



ARKANSAS SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

REPORTER

OCTOBER 2003

Volume 21, Number 2

New twist on the Fall Regional Meetings

ASBA's Fall Regional Meetings (*all 14 of them*) will be held on three evenings, Oct. 20, 21, and 23. By using distance learning (compressed interactive video, or CIV), multiple meetings will be held on each of those three nights.

The meetings this year, unlike all previous years, will begin with dinner at 6:00 p.m. Previously the meetings always began at 6:30. Because of the nature of the delivering program via CIV, time is a paramount concern.

Following dinner, any business that may need to be conducted in

any given region must take place and allow participants to physically move into another space for the program, which will begin promptly at 7:15 p.m. In some locations, the dinner will be held in a different room from the broadcast due to technical requirements.

An unusually high number of director elections will be held this year. In fact, elections will be held in 10 regions, so it is imperative that we are all on schedule. Everyone must be seated at each site before the program's start time

of 7:15. Since the technology is interactive, movement and noise will activate cameras and will create disruption.

Elections will be conducted in Regions 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, and 14. Five of six directors eligible for re-election are seeking a second term. They are: Donna Braymer, Region 2; Fran Haines, Region 3; Ray Edwards, Region 6; Dr. Chuck Kauffman, Region 11, and Arnell Washington, Region 14.

See Director elections on page 4

New Board Member Workshop provides orientation for school board service

ASBA will host the New Board Member Workshop on Oct. 15 at the DoubleTree Hotel in Little Rock.

The event will fulfill the state requirement for six hours of training for all school board members.

ASBA Executive Director Dan Farley will open the conference with an overview of ASBA, the Key Work of School Boards, and the duties and responsibilities of school boards. Kathy Morledge will follow up with questions that school board members should ask about testing, curriculum, instruction, and student achievement.

Dr. Tom Kimbrell, superintendent of Paragould schools, will talk about the ABCs of school finance.

Lynn Hamilton, a veteran school board member, will discuss building relationships with board members and the superintendent.

Staff Attorney Kristen Gould will discuss the Freedom of Information Act and other legal issues. ASBA General Counsel Paul Blume will speak about issues related to students and employees.

Farley and Gould will moderate a video presentation of "Ethics and the Board Member," featuring

SCHOOL BOARD
BRIEFCASE

- ▲ Oct 7—Runoff Elections
- ▲ Oct 15—New Board Member Workshop
- ▲ Oct. 20, 21, and 23—Regional Meetings
- ▲ Dec. 9-11—ASBA 50th Annual Conference in Little Rock

everyone's favorite example of the "bad" board member, Andy.

To register call ASBA at (800) 482-1212 or (501) 372-1415 or visit our website at www.arsba.org for a downloadable registration form.

50th annual ASBA Conference is Dec. 9-11

ASBA's annual conference is just around the corner. This year's dates are Dec. 9-11 at the Peabody Hotel and Statehouse Convention Center in Little Rock.

The conference could be coinciding with a special legislative session. The Governor has said he may call legislators into session on Dec. 8 to meet the

Supreme Court's Jan. 1 deadline for a plan to address Constitutional issues of educational equity and adequacy.

ASBA believes the biggest challenge before us is to take

substantial steps to bridge the achievement gap among Arkansas students. In that spirit, the theme of this year's conference is

ASBA believes the biggest challenge before us is to take substantial steps to bridge the achievement gap among Arkansas students.

innovative educator and author of *For the Children, Lessons from a Visionary Principal*, will be the featured speaker at the annual ASBA Pinnacle Awards Luncheon during the association's 50th

annual conference, Dec. 9-11 in Little Rock. Cartwright's Dec. 10 address will be one of the conference highlights this year.

One of 13 children who grew up in rural Pennsylvania, Cartwright has an extraordinary story about how she took over a troubled, poverty ravaged inner-city school and turned it completely around. Test scores went up, attendance grew to 92%, and she helped inspire a community where 63% of its families received public assistance to overcome apathy and despair. Her book, *For the Children*, is a battle cry of hope and a
See Conference on page 3

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Conference is Dec. 9-11
Continued from page 4

directive for the right of every child—in the wealthiest suburbs and the most poverty-stricken districts—to attend a school where education, warmth, and encouragement are abundant.

