

ARKANSAS EDUCATION ASSOCIATION PRESENTATION TO THE HOUSE AND SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEES

The Arkansas Education Association is pleased to provide the following testimony to the House and Senate Interim Education Committees. The Association will also provide follow-up information on each of these issues during the next several months. The Association also would like to take this opportunity to commend the co-chairs, committee members, Bureau of Legislative Research staff and the Arkansas Department of Education for their diligence in pursuing this important work.

Educator Quality, Recruitment and Retention

Educator quality is arguably the most important component of educational adequacy. The National Education Association has developed a policy statement, "Leading the Profession: NEA's Three-Point Plan for Reform," which was released December 8, 2011.

The three points are:

1. Raising the Bar for Entry
 - A. Every teacher candidate should have one full year of residency under the supervision of a Master Teacher before earning a full license
 - B. Every teacher candidate should pass a rigorous classroom-based performance assessment at the end of his or her candidacy
2. Teachers Ensuring Great Teaching by Maintaining a High Standard of Practice
3. Providing Association Leadership to Transform Our Profession

The Association believes that the Adequacy report should recommend:

- Rigorous educator preparation programs that stress high academic performance, extensive clinical practice and field experiences, knowledge of subject matter and knowledge of pedagogy, cultural competency, child development and learning acquisition
- The requirement that all educator preparation programs, whether traditional or nontraditional, be focused on quality teaching standards and provide equal rigor and focus, meet the same standards, and demonstrate the same required level of performance
- Financial and other incentives to encourage more teachers to seek graduate degrees
- Raising teacher salary and benefits to make them more competitive

In March of 2011, the Arkansas Partnership for Teacher Quality – a statewide initiative of the Arkansas Education Association and the Arkansas Association of Colleges for Teacher Education – released the report, "An Emerging Understanding of the Arkansas Teacher Pipeline." Two purposes drove the research behind this report: (1) to answer basic questions about teacher production, employment and retention and their impact on student learning; and (2) to assess the capacity of the state's data system to answer these questions.

The results of the study indicate that (1) teachers prepared by institutions of higher education stay longer in the profession and feel more prepared; (2) the key reason why teachers stay in or leave the classroom is the level of principal support; (3) clinical preparation is a significant contributor to the level of preparedness of new teachers; (4) the demographic divide between

teachers and students is expanding; (5) more teachers from nontraditional than from traditional undergraduate routes obtain employment; (6) while the overall teacher retention rate in Arkansas is high, there is a relatively high turnover rate of newly licensed teachers in predominately African American schools; and (7) we are a data-rich state, but problems exist in using state databases to answer practice and policy related questions.

The report made the following recommendations to state policymakers:

- Convene a task force to review all current and planned data collection efforts and develop a plan to standardize the collection of educator and educator preparation data
- Create and administer a series of surveys of newly licensed teachers, newly hired teachers and teachers exiting a school or the profession
- Support the administration of high quality surveys of teacher and principal working conditions
- Further investigate the demographic trends of newly licensed teachers and the high turnover rate of newly licensed teachers in predominately African American schools
- Explore the quality and diversity of field experiences of preservice teachers and identify the critical experiences of teacher preparation that result in the retention of highly qualified teachers

Based upon the overwhelming evidence that National Board Certification leads to better teaching, the Association believes that the Adequacy report should recommend additional resources and incentives to encourage more teachers, particularly minority teachers and teachers in high priority (high-need) schools, to apply for and complete National Board Certification.

The National Education Association has worked to recruit National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) for priority schools and grow them from within. In a series of six state policy summits, over 2,000 NBCTs made clear the conditions they believe will attract and keep effective teachers in our most challenging schools:

- Good principals who both know how to lead and support teacher leadership
- A commitment to creative teaching and inquiry learning, not scripted instruction
- The opportunity to team with a critical mass of highly-skilled teachers who share responsibility for every student's success
- Sufficient resources to get the job done, including new technologies, classroom libraries and instructional supplies-and access to and connections to social and health services

The NBCTs agree that teachers need to be paid more when they teach in high-needs schools, but that the right working conditions matter most. Therefore, the Association believes that the state should fund a comprehensive working conditions study similar to that outlined in the state's 2010 Race to the Top (RTTT) application.

