

MINUTES
JOINT MEETING
OF THE
HOUSE AND SENATE INTERIM COMMITTEES ON EDUCATION

Monday, May 7, 2012
1:30 P.M.
Room 171, State Capitol
Little Rock, Arkansas

Representative Eddie Cheatham, the Chair of the House Interim Committee on Education, called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m.

MEMBERS OF THE SENATE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION IN ATTENDANCE: Senator Jimmy Jeffress, Chair; Senator Mary Anne Salmon, Vice Chair; Senator Gilbert Baker; Senator Joyce Elliott; Senator Kim Hendren; and Senator Gene Jeffress.

MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION IN ATTENDANCE: Representative Eddie Cheatham, Chair; Representative Duncan Baird; Representative Toni Bradford; Representative Jerry Brown; Representative Les Carnine; Representative Ann Clemmer; Representative Jane English; Representative Debra Hobbs; Representative Karen Hopper; Representative Donna Hutchinson; Representative Bobby Pierce; Representative Randy Stewart; and Representative Tommy Wren.

NON-VOTING MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION IN ATTENDANCE: Representative John Catlett; Representative Gary Deffenbaugh; Representative Jeremy Gillam; Representative Homer Lenderman; Representative Kelley Linck; and Representative Tiffany Rogers.

OTHER MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN ATTENDANCE: Senator Cecile Bledsoe; Senator Linda Chesterfield; Senator Jonathan Dismang; Senator Michael Lamoureux; Senator Randy Laverty; Senator Eddie Joe Williams; Senator David Wyatt; Representative Tommy Lee Baker; Representative David Branscum; Representative John Burris; Representative David Fielding; Representative Billy Gaskill; Representative Barry Hyde; Representative Sheilla Lampkin; Representative Uvalde Lindsey; Representative Buddy Lovell; Representative Loy Mauch; Representative Jim Nickels; Representative Betty Overbey; Representative Mike Patterson; Representative Tracy Pennartz; Representative James Ratliff; Representative Tommy Thompson; Representative Jeff Wardlaw; and Representative Marshall Wright.

Without objection, the minutes of April 9, 2012, and April 10, 2012, were approved as written.

Mr. Shane Broadway, Interim Director, Arkansas Department of Higher Education, and Former Member of the Arkansas State Senate, was recognized. Mr. Broadway introduced Mr. Jamie Merisotis, President and CEO of the Lumina Foundation, the nation's largest private foundation committed solely to enrolling and graduating more students from college. He commented that the Lumina Foundation has partnered with the Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE) and other institutions to increase the number of graduates with a quality education. Mr. Broadway thanked the Co-Chairs for giving Mr. Merisotis the opportunity to speak before the Committees about the Foundation and what it is doing in Arkansas and around the country.

Mr. Jamie Merisotis, President and CEO, Lumina Foundation, was recognized. Mr. Merisotis provided members with informational packets containing various reports on the Lumina Foundation and said he appreciated the opportunity to speak before the Committees. Mr. Merisotis stated that the Lumina Foundation is a national foundation that plays an unusual role in the field of philanthropy in the United States. He said that all of the Foundation's efforts focus on increasing high-quality degree attainment for Americans. He related that the Foundation works with the ADHE and with colleges and universities in Arkansas on initiatives such as improving the productivity of higher education, admissions and placement, increasing student success in community colleges, and enhancing the K-12 education system. He commented that as he has traveled around the country this year, meeting with governors and legislative leaders and testifying before legislatures, he has seen issues of higher education at or near the top of the agenda in many states because of the inseparable connection between higher education and economic development. He said the needs of the United States will be increasingly driven by ensuring that more people have high-quality, post-high school credentials that lead to good jobs. He said the idea of continuing to be a part of the American middle class without some post-high school education is a remnant of a bygone era. The reality is that unless a person has some form of post-secondary education in the modern economy, there's a good chance that person will be poor. Mr. Merisotis described the work of the Foundation as focusing on system-level change, on improving productivity in higher education, on increasing success for students, and on ensuring better academic, financial, and social preparation for college. He encouraged Committee members to see higher education as the ultimate outcome of all their efforts in education. He said improving the quality of K-12 education is vitally important; for most people in our society, it is the starting line. The finish line is a post-secondary degree or credential. Mr. Merisotis said he hoped that, through legislative efforts and through funding or incentives, institutions would be encouraged to think about the ultimate goal of what a high-quality, post-secondary credential means to the future economic and social well-being of Arkansas and its citizens.

