

Pols pledge support

◆ASBA representatives meet with state's D.C. delegation seeking signatures for students

Five of the six members of Arkansas' congressional delegation have signed a "Pledge to America's Schoolchildren" thanks to ASBA's efforts.

The pledge is part of a nationwide grass-roots project created by the National School Boards Association last summer and fall to influence members of Congress to do more to serve schoolchildren. The project's goal is to get the signed commitment of every member of Congress to support the fundamental education goals outlined in the pledge.

During the 34th annual Federal Relations Network Conference, held in Washington, D.C., in late-January, the Arkansas delegation



PUTTING IT IN WRITING — Sen. Blanche Lincoln signs the "Pledge to America's Schoolchildren."

met with Senator Pryor and Reps. Ross and Boozman, and with the staffs of Senator Lincoln and Reps. Snyder and Berry.

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Beebe touts cooperation, pre-K classes

Governor Mike Beebe pledged to maintain a cooperative relationship with public school educators and asked for help passing his pre-school education program in a speech that concluded ASBA's 2006 annual conference December 7.

Speaking a month before he was sworn in as governor, Beebe told school board members and educators, "There needs to be and there will be an attitude of cooperation between the state Department of Education and the members of the respective school districts across this state where you all know that we are there for you, we're there to help you, we're there to make sure that your job's even easier, and we're there to make

[See Beebe...page 2](#)

Here's a tip for schools – get TAPS

First there was TIPS (the Texas Interlocal Purchasing System). Then there was TAPS (the Texas Arkansas Purchasing System). Both are helping school districts

save money.

TIPS has now expanded into Missouri and Oklahoma and now stands for The Interlocal Purchasing System — and it was

named the National Exemplary Program of the Year in 2006 by the National Rural Education

[See TAPS...page 16](#)

Beebe

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sure that all of us do the right thing together, and that's improve the quality of education for our children. We want to be your friendly partner, not your adversarial enemy, and we're going to make sure it happens."

Beebe asked for board members' help in passing a preschool education program that would provide services to all children whose parents or guardians choose it. He illustrated the need for the program by describing a campaign visit with an El Dorado kindergarten teacher who told him there was a "daylight and dark" difference between children who needed preschool but didn't receive it, and those who either did attend preschool or didn't need to because of favorable circumstances at home. Pressed further, she told him



BEEBE SPEAKS — Then-Governor-elect Mike Beebe speaks to ASBA's 2006 annual conference December 7

she spent a large portion of her time trying to help those students catch up to their peers, a process that limited the progress of the

"We want to be your friendly partner, not your adversarial enemy, and we're going to make sure it happens."

— Mike Beebe

other students. Investing in preschool, Beebe said, would help those at-risk students for the rest of their educational careers. "It's like building a building," he said. "If the foundation is not there, if that basis is not there, how do you put the second story or the third story on it?"

Beebe also told the conference that while the state must not retreat from high standards, it must also provide assistance to local districts so they can meet those standards. Isolated schools can remain open through options such as distance learning and the traveling teacher program, he said.

Pledge

Continued from page 1

Rep. Ross was the first to sign the pledge. On January 30 and in the days following, four others also signed, leaving only Rep. Snyder who has not yet followed suit.

ASBA's delegation joined nearly 1,000 other school board members from throughout the nation in visiting Capitol Hill to discuss the need for increased funding for public education and to seek support for the pledge. ASBA President Amy Daniel led the delegation, which also included President-elect Perry Newman, Secretary-Treasurer Gene Boeckmann, Carol Brown, Jeannie

Pledge to America's Schoolchildren

As a Member of Congress, I pledge to work and vote to:

- Improve the No Child Left Behind Act to give my school district(s) better measures for student and school performance, and the support needed to close the achievement gap.
- Help my school district(s) meet the needs of students with disabilities by supporting the funding goals of the Individuals with Disabilities

Education Improvement Act (IDEA).

