

# REPORTER

DECEMBER 2003

Volume 21, Number 4

## Very special conference is only days away

Each member of the General Assembly has been invited to join us at our conference on Dec. 10 at a special reception when we will celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary and honor our own Carol Brown, president this year of the National School Boards Association.

As we mentioned during the regional meetings, we ask that you, too, extend invitations to your legislators to join us for this special event. It will begin at 4:15 that afternoon in the Peabody Ballroom. We'll have plenty of good food and some great entertainment by George Fields, America's musical humorist.

The late-afternoon reception has been planned, hopefully, to best accommodate our lawmakers

since they will be in session. Also, we've kept in mind that many of you like to go to dinner on that evening, so the reception will wrap up at 6:00 p.m.

With the unveiling of two new on-line courses developed by ASBA, there will be a computer lab set up all day on Dec. 10 to give you a preview of the courses and how to access them.

Parliamentarian Jim Slaughter is returning again this year to present two pre-conference workshops on Dec. 9. Always a conference highlight, Slaughter will help you run more efficient and effective board meetings.

On Wednesday, educator and author Madeline Cartwright will deliver the keynote address during the annual Pinnacle Awards Luncheon. As a principal, Cartwright took over a school amidst enormous poverty, poor attendance and terrible test scores and turned it completely around. Her message has great significance for all Arkansans.

Her remarks will be preceded by NSBA President Carol Brown.

During the reception, we'll be edified and entertained by George Fields, who was very warmly received when he last appeared

nine years ago at our annual conference. He was such a hit, we invited him back to help us celebrate our anniversary and honor NSBA President Carol Brown.

*Correction: In the conference flyer, Jim Slaughter's pre-conference sessions were listed with the wrong date. The correct date is Dec. 9 for the pre-conference sessions.*

At our breakfast on Thursday morning, we'll hear from Interim ADE Director Tom Courtway. Michael Resnick, NSBA's associate executive director for advocacy and issues management, will be on hand to discuss No Child Left Behind and how Arkansas board members can and should be more involved in helping shape federal education policy. The conference will conclude with a focus on Lake View. Attorneys Mitch Llewellyn, Bill Lewellen and David Matthews, who have been involved in the litigation, will share their thoughts as the General Assembly races toward a Jan. 1

*See Conference on page 4*

### SCHOOL BOARD BRIEF CASE

- ▲ Dec. 8 Proposed beginning of Special Session
- ▲ Dec. 9-11 ASBA Golden Anniversary Conference

# NAEP scores reveal Arkansas 4th graders are improving in mathematics

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores in mathematics and reading were released on Nov. 13 by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in its Nation's Report Card.

NAEP is a national sampling criterion-referenced test that measures national education standards. A sampling test is given to randomly selected groups of stu-

dents across the state. Often, not even all of the students in a grade level in a school are selected. The notion behind such a test is to give a broad view of the performance of the students against national standards of academics.

In reviewing Arkansas 4th graders who took the test in 2002, 26% scored at or above the proficient level. In 2003, 28% scored at or

above the proficient level compared with 30% nationally. Prior to 2002, the last time the test was given to Arkansas 4th graders in 1998, 23% of those students scored at or above the proficient range.

Eighth grade scores in reading reflected 28% proficient or above in 2002 and 27% proficient or above in 2003. The 1% difference should not be considered a major

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decline. The nation's 8th graders scored 30% proficient or above in mathematics in 2003.

The focus of Smart Start and Smart Step has been on reading, writing and mathematics for the last few years. The focus has shifted toward mathematics at the primary level recently. NAEP was administered to Arkansas 4th graders and 8th graders in 2000 and was administered again in 2003.

In 2000, 14% of Arkansas 4th graders scored at or above the proficient level on the NAEP com-

pared to 26% proficient or above in 2003. This is a significant gain.

Arkansas 8th graders scored 13% proficient or above in mathematics in 2000 and 19% proficient or above in mathematics in 2003. This, too, is a significant gain.

Although no single factor could be attributed to the gain, it should be noted that the increased focus on professional development in the area of mathematics curriculum and instruction likely played a role in the gains.

Experts have noted that the

NAEP uses a very high set of standards for assessment. Many experts believe that NAEP standards are higher than those of any state standards. The fact that Arkansas students are improving on the NAEP and the Arkansas Benchmark Exams could certainly support the idea that Arkansas standards are valid, are high and are serving to push students to higher levels of achievement.

For more information, please visit the NCES web site <http://nces.ed.gov.nationsreportcard>.

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## Conference plans are revealed

*Continued from page 4*

Supreme Court-ordered deadline to address public education.

In addition to the line-up of the great general sessions, there will be a number of interesting and informative breakout sessions. In fact, there will be opportunities for you to participate in up to four different breakouts throughout the day on Dec. 10.

For those of you who did not have a chance to attend our annual New Board Member Workshop, there are a couple of breakout sessions that morning with you in mind. Dr. Tom Kimbrell, superintendent of the Paragould School District, will reprise the "ABCs of School Finance," and former North Little Rock Board Member Lynn Hamilton will expand his session on "Building Relationships for Successful School Board Service." Both of those sessions got very high evaluations at the October workshop and both are particularly important for newly elected board members. These sessions will be offered twice that morning, enabling you to attend them both.

Here is a schedule of the breakout sessions with brief descriptions and when they will be offered:

### Wed., 9:30-11:20

Special Double Session

- **Internet Predators and How to Protect our Children**—Lt. Tracy Roulston and his team of investigators from the North Little Rock Police Department are back by popular demand in this double-length session.

### Wed., 9:30-10:20

- **Using Study Circles to Engage Your Community**—Diane Vibhakar, coordinator of the Arkansas Study Circles Project, and Connie Whitfield, parent and community

liaison with Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families will explain what they are and actually give you a taste, how to organize them, and talk about our latest discussion guide, "Building Partnerships with Schools and Families."

