

Dr. Ken James
Commissioner of
Education

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*The Arkansas
Department of
Education strives to
ensure that all children
in the state have access
to a quality education
by providing educators,
administrators and staff
with leadership,
resources and training.*



Going electronic

With so much important information to share with you, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) has chosen to deliver Arkansas' Education Matters to you electronically each month. This will allow us to deliver timely information as well as make sure our newsletter lands right on your desktop (or laptop or handheld computer, as the case may be.)

Education Matters will be e-mailed directly to Arkansas superintendents and principals once a month. Please feel free to share it with anyone in your district you believe would benefit from knowing what you know.

Also, we look forward to hearing from you. Please send your feedback or any items of interest you would like considered for the newsletter to Julie Johnson Thompson, ADE's director of communications.

Thanks! And best wishes for a terrific rest of the summer.

--T. Kenneth James, Commissioner of Education

Test scores climb; gap closes

Student performance continued to climb and the achievement gap between whites and African-Americans narrowed for the first time on the 2007 Arkansas Benchmark Examination, while performance on the 2007 Iowa Tests of Basic Skills remained stable compared to last year's scores.

"We are making sure and steady progress with student achievement in the state," said Dr. Ken James, Commissioner of Education. "Every teacher, administrator, parent and child involved in education in Arkansas should be both proud and encouraged to continue to expect high levels of learning from all students."

The state is realizing achievement gains because of several factors, James said, listing the dedication of public school staff, quality professional development for teachers and administrators, and high expectations for all students.

"The fact that scores increased pretty much across the board is reason enough to celebrate," Dr. James said. "But we are delighted to see that the achievement gap between our white and African-American students is starting to narrow in most instances."

While the achievement gap between white and African-American subgroups of students narrowed at most grade levels for both mathematics and literacy, it more frequently grew between white and Hispanic students. Much of that is due to the fact that, to comply with U.S. Department of Education regulations, many students with limited proficiency in English had to take the regular Benchmark exam. Previously,

2007-2008 Testing Dates

**August 13, 2007 –
September 21, 2007**
*Window for Kindergarten
Inventory*

January 22-23, 2008
*Mid-Year End of Course
Algebra I Exam
(Tuesday-Wednesday)*

January 24-25, 2008
*Mid-Year End of Course
Geometry Exam
(Thursday-Friday)*

January 29-30, 2008
*Mid-Year End of Course
Biology Exam
(Tuesday-Wednesday)*

March 4-5, 2008
*Grade 11 Literacy Exam
(Tuesday-Wednesday)*

March 31 – May 9, 2008
*(Window) English
Language Development
Assessment (ELDA) for LEP
students K-12*

April 7-18, 2008
*Window for K-2, Grade 9
NRT Testing*

April 14-18, 2008
*Augmented Benchmark
Exams in Grades 3-8
(Monday-Friday)*

April 16-17, 2008
*End of Course Biology
Exam (Wednesday-
Thursday)*

April 22-23, 2008
*End of Course
Geometry Exam
(Tuesday-Wednesday)*

April 24-25, 2008
*End of Course Algebra I
Exam (Thursday-
Friday)*

these students completed an alternative portfolio, which allowed more assistance in translating from English to their native languages.

"It's not surprising that scores in this sub-group dipped somewhat this year," Dr. James said.

In addition to the Benchmark, students in 2007 took the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills. Those composite scores ranged from the 48th percentile in the ninth grade to the 62nd percentile in the fourth grade.

All 2007 test scores at school and district levels are available on the Arkansas Department of Education's Web site, ArkansasEd.org.

Spellings: Follow AR lead

Arkansas standards were recently judged by the U.S. Department of Education to be some of those most closely aligned with the rigorous standards of the National Assessment for Educational Progress examination, which is also referred to as The Nation's Report Card.

In fact, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings was quoted in The Washington Post as saying, "States that have shown true leadership, such as Arkansas and Massachusetts, can inspire others to act."

Dr. Ken James, Commissioner of Education, welcomed the accolades, saying that this was excellent news for Arkansas students and their families. "Because we have some of the toughest learning standards in the nation, we can feel confident that when a child scores proficient in Arkansas, he or she is prepared to succeed in Arkansas, in the United States, and, indeed, in the world."

