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EDUCATION POLICY NEWS

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Special Points of Interest:

- OEP recently released its first annual Arkansas Report Card, providing state-level achievement and demographic data at a glance.
- Teacher salaries in the state are on the rise, and the difference between the highest-paying and the lowest-paying districts is shrinking.

OEP's 2006 ARKANSAS REPORT CARD

In accordance with state law, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) recently mailed its fifth annual Arkansas School Performance Report Card to parents across the state and added a searchable version to its website. The report cards consist of state, district, and school-level achievement data and other accountability measures from 2005, including achievement, access, retention, discipline, demographics, school choice, and school finance.

The Office for Education Policy (OEP) at the University of Arkansas has also assembled its own handy 2006 Arkansas Report Card, which is included in this

newsletter. This state-level report card provides a snapshot of Arkansas demographics and achievement data from several state and national exams: the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), ACT, Advanced Placement Exams, End of Course exams in Geometry, Algebra, and Grade 11 Literacy, and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). As this report card shows, Arkansas' students are improving on almost all academic indicators, yet still remain a bit behind national norms on the NAEP and ACT exams. To access OEP's report card online, visit our website at http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/factsheets/2006_Arkansas_Report_Card.pdf

AYP IN ARKANSAS: WHO'S ON TRACK?

How "good" are Arkansas schools? Under the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, the current measure of a school's success in Arkansas and around the country is based on whether its students' standardized test scores reached the adequate yearly progress (AYP) benchmark. Those schools not making AYP are placed on the list of schools "in need of improvement," and therefore face a series of sanctions, from being required to offer students school choice or free supplemental education services, to being taken over by the state.

In November 2005, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) announced that nearly a quarter of Arkansas' public schools (274) failed to make AYP in 2004-05 and are therefore classified as being in "school improvement" (SI) status for the 2005-06 school year (see Table 2).

But is this a fair or accurate assessment of schools' quality of instruction? Schools may appear on the list for a variety of reasons. For example, a school may miss AYP in just one subgroup, but still be placed on the list of schools needing improvement.

Researchers from the Office for Education Policy (OEP) analyzed data for all Arkansas schools on this SI list in 2004-05 and 2005-06, as compared to all schools that did make AYP during these periods. OEP examined the following characteristics of schools on the school improvement lists:

- school level (grade span);
- school and district size;
- geographic region and urbanicity;
- % of minority students;
- % of students in free/reduced-price

(Continued on page 3)

ARKANSAS TEACHER SALARIES

On April 7, 2006, the legislature voted to increase teacher salaries by 1.6% in 2006-07 and another 2.4% in 2007-08. These increases are in response to the belief that Arkansas does not pay its teachers enough; these concerns are generally based on questions of adequacy and equity.

Teacher Salaries: Adequacy

In order to test the adequacy of teacher salaries, we examined the salaries of Arkansas teachers over the last decade in comparison to other states. The most recent national data on teacher salaries is for 2003-04, which is before Arkansas provided further increases to its teacher salaries, based on the Act 59 funding formula. However, we can describe the changes from 1993-94 to 2003-04.

As Table 1 indicates, Arkansas paid teachers over 25% less than the national average in 1993-94. After adjusting for cost-of-living (COL) differences between states, Arkansas' 1993-94 rank improved to 38th, which still ranks in the lower half of all states. A decade later, Arkansas' 2003-04 teacher salaries ranked 37th, but improved to 25th after COL adjustments. This information indicates that Arkansas increased its salaries relative to other states.

To investigate this question further, we computed the changes in salaries in the last two years and over the last decade. We find that from 2001-02 to 2003-04, Arkansas' teacher salaries experienced greater percentage increases than occurred in all but three other states, and Arkansas ranks 11th in the rate of salary increases made over the

last decade. The most recent legislative decisions to further increase teacher salaries may well nudge Arkansas into the upper half of the United States with respect to teacher salary. Consequently, in the future, Arkansas legislative and school leaders may not need to face criticism on the level of salaries paid to teachers in the state.

