

Fall 2005

Education Policy News, Fall 2005

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. (2005). Education Policy News, Fall 2005. *Education Policy News.*, 2 (3) Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/education-policy-news/5>

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EDUCATION POLICY NEWS

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>Superintendents Speak Out</i>	1
<i>A Closer Look at Consolidation</i>	1
<i>Spotlight: KIPP Charter Schools</i>	4
<i>Policymaker's Corner: ADE's Janinne Riggs</i>	5
<i>AR Test Score Update</i>	6
<i>Statistical Snapshot: Teacher Supply</i>	6
<i>In the News</i>	7
<i>AR School Reform Timeline</i>	7
<i>The Editor's Notes</i>	8

Special Points of Interest:

- Superintendents who state their districts have adequate funding to attract highly-qualified teachers are more likely to come from larger districts with higher teacher salaries, lower per-pupil spending, fewer minority and free/reduced-lunch students, and slightly higher scores on the grade 11 Literacy End-of-Course Exam.
- Districts targeted for consolidation had greater per-pupil expenditures yet significantly lower teacher salaries than the rest of districts in the state.

SUPERINTENDENTS SPEAK OUT

Since the *Lake View* ruling in 2002, Arkansas has made many education reforms aimed at improving the system. The Office for Education Policy (OEP) surveyed superintendents to see what kinds of successes and challenges districts are having as a result of these reforms. OEP also asked superintendents about teacher quality and supply issues in their districts, particularly in light of No Child Left Behind's (NCLB) requirement that all schools be staffed with "highly-qualified teachers."

As of September 30, 2005, superintendents from 101 of the state's 253 districts responded. Responding

districts were representative of the entire state with respect to geographic region, school size, teacher salaries, per-pupil spending, achievement scores, and the percentage of minority and low-income students. The data analysis is not yet finalized, but here we present some initial results based on the current responses.

Funding Allocations

Survey respondents claim that they are using the majority of the recent per-pupil funding increase for professional development, hiring additional teachers and other staff, and increasing teacher

(Continued on page 2)

A CLOSER LOOK AT CONSOLIDATION

Legislation Review: Act 60

The most contentious debate during the recent flurry of school reforms was the plan to consolidate several of Arkansas' school districts. According to Act 60, all districts with fewer than 350 students in kindergarten through grade 12 for two consecutive years may voluntarily agree to consolidate with or be annexed to another district. "Administrative annexation" is the joining of an affected school district or a part of the school district with a receiving district, whereas, "administrative consolidation" is the joining of two or more school districts to create a new single school district with one administrative unit and one board of directors. However, there is no mandate to close school facilities.

The Impact: Year One

Based upon enrollment totals from 2002-03 and 2003-04, 57 of the state's smallest school districts merged with or were

annexed to create larger districts. Thirty school districts were annexed, while 27 were consolidated. Some significant differences, other than obvious enrollment disparities, are evident between the school districts targeted for consolidation/annexation with non-targeted districts across the state. As Table 3 indicates, on average there were higher rates of poverty, more minority students, lower teacher salaries, lower teacher-student ratios, and lower ACT scores in the 57 districts targeted for consolidation.

When examining for geographic trends among these affected districts, OEP found that a large percentage of the districts that were either consolidated or annexed are located in the northeast and southwest corners of the state. One of the most interesting findings is that targeted districts had greater per-pupil

(Continued on page 3)

SUPERINTENDENTS SPEAK OUT (CONT.)

(Continued from page 1)

salaries. Of those districts receiving an increase in categorical funding for low-income students, most are using this funding for special programs, such as after-school tutoring, as well as hiring additional staff, such as reading coaches. Nearly 48% of these respondents feel that these measures are resulting in improved student achievement, though 39% believe it is too soon to tell. One superintendent believes, *“the [achievement] gaps still exist, but the gaps are smaller.”* Another concludes, *“Until the legislators realize that money does matter, Arkansas will continue to struggle and suffer.”* Clearly, despite the real increases in resources that have been allocated in recent years, some administrators still believe more resources are needed.

Teacher Quality & Supply

Superintendents responding to the survey hired an average of 17 new full-time K-12 teachers in 2004-05, with a median of six. Of these, an average of 12 graduated from an Arkansas university with under-graduate degrees in education, while five received master’s degrees in education. However, most superintendents (76%) claim that the school from which teachers graduate does not matter much in hiring decisions, since most applicants graduate from the college closest to the district.

