

ARKANSAS SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

# REPORTER

JANUARY 2003

Volume 21, Number 5

## The learning is the thing—the only thing

*By Kathy Morledge*

Learning is the unique charge of schools. No corporation, foundation, government entity, nor anyone else has this charge except schools. Ford Motor Company makes automotive vehicles. Bic Pen Company makes writing utensils. School districts teach children—the learning is the thing.

In corporate America, the product is the thing. Corporations intend to deliver the best possible product or service to their consumers, so the product or the service that they sell is the thing.

Most corporations, foundations, etc., provide training for their employees to inform them of new laws, regulations, procedures, or to improve their skills. This is “retooling” and “retraining” of staff members. This provision for teaching employees is not the mission of those organizations—it is retooling.

In schools, our mission is to teach the children.

Retooling refers to changing or adding tools that are needed for the process of producing the product for the organization. Retraining

refers to teaching the employees new skills to effectively produce the desired product.

In schools, retooling refers not only to equipment, but also the skills that are necessary to teach more effectively. In order to learn these new skills, we must retrain the employees.

In school districts, retraining refers to professional development for educators. Educators are being asked to perform many tasks for which they have never been trained. Our administrators are

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## ASBA Conference sees record attendance

The 49th annual Conference of the Arkansas School Boards Association was held at the Statehouse Convention Center and Peabody Hotel Dec. 10 - 12. Over 600 school board members and school administrators attended the conference.

Jim Slaughter kicked off the event with preconference workshops that focused on parliamentary procedure and leadership. Slaughter also served as the parliamentarian for the Delegate Assembly.

New officers were elected for ASBA. Leland Wells ascended to

the presidency. Jack Gardner became president-elect. John Young became vice president. Kathy McFetridge was elected secretary-treasurer. Ron McNair is the immediate past president.

Beliefs and Resolutions were adopted by the Delegate Assembly. The delegates also adopted the newly drafted Standards for Arkansas School Boards.

More breakout sessions were offered at this conference than ever before. Attendees learned how to raise test scores, how to under-

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*Certified Parliamentarian Jim Slaughter taught a preconference session and served as parliamentarian for the Delegate Assembly.*

## Conference

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stand the basics of school finance, how to protect children from Internet crime, what to expect from the No Child Left Behind Act, how to improve literacy in your district, how to involve the community

and recruit volunteers, how to begin the development of a crisis response plan, how to assure that science labs are safe for students, how to read a law book, how to use and adopt a policy manual, and more.

Dr. Robert Bradley of UALR spoke at the general session on Wednesday

morning about early childhood education. Bradley addressed the need for teaching children readiness skills prior to first grade. He presented research that supports the belief that early childhood education can have a positive impact on learning in later grades.

NSBA President Mossi White key-

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noted the Awards Luncheon. As she shared her stories about children, she underscored the importance of school boards and their role in elevating student achievement. Her speech was interrupted several times by applause.

Pinnacle Awards were presented to seven school board members

who have earned 200 hours or more in the boardmanship program. Virginia Holt of Stuttgart won the Dr. Dan Pilkinton Award.

Master Board Member Award winners were honored with a reception on Tuesday. The event was hosted by the ASBA Board.

The final session of the conference

began with breakfast speaker Larry Ross. Ross chairs the Arkansas Educational Television Commission. Ross shared thoughts about his service as chair of the Finance and Facilities subcommittee of the Blue Ribbon Commission.

Gov. Mike Huckabee addressed the group and discussed the Supreme Court decision concerning Lake View.

Arkansas Department of Education Director Ray Simon also spoke. He noted that everyone would have different job descriptions including himself, school personnel, members of the education department, and school board members. He remarked that the biggest burden would fall on the shoulders of building level educators.

The final speakers were three veteran legislators: Sens. Jodie Mahony, John Brown, and Jim Argue addressed the future of education and what they believe might occur during the upcoming General Assembly.

Mark your calendars now for next year's conference on Dec. 9 - 11 at the same location.

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## JOB BULLETIN

Superintendent, Berryville School District. Salary negotiable. Deadline: Feb. 15. Apply to: Berryville Supt. Position, Box 706, Berryville, AR 72616

Superintendent, Emerson School District. Deadline: Until filled. Apply to: Arthur Pharr, Interim Supt., P. O. Box 129, Emerson, AR 71740, (870) 547-2218

## Learning

*Continued from page 1*

being asked to lead in new and different ways. We are at a crucial juncture in education. We need education leaders who have been trained and are up to the task. Our institutions of higher education are retooling their programs to meet the new and demanding tasks that are before us. They are producing educators who have received training, but the school districts will still have a huge task of retraining existing staff members and extending the learning for new teachers. The idea is that in schools we want to deliver the best learning to the students that we possibly can, because the learning is the thing.

Educators are being asked to review curriculum, rewrite it, and realign it. They must decide at what grade levels particular skills and concepts should be taught. Unlike corporations, they don't have lots of options for research and development. Few opportunities to pilot ideas outside of the

classroom exist. Based on their knowledge and training, they must make decisions about when and where each idea should be taught. Keep in mind that the learning is the thing.

Once the curriculum has been through the initial realignment process, educators must determine the best method of assessing that curriculum. In other words, how do we know if the curriculum is effective or even if the students are learning it? These assessments must be based on the curriculum that has been designed for the students. Are the students learning what they should and are they learning it at the correct level and in the sequence that will be best for them? Always, the learning is the thing.

