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Supplemental Education Services in Arkansas

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NCLB SUPPLEMENTAL SERVICES

The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 gives eligible students who attend Title I schools not making adequate yearly progress (AYP) for at least three consecutive years the right to 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, theoretically, provide the list to parents of eligible students prior to the start of the school year, so that they can choose the best provider for their children (U. S. Department of Education, 2005).

According to the U. S. Department of Education's latest figures, approximately 1.4 million students nationwide were eligible to receive supplemental education services in 2003-04 (Stullich, Eisner, McCrary, Roney, 2006). However, only an estimated 233,000 students (17% of eligible students) took advantage of the supplemental services option during this period. Several other studies have attributed this low level of utilization to districts' poor communication of the services to parents, difficulty finding providers to serve their areas, limited state support and guidance, and other factors (Anderson & Laguarda, 2005; Benigno, 2003; Center on Education Policy, 2006; Hess & Finn, 2004; Sunderman & Kim, 2004).

SUPPLEMENTAL SERVICES IN ARKANSAS

As of the 2005-06 school year, 200 schools in Arkansas are required to offer supplement services to eligible students, up from 70 in 2004-05 (Blankenship & Barnett, 2006). 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.

As part of a larger study on the implementation of NCLB in Arkansas, researchers from OEP analyzed the list of supplemental service providers approved by the ADE for 2004-05 and 2005-06, to see what kinds of options are available to parents. We coded the state's list of service 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, such as limited English proficiency); and evidence of qualifications or effectiveness. This policy brief highlights key findings from OEP's analysis, including:

- 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 serve 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 future studies are needed on their effectiveness in improving student achievement.

Accessibility of Information

The list of approved providers is available on the Arkansas Department of Education's (ADE) website, within a section on NCLB: http://arkedu.state.ar.us/nochild/supplemental_providers.html

The list of providers for 2005-06 is 61 pages long, with 1-1 ½ pages reserved for each approved provider. A quick perusal reveals that there is a great deal of missing or unclear information throughout the list. Furthermore, there is no easy way for districts or parents to find out which providers serve their area, which grade levels they serve, what subject area(s) they cover, and so forth. According to the list of providers, nearly all service providers have websites, but many of these were not working as of April 2006, and few actually include information about supplemental services on them.

Characteristics of Providers

There were 33 approved supplemental service providers in Arkansas in 2005-06, down from 37 in 2004-05:

- A to Z In-Home Tutoring
- Arkansas School for Mathematics and Sciences
- ASKIA Learning Concepts
- ATS Educational Consulting Services
- Babbage Net School, Inc.
- Brainfuse Online Instruction
- Bright Sky Learning
- Catapult Online
- Club Z! Tutoring, Inc.
- Crisis & Conflict Communication Associates
- Destiny Program (UA Fort Smith)
- Edu-Care International, Inc.
- Education Station
- Educators Consulting Academic RX
- Failure Free Reading
- Grades Up Development Corp.
- Huntington Learning Center, Inc.
- I Can Learn Education System: I Can Learn Math Center
- JBHM Education Group, LLC
- Learning Rx
- Learning Today, Inc.
- Millennium Education Music Project
- NCLB Tutors
- Newton Learning
- Oxford Learning Center
- Plato Learning
- Porter Education & Communications
- Princeton Review
- Save Our Kids: Academics Through Sports
- Scholars Learning Center
- School Technology eXtension (STX)
- Southern Arkansas University Tech
- Sylvan Learning (PCAG dba)

Of the 33 providers approved in 2005-06, 15 providers (43%) were based in Arkansas. While nearly all providers appeared to be for-profit companies, five providers were local universities or colleges, one was a magnet school, and one was a church. Although school districts themselves can serve as supplemental service providers (as long as they too have not been sanctioned), no districts in Arkansas have done so thus far. There appears to be a high turnover in the companies approved from year to year; in 2005-06, only 18 of the 33 service providers had been approved by the state in the previous year.

The cost for services (which districts, not parents, are responsible for paying) was listed for 24 of the 33 providers in 2005-06. However, it was unclear from the list whether the cost was per hour or per day, or whether it was per student or per groups of students. According to the list, some providers require a minimum number of students to be enrolled in order to serve a district, often as many as 100, which is prohibitive for many small and rural districts. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of Arkansas' supplemental services providers approved in 2004-05 and 2005-06.

Table 1: Characteristics of Approved Providers

	2004-05 (N = 37)	2005-06 (N = 33)
Based in Arkansas	17 (46%)	15 (43%)
Approved Provider in 2003-04?	22 (59%)	9 (27%)
Approved Provider in 2004-05?	N/A	18 (55%)

Types and Locations of Services Offered

All service providers claimed to offer tutoring after school in 2005-06, and many were capable of serving students before school, on the weekend, or in the summer as well (see Table 2).

