

Miles To Go

Arkansas



Southern Education Foundation

SEF Arkansas Advisory Council of Governors and Advisory Committee

Miles To Go

Arkansas

Beyond High School:
Economic Imperatives for Enlarging Equity and Achievement

With Support From:
The Ford Foundation
The W.K. Kellogg Foundation



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Aims and Auspices

The Southern Education Foundation (SEF) is a regional public charity based in Atlanta, Georgia, that traces its roots back to 1867, when philanthropist George Peabody established a dedicated fund to advance education in the American South. This fund and several others were joined in 1937 to create SEF.

For 135 years, SEF has been at the forefront of efforts to improve educational opportunity and quality through policy advocacy, research, information sharing, convening, technical assistance, and program development and implementation. SEF does not make grants or receive unsolicited proposals and relies on donors of diverse types for support of its program activities. SEF's chairman is Dr. Norman Francis, president of Xavier University in New Orleans, Louisiana. Lynn Huntley, Esq. is its president.

Miles to Go, Arkansas, is one of a series of reports issued or under development by SEF as part of its Equal Opportunity in Post Secondary Desegregation Project, funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Ford Foundation. Begun in 1992, following the decision of the United States Supreme Court in *United States v. Fordice*, the Project undertakes research, disseminates information and works with policymakers to provide opportunity in education in the South. Prior reports by the Project include *Redeeming the American Promise* (1995), a comprehensive set of findings and recommendations about the status of minorities in

public higher education in 12 states; *Miles to Go* (1998), which looked at the status of African American students in all 19 states that formerly operated race-based dual systems of public higher education; *Miles to Go, Maryland* (1999), and *Miles to Go, South Carolina* (2002) assessments of needs and strategies to enhance educational opportunity in those states.

SEF thanks the many Arkansans who offered their time and talent to participate in the hearings and deliberations leading to this report and who will continue to be leaders shaping the public policy agenda for K-16 education reform. SEF also expresses appreciation to consultant Robert Johnston and staff member Janet Keene for their assistance. SEF program coordinator, Steve Suitts, was primarily responsible for the development of the report.

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Copies of *Miles to Go: Arkansas* are available from the Southern Education Foundation, 135 Auburn Avenue, Second Floor, Atlanta, GA 30303-2503 for \$15.00 each while supplies last. An electronic version is available at www.sefatl.org.

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There was a time when having a high school education was enough to ensure qualification for plentiful jobs that paid livable wages. In fact, many people who did not graduate from high school were able to find such jobs in agriculture or industry and provide adequately, if not well, for themselves and their families. Though their wages were low, the cost of goods and services was also low.

Those days are practically gone. The global revolution in technology has created new economic realities and workforce requirements. Today, in order to get ahead and be assured of being competitive, a high school diploma is the bare minimum prerequisite. Higher education is essential for higher paying jobs, flexibility and mobility in the skills-driven new economy of which Arkansas is now a part. The changes evident in Arkansas are mirrored throughout the South – indeed, the nation.

This report is about how Arkansas' educational system is anticipating and responding to the new economy. It is the product of collaboration between public-spirited Arkansans and the Southern Education Foundation, a regional public charity concerned with equity and excellence in education in the South at all levels. It tells a story with data to which we all should be attentive.

The report acknowledges that Arkansas has made improvements in public education over the years. Thoughtful people at all levels have worked hard to reform education policy and practice. Many promising but small-scale programs, policies and practices have been initiated that, if adequately funded and extended fairly, would help the state advance.

But the progress has been unevenly shared. Low income and/or African American students and communities, who need the most help, are the least well served by the current education system. Such students are concentrated in the least well maintained facilities, taught by the least well prepared teachers, receive inadequate support and compensatory services, and, predictably, continue to have high drop out rates or lag behind more affluent counterparts in levels of educational attainment. The absence of adequate need-based scholarship aid and priority attached to helping low income students succeed in higher education is causing too many to fail in developing their talents and skills to full measure.

Arkansas cannot expect to provide a decent quality of life for all of its people when its tax revenue base is small due to the large number of poorly educated, low wage earners. Arkansas cannot expect to have low crime rates, good intergroup relations, and safe communities when so many people are unemployed and underemployed. Arkansas cannot expect to attract new investments when so many are ill equipped to function in the contemporary marketplace, and the public schools are failing to meet high performance and accountability standards. Arkansas, a state with a large low income and minority population, cannot expect to thrive economically when so many of its people are struggling just to make ends meet. Uncertainty about tomorrow stalks those with little education and low paying jobs. Unless and until the state attaches priority to broadening its economic base at its widest point, *the bottom*, all other measures to enhance the quality of life in the state will be severely compromised.

