

Arkansans Speak Up! on Education

Report submitted to the:
Arkansas Blue Ribbon Commission on Public Education

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	2
Purpose.....	5
Methodology.....	6
Findings.....	8
Site Summaries	
Appendix I: Site Listing with Codes	
Appendix II: Group Priorities Organized by Theme with Site Codes	
Appendix III: Speak Up, Arkansas! Demographic Questionnaire	
Appendix IV: Suggestions, Issues Or Concerns That Attendees Would Like The Blue Ribbon Commission To Know About	
Acknowledgements	

Executive Summary

The intent of this report is to synthesize data from 91 sites into a coherent representation of public discourse from the Speak Up, Arkansas! forums held on April 4, 2002. This overview of findings will inform commissioners' discussions and their subsequent recommendations. The purpose of this report, however, is not to make recommendations for the future of Arkansas education. That responsibility remains with those serving on the Arkansas Blue Ribbon Commission for Public Education.

Attendance:

- ◆ Estimated total attendance at Speak Up, Arkansas! forums was 5711. This number differs from the original estimate provided by the Arkansas School Board Association.
- ◆ There were 91 Speak Up, Arkansas! sites across the state. Ninety groups met on April 4, 2002 and one youth session met prior to that date. Each county hosted at least one meeting.
- ◆ The average attendance for all sites was 61 participants.
- ◆ The average attendance in the counties that contain the 10 largest school districts (i.e. Benton, Faulkner, Pulaski, Sebastian, Washington) was 66 people with a median of 49 participants. These counties accounted for 19 forums. Among these 19 sites, the lowest attendance was 14 at the Dalton Whetstone Boys Club and the highest participation was 210 for the New Rogers High School.
- ◆ Attendance at sites outside of the counties in which the 10 largest school districts are located was an average 61 people with a median of 53 participants. The lowest attendance among these sites was 14 participants, with the highest at 165 participants at the Boone County location, John Paul Hammerschmidt Center.

All Sites- Demographic Profile: (excludes 2 sites)

- ◆ Approximately two-thirds of all participants were 41 years of age or older. More than half of participants were women. Eighty-five percent of participants were White-Caucasian, twelve percent were Black-African-American, and three

percent were of another race. Two percent of all participants indicated they were Hispanic or of Spanish origin.

- ◆ Considering race and Hispanic origin, participants were typical of Arkansas' general population. In contrast, women and older Arkansans' were over-represented at the Speak Up, Arkansas! forums.
- ◆ On the whole, participants were highly educated compared to the vast majority of Arkansans. Seventy-four percent had earned a Bachelor's degree or more compared to ten percent among Arkansas' general population.
- ◆ There was almost equal attendance by parents or guardians of a school aged child (49 percent) compared to persons without school aged children (51 percent). Of those parents or guardians of school aged children, the overwhelming majority (96 percent) had a student enrolled in public school.

Group Priorities:

- ◆ The report includes priorities from all 91 sites' small group discussions. In the end, there were 1790 priorities.
- ◆ One-third of all priorities fell into the categories of Curriculum/Early Childhood Education.
- ◆ To create a more systematic statewide analysis, researchers identified 107 emergent themes that provided a conceptual framework to compare sites. The researchers then assigned each priority description one or more themes.
- ◆ Based on an analysis of all priorities, the most priorities fell within the following themes.

1. Teacher Salaries
2. Parental Involvement
3. Early Childhood Education
4. Curriculum
5. Basic Skills
6. Funding
7. Discipline
8. Testing
9. Smaller Class Size
10. Equitable Funding

