



# A NEW VISION FOR ARKANSAS EDUCATION



WORKING TOGETHER TO ADVANCE EDUCATION

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VISION:

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Our vision  
is that *every*  
Arkansas student  
will graduate  
prepared  
for success in  
**COLLEGE**  
and the  
**WORKPLACE.**

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# What Great Looks Like

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## When the bus pulls up to the stop, Marcus and his mother are waiting.

He gets a quick hug from Mom, then a high-five from Ms. Susan, the bus driver, before heading off to school. When they get there, a volunteer who owns a café in town greets the kids and helps monitor the parking lot.

Marcus walks in carrying a book assigned for class, hoping to read a few extra pages before the bell rings. Sure, he's two chapters ahead, but it's getting really good! Breakfast is whole-grain blueberry muffins with fruit and milk - one of his favorites - so the book might have to wait for a little while.

Marcus's teacher, Mrs. Raines, is busy putting the finishing touches on a new multiplication relay the class is going to play this morning. They'll analyze the results on school tablets afterward. During their weekly collaboration time, she and her fellow teachers have been working on ways to incorporate active games into math lessons. This is just the thing some of her kids need to make those math facts really stick.

Later, Marcus and several friends are going on a nature scavenger hunt with the afterschool program, plus working on creating slide presentations. They'll do homework, too, but Marcus doesn't mind. Mr. Clarkson will be there to help him check his writing (and then teach him some more chess moves).

Mom picks him up on the way home from work, and Marcus spends the entire trip telling her about this new computer design project. Mrs. Raines showed him a website with pictures of famous buildings. She said he could be an architect one day, and that sounds like a pretty cool career.



# About ForwARd

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ForwARd Arkansas is a partnership of education, business, government and community members committed to improving public education in our state. The group, guided by a steering committee, has conducted extensive research and is encouraging statewide discussion and activities aimed at strengthening public education.

ForwARd is organized by the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, Walton Family Foundation and Arkansas Board of Education. The steering committee is made up of the following individuals, all of whom voted and approved these recommendations:

## Steering Committee

**Ana Aguayo**, Board Member, Citizens First Congress

**Shane Broadway**, Vice President for University Relations, Arkansas State University

**Deborah Coffman**, Chief of Staff, Arkansas Department of Education

**Toby Daugherty**, Lead Recruiter and Outreach Coordinator, The STAND Foundation

**Bill Dillard III**, Vice President, Dillard's Inc.

**Marcy Doderer**, President and CEO, Arkansas Children's Hospital

**Matt Dozier**, President and CEO, Environmental and Spatial Technology (EAST) Initiative

**Bob East**, Co-Founder, East-Harding Inc.

**Joyce Elliot**, Arkansas State Senator

**Melanie Fox**, Co-Founder, J&M Foods

**Diana Gonzales Worthen**, Director, Project RISE at University of Arkansas at Fayetteville

**Lavina Grandon**, Founder and President, Rural Community Alliance

**Ginny Kurrus**, Former State President, Arkansas Parent-Teacher Association

**Michele Linch**, Executive Director, Arkansas State Teachers Association

**Hugh McDonald**, President and CEO, Entergy Arkansas Inc.

**Justin Minkel**, Elementary School Teacher, Jones Elementary School in Springdale

**David Rainey**, Former Superintendent, Dumas Public Schools

**John Riggs IV**, President, J.A. Riggs Tractor Company

**Brenda Robinson**, President, Arkansas Education Association

**Scott Shirey**, Founder and Executive Director, KIPP Delta Public Schools

**Ray Simon**, Former Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of Education

**Kathy Smith**, Senior Program Officer, Walton Family Foundation

**Leandro Braslavsky Soldi**, Finance Director, Hispanic Community Services Inc.

**LaDonna Spain**, School Improvement Specialist, Arkansas Department of Education

**Joy Springer**, Student Advocate

**Sherece West-Scantlebury**, President and CEO, Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation

**Darrin Williams**, CEO, Southern Bancorp Inc.

**Kenya Williams**, Co-Chair, Strong-Community Leadership Alliance

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Get to know us better. We want you to know who we are and what we are trying to do. Want more information? Contact us at [info@forwardarkansas.org](mailto:info@forwardarkansas.org).

## **OUR PROCESS: Pages 5-7**

Hundreds of hours of research and discussion have been invested in developing these recommendations. We want you to understand our process and how we reached these recommendations.

## **WHERE WE WANT TO GO: Pages 8-9**

Every good vision starts with a goal, and every good goal has measurable results. This section explains our goal and how we plan to measure the results of our efforts.

## **AREAS OF FOCUS: Pages 10-51**

After defining the seven areas of focus, the group directed its research efforts on fully understanding those areas. This section is divided into the seven areas of focus and explains the importance of the focus area, research on current Arkansas education, and aspirations and recommendations for the future.

The recommendations for each focus area are divided into a few different categories. “Foundational recommendations” are those deemed by the steering committee to be the most critical to improving Arkansas education. “Quick wins” are faster to accomplish and will get results quickly. Other recommendations might not fall into either category, but are still important.

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## **CONCLUSION: Pages 52-53**

This section explains how implementing these recommendations can affect Arkansans and how you can get involved. Will you join us?

# Introduction

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We want every day to be a great day for Arkansas students. What does great look like? It looks like Marcus – and thousands of children like him – being happy, healthy and excited about learning. It looks like teachers who are supported and prepared. It looks like parents who are engaged and invested. It looks like progress. Arkansas has the ability to do all of this and more for students in every corner of the state – and that will change everything. More students graduating from college. A better, prepared workforce. Higher incomes. Increased prosperity. Education is where it all begins.

The ForwARd State of Education in Arkansas Report, made public in January 2015, highlighted opportunities for improvement in Arkansas education based on in-depth analysis of school readiness, academic performance and college outcomes. The research was clear: Arkansas is making gains to increase access to pre-K and college, but kindergarten readiness and college completion rates are still low. On nationally administered tests of students in fourth- and eighth-grade math and reading, the average scores in Arkansas are below national averages.

While the report identified clear gaps affecting our students, simply recognizing those gaps in Arkansas education will not close them. To close the gaps and move all students to excellence, we need a new vision for education in Arkansas.

To create realistic, workable recommendations that are tailored to Arkansas, the ForwARd team relied on input from students, teachers, administrators, community and business leaders, parents and more. Working together, the steering committee developed a vision that every Arkansas student will graduate prepared for success in college and the workplace. To measure progress toward that vision, the steering committee established a strategic goal, metrics and targets.

## VISION:

**Our vision is that every Arkansas student will graduate prepared for success in college and the workplace.**

## STRATEGIC GOAL:

**Becoming a leading state in education by improving student achievement at a historically ambitious yet achievable rate and closing the achievement gap within a generation.**

They then selected seven areas of focus where changes will make the biggest impact on Arkansas education. Based on the research and feedback outlined in this document, the ForwARd team has created a list of recommendations for each of the focus areas: pre-K, teaching and learning, teacher pipeline, effective leadership, support beyond the classroom, academic distress, and systems and policies. Implementing these recommendations fully and consistently should result in a dramatic improvement in Arkansas education.

These recommendations are informed by Arkansans across the state and reflect the rigorous efforts of a diverse steering committee. As the recommendations are implemented, it may be necessary to make adjustments based on the values and aspirations of the steering committee and ForwARd's commitment to excellence for every student in Arkansas.

# Our Process

Since November 2014, the ForwARd team has been gathering information about the state of education in Arkansas. Our first set of findings is outlined in the State of Education in Arkansas Report, published in January 2015. Below is a summary of the key findings from the report. The full report can be read at [ForwardArkansas.org](http://ForwardArkansas.org).

## Findings From State of Education in Arkansas

### 1 Access

Arkansas has been successful in improving access to education and in increasing participation in higher-level educational activities.

- ▶ **Pre-K Access:** Top 20 nationally
- ▶ **High School Graduation Rate:** Above national average
- ▶ **AP Exams & ACT:** Very large increase in participating students
- ▶ **College-Going Rate:** Top 20 nationally

### 2 Standards

Arkansas has established policies and standards that should support improved student outcomes.

- ▶ **Common Core:** Arkansas is now four years into the implementation of this rigorous college-ready standards program
- ▶ **Principal & Teacher Licensure & Training:** Arkansas has been recognized as a leader in developing standards in these areas
- ▶ **Per-Pupil Expenditure:** Arkansas's per-pupil expenditure has increased in recent years and is near national average

### 3 Outcomes

Student outcomes are still far below aspirations across the state; opportunity exists to improve.

- ▶ **Pre-K:** For low-income children who attended pre-K, only 18 percent were considered “developed” in all six Qualls Early Learning Inventory (QELI) categories: 31 percent in at least five categories, 43 percent in at least four categories and 57 percent in three or less categories
- ▶ **Fourth- and Eighth-Grade:** Bottom 20 nationally in math and literacy test scores – and that rank has dropped since 2005
- ▶ **College Graduation Rate:** 39 percent (48th in the nation)

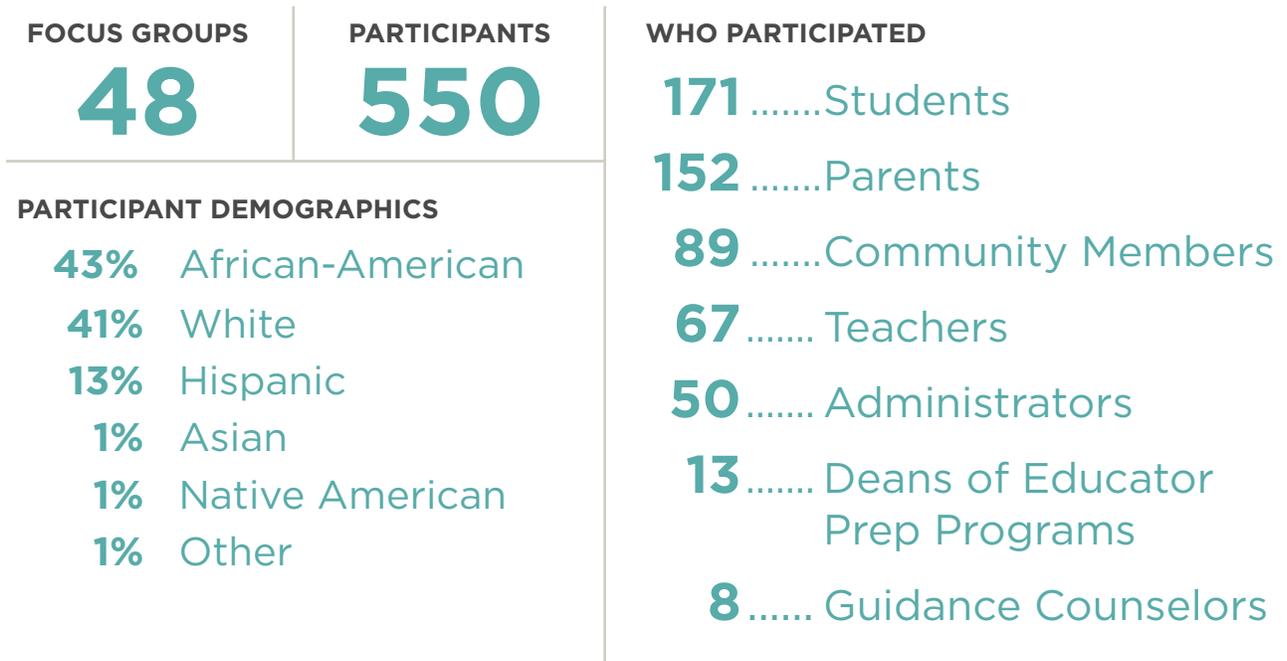
### 4 Achievement Gap

Despite recent gains, the achievement gap is still significant, and this is reflected in economic, racial and regional disparities.