Our message is simple: whether it is good or bad times, the education of all our children – including poor, African American, and Latino children – cannot be deferred. For the sake of all of Arkansas, the state must set a new course, a new direction in public education. It is an imperative that reaches beyond one year, one educational program, one governor, one legislative session, one state budget, and one court decision. This new direction requires a fundamental shift that will need the consistent, bi-partisan support of Arkansas leaders in and outside of government.

A commitment in pursuit of fairness and excellence in education has always been morally right. Today, it is economically necessary for the future welfare of the *entire* state. Arkansas has “miles to go.” But it also has a chance, an important chance, to take significant strides toward helping all Arkansans be all that they can be.

Lynn Huntley
President
The Southern Education Foundation
August 2002

Education: Arkansas' Engine of Progress

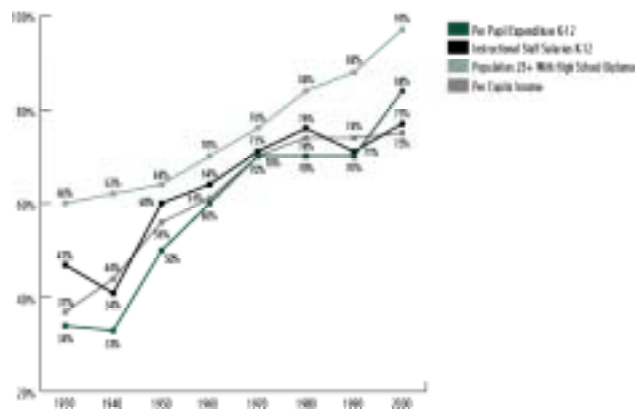
For as long as Arkansas has been a state, its leaders and its people have understood a fundamental truth of American democracy: the education of all people is the engine of progress for an entire society. Over the last 70 years, for example, Arkansas has become more prosperous primarily because all of its children have become more educated. In 1930, Arkansans had an income of \$310 per person and a median education level of 7.3 years of schooling. During most of the 20th century, as the state increased its educational efforts, the next generation of Arkansans increased their per capita income. As a result, there has been an enormous gain in per capita income over the last 70 years, and the huge difference between per person income in Arkansas and in the nation in the 20th century has been cut in half.

Economic advancement has been only one of several benefits of higher educational achievement. Today, most families in Arkansas enjoy better health, a longer life, civic participation, more leisure time, and an overall higher quality of life – all associated with rising levels of education.

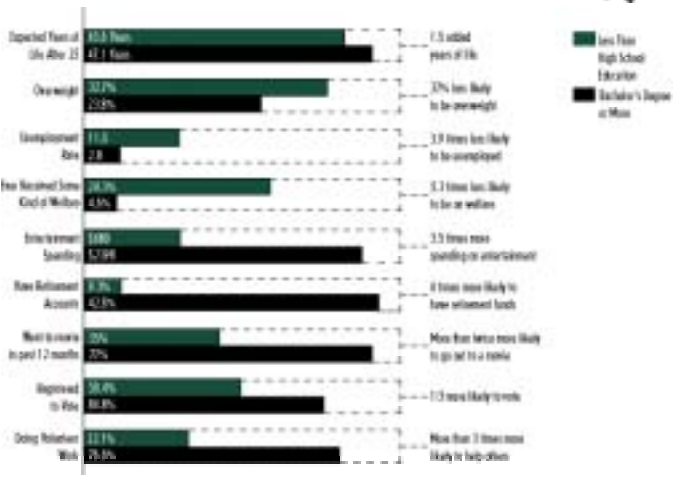
Yet, this progress is not automatic. Today, the state is at a crossroads that will decide much of its future. More than ever before, Arkansans' collective income and well-being are directly tied to increasing the number of students who attain higher levels of education – notably beyond the traditional goal of a high school diploma. No longer can Arkansas as a state progress if high levels of success in education are reached by only a “favored few.”

