

2013

Moving Forward on Closing the
Academic Achievement Gap



Annual Report

Arkansas Commission on Closing the
Academic Achievement Gap

11/1/2013

Arkansas Commission on Closing the Achievement Gap Annual Report

Mission

Originally created by Act 1777 in 2003, the GAP Commission's primary purpose was to work with educators from across the state who worked first-hand in addressing the academic disparity that we continue to see among various disadvantaged groups. As such, we are committed to working along-side school districts to ensure that all students are given the support they need to succeed in school, and we are also committed to provide any assistance we can on the state level to make real progress in closing the academic achievement gap here in Arkansas.

Specifically, the Commission is mandated by legislation (HB 2164) to focus on these 5 key issues:

- *To Develop a plan designed to enable all public school students to meet the state's student academic achievement standards while working towards the goal of narrowing the achievement gaps in public schools, for both economically disadvantaged students, as well as students from major racial and ethnic groups.*
- *To monitor the Arkansas 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.*
- *To monitor the department's identification of population groups to be motivated in closing the academic achievement gap efforts.*
- *To receive national school lunch data and reports biennially from the Arkansas Department of Education.*
- *To interface with local school district achievement gap task forces to provide data on the achievement gap, as well as intervention strategies.*

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 includes eleven (11) Commissioners in total: 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 **(see attached)**.

Commission Meetings: 2013

Since submitting our last annual report in 2012, the Commission has met on 8 separate occasions. Although we are only required to meet no less than 4 times a year, we as a Commission believe that there is too much important work to be done to only meet on a quarterly basis. As such, we met each month, beginning in January, and only took a short summer hiatus in July and August.

Meeting Dates:

- January 17, 2013
- February 21, 2013
- March 14, 2013
- April 18, 2013

- May 23, 2013
- September 13, 2013
- October 10, 2013
- November 7, 2013

***Bridging the Gap* Annual Educational Symposium**

- June 7, 2013

Website Link

<http://www.arkansased.org/divisions/policy/arkansas-commission-on-closing-the-achievement-gap>

It was the Commission’s recommendation in 2011 that the Arkansas Commission on Closing the Academic Achievement Gap be given a website link on the Arkansas Department of Education’s website. Our vision was that by doing so, we would not only be more visible as a state commission, but that as a result of that visibility, those interested in learning more about this issue would have access to our research, reports, presentations, etc., and be able to contact us for further information, and/or to answer any questions. As a result of collaborating with the Arkansas Department of Education’s web master, our website link has enabled us to reach out to educators, administrators, community leaders, and parents across the state. As the Chairman, I have received numerous emails and phone calls from those interested in learning more about our organization, including TV interviews by KARK in their *Education Matters* segment, as well as educational organizations, such as Scholastic, Incorporated, who are interested in partnering with us for future events.

Pictures of each Commission member have been taken, with relevant contact info included, for each member. Additionally, the website link includes the following:

- Current Membership List
- Relevant Legislation
- Annual Reports
- Meeting Agendas
- Meeting Minutes
- Presentations
- Research

Committee Work

The Commission currently has a total of four Standing Subcommittees aimed at developing a state plan to close the achievement gap for Arkansas students statewide. These committees examine issues that have been tied to closing the academic achievement gap among the various subpopulations, as documented by current research. These subcommittees include the following:

- Scholastic Resources/ACSIP
- Parental Involvement
- Common Core
- Interfacing with Local Gap Task Forces

Below are the findings of each Sub-committee:

- ***Subcommittee: Distribution of Scholastic Resources & ACSIP***
 - ***Scholastic Resources: Interim Chairman, Dr. Luis Restrepo***
 - ***ACSIP: Chairman, Dr. Vera Lang Brown***

In this year's annual report, we combined these previously separate committees into one subcommittee which would examine the distribution of educational resources along with the ACSIP plans statewide. This year's focus was led by Dr. Luis Restrepo's analysis of the distribution of those educational resources:

Our goal as a Commission in evaluating the distribution of educational resources was to evaluate the equity, and any subsequent disparity, in regards to the link between educational resources and the academic achievement gap in local school districts across the state. Additionally, we were interested in evaluating best practices that other schools can implement as a model of how to close the achievement gaps among today's students. As such, this Sub-committee found current research that examined various factors affecting the distribution of resources and the schools' subsequent performance in evaluating those "exemplary" schools:

Arkansas is required to identify a reasonable number of high performance and high progress schools for designation as Exemplary (Reward) Schools on an annual basis beginning with 2011. Four categories of performance were identified by stakeholders as notable performance for Exemplary School designation. These were schools demonstrating high performance, schools with large populations of at risk students with high performance, schools with high progress; and schools with large populations of at risk students with high progress. The Targeted Achievement Gap Group (TAGG) was used as a measure of the size of the population of at risk students within a school. Schools were considered to have high TAGG populations when two-thirds (66.7%) of the students tested are members of the TAGG, i.e., economically disadvantaged, ELs and/or SWD. Beginning in 2012, schools had to meet all Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) for All Students, the TAGG, as well as all ESEA subgroups with 25 or more students for performance, growth (where applicable) and graduation rate (where applicable) to be eligible for consideration (continuing or new designation). Seventy-one schools met these minimum eligibility criteria for consideration. To determine Exemplary Schools for high performance, high progress, high-TAGG performance and high-TAGG progress three years of Arkansas Benchmark and End of Course Exam results were used to calculate a three-year average percentage of students Proficient/Advanced for math and literacy combined for 2010 through 2012. Combining the grade levels and the years for each school provides a more stable percentage for comparability and accountability purposes.

High Performing and High TAGG-High Performing schools were ranked within K – 5, 6 – 8, and 9 – 12 grade ranges. High Performance was based on ranking at or above the 90th state percentile within their grade ranges. Schools were removed from consideration if their achievement gap between TAGG and Non-TAGG students was 2 larger than the gap size of the 25 percent of schools with the smallest achievement gap sizes, or if schools' graduation rates were below the state median graduation rate of 84.39 percent for the 2011 rate, or 83.94 percent using the 2010 and 2011 weighted average rate. Progress was calculated based on the difference between schools' three year percentage of students Proficient/Advanced for math and literacy for 2009 through 2011 scores and the three year percentage of students Proficient/Advanced for math and literacy for 2010 through 2012 scores. The difference scores represent the gain or loss in proficiency for a school between the two time periods. High Progress and High TAGG-High Progress schools were ranked based on their difference scores within the three grade ranges. High Progress was based on ranking at or above the 90th state percentile for gains within their grade ranges. Schools were required to be removed from consideration if their achievement gap between TAGG and Non-TAGG students was larger than the gap size of the 25 percent of schools with the smallest achievement gap sizes, or if schools' graduation rates were below the state median of 84.39 percent for the 2011 rate, or 83.94 percent using the 2010 and 2011 weighted average rate.

Category of Exemplary	School	District
High Performance	Academy of Technology	Vilonia
High Performance	Arnold Drive Elementary	Pulaski County Special
High Performance	Haas Hall Academy	Open Enrollment Charter
High Performance	Woodland Heights Elementary	Harrison
High Progress	Clinton Junior High School	Clinton
High Progress	Pottsville High School	Pottsville
High TAGG High Performance	Eudora Elementary	Lakeside
High TAGG high Performance	KIPP Delta Collegiate High School	Open Enrollment Charter
High TAGG High Performance	Norfolk Elementary	Norfolk
High TAGG High Performance	West Junior High School	West Memphis
High TAGG High Performance and High Progress	Gillett Elementary School	DeWitt
High TAGG High Performance and High Progress	Green Forest Elementary School	Green Forest
High TAGG High Progress	Cotton Plant Elementary School	Augusta
High TAGG High Progress	Centerpoint Elementary School	Centerpoint

In terms of equitable school resources, two key indicators of progress in closing the academic Achievement gap for low income and minority students is the enrollment and success in Advanced Placement courses and their performance in the ACT exam. In addition, access to preschool is a determinant factor in achieving educational equity.

According to the 8th Annual College Board *AP Report to the Nation*, released February 8, 2012, there was a significant increase in the number of minority and low income students that took AP classes in 2011. For example, 3,246 low income students took AP exam in 2011, compared to 2,625 in 2010. 1,734 black/African American 791 Latinos, 111 American Indian/ Alaskan 336 Asian/Asian American/Pacific graduates in the class of 2011 took the AP Exam. However, the number of students passing the exam with a 3 or more is low. Only 838 low income, 204 African American, 290 Hispanic/ Latino, 36 American Indian/ Alaska Native, 166 Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander students passed the exam with a score of 3 or more **(see attached report)**.

The 2012 *ACT College and Career Readiness Report* for Arkansas, 88% of the 2011 graduates took the ACT or 26,058 students. However, the performance in this college entrance exam reveals considerable gaps between different student groups. For instance, only 12 percent of African Americans and 21 percent of Pacific Islanders meet the College Readiness Benchmark in Mathematics, compared to 44 percent of White students. In Science, only 5 percent of African Americans, 14 percent of Hispanics and 4 percent of Pacific Islanders met the College Readiness Benchmark, compared to 29 percent for White students. (See Arkansas ACT Report 2012 attached). In addition, according to the *LATINOS AND THE ACT IN ROGERS AND SPRINGDALE SCHOOL DISTRICTS 2012 Report* for the Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE) by the Office of Latino Academic Advancement and Community Relations of the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, only half of Latinos in Arkansas took the ACT. The report outlines several recommendations

including bilingual programs reaching out to the parents who may be unfamiliar with the importance of this college entrance exam (**see attached report**).