Research shows that effective schools are places where multiple instructional leaders, the principal and teachers work together collaboratively as a part of learning communities.

As we pointed out in our 2010 Adequacy testimony, the 2009 MetLife Survey of the American Teacher examines the views of teachers, principals and students about current practice, priorities and respective roles and responsibilities. One of the major findings of Part One of the report is

that two-thirds of the teachers and three-quarters of the principals believe that greater collaboration between teachers and school leaders would have a greater impact on improving student learning.

In an article for the October 2009 Phi Delta Kappan, Tom Carroll of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future says that cross-generational learning teams that bring together novice teachers with veteran teachers would address problems at both ends of the teacher pipeline and benefit student learning at the same time. Such teams would recognize that quality teaching is not an individual accomplishment and would surround teachers and students with the teamwork that is at the heart of high-performing organizations.

Relevant, high quality professional development is an essential ingredient in providing quality education for all children. There is a vital need for initial and ongoing quality professional development to ensure that every educator that will be evaluated under Act 1209 – Teacher Excellence Support System is properly trained. The evaluators and the educators that are evaluated must understand what the rubrics and process will involve.

Professional Development offerings should be available in areas needed for each educator to improve their practice. The decisions on those areas of training should be decided collaboratively with the educators and the evaluators. Professional Development can no longer be “one size fits all” in a school if we are to provide real progress in the art of teaching and learning.

AEA believes that there needs to be more meaningful teacher involvement in planning, presenting and evaluating professional development, greater access to online professional development, and adequate notice of required professional development.

The Association also believes that we must look at ways to restructure the school day to provide teachers and others who work with students with professional development embedded in the school day, as well as more time for individual and collaborative planning.

Student Learning, Closing the Achievement Gap and Class Size

The Association recommends that the 2012 Adequacy study recommend passage of legislation that will incorporate the concepts set forth in HB 1877 filed during the 2011 legislative session by Representative Bobby Pierce.

The Association believes that the Adequacy Study should further evaluate the effectiveness of various third-party vendors contracting with schools to improve teaching and learning and determine what legislative action is needed to give the Arkansas Department of Education authority to regulate such vendors.

The Association believes that the Adequacy study should look closely at recent research that suggests that test-based accountability systems are not improving student learning.

The Association believes that we can motivate and engage students in learning through an arts-infused delivery system of instruction for the curriculum. An arts-infused delivery system means

teaching all subjects using art, drama, music, and rhyme to enhance the learning process. The Adequacy report should recommend the strategies and resources necessary to accomplish this goal.

While we can be proud of the fact that there continues to be significant improvement in student achievement in Arkansas, there remains the serious problem of the achievement gaps. In dealing with priority schools, the Association believes that the Adequacy report should recommend research-driven elements that lead to permanent systemic change: leveraging community assets, improving staff capacity and effectiveness, developing family and community partnerships, improving district and local association capacity and collaboration, and improving student achievement and learning.

As we have pointed out in earlier testimony in 2008 and 2010, AEA believes that the state has an obligation to ensure that Arkansas' public schools are making the needed efforts and are provided the resources necessary to close the achievement gaps. The state must also address the circumstances that create disadvantages for low-income and minority students: language development, literacy development, self-confidence, health, and housing. While some of these issues may be more properly addressed by other legislative committees, we believe that the Education Committees should include in the Adequacy report recommendations to those committees.

Dr. Gary Orfield, Director of the Civil Rights Project at the University of California -- Los Angeles, has pointed out that we have become a nation that accepts separate and unequal schools as if nothing can be done about it. Orfield argues that doing educational reform while ignoring the fundamental divisions in our society is profoundly counterproductive. He says that we will likely fail if we don't have a plan for racial and ethnic equity everywhere and integration where possible. There is also a significant body of research that suggests we need to do more to address the education of English Language Learners. The Association believes that the Adequacy report should address these issues.

