

Conclusions and Recommendations of the Koret Task Force

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Arkansas has made an earnest, promising start on reforming its public education system, particularly in the past five years, and we commend its lawmakers, civic leaders and educators for their willingness to begin changing obsolete practices, outdated assumptions, and archaic or dysfunctional structures.

That arduous journey, however, has just begun—assuming, as we do, that Arkansans’ destination is a world-class education system engineered for the twenty-first century. No state has yet attained that ambitious goal, and we find no fault with Arkansas for not yet having reached it. Nothing is more resistant to fundamental change than public education, burdened as it is by tradition and habit, by a swarming and tireless host of adult interests that profit from the status quo, by the erroneous belief that “more” is the only path to “better,” and by the earnest but misguided view of many parents and other citizens that *their* schools are good enough and it’s other folks’ schools that need to change.

But major-league change, in fact, is what’s called for—again assuming that the people of Arkansas seek a K–12 education sys-

tem that maximizes the potential of every child, that is both rigorous and compassionate, demanding yet equitable, that equips young Arkansans with the skills and knowledge to succeed both in higher education and in tomorrow's jobs, and that supplies the state with the human capital and leadership required for a strong economy, a vital culture and a vibrant civil society. Parts of Arkansas are booming, but too many parts are not. Much of the state's economy needs the sort of growth spurt and productivity leap that only a well-educated, highly skilled populace can effect. Else the great jobs will go overseas and to states and regions that are prepared to handle them well. Moreover, too much of Arkansas has been immersed for too long in a culture of educational mediocrity. That just won't cut it in the twenty-first century.

To inject some national expertise and perspective into the Natural State's education reform debates, early this year Governor Mike Huckabee invited Stanford's Hoover Institution to ask its Koret Task Force on K–12 Education to prepare a report on Arkansas. The task force had previously done such a report for Texas (at the invitation of the governor and legislative leaders) and has conducted several studies of national significance. Task force members are education experts from around the country, brought together by Hoover with the support of the Koret Foundation, to work on education reform. Its primary objectives are to gather, evaluate, and disseminate evidence in an analytical context, and to analyze and recommend reform measures to enhance the quality and productivity of K–12 education. The task force includes some of America's most highly regarded education scholars. Most are professors at leading universities and many have served in policy roles for federal, state, and local governments.

In this chapter, I summarize the Koret Task Force's principal conclusions and recommendations, which are explained and amplified by individual authors in subsequent chapters. We chose to organize our advice and structure the chapters under four

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headings: standards and curriculum; assessment and accountability; organization and options; and teachers. These are exceptionally timely topics in Arkansas, presently on many minds and many desks, and they encompass what we observe to be the most urgent needs affecting education in the state.

Our recommendations for Arkansas are grounded in decades of research that the task force has distilled into three precepts for a high-performance public education system that honors the values of American democracy. Those precepts are neatly explained in one of the task force's earlier books, *Our Schools and Our Future: Are We Still at Risk?*, issued on the twentieth anniversary of *A Nation at Risk*, the 1983 report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, which most observers agree was the primary launch pad for today's nationwide attention to "standards-based reform." In the book, we write that

. . . fundamental changes are needed in the incentive structures and power relationships of [American] schooling. Those changes are anchored to three core principles: *accountability*, *choice*, and *transparency*.

By *accountability*, we mean that every school or education provider—at least every one that accepts public dollars—subscribes to a coherent set of rigorous, statewide academic standards, statewide assessments of student and school performance, and statewide systems of incentives and interventions tied to academic results in relation to those standards. . . . By *choice* we mean that parental decisions rather than bureaucratic regulation should drive the education enterprise. Open competition among ideas and methods, with people free to abandon weak schools for stronger ones, is the surest way to make major progress. . . . By *transparency* we mean that those who seek complete information about a school or school system (excluding personal information about individuals) should readily be able to get it. This information should be provided in forms and formats that enable users to easily compare one school, system, or state with another. . . . Transparency yields

the information needed to assure both top down accountability and a viable marketplace of methods and ideas.