Pre-school education has been considered one key determinant for academic success. Minorities and students from low income households do not have access to pre-school education, according to the State of Preschool Education in Arkansas. As part of a statewide education reform initiative, the Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) program was established in 1991 and was originally funded only through a dedicated sales tax. However, between 2001 and 2007 it received additional funding from an excise tax on packaged beer. Although the program operates with some federal funding as well, at least 40 percent of the program's overall funding must be local contributions. ABC offers early childhood education services to children from low-income families from birth to age 5. Other risk factors can help determine eligibility, including developmental delay, family violence, foster care, having a parent in active overseas military duty, low parental education levels, having a teen parent, low birth weight, or non-English speaking family members. The program uses a diverse delivery system to provide pre-K access through educational service cooperatives, Head Start, nonprofit organizations, private businesses, and public schools.

The Arkansas Better Chance program provides financial support for professional development, including pursuit of college degrees, to its pre-K teachers. Effective January 2011, Act 187 of 2009 established the Birth through Prekindergarten Teaching Credential. This credential allows an additional professional pathway for preschool teachers in the ABC program, and five institutions have been approved to offer the credential. ABC also participates in an ongoing study that began in the 2005-2006 year to evaluate both impact/child and quality outcomes.

The Arkansas Better Chance for School Success (ABCSS) launched in the 2004-2005 program year as a result of additional state funds. ABCSS is available to 3- and 4-year-olds from families who have an income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. ABCSS funding was originally offered only to school districts where at least 75 percent of fourth grade children performed below "proficient" on state benchmarks exams in math and literacy or to districts classified as being in academic distress or school improvement status. Eligible children in other districts now receive services as well due to expansion of the program. This report profiles the ABC and ABCSS programs together as they have similar requirements and standards. According to the report, only 37% of 4 year old students were enrolled in preschool with a state expenditure of \$5,409 per child.

- ***Subcommittee: Parental Involvement:***
 - ***Chairman, Mr. Jon Fulkerson***

The commission would be remiss if we did not mention the great importance that parental involvement has upon the overwhelming concern of the academic achievement gap. It is the opinion of the sub-committee involving parental involvement that a parent/guardian will have a continued educational impact upon a child as being their first educator from birth until school age. In addition, their support by being present within the school (through the day and at school events) as well as their continued support at home after the normal school day is absolutely essential.

The gap widens however, when students that were victims of less involved parents in their education become parents and continue the trend. Many parents are simply not aware of how to best help their child in their academic exercises. Schools often assume that the parents are establishing ideal working environments for their children at home. The commission would like to study further the resources and training currently available to parents across the state on how to support their children academically at home.

Transportation is also a concern for parents at or below the poverty line. Getting students to and from school events where bus services are not available is a concern for many schools. Parents with a lack of transportation do not have the same opportunities to volunteer in schools, at school events or attend parent/teacher conferences. The commission will also be studying transportation as a direct impact on parental involvement and in turn student success.

- **Subcommittee: Common Core:**
 - **Chairman, Dr. Jesse Hargrove**

Our Common Core Sub-committee made a presentation at our *Bridging the Gap* educational symposium this past June and continues to work on additional research on this very important issue. Additionally, the members of the Sub-committee would be available to provide information upon request, particularly with respect to any local task forces that are examining this issue.

- **Subcommittee: Interfacing with Local Gap Task Forces:**
 - **Chairman, Dr. Dawn Tirado Simpson**
 - **Site Coordinator: Dr. Vera Lang Brown**

Second Annual Educational Outreach – Bridging the Gap: It Takes A Village To Educate a Child June 7, 2013

On June 7, 2013, we hosted our second annual educational symposium, entitled *Bridging the Gap: It Takes A Village To Educate a Child*, in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Our vision in hosting these educational symposiums was to invite educators from each Congressional District who work first-hand in addressing the academic achievement gaps in their local schools. As a Commission, we emphasized that we were ready to work along-side school districts to ensure that all students are given the support they need to succeed in school. Additionally, we as a Commission are committed to provide any assistance we can on the state level to make real progress in closing the academic achievement gap in Arkansas.

Since we are already mandated by current legislation to interface with the local achievement gap task forces in each of the four congressional districts, we believe that hosting the *Bridging the Gap* symposium gives our Commission the opportunity to meet educators, parents and community stakeholders from across the state that are interested in this vital issue – plans are already underway to host our next symposium in the 3rd Congressional District, in Fayetteville, AR on June 8-9, 2014.