- Support school readiness programs for children entering kindergarten in my school district(s).
- Help my school district(s) to attract, train and retain highly qualified and effective teachers.
- Help my school district(s) to provide all students with 21st Century skills, and knowledge, including math, science, and technology.

Cole, Mildred Tatum, Damon Daniels, Darrell Smith, and ASBA Executive Director Dan Farley.

"The requests we were seeking amount to about two-tenths of one

percent of the federal budget," Daniel said. "Our senators and representatives were very receptive and pledged to work toward the goals we put forward."

Need college \$ for your senior?

◆ASBA has scholarships available for five children of school board members

Scholarships will be available for the 2007-08 school year for five graduating senior students of Arkansas school board members. The scholarships are provided through the ASBA Educational Foundation and are awarded to students who will begin their post-secondary education next fall.

To qualify for a scholarship, the student's school board member parent must have been serving on his or her local school board on

September 1 of the school year in which the grant is awarded.

The \$650 scholarships will be one-time grants to freshmen entering two-year or four-year

Download the application form and directions from the ASBA website at www.arsba.org, or call the ASBA office at 800-482-1212.

demonstrated leadership, and demonstrated need. One scholarship is given in each of the

Arkansas institutions of higher education. The scholarships are awarded based on academic performance,

state's four congressional districts, and one scholarship is awarded at-large.

To apply, students and school board parents must submit an application form; three letters of recommendation; a counselor-completed form confirming the student's academic performance; the student's official transcript; a 500-word essay written by the student, and other pertinent information that demonstrates the student's academic potential, leadership ability, and/or financial need.

Deadline is April 1. The awards will be announced in May.

Check this out – FARS fights bad checks

◆ASBA-sponsored partnership is free to all Arkansas school districts

In the association's continuing quest for beneficial services and programs, ASBA last summer partnered with the Federal Automated Recovery System to help school districts recover non-sufficiently-funded checks.

Utilizing federal and state laws, FARS electronically credits 100 percent of the face value of each recovered check and electronically credits the full face value back to the originating bank account at

the district. In addition, school districts receive a flat fee of \$5 per recovered check to assist with special bank handling fees.

In an alternate plan, FARS guarantees the full face value of

this service. The district pays no retainer or up-front or annual fee.

Utilizing FARS is a way for school districts to be fiscally accountable in a more efficient and cost effective manner. For more



BAD CHECK – FARS protects school districts from bad checks that can ruin everybody's day. It's a great new service offered through ASBA.

every check written for \$225 or less. This plan does not provide the \$5 fee to the district.

There is no district cost for

information on how your district can participate in this no-cost program, contact Paulette Walker at 1-800-482-1212.



“What percentage of public school teachers in America are aging baby boomers? Try something like 65 percent. You think you’ve got teacher shortage problems now? You haven’t seen anything yet.”

– Dr. James Johnson



MAKING HIS POINTS — America is becoming “brown” and “grayer,” demographer Dr. James Johnson told ASBA members at the 2006 annual conference. Schools will have to adapt to these demographic realities at the same time they prepare students to compete in a global economy.

Changing times

◆ Demographer James Johnson offers ASBA members a sobering look at the challenges schools face in a rapidly changing country and a rapidly shrinking world

By Steve Brawner

America’s increasing ethnic diversity and aging population are transforming our society while the world is becoming smaller by the minute, and public schools will have to transform themselves to

keep pace with it all.

So said Dr. James Johnson, a University of North Carolina demographer, at ASBA’s 2006 annual conference in Little Rock December 6.

According to Johnson, Arkansas’s Hispanic population growth of 48 percent from 2000-2005 was the fastest in the nation, while the state is among the nation’s leaders in overall immigrant growth. He said the migration is being fueled by meat processing industries that advertise for jobs south of the border and in

gateway communities across the country.

