

2015

Arkansas Commission on Closing the Academic Achievement Gap

2015 Annual Report

The Arkansas Commission on Closing the Academic Achievement Gap goal is to document and assess progress in educational equity. As a state commission, we serve as both a resource and advocacy group. This report includes policy recommendations based on reports, research and input from educational stakeholders across the state.

Dr. Luis Fernando Restrepo, interim chair

11/2/2015



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 legislation (HB 2164) mandated the Commission 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 legislation ANNEX I**).

Commission Website Link

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

Commission Acknowledgements

The Commission would like to acknowledge the service and leadership of our departing chair, Dr. Dawn Simpson and Commissioner Dr. Jesse Hargrove. We commend them both for their sustained efforts and commitment as members of the Commission since 2003.

Commission Meetings: 2015

Since submitting our last annual report in 2014, the Commission has met on 7 separate occasions, which includes not only our Commission meetings, but also our educational symposium. 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, taking breaks in the summer and the beginning of the school year.

2015 Meeting Dates:

- January 15, 2015
- February 12, 2015
- March 19, 2015
- April 16, 2015
- May 21, 2015
- September 17, 2015
- October 16, 2015

2015 *Bridging the Gap* Annual Educational Symposium

- June 19, 2015

The Commission website is hosted by the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE). The page provides the following information:

- Current Membership List
- Relevant Legislation
- Annual Reports
- Meeting Agendas
- Meeting Minutes
- Presentations
- Relevant research and educational reports

Committee Work

The Commission currently has a total of five 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:

- Bridging the Gap Annual Educational Symposium
- Common Core and its Impact on Achievement
- Evaluation of Yearly Progress in Closing the Academic Achievement Gap
- Parental Involvement and its Impact on Student Success
- Scholastic Resources and ACSIP – Evaluation of a Future Pilot Program

Subcommittee: Bridging the Gap Symposium

Chairman, Dr. Dawn Tirado Simpson

- ***Committee Members:***
 - ***Dr Jesse Hargrove***
 - ***Senator Jack Crumbly***

Fourth Annual Educational Outreach – Bridging the Gap

On June 19, 2015, we hosted our Fourth Annual Educational Symposium series, *Bridging the Gap*, at the Arkansas Career Training Institute (ACTI) in Hot Springs, Arkansas (**see Annex II. Flyer and agenda**). Our vision in hosting these educational symposiums is 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 alongside 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 next year’s symposium at the Arkansas Career Training Institute, in Hot Springs, Arkansas

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 across 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 (annual report) authored by this Commission.

Structure of the Symposium/Educational Outreach

- Our goal was to host one of these symposiums in each of the Arkansas’ four congressional districts, and we have been successful in that endeavor. Beginning our journey in Blytheville, AR, our second symposium was held in Pine Bluff, AR, our third symposium was held in Springdale, AR, and this year’s event was held in Hot Springs.
- Plans included an Opening Session, Keynote Speakers and Breakout Sessions held by key educators and legislators (**see attached agenda. Annex II**).
- The welcome was given by Mr. Jonathan Bibb, the Administrator of ACTI ,and breakout sessions included members of the Gap Commission, along with key educational leaders. US Congressman Bruce Westerman was also there in support of our Commission and gave his remarks as well.
- Professional development credit was offered through ACTI all those who qualified, and the symposium ran from 8:00 AM until 3:00 PM, with lunch being served.