- ◆ Over 200 priorities were concerned with Teacher Salaries. The essence of this theme was 'increase teacher salaries'. Another set of priorities encompassed by this theme recommended uniform statewide salaries for teachers. There was some disagreement within this theme regarding whether student outcomes should be linked to teacher salaries.
- ◆ Almost three-quarters of all sites had at least one group that articulated a priority that fell in the theme of Parental Involvement. Over 147 priority descriptions reflected some interest in Parental Involvement. This theme is distinct from calls for Parental Accountability. Importantly, 47 other priorities suggest a need for greater parental accountability. The combination of these themes indicates that the role of parents in schools and with their children is a serious concern to Arkansas citizens.
- ◆ In almost two-thirds of all sites, at least one group mentioned Early Childhood Education as a priority. A total of 117 groups identified a priority consistent with the Early Childhood Education theme. Nevertheless, the theme contains descriptions and recommendations of significant diversity. The theme contains group concerns regarding students' lack of preparation upon entering elementary school. Some group priorities included mandated Pre-K programs and recommendations for making pre-school programs available to all persons. Other groups expressed divergent opinions regarding making Pre-K mandatory and using funds for Early Childhood programs rather than K - 12.
- ◆ More than half of all sites had at least one group list a general curriculum priority. There were 113 priorities concerned with Curriculum. Additionally, another variation of Curriculum appears in the Top 25 theme list with discussion of a Consistent Curriculum. Priorities regarding the need for standardized and consistent curricula appeared in 32 priorities and in 35 percent of all sites. The Curriculum theme contains priorities that focus on who has authority over decisions regarding curricula, best practices, the effects of funding, and content.
- ◆ At least one group at 57 percent of all sites indicated attention to Basic Skills as a priority. By Basic Skills, participants most often meant "The 3 R's / Basics (Hamburg Junior High School)."

Purpose

What is Speak Up, Arkansas!?

On April 4, 2002, the Arkansas Blue Ribbon Commission on Public Education convened 90 forums for Speak Up, Arkansas!¹. Concerned citizens across the state met with others to discuss what they want their public schools to do to educate children. The intent of these forums was to garner public input on the current state of public education in Arkansas and the citizenry's concerns for the future.

The discussion centered around one fundamental question:

What do we want our schools to do to educate our children?

The answers to this question will inform the Arkansas Blue Ribbon Commission on Public Education's discussions and recommendations to the Arkansas General Assembly. The Speak Up, Arkansas! forums are a critical piece to gaining understanding of the issues, establishing a dialogue with concerned citizens, and reforming Arkansas' educational system. "Reform is inevitable, perhaps even overdue. Change will come. You can take that to the bank. But change for change sake won't be accepted. People will support what they help to build. This is our opportunity to help build a system of public education that will serve us well that will brighten our collective future and the individual futures of thousands and thousands of Arkansas students. This is an opportunity to raise our schools and our children from the bottom numbers of all those lists to a place at which we will all be proud." (www.educationinarkansas.com)

Scope of this report

The intent of this report is to synthesize data from 91 sites into a coherent representation of public discourse from the Speak Up, Arkansas! forums. The findings will inform commissioners' discussions and their subsequent recommendations. The purpose of this report, however, is not to make recommendations for the future of Arkansas education. That responsibility

¹ This report includes data representing 91 Speak Up, Arkansas! sites. One youth site met in North Little Rock prior to April 4, 2002.

remains with those serving on the Arkansas Blue Ribbon Commission for Public Education.

Ultimately, the goals of this report are twofold. First, the purpose of this report is to offer a statewide summary based on analysis of data from the Speak Up, Arkansas! forums. Second, this document provides a record of the priorities that emerged in each site even if the issue is not present in other locales. Thus, the challenge is making sense of these findings and presenting trends without diminishing the voices of those interested citizens who spoke up in these forums.

What follows is a brief description of the methods used to collect and compile data from the Speak Up, Arkansas! meetings. This section is followed by an analysis of demographic characteristics of participants and a summary of statewide trends from the small group discussions at these forums. In addition, the report provides a one-page overview of findings from each site.

Methodology

Data collection began the night of April 4, 2002. The UALR Institute of Government (IOG) secured the last site's priority data on April 13, 2002. Each site provided two data sets - completed demographic surveys and the top three priorities for each small group discussion at their site. Many sites included data for a fourth and fifth priority from each group.

Project coordinators from the Arkansas School Board Association (ARSBA) requested that all site coordinators or facilitators submit data from their site's small group discussions within 48 hours. Some facilitators and/or site coordinators entered data into the IOG web forms on the night of April 4, 2002. IOG researchers and a liaison with the ARSBA sent e-mails, made phone calls to persons from sites that had not reported from their site and encouraged coordinators or facilitators to share all information.