The growth in Arkansas’ immigration rate mirrors national trends. Johnson said that during the 20th century, immigration patterns shifted from European countries to Latin America and Asia. In the most recent few decades, the number of illegal immigrants exploded until there are now an estimated seven to 15 million of them. “Whenever I get a call from the media today about how many illegal immigrants there are in America, I just say ‘a lot,’”

Between 2000 and 2003, long-term joblessness increased more rapidly among those with at least some college education than it did for those with only a high school diploma or less.

Johnson joked. “Your guess is as good as mine. It’s a lot.”

Johnson said that while America’s population will continue growing to an expected 425 million by 2050, whites will make up barely half the population and African-Americans will increase only slightly as a percentage, from 12 to 13.5 percent. But Hispanics will increase to 24 percent of the population, and Asians will grow to eight percent.

The increasing ethnic diversity – what Johnson called the “browning of America” is occurring at the same time the native-born population is aging – a process he called the “graying of America.”

Both trends are having a huge impact on schools. Johnson said schools must be prepared to educate the children of immigrants. And when the 82 million members of the baby boom generation leave the workforce, the 67 million-member baby bust generation won’t be large enough to fill the jobs – a reality demographers call “the succession problem.” “What percentage of public school teachers in America are aging baby boomers? Try something like 65 percent,” he said. “You think you’ve got teacher shortage problems now? You haven’t seen anything yet.”

Globalization is changing the way we work, compete

These ethnic and demographic changes are occurring amidst the backdrop of a rapidly globalizing economy that has seen American

jobs head overseas in droves. The country lost 5.7 million manufacturing jobs between 1979 and 2003 – half of them between 2000 and 2003. Johnson said those workers were told to return to school and obtain knowledge-based skills. But now white-collar jobs are disappearing as well because technology enables workers in developing countries, many of whom are better educated than their American counterparts, to perform knowledge-based jobs at a fraction of the cost. Between 2000

Arkansas’s Hispanic population growth of 48 percent from 2000-2005 was the fastest in the nation, while the state is among the nation’s leaders in overall immigrant growth.

and 2003, long-term joblessness increased more rapidly among Americans with at least some college education than it did for those with only a high school diploma or less.

Behind those numbers are concrete examples. Johnson described a self-employed North Carolina carpenter who needed a heart bypass surgery that would cost \$200,000 in the United States. Instead he traveled to an Indian hospital for less than \$7,000 including round-trip tickets for him and his wife and recuperation in a seaside resort. General Electric has opened a research and development

center in Bangalore, India, where 1,600 scientists and engineers are each earning \$650 a month. They developed 121 patents the first year of operation.

So how do schools cope with this rapidly changing world? Johnson said schools should globalize their curriculum and create learning systems that encourage entrepreneurial thinking and creativity. He encouraged schools to recruit teachers from overseas to deal with the labor shortage. He called for mandatory diversity training for faculty and staff to deal with cultural differences. Extracurricular activities and sports need to be restructured for students with different backgrounds. And more resources should be invested in adult education for those in danger of being left out of the rapidly changing world.

Johnson said schools must change in a new global economy in which the long-defined path to the American dream – study hard, go to college, and get a degree – is running into the reality that workers on the other side of the globe are better-educated, willing to work harder, and do it all for a fraction of the cost. “We’re accustomed to being the big kid on the block, but what information technology has done is level the playing field,” he said. “We’ve got people who will clean your clock halfway around the world while you’re sleeping. Because when the sun goes down here, it’s coming up someplace else.”

James: Schools need overhaul

By Rich Carvell

Dr. Ken James, Arkansas Commissioner of Education, brought his high school curriculum redesign road show to the annual ASBA conference in an effort to convince school board members of the need to update Arkansas education. School board members didn't need convincing.

James said Arkansas' 19th century agrarian school model is trying to use a 20th century industrial curriculum to prepare students for a 21st century digital world. In other words, it isn't working.

NextStep is the next step

To fix it, James is offering the Department of Education's "NextStep for Arkansas" high school redesign plan, which includes higher and tougher requirements for high school graduation. More "rigor" is needed, the commissioner said again and again.