In the heart of the poorest and most dangerous part of the city (North Philadelphia), Cartwright was an elementary school principal for 11 years and while she was there, she writes: “I climbed into their lives, outside the school as well as in the classrooms. I brought them, parents and teachers alike, into a place they had not believed belonged to them and made it a

beacon in their lives. I learned from them, and they learned from me. And together—Together!—we turned our little corner of this cruel and crippling world around. What we did at Blaine can be done at any ... school in America.”

Jim Slaughter, the Virginia parliamentarian who has become a mainstay at our annual conference, will be on hand again this year providing a couple of pre-conference workshops on Dec. 9, and serving as parliamentarian for the annual Delegate Assembly meeting on Dec. 10.

Also on this year’s conference agenda is Michael Resnick, associate executive director of the National School Boards Association, who will talk about No Child Left Behind and other federal legislative issues, and to help strengthen NSBA’s Federal Relations Network efforts by Arkansas school board members.

George Fields, known as “America’s Musical Humorist,” will bring his magical, musical



Virginia parliamentarian Jim Slaughter will return for this year’s conference.

talents to highlight a special reception commemorating ASBA’s 50th Anniversary Conference and to honor Arkansas’s own Carol Brown, president of the National School Boards Association. The reception will be held on Wednesday afternoon, Dec. 10. This year’s ASBA Master Board Award winners will be honored and we will extend invitations to members of the General Assembly, who likely will be in the city for a special legislative session.

Other general session speakers will be announced shortly and plans are being completed to bring you an array of special interest breakout sessions. In addition, the conference will also feature dozens of exhibitors and provide you with opportunities to visit and network with your colleagues from around the state.

More complete conference information and registration forms will be coming to you soon. ***Deadline for making room reservations at the Peabody Hotel is November 9.*** To reserve rooms, call (800) 732-2639.

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Director elections set at 10 Regional Meetings

Continued from page 1

Cathy Allen of Rogers will stand for election for the remaining two years as Region 1 Director. She was appointed in January to assume the seat previously held by Kathy McFetridge of Springdale. McFetridge was elected ASBA Secretary-Treasurer last December, creating the vacancy in Region 1. Allen is the only announced candidate for the position.

Elections in three other regions will be held to fill the balance of terms for Directors' seats recently vacated.

Judy Magness (Region 8) did not seek re-election to the Little Rock Board. There are two years remaining on that term. So far, two candidates have been officially nominated by their boards—Amy Daniel, president of the Benton School Board, and Mildred Tatum, a member

of the Pulaski County School Board.

Betty McGruder (Region 9) resigned her board seat in Hughes to become superintendent of the Weiner School District. One year remains on that term. Two candidates have been nominated for the position—Virginia Holt of Stuttgart and Johnny Lockley of DeWitt.

In Region 12, Donny Chandler resigned from the Spring Hill School Board to prevent any conflict of interest so that his wife could accept a teaching position in the district. There are two years remaining on that term. At present three candidates have been nominated to fill the two years remaining in that term: Jesse Buchanan of the Texarkana School Board, Rev. Jerry Bishop of the Nevada School Board, and Patricia Blake of the Prescott School Board.

Current Region 13 Director Bracy Yarbrough has decided not to seek re-election for a full, three-year term. Wayne Gibson, a member of the El Dorado School Board, is the only announced candidate for the position.

School board members interested in seeking the position should ensure that they have ample time remaining on their local boards to fulfill the ASBA Board obligation. Their local boards should submit a letter of nomination to ASBA President Leland Wells, with a copy to Executive Director Dan Farley, at least 14 days prior to that regional election.

The schedule of Regional Meetings appears below. Please note that some changes have been made from the previously announced schedule.

