

**Arkansas Commission on Closing the Achievement Gap
Annual Report
November 1, 2010**

Commission Composition

The Commission on Closing the Achievement Gap consists of the Following Commissioners:

Dr. Dawn Tirado Simpson, Chair, Director of Vocational Training, ACTI (Reappointed by the Governor)

Dr. Jesse J. Hargrove, Philander Smith College (Reappointed by the Governor)

Mr. Jonathan Fulkerson, Dir. of Bands, Blytheville School District, (Appointed by the Governor)

Ms. Kelly Lyon, University of Central Arkansas (Appointed by the Governor)

Dr. Eddie McCoy, Consultant, (Appointed by the President Pro Tempore of the Senate)

Mr. Gus Williamson, Batesville School District, (Appointed by the President Pro Tempore of the Senate)

Ms. Elfreda Boyd, Pine Bluff School District, (Appointed by the Speaker of the House)

Ms. Tammy Whatley, De Queen School District, (Appointed by the Speaker of the House)

Mr. Marc Harrison, Special Assistant for Policy to Governor Mike Beebe (Liaison)

Dr. Jim Purcell, Director, Arkansas Department of Higher Education (Ex Officio)

Dr. Karen Wheeler, Assoc. Dir., Arkansas Department of Higher Education (Ex Officio)

Dr. Tom Kimbrell, Commissioner, Arkansas Department of Education (Ex Officio)

Legislation

The Arkansas Commission on Closing the Achievement Gap has been re-constituted, and is now composed in accordance with two powerful pieces of legislation enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Arkansas: Act 949 (HB 2163) and Act 1314 (HB 2164) of 2009 as approved on April 6, 2009 and April 9, 2009 respectively. In accordance with Arkansas Code 6-15-1601 (b) concerning membership on the Commission, the body has been downsized to eleven (11) Commissioners: Five Commissioners appointed by the Governor, three (3) by the

President Pro Tempore of the Senate, and three (3) by the Speaker of the House. Currently, the Commission is awaiting one more member to be appointed by the Governor.

Mission

The Commission on Closing the Achievement Gap is charged by the Arkansas State Legislature, under Act 1314, Section 2 of the Arkansas Code 6-15-1601 (g) of its amended duties to:

(1) Develop a plan for the state designed to enable all public school students to meet the state's student academic achievement standards while working toward the goal of narrowing the achievement gap in public schools for the following subgroups:

- (A) Economically disadvantaged students; and
- (B) Students from major racial and ethnic groups;

(2) Monitor the Department of Education's efforts to comply with federal guidelines on improving the academic achievement of the disadvantaged, specifically including, but not limited to, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001;

(3) Monitor the Department's identification of population groups to be motivated in closing the achievement gap efforts. The Commission may also expand the role and scope of the Commission to cover specific population groups as identified by the Department as target groups for closing the achievement gap.

(4) Receive national school lunch data and reports biennially from the Arkansas Department of Education.

(5) Interface with local school district achievement gap taskforces created under Arkansas Code 6-15-1603 to provide data on the achievement gap and achievement gap intervention strategies.

(6) Present a report to the House Committee on Education and the Senate Committee on Education, the Governor, and the State Board of Education no later than November 1 of each year; and

(7) Create a website that contains without limitation:

- (A) Notices of Upcoming meetings;
- (B) The state plan for closing the achievement gap;
- (C) A school district plan for closing the achievement gap from each school district;
- (D) The membership and contact information for members of the commission and each local school district achievement gap taskforce;
- (E) The minutes from commission meetings;
- (F) A clearinghouse for research and other information the commission identifies as important or useful for understanding the achievement gap in the state; and
- (G) Other information that the commission deems as appropriate.

Commission Meetings: 2009-2010

Since submitting our last annual report on November 1, 2009, the Commission has met on 7 separate occasions, including: January 21, 2010, February 18, 2010, March 18, 2010, April 15, 2010, September 16, 2010, and October 21, 2010.

