

REPORTER

SEPTEMBER 2003

Volume 22, Number 1

ASBA goes high tech with regional meetings

“Beam me up, Scotty!” Or, should it be, “Beam us in, ASBA!”

The annual ASBA Fall Regional Meetings will be held on Oct. 20, 21, and 23. This year we will host our regular meetings at the locations that are indicated on the schedule on page 3. The meetings will begin promptly at **6 p.m.** (this is 30 minutes earlier than in previous years) with dinner and a brief business meeting. Elections for regional directors will be held in Regions 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, and 14. (See additional story on page 4.) Following the business meeting, the program will begin promptly at **7:15 p.m.** via com-

pressed interactive video (CIV).

Current regional directors will preside over the business meetings. If an election is to be held and the current regional director is running for re-election, a representative from ASBA will be present to conduct the election.

This year punctuality will be very important since the broadcasts will reach four or five regions at the same time. In some locations, the dinner and business meeting will be held in a different room than the broadcast due to technical requirements. Make sure that you understand the arrangements prior to your meeting.

During the broadcast, ASBA’s Dan Farley and Kathy Morledge will be coming to you live from a studio in Maumelle. They will make their remarks and open the floor for questions. We hope that each of you will participate.

At each location, a “techie” will be present to coach you on how to “engage” the camera and microphone. Some of the equipment is sensitive enough to pick up low level sound and movement, so we ask that during the presentations, participants sit as quietly as possible and remain seated so that the cameras are not distracted away from the speakers.

PDK Poll points to difficult times

The 35th annual *Phi Delta Kappan* (PDK)/Gallup Poll of the public’s attitudes toward public schools in the United States revealed the complexity of the relationships among federal, state, and local issues. At a time in our history when change seems to be the demand of the day and money is short in nearly every state, it would seem that the public schools of America are in for more difficult times.

Take schools with strong community support, add in the possibility of stringent state controls due to state supreme court mandates, and

layer on rigid requirements for federal legislation and the task that lies before public schools seems nearly insurmountable.

Attention is directed at efforts to improve student academic achievement, with special emphasis being given to subpopulations such as race, English language learners, special education, and Title I students. The differences in the academic performances of these groups has been dubbed the “achievement gap.” Virtually everyone agrees that the gap must be closed. How this will be achieved

SCHOOL BOARD BRIEF CASE

- ▲ Sept 16—Annual School Elections
- ▲ Oct 7—Runoffs
- ▲ Oct 15—New Board Member Workshop
- ▲ Oct. 20, 21, and 23—Regional Meetings

and who will take responsibility for that closure remains a matter for debate.

The 35th PDK Poll addresses

See *Public* on page 10

New Board Member Workshop scheduled for Oct. 15

Mark your calendars for the annual ASBA New Board Member Workshop. The conference will be held on Oct. 15 at the DoubleTree Hotel in Little Rock.

The workshop provides an orientation to school board service for new school board members and may provide a refresher course for veteran board members. The training meets the state requirement of six hours of inservice training and will be counted toward ASBA's boardmanship program.

Please be sure to bring your parking stub from the DoubleTree parking garage to the registration desk so that it may be stamped and you may receive a discounted parking price. If you are staying overnight at the DoubleTree, be sure to mention that you are with the ASBA meeting for a discount on that also. You must contact the hotel directly for hotel registration. ASBA only registers participants for the workshop.

Pre-registration for the workshop is \$60 per participant

which includes lunch and materials. Pre-registration deadline is Oct. 8. The cost of registration after the deadline is \$70. If your district is electing new board members this year, please feel free to complete the registration form and pay the fees in advance to hold a spot for the new member before the deadline. Simply list that name as "New Board Member." You may call the information into ASBA as soon as you know the name(s). We want everyone to be able to attend.

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Legislators tentatively adopt Adequacy Study

By Diane Vibhakar and Ron Harder

The Joint Committee on Educational Adequacy tentatively approved the Adequacy Report and Proposed Funding Formula on Aug. 18 and 19. It was approved on the condition it could be revised once the committee received requested information from the Arkansas Department of Education. This educational funding plan is focused on:

- ▲ accountability for student performance,
- ▲ performance pay for teachers based on knowledge and skills,
- ▲ program restructuring at all levels,
- ▲ improved instructional practice, and
- ▲ significant resource allocation.