- **Teaching Children of Poverty**—Diedra South, assistant principal, and Kim Calder-Isgrig, counselor and gifted/talented facilitator at North Little Rock's Ridgeroad Charter Middle School, will talk about the unique design of this school and the principles that guide teachers who work with children of poverty.

- **Wage and Hour Laws**—ASBA Staff Attorney Kristen Gould will provide information on how to comply with wage and hour laws and avoid potential lawsuits.

- **Building Positive Relationships: A School Board Member's Most Important Role**—Fifteen-year veteran school board member Lynn Hamilton has accumulated a lot of wisdom in building the kind of relationships that lead to productive board service. (Recommended for new board members who were unable to attend the New Board Member Workshop.)

- **Using Test Data to Guide Reform**—Bill Ballard, private consultant, will discuss how school districts should use test scores to direct instructional reform.

- **ABCs of School Finance**—Dr. Tom Kimbrell, superintendent of the Paragould School District, will reprise and expand this primer on school finance from October's New Board Member Workshop (recommended for new board members who were unable to attend the October workshop).

- **Lease-Purchase Agreements**—Daniel Goodwin, attorney with Gill, Elrod, Ragon, Owen, & Sherman, will explain how school districts can utilize lease-purchase agreements.

- **Searching for a Superintendent?**—Bobby Lester, Arkansas's lead consultant with the ASBA-endorsed superintendent search firm, McPherson & Jacobson, will walk you through the process of recruiting, selecting, and hiring a new superintendent. (This session will be repeated during each breakout period throughout the day.)

- **ASBA On-line**—There will be a computer lab set up all day for you to visit and learn about ASBA's new on-line courses, as well as others available through NSBA's On-Line Learning Consortium. ASBA trainer Chester Cummins will help you navigate and answer questions about how board members can obtain professional development on the Internet.

### Wed., 10:30 - 11:20

- **Intensive School Support**—Dr. Paula Cummins, assistant executive director of the Arkansas Leadership Academy, will explain the plan to bring all the leadership building forces of the Academy together to help districts improve academic achievement. The plan was developed over the past couple of years by the Academy and the Southern Region Educational Board.

- **Using and Managing the Data**—Supt. Al Brown will discuss how the Corning School District is using data to improve student learning and the data management system they use to do it.

- **ABCs of School Finance**—Dr. Tom Kimbrell

- **Education Service Cooperatives: What They Can Do for You**—Directors from some of the state's 15 education service co-ops will talk about their programs and services, and how they can benefit your school districts.

- **Building Positive Relationships: A School Board Member's Most Important Role**—Lynn Hamilton

- **Using Test Data to Guide Reform**—Bill Ballard
- **Lease-Purchase Agreements**—Daniel Goodwin
- **Searching for a Superintendent?**—Bobby Lester
- **ASBA On-line**—Chester Cummins—The computer lab will be set up all day.

### Wed., 1:45 - 2:35

- **Using Study Circles to Engage Your Community**—Diane Vibhakar, coordinator of the Arkansas Study Circles Project, and Connie Whitfield, parent and community liaison with Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families will repeat this session.
- **Wage and Hour Laws**—Kristen Gould
- **Early Care and Education**—Kathy Stegall, early childhood specialist, will present a program about the value of early childhood education.
- **Digital Skills for the 21st Century**—Maureen Brim with Apple Computers will present the skills that are needed to be successful in the 21st Century.

- **School Improvement Processes**—Dr. Charity Smith, the Arkansas Department of Education's Assistant Director for Accountability, will explain the state's school improvement processes.
- **Regulations for the Omnibus Quality Education Act**—ADE General Counsel Scott Smith will explain the regulations for the state's new educational accountability law.
- **'Tell Me and I Forget, Teach Me and I Remember, Involve Me and I Learn'**—Marva Harrison of the Creative Education Institute will talk about research-based learning programs that help challenged students master basic skills and to provide professional development so that educators can effectively use them. She will be joined by representatives of two Arkansas districts that are using the programs.
- **Searching for a Superintendent?**—Bobby Lester
- **ASBA On-line**—Chester Cummins—The computer lab will be set up all day.

### Wed., 2:45 - 3:35

- **School Improvement Processes**—Dr. Charity Smith
- **Regulations for the Omnibus Quality Education Act**—Scott Smith
- **'Tell Me and I Forget, Teach Me and I Remember, Involve Me and I Learn'**—Marva Harrison
- **Intensive School Support**—Dr. Paula Cummins
- **HIPPY**—Barbara Gilkey of Arkansas Childrens' Hospital will discuss the value of the HIPPY program in Arkansas.
- **Building High Performance Schools**—Teri Borton, Jan Meyer, and Mary Jane Murray, specialist in the area of building high performance schools, will discuss the impact of a building's environment on learning.
- **Education Service Cooperatives: What They Can Do for You**—Directors from some of the state's 15 education service co-ops
- **Searching for a Superintendent?**—Bobby Lester
- **ASBA On-line**—Chester Cummins—The computer lab will be set up all day.

## ***Miles to Go Arkansas Update*** released Nov. 18

In August 2002, the Southern Education Foundation (SEF) issued *Miles to Go Arkansas*, a report on education. Key findings of that publication included:

- ▲ Arkansas's economic development flows directly from education.
- ▲ Incomes are strongly related to education.
- ▲ Arkansas is near the bottom among the 50 states in producing college graduates and per capita income.
- ▲ Arkansas has a near majority of low-income, minority students who have the most needs and the least educational resources.
- ▲ Only about 15% of 9th graders graduate from college within 10 years—close to the same percent-

age of adults who have a college degree. Arkansas is failing to close its education gap with the nation.