Purpose of the Symposium/Educational Outreach

- Establish rapport and partnership with those around the state who are interested in closing the gap.
- Increase the visibility of the Commission and emphasize our advocacy and dedication to work alongside school districts across the state.
- 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 Symposium/Educational Outreach

- Our goal was to host one of these meetings in each of the Arkansas’ four congressional districts. Last year we began this journey by starting in the 1st Congressional District, in Blytheville, AR. This year’s event was held in 2nd Congressional District in the host city of Pine Bluff, led by Commissioner Dr. Vera Lang Brown.
- Dr. Brown scheduled the symposium for June 7, 2013 at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. Plans included keynote speakers and breakout sessions held by key educators and legislators.
- Parents and community leaders were invited to the event, and box lunches were provided.
- Professional development credit was offered through the Department of Education for the University for all those who qualified.

Special Presentations

As a result of our interest in keeping up to date on the current research on closing the academic achievement gap, we sought out the expertise of key educators and educational organizations. As a result, we had the opportunity to hear two special presentations this year, one by Dr. Andre Guerrero from the Arkansas Department of Education, and one by Mr. Sam Howe, from Scholastic, Incorporated. These reports focused on the multitude of issues surrounding ESL education in Arkansas, as well as the affect of fragile families on closing the academic achievement gap **(these reports are listed below and attached for your convenience).**

Reports:

- *Arkansas Department of Education 2012-2013 Programs for Language Minority Students*
- *ADE- Meeting the Needs of AR Students Whose First Language is Not English*
- *Navigating the Waves of Change in the State of Arkansas – Driving Academic Improvement Through Challenging Times*

Summary & Recommendations

Summary

As a result of the research conducted as a Commission throughout the year, and through the various presentations that we have been privy to, we have seen both the educational and economic impact the achievement gap can have across our state. There is no question that closing the academic achievement gap among those groups who are currently struggling to do well in school can greatly impact the drop-out rates among Arkansas schools across the state. If that contention holds true, then the economies of our local communities will feel this impact. As a Commission, we have mentioned the economic impact the student drop-out rate can have on our schools and communities, but it bears repeating – for example, according to statisticians, if the current drop-out rate was reduced by even half (which would include approximately 5900 Arkansas students), the state would see the following results:

- \$ 60 million dollar *increase* in home sales
- \$ 51 million dollar *increase* in the gross state product
- \$ 42 million dollar *increase* in earnings
- \$ 33 million dollar *increase* in spending
- \$ 9.8 million dollar *increase* in investments
- \$ 5.9 million dollar *increase* in auto sales
- \$ 3.5 million dollar *increase* in tax revenue

Just from this research alone, one can see why ensuring that ***all*** students have an equal chance to succeed in the classroom is of such vital importance to the future of our state.

Recommendations

One of the most important aspects of serving on The Arkansas Commission on Closing the Academic Achievement Gap, is that we are authorized to make recommendations to our governing officials and key educational leaders – as such, we

as a Commission would like to make 3 recommendations that, if followed, could impact the effectiveness of our future work as a Commission, as we work alongside school districts on this vital issue:

1) **Speaking at a Future Education Committee Meeting** – we as a Commission would value the opportunity to speak to both the House and Senate about an issue we believe so wholeheartedly in. I have served on the Commission since its inception in 2003, and over these past 10 years, we have seen great strides in the progress we have made as a state, particularly when we compare these results from where we started. Arkansas has led the way in recent years in bridging that gap, and we would like to provide any assistance we can in ensuring that we continue to do so. Having the opportunity to discuss these issues and get feedback on where we are, and where we would like to go, could help us tremendously as we continue on this journey.

2) **Adding an Annual Budget of 2500 Per Congressional District** - Without an operating budget, we are limited on what we can do. We strongly believe that Arkansas has made great strides in examining this issue and we also believe that we could continue to be on the forefront of academic progressiveness. As such, we as a Commission could become the model for other states to follow, demonstrating first-hand how a state commission can serve as both an educational resource and an advocacy group. The focus of our work would be centered around working alongside local school districts across our state in taking a more pro- active, rather than a re-active, stand on this very important issue.

An annual budget of \$2,500 per Congressional District, or \$10,000 a year, would allow the Commission the ability to accomplish the following:

- Invite both state, and nationally recognized, keynote speakers
- Provide the necessary educational materials for our annual symposium attendees
- Reimburse the travel expenses for our Commission members who would be presenting at the conference.

3) **Expecting School Districts to Follow the Local Achievement Gap Task Force Mandate** - School districts and their Superintendents should take heed that local gap task forces charged with examining the academic discrepancies among their school sub-groups should already be in place. Codified on April 24, 2012, we discovered this year that few school districts are implementing this requirement. At present, there doesn't appear to be any consequence for failing to meet these criteria, and perhaps, there should be. We as a Commission do not wish to be punitive, but instead, would like to assist school districts, in any way that we can, to meet this goal.

Commission Composition

The Arkansas Commission on Closing the Achievement Gap consists of the following members:



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