

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

ADEQUACY

Tuesday, February 7, 2012
9:00 A.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 9:00 a.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 Kim Hendren; and Senator Johnny Key.

MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION IN ATTENDANCE: Representative Eddie Cheatham, Chair; Representative Johnnie Roebuck, Vice Chair; Representative Duncan Baird; Representative Jerry Brown; Representative Les Carnine; Representative Ann Clemmer; Representative Robert Dale; Representative Jody Dickinson; Representative Jane English; Representative Debra Hobbs; Representative Karen Hopper; Representative Donna Hutchinson; and Representative Tommy Wren.

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

OTHER MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN ATTENDANCE: Senator Cecile Bledsoe; Representative Denny Altes; Representative Tommy Lee Baker; Representative Nate Bell; Representative David Fielding; Representative Hudson Hallum; Representative Buddy Lovell; Representative Betty Overbey; Representative James Ratliff; and Representative Jeff Wardlaw.

Representative Cheatham requested that, because of today's lengthy agenda, presentations be limited to 45 minutes. He also called the Committees' attention to updated maps of remediation rates in Arkansas on display in the meeting room.

Discussion of Issues Related to the Arkansas Comprehensive Testing, Assessment, and Accountability Program (ACTAAP) and School Improvement

Ms. Cheryl Reinhart, Staff Attorney, Legal Division, Bureau of Legislative Research, was recognized,

and referenced *Legal Framework for ACTAAP* in the members' packets. She noted that the document is an overview of A.C.A. § 6-15-408 through 413 and is for informational use as adequacy is being considered.

Dr. Laura Bednar, Assistant Commissioner, Division of Learning Services, Arkansas Department of Education, was recognized. Dr. Bednar responded to a list of questions, *ACTAAP and School Improvement Discussion Topics*, in the members' packets. She first addressed whether all school assessment, monitoring, reporting, and department support, including staff in education service cooperatives, are being used efficiently, and if, post-Lakeview and prior to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (Common Core), this is the time to streamline and select the strongest strategies. She explained the necessity of taking a collective look at those things that are working and at those things needing assessment, and making changes, going forward.

Dr. Bednar next addressed the following:

- Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Flexibility Request. Dr. Bednar stated that the Commissioner will be sharing that information at the next state board meeting. She said the department is hopeful that the outcome will enable school improvement efforts to focus on student achievement.
- Arkansas Comprehensive School Improvement Plan Staffing Chart (Handout). She indicated that all parties must work together and provide support to schools that are in need of improvement, as well as to those schools that are doing well, but need additional support. Dr. Bednar said the School Improvement Unit, with a staff of nine (9) advisors, provides support to a total of 284 schools. She additionally provided numbers for schools on alert.
- Scholastic Audits. Dr. Bednar furnished the numbers for scholastic audits over the past three years as: SY08-09 – 32, SY09-10 – 40, SY10-11 – 55, and SY11-12 – 51 (after March 9, 2012), with the average cost to school districts being \$23,000 - \$25,000. She said the cost is aligned to size of school staff, student populations, school programs, and other factors. In SY10-11, the highest cost for an audit was \$33,416.83 for the Hope School District, and the lowest cost was \$18,957.45 for the Hamburg School District. She said the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) and/or its designee must use or conduct an Arkansas scholastic audit. The results of an audit are used to drive the school improvement efforts in each school district.
- Evaluating Supplemental Service Providers. A handout, *Districts---SES (Supplemental Educational Services), 2011-2012*, listing districts and providers working in the district, was distributed to members. Dr. Bednar said the ADE is only allowed/required by the United States Department of Education (USDOE) to go in and evaluate providers that are providing services to the lowest-performing schools receiving School Improvement Grants (SIG). It is not allowed to evaluate external supplemental providers. She stated that should a school district have a concern with an external supplemental provider, the ADE has a process in place to review that complaint until it is resolved. She mentioned the availability of a required evaluation of SIG SES providers completed by the University of Arkansas (U of A).
- Amounts Awarded to SIG Schools. Dr. Bednar furnished members with a chart showing amounts awarded to SIG schools in 2010 and 2011. She stated the SIG schools are monitored on a quarterly basis with a written report submitted to each district's superintendent and building

principal after each monitoring visit. Deficiencies related to the fidelity of the grant are addressed in each monitoring report. Dr. Bednar said that at the conclusion of each school year, each SIG school must submit a SIG renewal application that reflects on each goal as written in the original grant application. This information, in addition to the quarterly monitoring report, is used in consideration of grant renewal for the upcoming year.

In conclusion, Dr. Bednar updated progress on work being done on the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the End-of-Course (EOC) assessments.

Mr. John Hoy, Assistant Commissioner, Division of Academic Accountability, Arkansas Department of Education, was recognized, and continued the presentation. He remarked that the Division of Academic Accountability provides data on how schools are doing in terms of educating children.