Teachers must also design the best methods of delivering that curriculum. That means new instructional skills. Perhaps, the assessments reveal weak areas of the curriculum. Could that be due to the need for new instructional techniques? Could it be due to a need to relook at the scope and

sequence of the curriculum? Most importantly, the learning is the thing.

Which brings us back to reviewing, rewriting, and realigning the curriculum.

All of this requires retraining and reteaching. If the most effective tool that we have to impact learning in a classroom is the teacher, then we must provide teachers with the best training that we possibly can. With highly trained, highly skilled, learned teachers, then the real questions become:

- ▲ Who is not learning?
- ▲ What are they not learning?
- ▲ What are we doing about it?

It all goes back to the learning. The learning is the thing. It is a job that must be done. We must do it, because there is no one else who can. We are the only ones charged with the task. As an organization called school, we must retool, retrain, and regain our international status as leaders in education. If we don't, who will? We can, but we must remember, the learning is the thing.



*The ASBA Board of Directors hosted a reception for winners of the Master Board Member Award. School board members who have earned 50 hours or more through the Boardmanship Awards Program were presented with a plaque. Entertainment for the event was provided by local musical artist, Doug Hall, pictured at left. At right, Arkansas PTA President and Fort Smith School Board Member Jeannie Cole discussed how to get parents more involved in the educational process. Cole and her team also discussed the National Standards for PTA units that many local PTAs have adopted.*



# But have we loved them well?

By Kathy Morledge

As Arkansas Department of Education Director Ray Simon spoke at the ASBA conference on Dec. 12, I heard echoes of times gone by. Many of us can recall teachers who challenged us to learn more, do more, excel more. Sometimes we even felt anger and resentment toward those teachers because they seemed to want more of us than we could give. And yet, we found ourselves actually learning more, doing more, and excelling more, in spite of ourselves and because of them. We learned that learning is hard work and that anything worth having is worth working hard to get.

Over the years a malaise has spread throughout our public schools. We didn't notice it. We "pooh-poohed" the warnings of those harbingers of doom when they told us that our schools were sliding. The annual Phi Delta Kappa education poll shows every year that all of us believe that our school is doing just fine. It's those other schools that need to be fixed.

I guess the malaise is not unlike that live frog in the pot of water on the stove. As the heat is turned up very slowly, that frog just sits there basking in the warmth of the water around him. Even as the heat moves ever so slowly higher, he still just sits there, enjoying his warm habitat, until finally, the water begins to boil. But by then, it doesn't matter anymore. He's just a boiled frog—no longer feeling the heat because his life has gone out of him.

Our public schools are much like that frog. As the heat of progress, technology, and global economy has grown higher, we have sat complacently in our warm habitat and basked in it. We have let our schools be warm places, but not places of hard work and excellence.

We have not loved our children well. We have loved them, but we have not loved them well.

We have failed to help our students equate success and excellence with hard work. We have failed to help them understand that failure to meet the goal will result in harder work to meet that goal, not simply a pat on the back and an assurance that they tried and that was all that mattered. Don't we wish that was all that mattered!

Over the years in our warming pot of water, we have looked those children in the eyes and told them that it was okay to try some and not a lot.

We have told that child who failed to complete his homework assignment because he was busy, that we loved him anyway, and that was all right, we just simply wouldn't count the homework assignment.

We have told that child who failed a test because she didn't study, that it was okay, because we loved her and she probably knew the material anyway.

We have told that special education child who failed to complete any of his Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals because he didn't want to do the work, that it was okay, we would lower those goals because they were probably too high.

We truly do love the children. We who are associated with education do truly love children. But we haven't loved them well.

We have not told the child who failed to complete the homework that the assignment was important or it would not have been assigned. It was important for his learning. He would not be allowed to move forward until the assignment was completed. Learning is hard work.

We have not told the child who failed the test because she did not

study, that based on the results of that test, she hadn't learned what she needed to learn. She would have to be retaught that material and tested again. That material was critical for the next step of her learning. Learning is hard work.

We have not told that special education student who did not want to learn, that it was important to learn. That the plan that was developed especially for him was based on what he needed to learn next and that he was expected to learn it, because learning is hard work.

Over the years our malaise has been one of low expectations for our students. As our economic environment grew hotter and more demanding, we simply basked in the warmth of our pot on the stove.

Now that the water has nearly reached the boiling point, we have grown alarmed and we want to jump out, but it is difficult to find a safe place to land. We may simply have to jump out into the fire and determine our path from there before the life goes out of our schools and we croak (pun intended).

We must love our children well and teach them how to succeed and excel. We must not let them boil to death in this environment in which we have found ourselves. We must not simply love them; we must love them well.

## SCHOOL BOARD BRIEF CASE

- ▲ Jan. 1 Return ASBA surveys
- ▲ Jan. 13 Arkansas General Assembly convenes
- ▲ Feb. 4 Arkansas PTA Public School Day Rally



*ASBA's 2002 Dr. Dan Pilkinton Award winner Virginia Holt of Stuttgart is congratulated by ASBA President Leland Wells at the annual ASBA Awards Luncheon.*

## Virginia Holt wins Dr. Dan Award

Virginia Holt of Stuttgart was named the Dr. Dan Pilkinton Award winner for 2002 at the annual Arkansas School Boards Association conference on Dec. 11, at the Peabody Hotel in Little Rock.