Subcommittee: Common Core

- ***Chairman, Mrs. Kathy Powers***
- ***Members: Dr. Jesse Hargrove, Dr. Luis Restrepo, and Dr. Vera Lang Brown***

Even in the wealthiest areas of Arkansas, there exists an academic achievement gap between and among Arkansas's ethnic and socioeconomic groups and sub-populations. Members of this Commission have been working for the past two years to find and enact system change to address this issue. The philosophy of the Commission is to "ensure that all children have an opportunity for an education that will focus on equity as a means to achieve a closure in scores between and among diverse learning communities of students." The Common Core State Standards provide a structure which supports students from poverty and helps to close the academic achievement gap.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were created in 2009 in response to the fact that not every student in the United States had access to a great public school with rigorous coursework necessary to allow students to transition smoothly to postsecondary educational options without remediation. Graduation rates were improving incrementally, but achievement gaps and increased dropout rates that fell along socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial lines persisted. If students in this country were going to be equally ready to be globally competitive in the future, we needed a set of consistent learning standards that would ensure that ALL students had access to the same increased rigor no matter where they lived (**for further information, visit <http://www.corestandards.org>**).

A group of state and educational leaders developed the common core state standards for Mathematics and English Language Arts. In Arkansas, Common Core became fully implemented in fall 2014. The standards were designed to be fewer in number, clearer, encompass broad academic goals, integrate content area instruction, and to prepare students for a variety of postsecondary experiences. Today, forty-three states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) have adopted the Common Core State Standards.

In 2014 Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson created a task force to review the Common Core standards for the state. In addition to sending out a public perception survey to parents, educators, and citizens, the task force heard testimony from educators and the public about Common Core. The task force concluded that Arkansas should keep but revise the standards to address survey and public concerns. In 2015, a committee of educators from all over the state was created to revise the standards for Arkansas. Until that work is complete, Arkansas educators will continue to base math and English Language Arts instruction on the Common Core standards.

Although the standards will be revised, Arkansas school districts continue to have the freedom to select curriculum and programs for delivering the standards. Individual teachers have the flexibility to use professional judgment to design instruction for how the standards would be best taught to his or her students. This includes designing modified instruction necessary to support and accommodate students with disabilities, English language learners, and impoverished students.

Students who are raised in poverty are not disabled, but come to school with distinct disadvantages. Ruby Payne's research on poverty states that kindergarten children come to school with one half of the listening and speaking vocabulary that other classmates possess and that children in poverty have a huge deficit in the area of background knowledge(**for further information visit <http://www.ahaprocess.com/who-we-are/dr-ruby-payne/>**).

Robert Marzano's work states that what works in schools for struggling students and students from poverty is direct instruction in vocabulary and providing background knowledge. The revised Common Core English Language Arts standards should continue promote both rich vocabulary instruction and paired fiction with related nonfiction texts. This pairing of texts provide background knowledge to the reader where no prior knowledge exists. All students can discuss the text and provide evidence for their arguments from "right-there" texts no matter the depth of their previous background knowledge on the subject. The research of Marzano and Payne also suggest that instructional strategies such as cooperative learning structures, thematic, integrated approaches, and work with

peers also support learners from poverty. The Common Core ELA standards have these support structures built by design (**see attached report, The Art and Science of Teaching. ANNEX III**).

Having common standards also benefits Arkansas teachers. One of the recommendations of the Common Core task force is to keep the CCSS numbering system intact so that Arkansas teachers can still access internet resources designed around the Common Core. Professional development workshops, training, and materials can all be focused on common standards; not just designed for the old state standards of the larger educational markets like Texas and California. Teachers from all over the nation can collaborate online and share best practices centered around our now common standards- especially ideas for how to raise the achievement level of our students living in poverty. The Common Core State Standards are a systemic change that will help to narrow the academic achievement gap.

This subcommittee recommends that the revised standards for Arkansas align as closely as possible to the original Common Core State Standards in order to maintain the rigor our students need to stay competitive with their national peers, and for teachers to continue to have access to online resources built around the Common Core state standards.