Taken together, the result of these three [precepts] will be a reinvigorated yet very different public education system, a new constitutional arrangement with power distributed where it belongs, checks and balances among those who wield that power, and incentives that pull toward—rather than away from—achievement, productivity, freedom and accountability.

As we examine Arkansas' education reforms of the past half-decade, we find a decent start on “accountability” and very modest starts on “choice” and “transparency.” The fact is, however, that much of the state's education-reform energy has been focused—as the *Lake View* case foreordained—on the financing of public education, a topic that we do not tackle in the following pages. As we write, the State Supreme Court's ruling is awaited in the latest of many cycles of judicial review of the adequacy and fairness of Arkansas' evolving approach to the financing of public education. We will not further muddy those turbulent waters. Most states have continuing disputes over dollar amounts and distribution formulae, and people inevitably disagree over how much of which taxes levied upon whom should support what. Those are matters for political leaders to work through via the constitutional processes of democratic government, not topics that lend themselves to resolution via “outside experts.” Let us note, though, that Arkansas is spending considerably more money on K–12 education today than just a few years back. If it does not now create a twenty-first century education system, the reason will not be lack of resources.

The crucial point is that money alone does not yield better education. In his epochal *Lake View* ruling in 2001, Judge Kilgore made clear that the state would not be in full compliance until it constructed an effective education system atop the fiscal foundation that he called for. Whether the educational capacities he

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decreed that every child should acquire are right or not (whether, indeed, the courts are the right place to decide such matters at all), Judge Kilgore at least made plain that “adequacy” and “equity” in Arkansas education hinge on academic achievements as much as on financial inputs and school programs. The courts, in other words, not only challenged state lawmakers to reconstruct the financial underpinnings of the K–12 system but also to create a delivery system that would yield ambitious educational results for every child. They recognized that funding reform is not the same as education reform, that having a foundation in place is not the same as erecting a fine structure upon it.

Indeed, it’s wrong to think that intelligent funding decisions can be made independent of basic policy decisions about accountability, incentives, institutional structures and student choices. School policy must be directly linked to finances and to rewards for success and interventions or alternatives in the event of failure.

Many of the recommendations that follow require little or no additional funding. They call instead for redirecting ineffective policies to ones that have a higher likelihood of success. Others, however, will need some added resources, especially during their phase-in.

Standards and Curriculum

Standards-based reform begins with academic standards—statements of the skills and knowledge that the state expects all of its students to acquire in particular subjects at each grade level. A language-arts standard might, for example, say that a fourth grader should be able to distinguish adjectives from adverbs and know the uses of each. A math standard might say that a fifth grader should know the multiplication table up to twelve times twelve or be able to add and subtract fractions with different

denominators. A history standard might say that an eleventh grader should understand the causes and consequences of the Civil War and it might identify the key figures and battles in that conflict that students should know about.

With strong, clear, specific standards, much else becomes possible. Curriculum developers and textbook writers know what is to be “covered.” Teachers know what they must teach. Test-makers know what to assess. Parents understand what their daughters and sons are supposed to learn. And a results-based accountability system begins to be possible, since its essence is to compare the results being achieved with those that are desired.

Arkansas first plowed this field in 1999, with legislation that sought “to provide the statutory framework necessary to ensure that all students in the public schools of this state demonstrate grade-level academic proficiency through the application of knowledge and skills in the core academic subjects consistent with state curriculum frameworks, performance standards, and assessments.”

Arkansas started by drafting academic “frameworks” for clusters of grades, not grade by grade. It has now developed these across seven subjects, which are supposed to be reviewed and revised on a six-year cycle, and, in complying with the federal No Child Left Behind Act (2001), the state has created grade-specific academic standards in reading and math. Ultimately, all standards should be grade by grade, in order to avoid gaps and repetitions from one teacher to the next, especially for disadvantaged children who often move from one school to another.

