

MINUTES

ARKANSAS BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION ON PUBLIC EDUCATION

December 5, 2001

10:00 a.m.

**Room 149, State Capitol
Little Rock, Arkansas**

Ms. Stacy Pittman, the Co-Chair of the Arkansas Blue Ribbon Commission on Public Education, called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

ARKANSAS BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION ON PUBLIC EDUCATION

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: Mr. Robert McGinnis, Co-Chair; Ms. Stacy Pittman, Co-Chair; Mr. Frank Anthony; Ms. Charlie Cole Chaffin; Ms. Judy Donovan; Dr. Charles Dunn; Dr. Benny Gooden; Dr. Reed Greenwood; Mr. Gene Gregory; Ms. Pat Harris; Mr. Wayne Hartsfield; Ms. Shelby Hillman; Mr. Randy Hughes; Dr. Don Love; Mr. Hugh McDonald; Ms. Kathy McFetridge; Dr. Martha McNair; Mr. David Matthews; Mr. Kevin Moore; Mr. Ulicious Reed; Mr. Larry Ross; and Mr. Keith Stokes.

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT: Senator Jim Hill; Representative M. Olin Cook; and Representative Larry Teague.

OTHER MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY PRESENT: Senator Jimmy Jeffress; Representative Ken Cowling; Representative LeRoy Dangeau; Representative Marvin Parks; and Representative Robert White.

Approval of the Minutes of the November 21, 2001 Meeting of the Blue Ribbon Commission [Exhibit C].

After reviewing the minutes of the November 21, 2001, meeting of the Blue Ribbon Commission, the minutes were approved as written.

Mr. Bob McGinnis, the Co-Chair of the Arkansas Blue Ribbon Commission on Public Education was recognized. Mr. McGinnis provided the members of the Commission with a handout concerning pupil/teacher ratios in the state's school districts and a copy of a newspaper article from the September 2, 2001, edition of the *Washington Post* regarding the relationship between low socioeconomic status and poor academic performance by students. Mr. McGinnis discussed his recent trip to the Fort Smith School District, where he visited Sunnymede Elementary School and the alternative school. Mr. McGinnis discussed the efforts underway at the two schools to improve student performance. Mr. McGinnis encouraged other members of the Commission to make arrangements to visit the two schools so that they could see firsthand the efforts being undertaken to enhance student achievement in the face of often-adverse circumstances.

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Meetings of the Commission's Subcommittees

The meeting recessed at 10:30 a.m. The Commission's subcommittees met from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in the various committee rooms of the Capitol. The Commission recessed for lunch at 12:30 p.m. and reconvened at 1:00 p.m., with Mr. McGinnis presiding.

Reports from Subcommittees

Organizational Structure

Ms. Charlie Cole Chaffin, Chair, Organizational Structures Subcommittee reported the subcommittee discussed the following items:

- Presentation by **Dr. Charles Hathaway**, Chancellor, University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR), regarding the 1996 UALR Report, *A Study of the Arkansas Department of Education*. The report proposed several structural changes in the organization and operation of the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE). The current director of the ADE, Mr. Raymond Simon, will be invited to the next Subcommittee meeting to discuss the changes made in response to the UALR study.
- Presentation by **Ms. Tommie Sue Anthony**, Coordinator, Advanced Placement Teacher Development, College of Education, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, concerning the Advanced Placement Program.
- Presentation by **Ms. Belinda Kittrell**, Program Support Manager, Distance Learning and Internet Applications Unit, Arkansas Department of Education, on issues related to distance learning.

The members of the Subcommittee also discussed items related to the Subcommittee's report to the full Commission and the handout concerning pupil/teacher ratios in the state's school districts.