Historical Trends: Education Pays

Arkansas Achievements As Percent of National Average

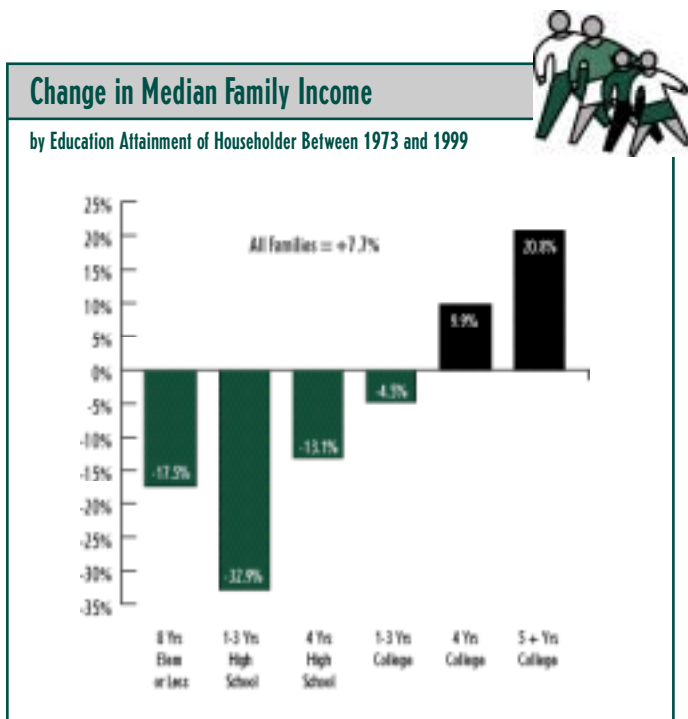


Quality of Life by Level of Education



progress

economic growth



Recent history is clear. Because of enduring technological changes, the nation's economy has changed. For example, families headed by at least one adult with at least 4 years of college were the *only families* in the United States whose real median income actually increased during the last quarter of a century. The median income for families of men or women with only a high school diploma, for example, dropped by over 13 percent since 1973. This general trend will only worsen in Arkansas and America over time. In the future, regardless of the state of the economy, good-paying jobs will require increases in education and thinking skills.

Arkansas' progress over the 20th century points toward the necessary direction for the 21st. The essential engine for economic growth and prosperity will be, above all else, an increase in the educational achievement of *all* Arkansas students – especially of poor students and African American students. As this report clearly evidences, Arkansas as a state will not prosper in future decades if these two groups of students – and an enlarging number of Latino students – fail to achieve at high levels in school. The prospects for these students' education will literally shape the entire state's future.

The speed and distance by which Arkansas moves toward new levels of educational achievement – toward enlarging the numbers of students who are prepared for and succeed at college – will determine whether Arkansas enjoys future progress or quagmires at the very bottom ranks of the nation. It is a choice.

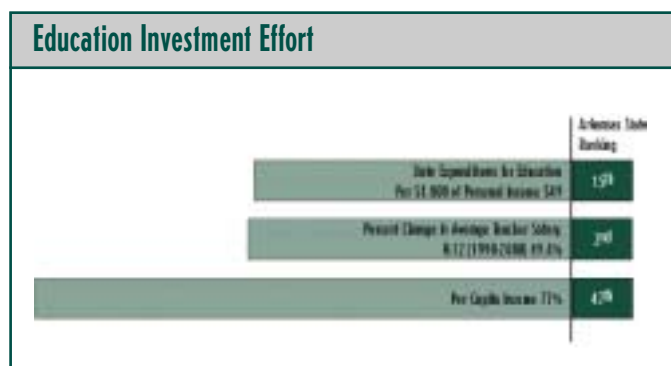
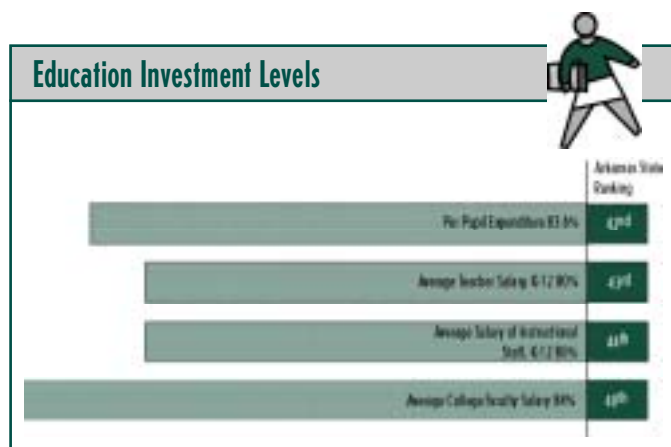
Investments and Performance in Arkansas Education

Like most other Southern states, Arkansas does not rank high today in the United States on most measurements for investing in education or for the educational performance of its students.

