high school.
The proposal was developed in response to challenges including principal turnover, a limited pool of qualified applicants, stagnant academic performance, and the need to expand teacher leadership opportunities. Research cited indicates that distributed leadership models can improve instructional quality, teacher collaboration, school climate, and student achievement.
This pilot is not about removing leadership; it is about strengthening leadership and building leadership capacity across the school while maintaining clear accountability and keeping our focus on what matters most:

student success. The traditional model at the high school has not improved student outcomes; therefore, continuing with the status quo was not an option. The Superintendent has successfully completed the TESS recredentialing and sends out a weekly look-fors to all of Brinkley School District Staff with examples of what each domain looks and sounds like for the student and teachers in classroom practice; this allows training to be embedded throughout the year and clear expectations to support TIER I instruction to be communicated with staff.

Additionally, Project 6678 was aligned with the Arkansas Teacher Excellence and Support System and the LEARNS ACT to ensure compliance.

Research Citation:
Spillane, J. P. (2006). Distributed Leadership. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
Key Finding:
Spillane's research demonstrates that leadership distributed across administrators, teachers, and staff improves organizational effectiveness by leveraging collective expertise rather than relying on a single leader.

Additional Source:
Leithwood, K., & Mascall, B. (2008). Collective leadership effects on student achievement. Educational Administration Quarterly, 44(4), 529–561.

Key Finding:
Schools with stronger distributed leadership practices showed higher levels of student achievement and improved instructional practices.

- Increased teacher ownership correlates with higher student achievement

Citation
Ingersoll, R., & Strong, M. (2011). The impact of induction and mentoring programs for beginning teachers. Review of Educational Research, 81(2), 201–233.

Key Finding
Teacher involvement in leadership and collaborative decision-making increases professional commitment, which correlates with improved classroom instruction and student outcomes.

Additional Source:
Marks, H. M., & Printy, S. M. (2003). Principal leadership and school performance: An integration of transformational and instructional leadership. Educational Administration Quarterly, 39(3), 370–397.

Key Finding:
Schools where teachers shared leadership roles demonstrated higher academic performance and stronger instructional quality.

- Collaborative governance models increase morale and accountability

Citation:
Goddard, Y., Goddard, R., & Tschannen-Moran, M. (2007). A theoretical and empirical investigation of teacher collaboration for school improvement. Teachers College Record, 109(4), 877–896.

Key Finding:
Teacher collaboration contributes to higher levels of teacher efficacy, improved school climate, and stronger accountability for student learning.

Additional Source:
DuFour, R., & Fullan, M. (2013). Cultures Built to Last: Systemic PLCs at Work. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

Key Finding:
Schools operating under collaborative leadership structures such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) show higher teacher morale, stronger accountability systems, and improved student achievement.

RATIONALE
Provide a detailed rationale explaining how the waiver will enhance student learning opportunities, promote innovation, or increase access to effective teachers:
Project 6678 will improve student learning by replacing a traditional single-principal structure with a structured, accountable distributed leadership model that places effective teachers and staff in meaningful leadership roles. The Core Council received team training last year through NIET and will continue this year. The Great Rivers Cooperative has also been made aware of this pilot and the structure and will conduct monthly walkthroughs with the superintendent and with school team members. Additionally, this model directly addresses Brinkley High School's challenges with principal turnover, limited applicant pools, stagnant academic performance, school climate concerns, and limited teacher voice.
Through the Core Leadership Council and Instructional Leadership Team, teacher leaders will use ATLAS, iReady, learning walks, and all student-related data to monitor achievement, identify teacher and student learning needs, strengthen instructional practices, and make timely academic decisions through the PLC process and teacher evaluation system. This structure increases students' access to effective educators by allowing strong teachers to remain in the classroom while expanding their influence through instructional leadership, collaboration, and shared decision-making. Each teacher at the high school received a stipend approved by the board of directors and the PPC for extra leadership responsibilities. And to address teacher retention. The stipend funds were generated from the principal's salary. The Core Council members received an additional $5,000, the remaining teaching staff, $2,500, and the classified staff, $1,500. The superintendent serving as the compliance officer/high school principal does not receive any additional compensation under this learning model.
The waiver also creates space for innovation and teacher retention by establishing leadership teams focused on academics, culture and climate, operations, family engagement, and health and safety; increased teacher voice and agency will improve teacher morale and collective efficacy. A Director of Student Culture/Dean of Students was hired to address discipline, attendance, and restorative practices, helping protect instructional time so teachers can focus on teaching and students can focus on learning.

Success will be measured by monitoring academic growth, attendance, discipline, graduation rates, staff retention, school climate, and family engagement, ensuring the innovative model remains directly accountable for improved student outcomes. The Core Council will also report to the board of directors quarterly; they presented the beginning-of-school updates at our August 17 board meeting.

Provide a detailed explanation of how the intent of the requirement being waived will be upheld:
Instead of having one leader, we are building a school of leaders. The pilot has a Core Council that works directly with the superintendent. Each team member was selected to serve as the head of one of the five specialized school teams focused on academics, school culture, operations, family and community engagement, and health and safety, on which teachers throughout the school also serve. A dean of students was hired to handle discipline and work closely with the counselor and social worker to address social, emotional, attendance, and behavioral issues that affect student learning and participation in extracurricular events. Classroom walkthroughs are being conducted by the Core Council and the Great Rivers Cooperative, both of which the superintendent participates in. The superintendent will conduct teacher evaluations and ensure that all reporting requirements are met at both the local and state levels.

Provide a detailed explanation of how the district will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the waiver:
The following accountability measures will be monitored and reported to the Board of Directors. An executive data dashboard has also been built for public accountability and will be available on the website.

- Student academic growth from BOY, MOY, and EOY
- Attendance- Quarterly
- Discipline-Quarterly
- Graduation rates-EOY
- Staff retention-EOY
- School climate surveys-By Semester
- Family engagement-By Semester
- Classroom Walkthroughs-Weekly by Superintendent and Monthly with Teams