*Miles to Go Arkansas* recommended that the state set new long-term goals in order to achieve the following necessary goals within 10 years:

1. Close the educational resources gap by income and race in per pupil expenditures, effective teaching, student support, challenging curriculum and teacher salaries.
2. Reduce the racial and income gaps in average test scores for writing, reading, mathematics and science.
3. Double the percentage of college graduates in Arkansas from all population groups.

On Nov. 18, SEF released *Update*:

*Miles to Go Arkansas*. This publication provides the research basis for the goals that were outlined in the original issue 15 months earlier.

Per capita income is widely used as a measure of a state's economic

See *Miles* on page 14

### JOB BULLETIN

Superintendent, Nettleton School District. Deadline: Until filled. Apply to: Danny Blalock, Nettleton School District, 2616 Progress St., Jonesboro, AR 72401, (870) 910-7800, ext. 221, or email [dblalock@nettleton.crs.k12.ar.us](mailto:dblalock@nettleton.crs.k12.ar.us)

## Keep those kids "bus safe"

With the end of Daylight-saving Time in most parts of the country, this is a good time to remind students, parents and bus drivers about tips for school bus safety. Research shows that school bus transportation is safe, even safer than cars. Most school bus-related injuries and deaths occur as pupils were entering and exiting the bus—not in a crash.

Here are some safety tips from the National Safety Council to remember:

▲ Have a safe place to wait for your bus, away from traffic and the street.

▲ Stay away from the bus until it comes to a complete stop and the driver signals you to enter.

▲ When being dropped off, exit the bus and walk 10 giant steps away from the bus. Keep a safe distance between you and the bus. Also, remember that the bus driver can see you best when you are back away from the bus.

▲ Stay away from the bus until the driver gives his/her signal that it's okay to approach.

▲ Be aware of the street traffic around you. Drivers are required to follow certain rules of the road concerning school buses, however, not all do. Protect yourself and watch out!

▲ When waiting for the bus, stay away from traffic and avoid roughhousing or other behavior that can lead to carelessness. Do not stray onto streets, alleys or private property.

▲ Line up away from the street or road as the school bus approaches. Wait until the bus has stopped and the door opens before stepping onto the roadway.

▲ When on the bus, find a seat and sit down. Loud talking or other noise can distract the bus driver and is not allowed. Never put head, arms or hands out of the window.

▲ Keep aisles clear—books or bags are tripping hazards and can block the way in an emergency.



*ASBA Workers' Compensation Trust Manager Rhoda Parsons and ASBA Executive Director Dan Farley accept the Outstanding Performance Award plaque from Arkansas Workers' Compensation Commission Chairman Olan W. Reeves and Commissioner Karen H. McKinney.*

## ASBA honored for fifth year by Workers' Comp panel

ASBA has done it again! For the fifth consecutive year, the Workers' Compensation Trust has been awarded the Outstanding Performance Award for Public Self-Insurer in Arkansas.

The award was presented to ASBA Workers' Compensation Trust Manager Rhoda Parsons and ASBA Executive Director Dan Farley by the Arkansas Workers' Compensation Commission at its 16th Annual Education Confer-

ence at the DoubleTree Hotel in Little Rock.

Each year, the Self-Insurance Division of the Commission monitors companies handling workers' compensation claims for employers, grading each company on the number of cases and the timeliness in reporting injuries and paying injured employees. The award represents excellent claims handling by a self-insured group.

▲ At your stop, wait for the bus to stop completely before getting up from your seat. Then, walk to the front door and exit, using the hand rail.

▲ If you have to cross the street in front of the bus, walk at least ten feet ahead of the bus along the side of the road, until you can turn around and see the driver. Make sure that the driver can see you. Wait for a signal

from the driver before beginning to cross. When the driver signals, walk across the road, keeping an eye out for sudden traffic changes.

▲ Do not cross the center line of the road until the driver has signaled that it is safe for you to begin walking.

Source: National Safety Council at [www.nsc.org](http://www.nsc.org).

# ASBA Board welcomes four new members

The ASBA Board of Directors added four new members during the recent Regional Meetings. Elections were held in 10 of the 14 regions. In six of those regions, current ASBA board members were re-elected.

ASBA board members who were re-elected include Donna Braymer, Harrison, Region 2; Fran Haines, Corning, Region 3; Ray Edwards, White County Central, Region 6; Dr. Chuck Kauffman, Fordyce, Region 11; and Arnell Washington, Dumas, Region 14. Cathy Allen of Rogers was elected Region 1 Director. She had been appointed in January to fill the position vacated by Kathy McFetridge of Springdale who had been



*Amy Daniel of Benton*

elected ASBA Secretary/Treasurer last December.

Amy Daniel of Benton was elected to serve as the Region 8 director. Daniel replaces Judy Magness of Little Rock who chose not to run for re-election in her district this year. Daniel is a 16-year veteran of school board service, having served as president, vice president and secretary during her tenure on the Benton School Board. She has attained the Pinnacle Award. She earned a bachelor's degree in biology from Henderson State University. Daniel currently works as the Saline County deputy circuit clerk,

serving two judges.

As a child advocate, she has served on the boards of the Boy Scouts of America and PTA and is a former president of the Benton Athletic Booster Club.



*Johnny Lockley of DeWitt*

The new Region 9 Director is Johnny Lockley of DeWitt. Lockley replaces Betty Magruder who moved from her school district. Many of you may remember Lockley, who spoke at ASBA's New Board Member Workshop in 2002. Lockley, who works for Centerpoint Energy, is married and has two children. He earned an A.A.S. in business management from Phillips County Community College. Lockley also has served his community as a member of the Arkansas County Fair Board.

Hailing from Nevada County, the new director for Region 12 is Rev. Jerry Bishop. Bishop replaces Donny Chandler of Spring Hill.