Teacher Salaries: Equity

In addition to the adequacy discussion, there is concern that Arkansas is not providing equitable salaries to teachers across the state. One straightforward method to test this assertion is to compare the salaries in the highest-paying districts (95th percentile) to those in the lowest-paying districts (5th percentile) over time. We did this for both average and beginning teacher salary in 2003-04 and 2004-05.

We find that the difference between the highest and lowest paying districts for average teacher salary decreased from 48.6% to 36.2% over the two-year period. Similarly, we found the difference between the highest and lowest paying districts for beginning teacher salary decreased from 33.7% to 17.8% over that same time frame. These reductions in salary disparities indicates that Arkansas is becoming more equitable; indeed, compared to other states, school resources in Arkansas are distributed relatively equitably.

To read more on this issue, see our policy brief at <http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/briefs/teachersalaries06.pdf>

Table 1: Average Teacher Salary Comparison, 1993-94 to 2003-04

State	Average Salary 1993-94	Average Salary 2001-02	Average Salary 2003-04	Adjusted Average Salary 2003-04	% Change from 2001-02 to 2003-04	% Change from 1993-94 to 2003-04
Arkansas	\$28,312	\$36,026	\$39,226	\$44,373	8.9%	38.5%
Louisiana	\$26,243	\$36,328	\$37,123	\$41,294	2.2%	41.5%
Mississippi	\$25,153	\$33,295	\$36,217	\$41,344	8.8%	44.0%
Missouri	\$30,324	\$36,053	\$38,247	\$42,497	6.1%	26.1%
Oklahoma	\$27,612	\$32,870	\$35,061	\$40,162	6.7%	27.0%
Tennessee	\$30,514	\$38,515	\$40,318	\$45,200	4.7%	32.1%
Texas	\$30,519	\$39,230	\$40,476	\$45,530	3.2%	32.6%
US Average	\$35,813	\$44,367	\$46,597	\$46,597	5.0%	30.1%
AR Diff. From US Average	-\$7,501	-\$8,341	-\$7,371	-\$2,224	+3.9%	+8.4%
AR Rank of 51 (high=1)	42	45	37	25	4	11

AYP IN ARKANSAS: WHO'S ON TRACK? (CONT.)

lunch program;

- per-pupil expenditures; and
- scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and the state's Grade 11 Literacy Exam.

Among the study's findings: the subgroups most likely to not make AYP in Arkansas during 2005-06 were low-income students in math and reading (51.8% and 45.3% of sanctioned schools, respectively, missed making AYP in these subgroups), African-American students in math (45.4%), and the combined student population in math (34.7%). This follows the trend from 2004-05.

The authors also found some significant differences in the student characteristics of schools making AYP compared to those not making AYP. In particular, schools not making AYP had significantly more low-income and minority students. Schools not making AYP also had significantly larger enrollments and were located in districts with higher per-pupil expenditures. Not surprisingly, they also had lower scores on the ITBS and Grade 11 literacy exam.

Our findings appear to support those of many other studies on AYP and subgroup accountability policies: the identification of many schools in Arkansas as "needing improvement" may be a reflection of the disadvantages their students face. Consequently, some researchers have

suggested measuring annual growth in student achievement, rather than using mean proficiency as the primary measure of the performance of schools and subgroups. In fact, the U. S. Department of Education (DOE) is currently considering proposals from several states—including Arkansas—to participate in a pilot program that would allow them to use value-added measures of student growth rather than the current AYP model under NCLB. OEP will continue to monitor Arkansas schools' AYP status and the potential new growth model over the coming months and examine how it will affect all students and schools across the state.

In the meantime, researchers in the University of Arkansas' Department of Education Reform have developed a new School Performance Index (SPI), which attempts to disentangle school quality from the advantages and disadvantages given to a school, such as student poverty levels. Based on the SPI, many schools that failed to make AYP actually performed much better than expected, despite the high numbers of disadvantaged students.