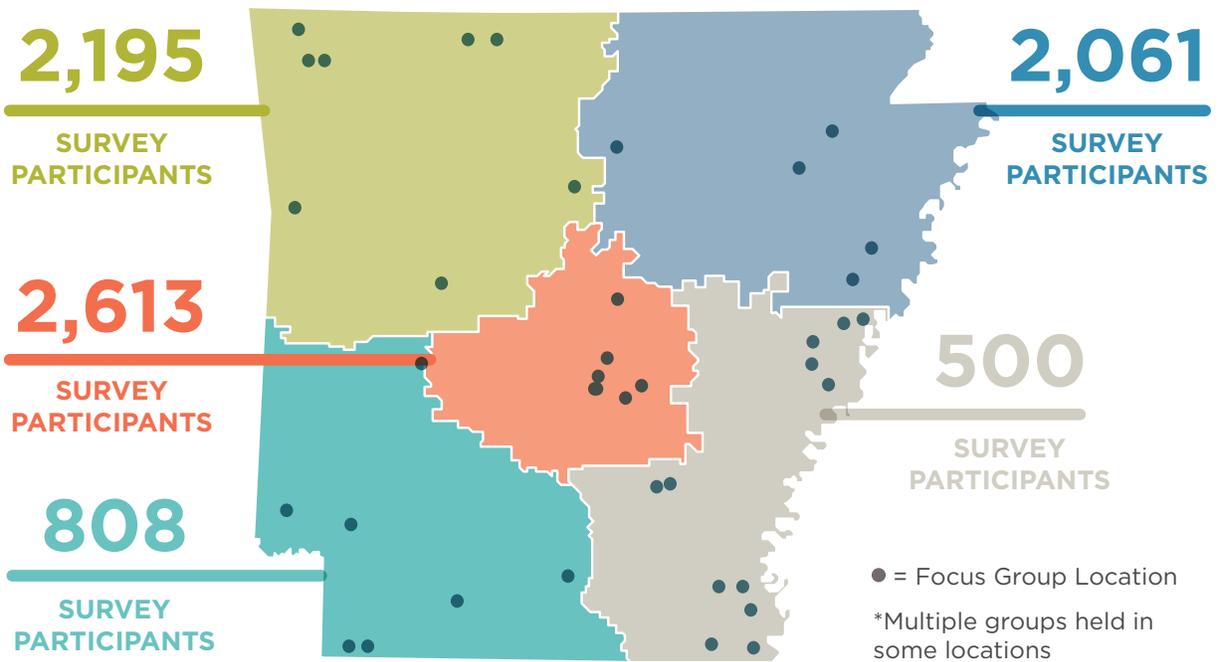
- ▶ **Low-Income & Minority Students:** Perform below other students on national tests, although the gap has narrowed since 2005
- ▶ **Regional Achievement:** Southeast has lowest average but largest gains; Central has largest disparity and concentration of academically distressed schools
- ▶ **Pockets of Performance:** Across Arkansas, there are pockets of high and low performance suggesting opportunity to spread what already works well statewide

After compiling data on Arkansas education, ForwARd gained valuable insight by conducting interviews, surveys and focus groups with a wide variety of Arkansans. Their input helped us better understand the challenges and opportunities in Arkansas education. We sought to capture diverse perspectives on best practices and challenges by conducting interviews, surveys and focus groups, including:

### Focus Groups: Who Provided Input

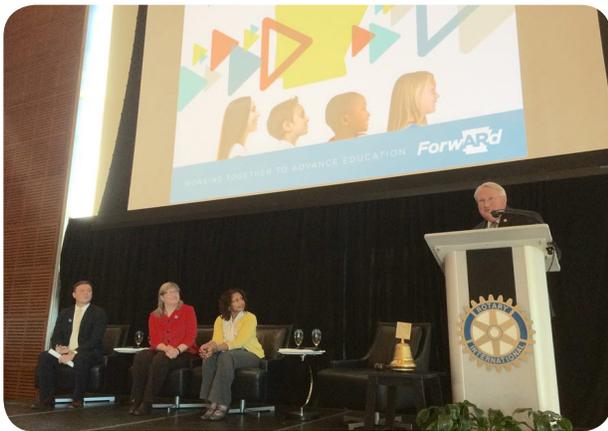
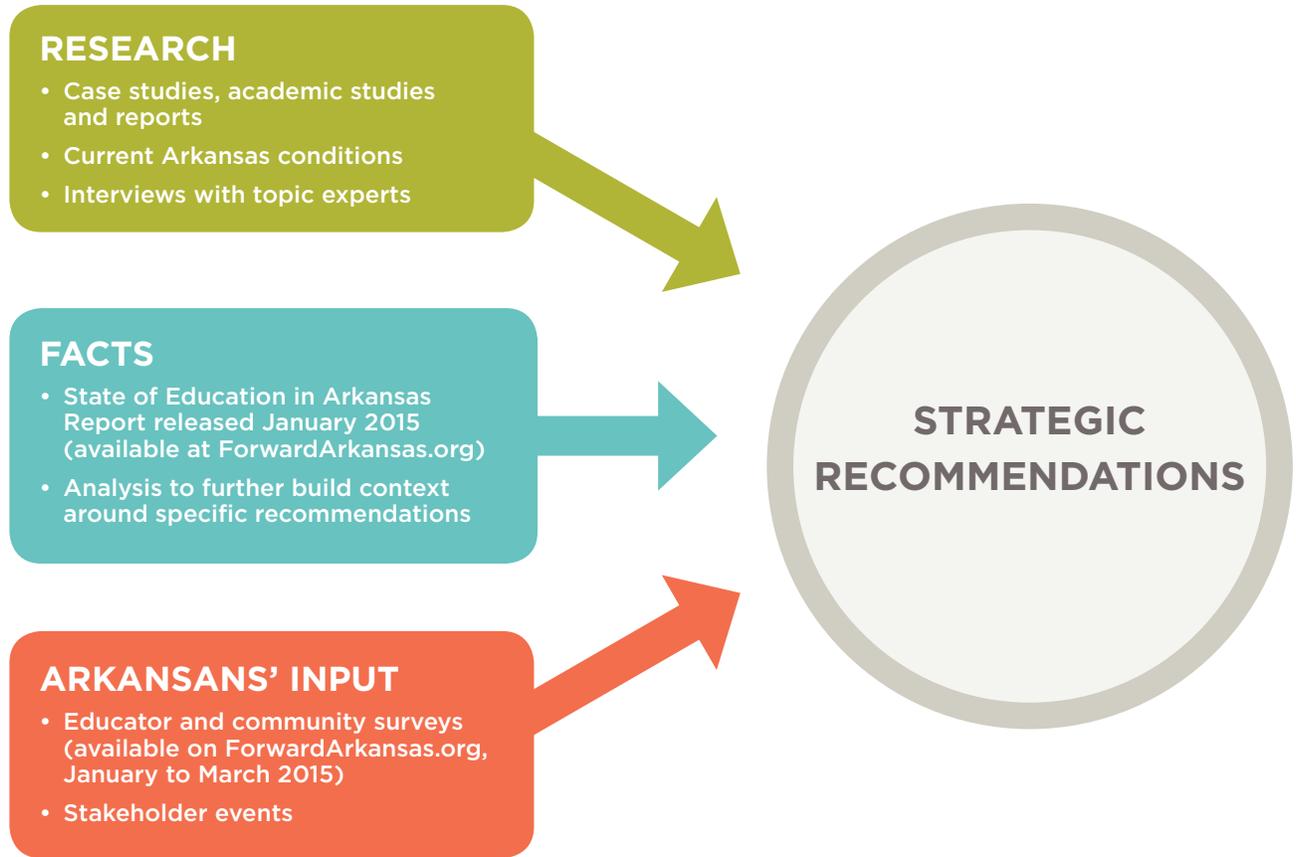


### Where Input Came From



Over 90 percent of districts and 70 percent of schools are represented in the survey results.

We believe that there are nuances to Arkansas education that go above and beyond what statistics and data can convey. What is working in our state? What isn't? What do Arkansans aspire to? Firsthand insight is critical to our future success. That is why we used all of the information collected through online surveys and form submissions, focus groups, community events and interviews with experts in the field to ultimately shape the recommendations.



# Where We Want to Go

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To ensure we are making progress toward our strategic goal – and ultimately our vision – we need measurable checkpoints along the way. Metrics also show our progress, or lack thereof, so we can know if student needs are being met and if schools are moving in the right direction. As a state, we must compare our student achievement to what other states, and ultimately other nations, prove is achievable. Why? Because our kids deserve the best.

Of course, setting state metrics and targets does not take the place of individual schools and districts setting their own goals and measures that provide local insight.

Unfortunately, measuring progress in education is difficult. Currently, there is not a set of metrics available that we feel measures progress holistically. For example, there is no established metric for measuring how prepared students are for the workplace. Until we can develop better metrics, we must continue to rely on existing assessments, rankings and test scores. But we will use them in a new way.

Traditional metrics have long been used to hold educators and students accountable. For many, these metrics feel like the center of the educational universe around which everything else revolves. Now it's time to use available metrics to hold ourselves accountable. Legislators, school boards, community members, parents – we all have a responsibility to our students and educators. To assess progress toward that end, we recommend using the following metrics:

## METRICS FOR STRATEGIC GOAL:

### KINDERGARTEN READINESS

Average Qualls Early Learning Inventory (QELI) score for Free and Reduced Lunch students attending ABC/Head Start

QELI is an observational tool for use in the primary grades to identify student development in six areas related to school learning. The inventory observes behaviors developed in school so observations can be used to inform instruction and improve achievement.

### MIDDLE SCHOOL READINESS

Fourth-grade National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading rank

### HIGH SCHOOL READINESS

Eighth-grade National Assessment of

Educational Progress (NAEP) math rank. NAEP is the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of what students in the United States know and can do in various subject areas.

### COLLEGE READINESS

Arkansas's national ACT rank among states with more than 50 percent participation in the ACT

The ACT is a national college admissions examination that consists of subject area tests in English, mathematics, reading and science.

### POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS

Two- and four-year college graduation rate national rank

## Tracking Progress<sup>1</sup>

In order to reach our goal, Arkansas will have to make substantial gains at all levels – pre-K, elementary, middle school, high school and college – over the next 25 years. With this in mind, we set target metrics at each level to track both parts of our goal: raising overall achievement and eliminating the achievement gap.

For example, Arkansas’s NAEP fourth-grade reading score must improve by 1.4 points each year for Arkansas to be ranked fifth in the nation by 2041, and the achievement gap must decrease by .97 points each year to be eliminated by 2041. These projected gains are based on the assumption that other states will continue to improve at the national average growth rate, and that Arkansas meets its annual goals. Maintaining this rate of improvement will be a challenge, but it is possible. Consider our target fourth-grade reading score improvement of 1.4 points per year. At least three states have improved at this rate or faster over the last 10 years.



# Areas of Focus

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## How We Get There

The following pages include a detailed explanation of each of the areas of focus for which we have created specific recommendations. Each area of focus is divided into three categories: importance of the focus area, research on current Arkansas education, and aspirations and recommendations for the future of Arkansas education. Below is an overview for each section.

### 1 Pre-K

All students, starting with those in highest need, have access to high-quality early childhood learning opportunities so they arrive at kindergarten ready to learn.

- Starting with lowest-income areas, improve quality of programs to meet new, high standards.
- Then, increase access to pre-K in areas of shortage.

### 2 Teaching & Learning

Each student is supported in developing the full range of knowledge and skills she/he needs to be successful in college and career. All schools have a culture of mutual respect, high expectations for all, teamwork and continuous growth.

- Embed more high-quality teacher collaboration in schools.
- Establish workforce education pathways that provide college credit during high school and prepare students for both career and higher education options.
- Improve testing in a way that maintains academic rigor, uses classroom time thoughtfully, informs teaching, and measures student progress holistically.

### 3 Teacher Pipeline

All schools, especially those in high-need areas, have access to talented educators who have been rigorously prepared.

- Build homegrown teaching talent by expanding programs like Teacher Cadet.
- Expand pathways for nontraditional educators without sacrificing quality.
- Attract top talent to high-need schools and subjects by improving incentives.

## 4 Support Beyond the Classroom

All students and families, starting with those in highest need, have access to and support in accessing the nutritional and health resources needed to come to school ready to learn.

- Increase access to nutrition by implementing healthy breakfast as a part of the school day.
- Provide high-risk children and families improved support in navigating access to quality health care services.

## 5 Leadership

All education leaders put students at the center of their decisions, work tirelessly to build and support a team, deploy resources effectively, and hold themselves and their team accountable for enabling all children to be successful.

- Empower principals to set a shared vision, and manage staff and resources to reach it.
- Support implementation of a rigorous administrator evaluation system.
- Expand rigorous preparation programs and mentorship.
- Focus school board training on good governance; align board elections with general election.