Subcommittee: Evaluating Yearly Progress in Closing the Academic Achievement Gap in Arkansas

- ***Chairman, Dr. Luis Restrepo***
- ***Committee Members: Dr. Dawn Tirado Simpson***

The Commission seeks to evaluate yearly progress in closing the academic achievement gap in Arkansas. Following the *2008 Report Education in the Post-Lake View Era: What Is Arkansas Doing To Close The Achievement Gap?* Written by Jay Barth and Keith Nitta, the Commission focuses on 1) economically disadvantaged students, identified as those eligible for free or reduced –price lunches under the federal school lunch program and 2) students from major racial and ethnic groups in Arkansas. Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) identifies four major ethnic groups: White, African American, Latino, and Asian/Pacific Islander. The Barth and Nitta Report recommended measuring the achievement gap between these groups with (1) standardized test scores, (2) graduation rates, (3) remediation rates, (4) access to advanced coursework, (5) school discipline rates, and (6) college-attendance rates. Based on state and national data and reports, this 2015 Commission Report indicates that although there has been considerable progress in educational equity in Arkansas, there are still significant educational disparities that need to be addressed.

1. STANDARIZED TEST REPORTS

This year’s report focuses on two indicators of the work to be done in terms of closing the academic achievement gap.

First, despite the improving performance of low income students in Arkansas public schools, there achievement gap has not been significantly reduced.

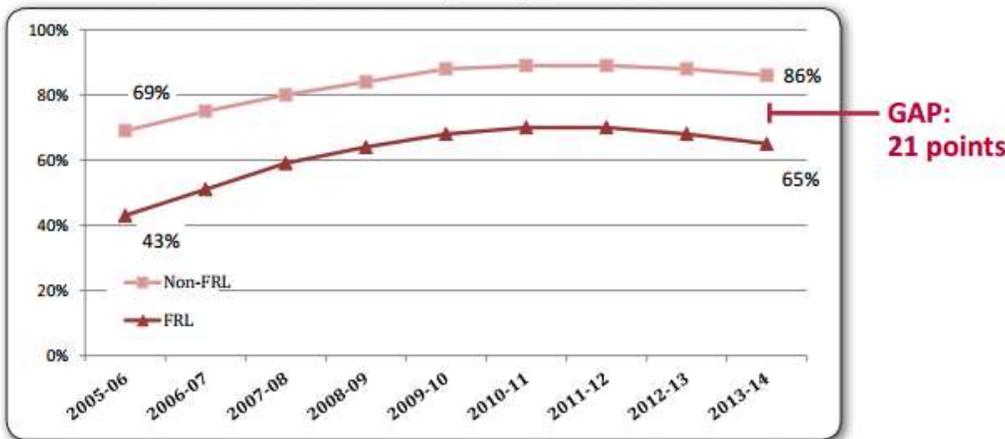
The University of Arkansas Educational Policy 2014 Arkansas Schools Report Card, released February 25, 2015, clearly illustrates this pattern.

OEP 2014 REPORT CARD:

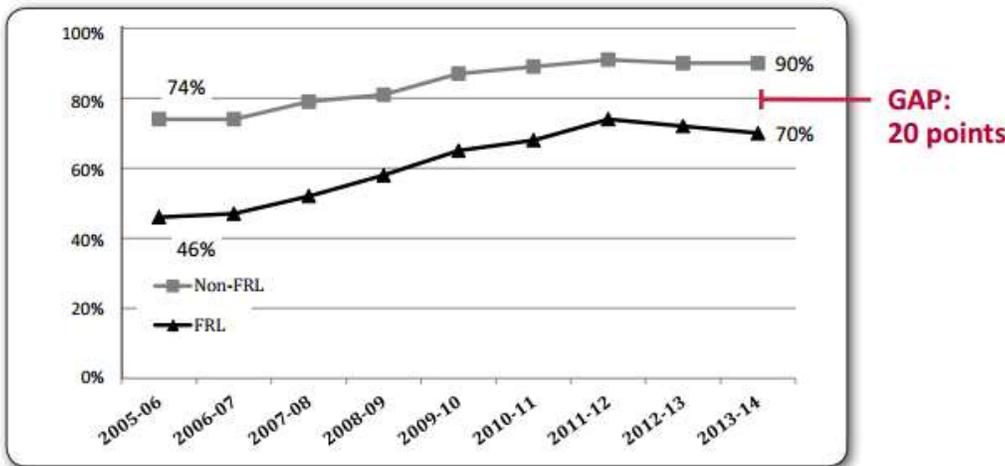
The academic performance of students who face economic challenges has increased over the last decade, but the gap between those students and their peers who are not eligible for Free/ Reduced lunch programs have proven difficult to close. Students have made substantial gains in Benchmark proficiency rates in both literacy and math since 2005-06, and students eligible for Free/Reduced lunch programs are scoring proficient at rates similar to non-FRL students from 2005-06. Growth across both student groups, however, has not significantly impacted the achievement gap, which has been holding around 20 percentage points for several years.