In response to an inquiry about those with college degrees who can't get jobs because of no demand for their particular major, Mr. Merisotis replied that, for virtually everyone, getting a post-secondary credential is better than not having one. He stated that educators have to make sure that, in addition to what is learned in a major, learning prepares students for work and for life. He said that higher education and society have to do a better job of ensuring that students graduate with credentials that have meaning and that demonstrate competency. He said students need to have developed the ability to think critically, to be analytical, and to be problem solvers. He concluded by remarking that the system needs to develop the capacity to serve a lot more people in higher quality ways.

Representative Cheatham thanked Mr. Merisotis for the information on the Foundation.

Reports from Members Who Attended Recent Meetings Concerning Public or Higher Education

The Honorable Les Carnine, State Representative, District 94, was recognized, and briefly reported on a Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) meeting on school leadership which he attended in Atlanta. He said that the SREB is at the forefront of research into the issue of struggling schools designated for school improvement that need to be turned around. He said that principal leadership, in tandem with teacher and other leadership, is a key component in developing core relationships to ensure

a school is moving in the right direction. Representative Carnine discussed the effect of the recession on principal turnover, leadership at the school level, the Arkansas Leadership Academy, and difficulties experienced by rural states. He commented that the meeting was interesting, and complimented the SREB on its work in Arkansas.

The Honorable Kim Hendren, State Senator, District 9, was recognized. Senator Hendren had a handout distributed to the Committees and expressed his concern about the volume of information requests being submitted to public institutions of higher education by the General Assembly.

The Honorable Donna Hutchinson, State Representative, District 98, was recognized. Representative Hutchinson told of hearing that, following Hurricane Katrina, requirements had been lowered in the school system in New Orleans and charter schools had been opened in order to rebuild the city's education process. She related that she had heard those schools were now teaching and graduating more students. She wanted verification from the SREB or the Bureau of Legislative Research (BLR) staff that the schools in New Orleans have improved.

Representative Cheatham said he would ask the staff to get that information.

Representative Cheatham announced that, as Mr. Paul Leopoulos, Executive Director of the Thea Foundation, was not present, there would be a deviation from the agenda, and the Committees would take up Item F.

Discussion of the Activities of the Arkansas Project Graduation Commission

Ms. Nancy Duffy Blount, Vice Chair, Arkansas Project Graduation Commission, Retired Educator, and Former Member of the Arkansas House of Representatives, was recognized. Ms. Blount said she had been appointed to the Commission by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and was filling in today for Mr. Donnie Whitten, Chair, to present a brief overview of the Commission's responsibilities and what it has accomplished to this point. She explained the Commission was enabled by Act 1306 of 2009 to investigate and analyze high school dropout prevention strategies in Arkansas and the relationship between high school graduation rates and the state's economy. She said the Commission and representatives from various sectors meet once a month to discuss issues related to high school dropout rates, and to gain a better understanding of the impact of education on Arkansas's economy. Ms. Blount stated the Commission has compiled its findings and recommendations into the *Annual Report 2011* submitted to the General Assembly, a copy of which is in each member's packet. She said some of the findings from the presentations and data presented to the Commission are:

In Arkansas,

- 31 percent of high school students in Arkansas do not graduate from high school on time with a regular diploma.
- high school dropouts earn \$200,000 less over a lifetime and pay \$60,000 less in taxes.
- an intervention advancing 600,000 dropouts by one grade would save the government programs for the uninsured an additional \$248 million.

- if all Arkansas students in the class of 2005-2006 had graduated, the state could have saved \$8,222 in Medicaid expenses, and \$93,711,844 in total lifetime health savings.
- improved cognition helps students make choices that may decrease their risk for teen pregnancy.
- the cost to taxpayers (federal, state, and local) associated with teen childbearing is estimated to be at least \$112 million in 2004.
- 10 of the 278 high schools in Arkansas are considered among the nation's lowest-performing high schools (*i.e.*, schools where fewer than 60 percent of freshmen progress to their senior year on time).

