

# Education Matters

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ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF  
Education 

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*Education Commissioner Ken James addresses one of the Joint Senate and House Education Committee hearings in preparation for an anticipated Special Session required to respond to the latest Lakeview ruling by the Arkansas Supreme Court. Listening to his testimony are, from left, legislative analyst Mark Hudson, Senate Pro Tem Jim Argue and Rep. Joyce Elliott. The legislature is considering, among other measures, applying cost of living adjustment increases to this year's and next year's foundation funding amount, reimbursing school districts for the increase in the districts' share of teacher retirement fund contributions and making adjustments to the way academic facilities projects are funded.*



## Commissioner's Memo

Those of you who have heard me speak over the last year or so have already heard me say this, but it bears repeating here. Arkansas education receives many more accolades outside the state than it does inside. Therefore, my staff and I are too often the only ones aware of this positive image of our educational system that shines outside our borders.

Three quick points that I'd like to reiterate here reflect our recognized successes:

- Arkansas received a \$2 million National Governors Association Honors Grant to Redesign America's High Schools largely because our Smart Core curriculum puts us ahead of the curve when it comes to demanding rigorous coursework for high school graduation.

- Arkansas was one of 14 states the U.S. Department of Education awarded "data grants" to upgrade systems that were already deemed models for the nation. ADE received \$3,328,503 over three years for the construction of a longitudinal data system that will enable ADE to more effectively manage, analyze, disaggregate and use individual student data to support decision making. Arkansas was recognized for meeting seven of the 10 data system requirements outlined by USDOE. Few other states met this many of the requirements.
- Arkansas was one of 20 states submitting applications for use of a growth model under No Child Left

Behind. That's because Arkansas again is in the forefront of meeting the criteria required to submit an application, namely having two years of testing in place for third through eighth grades and having a system in place to track the progress of individual students over time.

These factors, combined with the news we announced in the last Education Matters concerning our students' notable performance on the 2005 National Assessment for Educational Progress, indicate that news about education in Arkansas is indeed bright.



T. Kenneth James, Ed.D.  
Commissioner of Education

# ADE funds Diversity Councils

Flanked by Little Rock Mayor Jim Dailey, members of Little Rock's Racial and Cultural Diversity Commission and area educators, Arkansas Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Ken James awarded the city of Little Rock a grant in the amount of \$35,000 to create Diversity Councils in area high schools. The award presentation was held in the rotunda of Little Rock City Hall.

"Over the years, the Little Rock community has become increasingly a racially and culturally diverse community," said Dr. James. "The ADE welcomes this opportunity to promote tolerance and respect among our diverse student population."

"Since 1994, Little Rock's Racial and Cultural Diversity Commission has been creating programs to increase our awareness of—and appreciation for—other backgrounds, cultures and races," said Mayor Dailey. "The creation of Diversity Councils is the next step



*Education Commissioner Ken James speaks during a press conference with Little Rock Mayor Jim Dailey.*

in their efforts"

Diversity Councils will be established at public, private and parochial high schools in Central Arkansas to sponsor programs and activities to promote diversity, tolerance and appreciation of different cultures. Student representatives from each participating school will be selected to serve on a Youth Advisory Council to work with the Racial and Cultural Diversity Commission's Education Committee.

Six schools are participating in the effort so far: Little Rock Central, Mount St. Mary's Academy, Pulaski Academy, Mills, North Little Rock and North Pulaski. Five more high schools are interested in participating, according to Carlette Henderson, Racial and Cultural Diversity Commission executive director.

"Since 2004, the Commission has sponsored the 'Keeping It Real' youth summit, which brings high school students from Central Arkansas public and private schools together for a day of inspiration, fellowship and unity," said Henderson. "Each year, this event empowers students to realize that they really can change the course of our city, state, nation and world for the better."

"But 'Keeping It Real' is only for one day. We know that there are 364 other days in which we still need to equip youth. The Diversity Councils are the tools for this to happen."

## Education Matters

Education Matters is a quarterly publication of the Arkansas Department of Education, located at 4 State Capitol Mall, Little Rock, AR, 72201; (501) 682-4475.