In nearly one-third of all sites, the facilitator or site coordinator did not submit data via the web. Instead, he or she mailed outcomes from the small group discussions to the IOG. In those cases, researchers of the IOG made follow up phone calls to appropriate persons to ascertain the number of participants, number of groups, and descriptions of priorities. In a few cases, the IOG derived information for small group priorities from the information provided (e.g. flip charts for each group with voting records). Thus, this report includes priority data from all sites.

Group Priorities - Coding

In order to illuminate statewide patterns, the IOG research team identified emergent themes in the descriptions of priorities provided by each site. For consistency, one Research Associate read all 1790 priority descriptions and coded each priority with one or more themes (see Appendix II).² There are a total of 107 conceptual themes.

Subsequently, a researcher grouped those themes into conceptual rubrics consistent with the Arkansas Blue Ribbon Commission on Public Education's subcommittee's foci (i.e. Teacher Salaries/Professional Development, Organizational Structure, Funding/Facilities, Curriculum/Early Childhood Education, and Other). In some cases, the new categorization differed from the original identification made by the facilitator or site coordinator. This change, however, was necessary in order to establish uniformity in coding for the data set. Without consistent coding, it would be extremely difficult if not impossible to identify systematic patterns in the statewide data.

Demographic Survey

Given that IOG researchers could not anticipate turnout at the Speak Up, Arkansas! forums but knew the necessity for quick turnaround, the IOG provided each site with op-scan readable forms that facilitated faster compilation of demographic data. The instrument (see Appendix III) contains questions regarding age, gender, race, Hispanic origin, educational attainment, whether the participant has school age children, and if so, the type of school those children attend. In the interest of providing an additional outlet to those persons who might have comments not illuminated by the small group discussions, participants had the opportunity to provide feedback on any other relevant issues (see Appendix IV for a list of all comments organized by site).

The deadline for this report hampered data collection, such that the IOG did not receive completed demographic surveys for two sites before this report went to press. Thus, demographic information for these sites does not appear on their summary pages (site 074 - Benton; site 045 - Paris).

Note that the total count for a particular variable in the demographic tables may not add up to the same value. Some respondents left questions blank; the IOG

² While the coding method may have increased uniformity, the IOG researchers acknowledge the potential subjectivity involved in this process. Likewise, there is always room for human error and disagreement. Nevertheless, this method provided a mechanism through which statewide analysis could be meaningful and consistent.

researchers treated those instances as missing data and calculated percentages on the number of persons answering the particular question, not the total. As is customary in survey research, participants could refuse to participate or ignore any question. The total number of persons completing the questionnaire may be less than the estimated attendance for the site. Moreover, some facilitators reported that participants arrived late and left early. Timing may have prevented some persons from participating in the survey

Findings

Statewide Participation

Attendance

On April 4, 2002, facilitators and site coordinators reported attendance estimates. Initial estimates indicate turnout of more than 5900 participants throughout the state. Based on data collection, the estimated turnout was 5711.

This revised estimate relies on the collection of total attendance data from each site and the number of demographic surveys completed. In some cases, the IOG received more surveys than the initial estimated attendance for that site. In other instances, the facilitator or coordinator returned fewer completed surveys than their site's estimated attendance. Thus, estimated attendance increased at some sites when there were more completed surveys than estimated attendance. If the site returned fewer demographic surveys than their estimated attendance, then the estimate remained the same. Lower numbers at a given site might simply indicate that some participants refused to take part in the survey or departed the meeting before they received a questionnaire. The only decreases in site attendance occurred when the facilitator or site coordinator reported a total attendance figure lower than the estimate provided to the project coordinators the night of April 4, 2002.

Demographics

The driving force of Speak Up, Arkansas! is to involve citizens in planning for change in Arkansas schools. The intent was to bring diverse vantagepoints to the table and engage all citizens; " That means parents, students, teachers, administrators, school board members, business people, and senior citizens - Arkansas citizens". (<http://www.educationinarkansas.com>)

Data from the demographic surveys indicate that more than two-thirds of attendees are 41 years of age or older; slightly more than 60 percent were female. Eighty-five percent of participants were White-Caucasian (see Exhibit 1). Minority turnout was fifteen percent according to demographic survey data. Twelve percent were African-American/Black and another three percent of participants were another race. Also, data indicate that two percent of all participants were Hispanic or of Spanish origin. Considering race and ethnicity, demographic characteristics of participants parallel Arkansas' 2000 Census population. Regarding gender, females were significantly over-represented at the forums.