## 6 Academic Distress

All schools in academic distress and pre-academic distress receive support and interventions that enable them to transform their school cultures, dramatically improve student achievement, and sustain their improvement over time.

- Create a transparent process that proactively identifies schools approaching distress.
- Empower one unit at the ADE and staff it with top talent to manage the process.
- Measure progress holistically (not just test scores) and share with the community.

## 7 Systems & Policies

All school districts have sufficient funding and use resources in a way that most effectively supports student success. Policies enable the implementation of recommendations needed for Arkansas to become a leading state in education.

- Streamline the regulatory burden (on teachers and administrators, educator prep programs, ADE) to enable a focus on instruction, encourage innovation, and support a mindset shift from compliance to excellence.
- Improve district capabilities to make decisions based on evidence of educational impact.
- Over time, increase funding to support educational excellence, tying incremental increases to evidence of effective resource use.

# 1

## Pre-K

### Why It's Important

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High-quality pre-K is crucial for preparing children to succeed. This stance is supported by the most respected national research, as well as by Arkansas student outcomes data. Research shows that the benefits of a high-quality pre-K program last through adulthood – particularly for students growing up in poverty. While developing academic skills like reading is important, it's about more than learning to read – pre-K also helps develop social skills and the ability to self-regulate. Investment in high-quality pre-K programs will prevent delays for many children, thus the need for remediation in later grades.<sup>2</sup>

**“The children coming to kindergarten without pre-K instruction are performing significantly lower than their peers.”**

**– Arkansas Educator**  
(ForwARd Educator Survey)



# Pre-K in Arkansas Today

## Pre-K Quality<sup>3</sup>

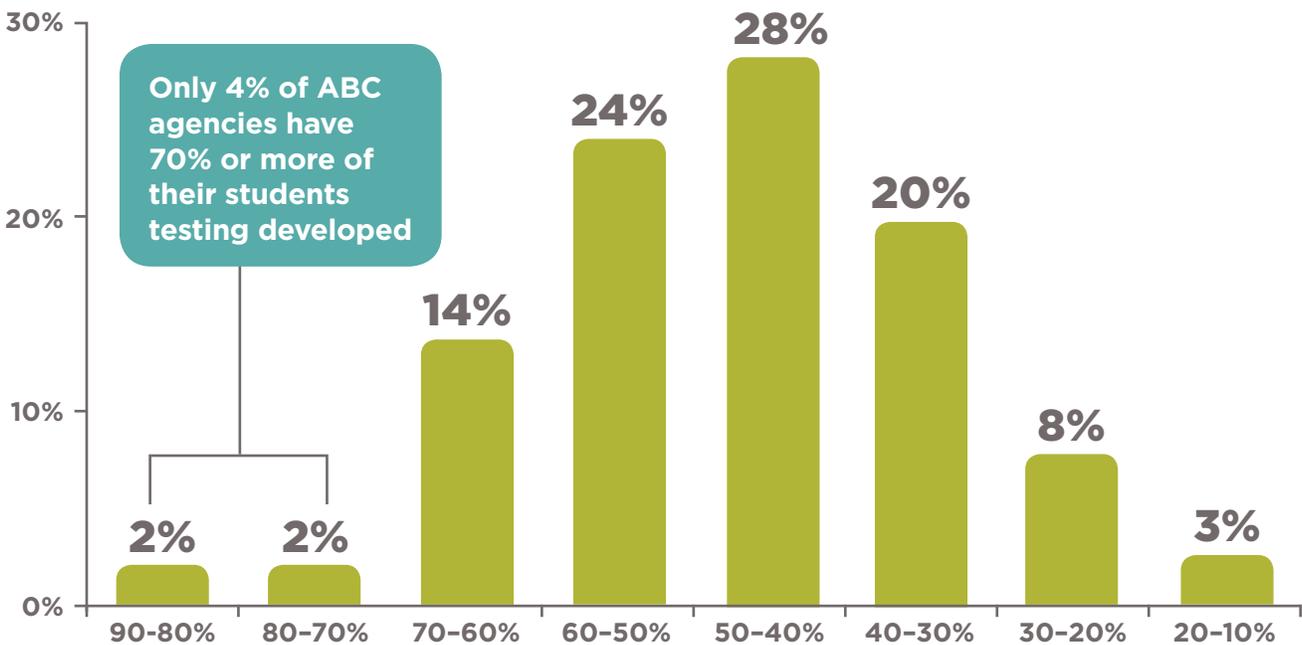
The Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) program is designed to support high-quality pre-K programming that helps at-risk children develop intellectually, physically, socially and emotionally. This program mainly consists of students from families with incomes under 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Line (FPL).

In Arkansas, 49 percent of 3- and 4-year-olds attend pre-K, which is in keeping with the national average of 48 percent. However, there is a vast difference in the performance of students from different pre-K programs.

To understand the difference in programs, we looked at student outcomes with family income below 100 percent of the FPL. In the top third of programs, more than 70 percent of low-income students test as developed on the Qualls Early Learning Inventory (QELI). QELI is an observational tool for use in the primary grades to identify student development in six areas related to school learning. The inventory observes behaviors developed in school so observations can be used to inform instruction and improve achievement. However, the bottom third of ABC providers have fewer than 30 percent of low-income students reach that same goal.

### Students From ABC Agencies Testing Developed\*

Percentage of ABC agencies



Average percentage of free-lunch students testing developed

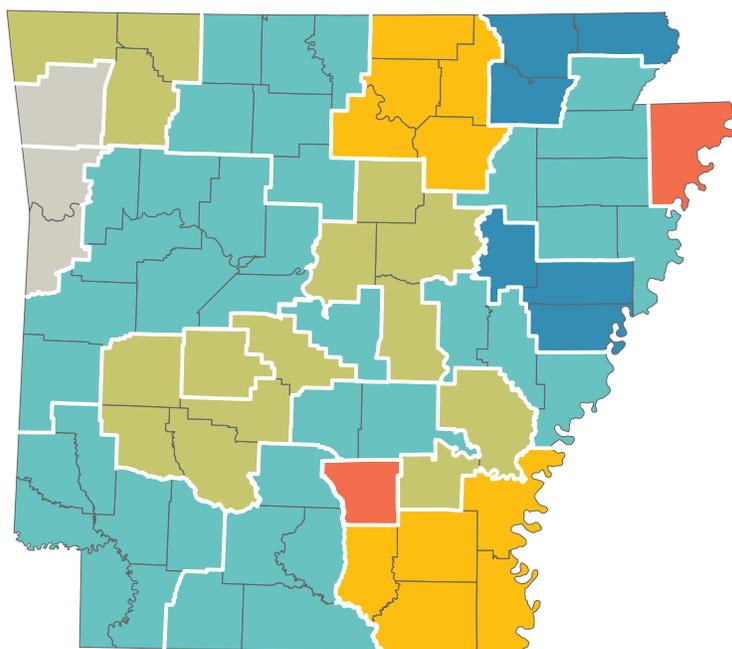
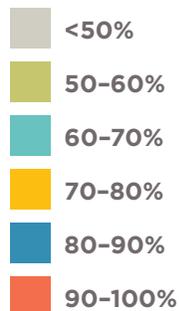
\*Based on Qualls Early Learning Inventory (QELI)

## Pre-K Availability<sup>4</sup>

Not all students who are eligible for an ABC program have the opportunity to attend. Why? There simply aren't enough seats. Arkansas has the capacity to accommodate 62 percent of low-income 4-year-olds in either an ABC or Head Start program. However, this availability varies widely by region.

In some regions, there are enough seats to accommodate every child under 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Line. Yet two Arkansas jurisdictions do not have enough seats for even half of the eligible students. Counties in northwest Arkansas are among those with the least capacity compared to the population of eligible students.

### Percentage of 4-year-old FRL students covered by ABC or Head Start pre-K<sup>5</sup>



White outlines = Jurisdictions  
Black outlines = Counties

## Pre-K Performance Over Time

To fully understand the importance of early childhood education, it is crucial to have data that demonstrates the long-term impact on students. However, currently, no system exists statewide to link pre-K student enrollment with K-12 performance in order to measure long-term effectiveness of pre-K programs.

# Where We Want to Go

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## Aspiration

All students, starting with those in highest need, have access to high-quality early childhood learning opportunities so they arrive at kindergarten ready to learn.

## Recommendations

### FOUNDATIONAL

- ▶ Set clear standards for what high quality means in Arkansas, based on established research, and improve all pre-K seats to meet these new, high-quality standards.
- ▶ Improve longitudinal tracking of student performance, trace outcomes back to specific programs, and actively collect data on barriers faced by families preventing higher enrollment.
- ▶ After all current seats meet high-quality standards, increase number of seats in areas with shortages so all eligible students can attend Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) or Head Start (maximizing use of federal funds; for example, Head Start, funds allocated to daycare, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, etc.).

### QUICK WINS

- ▶ Develop or select strong kindergarten readiness indicators.
- ▶ Tightly align Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) and Head Start curricula with strategic goal of kindergarten readiness.
- ▶ Develop marketing program to educate and communicate value of pre-K to parents.

### OTHER

- ▶ Move toward goal of ensuring all pre-K teachers have a bachelor's degree and specialized Early Childhood Education training.
- ▶ Conduct analysis to determine if there is need to expand 200 percent Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) threshold for guaranteed pre-K seats.

# 2

## Teaching & Learning

### Why It's Important

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Empowering teachers to learn and grow in their professional skills is arguably one of the most important ways to create a culture of continuous growth, lift student achievement and make the profession attractive over the long term. But efforts to support and strengthen education – whether in the classroom, online or in the field – must ultimately have a positive impact on student learning. Therefore, being learner-centric must be a top priority in order to maximize resources (time, training, curriculum, funding and more) and support student achievement.

### Teaching & Learning in AR Today

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#### Teacher Learning and Development

Through our outreach efforts, Arkansas educators identified a need for professional learning opportunities that are more relevant to their experiences, immediately applicable in the classroom, and interactive. In addition, educators indicated that they learn more when material is delivered by someone who understands what it is like to be a teacher and when learning opportunities are sustained over time.

Educators also identified well-structured collaboration with other educators as an opportunity to learn and grow. This time can be spent developing content skills, agreeing with other educators on standards and expectations, building relationships, and working together to plan specific lessons. However, many educators in Arkansas either don't have time built into the school week to collaborate with their peers or feel that the collaboration time lacks clear objectives.

**“We should have collaboration and mentorship for teachers built into the day so teachers can grow continuously.”**

**– Arkansas Educator**  
(ForwARd Educator Survey)

## Instructional Preparation

In our focus groups and surveys, educators expressed concerns about spending fewer hours than ever before on preparing to teach. As more rules and responsibilities have been introduced – requiring educators to spend more and more time “checking the box” – teachers feel that students must compete with paperwork for time and attention.

## Testing

Appropriate, well-planned testing can provide crucial feedback for instruction. Results can be used to identify a student’s learning strengths and needs or to assure that all student groups in a school are making progress in their learning. Either way, testing outcomes can be powerful drivers of data-driven decision-making at all levels to ensure that individual needs are met and district curriculum and instruction alignment is effective.

However, focus groups and survey participants – including Arkansas educators, parents and students – all cite concerns about the current testing environment. We heard that testing takes too much time away from instruction, and that it doesn’t help students develop a full range of knowledge and skills. To address these shared concerns, we need to ensure that testing is useful. How? By eliminating any redundancies and streamlining testing requirements. In addition, testing should be holistic and help students develop the skills they need to succeed beyond the classroom.

## Workforce Education

Only about one in five Arkansas students (20 percent) graduates from a two-year college within three years, or a four-year college within six years. This tells us that we have an opportunity to better transition students from K-12 education into and through higher education and the workforce.<sup>6</sup>

One way of doing this is through a workforce education pathway: a program that, beginning in high school, teaches students academic and technical skills needed to succeed in college and/or high-demand, high-opportunity jobs. Students aren’t required to decide up front whether they want to get a job or go to college; instead, they get hands-on experience, earn college credit while still in high school, and keep their future options open. For example, through an advanced manufacturing pathway, a student would have the option to get an advanced manufacturing job after high school, pursue a community college degree, or pursue a bachelor’s degree and beyond.