*Education Commissioner*  
T. Kenneth James

*Director of Communications*  
Julie Johnson Thompson

*Communications Manager*  
Gayle Morris

*Communications Program Support Manager*

Dauphne Trenholm

*Secretary*  
Marla Holmes

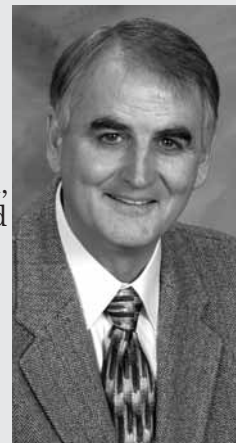
*Photographer*  
Kevin Briggs

## Clinton veterinarian named to State Board

Gov. Mike Huckabee has appointed Dr. Ben Mays of Clinton to the State Board of Education. Dr. Mays replaces JoNell Caldwell, whose term on the Board expired in June 2005.

Mays, a veterinarian and owner of Van Buren County Veterinary Clinic, will serve until June 30, 2012. He has served on the Clinton school board for 22

years. "Ben's work on a local school board gives him the perfect back-



*Ben Mays*

ground for being a member of the state Board of Education," Huckabee said in a prepared statement. "I'm thrilled he has agreed to serve at such an important time in our state's history."

Mays serves on the Arkansas Veterinarian Medical Licenses Board. He has served on the Van Buren County Hospital

Board for eight years and is a member of the Clinton Chamber of Commerce.

	2006 Arkansas	2006 Nat'l Average	2005 Arkansas
<b>Overall</b>	<b>B-</b>	<b>C+</b>	<i>none given</i>
Standards/ accountability	C+	B-	C
Improving teacher quality	A-	C+	B+
School climate	C+	C+	C+
Resource equity	B-	C	C+

# Education Week gives state good grade

Arkansas earned its top grades ever from *Education Week* in its 2006 Quality Counts issue. The annual report grades states on education policy and achievement measures.

Arkansas earned a B- overall and scored at or above the national average on three of the four measures. In regard to policies for improving teacher quality, Arkansas earned the fourth highest grade in the nation.

“Quality Counts is a respected assessment of educational progress, so it is gratifying to see our state scoring so well. The hard work of Arkansas educators, parents, students and policy-makers is paying off. This is another strong sign that our state no longer dwells at the bottom of lists concerning educational quality,” said Dr. Ken James, Commissioner of the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE).

The 2006 grades for Arkansas with comparisons to the national average and the state’s scores for last year are shown in the table above.

“This marked improvement in grades reflects what has been happening in Arkansas education over the past 10 years,” Dr. James explained. “We now have some of the best and most rigorous accreditation standards for schools in the nation. Schools are being held accountable for student achieve-

ment in ways they’ve never been and, for the most part, they are rising gallantly to that challenge. Even so, while we are proud of our progress, we are excited about the work and improvements that lie ahead.”

**This is another strong sign that our state no longer dwells at the bottom of lists concerning educational quality.**

The Quality Counts report states that Arkansas excels in efforts to improve teacher quality because it requires prospective teachers to pass a comprehensive battery of tests, and it requires veteran teachers to undergo classroom observations and to complete portfolios in order to earn a more advanced level of certification.

“Our score of an “A-” in teacher quality is a feather in the hats of all educators in Arkansas,” ADE Assistant Commissioner for Human Resources/Licensure Beverly Williams said. “The State Board of Education and ADE staff should be commended for the commitment they have made to improve teacher quality in the state. In addition, dedicated leaders in our school districts and institutions of higher education have spent many years plus mil-

lions of dollars to enhance teacher preparation, mentoring and professional development programs and our legislators have been visionary in making teacher quality a priority. All of this is important because teacher quality is essential to a productive classroom that maximizes student learning.”

The report also said that Arkansas does fairly well in resource equity, though wealthier districts still have higher per student funding than poorer districts. The state was marked down in the standards and accountability area because the state had no science and social studies assessments. Arkansas received good marks in school climate because it tracks the condition of school facilities and more students attend small schools in Arkansas than in other states.

Quality Counts also highlighted the fact that Arkansas was one of seven states that significantly outpaced the nation in improvement in fourth- and eighth-grade National Assessment of Student Progress (NAEP) mathematics scores. Arkansas also was one of 14 states to show significant improvement in the average scale score on the NAEP fourth-grade reading exam.

This year marked the 10th edition of Quality Counts, which reports on states’ implementation of policies related to standards-based education.

## Division gets new director

Douglas C. Eaton was named Director of the Arkansas Public School Academic Facilities and Transportation Division in December. Eaton replaced long time Arkansas Department of Education employee Dave Floyd, who served as the first director of the division.

“We are pleased to have found someone of Doug Eaton’s caliber to assume this role,” Dr. Ken James, Arkansas Commissioner of Education and chairman of the Commission on Public School Academic School Facilities and Transportation, said when the Commission announced the appointment. The other Commission members are Richard Weiss, Director of the Department of Finance and Administration, and Mac Dodson, President of the Arkansas Development Finance Authority.

