

Arkansas
Education
Association

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.

School Demographics and Implications for Adequacy

Nationwide, public schools serve a vibrant, diverse population. English Language Learners are the fastest growing segment of the public school population. The number of immigrants continues to grow, especially in the Southeast and Midwest.

A new report from the Southern Education Foundation highlights the growing number of public school students living in poverty. A majority of public school children in Arkansas and 16 other states, one-third of the 50 states across the nation, were low income students – eligible for free or reduced lunches – in the school year that ended in 2011. A decade earlier, only four states reported poor children as a majority of their public school population. Sixty percent of Arkansas public school students live in poverty; only four states [Mississippi, New Mexico, Louisiana, and Oklahoma] have a higher percentage of children in poverty.

Besides more students living in poverty, there is also a rise in the number of students with developmental disabilities and with particular language needs. Both populations require educators to adapt instruction and academic content to meet students' individual needs and to creatively develop new methods to teach more demanding content.

Educators know that ensuring that every student has access to a great public school means addressing the academic, social and health needs that children living in poverty bring to the classroom. Providing high quality early childhood programs, for students from birth through age four, will help tremendously in this regard. Building a system of wrap-around supports – such as school-based health clinics and after-school and summer programs – will help ensure that every student has access to the same resources and opportunities throughout their school careers.

Whole Child – Whole Community

As our world becomes increasingly complex, it is clear that schools alone cannot support all the learning needs for children to be prepared for careers, college and life.

The 2013 Arkansas General Assembly passed Act 1326 establishing the Whole Child-Whole Community Initiative. This initiative recognizes that each Arkansas community should ensure that our children have comprehensive community support to realize their whole potential through high-quality access to the following tenets: (A) Healthy Options (B) Safety (C) Active Engagement (D) Adult Support and (E) An Intellectually Stimulating Environment.

Educators believe that any definition of an adequate education should include provisions that evaluate how well the state, schools and communities are meeting the comprehensive needs of all children and provide a fuller picture of the education of Arkansas students that extends beyond test scores, school district labels and other narrow determinants.

The state must 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.

Closing the Achievement Gaps

As we have pointed out in earlier testimony, educators believe 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.

AEA continues to recommend 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 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.

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.

Educator Quality, Recruitment and Retention

Educator quality is arguably the most important school 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

National Board Certification

Compelling research continues to accrue about the positive impact of National Board Certification on the practice of teaching and student learning.

The National Education Association was among the founding organizations that established the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) in 1987, and remains one of its strongest supporters for several reasons:

- Teachers attest to the positive effects the National Board Certification process has on their classroom practices.
- A growing body of research links National Board Certification with improved student achievement.
- The certification process is a rigorous, challenging process that causes teachers to analyze their work. It is a powerful learning experience whether the teacher achieves National Board Certification or not.

In response to a request from the U.S. Congress, the National Research Council developed a framework for evaluating programs that award advanced-level teacher certification and applied that framework in an evaluation of the impacts of the NBPTS. Specifically, the study found that teachers who earn board certification are more effective at improving their students' achievement than other teachers, but school systems vary greatly in the extent to which they recognize and make use of board-certified 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.

Recruiting and Retaining Quality Teachers

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 earlier 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.

AEA believes that public schools must provide supportive conditions for teaching and learning. That broad statement can encompass everything from the quality of professional preparation to the quality of instructional resources to the quality of school leadership. For teachers and students to do their best work, schools must also address the environmental, social, emotional,

and health factors that affect students and school employees. The Adequacy report should recommend the establishment of standards for teaching and learning conditions to promote student achievement and to foster a positive work climate for teachers. The standards should then be used to drive budget and personnel decisions.

Professional Development

Relevant, high quality professional development is an essential ingredient in providing quality education for all children. 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.

The Adequacy Report should recommend the establishment of Professional Development models and programs that have clear and high standards in the same way that the state has specific learning benchmarks for students.

Access to Quality Pre-K

Research regarding the short-and long-term effects of preschool education on young children’s learning and development clearly shows that quality preschool programs produce positive effects on children’s learning and development.

Well-designed pre-school education programs produce long-term improvements in school success, including higher achievement test scores, lower rates of grade repetition and special education, and higher educational attainment. Pre-school programs are also associated with reduced delinquency and crime in childhood and adulthood.

The strongest evidence suggests that economically disadvantaged children reap long-term benefits from preschool. However, children from all other socioeconomic backgrounds have been found to benefit as well.

Recognizing the importance of high-quality early childhood education, the Arkansas General Assembly in 2003 created the Arkansas Better Chance for School Success Program, a preschool program for three and four year olds whose family income is at 200% of poverty or less.

Subsequent legislative sessions increased funding for this program. Together, the state-funded program and federally-funded Head Start programs serve approximately forty-seven percent (47%) of eligible three-year olds and eighty percent of eligible four-year old children.

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) releases a State of Pre-School report every year. Arkansas ranks 11th in access for 4-year olds and 5th in access for 3-year olds. Arkansas has ranked 10th in the country when it comes to spending per child.

