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Special points of interest:

- *What does research tell us about achievement gaps and how does Arkansas compare to the nation and surrounding states with regard to the Black-White achievement gap?*
- *Take a closer look at the Arkansas Adequacy report. Specifically, what was recommended by the researchers and what was the predicted cost to Arkansas?*
- *How do schools obtain high expectations from teachers and students? What programs or models are most effective in increasing school performance? Review current research on effective school reform strategies.*

EXPLORING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Educators across Arkansas and the nation are sharpening their focus on “student achievement gaps,” or those areas in which less-advantaged students perform poorly compared to their more advantaged peers. The No Child Left Behind Act and the *Lake View* ruling have pushed state and local education policymakers in Arkansas to address these achievement gaps to ensure that all students perform at high standards.

What are Achievement Gaps?

When researchers and policymakers refer to educational achievement gaps, they are referring to the disparities with respect to test scores, grades, course selection, and college completion between white and minority students and between affluent and poor students. This article discusses, particularly, racial differences in school achievement, while the full report on our website delves into class differences as well.

White students, on average, score higher on standardized achievement tests and are

more likely to graduate from high school and college than are black and Hispanic students. While the gap has narrowed slightly, overall, the median black student still scored at the 20th to 25th percentile of the White distribution in 1996. However, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), known as the “Nation’s Report Card,” the math and reading achievement gaps have narrowed over the last decade for 4th and 8th grade white and black students.

Gaps in Arkansas

NAEP scores indicate that the Arkansas black-white achievement gaps for Grade 4 math, Grade 8 math, Grade 4 reading, and Grade 8 reading have increased over the past five years and are greater than the national average in all four areas. Further, researchers at the National Office for Rural Measurement and Evaluation Systems (NORMES) at the

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DEFINING EDUCATIONAL ADEQUACY

Judge Collins Kilgore, Chancery Court Judge in Pulaski County, in a 2001 ruling in *Lake View v. Huckabee*, ordered that “an adequacy study is necessary and must be conducted forthwith.” In 2002, the Arkansas Supreme Court upheld the lower court ruling and mandated that the General Assembly conduct an “adequacy study.” Consequently, Act 94 of 2003 created the Arkansas Joint Legislative Committee on Educational Adequacy.

The Committee contracted with the nationally respected consulting firm of Lawrence O. Picus and Associates to conduct the study and report back to the Committee in the Fall of 2003. The consultants based the recommendations in their report on their extensive research and experience in the field of school

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EFFECTIVE SCHOOL REFORM STRATEGIES

Efforts to ensure that all children, especially those who are students in low performing, high-poverty schools, receive a quality education are at the forefront of education research and policy agendas. The question of which programs and strategies are most effective in reforming K-12 education is complex. School administrators and policymakers throughout the nation are seeking strategies that will help *all* students to achieve mastery of basic grade-level academic skills as measured by standardized tests. This article explores the research literature on characteristics of effective schools, effective teachers, and effective school-wide reform models that have been shown to foster student achievement.

The Lake View Case

Education policymakers in Arkansas have struggled to meet the January 2004 deadline of the final ruling in the 1992 *Lake View* case. They continue to struggle with how to improve the adequacy and equity of public education in order to provide a “general, suitable and efficient system of free public schools equally available to all.” Getting adequate and equitable resources to each school will be the first step; the difficult next step will be translating these resources into effective educational programs. *What does the literature say about this problem?*

What approaches do effective teachers use to promote high expectations of students?

A teacher, in order to be effective with all children, needs to possess a wide range of knowledge. In addition to mastering his or her content area, a teacher needs to understand how students develop and learn, as well as how to enhance the learning process. Effective teachers must convey high expectations to develop positive student attitudes. When teachers and administrators work together to communicate high expectations to the school community, they promote increased student involvement in learning and overall improved learning outcomes.

What approaches do effective schools use to promote high expectations of students?