ASBA Regional Meetings, Fall 2003

OCTOBER	REGION	LOCATION
20	1*	Lincoln School District, 502 EP Rothrock Dr., Lincoln
20	2*	North Arkansas College, Hammerschmidt Conference Center, Harrison
20	4	Western Arkansas Cooperative, 3010 E. Hwy 22, Branch
20	7	Mid-South Community College, Magruder Hall, West Memphis
21	5	Arch Ford Cooperative, 101 Bulldog Dr., Plumerville
21	8*	UCA Campus, Brewer-Hegeman Conference Center, Conway
21	9*	Great Rivers Cooperative, 100 Campus Dr., West Helena
21	12*	U of A Community College at Hope, 2500 S. Main St., Hope
23	3*	Northeast Arkansas Cooperative, 211 W. Hickory, Walnut Ridge
23	6*	ASU-Beebe, Student Center Cafeteria, Beebe
23	10	Arkadelphia High School, 401 High School Rd., Arkadelphia
23	11*	Arkansas River Cooperative, 912 W. 6th St., Pine Bluff
23	13*	Ellis Conference Center, AHEC, 460 W. Oak, El Dorado
23	14*	Southeast Arkansas Cooperative, 1022 Scogin Dr., Monticello

**Denotes election of regional director to ASBA Board.*

Effective home-to-school communication

NSPRA provides an ABCs list of tips and techniques

To build strong schools we must have strong partnerships between families, schools, and the community. Parents and care providers can support that partnership by staying in touch with their children's schools.

The National School Public Relations Association has provided tips and techniques for serving children through great communication.

Ask questions whenever you have a concern. Good schools want involved parents who know what is going on in their schools. Children of involved parents usually perform better in school.

Build your child's confidence with regular communication. Ask your child specific questions about classwork as well as the daily activities of the school. Compliment good effort and encourage questions.

Clarify language that you do not understand. Do not be intimidated by educationese. Ask questions until you are comfortable with your level of understanding.

Dig deeper into your child's homework and understand what is going on. Partner with your child and the teachers to build a home-school learning team. Understand the objectives for the assignments. Read over their assignments and review their homework.

Email your child's teacher or principal. It's a good tool for checking in with your school and getting information. It is not a good tool for resolving conflict.

Follow up with teachers and others at your school. Good com-

munication is an on-going process and a two-way street. Building the relationships between school and home is critical and takes time.

Gather information on how your school works. Keep handbooks and calendars easily accessible. These can be good resources when you need information.

Have patience when trying to reach teachers. Remember that teachers often start classes very early in the day and have responsibilities for children most of their day. Leave voice messages or send

emails. Expect timely, but not immediate responses. If the situation, is urgent, do call the principal or counselor immedi-

ately.

Inform your school and teacher about issues important to your child. Educators want to know as much as possible about your child. Keep them informed about issues that might be important to your child and the learning. Explain special situations or events that might be influencing behavior.

Join parent organizations and school committees. Parents and community members are vital to the process of education. If you are not

sure how to get involved or at what level you can or should be involved, contact your teacher or principal and ask how you can help.

Keep up to date on technology. Many school districts maintain websites that offer everything from the latest news in the school district to lunch menus, student

handbooks, class calendars, class assignments, and much, much more.

Let teachers and principals know that you appreciate good communication. Send of a note of appreciation when you get a note, newsletter, or some other message. Let them know that you are reading those and that you find them helpful. Feel free to offer ideas for improvement or issues that you would like to hear more about.

Meet people whenever you can. Attend Open House, PTA or PTO meetings, and committee meetings. Participate in parent-teacher conferences. Establish a "face to face" relationship with those who are responsible for educating your child.

Never go away feeling confused. Over the course of a child's education, issues arise that can sometimes be emotional. Take the time to discuss the issues and to understand fully what is going on. Don't look for instant solutions. Good communication takes time.

Organize your thoughts and questions before attending school meetings. Make the most of the time that you spend with your child's educators. Consider making a list of key questions for your discussion so that nothing is overlooked.

