



EDUCATION POLICY NEWS

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BEEBE, HUTCHINSON SQUARE OFF ON EDUCATION

As the November elections approach, the campaign for Governor of Arkansas is heating up. Both major party candidates, Mike Beebe (D) and Asa Hutchinson (R), have cited education policy as critical components of their campaigns. Whoever wins in November will wrestle with the legacy of the *Lake View* litigation, the fate of rural schools, the implementation of a new testing system, and assorted other issues. In addition, the candidates have outlined new approaches to dealing with perennial education issues, including funding adequacy, merit pay for teachers, teacher retention and salary disparities, curriculum standards, and new preschool

programs.

The Office for Education Policy recently interviewed Beebe and Hutchinson to get a sense of their respective stances on education policy issues confronting the state. Over the course of the campaign, both have noted the positive strides that have been made over the past few years, and both tend to agree that more work remains. However, their approach as to how best to tackle education issues quickly diverge, as their interviews attest.

For one, Mike Beebe noted several positive trends of late. "There are a lot of

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Special Points of Interest:

- Both of the leading candidates for Governor of Arkansas favor a halt to further school consolidation, as well as increasing teacher compensation. They offer differing views, however, on curriculum standards and other policies, such as merit pay and charter schools (p. 1, 4).
- The recently released funding adequacy reports show per pupil spending is on the rise, especially in the state's poorest school districts (p. 1, 2).
- The state is making progress in complying with Act 35, but more work remains to be done (p. 3).

SCHOOL FUNDING: THE ARKANSAS ADEQUACY REPORTS

School financing in Arkansas has become the source of considerable controversy, spurring much litigation and legislation in recent years. In *Lake View v. Huckabee* (2002) the state Supreme Court ruled that Arkansas was failing to meet its constitutional requirement to "maintain a general, suitable and efficient system of free public schools." The Court ordered that the state, using some reasonable method, define the cost of an adequate education. This resulted in the 2003 report, *An Evidence Based Approach to School Finance Adequacy in Arkansas*, which recommended a substantial hike in school funding, based on prototype schools to estimate the level of funding. (The Office for Education Policy previously assessed this report in a 2004 policy brief, which can be accessed at <http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/briefs/LakeView121505.htm>).

Drawing from the 2003 adequacy report, the Arkansas General Assembly convened

in a special session to address a host of education issues, including funding adequacy. This resulted in the passage of Act 59, which converted the funding model based on a prototype school into a per pupil level of funding. Among its provisions, Act 59 calls for annual reports on funding adequacy, expenditures, and use of education resources. Accordingly, Picus and Associates was brought in to conduct such a study, which resulted in three reports issued in 2006. The primary sections of these reports address three areas: (1) Expenditure Analysis, (2) Use of Education Resources, and (3) Funding Recalibration. As in the previous report, the 2006 reports also focus considerable attention on disadvantaged students.

Expenditure Analysis

The purpose of the expenditure analysis was to examine the level of changes

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SCHOOL FUNDING: THE ARKANSAS ADEQUACY REPORTS

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in revenues and expenditures per pupil for education in the state of Arkansas from the 2003-04 school year, the year before the implementation of Act 59, to the 2004-05 school year, the last year for which audited data are available and the first year of the response to the court's school finance adequacy mandate. The report showed that:

- Since 2003-04, current expenditures per pupil in Arkansas has risen 13%, from an average of \$6,045 to \$7,218 in 2004-05.
- Average teacher compensation, which comprises 61% of the total cost of instruction, rose from \$39,409 in 2003-04 to \$41,489 in 2004-05.
- Revenues per pupil were \$8,902, including \$5,424 per pupil for the foundation program, \$422 per pupil for all state categorical programs, \$845 per pupil for local property tax add-ons, \$1,049 per pupil from the federal government, and \$39 per pupil from state revenues for capital, i.e., debt service and general facilities.
- The state has equalized spending between rich and poor districts. The linkage between expenditures per pupil (excluding transportation) and property wealth per pupil is very modest and declined from 2003-04 to 2004-05.
- The state has more effectively targeted new educational dollars to needy students in disadvantaged districts. Districts serving high numbers students in poverty, high numbers of minority of students, and high numbers of students who do not pass state exams have higher levels of school spending and have experienced the largest funding increases.
- Spending per pupil on instruction has not risen as a percentage of overall operating expenses. If higher spending on instruction is one way to improve student achievement, accomplishing this objective over time is still a goal that needs to be attained.