We note that the Arkansas view of “standards” is not confined to student academic results. It also has standards for school accreditation, high-school course offerings, and more. The state takes pride in its “Smart Core” curriculum, a set of college-prep course requirements that becomes the “default” curriculum for the graduating class of 2010, and in its ambitious array of man-

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datory high-school course offerings, including Advanced Placement courses.

Well and good. But the essence of standards is not what is offered or taken but what is taught and learned. To that end, the state's subject-specific "frameworks," and the assessments aligned to them, are the place to begin any appraisal.

In earlier reviews by outside organizations, such as the American Federation of Teachers and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, Arkansas' frameworks have generally received low marks. Koret Task Force members reviewed the current "frameworks" for language-arts (2003 version), math (2004), and social studies (2000). Here is what they concluded:

K–12 English Language-Arts

Though widespread in U.S. education circles, the process-oriented ideas reflected in the Arkansas standards (and tests) are holding back progress in reading comprehension. These ideas assume that reading comprehension is mainly a set of formal skills developed by practicing formal strategies such as "finding the main idea," "questioning the author," "clarifying" and "summarizing." Yet a scientific consensus in cognitive psychology now agrees that this view of literacy is altogether inadequate. Arkansas' standards do a satisfactory job of setting forth what is expected by way of "decoding," i.e. translating print into language accurately and fluently. But they are deficient with respect to the background knowledge needed for comprehension: for the ability, fluently and accurately, to understand what the language says. As they stand, the Arkansas standards for language-arts are remarkably lacking in the content children need to be proficient readers.

Recommendations

1. Make the language-arts curriculum specific, and integrate it with other subjects. This is the critical recommendation to improve reading (and writing) and from it much else will follow. Arkansas should revise its language-arts (and other) “standards” to place less emphasis on abstract skills, and instead stress a required core of grade-by-grade factual knowledge that is highly specific. This statewide core content should comprise at least 50 percent of the curriculum. Because reading proficiency requires general knowledge, this specificity of content should characterize not just language-arts, but also history, science, and the arts.
2. Align the state’s language-arts assessments with the content framework. The current Arkansas Reading Test is conceived as a test of formal skills, ignoring the fact that reading comprehension is knowledge-based. The Arkansas test should be reconceived to test the knowledge needed for reading comprehension.

Mathematics

The state’s 2004 math standards are a clear improvement over previous years’ standards, but the next iteration needs further changes. The present framework retains an excessive emphasis on technology and manipulatives, focuses too much on process rather than learning objectives, and would benefit from a sharper focus on fraction development and mastery of the standard algorithms of mathematics. Its structure and organization tend to place too many topics on the agenda for each year, making an in-depth focus difficult to achieve. Although much of the important content of school mathematics is addressed, many of the standards are

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still too vague to be truly useful to teachers, parents, test-makers, and other key users.

Recommendations

1. Reduce the number of standards at each grade to allow a more in-depth focus.
2. Rework vaguely defined standards to be more concrete and applicable.
3. Lessen the emphasis on technology and manipulatives.
4. Sharpen the focus on fraction development and mastery of standard algorithms.
5. Place greater focus on measurable student achievement rather than pedagogy and process.

Social Studies

Arkansas' present social studies standards are woefully inadequate. Taking advantage of the revision cycle now commencing for this subject, the state should fundamentally overhaul them.

Presently, the Arkansas social studies framework contains no history at all in grades K–4, nor is there a well-defined and coherent core of historical studies in grades 5–12. The standards contain much diffuse conceptual language but no real historical content to guide instruction or assessment. They do not mention any people worthy of study; they provide no historical context for understanding our nation's political heritage; they do not acknowledge the importance of chronology; and they do not build knowledge sequentially from grade to grade.