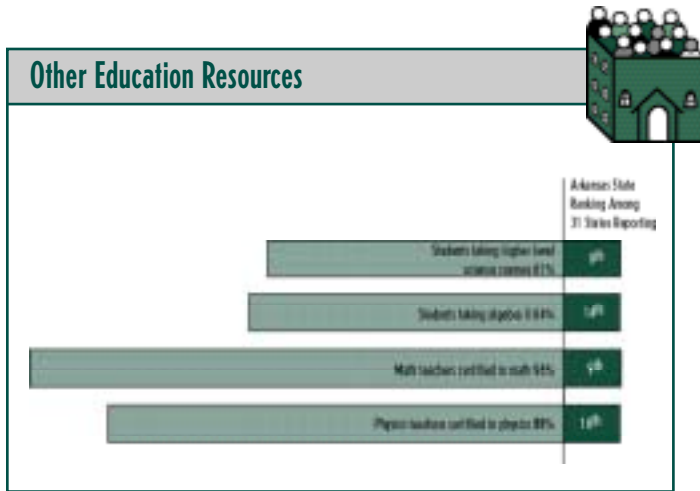
Education Funding

Among the states, Arkansas ranks near the bottom in per pupil expenditures in K-12 public schools. In 1999-2000, for example, Arkansas' expenditures per student were 84 percent of the national average – earning a rank of 42nd in the nation. The state's average teacher's salary is also low in comparison with the rest of the nation. In 1999-2000, Arkansas ranked 43rd – ahead of only Mississippi and Louisiana within the South – with teacher salaries at only 80 percent of the U.S. average. Salaries for Arkansas' college faculties were similarly low: 84 percent of the national average and near the bottom in the South and the nation.

These indicators demonstrate low levels of investment, but not a lack of credible citizens' efforts in support of education. In recent years, Arkansas has shown high rates of growth in support of education. For example, Arkansas ranks 15th in the nation – far ahead of states such as Connecticut, Massachusetts, California, and New York – when state expenditures for education are measured against Arkansas' personal income. This mismatch between low investments and high efforts reflects the state's own comparatively low levels of per capita income (ranked 47th in the nation) and its high reliance on sales taxes and individual income taxes for state revenues.



“People ask: ‘Isn’t education expensive?’ My response is: ‘It’s much less expensive than the alternative.’ Ignorance is expensive. Failure is expensive.” Gov. Mike Huckabee, June 6, 2000



Other Education Resources

There are critical resources for student learning not adequately measured by money. These include effective teaching and challenging courses. While available data are only suggestive, Arkansas has moved above the nation in some areas. From 1990 to 1998, for example, the percent of high school students in Arkansas taking chemistry and Algebra II moved from below the national average to above it. Also, Arkansas ranked near the national average in the percentage of teachers certified and teaching in the fields of math and science.

At the same time, national surveys in 1996 and 1998 indicated that Arkansas' 8th grade students are less likely than the average US student to take algebra, to have hands-on assignments in science, and to discuss, write about, or use a calculator to solve math problems.

“Over the long run, education is the key to our economic revival and our perennial quest for prosperity.”

Gov. Bill Clinton, January 11, 1983

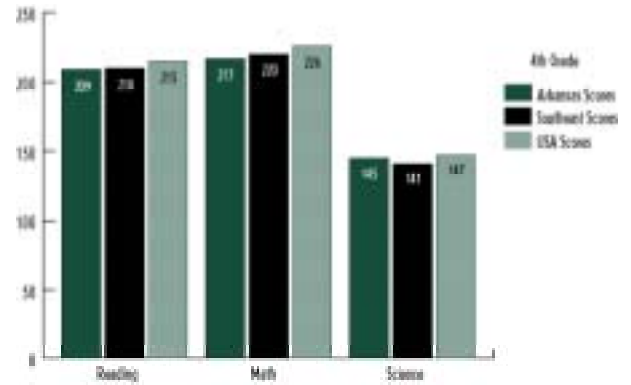
Education Performance

The hard, cold truth is that Arkansas continues to lag in educational performance far behind the nation and, usually, most other Southern states. In the latest nation-wide tests, Arkansas students scored well below the national average in every discipline – reading, writing, math and science. In 1998, for instance, only 24 percent of Arkansas 8th grade students tested “proficient” or “advanced” in reading. Among the states, only Mississippi and Louisiana ranked lower.

In science tests in 2000, Arkansas’ 4th graders scored above the average for Southern states, and 8th graders matched the South’s average student. In math, however, national tests showed only 13 to 14 percent of Arkansas students were proficient or better – compared to almost twice that percentage throughout the nation.

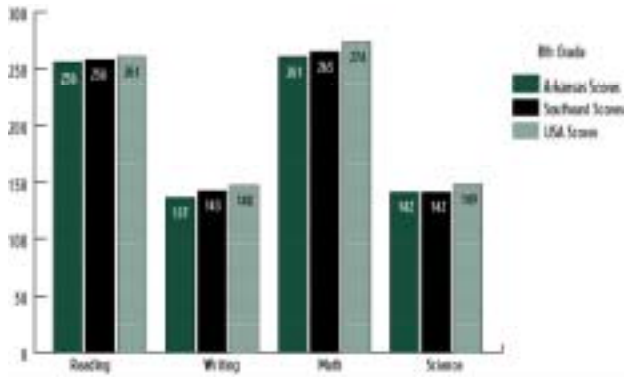
Education Performance

Average Scores in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)
4th Grade