All educational initiatives and their funding are included in the recommendations, which are backed by research evidence on their effectiveness.

Act 64 of 2003, signed into law on Feb. 10, created the Joint Committee on Educational Adequacy (the Adequacy Committee). The committee consisted of five Senators and five Representatives with Arkansas Department of Education Director Ray Simon serving in an ex-officio capacity. The committee's charge was to define an adequate, efficient, and equitable education. It also was charged with making recommendations on what constitutes an adequate education and the costs associated with providing that adequate education to all students in Arkansas. The Adequacy Committee reported its findings to the Joint Education Committee on Aug. 29.

The Adequacy Committee hired the firm of Picus and Associates to assist in this process. They were charged with developing specifications to provide adequate

resources for all public schools in Arkansas that would satisfy the ruling of the Arkansas Supreme Court in the Lake View case. The consultants submitted draft recommendations to the committee on Apr. 7 and met three times with the committee in May to walk members through the details of the recommendations.

The consultants convened two professional judgment panels, comprising a total of 70 Arkansas education leaders, for two days in June. In mid-July, the Adequacy Committee met to review the original report, the recommendations of the state's professional judgment panels, and proposals for a performance pay system for teachers. The Adequacy Committee discussed and modified the recommendations of these two groups.

Dr. Larry Picus, Dr. Allan Odden, Dr. Marc J. Wallace, and Dr. Mark Fermanich of Picus and Associates, presented the Adequacy Report and Proposed Funding Formula for final review at the August meeting. The tentative price tag is \$847 million over the current state and local education expenditures. This does not include any estimates on facilities. It is significant, however, that the Adequacy Committee was able to work through its enormous task and come to a basic agreement on what is, and how to provide, an adequate education.

While the consultants have helped the Adequacy Committee shape these recommendations, the final recommendations will be those of the committee and not the consultants. The Adequacy Committee adopted a definition of educational adequacy that included the current accountability standards of 38 courses in high school, the state's curriculum

frameworks, and the state's testing system including the proficiency levels for student performance. This definition serves as a basis for identifying the resources required for adequate funding. The consultants have pointed out that it is the state's responsibility, via a solidly enforced accountability system, to ensure high quality courses that are taught by highly qualified teachers.

To provide this adequate education system will take time, effort, and money to develop the infrastructure necessary to give schools and teachers the support they will need to be successful. It is likely that several of the components of the plan will have to be phased in over time. The Adequacy Committee has proposed allowing development of a plan to phase in this program over a period not to exceed two bienniums.

The Adequacy Report has several major points:

- ▲ Performance pay structure for teachers where increases in base pay for teachers would depend on a teacher demonstrating a mastery of certain instructional skills that lead to an increase in student achievement, rather than years of experience. This is called a Knowledge and Skills-Based Salary Schedule. Teachers would be paid for their knowledge, skills, and instructional expertise.
- ▲ Schools would earn bonuses to be distributed to faculty for improving student achievement towards state performance goals.
- ▲ Incentive funding to attract quality teachers to specific hard to fill geographic and specialty areas.
- ▲ The minimum starting salary would be significantly raised to slightly above the Southern Region Education Board (SREB) average.

See *Adequacy* on Page 5

ASBA Regional Meetings, Fall 2003

OCTOBER	REGION	LOCATION
20	1	Lincoln School District, 502 EP Rothrock Dr., Lincoln
20	2*	OUR Cooperative, 525 Old Bellefont Rd., Harrison
20	4	Western Arkansas Cooperative, 3010 E. Hwy 22, Branch
20	13*	South Central Cooperative, 440 Maul Rd., Camden
21	5	Arch Ford Cooperative, 101 Bulldog Dr., Plumerville
21	6*	Wilbur Mills Cooperative, 135 N. Main St., Beebe
21	9*	Great Rivers Cooperative, 1000 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	10	Arkadelphia High School, 401 High School Rd., Arkadelphia
23	11*	Arkansas River Cooperative, 912 W. 6th St., Pine Bluff
23	14*	Southeast Arkansas Cooperative, 1022 Scogin Dr., Monticello

DATES AND LOCATIONS TO BE ANNOUNCED

REGION

7

8*

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

Elections set for nine Regional Meetings

There will be elections for ASBA Regional Directors at nine of the Fall Regional Meetings. Directors from six of the regions are eligible to be re-elected to second three-year terms. Those include: Donna Braymer, Region 2; Fran Haines, Region 3; Ray Edwards, Region 6; Dr. Chuck Kauffman, Region 11; Bracy Yarbrough, Region 13, and Arnell Washington, Region 14.