Schools that are effective in helping *all* children, particularly low-achieving children, meet challenging academic standards tend to share some common

characteristics: strong administrative leadership; high expectations for student achievement; an orderly atmosphere conducive to learning; an emphasis on basic skills acquisition; and frequent monitoring of student progress. Schools with high poverty levels that are successful in meeting high expectations for students tend to share the following attributes: utilize state standards to drive curriculum, instruction, and assessment; schedule extended instructional time in math and reading; spend proportionately more money on professional development than other schools; utilize systematic assessments to monitor student progress; encourage parents to become involved with student’s school work; and hold teachers and administrators responsible for student outcomes through accountability standards.

A combined approach to effective schools: Whole-school reform

Whole-school or comprehensive school reform efforts include effective approaches by teachers and administrators. While there are now more than 20 whole-school reform models that have arisen in recent years, researchers know very little about which programs work well. Two recent systematic reviews of the literature synthesized the evidence of effectiveness for many of these whole-school reform strategies and highlighted a handful of these programs with rigorous evidence of effectiveness at raising student achievement. The four models that these reviews highlight are: Success for All, Comer’s School Development Project, Direct Instruction, and High Schools that Work. (More details on each of these specific program models are available on our website.)

A school considering models for school-wide reform will want to consider goodness of fit with its school goals and objectives and empirical evidence of program effectiveness. Effective school reform begins with the idea that *all* students, especially students at low-performing, high-poverty schools, deserve a quality education. But the good news is that schools in need of school improvement programs can consider several models that have been subjected to rigorous evaluation and show positive results.

To read the complete text of this report, including citations and references, click on this link to the OEP website at <http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/>

EXPLORING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 1)

University of Arkansas investigated the black-white student gap across the state and found that, on the 2002 Benchmark and End-of-Course Exams, 19 percent of black students were proficient in literacy compared to 45 percent of white students. In math, 12 percent of black students were proficient compared to 42 percent of White students.

Fixing the Achievement Gap

The seminal work on the racial achievement gap, *Black-White Test Score Gap*, authored by Meredith Phillips and Christopher Jencks, discusses numerous successful strategies for addressing the gap. Three fundamental facts give hope that achievement gaps can be reduced in the future:

- Achievement scores are sensitive to environmental change
- Black-white differences have narrowed over the past century
- The social and cultural environment has been shown to influence achievement

A recent Brookings Institution compilation, *Closing the Achievement Gap*, highlighted several strategies that have shown promise for closing the racial gaps.

Offering hope to all schools, this work includes success stories in schools where students are succeeding even though 77 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch and over 90 percent of students are non-white. The strategies cited for such dramatic results include a curricula focused on reading and core academic skills, reduced class size for K-3 students, requirements that all students take “tougher” courses, annual testing and disaggregated achievement reporting, the nurturing of a high-achievement culture within the school, and the offering of vouchers to parents in big-city school districts.

Although the national black-white gap may be shrinking, numerous states, like Arkansas, are seeing their black-white gap widening. While models and strategies continue to be developed and refined, expanded research and effort is needed to explore the specific causes and consequences of the gap and the best ways to reduce it.

To read the complete text of this report, including citations and references, click on this link to the OEP website at <http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/>

WHAT DO ARKANSANS WANT FROM EDUCATION?

As public debate continues about how to respond to the *Lake View* decision, university researchers completed the 4th Annual Arkansas Poll in October 2003. The vast majority of those polled supported three of the key issues facing policymakers: improving school facilities (89%), increasing teacher salaries (84%), and expanding access to state funded pre-school programs (79%). There was strong support as well for expanding the use of mandatory standardized testing to measure student performance (68%) and for awarding bonus merit pay to those teachers whose students perform well on state exams (59%).

Respondents indicated that they strongly favored a requirement that all high schools offer all core courses every year (91%), and that they expand the overall number of courses, especially college preparatory courses offered (88%), yet only 41% supported

consolidating small high schools into larger, regional high schools.

Predictably, though respondents were agreeable to most reforms suggested, they were lukewarm about increased sales tax (41%), income tax (35%), or property tax (26%). A strong contingent (62%) favored a state lottery, while 41% favored cutting other government services to pay for reforms. These results suggest that if lawmakers are forced to increase taxes to finance educational reform, increased sales tax would be more popular with Arkansans than would increased income or property taxes.

