

Thoughts on Adequate Funding of Public Education in Arkansas

**A Report for the Joint Adequacy Evaluation
Oversight Subcommittee**

Submitted by the Arkansas School Boards Association



**ARKANSAS
SCHOOL BOARDS
ASSOCIATION**

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The Arkansas School Boards Association (ASBA) appreciates the General Assembly's interest in receiving our thoughts as it re-evaluates the dynamic nature of adequacy and equity. Over the last several years, the General Assembly has encountered many difficult issues and made strong decisions that have been instrumental in significantly moving public education forward in Arkansas. The combination of implementing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) along with significantly expanded teacher evaluations presents the opportunity for the state to boldly move to the head of the class, nationally, in public education.

ASBA appreciates the political and economic realities that enter into the funding and implementation of the State's responsibility to provide an adequate and equitable public education. We also believe it's a given that education drives the future of this state both economically and culturally. As the 88th Arkansas General Assembly works to make its Adequacy recommendations to the 89th General Assembly, it is vital that the positive momentum generated in K-12 education over the last several years be maintained.

Acknowledging the ever present conflict between K-12 funding and all the other programs needing state funding, ASBA suggests legislative consideration be given to "weeding the garden" of the long and ever growing list of requirements put on school districts. This year's Adequacy Study could follow the Common Core State Standard's example of moving from an "inch wide and mile deep" to a "less is more" model by reviewing the current ADE Standards of Accreditation and state statutes to determine how the "required" list could be made optional, open to waivers, or eliminated all together.

Given the ADE's statutory powers of mandatory intervention (Fiscal Distress, Academic Distress, and Facilities Distress), there is no lack of authority for the ADE to deal with a district that is failing to meet the needs of its students. Charter schools were originally conceived of as a laboratory for exploring alternative methods of educating students. Granting traditional school districts the same opportunity for creating their own models for success (waivers) without having to become charters would promote innovation.

Culture

While "culture" may not seem to be an "adequacy" issue, we believe changing the culture of public education is both the most important and most difficult aspect of significantly improving Arkansas's future. The state's education culture as a whole certainly affects student achievement, but in this testimony we will only deal with culture in relation to adequacy.

In the September 1, 2003, report, Picus and Odden state that, "Full implementation of this...adequate education program with the proposed resources will require that each school rethink if not restructure its entire education program, and allocate all current and any new resources to this restructured and more effective educational program." This strong statement will only be accomplished through a cultural shift within public education.

ASBA believes that an ADE and the Arkansas Leadership Academy **with sufficient staffing** could be an economically viable means for helping districts change their culture by being a resource for "best practices" along with the expertise to help districts implement those practices. Recent testimony by the BLR to the House Interim Committee on Education and the Senate Interim Committee on Education (February 7, 2012) indicated that while there are several outside sources available to school districts to

assist them in improving their student's academic success, no one source has been shown to be consistently better than another. There is, however, a significant difference between the costs charged by differing sources. Providing the ADE and the Arkansas Leadership Academy with the necessary funding for staff sufficient to meet the challenge of turning around academically struggling districts could be a fiscally sound policy for the state to consider. Increasing state staffing in this regard would be analogous to the General Assembly's decision to discontinue hiring Picus and Odden for adequacy studies and to rely, instead, on the BLR.

Common Core State Standards

The State has adopted and begun implementing the CCSS. ASBA fully supports the Standards and the opportunity they afford to significantly improve student learning. The significant challenge to districts the CCSS presents cannot be overstated, but neither can the opportunity. In the re-evaluation of Adequacy, providing an adequate education for the next biennium means ensuring districts have the support necessary to successfully implement the CCSS. Part of that support necessarily includes helping districts change their culture.

Interim Study Proposals 2009-233 and 2009-234 (College Remediation and EOC exams) clearly showed that the primary reason for college remediation is that the K-12 curriculum is not aligned with college curriculum. In other words, no matter how well a teacher teaches and a student learns our current standards, a student's odds of needing college remediation are significant. Because the CCSS **are aligned** with college learning expectations, successfully implementing the CCSS should significantly decrease the college remediation rate.

This presents a near-term funding challenge to the State. The CCSS won't bear fruit for several years and needs significant support to reach its promise. The costs to the State for college remediation are very likely to remain high until the CCSS bear fruit. Short term costs will necessarily increase before decreasing in the long term. But, the CCSS offers the promise that once successfully implemented, the funding required for college remediation will significantly decrease. This is good for the state, its students and their parents.