Elections in the other three regions are necessitated by vacancies. Judy Magness, Region 8, is not running for re-election on her local board. Betty McGruder, Region 9, and Donny Chandler, Region 12, have both resigned from their local boards. There are two years

remaining on the terms for Regions 8 and 12. One year remains on the term in Region 9.

Article II, Section 5 of the ASBA Bylaws states: "A person desiring to serve as a Regional Director of ASBA shall have a letter of nomination from his/her local school board. The Letter of Nomination for a Regional Director shall be mailed to the President of ASBA with a copy to the Executive Director. This letter must be received 14 days before the Regional Meeting in which the election will be held."

The Bylaws also state that "regardless of the number of member-board members present at the Re-

gional Meeting, only one vote may be cast by each member-board."

OFFICERS

The association's president-elect is elected at the annual meeting of the ASBA Delegate Assembly and serves until the next year when he/she automatically accedes to the presidency.

Section 2: "Persons desiring to serve as President-elect, Vice President, or Secretary-Treasurer shall mail a Letter of Nomination from their local school board to the President of ASBA, with a copy to the Executive Director, at least 30 days before the date of the annual meeting of the Delegate Assembly."

Adequacy Report released by consultants

Adequacy continued from page 3

▲ Increase of five more contract days to be used for professional development for teachers (10 total).

▲ All school faculties will have ongoing, effective professional development provided by site-based instructional facilitators/coaches/mentors. Time for collaborative planning, job-embedded professional development, and ongoing curriculum development and review should be allocated each day for teachers. This should include extensive coaching in each teacher's classroom for all faculty, should focus heavily on content and curriculum, and be aligned with the state/district content standards and student tests. Each teacher should receive from 100 to 200 hours of job-embedded professional development annually.

▲ To implement the effective school models on which the cost figures are calculated, most schools will need to examine their organizational structure to enable them to reallocate both old and new resources to create a more effective, school-wide educational program.

▲ The funding formula for the new system is based on every district levying 25 mills that are termed "pure." This means they would be strictly Maintenance and Operation mills with no debt service or supplemental mills. The state would be responsible for providing funding beyond what the 25 mills produced that would be necessary to provide the defined adequate education model.

▲ Prototypical school models for elementary, middle, and high school were developed and funding for all schools will be based on these models. Funding would be prorated based on size.

▲ Little, if any, fiscal subsidy for small schools will be provided. All schools will be funded according to the same model, with no minimum numbers of teachers.

▲ All schools will be accountable for improving student performance as measured by the state's testing system.

The Adequacy Report focused on improving schooling in the years before high school to enhance the chances of all students completing high school successfully. These recommendations include:

▲ Expanded preschool programs for all students age 3 and 4 from families with an income at 200 percent above the poverty level or below, and

▲ Reduced class sizes in grades K-3 to 15 students per one teacher.

Research shows that the two early childhood strategies have substantial short and long-term positive impacts on student performance. Preschool is known to provide an \$8.00 to \$10.00 return for each dollar spent.

The effective schools models, which determines the large part of the price tag, is focused on dramatically improving instruction, both through its professional development elements and its performance pay structure. Studies show that the improved classroom instruction produces improved student achievement – the goal of an adequate education system.

In their final statements before the committee, Picus said the adequacy model is based on the

best current research that helps children learn. He said that properly run with well trained teachers and if implemented well, he predicts that in five years people will be visiting Arkansas. Odden agreed that if implemented well, Arkansas will be on the cutting edge. He felt the committee had worked long and hard, gone through a great process which had resulted in a good proposal. Wallace followed by saying this is the first step of a long process and that it will be a big challenge to pilot the process to improve teaching and learning.

