

2004

Education Policy News, September 2004

University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. Dept. of Education Reform. Office for Education Policy

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Citation

University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. Dept. of Education Reform. Office for Education Policy. (2004). Education Policy News, September 2004. *Education Policy News.*, 1 (2) Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/education-policy-news/2>

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EDUCATION POLICY NEWS

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Special Points of Interest:

- *How does Arkansas' education legislation compare with that of the national No Child Left Behind Act of 2001?*
- *What are the highlights of NCLB, and what are the most heavily debated points?*
- *How does Arkansas determine whether schools are making adequate yearly progress (AYP)?*
- *Who is and how does one become a Highly Qualified Teacher in Arkansas?*

HOW DOES THE ARKANSAS ACCOUNTABILITY LAW FIT WITH THE NCLB GUIDELINES?

The Student Assessment and Educational Accountability Act, or Arkansas Act 35, represents an ambitious attempt to develop and articulate a strategic plan for ensuring that all students in Arkansas are meeting grade-level standards in reading and math. The legislation describes the types of testing schools must implement each year, how schools and districts should report data, how data should be used to inform staff development, and the sanctions students and schools will face if they fail to meet state standards.

The legislation predominantly follows guidelines outlined in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) but also exceeds some of the expectations in the federal legislation, most notably in testing requirements. NCLB requires criterion-based testing (testing that determines whether students meet Arkansas' state standards) for grades 3-8 and a continuation of the representative sample NAEP testing that Arkansas

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KEY PROVISIONS OF NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), the cornerstone of the Bush Administration's plan to reform K-12 education, strengthens significantly the federal role in education through sweeping reforms to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The stated legislative intent of the NCLB Act is "to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind". Key provisions of the measure, for both Title I and non-Title I schools, are as follows:

- accountability for education results through **annual standardized testing** and through additional standards that determine a school's adequate yearly progress (AYP);
- publication at the state and local levels of an **annual report card** detailing each school's test scores

and movement toward accomplishing AYP standards;

- implementation of a system of **rewards and sanctions** to promote school improvement;
- implementation of a plan to recruit and retain **highly qualified teachers** in every classroom.

Even as the No Child Left Behind Act sets broad federal standards for accountability, teacher quality, school improvement, and reporting results, it requires that each state develop its own NCLB plan, suited to the state's particular needs and circumstances.

To review a more detailed description of the NCLB law, and to read the complete text of this policy brief, including citations and references, visit the OEP website at <http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/Briefs.htm>

WHAT EXACTLY IS ADEQUATE YEARLY PROGRESS?

NCLB mandates that all states develop an accountability system that measures student achievement every year. The mechanism for this measurement is adequate yearly progress (AYP). States must strive to bring all students to proficient academic performance levels in reading and math on the state exams by 2014 in order to continue receiving Title I funds, a federal funding program that commits \$12 billion per year to help lower-income children.

In Arkansas, the Arkansas Comprehensive Testing Assessment and Accountability Program (ACTAAP) serves as the basis for determining AYP and incorporates the mandates of NCLB. According to a 2004 report by The Education Trust, determining AYP is a five-step process. The following article outlines the five steps and describes Arkansas' approach to determining AYP.

Step 1: States determine what all students should know and be able to do and identify appropriate assessments.

This process begins by states setting subject standards for what skills and concepts K-12 students should master at each grade level.

In Arkansas: The Arkansas Department of Education website provides curricular frameworks in all subject areas as well as a sample model curriculum.

Step 2: States identify the starting point for AYP.

The beginning targets that determine student proficiency must be set at least as high as the greater of:

- the percent proficient in the lowest performing group of students in the state (e.g. low-income students); or
- the percent proficient in the school at the 20th percentile of student enrollment within the state.

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NCLB: EDUCATION'S PANACEA OR DISASTER?

The following table comes from a policy brief that identifies strengths, weaknesses, and controversial points in the NCLB legislation. To read the complete text of this brief, including citations and references, visit the OEP website at <http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/Briefs.htm>.

NCLB: Panacea!