Education Resource Use Recommendations

The purpose of this report was to examine the use of resources and to make recommendations for the coming school years. Picus and Associates found resources use largely went unchanged since 2003. They also noted that districts fell short of the 2003 report's resource use recommendations, and offered several new strategies and suggestions:

- Small classes only in the early elementary years.

- 6 rather than 7 period days in secondary schools.
- 10 days of intensive teacher training in summer institutes.
- Full time instructional coaches in all schools.
- Extended learning opportunities for struggling kids: tutoring, extended days, summer, ESL.
- Analyze student achievement data to help further understand the achievement gap.
- Replace current curriculum with a new, more rigorous program that emphasizes critical thinking skills.

Funding Recalibration Recommendations

The 2006 Picus report made the following funding recommendations for recalibration of funding levels in 2007-08:

- A minimum per pupil funding level of \$5,864.
- Recommended teacher salary of \$40,054 (an increase from a statewide average in 2004-05 of \$39,000).
- An additional \$50 per pupil for professional development (No change from 2003 report).
- \$452 per pupil for NSL students and \$542 per pupil for ELL students.
- \$6,774 per pupil for ALE students (but limiting the pupil size of ALE schools and establishing a strict criteria for enrollment in ALE programs).
- An additional \$286 per pupil for transportation (based on districts' actual transportation expenditures in 2004-05, which vary by district, from a low of \$67 per pupil to a high of \$591).

In early 2007, the Arkansas General Assembly will reconvene and consider making further changes to the education system, specifically examining the recommendations of the most recent Picus report. Regardless of what changes are made, the state's efforts will be closely monitored by school officials across the state, who will be comparing the states' actions to the Supreme Court's requirements.

The complete reports on Expenditures Analysis, Use of Education Resources, and Funding Recalibration can be accessed at <http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/data/education/web.htm>

OEP's recent policy briefs on these issues can be accessed at <http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/policybriefs.htm>

ACT 35 REPORT CARD

The Office for Education Policy has recently revisited Act 35 of the Arkansas General Assembly’s second extraordinary session of 2003 to highlight the Act’s provisions and assess the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) and the State Board of Education’s progress in addressing those accountability measures. In addition to supplementing the provisions of the existing ACTAAP, Act 35 mandates ADE reporting to the General Assembly on schools requiring technical assistance, establishment of financial incentives for successful schools, and financial accountability measurement and reporting. This OEP report is part of our continuing effort to keep our constituents informed of the extent to which reforms are being implemented in Arkansas. We have completed a policy brief and an itemized report card for further review, which can be accessed at <http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/policybriefs.htm>

At this point, the ADE and State Board have made strong progress in addressing and implementing solutions to many of the Act’s provisions, especially regarding updates to the ACTAAP. However, the ADE, State Board, and legislature still have work to do in order to become fully compliant with the Act.

ADE and State Board Efforts:

- The main question is whether the current standardized tests satisfy all the goals of the Act. It is clear that no new tests were specifically developed by the July 1, 2006 deadline for the purposes of the Act. Apparently, the ADE has decided to create new augmented criterion-referenced tests, but the question remains of whether the new tests will be designed to satisfy all that Act 35 set out to accomplish. If new tests will be developed and adopted to address the need for the criterion-referenced test to be “externally linked to a national norm and vertically scaled,” the ADE will need to consider how quickly the new tests can be developed, adopted, and implemented.
- Further, the ADE must make progress on analysis of student, school, and district data. Presumably, implementation of the new \$3.3M federally-funded database will help to “provide the best estimates of classroom, school, and school district effects on student progress based on established, value-added longitudinal calculations.”
- In addition, the ADE must implement the financial oversight system to include the grading of

schools on their use of financial best practices, which to date has not occurred.

Legislative Efforts:

- The legislature must consider and make available funding for the Act’s financial awards (which are to be attached to the rating system, and to be in place within two years).