Professional Presentations/Data Presented

In accordance with our mission, the Commission scheduled various professional presentations relevant to the achievement gap as a result of our collaboration with the Arkansas Department of Education, the Arkansas Education Association, and Lyon College, just to name a few. Presentations included relevant research, updated data analysis, literature reviews, Power Point presentation, and group discussions. Some of the presentations made this year included the following:

- Overview of Smart Accountability – Dr. Dee Cox
- Data Review on Closing the GAP – Dr. Gayle Potter
- Holding Schools Accountable for Student Achievement – Dr. Charity Smith
- Addressing the Whole Child in Closing the Achievement Gap – Dr. Dee Cox
- C.A.R.E: Strategies for Closing the Academic Achievement Gap – Richard Hutchinson & Dr. Kathy Price

Website Development

In accordance to our mission statement, we have collaborated with the Arkansas Department of Education's web master to create a website link to the Closing the Achievement Gap Commission, which will be accessible for the first time this year. Pictures of each Commission member have been taken, with relevant contact info included for each member. Additionally, the website link will include the following: membership list, relevant legislation, state plan, previous annual reports, previous meeting agendas, previous minutes, presentations, and relevant data.

Committee Work

The Commission had also formed five subcommittees last year to develop a state plan to close the achievement gap for Arkansas children. The subcommittees include the Scholastic Audit/ACSIP Alignment Subcommittee, Analysis of School Improvement Subcommittee, Local Closing the Achievement Gap Task Forces Subcommittee, Algebra 1 Subcommittee on Closing the Achievement Gap, and the Arts and Music Subcommittee. Although we have continued our work on these various subcommittees, our focus this year has been to implement the recommendations of the Local Closing the Achievement Gap Task Force Subcommittee made on March 30, 2010.

Collaboration with Local Task Force Event

- Plan local meeting/training either in the fall or spring as a means to announce ourselves to the local task forces and other key educational and community leaders. The theme will be “Building an effective Local GAP Task Force”.
- Plan on inviting local commissions from the congressional region as well as the superintendent, a principal, or an instructional leader from every school district in the region.
- Send a letter of invitation that will outline our goals/purpose statewide.
- Make the meeting open to the community and invite the media to attend

Purpose of the Meeting

- Establish rapport and partnership with those around the state who are interested in closing the gap.
- Increase the visibility of the GAP Commission.
- Collect information from different constituencies around the state as to what the achievement gap looks like in their region and what attempts have been made to close it.
- Compile the information from meetings around the state and develop an overall report or White Paper authored by this commission.

Structure of the Meeting

- Breakout Sessions: Plan for approximately 100 people, to break out into 4 groups – topics covered include the following:
 - What are strategies that have been successful at your school/district in closing the achievement gap?
 - What are strategies that have been unsuccessful at your school/district in closing the achievement gap?
 - What resources do you need in your school/district to close the achievement gap?
 - What are some obstacles or barriers in your community that you think are preventing closing the achievement gap?
 - Regarding introducing new legislation or policy, what could the state do to help you close the achievement gap?
 - Directed to local gap commissions specifically: What are the most critical elements for closing the achievement gap?
- A GAP Commissioner would moderate each group in addressing these questions and document the responses.
- A reception will be held for the GAP Commissioners the evening before to meet the local GAP task forces and as a meet/greet within the community.

Upon reconvening the Subcommittee on October 19, 2010, the following goals were set and plans made:

- Although we plan to host one of these meeting in each of the Arkansas' four congressional districts, we will start in the first congressional district, with the host city being Blytheville.
- After meeting with the school district's superintendant, the meeting will be scheduled during the last week of February and will include not only a reception the evening before, but will also include a tour of the school district, an opening session with keynote speakers, and breakout sessions.
- Parents and community leaders will be invited both to the reception and the lunch that will follow the training. Lunch will include a panel discussion with students and local task force members.
- Professional development credit will be offered for all those that qualify, including the 2 hour required Parental Involvement component for teacher licensure.

Recommendations

Based upon the various presentations made, research conducted, data collected, and meetings held, it is our recommendation as a Commission that we make the following suggestions with regards to our state plan for the upcoming year:

- Continue to not only highlight the great strides made within the past year in narrowing the academic achievement gaps across the state, but to also continue to educate key personnel with regards to how well Arkansas students have done when compared to students nationwide.
- Ensure that special attention should be paid to how achievement "gaps" are defined, as well as how success in narrowing those deficits are measured.
- Continue to evaluate the growth models as it pertains to address system-induced gaps, as well as technology-induced gaps, state wide.
- Intensify the efforts to implement the initiatives made to address the chronically poor performing schools where the gaps are the largest.
- Evaluate the quality of the pre-school programs in low-performing schools as a means of improving the level of school "readiness" as students first enter elementary school.