

REPORTER

SUMMER 2003

Volume 21, Number 10

'Is it well with the children?'

By Kathy Morledge

How does a group go about making decisions? Are those decisions based on "gut" feelings? Are those decisions based on criteria? How much discussion or thought goes into each decision?

At the Arkansas School Boards Association (ASBA), we have to make many decisions that have an impact not only on the operation of our organization, but, more importantly, on the education of the children of our state. Certainly, we use our mission statement and our beliefs as our guide, but what are those specific criteria that are used to critically view issues such as those that we face during a legislative session?

The first filter or question that is always asked is, "Is it good for kids?" If we cannot answer unequivocally, "Yes," then there is no point in wasting any resources on the issue. The mission of our organization

involves pursuit of academic excellence. How could we support anything that we cannot say for sure is good for kids? There is too much competition for precious resources to waste those on programs that will not benefit the kids.

The principal of a dynamic, economically depressed school in which test scores were rising, parents were becoming involved in ways that had never occurred before, discipline incidents were declining—in other words, a school that had turned around—was asked to implement a curriculum that would promote drug refusal skills for kids. The expensive curriculum would be

free to the school and the teachers would receive extensive training. The principal refused to accept the program. Why? It wasn't good for her kids. You see, this was a middle school and the curriculum was designed for lower elementary students. It wasn't good for her kids; however, she did refer the person to the elementary school down the

road where her students attended before coming to her middle school. The first and most important question must always be, "Is it good for the kids?"

The second filter that we consider is, "Will it build an education ethic for the community?" That one is a bit harder to understand.

As Americans, we understand the work ethic. We understand that hard work is valued. We look for ways to increase our productivity and save time. We work long hours and take short, if any, vacations. We value work and es-

See Good on page 3

"Is it good for kids?" If we cannot answer unequivocally, "Yes," then there is no point in wasting resources on the issue.

SCHOOL BOARD BRIEF CASE

- ▲ July 16-19—NSBA Southern Region Conference in Savannah, GA
- ▲ July 21—ASBA Distance Learning featuring Staff Attorney Kristen Gould, "Board Meetings from A to Z"
- ▲ Sept 10—Law Seminar
- ▲ Oct 15—New Board Member Workshop
- ▲ Oct. 20, 21, and 23—Regional Meetings

ASBA Corporate Members



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(501) 312-8042

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North Little Rock, AR 72114
(501) 376-9776

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10220 W. Markham, Ste. 201-B
Little Rock, AR 72205
(501) 228-0300

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Little Rock, AR 72204
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Hillcrest Sta.
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Little Rock, AR 72201
(501) 378-3337

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Stuttgart, AR 72160
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Jonesboro Roofing Co. Inc.
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(870) 935-4221

Laidlaw Education Services
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Little Rock, AR 72201
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Van Buren, AR 72957
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Inc.**
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Little Rock, AR 72212
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Chippewa Falls, WI 54729
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1519 Market Place
Jonesboro, AR 72202
(870) 972-6158

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3600 Cantrell Road, Ste. 301
Little Rock, AR 72202
(501) 801-3720

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Little Rock, AR 72225
(501) 614-1142

**School and Office Products of
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P. O. Box 26015
Little Rock, AR 72221-6015
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Graham, TX 76450
(940) 549-0733

Good for kids, education ethic, accountability

pecially hard work.

continued from Page 1

Do we value education? It has been said that if you want to know what a person truly values, look at their checkbook register. Where your treasure lies, there is your heart also. Are our hearts and our resources in education?

The Masai people of Africa are a warring culture. They pride themselves on being fierce warriors; however, they treasure and value their children. When literally translated, the meaning of their word for greeting one another means, "Is it well with the children?" The Masai believe that if all is well with their children, their vil-

lage is doing well.

If an education ethic exists in a community, the children are highly treasured and valued. Schools are supported by the entire community. The economic success of a community is directly related to the success of its schools. In communities where the children and the school are valued, the communities fare well. That is what building an education ethic is all about.

The third filter through which issues or ideas must pass is, "Will everyone be held appropriately accountable?"

In education we often fall victim to the "Trickle Down Theory of Education" when it comes to accountability. We just don't seem to want to shoulder our part of the responsibility. Sometimes it sounds something like this:

College Professor:

Such ignorance in a pupil is a shame; Lack of preparation at the high school is to blame.

High School Teacher:

Good heavens, this boy sure is a fool; The fault lies, of course, at the middle school.

Middle School Teacher:

From such stupidity may I be spared; They send them to me so unprepared.

Elementary School Teacher:

Such lack of training never did I see; What kind of woman must his mother be?

Mother: Poor helpless child; he's not to blame; His father's people were the same.

Father: I have so much trouble keeping him in line; I doubt the rascal's even mine!

Or perhaps we just simply spin the Blame Game wheel like those on a game show. Only, this wheel is labeled with "Parents," "Administrators," "Teachers," "School Board," "Students," and "Communi-

nity." Wherever the marker lands is the group that gets saddled with accountability today!

Accountability for education belongs to all of us. It is more than just holding someone's feet to the fire. It is also a willingness to step up to the plate and take a swing at the ball. We all must play our part.

We must consider whether or not a program or idea will promote accountability for all. We must ask ourselves to look at the hard data, consider the facts, and make a sound decision—one that benefits the children even if it is an unpopular one among some groups.

These filters have served ASBA well over the past few months as we have considered tough issues. We believe that we always land on the side of the kids. As long as we keep our focus on the kids and put their education needs first, we believe that we will be building that education ethic and that when we ask one another, "Is it well with the children," our response will be, "Yes, and it's getting better all the time."

Sport Court

700 Minton Road
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(501) 316-2255

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111 Center Street
Little Rock, AR 72203
(501) 377-2306

Student Athletic Protection, Inc.

3207 Stadium Drive, #7
Kalamazoo, MI 49008
(800) 232-1579

Harrison Trane

1501 Westpark Dr., #9
Little Rock, AR 72204
(501) 661-0621

USAbLe Life

P. O. Box 1650
Little Rock, AR 72203
(501) 378-3362

VIRCO

P. O. Box 5000
Conway, AR 72032
(501) 329-2901

Ward Transportation Services, Inc.

P. O. Box 1466
Conway, AR 72033
(501) 329-9874

Wittenberg, Delony & Davidson, Inc.

400 West Capitol Ave., #1800
Little Rock, AR 72201
(501) 376-6681

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Education scholarship fund honors former director, recognizes outstanding students

Five graduating high seniors who are children of Arkansas school board members will receive Arkansas School Boards Association's 2003 Educational Foundation Scholarships.

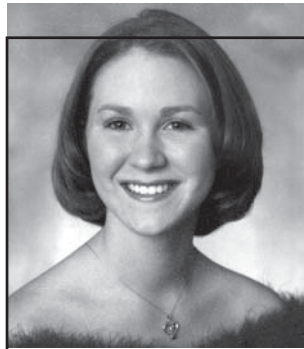
The recipients of the \$500, one-year grants are Linda Donelle Bartley of Bradford, Lyndsey Jackson of Harmony Grove-Benton, Sarah Van Bebber of Springdale, Greg Northen of Jessieville, and Adam Buerkle of Stuttgart. These young people were chosen from an outstanding field of 46 applicants. One student is chosen from each Congressional district plus one student at large.