Provide a good example of communication. What you say and how you say can have a tremendous impact on the attitude and outlook that your child brings to school. Let your child know that you are very concerned about the quality of his or her performance. Be careful about making offhand
See *Good communication on page 12*

Good communication is an on-going process and a two-way street. Building the relationships between school and home is critical and takes time.

Establish a "face to face" relationship with those who are responsible for educating your child.

LELAND WELLS ASBA PRESIDENT



Weathering the storm—together

There are rough seas ahead of us. We must all work together for the best interests of our students. We have to row together as a group or we will miss our mark and never sail our ship into port.

We may not always agree on the details of each of the issues that are before us, but we must all agree to work for the kids. We cannot afford to let our disagreements divide us to the point where we cannot perform the task to which we

were elected.

We must focus on the issues where we do find agreement. Among these are closing the achievement gap. In our state, there are too many children who are not reading, writing, and performing mathematics on grade level. We must direct our resources to teach these children. If our children are not literate and numerate, they cannot compete with those children from other states

who are. Our children deserve the best and we must not settle for less.

In order for us to know how well our children are performing, we must assess their progress. We must measure their progress toward literacy and numeracy based on the criteria that have been established through our curriculum standards. We must also gather information about the academic progress of our children and how they stack up
*See **Working Together** on page 8*

DAN FARLEY ASBA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Where there's a will, there's a way: A new delivery method for Fall Regional Meetings

Since we've all known for much of the year that a special session of the legislature would be called for sometime this fall, we began months ago trying to figure out how we would conduct our regional meetings, which normally run from late-September until early-November. The very nature of trying to conduct 14 separate meetings at 14 separate sites during a period of time we assumed the General Assembly would be meeting left us trying to figure out how we can make all that happen.

Since distance education has been much discussed and because we aren't sure just how many of you have ever had any exposure

to it, we decided that would be the way to go to conduct our annual Fall Regional Meetings. We started to work on setting this up in early-June.

Only within the last few weeks did we learn that the session would not be called until Dec. 8, which, by the way, is the day before our annual conference begins here in Little Rock. Since we contract with many different folks to make the annual conference happen, we did not have the luxury of rescheduling the conference dates (Dec. 9-11).

We have found sites for all of the fall meetings.

Using compressed interactive video (CIV) is certainly new to us

as we try to model the use of technology and give our membership a taste of how it works, but it's certainly not as satisfying as being on site with you. But we take what we have to work with and we try to do the very best job we can. We will treat this no differently and we hope it will be a good experience for everyone.

However, it won't be like it's always been. Kathy and I will be in a studio in Central Arkansas and multiple regions will be meeting simultaneously. Finding the facilities to hold these meetings has been difficult. Many locations that have CIV capability cannot

*See **New Format** on page 8*



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PAUL BLUME ASBA GENERAL COUNSEL

Grievances and other gripes



Back in the winter of aught-one, the Senate Education Committee was wrestling with the idea of whether the law on grievances should be changed to allow only the employee bringing a grievance to a school board hearing to decide whether the hearing was to be open or closed. At that time, the law allowed either the employee or the superintendent to decide: if one wanted the hearing closed, it was closed.

We patiently explained to the Committee that the typical grievance is brought by an employee angry with the principal or superintendent, and giving the employee the sole power of making that decision would simply guarantee a public forum for allowing the principal, *et al.*, to be scolded publicly by the employee.

The Committee gave the bill a "do pass," it was passed by both houses and signed by the governor. Since that time, I have presided over, I think, one grievance hearing in closed session, with the remaining ones being held in public, in which the employee and/or his union representative publicly scolded the principal, *et al.*, in a public forum.

In a mood to help the schools again, and even more, the legislature aimed its sights on the grievance law in the aught-three session. We can't thank them enough.

The helpfulness of the legislature in the new law, Act 1357 of 2003, extends to all. Now, not only may an individual file a grievance, so as to publicly scold the principal, *et al.*, in public, whole groups may do so. Section (a)(1)(B) says, "A group of employees who have the same grievance may file a group grievance."