Recommendations

1. Arkansas should develop a new curriculum framework for history/social studies. The state does not, however, have to reinvent this wheel. It could make use of exemplary standards already created in this field by Alabama, Arizona, California, Indiana, and Massachusetts.
2. Arkansas should develop grade-by-grade history/social studies standards (as in reading and math) that are coherent and rich in content, even in the early elementary grades.
3. Arkansas' standards should be organized around the study of history and should include civics, geography and economics, as well as connections to the study of literature and biography.
4. Arkansas' standards should include the study of important individuals, events, and the evolution of democratic ideas, and should emphasize the importance of chronological thinking.
5. Arkansas should develop and deploy end-of-course assessments in history/social studies.

Assessment and Accountability**Statewide Testing**

The construction of Arkansas' results-based accountability system began with 1999 legislation calling for criterion-referenced tests developed by the state and administered in selected grades. Urged by state business leaders, Arkansas now also administers a norm-referenced test in grades K–9. (It recently switched from the Stanford 9 to Iowa Test of Basic Skills, not because people thought the latter was a better test but because the vendors came in with a stronger and more cost efficient proposal. To a consid-

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erable and worrisome extent, test decisions in Arkansas are made via the state's uniform procurement process. This introduces a jerky, stop-and-start rhythm into the system that seems to us generally inconsistent with sound testing practice.)

End-of-course exams are also administered in algebra 1 and geometry. There is not, however, a statewide high-school graduation test.

Recommendations

1. Continue reporting the percentages of students that attain "Below Basic," "Basic," "Proficient," and "Advanced" levels so that educators are encouraged to help students at all levels of achievement, not just those slightly below "Proficient."
2. Maintain the use of the Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate exams, and extend end-of-course tests to more subjects and courses.
3. Launch and evaluate a pilot computer-adaptive examination system to examine its benefits and possible weaknesses.
4. Commission an analysis of the possibility of cost-effectively substituting computer-adaptive tests for the state's norm-referenced tests and substantial parts of its criterion-referenced tests.
5. Revise state standards in all curriculum areas in light not only of the recommendations elsewhere in this volume but also state-of-the-art Core Knowledge specifications.
6. By 2006–7, assess students' general or core knowledge beyond the skills covered by the federal No Child Left Behind Act, including history, civics, and geography.

No Child Left Behind

Arkansas' implementation of the federal No Child Left Behind Act has, for the most part, been workmanlike and honest. The state has not sought to undo, fight or subvert the law. But its current efforts have four significant shortcomings.

First, due to the introduction of new tests and a woefully slow process of scoring and setting "passing" levels on them, Arkansas has not been able to provide educators, parents, or communities with timely information as to which schools are and are not making "adequate yearly progress" (AYP). This means that the parent options and school interventions meant to be triggered by a school's not "making AYP" cannot begin until well into the following school year.

Second, because some grades have not had suitable tests in place, and because Arkansas opted for a relatively large "sub-group size" for purposes of calculating AYP, many students and groups of students have not had their results "counted" for NCLB purposes. If the purpose of the law is to leave *no* child behind, then it's wrong for a state in effect to exempt thousands of children from its provisions.

Third, while Arkansas is otherwise doing a conscientious job of identifying schools "in need of improvement" under the provisions of NCLB, the state and its districts have not yet demonstrated either the capacity or the appetite to introduce the remedies, interventions, and options that are supposed to follow. Arkansas, in other words, is doing better at labeling weak schools than at strengthening them—or presenting their students with the viable alternatives (other schools, tutoring programs) that NCLB says they should have.

Fourth, Arkansas has a weak and loophole-riddled system for determining which of its veteran teachers are "highly qualified"

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under the provisions of NCLB, particularly with respect to subject-matter knowledge.

