

Education Matters

for administrators

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Notes from the Commissioner

Have you heard the term “dropout factories?”

Recent research by Robert Balfanz at Johns Hopkins University shows that about 8 percent of American high schools have become just that because they lose so many of their students between the first day of ninth-grade and high school graduation. These schools largely serve high-minority and low-income students.

For years, this phenomenon has been blamed on socio-economic background and similar factors, but a large focus in our continuing push to make the high school experience more meaningful and beneficial for students is to ensure that students find the same opportunities for success regardless of their ZIP code, family background or income. As you are well aware, research shows that all students are capable of high levels of learning. I firmly believe it is our responsibility as educators to help each child overcome obstacles to learning so he or she can reach his or her full potential.

An organization I belong to as Commissioner — the Council of Chief State School Officers — is developing an action plan to involve those of us at the state level in examining these high schools with challenging populations to determine best practices for retaining and engaging students.

I look forward to sharing with you the findings of this effort.

Sincerely,



Ken James, Ed.D.
Arkansas Commissioner of Education



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Need to keep up with important events?

Look to **ArkansasEd.org**'s Calendar of Events for the dates and information you need.

Arkansas Education Directory now available online

The Arkansas Education Directory is now available at ArkansasEd.org. It may be accessed through the "Quick Links" dropdown menu by linking to "Arkansas Education Directory." The directory is available in PDF and Excel formats.

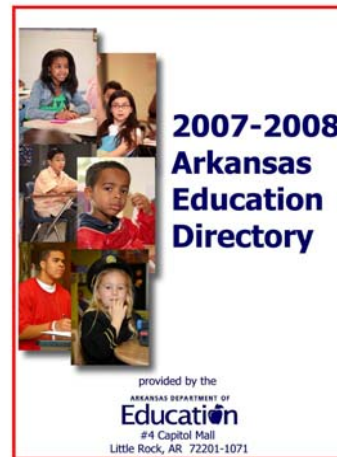
"The expense of printing and mailing directories combined with the ability to keep directory information current spurred us to publish this year's Arkansas Education Directory in electronic format," said Julie Johnson Thompson, director of communications for ADE.

"Anyone who wishes to keep a printed version of the directory on his desk may print individual sections or all of the PDF version and put the pages in a binder," Thompson said. "That will result in a directory much like past years' versions.

"But some people prefer to search electronically by name or title," she said, "and those individuals will find the electronic Excel version more useful."

School personnel should e-mail necessary changes for the directory to Dauphne Trenholm, ADE's communications project manager and directory editor, at dauphne.trenholm@arkansas.gov.

The Arkansas Education Directory will be updated monthly.



NMSI gives to AP in AR

Arkansas school districts will soon be able to apply for the opportunity to participate in a program to boost performance in Advanced Placement (AP) and pre-AP courses, thanks to a \$13.2 million grant to the state from the National Math and Science Initiative.

A Commissioner's Memo has been placed on the Arkansas Department of Education Web site with complete application details, according to Commissioner of Education Ken James. Twenty-one schools will be approved for inclusion in the program, which will focus on raising pre-AP and AP performance through teacher training and potential financial incentives for both teachers and students.

Tommie Sue Anthony, former coordinator of UALR's Arkansas Advanced Placement Professional Development Center, is president of the new organization, Arkansas Advanced Initiative for Math and Science, which will be based at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

SBE approves new rules

The Arkansas State Board of Education approved a number of rules at its regular September meeting, most of which reflected new legislation passed in the 2007 Arkansas General Assembly.

Among the rules that were either amended or created were regulations governing the Arkansas financial accounting system and annual training, public school funding, athletic expenditures and waivers for substitute teachers.

The State Board approved for public comment rules regarding the use of net gate receipts by public school districts.

For a complete list of actions of the State Board at its September 10 meeting, please go to this link: http://arkansased.org/sbe/pdf/sbe_action_091007.pdf.