Education Performance

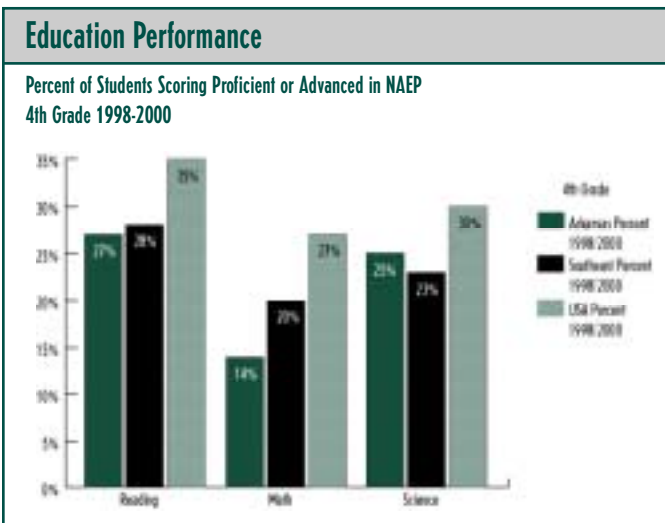
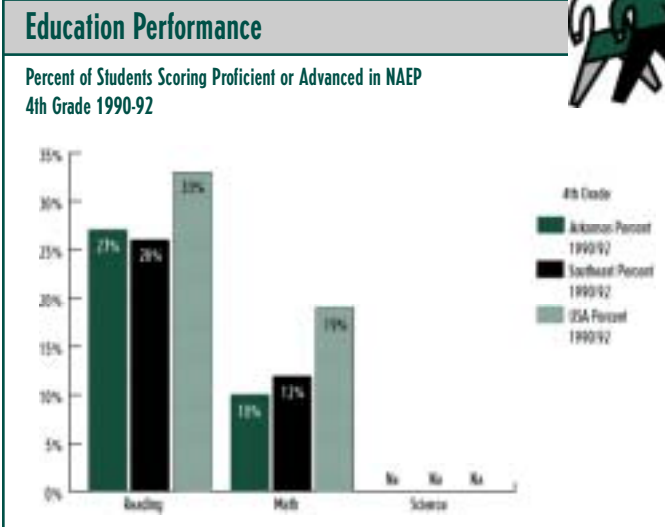
Average Scores in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)
8th Grade



NAEP reading and writing scores for year 1998; math and science scores for 2000.

performance

achievement



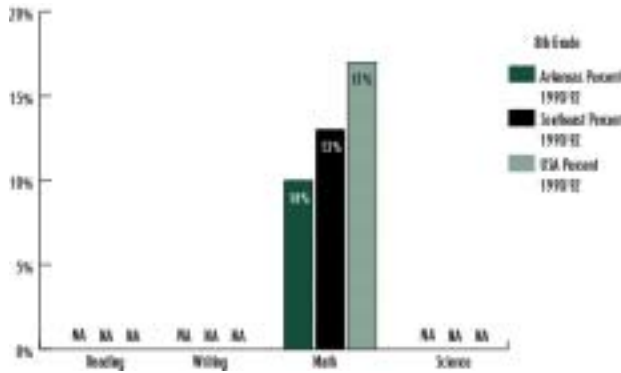
No less worrisome, over the last several years in reading, writing, and math, where national tests have been assessing student performance over time, Arkansas students have fallen further behind the nation. In 1990, for example, Arkansas' 8th graders scoring proficient or above in math stood 7 percentage points behind the nation. By 2000, the gap more than doubled to a difference of 16 points. These patterns of performance are also borne out in the nation's ACT scores for high school students in the year 2001. Arkansas ranked 41st among the 50 states.

Arkansas' rate of public high school graduates, however, is one indicator of achievement where the state ranks well above the nation as a whole. Under its current system of grading, nearly three-fourths of Arkansas' 9th grade students in 1996 received a high school diploma in 1999. (The national average was approximately 67.2 percent.) Yet, the chance of Arkansas' public high school graduates going on to college is in the bottom half of the nation. The state ranks 36th in the percentage of high school graduates who are enrolled in college the next year. In addition, while the rate has increased in recent years, the percentage of 18 to 24 year olds in Arkansas enrolled in college remains well below the national average and behind most other Southern states.

As a result, Arkansas is at the bottom among states in producing college graduates. The state ranks 49th in the percent of high school graduates receiving two-year degrees, 49th in the percent of adults over 25 with BA degrees, and 49th in the percent of adults with advanced degrees. In 2000, only 18 percent of Arkansas adults had a bachelor's degree.