The competitive program, which was created to recognize the academic achievement of students whose parents serve on local school boards in Arkansas, is in its 11th year. Gifts honoring ASBA Director J. K. Williams upon his retirement in 1992 were donated to establish the scholarship fund.

Like the previous 41 winners, this year's recipients are outstanding young folks. Factors influencing their selection included: academic performance, demonstrated leadership and community involvement, a personal essay, and written recommendations from school and community representatives.

▲ **Linda Donelle Bartley** is the daughter of Nick Money of the Midland School Board.

Upon graduation she plans to attend college and eventually dental school. Her career goal is to become an orthodontist which she says has been her dream since she was in elementary school. She feels that the community needs an orthodontist and that she would



Linda Donelle Bartley

outgoing personality will be important attributes to bring to a college campus where she believes that she can contribute as a leader. Donelle certainly has been a leader at Midland High School where she participated in Student Council, Beta Club, FBLA, Annual Staff, and many other activities. Donelle was the salutatorian of her class.

In her essay Donelle said, "As a college student, I would exhibit role model behavior . . . by making the type of grades that are required to get into medical school."

▲ **Lyndsey Jackson** is the daughter of Tracy Jackson of the Harmony Grove-Benton School Board.

Lyndsey desires to become a teacher and, eventually, a high school counselor. She plans to attend Arkansas State University at Jonesboro this fall.

Lyndsey enjoys serving others and has done so through a variety of activities in her school as well

like to return to her hometown to open her practice.

Donelle believes that her friendliness and

as her community. As a leader of her peers, Lyndsey served as president of the student council and president of the Beta Club. She was an athlete and was active in Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Lyndsey performed with the high school Abstinence by Choice skit team which gave her an opportunity to encourage her peers to abstain from drugs, alcohol, and premarital sex. Lyndsey is the valedictorian of her class.

Lyndsey wrote, "If I were to boast about anything it would be my exceptional

parents, who have always been encouraging, and motivating. Through their discipline and love,

I have the confidence to go for my dreams and succeed."



Sarah Van Bebber

▲ **Sarah Van Bebber** is the daughter of David Van Bebber of the Springdale School Board.

Sarah plans to pursue a degree in nursing at the University of Central Arkansas as a freshman this fall. In preparation for this she has been involved in activities that were directed toward the medical profession by being involved with the community blood drive at her school. She also was active in helping families at Christmas.

Sarah was involved in many activities throughout her school career including Youth for Christ, Priority One, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, junior and senior



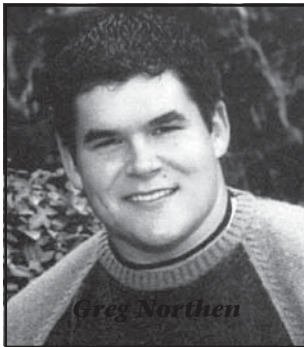
Lyndsey Jackson

class councils, Health Occupations Students of America, Peer Helpers, and cheerleading. As a highlight of her high school experiences, Sarah cited shadowing a pediatric nurse as pivotal event that assured her that nursing was the right profession for her.

In her essay, Sarah wrote, "I am entering college to pursue a dream. The dream is to be a well-balanced person and most importantly to help people through my career. If there is one thing I have known to be true through high school that is, "The future depends on what we do in the present."

▲ Greg Northen

is the son of Jessieville School Board Member Rick Northen.



Greg Northen

Greg hopes to attend

Harding University to pursue a degree program in business and administration.

Greg was actively involved throughout his high school career. During his senior year, he served as president of the Beta Club as well as president of Key Club. He was captain of the baseball team and a member of the Quiz Bowl team. As a multi-sport, award-winning athlete, Greg also was involved with Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Greg was valedictorian of his class.

Greg wrote that he wishes to attend Harding College and acknowledges that he is aware of the higher tuition cost of the school compared to state-sponsored colleges. He stated, "Any scholarships that would be awarded to me would be greatly appreciated and I feel like I

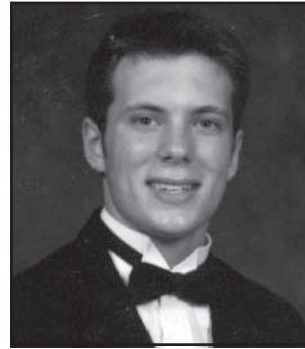
could utilize this scholarship as a dedicated student to help further my higher education."

▲ **Adam Buerkle** is the son of Stuttgart School Board Member Beth Buerkle.

Adam plans to pursue a degree in biology beginning this fall at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. Upon college graduation, Adam plans to attend pharmacy school.

His main goal is become a pharmacist.

Adam has been involved in many school activities and has demonstrated leadership in many of those. He is an Eagle Scout, was president of the student council, winner of the DAR Leadership Award, and a delegate to Boys State. Adam was



Adam Buerkle

selected for Who's Who in American High Schools. He was enrolled in advanced placement classes and took some classes for concurrent credit. Upon his graduation, Adam had accrued 12 hours of college credit. He is in the top of 10% of his class.

In his essay, Greg wrote, "Throughout my life I have learned that in order to accomplish something important I need to set goals. . . . This scholarship will help me accomplish my goals."

ASBA sends special congratulations to all of the scholarship winners as well as congratulations to all of the graduating seniors this year and wishes all of them well in their endeavors.

JOB BULLETIN

Superintendent, Lockesburg School District. Deadline: Until filled. Apply to: Gene Slaton, Supt., P. O. Box 88, Lockesburg, AR 71846, (870) 289-5161 or fax to (870) 289-5189

Superintendent, Umpire School District. Salary negotiable. Deadline: Until filled; Apply to: Janie Krantz, Board Secty; Umpire SD; 236 Krantz; Dierks, AR 71833

Superintendent, St. Paul School District. Deadline: Until filled. Apply to: St. Board of Directors, P. O. Box 202, St. Paul, AR 72776, (479) 677-2522

Superintendent, Pea Ridge School District. Salary negotiable. Apply to: Billy Clark, Board President, 781 W. Pickens Rd., Pea Ridge, AR 72751, (479) 451-8181

Superintendent, Paris School District. Salary negotiable. Deadline: Until filled. Apply to: Dr. Richard Abernathy, P.O. Box 645, Paris, AR 72855, (479) 963-3243

Superintendent, Kingston School District. Salary negotiable. Deadline: Until filled. Apply to: Mike Cox, Supt, Box 149, Kingston, AR 72742, (479) 665-2995

LELAND WELLS ASBA PRESIDENT

Our work continues

I hope that everyone is having a great summer. Although the students are out of school, it seems that the work of schools never ends. Before we can wrap up one school year, we are already in the throes of working on the next one. Summer used to be a relaxing time for students and teachers, but, no more. Many teachers work hard in workshops all summer long to improve their skills or attend school or work in their classrooms or work

at home. I hope that everyone will find some time to enjoy one another as friends and families.

Like our hard-working educators, ASBA works all summer also. Our staff is hard at work updating the policy service, preparing for new Study Circles conversations, opening new on-line training courses, and gearing up for regional meetings.