(OEP 2014 AR Report Card p.9 ANNEX IV)

Arkansas Benchmark Math: 2009-2014
Percent Proficient & Advanced by Free/Reduced Lunch Status



Arkansas Benchmark Literacy: 2009-2014
Percent Proficient & Advanced by Free/Reduced Lunch Status



Although there is still work to be done in closing the academic achievement gap, it is important to recognize efforts that are making a positive impact across the state. The September 30, 2015 report *Beating the Odds- High-Achieving Schools Serving Low-Income Communities* by the Office of Educational Policy lists over fifty schools across Arkansas, public and charter, with a significant number of students performing at the proficient or advanced levels in the benchmark exams, despite serving a high poverty student body (66% and above of students in Free and Reduced Lunch). (See attached Beating the Odds report ANNEX V)

The second standardized test the Commission examined to determine attainment gaps is the Arkansas ACT exam. The following five year trends for ACT exam by race and ethnicity shows a significant gap between average ACT scores of Whites (21.6) and other ethnic groups, with African Americans and Latinos with average scores of 16.9 and 19.6, respectively. However, Latino/Hispanic average increased slightly from 18.8 in 2014. The Commission is deeply concerned with the recent changes to the lottery scholarships that rely solely on ACT scores with a minimum of 19, considering that low income and minority groups may be significantly affected by this policy to receive state financial aid.

Table 1.5. Five Year Trends—Percent and Average Composite Score by Race/Ethnicity

	2011			2012			2013			2014			2015		
	N	%	Avg												
All Students	27,020	100	19.9	26,058	100	20.3	25,875	100	20.2	26,821	100	20.4	26,955	100	20.4
Black/African American	4,880	18	16.6	4,677	18	16.9	4,403	17	16.7	4,452	17	16.9	4,540	17	16.9
American Indian/Alaska Native	274	1	19.8	178	1	19.7	161	1	19.5	138	1	19.8	167	1	19.6
White	17,526	65	21.1	17,282	66	21.4	16,784	65	21.4	17,181	64	21.6	17,071	63	21.6
Hispanic/Latino	1,666	6	18.5	1,776	7	18.7	2,005	8	18.9	2,179	8	18.8	2,342	9	19.0
Asian	492	2	21.4	433	2	21.3	416	2	22.1	466	2	22.3	519	2	22.5
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	19	0	19.3	28	0	18.9	37	0	18.2	54	0	17.2	41	0	18.4
Two or more races	601	2	20.6	758	3	20.7	920	4	20.8	942	4	20.8	1,106	4	20.7
Prefer not to respond/No response	1,562	6	18.1	926	4	19.3	1,149	4	19.0	1,409	5	19.1	1,169	4	19.1

SOURCE: 2015 ACT STATE REPORT p. 8.