Not only that, but, casting aside the whole idea that a problem might be resolved at the lowest level possible, without rancor or name-calling, the new law provides that "The right of all parties to be represented by a person of his or her own choosing, but not by a member of a party's immediate family at any level of the procedure" is to be a part of any policy. Hello, adversarial proceeding!

See *Grievances* on page 11

Working together we can provide for our children

Continued from page 6

against students from other states and other regions.

Once we have the data about our students' progress, we must use those data to determine if our teachers are using appropriate teaching methods and if they are teaching the curriculum that the children must learn. We must empower our educators through providing the resources to design a curriculum that will meet the needs of our children as well as design the teaching methods to deliver that curriculum.

We must provide salaries for our educators that will keep our good folks in our schools. In other words, we must provide a substantial enough salary that they will be able to continue teaching rather than leaving to pursue careers that will provide adequate financial

support for their families.

We must provide the kind of quality training that educators need to be able to bring all of our kids to that level of literacy and numeracy that they need to function as citizens in our society as well as to compete in a global market. Our educators deserve the best possible professional development that we can offer because as they improve their skills and implement those new skills in the classroom, our students will learn more and be more successful.

We must provide a solid base of learning as a starting point for our children as they enter school. Early childhood education provides that base by teaching 3- and 4-year olds the skills that they need to be able to learn when they enter kindergarten.

We must be accountable for the funds that we administer. We must be able to show how these monies impact student learning and be able to track how the dollars flow from the budget to the direct sup-

port of learning.

We must maintain our stance for strong local governance. When the locus of government is close to the people, then the community has greater access to that governing body. The public is more likely to support our schools.

We must plan for the schools that we want in the future. We cannot afford to be shortsighted and only look down the road a year or two. Our times, our culture, our economy—all are changing so rapidly, that only planning for the moment will leave us running behind and playing catchup. We must take a leadership role and plan for the schools that we want our children to attend today, tomorrow, and for many tomorrows to come.

These seem to be the issues that unite us. Let's rally around these points and stay the course, row together, and weather these rough seas ahead as a strong association—one that is united for the good of our kids.

New format for Regional Meetings

Continued from page 6

house large numbers, so making it work will require your help and patience and understanding. We have always started the regional meetings with dinner at 6:30 p.m. This year the meetings will begin with dinner at 6:00 p.m. That will provide ample time to have a meal and a short business meeting (including elections for regional directors in several sites) before moving into another part of the facility, or to another (albeit short distance away) location. Time is crucial because the broadcasts will begin promptly at 7:15. There is no variance on that. Your understanding and cooperation will be crucial to make these

meetings happen as smoothly as possible.

Since the annual conference will be happening at the same time as the special legislative session, it will create enormous stress on the few staff we have to be in both places. Again, unusual circumstances bring unusual problems. We are trying to foresee what we can and plan accordingly, but things, as you know, are not usual this year.

The organization has been through some turbulent times in the past and we have weathered them. In fact, the organization has come out of them stronger than it ever was. We took lemons and tried to make lemonade. We're taking the same approach right now. Time and circumstances are not within our control and I'm

taking this opportunity to explain why because you are ASBA and the work we do is for you.

We hope you'll work with us as we try to find the best workable solutions to fit unusual times. So, remember that our 14 meetings will be held on three evenings: Oct. 20, 21 and 23. Check the web site and be looking for information in the mail.

One final thought. The annual New Board Member Workshop is Oct. 15. It will be the first time in our history that we will actually have the workshop before the regional meetings begin. Usually, half of them are finished before the annual orientation for newly elected school board members. See, there's something good in everything.

Study Circles can help build strong family and school ties

Partnerships between schools and families can make all of the difference in a child's educational success. This has been shown over and over in research during the past thirty years. When educators and families support each other at home and at school, children from all backgrounds will achieve more and schools will perform better.

Family involvement in education requires more than just making sure that homework gets done or being involved in a fundraising event, although those are important. It requires a working partnership among families, teachers, administrators, and the whole community.