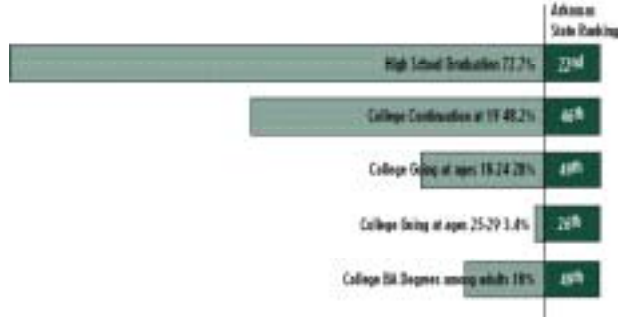
Education Performance

Percent of Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced in NAEP
8th Grade 1990-92



Education Performance

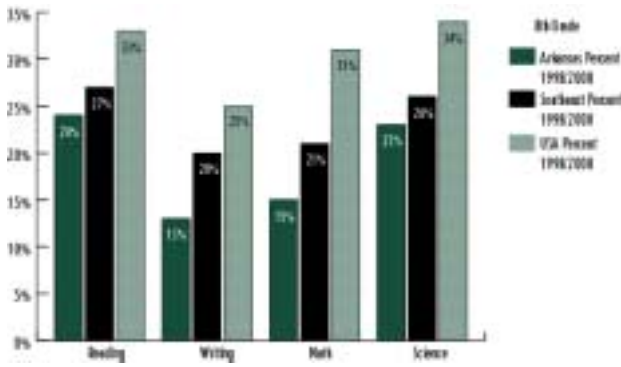
"Beyond High School" Indicators



Years: 1994 through 2000

Education Performance

Percent of Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced in NAEP
8th Grade 1998-2000



test scores

equity gaps

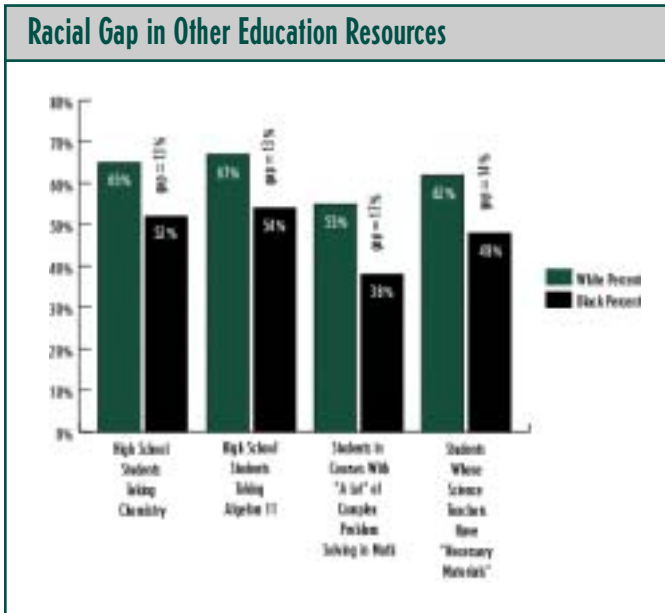
Equity Gaps in Arkansas Education

Within Arkansas there are vast gaps in education investment, resources, and performance primarily associated with race and income. These disparities place many African American and poor white students far behind other Arkansas students and account for the largest part of the state's challenge in overcoming its under-investment and overall shortcomings in education.

Education Funding

The amount of money spent for education differs widely across Arkansas, according to a recent court opinion (*Lake View School District vs. Huckabee*) by Chancellor Collins Kilgore. National data support this conclusion. On average, Arkansas school districts with the highest rates of poverty have \$378 less from local and state sources to spend on education when compared with the districts with the lowest levels of poverty.

These are real disparities. Wealthier districts spend annually \$9450 more per classroom (with an average of 25 students). An average school with 350 students in a poor district has \$132,300 less money to spend each year educating its children. Over 12 years of elementary and secondary schooling, this disparity means that the education of a child in Arkansas' poor districts is worth \$1.5 million less than the education of a child in similar-sized schools in Arkansas' wealthier districts.



Years: 1996 and 1998

In his judicial opinion, Chancellor Kilgore has portrayed what this disparity really means in the Lakeview School District where 94 percent of the students receive free or subsidized lunches:

Lake View has one uncertified mathematics teacher for all high school mathematics courses: pre-algebra, algebra I and II, geometry and trigonometry. Calculus is available through distance learning. The mathematics teacher is paid \$10,000 a year as a substitute teacher which he supplements with \$5,000 annually for school bus driving...

The mathematics teacher... teaches a trigonometry course with a Prentice Hall textbook that is a graphing calculator supported program. The calculators are expensive. There are ten students and four calculators. His classroom has two electrical outlets to support such conventional needs as overhead projectors, computers, lights and other electrical equipment. In his geometry class he does not have compasses. Only one of four chalkboards is useable.

Other Education Resources

There are also gaps in the fair distribution of other educational resources in Arkansas, although these disparities are related primarily to race – not income. For example, no more than half of Arkansas’ African American students have had algebra II and chemistry by graduation, while 2/3 of the white students have taken these courses. Similarly, Arkansas’ black 8th graders are far less likely than their white classmates to take courses where students spend “a lot” of time solving complex math problems.