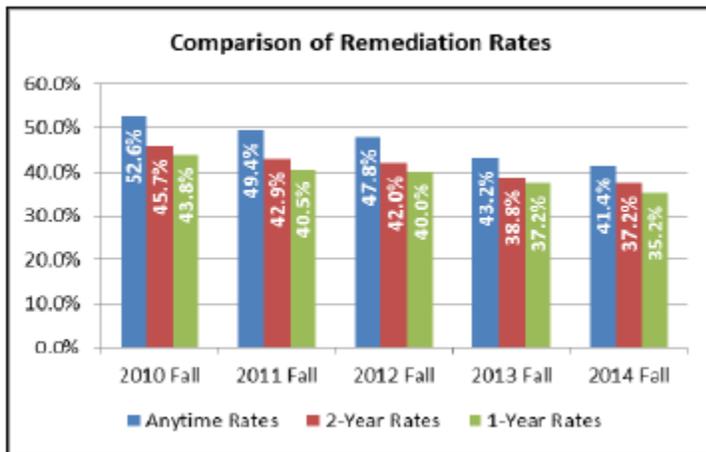
2. GRADUATION RATES

The graduation rates for the 2014 school year indicate that there is a 9% gap between the TAGG groups (Targeted Achievement Gap Group) and non-TAGG students, as indicated by the last column to the right in the ADE Data Center Graduation Rates Report for 2014.

Executive Summary Adjusted Graduation Rates for Arkansas Districts: 2013-14								
District Name	District Enrollment	Region	District % FRL	District % Minority	Overall Graduation Rate	TAGG Graduation Rate	Non-TAGG Graduation Rate	Gap Between TAGG and Non-TAGG Students
Arkansas Overall	471.407	-	61%	37%	87%	83%	92%	-9%
Northwest	165.616	1	58%	30%	89%	84%	93%	-9%
Northeast	95.348	2	64%	28%	88%	85%	93%	-9%
Central	137.934	3	57%	44%	83%	78%	89%	-11%
Southwest	46.436	4	68%	44%	89%	87%	92%	-5%
Southeast	26.073	5	72%	52%	86%	83%	92%	-9%

3. REMEDIATION RATES

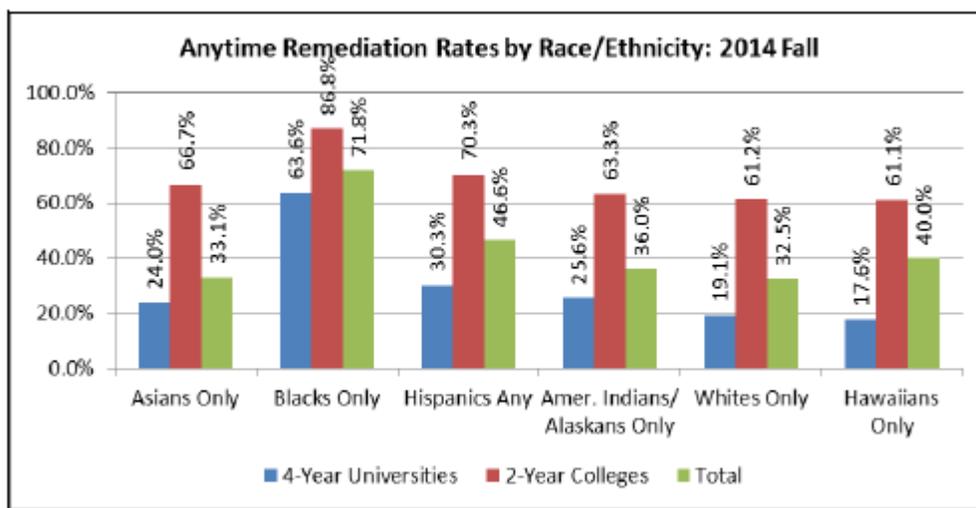
According to the ADHE Annual Report on First-Year Student Remediation, released January 30, 2015, there is a steady decrease in remediation rates since 2009, and an slight positive decrease in remediation rates from 2013 to 2014.

