



# BureauBrief

TO :	House and Senate Education Committees Members	
FROM:	Policy Analysis and Research Section, Bureau of Legislative Research	
DATE :	October 8, 2018	
SUBJECT :	Adequacy Study Public Comments, Part Two	Project #:18-001

During the August 21, 2018, meeting of the House and Senate Education Committees, members voted to collect public comments for inclusion in the educational adequacy study. A notice was posted on the General Assembly's website on August 27, 2018, with a link where individuals could leave their name, phone number, email address and a comment.

The Bureau of Legislative Research (BLR) downloaded comments submitted as of September 19, 2018, and provided them to the committees on September 25, 2018. The link remained available for several more days before closing. This document provides all comments submitted after the September 19 download. It includes only the name of the commenter and the comment each submitted, but phone numbers and email addresses provided by commenters are available upon request. BLR staff did not edit the comments, with the exception of minor formatting.

	Name	Public Comment
1.	Brennan	My hope is that you will continue to support our rural schools and small communities in the effort to educate each and every Child To his or her full potential.
2.	Lavina Grandon	Legislators need to keep the promise of Lake View and base funding on what is NEEDED to ensure an adequate, equitable education, not on just what they want to spend. We need more equity in teacher pay, facilities, and educational supports in order for every child to have an adequate education.
3.	Nick Cartwright	I believe we need to adequately fund rural schools on par with larger schools across the state. As a graduate of a rural high school and someone who works with them now, there is great need for some of the most basic things: materials, facility improvements, teacher pay. Not to mention all of the state of the art things many larger schools are able to fund and rural schools miss out on. Students in rural places matter just as much as those in booming NWA!
4.	Virginia Crabtree	I support the small public school and do not want to see them phased out. I think that smaller schools give the student a more one on one study time with the teacher.
5.	Sydney Cartwright	I grew up going to a public school, so I know firsthand how great they can be. While there are several great aspects of public schools a few things that I wished were different in my school, Rose Bud High School, was the lack of materials to educate students. I'm classes there were not enough books for students to be able to do homework or read outside of class limiting the teachers and students. Along with not enough materials, is the fact that if there were enough, the teachers could not teach from them because they were not up to date with what was supposed to be taught. Another aspect I believe is limited to public schools such as Rose Bud is to the teachers. The salary of a public school teacher is not enough. These are the people who taught us and are teaching generation after generation and they deserve more than what is being given to them. I would love to see Rose Bud expand its libraries and different learning facilities. They have built and redone sports facilities on campus, but when it comes to bigger libraries or labs for a science class, they are limited.
6.	Karen Childers	Please pass legislation to take test coordination off the backs of school counselors. We spend so much time testing all year that we are not able to focus on the needs of students. Both ACT and the College Board allow teacher aides to administer testing. If it's good enough for them it should be good enough for ADE. The best thing we could do for school safety is to allow trained school counselors to do their jobs effectively. There is no reason that other people can't coordinate testing. Test coordination does not fall in any domain of school counseling as it does not involve direct work with the student or work on their behalf for academic, psychosocial, or vocational advising. It is an administrative function.

