

## **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  
October 18, 2012

**Members in Attendance:** Dr. Dawn Simpson, Mr. Jon Fulkerson, Rev. Charles Killion, Dr. Vera Lang Brown, Ms. Kim Wilson, Dr. Luis Restrepo, Ms. Lillian Williams, Dr. Jesse Hargrove, Ms. Susan Harriman

**Others in Attendance:** Dr. Calvin Johnson, Dr. David Rainey, Mr. Richard Hutchinson

**Excused Absence:** 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 September 20, 2012:**

Ms. Harriman 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. Simpson welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the two newest members of the Commission on Closing the Academic Achievement Gap (The Commission): Reverend Charles Killion and Ms. Kim Wilson.

**Dr. Calvin Johnson: guest speaker**

Dr. Johnson worked on the legislation creating the Commission on Closing the Academic Achievement Gap in 2003. As a result of the Lake View ruling, a system was needed to identify lower economic students and higher economic students. Additionally, these subpopulations of students were required to be identified in federal reporting due to the No Child Left Behind legislation. State officials met with key leaders in Ohio to help craft the legislation on Closing the Academic Achievement Gap.

The legislation was meant to provide an extension of the law and to create a way to continue the work. The Commission was created to monitor what the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) and school districts are doing with students who are not performing at the same level academically as their peers. In addition to its monitoring charge, The Commission has been given responsibility to help schools or districts with best practices and parental involvement, and to alert state legislators of additional legislation needed or problems/issues observed. Finally, Dr. Johnson asked that the Commission study student remediation, retention, and graduation rates.

**Dr. David Rainey: guest speaker**

Dr. Rainey worked on the Closing the Academic Achievement Gap with Dr. Johnson. Dr. Rainey became interested in the academic achievement gap when he heard information on student achievement gaps reported as state results, but the reporting did not include

achievement gaps of students broken down by specific regions within the state. The state results could mask struggling schools and students in certain pockets of the state including the Delta region.

Dr. Rainey addressed the current flexibility plan. Some Arkansas schools have been identified as focus schools or priority schools. The ADE is requiring certain things from these schools to help them improve. The local closing the gap commissions will be very important as a monitoring agent to ensure local schools are complying with the ADE mandates. Dumas High School is a focus school as well as a new technology high school. As superintendent of the Dumas School District, Dr. Rainey expressed his excitement in using proven strategies that will challenge and raise achievement levels for all students.

The members of the Commission thanked Dr. Johnson and Dr. Rainey for attending the meeting and sharing their thoughts on the Closing the Achievement Gap Commission and their work. Dr. Lang Brown asked if the legislation could be modified to include funding for the Commission which would be beneficial in achieving their mission. Dr. Johnson stated he tried to get funding several years ago, but was unsuccessful. He did mention that it wouldn't hurt for the Commission to try again to secure funding. Schools can also use parental involvement title money to fund local closing the achievement gap commissions.

Ms. Williams suggested that data could be collected on how parents can help their children. Parents attend meetings and open houses and receive free pizza, but never receive information on how to help their child. Mr. Fulkerson stated that parental attendance and parental involvement are not the same thing. Dr. Johnson said that school board members can act as important allies in helping get things accomplished quickly. The members have a direct line to the superintendent and are in a position to replace this person if necessary.

In terms of preparing for the upcoming annual report, Dr. Rainey advised that asking direct questions to all stakeholders is very important. For example, ask parents what their child needs and ask school principals how many poor and minority students are taking advanced placement classes. Other questions to be asked of school leaders include how schools are doing student data, how many children are kindergarten ready, and how many students graduated on time and what are they prepared to do after leaving high school.

Mr. Richard Hutchinson: guest speaker

An area wide summit called "Opportunity to Learn" will be held in Little Rock on November 29-December 1, 2012. Mr. Hutchinson is inviting the Commission members to attend. The summit is designed to work with local grass root coalitions to conduct work on policy goals rather than to talk with each other. A few of the goals of the summit include access to high quality pre-Kindergarten, expanding after school and summer programs, improving teacher and administrator preparation programs, and parental involvement.

Other business:

Dr. Lang Brown made a motion that the full name, "Closing the Academic Achievement Gap," would be used in all communication. Due to a lack of quorum, this motion will be revisited at a future meeting when a majority of members are present to vote.

Dr. Lang Brown updated the Commission on plans for the upcoming Pine Bluff symposium. It is being planned for the beginning of June.

Dr. Simpson updated the Commission on filling the Commission vacancies. Ms. Kathy Powers' name has been submitted as a potential Commissioner.

**Future Meeting Dates:**

January 17, 2012

February 21, 2012

March 15, 2012

April 19, 2012

May 9, 2012

Meeting adjourned at 3:15 pm