School improvement efforts are more successful when families understand what is being asked of them. Research also shows that failing to involve families in decisions affecting public education often results in apathy, distrust, or confrontation with schools. When families are engaged in education, however, students perform better, attendance increases, dropout rates are lower and schools are more productive in their missions.

Why should we talk about family involvement in education?

New laws and policies concerning family involvement, such as Act 603 of 2003 and No Child Left Behind (NCLB), are coming at a time when more and more families are pulling away from their involvement in schools. There are many different ideas and views about why families are less involved:

- △ Educators have limited or no training in involving families.
- △ Schools and families have negative school experiences and some do not feel welcome in schools.
- △ Cultural or language barriers make involvement scary for all parties involved.
- △ Some families lack the tools and skills needed to effectively help their

children.

△ Many educators and families do not understand how good family involvement can impact student achievement.

Here is what some people see as the solutions to the problem. They say we need to:

△ assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills and assist schools in understanding families,

△ communicate with families about school programs, student progress, and what families can do at home to help their children,

△ improvement recruitment, training, and provide a variety of schedules to involve families,

△ involve families with their children in learning activities at home,

△ include families as partners in

See Study Circles on page 10

ASBA's Workers' Compensation Trust sponsors workshops to aid in controlling costs

The ASBA Workers' Compensation Trust is sponsoring workshops this fall through each education service cooperative. Workshops will be conducted by the Risk Management Resources concerning management of workers' compensation programs.

Topics will include e-mods/premiums, Rule 32/health and safety plans, controlling fraud, return-to-work programs, claims forms review, reporting procedures/benefits, designated physicians, and non-compliance.

Each training session will begin at 8:00 a.m. and continue through noon. A schedule of locations follows.

For information call Dwayne McAnally with Risk Management Resources at (501) 614-1555.

Managing Workers' Compensation Workshop Schedule

October 1	Northwest Arkansas	Sprngdale
October 3	Western Arkansas	Branch
October 14	North Central Arkansas	Melbourne
October 15	Ozark Unlimited Resources	Harrison
October 21	*Crowley's Ridge	Harrisburg
October 22	Northeast Arkansas	Walnut Ridge
October 23	Arch Ford	Plumerville
October 24	**Wilbur Mills	Beebe
October 29	Arkansas River	Pine Bluff
October 30	Great Rivers	West Helena
November 5	DeQueen/Mena	Gillham
November 6	Dawson	Arkadelphia
November 11	Southeast Arkansas	Monticello
November 12	South Central Arkansas	Camden
November 13	Southwest Arkansas	Hope

*Crowley's Ridge meeting will be held at the Jonesboro Holiday Inn, 3006 Caraway

**Wilbur Mills meeting will be held in the Workforce Education Center at the ASU Beebe campus located at the corner of College and Orange Streets

Study Circles offers way to meet requirements of Act 603

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school decisions and to help them advocate for their children, and
 ▲ coordinate resources and services for families, students, and schools with businesses, agencies and other groups that provide services to the community.

We may disagree about some of these causes and solutions. Finding solutions to these complex problems will not be easy. It will take many different efforts and many different groups working together. But, we must work together for when we fail to educate all of our students, each and every one of us, our families, the communities that we live in, and eventually our whole state will be affected. When schools and families are partners in helping all students become successful, the whole community benefits.

Why should we use study circles to talk about family involvement?

Good communication is essential to finding solutions that work. Study circles promote good communication by:

- ▲ building trust and connections among diverse groups of people,
- ▲ deepening our understanding of why students do or do not, succeed in school,
- ▲ helping people respect each other and listen to different ideas,
- ▲ helping people find common ground for solutions and actions.

Whether your school is struggling or a success story, these elements can help improve your community's schools as well as schools all across our state.

Your school and community may already have special programs to help families become involved in the education of their children. If that is the case, then study circles can help in two ways.

▲ By helping more educators, parents, community members, and others become aware of existing

programs, more individuals may be able to take advantage of them.