The new laws have brought some updates for the policy service. Ron Harder, Kristen Gould, and Paul

Blume have worked to make certain that our subscribers have accurate, up-to-date model policies from which to work. They have painstakingly considered each word and have sought to provide districts with policies that are usable and adaptable for their needs.

Heather Gage and Diane Vibhakar have been working to develop two new Study Circles con-

See *New* on page 8

DAN FARLEY ASBA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

We are changing with the times

"Children may be about 20% of the population, but they are 100% of the future." —David Tyack, author and historian.

From the grim financial realities facing states, cities, counties, and schools to the eminence of substantial reforms to public education as a result of the Lake View decisions, we are all anxious about an uncertain future. That's not unusual. Change is always fraught with fear and angst, and folks are often resistant to it.

One thing is certain: nothing stays the same. So, change is an inevitability we must accept. We need to be ever mindful that Arkansas is working to correct the inadequacies of its public school system. Ultimately, we're working

to better educate all the students of our state. Whatever happens, our foremost filter should be: Is it good for kids?

Adaptability is a prerequisite for successfully dealing with change. We must be adaptable and look at new ways of doing things. Thinking outside the box has never been more needed. Being informed has never been more important. Engaging parents and community members has never been more essential. If we expect to affect meaningful change, we have to become change agents who are focused on higher levels of student academic achievement.

With finite resources, we have to be creative to meet the demands of change. And so it is with ASBA.

Looking ahead to the new school year and the special legislative session set to convene in early-September, we have had to think outside the box in order to fulfill our obligations to you, our members.

With the legislature likely meeting throughout the fall, we knew it would be virtually impossible for Kathy and me to make 14 trips out into the state from Little Rock during the evenings and be back at the Capitol every day. We thought of sending other staff out, but the fact is that we need them here as lawmakers face the Supreme Court's deadline on a plan for educational equity and adequacy.

See *Virtual* on page 8

Arkansas School Boards Association

New Laws Summary 2003

Many new acts were passed by the General Assembly during the recent legislative session. Those which pertain to education are summarized here. For a complete copy of the acts, please visit the General Assembly's website at www.arkleg.state.ar.us.

▲ Student Attendance

Act 63 amends A.C.A. 6-18-208 (b), which lists the documents proving age that a child's parent or guardian may present for the purposes of school admission. This act adds U.S. military identification to the list of acceptable documents.

Act 144 changes current law to create a continuing property interest in attending school in a particular school district under certain circumstances. Prior to the 2001 legislative session, as provided by A.C.A. 6-18-203, the children of persons whose residential property overlapped the boundaries of more than one school district could choose to attend school in either school district, regardless of the

location of the dwelling house on the property. In 2001, this longstanding exception was repealed and the new rule was that a child must attend school in the district where he physically resided, making the location of the dwelling house determine school attendance. However, children who were attending school in a particular district under the "overlapping property exception" were "grandfathered" and could continue to attend school in that district until they completed school. Act 144 permits this "grandfather" privilege to transfer to subsequent buyers of the property, provided that the prior owner lived on the property for 10 or more years prior to August 13, 2001, and the property is undivided.

Act 999 amends A.C.A. 6-18-702 concerning immunizations required for school attendance. The Department of Health may grant an annual exemption from immunization requirements for children whose parents express religious or philosophical objections to immunization. The Department of

Health has the ability to direct that a child who has not been immunized be removed from school during an outbreak of a disease to which the child is vulnerable.

Note: School Districts do not grant exemptions; these can only be granted by the Department of Health. Children seeking enrollment in Arkansas public schools must either already be or become vaccinated according to the requirements of state law, or hold a current exemption; exemptions are granted for one year only and must be reapplied for each year. Parents seeking exemptions should be referred to the Department of Health.

Act 675 requires students in grades 9-12 to attend school for a full school day, and be enrolled in no fewer than 350 minutes of planned instructional time each day as a requirement for graduation, beginning with the 2004-2005 school year. No student may be assigned more than one class period each day for a study hall, and no more than one class period each day may be scheduled as ex-

tracurricular activities. School boards may grant waivers from this requirement for proven financial hardships, which are defined as "harm or suffering caused by a student's inability to obtain or provide basic life necessities of food, clothing, and shelter for the student or the student's family."

Note: School districts should plan to make modifications to their policies concerning graduation requirements, notify current students that they will be required to attend a full day in 2004-2005, and modify next year's student handbook accordingly.

▲ Student Discipline

Act 681 requires school districts to adopt policies to prevent bullying. These policies should clearly define bullying, prohibit it on school property including buses and at school-sponsored activities, and state the disciplinary consequences should bullying occur. Policies should require school employees to report bullying or suspected bullying to the building principal. Schools must conspicuously post notices that define bullying, explain that bullying is prohibited, and that state the consequences of bullying in every classroom, cafeteria, restroom, gymnasium, auditorium, and school bus in the district, as well as to parents, students, school volunteers and employees.

Note: In addition to developing a board policy, the policy should be modified for inclusion in the student handbook, which will satisfy the requirement that notice be given to students and to parents. Notice to staff can be achieved by giving them a copy of the policy concerning bullying during staff in-service, and notice to volunteers could be given in a volunteer orientation meeting or packet.

▲ Student Health and Safety

Act 648 charges the Safe Schools Committee of the Department of Education with the responsibility of creating and making available model policies and emergency plans and procedures to assist schools in responding in the event of a terrorist attack. School districts must have adopted terrorist attack emergency plans no later than January 1, 2004.

Note: School districts should watch for the model policies created by the Safe Schools Committee, and adopt them when they are made available.

Act 758 requires that when investigations of child abuse or maltreatment on school property are being conducted, the school must provide the investigating agency, upon request, the name, date of birth, social security number, and last known address and phone number of any person identified as an alleged offender.

Act 1100 requires that parental disclosure be made and parental permission be obtained before any non-school, non-governmental survey that requests personal identifying information be administered to a student.

Act 1220 requires schools to prohibit elementary students from having access to vending machines, disclose as part of the annual report to parents the amount and sources of funds generated by competitive food and beverage contracts, and how those funds were spent. Schools are also required to each year calculate and place on every report card every students' body mass index, and provide information to parents annually concerning body mass index, physical activity, and nutrition.

▲ Graduation

Act 216 permits a school district, pursuant to rules and regulations that will be developed by the Department of Education, to award a high school diploma to veterans of World War II who meet certain requirements.

Act 453 is similar, but applies to veterans of the Korean and Vietnam wars.

▲ School Buses

Act 219 makes it an unclassified misdemeanor for any person to use a cellular telephone while operating a school bus.

▲ Personnel (Applies to both certified and classified employees)

Act 42 provides that criminal background checks for both certified and classified employees may be waived by the resulting districts' boards when there has been a consolidation, annexation, or detachment. This will apply to employees who were employed by any district that was a party to the consolidation, annexation, or detachment immediately prior to becoming part of the new district, and who have had a complete criminal background check as a condition of employment in the prior district. This act contained an emergency clause, and is presently in effect.

Act 546 provides that school employees may take up to 7 days of leave to serve as a bone marrow donor and up to 30 days of leave to serve as an organ donor, without reduction of pay, sick leave, or credit for service, provided certain requirements are met.