Most (54%) also think there is little difference between teacher education schools in terms of how well they prepare new teachers. *“We find good and poor teachers from all universities,”* one writes. Others, however, insist that not all programs are created equal: *“Teachers from some institutions are simply prepared for the classroom. They do not understand alignment, differentiated instruction, or have the strategies to work with students with a wide range of abilities.”*

Superintendents had mixed responses on whether their districts are receiving an adequate number of qualified applicants for positions in specific subject areas or levels. Most superintendents are able to attract sufficient numbers of language and social studies and elementary school teachers (66% and 90%, respectively). However, the vast majority are facing a dire shortage of special education (97%) and math and science (90%) teachers in their district (see graph on page 6). Not surprisingly, higher-poverty districts have a harder time attracting teachers at all levels. As one respondent explains, *“we have no choice but to take whoever applies.”*

Most respondents (86%) believe that most of the teachers who have applied to their district over the past three years were highly qualified. However, most also feel that their district does not have adequate funding to attract enough highly-qualified teachers to meet their needs (67%), or to provide an adequate education to all students (69%).

Notably, superintendents who deemed their resources as adequate to attract highly-qualified teachers (33%) were from larger districts with higher teacher salaries, less per-pupil spending, fewer minority students, but have slightly higher scores on the grade 11 Literacy End-of-Course Exam (see Table 1).

Table 1: My district has adequate funding to attract enough highly-qualified teachers to meet our needs.

District Characteristics	Agree	Disagree
District Size	2,326	1,685
Teacher Salaries	\$37,089	\$35,347
Per-Pupil Expenditures	\$6,234	\$6,269
% Minorities	16%	20%
% Free/Reduced Lunch	53%	55%
Grade 11 EOC Literacy Exam	197	194

Finally, one surprising finding is that 40% of respondents believed that a performance-pay system would help attract more highly-qualified teachers to their district. Superintendents who supported performance pay were from smaller districts with slightly lower teacher salaries, higher expenditures per pupil, more poverty students, and lower Grade 11 End-of-Course Literacy Exam scores.

Table 2: A performance-pay system would help attract more highly-qualified teachers to our district.

District Characteristics	Agree	Disagree
District Size	1,585	2,161
Teacher Salaries	\$35,224	\$36,445
Per-Pupil Expenditures	\$6,404	\$6,132
% Minorities	18%	19%
% Free/Reduced Lunch	56%	52%
Grade 11 EOC Literacy Exam	194	196

To read a policy brief on the survey results, visit OEP’s website at: <http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/Briefs.htm>

A CLOSER LOOK AT CONSOLIDATION (CONT.)

Variables	Targeted Districts (n = 57)	Districts Not Targeted (n = 251)
% Free/Reduced Lunch	66.78	53.20
% Non-white	23.61	21.96
Per-Pupil Spending	\$8,803	\$6,290
Teacher Salaries	\$30,803	\$35,879
Teacher-Student Ratio	10.40	13.77
ACT	18.81	20.19
Enrollment	236.33	1743.21

Winslow High / Greenland	Lake View Campus / Barton-Lexa
Bright Star / Fouke	Grady Campus / Star City
McRae High / Beebe	Gould High / Dumas
Cotton Plant High / August	Arkansas City High / McGehee
Holly Grove High / Clarendon	Cord-Charlotte High / Cedar Ridge
Mt. Holly High / Smackover	

expenditures yet significantly lower teacher salaries compared to non-targeted districts.