These programs are often developed in partnership with local community colleges and industries. One example in Arkansas is the Arkansas Delta Training and Education Consortium (ADTEC), a collaboration of community colleges in eastern Arkansas that partners with businesses to develop industry-driven career and technical training. More than 9,000 individuals, including 1,000 youth, have been provided career-specific training, with employers voicing satisfaction with “dramatic” changes in students’ skill levels.<sup>7</sup>

# Where We Want to Go

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## Aspiration

**Each student is supported in developing the full range of knowledge and skills he/she needs to be successful in college and career. All schools have a culture of mutual respect, high expectations for all, teamwork and continuous growth.**

## Recommendations

### FOUNDATIONAL

- ▶ Schools should embed meaningful teacher collaboration time into the school day (for example, three hours per week) and provide support to teachers in order to use this time effectively.
- ▶ Districts should assess effectiveness of current professional development. For less effective professional development, reinvest time and funds toward more district teacher-driven professional development, observations and coaching.
- ▶ Improve testing for students, teachers and schools. The emerging assessment approach should maintain academic rigor, use classroom time thoughtfully (by eliminating redundant or low-priority tests), inform teaching and continuous learning, and measure student progress holistically (including “21st century” higher-order cognitive skills and noncognitive skills).
- ▶ Establish workforce education pathways across the state that enable students to earn college credit in high school and pursue career opportunities while preserving options to pursue higher education. For example, through an advanced manufacturing pathway, a student would have the option to get an advanced manufacturing job after high school, pursue a community college degree, or pursue a bachelor’s degree and beyond. Pathways should be developed with consideration of job opportunities in the state and beyond.
- ▶ Offer adequate broadband access for all schools, meeting national standards for throughput (100 kbps/student as of 2015). Adequate broadband will enable students and teachers to access online resources and improve teaching and learning.

### QUICK WINS

- ▶ Introduce more flexibility at state and district levels for what can count toward professional development hours (for example, allow National Board Certified Teachers a degree of flexibility with professional development hours.)
- ▶ Reduce and streamline teachers’ tasks to enable them to focus on instruction. Begin with an investigation of current teacher tasks and streamlining opportunities.

**OTHER**

- ▶ Support the rigorous implementation of standards (for example, Common Core State Standards) through continued professional development provided by the state, Education Service Cooperatives (co-ops) and districts.
- ▶ Offering competitive funding for school and district proposals to implement structural innovations. Research-based structural innovations to consider include implementing a year-round calendar, extending learning time (school day and/or year, with a proportional increase in staff pay), and looping classrooms (having same teacher instruct same students for more than one school year).



# 3

## Teacher Pipeline

### Why It's Important

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A high-quality teacher has proven to be the single most important in-school factor for student learning, with one influential study suggesting that teacher quality alone could account for anywhere between 7 and 20 percent of the variation in student achievement.<sup>8</sup> Another study found that simply replacing the least effective 5 to 10 percent of U.S. teachers with just an average-performing counterpart would lead U.S. schools to rise to the top of international rankings.<sup>9</sup>

#### Building Strong Teachers for Arkansas

- **ATTRACT** the most qualified applicants
- **PREPARE** to the highest standards
- **SUPPORT & DEVELOP** through fair evaluations and strong training and mentoring

**“With a great teacher, the kids are excited and learning. Without a great teacher, the kids are bored and not engaged.”**

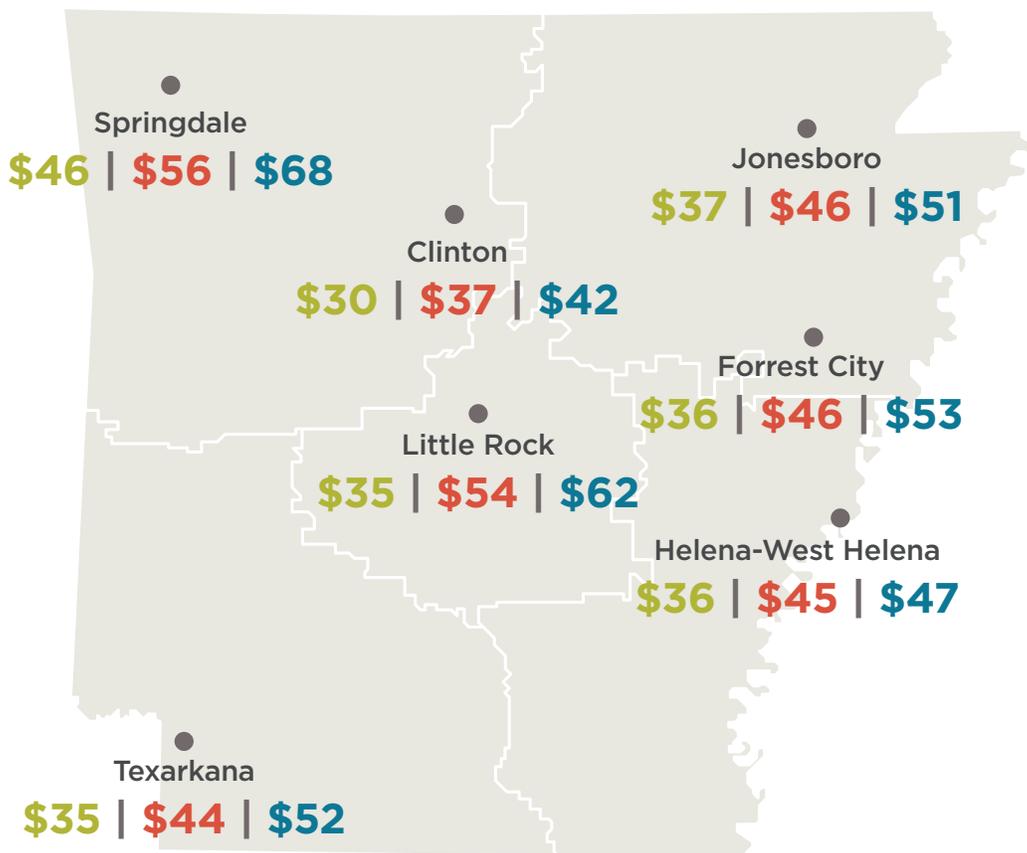
**– Arkansas Educator**  
(ForwARd Educator Survey)

# Teacher Pipeline in Arkansas Today

## Attracting Teachers

Teachers consider salary, location, leadership and school culture when selecting a school district. Many Arkansas districts report difficulty in attracting teachers to high-need subjects, such as math and computer science, and to various locations across the state. Districts have flexibility to adjust teacher salaries and the chart below shows how those salaries vary statewide.

### Teacher Salaries Vary Across the State<sup>10</sup>



Salary for length of time working = 0 yrs | 15 yrs | Max

Measured in thousands

## Prepare

Traditionally, Arkansas educators are prepared through educator preparation bachelor's degree programs, where students spend four years learning subject matter knowledge, learning how to be a teacher and getting classroom experience. In Arkansas, there are also several alternative educator preparation routes that enable high-potential, nontraditional candidates to become educators and teach in Arkansas's highest-need areas, such as the Arkansas Teacher Corp and Teach for America. There is a need to continue to improve our educator preparation programs, both traditional and alternative, in order to ensure Arkansas's students have the best educators possible.

In our outreach, we heard that while all agree that setting a high standard for educator preparation programs is important, Arkansas's educator preparation programs have been constrained by excess regulations and paperwork that do not help programs prepare educators. This includes redundant paperwork and reporting, as well as excessively detailed and prescriptive requirements around how programs are run (for example, details on which topics are covered and how much time students spend in their internship).

Understanding the effectiveness of an educator preparation program is an important part of helping programs improve. In 2014, Arkansas Department of Education published its first Educator Preparation Performance Report (EPPR) which measures teacher program effectiveness. While currently using limited metrics, the ADE aspires that future EPPRs measure more outcomes, like student growth of program graduates. Providing transparency on outcomes, highlighting effective practices, and offering data-driven improvement suggestions will help improve programs.<sup>11</sup>

## Support and Develop

In 2013, Arkansas passed the Teacher Excellence and Support System (TESS), a comprehensive and standardized teacher evaluation process, to promote effective teaching and leading in Arkansas schools. The majority of teachers believe TESS in Arkansas is headed in the right direction, but implementation must be well executed for maximum impact. We need to support efforts to ensure that teachers receive effective preparation and are also provided continuous feedback for professional development.

# Where We Want to Go

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## Aspiration

All schools, especially those in high-need areas, have access to talented educators who have been rigorously prepared.

## Recommendations

### FOUNDATIONAL

- ▶ Support the introduction and expansion of programs that encourage talented, local high school students to pursue a teaching credential and enter the teaching profession (for example, the Teacher Cadet Program offers top high school students an opportunity to learn about teaching and get classroom experience with teacher supervision).
- ▶ Attract top talent to teach in high-need subjects (for example, Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM), special education, English as a Second Language (ESL)) and high-need schools by offering districts flexibility to pay these teachers more than stipulated by the salary schedule and by improving the incentives offered. Ensure high-need subjects can be defined locally to account for geographical variation.
- ▶ Support expansion of effective alternative educator pathways and subject expert pathways for nontraditional talent to enter the teaching profession without sacrificing quality. Explore additional innovative models from traditional and alternative providers to address the need for talent in high-need subjects and high-need schools.
- ▶ Enable both traditional and alternative educator preparation programs to innovate and improve by reviewing and streamlining regulations that do not drive outcomes. More regulatory flexibility could allow for programs with experiential/competency-based learning elements and 3+1 programs where teachers have paid, year-long internships.
- ▶ Support state efforts to measure and report the performance of educator preparation programs, including the inclusion of multiple outcome measures such as the student growth of graduates. In addition, encourage the state to hold traditional and alternative educator preparation programs, accountable for their completers/graduates impact on student learning.

### QUICK WINS

- ▶ Establish centralized educator recruitment resources for potential educators across Arkansas. Develop a state-of-the-art website in order to attract and recruit potential teachers from across the state and beyond.

## OTHER

- ▶ In the long term, support substantial additional investment to pay teachers more.
- ▶ Offer funding for educator preparation program proposals to offer support to graduates in their first year of teaching.
- ▶ Enable educator preparation programs to learn from the most highly-rated programs on the educator preparation report card by systematically recognizing, sharing and learning from excellent educator preparation practices. This could be supported by activities at an Arkansas-wide teaching and learning summit.
- ▶ Develop teacher leader roles (especially roles allowing teachers to maintain time in the classroom) to allow effective teachers to take on more responsibility, support school leadership and be compensated more. Teacher leaders should be selected based on rigorous, objective criteria.
- ▶ Support ongoing implementation of a rigorous teacher support and accountability system, such as Teacher Excellence and Support System. Monitor policies and implementation to maintain evaluation accuracy, rigor and fairness, and offer continued administrator professional development.
- ▶ Recognize, celebrate and systematically learn from excellent teaching and excellent teachers (for example, Arkansas-wide teaching and learning summit, public marketing campaign showcasing excellent teachers and their impact).



# 4

## Effective Leadership

### Why It's Important

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Highly effective principals, assistant principals, superintendents, assistant superintendents, school board members and other district leadership in schools are critical for improving educational outcomes in Arkansas. These leaders use resources well and wisely and are focused on helping students succeed. The recommendations in this section aim to attract, develop and support these effective education leaders, as well as help create the systems needed to enable these leaders to be successful.

▶ Research suggests a principal accounts for **25%** of a school's total impact on student achievement.<sup>12</sup>

### Leadership in Arkansas Today

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#### Building Leadership in Arkansas Education

**ATTRACT** the most qualified applicants  
**TRAIN** to the highest standards  
**TRUST** leadership decisions  
**HOLD** leaders accountable for outcomes

**“Great leaders have a respect for teachers and their potential, and will empower them to be successful. What happens in the classroom is a direct reflection of the leadership support.”**

**– Arkansas Educator**  
(ForwARd Educator Survey)

## Attract

Education leadership roles, especially the principal role, are extremely important – and extremely challenging. While there are many schools in Arkansas with highly effective principals at the helm, there are also many schools where leaders are unable to provide the support needed for students, teachers and staff to be successful. Furthermore, especially in the highest-need areas, leadership turnover is a major challenge. School leadership requires time and stability to develop relationships and to set and take action toward long-term goals.

While we know that educators enter the profession to help students and make a difference, we cannot expect educators to contribute for decades if other aspects of the profession are not sufficiently appealing. It is imperative to make schools and districts a great place to work statewide.