Eaton came to the Division from the Little Rock School District, where he worked as Director of Facilities Services since 1991. Before that, he had a long career with the United States Army Corps of Engineers.

“We will miss Dave and the wonderful leadership he brought to this division,” said James. “But we know we can move forward confidently. Doug possesses an in-depth knowledge of the requirements for building and maintaining suitable facilities for Arkansas’ public schools, which makes him the ideal person to continue the critical task this division has already begun.”



*Doug Eaton*

## Division’s activities at full speed

The pace in the Arkansas Division of Public School Academic Facilities and Transportation remains in high gear as staff sort through a new set of applications for funding – this time for money to be distributed through the system’s Partnership Program.

After approval last fall of \$67 million worth of Immediate Repair projects, which allow schools to make needed upgrades such as replacing leaky roofs and worn down HVAC systems, the division moved on to look at applications under its Transitional Program. This money, approved in early March, comes to the aid of school districts that began construction on academic facilities between Jan. 1, 2005, and June 30, 2006. The total cost of these projects is just under \$300 million.

The state’s share under each program is less, however, due to the use of a wealth index to determine state and local participation rates. Therefore, the state will contribute \$34 million under the Immediate Repair program and about \$86 million for the Transitional Program.

Applications for future projects were to be made under the Partnership Program. Requests for projects occurring in 2006 through 2009 had to be postmarked for delivery to the Division by March 1, 2006.

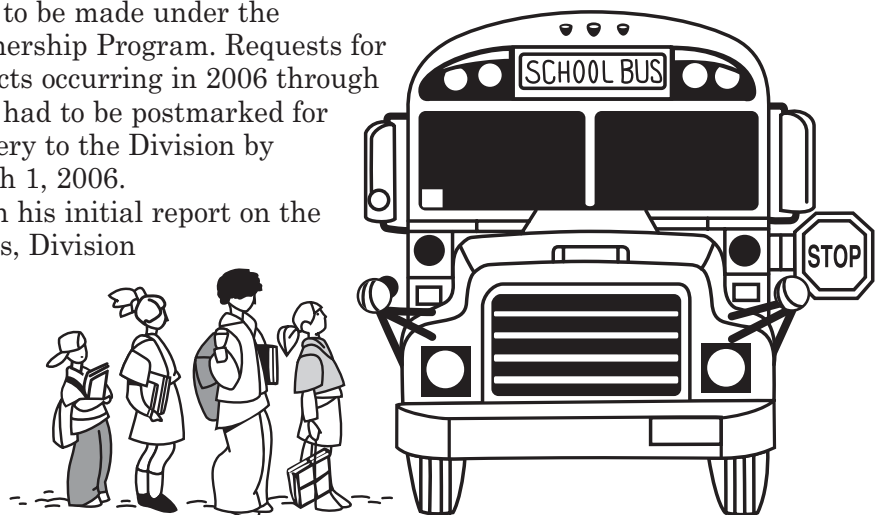
In his initial report on the status, Division

Director Doug Eaton told the Joint Senate and House Education Committees that 175 school districts had applied for about 1,500 projects. A cursory review of the applications, which have yet to be fully evaluated, show that the cost of these projects could range from \$200 million to \$398 million dollars, with the state’s share ranging from \$50 million to \$180 million.

More accurate figures will be reported May 1, and the official amount will be announced by July 1.

Meanwhile, staff members in the Transportation unit of the Division are working at a similarly accelerated pace. In a report to the Arkansas Public School Academic Facilities and Transportation Commission on March 8, Eaton said that inspectors from the division had visited 47 school districts, which own and operate a total of 1,063 buses. Of those, 274 (about 26 percent) had been inspected. They found minor deficiencies in 196 buses and major deficiencies in 31 (11 percent).

“We are happy to report that the school districts reacted very favorably,” Eaton told the Commission, “and that all thirty-one buses were repaired and back in service within forty-eight hours.”



# ADE web site boasts new look, features

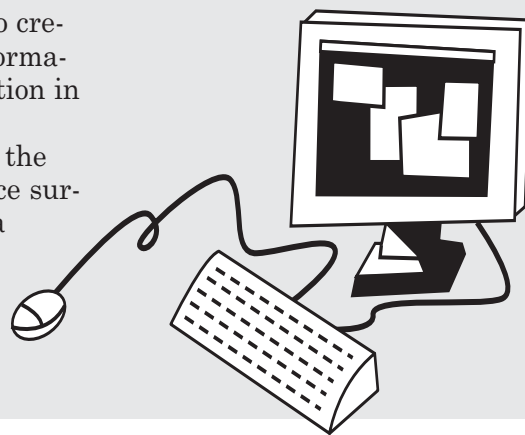
Visitors to the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) web site – currently located at <http://arkedu.state.ar.us> — will soon be treated to updated graphics, expanded content and a more user-friendly organization.

