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Arkansas Department of Education Announces Results of College Professor Survey Focusing On High School Graduates' Lack of Preparedness for College

LITTLE ROCK, ARK. (Nov. 29, 2006) – Dr. Ken James, commissioner of the Arkansas Department of Education, today announced the results of a recent survey of Arkansas college professors who teach freshman-level courses concerning the preparedness of high school graduates for post-secondary school.

Eighty-two percent of respondents said that high school graduates are “somewhat prepared” or “not very prepared” for college, which mirrors similar surveys on the national level. Only about 40 percent of professors say they are “somewhat satisfied” with the job Arkansas public high schools are doing in preparing students for college. Almost half are not satisfied with the job being done.

However, at the same time, the majority of professors consider the level of admissions not to be very competitive within their colleges. About 28 percent expressed concerns that the level of admission standards is not very competitive at their college or university, and 54 percent said admission standards are not competitive at all.

College professors “graded” the overall academic quality of public high schools in preparing students for college with mostly Ds (50 percent) and Cs (39 percent). One

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in 10 gave the overall academic quality an F.

About 66 percent of respondents believe that remedial or development courses are needed by more than half of the freshmen they teach. The areas they feel need improvement include: math, critical thinking, English, study habits, discipline, work ethic, independent thinking, literacy, communication and report writing.

“I am not surprised by the survey findings,” James said. “This survey validates the results of research our department conducted with local business leaders earlier this year, which found that high school graduates are not prepared to enter the workforce. Plus, these results are very similar to national surveys focusing on the same subject.

“We know that high school students need the same skills whether they plan to go to college after graduation or enter the workforce. And we know that students are lacking both hard and soft skills. That’s why we are working to redesign high schools so all students are prepared for success following graduation.”

Hard skills include academics, such as writing, math, science, computer skills and reading comprehension. Soft skills refer to social skills, such as leadership qualities, the ability to work in a group, work ethic, attendance and personal presentation.

James said the Arkansas Department of Education is working to:

- Increase high school graduates’ readiness for college and workforce.
- Decrease college students’ remediation rates.

- Increase retention and timely graduation at colleges and universities.
- Decrease high school intervention.

“We must and can do better,” he said. “The best-educated kids in the United States and Arkansas are the best-educated kids in the world. However, we have large groups of kids who, because of where they live or how much money their family has,

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are not enrolled in the same rigorous classes or facing the same high expectations from their teachers. This must change.”

The survey was an online one in which professors from 33 Arkansas colleges and universities, both two-year and four-year institutions, were invited to participate. The study respondents were anonymous and not identified individually or by the name of the institution where they teach.

A detailed report of the study is available in PDF format on the Arkansas Department of Education Web Site: ArkansasEd.org.

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