100% of Students Proficient in Reading and Math by 2014	If the law did not set a goal of 100% proficiency, the students most likely to be left behind would be poor and minority students and students in troubled schools.
Testing, Testing, Testing...and the High Stakes Attached	If the tests are aligned with state standards, then they are an accurate measure of what students have learned. Using multiple measures requires more time and subjectivity, which would be impractical and unrealistic.
Disaggregating Test Scores for Subgroups	Spotlighting the groups that repeatedly fall through the cracks in the education system ensures that these students receive additional support if they do not make adequate yearly progress (AYP).
School Choice	NCLB offers students the opportunity to change their situation by using federal money to attend a high-performing public school.

NCLB: Disaster!

Achieving 100% proficiency in 12 years sets an unrealistic goal. Even policymakers in states that had strong accountability systems before NCLB suggest that 100% proficiency is not realizable.
Just as teachers use multiple measures collected over time to determine the progress of their students, so should states evaluate schools using multiple indicators. Further, when there are high stakes, teachers spend a disproportionate amount of time on test-taking skills.
Even in schools where students display almost identical test scores, the schools that have more subgroups are more likely to miss their growth targets simply because they have more chances to fail.
The choice component of the legislation fails in practice because districts do not have an incentive to make the transfer an easy process to navigate; and districts with a high number of low-performing schools often have few options for students.

HOW DOES THE ARKANSAS ACCOUNTABILITY LAW FIT WITH THE NCLB GUIDELINES? (CONT.)

(Continued from page 1)

students participate in every other year. In addition to the tests mandated in NCLB, Act 35 requires:

- developmentally appropriate testing in K-2;
- norm-based testing (testing that allows schools to compare the performance of their students with those in other states) in grades 3-9; and
- end-of-course exams in multiple subject areas.

Additionally, Act 35 requires that districts biennially receive a rating from the state for their financial management practices.

The following table presents the requirements for Arkansas under NCLB side-by-side with the accompanying requirements of Act 35.

To read the complete text of this brief, including citations and references, visit the OEP website at <http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/Briefs.htm>

No Child Left Behind Act, 2001	Arkansas' Act 35, 2003: Student Assessment and Educational Accountability
Assessment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Testing in reading and math for students in grades 3-8 • By 2007-08, students tested at least once in elementary, middle, and high school in science • National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) testing in reading and math every other year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developmentally appropriate testing for students in grades K-2 • Norm-referenced tests in grades 3-9 • End of course tests in algebra I, geometry, literacy and other content areas as defined by the State
Accountability: For Schools	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statewide reports will include performance data disaggregated according to race, gender, and other criteria • Annual report cards will be made available to parents, educators, citizens, and policymakers • Schools are labeled as “in need of improvement” if they fail to meet their AYP goals two years in a row • Parents will be allowed to transfer their child to a better-performing public school • Expands federal support for charter schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools undergo a best financial management practices review biennially, conducted through site visits and receive a grade rating between an “A” and an “F” • Beginning in 2007-08, schools will receive a ranking between 1 and 5 based on student performances on criterion-referenced exams
Accountability: For Districts	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Districts publish annual report cards that report on the students as a whole as well as specified disadvantaged subgroups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Districts must publish a school performance report in the local newspaper by October 15 of each year, beginning in 2004
Accountability: For Students	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any student in a school labeled as failing after one year will be eligible for supplemental services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students not meeting the proficiency level will have a personal academic improvement plan • Beginning in 2004-05, non-proficient students will participate in a remediation program

WHAT EXACTLY IS ADEQUATE YEARLY PROGRESS? (CONT.)

(Continued from page 2)

In Arkansas: States had the option of computing one baseline for all grades or calculating different baselines for elementary, middle, and high schools. Arkansas chose to calculate separate baselines for different groups, each one indicating the standard score that defines the proficiency level for each group (see Table 1).

Step 3: States set specific targets to measure whether all groups of students are making AYP in reading and math.

After establishing the baseline, states then determine targets for increasing the number of proficient students over time. In addition to the measures of performance in reading and math, states also choose another indicator (e.g. attendance) to measure overall performance.

In Arkansas: Table 1 shows Arkansas' incremental growth targets, which culminate in 100 percent proficiency by 2014.

Step 4: Measure the performance of students and schools to determine if schools meet AYP goals.