Sen. Jim Argue closed the meeting by commenting, "This could be a moment that impacts the lives of generation after generation of kids in all districts. The potential impact is amazing!"

Diane Vibhakar is the Coordinator for the Arkansas Study Circles Project and Ron Harder is the Director of the ASBA Policy Service. Both work with ASBA on the legislative team.

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LELAND WELLS ASBA PRESIDENT**ASBA Legislative team works hard for Arkansas school boards**

Welcome back to another school year. It seems like the last one just ended and here we are again starting a new one.

What a summer it has been. Our ASBA legislative team has been monitoring the Joint Committee on Adequacy in Public Education all summer. They have represented us well. What a stir ASBA created when our team displayed a "Red Dot" map that showed the top and bottom literacy and math Bench-

mark and End-of-Course exam scores as they were reported on July 31 in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*. The team used red dots to indicate the "bottom" scores and green dots to indicate the "top" scores. To no one's surprise, the Delta held the greatest number of red dots. One of the legislators was heard a few days later referring to the "Red Dot Factor" of poverty in the Delta. The ASBA team held that all students deserve a quality edu-

cation and that if we are going to provide that for all children we must improve in all of our schools.

At that same presentation, the team discussed the idea that researchers have said that what appears to be the most important factor in a child's classroom experience is the effectiveness of the teacher. ASBA proposed to expand professional development for teachers and to provide more tech-

See **Look** on page 8

DAN FARLEY ASBA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**Poverty and adult illiteracy compound problems facing public education**

Conversations about the "achievement gap" in Arkansas often end up being conversations about race. The reality, however, is that the gap is more tied to poverty than any other single factor, and poverty isn't limited to any particular ethnic group.

Another factor is one we rarely hear articulated, but a recent NBC news program hosted by Tom Brokaw, looked at adult illiteracy in the U.S. The numbers were staggering. We assume a middle class view of literacy and we show little tolerance or understanding of the adult who is functionally illiterate. Unfortunately, illiteracy in Arkansas is a real problem, often compounded with poverty.

During the infinite deliberations on education during these last two

years, we have repeatedly heard that everyone must be accountable in the education of our young people. That list includes, of course, the school personnel, particularly teachers. It also often includes students and parents. I couldn't agree more, but parents who cannot read also cannot help their students with their homework, or read to them, or interpret a note to them from the teacher. Many of those same people are so embarrassed and ashamed of their inability to read that they try to conceal that fact from others, including their own children.

The NBC program really got me thinking about the problems that we are trying to confront in our own state. I thought about the three

filters we use at ASBA, particularly the second one: Does it help to build an education ethic in our state?

Like poverty, illiteracy tends to be generational, handed down, so to speak. In fact, parents who had little education often send the message to their kids that school isn't that important. Perhaps because their own school experience was so negative, they have few expectations and place little value on school or schoolwork. And so the cycle continues.

To bridge the achievement gap is our most important mission as a state. To do that, we need to acknowledge that poverty is indeed the biggest obstacle we have to overcome. Getting

See **Youngest** on page 8

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PAUL BLUME ASBA GENERAL COUNSEL

What can school personnel search and seize?

Ya know, some time back, I mentioned that my faithful shedding canine, Mary Margaret the Wonder Pooch, told me that a good sniff would take care of a lot of student search problems. Although I expressed reservations about such a procedure, pointing out that it is not permissible to allow a dope-sniffing dog to sniff kids, Mary Margaret is not really off the mark. There are circumstances when a good pooch-sniff can do wonders.

There are different kinds of student searches, some requiring individualized suspicion of a particular student, and others which can be done on a bunch of kids at a time.

Since we've been over the general law on searches in the not-too-distant past, let's stick with just a few this month: backpacks, purses and pockets; and vehicles.

Okay, let's review: In the last column on searches, I pointed out how judges love things to be reasonable, so they talk about reasonableness a lot. For example, if a student has a reasonable expectation of privacy in a certain thing or area, you may not search that thing or area unless you have reasonable suspicion that there is something in that thing or area that shouldn't be there. (Remember that? Of course you do). Do you wonder what the heck I'm talking about? (Of course you do). Let's look at the difference in searches of students and things which are not students such as vehicles.

