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# Educator Panels

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Presentation to the Senate Committee on Education  
and the House Committee on Education  
Little Rock, Arkansas  
October 5, 2020

# Presentation Overview

- Description of panels and selection process
- Discussion of key themes by topic area:
  - The definition of College and Career Readiness
  - The impacts of being economically disadvantaged on performance and resource needs
  - The ability of schools and districts to attract and retain staff
  - The Arkansas funding matrix and additional funding outside of the matrix for specific purposes

# Educator Panels

- Convened over 20 educator panels in September
  - 10 district and charter system administrator panels
    - Two per region (Central, Northwest, Northeast, Southwest, Southeast)
  - 2 CFO/Business Manager panels
  - 4 School Administrator panels
  - 6 Teacher panels
- The study team asked all superintendents/charter system administrators and professional association leaders to nominate panelists

# Educator Panel Participants

- All nominees sent in by districts, charters and professional associations were invited to participate on a panel
  - However, getting school level participation was difficult given the challenges of this fall for schools
- About 125 educators participated in the panels, of those 85 were district/charter system administrators and CFOs/Business Managers
  - Participants from all regions in the state

## *Feedback Questions*

# College and Career Readiness

- What does it mean to be college and career ready in Arkansas?
- What should be included in the state's definition of college and career readiness?
  - *For example: academic core knowledge, coursework, performance outcomes, behavioral skills and/or capabilities?*
  - Do you believe the state's curriculum and graduation requirements are well aligned with this definition? If not, what changes are needed to make them better aligned?

## *Key Themes*

# College and Career Readiness

- Need to emphasize career readiness, not just college readiness
  - Many educators indicated that the current standards and requirements are geared towards college, and that the focus has been on every student going to college for the past two decades
    - One educator noted that even the phrase “college and career readiness” indicates the priority, since college comes first (even though career should alphabetically)
    - Similarly, another educator said that it should be Career Readiness, since all students are working towards a career and the path that gets them there
  - For students not college bound, should be less focus on standardized assessments and more on demonstration of skills, such as using ACT WorkKeys
  - Need more flexibility in current standards and graduation requirements to fit their path- not lowering expectations, but having personalized expectations
  - Would like to see more CTE, AP, concurrent enrollment courses, as well as internships and apprenticeships

## *Key Themes*

# College and Career Readiness

- Every student should leave high school with a next step and plan—regardless of whether that is college (2- or 4-year), a technical program, military service, or an entry level career position
  - Certificates or concurrent/AP credit should be a component of progress toward the plan
  - Some districts reported having career coaches, advisors or counselors to help develop relationships, have one-on-one discussions to establish next steps, and monitor concrete progress towards plan
  - Career exposure is important in younger grades to show them possible paths and ground discussions of next steps

## *Key Themes*

# College and Career Readiness

- Academic content knowledge is well addressed, but need to also have a strong focus on behaviors, capabilities and skills
  - Including: showing up on time, time management, communication, critical thinking, perseverance to complete a task when things get hard, problem solving, self-advocacy, financial literacy, and reading and writing in a professional or technical setting (including resume writing).
  - Some districts have worked with industries to identify necessary skills and have created “profiles of a graduate” which demonstrates what their students are able to do/know after graduation

## *Feedback Questions*

# Staff Attraction and Retention

- Does your district or school face any challenges recruiting and retaining staff?
  - Are there any staffing positions/areas that are particularly difficult to attract and retain qualified staff? (Teachers, administrative staff, nurses, etc.)
- What factors (positive or negative) impact your school or district's ability to attract and retain staff?
- What could the state do to support staff attraction and retention?

## *Key Themes*

# Staff Attraction and Retention

- Salaries are the key issue in many districts
  - Salary disparities across the state, particularly in small and rural districts
  - Districts often compete for districts in bordering states for teachers, so the salaries must be competitive
  - Minimum salary increase- districts who received the state funding have concerns about sustainability of increases over time and those who did not are no longer as competitive
- Other issues noted included: access to amenities, jobs for spouses, housing availability and teacher burnout/workload

# *Key Themes*

## Staff Attraction and Retention

- Hard to staff positions reported include:
  - **Special education teachers**
    - Educators reported that there are just not enough teachers going into special education and the licensure requirements for these teachers are more strict
  - **CTE teachers**
    - Schools cannot pay the same as other industries
  - **Secondary math and science teachers**
    - Similar to special education, there are not enough teachers coming out of teacher prep programs in this area
    - Graduates with advanced math and science degrees also can make more money in other professions
  - **Bus drivers and custodians**
    - Largely due to pay, and for bus drivers the hours can be challenging
  - **Nurses** are another hard to staff area for some districts
    - Difficulty competing against salaries in hospitals/medical offices

## *Key Themes*

# Staff Attraction and Retention

- Suggested solutions to resolve teacher shortage in hard to fill position areas:
  - “Grow your own” efforts
    - Teachers from the community are more likely to stay
    - Support existing teachers or paraprofessionals to pursue additional education and licensure
  - Revisit licensure requirements
    - For example: reciprocity of teaching licenses from other states
  - Consider loan forgiveness programs to encourage more students, particularly minority students, to go into teaching and into specialized and hard to staff areas

## *Feedback Questions*

# Addressing the Needs of Economically Disadvantaged Students

- On average, does a student being economically disadvantaged have an impact on the student's ability to be academically prepared and/or succeed? If so, in what ways does this manifest?
- What supports and services are the most effective in serving economically disadvantaged students?
  - Does this vary based upon the concentration of poverty in the school?