Act 1357 broadens the scope of existing law concerning employee grievances, giving employees the ability to file group or "class action" grievances. The definition of grievance has been substantially broadened to include "any concern related to personnel policy, salary, federal or state laws and regulations, or terms or conditions of employment raised by an employee." Employees now have a right to representation at all levels of a grievance (formerly the right to representation arose only at the board level) but that representative may not be a member of the employee's immediate family. At the board level, the board must allow no less than 90 minutes for the employee to present the grievance.

▲ Teachers

Act 462 amends A.C.A. 6-17-114 regarding planning time. Formerly, this planning time was to be scheduled in minimum increments of 30 minutes; now, the minimum increment is 40 minutes. Prior law requires that a teacher is owed his or her hourly rate (contract amount divided by days divided by hours) should planning time not be provided by the school district

Act 756 amends A.C.A. 6-21-303 and increases the amount of money school districts must give teachers to use to purchase classroom supplies from \$250 to \$500 a year.

Note: School districts should create a reimbursement policy to manage this process.

Act 869 provides that a teacher is entitled to have a representative or witness be present in a conference with a school administrator to discuss a grievance or a disciplinary matter.

Act 1398 amends 6-17-116 to limit the time spent by a teacher on "non-instructional duties" (defined as "supervision of students before or after the instructional day begins or ends for students or for the supervision of student during breakfasts, lunches, recesses, or scheduled breaks") to 60 minutes in a week. If teachers are assigned non-instructional duties in excess of the 60 minutes a week, they must be contracted with in accordance with A.C.A. 6-17-807(g), the same provision that governs separate contracts for teachers who teach summer school.

Note: Districts may want to explore the possibility of assigning classified employees instead of teachers to perform non-instructional duties or ask volunteers to assume these responsibilities. It is legal for classified employees or volunteers to supervise children.

Note: A.C.A. 6-18-502 requires that classified school employees and volunteers be provided with appropriate student discipline training.

Act 1728 amends A.C.A. 6-15-1004 concerning continuing education (inservice) for teachers to provide that a three college hour graduate level course is to be counted as 12 hours of professional development, when the college credit is related to the subject area in which the teacher is presently teaching, or is part of the requirements for additional certification in a subject area designated by the Department of Education as having a critical shortage of teachers. This provision does not in any way limit or prevent a school district from requiring additional inservice hours.

Act 1768 amends A.C.A. 6-17-1001 to require that, effective the 2003-2004 school year, all teach-

ers be given full credit for all years of Arkansas public school teaching experience. School districts which have "discounted" by policy the number of years a newly hired experienced teacher may be credited with on the school district must adjust the salary amount accordingly. This will result in some teachers in districts that practiced "discounting" to receive very large one-time salary increases in the 2003-2004 school year, and then continue thereafter at the higher position on the salary schedule.

Act 1803 increases the starting bonus and annual bonus paid National Certification teachers from \$2000 each to \$3000 in 2003; \$4000 in 2004; and \$5000 in 2005. Teachers either get a starting bonus or a yearly incentive but not both.

▲ Personnel Policies and Personnel Policies Committees

Act 1120 expands the scope of personnel policies for certified personnel. The definition includes all district policies, regulations, and procedures that relate to the terms and conditions of a teacher's employment. In addition, the act specifies that the following are considered personnel policies and hence under the laws concerning the Personnel Policy Committee: benefits, compensation, work days, holidays, calendar, methods of evaluation, extra duties, leave, grievances, dismissal, non renewal, reduction in force, and assignment of teacher aides.

Act 1334 permits school districts to distribute personnel policies to teachers in the form of a hard copy on paper, a digital copy or an online copy accessible by Internet or intranet, and thus meet the requirements of A.C.A. 6-17-206.

Act 1399 requires the State Board of Education to require the superintendent to submit a written statement to the Department of Education that the school district is in compliance with the laws concerning personnel policies.

▲ Curriculum and School Day

Act 546 requires driver education courses and high school health classes to use instructional materials provided by the Arkansas Regional Organ Recovery Agency concerning organ and tissue donation, beginning with the 2004-2005 school year.

Act 1116 requires that all courses be aligned with the Arkansas Curriculum Frameworks where frameworks are available. In addition, any course offered in addition to the units required by the standards for accreditation must be approved by the Department of Education prior to being offered for credit.

Act 1216 requires the Department of Education to adopt curriculum standards concerning oral health as part of the physical education and health curriculum; the goal is gradual implementation beginning in fall 2005 for early elementary.

Act 1729 amends 6-16-132, which required P.E. for grades K-9, to only require it in grades K-8, and drops the minimum to 20 minutes of activity three times a week, which should ease high school scheduling problems. School districts are now required report compliance by Oct. 15 of each school year in the form of a letter of assurance to the Department of Education.

Act 1759 requires each school district to mail a letter to the parents of every student who will be

in grades 9-12, notifying the parents that the district is obligated to offer certain classes by the standards for accreditation, indicating the classes that are taught each year and those that are taught every other year. This letter must be mailed no later than 20 days prior to the date that students are required to register for classes; most districts will be making this notification in the Spring of 2004.

Act 1333 requires the State Board of Education to adopt a policy that all students in grades K-12 who are physically able are to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance during the first class period each school day be required to do so. No student or teacher who has objections to participation will be required to comply.

▲ Records

Act 553 amends A.C.A. 6-18-213 to provide for recording student attendance in an electronic form prescribed by the Department of Education. Since virtually every school district has been doing this for some time, this should represent no change for most districts.

▲ Operations and Finance

Act 340 will increase the percentage amount school districts must remit to Arkansas Teacher Retirement from 12% of each teacher's salary to 13%, effective July 1, 2003.

Act 671 requires school boards, at the reorganization meeting after the school election this fall, to select one member to be the board's disbursing officer, and one other member as an alternative disbursing officer. These disbursing officers and the superintendent are to sign, either personally or, if au-

thorized by the board, by facsimile signature, all checks and warrants (except food service and activity funds) issued by the school district.

Act 840 amends A.C.A. 6-20-402 to permit a school district to refinance post-dated warrants, lease purchase agreements, or installment contracts when it would result in a net savings to the district, subject to certain conditions. Prior approval by the Department of Education is required.

Act 925 amends existing law concerning all employers to provide that employees may be paid by direct deposit of monies owed them into their account, but that employees may opt out of direct deposit by requesting in writing that they be paid by check.

Act 992 requires that contributions to Arkansas Teacher Retirement on behalf of participants currently on TDROP be gradually phased back in, beginning with a 1% of salary contribution for the period of July 1, 2003 through June 30, 2005. By July 1, 2011, the contribution for TDROP employees will be 12%. Up to now, no contribution was required for participants on TDROP.

Note: Some districts have chosen to provide additional fringe benefits or supplementary payments to TDROP employees because no contribution to Arkansas Teacher Retirement was required. In light of the phased in contribution, districts may want to reexamine these practices and modify their personnel policies accordingly.

Act 1097 requires all school districts and educational cooperatives to use APSCN for fund accounting (including activity funds), preparing the budget, human resources and to track fixed assets, beginning

with the 2003-2004 fiscal year.