The "SmartCore" high school curriculum redesign requires four units of math, three units of social science, four units of English, and three units of physical science. The local school board would establish the required six units of career focus courses. In addition, there are requirements for oral communications, PE, health and safety, and fine arts. School districts may require additional units for graduation.

James said SmartCore is the "default" curriculum in Arkansas high schools. Students take this curriculum unless their parents opt out. James said the statewide opt-



Dr. Ken James

out rate is 10 percent, but in some districts up to 40 percent of students choose not to participate in the more rigorous curriculum.

James has been hosting town meetings across the state to explain the need to redesign the high school curriculum and the Next-Step proposal.

Current system not meeting students', employers' needs

It's important to implement the SmartCore curriculum in Arkansas high schools, the education commissioner said, because 52 percent of Arkansas high school graduates "require remediation in college" and because more than three-quarters of Arkansas employers surveyed said "less than half of Arkansas high school grads have quality communications and math skills" to enable them to compete in the workforce. James said that surveys say 60 percent of employers are "not satisfied with (Arkansas) high school graduates'

ability to read and write." And, he noted, 20 percent of Arkansas ninth-graders will not earn a high school diploma. The dropout rate, James said, is even higher for African-Americans and Hispanics.

James said Arkansas and its schools have a "moral imperative to be competitive" in providing educational opportunities to students. That, he said, means the state will have to consider extending the school day or the school year – both "high cost" items – in order to provide all the tools Arkansas students need to succeed in both the workplace and in college.

"That's our job," James said, meaning helping students prepare for college work, arrive at college without needing remediation, and stay in college and graduate.

James said achieving these goals will happen incrementally. "We've got to get better every day," he said, by "stretching and by challenging students."

James said schools need a challenging curriculum, frameworks aligned grade to grade, rigorous assessments, and the technical capacity to track students year to year, which the Department of Education is accomplishing with electronic transcripts that will follow Arkansas students when they transfer from district to district.

More information about Next-Step and SmartCore is available at <http://www.nextsteparkansas.org/>.

Rich Carvell, chairman of the Radio & TV Department at Arkansas State University, is ASBA Region 3 Director.



PINNACLE AWARD WINNERS — The Pinnacle Award is reserved for the highest achievement among individual board members. Congratulations to these members who have accrued at least 200 hours of boardmanship credit. Standing, left to right: Jerry Rice, England; Robert Parker, Batesville Southside; Gene Boeckmann, Wynne; Barbara Hathcock, Fort Smith; Donald Simmons, Cave City; Connie Meyer, Lincoln Consolidated; Karen Daugherty, West Fork; Don Dickens, Magazine; Rayne Gordon, Helena-West Helena. Sitting, left to right: Don Williams, Malvern; Ruth McConnell, Greenwood; Darrylee Arms, Marion; Katie Daniel, McGehee; Alice Banks, McGehee. Not pictured: Carol Jacobs, Stuttgart; Larry Allison, White Hall; Steve Sutton, Marion; Jerry Don Woods, Dardanelle.

And the winners are ...

One of the highlights of each year's annual conference is the presenting of awards: the Pinnacle Award for 200 hours of boardmanship credit; the Master Award for 50 hours of credit; and the Master Board, Outstanding Board, and Honor Board awards.

Each year, ASBA honors one individual whose contributions go far beyond the call of duty with

the Dr. Daniel L. Pilkington Award for Outstanding Service to Public Education.

This year's "Dr. Dan Award" went to Robert Lambert Jr., pictured right, an 18-year veteran of the Springdale School Board who led his district through an extraordinary period of growth and change.

Congratulations, Robert!



2006 Master Board Member Award

The Master Board Member Award recognizes those members who have earned 50 hours in ASBA's Boardmanship Program.