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7.	Deanna Felts	Arkansas teachers need a raise! It has been over 10 years since Arkansas teachers have had a state-wide salary increase. Though some of the richer individual districts have given limited salary increases, most Arkansas teachers have not seen a real increase since 2007. Their real income is less than it was 10 years ago. At this rate we will soon see a shortage of teachers if salaries remain at the same level.
8.	Davis Hendricks	My comments here are simply to register my support for the AGATE and AAGEA entry to these public comments about Adequacy and GT Education. As a 30+ year veteran of GT education, I was present in 2003 when Picus and Odden provided data for the first Adequacy Report. That report had an entry for GT Teachers in the matrix and the notation to "Retain the current standards, expenditure requirements and monitoring." Dr. Ann Robinson provided Odden and Picus several paragraphs of research rationale for including GT students and the programs that serve them in the review of adequacy at that time. The first report referenced GT students and the importance of their inclusion into subsequent reports, but close examination of the 2006 report revealed no references to GT students, programs or funding. I support the suggestions from AGATE and AAGEA for how that could be addressed by the committee in both the 2018 report and subsequent Adequacy Reports.
9.	Jason Bowles	I understand costs and cost controls, but premiums+copay+coinsurance for a family of four is ridiculous. I am about to have surgery and have had nine specialist visits at 50.00 each, will have a total of 15 p.t. visits at 25 each, and the premium for PSPREM. All in the last 3 months in preparation for neck surgery.
10.	Christine Deitz	AGATE, (Arkansans for Gifted and Talented Education), and AAGEA (Arkansas Association of Gifted Education Administrators) appreciate the opportunity to comment on the 2018 Adequacy Report. Close reading of the report doesn't reflect any awareness of GT education programs, the students they are mandated to serve, or any role for GT Education in adequacy. Based on the original report of 2003, "A sound analysis of educational adequacy should include the gifted and talented student." In light of the recent acceptance of Arkansas' ESSA Guidelines, AGATE and AAGEA believe it is timely to analyze the appropriate data associated with GT program implementation in Arkansas in an effort to determine whether or not current funding and implementation meets the expectations of adequacy. AGATE and AAGEA respectfully request that GT Education be restored to the Adequacy Report and the original recommendations be reflected in subsequent reports on Educational Adequacy in Arkansas. We are preparing a position paper with our updated rationale and recommendations and will be sharing it with the committee soon. Sincerely, Christine Deitz, President, AGATE Janet Calloway, President, AAGEA Sandra Johnson, Legislative Chair, AGATE & AAGEA
11.	Holly Couch	I'm in my 27th year in public education. I have a bachelor's, master's, and education specialist degrees. I have been at the top of the pay scale for 12 years. Something must be done to address pay for veteran teachers who, when their pay is adjusted for inflation, are making less each year. Also, I URGE lawmakers to leave ATRS alone. It is an exceptionally strong, solvent pension system that Arkansas teachers depend on and trust. We need no outside influence to tamper with excellence. Last, I urge lawmakers to do something about the abysmal insurance options available to teachers. It is expensive, and not very good. I'm a widow, and to cover my high deductible, I carry additional hospital and critical care insurance. Any small bonus I receive is eaten up with rising insurance costs. Teachers are fed up. We work hard and deserve decent insurance and pay. And we want our retirement left alone! Thank you.
12.	Sandra Johnson	AGATE, (Arkansans for Gifted and Talented Education), and AAGEA (Arkansas Association of Gifted Education Administrators) appreciate the opportunity to comment on the 2018 Adequacy Report. Close reading of the report doesn't reflect any awareness of GT education programs, the students they are mandated to serve, or any role for GT Education in adequacy. Based on the original report of 2003, A sound analysis of educational adequacy should include the gifted and talented student." In light of the recent acceptance of Arkansas' ESSA Guidelines, AGATE and AAGEA believe it is timely to analyze the appropriate data associated with GT program implementation in Arkansas in an effort to determine whether or not current funding and implementation meets the expectations of adequacy. AGATE and AAGEA respectfully request that GT Education be restored to the Adequacy Report and the original recommendations be reflected in subsequent reports on Educational Adequacy in Arkansas. We are preparing a position paper with our updated rationale and recommendations and will be sharing it with the committee soon." Sincerely, Christine Deitz, President, AGATE Janet Calloway, President, AAGEA Sandra Johnson, Legislative Chair, AGATE & AAGEA