A school makes AYP if: 1) the school as a whole has met or exceeded the statewide goal in math or reading; 2) each subgroup within the school has met or exceeded the statewide goal; 3) 95 percent of all students and 95 percent of the students in each subgroup took the tests; **and** 4) the school met the goal for the additional academic indicator. However, NCLB allows for exceptions and unique circumstances. Schools and districts may exempt up to 1 percent of all students with serious cognitive disabilities from grade-level tests. Newly arrived limited English proficiency (LEP) students also do

not factor into determining AYP. If a school does not meet the statewide goal in a given year but reduces the percent of students who are not proficient by 10 percent from the previous year and makes progress on the other academic indicator, the school will still make AYP under a "Safe Harbor" provision in the legislation.

In Arkansas: A three-year model is being used to determine AYP. The percent of students proficient for each school will be determined based on data for the most recent three consecutive years.

Step 5: Steps are taken to help students in schools that do not make AYP.

While the federal legislation encourages the states to adopt one accountability system for all public schools, only schools that receive Title I funds must face the consequences according to NCLB. Steps that are taken to help schools improve include federal funds for supplemental services, professional development, and school transfers for eligible students.

In Arkansas: The state identified 328 schools as "academically troubled" based on 2003-04 test scores, which means that they failed to make AYP for two consecutive years and will face NCLB sanctions.

The Role of AYP in Improving Schools

While the collection of data is daunting to many states, the goal of AYP is to encourage educators, parents, and the public to carefully examine student achievement data so that all students can improve.

To read the complete text of this policy brief, including citations and references, visit the OEP website at <http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/Briefs.htm>

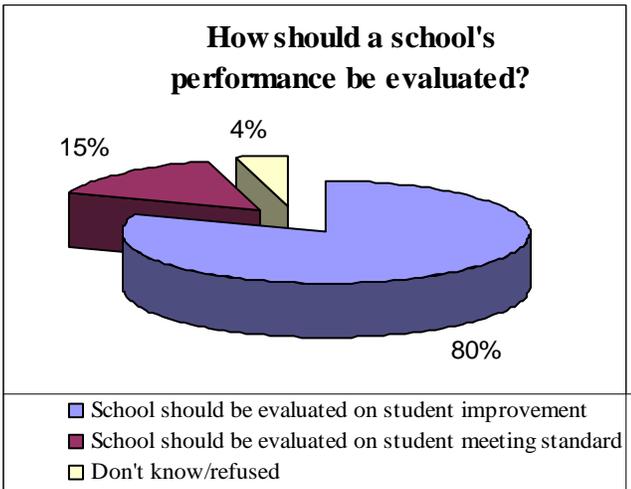
Table 1: Adequate Yearly Progress Grade Level Baselines and Target Proficiency Levels

Grade Level	Baseline Scores for 2001-02	Annual Targets for Increasing Proficiency Levels
Kindergarten - Fifth Grade Literacy	31.8%	5.68
Kindergarten - Fifth Grade Mathematics	28.2%	5.98
Sixth - Eighth Grade Literacy	18.1%	6.83
Sixth - Eighth Grade Mathematics	15.3%	7.06
Ninth - Twelfth Grade Literacy	19.0%	6.75
Ninth - Twelfth Grade Mathematics	10.4%	7.47

STATISTICAL SNAPSHOT

In March 2004, the Survey Research Center in the College of Education and Health Professions at the University of Arkansas conducted a telephone survey of more than 600 Arkansas residents concerning the NCLB. Participants in the survey encompassed a wide range of education and income levels; the vast majority were white (80%) and female (66%), and about one-third had school-aged children.