To read OEP's working paper, "AYP in Arkansas: Who's on Track?," visit our website at

<http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/workingpapers/ayp.pdf>

To learn more about the SPI, visit

http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/der_spi_index.htm

STATISTICAL SNAPSHOT: AYP STATUS OF ARKANSAS SCHOOLS

Table 2: School Improvement (SI) Status for Schools Not Making AYP in 2004-05 and 2005-06

School Improvement Status	2004-05			2005-06		
	# of Schools	% of Schools on SI List	% of all AR Schools (N = 1,130)	# of Schools	% of Schools on SI List	% of all AR Schools (N = 1,137)
SI-Year 1	235	77.0%	20.7%	74	27.0%	6.5%
SI-Year 2	65	21.3%	5.7%	151	55.1%	13.2%
SI-Year 3	4	1.3%	0.3%	44	16.0%	3.8%
SI-Year 4 or 5	1	0.3%	0.0%	5	1.7%	0.3%
Total	305	100.0%	26.9%	274	100.0%	24.1%

SPOTLIGHT: SUPPLEMENTAL EDUCATION SERVICES

NCLB Supplemental Services

The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 gives students who attend Title I schools not making adequate yearly progress (AYP) the right to transfer to better-performing public schools and/or receive free supplemental education services, such as after-school tutoring. Under NCLB, states must provide a list of approved supplemental services providers to districts, who then are supposed to provide the list to parents of eligible students prior to the start of the school year, so that they can select the best service provider for their children themselves.

Supplemental Education Services in Arkansas

As of the 2005-06 school year, 200 schools in Arkansas are in School Improvement Year 2 or above and are therefore required to offer supplement services to eligible students, up from 70 in 2004-05 (see Table 2). However, no studies have been conducted on how (or whether) districts or schools are actually implementing this requirement of the NCLB law, or whether it appears to be improving student achievement.

To help fill in the gap in our knowledge about supplemental services, OEP analyzed the list of supplemental service providers approved by the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) for 2004-05 and 2005-06, to see what kinds of options are available to parents. We coded the state's list of providers according to several categories and subcategories: accessibility of information; characteristics of providers (e. g., for-profit vs. non-profit, cost of services); types of services offered (e. g., times, locations, and subject areas); types of students served (e. g., grade levels and student subgroups); and evidence of qualifications or effectiveness.

Examples of Approved Providers

A scan of the 2005-06 list of approved providers quickly reveals the vast range of providers' apparent qualifications and strategies to boost academic achievement. For example, **Education Station**, which is affiliated with the national for-profit company, Sylvan Learning, reports that its own internal evaluation found that its national average for students with more than 30 hours of tutoring showed statistically significant improvement in reading.

In contrast, another provider, **Save Our Kids: Academics Through Sports**, based in Crawfordsville, AR, presents as evidence of demonstrated effectiveness the fact that the program is "directed by a former Harlem Globetrotter who has worked extensively in after school programs and summer camps with low socioeconomic status students." Likewise, the **Crisis and Conflict Communication Association**, based in North Little Rock, AR, makes no mention of how the Association has (or potentially could) improve students' math and reading skills. Rather, the program (which costs \$175 per pupil per day) seeks "to provide students with the training, skills, and resources necessary to manage conflicts constructively, to solve problems creatively, to make difficult decisions collaboratively, and to develop students emotionally, socially, and cognitively in order to contribute in the creation of a save [sic] and constructive learning environment for all students and educators." More research is needed in order to evaluate each provider's claims.

There were 33 approved supplemental service providers in Arkansas in 2005-06, down from 37 in 2004-05. Of these, 15 providers (43%) were based in Arkansas. In 2005-06, only 18 of the 33 service providers had been approved by the state in the previous year, and there appears to be a high turnover in the companies approved from year to year. The cost of services (which districts, not parents, are responsible for paying) was listed for most of the 33 providers in 2005-06; however, it is unclear whether these figures are per student vs. per group of students, or per hour vs. per week, etc.