Funding/Facilities

Mr. Larry Ross, Chair, Funding/Facilities Subcommittee, reported the subcommittee held a panel discussion with teachers concerning funding issues. The teachers participating in the discussions were:

- Ms. Nancy Blount**, Teacher, Lee County School District
- Ms. Betty Butler**, Title I Supervisor, West Memphis School District
- Ms. Nancy Downing**, Teacher, Little Rock School District
- Ms. Connie Green**, Teacher, Little Rock School District
- Ms. Nelene Harris**, Teacher, Fouke School District
- Ms. Louene Lipsmeyer**, Teacher, North Little Rock School District
- Ms. Lou Ethel Nauden**, Teacher, Little Rock School District
- Ms. Tracy Streeter**, Teacher Hamburg School District
- Ms. Charlotte Taft**, Counselor, Ozark School District
- Ms. Cathy Tennison**, Teacher, Nettleton School District

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Each teacher was asked to respond to a series of questions concerning the financial needs of the state's system of public education. The critical issues identified as a result of these discussions included the following:

- Critical need for preschool programs
- Smaller class size
- Additional training for teachers
- Additional days added to teachers' contracts
- Scholarships for perspective teachers
- Additional planning time during the classroom day
- Additional support staff to assist with non-teaching duties
- Need to reduce out-of-pocket expenditures for teachers
- Need to establish standards for laboratory classes to ensure all students have access
- Extra resources for student remediation
- Elementary-level alternative classrooms
- Need for on-site assistance for technology-related problems
- Continuation and expansion of mentoring program for new teachers

There was a general discussion of the need to establish an "electronic suggestion box" that would allow educator and public input into the Commission's work. The co-chairs and staff were asked to review the possibility of establishing a website or mechanism for this purpose.

Curriculum Education

Dr. Benny Gooden, Chair, Curriculum/Early Childhood Education Subcommittee, reported that the subcommittee discussed the following items:

- Presentation by **Dr. Linda Dorn**, Director, Reading Recovery/Early Literacy, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, on the Comprehensive Literacy Program. Dr. Dorn noted that the Comprehensive Literacy Program required intense staff development, teaching teams, continuous assessment and the use of literacy coaches to assist at each school. Dr. Dorn introduced **Ms. Donnie Skinner**, a literacy coach at Boone Park Elementary School in North Little Rock, and **Ms. Mavis Cherry**, the Principal of Boone Park Elementary, to discuss the impact of the program at their school.
- Presentation by **Judge Gary Isbell**, a juvenile judge from Mountain Home and the chair of the Governor's Commission on Nontraditional Education - Pygmalion Commission, regarding alternative learning environments (ALE's) for students who are experiencing difficulty in the

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regular classroom environment. **Ms. Ann Smith** of Jonesboro, a consultant to the Pygmalion Commission, provided additional information to the subcommittee.

Teacher Salaries/Professional Development

Ms. Judy Donovan, a member of the Teacher Salaries/Professional Development Subcommittee, reported that the subcommittee discussed the following items:

- Presentation by **Mr. Richard Hutchinson**, the Director of Government Relations/Agency Relations for the Arkansas Education Association, concerning the need to improve the state's system of professional development for teachers, recognizing that these improvements would be costly and require long-term commitment. Among the suggested improvements were revamping the school calendar and the school day.
- Presentation by **Ms. Elaine Cowling**, Teacher Center Coordinator, DeQueen/Mena Education Service Cooperative, regarding the professional development services available through the cooperatives across the state.
- Presentation by **Dr. Suzanne Mitchell**, Project Director, Teacher Quality Enhancement, Arkansas Department of Higher Education, concerning the recommendations of Teacher Quality Enhancement task force on professional development and a draft of the professional development standards developed by the task force. Ms. Mitchell also provided information to the subcommittee regarding the recommendations of two other Teacher Quality Enhancement task forces and professional development opportunities available during the summer months.

Mr. McGinnis stated the next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, December 19, 2001, at 10 a.m. in Room 151 of the State Capitol.

There being no further business, the Commission adjourned at 2:00 p.m.