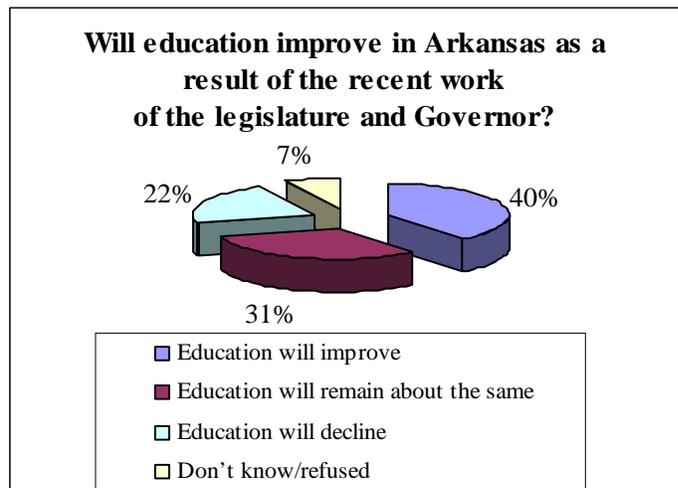
Lake View litigation reiterated) that the state is the entity that is constitutionally responsible for providing public education, many citizens were not so sure. When asked who is ultimately, legally responsible for providing public education, some correctly replied state government (39%), while others indicated that local school boards were ultimately responsible (33%), and still others understood the federal government to be primarily responsible (18%).



The No Child Left Behind Act requires that public schools administer standardized tests each year to 95 percent of students in 3rd grade and older to measure student progress. The results of the survey indicate that Arkansans strongly support (80%) evaluating a school based on how much students improve in a given school year. Also, most (75%) indicated that they do not believe that students in special education should be measured by the same standards as other students.

Finally, there were mixed responses to the recent work of the Arkansas General Assembly and the Governor's office. While 40 percent of the survey participants expressed the belief that these efforts will improve the public education available to Arkansas children, 31 percent were ambivalent, indicating that education would neither improve nor decline. Clearly, many Arkansans are taking a "wait and see" stance toward the sweeping education reforms that the legislature has initiated.

When asked how they would respond if they learned that the school their child attended was placed on the school improvement list, the vast majority (85%) indicated that they would leave their child in that school and support the school's efforts to correct deficiencies. Only 13 percent indicated that they would want to transfer their child to another school.



While most Arkansans surveyed (78%) were aware of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, many were unclear about the relationships among federal, state, and local government agencies with respect to public education. Although many Arkansans know (and the

NOW HIRING: HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS

One of the key features of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 is a requirement that all teachers in core academic areas be “highly qualified” by the 2005-2006 school year. The core academic areas which must be taught by a “highly qualified” teacher are English, reading, math, science, arts and foreign language, economics, geography, civics or government, and history. The question, however, facing many teachers, administrators, and parents is—what does “highly qualified” mean?

What Does “Highly Qualified” Mean?

According to NCLB, a “highly qualified” teacher will have a bachelor’s degree, have full certification as defined by the state, and have demonstrated competency as defined by the state in each subject area taught. Across the nation, NCLB requires **new** elementary teachers to demonstrate competency by passing a rigorous state test on subject knowledge and teaching skills in reading, writing, math, and any other academic area in the elementary curriculum. New middle and high school teachers must demonstrate competency by either passing a rigorous state exam in each core academic area they teach or by obtaining an academic major or completing coursework equivalent to an academic major, an advanced degree, or advanced certification.

Experienced elementary, middle, and high school teachers must also possess a bachelor’s degree, obtain full certification, and demonstrate their competency based on the same criteria used for new teachers—that is, they must pass a test, or states may create a “high, objective, uniform state standard of evaluation” (HOUSSE) that will determine a teacher’s ability to demonstrate subject area competency. The HOUSSE may be established by the state in accordance with six criteria established by NCLB. The standard of evaluation must:

1. Be set by the state for grade-appropriate academic subject-matter knowledge and teaching skills;
2. Be aligned with challenging state academic content standards and student achievement standards and developed in consultation with core content specialists, teachers, principals, and school administrators;
3. Provide objective, coherent information about the teacher’s attainment of core content knowledge in the academic subjects in which a teacher teaches;

3. Be applied uniformly to all teachers in the same academic subject and the same grade level throughout the state;
4. Take into consideration, but not be based primarily on, the time a teacher has been teaching the academic subject; and
5. Be made available to the public upon request.

An important clarification is that NCLB does not require all teachers to take a test to meet their state’s highly qualified requirement. Testing is only mandatory for **new elementary school** teachers. Each state will individually determine what teachers must do to be highly qualified because each state determines its certification process and how teachers can demonstrate competency in their respective teaching fields.

