

9-11-2009

Recognizing the Accomplishments of ADE Commissioner Ken James

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Citation

Jensen, N. C., & Ritter, G. W. (2009). Recognizing the Accomplishments of ADE Commissioner Ken James. *Policy Briefs*. Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/oepbrief/76>

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RECOGNIZING THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF ADE COMMISSIONER KEN JAMES

Policy Brief Volume 6, Issue 8: September 2009



This summer, Dr. Ken James announced his resignation as Education Commissioner at the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE). Dr. James' last day was June 30, 2009 and Diana Julian stepped in as interim commissioner.

Today, Governor Mike Beebe announced Tom Kimbrell as

his choice for the next commissioner. As we await the official appointment of the new commissioner, the OEP felt it was appropriate to highlight Dr. James' contributions to Arkansas education.

Prior to his appointment as commissioner, Dr. James was superintendent in Lexington, KY and in the Arkansas school districts of Little Rock, Van Buren, and Batesville. Governor Mike Huckabee appointed James in May 2004 as education commissioner and Governor Beebe reappointed James in 2007. During his five plus years leading the Department, he served on the board of directors of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) and more recently as president of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).

Dr. James led Arkansas through a challenging period of reform in Arkansas schools when he entered the scene in 2004. Arkansas lawmakers were struggling with a response to the Lake View lawsuit by the Arkansas Supreme Court, which found the state's system of schooling unconstitutional in 2002. Dr. James was a key leader of the improvements enacted to bring the long-running court case to a close in 2007, including a \$122 million increase in per-pupil funding to provide a "general and suitable" education for Arkansas' students. James also presided over the ADE during the enactment of the controversial Act 60, which mandated consolidation for districts with fewer than 350 students. Under this law, the state went from 310 districts to 254

districts in one day. The state also took over 6 districts classified as fiscally distressed.

Under Dr. James' leadership, Arkansas has implemented more rigorous standards for students and improved student achievement on state assessments. In 2005, the math and literacy state tests were revised and higher cut scores for performance levels were implemented. This initially caused the percent of students scoring proficient or advanced to decline, but now Arkansas students are held to a higher standard. In 2007, the norm-referenced tests and criterion-referenced tests were combined into the single Augmented Benchmark Examination, rather than two separate tests. In addition, more and more students are taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses each year. This summer, the College Board announced that Arkansas saw another increase in the number of students taking AP exams, as well as an overall better performance on those tests. The ADE has also raised high school standards by making Arkansas one of only ten states implementing the rigorous Smart Core curriculum.

"If I could choose my legacy as Arkansas Commissioner of Education, it would be that each step I took was to make a positive impact on the academic success of Arkansas students. Sometimes that meant stretching in new and not always comfortable directions. At others it meant stubbornly holding firm to the progress the state had made and staving off attempts to weaken effective policies. Looking at the upward trend of our student benchmark scores and those of other indicators, I am proud of the impact that educators all across this state have achieved during my years as Commissioner."

- Dr. Ken James, May 29, 2009

Consequently, Arkansas has gained national recognition under James' leadership. In January 2006, Arkansas was recognized as one of only two states to make significant improvements on the National Assessment of Education Progress math and reading examinations at the fourth and eighth grade levels by Stateline.org. In June 2007, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings afforded our state high praise by stating: "States that have shown true leadership, such as Arkansas and Massachusetts, can inspire others to act."

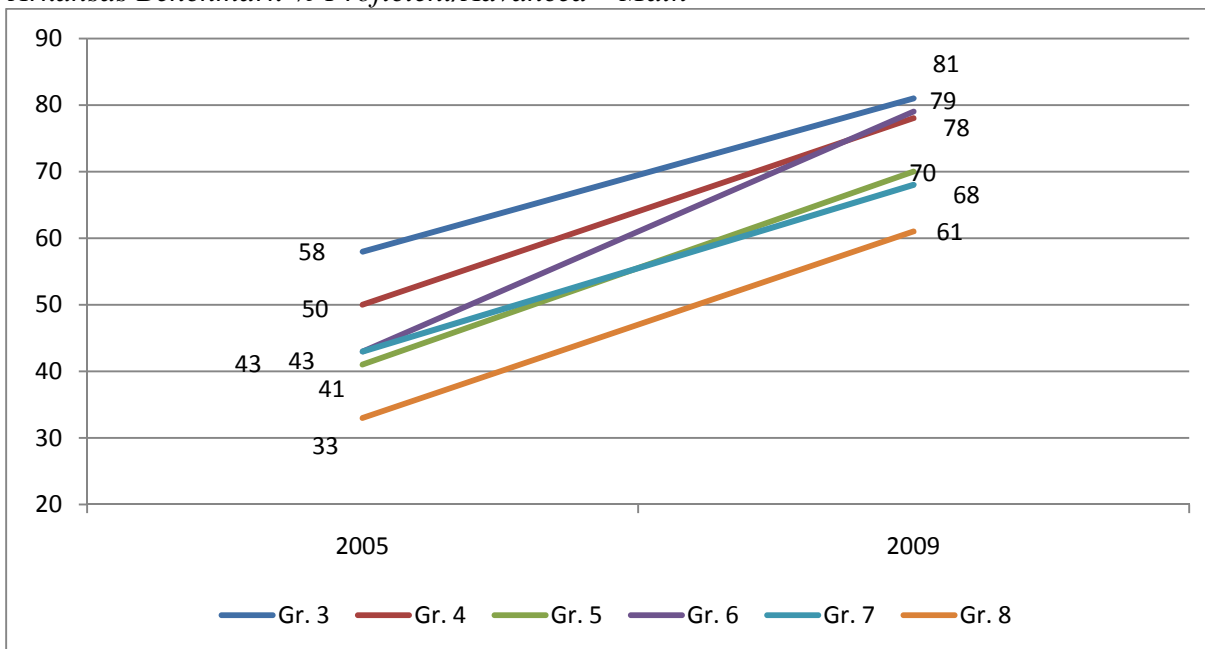
The ADE has been working hard to find a replacement for Dr. James, and today Governor Beebe announced Tom Kimbrell as his choice for Education Commissioner. During this transition time, we would like to thank Dr. James for his dedication to Arkansas' education, echoing Governor Beebe who said:

"Ken James has played an invaluable role in moving Arkansas's education system out of the courtroom and onto the path of excellence. The educational advancements he oversaw have already produced measurable improvements for our students, but the true extent of those advancements will be revealed further with each additional school year. On behalf of all Arkansans, I thank Ken for his tireless, single-minded efforts to improve the education of our children."

Under Dr. James' leadership, Arkansas was among the first states to:

- receive a \$2 million National Governors Association grant to implement high school redesign
- receive a \$3 million technology grant (and then a second, \$5 million technology grant) from the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE)
- gain approval for a growth model approved by USDOE for use in calculating Adequately Yearly Progress under No Child Left Behind (NCLB)
- gain approval of a differentiated accountability system (Smart Accountability) for use with schools classified as "schools in need of improvement" under NCLB
- receive a \$13.2 million grant from National Math and Science Initiative to increase access and achievement in math, science, and English Advanced Placement courses
- join a consortium to administer a common Algebra II End-of-Course exam
- join a consortium to develop voluntary, state-led national standards

Arkansas Benchmark % Proficient/Advanced – Math



The Arkansas Benchmark Math scores, like Literacy scores, have improved under the leadership of Dr. Ken James.