To read the complete text of this report, including citations and references, click on this link to the OEP website at <http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/> or the Arkansas Poll at <http://plsc.uark.edu/arkpoll>.

DEFINING EDUCATIONAL ADEQUACY (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 1)

finance, on several meetings with the Joint Committee, and on meetings with two professional judgment panels comprised of 70 Arkansas education leaders. The recommendations provided are not those of the consultants alone; rather, the recommendations are those of the Committee and are based on deliberations among the consultants and the Committee members.

Overall, the Committee recommended reforms requiring nearly \$850 million new dollars! The five main themes underlying the report were: (1) the provision of adequate funding, (2) the closure of the achievement gaps, (3) a focus on accountability for results, (4) an emphasis on early intervention, and (5) a reliance on evidence in the development of these proposals.

Evidence-based Matrix of Necessary Resources (\$224.6 million). The educational initiatives and changes in school organization recommended by the committee include class sizes of approximately 15 for students in grades K-3, additional teachers to allow for enrichment programs and planning time, additional staff for schools with high concentrations of poverty, additional funding for professional development and instructional improvement, supervisory aides, and additional resources for technology.

Teacher Compensation (\$356.0 million). Substantial increases in teacher salaries were recommended, along with proposals for performance-based pay for teachers who boost student achievement and addi-

tional incentive pay to attract effective teachers into specialized subject areas and into geographic areas where there are shortages of qualified teachers.

Early Childhood Education (\$100.0 million). The committee recommended that preschool programs in the state be expanded and offered to all students age 3 and 4 from families with an income at 200 percent of the poverty level or below.

Funding Formula Corrections (\$167.7 million). The committee recommended the creation of a needs-based funding formula that will provide each district with a funding level that is adequate to increase teacher salaries and fully implement all of the reforms.

The Adequacy Report includes a comprehensive matrix that details the characteristics of all schools offering an adequate education. The matrix provides data with respect to school size, class size, number of teachers, per pupil expenditures, and much more.

The Committee recommended the adoption and funding of all the initiatives described in the report and concluded that the prescribed adequate resources, the performance pay program, and the prescribed leadership actions “include the necessary and sufficient conditions for having schools teach Arkansas students to its rigorous performance standards.”

To read the complete text of this report, including citations and references, click on this link to the OEP website and <http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/>

SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT: FORT SMITH SOUTHSIDE HIGH SCHOOL

With a 2003-2004 student enrollment of 1,497, Fort Smith Southside High School continues to perform exceptionally well in the state of Arkansas. With 100% of its teachers completely certified and 43% holding a master's degree or higher, Southside offers a rich and challenging curriculum to its

students. In 2001-2002, Southside had seven National Merit Finalists and 78% of the 2002 graduates entered 4 year colleges or universities. Southside has also been selected as a National Blue Ribbon School on numerous occasions over the past twenty years.



EDUCATION RESEARCH IN THE NEWS

Parsing the Achievement Gap

Would more careful attention to various pieces—or correlates—of achievement gaps help policymakers reduce persistent educational inequality? Researchers from ETS make this argument in a recently published report, *Parsing the Achievement Gap*. The authors focus on 14 indicators clearly linked to educational achievement and highlight the gaps between white and non-white students and the gaps between affluent and poor students on these indicators. To read more, visit <http://www.ets.org/research/pic/parsing.pdf>.

Are Teachers Fairly Paid?

Education Next recently provided a forum around this controversial question. While Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin argue that low salaries cause teachers to exit the field, Podgursky rebuts that teachers are actually compensated quite well after all factors are considered. To read more, visit the *Education Next* Summer 2003 issue at <http://www.educationnext.org>.