Mr. Hoy addressed the following:

- ESEA Flexibility Request. Mr. Hoy said that Arkansas intends to submit its request on February 21, 2012. In the meantime, the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) are still law.
- Arkansas Comprehensive School Improvement Planning (ACSIP) Monitoring. Mr. Hoy explained that Mr. Willie Morris is the Unit Leader over six (6) people who make on-site visits to school districts in the state and monitor schools' Arkansas Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (ACSIP) on a six-year rotating cycle. Mr. Hoy stated that any findings are shared with Dr. Bednar's division.
- Accreditation Monitoring. Mr. Hoy stated that accreditation monitoring has to do with going into school districts and making sure applicable state laws are being met. He commented that since superintendents want to be in compliance with the law, he feels their certifications are accurate assessments of school status. He explained that on January 1 of each year a preliminary report of what has been found in the Arkansas Public School Computer Network (APSCN) is sent to school districts. School districts have time to make corrections before on-site visits commence. Twelve (12) people make on-site visits on a 4-year rotation basis. Schools can be accredited with all classes at the maximum class size. The average class size no longer applies in terms of what is checked for schools meeting standards.
- Gains and Status Rating Systems. Mr. Hoy explained the systems used to indicate how Arkansas schools are doing. The status rating system indicates the status of testing. The gains system determines year-to-year improvements and student movement between categories.
- Performance Reporting. Mr. Hoy said that, up to this point, the report card has been mailed to parents. The option to distribute it online was made available in the last legislative session. So that parents can better judge a school's performance, the report card includes a number of metrics, such as ACT scores, remediation rate, test scores by subgroup, gains in status rating, attendance, and graduation rate.

A discussion ensued following the presentations. Topics included:

- Addressing the issue of schools giving out fake grades; dealing with grade inflation,

- Decrease in the need for school improvement because the teacher evaluation bill and the superintendent mentoring bill were passed,
- Explanation for multiple providers in some districts, and
- Funds and grants used to pay for providers.

Representative Cheatham thanked Dr. Bednar and Mr. Hoy for their presentations.

Presentation of Report, *Review of School Improvement Consulting Expenditures and Results*

Ms. Nell Smith, Senior Research Specialist, Policy Analysis and Research Section, Bureau of Legislative Research, was recognized. Ms. Smith explained that this report looks at school improvement providers working in Arkansas to determine the amount of money being spent on their services and their impact on student achievement. The report includes providers that are supported by the state and those hired by school districts. Ms. Smith provided a background on the school improvement process and the companies created to help raise test scores. She mentioned America's Choice and JBHM Education Group as two of the earliest consulting companies in operation and as companies that have received most of the business in Arkansas in the last five years. Ms. Smith said two things have fostered the proliferation of these businesses: 1) the state's accountability system that encourages troubled schools to hire consultants, and 2) new federal funding that allows them to pay for it. She said in the previous five years, nearly 300 schools have received some type of service from a school improvement provider with a total price tag of nearly \$70 million, much of which was paid for by federal funding. Last year, school districts spent nearly \$20 million on school improvement consulting services. She commented that while the ADE has an approval process for external providers, schools are still allowed to hire companies and consultants not on the approved list. Ms. Smith explained there are three types of approved external providers in Arkansas: 1) school improvement specialists, 2) school improvement directors, and 3) school turnaround providers, although in practice, there is very little distinction between these three types. There are currently thirty-six (36) approved consultants and companies listed as external providers, and most are approved as all three types. Ms. Smith elaborated on contracts with five (5) leading providers in Arkansas from 2007 through 2011, illustrated in a chart on page 7 of the report. She said that, in general, these companies offer some type of consulting service wherein a consulting educator goes to the school regularly and provides teacher coaching or leadership assistance. Consultants may write regular reports for the principal or superintendent detailing the progress being made in the school or problems observed. The organizations may also provide other services such as analyzing test score data or providing professional development. Ms. Smith indicated that a second chart at the bottom of page 7 details districts where the most money was spent on school improvement providers. To examine the results of schools where these school improvement providers have worked, each of the external providers was asked for a list of schools in which they've worked, the years in which they worked with those schools, and the contract amount for each of those schools. Ms. Smith alerted the Committees to the importance of understanding that the financial data and the schools examined in this report are self-reported by the companies. She said the data in APSCN is not coded in a way that allows school-level expenditures to be pulled for each vendor, so reliance was placed on the companies' information. Ms. Smith continued to walk the Committees through the report, discussing charts on various pages and explaining conclusions and/or results.