In addition to those pictured on these pages, the following ASBA members received the Master Board Member Award: Katina Briscoe, Augusta; Randy Mink, Bay; Doris Parham, Bearden; Sam Stueart, Benton; Doyle Fuqua, Bentonville; Fred Campbell, Cabot; Dawn McCormick, Keith Stokes, Dardanelle; Jimna Stinnett, DeQueen; Sandra Taylor, Forrest City; Mike Evilsizer, Fouke; Gus Lorenz, Greenbrier; Danny Breckenridge, Brian Duncan, Green County Tech; Horace Carter, Harmony Grove-Camden; Ulysses Jean Williams, Constance Jarrett, Helena-West Helena; Debbie Ugbade, Ann Hill, Hot Springs; Dale Phillips, Gary Hatfield, Huntsville; Jeff Johnson, Lead Hill; Joe Cheney, Magazine; Harold Smith, Mena; Kirby Starr, Mt. Vernon Enola; David Eddy, Russellville; Michael Liles, Searcy; Beverly Wells, Lee Henson, Sheridan; Shelby Brown, Kyle Davis, Texarkana; Tammi Hamby, Van Buren; Bud Sims, Waldron; Leon McCleskey, Wickes; Gary Kaufman, Wonderview; Melvin Taylor, Robert Hayes Jr., Wynne.



REGIONS 1 AND 2 – Standing, Clifford Methvin, Lead Hill; Julie Adams, Green Forest; Bill Groom, Randall Payne, Greenland; Marion Harris, Gravette. Sitting, Robert McCormick, Deborah Smith, Rusty Windle, Eureka Springs; Tim Hudson, Fayetteville.



REGIONS 4 AND 5
– Standing, Steve Williams, Brian Cooper, Wanda Keener, Paris; Glynda McConnell, Booneville. Sitting, Bentley Johnson, Dardanelle; Danny Hughes, Clarksville; Yvonne Keaton-Martin, Fort Smith.



REGIONS 6, 7, AND 8 – Standing, David Hipp, Cabot; Jim Davis, David Passmore, Bryant; Brooks Nash, Cabot; Rodney Stroud, Batesville. Sitting, Debbie Briscoe, Augusta; Dale Smith, Marked Tree; Marlene Thomas, West Memphis.

REGIONS**9,10 AND 11**

– Standing, James Wilson, Cleveland County; Les Warren, Lakeside-Hot Springs; Jack Rynders, Magnet Cove. Sitting, Margaret Simpson, Clarendon; Citronella Dixon, Delight.

**REGIONS 12, 13, AND 14**

– Standing, Alan Minor, Dumas; Macon Patton, Camden Fairview; Miles Mitchell, Nashville; Sandy Miller-Huntsberger, DeQueen. Sitting, Relda Steelman, Harmony Grove-Camden; Bruce Warren, Crossett.

**Outstanding Boards**

The Outstanding Board Award recognizes school boards in which every member has earned at least 25 hours in ASBA's Boardmanship Program. The 2006 awardees were Cabot, Dardanelle, Drew Central, Dumas, Fort Smith, Greenland, Nettleton, Paris, Siloam Springs.

Honor Boards

The Honor Board Award recognizes school boards in which every member has earned at least 15 hours in ASBA's Boardmanship Program. The 2006 awardees were Booneville, Bryant, Charleston, Clarendon, Crossett, Eureka Springs, Foreman, Fountain Lake, Greenbrier, Greenland, Hot Springs, Junction City, Lakeside-Lake Village, Lavaca, Magnolia, Marked Tree, Mountainburg, Mulberry/Pleasant View Bi-County, North Little Rock, Prescott, Stephens, Valley View, Waldron, Westside Consolidated.

2006 Master Board Award

The Master Board Award recognizes school boards in which every member has earned at least 50 hours in ASBA's Boardmanship Program. This year's Master Board Awardees were the Dardanelle School Board, not pictured, and the Russellville School Board, pictured right. Standing are Randall Williams, superintendent; Leon Anderson; James Sorrells; and David Eddy. Sitting are Margie Smith; Virginia Berner; and Kevin Moore. Not pictured is Herb Taylor.