The CCSS will challenge teachers to teach differently, both how they teach and what they teach. Students will be expected to be much more active participants in their learning with significantly less "sit and get" time in the classroom. Teachers will need to collaborate across curricula; this will be a challenge for many and would be greatly facilitated by allowing more flexibility in the school day and week (see Professional Development section below).

Much time and effort will need to be spent by teachers and administrators, separately and in collaboration with each other, to understand the CCSS and how teaching will need to change under the new standards. It will be a stressful implementation.

Teacher Evaluations

Act 1209 of 2011:

- fundamentally changes how teacher evaluations are to be conducted. This is a good thing, but this is another area that will put a great deal of stress on the state's education system. To date, teacher evaluations have generally required a small amount of time to conduct with a corresponding lack of benefit to the teacher or the teacher's students. The evaluation system required by Act 1209 is estimated to require about three hours per evaluation. That is a huge increase and needs to be funded in the matrix.
- requires the summative evaluator to be an administrator. There are also portions of Act 1209 outside the requirements of the summative evaluation that do not have to be done by administrators and lend themselves to the skills of instructional facilitators. The time involved in both summative and interim evaluations, however, only exacerbate the demands placed on the matrix's allocation of instructional facilitator positions. The portion of our 2010 testimony regarding instructional facilitators is included in this testimony due to its continued relevance and increased importance.
- focuses the teacher evaluation on a process (rather than an event) that creates a dialogue between the evaluator and the teacher that should result in improved teaching and student learning.
- necessitates a substantial amount of time (as yet to be determined) for professional development for both teachers and evaluators to understand the components of the new evaluation system and each person's respective roles and duties. The professional development associated with the evaluation process is essential for its successful implementation.
- increases the importance of professional development for teachers in "intensive support."

Implementation Effects of CCSS and Teacher Evaluations

The opportunities and threats of both CCSS and the new teacher evaluations are huge. Taken together and done well, ASBA believes they will fundamentally improve public education in Arkansas. Done poorly, they will be a train wreck that will take many years to correct. The ADE has been a strong leader in working to make the implementations successful, but it needs more staff to handle the proper role of supporting district needs. Districts need additional administrative staff to meet the demands and challenges of both CCSS and the new teacher evaluations, especially since they are both to be fully implemented the same school-year, 2014-15.

The CCSS sets a new standard for student instruction and learning and therefore becomes the new standard for an adequate education.

The new teacher evaluation system also sets a new standards and that standard has to be funded under the matrix.

Bandwidth and Technology

The CCSS along with the ever increasing use of technology for educational purposes require significantly larger amounts of bandwidth than is currently available in many areas of the state. This is a serious issue and the State has both a duty and a responsibility to ensure the infrastructure is ready and available to districts prior to the full implementation date of the CCSS (sooner is certainly preferable to later).

The hardware and software necessary to meet the demands of the CCSS and the ever increasing use of technology for educational purposes is the responsibility of districts and is funded through a line item in the matrix. This year's adequacy study needs to look at the requirements of the CCSS regarding technology to ensure the line item's funding is sufficient. Particular attention needs to be paid to the platform requirements of the CCSS's assessments. A determination needs to be made of how much of districts' current technology will be applicable to meeting needs of the CCSS?

Instructional Facilitators

This is a source of conflict between the matrix and the need to change school culture. The matrix funds 2.5 positions for instructional facilitators. ASBA believes the matrix should fund 4.0 instructional facilitators based on the following reasons:

- One desired culture change is to have the principal be his/her school's instructional leader. For this to happen, the principal must do more than "manage" the school and handle student discipline. 15.02. of the Standards of Accreditation requires a half-time assistant principal, instructional supervisor, or curriculum specialist for schools over 500. ASBA believes an assistant principal is a necessary position if a principal is to be the school's instructional leader. While this theoretically gives schools a choice, it does so at the expense of truly staffing the positions needed to run an efficient, orderly, safe, and achieving school. Districts should not have to choose between hiring an instructional facilitator to assist in improving instruction for students and an assistant principal, whose task is to help maintain an orderly and safe school environment for learning.
- In our March 17, 2008, testimony, we discussed the need for more than a half-time technology position in the matrix. That need still exists and is necessary for several reasons. First, the likelihood that a "good" technology person would also be a good instructional facilitator is low. It is also not likely that many certified teachers (who presumably would have the needed skills of being an instructional facilitator for technology) will have the needed technology expertise to be able to efficiently accomplish technology related tasks. Second, district technology needs are high. In fact, Section 5 of the Arkansas School Facility Manual suggests up to seven positions describing varying responsibilities for implementing and maintaining a district's technology infrastructure. The manual does not assume any of these positions would also double as an instructional facilitator. We believe there is a difference between a technology "expert" being able to help a teacher with technology-related issues and that same person being able to facilitate the teacher in how to create lesson plans and incorporate the technology into the teacher's classroom. Technology staffing in the matrix is insufficient and overlapping technology with instructional facilitation is unrealistic. We believe a minimum of one full time position is necessary for a school of 500.

- **Instructional facilitators will be most productive when facilitating within their field of expertise. As we strive to improve our students' math and literacy achievement, there should be at least two instructional facilitators to enable effective facilitation.**

Professional Development

The 7/20/2006 Picus and Odden Report reads, "Effective professional development (PD) is defined as PD that produces change in teachers' classroom-based instructional practice which can be linked to improvements in student learning." Picus and Odden note that "...there is little support in this research for the development of individually oriented professional development plans; the research implies a much more systemic and all-teachers-in-the-school approach." As it relates to changing the culture of public education, effective professional development is crucial. The September 1 2003, Picus and Odden report reads, "...all the resources recommended in this report need to be transformed into high quality instruction in order to transform them into increases in student learning. And effective professional development is the primary way those resources get transformed into effective and productive instructional practices."

Prior to Lake View, teachers were required to have 30 hours of PD annually. Picus and Odden encouraged Arkansas to raise the number to 100 or even 200 hours. The General Assembly settled on 60 hours. Inherent in the proposed increase to 100 or 200 hours, but still relevant for 60 hours is a change in the understanding of what constitutes PD. While Picus and Odden believe in intensive summer training institutes, they also encourage continuous, ongoing, embedded, data-driven PD that would occur all year long. It could consist of time spent with instructional facilitators, as well as collaborative time with fellow teachers to help align curriculum or work on addressing individual student needs. The revised scope of what constitutes PD makes 60, 100, or even 200 hours a more easily attainable figure and would work to accelerate positive change our education culture and student achievement.

Currently, A.C.A. § 6-17-117 requires a minimum of 200 minutes of planning time per week for each teacher in increments of no less than 40 minutes. The Arkansas Attorney General has opined (2005-299) that the law prohibits administrators from stipulating teachers' use of their planning time. This statutory impediment to implementing "collaborative" PD needs to be addressed in the next legislative session. Teachers need planning time, but administrators also need to be able to organize collaborative professional development activities during the school day. A legislative compromise needs to be reached.

ASBA strongly opposes any attempt to lessen the number of hours of required PD. ASBA encourages the General Assembly to work to differentiate between what could be construed as teacher training and professional development can truly be linked to improvements in student learning. Teacher training could often be accomplished through other means than true PD which would open up the opportunity for better and more meaningful PD that is based on a teacher's content area.

School Year

This issue gets to the heart of moving education to the 21st Century. The traditional school year is a contributor to the student achievement gap. Students from a lower socioeconomic background tend to lose ground over the summer while more affluent students lose less or even gain ground. In short, our current school year/calendar is counterproductive to student learning.

While a longer school-year needs to ultimately be a state goal, changing the school-year doesn't have to mean a longer year. Multiple breaks that are of shorter duration than the current summer break can result in the same number of student/teacher interaction days and, at the same time, lessen the learning loss that contributes to an increased achievement gap. Such a schedule also can decrease teacher burnout and offer "interim" remediation opportunities to help keep students from getting so far behind that they give up.

Seat Time

To the extent that adequacy is about student achievement, it begs the question of whether achievement has to be tied to a student's time spent sitting in a classroom. A student's knowledge of a subject and ability to apply what they have learned to the "real world" should be the goal. The assessments being discussed as part of the CCSS would seem to lend themselves to allowing education to be about learning and not just seat time. Certainly when it comes to the cost of providing an adequate education, this issue should be discussed.