▲ By bringing new energy and ideas into current programs, they can expand, improve, and identify needs that have not been met.

If your community does not have successful and strong family involvement programs in place, study circles can be a good way to begin thinking about new programs.

The Arkansas Study Circles Project (ASCP) is ready to work with your community on promoting and organizing dialogue around family involvement. Our new discussion guide, *Building Partnerships with Schools and Families*, will help communities and schools think about what family involvement is and design an effective program that meets and goes beyond what is required by law.

In a study circle, each session builds on the one before it. The sessions in the new guide are arranged to facilitate the discussion.

Session 1: What Does Family Involvement Mean to Each of Us?

In this session, the group will explore family involvement from a personal perspective and explore the National Family Involvement Standards.

Session 2: Why Are So Many Families in Our Schools Not Involved in Our Schools?

This session explores different views on how schools and families relate to each other and what they think their roles and responsibilities should be in the education of children.

Session 3: Picture a Community Where All Schools and Families Are Partners in Helping All Students Do Their Best

During this session, participants will visualize how their school would look if all families are involved in their children's education and they will also define family involvement for themselves.

Session 4: Making a Difference: What Specific Actions Do We Want to Take?

The final session takes information from the three previous sessions and prioritizes specific action ideas for building partnerships between schools and families.

After all of the sessions are over, a large community meeting of all of the study circles and other interested individuals is held. Each circle shares its action ideas, which are collected and recorded. At this forum, people who want to stay involved in the process, sign up to put these ideas into action. Action Forums often produce recommendations to principals, superintendents, school boards, city councils, and legislative committees.

ASBA Executive Director Dan Farley has said, "Study circles are a perfect way for communities to more clearly define parental involvement for their schools and school districts. Questions can be answered, suggestions can be heard, and consensus can be reached on how community members can work with the schools to raise the level of student achievement. The result can be stronger schools and stronger communities."

If you are interested in learning more about how the Arkansas Study Circle Project can help you with this process in your community, please contact Heather Gage or Diane Vibhakar at (800) 482-1212 or email us at studycircles@arsba.org.

*The 50th Annual
Arkansas School
Boards Association
Conference*

December 9 - 11

*Statehouse
Convention Center
and Peabody Hotel*

Grievances have new procedures

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In short, the person bringing the grievance may be represented by a lawyer or union representative, or someone else chosen by the employee (except, say, spouse), to assert the arguments of the employee. Of course, expect escalation of the representation thing: if a teacher or other employee wants to be represented before the principal and/or superintendent, the principal and/or superintendent will want to be represented, too. By whom? Well, the principal may bring in the superintendent, and the superintendent may bring in the principal; but if the employee wants to up the ante at any stage, by bringing in, say, a lawyer or union representative, the administrator's colleague might seem inadequate to meet the challenge. (See? Adversarial.) Then, the superintendent calls a

lawyer and, well, you can guess the rest. And, you could be paying a lawyer for three different levels of the grievance process by the time the matter gets to the board.

Finally, the legislature helped us even more by setting a minimum amount of time during which the grievance must be heard. "At the hearing, the employee shall have an adequate opportunity to present the grievance but no less than 90 minutes, and both parties shall have the opportunity to present and question witnesses."

Okay, I'll admit to some of the blame for this part of the new law. I had the silly, silly notion that most grievances are very simple and can be presented to the Board in, say, 30 to 45 minutes. So, when conducting a grievance hearing, I always suggest putting a limit on the time for presentation. Often the most daunting part of a grievance hearing usually is just to get the employee, *et al.*, to state what they

perceive the problem to be and what they want the board to do about it. Sounds simple, doesn't it? Often it is the most difficult part of the proceedings.

The first draft of that part of the new grievance law required that NO time limit be placed on the presentation of a grievance. The lawmakers did figure out that the complete lack of ability to put a time limit on a board grievance hearing (or anything, for that matter) could cause some problems. They determined that 90 minutes was the magic number. As a minimum, mind you. Not that you elected and unpaid board members have anything else you want to do. Not that you might want to have a meeting of some reasonable length. Well, and I'm not being sarcastic here, I promise, the decision of the legislature to impose a minimum of an hour and a half for the presentation of a grievance was downright solomonic.