For more on Act 35, see <http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/briefs/Act35.pdf>

Act 35 Action to be Taken	Has Progress Been Made?
Establish and Review Content Standards	Yes
Schedule Standardized Tests	Yes
Adopt Readiness Exams/K-2 Exams	Yes
Adopt Better Criterion Reference Exams	Partially
Develop Minimum Performance Standards	Yes
Adopt and Implement Norm-Referenced Exams	Yes
Develop End-of-Course Tests for New Subject Areas	Partially
Participate in NAEP Testing	Yes
Add Writing Testing to ACTAAP	Yes
Publicly Report Required Standardized Test Results	Yes
Design System for Student Improvement Plans	Yes
Establish Financial Management and Review System	No
Report on Post-secondary Remediation and Recommend Statutory Changes to Reduce Incidence Rates	Partially
Report on Schools Requiring Technical Assistance	Partially
Reading First (Intensive Reading Instruction)	Yes
Align Professional Development	Yes
Monitor School Improvement Plans	Yes
Establish Improvement and Performance Category	Partially
Make Available Financial Rewards for School	No
Conduct Comprehensive Financial Impact Study	Partially
Create School Choice Provisions	Yes

BEEBE, HUTCHINSON SQUARE OFF ON EDUCATION (CONT.)

(Continued from page 1)

good things going on...Arkansas has raised its standards for our K-12 education in terms of our courses by requiring 38 units be taught.” He suggested, though, that his opponent was willing to back down from such standards, arguing that “the most glaring difference between me and my opponent is that I don’t want to lower the standards.”

Hutchinson, for his part, has repeatedly asserted that he does not wish to see standards lowered, but has also suggested that the state reassess the matter if it means preventing smaller schools from closing. He recently cited the closing of Paron schools (whose students were absorbed into the Bryant district) as an example of the state being too aggressive in closing small schools.

Beebe also takes a strong stance on the issues of consolidation and teacher pay. “I’ve said over and over I think we’ve had enough consolidation,” Beebe said. Hutchinson argued that closing rural schools has a negative impact on local communities and ultimately harms student performance. He argued that in consolidating schools, the state has ignored the effects of long-distance transportation. He also defended his critics’ charges that he seeks to lower education standards. “While I firmly believe that the state of Arkansas must have high standards for excellent education,” he stated, “I also believe that high standards can be applied with common sense.” Hutchinson offered several alternatives to closing rural schools, including distance learning and charter school programs.



“I’ve said over and over I think we’ve had enough consolidation.”
—Mike Beebe (D)

Beebe addressed the issue of rural schools by proposing a program that would bring traveling teachers to high-need schools. He too noted the possibilities of distance learning and

the utilization of technology.

Beebe also argued that increasing teacher pay was critically important in attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers, especially in light of studies that suggest that up to half of all new teachers leave the profession within five years. “[That’s] a startling statistic,” he noted, “and that scares me.”

While Hutchinson also favors an increase in teacher compensation, he warned that Arkansas schools need new solutions beyond simply increasing spending. “We need to recognize,” he noted, “that simply throwing money at the system will not suffice.” Instead, he proposed offering incentives to teachers and schools according to student performance.



“We need to reward teachers for going the extra mile.”
—Asa Hutchinson (R)

Accordingly, Hutchinson has made merit pay a part of his TOOLS strategy (Teachers Ongoing Opportunities and Learning Support), a teacher support program that aims to attract qualified new teachers. “We need new thinking. We need to reward teachers for going the extra mile,” he said.

As the campaign moves closer toward the November 7 election, the candidates—as their recent debates suggest—will continue to speak out on education policy, since it remains one of the issues most important in the minds of Arkansas voters.

The full text of OEP’s interview with Mike Beebe can be downloaded here: http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/interview_beebe.pdf

The full text of OEP’s interview with Asa Hutchinson can be downloaded here: http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep/interview_asa.pdf

SPOTLIGHT: *America's Choice* School Design

Recently the Arkansas Department of Education contracted *America's Choice*, a comprehensive school reform program, to be implemented in 36 low performing schools across the state. The schools that were chosen have been identified as being in their third or fourth year of school improvement under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

Associated with The National Center of Education and the Economy, *America's Choice*, the result of ten years of research, is a comprehensive school reform program. By discovering the most effective and appropriate methods to teach children and developing school reforms around those findings, *America's Choice* seeks to enable students to be academically successful, not only on state and local assessments, but also to keep pace with international students. Overall, *America's Choice* tries to prepare students for college and teach them skills to be successful in today's economy.

