Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Steering Committee Members

Johnny Key - Committee Chair

Mr. Key has served as the commissioner for the Arkansas Department of Education since March 2015. Prior to being named commissioner, Key served as associate vice president for university relations at the University of Arkansas System. Key began his career in public service in 1997 when he was elected to serve as a justice of the peace on the Baxter County Quorum Court. He was elected to three two-year terms in the House of Representatives, followed by a tenure in the Senate that began in 2008. Key graduated from Gurdon High School and received a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering in 1991 from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville.

Anthony Bennett, Jr.

Mr. Bennett is a recent graduate of Ashdown High School. He is entering his freshman year at Hendrix College in Conway where he plans to major in politics with a minor in philosophy. He currently serves two nonprofit organizations: (1) Youth for a Change, where he is the Southcentral Regional director (overseeing Arkansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas); and (2) Youth Caucus of America, where he serves as chair of the National Education Policy. Both organizations strive to promote the involvement and representation of youth at all levels of government.

Melissa Bratton

Ms. Bratton graduated with an associate degree in Radiological Sciences from National Park Community College at Hot Springs. She later received a bachelor's degree in Business Management and a master's degree in Human Resources Management from DeVry University. She began working in the English as a Second Language program at the Hot Springs School District in 2011. She attended the ESL Academy in 2013 at Henderson State University at Arkadelphia and became the district ESL coordinator in 2014. In addition to her work at the school, Ms. Bratton continues as a volunteer in her community.

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Representative Bruce Cozart

Representative Cozart is serving his third term in the Arkansas House of Representatives and represents District 24, which includes a portion of Garland County. He currently serves on the Legislative Joint Auditing Committee, the Committee for Insurance and Commerce, the Committee for Education, and the State and Public School Life and Health Insurance Program Legislative Task Force.

Senator Jane English

Senator English is currently serving her first term in the Arkansas Senate and represents Senate District 34, which covers a part of Pulaski County. Previously, she was elected to the Arkansas House of Representatives and served two consecutive terms. She is chairwoman of three committees including Joint Performance Review, State Agencies and Government Affairs and the Veteran's Home Task Force. She is a member of several other committees, both at the state and national levels.

Ima Etim

Ms. Etim is a third-year English Language Arts teacher in Pine Bluff. She is a native of California and a graduate of the University of California at Berkeley. Upon graduation, she joined Teach for America and began working in Pine Bluff, where she also volunteered as a program facilitator for What's Next Pine Bluff. For the upcoming school year, she will be the founder/director of the Arkansas Student Voice Council, whose purpose is to provide students in the state a platform in which they are empowered to find their voice, enhance their leadership skills and become advocates for educational change with the state.

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Joyce Flowers

Ms. Flowers has worked for the Camden School District for 45 years. She has taught grades five through 12, including Composition I and II, AP Literature and Composition, AP Language and Composition, and Basic English. For the past two years, she has served as a literacy specialist for the district. Her greatest joy is watching her children and all of her students reach their goals and foster pride in their communities.

Melinda Kinnison

Ms. Kinnison is a medical technologist at Baptist Medical Center in Little Rock and a church musician at Lakewood UMC in North Little Rock. She is a graduate of Carlisle High School and the University of Central Arkansas in Conway with a BS(MT) degree in Medical Technology. Both of her children graduated from North Little Rock High School. She has been a PTA member for 20 years and has served in leadership roles at the local, council, and state level. Ms. Kinnison serves on the Child Health Advisory Committee, and in April, 2019, she will begin her term as Arkansas PTA President.

Michelle Owens Hayward

Ms. Hayward has dedicated 27 years of service to Arkansas public schools as a teacher and principal. Currently, she is principal at McNair Middle School at Fayetteville Public Schools. In addition to serving her students and school community, she is serving on the Association of Middle Level Educators' Board of Trustees, representing the Southern Region. She is president of the Arkansas Association of Middle Level Administrators and is co-director for the Arkansas Schools to Watch initiative. Michelle received the Association of Middle Level Educators "Distinguished Educator Award" in 2013 and was named Arkansas' Middle School Principal of the Year and National Distinguished Principal for Middle School in both 2008 and 2014.

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Dr. Harold Jeffcoat

Dr. Jeffcoat was named superintendent of the Van Buren School District in April 2015. Previously, he served seven years in the central administration office at the Cabot School District. He also served as a teacher in the Little Rock School District, assistant principal in the Benton School District and principal in the Sheridan School District. He completed his doctoral work in the Department of Educational Administration and Supervision at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock in May 2011. He is an active member of the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, American Association of School Administrators, and many local civic clubs and organizations.

Ouida Newton

Ms. Newton has 38 years of experience as an educator. In addition to teaching math and science, she has served as a library media specialist, math coach, curriculum supervisor, class sponsor, Arkansas State Beta Club sponsor and Teachers of Tomorrow supervisor. She has been an adjunct professor at College of the Ouachitas in Malvern. In 2014, she was named the Arkansas Rural Education Teacher of the Year and Arkansas Middle Level Math Teacher of the Year. In 2015 she was named the Arkansas Teacher of the Year and recently was appointed to serve on the State Board of Education.

Gloria Phillips

Ms. Phillips is the pre-K through grade 2 principal at Rivercrest Elementary. This year begins her 33rd year as an educator in the Rivercrest School District. She previously was a teacher for 16 years and is beginning her 17th year as an administrator.