Exhibit 1

**State and Speak Up Participants
Demographic Comparisons**

	State of Arkansas Census 2000	Speak Up, Arkansas! Survey Participants
Gender		
Male	49%	36%
Female	51%	64%
Educational Attainment		
No High School Diploma	14%	3%
High School Graduate or Equivalent	22%	10%
Some College, No Degree	13%	13%
Bachelor's Degree	7%	16%
Graduate or Professional Degree	3%	58%
Race		
Black - African American	16%	12%
White - Caucasian	80%	85%
Other	3%	3%
Hispanic Origin	3%	2%

One notable divergence from statewide population data appears in the level of education attainment of attendees. On the whole, participants in these forums were highly educated compared to the vast majority of Arkansans. Seventy-four percent had earned a Bachelor's degree or more compared to an estimated ten percent among Arkansas' general population. Moreover, this demographic point is

reinforced by the high level of knowledge of educational policies and practices articulated in the priority descriptions and verbatim responses.

Statewide Priorities

At each Speak Up, Arkansas! forum the guiding question for each small group discussion was:

What do we want our schools to do to educate our children?

What emerged was a vast array of concerns (1709 priority descriptions). One-third of all priorities fell into the categories of Curriculum/ Early Childhood Education. The remaining priorities distributed fairly evenly across the other categories: Organizational Structure, Funding/Facilities, Teacher Salaries/Professional Development, and Other (see Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2