America's Choice is designed to comply with all of the aspects of the NCLB Act of 2002, while providing reform designs for all levels of schools, including elementary, middle, and high schools. They offer school-wide improvements plans, as well as more subject-specific plans for literacy and math.

The Arkansas Department of Education agreed to pay *America's Choice* \$6 million for one year of implementation, mostly funded by federal money. According to Judy Aaronson, Special Assistant to the President of the organization, *America's Choice* trainers, known as Cluster Leaders, undergo a rigorous orientation process and are assigned to one of three areas: literacy, mathematics, and leadership. In Arkansas, Cluster Leaders offer weekly onsite technical assistance and training in elementary schools. In high schools, they are onsite twice during each week. Existing programs that have been deemed to have no discernible effect on student performance will be eliminated.

The *America's Choice* School Design is based on five key elements to prepare students for success:

Standards and Assessments. All *America's Choice* schools place a high emphasis on student performance, which is expected to be shown through assessment scores. The goal of this element is to closely follow assessment curricula and develop standards that align with the assessments.

Aligned Instructional Systems. Students are taught strategies to build fundamental skills and concepts, further enabling them to apply their knowledge. For students that are struggling academically, there are "safety nets" available at multiple levels.

High Performance Leadership, Management, and Organization. School leadership teams are developed and then assist the faculty in fully implementing the program. Then, the leadership teams are taught how to build faculty teams, which create small, supportive learning communities for students.

Professional Learning Communities. Before the program is implemented, extensive teacher training is provided and assistance is provided continually by staffers who are at each school every week to assess the program's impact.

Parent and Community

Involvement. The importance of community and parental involvement is emphasized in the design by teaching a variety of strategies to help encourage involvement in education.

Evidence of Success

Over the last decade several studies have been conducted on *America's Choice* revealing gains in students performance. Today, over 500 schools in 15 states are participating. The Consortium for Policy Research (CPRE) at the University of Pennsylvania has documented the program's performance

Participating *America's Choice* Schools in Arkansas

Augusta Elementary
 Brady Elementary
 Brinkley High
 Cloverdale Middle School
 Bob Courtway Middle School, and Carl Stuart Middle School (Conway)
 Dermott Middle School
 Kimmons Junior High
 Darby Junior High and Tilles Elementary (Fort Smith)
 Miller Junior High - Helena-West Helena
 Hermitage High
 Hughes High
 Southwest Middle School, Watson Elementary, and Chicot Elementary (Little Rock)
 Marked Tree Elementary
 Marvell Elementary and High Schools
 Gibbs Albright Elementary (Newport)
 Lynch Drive Elementary and Rose City Middle School (North Little Rock)
 Jack Robey Junior High and Sam Taylor Elementary (Pine Bluff)
 McRae Middle School (Prescott)
 Oak Grove High and Sylvan Hills Middle School (Pulaski County)
 Gardner-Strong Elementary (Strong)
 Cedar Park Elementary (Trumann)
 Turrell High
 Coleman Intermediate School, and Watson Chapel Junior High (Watson Chapel)
 Jackson and Wonder Elementary Schools (West Memphis)
 Wynne Junior High

SPOTLIGHT: AMERICA'S CHOICE SCHOOL DESIGN (CONT.)

at schools in New York, New Jersey, and Florida.

For example, in Plainfield, New Jersey, the percentage of students at or above the state standard in English language arts climbed from 30 percent to 49 percent after one year of implementation. A number of evaluations of the program have been undertaken, most recently by the American Institutes for Research (AIR), which recently published a systematic review of the evidence of effectiveness for all comprehensive school reform designs, such as *America's Choice*.

The AIR review found *America's Choice* to have had “moderate” success in improving student performance, yet found it be lacking in meeting the needs of diverse student populations.