Arkansas Teachers

The future and current teachers of Arkansas are now faced with the same scenario occurring in districts across the United States. The following summary provides a straightforward answer to the question of what an experienced teacher in Arkansas needs to do to become or to remain a highly qualified elementary, middle, or secondary school teacher. In addition to obtaining a bachelor’s degree and meeting state certification, Arkansas teachers may choose one of the following options to demonstrate subject-area competency:

1. For those teachers who are fully licensed, but have not passed the state licensure assessment, they must:
 - pass the licensure assessment, OR
 - have a minimum of 5 years of teaching experience in the academic subject area in which the teacher teaches; OR
2. obtain ninety hours of Professional Development credit which must be:
 - recognizable for license renewal,
 - approved by the school district,
 - and in the academic subject area the teacher teaches; OR
3. earn an advanced Degree (Master’s, or Education Specialist, or Doctorate) in the academic subject area the teacher teaches; OR

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NOW HIRING: HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 6)

4. obtain National Board Certification compatible with the teaching assignment; OR
5. complete a standard program of study as described in an ADE Additional Licensure Plan (which includes the state licensure assessment) in the academic subject area the teacher teaches; OR
6. For teachers whose license expired and are pursuing re-licensure:
 - Six credit hours of coursework in the academic subject area the teacher teaches, and
 - Passing the licensure area assessment.

Conclusion

One of the primary objectives of the NCLB act is to place highly qualified teacher in every classroom across

the nation. According to NCLB, teachers must hold a bachelor's degree, have full state certification, and demonstrate subject area competency if teaching in a core academic area.

In practice, these requirements are not brand new. Of the three requirements, most states already require teachers to have a bachelor's degree and state certification. Therefore, the "new" requirement of demonstrating competency is perhaps the biggest challenge for new and experienced teachers. This is also a challenge for Arkansas and other states, as the states themselves must define their own methods for demonstrating competency.

To read the complete text of this report, including citations and references, visit the OEP website at <http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/Briefs.htm>

SPOTLIGHT: HOT SPRINGS SCHOOL DISTRICT

Quick Facts:

Total Number of Students: 3,401

Total Number of Schools: 6

Free and Reduced Lunch Rate: 70.4%

Web address: <http://hssd.net>

Student Demographics:

African American: 43%

Caucasian: 49%

Other: 8%

Hot Springs School District (HSSD) has recently been identified as one of six Innovative Magnet School Districts by the U.S. Department of Education. This recognition was due to the quality of the theme-based instructional programs, their innovative use of precise, standards-based assessments, and reporting to inform teaching and learning. Because of these strategies, this urban district has experienced dramatic increases in both student enrollment and student achievement in the last 3 years, gaining HSSD a national reputation for its dramatically improved schools.

The following are among the most notable success stories in the Hot Springs School District in recent years:

- HSSD is 1 of only 8 districts nationwide to have a K-12 International Baccalaureate course of study.
- Three of HSSD's magnet elementary schools were among the top 15 in the nation according to the Magnet Schools of America.
- HSSD developed a comprehensive formative assessment and reporting system for mathematics and literacy that is now being replicated in 8 districts across Arkansas.
- HSSD showed consistent and dramatic improvement in Benchmark scores across all grade levels and subjects tested, especially with regard to minority and economically deprived students.
- HSSD created *The Learning Institute* to help districts with curriculum alignment, formative assessment, and standards-based professional development.

"Our success is built on providing teachers and students with an internal accountability system that relies on data from carefully aligned formative assessments. Continuous improvement is only possible if we are able to take a critical look at meaningful data about student learning and then work with teachers to improve instruction based on those results."

Roy Rowe, Superintendent of HSSD

PRACTITIONER'S CORNER

INTERVIEW WITH DR. KEN JAMES, ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

In September, we were fortunate to spend some time talking with Dr. Ken James, recently appointed Director of the Arkansas Department of Education. Prior to James' May 2004 appointment, he had served as Superintendent of Schools in Lexington, Kentucky, Little Rock, Arkansas, Van Buren, Arkansas, and Batesville, Arkansas. We discussed many issues including the state of the new school year, the Lake View reforms, and (of course) the implementation of NCLB in Arkansas. What follows are excerpts from our discussion.

