



ARKANSAS EDUCATION MATTERS

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MESSAGE FROM THE COMMISSIONER



Many of us had the opportunity to attend the Arkansas Works Summit, Gov. Mike Beebe's impressive event to bring teams from every county to focus on their community's education system and opportunities (and challenges) for economic development.

I am grateful that we have a governor who recognizes the strong tie between education and economic development. Over and over again we heard the message that creating an economy that will thrive in the 21st century depends on educating our students to levels that far surpass those of yesteryear. And that's not educating only those top-performing students, but ALL students.

The Smart Core curriculum for high school students IS the way to do that. Arkansas is recognized nationally for making Smart Core the default curriculum long before other states took such a step toward implementing rigor in the high school experience. But we're losing ground fast, because, while we still have Smart Core as a default curriculum, other states have mandated it for their students.

So in addition to urging you to encourage all of your students to pursue Smart Core and to find appropriate means of supporting all of your students in that quest, I also ask that you take an honest look at how many of your students are doing so. When we compare actual data of students on track to complete Smart Core (we looked at the percent of 10th graders who took the end-of-course exam in geometry) the numbers are vastly different from the self-reported data we receive on students opting out of Smart Core.

Folks, getting to the point of having that thriving economy in Arkansas demands that we look at the hard data of where we are and then determine how best to improve from there. That's what ArkansasWorks was all about and, I dare say, that's what we need to be about as well.

Sincerely,



MILKEN EDUCATOR AWARDS PRESENTED IN FORT SMITH, RUSSELLVILLE

Elizabeth Parker, a second grade teacher at Fort Smith's Cavanaugh Elementary, and Sheri Shirley, principal of Russellville's Oakland Heights Elementary School, were named Milken Educator Award winners during surprise ceremonies at their schools in October. As winners, they received \$25,000 in non-restrictive funds and will attend a national conference and awards ceremony with other Milken winners from around the country in the spring.

Family Foundation Chairman and Co-founder Lowell Milken created these awards in 1985 to recognize, honor, celebrate and attract the highest caliber school professionals. Since the program's inception, more than \$56 million in cash prizes have been awarded to 2,300-plus educators. In Arkansas, the Foundation has awarded \$1.6 million to 64 recipients since the program began.

To read more about the winners, please link to

http://www.arkansased.org/communications/pdf/fort_smith_release_101008.pdf

and http://www.arkansased.org/communications/pdf/milken_release_101708.pdf.

TEACHER OF THE YEAR TO BE NAMED IN DECEMBER CEREMONY

The field has been narrowed to 15, and from that select group of teachers, the 2008-2009 Teacher of the Year will be named at a ceremony at the State Capitol on December 10. The educators represent each of the co-ops that submitted entries and the Pulaski County school districts. They are: **Sandy Alexander** of Umpire Elementary School, **Teresa Bailey** of Searcy McRea Elementary School, **Peggy Lea Carter** of Ruth Doyle Intermediate School in Conway, **Teresa W. Garrett** of Harmony Grove Elementary School in Camden, **Patricia Leah Hesse** of Weiner Public School, **Jennifer Dillard Laurent** of Stuttgart Junior High School, **Cynthia Lynn Logan** of Walnut Ridge High School, **Phyllis McCance** of Cedar Ridge High School in Newark, **Jeffrey Harold Mosby** of Ramsey Junior High in Fort Smith, **Sarah Perdue** of Harp Elementary School in Lowell, **Sherry Ratliff** of North Little Rock High School – West Campus, **Jane Razaq** of College Hill Elementary International Baccalaureate World School in Texarkana, **Jennifer Touchstone** of Monticello Middle School, **Susan Waggener** of West Memphis High School, **Janet D. Watson** of Bryant High School.

HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS NAMED

The 87th General Assembly arrives for business on January 12, 2009. Members of the House of Representatives who will serve on the Education Committee were recently named. They are Bill Abernathy, Nancy Duffy Blount, Mark Martin, Rick Saunders, David Rainey, David Cook, Eddie Cheatham, Toni Bradford, Donna Hutchinson, Jerry Brown, Charlotte Wagner, Steven Breedlove, Dan Greenberg, Tim Summers, Les Carnine, Mark Perry, Linda Tyler, Robert Dale, Monty Betts and Jody Dickenson.

NORFORK SCHOOL RECEIVES NATIONAL RECOGNITION

Norfolk Elementary schools was among four schools from across the nation that Education Trust presented the sixth annual [Dispelling the Myth](#) awards for being extraordinarily successful in educating low-income students and students of color to high academic levels.

The awards recognize schools for making significant strides in narrowing gaps in academic achievement among student groups, showing achievement levels that significantly exceed the averages in their states, or improving student performance at a rapid pace.

The 2008 Dispelling the Myth schools are:

- Graham Road Elementary School in Falls Church, Va.;
- Norfolk Elementary School in Norfolk, Ark.;
- Roxbury Preparatory Charter School in Roxbury, Mass.; and
- Wells Elementary School in Steubenville, Ohio.

While these schools don't offer simple answers or easy solutions to the gaps that far too often separate low-income students and student of color from their peers, Education Trust found that several common strategies emerge from their practices. Among them are providing rich curriculum coupled with strong, focused instruction; having high expectations for all students; using data to track student progress and individual student needs; and employing purposeful professional development to improve teachers' skills.

ARKANSAS GREATER GRADUATION PROJECT TO FOCUS ON DROP-OUT PREVENTION

Teams from 16 school districts are being invited to attend the Arkansas Greater Graduation Project, a one-day summit to focus on drop-out prevention that is being sponsored by America's Promise, AT&T, State Farm and the Arkansas Department of Education. Speakers and presentations throughout the day will focus on the economic and personal losses caused whenever students drop out of school as well as on strategies to help students stay engaged in their classes.

The Summit, which will be held December 17 at the Crowne Plaza in West Little Rock, will feature Governor Mike Beebe, Arkansas Education Commissioner Dr. Ken James, and various national and local experts in the issues surrounding low graduation rates.

For more information, please visit the ADE's main Website, <http://arkansased.org>.