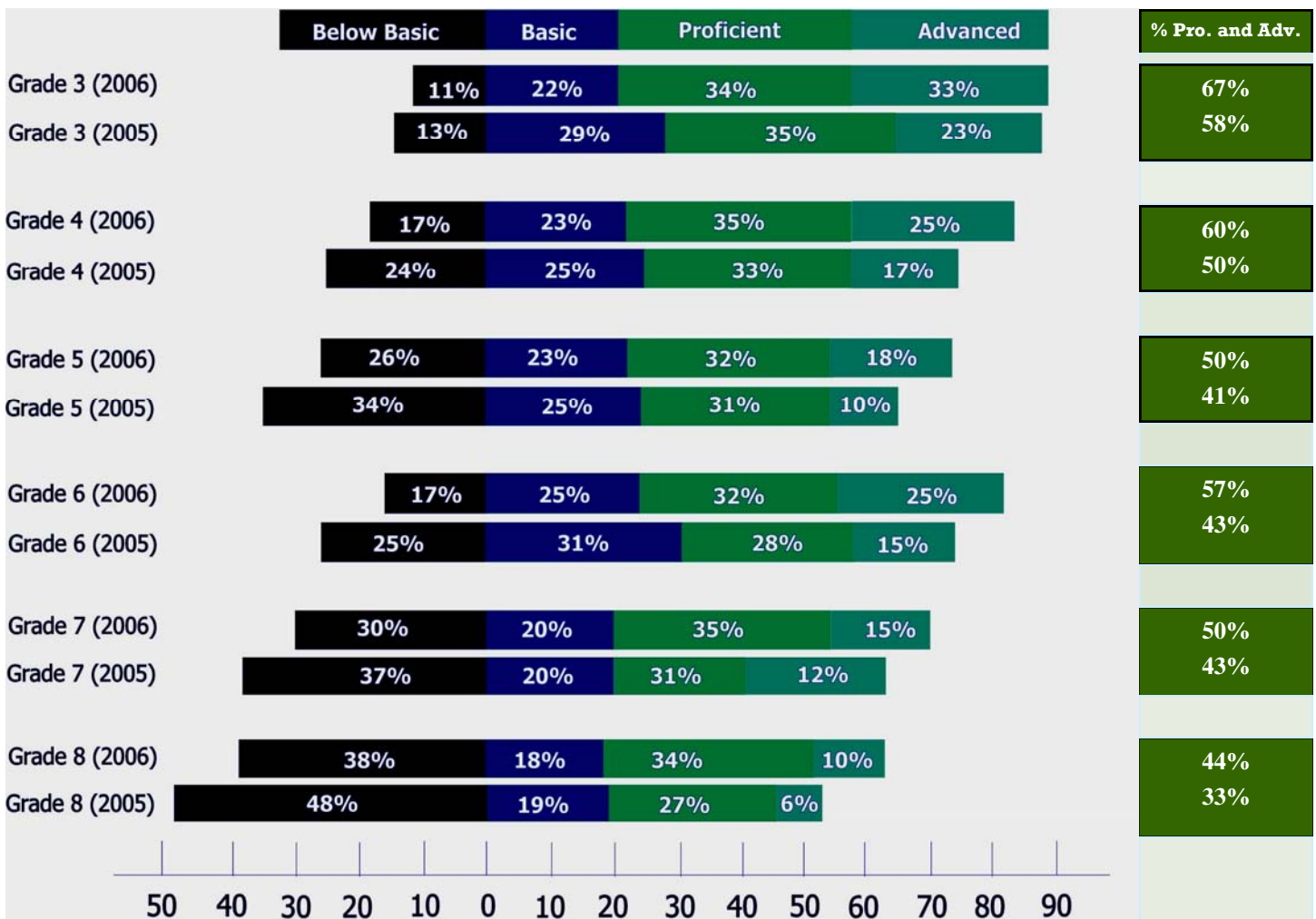
The AIR report also noted that *America's Choice* had, to date, shown little positive effect on improving writing skills. Nevertheless, only two school reform designs (*Success for All* and *Direct Instruction*) received a higher rating than *America's Choice*. School leaders in Arkansas are hopeful that this reform strategy will lead to improved student performance for many schools over the next several years.