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13. Jane Ziemann	The teacher salary and retention efforts for teachers should be address. The insurance is deplorable today thus adequate retirement is the only reason for veteran teachers to stay in the field. We must work to keep our teacher teaching.
14. Sharon Pierce	School teachers influence the whole world. We need ours to be the cream of the crop. In order to do this, they need great pay, great benefits, and great teaching environments. In the long run, this would pay off for Arkansas. Instead, teacher raises are met with higher insurance rates to the point that they barely get an actual raise in their take home pay. We need to attract the bet minds in the fields, to do this we need to treat them better.
15. Jeff Rion	I am a secondary education physical science certified teacher, and being as though I teach in an area that is short of educators regardless of the state, I am looking at moving away from Arkansas if salaries and benefits do not provide a decent wage for a high demand teaching certification. I know I'm not the only one looking at leaving the state to pursue better pay either. I am also on the younger side of education being 34, and most of your current educators are elderly. If you don't give students an incentive to be a teacher, you will not replenish the ones you lose to retirement.
16. Megan Evans	I am a teacher. This is year 11 of a wonderful and extremely rewarding career. I am very interested in how my retirement is going to look. While retirement plans in other states have floundered, failed, or been converted to skeletal plans that will run out of money in a few years, the Arkansas Teacher Retirement System (ATRS) has maintained a plan that is consistently in the top 1 percent of all plans in the country. It has been well-managed, and has investments that benefit the economy of Arkansas. It also has diversified investments nationally and globally. It is the best benefit that teachers and school employees have to look forward to after their years of dedication to the children of Arkansas. Not only does ATRS have an 81-year history of providing this solid benefit, it also has a board and expert consultants who advise them as to best pathways for the future to keep it on solid ground. My feelings can be best summed up by the editorial written by Shelley Smith: In his opening remarks the chair of the committee stated that nobody intends to merge the plans, to make any kind of changes, or to convert them to any form of 401(k). This has also been stated repeatedly in emails. He admonished some individuals and groups in the room for spreading fear and rumors that such things were being discussed. There was much indignation on his part that anyone would believe they were considering actions such as these. For the remainder of the day the audience listened to the presenters who were introduced as experts in their fields, explaining in great detail why our plan is allegedly unsustainable and likely to fail in the future. They recommended a variety of drastic solutions, including 401(k)-style plans. When asked which states had already implemented these recommended plans one presenter said Kansas and Kentucky were two of several, which is interesting since teachers in Kentucky walked out earlier this year because their retirement plan was gutted. Pew and Reason Foundation are heavily funded by John Arnold, who is a former hedge fund manager with Enron. Evidently his life's work after making billions of dollars with Enron is to share the news that we should convert traditional retirement plans into something that saves employers money, and will save the world from terrible plans like ours. I have questions about this, a lot of them. First of all, why are we listening to the philosophy of a former Enron employee? Second, why are billionaire philanthropists from other states interested in how we do public retirement in Arkansas? Third, if this joint committee is truly studying what is best for our retirement systems, then why are all the presenters peddling the same "solutions"? It's almost like there is an unseen agenda. Are there no other professional opinions on how Arkansas should "stress test" the plans and address any potential issues in the future? Who invited these so-called experts to testify, and were they paid for their presentations? If they came here at their own expense, which is what was said, I'm interested to know why. Why is the expertise of the ATRS and APERS boards insufficient to handle the business of the state's public retirees? Why were so many committee members not present at the meeting? Why were some committee members so obviously distracted and uninterested when voters in the audience (and watching the live-stream video) are clearly paying attention to how business is done at these meetings? Finally, and most importantly, if it was stated and restated numerous times that there is no intent to change the retirement plans, then why spend two days listening to testimony from those who recommend doing exactly that? If one spends a little time researching these companies, it does not take long to determine that they most certainly do not appear to have employees' best interests at heart. Denial is a slippery thing. In order to be believable it has to be backed up with at least a sliver of evidence. Teachers are an extremely diverse group. We come from all parts of the political spectrum, and we disagree on many topics; however, our retirement is not one of them. We love ATRS and will stand together to protect it from predators. We support the board and the director. We know which legislators support ATRS and we appreciate them. We are paying attention to what goes on at the Capitol, and we vote.

