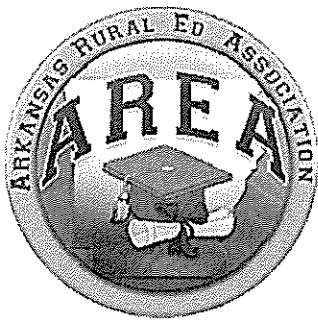


MATRIX SALARIES
ADDITIONAL
WRITTEN TESTIMONY

Joint Meeting
of the
House and Senate Interim
Committees on Education

October 27, 2014

Arkansas Rural
Education Association



Arkansas Rural Ed Association

1309 Texas Street

Mena, AR 71953

479-234-2733

October 27, 2014

Senator Joyce Elliott
Arkansas Senate
Little Rock, AR 72201

Dear Senator Elliott,

Thank you for asking for input of Arkansas Rural Ed Association into the process of making decisions related to minimum salary levels for Arkansas educators. We certainly support increasing the salary level for our teachers. Based on research data from the Picus Odden study, the matrix recommends foundation revenue needed to fund lines in the matrix for providing an adequate education for every student in Arkansas schools. The matrix is a research-based funding model rather than a spending model. Changing any portion of this matrix to a spending model can produce unintended consequences since schools have a variety of needs and various sources of revenue.

School districts spent 99.71% of foundation funding allocated through the matrix in 2013. By utilizing these funds fully for the benefit of educating all students, the schools should be commended for their budgeting processes and planning. However, a mandated spending model would have negative effects on schools which have such varied needs identified through their local and state data, revenue sources, and other needs associated with the effective operation of this wide range of districts.

The teacher salary line in the matrix may not have been fully spent on salaries due to underfunding of maintenance/operation and transportation. Underfunding of maintenance/operation in the matrix was 32% less than the need, and transportation in some schools was more drastically underfunded than was maintenance and operation. Since the teacher salary allocation is the largest line of the matrix, many districts probably look to that source to ensure they have adequate maintenance/operation and transportation funding. Transportation and maintenance and operation funds must be budgeted to ensure staff and students have adequate, safe environments in which to teach and learn as well as attend school.

NSLA funding is critical in serving students from poverty backgrounds which require more resources to ensure that their needs are being fully addressed in the education environment. Arkansas, according to SREB, has 6 % more poverty students than the national average and 2 points higher than the SREB average. This number has grown since 2000 by 3%. Thus Arkansas has a greater need than the national average, and this high rate of poverty students is growing. Salaries are a portion of the program expenses for serving these students and should be equitable with the salaries and COLA of the staff as a whole.

The 2% inflation COLA should be fully funded in the matrix. Maintenance and operation and the higher cost of transportation for some districts should be adequately addressed in the matrix to ensure that schools can fund the three necessary lines of their budgets—salaries, transportation, and maintenance and operation. We have concerns related to one-time funding for mandated salary increases outside the matrix which will possibly lead some districts into fiscal distress when this one-time infusion of funds is depleted.

Sincerely,

Bill Abernathy
Director, Arkansas Rural Ed Association

Arkansas State
Teachers Association

October 24, 2014

Dear Senator Elliott,

Thank you for asking about personnel funding in the matrix. I've had some thoughts on this issue as it relates to leadership capacity and alignment of resources for years. The Arkansas State Teachers Association (ASTA) also has member survey data that could help drive the conversation concerning adequacy and salaries.

When I look at the data gathered for the adequacy report, I see broad descriptive statistics begging for further study. Data reflecting averages across the state does not allow for identification of effective alignment of resources or patterns that may give insight into best practices. Of course we want to see teachers and other education professionals, especially those directly serving Arkansas children, be better compensated in the form of salary and benefits. Over 90% of ASTA members believe the health insurance premium issue is a critical retention and recruitment roadblock. If I were in a legislator's shoes at this moment, these are some of the questions I would want answers to in order to better understand the data provided in the adequacy report. (Please note open-enrollment charter data would be important to include):

- How do each district's start and maximum salaries rank in terms of lowest to highest paid for both starting and maximum salaries for teachers, athletic coaches and instructional coaches?
- How does each district rank in terms of starting and maximum salaries of teachers who teach in a high need content and high poverty schools?
- How do each district's principal/director and superintendent/CEO salaries rank in terms of lowest to highest? I would ask that principal/director salaries broken down into elementary, middle school and high school.
- How do each district's highest paid coach and athletic director salaries rank when compared all other districts?
- How does each district's average administrative salary rank when compared to all other districts?
- How do these districts rank in terms of the above items when compared to districts in their immediate areas?
- Where does each district rank in terms of the percentage of "extra duty" funds spent toward coaching/athletic stipends versus faculty stipends for academic purposes?
- Where does each district rank in terms of per pupil spending?
- Where does each district rank in terms of per pupil spending on transportation?
- And finally, and most important in order to start identifying patterns related to student learning, how is each district/school ranked in academic achievement in relation to how resources are aligned for the above areas?

After having these questions answered, I think we could begin to have more realistic conversations about what is and is not effective in terms of fiscal resource alignment. We would like to see a study comparing spending choices result in resource alignment best practice recommendations for districts. It would be interesting to look at these data through different lenses such as rural vs. urban districts, poverty rates, race, ESL, and gender. While over 85% of our members believe local control is critical to their district, close to 60% of them also believe their district could better align funds to meet student learning needs and retain high quality teachers. In addition 69% listed "athletics" as the main area they think is allotted excessive resources compared to resources that advance and support student learning. Clearly, there are questions about how well district leadership aligns funds to meet student learning needs and retain and recruit quality teachers.

I think we have much work to do if we want to identify the resource alignment attributes of our highest and lowest performing schools and districts. These data need to be compiled yearly and publically published in order to drive data-based decision making and heighten awareness of how districts and charter schools spend taxpayer money. Thank you for all you do for Arkansas education. We appreciate the opportunity to speak on behalf of ASTA members.

Sincerely,

Michele Linch, PhD

Executive Director

Arkansas State Teachers Association