Most girls and ladies have a reasonable expectation of privacy in their purses. That is, they expect that you won't go looking around in there, unless you are told it's okay. Same with guys' pockets. Book bags usually are like purses: don't go looking in there unless you want to lose a hand or have your nose moved from the front of your head. That's an expectation of privacy, and most of us would agree that expectation is reasonable (thereby making judges happy. Reasonably happy).

However, what if, say, your principal has information from a fairly reliable source that a student, say Bill, has some green vegetable material (marijuana

See *Reasonable* on page 9

New look at learning resources

Look continued from page 7

nical resources for teachers to use as they implement new skills.

The staff has been working on re-designing our annual Fall Regional Meetings. Because the special session was originally tentatively scheduled to begin in September, the ASBA staff went to work to find an alternative to the method that we have used to deliver these events. It certainly would have been nearly impossible for the staff to have been on the road for regional meetings and at the Capitol every day also. The idea arose to host these meetings via compressed interactive

video or CIV.

What a great idea!

With CIV we can see firsthand one of the ways that distance learning works. As this column is being written, nearly every site has been secured and the plans are moving forward. Dan and Kathy will present from a studio in Maumelle and they will be able to interact with us for a question and answer session. Another great bonus with this method is that we will also be able to interact with school board members from other regions who are meeting on the same night.

We should begin with our youngest

Youngest continued from page 7

children whose lives are at risk because of generational poverty into early childhood programs is one way we can begin to combat its ill effects. Helping those children's parents improve their own literacy skills and teaching them how they can be active partners in their kids' education would be another step in the long march we must make to transform our state's education ethic. After

all, how can you value what you've never known?

As is clear in the Lake View decisions, we have an obligation to all the children of our state to provide them with a meaningful education. We must begin to think of all Arkansas children as our own because our collective future is directly tied to their success. If it means we must pay more to educate those most in need, then it is a moral imperative that we do so.

'Dr. Dan Award' honors contributions to public education

Whom do you know in your school or community who has contributed significantly to promoting public education?

Nomination forms for the Dr. Daniel L. Pilkinton Award for Outstanding Service to Public Education will be sent to all ASBA member-board presidents and superintendents.

The award will be presented at the conference in December. An outstanding board member, administrator, teacher, principal, school attorney or other school employee, or community member, whose service

to public schools deserves attention will be recognized.

Past winners are: C.B. Garrison, Richard Carvell, James Laird, George Jones, John Sawyer, Phil Phillips, Jr., E. W. (Earl) Park, Ron Harder, Dr. Benny Gooden, Kathy McFetridge, and Virginia Holt.

The nomination deadline is Oct. 31. A committee will review the nominees and select this year's recipient. To request a form, contact us at (800) 482-1212 or at www.arsba.org.

Nominations may be made by ASBA-member school boards, superintendents, or by individual school board members.

New Study Circles guide engages families

ASBA Vice President John Young, stated that his reason for wanting to keep the public involved is simple, "When people don't know what is going on they are naturally skeptical. That skepticism eventually evolves into resentment. Nothing positive can be accomplished within an atmosphere of resentment." This is especially true for family involvement and ASBA is taking this seriously.

The Arkansas Study Circles Project, a program of ASBA, has developed a discussion guide to help schools, families, and communities participate in dialogue that can lead to increased family involvement in a child's education. The discussion guide, "*Building Partnerships with Schools and Families*", assists study circle groups by walking through steps that will help them understand the barriers between school and family partnerships and the variety of ways to overcome them. Most importantly, the dialogue can help communities define what family involvement means to them.

With the enactment of Act 603 during the regular legislative session, all schools and school district must develop a "parent involvement plan". The Arkansas Study Circles Project invites you to contact us to learn how study circles can help your school gain the support needed for family involvement. Even though the deadline has passed for submitting the plans to the Department of Education, it is critical to bring your community together to understand what the needs and desires of the community are in regards to family involvement. A corollary to Young's opinion is that people will support what they help build. For more information call Heather Gage or Diane Vibhakar at 1-800-482-1212.

The battle of the bulging backpack is back at school

Bulging backpacks have become a familiar sight in schools around the country. While students may consider them a nuisance, many parents and doctors are starting to see them as an occupational hazard.

