

**GLR Interim Study Presentation
Joint Education Committee
October 13, 2014**

1. Why did I request this interim study?

Senator Johnson (2 minutes)

2. Why focus on third grade?

Angela Duran (3 minutes)

A disturbingly low number of children—about one-third nationwide and just a fifth of those from low-income families—are proficient readers by the end of third grade. Based on this data, states around the country are focusing on 3rd grade reading as a critical milestone for the overall educational success of their students. They have chosen 3rd grade because up until that point, children are learning to read. After 3rd grade, they are reading to learn. Children who read on grade level by the end of third grade are more likely to continue to do well in school, graduate from high school, and go on to college.

According to the state Benchmark exam, we have made progress on 3rd grade reading over the past decade. The percentage of 3rd graders reading on grade level increased steadily from 57 percent in the 2005-2006 school year to a peak of 81 percent in 2011-2012. The scores have dropped over the past few years to 77 percent in 2013-2014.

Beginning with the current school year, Arkansas will use the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment, which will let us see how we compare to other states. So for the next few years, the best measure we have for tracking improvement is the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is given in 4th grade and also shows how we stack up against other states. According to the NAEP, just 32 percent of 4th graders in Arkansas are reading on grade level.

Research has found several drivers that impact a child's ability to read on grade-level. First, children need to have the basic skills to succeed in kindergarten. They need to know their letters, sounds, and numbers as well as social skills. Unfortunately, only about half of all Arkansas children are ready for school when they get there.

Second, they need to be in school on time, every day. More than one in 10 kindergarten and 1st grade students in Arkansas are chronically absent, meaning they miss 10 percent or more of the school year – just two days a month. Half of all chronically absent students in 1st through 3rd grade are not reading proficiently.

Third, low-income students are more likely to experience summer learning loss than their higher income peers because they have less access to educational opportunities in their homes and communities. Low-income students can fall behind two to three months each summer, which by 5th grade can put them 2.5 to 3 grade levels behind their peers. Quality summer learning programs can help bridge this gap.

Fourth, parent and community engagement can enhance learning outcomes for children and consequently improve whole schools when it is part of an overall system of quality education. Merely opening the school doors for parent meetings is not sufficient. It takes careful planning and sustained effort to reach families who are hesitant about interactions with school personnel or busy working to support their families.

I am the Director of the Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and we are working to move the needle on these issues so we can help all children in Arkansas read on grade level.

Our next speaker, Jamie Gates from the Conway Chamber, is going to provide a business perspective on the importance of pre-K programs that prepare children to succeed in school. Before I turn it over to Jamie, we would like to show a short video that gives the perspective of a kindergarten teacher.

3. Show pre-K video

2 minutes

4. What Can We Do to Make Sure Our Children Are Ready for School?

Jamie Gates, Conway Chamber of Commerce – 3 minutes

- Introduce self
- Talk about why the Chamber supports pre-K – why it is important to economic development and quality of life in Conway.
- Talk about why support for pre-K is a good business investment. See http://www.heckmanequation.org/sites/default/files/040313_HeckmanDeficitPieceCUSTOM-Arkansas.pdf or http://www.ReadyNation.org/uploads/db_files/ReadyNation%20Business%20Brief68.pdf for ideas, if you need them.
- Talk about the investment you've made in pre-K through the Toad Suck Daze proceeds
- Can you say a bit about the research on the Arkansas Better Chance pre-school program? Here are a few points you could make:
 - o Two studies on the Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) pre-K program in 2013 found that

- 1) Children who attend ABC show improved scores in vocabulary and math through the 2nd grade and literacy through the 3rd grade,
 - 2) Pre-K is helping to close the education gap between low-income students and their more affluent counterparts, and
 - 3) Children who attended ABC were more prepared for kindergarten than children who did not attend.
- As a closer, can you make a plug for expanded funding for the ABC pre-K program, to provide a much needed and overdue cost of living adjustment?

5. How can summer and after school programs help achieve the goal?

Sylvia Moore, Principal, Marvell-Elaine Elementary School (3 minutes)

Hello, my name is Sylvia Moore, and I am the principal of Marvell-Elaine Elementary School. Following the approval of the state's Elementary And Secondary Education Act waiver by the U.S. Department of Education, the Arkansas Department of Education implemented a new school accountability system.

During the first year of the new system, Marvell-Elaine Elementary School was designated a Needs Improvement Focus school. In 2011-2012, 68 percent of our students read on grade level. By the 2012-2013 school year, we had increased to 81 percent of our students reading on grade level and were named an Achieving School.

I attribute our success to several things. First, we use the Response to Intervention (RtI) instructional approach in our classrooms. Through RtI, we use data-based decision making, screening, progress monitoring, and multi-level prevention systems. The first tier involves the delivery of high-quality core instruction that meets the needs of most students in the class. Tier 2 involves the delivery of research-based intervention(s) of moderate intensity to address the learning or behavioral challenges of most at-risk students in the class. And the third tier involves the delivery of individualized intervention(s) of increased intensity for students who show minimal response to secondary prevention.

Second, I have a terrific literacy coach. She and I worked together with Education Consulting Services to implement a coaching model with our teachers that helped us deepen our implementation of RtI. ECS helped teachers develop lesson plans, taught with them in the classroom to model new strategies, observed the implementation of those new strategies and provided ongoing feedback. ECS also helped us determine which formative assessment would be best for us and helped develop an assessment wall so we could track student progress on a regular basis.

Third, we know that our children lose ground over the summer so we partner with a local nonprofit, Boys, Girls, Adults Community Development Center, to offer an eight-week summer learning program that combines our summer school with BGACDC's Freedom School curriculum. This past summer, almost half of my students, including those who were entering kindergarten, participated in the program, which is held on the school campus. We provide breakfast and lunch each day as well as transportation.

6. Recommendations

Jerri Derlikowski (2 minutes)

The full interim study report lays out a series of recommendations for moving Arkansas forward so that all children can read on grade-level. Today, I would like to highlight a few key ones.

1. Provide a cost of living adjustment for the Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) pre-K program. ABC has shown that it closes the achievement gap and prepares children for kindergarten, but the program has not had a cost of living increase for seven years—since 2008. Providers are now having to make difficult decisions about cutting quality, serving fewer kids, losing their best teachers because they can't compete on salaries, or in some cases, closing their doors. A cost of living increase equivalent to the CPI for those years is \$13.8 million.
2. Require NSLA funds in Focus and Priority schools to be used for BLR-recommended solutions, such as pre-K and summer and after school programs, and narrow the list of allowable activities under NSLA for all schools. Numerous studies have concluded that NSLA funding is not achieving the desired effect of reducing the achievement gap. Too many school districts are using it for purposes that do not improve achievement for low-income and struggling students.
3. Refrain from adopting a mandatory retention policy. A mandatory retention policy will require significant funding from the legislature, and there is little evidence confirming such policies impact students' performance and success over time. Retention policies should be viewed as a last resort rather than a first alternative. The state should maintain the law already in place that allows school districts and parents to make student specific decisions about retention and academic intervention.
4. Provide funding for the Positive Youth Development Act. The Act was passed in 2011 to set up standards for summer and after-school programs administered by non-profit organizations and coordinated with school

officials. A pilot program to identify strong models would require \$5 million of state funds.

7. Discussion / Question and Answer