Among OEP's main findings:

- So far, little reliable information on supplemental service providers is available for parents and districts, making it difficult for them to make informed decisions about the services;
- Most service providers claim to be able to serve students in multiple locations (including online) and at varying times of the day or year;
- While there appears to be an ample supply of approved service providers in Arkansas, the distribution of these providers is uneven across the state; and
- The overall quality of service providers approved by the state remains unclear, and studies are needed on their effectiveness in improving student achievement.

To read OEP's policy brief, "Supplemental Services in Arkansas," visit our website at <http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/briefs/ses.pdf>

POLICYMAKER'S CORNER: DR. BRUCE BAKER

Dr. Bruce D. Baker is Associate Professor at the University of Kansas, where he focuses on school finance and equity. He has done extensive work on school finance litigation for the states of Kansas and Texas. OEP asked for his perspective on school finance reforms across the country and the role of empirical evidence in the decision-making process.



In Arkansas, the state Supreme Court has played an important role in defining adequacy and equity in K-12 education. Is this a reasonable role for a state court?

Equity and adequacy lawsuits are common—more than 40 states have been involved in such litigation. State courts are better positioned to deal with questions of distribution, fairness, and equity than to deal with the overall level of funding—this can be influenced by state budget constraints. That said, there may be extreme cases where at least some districts' students are being deprived of even a minimally adequate education. In this case, there is a role for the state court to intervene on the question of adequacy.

Arkansas hired consultants to conduct an adequacy study, by which legislators defined the characteristics and the cost of an “adequate” education. Can we truly define an “adequate” education using research?

Research can be helpful as rigorous data analysis is necessary for informing policymakers who must make decisions regarding distribution of resources across districts, especially where questions of vertical equity are concerned. That is, empirical analysis is especially important to identify those areas where more money is needed and by how much.

Critics of adequacy studies argue that choices regarding educational spending are purely political decisions. How would you respond?

Pure political control over distribution across districts and children can lead to systematic discrimination against groups whose legislators simply have less power in the political process. For example, a key element of the Kansas case is what the Supreme Court has referred to as “political distortion” of the cost adjustments to base aid as the system provides greater need adjusted aid per pupil to affluent suburban districts than to their poor urban neighbors. The justification is that it costs more to educate children attending new school facilities (in the suburban districts) and that suburban teachers must be paid more because of high suburban housing prices. This is vertical equity gone awry. In this case, the Kansas court intervened. This appeared to be a case of discrimination, not simply a matter of political decision-making. There must be limits to such legislative discretion. Judicial oversight has a role in school finance.

How can one calculate the “cost” of an adequate education when the context in each school and district is different?

Rigorous data analysis includes linking resource levels to student outcomes and considering the influence of student characteristics and district conditions. We must also consider the relative cost efficiency of schools and districts. That is, the best possible approach to evaluating the cost of educational outcomes, and especially how those costs vary from one district to another, is the education cost function, based on: 1) multiple years of data within a state; 2) a mix of performance level and value-added student outcomes; and 3) a broad range of student characteristics.

What does research on education cost functions suggest?

All available education cost function studies do find that it costs more to achieve higher outcomes (positive, statistically significant coefficient between outcomes and spending, controlling for inefficiency) and that it costs more to achieve higher outcomes with certain student populations (poverty, LEP/ELL) and under certain conditions (small, remote rural schools, high cost labor markets, etc.).

Many studies have shown no consistent relationship between spending and educational achievement. Are these results consistent with your comment above?

Yes, when one summarizes all of the statistical attempts since the 1960s to estimate a relationship between money and test scores, one gets a really mixed bag, with a large number of non-significant relationships. However, even among these studies, when one looks at those that estimate more statistically rigorous models of resource effects on individual student level value added outcomes, where the hierarchical structure of schooling is incorporated, and where the “shape” (non-linear) of the input-outcome relationship is not oversimplified, most studies do find a positive, statistically significant relationship between money and outcomes. The frequent claim that the “vast majority of studies” show no relationship between money and outcomes is at best misleading and at worst flat-out wrong.