**“Leadership attrition is a major problem, especially in high-need communities. It takes time to develop relationships. When people leave, you start different initiatives again.”**

**– Arkansas Educator**  
(ForwARd Educator Survey)

## Train

Arkansas already has several effective, rigorous programs available to prepare principals. But the educators, families and leaders we heard from want to see Arkansas develop programs that rival the best in the nation. The most effective programs include heavy mentorship and residency components where candidates can see what excellence looks like and learn from the most effective school and district leaders. After principals accept positions, continued support is needed, such as mentoring by highly effective principals and meaningful professional development.

**“Experiential learning is far superior for leadership preparation – it requires apprenticeship and on-the-job training.”**

**– Arkansas Educator**  
(ForwARd Educator Survey)

## Trust and Hold

An individual leader’s effectiveness can be enhanced or constrained by the support he/she receives. While there are many schools and districts where conditions support leaders, there are some that struggle with leadership retention or have specific factors in place that hinder – or even undermine – strong leadership. Some obstacles leaders identified in our outreach include paperwork and regulatory requirements that do not help student achievement, and a lack of decision-making authority and resources to effectively guide student achievement. Leaders also deserve thoughtful evaluations that help them improve.

**“As a principal for the past 10 years, I have seen an overwhelming increase in tasks that require a great deal of time but have little impact on student achievement. The principal role has become overwhelming.”**

**– Arkansas Educator**  
(ForwARd Educator Survey)

# Where We Want to Go

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## What Great Leadership Looks Like<sup>13</sup>

Effective leaders put students at the center of all their decisions. They work tirelessly to build up a team and provide resources that will enable all children – regardless of background – to be successful beyond their school walls. Effective leaders hold themselves and their team accountable to that end.

### AN EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADER (PRINCIPAL, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL AND OTHER LEADER):

- Allocates a substantial majority of time, focus and energy to instructional leadership, as well as building and developing the team

### AN EFFECTIVE SYSTEM LEADER (SUPERINTENDENT, ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT AND OTHER DISTRICT LEADER):

- Is committed to bringing system resources to bear to support schools
- Empowers school leaders to be instructional leaders and managers of their teams; protects schools from undue interference; understands and acts on the principle that one size does not fit all schools
- Ensures all school leaders receive frequent, high-quality coaching and mentorship in being effective instructional leaders and people managers
- Holds school leaders and leadership teams accountable for student outcomes, defined holistically

### AN EFFECTIVE SCHOOL BOARD:

- Is highly engaged in critical governance activities, including hiring and evaluating the superintendent, setting strategic direction and guiding the system's use of resources
- Empowers system leaders to manage the district in part by backing away from operational details/decisions and focusing on delivery of results

In addition, education leadership needs to be tightly aligned across all levels of the district – from the school leader, to the system leader, to the school board.

Finally, strong leadership needs to be supported by an environment that enables leaders to be successful. Although exceptional leaders can be successful in the most challenging situations, this is not a sustainable or scalable strategy. To enable more education leaders to be successful, they need to be empowered with autonomies to make the most impactful decisions, supported by the system and staff, and held holistically accountable for student success.

# Where We Want to Go

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## Aspiration

**All education leaders put students at the center of their decisions, work tirelessly to build and support a team, deploy resources effectively, and hold themselves and their team accountable for enabling all children to be successful.**

## Recommendations

### FOUNDATIONAL

- ▶ In the long term, support additional investment to pay school leaders more. Align compensation increases with evidence of effectiveness.
- ▶ Develop alternative pathways that will enable effective educators to become effective school leaders.
- ▶ Prepare principals to be effective in their role by establishing and supporting existing highly rigorous principal preparation programs and by ensuring novice principals are mentored by highly effective principals.
- ▶ Implement principal support strategies by providing incentives and support for interested schools. Strategies may include 1) creating a school administration manager role to support operations, 2) creating a principal supervisor role to support principals with external needs, and/or 3) developing teacher leader positions for teachers to share leadership responsibilities.
- ▶ Empower principals to partner with school staff in developing a shared vision for instruction in their school and to manage resources important to achieving this vision, including the ability to 1) hire and place staff, 2) remove low-performing staff while ensuring due process, and 3) deploy instructional support resources to meet the school's unique needs.
- ▶ Support the ongoing implementation of a rigorous administrator evaluation system (for example, the Leader Excellence and Development System). Monitor the implementation to make sure system leaders use the evaluation system effectively to provide developmental support and hold administrators accountable for their effectiveness and outcomes.

### QUICK WINS

- ▶ Expose Arkansas's education leaders to the highest-performing schools inside and outside the state, and provide them a clear point of reference for what outstanding schools look like.
- ▶ Streamline current paperwork and regulatory requirements for administrators. Although streamlining regulatory requirements will not be quick, a quick win could be to conduct a review of current practices.

**OTHER**

- ▶ Attract and retain top leadership talent to work in high-need schools by offering districts flexibility to pay school leaders more and by improving the incentives offered.
- ▶ Support state efforts to measure administrator preparation program effectiveness. In addition, encourage the state to hold programs accountable for outcomes.
- ▶ Establish new and support existing highly effective administrator professional development programs (for example, programs that emphasize ongoing, job-embedded, cohort-based, and/or school team-based professional development).
- ▶ Change the timing of school board elections to coincide with state or district elections.
- ▶ Revamp current school board training and offer high-quality professional development focused on how to govern instead of micromanage, on hiring, supporting and evaluating superintendents, and on budget.
- ▶ Invest in a state-funded mentor to support superintendents and school boards in districts with priority schools on effective board governance.



# 5

## Support Students Beyond the Classroom

### Why It's Important

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A hungry, sick or emotionally unstable child simply cannot perform his/her best in the classroom, so we believe improving access to the basic nutritional and health resources is crucial to improving education. Beyond the basic needs, many students face language barriers, poverty, transportation issues, a lack of one-on-one support - any of which can have a direct impact on student achievement.

**“There is a desperate need for improved access to mental health care for students and their families.”**

**- Arkansas Educator  
(ForwARd Educator Survey)**

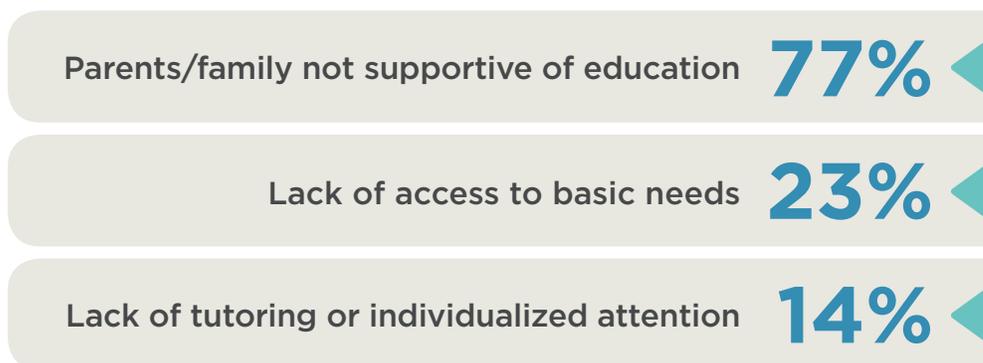


# Support Beyond the Classroom in Arkansas Today

## Parent and Family Engagement

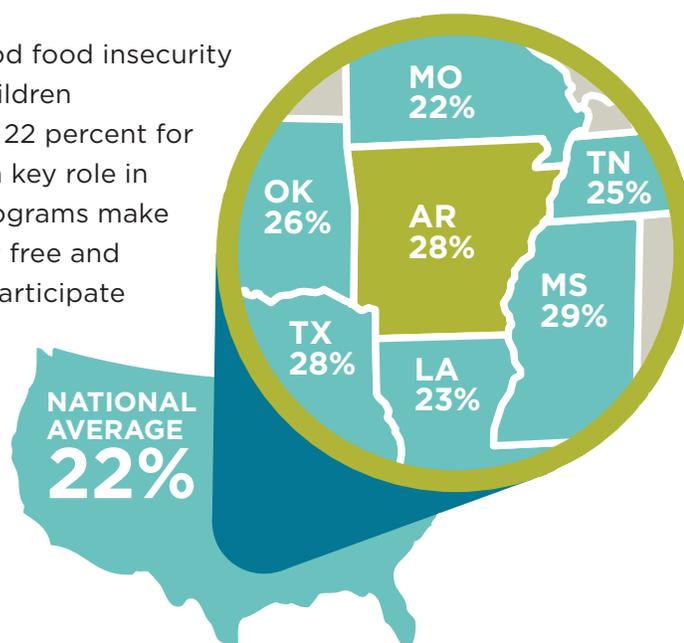
When there is a lack of supportive or engaged adults in a student's life, schools must have strong collaborative practices and a true culture of high expectations to support that student. Arkansas educators called out these needs in our educator surveys and focus groups, identifying lack of parent engagement and lack of basic needs as significant concerns. When asked to choose up to three obstacles (from a list of 10) to students achieving high levels of proficiency, educators selected:

### Percent of Teacher Survey Respondents Selecting Obstacles to Student Success



## Food Insecurity<sup>14</sup>

Arkansas has one of the highest childhood food insecurity rates in the nation, with 28 percent of children considered “food insecure” compared to 22 percent for the U.S. School nutrition programs play a key role in filling this gap. While school nutrition programs make both breakfast and lunch available, many free and reduced lunch-eligible students do not participate in breakfast. Why? Some want to avoid the social stigma associated with free meals; others can't get to school in time to eat before classes begin. Increasing breakfast participation would improve nutrition and school readiness among students at risk for food insecurity.

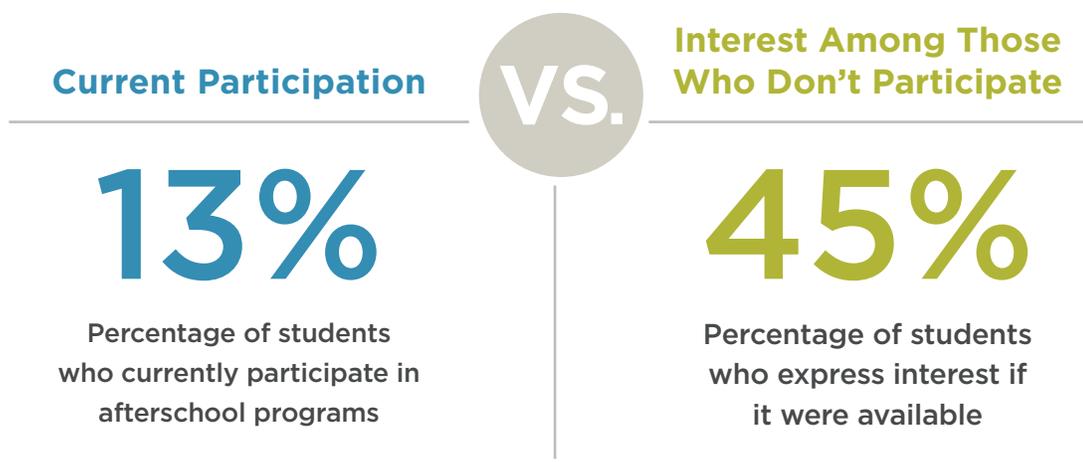


## Access to Health and Dental Care<sup>15</sup>

Our state is also in the bottom quartile of states for access to preventative health and dental care, putting Arkansas students at risk from multiple angles. In fact, for students in Arkansas ages 2-17, four out of 10 children lack sufficient access to medical or dental care.

## Participation in Afterschool and Summer Programs<sup>16</sup>

High-quality programs beyond the regular school hours can provide students with enrichment opportunities, positive reinforcement, one-on-one attention, mentoring and more. However, many Arkansas students are unable to participate in afterschool and summer programs due to lack of seats and barriers to transportation. A recent survey by the advocacy organization *America After 3PM* identified that only 13 percent of Arkansas students participate in afterschool or summer programs – but 45 percent of those who do not participate express interest if no barriers to participation existed.



# Where We Want to Go

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## Aspiration

**All students and families, starting with those in highest need, have access to and support in accessing the nutritional and health resources needed to come to school ready to learn.**

## Recommendations

### FOUNDATIONAL

- ▶ Implement healthy breakfast as part of school day and provide all children nutritious snacks/dinner at afterschool and summer programs in high-need schools.
- ▶ Coordinate school-based resources information so high-risk children and families receive support, access to quality health care resources, and the effective communication they need.
- ▶ Expand high-quality afterschool and summer programs for all children P-12 by securing dedicated revenue stream including state support.