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17. Michelle	I have many concerns regarding public schools, funding, teacher retention, and education in AR. Teachers/public school employees are continuing to see our health insurance rates climb higher, while our benefits decrease. Pay for public school employees is another area of concern. It meets to raised across the state and treated as the profession that it is. I'm sad to see the continued attacks on public schools and the lack of funding for salaries, insurance, building facilities & maintenance. There seem to be many legislators who hate teachers and have little to no respect for them. The way charter schools are given ridiculous waivers hurts our students. It hurts our schools. The charters are not held to the same standards as traditional public schools. This is wrong b/c they are allowed to use public money. It's also horrible to see the law that allows charters to take public school facilities. None of this is ok. It's hurting our state as a whole and it needs to be fixed.
18. Amy Castling	Expecting teachers to work overtime without pay out of the goodness of their hearts is abusive. Recently I read an article that compares teachers to women who are afraid to leave a man that abuses them. Teachers, whom are mostly women, are taken advantage of and expected to do whatever it takes no matter what. Because we do. We will not continue the lie to college age youth that we recommend teaching. I can not with a clear conscience recommend teaching to anyone if the expectations and out of pocket expenses do not change. And that is why teaching is in shortage, because we have stopped sugar coating the truth to young adults. We are not paid like other professionals with bachelor or master's degrees. It us unethical to not treat teachers as professional, but yet expect professional results. Teachers are not given adequate planning time or bathroom breaks. Our jobs are constant performance and no other profession would expect that amount of performance with that little planning time. We run tests, prescribe, diagnosis,and treat all in one. What other professions do these skills? How are they paid? Teacher shortages will not be fixed by incentives for new teachers only. Because in a few years they will also see the truth and head for the door. I hope that in the future things will get better. I give the same exact therapy to dyslexic students that the speech teacher down the hall gives. She bills to Medicaid and gets paid so much more. I get paid by the public school for the same exact work and you know my salary does not compare, even with a Masters. It is unfair to not be paid comparably for the professional work that we do.
19. Kathy Ramsey	I am very concerned about proposed changes to teacher insurance and retirement. I am a 36 year veteran teacher.
20. Dinah Allen	I am a retired teacher. I taught for 32 years with a Masters degree. I was earning \$55,000 a year when I retired. I was underpaid and overworked the whole 32 years. Teacher retirement and t-dropping are what kept me teaching. Otherwise I would have worked in the private sector. Teachers are hard to find. I never encourage young people to major in education. The pay is awful and the support from administration is nonexistent. Now everyone has to teach all subjects at the same time. Teach dirt on Tuesday, September 26. I spent a month on the New Madrid fault. It had been predicted it would shake on a certain date. We taught earthquakes and volcanoes; we taught the results of earthquakes; we designed and built earthquake free homes; art, music, etc I could not do that now. It was a great project that the students will remember. Quit interfering with our retirement. Support teachers and give them a large raise.
21. Jennifer Buresh	The insurance we have is a joke. High deductibles, my myrbetriq is not covered and have to order from Canada. I pay more now for medical services than I ever did when I wasn't working! Our hours do not always start at 7:30 and end at 3:30. We are often at school way past that and take things home. If we were paid based on how many hours we worked, we would be making way more money.
22. Carla Suiter	I don't know how much longer I can afford to be an Arkansas educator in a rural district. I have been teaching in Paris for 14 years. Last year was the first year I have received a raise. I currently work 5 nights a week teaching English to Spanish speaking adults. I am working 2 full-time jobs and barely supporting my family. Due to rising health insurance premiums and poor basic coverage, I am forced to work 2 jobs. I got rid of luxuries like Internet and satellite years ago. I could easily make \$20,000 more by teaching in a larger district. Please address these concerns.
23. Kiley Simms	Teacher pay in Arkansas has stagnated. I understand that districts are responsible for pay scales, but when additional funding is not pouring in, additional pay cannot roll out. Consider this: base pay in my district has not been raised since I started teaching in January 2007. In that time, the cost of living has increase 20% (Aier.org). I'm no magician and cannot make an additional \$7320 appear to raise my wage to match the cost of living! I know our state legislators, governor, and many others received a hefty pay raise in 2015, legislation they wrote, voted on by them (you)! It must be nice to be paid what you are worth. There are days I don't have the opportunity to eat, to use the restroom, to have a moment a peace between 7 am and at least 5 pm. I LOVE my job, my career, my