AMY DANIEL, ASBA PRESIDENT

School boards must be a part of legislative process



With a new governor in place and new leadership in the General Assembly, the session is under way but the number of bills so far has been small. We all know that will change, but we are optimistic that it will be less contentious than sessions of the past few years.

In the House Education Committee, Chairman Mike Kenney has made it clear that the committee will not consider bills without a fiscal impact statement, hopefully avoiding passage of unfunded mandates to the public schools. That is a good thing and something ASBA has professed. If new legislation is going to cost

districts dollars, the legislature should be prepared to provide the needed funding.

Although the number of bills right now is reasonably low, that doesn't mean our ongoing work with our lawmakers should be affected. As we have said for months, building those collaborative relationships with legislators is imperative. Senators and representatives need to hear from their constituents. They need factual and timely information from the folks they represent. Establishing trusting relationships will help to ensure that they understand the ramifications of

proposed legislation, and how any given bill will affect their school districts.

We are beginning to gather data from a number of indicators that Arkansas is making marked improvements through the school reform measures that have been legislated over the past few years. That doesn't signal that our job is done. It has really only just begun, but it should provide us with encouragement and help keep us focused on what we can do to continue raising student achievement levels.

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DAN FARLEY, ASBA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Many still confused by complex funding formula



One of the things abundantly clear to Arkansas educators is that there is barely enough time in the school day for current requirements, let alone for any added mandates, so it is our hope that the current General Assembly won't add to the current time challenges facing the schools.

Often the proposals are noble. If schools had all the time they needed, we would probably support many of them. The fact is there

is insufficient time available in the present school day or year to address what must be taught, which has been a cause for concern among many of us.

In his discussion of SmartCore at our annual conference, state Education Commissioner Dr. Ken James said that Arkansas and its schools have a "moral imperative to be competitive" in providing educational opportunities to students. That, he said, means

the state will have to consider extending the school day or the school year — both "high cost" items — in order to provide all the tools Arkansas students need to succeed in both the workplace and in college.

Increasing the length of the school year would prove quite costly. Even a small increase in the length of the school day would

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PAUL BLUME, ASBA GENERAL COUNSEL

Of conferences and hearings

Coupla things this time around: Employee conferences between administrators and employees; and lawyers at school board hearings.

First off, Arkansas Code Annotated Section 6-17-210 states: "An employee shall be entitled to and shall be offered the opportunity to have a witness or representative of the employee's choice present during any disciplinary or grievance matter with any administrator."

That's all it says, and it doesn't give much guidance about how to set about complying. Therefore, I'll venture out on my limb and suggest a few things.

There is a big difference between a "witness" and a "representative." Generally, a "witness" is a passive observer, there to ensure that a separate, arguably disinterested or objective person is present to be able to say what went on, without the histrionics or manipulations of the facts that an interested party might be subject to. On the other hand, a "representative" is usually recognized as someone who acts as an advocate for the person involved. That is, rather than being a passive witness of the proceedings, the representative has the ability – and, perhaps, the obligation – to take up the cudgel for the employee. Kinda like lawyers do. In fact, there is nothing in the law which would prevent an employee from bringing his lawyer to a conference where the principal will, for example, tell the employee that further instances of chaining the superintendent's car to the high school building will not be tolerated.

Therefore, before any disciplinary conference with an employee, the principal or superintendent must tell the employee that he has a right to a witness or representative at the conference which is to take place, say, in the principal's office at 4 o'clock that afternoon.