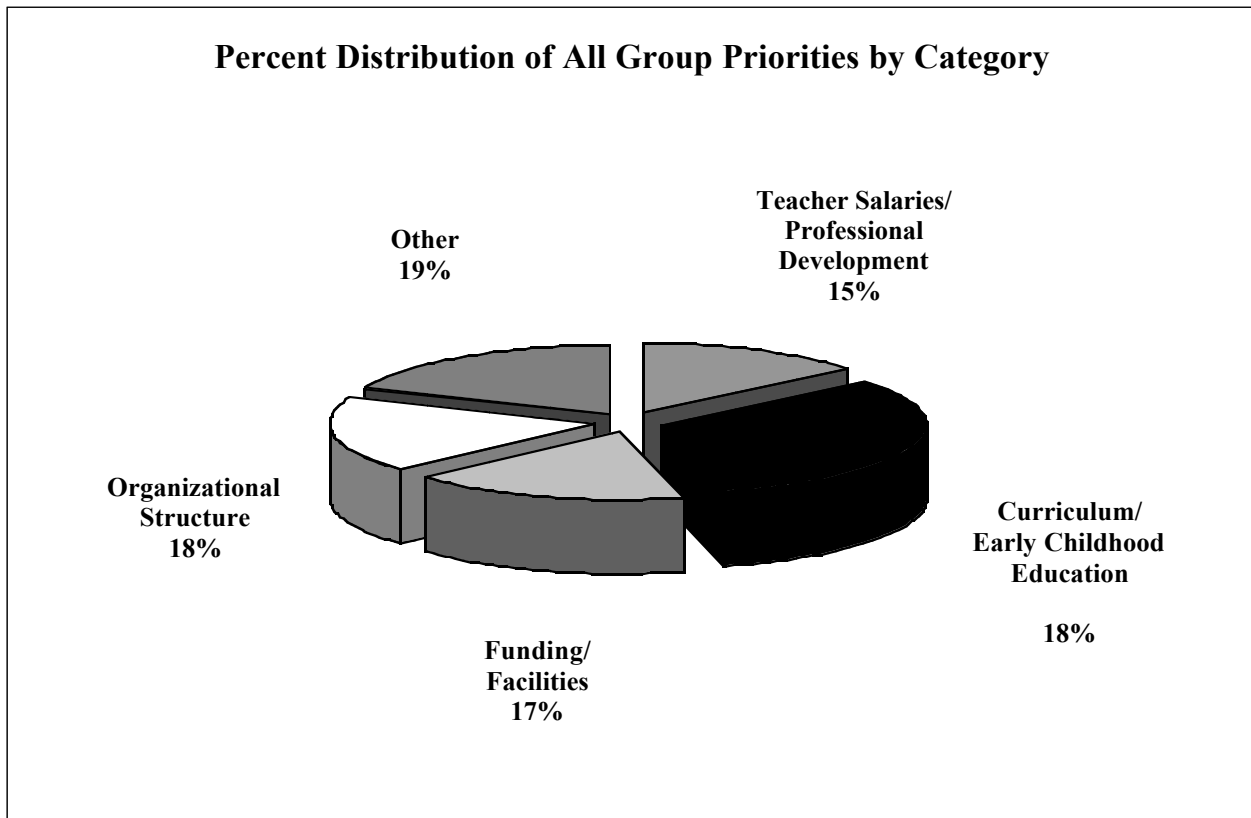


Exhibit 3 identifies the Top 25 themes that emerged from the group priorities and displays a ranking of themes based on the number of priorities associated with that

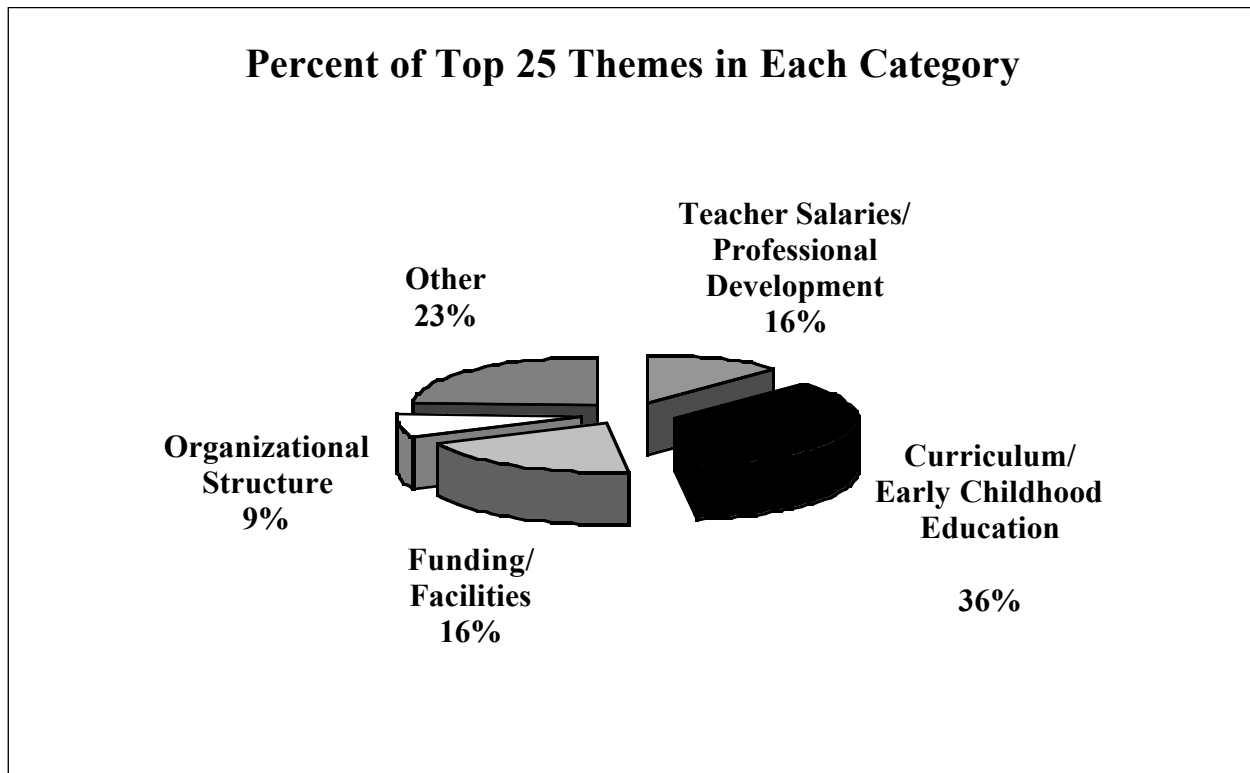
theme. A theme may appear in several priorities from the same group. In addition, a complex priority may associate with more than one theme.