The Dr. Daniel L. Pilkinton Award for Outstanding Service to Public Education is presented to an outstanding school board member, administrator, teacher, principal, school attorney or other school employee, or community member, whose service to public education deserves special attention. The nominations are reviewed by a panel of school board members and a winner is chosen.

Holt exemplifies all that the Dr. Dan Award represents. Although she left high school at an early age to raise a large family, she returned later to earn her GED and enroll in several post-high school programs. At the age when most folks would retire, she went back to school again to earn her certification as a Certified Nursing Assistant and currently works part-time at a local care facility for the elderly. Her nine children, her 30 grandchildren, and her 10 great-grandchildren all know that she believes in education and that she strongly encourages every-

one to pursue an education.

As a school board member, Holt has championed progressive changes in the curriculum, technology integration, and high quality professional development. She was willing to take an unpopular stand to close a campus that she felt was unsafe for students. She worked diligently for a millage campaign aimed at updating facilities to provide 21st Century technology. Holt traveled to Europe with the ScholAR program in search of quality education for the children of her district. She currently serves as the vice president of the Stuttgart School Board.

Holt is a member of her local city council where she has actively worked to remove abandoned houses and to improve police and fire services. She volunteers at a local legal services center for abandoned and battered spouses. She teaches Sunday School to home bound church members and serves as the outreach director for her church.

To quote Stuttgart Supt. Linda Scott, Holt "makes every effort to be involved in the community. She encourages the youth to the best, by example, not just word. Her efforts reach into every home throughout the school district."

## ASBA adopts standards

The Delegate Assembly of the Arkansas School Boards Association adopted standards that represent school board behaviors.

The process began when the ASBA Board of Directors identified the major areas for school board standards. The identified areas were vision, organization, board operations, personnel operations, board development, board/staff relations, and community relations.

At regional meetings in the fall, attendees participated in carousel brainstorming to identify what the specific behaviors for school boards in each major area. Over 800 school board members and superintendents gave input into the process.

A writing team reviewed the data from the regional meetings and drafted a document. The team recommended that two areas should be combined to avoid redundancy. Board/staff relations and community relations were combined into one major area and relabeled as board/staff/community relations.

Members of the writing team were school board members Jeanne Godbold, Fountain Lake; Amy Daniel, Cabot; Jerry Bishop, Nevada County; ASBA Vice President Jack Gardner; Superintendent Ron Holt, Malvern; and ASBA Study Circles Project Coordinator Diane Vibhakar. Kathy Morledge facilitated the team.

Next steps for these standards include publishing these for board members across the state for consideration for adoption. ASBA plans to develop a self-assessment for school boards based on these standards.

The newly adopted Standards for Arkansas School Boards are printed on page 7 of this Reporter. Questions about the standards and the process that was used to develop them should be directed to Kathy Morledge at ASBA. She can be reached at (800) 482-1212 or [kmorledge@arsba.org](mailto:kmorledge@arsba.org).

# Standards for Arkansas School Boards

## I. Vision/Philosophy

A. The School Board creates a clear vision for the district that focuses on students, excellence in education, and academic achievement.

B. The School Board adopts this vision that is created through collaborative processes that involve the staff, parents, community, and students.

C. The School Board effectively communicates this vision to the staff, parents, community, and students.

D. The School Board adopts long- and short-term goals to accomplish the vision of the district.

E. The School Board believes that accountability for achieving the goals of the district rests with the School Board, the superintendent, the staff, the parents, the community, the students, and the state.

## II. Organization

A. The School Board adopts and follows a "Code of Ethics."

B. The School Board adopts policies that clearly define the roles and duties of its members.

C. The School Board adopts policies delineating the procedures for electing its officers and defining their roles and duties.

## III. Board Operations

A. The School Board governs through approved policies and maintains a current policy manual which is reviewed regularly.

B. The School Board conducts professional meetings in accordance with the Arkansas Freedom of Information Act by establishing and publishing the agenda prior to the meeting and by following the agenda during the meeting.

C. The School Board conducts public forums periodically to receive input from citizens.

D. The School Board acts with fiscal responsibility.

## IV. Board Development

A. The School Board receives annual training as recommended and/or conducted by the Arkansas School Boards Association and is familiar with A Handbook for Arkansas School Board Members.

B. New School Board members receive additional timely training regarding School Board member responsibilities.

C. The School Board conducts annual self-assessments and avails itself of professional development opportunities based on the needs of its members.

D. The School Board keeps abreast of state and federal laws that impact education.

E. The School Board stays informed about current education issues.

F. The School Board attends regional and state Arkansas School Boards Association meetings and remains informed of National School Boards Association meetings and issues.

G. The School Board, at least annually, convenes for an extended work session to review goals, evaluate the progress of the district, and develop long-range plans.

H. The School Board is familiar with *Key Work of School Boards* and implements those concepts.

## V. Personnel Operations

A. The School Board maintains a high standard of ethics in all personnel matters.

B. The School Board remains neutral in all personnel matters until the superintendent brings a recommendation to them.

C. The School Board adopts personnel policies with input from district personnel.

D. The School Board empowers the administration to recruit and recommend highly qualified applicants to the Board.

E. The School Board expects the administration to maintain a highly qualified staff by offering

timely and adequate opportunities for professional development.