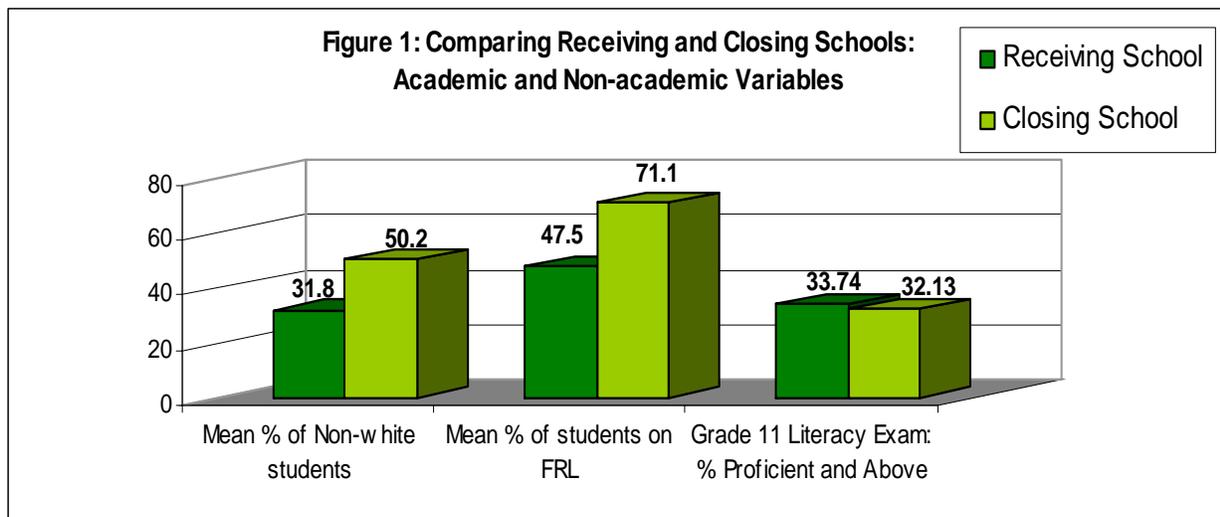
The Impact: Year Two

A primary driver of the consolidation debate is the existence of small high schools that may be unable to deliver required coursework. In year one, consolidation of high schools was prohibited; however, in year two, eleven of the state’s small high schools were closed as a result of the consolidation and annexation of the aforementioned school districts. Table 4 lists schools which were closed, along with their receiving schools.

A first look at the consolidated high schools reveals some interesting differences between schools that were closed and the receiving schools, with respect to the percentage of minority and free/reduced-lunch students and standardized test scores (see figure below).

Test scores and funding information for the 2004-05 school year, the first year of the consolidation, will soon become available, and researchers will investigate how consolidation has affected the educational systems for those districts, schools, and communities that were changed by Act 60. At the time of publication of this newsletter, however, few conclusions can be drawn from the consolidated districts. Are students in these districts now receiving a “better” education? Do they have more course choices? Are students being exposed to more activities? The purpose of the consolidation was to ultimately benefit students; however, the full benefits and costs of the consolidation effort are likely to only be evident after a few more years. OEP will be watching these developments and will provide further analysis as results become available.

To read a policy brief on the effects of consolidation,, visit OEP’s website at: <http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/Briefs.htm>



SPOTLIGHT: KIPP CHARTER SCHOOLS

During the most recent legislative session, the maximum number of open-enrollment charter schools was increased from 12 to 24. Also, in recognition of the effectiveness of the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP), charter schools partnering with KIPP are exempt from this cap.

KIPP is a network of free, open-enrollment public charter schools for 5th-8th grade students in high-need communities throughout the United States. Three-quarters of KIPP students receive free or reduced-price lunches, and 90% are minorities. KIPP has grown to a national network of 51 schools in 15 states and the District of Columbia, with many new schools slated for opening this fall.

KIPP Schools share a core set of operating principles known as the Five Pillars:

- 1. High Expectations.** KIPP has clear, measurable, high expectations, reinforced through a range of rewards and consequences for academic performance and good behavior.
- 2. Choice & Commitment.** KIPP faculty, students, and parents must sign a “commitment statement” regarding the time and effort they must put forth in order to achieve success.
- 3. More Time.** KIPP students attend school from 7:15 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, and on Saturdays and summer breaks as needed.
- 4. Power to Lead.** The principals of KIPP Schools have control over their school budgets and personnel. All KIPP educators and staff receive ongoing professional development.

Time Spent in School:

- Average # of hours KIPP students are in school each year: 1,878 hours
- Average # of hours neighboring public school students are in school each year: 1,170
- KIPP students spend 38% more time in school each year than other students.