“We realize that the web site is one of our primary means of communicating with people outside of the agency,” said Dauphne Trenholm, the ADE Communications staffer in charge of the department’s external web site. “Our goal is to create a site that provides information and news about education in Arkansas.”

To plan for the change, the ADE Communications Office surveyed web site users with a questionnaire that was available on the ADE site from February 13 to March 3. Participants

answered questions concerning connection speed, frequency of use and browser preference, as well as questions to determine levels of satisfaction with specific content areas and what new content is needed.

A total of 118 web site visitors answered the survey. “Administrators and teachers appeared to be the most frequent users of the Department’s web site,” Trenholm said. “While most



respondents had fast Internet connections, many still required features that will not stall with a dial-up connection.”

Suggestions for enhancing the site included refining the search feature, improving professional development opportunity listings, and adding a school-year calendar.

Improving the quality of the Arkansas Department of Education’s web site will be an ongoing process. The survey data will help show which pages currently require fine-tuning and how useful additional content such as an interactive school district map or test score information would be, Trenholm said.

“The redesign will not end with the launch of the new site, however,” she said. “Adjustments and upgrades will continue in order to ensure that the site remains beneficial to its users.”

# State Board gives go-ahead on augmented test

With a 5-4 vote, the State Board of Education gave the go-ahead for the Arkansas Department of Education to pursue an “augmented test” during its March meeting.

This single test would combine elements of the state’s Benchmark Exam with national norm-referenced exam questions. This year, students in grades three through eight are taking both sets of exams over several days across three months. The new test will be in development for one to two years before it is ready for administration.

The benefits of such a system were the final selling points for the State Board: less testing time for students in addition to a quicker

turn-around time for test scores, allowing parents and educators to implement needed learning strategies in a more timely manner.

“We get constantly criticized because there is too much testing. We get constantly criticized because the results are not back in time,” Dr. Ken James, Commissioner of Education, told the State Board. He urged board members to act decisively one way or the other on the testing option, which has been discussed for years.

Concerns with the augmented exam included a loss of rigor in the test instrument, less alignment with Arkansas content frameworks and a loss of richness in the test results. In addition, any replace-

ment of the Benchmark test requires approval from the U.S. Department of Education.

Representatives from two vendors told the board that these concerns could and would be addressed in the design of the new instrument.

Arkansas students have made significant gains in achievement in recent years, scoring at or near the national average on the 2005 National Assessment of Education Progress. That’s the first time Arkansas students have scored so well and, Dr. James said, indicates the effectiveness of the Benchmarks and other education reforms in the state.

“We do not have in any shape, fashion or form a desire to go backwards,” he told the State Board. “Especially in regard to NAEP, we want to maintain where we are now for the first time in the history of this state.”

# Africanized honeybees may pose threat to Arkansas students

They moved to the U. S. about 15 years ago, and they have been making news ever since. In May 1991, Jesus Diaz became the first person to be attacked by Africanized honeybees, which the media and others often refer to as “killer bees.”

The Africanized honeybees arrived in Arkansas in June 2005. Their arrival has sounded an alarm for a wide variety of Arkansans, ranging from beekeepers to emergency medical technicians to state agency administrators to school administrators.

Africanized honeybees look just like common garden honeybees. They will set up colonies in all the same areas as the common honeybee and will also nest close to or in the ground. The most noticeable difference between the two types of bees is that Africanized honeybees are extremely aggressive in defense of the colony.

At any perceived threat, bees can “swarm” out of the colony and attack, stinging in large numbers,

sometimes in the hundreds. The Africanized honeybees will chase a victim for up to a quarter or half mile and will remain agitated for an hour or more after an attack. This could cause a problem for someone arriving after an attack and walking into the areas where the agitated bees are.

The Africanized honeybees pose the greatest threat for people who need to work outside: farmers, construction workers, park rangers, lawn and garden service people and even pest control agents. Because they play outdoors often, children are also at risk.

Schools may want to take a few precautions to help protect students. The following are some guidelines for planning for Africanized honeybee safety on and around campus.