*Rev. Jerry Bishop of Nevada County*

Bishop served as member of the writing team for the ASBA School Board Standards. He is married and has two children. Other areas of service include treasurer of the Columbia Connection, board member for Stand, Inc., and advisory board for Sen. Blanche Lincoln.

The new ASBA Board of Directors member from Region 13 is Wayne Gibson. Gibson is from El Dorado and replaces Bracy Yarbrough of Stephens. Gibson is married and has one daughter. He is employed by Murphy Oil Company. Gibson earned a degree in management and accounting from Henderson State University. Gibson has served the El Dorado community in a variety of ways



*Wayne Gibson of El Dorado*

including Barton Library Board, South Arkansas Symphony, Literary Council and Kiwanis. He currently serves as chairman of the trustees of his church. Professional organizations include the Arkansas Realtors Association and the El Dorado Board of Realtors.

ASBA proudly welcomes these four new members to the Board.

## LELAND WELLS ASBA PRESIDENT



## Thanks for the memories

Somewhere in the back of my mind, I hear Bob Hope singing "Thanks for the memories." That tune conjures up warm, nostalgic feelings that are similar to those I feel when I reflect back over my year as your association president.

Before I stroll down memory lane of this past year, I want to thank you for allowing me to serve as your president. I feel very honored and humbled by the experience. It has been a very rewarding ad-

venture.

Since thank yous are few and far between for school board members, I want to express my gratitude to you for the many, many hours that you spend serving the children of our state. Thank you for the thoughtful, studied, judicious decisions that you make as we all strive to improve education for our kids.

Many thanks to the ASBA staff members who work tirelessly and

carefully to provide us with informative publications, quality training opportunities, a voice at the Capitol, legal services, access to policy services and insurance services and opportunities to ask questions, share ideas and vent our opinions.

I would also like to thank the ASBA Board of Directors for its support this year. I am grateful for the wisdom and leadership of each

*See Great year on page 10*

## DAN FARLEY ASBA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



## It's all about the money

"It's all about the money," a notable lobbyist told me recently during a conversation about reforming our schools and complying with the Supreme Court's Jan. 1 deadline to produce a plan to do so.

You'd have to be a fool to disagree. None of the reform plans currently under study will come cheaply, and lawmakers must measure the cost as well as the proposed measures to improve our public schools. That's pragmatic reality.

As the date for the proposed special session draws nearer, it's the money that has the attention of most. The vision of what our public education system will look like has yet to surface. That's

disappointing for us because we believe it's the vision that will get us where we need to be. As board members, you've heard us talk about why it's crucial to engage your community in building a shared vision for your schools. The same should be done with a statewide view.

The adequacy study laid a foundation for a vision that would bolster education, but its cost estimates have delayed any real progress toward solving our collective problem. The figure is staggering, to be sure, but the failure to implement the reforms it would bring would seem to defy the edict issued by the Supreme Court and further delay moving us toward the advances we need.

When we work with school boards about vision, we always encourage them to build their vision for their schools without any constraints. In other words, we say, "What would your schools look like if you had all the money you needed?" A vision, after all, is a preferred future. If you know where you want to go, you can chart a path to get there. You may not get there all at once, but if you remain true to the vision, you ultimately will arrive.

The most often used example of such thinking is that of JFK who challenged us to put a man on the moon by the end of a decade. Before his vision was revealed, no one—not even at NASA—had

*See Money on page 11*

# REPORTER

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for local school boards.*



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### Region 1

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## PAUL BLUME ASBA GENERAL COUNSEL

### Recipe for a grievance hearing in nine easy steps



A couple of months ago, I griped about the new laws affecting grievances and hearings. Today, we'll look at what goes into a grievance hearing, so that you may conduct the less contentious ones without the expense of a lawyer. I know it might be impossible to tell just how contentious a hearing might become, at least until it's too late, but there are some relatively cordial grievance hearings every now and then. So, let's go through the process. (If there is an issue of whether the employee is bringing a grievance which is not grievable, then look at the end of this column for the procedure.)

When the meeting is called to order, the order the hearing is as follows:

1. State the following: "This is a hearing on a grievance brought by an employee (Name). Is the employee represented by an attorney or other person?" (Ask any representative to identify himself.)
2. Ask the employee whether he wants the hearing to be open or closed to the public. (Note: That choice is solely that of the employee. If he wants it closed, remove all who are not directly involved in the hearing in some way from the room.)
3. State that both the employee and the administration will have a maximum of 90 minutes in which to make their presentations. (Plan on starting the time clock running as soon as the employee—or his representative—begins his presentation.)
4. Ask the employee (or representative) to begin the hearing by stating, first, the nature of the grievance (*i.e.*, what his gripe is) in a very short statement, followed by what he wants the Board to do about it. (This is called the "relief" sought by the employee.) If the employee or his representative can't do that, he has a problem. The Board must know not only what the problem is, but what the employee wants done about it. Insist that this information be stated to the Board on the front end. This is not information that you should have to pick out from all of the statements, documents, etc., that the employee might want to present. If he can't tell you what he wants and why, he probably doesn't have a grievance, but

See *Grievance* on page 15

## It's been a really great year

*Continued from page 8*

of you in guiding this organization.

As I began my year in office last December, the ASBA Delegate Assembly had just passed the recommendation for school board standards. These standards were created by nearly 900 of you who attended Regional Meetings in the fall of 2002. Many school boards have adopted these as standards for which your boards are striving. If your board has not yet considered this, I urge you to review and adopt them. They may be downloaded from our web site at [www.arsba.org](http://www.arsba.org).

January arrived and found ASBA demonstrating a strong presence at the Capitol when the Arkansas General Assembly convened. As the furor of the debate over education reform grew hotter, ASBA's voice was heard through passionate testimony in the committee rooms, honest intercessions in the hallways and thoughtful opinions in the *Reporter*, public speeches and position documents.