Visit *America's Choice* online at <http://www.ncee.org/acsd>

For recent evaluations on *America's Choice*, navigate here: http://www.cpre.org/Research/Research_Project_America's_Choice.htm

The full AIR report can be accessed here: http://www.csrq.org/documents/MSHS2006Report_FinalFullVersion10-03-06.pdf

STATISTICAL SNAPSHOT: ARKANSAS BENCHMARK TEST SCORES IN MATHEMATICS, GRADES 3—8



Source: Arkansas Department of Education, <http://arkansased.org/ppt/2006%20Test%20Scores.ppt> (Summer 2006)

IN THE NEWS

[Arkansas College Rolls See 3% Boost](#)

According to numbers released September 19 by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education, enrollment at colleges & universities across the state rose by about 3% in the last year. Enrollment increased at 9 of the state's 11 public universities, as well as at about half of the state's 22 public two-year colleges. Growth was generally attributed to increased outreach programs and advertising campaigns.

[Parents Saying No to Tougher Classes](#)

Parents of almost 10 percent of Arkansas seventh- and eighth-graders chose not to enroll their children in the new state-mandated "Smart Core" curriculum. This year's ninth-graders will be the first to be required to complete the more challenging course load. Students whose parents signed a waiver exempting them from Smart Core will be allowed to enroll in an easier curriculum. The Smart Core requirements include four units of mathematics: algebra I, geometry, algebra II, and one unit beyond algebra II, such as trigonometry. Students taking the easier, 22-unit, Common Core curriculum are not required to take math courses higher than geometry, and the science requirements only call for students to take biology and one physical science course.

[Arkansas to Receive \\$700,000 in Federal Grants](#)

Arkansas will receive \$700,000 from the U.S. Department of Education as part of its No Child Left Behind Program. The funds were awarded for pre-kindergarten through college-level educational partnerships, and are intended to help raise student achievement through improved teaching methods. The Arkansas Department of Higher Education will disperse the funds to colleges and universities across the state that have approved teacher-preparation programs, and will fund sub-grants for professional development.

[Officials Unveil New Online Teacher Professional Development Program](#)

A new program called Arkansas IDEAS, introduced September 6th, allows Arkansas teachers to take required professional development programs online. Created by ACT 2318 of 2005 and made possible by the Arkansas Department of Education in partnership with the Arkansas Education Television Network, the program will offer more than 70 courses beginning in October. AETN will offer 4,000 course enrollments, and the online portal is free to all Arkansas educators.



Upcoming Events

Education Committee – Joint Session

Thursday, October 26, 2006 1:00 p.m.
Room 138, State Capitol

Arkansas Association of Educational Professionals Annual Conference/ Workshop

Thursday - Friday, November 2-3, 2006,
Austin Hotel - Hot Springs

Arkansas Education Association's Annual Convention

Thursday - Friday, November 2 - 3, 2006,
Robinson Auditorium - Little Rock

Education Committee – Joint Session

Thursday, November 9, 2006, 1:00 p.m.
Room 138, State Capitol

Education Committee – Joint Session

Tuesday, Dec 19, 2006, 10:00 a.m. Room
138, State Capitol

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**IN OUR
NEXT
ISSUE...**

*The next Office for
Education Policy
newsletter will be
published in Winter,
2007, and will focus on
the upcoming legisla-
tive session.*

Visit our website for more info!
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OFFICE FOR EDUCATION POLICY MISSION:

*The Office for Education Policy seeks
to be a resource that aids state policymakers, educators,
administrators, and other leaders in thoughtful decision-making
concerning K-12 education in the State of Arkansas.*

THE EDITOR'S NOTES

Dear Colleagues,

With another school year well underway, the Office for Education Policy is busy staying on top of the latest education news throughout the state.

This issue of the OEP newsletter focuses on the 2006 Governor's race, as the leading candidates offer their views on education policy. As part of our coverage, the OEP website offers full-length interviews with both Mike Beebe (D) and Asa Hutchinson (R), covering a wide range of topics.

In this issue we also take a look at the recently released funding adequacy reports to examine how much is being spent on schools, and how resources are being used. We also shine our spotlight on *America's Choice*, a comprehensive school reform

program currently being implemented throughout Arkansas. In addition, this issue evaluates how recent education reforms in Act 35 are being applied.

As always, we seek to serve the interests of both students and policymakers, and as such, we value the input of our readers. If you have any thoughts on how we might use our resources, please do not hesitate to contact us at oep@uark.edu.

As the next legislative session approaches, we are particularly interested in hearing your ideas as to which issues we should examine. We hope to hear from you soon.

Respectfully,

Gary Ritter

Director, *Office for Education Policy*



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