F. The School Board hires the superintendent and is responsible for conducting a search to replace an exiting superintendent.

G. The School Board evaluates the superintendent annually and determines the continued employment of the superintendent.

## VI. Board/Staff/Community Relations

A. The School Board maintains a positive, supportive, and professional attitude toward all staff.

B. The School Board and the superintendent work together as a leadership team.

C. The School Board recognizes, protects, and encourages the chain of command at all times.

D. The School Board and superintendent recognize that communication is a two-way process.

E. The School Board and the superintendent work together to provide and follow a process that encourages and seeks input from the staff and community when appropriate on significant issues by:

1. providing leadership in the establishment of open dialogue through community discussion groups, school councils, and other means;

2. collaborating with local, state, and national agencies;

3. working with the media to provide information;

4. visiting schools; and

5. including informative presentations from staff and students at school board meetings.

F. The School Board models respect for the superintendent, staff, parents, community, and students.

G. The School Board supports and adopts the use of Study Circles, or a similar process, as a method of communicating with the staff, the parents, the community, and the students.

## LELAND WELLS ASBA PRESIDENT



## Let our voices be heard this year at the General Assembly

Thank you for the opportunity to serve you as your president this year. I promise you that I will remember that first of all, we are here to serve the children of our districts—the public school children of Arkansas. Secondly, I promise you that I will serve you and your needs as school board members. Thirdly, I promise to promote public schools, not only in Arkansas, but at national meetings as well. I thank you for your vote of confi-

dence and I ask you to support me this year.

What a great conference! It is hard to imagine that our conference could grow and get better every year, but it certainly seems to do so. All of the speakers this year from the general session speakers to the breakout speakers, seem to be right on target in meeting our needs. My only regret was that there were far more breakouts that I wanted to attend than I had

time to attend. Kudos to the ASBA staff for their organizational efforts. It was wonderful.

As we head into 2003 there are many uncertainties looming ahead of us. The speakers at the conference on the final day addressed the future of public education over and over again.

The General Assembly convenes on January 13. Since the Arkansas Supreme Court directed the State

*See **General Assembly** on page 12*

## DAN FARLEY ASBA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



## Roles may change, but school boards remain an important part of public education

*The following is excerpted from the Executive Director's Annual Report to the ASBA Delegate Assembly, presented Dec. 11.*

The ASBA Board continues to be very strong in its resolve to make our association an important, proactive education organization. You will see that mirrored in the Beliefs and Resolutions. We all agree that our effectiveness lies in our willingness to work together, to collaborate with others, and to be diligent advocates for our children and our schools. I am proud to work for you and I am proud of what our small but dedicated staff accomplishes on behalf of Arkansas school boards and Arkansas schoolchildren.

The issues confronting all of us right now can be mind-boggling. Since the Supreme Court's ruling on the Lake View decision last month, we read new reports every day of how the state will make our public schools both equitable and adequate. Some of those reports are disturbing, others actually seem frivolous. For instance, we have heard that the Supreme Court's ruling effectively ends local control of our public schools. I have read and re-read the Court's ruling and nowhere have I found that creation of an adequate educational system means the dissolution of local school boards.

The immediate response by many political leaders was that the Court has said that education and

its funding is the responsibility of the state, which rests with the General Assembly. They are right. That's nothing new. School districts in Arkansas are minor political subdivisions of the state and school boards are the local bodies, created by state law, which are charged with operating our public schools. And, as found in Chapter 1 of our Handbook for Arkansas School Board Members, school boards are legislative bodies and their members are state officials who are charged with fulfilling the mandates of the General Assembly. They have no powers except those specifically given them by actions of the General Assembly or that are reasonably implied by legislative

*See **School boards** on page 12*



# REPORTER

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*Championing excellence in public education  
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for local school boards.*



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Behind closed  
doors



Okay, so we're in a Charlie Rich mode this month. We're not going to find out what goes on behind closed doors, but we will look at when those school board meeting doors can be closed.

Challenged recently by a reporter before going into a closed grievance hearing, I had to explain to her that not all executive sessions are accounted for in the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) A.C.A. §25-19-101 through 107, starting on page 687 of your Green Law Book. Indeed, there are several situations outside of FOIA which let you have a closed session, some with lawyers, even. Isn't that nice? Of course it is. It's always nice to have lawyers around. Everybody knows that.

As all of you should know by now, the FOIA provides for executive sessions for certain, limited personnel reasons: employment, appointment, promotion, demotion disciplining or resignation of public officers or employees. (School Board members are "public officers"; everybody else who works for your District is a "public employee"). Those are the only reasons for an executive session under FOIA, and, before you go into executive session under FOIA, you must announce one of those reasons listed above. ("The Board will now go into executive session to consider the employment of a teacher.")

Most people think only of FOIA when thinking of executive session, but whenever you're going to have a hearing on something—anything—that law has no application. *Exempli gratia.*

Employee dismissals are covered by two laws, the Public School Employee Fair Hearing Act for noncertified employees, A.C.A. §6-17-1701 through 1705, starting on page 214 of your Green Law Book; and the Teacher Fair Dismissal Act for teachers, A.C.A. §6-17-1501 through 1510, starting on page 206 of the Green Law Book. Both of these laws provide for the hearing to be closed.