Although the General Assembly ended with many unresolved issues, ASBA's staff continued faithfully to represent our association. We emerged from that a little worse for the wear but wiser and with more respect from legislators and other constituent organizations.

Our policy service continues to grow. To date, more than half of the school districts in the state are subscribers (169 school districts and two charter schools). As new laws are published and new regulations and rules are released from the State Board of Education, policies are updated and delivered to subscribers.

At the NSBA Conference in San Francisco, many of us were on hand to see our own Carol Brown

accede to the presidency of our national organization. We can all be very proud of Carol. She continues to advocate for the children at home and in Washington as well as serve as a wonderful ambassador for our state.

The Arkansas Study Circles Project expanded with a new discussion guide to facilitate family and community engagement in our schools. A second guide on early childhood education is anticipated before the end of the year. Several communities are in various stages of organizing local projects.

ASBA has developed on-line training courses that are available through the Internet. To learn more about this aspect of training, please attend that breakout session at the conference.

Because of an anticipated special session of the Arkansas General Assembly that was expected to begin in September, ASBA decided to approach Regional Meetings differently. It would have been very difficult for Dan and Kathy to travel to our meetings two or three nights each week and return to Little Rock to be present at the Capitol the next morning. Instead, the staff sought a way to continue the fall meetings yet avoid travel. For the first time in ASBA history, we conducted those meetings via a distance learning strategy known as compressed interactive video (CIV). What a creative way to accomplish so many tasks. Not only did we receive valuable information from Dan and training from Kathy, we also experienced distance learning firsthand. Although we would probably all agree that it can never replace a face-to-face, hand-shaking encounter, it was a great solution to a difficult problem.

So now it is December again, and my year is drawing to a close. The annual conference, our 50th Anniversary, promises to be the best we have ever had. I hope that all of you

are making plans to attend. Our sessions include how schools turned around from failure to success, No Child Left Behind, Lake View and beyond, how to protect your children from Internet predators, on-line learning through ASBA and much more. Plus, we will host a reception to celebrate 50 years as an association, honor NSBA President Carol Brown of Wynne and dialog with our legislators.

Even though ASBA will send formal invitations to our legislators for our reception, I urge you to personally contact and invite your state senator and representative. The Special Session is proposed to begin on Dec. 8, so the legislators will already be in Little Rock. I hope the you will take this opportunity to visit with them.

Once again, thanks for the memories. It has been a wonderful year.

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## Money really does matter

*Continued from page 8*

imagined such a feat. It was vision that got us there.

Just like our attempt to land a man on the moon, it will take some time and commitment to realize the vision of every Arkansas child having access to a great school where learning is the thing. JFK didn't suggest a lunar landing one day and expect it to happen next week. He knew that focusing on where we wanted to be was a great part of getting there.

Any plan to improve our schools—to provide an adequate and equitable education to all Arkansas kids—won't realize instant success. If that's the expectation, we're all setting ourselves up for a huge disappointment. A gigantic part of the change we must see is dependent on our collective value of education. What we call an education ethic. (Remember our second filter?)

Until we as a people begin to value education more than we presently do, we will continue to send mixed messages to the children we claim to be considering. On the one hand, we say we expect our kids to do better. We're quick to criticize and condemn. When it comes to school, everyone is a critic. That's because virtually everyone had some kind of school experience, either good or bad. We internalize those experiences and our whole notion of school is shaped by them without regard to how many years back our experience goes. If you had disregard for teachers, chances are you've managed to communicate that to your kids.

When I was growing up, I often heard comments like the following one: "The guy's got a lot of book learnin', but he ain't got

no common sense." Sound familiar? Or this one: "That English (or history or geography or science) stuff is just a waste of time. If you're willing to work hard, you can make a decent living. I always did."

Unfortunately, those same sentiments continue to exist. The population of adults with children in school has diminished and so has their interest in the schools. The challenges of education have not diminished. They are greater today than ever before. Kids have to know much more today to be successful than they once did. The demands are greater and the rigor must be, too.

Until we own up to the importance of academic achievement for our children, we will continue to flounder. It will affect us all no matter what part of the state we may call home.

The support we need is certainly financial, but it goes much deeper than just dollars and cents. We tend to find the dollars and cents for those things that are important to us. We Arkansans spend huge amounts of money supporting our favorite teams, buying our favorite vehicles, and equipping ourselves with the latest hunting and fishing gear. That's perfectly fine, but it's also important for our kids to know that we support their education and their future as much as we support our other passions. It's all about our values. It's all about our ethic as a people.

When we get focused on a desired future for Arkansas, perhaps we'll begin to build the ethos we need for our schools. As that happens, the benefits of an education will begin to outweigh its cost. It will then be money well spent and we'll all wonder why we didn't realize it long ago.

Yes, it's all about the money—and what we value as a people.

## Short-term lease is option for boards

*By T. Daniel Goodwin*

Arkansas law obligates school boards to maintain schools in a good state of repair. To meet this obligation, school districts must usually finance the cost of new construction, renovation or system upgrades. However, Arkansas school districts cannot borrow money for more than one year unless they issue bonds to the public, borrow money from the State's Revolving Loan Fund or issue qualified 10- or 30-year lease-purchase agreements, installment sales contracts or post-dated warrants to the creditor.

Issuing bonds or using the Revolving Loan Fund can be time consuming and complicated, especially if the school district must hold an election to raise its millage for the bonds. Depending on the school district's needs, lease-purchase agreements, installment sales contracts or post-dated warrants ("Short-Term Finance Instruments") may offer the most hassle-free and flexible approach. Recent changes in Arkansas law and Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) regulations make it more important than ever that school district boards understand this method of finance.