Act 1738, effective July 16, will for approximately one year, limit the authority and ability of school districts and school boards to enter into certain contracts. No contract for purchase, sale, construction, improvement, nor repairs of equipment or facilities or real property in excess of \$75,000 or 1% of the District's revenues, whichever is greater, may be entered into without prior written approval of the Department of Education or State Board of Education. No professional contracts (i.e., superintendent, assistant superintendent, or other certified staff member on a multi-year contract) or service contracts in excess of one year may be entered into or extended without prior written approval by the State Board of Education. This will not effect current contractual obligations, court ordered mandates, contracts related to a bond issuance previously approved, or regularly scheduled maintenance projects. Permitted employment contracts cannot have a combined total increase of salary, income, and benefits (but excluding increments for experience or education) in excess of 7.5 percent. Knowing and intentional violation can lead to license suspension or revocation for superintendents, or prosecution for board members, administrators, and/or removal from office for a board member.

Note: this law originally had an emergency clause, but it was line item vetoed by Gov. Huckabee.

▲ Parental Involvement

Act 603 requires each public school and each public school district to collaborate with parents and create by Sept. 1, 2003 a detailed parental involvement plan, which

is to be reviewed and revised each year thereafter. The act is very specific about the content of the plan, and imposes a number of expensive requirements on schools. Some of these are to purchase parenting books and periodicals for the school library and permit parents to borrow them; publish notices in local newspapers; hold conferences and meetings for parents; conduct surveys of parents; and publish and distribute information on a variety of topics to parents and to area employers. Each school must designate and compensate a certified staff member to serve as a parent facilitator. The parent facilitator's duties are to organize training for staff and parents and to encourage and promote parental involvement in the school. The requirements of Act 603 are entirely unfunded, and compliance will have to be achieved within the present funding framework.

Note: Careful attention should be paid to Act 603, and frequent reference to it should be made as schools and school district create the parental involvement plan. Since this must be in place by September 2003, creating this plan should be a high priority for schools and school districts. No funding was provided for implementation of this law.

▲ School Choice

Act 1272 requires all school districts in the state to participate in School Choice. All districts must advertise that they are taking applications for school choice. All school choice applications must be accepted or rejected and the parents of the student notified within 30 days of receipt of the application. School districts may, but need not, provide transportation for non-resident school choice stu-

dents. The resident district does not have the ability to prevent the non-resident district from entering the resident school district with a bus to pick up choice students.

Note: School boards should immediately establish by resolution, standards for acceptance or rejection of applicants. School districts are under no obligation to accept students if they would be required to add teachers, staff, or classrooms or standards or requirements currently in place in law and/or regulations.

▲ Standards & Accountability

Act 1467 abandons the familiar three phase Academic and Fiscal Distress system and adopts a streamlined system that permits immediate action on the part of the Department of Education at the first sign that a school district is faltering. Any school district that fails to meet standards for accreditation or standards for the operation of a school district, including financial standards, is placed on probationary status for one year. A school district on probationary status may be required by the Department of Education to do one or more of the following: reorganize or reassign staff; implement new curriculum including professional in service; give up a school or schools; establish alternative governance of a school or schools; close or dissolve a school or schools; annex or consolidate all or part of the probationary school district with another school district; remove or suspend the superintendent or one or more school board members.

The failure of a school district to move off of probationary status during a two year basis, regardless of whether the cause of the probation during the second year was unrelated to that of the first year,

will subject the school district to a range of possible consequences, including possible consolidation, annexation, or reconstitution of the school district.

Any school or school district whose students fail to meet established levels of academic achievement will be placed in "school improvement;" schools or school districts failing to meet minimum levels of academic achievement will be designated as being in "academic distress." The school improvement designation requires the district or school to create a revised comprehensive school improvement plan, and direct professional development accordingly. School districts in academic distress will have a maximum of two consecutive years from the date of identification to meet standards and be removed from academic distress. A school district in academic distress may at any time be subject to annexation, consolidation, or reconstitution of a school district. Reconstitution includes, but is not limited to, the ability of the Department of Education to require the superintendent to relinquish all authority and appoint an administrator to fulfill those functions, the ability to remove all or some of the school board members, or order annexation or consolidation of the school district. Students attending school districts classified as being in academic distress are entitled to transfer to other, non-distressed school districts under School Choice, but not subject to the application deadline of July 1. Transportation of students electing this option is borne by the distressed resident school district.

A school district may be placed in fiscal distress for fiscal, facilities, construction, audit, and other financial irregularities. School districts must create a plan to remedy the problem, and the

Department of education has the ability to require superintendent to relinquish administrative control, appoint an administrator, temporarily suspend the school board, force new school board elections, annex or consolidate the school district.

▲ School Elections

Act 1280 clarifies the law concerning the publication of the budget, making it clear that the budget must be published prior to any election in which the annual ad valorem property tax is on the ballot.

Act 1295 amends A.C.A. 6-14-102 to make it possible to conduct a school election entirely by absentee ballot and early voting, and to open no polling places on election day.

▲ Classified Employees

Act 1752 requires each school district to provide two paid, 15-minute breaks for each classified employee working at least 20 hours per week, without extending the contract day.

Act 1773 modifies A.C.A. 6-17-2203 to have the minimum salary that may be paid a classified school employee (including substitutes), currently \$6.25 an hour, to be increased each year by a percentage equal to the percentage increase of the consumer price index. This does not require you to give every classified employee a percentage raise each year, but merely moves upward the minimum amount that can be paid the lowest paid employees in your district.

Act 1780 requires that each school district have written personnel policies and written salary schedules for all classified employees. A classified employee is an employee who is not required to hold a teacher's certificate in order to perform the functions of his or her job. Further, by mid-October, each school district must have a classified personnel policies committee with at least one non-management representative from five employment classifications: maintenance and operation, transportation, food service, secretarial and clerical, and aides and paraprofessionals. There may be a maximum of three administrators on the committee, one of which can be the superintendent. A procedure similar to that which must be followed for changing certified personnel policies will henceforth be required to change classified personnel policies.

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Nonrenewal: Not a 'do-it- yourselfer'



Okay. As of the writing of this column, we're in the middle of the teacher nonrenewal season, and I'm busy and miffed. That's right. Miffed. Why, you ask?

Well, the reason for my miffness (miffedness?) is that some of you folks out there are not using the wonderful, elegant and free services of the Arkansas School Boards Association to their full effect. The result of that is that some nonrenewals which might should have taken place did not. Let me 'splain.

The portion of the Arkansas Teacher Fair Dismissal Act which addresses notification of the teacher that the superintendent is about to drop the hammer (i.e., recommend nonrenewal), A.C.A. §6-17-1506(b)(2)(B), located at page 209 in your green law book, states:

"The notice of recommended nonrenewal of a teacher shall include a statement of the reasons for the recommendation, setting forth the reasons in separately numbered paragraphs so that a reasonable teacher can prepare a defense."

Not only that, but the teacher should be notified of his rights under the law, including time for requesting a hearing, representation and a hearing record, etc.

Sound easy? It's not. Preparing a letter to a teacher, notifying him that the superintendent is fixin' to put his name before the school board in a less-than-flattering way, and which could result in a change in the teacher's zip code, is not a do-it-yourself job.