Q. How has the job started out and how are you enjoying being the director of ADE?

KJ: ...As we started out, it was extremely busy and we hit the ground running, but with respect to that, I am very pleased with what transpired and very proud of the State Board for stepping up to the plate and tackling these very tough issues, and making their decisions based upon the best interest of the kids.

Q. How ready was Arkansas to deal with the reforms required by No Child Left Behind?

KJ: Well, I think that Smart Start and Smart Step set the stage years ago, in terms of putting Arkansas on the road to reform efforts...we had the necessary groundwork in place with respect to No Child Left Behind. I think that positioned our state nicely. I think, as we continue to look at what we are doing in the testing arena and our accountability package...we'll continue to make adjustments as necessary to make it fair and equitable across the state as we continue to move forward. But I think Arkansas was positioned very nicely....In the most recent report, we're showing steady progress over time and this progress demonstrates that we are doing some good things in that arena.

Q. How do you think we are doing now in Arkansas at implementing No Child Left Behind's reforms?

KJ: I think we're doing very well in implementing them here at the State Department level. In our most

recent results with AYP, even though we had about 60+ new schools identified, we had well over half of our schools meeting AYP and meeting standards. I think that those are clear indicators for us that some positive things are beginning to happen....We need to make sure—and the

"We are at a pivotal time in Arkansas...We've got more money going into education than we've ever had in past history. It's going to be on our shoulders—'our shoulders' being everyone in this state and everybody working together for educational reform—to make sure that we don't squander this opportunity...We've never had the stars lined up like we have them right now."

- Dr. Ken James

law requires—that we look deep enough into data... more so than we ever have in the past...and make sure that we are, in fact, doing our best not to leave any child behind....I think that No Child Left Behind is a good law.

I don't think any of us can argue about the accountability...We've been able to tweak our accountability workbook and it put us on a more level playing field with the other surrounding states.

We've changed our "N-number," which is the big factor, from 25 up to 40...that has placed us in a better position than where we were before in terms of making sure that we are being fair and equitable to all of our school districts across the state.

Q. What are some of the biggest challenges Arkansas faces in meeting No Child Left Behind requirements?

KJ: What all states face, with respect to No Child Left Behind—one of the key factors—is making sure our constituents understand what No Child Left Behind is trying to do by working with the media to help *them* fully understand....

For example (regarding the school improvement list), everyone was painted with that broad brush....You may have 15 or 16 targets to hit in your school and you may be hitting 15 of them, but if you're not hitting all 16, if you fall into one of these categories, then you're on school improvement. We have to do a better job, I think, of educating our publics and helping them understand what school improvement is, and that it doesn't necessarily translate that you have a school that's a failure.

PRACTITIONER'S CORNER

INTERVIEW WITH DR. KEN JAMES, ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (CONT.)

Q. People talk about the school improvement list in two different ways: critics of No Child Left Behind are concerned we will over-identify schools in need of improvement. On the other hand, supporters of NCLB contend that over-identifying is okay, since identifying means we will examine the school data and look for areas that need improvement. Which one of these interpretations seems to resonate with you—is NCLB just shining a light on potential areas of concern? Or is it unfairly labeling schools?

KJ: Well, probably a combination of both....I think that it's important that we point out problem areas in schools and aggressively focus our efforts to work on those schools...but when we have labels that are tagged onto school districts...we spend a lot of time in those districts overcoming that label, and really spending a lot of energy in terms of making people understand that we're really not failing, that we've got a lot of good things going on...oftentimes it's a hard stigma to get taken away. So I think therein lies some of the problem with the labeling.

I think that we can work better and more constructively with the media to help them better understand what being on improvement means...the word "failure" was an inappropriate term, but that was immediately what was seized upon by media around the country

So we've got to do a better job of stressing to media folks, as well as to our patrons, that being on this list does not mean, necessarily, that you're about to be doomed for closure....It just means that we have some targeted areas that we need to focus on and work on, and we've got the resources to be able to do that.

Q. What do you see as the strengths of our system?

KJ: I think our strengths definitely focus on the fact that we've had some real significant professional development...some real concentrated, targeted professional development over the last few years in the areas of literacy and math.... I think that targeted focus—the fact that we've stayed the course with our benchmarks...I think that Smart Start and Smart Step have brought a clear focus to what we need to do in literacy development and math development...and I think we have a keener sense now, across the state, of

accountability and focus on learning, and really what that means.