Short-Term Finance Instruments allow school districts to finance the purchase of school buses; the payment of certain insurance premiums; the purchase of equipment; the repair and renovation of school facilities; the purchase of school sites; the payment on loans relating to litigation against a school district; the payment of the district's pro rata share the cost of real estate appraisers for ad valorem tax purposes; the purchase of energy conservation measures; and the

*See Lease options on page 16*

# What's right with our schools

By Richard D. Bagin

A cluster of “soccer moms” (the kind of folks that some pollsters claim were instrumental in the last presidential election) were chatting about schools and how they “just aren’t as good as they used to be.” A few grandparents also jumped on the bashing bandwagon, which prompted me to shed my “Clark Kent” image and change into an aggressive, high-flying champion of what’s right with today’s schools and the educators who serve them.

I hit them with some of my best shots:

- Schools are better than ever, and scores prove it;
- Public education is a real bargain, even for senior citizens;
- Schools do more for all children than ever before; and
- Schools are the best and safest places for children to be. I also asked three questions, which normally knock the wind out of school-bashers’ sails.

*1. How do you know what you are saying is true?*

Answers normally fall into the range of “I heard it on a talk show,” to a neighbor’s comments, to a single unresolved personal experience. Most negative comments typically are based on a local grapevine fertilized by media attacks on two critical issues of public education—achievement and money.

*2. When was the last time you were in school to see learning in action?*

The bottom-line answer to this question is that most people have not witnessed the positive, daily learning that is going on in our schools. Many of our harshest critics have not been in a public elementary school for many years—even decades. However, some parents who do participate in our schools have not been given the

opportunity to see meaningful learning taking place. That’s our fault, and we have to get better at providing those opportunities.

And finally:

*3. How can you talk about your schools if you don’t know what you are saying is true, or you haven’t even visited them to see what the truth is?*

The gossip at Saturday morning soccer games may never be the same, but I feel better about standing up and shooting down unsubstantiated attacks on my local schools. The real tragedy of public education these days is that too many of us who know the truth, and have witnessed great learning taking place, remain silent while schools are being bashed.

I realize that schools are not perfect and that some of the criticism rings true. But we need to respond to those criticisms by involving our communities in an effort to fix the problems that do exist. A community should be known by the schools it keeps, and to criticize them without offering solutions is a get-bad-quick approach that can eventually result in lower property values, higher taxes, and aborted business and community growth. Not a nice place to live.

In my opinion, the time has come for principals, teachers, and other school leaders to lead the way in speaking up on behalf of education and the future of our nation. We’ve all heard the story about the teenage clerks at McDonald’s who couldn’t make change when lightning shorted out their registers. True? Who knows, but it sure convinced many people that schools were not teaching the basics. We have to counter such canards by sending messages like these to your communities:

*Schools are among the safest places*

*kids can be.*

A few years ago, four shooting incidents in schools and 11 resulting deaths produced a 700% increase in the reporting of school-related shootings. But there was actually a 30% decrease in these incidents. While every child’s death is an unacceptable disaster, our critics need to realize that every two days in America 11 children die from family violence, abuse, or neglect. The likelihood of violent death in school is far less than in the workplace, where each year almost a million people become victims of violent crime.

*Schools are better than they used to be.*

One of my favorite anecdotes is a New York Times story which noted that, “A large majority [of incoming college students] ... could not identify such names as Abraham Lincoln ... Some students believed that George Washington was president during the War of 1812 ... and St. Louis was placed on the Pacific Ocean, Lake Huron, the Atlantic Ocean.” Sounds like today’s typical bashing, doesn’t it? But guess what—this *New York Times* story was published in 1943! So maybe the schooling that some are yearning to return to was not quite as good as people remember it.

Today’s test scores, by most accounts, prove that our students are learning more, taking many more advanced classes, and are better educated than ever before. More students than ever are taking national tests and showing improvement. Almost a third of those taking the SAT in 1997 were minority students—up from 22% just 10 years ago. These students were virtually invisible in the “good old days.”

Today’s schools also attempt to

meet the needs of special education students. In the “good old days,” these children were given very little attention, but now we have learned ways to help make them contributing members to our society.

Today, more students are staying in school longer and graduating than ever before. And many more are pursuing education beyond high school. Our brightest students continue to do extremely well in tests, in colleges, and in life. And although critics claim that we don’t stack up well in international competition, respected researchers like David Berliner and Gerald Bracey tell us differently.

The bottom line is that schools are much better today than they were in the past. One of the better ways to prove how much your students are achieving is to have the media and community leaders sample a standardized test, and see how well they fare. That should be an eye-opener.

*Today’s schools offer value to all taxpayers.*

I don’t know anyone who likes to pay taxes. However, when you put local public education under a financial microscope, you should be able to prove a major value for tax dollars.

Again, let me use a personal example. I have two sons who, if everything goes well, will spend a combined total of 26 years (K-12) in our local public schools. Last year, these schools spent \$6,670 per student—including instruction, transportation, and administrative costs. If I use that figure as an average for all 26 years, \$173,420 will be spent on my sons’ education.

I estimate that \$3,800 of my property and income taxes goes to local education. Using that figure as an average, I would need to live in my house and pay taxes for more than 45 years before I could

repay the cost of my sons’ education.

Public education is a real value—not just to parents but even to “empty nesters” who may have grandchildren in public schools. Today’s schools offer value for all taxpayers, and we need to remind them of that fact as frequently as we can.

*Business uses more supervisors than education does.*

Many of us have heard the maxim that schools should be run more like businesses. But if we did that, in at least one category we would most likely catch the wrath of even more critics.

A recent study by the Educational Research Service indicates that public education has 13.5 staff members per supervisor or administrator—the highest ratio of the 10 industries studied. Compared to all manufacturing industries (6.2 to 1) and public administration (3.5 to 1), education’s ratio of 13.5 to 1 means that we spend less on supervision—a fact that explodes the perception that we have too many administrators.