Money can matter. Teacher quality improvements, such as having more teachers with stronger academic backgrounds, especially in math and science, can also lead to improved outcomes. In the long term, increased wages for teachers can influence the types of individuals that choose to go into teaching. In short, more teachers and higher quality teachers do cost more. And it costs even more to get higher quality teachers to work in the least desirable schools.

Unfortunately, current teacher pay structures are not designed to attract, recruit, retain, or reward the best and brightest teachers. Structural changes to teacher pay are necessary in addition to more money.

COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL REFORMS

Thousands of schools across the country, in particular low-performing schools that serve low-income students, are implementing comprehensive school reforms (CSR) to better serve their students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. As school leaders in Arkansas look for proven options that will increase student performance and school management, CSR is one *research-supported* option to consider.

What is a CSR Model?

The purpose of comprehensive school reforms is to integrate research-based practices into a school-wide effort to raise student achievement and improve other important student outcomes, such as dropout rates or classroom behavior. Though there are a variety of CSR models, they all have one common goal: to re-organize and revitalize entire schools rather than simply using a “band-aid” method of implementing numerous specialized, often uncoordinated school improvement initiatives. When implemented correctly, CSR models can represent a comprehensive and scientifically-based approach to school reform.

Selecting a CSR Model

There are a variety of CSR models that schools can choose to implement. In an effort to help schools in this selection process, researchers have been studying the effectiveness of the most commonly implemented CSR models for several years. Findings from the most recent review of CSR models were published this past fall by the Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center (CSRQ) at the American Institutes for Research. This report reviewed nearly 800 existing studies that examined 22 widely implemented CSR models (mostly at the elementary school level). Each CSR model was reviewed using stringent standards and was rated on five domains:

- 1) Evidence of positive effects on student achievement;
- 2) Evidence of positive effects on additional outcomes;
- 2) Evidence of positive effects on parent, family, and community involvement;
- 4) Evidence of a link between research and the model’s design; and
- 5) Evidence of services and support to schools to enable successful implementation.

Evidence of Effectiveness

The review by CSRQ, which echoed the findings of many previous reviews of CSR models, found that two models stand above the rest with regard to their ability to increase academic achievement for at-risk students: *Direct Instruction* and *Success for All*. According to the CSRQ report, both Direct Instruction and Success for All rated “very strong” on evidence of links between research and the model’s design, evidence of readiness for successful implementation, and evidence of professional development/technical assistance for successful implementation. They were also rated “moderately strong” on evidence of positive overall effects and evidence of positive effects on student reading abilities. Both models cost around \$80,000 to implement during the first year, with prices dropping each additional year.

While Direct Instruction and Success for All were the only two programs that earned an overall “moderately strong” rating, five other CSR models were also identified in the CSRQ report as models that were shown to have “moderate” levels of effectiveness:

- Accelerates Schools PLUS;
- America’s Choice School Design;
- Core Knowledge;
- School Renaissance; and
- The School Development Program.

While each model is meant to be implemented in elementary school, several of them also serve middle schools, junior highs, and high schools. The cost of implementing the CSR models varies, but districts can use Title I or categorical funding to pay for such programs.

There is evidence that CSR reforms are effective for some student populations; however, schools must be selective in determining which CSR model to implement. Continued research will provide more insight regarding for whom the CSR models are most effective.