Q. Where do we need to improve?

KJ: As you look at our data, mathematics in Arkansas has always been an issue, and it continues to be one...As you look at our fourth graders, we're making steady progress...as you get on up into eighth grade, we're making progress, but the scores aren't where they need to be in terms of having kids at higher levels of learning. So mathematics has got to be our focus... because, historically, it has been our greatest problem.

I think that closing the achievement gap, not only in this state, but across the country, is something that we're going to have to get a better handle on...we have quite a discrepancy with respect to achievement levels in majority versus minority students. So these are areas that we're going to have to really focus on: to make sure that we've got good preschool programs, that we continue to develop and focus our professional development, and that we have highly qualified teachers, especially in at-risk and high poverty schools.

Q. Do you have any other thoughts about implementing education reform in Arkansas?

KJ: ...We are at a pivotal time in Arkansas. We've gotten a lot of national attention right now, primarily because of all of the recent legislation and accountability acts that have been passed, coupled with the infusion of new dollars that we have across the board. We've got more money going into education than we've ever had in past history. It's going to be on our shoulders—"our shoulders" being everyone in this state and everybody working together for educational reform—to make sure that we don't squander this opportunity that we have. We've never had the stars lined up like we have them right now.

To read the complete text of this interview, visit the OEP website at <http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/Briefs.htm>

PRACTITIONER'S CORNER

INTERVIEW WITH DR. CHARLES WATSON, ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

In September, we were also able to ask some questions of Dr. Charles Watson, Federal Liaison and Program Manager, State Board of Education Office, Arkansas Department of Education. Dr. Watson is the primary administrator charged with implementation of NCLB.

Q. Could you talk a little bit about what AYP means and how we are implementing AYP in Arkansas?

CW: Essentially, AYP is establishing a standard, assessing students based on that standard, and reporting the results for all students as they either meet or fail to meet the conditions of the standard that's been set. The standard is a very high standard; it has to do with proficiency of kids' (performance), and ultimately, by a specific point in time, expecting all kids to meet that proficiency standard. That's a tough standard.

Q. How are we doing, in terms of how many schools, thus far, are or are not meeting AYP?

CW: Well, as of this year roughly one-third of our schools do not to meet the AYP standard at this time. Two-thirds do. Also, we had 68 schools that were previously in school improvement, and met the standard this year... You have to meet the standards for two consecutive years, so they met standards for this year, and if they meet standards next year then they'll be removed from the list.

Q. Prior to the NCLB legislation, we did have a state accountability system that included standards, assessments, etc. How is it working, integrating the new system for accountability and assessment we had previously with the new legislation?

CW: The NCLB legislation is almost mirrored in Act 35 that was approved during the Special Session in 2003.... We've been working with accountability measures, but this is really the first time where there have been penalties associated with schools.... I think the impact of NCLB has (further) shaped the state's accountability system.

Q. Overall, are there any concerns that policy-makers at the state level have with the way the legislation is

set up? Any challenges that may compel the Feds to reshape the regulations slightly?

CW: I think there are always challenges to implementation of any piece of legislation... the impact of subgroups and the fact that now all children are held to the same accountability standard is a new venture for us. I think there certainly will be dialogue... about the standard for, say... students with disabilities. Also)

"AYP is establishing a standard, assessing students based on that standard, and reporting the results for all students as they either meet or fail to meet the conditions of the standard... The standard is a very high standard."

—Dr. Charles Watson

there have been some concessions made at the federal level, in terms of students for whom English is not their primary language.

Q. There have been lots of arguments back and forth about whether we're going to end up identifying schools with lots of subgroups more often than others? I've heard two ways

of looking at it. One is you're punishing schools by identifying them and the other view is you are shining a light on these schools and then offering assistance to help them get better more quickly. Can you talk about both sides of that and how you think it's going to play out in Arkansas?