According to U.S. Department of Education figures for 1995-96, the total central office administrative and professional staff of America’s public school districts comprised just 1% of the total staff. Even if you count principals and assistant principals, you only add 2.4%, and 3.4% is a far cry from being bloated and top-heavy—a fact that escapes most critics of public education.

*Schools serve the community.*

Let’s not forget the value that schools bring to their communities. Whenever hurricanes, tornados, floods, or fire threaten the community, where do many resi-

dents find shelter? When election day rolls around, who welcomes voters and even cleans up after them? Where do the scouts meet? Where do seniors learn computer skills? How about providing facilities for those budding Michael Jordans, Mark McGwires and Dominique Daweses? And don’t forget the collections of clothing, food, and funds for the needy.

Schools fill a number of service roles, and your community is better today because of their efforts. Remember to mention them when talking about the accomplishments of your schools. More people need to know and appreciate the fact that school and community indeed are one and the same.

Now that you have some talking points about what’s right with education, do something with them! Get your staff to help you come up with some things that you are

*The real tragedy of public education these days is that too many of us who know the truth, and have witnessed great learning taking place, remain silent while schools are being bashed.*

proud of in your school and begin getting out those messages any way you can. Remind your staff that we are all in this together. If we can mobilize everyone involved

in public education, we may finally be able to make education a positive discussion point for all Americans—especially at Saturday morning soccer games.

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*Source: Rich Bagin, APR, executive director, National School Public Relations Association, 15948 Derwood Rd., Rockville MD 20855; [www.nspr.org](http://www.nspr.org) (301) 519-0496.*

## ***Miles to Go Update*** has great impact for education reform

*Continued from page 5*

health. It reflects wages, other personal income (such as investments and ownership), and the number of jobs in a state's economy. Per capita income captures in one statistic a wide range of economic measurements that determine an entire state's economic growth and progress. In 2002, the national per capita income was \$30,941 compared to Arkansas's 2002 per capita income of \$23,417.

In 1950, the per capita income in Arkansas was 56% of the nation's per capita income. Twenty years later, in 1970, the level in Arkansas had risen to 70% of the nation's per capita income.

In the mid-70s, as the nation moved toward a human capital economy that required higher, multiple skills, Arkansas's relative gains in per capita income slowed and stopped.

In 1980, the per capita income of Arkansas was 74% of the national average where it remained for the next 10 years. By 1998, it had only inched up to 76%. Over the last 4 years, Arkansas's per capita income has remained between 75% and 77% of the national average.

Early this year, SEF commissioned an independent study by the Center for Business and Economic Research (CBER) to study what most Arkansans already generally believe: *education is the major factor explaining the difference in per capita income between Arkansas and the nation.*

According to CBER findings, Arkansas's lower levels of education explain 69% of the difference between the per capita income of Arkansas and the nation. In other words, the study's results strongly

suggest that if Arkansas's education levels were equal to the national levels, approximately 69% of the gap between Arkansas's per capita income and the national average would be eliminated.

Walter W. McMahon, professor emeritus of economics and of education at the University of Illinois, conducted an independent study. He estimated that increases in educational attainment over a period of 30 to 40 years in Arkansas—only two generations of students going from preschool through college—would have a significant impact by enlarging Arkansas's gross state product (GSP), increasing residents' life expectancies, lowering population growth, reducing infant mortality, reducing homicides and property crimes, increasing the preservation of Arkansas's environment, and enlarging worker productivity. In other words, the quality of life for all Arkansans would improve.

SEF's studies use two commonly accepted standards for educational attainment: high school graduation and rates of college bachelor's degrees (BAs). The rate of Arkansas high school graduation ranks well above the nation. Nearly three quarters of Arkansas's 9th grade students in 1996, received a high school diploma. (The national average was approximately 67%.)

The state ranks 36th in the number of high school graduates who enrolled in college the next year. The percentage of 18- to 24- year-olds in Arkansas enrolled in college remains below the national average and behind most other Southern states. Also, retention and graduation rates in Arkansas are low.

Arkansas ranks 49th in the percent of high school graduates receiving a two-year degree, 49th in the percent of adults over 25 with bachelor's degrees, and 49th in the percent of adults with advanced degrees. In 2000, only 18% of Arkansas adults had a

bachelor's degree.

To increase college attainment in Arkansas, the SEF recommends:

- ▲ Pre-kindergarten (Pre-K),
- ▲ College-ready curriculum and teaching, and
- ▲ Access to college.

National and state studies are virtually unanimous on one central finding: pre-K gives children an early start that often helps keep them from falling behind in the primary grades and beyond.

Arkansas must also assure that the state's educational system from kindergarten through the 12th grade prepares and supports students to go to college. Almost 60% of all Arkansas freshmen students require remediation courses to supplement the knowledge and skills they bring from high school.

To increase substantially the numbers of students who attain a college degree, Arkansas must assist more low-income student to pay for the costs of college. According to a recent national study, the college participation rate for students from low-income families in Arkansas has been among the worst in the nation.

When measured against the income of most Arkansans, tuition costs and fees for attending the state's four-year public colleges and universities are very high—far above the national and regional averages. In addition, the state's financial aid is meager when compared with most states and compared to need. Recently Arkansas ranked 7th in the nation in the percent of college students in need of financial aid. When a state ranks 7th in student need for financial aid and 45th in college participation for low-income students, the message is clear: Arkansas must provide more financial aid to increase overall educational attainment in college.

Basically, money matters in edu-

*See Miles on page 15*

## Grievance hearings made easier step-by-step

*Continued from page 9*

just a bad attitude (or, he might just be angry about something that the Board can't fix. Or, for that matter, shouldn't try to fix). When he begins talking, the clock starts.