## *Key Themes*

# Addressing the Needs of Economically Disadvantaged Students

- Schools have to meet students' physical and emotional needs before they can meet their education needs
  - Clothing, food, health clinics, mental health services
  - Relationship building
- Academic needs can be addressed through strong Tier 1 instruction, with additional RTI support for Tier 2 and Tier 3
  - Includes small group instruction, pull out interventions, tutoring after school in some districts
- Others suggested providing access to experiences (for example: theatre, dinner, museums)

## *Key Themes*

# Addressing the Needs of Economically Disadvantaged Students

- Universal preschool would go a long way to address achievement gaps
- Lack of access at home to technology and wifi/broadband is an equity issue, particularly for low income students (and students in rural areas)
- Focusing on career exploration and readiness will help break the poverty cycle
  - Particularly at younger grades to get students excited about their future, broaden their horizons

## *Feedback Questions*

# Resources in the Funding Matrix

- Are there any resource areas that are not currently addressed in the resource matrix that should be?
- Are there any resource areas in the matrix that should be modified in some way (such as to decrease or increase the level of resource)?

*Note, the educators on the panel were provided a reference slide on the resources in the matrix for FY21*

## *Feedback Questions*

# Resources in the Funding Matrix

- General feedback:
  - Educators stressed that the matrix is a revenue model and not an expenditure model, concerns when districts are expected to resource schools exactly as provided in the matrix
  - Unfunded mandates are an issue that take general education funding away from intended purposes
    - For example: dyslexia requirements
    - Educators noted that there is an unfunded mandate law in Arkansas

## *Feedback Questions*

# Resources in the Funding Matrix

- Areas not currently addressed in funding matrix that educators believe should be:
  - School Resource Officers (SROs) and school safety
  - Student mental health
- FTE areas within the matrix that educators believe should be adjusted:
  - Many educators noted that the matrix does not align with accreditation requirements, including that an Assistant Principal is required at 0.5 FTE in a school of 500 and that a librarian is supposed to be full-time, but funded at 0.85
  - Educators indicated that school secretary is underfunded at 1.0, and that a school will typically have at least two main office staff members

## *Feedback Questions*

# Resources in the Funding Matrix

- FTE areas within the matrix that educators believe should be adjusted (continued):
  - Classroom maximum sizes in some instances are too close to funding levels, particularly for kindergarten
    - Districts need more flexibility since students do not come in equal packages; educators suggested some cushion or rounding to allow for this flexibility
    - No concerns that the targeted class sizes were too high or low

## *Feedback Questions*

# Resources in the Funding Matrix

- Salaries
  - Principal and secretary salary levels in the matrix have not been increased for the past three years (FY19-21)
  - The raise in insurance benefit costs has districts putting increases for funded salaries into insurance benefits to keep them lower
- Other matrix areas:
  - Technology was reported as being underfunded
  - Educators indicated that the amounts provided for substitutes, supervisory aides, and maintenance and operations should be revisited in light of minimum wage increases
  - Transportation
    - Funded on a per student level, but actual cost varies widely between districts
    - While not a matrix item, it was noted that the extraordinary cost formula is not transparent

## *Feedback Questions*

# Additional Funding Outside of the Matrix

- Any feedback you would like to share regarding available funding for the following purposes outside of the funding matrix:
  - Tiered funding for economically disadvantaged students?
  - Funding for English Learners?
  - Funding for high cost special education students?
  - Funding for Alternative Learning Environments (ALE)?
  - Funding for professional development?
  - Funding for capital needs?
  - Funding for a different purpose not currently addressed?

## *Key Themes*

# Additional Funding Outside of the Matrix

- Enhanced Student Achievement (ESA)
  - In many districts, a portion of ESA funds are used to support other student groups and fill in “missing” matrix resources
    - Provide SRO, mental health/counselor, and technology resources for all students
    - Provide resources specifically for special education, English Learners and ALE
  - “Cliffs” in tiered ESA funding are an issue
    - Broad agreement that funding should be smoother, but noted that this has been discussed in the past
      - Districts on the cusps discussed about the challenges and inequities that occur
    - Educators also discussed that difference in needs for each student were not at the same scale as the differences in funding between the tiers

## *Key Themes*

# Additional Funding Outside of the Matrix

- High cost/catastrophic special education funding
  - Fixed dollar amount that is split by the number of applicants, not actual costs/student need
  - Educators reported that the funding is not predictable and does not cover the cost of serving students
    - For example, in one district it covers about 40% of the cost
  - Special education services are required by IEPs and federal maintenance of effort requirements
    - Unmet funding need means that dollars are pulled from other categories/general fund
- English Learners funding
  - Insufficiently funded (currently about \$350 per student), so similar to above, districts end up using ESA funds to cover

## *Key Themes*

# Additional Funding Outside of the Matrix

- Alternative Learning Environments
  - Not fully funded, and requirement for 20 days of continuous service is a difficulty
- Capital
  - Educators (district level) felt there was not enough available funding out there to address all of the capital needs in the state
  - Shifting priorities of warm, safe and dry vs. new construction, and resulting prioritization of projects helps some districts and harms others
  - Not all districts are in communities that will support millages



Questions?