Under FOIA, you recall, the determination of whether there is to be an executive session is made by the School Board. Under these two dismissal laws,

See *Closed doors* on page 16

## Master Board Members honored with reception at ASBA conference

Master Board Members were honored with a reception at the annual Arkansas School Boards Association conference on Dec. 10. The reception was hosted by the ASBA board of directors.

Each Master Board award winner was presented a placque in recognition of the honor. Master Board winners have earned 50 hours or more of training and service.

School board members who have earned the designation as Master Board Members are pictured here. Award winners who are not pictured are: Marvin Higginbottom, Eureka Springs; Howard Hamilton, Fayetteville; James Miller, Greenland; Gary Morris, Lincoln; Elizabeth Kennedy, St. Paul; John Wayne Carter, Cave City; David Cordell; Dr. James Taylor, Russellville; Marlin Boyle, South Conway County; Dr. Stephen Carter, South Conway County; Mark Stobaugh, South Conway County; Linda Benson, Searcy; Steve Littrell, Blytheville; Harold Vault, Cotton Plant; Penny Wolf, Weiner; Debbie Reid, Carlisle; Andrew Moore, England; Monieca West, North Little Rock; Deborah Smith, Malvern; Don Williams, Malvern; Norvell Dixon, Gould; Jessie Henry, Hope; Wayne Gibson, El Dorado; Pat Odom, El Dorado; Susan Turbeville, El Dorado; Bonnie Fish, Parkers Chapel; Kenneth Watson, Drew Central; and Stephen Savage, Monticello.



*Master Board Members standing are: Dr. Randall Hestir, DeWitt; Craig Reeves, McCrory; Jesse Buchanan, Texarkana; Robert Artis, Holly Grove; Ray Nelson, Texarkana; Ricky Ward, Ashdown; and Jimmy John Ward, Quitman. Sitting: Mike Faris, Booneville; Cyndi Doepel, Brinkley; Teresa Swint, El Dorado; Bob Warren, Elkins; Beverly Biggs, Paragould; and Linda Pitts, Mountain Home.*



*Master Board Members standing are: John Looney, Pine Bluff; Todd Bartholomew, Weiner; Joe Isham, Dierks; Sammy Vaught, Cross County; Richard Poll, Gillett; and Jimmy Reed, El Dorado. Sitting: Susan Johnson, Weiner; Margie Smith, Russellville; Patsy Lockley, Cross County; and Nan Kirksey, Centerpoint.*

## Pinnacle Award winners and Master Boards announced

Seven school board members were awarded the prestigious Pinnacle Award. The award is given to school board members who earn 200 hours or more of boardmanship training.

The awards were presented at the Awards Luncheon at the annual Arkansas School Boards Association

Conference on Dec. 11, at the Peabody Hotel in Little Rock.

ASBA members who received the award are: Sharon Lane, Calico Rock; Don Frost, Waldron; Patty Shipp, South Conway County; Rev. Jeffrey Richardson; Virginia Holt, Stuttgart; Dorothy Henderson, Ashdown; and

Kevin Smalling, Waldron.

The Grady School Board and the West Fork School Board were named as Master Boards. For school boards to be named, all members of the board must have accrued at least 50 hours of training through ASBA's inservice program.



Senators John Brown and Jim Argue listen as Sen. Jodie Mahony discusses his concerns about the recent Arkansas Supreme Court decision about Lake View.



Gov. Mike Huckabee addresses the final session of the ASBA conference.



ADE Director Ray Simon says that everyone will have a different role in the future in the education of the children.

### PTA will sponsor Public School Rally Day

Arkansas PTA will sponsor a Public School Day Rally and press conference on Feb. 4, to create a grassroots campaign in support of public education and the children of Arkansas. The rally will be held on the steps of the State Capitol.

Arkansas PTA encourages parents to attend and support the rally. For more information contact the Arkansas PTA office at (501) 753-5247, (800) 782-4782, or email at [arpta\\_office@yahoo.com](mailto:arpta_office@yahoo.com). All parents and educators should attend.



AETN Commission Chairman Larry Ross addresses the future of public education in Arkansas.

### Surveys are in the mail

By this time, you should have received a comprehensive survey from ASBA. The results from this will be used to help direct our work. The data will be tabulated by the Institute of Government at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

We need your input. *Time is of the essence.* If you have already completed your survey and returned it to us, we thank you. If you have yet to complete your survey, please take some time and do so as soon as possible. We hope to have the results by early-February so these can benefit us during the legislative session.



ASBA Board of Directors Standing: Dr. Chuck Kauffman, Bracy Yarbrough, President Leland Wells, Past President, Ron McNair, Gene Boeckmann, President-elect Jack Gardner, former President Teresa Burl, Arnell Washington, Perry Newman, Vice President John Young, Mike Sawyer, Donny Chandler, and Ray Edwards. Sitting: Judy Magness, Vonda Cranford, Secretary-Treasurer Kathy McFetridge, Donna Braymer, Betty McGruder, NSBA President-elect Carol Brown, and Fran Haines.