Exhibit 3

Theme	Total Number of Priorities Within A Theme
Teacher Salaries	203
Parental Involvement	147
Early Childhood	117
Curriculum	113
Basic Skills	103
Funding	90
Discipline	87
Testing	76
Smaller Class Size	75
Equitable Funding	67
Quality Teachers and Staff	62
Consolidation	52
Prep for Future	51
Accountability - Parents	47
Vocational Education	45
Community Involvement	42
Positive Atmosphere and Image	41
Safety	39
Accountability - Students	38
Meet Students' Needs	37
Facilities	36
Teaching	36
Curriculum - Consistent	32
Emphasize Academics vs Non-academics	32
Accountability - All	30

In Exhibit 4 the Top 25 themes are distributed among all five categories with the fewest in the category of Organizational Structure. In spite of the fact that Teacher Salaries was mentioned most frequently as a priority, the category of Teacher Salaries/Professional Development contains only thirteen percent of themes in the Top 25. The leading category in the Top 25 themes is Curriculum/Early Childhood Education. More than one-third of all themes in the Top 25 list are related to Early Childhood Education or some dimension of Curriculum.

Exhibit 4



As a second means of understanding the Top 25 themes, Exhibit 5 provides the percentage of sites that had at least one group that articulated this theme in their priorities. By either method, the Top 25 theme list remains the same in its content. The order, however, changes slightly.

Exhibit 5

Theme	Percent of Sites Identifying Priorities Within A Theme
Teacher Salaries	85%
Parental Involvement	73%
Early Childhood	63%
Curriculum	60%
Basic Skills	57%
Funding	53%
Discipline	51%
Smaller Class Size	48%
Testing	48%
Quality Teachers and Staff	47%
Equitable Funding	42%
Vocational Education	39%
Accountability - Parents	38%
Prep for Future	38%
Community Involvement	35%
Consolidation	35%
Positive Atmosphere and Image	31%
Accountability - Students	29%
Teaching	29%
Emphasize Academics vs Non-Academics	28%
Facilities	28%
Meet Students' Needs	28%
Curriculum - Consistent	27%
Safety	27%
Accountability - All	24%

Overview of findings for the Top 5 Themes

Based on analysis of all priority descriptions and their corresponding themes, the top five statewide concerns are Teacher Salaries, Parental Involvement, Early Childhood Education, Curriculum, and Basic Skills.

#1 - Teacher Salaries

Over 200 priority descriptions reflected some interest in Teacher Salaries. The essence of this theme is 'increase teacher salaries' as evidenced in the following description.

"Raise teacher salaries so teachers aren't forced to choose between staying in the profession they love and taking a higher paying job in the private sector that provides more for their families". (Phillips Community College of UA - Stuttgart)

Nonetheless, there is some variability in the context in which this sentiment is conveyed. Along with calls for increasing teacher salaries, several groups stated need for uniform salaries for teachers statewide. The following quotations illuminate this priority.

"Uniform salary statewide that is comparable with neighboring states". (Hamburg Junior High School)

"Raise teacher salaries so they are commensurate with surrounding states and have statewide equity in salaries based on accountability and evaluation". (UA Community College - Hope)

The preceding priority description raises other issues common in this theme. Many groups expressed an interest in increasing teacher salaries as incentives to retain quality educators, recruit new instructors, or motivate current teachers.

"Teacher salaries attract the best educators". (Russellville High School)

"Increase teacher salaries (to get professionals - pay like professionals)". (Benton High School)

"Give teachers incentives to care about teaching (such as higher salaries)". (North Little Rock Youth Leadership Program)

But, not all groups called for an increase in teacher salaries. In some instances, groups articulated interest in tying teacher pay to outcomes. This sentiment was not uniform but present nonetheless. The following quotations offer differing perspectives on the issue.

"Teacher salaries need to be linked to professional development and test results" (Martin Luther King Jr. Magnet Elementary)

"Not base pay on student performance". (South Arkansas Community College)

#2 - Parental Involvement

Almost three-quarters of all sites (73 percent) had at least one group report Parental Involvement as a priority. Approximately 150 priority descriptions reflected some interest in Parental Involvement. This theme is distinct from other recommendations for Parental Accountability. Importantly, Parental Accountability is associated with 47 group priorities. The combination suggests that the role of parents in schools and with their children is a serious concern to Arkansas citizens.