College Attendance & Scholarships:

- Percentage of KIPP alumni in college: 76%
- High school scholarships and aid earned by KIPP alumni: over \$21 million

5. Focus on Results. KIPP Schools focus on high student performance on standardized tests and other objective measures.

The “KIPP to College” program empowers KIPP alumni to continue to use the scholarly habits, knowledge, and qualities of character learned at KIPP through:

- Support counseling for the student and their family;
- Academic support services and programs;
- College and financial aid counseling;
- Extracurricular activities; and
- Summer internships, job placement, and other leadership and enrichment opportunities.

The results have been positive: students excel academically, develop confidence and leadership skills, and experience the world through local and out-of-state field lessons. A study released in August 2005 by the Educational Policy Institute (EPI) found that KIPP Schools “have a dramatic impact on reading, language, and mathematics achievement for fifth-grade students.” The EPI study found that 5th-grade cohorts at KIPP Schools post substantially greater academic gains on the [SAT], a finding consistent with prior research on KIPP schools. After four years at KIPP, students earn acceptance to competitive college-preparatory high schools, many becoming first generation college students.

For more information about KIPP schools, visit <http://www.kipp.org>

To read EPI’s evaluation, visit: <http://www.educationalpolicy.org/pdf/KIPP.pdf>

Delta College Preparatory School

There is one KIPP school in Arkansas: the Delta College Preparatory School located in Helena, AR. The charter school opened its doors to 25 fifth-graders in 2002 and will expand to a full middle school by the 2005-06 school year. For more information, visit:

<http://www.deltacollegeprep.org>

POLICYMAKER'S CORNER: JANINNE RIGGS

Janinne Riggs is Assistant Director of the School Improvement and Professional Development division of the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE), which helps schools develop curricular and instructional practices, access effective professional development opportunities, and locate and use community, state, and federal resources for school improvement. OEP was fortunate to get her perspective on the state's new professional development requirements.

Last year, the state legislature enacted Act 74, which requires teachers to participate in 60 hours of professional development each year instead of the previously mandated 30 hours. Have teachers been able to find opportunities to meet these requirements?

The professional development funds must be used to support the requirements of the ACSIP [Arkansas Consolidated School Improvement Planning] for increasing student achievement. One use of the funds has been to employ literacy and mathematics specialists and coaches.

Teachers can participate in a variety of professional development offerings available through ADE, co-ops [educational service cooperatives], the Arkansas Leadership Academy, and other organizations. These groups work collaboratively to ensure that offerings meet the needs of schools, are aligned to the standards developed by the NSDC [the National Staff Development Council], and are tied to the school improvement plan. Teachers can also earn credit for college work that meets the Act's criteria. In addition, credit can be earned for job-embedded activities, such as study groups, learning teams, and action research. The Act also requires that professional development be evaluated by participants. One component of the online system currently under development will be a uniform professional development evaluation tool.

Many teachers now fulfill most of their professional development requirements before the school year begins. Is this strategy more effective than taking courses throughout the year?

We recognize that one-shot workshops are not the most effective professional development delivery system. Thus, the ADE offerings are based on a one- to three-year commitment, with teams of teachers attending the courses. Principals are also required to attend specific sessions. The courses allow not only for acquiring new knowledge and studying the latest research, but also for application, reflection, and coaching.

What are some benefits we should expect to see as a result of the increased funding?

Higher student achievement should be a major benefit of quality professional development. Another key benefit is teacher retention.

Do some programs seem to be more effective than others?

Reading First is a model that employs all aspects of quality professional development—research based, long-term, job-embedded reflection and coaching.

How are rural districts managing to offer increased professional development for their teachers?

Co-ops, as well as the ADE, provide programs for rural districts. Online programs will also expand opportunities. The state is currently developing a system for making online programs available to teachers 24-7. Professional development is not just attending a workshop or having a speaker in the district. It is a group of teachers with a common need coming together to research and study as a team. Grade levels need to have common time to study student work in order to design and implement curriculum that enable students to be successful.

In sum, what recommendations would you make for how to increase the skills of Arkansas teachers?

We recommend that professional development plans be strategic and focused and allow for a variety of delivery methods. Professional development plans should be developed in a collaborative effort between teachers and administrators. Finally, we should no longer view professional development as a single workshop or conference, but instead as job-embedded, allowing for study groups and learning-team types of activities.

“Professional development is not just attending a workshop or having a speaker in the district.”