Quality Counts 2004 Review

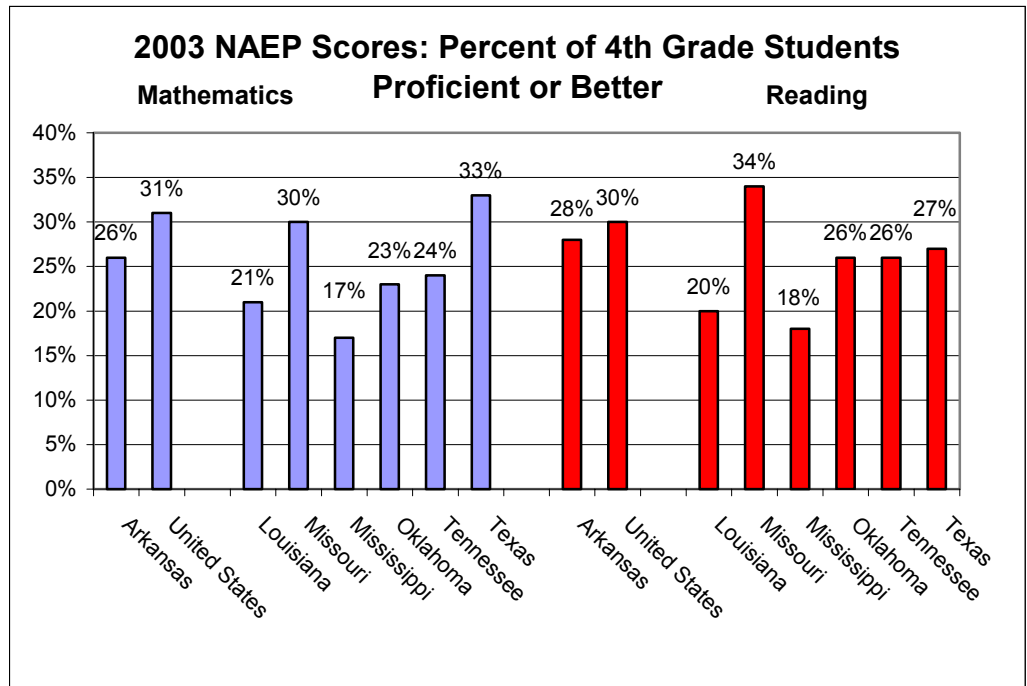
In its annual review of the states, *Education Week* focuses on NCLB and state standards. With NCLB requiring states to establish standards for the “vast majority” of special education students to be proficient within 10 years, how are the states addressing these students? Where does Arkansas rank? Visit <http://www.edweek.org/sreports/qc04/>.

The “Truth” About Qualified Teachers

In a recent review of state policies regarding the numbers of highly qualified teachers (an NCLB mandate by 2005-2006), the Education Trust was critical of several states for “not telling the truth” and inflating the numbers. As one senior policy analyst reported, “this kind of deception undermines the likelihood of genuine improvement efforts and hurts the educational prospects of students.” To read why Arkansas was one of those states visit <http://www2.edtrust.org/EdTrust/Press+Room/tell+the+truth.htm>.

A STATISTICAL SNAPSHOT

In November 2003, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results were released. On average, fourth grade students in Arkansas scored higher than their peers in Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Tennessee on the math and reading test, but scored lower than the national average. Fourth grade students in Arkansas, however, gained in relation to the national average. The previous NAEP test put Arkansas behind 8% in math and 4% in reading, but the 2003 scores indicate Arkansas is only behind 5% in math and 2% in reading.



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IN OUR
NEXT
ISSUE...

*The next Office for
Education Policy
newsletter will be pub-
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and will examine
the issues of teacher
quality and teacher
performance.*

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OFFICE FOR EDUCATION POLICY
MISSION:

*The Office for Education Policy seeks
to be a resource that aids state policymakers, educators,
administrators, and other leaders in thoughtful decision-making
concerning K-12 education in the State of Arkansas.*

THE EDITOR'S CORNER

Beginnings... About a year ago now, the administration and faculty of the University's College of Education and Health Professions began the work of developing an Office for Education Policy (OEP) that would serve as a resource about K-12 education in Arkansas. Through a generous gift from a foundation and the work of several faculty, graduate students and our Advisory Council, we present ourselves to the public in this inaugural newsletter.

In this first issue of our newsletter, we have highlighted some of the issues re-

lated to educational equity underscored by the *Lake View* case, including the achievement gap, school effectiveness, and a review of the Picus adequacy study. At the end of each article are links that will connect readers to both policy briefs and more extensive working papers on each topic addressed.

We look forward to serving the community of educators and policymakers in Arkansas in the coming years.

- Gary Ritter, editor



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