### QUICK WINS

- ▶ Encourage all eligible schools and districts to sign up for Community Eligibility Program, which provides all students in a school free breakfast and lunch.
- ▶ Encourage regular, convenient, two-way parental and caregiver communication during and out of the school year. To achieve this, schools and districts must align their current outreach with best practices highlighted by leading advocacy organizations such as the National Parent Teacher Association and those practices observed in other districts (for example, providing English as a Second Language parents night classes on English, coaching parents to assist their children at home with class assignments).

### OTHER

- ▶ Use telemedicine to cost-effectively deliver common health services to students.

# 6

## Academically Distressed Schools

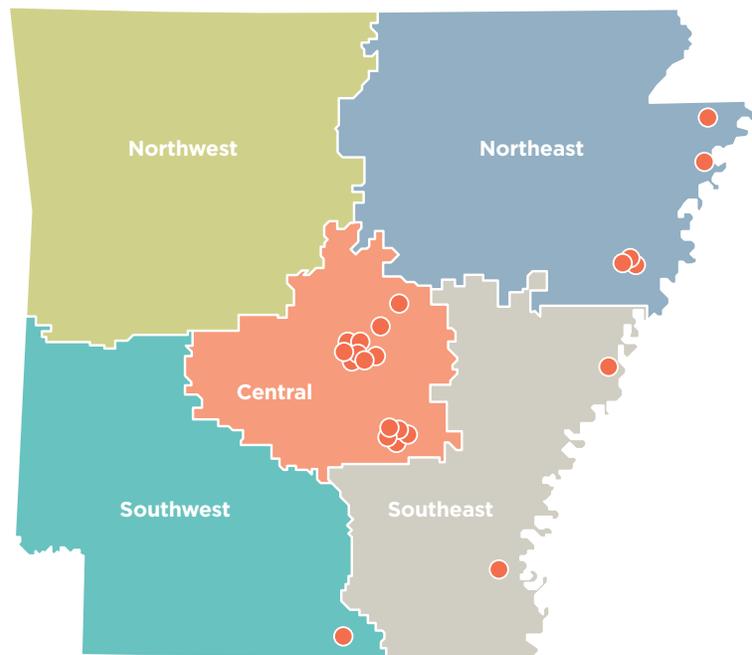
### Why It's Important<sup>17</sup>

In 2013-14, approximately 14,000 students in Arkansas attended schools in academic distress. Unfortunately, most of these students represent already at-risk populations with minority students representing 88 percent, and Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) 83 percent of the total student body. Statewide, student populations are less than 40 percent minority and 60 percent FRL. For many of these families, simply changing schools is not an option. Why? Academically distressed schools in Arkansas tend to be clustered together, making transportation and proximity real barriers. Arkansas must work to empower academically distressed schools to turn around and better serve their students.

#### SCHOOLS IN ACADEMIC DISTRESS AS OF SPRING 2015

##### What is Academic Distress?

The term “academic distress” applies to a school where 49.5 percent or less of students score at or above proficiency on a composite of math and literacy tests over a three-year period, or is a “Needs Improvement” school that has not made progress against its Improvement Plan.



● = one distressed school

# Academic Distress in Arkansas Today

While all recommendations can be applied to schools in academic distress, it's important to address areas that are unique to academically distressed schools. Right now, Arkansas does not have the resources in place to support and coordinate turnaround efforts at all academically distressed schools.

With all of the challenges faced by academically distressed schools, it's no wonder that educators in those schools report being much less satisfied with student achievement than peers in higher-performing schools (44 percent vs. 63 percent). However, a strong majority of educators do agree that the lowest-performing schools can be improved.

## Positive Outlook

# 85%

Percentage of teachers in and out of academically distressed schools who believe the lowest-performing schools can be improved.



# Where We Want to Go

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## Aspiration

**All schools in academic distress and pre-academic distress receive support and interventions that enable them to transform their school cultures, dramatically improve student achievement and sustain their improvement over time.**

## Recommendations

Academic distress is a complicated situation for schools, districts, communities and more. There are no fast fixes or easy outs. Because academic distress involves several key components of the education system, we have grouped recommendations into the following categories: process, support, interventions, evaluation, community, and the Arkansas Department of Education.

### PROCESS

Recommendations on how, when and why a school is deemed academically distressed.

### SUPPORT

Recommendations on resources and assistance for schools in or approaching academic distress.

### INTERVENTIONS

Recommendations on improving performance and progress to avoid or exit academic distress.

### EVALUATION

Recommendations on a holistic, ongoing evaluation process to measure and share progress with the community.

### COMMUNITY

Recommendations on how to inform and engage the community before, during and after academic distress.

### ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Recommendations on how the state can assess, manage and monitor academic distress in Arkansas schools.

## ► PROCESS

### Before Academic Distress (AD)

- The state should clearly explain how the “A-F report card” and Elementary and Secondary Education Act “focus” and “priority” schools relate to AD classifications in order to communicate more clearly with districts and communities.
- The state should create a Pre-Academic Distress (“Pre-AD”) zone to identify schools and districts that are on a path to academic distress.
- The Pre-AD zone should be composed of schools in the lowest-performing 5 percent not already in academic distress in order to concentrate focus and resources.
- Pre-AD schools that do not follow “binding recommendations” and do not demonstrate student achievement gains can be moved to AD classification.
- All Pre-AD and AD schools should participate in a comprehensive evaluation process.
  - Each comprehensive evaluation should provide Pre-AD and AD schools with specific recommendations of programs, interventions and strategies that improve student outcomes, particularly those necessary to increase performance in the areas causing the Pre-AD and AD designations
- The comprehensive evaluation process should result in “binding recommendations” (i.e., mandated actions) created with significant input from school leaders.
- The results of the comprehensive evaluation and “binding recommendations” should be shared with school and district leadership, the school board and the community.

### Exiting Academic Distress

- The “academic distress” label should just be a classification and should end as soon as a school rises above the agreed-upon performance threshold signaling academic distress (for example, a school should not continue to be considered academically distressed after its performance has risen above the original threshold).
- Support and binding recommendations associated with academic distress should continue until a school demonstrates that it can sustain turnaround (i.e., support associated with academic distress should not necessarily end as soon as a school rises above the agreed-upon performance threshold).
- The decision to “exit” schools from state control should be made on a case-by-case basis, but should occur as soon as the school has met the agreed-upon performance threshold and demonstrated sustained progress implementing the recommendations in its comprehensive evaluation.

## ► SUPPORT

### During Academic Distress

- In order to fund the specific supports recommended to schools in their comprehensive evaluation, the state should work with AD and Pre-AD schools to:
  - Supplement existing funds from a dedicated state funding pool for AD school support, when current sources (including districts, co-ops and the Arkansas Department of Education) are insufficient to fund recommendations
  - Reallocate existing funds from lower-impact programs where possible
  - Leverage all additional funds available to AD schools (for example, 1003g grants)
- Create a “turnaround academy” to train teachers and leaders (including those currently in AD schools) in specific skills needed to be successful in turnaround environments and provide financial and nonfinancial incentives to graduates who work in academically distressed schools.
  - The “turnaround academy” should be made accessible to participants living throughout the state
  - The “turnaround academy” should include a track for school-support personnel including those in the Arkansas Department of Education, districts and co-ops
  - The “turnaround academy” curriculum should be built from national best practices and include application of theory in the classroom, in addition to theory-based learning
- School boards of districts with schools in AD or Pre-AD must participate in special trainings on the academic distress process.

## ► INTERVENTIONS

### During Academic Distress

- Decisions to remove leadership and/or assume state control should be case dependent and should be made if leadership (including principal, superintendent and/or board) demonstrates an inability to implement the plan and make improvements (as evidenced by changes in students’ actions).
  - The state should consider removal of leadership and/or assuming control if in-depth evaluation finds leadership does not have reasonable probability of implementing the plan and improving if given support
  - After initial evaluation, leadership should continue to lead turnaround process if they consistently demonstrate progress implementing their plan and improvement in the classroom throughout their time in academic distress

## ► EVALUATION

### Holistic Metrics

- Progress in AD and Pre-AD schools should be measured using a balanced set of metrics, not just proficiency levels on test scores. Specifically, evaluation should include:
  - Progress implementing recommendations following timeline outlined in initial comprehensive evaluation (assessed through site visits)
  - Student achievement growth
  - Leading indicators of achievement (for example, attendance, tardiness, retention)
  - Educator and community input (for example, survey, focus groups, interviews)
  - Analysis of contextual factors which may be contributing to or inhibiting progress in implementing interventions identified in the comprehensive evaluation, including:
    - Academic supports available as compared to high-achieving schools with similar demographic populations (see example of academic supports at the end of this section)
    - Other important context including but not limited to demographic and enrollment trends and external risk factors (for example, safety, housing, healthy food options, public transportation and green spaces)
- The results of ongoing evaluation should be clearly communicated to families and the community.
- A new ADE team will be created to support the creation and implementation of the evaluation process (see ADE capacity). This team will be distinct from the team providing support to schools.



## ► COMMUNITY

• Family-community partnership with schools is an important part of turning around each AD or Pre-AD school. Partnership will ensure families and communities will have a say in the overall direction and sustainability of the turnaround. During the AD and Pre-AD process, communities need frequent, relevant communications and engagement to keep them well informed about the situation and improvement plan. Specifically:

- AD and Pre-AD schools should be required to have a community-chosen community advisory body which will take an active role advising the management of AD and Pre-AD schools
- Struggling schools' academic standing (Pre-AD and AD) should be clearly communicated to the community
- AD and Pre-AD schools' ongoing evaluation results (for example, quarterly reports) should be shared with the community in a public-friendly format
- Regular and effective parent and community engagement should be part of the accountability framework for AD and Pre-AD schools
- Community input should be part of AD and Pre-AD schools' evaluation process
- Community input should be part of AD and Pre-AD school leaders' evaluation process

• A new ADE team will be created to empower schools to build their own capacity to support their communities and hold schools accountable for effectively engaging with their communities in partnership with the evaluation teams (see the Arkansas Department of Education capacity recommendation).

## ► ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION CAPACITY

### Management of AD Process

- There should be a single unit, internal to the Arkansas Department of Education, responsible for managing the entire AD and Pre-AD process.
- The unit should be responsible for providing or coordinating the provision of the comprehensive evaluation, support, accountability, intervention and all other actions outlined in prior AD process, support and intervention recommendations.
- The single unit should be led by a direct report to the commissioner.

### Size and Organization of ADE Unit

- School-support personnel should maintain a 3:1 ratio of AD and Pre-AD schools to support personnel.

- New teams with specialized capabilities (incremental to school-support personnel) should be created inside the Arkansas Department of Education unit.
  - Community engagement team (2-4 incremental full-time employees): made up of “community-engagement specialists” and designed to empower schools to build their own capacity to support their communities and to hold schools accountable for effectively engaging their communities
  - Ongoing evaluation team (1-2 incremental full-time employees): designed to create, pilot and implement the new AD evaluation process (see “Process: Before Academic Distress” proposed recommendation)

### **Skills and Capabilities**

- School-support personnel should have experience leading in turnaround environments and demonstrate the ability to coach leaders in development of turnaround skills such as competencies for turnaround success, in addition to existing job description.

### **Recruiting and Retention**

- Recruiting highly skilled, highly qualified personnel to internal Arkansas Department of Education unit must be a top priority for ADE.
  - ADE should be allowed hiring flexibility to staff team more efficiently (including waivers from mandated salary ranges, job posting duration requirements and hiring timeline)
- Salaries for school-support positions must be competitive with comparable positions in school districts.
- “Turnaround academy” should include a track for school-support personnel, including those in the Arkansas Department of Education, districts and co-ops.

