

# Education Matters

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## Arkansas called a national model for AP studies

Gov. Mike Beebe announced the state's latest national accolades for educational accomplishments in a news conference at the State Capitol in February: Arkansas led the nation in increasing student achievement on Advanced Placement (AP) exams during the past year. In addition, College Board highlighted the "Arkansas Model" as one all states should look to for its legislation requiring all high schools to offer AP exams and requiring the state to pay for students to take those exams.

"These are the kinds of educational dividends we have been waiting to see after our state's unprecedented investment in education over the past three years," Gov. Beebe said. "We strive to provide excellence in education for our children and this study shows that Arkansas is becoming a state that people will look to for educational innovation and say, 'We want to do what they've done in Arkansas.'"



The College Board study showed that Arkansas and New Hampshire tied for having the greatest one-year increase in AP grades of three, which is "qualified," or greater. In 2006, Arkansas produced 6,868 students who scored in that range on AP exams, compared with 6,012 in 2005.

Overall, the state saw a 14-percent increase in the number of students taking AP courses.

Arkansas' public-school graduating class of 2006 is above the national average for taking AP exams, with more than 30 percent of the class taking the tests. The national average is approximately 24 percent.

"Once again, Arkansas is being spotlighted as an innovative leader in public education," said Commissioner of Education Ken James. "In fact, when the College Board representative first told us about the state being named a national model, she said she felt like Santa Claus delivering gifts –

*Sidney Fussell, a senior at Little Rock Central High School senior, shares the advantages he's found in Advanced Placement classes during a press conference at the State Capitol in February. Looking on are Dr. Ken James, Commissioner of Education (far left), Gov. Mike Beebe (far right) and other legislators and educators who are proponents of the Advanced Placement program.*

except that Santa delivers gifts without them being earned."

She told the commissioner that Arkansas definitely deserves this notable distinction. "I second that sentiment," James stated. "Every student who participated in an AP exam, every teacher who trained to teach AP level courses and every administrator who has worked to make AP a successful element in the high school curriculum has earned this recognition for our state."

Since 2001, overall Arkansas participation in AP exams has increased by 312 percent.

## Commissioner wins AGATE award

On February 15, Arkansans for Gifted and Talented Education (AGATE) presented Dr. Ken James, Commissioner of Education, with the organization's highest honor – the Award of Excellence.



This award, which was presented at a luncheon with about 600 members in attendance, recognizes an individual who promotes excellence in education, particularly as it relates to gifted and talented children and youth in the state.

"I thought I was at the conference to bring greetings," Dr. James said of the award. "Needless to say, this was a very unexpected honor, and one I value greatly."

## 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.

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# State chiefs share ideas for NCLB update

As Congress begins to focus on reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act, the country's state school chiefs have crafted policy statement with suggested changes to make this legislation stronger for students and more supportive for schools.

In January, Arkansas Commissioner of Education Ken James and Gene Wilhoit, executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), were called to the United States Capitol to present the state chiefs' recommendations to key members of both houses and their staffs.

"The meetings proved very productive, and I believe our concerns were both heard and understood," Dr. James said.

The proposals urge Congress and the U.S. Department of Education to pursue a new partnership model based on three core themes: innovations, including continued support and increased autonomy for states to build on the foundations of standards-based reform; capacity, including greater focus on building the ability of state and local education agencies to improve learning opportunities for all students and to intervene in consistently low-performing school districts and schools; and research and development, including increased investment in research, evaluation, technical assistance and collaboration to help support state and local efforts to improve student achievement and close achievement gaps.

More specifically, the CCSSO policy statement calls for:

- Promoting innovative models and improving the peer review process so that it focuses more on promotion of educationally sound models rather than monitoring for narrow compliance.
- Encouraging use of a variety

of accountability models focused on individual student achievement that build on adequate yearly progress to promote more valid, reliable and educationally meaningful accountability models.

- Encouraging a full range of rewards and consequences for districts and schools that differ appropriately in nature and degree, based, for example, on whether schools miss making adequate yearly progress by a little or by a lot.

- Encouraging use of a variety of state and local assessment models that can improve teaching and learning as well as promote more valid, reliable accountability determinations.

- Encouraging inclusion of students with disabilities in state assessment and accountability systems in a manner that is most meaningful for the full range of students with disabilities, based on ambitious but educationally sound performance goals and measures. Encouraging inclusion of English language learner (ELL) students in state assessment and accountability systems in a manner that is most meaningful for the full range of ELL students, based on ambitious but educationally sound performance goals and measures.

- Providing incentives for states to create the best teaching force in the world by continuously improving teacher quality, by supporting best-in-class professional development and by encouraging use of multiple individual pathways to pedagogical and subject matter expertise.