Demographic Snapshot: Arkansas

Today, Arkansas has around 750,000 persons who are 5-24 years of age. About 460,000 children are in the public schools, K-12, and roughly 100,000 students are in the state’s colleges and universities.

African Americans make up 24-25 percent of all public school children and 15-16 percent of all college students in the state. The percentage of black children is expected to approach one third of the total student population by 2010. Latinos are 4 percent of the current student population. Hispanic students may comprise 8-10 percent of the K-12 population by 2010.

This enlarging diversity of Arkansas’ young people links the state’s overall future prosperity increasingly with the education performance, skills, and citizenship of students who currently are not performing well in school.

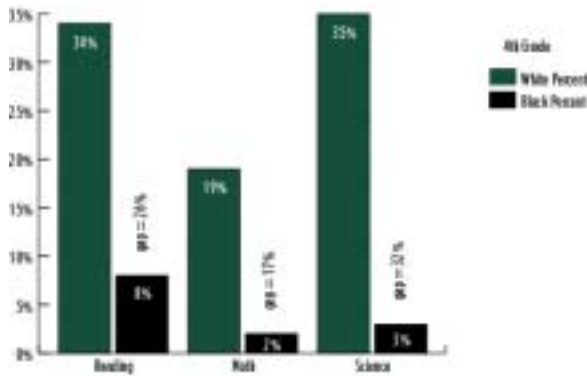
“An era of realism does not mean limited educational opportunities ...” Gov. Frank White, January 13, 1981

disparities



Racial Gap in Education Performance

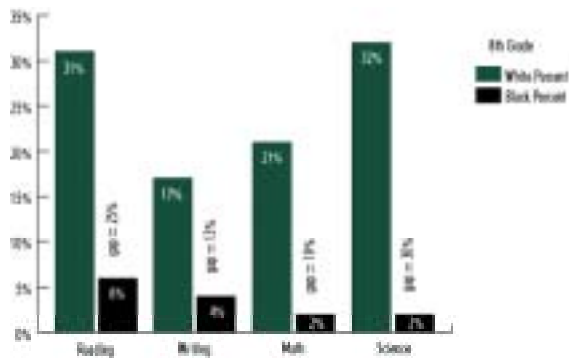
Percent of Students by Race Scoring Proficient or Advanced in NAEP Tests
4th Grade



NAEP reading scores for year 1998; math and science scores for 2000.

Racial Gap in Education Performance

Percent of Students by Race Scoring Proficient or Advanced in NAEP Tests
8th Grade



NAEP reading and writing scores for year 1998; math and science scores for 2000.

Education Performance

The gaps in resources carry over to gaps in performance. Arkansas' largest gaps in student achievement are measured by race and income in almost every field of study – from elementary school to college graduation.

K-12 Schooling

The state's largest equity gaps are measured by race. In 2000, a third of the white students in 4th grade in Arkansas scored "proficient" or "advanced" in national science tests, but only 3 percent of the state's African American students did so well. In math, 19 percent of Arkansas' white students achieved "proficient" or "advanced" scores, while only 2 percent of the black students matched those scores. In other words, white students in Arkansas' 4th grade were roughly 10 times more likely than black students to score proficient or advanced in math and in science in 2000. There are also large racial disparities in achievement levels for reading in the 4th grade.

These gaps do *not* narrow by the 8th grade. In fact, scores in 2000 showed that the gap in science scores enlarged from the 4th to the 8th grade. In the 4th grade, Arkansas' white students were 10 times more likely than black students to score well. By the 8th grade, white students were 15 times more likely to be proficient or advanced in science. Generally, in math and reading, test scores in the 8th grade separated black and white children as much as they did in the 4th grade.

Latinos in Arkansas

Latinos are a small but rapidly growing segment of the Arkansas student population. Often with families migrating from Mexico and Central America, Hispanic children make up nearly 4 percent of the state's student body. Projections suggest that by 2010, Latinos may comprise as much as 8 to 10 percent of the state's children.

Today, Arkansas' Hispanic students on average score far below white students in testing of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and usually in the same range with – although often slightly above – African American students. For example, in 1998, eleven percent of the Hispanic 8th grade students in Arkansas were “proficient or advanced” in reading tests (taken in English). Eight percent of African American students scored as well; 34 percent of white students were proficient or advanced in reading. Similarly, in NAEP tests for math, science, and writing, Hispanic students usually scored a little above black students, but a long way behind white students.