Dr. Brent Benda, Senior Research Specialist, Policy Analysis and Research Section, Bureau of Legislative Research, and **Dr. Tom Kimbrell**, Commissioner, Arkansas Department of Education, were recognized, and joined in the discussion that followed the report. Topics included:

- Concerns about self-reporting; better ways to get data other than through self-reporting,
- Ease of schools with lowest proficiency to make gains,
- Accountability within external providers; use of evaluation tools,
- State's measures of accountability for external providers,
- Increase in number of schools on school improvement list,
- Methodology employed in research,
- Guidance from ADE to school districts on selection of providers,
- Sharing report with school districts and vendors,
- Coordinated effort for a comprehensive plan that utilizes a clearing house through the Arkansas Leadership Academy and the ADE along with the scholastic audit to determine which private vendor services are best suited to a district's need; consistency of effort,
- Funding amounts and adequacy, and
- Outcome of Rose City Middle School's working with a provider.

Representative Cheatham thanked Ms. Smith for the report and Dr. Benda for his assistance.

Preliminary Discussion of Issues Related to State's Educational Technology Infrastructure

Ms. Jerri Derlikowski, Administrator, Policy Analysis and Research Section, Bureau of Legislative Research, was recognized. Ms. Derlikowski said a group of speakers was invited to make presentations today in the first of several conversations on the topic of bandwidth. She stated that Connect Arkansas, a project that works to educate Arkansans about Broadband, made a presentation last week to the General Assembly's Joint Advanced Communications and Information Technology Committee. The presentation today is representative of the work Connect Arkansas is doing and presented in that Committee. She noted that Mr. Thomas Melton, GIS Analyst, Connect Arkansas, had maps drawn up showing Broadband access in each school district in Arkansas. These maps show that Broadband access throughout the state is relatively limited. When Bureau of Legislative Research (BLR) research staff made on-site visits and questioned superintendents, many commented on problems with bandwidth in their districts and said that, in some cases, creative solutions had to be used to resolve the problems. Ms. Derlikowski then introduced the team of speakers.

Dr. Richard Abernathy, Executive Director, Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators, was recognized. Dr. Abernathy, utilizing a PowerPoint presentation, discussed results of a survey sent to superintendents and co-op directors regarding Broadband. Out of approximately 250 surveys sent out, 226 were returned for an 89% return rate. Many of those surveyed indicated their district had experienced problems with limited bandwidth during the past year, including having to restrict use of educationally relevant Internet sites, "dragging" (*i.e.*, slowdowns) on the network, bottlenecking, and slow speeds. Dr. Abernathy also discussed the process for securing additional bandwidth, including pricing information, when he was superintendent of the Bryant Public Schools. He cautioned that schools were going to have problems implementing Common Core if the Broadband issue is not addressed. He stated this problem has been around for a number of years and won't go away, and that policymakers are the only ones who can address the issue.

Dr. David Hopkins, Superintendent, Clarksville School District, was recognized. Dr. Hopkins related the experience of Clarksville School District as it prepared for one-to-one online assessments. He described the purchasing of 1,140 netbooks for student use, looking at increasing bandwidth in the

district to accommodate usage, putting out bids, running into problems with an initial vendor, needing to use two vendors for required connections, establishing wireless connectivity, encountering logjams and bottlenecks, reconfiguring servers for adequate hosting, and incurring unforeseen expenses and delays. Dr. Hopkins said that, despite pitfalls and stumbling blocks, increased Broadband provides so much potential for educational applications that the district is looking to expand Broadband use in the future.

Dr. Diann Gathright, Superintendent, Mena School District, was recognized. Dr. Gathright said that without enhanced access to Broadband, teachers won't be able to teach and students won't be able to function in the new learning environment required by Common Core. She spoke of the problems and expenses the district encountered in its endeavor to increase bandwidth in a rural community that lacks resources for connectivity. She explained what she thought was needed:

- ✓ A system districts can use that is affordable,
- ✓ Training of the technicians,
- ✓ A central clearinghouse to advise school districts on Broadband needs,
- ✓ Training of teachers in the use of technology, and
- ✓ Increased accessibility to technology for rural school districts.

Dr. Tom Kimbrell, Commissioner, Arkansas Department of Education, was recognized, and joined in the discussion that followed the speakers' presentations. Topics included:

- Tapping into the capabilities of Arkansas Research and Education Optical Network (ARE-ON),
- Obsolescence of old systems,
- Giving students in Arkansas the same capabilities as students have elsewhere,
- Need for a master plan for state and communities to have capabilities, and
- Companies fudging on what they're providing in terms of high-speed Internet.

Mr. Bill Abernathy, Executive Director, Arkansas Rural Education Association, was recognized. Mr. Abernathy summed up what needs to be done in the face of the Broadband challenge: 1) conduct needs surveys on school districts, and 2) research ARE-ON capacity.

Representative Cheatham thanked the presenters for their remarks.

Representative Cheatham announced that the next joint meetings of the Senate Interim Committee on Education and the House Interim Committee on Education would be at 1:30 p.m. on Monday, March 5, 2012 in Room 171 of the State Capitol in Little Rock, and at 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, March 6, 2012, in Room 171 of the State Capitol in Little Rock. The meeting on Tuesday will be limited to discussion on issues related to adequacy.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:45 a.m.