## General Assembly

*Continued from page 8*

to determine a way to adequately and equitably fund public education by January 2004, it should be a most interesting session. We must support our staff as they advocate for the children of Arkansas. Please contact your senators and representatives and express your concerns as well as the need for adequate and equitable funding. You may leave them email messages by contacting them via the Internet at <http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us>. If you prefer

to leave telephone messages, you may do so for the senators at (501) 682-6107 and for the representatives at (501) 682-7771. Ask your state legislators specific questions such as:

▲ What is the state doing to assure that our children are getting as good, if not better, education as any child in the country?

▲ What is the state doing to assure accountability not only for students, teachers, administrators, school board members, and community members, but also for the state itself, for improving education?

▲ Other than test scores, on what

measurements is the state relying to determine if programs are effectively improving learning for all students?

I encourage you to focus on improving student learning as the mission of your district. I once heard an educator say, "The learning is the thing." It truly is. Everything else that we do—whether it is putting a new roof on a school building, providing professional development of teachers, purchasing new textbooks, or approving the purchase of new computers—everything must support the learning of the students.

## School boards

*Continued from page 8*

schools by taxes and delegates to state agencies the responsibility for operating those schools.

Primarily, the General Assembly created school districts and school boards to carry out the mandate for free public education as set forth in Article XIV of the Arkansas Constitution. In addition, the General Assembly created the State Board of Education and the Arkansas Department of Education. The recent Supreme Court ruling on Lake View does not seem to indicate otherwise.

The development of American public education through its system of locally elected school boards reflects the desire of the American people to keep their most vital concern—the education of their children—close to themselves. Arkansans are no different. The fundamental reason for the existence of school boards is to make the will of the people effective in the operation of its schools. In fact, of all elected officials in this country, school board members generally have more public support and credibility than any others.

We believe firmly that strong community support for public

schools can make an enormous difference in their effectiveness. School boards provide that link. They can help shape a shared community vision that education is vital to the health of not only the communities they represent, but to the health and economic well-being of the state as a whole.

We believe that accountability is absolutely necessary and we believe that all children in this state, regardless of where they live or in what economic conditions they exist, are entitled to a meaningful education and the hope for a better life. If we live up to that, over a period of time, I firmly believe we will see a state whose economy is more vital, whose people have an improved quality of life, and whose regard for knowledge is a badge of honor and no longer a burden of shame. We hold in our hands our destiny, not only for ourselves but for future generations.

As we enter the upcoming legislative session, there will be many issues to address, many problems to solve, many compromises that we must be prepared to make. These are not issues about institutions. They are issues about children and the education they de-

serve. There will be difficult times ahead, for sure, but no problems are insurmountable.

What we must do is look through a new lens. Our decisions must be based on what's best for our children and their education. If we all focus on that and try to work together, we can—finally—elevate public education in our state to the prominent position it should have. When we do, I believe we will have achieved our finest moment and forever change the image we have of ourselves and of our state. Building learning communities is possible. We can do it and I believe, as a people, we will do it.

Change is inevitable. Perhaps it also is our greatest fear. If we can view the months ahead as an opportunity, we may very well provide our children with the skills and knowledge they need to live successful, productive, and happy lives. What better legacy could we leave them?

Thank you all, and bless you for the work you do for Arkansas kids. If we all work together, we can build better schools and stronger communities, and share a better future in The Natural State.

# ASBA awarded WRF grant for Study Circles

The Arkansas Study Circles Project has been awarded a significant grant from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation to continue its work in helping launch study circles on education in communities throughout the state.

The Arkansas Supreme Court recently upheld a lower court ruling that Arkansas public schools were both inadequate and inequitable in the delivery of education to the schoolchildren of the state. The Arkansas Study Circles Project is part of the Arkansas School Boards Association Educational Foundation. The organization has been the driving force for launching study circles to engage Arkansans in meaningful conversations about improving education for the state's 500,000 schoolchildren.

The grant, for \$245,800 over the next two years, will help the organization launch numerous study circles throughout the state to engage Arkansans in an effort to improve their public schools.

The organization used the model, with help from the Study Circles Resource Center, to help shape a massive one-night event last April to discuss the question: "What do we want our schools to do to educate our children." The event, called "Speak Up, Arkansas!" was developed between mid-January until April 4, when 6,000 people at 91 sites came together to provide their ideas for the legislatively-mandated Arkansas Blue Ribbon Commission on Public Education. The concerns that were articulated that night by Arkansans were collected and submitted to the Commission to help shape its recommendations on education reform to the state's General Assembly.

Members of the state's School Boards Association convinced the Commission that this type of pub-

lic engagement would be far more meaningful than its original notion to conduct public hearings on one night in the state's 75 counties.

The collaboration that created the event included the Commission, the Arkansas School Boards Association, and the Arkansas Chamber of Commerce. It included unprecedented live media coverage, including a live two-hour broadcast by the Arkansas Educational Television Network, a half hour of live, primetime coverage by the state's largest ABC-TV affiliate, KATV, and the Arkansas Public Radio Network.

"There was no way to know exactly how many people in our state were impacted by the event," said ASBA Executive Director Dan Farley, "because we will never know how many people watched it on TV or listened to it on the radio stations or followed it on the live webcast that night."

"After working very hard on the project for several weeks, it turned out that I would be out-of-state that night," Farley said. "Because of the media's participation, I was able to see and hear the event as it happened on my laptop computer in another state."