5. Once you're past that hurdle, ask the employee to present the information in support of his grievance. We don't care how that's done, as long as it doesn't involve fist fights or gunplay. The employee or representative may make an opening statement; the employee may make his one statement; he may call additional witnesses; he may present documents. Anyone making a statement—employee, witness, or, for that matter, even the representative—may be questioned by the School Board at the end of each statement. (Usually, asking for information from the attorney or other representative will get a bunch of self-serving arguments, not legitimate information, so try to avoid that). Mind you, the law requires that you afford the employee a minimum of 90 minutes for his presentation, but the law doesn't require that he use it all.

6. When either the presentation by the employee has been completed or he has used his 90 minutes, ask the administration to begin its pre-

sentation. Start that by asking the administration to state its recommended disposition of the grievance, and the decisions which have been made at the various administrative levels of the grievance process. This is similar to what you asked the employee to do at the beginning of his presentation. When the superintendent or other administrator starts talking, start the clock.

7. At the conclusion of the administration's presentation, ask the employer or his representative to make a (short) closing statement, followed by the administration.

8. Vote. You may either affirm the administration's decision; overturn the administration's decision and give the employee the requested relief; or you may do something in between, a modification of the administration's decision. If you want to discuss the grievance before the vote, how that is done depends on whether the hearing is open or closed. If closed, send everyone but Board members out of the room while the discussion occurs. If open, you have to discuss everything in public, unless the subject of the grievance is one which falls into one of the executive session exceptions to the Freedom of Information Act (and those types of grievances are fairly rare).

9. Go to the next item on the agenda.

Now, if the administration presents the grievance to you as one which does not fit into the definition of a grievance under your policies or state law, you must first hear whether the employee brings a "grievable" issue. To do that, have the employee (and/or representative) explain to the Board how this is supposed to fit into the definition. Then, have the administration respond, explaining how this is not a grievable issue. Following those explanations, the Board votes on whether to hear the grievance. If the Board decides that it is not a grievable issue, go to the next agenda item. If the employee's grievance does fall into the definition of a "grievance," begin the hearing on the grievance itself.

For the part of the hearing in which the Board determines whether a grievable issue has been brought by the employee, there is no minimum time for the employee or administration to be heard. Establish some reasonable amount of time, perhaps 10 or 15 minutes (max), since this is to determine whether the issue should be heard. You don't hear the full grievance in that pre-hearing. You have the potential to be in that full hearing a full 3 hours, so don't let anyone waste your time explaining a procedural issue like that for hours.

Easy enough? You betcha. Now go have some fun with grievances!

## Miles to Go Update has great impact

*Continued from page 14*

cation. If Arkansas were to make an extra effort by increasing investments in education by 2% of its GSP, while the nation as a whole continued to increase at its current rate, the result would be that within two generations—by the time the grandchildren of today's young adults graduate from college—Arkansas

could come close to catching up with the nation in per capita income. Currently a 2% increase would equal a little more than a \$474 increase in per capita income. In gross numbers, the amount equals a total of \$1.268 billion. If other developments and efforts also enlarged job creation and earnings, the timetable could be even shorter. Bottom line: it took many years for Arkansas to reach this economic and educational nadir. It will take

many years to fix it.

*This article was adapted from the complete report entitled Update: Miles to Go Arkansas written by Steve Suitts, SEF program coordinator. The original report may be viewed at [www.southerned.org](http://www.southerned.org). ASBA's article about the original report appeared in the Sept. 2002 issue of the Reporter. The article may be downloaded at [www.arsba.org](http://www.arsba.org).*

## Lease options are available

*Continued from page 11*

training of teachers or other programs under the federally recognized Qualified Zone Academy Bond program.

Other key elements of short-term finance include: (1) a maximum 10-year term (30 years on certain public-private projects); (2) registration of the debt with the ADE, the treasurer of the district and the board; (3) annual payments under Short-Term Finance Instruments must not exceed revenue receipts of the district for that particular year; (4) an optional authorization to withhold state aid from the district in the event of a default; (5) a rate of interest that can not exceed the maximum rate for school bonds; and (6) joint liability of the district and the school fiscal officer for any payment charged against the revenues of a school year if it exceeds the revenue receipts of the district for that school year.

In its 2003 regular session, the General Assembly passed Act 1738 which imposed additional restrictions on most school district

contracts, including Short-Term Financing Instruments.

Act 1738 prohibits a school board from approving any service agreement with a term exceeding 1 year or any obligation relating to the sale, acquisition or repair of school facilities or equipment exceeding \$75,000, without ADE approval. This prohibition does not extend to "regularly scheduled maintenance" projects. There are conflicting views regarding what constitutes "regularly scheduled maintenance." Some have stated that total HVAC replacement and re-roofing might qualify while others have stated that such activities constitutes long-term capital improvements. The good news is that the ADE approval process is relatively benign and an expedited emergency approval can sometimes be obtained in as little as 1 or 2 days. In general, the board should always consult with its finance attorney before entering into a contract exceeding 1 year or \$75,000 and when in doubt it should seek ADE approval.

Many school districts concerned about indoor air quality and reducing utility costs use Short-Term Finance Instruments to acquire

energy conservation measures ("ECM") such as HVAC equipment, energy control systems, energy-efficient lighting, etc. A common misconception exists that the financing of an ECM can extend to 15 or 20 years. This is not true. Although an installation, service or maintenance contract could potentially have a 20-year term, the Short-Term Finance Instrument funding that contract is still limited to a 10-year term.

In conclusion, Short-Term Finance Instruments provide a useful and relatively easy tool for school boards to fulfill their obligation to maintain schools. However, with the multiple short-term finance requirements and the recent changes in Arkansas law, school boards are well advised to consult with their finance attorney before issuing a Short-Term Finance Instrument.

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Arkansas School Boards Association

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