Both the inimitable Kristen Gould and I have been provided with a number of do-it-yourself letters this year (and last and before that) which were written in an attempt to rid a school of someone who wasn't getting the job done for the students. Unfortunately, in almost every case, the letter was insufficient, usually in the statement of reasons for the proposed nonrenewal. Sometimes the letter didn't let the teacher know about his rights. Sometimes the letter just said something like, "Well, I hate to do this, but don't come back next year."

I don't scream. But Kristen does. Loudly. And a lot.

See *Nonrenewal* on page 9

Virtual impossibility made possible virtually

continued from page 6

For months, we've been advocating that school districts should design creative solutions to meet student needs and educational standards. There has been a lot of discussion, for instance, on distance learning. Technology is surely one way to provide some course offerings for students, as well as professional development opportunities for staff.

Well, since we're constantly talking about modeling the behaviors we'd like to see, we decided it was high time that ASBA utilize technology as an educational tool. So at the Fall Regional Meetings, Kathy and I will be using compressed interactive video technology to join you at your meeting site. We'll be broadcasting to multiple meetings simultaneously (four or five regions will be meeting at the same time). You'll be able to see and hear us and we'll all be able to see and hear you from your various locations. Your Regional Director or a representative of the ASBA Board or staff will be on-site with you

to conduct the routine business meeting. If there is an election in your region, that person will conduct the election. Dinner at the meetings will begin this year at 6:00 p.m. rather than the usual 6:30. We apologize for that, but we must stay on schedule because the broadcasts will begin promptly at 7:15. They will conclude no later than 8:30. The satellite doesn't give us any wiggle room, so the schedule will be set in stone.

It promises to be an important educational experience. We suspect many of you have never observed delivery of distance learning. This will give you that opportunity and it will ensure that Kathy and I and the rest of the staff are in Little Rock and on the job monitoring the legislature. The project is a collaborative venture. We're working with the Department of Education's Distance Learning office, several of the education service cooperatives, and other institutions that can accommodate the needs for our meetings.

We've been telling you for some time about development of some online courses. Well, we're getting

really close to having two courses available for at-home professional development for board members. The ASBA Board got a look at the online courses at its annual work session and we have a group of board members from around the state who have volunteered to be beta testers for the courses before we release them.

In addition, we're looking at other ways to deliver training that is more convenient for you, our members, and which doesn't threaten the staff's capacity to provide the kinds of quality services and products you've come to expect of us.

Times are changing and we are changing with them. We can choose to embrace positive change and work toward its success or we can cling to old ways that produce old results. You know the tune: "If you always do what you always did..."

We'll miss being with you in person at the Fall Regional Meetings, but we *will* be there and we will provide you with some meaningful instruction about student learning that we hope will help you in your role as the principle advocates and policymakers for our public schools.

New conversations emphasize parents and kids

continued from page 6

versations. One of the new conversations concerns parent involvement and would be a wonderful piece to include as public engagement for the required parent involvement plans that state law now requires. The other conversation is about early childhood education and how districts can meet the challenges facing them in this critical area.

ASBA's first on-line training courses are open. Creating Successful Change Strategies Parts A and B will open this summer. The final

testing is being conducted to work out any "bugs." Please watch our website for more information. www.arsba.org.

Our regional meetings will go "high tech" this fall. ASBA members will go to their usual dinner meetings and in some regions, elections will be held. This year the program will be a live satellite broadcast via compressed interactive video (CIV). Several regions will meet on the same night in different locations across the state and participate in the broadcast that night. There will be three

nights of broadcasts involving different regions each night. Dan Farley and Kathy Morledge will present the program and be available live via the broadcast to respond to questions. Since they will also be advocating for our association at the special legislative session during the fall, this was an opportunity to continue the meetings in the fall and still be able to interact with our executive director. Watch the ASBA website and the September *Reporter* for more information.

Have a wonderful summer.

'Nonrenewal' resources available through ASBA

continued from page 7

Usually while I'm on the phone with one of you (her office is just down the hall, two doors), and you're wondering who I'm torturing. And, usually when she screams, it's when a superintendent has just read a letter to her that he sent to the teacher last week. I can tell from the volume of the screams (and, sometimes, the eloquence of the insults) that a do-it-yourself notice letter has been mailed, and it's too late to do anything about it.

Now, I'm going to tell you what to do about it: When you want to dismiss anyone—teacher, noncertified employee, the campus dog—call one of us. First. Before you do anything. Before you tell anyone. We will fax you a form letter, a dif-

ferent one, depending on the type of employee and the type of dismissal. You will fill in the blanks on the form letter (name, address, the reasons you want the employee to beat feet) and fax the letter back to us. That's the important part!!! We will look it over, call you back (or, sometimes, fax it back) with recommended changes, if any are needed. Then, you provide the employee with the letter in an approved fashion (certified mail or hand-delivered, not both), and we sit around and wait for the hearing request.

Call for a form letter only if you are then in the process of initiating the dismissal procedures. We don't hand out these things just to anyone or just for someone to

have on file. But, if you're there, make that call.

Now, we're not egotistical enough to tell you that, if we help you with the letter, you don't have anything to worry about. In fact, the form letter we fax you will have a bold-lettered disclaimer to the effect that we ain't guaranteein' nothin'. But you will be a lot better off than you would be if you sent a letter to a teacher which said something like, "I recommended to the School Board at last week's meeting that your contract not be renewed because you were not meeting expectations, and they accepted my recommendation."

Hear that? That's Kristen. Now, I have to go tell her that it wasn't a real letter. She'll be fine.

Parent involvement, early childhood guides aid in meeting requirements of Act 603

The Arkansas Study Circles Project has developed two new study guides that will be ready by this fall. One of the conversations is about parental involvement and the other is about early childhood education.

Project Director Heather Gage and Project Coordinator Diane Vibhakar have been working diligently with Connie Whitfield of Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families to create the new conversations.

Act 603 of 2003 requires each school district to create a parental involvement plan. The act is very specific in many ways about what must be included in the plan. The

act also requires that school districts engage in other activities that will identify resources. Study circles can be very helpful with that process.

Act 603 requires that the plan be filed with the Arkansas Department of Education by Sept. 1. That plan can include a proposal to conduct study circles throughout the school district.

Gage and Vibhakar have been in communication with several school districts who are interested in conducting study circles this fall and plan to include the project as part of their parent involvement plan.

In addition to the two new conversation guides, two other guides are also available. These concern



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For more information contact ASBA at (800) 482-1212 or contact Heather Gage at hgage@arsba.org or contact Diane Vibhakar at studycircles@arsba.org.

Team Conference addressed Arkansas education's important legal issues

Team Leadership IX Conference: Critical Issues for School Leaders was held May 7 at the Little Rock Convention Center. The conference was jointly sponsored by the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators and the Arkansas School Boards Association.

Superintendent Dan Shepherd of Marion discussed first-hand experiences with the wage and hour laws. Shepherd cited ways to avoid lawsuits and how to account for overtime for employees to assure that they receive the appropriate amount of pay. Many school districts in Mississippi have fallen victim to lawsuits because they were ill-informed of the critical nature of the issue. Shepherd stated that Arkansas is also a target state for these lawsuits.