However, funding for pre-school in Arkansas has not increased at all since 2008. High-quality programs for low-income families are either at full-capacity or their funding has remained stagnant for several years, making expansion impossible.

The Adequacy Report should recommend increased funding to reach more children, especially those that are under the age of three when brain-development is critical. Consideration should also be given to making these programs accessible beyond those most at risk, so that every child benefits and statewide educational progress continues.

After-School and Summer Programs

As mentioned earlier, schools alone cannot support all of the learning needs for students. Today's students need a greater set of skills and dispositions to succeed. They also need more opportunities to explore, test, venture and create. Innovative school-community partnerships in afterschool and summer programs we believe are well-suited to provide these opportunities.

New research indicates that more consistent time spent in quality after-school programs is associated with better work habits, improved academic performance, gains in self-efficacy, improved GPA and increased school attendance.

A recent study clearly demonstrates that high-income families understand the critical importance of quality out-of-school programs. The study found that on the average top-income families are now spending almost \$9000 a year on enrichment outside the regular school day and year for their children. The lack of quality after-school and summer programs in many low-income and rural areas raises the possibility of a new, critical inequality.

AEA believes that the Adequacy Report should recommend a significant level of funding for the Positive Youth Development Act.

Salaries, Health Insurance and Retirement

According to the most recent teacher salary studies, the average teacher salary in Arkansas was \$46,631 in 2012-13. This places Arkansas' rank as 5th when compared with the surrounding states; below Louisiana, Tennessee, Texas and Missouri. Only Oklahoma and Mississippi have a

lower average teacher salary. When compared with the Southern Region Education Board (SREB) states, Arkansas ranks twelfth out of sixteen states.

AEA believes that the Adequacy report should recommend entry-level salaries and career earnings comparable to those of other professions with similar preparation, and structured to provide compensation levels that encourage classroom teachers to remain in the classroom.

The disparity in teacher salaries between the lowest-paying and highest-paying school districts has grown during the past few years. AEA believes that the Minimum Teacher Salary provided for in statute must be increased significantly to address this issue.

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.

AEA believes that the legislature must provide a more equitable funding system for school employee health insurance. Some important facts to consider include: The Kaiser Family Foundation's (KFF's) 2013 Employer Health Benefits Survey reports that nationally, employees pay 17 percent and employers pay 83 percent of single coverage premiums, and employees pay 27 percent and employers pay 73 percent of the family coverage premiums. In Arkansas, the PSE members for single coverage pay 47% of the cost while employers pay 53% and for families the employer and state pay 16% and the employee pays 84% of the cost of the plan. We can look to the state employee plan where the employee pays approximately 25% of the cost and the employer pays 75% for a single plan and 50% of the cost of a family plan. When we look at participation in the plans which would help with funding we find that when funding above the minimum contribution (\$150 per month) increases, so does participation. We reach over 70% participation only when the district contribution is over \$200 per month. Whether from the state or the local district or a combination of the two we believe that 75% of the single premium cost should be borne by the employer.

Additional Recommendations

Research by Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families and other groups has determined that the allowable uses of NSLA categorical funding are too broad and have resulted in too many school districts spending the money on ways that are not effective in closing the achievement gaps. There are 19 allowable uses of poverty funding in statute and another 12 added through rules adopted by the State Board of Education.

AEA believes that the Adequacy report should recommend legislation that requires school districts, particularly those districts that remain in school improvement under ESEA, to spend more of these funds on programs that are evidence-based and show some correlation with improved student attendance and learning.

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.

The quality of school facilities can have a major impact on the education that our children receive and whether they succeed in school. Adequate funding for facilities was a significant part of the state's original Adequacy report. Yet, there is now evidence that funding is no longer adequate.

The Adequacy Report should recommend a new study of all public school academic facilities in the state and increased funding to meet the facility needs. AEA believes that the official standard that facilities need only be warm, safe, and dry is insufficient and needs to be strengthened.

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://learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning>
- National Board Certification
http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=12224
- Children of Poverty Deserve Great Teachers
<http://www.nea.org/home/35597.htm>

<http://dianeravitch.com/dianes-books/>

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/pdf/Publications/Reports_Studies/An_Emerging_Understandin_%20of_the_Arkansas_Teacher_Pipeline.pdf
- Arts Infusion Education
<http://theafoundation.org/arkansas-temp/>
- Family-School-Community Partnerships
<https://www.nea.org/assets/docs/Family-School-Community-Partnerships-2.0.pdf>
- Excellent Teachers: A Guide for State Policy
<http://www.teachingquality.org/sites/default/files/teaching-quality-policy-guide%281%29.pdf>
- Expanding Minds and Opportunities: The Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success
<http://www.expandinglearning.org/expandingminds/>
- Early Childhood Education
<http://www.aradvocates.org/early-childhood-care-education/>
- School Facilities
<http://www.aradvocates.org/assets/PDFs/K-12-Education/Why-School-Facilities-Matter-2013.pdf>
- Grade Level Reading
<http://www.ar-qlr.net/>
- Arkansas Opportunity to Learn Campaign
<http://arkansasotl.org/>