

**Implementation Working
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January 9, 2018

Mr. Mark Hudson, Legislative Analyst
Bureau of Legislative Research
Fifth Floor, One Capitol Mall
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201

Dear Mr. Hudson:

At the request of Senator Jane English and Representative Bruce Cozart, ForwARd Arkansas is pleased to submit written testimony outlining our views on the state's current system of funding for its public education system.

ForwARd is in the process of working with leading education organizations to tackle an extensive slate of initiatives addressing areas ranging from community broadband to eliminate the homework divide to innovative career technical education programming.

Please find our adequacy testimony enclosed as a separate document. We appreciate the opportunity to participate in this process that is critical to the states' education progress.

Sincerely,

Susan Harriman
Executive Director



ForwARd Arkansas Adequacy Testimony

ForwARd Arkansas is a partnership of the Arkansas State Board of Education, Walton Family Foundation and Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation that is committed to helping every Arkansas student graduate prepared for success in college and the workplace. ForwARd seeks to better connect all facets of learning across all ages and throughout communities so that each child in Arkansas can benefit from adequate, equitable, and innovative educational experiences.

To that end we share these notes regarding the Arkansas General Assembly's requirement to study the entire scope of education in Arkansas and to determine what constitutes adequate school funding.

It has been ten years since the Lakeview case ended in 2007. The iPhone was released that same year. The world has changed. The Standards for Accreditation of Arkansas Public Schools and School Districts have not changed, and neither has the adequacy formula, which is based primarily on those Standards. The need for change is apparent from the development of methods for schools to work around some restrictions contained in the current Standards. The rise of charter schools and the effects of Act 1240 of 2015 underscore this point.

ForwARd believes that innovation in education should be the norm, not the exception. Arkansas celebrates innovative schools. We should make it easier for all schools to adopt new practices like project-based learning or personalized learning, if they have documented positive outcomes. If Arkansas is to move ahead in education rankings across states, produce a competitive workforce, and grow our economy, innovation must be afforded a prominent place in our Standards for Accreditation and in our school funding formula. New efforts such as the Governor's computer science initiative are stymied when schools cannot find funding to implement them effectively or find themselves in the position of having to move funds, creating a shortfall elsewhere. We recommend that a process be established to revamp the state's method of assessing adequacy, including to provide for a stimulus for innovation, and to advise the Arkansas Departments of Education's revision of standards.

This is most essential in our underperforming schools. The Bureau of Legislative Research publishes an equity report each biennium describing how the funding provided by the state meets the test of equity.ⁱ Other reports establish the amount of funding needed for adequacy.ⁱⁱ The determination of equity and of adequacy relies on the provision of additional funding to meet the needs of low-income students, English Language Learners, and students in need of alternative education. While the amount of funding has been viewed as adequate and equitable, the state has undoubtedly fallen short in its responsibility to ensure funding is used as was outlined throughout the Lakeview proceedings, particularly as it regards our low-income children. And the state continues to fall short in holding schools accountable on this front. There will always be some students who perform better than others; when an entire subgroup of low-income students perform at lower levels consistently over time, however, and schools filled predominantly with these students underperform their peers year after year—as is the case in our state—it becomes increasingly difficult to pass the tests of educational adequacy and equity.

There must be greater insistence by the state that the funding provided to meet the special needs of these students accomplishes its purpose. The state is responsible for seeing to it that funds designed to provide equity and adequacy are not subverted to merely keeping a district afloat. We see a need for the Arkansas Department of Education to lead a working group to determine how to ensure that school funding actually results in a substantially equal and adequate education for all students, regardless of zip code.

ForwARd was built to serve our common interests by connecting leaders, aligning policies, promoting data and research, and engaging residents and communities that will drive this next generation of learning. ForwARd welcomes the opportunity to work with you as a catalyst, convener and partner to update this critical study.

ⁱ http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/education/K12/AdequacyReports/2018/2017-09-19/EquityofRevenuesandExpendituresReport_BLR-3.pdf

ⁱⁱ http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/education/K12/AdequacyReports/2016/2017-02-01/2016_Adequacy-Report_Volume-I_2017-02-01%20HOUSE%20Revision.pdf and http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/education/K12/AdequacyReports/2016/2017-11-01/2016_Adequacy-Report_Volume-I_2017-11-01%20SENATE%20DRAFT%20Revision.pdf