Recommendations

1. Arkansas should revamp its testing programs to ensure that definitive information about every school's AYP status during the previous year is made public not later than July. (We recognize that accomplishing this urgent objective will require many changes in many places.)
2. Arkansas should get serious about the public-school choice and "supplemental educational services" (i.e. tutoring) provisions of NCLB, which will require state leadership and proactive effort. Providing all eligible Arkansas families with credible, accessible, and high-quality options under both of these federal requirements will be challenging—but less so than turning around the low-performing schools in which they are presently stuck.
3. With respect to schools identified by NCLB as "needing improvement," the state must ensure that districts actually implement in timely and competent fashion the full cascade of interventions mandated by NCLB—and where districts are unable to do this, the state should do so directly.
4. Arkansas should insist that every single public-school teacher either possess an academic degree in the subject being taught or pass a rigorous test of subject-matter knowledge before being deemed "highly qualified" under NCLB. The only exceptions should be teachers who can demonstrate that their pupils are making satisfactory academic growth in those subjects.

Measuring Growth

As Arkansas continues to rework its testing systems, trying to reconcile the competing demands of NCLB, norm-based testing, criterion-referenced testing, end-of-course exams, and more, it should take the opportunity to think afresh about powerful options such as value-added analysis (i.e. measuring student growth in addition to gauging current performance). The call for this type of analysis arises from the view that knowing how a school (or district, state, teacher, pupil) is doing in absolute terms is necessary but insufficient; we also need to know whether youngsters in that school are making acceptable progress. That is, we need to be able to measure, as accurately as possible, whether students are making suitable academic gains from where they started to where they need to get. Without such “growth” measures, an ineffectual school blessed with high-performing (or fortunate) pupils may look good, while a remarkably productive school may look bad because its disadvantaged students have not yet reached a fixed standard, even though they’re getting closer and closer to meeting it.

Recommendations

1. In order to support better accountability and reward systems, Arkansas should track the performance of individual students and should calculate the value-added by teachers and schools to pupil achievement in each of the tested subjects. (The chapter by Eric A. Hanushek and Caroline M. Hoxby explains how this can be done and supplies illuminating examples.)
2. The calculation of value-added should use established statistical procedures and should be subject to verification by independent contractors.

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Organization and Options

Consolidation and Effectiveness

A major engine of change in the structure of public education in Arkansas has been the drive, catalyzed by Governor Huckabee in 2003, to consolidate tiny rural districts in the name of “efficiency.” As is normally the case with district consolidations and school closings, this has been contentious and the legislature has agreed to less of it than the governor sought. Today, 350 students is the minimum enrollment a district must have to remain separate, a threshold that led to the disappearance of fifty-seven smaller districts in the first year consolidations were carried out.

It’s easy for city folks to fail to appreciate the political, economic and employment roles of school districts in a rural state, and thus to undervalue the depth of feeling that accompanies efforts to reduce or alter those roles. Nevertheless, in the minds of the governor, some legislative leaders, and other education reformers, tiny rural districts are institutionally and fiscally incapable of supplying a truly adequate education to their pupils and are also, sometimes, bastions of archaic views about education and perpetuators of a culture of mediocrity.

We distinguish between district consolidation, which, up to a point, has educational advantages, and school consolidations, which often do not.

By consolidating districts but keeping many of its small schools intact, Arkansas has found a way of introducing administrative efficiencies without endangering the quality of the educational experience that can be realized in a small setting surrounded by a supportive community.

That’s not to say that every school, however tiny, should be preserved. No one is sure whether there is an “optimum” size for

schools. But neither is there evidence to support school enlargement as a major policy objective.

In general, consolidation seems to us an indirect way of addressing the largest problems plaguing rural education: an insufficiency of qualified teachers in certain subject areas, the limited administrative expertise of principals, the need for access to specialized subjects on the part of some high school students, the skimpy supply of school choice available to rural Americans, and the lack of adequate facilities.

Even without school consolidation, district consolidation can facilitate the recruitment of higher-quality instructors and administrative staff. Qualified teachers in specific subjects can be recruited and retained if the state helps districts move away from the standardized salary schedule toward one that gives extra incentives for teaching in rural areas, especially in fields where the shortage of qualified teachers is severe, such as math, science, and special education. Also, the Internet now affords students access to high-quality courses in specialized subjects, regardless of where they live. If this new, comparatively inexpensive, technology is properly deployed, rural schools can remain small but still provide their students with a broad range of courses to which they might not otherwise have access.