ASBA Staff Attorney Kristen Gould discussed the new laws that affect personnel, students, and school choice. She particularly discussed new acts that had deadlines for this summer and early fall. An in-depth discussion of these laws is printed in this issue of the *Reporter*.

Dr. Greg Murry, assistant superintendent for business in Springdale, presented the new laws

that would have a financial impact on the school districts of Arkansas. Issues such as insuring 40 minutes of uninterrupted preparation time for elementary teachers and paying teachers for time spent on non-instructional duties that exceeded an hour in one week were among the topics. The concepts behind many of the new laws are good; however, the unfunded financial impact will be great.

Arkansas Department of Education Associate Director John Kunkel followed Murry. Kunkel extended the conversation with specifics from the ADE's point of view and a projection of the budget for the next biennium.

ADE Director Ray Simon discussed the Omnibus Bill which empowers the ADE to act more quickly to assist distressed districts. Simon emphasized that the thrust of the bill was to offer assistance to districts to minimize the negative impact on children.

Attorney Mitch Llewellyn of Fort Smith gave an overview of the adequacy study and what school districts can expect from the study. Llewellyn described the professional judgment panels and how



Springdale Assistant Superintendent Dr. Greg Murry explains the financial impact of the new laws that were enacted during the recent session of the General Assembly

those data might be used. He emphasized the deadline of Sept. 1, for the committee to submit a definition of adequate education to the Joint Education Committee.

AAEA Executive Director Dr. Kellar Noggle and ASBA Executive Director Dan Farley ended the conference with a preview of expectations for the upcoming special legislative session which may begin Sept. 8.

'School Board Meetings from A to Z' will be offered through distance learning resources

ASBA Staff Attorney Kristen Gould will present Board Meetings A to Z via distance learning this summer. For those of you who have been unable to come to these small intimate seminars in Little Rock, you may access the workshop this summer.

On July 21, Gould will broadcast the workshop. Board members who wish to take to the course via

distance learning should contact their local educational service cooperatives for the schedule and the cost. Some cooperatives may charge a minimum fee to cover costs for employees who are present.

Each participant who completes the course that day will receive 3 hours of boardsmanship credit.

The number of participants is

not limited as it must be for the workshops that are conducted on site in the ASBA offices. Since the broadcast can be received by all fifteen cooperatives at once, the only limitations will be the seating at those sites.

We encourage board members to take advantage of this opportunity. Contact your local cooperative for information about this workshop.

Leaving rural children behind

This article appeared in the March 26 issue of Education Week and is reprinted here with permission from that publication and the author, Rachel B. Tompkins.

When state supreme courts in Arkansas and Tennessee ruled this past fall that their states' school funding systems were inequitable, inadequate, and therefore unconstitutional, they ruled in favor of the plaintiffs in these respective cases: small, rural schools unable to compete in the market for qualified teachers. The courts, in essence, said that students in these states were being left behind long before the "No Child Left Behind Act of 2001" was signed into law by President Bush. Both cases were decided before the regulations for implementing this landmark legislation were published last November. Unfortunately, the law's expectations for school performance raise the bar even higher for small, rural schools—particularly those in financially poor rural districts—that are already struggling to provide an adequate and equitable education for their students.

The No Child Left Behind Act is the latest example of the "one size fits all" education policies that have been so detrimental to the nation's rural schools—nearly one-quarter of the public schools in America. In Arkansas, Tennessee, and many other states, formulas that rely on property wealth to fund schools routinely deprive rural children of the equitable and adequate education they deserve—and that they are guaranteed under most state constitutions. Similarly, state facilities policies, fueled by the "bigger is better" mentality, have deprived hundreds of rural communities across America of their schools through consolida-

tion. Well-intentioned as it may be, the No Child Left Behind Act is yet another blanket solution that threatens America's already-stressed rural schools, and it will undoubtedly leave many rural children behind.

Almost every provision of the act is fraught with risks for rural schools and the more than 8 million children who attend them. Consider, for example, its requirements on teacher quality. The law says that all teachers must be fully certified or licensed, and that there will be no waivers of this requirement on an emergency or provisional basis. In addition, beginning this year, all new teachers hired with federal Title I funds must be "highly qualified," that is, certified in the core subject areas they teach. Even paraprofessionals hired with Title I money will soon face stricter requirements, which include two years of college, a minimum of an associate's degree, or some other "established quality standard."

Unfortunately, federal funding to help states implement these requirements is woefully inadequate. Studies in Vermont and New Hampshire, for example, indicate that it will cost these states three to five times as much to implement Title I of the legislation as they will receive from the federal government.

For hard-to-staff rural schools—many in communities with significant minority populations and high poverty rates—the new law's requirements will make it even

harder to attract and retain well-qualified teachers. These are schools that already face serious teacher shortages and large gaps in teacher pay when compared with urban and suburban schools. The average rural teacher makes only 86 cents for every dollar earned by his or her urban and suburban counterparts. Thirteen states have rural teacher salaries that fall behind urban/suburban salaries by more than \$5,000 a year. In a handful of states, the difference is even more dramatic: \$8,573 in Illinois, \$7,896 in New York, \$7,573 in Pennsylvania, \$6,868 in Iowa.

Under the No Child Left Behind Act, hard-to-staff schools will become harder to staff, as teachers abandon schools classified as needing improvement and are lured to schools in prosperous communities that can afford to pay top dollar for highly qualified teachers. If school funding formulas do not allow Title I

Platitudes will not suffice in an educational landscape where challenges are great and resources few.

schools to compete in the market for "highly qualified" education professionals, states will have failed in their commitment to low-income children. Courts in Tennessee and Arkansas have recently ruled that this issue—the inequity in the teacher market—makes their state funding formulas unconstitutional. The No Child Left Behind legislation may open up new constitutional issues at the federal level as well.

Another dangerous provision of the law—particularly to small ru-

See Misuse on page 12

Misuse of statistics is hitting hardest the schools which serve the most vulnerable

continued from page 11

ral schools—is its requirement that schools show "adequate yearly progress" in meeting state-defined goals for student proficiency. How this progress is measured may make sense for large urban and suburban districts, with thousands of students, but for schools in small towns and rural areas it is quite simply discriminatory.

When small numbers of students are tested at each grade level, as they often are in small rural schools, the year-to-year changes in the student population can cause wild fluctuations in school-level scores. This random variation based on small cohorts means that small schools will often not be able to sustain progress from year to year as required, no matter how well teachers perform.

The No Child Left Behind Act is the latest example of the 'one size fits all' education policies that have been so detrimental to the nation's rural schools. In Massachusetts, research indicates that annual variation in test scores is three to four times greater in schools with fewer than 100 students per tested grade than for schools with more than 150 students. A 2001 study in North Carolina concluded that test results at the school level are mainly "random noise," and that rewards or sanctions aimed at schools on this basis will primarily affect small schools, where the volatility is greatest, because of small sample sizes and random cohorts. Likewise, new research in Maine concludes that test scores in that state cannot be reliably or fairly used to measure the performance of small schools.

States are required under the No Child Left Behind Act to disaggre-

gate test data for certain subgroups of students, but are not required to publish the disaggregated data if the subgroup is too small to reach a statistically reliable conclusion. However, there is no prescription in the act against using small data sets if it is the entire school that is too small to yield reliable data. On the contrary, the U.S. Department of Education has made clear that it does not want states, in defining "adequate yearly progress," to make any exceptions to the act's requirements for publicly identifying schools in need of improvement.

