

## **Arkansas Commission on Closing the Achievement Gap**

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

Minutes  
March 15, 2012

**Members in Attendance:** Dr. Dawn Simpson, Dr. Jesse Hargrove, Ms. Kathy Powers, Dr. Vera Brown, Mr. Brooks Harrington, Mr. Jon Fulkerson (joined the meeting via teleconference)

**Others in Attendance:** Mr. John Hoy

**Excused Absence:** Mr. Gus Williamson, Dr. Eddie McCoy, Ms. Elfreda Boyd

**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.

Minutes of February 16, 2012: Dr. Hargrove made a motion to accept the minutes and Dr. Brown seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Dr. Simpson introduced Dr. Vera Brown as the newest Closing the Gap Commission member. Dr. Brown expressed her excitement in joining the group and is looking forward to the work of the Commission.

**Presentation by Mr. John Hoy, Assistant Commissioner, Division of Academic Accountability**

In 1964, the federal government decided there was an achievement gap among groups of students and allocated money to address the issue. This is when the Title I program began. Today, the gap still exists. Under current legislation, the goal is for states to have all students reach 100% proficiency by 2014. While this is an ambitious goal, many doubt whether this goal is achievable. To complicate matters further, proficiency levels in one state are not the same as proficiency levels in other states since states created their own independent sets of standards and assessment systems.

Over the last few months, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) has worked on a waiver application. The application is somewhat controversial in terms of student accountability. Currently, schools are responsible for the achievement of all students including students identified in subpopulations including minority, free and reduced lunch, and special services. In the current Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) system, one subgroup can cause an entire school to be placed in school improvement, even though the general population performed well on state tests. Additionally, a school could receive multiple penalties on a single student if a student is a minority, impoverished, and working under an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

While Arkansas schools have made improvements, most schools have not been able to keep up with the 100% trajectory rate required. While test scores in general are going up, the gap is not closing. Arkansas currently has over 400 schools in school improvement, but in some cases the label may be created by one or two subgroups. Additionally, if a school has less than 40 students in a subgroup, this subgroup is never identified since the numbers are too small. In situations where schools with less than 40 minority or poverty students, those unidentified students may not be receiving the attention and help needed. Furthermore, the schools with these unidentified subgroups which underperform won't receive state repercussions. Lowering the minimum number would not be very helpful to address this problem because a number is needed which is statistically stable, and lowering the number doesn't usually address the achievement gap.

The new goal that the U.S. Department of Education has set is a goal of college and career readiness. The ADE is proposing to create two groups: the general population and one combined subgroup. The minimum number will remain as 40 identified students. The question has arisen, "Won't this approach mask what is going on with any one group?" Mr. Hoy expressed that the main achievement gap is an economic gap and more students will be identified using this approach and will receive the services needed to help them succeed in school. Additionally, Arkansas will still break out the subgroups and report on them individually on the school report cards using 10 as a minimum number. This data can be used by schools to help plan interventions for various subpopulations of students, but schools will no longer be penalized for a single underperforming subgroup.

The waiver proposal will have the state identify the performing top and bottom 5% of schools. The top 5% of schools may be called exemplary schools and the bottom may be called priority schools. The schools with large achievement gaps will also be identified as focus schools. The goals of this waiver request include the following: to raise the bar for all students since achievement at every school needs to increase and to provide resources from the state to fix schools rather than closing the schools.

Mr. Hoy's objective was to present this information to the Closing the Gap Commission (the Commission) and get the members' thoughts and input. If interested, the full report can be found on the ADE website at [arkansased.org](http://arkansased.org) under the Elementary Secondary Education Act and flexibility request. The Commission was pleased that the smaller subgroup data would still be reported on the state report cards. The Commission was also pleased that more students would be identified and receive needed help and resources that have been previously ignored in the unidentified subgroups because the number of students was under 40 at many schools across the state.

#### **Business:**

The committee reports and Ms. Kathy Powers' scheduled presentation were deferred to a later meeting due to time limitations.

The letter to be sent out to schools is now complete. A copy of the letter was distributed.

The committee members received a draft agenda for the upcoming Blytheville symposium. Representative Rainey has been scheduled for opening remarks as well as leading a breakout session. Mr. John Hoy and Ms. Kathy Powers are also scheduled to

lead breakout sessions. There will be a panel discussion scheduled at the luncheon. Professional development will be offered to participants.

April 12, 2012, is the deadline for participants to register for the Blytheville symposium although the cutoff may be extended if necessary. Dr. Simpson will take care of having the programs printed and she is working with the ADE on the registration forms. A flyer announcing the event might also be needed. Please provide any feedback to Dr. Simpson as soon as possible on the draft agenda or other materials.

The Commission has a small travel budget for the meeting provided by the ADE.

**Future meeting dates:**

April 19, 2012

May 10-11, 2012—Blytheville symposium

May 17, 2012--strategic planning meeting

The meeting adjourned at 3:15 p.m.

Recorded by Sheree K. Baird, Social Studies Specialist