ASBA (with assistance from SCRC) trained the facilitators and then worked with the Arkansas Chamber in site coordination to prepare for the event. "We did it in an amazingly short period of time," Farley said. "It was monumental for our state."

Following that evening, the Arkansas Study Circles Project offered full-scale, four-week-long study circles this fall in a number of Arkansas communities, called "Speak Up, Arkansas! The Conversations Continue." The organization collaborated with the Arkansas PTA and Arkansas Advocates for Chil-

dren & Families to sponsor the follow-up study circles. Data from all the sites' action forums are presently being compiled by the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and will be shared with the public and the state's General Assembly.

"We believe in citizen participation and the kind of civil, democratic dialogue so key to the beliefs of SCRC's founder, the late visionary citizen, Paul Aicher," Farley said. "After the April event and during the planning period for this fall's study circles, I and three of my staff spent time with SCRC staff in Connecticut designing the new conversations. It was one of the supreme moments of my life to have been able to spend a few minutes with Paul Aicher while we were there. Despite his illness, he met with me and further inspired me to continue our public engagement work."

"I look upon this amazing year as a tribute to him and his vision for re-energizing the true spirit of democracy in this country," Farley said.

The Rockefeller grant will aid the association in expanding its work to involve Arkansans to help reconstruct public education in the state to more adequately and equitably educate its public school students.

"We view this as an unprecedented opportunity to significantly improve and advance education in a state that historically has been near the bottom of the list in every educational statistic. We believe people tend to support what they help to build, and we have a chance now to validate that premise," Farley said. "Education is at the core of everything we aspire to—including the democracy we all cherish."

"Finally," Farley said, "I would be  
*See WRF Grant on page 14*

## WRF Grant

*Continued from page 13*

derelict if I did not heap praise on Diane Vibhakar, who coordinates the Arkansas Study Circles Project. She has spent countless hours and has an enormous commitment to engaging Arkansas citizens in conversations about our public schools. Her passion for this work has helped get us to this point in the evolution of study circles in Arkansas.”

In 1974 the Trustees of Governor Winthrop Rockefeller's Estate endowed the Winthrop Rockefeller

Foundation to continue the work of the Rockwin Fund. Governor Rockefeller set up the The Rockwin Fund in 1954 and, on an annual basis from 1965 until his death in 1973, funded projects and programs he believed were important to improving the quality of life in Arkansas.

The Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation is a private, nonprofit foundation whose mission is to improve the lives of Arkansans by funding programs and projects that improve education; economic development; and economic, ra-

cial and social justice. During the past 28 years the Foundation has awarded over \$62 million in grants.

Additional information about the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation can be found on its web site, [www.wrfoundation.org](http://www.wrfoundation.org).



## Internet predators are stalking our kids

*By Zena Featherston*

“We used to know what the offenders ‘looked like.’ With the Internet, predators can hide very easily,” said Lt. Don Bridges, North Little Rock Police Department.

The “new offenders” Bridges and his colleagues, Inv. Keith Jackson and Inv. Tracy Rolston, discussed at the ASBA breakout entitled Protecting Our Children from the Internet, are predominantly professionals and white collar workers. The Internet has given this group of people a vehicle in which they can remain anonymous while executing plans and fantasies which are devastating to their victims.

“Children share too much information,” said Inv. Keith Jackson. “The Internet is new and exciting.” Predators who are computer savvy can very easily find children who they come into contact with on the Internet. These adults will use whatever means necessary to build credibility and then set up meetings with children. Many times these “meetings” have taken place and the predators have returned to their home states before parents and law enforcement become aware of the incident.

Bridges, Jackson and Rolston enumerated the ways in which

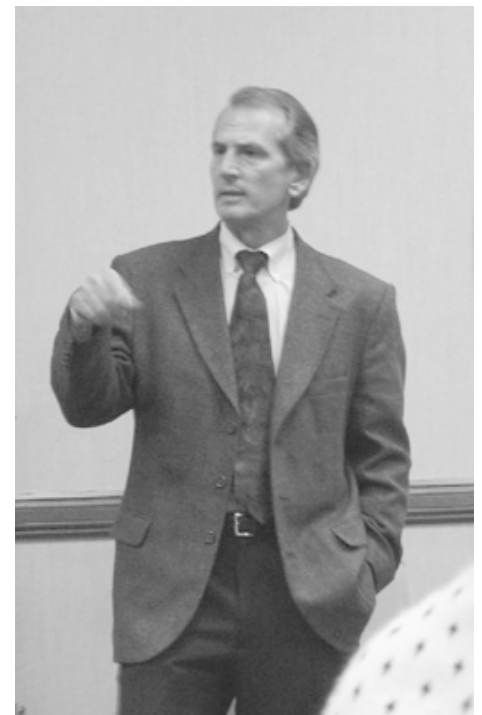
children can accidentally wander into pornographic web sites and emphasized just how easily this happens. Natural curiosity often times takes over when children are left unsupervised. From there the predators take control by initiating “chats” and thus building relationships.

Supervision is the key! Bridges noted that 71 percent of parents quit supervising their children after the children reach 14 years of age.

Other recommendations relate directly to the groups emphasis on supervision. In their investigations, they employ the use of screen-capture software. This allows law enforcement to track every key stroke and identify where on the Internet individuals have traveled. They encouraged the participants to consider this type of software for personal use and for supervising children at school. When asked about the Internet filters, they noted that they did not have sufficient experience with Internet filtering systems, but that many computer experts could find their way around filters. Another recommendation was to have home computers placed in visible locations and not in bedrooms

away from general traffic.