The call is to broaden our community

By Kathy Morledge

Recently, I had the pleasure of spending a weekend in the Parthenon community in Newton County. Arkansas is a great state for travel and meeting all kinds of wonderful folks.

On Sunday morning, I arose and went walking along some of the roads. As I walked, I encountered several folks making their way to church or to visit others or a myriad of other excursions. Each waved a cheery "Hello" and one even stopped to ask how things were going. I didn't know any of their names, but I was struck by the sense of community among folks. As I walked, I passed a man who walked over to help a neighbor set up for a special program at the community center. I picked up a piece of paper near a fence that de-

scribed a new bread delivery system. I saw a dozen eggs sticking out of a mail box at the side of the road. There were lots of signs of community. Folks depending on neighbors and being depended on by their neighbors. Economically, all benefitted.

Early every morning I walk in my suburban neighborhood. I pass several others each day and we exchange pleasantries and move on our way. One such morning, a delivery person asked me about an elderly neighbor of mine who seemed to be lost and was standing in the street shaking and frightened. My neighbor has Alzheimers and, indeed, she was disoriented that morning. Several other neighbors came to help as we all assisted her back into her home. Folks helping and depending on each other seems

to be a universal concept.

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines community as a unified body of individuals—people with common interests. The idea of community doesn't have to be limited to a neighborhood or even a town. It could be much larger, but it could still have the same meaning. A group of people working together and sharing common concerns and seeking mutual solutions.

Arkansas, like many states across our country, is facing a crisis in education. We must provide quality education for all of our children. Our economic future depends on it. We need to extend our neighborliness and our sense of community farther than the reaches of our daily walks. We need to focus on all of the state and help each other build a brighter future together.

Good communication can aid learning

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remarks when talking about schools and educators. These could easily be misconstrued by children and miscommunicated to the school.

Question school officials about special programs that may be available for your child. Schools offer a variety of programs and services for children. Investigate to find the ones that would benefit your child.

Read and respond to those many notices that your child brings home. Parents often miss key information that is sent home. Sometimes children forget to pass on the information. Consider you child's daily homecoming like you would checking your answering machine for messages. Always ask, "Do you have any messages for me?"

Spend time learning with your child. One of the best ways to review new learning is to explain or teach it to someone else. Focus your questions on the things that your child found interesting, exciting, fun, or new. Ask questions that allow your child to express his or her feelings about the learning.

Thank your child for sharing. Take the time to express your appreciation for the information that your child has shared with you. The positive reinforcement can keep the information flowing.

Understand school rules—and why they are important. Rules foster fairness, safety, and cooperation. As you discuss the rules with your child, ask him or her to think about the reason for having those rules. Children find rules easier to obey if they know why the rules are there.

Voice concerns only with people who can solve your problem. Don't waste time complaining to someone who can't fix your problem. Ask questions to find out who can help, and then make your request directly to them.

Wade through the red tape if it appears. Good schools are run by good people who want their schools to be responsive; yet, bureaucracies can arise. Recognize that unresponsiveness isn't personal. Be persistent—and polite. The best defense against organizational inaction is parents and

teachers who keep communicating until they get results.

X-out what isn't essential when communicating to others at school. Remember the line from the old TV drama *Dragnet*, "Just the facts, ma'am." Although it is tempting to editorialize when talking with educators, take the high road and focus on what is best for the success of your child in the school.

Yearn to help others help your child succeed. Many people will contribute the success of your child in school. Use sound communication to build relationships to serve your child.

Zero in on the positive messages essential to a great school experience. Don't let your communications be sidetracked by outside issues. Keep people and conversations focused on the outcomes that will mean the most to your child and your school. Use communication to bolster what is right. Don't use communication to dwell on what is wrong.

Arkansas School Boards Association



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