Board meeting to deal with Bald Knob District

The fate of the Bald Knob School District and a report on the compliance of Haas Hall, a charter school in northwest Arkansas, were on the agenda of the State Board of Education for its special meeting Monday, Sept. 24.

The Arkansas Department of Education in August had filed a petition to annex the Bald Knob District to a contiguous district because of its dire financial situation. After appearing before the State Board with proof of raising more than \$1.5 million dollars, of an additional sales tax to support the school on the ballot in November and of planned cuts in spending, the State Board voted to take the matter under advisement and not order annexation at this time.

Because of salaries that amount to more than the school receives in foundation funding and a number of loans coming due this year, the Arkansas Department of Education projected a \$2 million deficit for the district by the end of the 2007-2008 school year.

The Arkansas Department of Education took control of the Bald Knob School District on Aug. 22 after having to advance foundation payments to the district so it could both meet its August payroll and pay a \$500,000 note on an outstanding loan.

"This is the most serious fiscal situation I've seen for a school district ever," Dr. Ken James, Arkansas Commissioner of Education, told patrons of the Bald Knob schools when he met with them in August.

The five districts that are possible annexation partners for Bald Knob include Augusta, Bradford, Midland, Riverside and White County Central.

The State Board also heard that Haas Hall and the Arkansas Teacher Retirement System have reached a resolution regarding the funds the charter school owed the system. At the August meeting, ATRS reported that the amount they calculated being owed to them by Haas Hall was more than what Haas Hall had submitted.

Most recent BMI results released by ACHI

In September, the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement (ACHI) posted individual school BMI assessment results at www.achi.net.

Results for each school that reported data to ACHI are included in school-level and district-level profiles. These reports describe the extent to which the school and district are being affected by the obesity epidemic.

In response to Act 201 of 2007, BMI assessments will be conducted this year for students in kindergarten and grades two, four, six, eight and ten. Parents who do not want a child to be assessed must notify the school in writing.

Social Studies frameworks addressed for 7th, 8th grades

Members of the 2006 Social Studies frameworks committee were joined by members of the Arkansas History Education Coalition for three days in September to ensure that a semester of Arkansas history could be taught while still teaching all frameworks for the regular Social Studies classes in the 7th and 8th grades.

Governor Mike Beebe asked the Arkansas Department of Education to convene the meeting after members of the coalition complained that some Arkansas schools would not be able to teach Arkansas history at the 7th or 8th grade. Arkansas law calls for a one-semester course to be taught at some point between the 7th and 12th grades.

The group examined each student learning expectation and, after tightening, cutting and combining, reduced the total of learning expectations for those grades by about 50. The State Board of Education will have to approve the suggested revisions, which, if approved, will go into effect for the 2008-2009 school year.

Save the Date

What might life be like for students who don't take the Smart Core classes in high school?

That's the question explored in "Do the Smart Thing," a seven-minute video promoting Arkansas' rigorous, default curriculum for high school students that was prepared by a group of EAST Lab students working together on the project this past summer.

"Do the Smart Thing" will be featured in a Clinton School of Public Service Lecture at 6 p.m. November 19 at the Clinton School in Little Rock. To make reservations, please e-mail an RSVP to Publicprograms@clintonschool.uasys.edu or call 501-683-5239.

"These talented students have produced a wonderful video, and I believe their creative message will help convince fellow Arkansas students that they will be giving themselves a better future if they pursue the Smart Core courses," said Dr. Ken James, Arkansas Commissioner of Education.

In addition to a possible appearance by Governor Mike Beebe, the event will include a presentation by Smart Core, a discussion about the production of the film and a reception.

Nex+Step
for Arkansas' Future

All attendees will receive a DVD with "Do the Smart Thing" and two 30-second public service announcements promoting Smart Core that were also produced by the students. The public service announcement will air on television channels in December and January.

Arkansas Education Matters for administrators is a monthly, electronic publication of the Arkansas Department of Education. Published by the ADE Communications office, it is available at ArkansasEd.org.

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