

MINUTES**HOUSE AND SENATE INTERIM COMMITTEES ON EDUCATION****Tuesday, September 8, 2020****1:30 P.M.****Room A, MAC****Little Rock, Arkansas**

Committee members present: Senators Jane English, Chair; Joyce Elliott, Vice Chair; Eddie Cheatham, Linda Chesterfield, Lance Eads, Jim Hendren, Mark Johnson; Representatives Bruce Cozart, Chair; Reginald Murdock, Vice Chair; Rick Beck, LeAnne Burch, Gary Deffenbaugh, Jana Della Rosa, Jim Dotson, John Eubanks, Brian Evans, Denise Garner, Mark Lowery, Richard McGrew, Stephen Meeks, Nelda Speaks, Joy Springer, Dan Sullivan, and DeAnn Vaught.

Other members present: Senators Alan Clark, Trent Garner, and Kim Hammer; Representatives Cameron Cooper, Les Eaves, Denise Jones Ennett, Vivian Flowers, Kenneth Ferguson, Megan Godfrey, Jack Ladyman, Fredrick Love, Tippi McCullough, Aaron Pilkington, Johnny Rye, Jamie Scott, Keith Slape, Stu Smith, and Jim Wooten.

Representative Cozart called the meeting to order.

Approval of Minutes of August 10 and August 11, 2020, Meetings [Exhibits C1&C2]

Without objection, the Minutes from the August 10 and August 11, 2020, meetings were approved.

Discussion of Adequacy Study Update [Exhibit D]

Mr. Justin Silverstein, Co-CEO, APA Consulting, Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (APA), presented a study update and included the following information:

- stakeholder survey has been posted and will be open through September 18th (apasurvey.link/arkfeedback)
- educator panels include hosting over 20 district administrator, school administrator, CFO, and teacher panels
- nominees have the option to sign up for a number of different time slots across a two-week window

Topics for discussion at the next meeting include: best use of poverty funds, professional development/extra duty time, capital needs, school size policies; results from the district surveys regarding public input on school sizes and student mental health and educational opportunities.

Discussion of Identification of Gaps [Exhibits E&E1]

Dr. Raifu Durodoye Jr., Research Associate, WestEd, spoke on the achievement gaps in the state's educational system. The study team conducted an exploratory data analysis to identify gap areas in proficiency, growth, and per-pupil spending in Arkansas. They also studied proficiency across different student demographics to compare proficiency rates and per-pupil spending levels between high-needs students and their peers. Statewide proficiency rates on the ACT Aspire for English Language Arts (ELA) in tested grades was 43.7% in 2019; and in math, 46.6% of students were proficient. Examining subsets of the student population demonstrate that in both ELA and math, students with disabilities (SPED), students of color, low-income, and limited English proficient (LEP) all had lower proficiency rates than the state average and displayed significant gaps in the percentage of students that are proficient when compared to their counterparts.

Discussion of Concentrations of Poverty [Exhibits F&F1]

Mr. Patrick McClellan, Research Assistant, WestEd, stated the study team utilized student-level data from the Arkansas Department of Education to aggregate demographic and assessment outcomes to the school-level. Arkansas public school students (64%) were deemed to be economically disadvantaged in 2018-2019. Schools in large suburban areas had the lowest concentrations of poverty; on average, 57.2% of students at these schools were low-income students. Remote towns and rural areas had far higher rates of poverty, averaging upwards of 75% low-income students. Overall, low-income students achieved lower raw scores and proficiency rates than their wealthier peers. Students who were LEP, SPED, or Black were roughly 10 percentage points less likely to achieve proficiency than non-LEP, non-SPED, and White students, respectively.

Discussion of Performance and Funding [Exhibits G&G1]

Mr. Raifu Durodoye Jr., Research Associate, WestEd, said the study team examined student-level demographic and expenditure data and used this examination as the basis for its descriptive analysis, which assessed differences in school characteristics by per-pupil funding levels. The difference between the median and the mean suggested the average per-pupil expenditure rate was pulled up by students funded at higher per-pupil amounts. Overall, the findings revealed that schools with more low-income students, SPED, LEP, and underrepresented minority students expended more per-pupil. The analysis of ACT Aspire performance at the student level suggested that students funded at higher rates performed similarly to students funded at lower rates. The findings also suggested that while high-needs students received more per-pupil, the current amount of additional funding provided has not resulted in large gains in performance for disadvantaged students, and the amount of additional funds provided to at-risk students had not yet equated to increased performance.

Discussion of Class Size and Workforce [Exhibits H& H1]

Mr. Patrick McClellan, Research Assistant, WestEd, noted the average class size decreased as the proportion of low-income, special education, and homeless students increased. Students with limited LEP whose class sizes increased were more likely to attend schools with larger average class sizes. The study team found that class size positively correlates with school-level growth measures in math and ELA. When accounting for other factors, class size did not have a statistically significant effect on math or ELA growth on the ACT Aspire. Other factors, like the percentage of LEP students within the school and the school's previous achievement, were better predictors of growth. The team found that the previous year's average salary and total full-time equivalent staff were both negatively correlated with average salary. This suggests that as the previous year's average salary increased, and the total full-time equivalent staff increased, the average teacher salary decreased. The three variables that were positively correlated with average teacher salary were net current expenditures, total mills, and average teacher experience. These three variables had statistically significant relationships with average teacher salary, and indicated that as districts increase net expenditures, levied higher taxes, and employed more experienced teachers, the average teacher salary increased.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:00 pm.