Julian new deputy commissioner



Dr. Ken James, Commissioner of Education, recently named Dr. Diana Julian as ADE's new deputy commissioner. Dr. Julian, who has been serving as assistant commissioner for the department's Division of Learning Services for the last two years, assumed the position effective July 1. She replaces Dr. Donald M. Stewart, who retired from ADE on June 30.

"Diana brings a breadth of experience to the position, as she has been a teacher, a principal, a superintendent as well as a state department administrator," Dr. James said. In addition to her state-level role as assistant commissioner for learning services, Julian previously served as deputy director of ADE under Director Gene Wilhoit from 1994 to 1997.

Dr. Julian, who holds bachelor's and master's degrees in education as well as an Ed.S. in educational administration from Arkansas State University, obtained her doctorate in education from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville in educational leadership. She has served as superintendent for both the Benton and Bryant school districts and was named Arkansas Superintendent of the Year in 2005. That same year she was named an Outstanding Alumni in Educational Leadership, Curriculum, and Special Education by

Photo Gallery Now on ArkansasEd.org

Arkansas Department of Education events are now captured electronically for your viewing pleasure.

Photos from awards ceremonies, news conferences, education-related lectures and more are not available by visiting the department's Web site at ArkansasEd.org. You will find the link to the gallery under the Communications heading on the lefthand side of the site's home page.

Arkansas State University. In addition to her role at the department, Dr. Julian serves as an adjunct professor for several universities in the state. She began her career as a fourth grade teacher in Selma, Alabama.

"So many positive things are happening with public education in Arkansas right now, so I am pleased to be able to continue working with educators across the state for the academic achievement of all students," Dr. Julian said. "I have enjoyed my role as an assistant commissioner and look forward to that new opportunities and expanded responsibilities I will have as deputy commissioner."

AYP timeline announced

Janinne Riggs, ADE's special assistant to the commissioner, recently released tentative dates for compiling data and processing the calculations to determine which schools met adequate yearly progress in 2007. Riggs stressed that the timeline is tentative, as unforeseen circumstances could alter the deadlines.

The timeline is as follows:

July 12 -19: Data corrections posted to NORMES password protected district/school reporting site (ED.STATS). A Commissioner's Memo will be released alerting districts/schools that the information has been posted. Schools will be given the opportunity to correct student demographic discrepancies prior to the release of the school improvement reports.

August 10: School improvement reports posted to NORMES password protected reporting site (ED.STATS).

August 13 (week of): District superintendents notified by certified mail of the school improvement report postings on ED.STATS. Districts have 30 days from receipt of the notification to file an appeal on behalf of school(s) in the district. Appeals discrepancy reports will be available on ED.STATS.

September 24 (week of): District superintendents notified of appeal findings.

October 8 (week of): District superintendents notified by certified mail of the district improvement postings on ED STATS. Districts have 30 days from receipt of the notification to file an appeal.

November 12 (week of): District superintendents notified of appeal findings.

Augmented test begins in '08

After years of considering combining the state's criterion- and norm-referenced tests into one instrument, students will be able to take a single examination to satisfy both purposes beginning the spring of 2008.

The most noticeable benefit will be that tests are administered within a one-week period as opposed to the previous two separate testing periods lasting the better part of a week. A second readily recognizable plus will be the return of test scores before the school year ends. This will allow teachers and administrators to start recommending academic improvement plans for individual students much sooner they could than in prior years.

Test dates for augmented Benchmark tests are April 14-18, 2008.

Lights, cameras... Smart Core!

Several EAST students from Central Arkansas schools will be hard at work this summer producing a video touting Smart Core, the college- and work-ready default curriculum for all Arkansas students. Though it is possible to opt out of Smart Core, research shows that students are at a disadvantage in competing for college placement and jobs with future growth when they don't take this level of courses.

The students working on the film are Emma and Sarah Bailin of Horace Mann Middle School in Little Rock (Central High School in the fall), co-directors; Justin Rowland of Bryant High School, lead animator; Romero Pleasants of McClellan High School, composer; and Lauren Dozier of Horace Mann Middle School, trainee.

Watch the newsletter for more information regarding the video, which will be distributed to schools statewide later this fall.

Detherow joins ADE in policy role

Heather Detherow has joined the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) in the role of Special Advisor to the Commissioner effective July 1. Detherow comes to the department from the Arkansas School Boards Association, where she has worked for the past 4½ years managing the organization's Arkansas Study Circles Project and other public engagement strategies.

At ADE, Detherow will focus on policy development and special projects as well as serve as the department's liaison to the Southern Regional Education Board and to the Arkansas Department of Higher Education.