In a recent survey conducted by the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS), some 58 percent of orthopedists reported seeing patients complaining of back and shoulder pain brought on by heavy backpacks. Seven out of 10 said backpacks are causing children muscle fatigue problems that usually don't occur until later in adult life.

The doctor-recommended formula for preventing back problems: No more than 20 percent of body weight, and even lighter for small children. In an age of bloated, five-pound textbooks, that formula may be hard to adhere to, so rolling backpacks can be a good solution.

If the backpack is used, here are some other tips from the doctors to make it more comfortable:

- ▲ Use a hip strap for heavier weights.
- ▲ Use a pack with padded wide straps and a padded back.
- ▲ Use the pack properly — wear both of the straps, firmly tight-

ened, to hold the pack two inches above the waist.

▲ Engage in exercises, suggested by a physician, to condition back muscles.

▲ Use correct lifting techniques.

▲ Place the heaviest items close to the student's back.

▲ Try to make frequent trips to lockers between classes to replace books.

▲ When possible, consider purchasing duplicates of some books for home.

Source: American Federation of Teachers at <http://www.aft.org/parentpage/index.html>.

Reasonable expectation of privacy must guide decisions

Reasonable continued from page 8

to those of you who have never been in court while the stuff is being discussed) in a baggie, stuffed in between the pages of his otherwise never-opened World History book. That's reasonable suspicion, and the principal can look into Bill's book bag. Now, as for Bill's girlfriend, the lovely and intelligent Sally, although she has used disastrously poor judgment in dating Bill, that does not give the principal the right to look into Sally's purse. No one has even suggested that she has anything in her purse that shouldn't be there. Ergo, there is no reasonable suspicion that Sally is holding some green vegetable material which could be of interest to law enforcement and/or the principal. If the principal looks into Sally's purse, he has violated her Fourth Amendment right to be free from unreasonable searches and seizures. Her daddy will sue you and then buy Sally another new BMW to stop her sobs caused by the horror of it all. ("My purse, daddy! He looked in my purse!")

"Fine," you're thinking. "But, Paul, what about the book bags at our school? We require all book

bags to be see-through, either mesh or clear plastic. What about that?" Well, that's different. In that situation, the students have no more expectation of privacy than Wonder Woman does in her airplane.

Well, then. What about vehicles? Generally speaking, a student who drives to school has little or no reasonable expectation of privacy in the vehicle. Although we may not allow a dope-sniffing pooch to sniff any student, even Bill, we may allow the cars and trucks on the parking lot to be sniffed. We may even open trunks or toolboxes.

In a case out of Indiana, "a dog duly trained and certified in exploratory sniffing" alerted on a truck in the school parking lot. That meant that the duly trained and certified dog might have detected the odor of green vegetable material in the truck during his exploratory sniffing, so the school officials went to work. They found no green vegetable material or any other recreational substances; but,

in the locked toolbox in the bed of the truck, they found a machete. The school officials, upon seeing the machete, said that "it was 'immediately apparent' that the machete was an illegal knife under the school district rules." Bundick vs. Bay City Independent School Dis-

The judge said that the search was legal; and, the fact that the school people weren't looking for machetes . . . didn't mean that the folks doing the search had to look away at the sight of a knife which did not comport with school rules.

trict, 140 F.Supp. 735, 738 (N.D. Ind. 2000). The truck's owner (who was also the owner of the machete which did not comply with school district rules for knives) sued the school

district. The judge said that the search was legal; and, the fact that the school people weren't looking for machetes or any other type of cutlery didn't mean that the folks doing the search had to look away at the sight of a knife which did not comport with school rules. Amazing what people will sue over.

Well, Mary Margaret is feeling pretty spunky since she thinks her "sniffing theory" of student searches was vindicated. So, I have to go find some treats for her. She'll never let me forget this.

Public has high regard, wants needed improvement

Public continued from page 1

many of these concerns. Data collected from respondents to the poll, revealed several major findings.

The public has a high regard for public schools, wants needed improvement to come through those schools, and has little interest in seeking alternatives.