CW: Well, I don't necessarily see identifying schools (for improvement) as a punishment.... The intent of the act is to identify schools that are not meeting the standard, or for which a substantial number of students are not meeting the standard, and then to provide additional resources, to redirect resources, or to change what they're doing in order to get those students to meet the standard. NCLB should not be considered a punitive piece of legislation. It's not that at all. It is strictly legislation that has consequences when schools are not meeting the standards that have been established by the state and the federal government.

Q. What kind of assistance and additional resources will be directed at schools that have trouble making the standard?

CW: There are additional resources that go into schools that are in school improvement that can be used to plan

(Continued on page 11)

IN THE NEWS...

Parents Confused

We knew it would happen! With two different ratings systems in place in many states, there is the potential for contradictions. According to the *New York Times*, the new NCLB school ratings system has contradicted some state school report cards, which has left legislators, administrators, teachers, and parents confused about their neighborhood school. For example, 317 schools in California were rated as schools with “tremendous academic growth” on the state system but were labeled as low-performing by the federal system. Parents and educators are left wondering if the state, the federal system, or neither is correct. To read more, visit www.nytimes.com/2004/09/05education/05school.html

Who is of High Quality, Anyway?

A recent Southeast Center on Teaching Quality report discusses the difficulty of high needs schools to recruit highly qualified teachers. The report states that NCLB fails to address three key issues with regard to high quality teachers staffing every classroom. The report, however, does offer ways to address these concerns. To read more, visit http://www.teachingquality.org/Unfulfilled_Promise.htm

Who Really Graduates?

What are the *real* graduation rates in the United States? According to the latest report by Christopher Swanson of the *Urban Institute*, America’s graduation rate is grossly misstated—that is, rather than the 85 percent often mentioned, the figure is closer to 68 percent overall and as low as 50 percent for minority students. Furthermore, even within the new NCLB accountability requirements, there is concern that some states are misreporting their data. To read more, visit http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410934_WhoGraduates.pdf

Local Schools: A Good Investment

What impact can public schools have on economic development? New research from Jonathan D. Weiss of the KnowledgeWorks Foundation finds that high quality public schools can help make states and local communities more economically competitive and can increase residential property values. To read the full report, visit http://www.kwfdn.org/ProgramAreas/Facilities/weiss_book.pdf

PRACTITIONER’S CORNER (CONT.)

INTERVIEW WITH DR. CHARLES WATSON, ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

(Continued from page 10)

for additional professional development, for additional resources, for technical assistance, etc...The state has a cadre of mathematics, science, and literacy specialists who work across the state. The state has given those staff members the responsibility of assigning first priority to those schools that are in some level of school improvement in terms of their allocating their time for technical assistance. Schools are required to redirect some of their funds to improving the quality of staff members and the ability of staff to work in the school so there are many resources that are directed to helping schools meet the standard.

Q. How are we doing in the state in terms of ensuring that we will comply with the Highly Qualified Teacher requirements in 2005-2006?

CW: The state school board just adopted for public comment a rule that details our state level definition

for highly qualified teacher. Once that is in place, then we will move forward. I think that we will have issues in the area of special education, particularly at the high school and middle school level. In meeting the criteria for HQT, I think there will be some issues with teachers at middle school level, particularly those who have retooled from elementary into middle school, in terms of meeting the definition of HQT.

Q. Are there any pieces in NCLB that policymakers have looked at and said, “That’s great...that will really help us”?

CW: I think the whole idea of accountability... bringing the focus on standards to the forefront will be a big help in terms of student achievement and ultimately, the performance of all our kids.

To read the complete text of this interview, visit the OEP website at <http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/Briefs.htm>

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THE EDITOR'S NOTES

Dear Readers,

We are excited about disseminating this second issue of our newsletter. The articles in this issue explore a topic with which all educators are dealing: The No Child Left Behind Act.

One of our goals is to foster communications between policymakers and educators. To that end, this issue includes interviews with two key individuals at the ADE: Dr. Ken James, of course, is the Director of the ADE, while Dr. Charles Watson is the point person responsible for implementing

NCLB.

In our role of providing information to education policymakers and practitioners across the State of Arkansas, we are eager to hear a response from you, our readers, about this newsletter and the policy briefs that accompany it, now posted on our website, www.uark.edu/ua/oepec/. Please let us know how we can serve you most effectively.

Respectfully,
Gary Ritter



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