

Arkansas Commission on Closing the Academic Achievement Gap

The Commission on Closing the Academic Achievement Gap was established by the Arkansas State Legislature, under Act 33 during the Second Extraordinary Session of 2003.

Minutes
April 18, 2013

Members in Attendance: Dr. Dawn Simpson, Rev. Charles Killion, Mr. Jon Fulkerson, Ms. Kathy Powers, Dr. Luis Restrepo

Others in Attendance: Ms. Susan Harriman, Ms. Kim Wilson, Dr. Andre Guerrero

Excused Absence: Dr. Vera Lang Brown, Dr. Jesse Hargrove, Mr. Jack Crumbly, Ms. Lillian Williams

Meeting location: Commissioner's Conference Room, Arkansas Department of Education, Four State Capitol Mall, Little Rock, Arkansas

Welcome/ Call to Order:

Dr. Dawn Simpson, chair, opened the meeting at 1:00 p.m.

Dr. Simpson introduced Dr. Guerrero and let him begin his presentation.

Minutes of March 14, 2013:

Ms. Powers made a motion to accept the minutes, and Rev. Killion seconded the motion. Due to a lack of quorum, the minutes will be sent out for approval by e-mail to the other members.

Dr. Guerrero's Academic Gaps for ELL Discussion:

As we look at academic achievement gaps let's talk about a little history of Arkansas.

We'll talk about where these kids are and who they are.

Dr. G has been in AR about 26 years. There are large groups of immigrants who have come to AR. Many families worked with US troops during Viet Nam war and Fort Chaffee was available for these families to go to. A large number of Vietnamese settled in Fort Chaffee area. Our school systems stepped up to the plate. No one spoke Vietnamese to assist in this. One teacher had come and who taught French and English in Saigon. She was able to get others to come. Desegregation was also going on at this time. Legislature created an office to handle this. Dr. G had applied for the planning part of that department. He started out in the equity part of that office.

Dr. G looked at the state student attendance and realized the state wasn't in compliance. He looked at the model of the school in Fort Chaffee. Dr. G did surveys to find out where these student populations were. Around the same time Tyson was looking to expand. Tyson created an office recruiter, Barbara Berry to staff these new plants by finding them in Mexico. Other plants were created around the state. Northwest AR was predominantly Vietnamese and other groups of Hispanic populations for the plants. Civil rights training had to be done for this reason in the schools of these areas. LAU vs. Nichols indicated English had to be taught to these students to allow them the opportunity to receive an education.

Two things were addressed. Teach them language enough to be taught and tested. Also, immigrant students were to have equal access to clubs and activities as other students.

A need arose to train the teachers on how to teach the ELL students to learn as well as the English speaking students.

Question by Fulkerson: Was there ever a year when we taught them English only, and then put them in the classroom?

Dr. G: Yes it has but not in AR. A retired teacher did this in Texas in a small one-room classroom with 4th thru 12th doing individual instruction – Called "Newcomer Center".

One thing that has to happen when you have total immersion in the classroom is someone who could translate between their language and the English. The Arkansas Legislature passed a law that required English to be used as the only language of instruction in our schools. A lot of thought has been given to change that, but many don't like it or don't want to have bi-lingual language education taught in AR. Did that answer your question?

Fulkerson: I am a principal at 1st and 2nd grade school and those are going to pick up the English anyway, but older students this is not the case.

Powers: I lived in north Carolina and they had language learning going on in the earlier grades and was doing well.

Dr. G: We had someone pushing second language learning in legislature but the Foreign Language teachers did not like it because they wanted it to be French rather than Spanish at the time.

Dr. Simpson: When was this? Dr. G: in the 90's. Dr. S.: I taught Spanish and I was wondering if anyone addressed the language learning anxiety. My research addressed this issue for my doctorate.

Dr. G: I know your group is looking at the achievement gap for all students but I would like you to give a look at these special groups.

Dr. Restrepo: The push would be to look at these students in their subject areas. Students may get in that year be able to speak English but comprehension comes later. How do we look at other languages, are they a barrier? Corporations are behind the multi or bi-lingual languages.

Dr. Simpson: We have folks in AR that are struggling with their own language. In AR we have those promoting the bi-lingual for business and education. How are they and we addressing the needs of businesses.

Fulkerson: Suppose we have a family move in and enroll their child in our school who just came from another country. The child is placed in ESL along with immersion classroom and we find we have other needs to be addressed. So others have to be hired to comply with the law for them.

Dr. G: Bi-lingual, transitional bi-lingual, and others that I hope you will think about are being considered. The areas where we have the largest ELL enrollment are Springdale, Rogers and that general NW Arkansas area besides the Fort Smith area. In LR, immigrants drew another large group. Dardanell/ Russellville corridor from Fort Smith to LR. Danville, because of the plants there, has a majority minority latino in the state. DeQueen also has a large group. Jonesboro has some. Delta regions have the smallest number of ESL.

Powers: This is why we need training of teaching strategies for this group of learners.

Dr. G: Fifteen or twenty years ago I asked colleges to have classes for teaching this to new teachers. I was given a list of classes to look at what was currently being taught. Where would they get the money and resources to do this? So I created resources to do this. I met Barbara Berry at an Immigrant Fair at a Catholic Immigrant Conference where she was there to present a check. I asked for money to create resources to help give training to teachers in areas where Tyson had plants. Tyson agreed to help and did this for five years and called it Tyson ESL Academy. From this we had data to continue this ever since. Lately we have had an increase of ESL students and consequently an increase for applicants for the academy.

Dr. Guerrero then gave handouts that report enrollment of the different language minority student groups currently in districts, a mission statement, state districts in school improvement with minority groups, and the state 2012 ESEA Accountability report. Dr. G pointed out some important statistics involving ESL students. In AR public schools, 86% speak Spanish, 5.5% speak Marshallese, 1% speak Hmong, 1.36% speak Vietnamese, and 1.09% speak Laotian.

Fulkerson: How do we know ESL are proficient in their native language?

Dr. G: A large number of immigrants moving here, came from impoverished areas with little education.

Dr. Guerrero thanked the committee for the opportunity to share this information with this group. Dr. Simpson thanked him for coming and he said if there were more questions to call his office.

Subcommittee Discussion:

Dr. Simpson mentioned reports and future meeting dates to committee chairs.

Update on the Governor Appointees: Dr. Simpson explained about two members who had been appointed in 2009 in the House have been contacted are waiting for approval.

Update on Upcoming Presentations: Dr. Simpson said it would be tabled for now.

Future Meeting Dates:

May 23, 2013

The Commission will break for the summer months and reconvene in September.

Meeting adjourned at 3:10 pm.