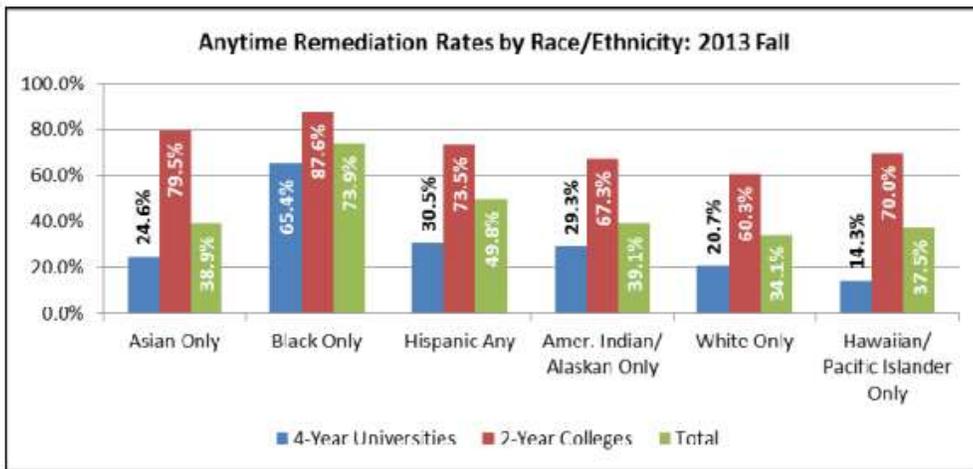


ADHE calculates remediation rates according to the following formula:

1. Anytime Rates – rates in which the high school graduation date is ignored
2. 2-Year Rates – rates in which the student graduated high school in the previous 2 years
3. 1-Year Rates – rates in which the student graduated high school in the previous 1 year

Based on the same 2015 ADHE report, remediation rates by student ethnicity shows still show some disparities between Whites and other ethnic groups, although, compared to the 2013 remediation report, included below, there is a slight positive decrease in the remediation rates of Arkansas ethnic minorities.





4. ACCESS TO ADVANCED COURSEWORK

Arkansas student involvement in Gifted and Talented Program still reflects a gap between White students and ethnic minorities' participation, as demonstrated by ADE data for 2014-2015.

		2 OR MORE RACES	ASIAN	BLACK	HISPANIC	NATIVE AMERICAN	NATIVE HAWAIIAN	WHITE
E	State Enrollment	9944	7345	98720	55681	3065	3005	298323
F	Gifted & Talented	821	1060	7467	2909	221	62	32618
(E/A)*100	% of State Enrollment	2.09%	1.54%	20.74%	11.7%	0.84%	0.63%	62.66%
(F/B)*100	% of Gifted & Talented	1.82%	2.35%	16.54%	6.44%	0.49%	0.14%	72.23%
(F/A)*100	% of Gifted & Talented in District	0.17%	0.22%	1.57%	0.61%	0.05%	0%	6.85%

Regarding AP and IB participation, the commission recommends that ADE provide data for these courses broken down by race/ethnicity and low income, since current information does not provide it. College Board 2015 Report was not available at the time the Commission's report was originally drafted (Oct. 29, 2015). According to College Board Data for 2015 exams, it is evident that African American, Latino/Hispanic students are still underrepresented in these college readiness programs. Only 26,500 students in Arkansas took at least on AP exam. This is low participation, considering that there are over 100,000 students in 10-12th grades across the state.

Arkansas students by grade. (ADE state profile)

Grade 10	36951
Grade 11	34862
Grade 12	32385

5. SCHOOL DISCIPLINE RATES

ADE Data Center provides detailed information on disciplinary actions, as demonstrated in the two charts included below. However, this information is not broken down by race/ethnicity or income level, to determine if there is any disproportion in disciplinary action between different student groups. The information from the U.S. Department of Education Civil Rights Office is included in this report to contrast with the ADE provided data.