Within this theme, group priorities contained an expressed desire to motivate parents and a need for education to begin at home. As the following excerpts suggest, there are myriad ways in which groups articulated the need for greater parental involvement in their children's education.

"Need parents that value education and relate that to their children".
(Great Rivers Technical Institute)

"More parent involvement and willing teachers to have parent involvement".
(Paris Community Center)

"Parents need to be more involved in their children's education, checking homework, holding children accountable". (Senior Adult Center)"

There was recognition that parental involvement is not necessarily an individual issue. The extent and nature of parental involvement may well depend on the receptivity and engagement of educators. The following priorities illuminate the need for relationships between educators and parents.

"Encourage and support respect building from students, staff and community, emphasizing increased parental/community involvement in the schools ". (Perryville High School)

"Communication should be more encouraging - school to parent, the less intimidating the better". (Fort Smith School Service Center)

"Motivate parents and get more parents involved - (All groups at this site said this)". (Carroll Electric Building)

In a few instances, groups described the need for greater parental involvement and suggested that this demand be accompanied by rules for compliance or mandated classes.

"Good parental support with parents receiving mandated education classes".
(Petit Jean Electric Co-Op)

Yet another dimension of parental involvement requires proactive attempts to meet the needs of minority populations. The following priority description identifies a need to include training for Hispanic families and attempts to overcome language barriers to achieve parental involvement in the child's educational journey.

"PTA training for Hispanic families - have information available for all parents in their language of understanding to take pride in the child's school". (AETN Studio)

#3 - Early Childhood Education

In almost two-thirds of all sites, at least one group mentioned Early Childhood Education as a priority. A total of 117 groups identified a priority consistent with the early childhood education theme. Nevertheless, the theme contains descriptions and recommendations of significant diversity.

Several groups pointed to a lack of adequate preparation for children entering elementary school. Participants stated concern over children falling behind before they begin elementary school. The following priority descriptions highlight these concerns.

"Strengthen school readiness". (Henderson Education Center)

"Kids not ready to start school". (Osceola So. Miss. County Chamber of Commerce)

Some groups recommended mandatory pre-K programs or HIPPPY. Other groups suggested that every school offer pre-K opportunities, although the priority did not suggest that the programs should be mandatory. Another set of groups focused on parents' autonomy to decide the kind of early childhood education for their child.

"Every district should have a mandatory pre-K program". (Magnolia High School)

As mentioned, previously, other groups expressed dissenting positions. In some cases, group priorities focused on extending availability of Pre-K and other early childhood opportunities without a mandatory component.

"Pre-school programs must increase in quality, number and availability for all individuals at all socio-economic levels". (Arkansas Methodist Medical Building, Paragould)

Moreover, other groups argued priorities that would divert moneys from early childhood education.

"Mandating of Pre-K is not the answer". (St. James United Methodist Church)

"No state funding for pre-school programs - the funds should be returned to K-12". (Flippin High School)

While many groups identified priorities in the area of Early Childhood Education, there is some disagreement regarding the best way in which young children can become better prepared for formal education.

One additional priority regarding early childhood connects to the next theme, Curriculum. Participants from one Speak Up, Arkansas! group stated a need for "Arkansas Department of Education to develop curricula for pre-school settings to promote readiness upon entering school". (Phillips Community College of UA - Helena)

#4 - Curriculum

The category of Curriculum/Early Childhood Education surpassed all others in the frequency with which related issues were noted in group priorities. More than half of all sites had at least one group note a general curriculum priority. In total, Curriculum accounted for 113 themes. Another variation of curriculum also appears in the Top 25 themes with priorities related to the need for a Consistent Curriculum.

This theme of Curriculum is a category mainly describing curriculum decisions in general. It contains priorities that focus on who has authority over decisions

regarding curricula, best practices, the effects of funding, and content. It does not encompass calls for statewide curricula or character education.

Decisions about curriculum may occur at various levels. Some groups indicated an interest in returning power in this arena to teachers.

"Give teacher back authority over curriculum, testing, major decisions, and local control". (Greater Jonesboro Chamber of Commerce)

Some sites acknowledged the diversity of curricula across the state while numerous groups called for a statewide curriculum, a preference not shared by all.