Nationally, the number of respondents assigning an A or B to schools in their community is 48%. For public school parents, the number assigning an A or B rises to 55%, and 68% of the parents who responded rated the school of their oldest child as an A or B.

Nationally, the number of respondents who believe that reform should come through the existing public schools is 73% which is up 4 points from 69% in the 2002 poll. The number of those seeking an alternative to the existing public school system is down to 25% in 2003 from 27% in 2002.

The public sees itself as uninformed on the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, with 69% saying they lack information needed to say whether their impression of the act is favorable or unfavorable. Forty percent say that they know very little with an additional 36% saying that they know nothing at all about the act. Surprisingly, parents of public school children consider themselves just as uninformed as others.

When asked about the strategies that are used in NCLB, survey participants showed little support for the methods that will be implemented.

▲ Who should have the greatest influence in deciding what is taught in public schools?

Federal government	15%
State government	22%
Local government	61%
Don't know	2%

▲ Which is the better way to judge the job that a school is doing?

Whether students meet a fixed standard	14%
----------------------------------------	-----

Whether students show reasonable improvement from where they are

84%

Don't know 2%

▲ Will a single test provide a fair picture of whether or not a school needs improvement?

Yes, will provide a fair picture 32%

No, will not provide a fair picture 66%

Don't know 2%

▲ Will a test covering only English and math provide a fair picture of whether a school is in need of improvement, or should the test be based on other subjects also?

Test covering only English and math would provide a fair picture of whether a school is in need of improvement 15%

Test should be based on other subjects also 83%

Don't know 2%

▲ Is it possible to accurately judge a student's proficiency in English or math on the basis of a single test?

Yes 26%

No 72%

Don't know 2%

▲ NCLB allows parents of a child in a public school in need of improvement to select another school in the same school district that is identified as not in need of improvement. Just as an impression, would parents in your community have enough information about the local schools to be able to select a school that is not in need of improvement?

Yes, have enough information 47%

No, do not have enough information 49%

Don't know 4%

▲ If your child was failing in his or her school, which kind of tutoring would you prefer—tutoring provided by teachers in your child's school or tutoring provided by an outside agency that you would se-

lect from a state-approved list?

Tutoring provided by teachers in child's school 52%

Tutoring provided by outside agency 45%

Don't know 3%

NCLB requires that every classroom have a highly qualified teacher by the beginning of the 2005-06 school year. When surveyed about whether their district has trouble getting good teachers, 61% stated that their district has a hard time and 37% said that their district did not. Sixty-six percent of the respondents stated that their district has a difficult time keeping good teachers and 31% said that their districts did not.

Most survey participants agreed that teacher salaries are too low. Of those surveyed, 6% said that salaries are too high, 59% said those were too low, 33% said those were just about right, and 2% said that they did not know. These data have changed dramatically over the years since 1969.

There is a recognized achievement gap between white students and black and Hispanic students, with white students consistently outperforming black and Hispanic students. Nationally, 90% of the respondents believed that it is very important or somewhat important to close this gap. However, 80% of the respondents attributed this gap mostly to factors other than the quality of schooling. When asked whether they believed it was possible to narrow the achievement gap between white students and black and Hispanic students without spending any more money than is currently being spent to help low-achieving students, 58% of the respondents said that is possible and 39% said that it is not possible to narrow that gap without spending more money.

Survey participants ranked parent involvement and home life and upbringing as the most impor-

tant factors that contribute to the achievement gap. These were followed closely by interest on the part of the students themselves and community environment. Other factors that were rated by participants were racial bias and family income.

When participants were surveyed concerning whether they favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense, 60% oppose such an option. The United States Supreme Court ruled last year that the Constitution does not prevent states from offering vouchers that parents can use to send their students to private schools at public expense. When surveyed about whether they favored or opposed this idea, 56% of the respondents opposed such vouchers. Forty-eight percent of those surveyed felt that vouchers would not improve student achievement and 48% believed that they would.

The public was surveyed about what they believed were the biggest problems that public schools

of their communities must deal with. Based upon a list that was read to them, they identified lack of funding as the number one concern. The second highest rated concern was lack of discipline followed by overcrowded schools, use of drugs, difficulty getting good/quality teachers, standards, fighting/violence/gangs, and low pay for teachers.