For a description of the seven CSR models mentioned here, please check out OEP’s Policy Brief at:
<http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/briefs/csr.pdf>

IN THE NEWS

Legislature Increases School Funding

The 85th General Assembly increased education funding by \$132.5 million during the special legislative session this April. Notably, it increased per-pupil funding for 2006-07 to \$5,620 from \$5,497. For more details on the special session, visit <http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/data/education/web.htm>

Arkansas Improves in *Quality Counts* Report

OEP has released a policy brief summarizing Arkansas' ratings in *Education Week's* latest "Quality Counts" report. OEP's brief also compares Arkansas to its border states for each grade given and illustrates Arkansas' changes over time. Arkansas scored at or above the national average on three of the four measures graded by *Education Week*, and the state now ranks 4th nationwide for its efforts to improve teacher quality. To read the policy brief, visit http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/briefs/quality_counts_2006.pdf

New CEP Report on NCLB Implementation

The Center on Education Policy (CEP) has released its fourth annual report, "From the Capital to the Classroom," on how the No Child Left Behind Act is being implemented on the federal, state, and local levels. The Fayetteville School District was included in CEP's case studies of districts. To read the report, visit <http://www.cep-dc.org/nclb/Year4/Press>

Dueling Studies on Graduation Rates Released

A new report from the Manhattan Institute claims that only 70% of high school students graduate on time, and the rate is even lower for minority students. But another study issued by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) finds the rate to be much higher for students overall (82%), as well as for minority students. You can find the studies online at:

http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_48.htm
http://www.epi.org/content.cfm/book_grad_rates

ALTERNATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

One intervention aimed at helping students who have not done well in traditional school settings is the alternative learning environment (ALE), or alternative schools. In general, students who attend ALEs are still enrolled in the public school system, but attend classes separately from traditional students. Students are typically referred to these programs if they are at risk of poor grades, truancy, disruptive behavior, suspension, pregnancy, or similar issues associated with dropping out of school (however, other alternative schools, such as magnet or charter schools, often serve gifted and talented students as well).

ALEs in Arkansas

Under Act 59, ALEs in Arkansas now receive an additional \$3,250 for each student who attended the ALE during the previous academic year. Approximately 1.5% of students in Arkansas were enrolled in ALEs during the 2004-05 school year. Some of the state's ALEs have been around for almost a decade. As mandated by the Arkansas Department of Education, every district in Arkansas, either on its own or in partnership with other districts, must have an ALE and must assess participating students either before or upon entry into the program.

Every ALE must also provide participants with non-punitive intervention strategies that address both behavioral and educational needs.

Effectiveness of ALEs

Little empirical data is available, at least at a national level, about how successful these ALEs have been at lowering dropout rates. A few studies have found that successful alternative programs include extra support/counseling for students, smaller and more personal settings, positive relationships with supportive adults, meaningful educational and transition goals, and an emphasis on living and vocational skills. Researchers at the Office for Education Policy are currently conducting an evaluation of an ALE in Northwest Arkansas, which uses a computer-assisted instruction (CAI) program called NovaNet. More scientifically-based research must be conducted on these programs in order to clearly understand the ways in which such interventions can be the most effective.

To read a policy brief summarizing the research on ALEs, visit OEP's website at <http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/briefs/ale.pdf>

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**IN OUR
NEXT
ISSUE...**

***OEP's next
newsletter will focus
on the state's school
finance adequacy
study and how it
may affect
Arkansas' schools.***

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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

Colleagues,

As always, there is a buzz of activity in K-12 education in the state. Our lawmakers met in a special session in the Spring and allocated new resources to the schools in response to the December Court ruling. State courts and state lawmakers have worked to ensure educational resources are in place.

This issue of the OEP newsletter focuses on the use of those resources. You can read about increases in teacher salaries resulting from new resources and about the number of Arkansas schools meeting the federal AYP benchmarks.

Also, we present articles on programs for those schools and students having trouble reaching achievement goals, such as

comprehensive school reform models, alternative learning environments, and supplemental education services.

This is an exciting time in K-12 education in Arkansas. Our challenge is to find innovative ways to employ our new resources to help our students. We are optimistic!

As always, 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/oepe/>

Respectfully,

Gary Ritter

Director, *Office for Education Policy*



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