- Retaining and providing additional funds at the state level that appropriately reflect the increased roles and responsibilities placed on states for systemic actions to help improve student achievement and close achievement gaps.



*Students in Junction City take an Advanced Placement Calculus course from teacher Mary Lester via the airwaves thanks to the Arkansas Department of Education's Distance Learning Center.*

## Distance learning expands opportunities for Arkansas students

Calculus students forge through a multi-step problem. Spanish students review vocabulary. Journalism students write feature stories.

And they all do it while being instructed by a teacher who is miles away.

This distance learning occurs across the state every day, allowing 8,589 public school students access to classes they otherwise wouldn't have this year.

Distance learning is provided from five sites in the state: ADE's Distance Learning Center in Maumelle; Arkansas Mathematics

and Science High School in Hot Springs; Arkansas Early College High School in Monticello; Arkansas Virtual High School/Arch Ford Education Service Cooperative in Plumerville; and Dawson Workforce Education in Arkadelphia.

"We teach all of the core 38, except for physical education and instrumental music courses, plus nearly 100 other courses," said Dee Cox, director of special programs at the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE).

"We are ahead of most states in terms of monitoring," Dr. Ken

James, Arkansas Commissioner of Education, said of the state. These coordinated efforts to ensure quality distance learning opportunities for students also creates an educational cohesiveness across the program, he said.

Distance learning has grown exponentially in Arkansas recently. This year boasts nearly 1,000 additional students, 43 more courses and 40 more schools in the program than there were in the 2005-2006 school year. Of the 245 school districts in Arkansas, 222 utilize distance learning for their students.

### Arkansas Department of Education Distance Learning Center Facts

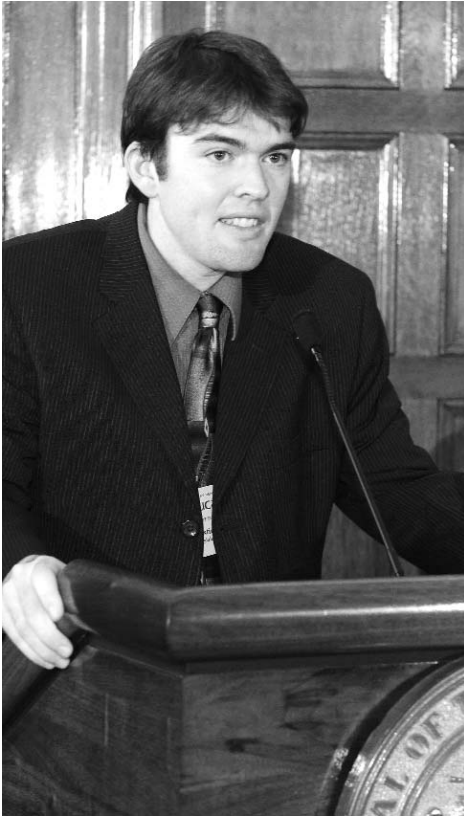
**74** Arkansas school districts – and **78** schools – receive content from the Distance Learning Center (DLC)

The typical school receives **four** classes from the DLC

**100** percent of **23** DLC teachers are highly qualified

Enrollment has increased from **76** students in 2001 to **2,105** students in 2006

**37** professional development courses were offered in June, July and August of 2006 for a total of **124** hours



# Double honoree takes competition national

Movie stars have the Academy Awards, and educators have both the Teacher of the Year Awards and the Milken Educator Awards. These two events for teachers occur in April, and Arkansas will be represented at both by one outstanding educator: Justin Minkel of Harvey Jones Elementary School in Springdale.

Minkel, who has already been named one of four finalists in the Teacher of the Year competition, has produced dramatic results for his students – many of whom are

low-income, speak English as a second language, or both – by combining high expectations for all students with differentiated learning techniques. “High expectations do not rest on the assumption that students who are drastically below grade level will rise to grade-level work if it is simply presented to them,” he said.

He also looks past the nature versus nurture explanations of who children are to recognize the essence of their individuality.

Minkel has taught for seven years and is a graduate of Cornell University and earned a master’s from the University of California at Berkeley.

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*Justin Minkel, a second grade teacher in Springdale, accepts the 2007 Arkansas Teacher of the Year Award at the State Capitol in December.*

closing the gap



*Coming to Little Rock July 2007*

*Learn what it takes to close the achievement gap for your students when Arkansas hosts educators from Kansas, Oklahoma, Missouri and Arkansas at the U.S. Department of Education’s Mid-Continent Comprehensive Center’s conference on closing the gap.*

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