This is a war that law enforcement is “absolutely losing” said Bridges. It is a global problem and one which parents, educators and anyone who has responsibilities supervising children should take very seriously.



*Lt. Don Bridges of the North Little Rock Police Department discusses how to protect children from Internet predators during ASBA conference.*

# Knowledge is the lightest load you can carry

By Zena Featherston

"Because it was urgent and vitally important, we were the only ones who could do it and it was the right thing to do," was her mother's response.

Mossi White, National School Boards Association President, began her life as a spy for the Resistance during World War II. With a high-ranking father in the Norwegian military, Mossi and her mother were under constant scrutiny by Nazi soldiers. Mossi's mother smuggled documents vital to the Resistance effort in Mossi's diapers. Later noting that she and her mother would surely have been shot, she asked her mother why she would make such a decision. Her mother responded, "Because it was urgent and vitally important, we were the only ones who could do it and it was the right thing to do."

Mossi related this story during her keynote address to Arkansas school board members and administrators. She noted that the work of school board members is essentially the same.

Growing up, Mossi believed that the United States was a place where all things could happen and where dreams come true. She still believes this emphasizing that by all accounts, in some challenges, the U.S. should not have succeeded. She said, "But we did!"

Mossi's Norwegian grandmother instilled in her granddaughter the idea, 'Knowledge is the lightest load you will ever carry.' Mossi said, "It's a gift that we must give to every child. Failure is not an option!"

She said, "We are at an absolute defining point in the battle for public education." She urged school board members to become "passionate and articulate" advocates for public education, because

it is "absolutely the right thing to do."

Speaking "English-As-A-Second-Language" herself, Mossi has wondered what it means to be "sitting on the Board of Education." Emphasizing that detractors to public education have slowly but surely instilled that public education has failed, she said, "We need to move quickly and actively on the scene, because public education has not failed!" She continued, "Has it been perfect? No, but we will fix it!"

She encouraged school board

members to tell everyone about challenges and successes. She said somewhere along the way the public has "bought the rhetoric and we need to come together and get the word out!"

*"Because it was urgent and vitally important, we were the only ones who could do it and it was the right thing to do," was her mother's response.*

When she is at home in Utah Mossi walks. She related a story of a youngster, who much to her surprise, joined her for a walk one day. He said to her

'I'll go with you.' She was moved by the absolute confidence and trust this young man placed in her judgement. She said, "He was sure that I would take us to a place where both he and I would find it a good place to be."

"We must decide where we are going to take educational opportunities in this country! We must take us to a place where they and we would like to be," she said.

Mossi concluded her keynote urging school board members to follow the progress of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). She projected that it has the potential to become the largest unfunded mandate—ever. She said, "I'm really, really tired of us using our children as a political platform and that public education is considered a political charity case."

"Education is the best investment we could ever make! Our economic development is dependent on how well we educate each child," she said. "There are many, many children in our country who are counting on us!"

"You and I must make sure it happens!"



*NSBA President Mossi White delivered the keynote address at the annual ASBA Conference.*

*ArkaNSPRA member Zena Featherston is the Communications Director for Fort Smith Schools.*

## Closed doors

*Continued from page 9*

however, the determination is made by the employee. In addition, the parties are allowed to have representation in the closed hearing. Under FOIA, if your lawyer is in an executive session with the School Board, the lawyer is breaking the law just as surely as you are. When you're considering dismissing an employee, however, if the employee says the hearing is closed, the press and most of the public go outside the meeting room, and you're perfectly legal.

In addition to dismissal hearings, closed hearings are provided for in student expulsion hearings, A.C.A. §6-18-507, page 243 in your Green Law Book; and for employee grievance hearings, A.C.A. §6-17-208, page 169 in your Green Law Book.

There is, of course, some overlap: The FOIA says that an executive

session can be held to consider "employment," and a dismissal falls into that category. As a practical matter, however, the FOIA executive session is held as part of a dismissal hearing only after all of the testimony of the hearing has been taken, and the Board wants to discuss the dismissal recommendation and the evidence. All that preceded that was done according to one of the dismissal laws, not the FOIA.

Most of the time, grievance hearings won't involve one of the reasons for an executive session, but in those few that do, an executive session may be held even after an open hearing. Regardless, the grievance law provides for closed hearings, at the discretion of the employee, and that has nothing to do with FOIA.

Speaking of which, there is nothing in a student expulsion hearing which could arguably fall within the executive session reasons under FOIA. There are no

employee interests (at least of the nature set out in FOIA) involved in that type of proceeding. In that type of hearing, it is easiest to see that there is no FOIA involvement, and the legislature decided to provide for confidentiality in student hearings in a completely separate law.

So, if a reporter (or anyone else) challenges your ability to have a closed hearing as being in violation of the FOIA, simply turn to the appropriate page (numbers provided for you, above) and show him that you really do know what you're doing.

Then, you can go into the closed/executive session, behind closed doors, with your favorite lawyer, to hear the issues before you and to bask in the glow and the warmth created by your lawyer's presence. You can even tell him you'll pay him double his usual hourly rate. He'll like that, and so will you.

Arkansas School Boards Association



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