ARKANSAS TEST SCORE UPDATE

While school was out over the summer, the Arkansas Department of Education released students' scores from several standardized tests administered over the past year.

Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)

This spring, 342,711 students in grades 3-9 were the first ever to take the norm-referenced Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in Arkansas. Students generally scored at or above the 50th percentile, based on national norms. High points include:

- Fourth-graders scored at the 68th percentile on the math concepts and estimation portion.
- Both the state's kindergarten math and 2nd-grade reading scores were in the 64th percentile when compared to their counterparts nationwide.

End-of-Course Exams

Arkansas students showed progress on end-of-course exams in algebra and geometry this year. In algebra, 23% of students scored at the advanced level in algebra, up from 14% last year; while 17% scored at the advanced level in geometry, up from 10%.

Meanwhile, 45% of students taking this year's 11th-grade literacy exam scored at proficient or above—the same percentage as last year. The percentage of minorities scoring at grade level increased by as much, if not more, than that of white students over the past

year, with four of the six racial/ethnic subgroups showing improvements of 1-2%.

Advanced Placement (AP) Exams

There was a major increase in the number of students participating in the Advanced Placement (AP) program in the state this year, as well as an increase in AP exam scores. *Increases* from last year's exam include:

- # of Arkansas students taking AP exams: 108%
- # of low-income students taking AP exams: 40%
- # of African-Americans taking AP exams: 30%
- # of Latinos taking AP exams: 45%
- # of AP exams scored 3+ (on scale of 1-5): 34%

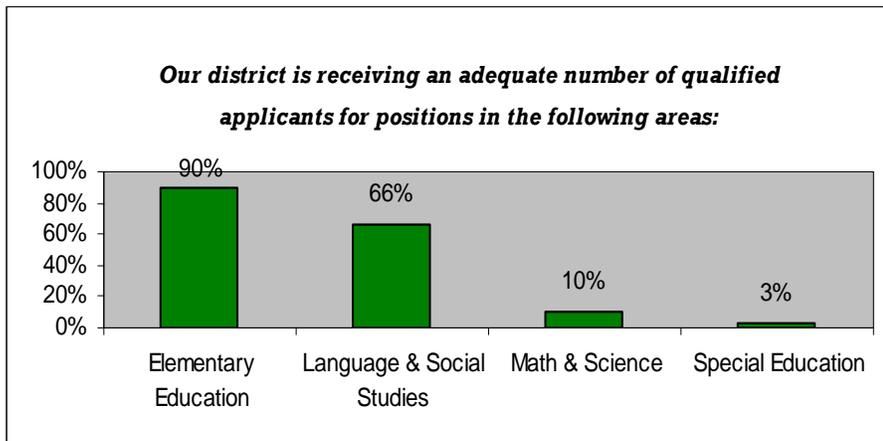
ACT College Entrance Exam

Students taking the ACT in 2005 scored roughly the same as their peers last year. The average composite score for students this year was 20.3, compared to 20.4 last year; the national average composite score this year was 20.9. Arkansas students averaged 19.6 in math and 20.1 in science, compared to national averages of 20.7 and 20.9, respectively.

For more information, visit OEP's website: <http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/ardepted.htm>

STATISTICAL SNAPSHOT: TEACHER SUPPLY IN AR

In our **2005 Superintendent Survey** (see page 1), OEP asked superintendents whether their districts are receiving enough qualified applicants in various levels and subject areas, such as math and science, language and social studies, special education, and elementary education. The percent of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing are shown



While Arkansas districts have an abundant supply of applicants in elementary education and language and social studies, there remains a dire shortage of aspiring teachers in math and science, and particularly special education.