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		vocation, my profession, but I cannot in good faith steer young people into the profession without having serious conversations. Becoming a teacher requires that a person give up part of who they are and turn it over to their students/ classrooms/ districts. We spend more time with others' children than we do with our own, sometimes having to miss significant parts of our childrens' lives because we have a deep-rooted obligation OR a fear that we will be looked down upon for using a personal/ sick day OR that we will be reprimanded or have a "documented conversation" for missing school. The list of grievances could continue; however, I'm sure the preceding paragraphs convey my point. I implore you to examine the funding matrix and consider increasing education funding 150% or at least match what we spend on incarceration per inmate per year. Our youth are bright and caring and hold our futures in their hands. Thank you for your time.
24.	Erika	I appreciate the insurance, but wish I didn't have to jump through hoops to get the "discount/fine". I also do not like the obvious differences in cost & coverage between the different state employees. Personally, I do not believe it is anyone's business if I smoke, I never have; wear my seatbelt, I do 99.9% of the time; or am overweight, I have a mirror & scale, but also have several issues that play into the extra weight...I'm not lazy or eat terribly unhealthy. If I pay for my insurance then I should receive coverage. Not all the issues are the fault of EBD, ADE, or whomever, BUT I was asked to tell what I thought about my insurance. Thank you
25.	Stacy Hopkins	No provision is made for vocational type class supplies -- it costs about \$142 per student to offer classes such as welding, agriculture, etc. Business and FACS classes also require supplies above and beyond textbooks, paper, etc. Also, coding has been a key initiative by the Governor. Currently the matrix recommends about \$200 per student for technology. For a school to be 1:1 on devices that amount is not enough. A chromebook alone is \$200 and does not include the required software utilized for instructional classes nor the money to maintain the wifi/internet service, and the related network equipment infrastructure. It should be noted that chromebooks need to be replaced every 2-3 years. Also computer labs need to be updated every 3-5 years.
26.	Ann Robinson	A key feature of school adequacy is how we support the development of talents in children and adolescents, particularly children and adolescents from low-income homes. Gifted education services with trained personnel should explicitly be part of our adequacy conversation. Thank you for the opportunity to offer comment.
27.	Polly Bakker	Comments concerning Gifted and Talented Students in Arkansas that you requested. Sir: I have been in G/T Education for over 32 years and I have seen the results of students staying in Arkansas and helping our state. Please check the data associated with G/T programs and include their adequacy findings to be reflected in new report. These children are our state's future. Thank you for your help. You are appreciated. Polly Bakker
28.	Harvie Nichols	Thanks for the opportunity to provide comments. 1)First is the COLA which must be sufficient to increase salaries for teachers and staff. 2) Categorical programs should receive increases for base funding. Otherwise since there are salary needs in these programs there will be good programs that have to be eliminated. 3) Facilities need to be funded at a level at least as high as the Advisory Committee recommended and warm safe and dry programs need to receive the same level of funding as growth. 4) Schools face increasing challenges with students with special needs. Significant increases in catastrophic funding and early childhood programs are needed. 5) Act 1240 needs to be amended so that districts do not have to report to the State Board of Education on the results of waivers they have been granted. Charter schools are not required to submit similar reports. What need exists to support that requirement? 6)Career education center funding needs to be increased significantly. I hear the comment about it isn't all about money but they can't provide programs and services to more students with the same amount of money they had a decade ago. 7) The proposed changes in the academic facility wealth index should be adopted with a five year phase in for districts growing at 2% or more annually. Thank you again for the opportunity to offer comments.
29.	Monica Meadows	I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the 2018 Adequacy Report. After reading the report, it doesn't appear to reflect any awareness of Gifted and Talented education programs, the students they are mandated to serve, or any role for GT Education in adequacy. Based on the original report of 2003, "A sound analysis of educational adequacy should include the gifted and talented student." In light of the recent acceptance of Arkansas' ESSA Guidelines, I believe it is important to analyze the appropriate data associated with GT program implementation in Arkansas in an effort to determine whether or not current funding and implementation meets the expectations of adequacy. I respectfully request that GT Education be restored to the Adequacy Report and the original recommendations be reflected in subsequent reports on Educational Adequacy in Arkansas.

