Cristy West: I'm Cristy West, and I'm Principal at Portland Elementary in Portland, Arkansas.

Portland Elementary is located in the small farming town of Portland, Arkansas, population 355. And, with a population of 355, I don't have enough students who live here to support a school, but Arkansas has a choice option. And so, I get many of my students from surrounding counties. And we are singleton, so we have one classroom per grade level.

We are departmentalized for grades third, fourth, and fifth. So, students loop for three years, and here at Portland, that means that one teacher has a set of students for their third-grade year, their fourth-grade year, their fifth-grade year, for a particular subject. For example, I have a reading teacher, a science teacher, a math teacher, and the students stay with that teacher for the three years. But on a daily basis, they're rotating to each teacher.

So, students change classes for math, reading, and language. And it works for us, because teachers are better able to build their relationships with their students. And they know exactly where their students are as far as the skills that they've mastered or those that they need to work on. They don't have to work on that at the beginning of each school year, they just finished up with them. So, they know where to start them off for the next year.

It helps me as an administrator, the grade looping. Because I get to see that teacher's performance, their teaching style, with three different grade levels. So, it gives me insight into their teaching style, their abilities, if they need particular professional development in their particular content. So as an administrator, it gives me a lot of insight into my teachers and what they may need, or where they're most successful and could share that with someone else.

The teachers like it, because they can concentrate on one content area and those standards that they have to cover. And then the students really like it because it breaks up their day. It gives them a change of environment, and just a little get up and move time in between switching classes.

Really, we - the only challenge we have found is the transition during the day from one class to the other. And it's just a matter of having to fine tune your schedule, and then making sure those transitions, your procedures are in place, that it goes smoothly and you're not wasting any of your instruction time.

The looping has built relationships, because of course the teacher, and the parent, and student are all having to communicate for three years. So, you just naturally develop more information about one another. And the parents are willing to communicate with them and ask for help. They're not intimidated, you know. A lot of times teachers are intimidating to parents, and this way they've had that person, they've had three years to get to deal with that same person, not having to start over. It's the same thing for the students. They feel more comfortable.

The advice I would give to someone who's thinking about doing looping in their school, would be to, first of all, talk to your teachers, and give them an overview of what looping could look like, and get their feedback on that. The other thing would be, talk to someone who does it, and get advice from them, get ideas on how they do that, or different ways that they could do that.