**Designate a school monitor to walk around school grounds daily to look for Africanized honeybee colonies or swarms.** Make sure the monitor is trained to recognize honeybees and is properly equipped (has a bee

veil available).

The monitor should look for sites that may be attractive to bees for nesting and report to maintenance to remove, cover or repair them. The monitor should remember that honeybees may nest in a variety of sites, ranging from animal burrows in the ground, to hollows in block walls, to overturned flower pots. Utility boxes, water or irrigation valve boxes, playground equipment and drainage pipes are also possibilities.

**If a honeybee swarm or colony is found, the monitor should notify all teachers to keep everyone away from the area.** Arrange to have swarms or colonies removed and/or destroyed immediately, even if they haven't been a problem in the past. School administrators should contact the local Cooperative Extension Office or the Arkansas State Plant Board (501-225-1598) directly for instructions. Some monitors may be able to remove swarms if properly trained.

## Capacity crowd

*A full crowd at the State Board of Education's February meeting forced patrons of the Midland School District to watch the board's proceedings on a monitor in the Arkansas Department of Education's (ADE) lobby (right). During that meeting, the State Board voted not to annex the Midland School District with another. In another action, the State Board voted to annex the Eudora School District with the Lakeside School District (Chicot County). Both districts had been classified in fiscal distress in April 2005.*



**Only licensed professional pest control operators or beekeepers who have received Africanized honeybee training from the Arkansas State Plant Board should try to remove an established colony.** Do not allow untrained individuals to spray the colony with pesticides or dump kerosene on the bees. This will only arouse the bees and make them defensive. Request that the bees be removed after school hours.

**Plan to use noisy equipment, such as lawn mowers, when students are indoors or away from campus, if possible.** Bees are alarmed by vibrations or loud noises produced by equipment such as weed eaters, chainsaws or electric generators. Honeybees may also be disturbed by strong odors, such as the odor of newly-mown grass. Thus, bees are often aroused during landscape maintenance operations.

**Establish a plan of action for a stinging incident.** Teach students to leave bees alone. If a bee nest is found, do not throw rocks at or otherwise disturb it. If students accidentally arouse an Africanized honeybee colony while at school, they should know what to do.

**Make sure the school nurse is ready.** The school nurse should know the proper way to remove bee stingers and should train others. Because even one bee sting may be fatal if the victim is allergic, the nurse should also know the signs of allergic reactions. If possible have an anaphylactic kit, bee suit and bee veil available for emergencies.

**Educate the students and faculty about what is being done.** Reassure them that most people will never encounter Africanized honeybees and that those who do are rarely seriously injured. Have “bee drills” so students know where to go and what to do.



*Participants at the Arkansas Department of Education’s “A Call to Teach: Pathways to Teaching” discuss opportunities for pursuing a teaching degree.*

## ADE’s ‘A Call to Teach’ draws huge response

More than 1,000 men and women interested in a teaching career visited the Arkansas Department of Education’s “A Call to Teach: Pathways to Teaching” at west Little Rock’s Embassy Suites in January.

“Arkansas is in such need of quality teachers, especially in certain areas of the state and in certain grade levels and subject areas,” said Christina Villareal, teacher recruitment program advisor. “We were gratified so many people interested in pursuing a career in education came to the event.”

Each year, the state awards teacher’s licenses to between 1,200 and 1,300 graduates of Arkansas’ 18 colleges of education as well as to another 450 to 600 persons through its non-traditional licensure program.

Even so, the state faces teacher shortages in such subject areas as

foreign languages, mathematics and special education as well as regionally in the Delta. The expected retirements of many teachers will no doubt exacerbate this situation. Therefore, ample opportunities to teach exist for qualified candidates.

At the event, education experts were stationed throughout the room to assist anyone wanting to learn more about pursuing a teaching career.

“We had people at all stages of life, from high school students trying to decide on college majors to professionals interested in changing careers,” Villareal said.

Attendees were able to find information and guidance for attaining the qualifications for a teaching career, be it through a traditional four-year program in a college of education or through ADE’s non-traditional licensing program.



*(Photo above) Education Commissioner Ken James congratulates Dorothy Gillam, his management project analyst, on 40 years of service to the Arkansas Department of Education. Service awards were presented to ADE employees at the agency's annual Holiday Party in December.*

*(Photo below) Education Commissioner Ken James looks on as Marsha Petty of Texarkana accepts the award for Arkansas Teacher of the Year at a November reception at the State Capitol.*



**ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF**  
**Education** 

Arkansas Department of Education  
Communications Office, Room 403-A  
4 State Capitol Mall  
Little Rock, AR 72201

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