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30.	Marcia B. Imbeau	Close reading of the report doesn't reflect any awareness of GT education programs, the students they are mandated to serve, or any role for GT Education in adequacy. Based on the original report of 2003, "A sound analysis of educational adequacy should include the gifted and talented student." I am concerned that an important of our education services here in the state of Arkansas is excluded. I respectfully request that gifted education be included in the report.
31.	Marci McVey	I support the request made by AAGEA and AGATE. Gifted students need to be addressed in adequacy. Thank you.
32.	Delene L. McCoy	I wholeheartedly support Gifted Education as part of our states Adequacy Report and support AGATE and AAGEA and this collaborative statement concerning adequacy.
33.	Benny Gooden	A cursory review of the adequacy reports for the past several years reveals a general disregard of the data compiled by Bureau of Legislative Research reflecting actual staffing patterns and their subsequent costs as well as the carefully reasoned testimony presented by those who hold the responsibility for the effective operation of Arkansas' local school districts. In some cases, the staffing levels reflected in the funding matrix fail to support minimal compliance with required personnel as outlined in state standards. Teacher salaries are slipping relative to SREB states and in keeping with other comparable professions. Simply requiring that the minimum salary be increased does not address the funding required to support salary schedules. In fact, even absent increases in the minimum salary, Foundation Aid increases during the past two bienniums have been insufficient to maintain required schedule costs in many school districts. Disregarding the BLR economic research which indicates increases in the CPI and other indicators and increasing the Foundation Aid by half the amount which the forecast supports is a recipe for failure in supporting Arkansas schools. The most obvious disregard of the state's honoring its Constitutional responsibility for ensuring adequacy is found in a review of statewide growth in local assessed valuation as compared to the approved funding growth in Foundation Aid. During multiple years in the recent past--including the latest year--the growth in assessed valuation statewide was double the percentage increase in Foundation Aid. What this means is: The state is providing less funding in real dollars from General Revenue while shifting the share of Foundation Aid from district sources to local schools. This is hardly in keeping with the letter or spirit of the Lake View decision. Arkansas can and must do better by its schools if we hope for the state to prosper economically.
34.	Bonnie Dale Curlin	Please include gifted education in the adequacy report.
35.	Connie T Doss	My question to the committee would be, why wouldn't you want Gifted Education? The only discouraging part is that like many other programs for specified students it does not get enough attention. This particular program is more about engaging more fully those students that want to take full advantage of their formative years in preparation for college. Thank you!
36.	Iarissa allen	We support Gifted Education at Berryville Public Schools on an administration, teacher, and parent level.
37.	Debbie Dailey	The 2018 Adequacy Report does not reflect any awareness of GT education programs, the students they are mandated to serve, or any role for GT Education in adequacy. It is important to analyze data from GT students to ensure we are addressing adequacy issues associated with these students. Please restore GT Education to the Adequacy Report.
38.	Michelle Buchanan	To whom it may concern: AGATE, (Arkansans for Gifted and Talented Education), and AAGEA (Arkansas Association of Gifted Education Administrators) appreciate the opportunity to comment on the 2018 Adequacy Report. Close reading of the report doesn't reflect any awareness of GT education programs, the students they are mandated to serve, or any role for GT Education in adequacy. Based on the original report of 2003, "A sound analysis of educational adequacy should include the gifted and talented student." In light of the recent acceptance of Arkansas' ESSA Guidelines, AGATE and AAGEA believe it is timely to analyze the appropriate data associated with GT program implementation in Arkansas in an effort to determine whether or not current funding and implementation meets the expectations of adequacy. AGATE and AAGEA respectfully request that GT Education be restored to the Adequacy Report and the original recommendations be reflected in subsequent reports on Educational Adequacy in Arkansas.
39.	Nykela Jackson	The current report does not reference or disaggregate data for gifted education students. It is important to provide an analysis of the gifted students the state serves to better understand if we are meeting their needs and determine areas of improvement.

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40.	Aaron Randolph	<p>As a public school educator, a life-long Arkansan, and as a public school parent, I would like to thank you for your time in supporting the quality of public schools in our state. To that end, I would like to share a few personal thoughts on the adequacy discussion. First of all, I believe that the education of gifted and talented students needs to be included somehow into the adequacy discussion. We cannot truly offer an adequate education to all in this state if all students aren't given the educational support they need. Educational opportunities for Gifted and talented students should be included in the same way that services for students with disabilities and for English Language Learners are included in the adequacy report. At various times since the Lakeview Lawsuit was settled G/T education was included and I believe it is time that it is permanently a part of this conversation. There is also specific language in our state-wide ESSA plan referencing gifted learners; therefore, bringing those students into the adequacy discussion would be a logical continuation of this process. Secondly, I feel that the members of the JEC committee need to consider how quickly and regularly the cost of educating our students has risen over the years and how the rate of increase in foundation funding has not matched the rate of expenditures. Recent legislation, while good and needed, continues to require more and more of our school districts, districts are also required to continue to follow salary schedules for employees, as well as expending more and more resources on school security measures. However, the increase in foundation funding has not even met the standard rate of inflation in our country. I do believe this raises concern about the adequate level of funding for public education in our state. Thank you for your time and your service to our state, Aaron M. Randolph</p>