Ms. Blount expressed the reality of Arkansas's problem with graduation rates, and the need for finding ways to decrease the dropout rate. She noted that, as a result of the data collected and the presentations given, some of the recommendations from the Commission relating to PreK-12 are:

1. Increase access and funding for high-quality early childhood (Pre-Kindergarten) programs in Arkansas.
2. Establish community partnerships to improve Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12 parental involvement.
3. Implement early intervention for targeted students (Middle/High School).
4. Continue emphasis and funding for Arkansas Works.

Mr. Brooks Harrington, Member, Arkansas Project Graduation Commission, and Program Specialist, Arkansas Department of Higher Education, was recognized. Mr. Harrington recognized several ex-officio members and voting members of the Commission who were attending the meeting. He said these members are very passionate about education in Arkansas. Mr. Harrington next highlighted some of the things being done in the state. He noted that one of the recommendations from the Commission in the *Annual Report 2011*, as it relates to higher education, is to reduce graduation barriers by targeting math requirements. He said that one project in which the ADHE is participating is the Complete College America initiative. Grant funding has been received and will be distributed to some of the nine (9) participating institutions. That funding has opened up a new first-year, college-level math course for non-STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) majors. He commented that, while non-STEM majors will still be required to take college algebra, the expectation is that they will come to higher education from secondary school equipped to take college algebra, but will also have this secondary track available.

Ms. Sonja Wright-McMurray, Member, Arkansas Project Graduation Commission, and Associate Director, Arkansas Works, Arkansas Department of Career Education, was recognized. Ms. Wright-McMurray furnished the Committees with handouts on two Arkansas Department of Career Education (ADCE) programs, *Jobs for Arkansas's Graduates (JAG)* and *Arkansas Works, College and Career Coaches Program*, that are focused on impacting high school graduation rates in Arkansas. She said the JAG program is designed to work with students who have been identified with specific barriers in academic, economic, or personal categories which will prevent them from graduating with a regular high school diploma or a GED (General Educational Development) credential. She described the two programs in the JAG initiative that have been designed to assist students to successfully graduate from high school and move into meaningful employment, postsecondary education, and/or the military. She said the JAG program is designed to track students for a full year following graduation from high school

to try to ensure their success. The program in Arkansas has a 94 percent success rate. Ms. Wright-McMurray next talked about the *Arkansas Works College and Career Coaches Program*, and said ideas and ways to continue to support this pilot program past its three-year grant period are being discussed. She said the program is in 21 counties and has been extended to three Little Rock high schools (Hall, JA Fair, and McClellen), classified as dropout factories. She described the results of the Academic ACT Academy provided to students attending these high schools. Ms. Wright-McMurray stated the career coaches help students by making them aware of what careers will be viable going forward and identifying career clusters, the careers available to them that fit their needs, interests, and abilities. She said career coaches try to make sure students are as educated as possible about selecting their careers.

Mr. Jim Boardman, Assistant Commissioner, Division of Research and Technology, Arkansas Department of Education, and **Mr. Shane Broadway**, Interim Director, Arkansas Department of Higher Education, and Former Member of the Arkansas State Senate, were recognized, and contributed, as needed, to the discussion following the presentation. Topics included:

- the Commission's definition of "on time," and who is counted in the timeframe,
- time for interaction between parents and teachers as an issue of the Commission,
- clarification of the data used to determine the graduation rate in Arkansas,
- school districts not assisting with the graduation rate,
- reconciliation of measurement numbers given for graduation rates; the best available numbers,
- comfort level with the calculations for graduation rates,
- clarification regarding the impact of high school dropouts on the Arkansas economy,
- the problem of the dropout rate for athletes,
- coordinating changes in requirements for math with the Common Core State Standards,
- long-term outcomes of changes in education,
- the focus on college degrees aligning with the economy,
- watering down the standards for achieving college degrees,
- reconciling the disconnect between retention and non-STEM math,
- those students included in the Commission's recommendation to target and support non-traditional learners,
- student placement by 2-year and 4-year institutions,
- autonomy of institutions in making the decision as to which math course to require of students,
- definition of "developmental education faculty" on page 10 of the *Annual Report 2011*,
- the controversy surrounding non-STEM math as a pilot project,
- whether 2-year grads and 4-year grads seek similar/dissimilar positions,
- concern about not currently testing for science in high school,
- entering college under a catalog, dropping out, and being able to finish under the same catalog if returning within seven (7) years,
- the dropout factories that are also magnet schools,
- determining placement of career coaches in high schools,
- anticipated funding sources for career coaches when federal grants run out, and
- funding cuts in federal programs.