Table 2: Times When Services Are Offered

Times of Service	2004-05 (N = 37)	2005-06 (N = 33)
Before School	25 (68%)	20 (61%)
After School	37 (100%)	33 (100%)
Weekends	30 (81%)	26 (79%)
Summers	34 (92%)	28 (84%)

The list provides very little information on either the duration (e.g., two hours per day, twice per week) or format of services provided (e. g., one-on-one tutoring versus group tutoring sessions).

Some providers claim to offer tutoring in multiple places, but school facilities are most often cited (see Table 3). However, it is often unclear what "online" means. For example, must students provide their own computers? Or may they use computers reserved at a school or other facility? Is a staff member provided to help students operate the computer-based instruction? Little of this information is given.

Table 3: Locations Where Services Are Offered

Place of Service	2004-05 (N = 37)	2005-06 (N = 33)
School	31 (84%)	23 (70%)
Online	19 (51%)	14 (43%)
Community Centers	14 (38%)	12 (34%)
Places of Worship	12 (32%)	11 (33%)
Students' Homes	12 (32%)	9 (27%)
Businesses	7 (19%)	5 (15%)
University/Community College	6 (16%)	4 (12%)
Provider's Facility	2 (5%)	2 (6%)

Table 5: Grade Levels Served by Providers

Grade Levels	2004-05 (N = 37)	2005-06 (N = 33)
Elementary Schools	17 (46%)	11 (33%)
Middle/Junior High Schools	17 (46%)	8 (24%)
High Schools	14 (38%)	7 (21%)
No answer provided	18 (49%)	22 (67%)

Student Subgroups

As for student subgroups, nearly all providers indicated that they could serve low-income and minority students' needs (100% and 97%, respectively), and many also were able to serve migrant students (70%), limited-English proficient students (70%), and special education students (79%) as well (see Table 6). Three providers (9%) even offered tutoring for students in gifted and talented or Advanced Placement programs.

Table 6: Student Subgroups Served by Providers

Students Subgroups	2004-05 (N = 37)	2005-06 (N = 33)
Low-Income	36 (97%)	32 (100%)
Minority	35 (95%)	32 (97%)
Migrant	24 (65%)	23 (70%)
Limited-English Proficiency (LEP)	23 (62%)	23 (70%)
Special Education	20 (54%)	26 (79%)
Advanced (Gifted & Talented or Advanced Placement)	2 (5%)	3 (9%)

However, it is unclear whether some providers cannot or will not serve certain subgroups of students, or if they simply did not check this box as a specialization on their application to the state.

Quality of Providers

It is also quite difficult to determine the qualifications or effectiveness of approved service providers based on the state's list. Although NCLB requires that all educational interventions be based on "scientifically rigorous evidence," a few providers submitted as evidence that they "did it last year." Most did claim that they hired certified teachers as tutors, and a few reported that external evaluations had been conducted on their programs in previous years. But for many providers, evidence of demonstrated effectiveness is only provided "upon request."

Types of Students Served

Geographic Region

In 2005-06, 13 of the 33 providers (39%) claimed they could serve "all districts" in the state—perhaps because many of these offered services online (see Table 4). But for "in-person" tutoring, there were very few providers to choose from in each region of the state, with no providers listed for central or southeast Arkansas. However, geographic information was not included for over half (52%) of the service providers on the state's 2005-06 list of providers.

Table 4: Regions of State Served by Providers

Regions	2004-05 (N = 37)	2005-06 (N = 33)
All Districts	27 (73%)	13 (39%)
Northwest	2 (5%)	1 (3%)
Northeast	2 (5%)	1 (3%)
Central	2 (5%)	0 (0%)
Southwest	3 (8%)	1 (3%)
Southeast	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
No answer	0 (0%)	17 (52%)

Grade Levels

As shown in Table 5, about a third of the providers on the 2005-06 list said they could serve students in elementary school, and another quarter could serve students in middle/junior high school; however, nearly a half of providers did not give an answer. For those that answered, categories are not mutually exclusive (could have said they served K-12 in application). So it would be hard for parents to tell if many providers would be able to serve their children's needs.

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 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 safe [sic] and constructive learning environment for all students and educators."

CONCLUSION

In summary, the Arkansas Department of Education's list of approved supplemental service providers is the only information available to educators and parents about supplemental services in Arkansas. And based on the ADE's documentation in both 2004-05 and 2005-06, it may be difficult for district officials and parents to make an informed decision about whether to request supplemental education services for students (or which provider to choose). Furthermore, as studies in other states have found, when information and communication about NCLB's provisions are limited, then few parents are likely to take advantage of supplemental services (Anderson & Laguarda, 2005; Benigno, 2003; Howell, 2004).

Clearly, more research is needed on the implementation and effectiveness of supplemental service providers in Arkansas, and how states and districts can best provide such services to eligible students.

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