"School specific curriculum to address different levels of each school's deficiency". (Mid-South Community College)

Some groups expressed interest in unconventional curricula as one means to promote learning.

"Encourage thinking outside the box, i.e. Hands on activities, field trips, outside help with active learning, addressing different learning styles and needs, student friendly classrooms". (New Rogers High School)

Other group priorities emphasized needed linkages between high school curricula, and the demands of college, work, or the global economy.

"College curriculum needs to align with public school curriculum". (Mid-South Community College)

Curriculum development and content raised other issues.

"Want a good curriculum based on education's best research practices - student centered". (Cabot High School)

"Every assignment should coincide with a rubric and the students should be informed of that rubric". (North Little Rock Youth Leadership Program)

Several groups articulated concern that some issues other than children's best interests and needs dictate curriculum decisions.

"Too much emphasis on testing and more time needed for curriculum". (Community Building - Murfreesboro)

"Funding drives the curriculum instead of the children's needs". (Huntsville High School)

Moreover, one group bridged the issue of curriculum and funding to consolidation. The group stated schools should "Consolidate for adequate curriculum". (South Arkansas Community College)

Some specific recommendations included increased emphasis on the arts, natural resources, agricultural history, and business oriented material. Regardless of content, the student site listed the following priority regarding curriculum.

"Relate topic to real world (North Little Rock Youth Leadership Program)"

#5 - Basic Skills

Consistent with citizens' attention to curriculum, the theme of Basic Skills made the list as the fifth leading concern among all priorities. At least one group at fifty-seven percent of all sites indicated Basic Skills as a priority. By Basic Skills, participants most often meant "The 3 R's". (Hamburg Junior High School) Many of the priorities in this theme articulated a need to reinforce basic skills in reading and math.

Groups expressed interest in achieving a "Strong Foundation in Basics". (UA Community College - Morrilton) Also, some groups stated that educators were trying to cover too much material at the expense of basic skills and material. Here are a few selected quotations:

"Schools are losing the basics". (Alma High School)

"Back to basics, try to cover too much". (Rison School)

"Firm basic skills: Be prepared for job force or college". (Community Building - Murfreesboro)

"Provide proper core development, no matter their career". (Bryant High School)

The final priority description connects the overarching issues of curriculum, reform, state mandates, and basic skills.

"Curriculum is currently an inch deep and a mile wide - too many concepts being taught in elementary grades - Teaching needs to relate to life skills. When curriculum is mandated, frameworks are necessary". (Fort Smith School Services Center)

Other themes and priorities

The themes of Funding and Discipline also received frequent mentions as priorities by at least one group at more than half of all sites. While this report will not detail specific findings for these themes, priority descriptions in the participants' words are included as Appendix II.

Site Summaries

The next section of this report provides a one-page summary of the key findings from the small group discussions and demographic analysis from each of the 91 Speak Up, Arkansas! sites. The priorities listed do not represent all issues raised at this particular forum, simply the most consistent concerns and themes that arose out of the small group priorities. For a more detailed listing of concerns, see Appendix IV. This section includes each theme with all of the related priorities as the facilitators or coordinators reported them.

Again, the goal of this report is not to offer recommendations or articulate every concern mentioned by concerned citizens across the state. The report attempts to offer an honest snapshot of Arkansas citizens' priorities regarding the kinds of education they want for the children of this state and their suggestions for how to accomplish the goal. There are many other findings to be obtained from this immense amount of rich data. Nevertheless, the preceding text offers a springboard for understanding the discourses from Speak Up, Arkansas!

Acknowledgements

The project leaders, Denise Cobb and Cindy Bennett Boland, at the UALR Institute of Government would like to express sincere appreciation to those groups and persons that assisted with this project. Our timely completion simply would not have been possible without support across the university and community. First and foremost, we want to thank Brandon Sharp for creating, maintaining, and troubleshooting the Speak Up, Arkansas! web-site for data entry.

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To the Arkansas Blue Ribbon Commission on Public Education, we hope that this report will serve you well in your efforts to initiate change in Arkansas' educational system. We are hopeful for Arkansas' educational system and happy to have been a small part of this endeavor.