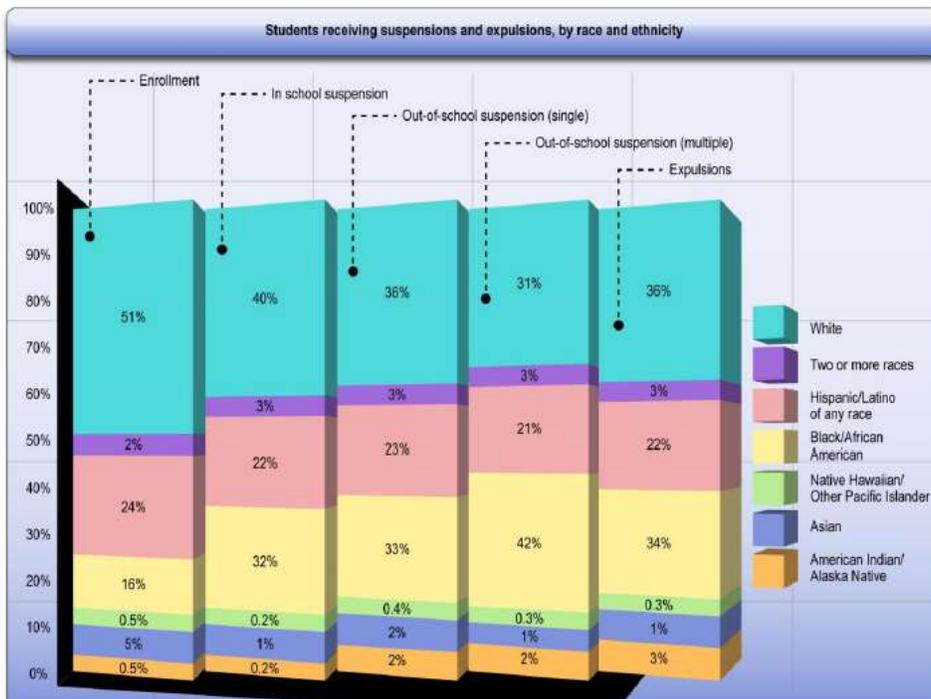
Disciplinary Infractions by State (2014-2015)

Drugs	Alcohol	Tobacco	Truancy	Student Assault	Staff Assault	Knife	Handgun	Rifle	Shotgun	Club	Gangs	Vandalism	Insubordination
2,116	499	3,412	17,966	2,562	664	613	53	10	15	63	162	1,206	58,886

Disciplinary Actions by State (2014-2015)

In-School Suspension	Out-of-School Suspension (Non-Injury)	Expelled	Expelled for Weapons	Corporal Punishment	Other	No Action	Alternative Learning Environment (Full Year)	Expelled for Drugs	Expelled for Dangerousness (Non-Injury)	Expelled for Dangerousness (Injury)
104,307	56,933	296	59	21,370	105,246	2,446	143	103	8	14

The U.S. Department of Education Civil Rights Office (2014) report based on data from every public school in the nation (approximately 16,500 school districts, 97,000 schools, and 49 million students) with a 98% responding rate. Alarmingly, at the national level, students of color are disciplined at significantly higher rates than White students.



NOTE: Detail may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Totals: Enrollment is 49 million students, in-school suspension is 3.5 million students, single out-of-school suspension is 1.9 million students, multiple out-of-school suspension is 1.55 million students, and expulsion is 130,000 students. Data reported in this figure represents 99% of responding schools.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011-12.

The Civil Right Data Collection (CRDC) report reveals that “Black students represent 16% of the student population, but 32-42% of students suspended or expelled. In comparison, white students also represent a similar range of between 31-40% of students suspended or expelled, but they are 51% of the student population” (Issue Brief No.1, released March 1, 2014).

Arkansas is highlighted in the Discipline Report, as one of the eleven states with higher gaps between the suspension rates of black students and white students. The Arkansas out of school suspension rate for black males is 24% compared to 20% nationally. The out of school suspension rates for Whites in Arkansas is 8%, compared to 6% nationally.