Recommendations

1. Given the benefits small schools provide in some contexts, district consolidation should be monitored so as not to encourage consolidations that sacrifice high-performing small schools that are successfully delivering all of the necessary coursework and required academic units to their students.
2. Arkansas should deploy multiple strategies for addressing the challenges of high-quality rural education, including the deliv-

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ery of instruction (and options) via technology and incentive pay for teachers and principals.

The Promise of Charter Schools

Arkansas is one of forty states with a charter school law on the books, allowing the creation of these independent public schools of choice that are intended to be free from regulations but held accountable for their performance. Though marginally strengthened by the 2005 legislature, Arkansas' charter law remains extremely weak, its charter schools are few and small, and its other forms of school choice are virtually non-existent. (The state has limited private school capacity outside metropolitan Little Rock.) People generally but erroneously assume that rural areas are inherently unsuited to choice as a strategy for school reform or for the creation of options for youngsters in poorly performing district schools. Arkansas has the potential to make charter schools a much more prominent feature of its education landscape. The state is neither too rural nor too small to have a vital charter sector. Other states similarly situated have done so.

It is the provisions of state law that matter most when it comes to successful charter schools. Arkansas should modify its charter law in ways that give the greatest boost to existing and future charter schools and pupils wishing to attend them.

Recommendations

1. *Conversion charters.* Most of Arkansas' existing charter schools are "conversions" of district public schools. The problem with the conversion process in Arkansas is that it can occur only at the initiative of the district superintendent, who then continues to govern the school even though it's termed a "charter." If conversion charters are to matter, they must

be able to be initiated by teachers or parents. They must also be governed by a board that is independent of the school district and not beholden to the district superintendent.

2. *New charters.* Arkansas recently moved to increase its supply of charter schools, raising an arbitrary cap on their number from twelve to twenty-four. To realize the potential of charter schooling, however, that cap should be lifted, today's regional rationing system should be discarded, and the market should determine the right number (and location) of schools to satisfy the needs of students and the preferences of their parents.
3. *Facilities and capital.* At best, charter schools in Arkansas are funded at the average of local and state operating revenue. They receive no funding for facilities, books, technology, or other capital items that are separately budgeted and funded in district-operated schools. Arkansas should take a cue from such jurisdictions as Minnesota and the District of Columbia and offer equitable support for the capital needs of its charters.
4. *Transportation.* If schools are going to be available to students outside of their neighborhoods or in rural areas, states or districts must provide transportation, or charter schools must be give additional funding to do this for themselves.
5. *Authorizers and appeals.* While the state board of education is an appropriate authorizer, it should not be the only one. Other states have given this authority to universities, municipalities, and not-for-profit education or community development organizations. They have also fashioned appeals processes to ensure that all charter applications receive a fair hearing. Arkansas should do likewise, thereby taking better advantage of fine organizations across the state that might

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make excellent authorizers and also taking better advantage of the workings of the market.

6. *Regulations.* The most successful charter laws automatically waive countless rules and regulations (except those dealing with health, safety, and civil rights.) In the case of conversion charters, they also lift existing collective bargaining agreements and employment contracts. In Arkansas, however, virtually no waivers are automatic: charter applicants must know specifically what freedoms they want and request these in the charter. This places undue burden on applicants to know and justify every modification to the school code they may require. Such a process needlessly slows the process of innovation. Waivers of the basic code should be automatic.

A Fully Transparent System

How transparent is Arkansas' K–12 education system? Not nearly as much as it could and should be. While parents and taxpayers can now learn quite a lot about a school's academic performance—too much, actually, as the state's lengthy school-specific “report cards” have grown too long and complex for most people to parse—it's nearly impossible for them to get school-specific information about crucial “inputs” such as teacher salaries. Even as NCLB mandates the collection, analysis, and publicizing of data about achievement at the school level, the ingredients of education are still tallied almost entirely at the district level—and not shared in user-friendly fashion with voters and taxpayers. And, left to their own devices, districts are less likely to issue transparent report cards for themselves than for individual schools.