In 2008 and 2010, AEA recommended that the Adequacy report include the recommendations listed below from the 2008 report on "Closing the Achievement Gap in Arkansas" by Jay Barth and Keith Nitta:

- Reintroduce state funding for health clinics for under-served students or promote their development through the Coordinated School Health Initiative
- Aggressively implement recommendations to provide high quality after-school and summer programs in the schools
- Reduce class size in grades K through 3

The Association believes that the Adequacy report should include all three of these recommendations. The class size recommendation was also a part of the findings of the original adequacy study conducted by Dr. Lawrence Picus and Dr. Allen Odden. The recommendation on high-quality after-school and summer programs is also particularly relevant following passage by the 2011 General Assembly of the Positive Youth Development Act.

Salaries, Health Insurance and Retirement

Arkansas' average teacher salary ranks 43rd out of the 50 states and the District of Columbia for the 2010-2011 school year at \$46,500. This represents a significant decline from its position of 32nd in the early 1990's. In relation to the six surrounding states, Arkansas' average teacher salary ranks third. It is a very distant third behind Louisiana (28th) at \$49,006 and Texas (31st) at \$48,638. In subsequent reports to the Committee on Educational Adequacy, the AEA will be presenting additional information about the average salaries in the states that belong to the Southern Regional Education Board, Arkansas' border city salaries, and the Association will be presenting more information concerning a plan to establish a starting salary for Arkansas teachers of \$40,000 and a "living wage" for classified public school employees.

In addition, the AEA will provide the Committee with information concerning changes in the state's contribution to the Public School Employee Health Insurance program.

The Association believes that it is very important to maintain current funding levels for the Arkansas Teacher Retirement System (ATRS). The system provides recruitment, retention and rewards for employees who serve in the public schools of Arkansas.

Other Recommendations

The Association believes that Implementation of the Common Core Curriculum will require that all public schools have access to adequate internet broadband connections for the online testing and training for educators.

The Association believes that the Adequacy report should also recommend policies that will increase parent, student, community and school partnerships. The report should also address the need for modernization of and access to career and technical education.

Links to Research Reports and Other Information

- Learning Teams <http://nctaf.org/documents/NCTAFLearningTeamsPolicyBriefFINAL.pdf>
- Professional Development
<http://www.nsd.org/news/jsd/dufour252.cfm>
- National Board Certification
http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=12224
- Children of Poverty Deserve Great Teachers
http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/children_of_poverty_09.pdf
<http://www.dianeravitch.com/>
http://books.google.com/books/about/The_fourth_way.html?id=cdq7F7OVByc
- Leading the Profession:
http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/PR_LeadingtheProfession.pdf
- An Emerging Understanding of the Arkansas Teacher Pipeline
<http://aacte.org/Research-Policy/Recent-Reports-on-Educator-Preparation/>
- Arts Infusion Education
<http://theafoundation.org/arkansas-temp/>
<http://annenberginstitute.org/VUE/wp-content/pdf/StraightTalk.pdf>
- Family-School-Community Partnerships
<https://www.nea.org/assets/docs/Family-School-Community-Partnerships-2.0.pdf>

**The Arkansas Education Association's Supplemental Written Testimony
Presented April 10, 2012**

1. The Arkansas Education Association believes that the House and Senate Education Committees should lead the effort to expand Arkansas' Early Childhood Education Program in two important ways. First, the current program provides a preschool education program for three and four year old children whose families' income is 200% of the poverty level or less. The AEA believes that the income limit should be removed in order that all Arkansas three and four year olds may have access to the state's high quality program. Second, the AEA believes that the early childhood education program should be expanded to provide programs from birth to age two. The Association will work with both education committees and other interested groups to determine the cost of each expansion.
2. The Arkansas Education Association believes that the House and Senate Education Committees should carefully review Arkansas' Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) or No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Flexibility Waiver request and consider aligning more of the state's resources to the schools in the state that will be designated as "Priority" (persistently low performing) and "Focus" (low performing) schools. Additional resources from the state will help ensure that these schools will reach and sustain higher levels of student achievement.
3. The AEA recognizes that some school superintendents perceive that the Educational Excellence Trust Fund (EETF) expenditure requirements are contributing to disparities in teacher salaries. In past years, the AEA has received and reviewed some of the information used to support this claim. At present, the AEA remains unconvinced that the EETF expenditure requirements have caused "significant" problems for school districts, but the AEA is willing to discuss this matter further with school district and AAEA representatives. Following further discussions and review the AEA will report back to the House and Senate Education Committees on this issue.