### **Empowerment and Accountability**

- Arkansas Department of Education unit should be held accountable for the success of schools in AD and Pre-AD.
- Evaluations of school-support personnel should be aligned with the way in which schools are evaluated (see “Process: Before Academic Distress” recommendations). The team evaluating schools should be separate from the school-support team.
- The Arkansas State Board of Education should continually evaluate the effectiveness of the internal Arkansas Department of Education unit and after five years should conduct a formal review to decide if it should continue, end or change this approach to school turnaround.
  - The results of the board’s evaluations and reviews should be presented to the Joint Legislative Committee on Education

### **Additional Information: Examples of Academic Supports That Could be Used as Part of Proposed Evaluation Recommendation**

- The AD evaluation recommendation includes tracking the academic supports available to schools in AD and how the availability of those supports compares to those of high-achieving Arkansas schools with similar demographic populations.
- The final list of academic supports tracked should be determined during the creation of the comprehensive evaluation. Examples of the types of academic supports that could be measured as part of the evaluation include:
  - Highly qualified teachers including teachers certified by the National Board, certified to teach GT classes, certified to teach Advanced Placement or pre-AP courses (not excluding other measures of highly qualified teachers), or teachers with previous success in high-need schools
  - Instructional coaches/facilitators including math and literacy coaches, interventionists and other certified staff who are not assigned a class-load of students who have clear goals, expectations and accountability
  - Building administrators including assistant principals and principals
  - Rigorous classes including GT classes (including seminar classes) for secondary schools, pre-AP classes for secondary schools and AP classes for secondary schools, EAST lab classes for elementary and secondary schools
  - Average class sizes
  - Technology resources including number of computers (desktop, laptop and iPads) assigned to the school, number of SMART boards, number of computer labs, number of computer lab attendants and teachers employed to run the computer labs
  - School partners and volunteers including the number of community organizations, local businesses engaged in formal partnerships with each school, the number of volunteer hours logged at each school
  - Grants, awards and other supplemental funding including the name of each grant and the amount of the grant (all federal, state and local grants and gifts including PTA funding given to schools for activities and programs)
  - Out-of-school learning opportunities including number of student field trips, trips for school clubs/organizations/teams, workshops/classes for students held in the evenings and on weekends
  - Facilities including the number of gymnasiums, auditoriums, science labs, outdoor classrooms, portable classrooms, nurse offices, counselor offices, square footage of facility



# 7

## Systems & Policies

### Why It's Important

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If Arkansas is to bring about significant improvements in public education, we must be ready to initiate and support those improvements with legislation, funding and a commitment to using every dollar wisely. Simply put, we have a responsibility to not only provide sufficient resources for Arkansas education, but also to ensure that those resources are used efficiently and effectively.

### Systems and Policies in Arkansas Today

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#### Arkansas Department of Education (ADE)

The ADE is the administrative arm of the State Board of Education. In addition to implementing education law, the ADE provides leadership, resources and support to school districts, schools and educators. Echoing concerns from teachers and leaders, we heard from ADE leadership that the burden of regulations and paperwork hinders its ability to support student achievement.

#### Education Service Cooperatives<sup>18</sup>

Co-ops were established by the Arkansas State Board of Education in 1985 to help districts meet standards, equalize education opportunities, use resources more effectively and promote coordination between school districts and the Arkansas Department of Education. The services provided by co-ops include support for professional development, curriculum, technology, purchasing and more.

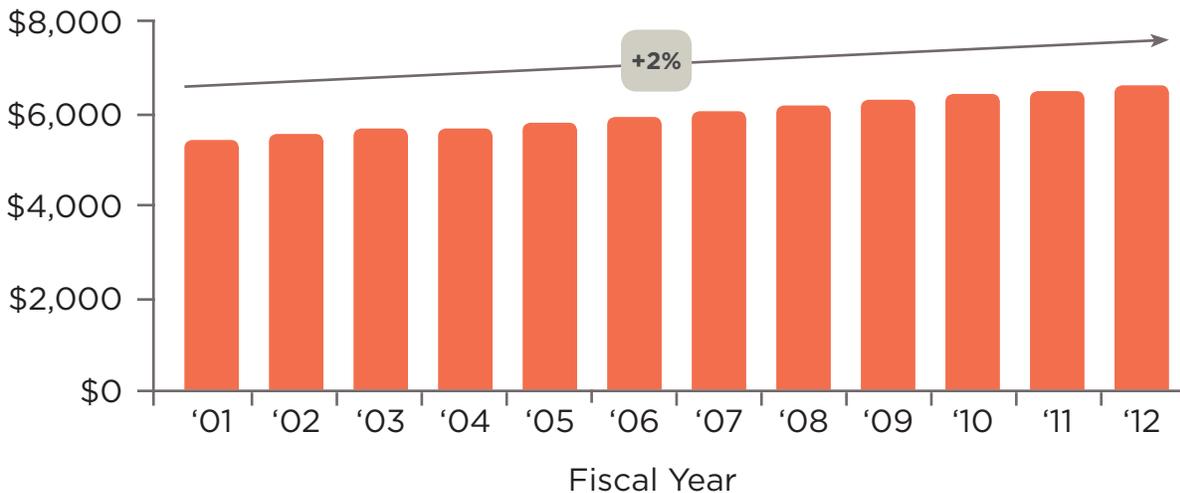
In our outreach efforts we heard that co-ops do important work today, but there is also an opportunity to reinforce that good work with additional support and attention from the ADE.

## Funding and Spending<sup>19</sup>

In Arkansas today, school districts are funded by a combination of federal funds, state funds and local funds raised by property taxes. More than half of Arkansas's total education funding is funding from the state and a uniform tax rate levied locally. That funding, called foundation funding, has generally increased about 2 percent annually over the last 10 years to account for changes in cost of living.

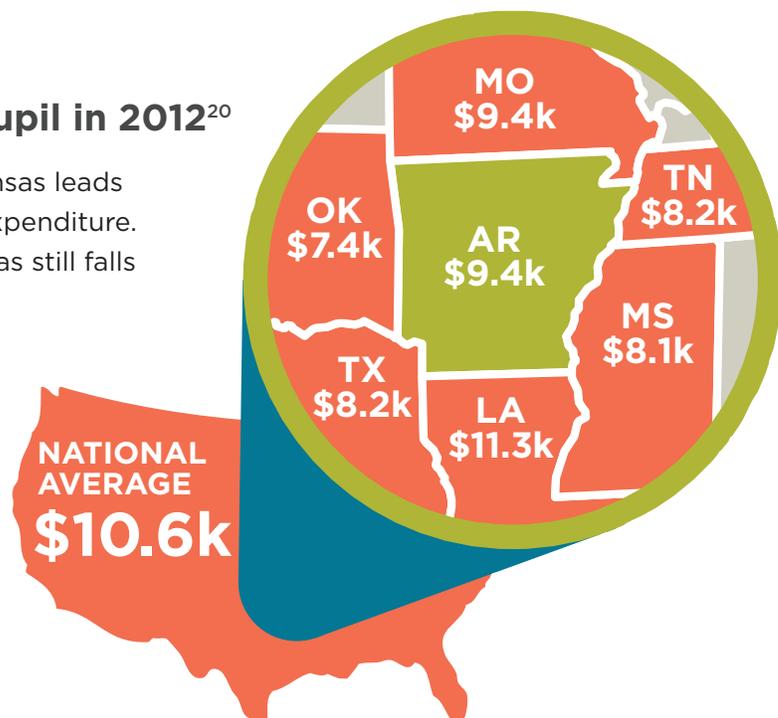
### INCREASE IN FOUNDATION FUNDING

Per Pupil Foundation Funding



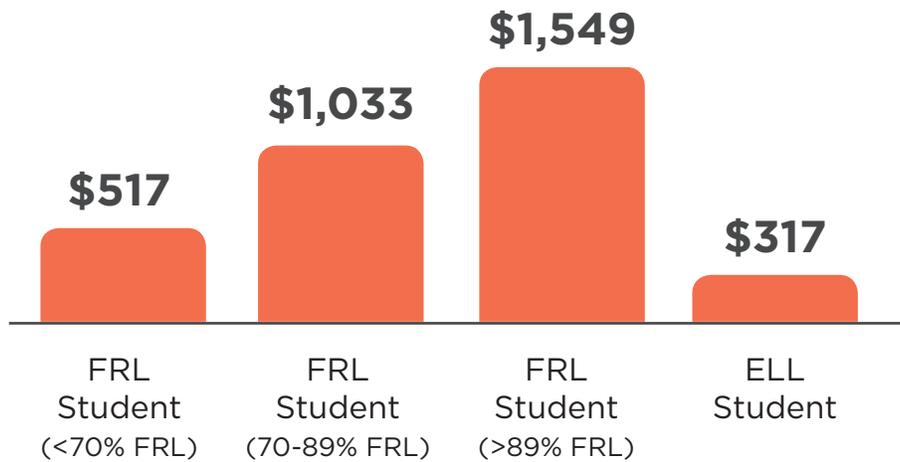
### FOUNDATION FUNDING: Current Expenditure Per Pupil in 2012<sup>20</sup>

With the exception of one state, Arkansas leads the region in per-student education expenditure. However, education funding in Arkansas still falls below the national average.



Levels of funding differ across the state to account for the fact that some students have different education and support needs. For example, each school district today receives about \$300 per year per student identified as an English Language Learner (ELL). Throughout our outreach, we heard that additional funding is needed to support the success of ELL students. Additionally, each school district receives additional funds to support students from low-income families. The amount of incremental funds awarded depends on the percent of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. In today’s model, the level of support at the percentage cut points varies drastically. A school district with 69 percent of the student population qualifying for Free & Reduced Lunch (FRL) receives only about half of what a district with 70 percent of its student population qualifying for FRL receives.

### Additional Pre-Pupil Funding for Free & Reduced Lunch and English Language Learner Students



## Aspiration

All school districts have adequate funding and use resources in a way that most effectively supports student success. Policies enable the implementation of recommendations needed for Arkansas to become a leading state in education.

## Recommendations

### ► Arkansas Department of Education and Education Service Cooperatives (Co-ops)

- Streamline the regulatory burden for educators at all levels (including the Arkansas Department of Education) to reduce complexity, encourage a shift from a compliance mindset to a performance-driven mindset, and enable educators to focus on their most important roles. Gather input from educators to inform specific changes. Focus regulations and related support on highest-risk situations where compliance activities could be most helpful (for example, struggling schools).
- Current staffing and budget rules governing the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) constrain ADE from hiring the best personnel for the job (for example, each ADE division is required to have a specified number of personnel from each salary schedule). Revise staffing and budget rules to offer more hiring autonomy to ADE leadership.
- Increase compensation in the Arkansas Department of Education staff salary schedule to be at least as competitive as districts in order to attract strong educator talent to ADE.
- The state should consider structural changes (for example, governance, funding, support) for underperforming co-ops to ensure all districts have access to a consistent set of high-quality services.
- The ADE should hold each co-op accountable for providing high-quality services that support student achievement and effective use of resources at the school and district levels.
- This effort should build and improve upon ADE's existing evaluation of co-ops as required by legislation in 2012. Refinements to consider include introducing greater rigor, requiring an independent evaluator, making formal evaluations more frequent, and introducing yearly reporting on progress.

## ► Recommendations to Improve Spending Effectiveness

- Districts, co-ops, ADE and other education stakeholders should make decisions based on educational value (for example, how much student impact is achieved with funds). Support districts and other entities in building this capability.
- Develop statewide district efficiency metrics to support spending transparency. For districts that are underperforming (for example, classified as Pre-Academically Distressed or Academically Distressed), efficiency targets should be set and intensive support should be provided to improve how funds are spent.
  - Metrics should be carefully developed with input from districts to mitigate unintended consequences (for example, sending misleading messages, adding bureaucratic requirements, encouraging changes not in the best interest of student achievement)
  - Consider implementing as part of current performance measurements and action plans so this does not add a new burden for districts
  - While any metrics should be the product of a fresh review, they might build on existing law established in Act 35 of the 2nd Extraordinary Session of 2003
- Drive greater efficiency of district spending without compromising outcomes. Form regional and/or statewide “communities of practice” around resource use in specific, high-value/high-inefficiency areas (for example, school staffing/class size, use of instructional coaches, purchasing, special education). Create or leverage an existing statewide public-private partnership to oversee these “communities of practice.”
  - Enable best-practice sharing and collective problem solving, and drive long-term improvement
  - Identify metrics to measure improvement and success
  - Build political will by convening key stakeholders from multiple sectors and across the state (e.g., districts, co-ops, industry leaders)
  - In areas where clear best practices are established, the state may then codify the practices into law or regulation (e.g., statewide purchasing practices)

## ► Funding for Excellence

- Arkansas's schools are not sufficiently resourced to perform at the aspired level of educational excellence. Invest in additional funding to support educational excellence. This funding should prioritize ForwARd's recommendations and be increased in increments, and additional funding should be tied to evidence of effective use of existing resources.
- Currently, National School Lunch (NLS) funding is provided to districts based on tiers of percentage of Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL), so that a district with 69 percent FRL students gets roughly half the funds of a 70 percent FRL district. Smooth out the step-wise function used for the National School Lunch program to reduce funding differences between similar percent FRL districts.
- Current English Language Learner funding is insufficient compared to the need – invest in greater categorical funding for ELL students. Funding should be used in ways that best provide additional support to ELL students (e.g., additional high-quality academic support).
- Tie a portion of English Language Learner and National School Lunch program funding to evidence of district effectiveness in supporting ELL and NSL students.
- Current pre-K funding is insufficient compared to the need – invest in greater funding for pre-K. Improving quality will require approximately \$70 million to \$100 million per year, then subsequently increasing access will require an incremental approximately \$20 million to \$80 million per year.