Ms. Blount thanked the Committees for the opportunity to make the presentation. She closed the discussion by remarking that partnerships and parental involvement are crucial in increasing the high

school graduation rate and the number of individuals who can be gainfully employed. She emphasized that the Commission needs the support of the legislature to ensure its success.

The Honorable Ann Clemmer, State Representative, District 29, was recognized, and shared with the Committees that the October 1 number for high school seniors not graduating is 4.6 percent. She noted that this information had been supplied by Mr. Boardman.

Senator Jimmy Jeffress, the Chair of the Senate Interim Committee on Education, assumed the Chair.

Senator Jeffress thanked Representative Clemmer.

Senator Jeffress thanked Ms. Blount, Mr. Harrington, Ms. Wright-McMurray, and the other contributors to the presentation.

Preliminary Discussion of Interim Study Proposal (ISP) 2011-164 by Senator Joyce Elliott, TO ENSURE THAT CHILDREN WITH DYSLEXIA HAVE THEIR NEEDS MET BY THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM.

The Honorable Joyce Elliott, State Senator, District 33, was recognized. Senator Elliott stated the impetus for introducing this bill was prompted by letters received from parents concerning issues and laws on dyslexia, and the lack of options available in the Arkansas public school system. She said the bill had originally been proposed during the 2011 General Session; the required fiscal impact statement came back from the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) attached with a \$4 million plus cost to address the issue, resulting in the bill being dead in the water. Senator Elliott commented that that's the reason for this ISP. She said, in a nutshell, the bill requires that testing for dyslexia and related disorders be done in K-2, that the ADE would identify specific research-based programs that will address dyslexia, that school districts would have the ability to chose from among those programs to use in their schools, and that parents would be notified when students are tested to let them know whether or not their children have dyslexia. Senator Elliott said there is lack of information and conflicting information about these issues, resulting in a high frustration level. She commented that if laws are already in place addressing these same issues, those laws need to be enforced.

Ms. Martha Kay Asti, Interim Associate Director, Special Education, Division of Learning Services, Arkansas Department of Education, was recognized. Ms. Asti said that when she was invited to talk about any statutes the state might have with regard to dyslexia, she wanted to make sure the statutes were aligned with those of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA). She said both IDEA and the state do not have a separate category for dyslexia, in terms of disability areas; Arkansas mirrors the categories of IDEA, and the definition it spells out is the same as that in Arkansas's regulations. Ms. Asti talked about the various criteria determining specific learning disabilities, Response to Intervention (RTI), protocols, characteristics, assessments, tiered levels, referrals, and the *ADE 2007 Resource Guide for Addressing Specific Learning Disabilities/Dyslexia*.

A brief discussion ensued following the presentation. Topics included:

- specific procedures that help different levels of dyslexia,
- testing done for dyslexia,
- timeliness of referrals to special education,
- identifying children with dyslexia before the 3rd Grade,
- whether there's a stigma attached to special education,
- mandating all school districts to universally follow rules and regulations to ensure delivery of special education services,
- clarification of whether 1 in 5 students have dyslexia, or, 1 in 5 students have a specific learning disability,
- training at The Luke Waites Center of the Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children, Dallas, TX; other centers for training,
- whether or not the multi-sensory approach is a good determinant for dyslexia,
- accuracy of the cost analysis in the fiscal impact statement, and
- how much in the bill is already being done.

Senator Jeffress thanked Senator Elliott and Ms. Asti.

The Honorable John Catlett, State Representative, District 61, and **The Honorable Sheilla Lampkin**, State Representative, District 10, were recognized. Senator Jeffress announced that both Representatives had been appointed by Governor Beebe to the Legislative Advisory Council of the SREB.

Senator Jeffress announced that the Committees would meet again at 9:00 a.m. tomorrow, Tuesday, May 8, 2012, in Room 171 of the State Capitol in Little Rock to discuss adequacy issues, and at 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday, May 9, 2012, in Room 171 of the State Capitol in Little Rock to review Department of Education Rules referred to the Committees by the Administrative Rules and Regulations Subcommittee of the Arkansas Legislative Council.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:50 p.m.

Approved: 08/13/12