Detherow holds a master's degree in public administration from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) and a bachelors' degree in social work from the University of Maine at Presque Isle. Other professional experiences include positions with UALR's Share America/Children International and Americorps VISTA.



SBE reviews new rating system

Dr. Charity Smith, ADE assistant commissioner for accountability, shared with the State Board of Education at its July meeting the state's plans to add the second component of a two-part system of rating schools so that they can be rated on the progress their students make on Arkansas Benchmark tests.

The system, which goes into effect in the 2009-2010 school year, will result in rewards or penalties.

The proposed system will give credit to Arkansas schools for progress on state exams by students who are improving but fall short of proficiency. The traditional benchmark categories advanced, proficient, basic and below basic will each be divided into two parts, with Advanced 2, the highest subcategory, designated by a 3.5 score and Below Basic 1, the lowest score, having a designation of -3.5.

Every time a student's test score moves from one subcategory to the next higher subcategory, 0.5 point is generated for the school. Similarly, a school loses 0.5 point for a student's single subcategory drop in achievement. If a student's performance category is unchanged from one year to the next, no points are generated.

Arkansas Education Commissioner Ken James told the state Board of Education that students in the low achievement categories can make "phenomenal" improvements but in the past have received little recognition because they remain below the proficiency level.

Act 35 of the 2003 special legislative session on education requires a two-pronged rating system for schools — one rating for their actual achievement level in a year and another for achievement changes from one year to the next, or their longitudinal improvement. The 2006-2007 year is the base year for that trend data. Beginning with the 2009-2010 school year, each school will be rated on a scale of one to five with five being a top rating, in each of the two categories.

James to serve on special SREB committee

Georgia Governor Sonny Purdue has invited Dr. Ken James, Arkansas Commissioner of Education, to serve on a special committee of the Southern Regional Education Board to develop recommendations for statewide policies to raise the percentage of high school students who graduate ready for success in college or careers. Gov. Purdue will serve as chair of the committee.

Arkansas is nationally recognized for its work in this regard, specifically for its default Smart Core curriculum at the high school level and the alignment of its mathematics and language arts frameworks with college and workforce expectations.

The committee will help states pursue such goals as reaching 100 percent high school graduation rates; raising diploma requirements for all students; reaching 100 percent proficiency standards; and having all high school graduates prepared for success in college or careers.

The committee will meet beginning late summer 2007 and complete its work by spring 2008. A report will be made to the SREB Board at its annual meeting in June 2008.

State hosts gap conference

Arkansas education officials were encouraged about steps the state has taken to improve the educational achievement of all students after attending a day-long conference on July 6 to discuss strategies for closing the achievement gap among student subgroups. The conference, sponsored by the Mid-Continent Comprehensive Center (MC3) and hosted by the Arkansas Department of Education, attracted state education leaders from Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma.

"As do all states in the nation, we have a ways to go to eliminate the achievement gap, but we are implementing research-based strategies that have been shown to make a difference," Dr. Ken James, Arkansas Commissioner of Education, said after the meeting. "That these strategies are paying off in the state was made evident when we released the 2007 Benchmark scores and saw our first narrowing of the gap ever."

Keynote speaker Dr. Stephanie Robinson with the Education Trust pointed to the gap in the level of instruction different subgroups of students receive, largely because teachers often have lower expectations for poor and minority students.

State stands by new frameworks

A group of Arkansas historians have launched a campaign against the 2006 revision of the social studies curriculum frameworks, saying that they give short shrift to Arkansas history. In addition to a flurry of e-mails generated by a posting by historian Tom Dillard on an Arkansas historians' list serve, the Arkansas History Education Coalition held a press conference in Little Rock on Saturday, July 14.

"This high-profile effort on their part caught us off-guard for a couple of reasons, the main one being that we have been proud of how effectively the 2006 revision strengthens the student learning expectations at each grade level," said Dr. Ken James, Arkansas Commissioner of Education. "The other is that we were never contacted by Mr. Dillard or the other historians before they went public with their concerns, many of which we think are founded on misinformation or misperceptions."

ADE and the Governor's Office have arranged a meeting with Dillard and department officials for July 19.

To view a fact sheet regarding the social studies frameworks revision process as well as copies of the 2006 and 2002 social studies frameworks, please visit this link: http://arkansased.org/teachers/frameworks_arkhistory.html