Recommendation to ADE: provide state disciplinary infractions and actions broken down by race/ethnicity and income levels.

6. COLLEGE ATTENDANCE RATES

ADHE Report on College Going Rates, released July 31, 2015, shows the number of 2014 graduates enrolling in higher education, with Asians and Hispanics enrolling at higher rates.

Race/Ethnicity	AY2014 HS Graduates	College Going Rate	
		First-Time Students	Percent
Asians	506	279	55.1%
Blacks	6,445	2,706	42.0%
Hispanics	1,855	1,084	58.4%
American Indians/Alaskan Natives	342	109	31.9%
Whites	21,200	10,545	49.7%
Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders	134	22	16.4%

The Commission invited ADHE Director Dr. Bret Powell, who presented the department’s *Closing the Gap 2020: A Master Plan for Arkansas Higher Education*. Among the recommendations are to increase the number of Minorities and students from low-income families who both enroll in, and complete, higher education at lower rates. In addition the ADHE Master Plan recommends exploring college affordability options. (See ADHE Master Plan. ANNEX VI).

Summary & Recommendations

Summary

With a highly enthusiastic and strongly committed individuals from diverse backgrounds and institutional affiliations, including K-12 educators and administrators, higher education faculty and administrators, legislators, and community leaders the Commission seeks to document and raise awareness on the educational disparities in Arkansas as well as to highlight efforts making education equitable.

As a non-partisan, volunteer Commission, we seek to provide research and experience based information to guide educational policymaking. Through our annual Bridging the Gap Symposium, we also reach out to educators, administrators, legislators, community leaders and other stakeholders across the state.

There are several forces changing public education in Arkansas today that make it imperative to monitor how these changes will affect students from historically underserved groups—the main charge of this Commission. Among these are the efforts to set national educational standards, new models of education including charter and innovation schools, raising costs of higher education with diminished state support and changing formulas for student financial aid, a shortage of qualified teachers in high poverty schools, greater pressures for accountability and transparency.

After a year’s work considering these and other factors affecting educational disparities, the Commission would like to make the following recommendations

Recommendations

1) **Speaking to the Joint Committee on Education on an Annual Basis** – we as a Commission would value the opportunity to present our annual report to both the House and Senate and to be considered as a key resource in the policy making process.

2) **Aligning Arkansas Standards with Common Core Standards.** The Commission recommends that the revised standards for Arkansas align as closely as possible to the original Common Core State Standards in order to maintain the rigor our students need to stay competitive with their national peers, and for teachers to continue to have access to online resources built around the Common Core state standards.

3) Distribution and selection process of state financial aid. Current distribution of State financial aid for higher education is merit based than need based. Such formula does not help close the academic achievement gap. Furthermore, given the disparities in ACT performance of ethnic minorities and low income students, broader indicators of intellectual capacity and merit are necessary.

4) Disciplinary infractions and actions reporting. Considering systemic disparities in disciplinary actions across the nation's public schools affecting negatively ethnic minorities and low income students as reported by the U.S. Department of Education Civil Rights Office, we recommend that ADE provide state disciplinary infractions and actions broken down by race/ethnicity and income levels.

5) Funding for Outreach Symposium funding and other GAP tasks. Adding an Annual Budget of \$2,500.00 per Congressional District –. Without an operating budget the Commission has struggled to annual outreach symposium to engage local closing the gap task forces across the state. An annual budget of \$2,500.00 per Congressional District, or \$10,000.00 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.
- Institute the legislation (2164) mandate across congregational districts

6) Support high priority schools with declining enrollment. School closings due to low enrollment significantly impacts negatively low income communities and their students. The Commission recommends that the state find additional resources to support these schools.

Commission Composition

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

Dr. Dawn Tirado Simpson

Arkansas Commission on Closing the Achievement Gap, Chair

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