



# Arkansas Department of Education

*Division of Elementary and Secondary Education*

Jacob Oliva, Secretary

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## **State Board of Education honors students, MLK Director, and three-year anniversary of LEARNS at March meeting**

**LITTLE ROCK, Ark.** — At its regular March meeting, the State Board of Education recognized Arkansas students for their national achievements and honored the Executive Director of the Arkansas Martin Luther King Jr. Commission for his recent national accolades. The meeting highlighted the impact of Arkansas' commitment to strong learning inside and outside the classroom, as well as meaningful community engagement.

Zander Schoultz, a junior at Lakeside High School, was recognized for winning the High School Ronald Reagan Oratory Competition. Schoultz ranks at the top of his class and demonstrates exceptional leadership through Speech and Debate Club and Student Council. He is a member of Senator John Boozman's Congressional Youth Cabinet and founded Lakeside's Young Conservatives organization. The competition allowed him to further develop his public speaking skills and deepen his civic engagement.

Jack Liu and Shangyu Wu, juniors at Little Rock Central High School, recently won the policy debate division at the Harvard National Speech and Debate Tournament, competing against more than 108 teams nationwide. They are the first Arkansas team to ever win the Harvard tournament title. The pair also earned eight bids to the prestigious Tournament of Champions, where they will compete in April. The Little Rock Central High School Policy Debate Team is currently ranked second in the nation.

"The students recognized at our board meeting prove that Arkansas can shine on any national stage, and their success is a testament to what hard work and education in Arkansas can achieve," **said Adrienne Woods, Chair of the State Board of Education.** "They embody the principle that with opportunity, our students can make history and lead the way for others."

Following student recognition, the State Board of Education honored one of ADE's own: DuShun Scarbrough, Executive Director of the Arkansas Martin Luther King Jr. Commission. Scarbrough recently received two national awards for his dedication to service, community, and the advancement of freedom. He was awarded The King Center's MLK Jr. Beloved Community Civic Leadership Award, presented annually during The King Center's King Holiday observance, as well

as the 2026 National Freedom Flame Award, presented by the organizers of the Selma Bridge Crossing Jubilee. Scarbrough is only the second Arkansan ever to receive the National Freedom Flame Award — the first being Dr. Maya Angelou.

“DuShun is a gift to ADE and the community as a whole,” **said Secretary of Education Jacob Oliva**. “His leadership in education, service, and commitment exemplifies what impactful change means to all Arkansans. There is no one more deserving of these honors.”

### **Three-Year LEARNS Update**

After completing action items, Secretary Oliva delivered an update on the first three years of the LEARNS Act, highlighting the following victories:

- 43,697 Arkansas children now have access to early childhood education.
- 23,422 students are receiving high-impact tutoring this year.
- 100% of the state’s D and F schools now have access to literacy coaches.
- 44,000 families are participating in the Education Freedom Account (EFA) program.
- Arkansas ranks 3rd in the nation for education freedom.
- The starting salary for Arkansas teachers is now \$50,000.
- Teachers can earn up to \$10,000 in merit pay.
- Teachers receive 12 weeks of paid maternity leave.
- Nearly 200,000 students are enrolled in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs.
- Families can save up to \$32,000 through concurrent credit opportunities.
- 92% of Arkansas school districts partner with a school-based mental health agency.

“Seeing the plan Governor Sanders, Secretary Oliva, and ADE built from the ground up come to fruition has brought tremendous pride over the past three years,” **said Deputy Commissioner of Education Stacy Smith**. “Standing before the Board alongside Secretary Oliva to share how we’ve positioned Arkansas as a national leader in education, with more accomplishments than we could fit into one presentation, proves that what we’re implementing is working. We know the work isn’t finished, but we have so much to celebrate from these first three years of a total education overhaul.”

The Board presentation came after Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders kicked off the three-year celebration of LEARNS with a school visit and roundtable discussion at Murrell Taylor Elementary School on March 9. Secretary Oliva participated in this event.

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