A state mandated report card, coupled with well-defined accounting rules—including a prohibition on teacher salary averaging—would ensure that districts issue candid reports about

themselves. This may require up-front investment by foundations and the state, but once transparent district-wide reporting is well established, districts can easily continue it.

Recommendations

1. A resource-transparency project should be undertaken in Arkansas, starting at the state level, with a merged accounting system for all state education funding streams. Ultimately, a single state account, with funds allocated on a weighted per pupil basis directly to the school, would make the whole system more transparent.
2. The state needs to use its data aggressively. Localities have long had the data they would need to make many things transparent, but have not made use of this information. The state should use its authority to mandate—and its funds to design—two layers of universally available report cards, one at the district level and one at the school level:
 - a. The district-level report card would track how its achievement and spending compare with districts serving similar children; whether its teaching staffs are more or less stable than those in other districts; and whether the district is a net importer or exporter of experienced teachers vis-à-vis other districts. The report card could treat student information similarly. Is the district, for example, continually losing families and only keeping enrollment because of immigration into Arkansas? Does the state fund schools equally on a per pupil basis, or is there lots of variation, either random or biased in some way.
 - b. The school-level report card would include spending data, staff turnover and absenteeism data, number of applicants for teacher vacancies relative to the district average, stu-

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dent attendance and turnover, the proportion of families making this school their first choice (when appropriate), and achievement trajectories by grade and subgroup.

Teachers

Nothing is more important to good education than good teachers. It stands to reason that if Arkansas (or any state) wants to provide its children with the best possible education, efforts to improve teacher quality should be high on its reform agenda. But Arkansas has a quantity challenge, too, with chronic shortages of qualified teachers in some regions and subjects. Faced with these dual demands, it's surprising how little the state has done to rethink how it recruits, prepares, certifies, and compensates them—or how it gauges their effectiveness. There are many opportunities here for bold innovation and far-reaching reform.

Preparation and Certification

There is no convincing evidence that traditional approaches to teacher training and certification yield effective, knowledgeable classroom practitioners. Yet Arkansas persists with those approaches. If the state is serious about making significant gains in the quality and supply of teachers, it must be willing to move toward a new system of certification and preparation.

Recommendations

1. Commit to a new model of teacher preparation and certification that promotes teacher quality in a different way than Arkansas traditionally has. Although the state has an alternative system in place, it needs to be expanded and relied upon as the primary means of licensing people to teach in Arkansas public schools. Its essential elements should include

automatically certifying anyone who possesses a bachelor's degree, who can pass a rigorous test of substantive knowledge, and who also passes a background check. Anyone thus certified can begin teaching, with the understanding that new teachers should also be provided with mentors and an ongoing support and evaluation system.

2. Let the education schools and teacher-training programs adapt to the new model, competing for students under its terms. If their programs “add value,” aspiring (and current) teachers will want to enroll in them.
3. Design or purchase rigorous tests of teacher subject-matter knowledge, both for new teachers and for veteran teachers.
4. Use pay, not just certification and training, to promote teacher quality.
5. Eliminate work rules that interfere with managerial flexibility in the selection, deployment, and retention of teachers.

Rewarding Effectiveness

While teachers cannot control who enters their classroom—children arrive with a wide variety of prior attainments and family resources—they can have a powerful effect on the gains a child makes while in that classroom. Scientific measurement of the gains that a teacher produces is the essence of value-added, or student growth, calculations. The virtue of such measurement is that it permits the state to reward teachers directly for boosting pupil achievement. Our recommended teacher reward system is anchored by value-added calculations. A substantial portion of each teacher's compensation would reflect how much he/she contributes to growth in pupil achievement. By creating rewards for

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those who are effective as teachers, this system creates incentives for successful individuals to join and remain in this occupation.