Now, sometimes, an employee will say that the person of his choice cannot be there at 4 o'clock. If

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Blume

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that happens, I recommend being flexible, trying to set a meeting which is convenient for all concerned. However, if the employee says that he wants his representative to be his wife's Uncle Bubba, but that Uncle Bubba is vacationing on the French Riviera and can't be there until next week (or next month), tell the employee to choose another person for his witness or representative. The law says that he has his choice of the witness, etc., but it doesn't say that it has to be his first choice. The employee can't, in other words, put off the conference for an unreasonable time because Uncle Bubba can't be there. Waiting a day or two for Uncle Bubba to show up would be reasonable; but, if you have to speak with someone about a problem of sufficient seriousness that it requires a witness or representative, and serious enough that you're going to write up the employee, tell him to find someone else, and fast.

Just don't forget to tell the employee, when you're scheduling the conference, about his right to a

witness or representative.

Interestingly, the law doesn't say anything about whether the administrator may be represented. However, if you think that a representative would be beneficial, if for no other reason than to put someone between you and the employee's representative, call the district's lawyer and ask him to be there. Sometimes, a lawyer or other representative will try to make life extremely difficult for the administrator in these situations. If the administrator is represented as well, it makes that problem much less likely.

Which leads us to Part Two of this column: lawyers at school board hearings.

As most of you know, I can be retained to assist in school board hearings, whether for employee dismissals or grievances or student expulsion hearings. For many years, I would show up, conduct the hearing with the superintendent taking on the whole responsibility for the presentation of the administration's recommendation (such as termination or expulsion), and everything was fine. However, in the last several years, for reasons I can't explain (global warming?),

these hearings have become much more contentious, sometimes adversarial in the extreme.

As a result, I now recommend in almost every circumstance where I know that the employee will be represented by a union rep or a lawyer, or where a student will be represented by a lawyer, that the administration hire its own lawyer (paid for, of course, by the district). The administration's lawyer will present witnesses to the board, question the employee's or student's witnesses and argue the administration's case to the board, both with regard to the facts and the law.

Since my primary representation is of school boards, I still conduct the hearing, decide objections, and instruct the board on the law and procedure, without becoming an advocate for either side.

So. If you're having a hearing, plan on paying for two lawyers. It's aggravating, I know, but the results are a more evenly-balanced presentation to the board, and your superintendent, principal, etc., is not out there alone, twisting slowly, slowly in the wind.

Trust me: That superintendent or principal will appreciate that.

Process

Continued from page 10

Obviously we're doing something right, and that should bolster our resolve to continue moving forward. Yes, we've made some significant gains, but the efforts must be sustained over time. Too often before these waves of school reform, our state would undertake a new initiative and toss

it before seeing if it was working. We cannot make those mistakes again. We need to see what's working and build on it. Success can beget more success.

As board members, we need to be engaged with policymakers and with one another. It is through those kinds of collaborations that we can take our state from 49th and 50th on all the lists to places we have never been before. It ought to make us feel better about ourselves to know that Arkansas

is considered a leader in many areas. Perhaps, as the staff phrases it through its three filters, we are beginning to have the kind of "education ethic" that will continue to move our state forward.

Being informed and being a strong advocate for your school districts will underscore the importance of locally elected school leaders. You owe it to your students and your communities to understand the issues and to be engaged in the legislative process.

Funding

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result in substantial cost increases because it would require changing the contracts of thousands of educators.

There seems to be little appetite for increasing foundation funding by much. In a joint meeting of the House and Senate Education Committees on January 22, the panel approved its final report on legislative hearings for the 2006 Interim Study on Educational Adequacy, required by Act 57. There was little discussion, and no public comments were sought. Questions by new members of the two committees were quickly addressed, yet those asking the questions seemed less than edified by the answers.

There continue to be mysteries in the funding matrix that confuse and confound those who are left to administer their districts. There were several recommendations in the final report offered by Picus and Odden, the consultants charged with "Recalibrating the Arkansas School Funding Structure," that are nowhere to be found in the funding matrix. It is, after all, the prerogative of the legislature to make the final decision.