This misuse of statistics to judge school performance is hitting hardest the schools that serve the most vulnerable students in the politically weakest regions. Ultimately, this practice is less likely to lead to school improvement than it is to school closure. When the school has been mislabeled, this is a shame. Where it does need improvement, it will often be because it has never had the resources to compete in the market for teachers or to provide the support those teachers and their students need to succeed.

When a small school is needlessly labeled as low-performing, children suffer. Beginning this year, states are required to publish annual report cards on the performance of school districts. Likewise, districts are required to submit similar reports to the public with school-level data. For rural schools, this could mean publishing results for very small classes in very small communities. When small-town newspaper readers find out, for example, that five out of 18 4th graders scored below proficiency in reading, there will likely be open speculation about

who the 5 kids are. Putting pressure on adults to perform better as teachers and school administrators is one thing. Publicly humiliating children is another.

When Arkansas was recently compelled by the U.S. Department of Education to use scores from the Stanford Achievement Test-9th Edition (SAT-9) to classify schools, it listed 47 schools as needing improvement. Forty-five of the 47 had fewer than 100 students per tested grade. Half had fewer than 50 students per grade. Significantly, 67% of the students in these schools are African American (compared with 23% statewide), and 75% are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches (compared with 50% statewide).

Five of the 47 schools are in Phillips County, in the heart of the Mississippi Delta. Among them is Lake View Elementary School, in the district that recently won an Arkansas Supreme Court appeal finding the state's school funding system unconstitutional. The state funding system, the court found, had deprived Lake View of the opportunity to compete in the market for highly qualified teachers.

Having starved rural schools of resources for many decades, some policymakers will now blame them for failing to meet high expectations. The facts in this case are instructive. In court testimony, an uncertified high school math teacher said he is paid \$10,000 per year to teach five classes (he makes another \$5,000 per year driving the bus). He has two electrical outlets in his classroom, calculators for half the students, and a single blackboard on which he writes exams by hand because there is no photocopier. Does anyone seri-

See One-size on page 13

ASBA introduces six new on-line board member courses; watch website for details

ASBA is nearing the release of its new on-line courses. The courses have been under construction for the past few months and are being tested by school board members. ASBA anticipates the opening of two courses by the fall.

Chester Cummins has been creating six on-line courses for ASBA. The first two courses, Creating Successful Change Strategies Part A and Creating Successful Change Strategies Part B will be the first two courses released.

Each of the new courses should require approximately 6 to 9 hours of on-line study time. School board members will re-

Board members can participate in the courses on their own time and can invest as little or as much time in each session as their schedules will allow.

ceive 9 hours of boardsmanship credit upon completion of each course. The courses require some thought and some discussion with other board members. The benefits to school board members and as well as to the school boards that they serve could be tremendous.

ASBA has been seeking new ways

to deliver quality training to school board members. This option allows participants to avoid travel expenses. School board members can participate in the courses on their own time and can invest as little or as much time in each session as their schedules will allow.

The cost of each course will be only slightly more than the cost of attending a 6-hour seminar in Little Rock. The content of the course can be applied more easily to specific school board situations.

ASBA anticipates the release of four more on-line courses over the next few months.

Be sure and watch our website at www.arsba.org for more information!

A one-size-fits-all approach most certainly will leave rural children behind

continued from page 12

ously expect this school to meet the high expectations of the No Child Left Behind Act?

There definitely needs to be some accountability, but the subject must be Arkansas' school funding formula, and the standard must be the state constitution. The federal government cannot substitute pious platitudes about children's being able to learn and accountability for adequate yearly progress for the cold, hard cash schools like Lake View need to buy the services of the good teachers they must have to accomplish these goals.

Unfortunately, many rural schools like Lake View will probably never get the chance to see what they can do with adequate and equitable funding. Having starved them of resources for many decades, some policymakers will

now blame them for failing to meet high expectations. They will accuse the teachers, leaders, parents, and community of incompetence, neglect, and failure. They will "rescue" these children from their small, close-to-home community schools by closing those schools and busing the pupils somewhere else.

This may satisfy economies of scale, equalize costs, and look better for the tax rate and the state

No one argues with the lofty goals of this legislation. No one argues that accountability is not a good thing.

budget. But it will not resolve the underlying issues of whether the expectations of the No Child Left Behind Act are reasonable, whether its measurements of school performance are valid, whether the funding provided is adequate to the challenge, or whether the time allowed to turn things around is realistic.

No one argues with the lofty goals of this legislation. No one argues that accountability is not a good thing. What is wrong with the No Child Left Behind Act is that its cookie-cutter approach, like many other well-meaning, one-size-fits-all education policies, will almost certainly leave rural schools—and rural children—behind.

Rachel B. Tompkins is the president of the Rural School and Community Trust (Rural Trust) in Washington.

Regional meetings to be delivered via compressed interactive video

Get ready for the regional meetings this fall! These are going to be different from other regional meetings in the past!

This fall, regional meetings will be held in locations that can receive a compressed interactive video (CIV) broadcast. The meetings will be held across the state on three nights in October. Several regions will be meeting each night and will participate together via distance learning.

The usual dinners will be held and business meetings will be conducted including elections in those regions where necessary. Following the meetings, school board members and superintendents will move to a room where the CIV broadcast can be received.

ASBA Executive Director Dan Farley will greet school board members from a studio in Maumelle. Farley will discuss the business of ASBA and update members about progress. Following Farley's presentation, ASBA Assistant Executive Director Kathy Morledge will present the program. Participants from the regions may ask questions following the program. The questions will be heard and viewed by all who partici-

pate in the meeting on that night.

The change in the format is due to the impending special legislative session, which may begin Sept. 8, and the demands on the ASBA staff. Because the ending date of the session is unknown, ASBA began to seek other options. Farley and Morledge attend the legislative sessions daily and would be unable to travel to all fourteen regions. This roadblock to regional meetings led to an opportunity for school board members and superintendents to participate in a distance learning experience. Since distance learning is viewed as a viable option for teaching students in remote areas, it will give school board members a real world experience with this style of learning and provide them with more information for making decisions about it.

The distance learning studio of the Arkansas Department of Education is working with ASBA to make these broadcasts possible. Director Belinda Kittrell and her staff deserve much thanks for this opportunity for school board members.

Many of the meeting dates and locations are set; however, some regions are still pending. Please

Visibility of board members can add emphasis in session

ASBA is seeking to expand its presence at the upcoming special legislative session this fall.

Legislators want to know what their constituents think and the presence of those constituents sitting in the audience at committee meetings and in the gallery during the sessions can mean a great deal to our lawmakers.

ASBA would particularly like to invite board members to visit on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. The House Education Committee meets Tuesdays and Thursdays and the Senate Education Committee meets Wednesdays and some Fridays.

If you would be interested in taking a more visible and active role with ASBA's advocacy team, please contact us at (800) 482-1212.

watch the September and October issues of the *Reporter* for exact dates and locations for your region. The three dates will be October 20, 21, and 23. As more information is available, it will also be posted on the website at www.arsba.org.

Arkansas School Boards Association

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