This reward system is a substantial change from the ineffective but well-established single salary schedule based on years in the classroom and academic training. To phase it in, we recommend that it be established for all new teachers and that existing teachers could voluntarily opt in. The contract would allow larger rewards for good performance in the classroom but would also entail larger risks because pay and promotion would no longer be guaranteed by time on the job.

Recommendations

1. All new state funding able to be allocated to teacher pay should be used to expand the reward system. Because of existing contracts and teacher expectations, it's impractical to hold total teacher salary spending constant while adding new incentives and rewards for classroom performance. The phase-in of the new reward-based pay system should make voluntary opt-in by existing teachers attractive, which requires adding to the compensation that they now receive. In the longer run, the incentive reward scheme will become the norm, although the average salaries for highly effective teachers would be expected to rise above the current levels.
2. Individual rewards of reasonable size must come to all effective teachers. The purpose of a reward system is to draw successful teachers into schools and keep them there. Small rewards to many teachers may seem fairer (or more politically palatable) while large rewards given to a few draw attention to exemplary teachers. But neither can transform teaching into a profession that competes successfully with other fields that reward better performance with higher career pay.

3. The reward system should directly incorporate data about student performance wherever practical and should base the majority of a teacher's reward on his/ her individual value-added. Rewards should be based chiefly on what an individual teacher can affect. For beginning teachers and those who teach non-academic subjects, however, rewards cannot depend primarily on individual value-added. Their rewards, too, however, should be based on quantitative student outcomes, not credentials, preparation or years on the job.
4. Assessments of value-added for individual teachers should incorporate several years of performance. In order to have a reliable assessment of teacher effectiveness, the quantitative portion of value-added calculations should rely on a moving window of student performance over, say, the previous four years. This approach eliminates large annual swings in incentive pay and emphasizes consistent teacher performance.
5. The reward system should blend state and local considerations. We recommend that the state prescribe the system's essential elements while districts work on local implementation.
6. To ensure that all concerned learn from Arkansas' teacher-reward scheme, data should be gathered to facilitate evaluation by the state and by external researchers. Such data should include information on the achievement levels and value-added, rewards earned, and districts' plans for individual rewards.

The Way Forward

Today, strong forces are pushing for change in Arkansas K–12 education. That's important. Durable reforms are ultimately the

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product of powerful, on-the-ground support. While education reform is politically challenging, Arkansas has already shown that it's not shy or cowardly. Yet it's important to understand that the steady drumbeat for education reform in Arkansas is growing louder largely because what has been accomplished so far is not nearly enough.

That's especially true in the state's southeastern region. One need not spend a great deal of time in Arkansas to become keenly aware that it's still a divided state. That this has been true for a long while does not justify it. Indeed, it should alarm and cause outrage. Moreover, when one looks closely enough, the divides in Arkansas are not confined to a single diagonal line. One has only to look at the profound differences in educational opportunities to be found in the schools within metropolitan Little Rock, for example, to know that Arkansas' education challenges are not confined to one end of the state. They intersect every community. Disparities exist within districts and between neighboring schools from Fayetteville to El Dorado.

What may, in fact, turn out to be the most powerful catalyst for real change in Arkansas education is what citizens of the state are increasingly seeing in their own backyards or just across the train tracks: inescapable signs of economic stagnation, social hardship, and gaps that are widening when they ought to be narrowing. Make no mistake: the threat that Arkansas faces is no distant storm cloud on the horizon. The lackluster performance of its schools and students is crippling the state today.

Arkansas has shown itself willing to change. When it comes to education reform, however, the change process is beginning, not ending. The chapters that follow provide a plan to help Arkansas do away with ineffectual policies and outmoded practices that encumber its public education system, firm up good ones

already in place, and introduce new ones to get the Natural State where it wants to be. Taken together, the reforms we recommend will enable Arkansas to establish a K–12 education system that meets the state’s present and future needs, and provides a model for others to emulate.