Since the original matrix was adopted, there has been much confusion about extrapolating funding, which is based on a model school district of 500 students, when legal school district enrollment is set at 350. To that concern, ASBA opined in its written testimony last August 15 the following comments:

"In redesigning the school funding formula, the General

Assembly has invested heavily in education since the special session of 2003-2004. We commend you on your investment in the development of human capital and the continued improvement of the economic well-being of the State of Arkansas. Both the initial report in 2003 and the present recalibration report have stressed that implementation of the matrix would require districts to rethink and/or restructure their entire educational program. This occurred in too few districts following the passage of the new funding formula in 2004. This was due in part to insufficient knowledge and understanding by those throughout the education community. There is also the reality that this is a huge ship which is trying to be turned around and, even with the best intentions, it will not happen overnight.

"Another deterrent was the lack of a real world model for districts to follow. We believe the design of several real world models is an absolutely essential element for successful implementation of any recalibration of the funding formula. We strongly urge the legislature to safeguard the investment in public education by hiring Picus and Odden to work out at least three implementations, on paper, of the funding matrix of real Arkansas districts during the Fall of 2006. The three districts should be chosen by a blind method similar to how the sample schools were chosen for the research phase of the present recalibration study and should consist of a small, a medium, and a large district which are broadly representative of the diversity of the student configurations within the state. Nine would be better than

three because it would allow one in each category to consist of low, medium, and high poverty and/or ELL student percentages.

"The paper implementations need to be comprehensive. Student class schedules, required course offerings, teacher assignments, all statutory requirements, as well as all requirements prescribed by the ADE Rules must be met. This will serve to give a blueprint that can be adapted by other districts to fit their realities. It also will help to point out any problems with present laws and/or rules that hinder implementation of the matrix or unforeseen problems within the matrix that need to be addressed.

"It is our belief that the funding matrix is the state's definition of both what is necessary to provide an adequate education and the elements necessary to close the achievement gap and ensure all students are proficient (an important goal with or without NCLB requirements). The confusion over how to implement the matrix or whether it can even be implemented is preventing public education from moving forward and harvesting the resulting long-term benefits to the state's economy and general social well-being of our citizens. We urge the legislature to have a sufficient number of districts assisted by Picus and Odden to work out on paper how the funding matrix can be implemented. It would be a very good way to protect the public's investment in our state's education."

The suggestion went nowhere. There are still mysteries and plenty of confused and confounded folks who want to do the right thing. They would just like to understand what that is.

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Taps

Continued from page 1

Association. Meanwhile, TAPS – the Arkansas part of TIPS – has expanded into more Arkansas districts. Districts in Oklahoma and Missouri also have begun to use the system to save money and fulfill the bid obligations of purchasing laws.

TIPS received the national award based on its providing a program specifically designed for public schools and other government entities, enabling them to access special pricing on classroom supplies, furniture, computer equipment, software, portable buildings, vehicles, and more.

By participating in the TAPS program, schools can communicate

purchasing needs with other schools in similar situations to help find the best pricing available. This networking strategy can help improve the stability of purchasing for districts of all sizes.

Purpose of TAPS

TAPS provides:

- Opportunities for school districts to have greater efficiency and economy in acquiring goods and services.
- Competitive price solicitation and bulk purchasing that yield economic benefits unobtainable by individuals.
- Quick and efficient delivery of goods and services through “high performance” vendors.
- Equalized purchasing power for smaller entities.
- Credibility and confidence in

business procedures by maintaining open competition for purchases and by complying with purchasing laws and ethical business practices.

- Documentation of bid awards and membership records.

Becoming a Member

If it hasn't already done so, your district can become a member of TAPS at no cost or obligation by adopting a board resolution and completing an interlocal agreement with the Dawson Education Service Cooperative in Arkadelphia. Once that is done and Dawson notifies TIPS, you will receive a welcome packet and a TIPS/TAPS vendor directory, along with instructions on how to order.

If you'd like to learn more about TAPS, visit the TIPS website at www.tips-usa.com.



Arkansas School Boards Association REPORTER

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