IN THE NEWS

State Welcomes Gulf Coast Students & Teachers

Over 75,000 hurricane evacuees from the Gulf Coast have made Arkansas their new (and perhaps permanent) home over the past few weeks, including an unknown number of teachers and students. The Arkansas Department of Education has developed a webpage to help teachers and students during this difficult time: http://arkedu.state.ar.us/news/hurricane_info.html

CEP Report: Good News on Public Schools

The Center on Education Policy's (CEP) recent report, *Do You Know... The Latest Good News About American Education?*, highlights positive trends in public education over the past 20 years in areas such as student achievement, teaching quality, and higher education: <http://www.ctredpol.org/pubs/LatestGoodNews/LatestGoodNewsAug05.pdf>

Family Dinners Linked to Better Grades, Lower Substance Abuse

A new Columbia University study finds that teenagers who eat dinner with their families at least five times a week are 40% more likely to get better grades in school, 42% less likely to drink alcohol, 59% less likely to smoke cigarettes, and 66% less likely to try marijuana: <http://www.casacolumbia.org>

AR Panel Finds Growing Achievement Gap

The Arkansas Public Policy Panel's new report claims that the state's achievement gap is increasing in terms of income, race, and disabilities. For example, a nearly 3-to-1 gap exists in passage rates on 11th-grade literacy exams between white and black students: http://www.arpanel.org/education_report.pdf

ARKANSAS SCHOOL REFORM TIMELINE

1979	Alma School District & 10 other districts file lawsuit over school-funding formula.
1983	Arkansas Supreme Court strikes down state's public school-funding formula.
1984	State raises sales tax by 1¢ to help fund public education.
1992	Lake View School District sues state over disparities in school funding.
1994	Pulaski County Chancery Court Judge rules in favor of Lake View, finding finance system violates education adequacy & equity provisions of state constitution.
1995	State enacts bill giving money to districts equally on a per-student basis.
1996	Voters approve Amendment 74, requiring all districts to have at least 25 property tax mills for schools.
2000	State Supreme Court sends Lake View case back to Pulaski County Circuit Court.
May 2001	Pulaski Chancery Court Judge declares funding system inequitable & inadequate and orders state to fund preschool.
Nov. 2002	State Supreme Court upholds Pulaski Chancery Court's ruling & sets Jan. 1, 2004, deadline for Legislature to comply; overrules decision on preschool funding.
Sept. 2003	Consultants issue school finance adequacy report calling for nearly \$850 million in new spending.
Dec. 2003	Legislature convenes special session to address school finance concerns.
Jan. 2004	Lake View District asks state Supreme Court to hold state in contempt for failing to comply with Lake View ruling; Supreme Court agrees, retaking jurisdiction of case & appointing 2 Special Masters to evaluate compliance.
Feb. 2004	Legislature increases school funding by more than \$400 million for 2005, sets new funding formula, and consolidates districts that have fewer than 350 students for two consecutive years.
June 2004	Supreme Court takes itself out of case, citing satisfaction with current work & concerns over separation of powers.
Nov. 2004	Consultants assess over 6,000 school buildings in state and find \$2.3 billion in immediate needs.
April 2005	Legislature sets aside \$104 million to improve facilities but delays an increase in base school funding level.
April 2005	49 districts request State Supreme Court to reopen Lake View case over lack of base funding increase.
June 2005	State Supreme Court agrees and reappoints Special Masters to take testimony and issue report by October 1, 2005.
Oct. 2005	Special Masters issue report calling for increased funding.

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**IN OUR
NEXT
ISSUE...**

***The Office for
Education Policy's
next newsletter will
focus on the
ongoing Lake View
school finance
lawsuit and
legislative
reactions.***

Visit our website for more info!
<http://www.uark.edu/ua/oeop>

OFFICE FOR EDUCATION POLICY MISSION:

***The Office for Education Policy seeks
to be a resource that aids state policymakers, educators,
administrators, and other leaders in thoughtful decision-making
concerning K-12 education in the state of Arkansas.***

THE EDITOR'S NOTES

Dear Colleagues,

This fall has gotten off to a busy start in the Office for Education Policy, as we keep on top of the latest education news and research throughout the state and beyond. This newsletter focuses on the effects of various education reform initiatives in the state over the past few years. Are recent funding increases making a difference? What challenges do districts and schools still seem to be facing? Among the issues addressed are:

- Perceptions of recent reforms by the state's superintendents;
- Early impacts of the school district consolidation legislation; and

- Arkansas students' latest standardized test score results.

In addition, Arkansas' Special Masters issued their findings on the legislature's compliance with the *Lake View* ruling this month, and we expect to be able to give you a complete update and analysis in the days to come.

Please let us know how we can best serve you in the future, and visit our website for the latest updates:

<http://www.uark.edu/ua/oeop>

Respectfully,
Gary Ritter



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