## ► Other Recommendations

- As a general principle, education laws should be kept as simple as possible. In that spirit, ForwARd recommends implementing legislative changes only when department policy changes are insufficient to drive the change needed.
- Evaluate a school's effectiveness based on both absolute performance and student growth (i.e. student achievement growth from the beginning to the end of the school year).
- Continue to build alignment across Arkansas's school performance designations to enhance clarity. Furthermore, improve communication of the designations to educators and communities.

# Potential Impact

Just as it will take many people working together to implement these recommendations, doing so will impact many people throughout the state. Students, educators, entire communities – all will feel the impact. How? Read through the graphic below to see just some of the ways achieving our goals will benefit Arkansas education.

## Educators

- Teachers are excited about how collaboration can help them become better teachers
- Teachers feel respected and that rules, training and processes support them in helping kids
- New teachers have a smooth transition into the profession with lots of hands-on training and mentors

## School and district leaders

- Principals and superintendents are inspired by visits to high-performing schools and districts to set lofty visions for their own schools and districts
- Administrators feel respected and are supported by rules, training and processes to make decisions and lead the teams toward their vision



## Schools in academic distress

- Teachers and leaders in schools in academic distress feel supported by the administration and community to overcome their challenges
- Students and the community of a school in Academic Distress feel like they have input in determining where support is needed

## Families and communities

- Families and communities feel like they know what's happening at their local school and know how to be involved
- Families and communities are assured that even in tough economic times, their kids will be able to get nutritious meals and health care through school

## Students

- Regardless of a student's family situation, he or she starts kindergarten on a level playing field, ready to learn
- Students are engaged in meaningful learning experiences that excite them and help them understand a wide variety of college and career options throughout their education
- Students in every classroom, regardless of location or subject, are taught by a talented, well-prepared teacher

# Moving ForwARd: Next Steps

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These recommendations set a lofty ambition for the state of Arkansas: that every student graduates prepared for college and the workplace. We believe that implementing the recommendations will get us there – but not overnight. Achieving this end will require hard work, true collaboration from around the state and a commitment to continuous improvement over the course of several years. We have a strong, diverse coalition – the ForwARd steering committee – that believes in this work. Will you join us?

Our first step will be to share these recommendations with the whole state. We've also identified some early priorities: supporting the Arkansas Department of Education in implementing the recommendations for Academic Distress, improving the quantity and quality of time that teachers spend collaborating, and creating more opportunities for our students to participate in summer programs.

We'll also be creating a new organization to help support and implement the recommendations, which will keep us on track for making progress at the rate we aspire to pursue.

## HOW CAN I BE INVOLVED?

- 1** Visit [ForwardArkansas.org](http://ForwardArkansas.org) to learn more about the state of education in Arkansas.
- 2** Share the recommendations with your friends, families, teachers and community leaders. We make it easy through our social portals on Facebook and Twitter.
- 3** Encourage conversations in your community and email us at [info@forwardarkansas.org](mailto:info@forwardarkansas.org) to tell us about your progress.
- 4** Sign up for our e-newsletter (on the home page of the website) to stay informed about ForwARd Arkansas's progress and how you can help.

# Glossary

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**Arkansas Better Chance (ABC):** The Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) program was created in 1991 to offer high-quality early education services to children ages 0 to 5 exhibiting developmental and socioeconomic risk factors. In 2003, the Arkansas General Assembly made a commitment to expand early childhood education funding by \$100 million to serve low-income 3- and 4-year-old children with high-quality prekindergarten services. This expansion, known as Arkansas Better Chance for School Success, has become the state prekindergarten program. ABC is only available to students with family income that is 200 percent or less of the federal poverty line. It operates as a grant program, and participating providers must renew ABC grants annually.

<http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dccece/Pages/aboutDCCECE.aspx>; ABC Shrinks Gaps (Arkansas Research Center)

**Academic Distress:** This term is used to describe a school or district that has, for a sustained period of time, demonstrated a lack of student achievement. Specifically, this is a classification assigned to (a) any public school or school district in which 49.5 percent or less of its students achieve proficient or advanced on a composite of math and literacy tests for the most recent three-year period; or (b) a Needs Improvement school (Priority) or a school district with a Needs Improvement (Priority) school that has not made the progress required under the school's Priority Improvement Plan (PIP). A Needs Improvement school is a school that has not met its annual targets in performance growth and high school graduation rates. See the Arkansas Accountability Addendum to Elementary Secondary Education Act Flexibility Request for more information.

[http://www.arkansased.org/public/userfiles/ESEA/ESEA\\_Flexibility\\_Accountability\\_Addendum.pdf](http://www.arkansased.org/public/userfiles/ESEA/ESEA_Flexibility_Accountability_Addendum.pdf), ADE Rules Governing ACTAAP and the Academic Distress Program, Sept 2014: [http://www.arkansased.org/public/userfiles/rules/Current/ACTAAP-FINAL\\_-\\_September\\_2014.pdf](http://www.arkansased.org/public/userfiles/rules/Current/ACTAAP-FINAL_-_September_2014.pdf)

**ACT:** The ACT is a national college admissions examination that consists of subject area tests in English, mathematics, reading and science.

<http://www.actstudent.org/faq/what.html>

**Arkansas Department of Education (ADE):** The administrative organization that carries out the state's education laws and policies of the state board.

**Advanced Placement Exams (AP):** AP exams are rigorous, multiple-component tests that are administered at high schools each May. High school students can earn college credit, placement or both for qualifying AP Exam scores. Each AP Exam has a corresponding AP course and provides a standardized measure of what students have learned in the AP classroom.

<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/testing/ap>

**Common Core State Standards:** The Common Core state standards is a set of high-quality academic standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy. These learning goals outline what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each grade. The standards were created to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career and life, regardless of where they live.

<http://www.arkansased.org/divisions/learning-services/assessment/definitions-of-common-terms>

**Quality Counts:** Quality Counts is *Education Week's* annual report on state-level efforts to improve public education. It is published in January.

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/qc/index.html>

**Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL):** The National School Lunch Program is a federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. It provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to children each school day. The program was established under the National School Lunch Act, signed by President Harry Truman in 1946. A student is eligible for free lunch at school if his or her family income is below 130 percent of the poverty line; the student is eligible for a reduced-price lunch if the family income is below 185 percent of the poverty line.

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/nsllp/national-school-lunch-program-nsllp>

# Glossary

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## National Assessment of Educational Progress

**(NAEP):** NAEP is the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of what students in the United States know and can do in various subject areas. Assessments are conducted periodically in mathematics, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, U.S. history and, beginning in 2014, technology and engineering literacy.

<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/>

## Qualls Early Learning Inventory (QELI):

Qualls Early Learning Inventory (QELI) is an observational tool for use in the primary grades to identify student development in six areas related to school learning. The inventory observes behaviors developed in school so observations can be used to inform instruction and improve achievement.

# Footnotes

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1. **Source:** NAEP database; ACT Condition of College and Career Readiness Report, 2007–2013; The Chronicle for Higher Education data on college completion – data from 2004–2013

2. **Source:** Abbott Preschool Program Longitudinal Effects Study: Fifth Grade Follow Up; The Abecedarian Project; The HighScope Perry Preschool Study; Chicago Child Parent Centers Program

3. **Source:** Office for Education Policy, *National and AR Research on Pre-K* (10/2014).

4. **Source:** QELI data gathered by the Arkansas Research Center, reported by Arkansas Department of Education. Data for 2013 only.

5. **Source:** ADE QELI performance and ABC enrollment data by county for 2012. 2011 4-year-old ABC enrollment assumed to equal 2012 kindergarten entry from ABC. American Community Survey, 2013 five-year estimate for age. Four-year-old Arkansas population by county estimated as 20 percent of 0-4 age group. ADE public school FRL demographics. Arkansas Head Start Association reported actual enrollment.

6. **Source:** NCES Public HS Four-Year On-Time Graduation Rates and Event Dropout Rates: School years 2010-11 and 2011-12; College going rate from NCHEMS Information Center, which relies on information from Tom Mortenson-Postsecondary Education Opportunity <http://www.postsecondary.org>; College completion rates calculated from: [http://collegecompletion.chronicle.com/state/no.state=AR&sector=public\\_four](http://collegecompletion.chronicle.com/state/no.state=AR&sector=public_four); data is based on IPEDS, which tracks completions of first time, full-time degree seeking undergrad students; Arkansas workforce funding white paper “Arkansas Workforce

Funding Model and the Middle-Skill Jobs Gap”.

7. **Source:** Workforce Strategy Center and the Gates Foundation report: “Employers, low-income young adults, and post secondary credentials: a practical typology for business, education, and community leaders” (2009); ADTEC reports; ADTEC interview

8. **Source:** Eric A. Hanushek, John F. Kain, and Steven G. Rivkin, “Teachers, Schools, and Student Achievement,” NBER Working Paper No. 6691, August 1998, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w6691>.

9. **Source:** Eric A. Hanushek, “Valuing Teachers,” Education Next, Summer 2011, <http://educationnext.org/valuing-teachers/>.

10. **Source:** Arkansas Department of Education, Teacher Salary Schedule Analysis 2014-2015, ForwARd analysis

11. **Source:** ADE website, ADE interview

12. **Source:** Arkansas LEADS rubric, Arkansas Leadership Academy Master Principal Program rubric, The Wallace Foundation report “The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning” (2012), The Center for Public Education (NSBA initiative) “Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards” (2011), The George W. Bush Institute and New Leaders “Great Principals at Scale: Creating District Conditions that Enable All Principals to be Effective” (2014), Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, University of Minnesota “How Leadership Influences Student Learning” (2004) and “Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning: Final Report of Research Findings” (2010), STAND for Children Leadership Center “Strengthening School Leadership” (2012)

# Footnotes

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13. **Sources:** Arkansas LEADS rubric, Arkansas Leadership Academy Master Principal Program rubric, The Wallace Foundation report “The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning” (2012), The Center for Public Education (NSBA initiative) “Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards” (2011), The George W. Bush Institute and New Leaders “Great Principals at Scale: Creating District Conditions that Enable All Principals to be Effective” (2014), Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, University of Minnesota “How Leadership Influences Student Learning” (2004) and “Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning: Final Report of Research Findings” (2010), STAND for Children Leadership Center “Strengthening School Leadership” (2012)

14. **Source:** Map the Meal Gap (2014), Feeding America, pg. 32-33.

15. **Source:** Kaiser Family Foundation based on national ACS health survey (2012/2013).

16. **Source:** Parent survey conducted by AR after 3 PM, advocacy organization in state for expanded range of support services.

17. **Source:** ADE. Regions and school enrollment identified based on school code in 2013-14 demographic data from Office for Education Policy at the University of Arkansas.

18. **Source:** Arkansas Education Service Cooperatives 2-page flyer, co-op director and ADE interviews.

18. **Source:** Arkansas Bureau Legislative Research report “A report on Legislative Hearings for the 2014 Interim Study on Educational Adequacy” (Oct 2014), Picus Odden & Associates report “Desk Audit of the Arkansas School Funding Matrix” (Sept. 2014).

19. **Source:** Census of Governments: Finance – Survey of School System Finances <http://www.census.gov/govs/school/>. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES): <http://nces.ed.gov/>.

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