Pollees were asked their opinion of the better way for their state to fund the public schools—provide equal dollars per student or vary the number of dollars to meet each student's educational needs. Fifty-two percent said that each student should receive equal dollars and 45% believed that the dollars should vary.

When read a list of reasons why students fail to learn, the respondents identified lack of parental support as the number one reason. This was followed by lack of student interest in learning, lack of discipline, lack of good teaching, lack of funding, and lack of community emphasis on education.

If you would like to read more about the survey, you may visit the

website at <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0309pol.htm>. A summary of the annual *Phi Delta Kappan* Gallup Poll appears in the September 2003 issue of the magazine.

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Where is the neglected "R?"

The writing weaknesses of incoming college students cost our campuses up to \$1 billion annually. And business leaders complain about the writing skills of new employees says a new report, "The Neglected 'R': The Need for a Writing Revolution," produced by the National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges. The report cites statistics to show how writing is falling by the wayside:

▲Most fourth-grade students spend less than three hours

Most fourth-grade students spend less than three hours writing per week, which is approximately 15 percent of the time they spend watching television.

writing per week, which is approximately 15 percent of the time they spend watching television.

▲Nearly 66 percent of high school seniors do not write a three-page paper as often as once a month for their English teachers.

▲Seventy-five percent of seniors never receive a writing assignment in history or social studies.

▲The senior research project has become an educational curiosity, something rarely assigned because teachers do not

have time to correct such projects.

▲Recent analyses indicate that by the first year of college, more than 50 percent of freshman classes are unable to produce papers relatively free of language errors or to analyze arguments or synthesize information.

Among other recommendations, "The Neglected 'R'" suggests that schools should double the amount of time that students spend writing, include writing across the curriculum and require more out-of-school homework writing assignments.

To view a full copy of the report, go to www.writingcommission.org. Source: National School Public Relations Association, www.nspr.org.

Leading with our minds and our hearts

By Kathy Morledge

Another school year has started and I always get excited when that happens. Somehow I never got over that schoolgirl feeling of starting over and starting new with a fresh slate for the new school year. Back then, I couldn't think of much more than who my teacher was going to be and who would sit next to me and could I really learn what the teacher expected of me. I sure wasn't thinking of next year or even tomorrow—just whatever was happening at that moment.

I still see that excitement in the faces of the children as they head off to school with their new folders and pencils and backpacks and clean tennis shoes. They seem to have that same sense of expectation and nervousness. They are not really sure what is just over the horizon, but they are trusting that the adults are already there to help them make their foray into the world a safe and productive one.

As the "big people" head into another school year, we are faced with new horizons also. We know that the face of education is changing and we are in the throes

of tumultuous events.

We have choices about how we face those changes.

We can face them with fear and dread that our world of education may be so radically different in the future that we can't even imagine what it will be like.

We could rant and rave about the changes and demand that everything stay the same.

We could charge headlong into the future without much thought about what kinds of changes need to be made.

We could accept that whatever comes is whatever it is and feel helpless in the process.

Or, we could face the challenges with our minds and our hearts set on doing the best that we can for our children, knowing that our children trust us and expect us to make the world a better place for them.

With our minds, we must decide what we believe is best for the children that we serve—all of the children. Yes, we should focus on the children in our specific schools and school districts, but we must also realize that unless all of our children in our state succeed, we

will doom ourselves to failure.

Without statewide academic improvement, our state cannot pull itself out of the quagmire of poor economics. Our academic poverty is sending us deeper into economic poverty. We must educate ourselves first on what it is that our schools must do to compete nationally and globally in the marketplace and then we must design our schools to be those high performing centers of academic excellence.

We must look into the future—not just three years or five years, but 10, 15, and 20 years and plan for the schools that we need then. We cannot afford to be shortsighted or we will be caught short.

With our hearts, we must accept that change is inevitable. Pain is optional. We can mourn the changes of our times and long for "the good ol' days," but only for a brief time, because the work is calling us to be strong leaders in these tough times. We must work with our hands open to others—ready to help them and accept help from them.

Arkansans have always risen to challenges. We will rise to this one also. We must. Our children are depending on us to lead them.

Arkansas School Boards Association

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