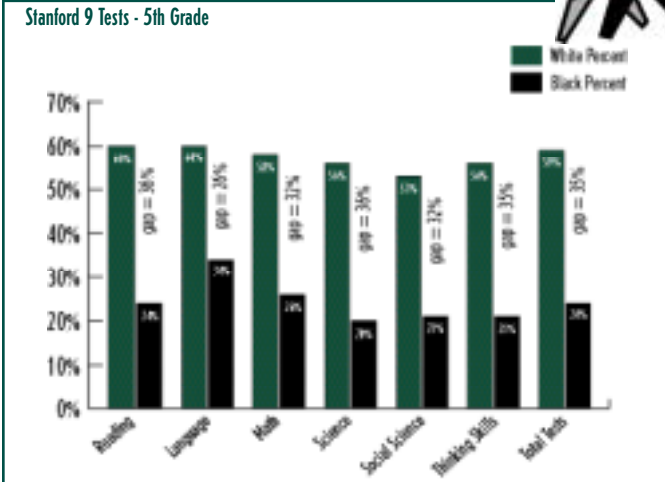
“Today’s events demonstrate the critical necessity for the finest educational system our state can afford. My commitment in education is to the students of Arkansas... at a time when education is necessary to succeed in a competitive economy.”

Gov. David Pryor, January 14, 1975

performance gap



Students Scoring at National Average or Above

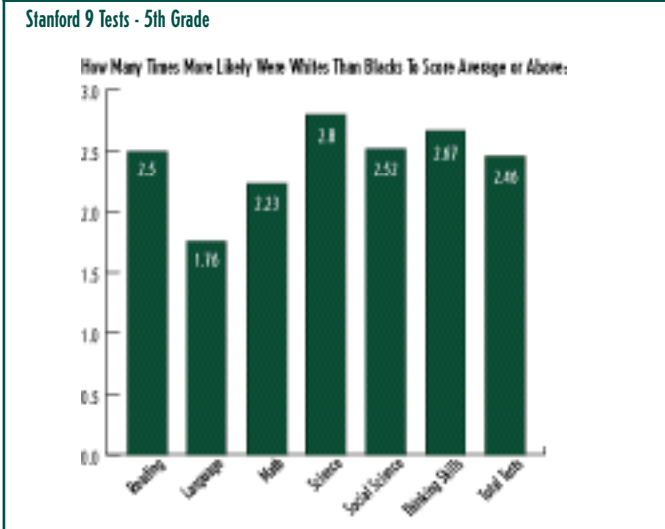


Year: 2001

Average scores also can measure these disparities. In 8th grade tests, Arkansas' white students scored 37 points higher than black students in math and 41 points higher in science. According to education experts, a difference of ten points on the NAEP test is roughly equal to one year of learning. By these terms, the Arkansas' average African American student in the 8th grade is virtually 4 years behind his white counterpart in a knowledge and mastery of math and science. Also, Arkansas' African American students in the 8th grade in 1998 had the lowest scores in writing in the nation.

State data confirm this overall pattern. Test scores from the state-administered "Stanford 9" show that Arkansas' white students generally are two and a half times more likely than black students to perform at or above the national average in reading, math, and science – as well as in other subjects such as social science and "thinking skills" – in the 5th and 7th grades. For example, in 2001, sixty-six percent of the white 7th graders in Arkansas scored in the top two quartiles of the "SAT9." Only 26 percent of black 7th graders did as well. At all grade levels, the gap in performance by race was smallest on the SAT9's language section.

Students Scoring at National Average or Above



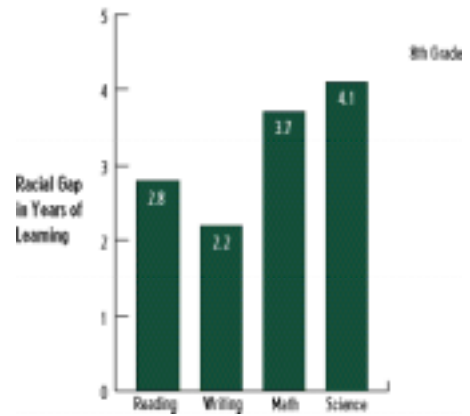
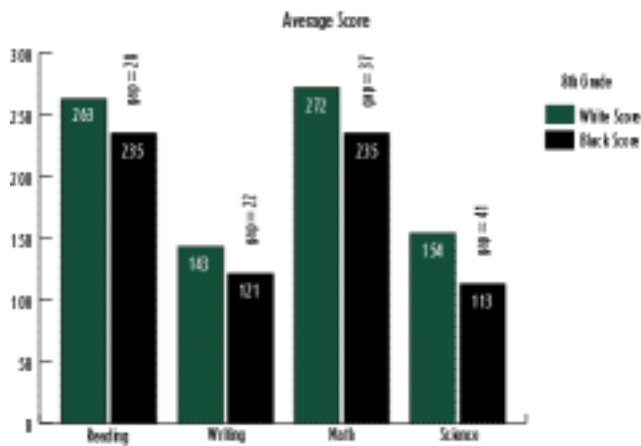
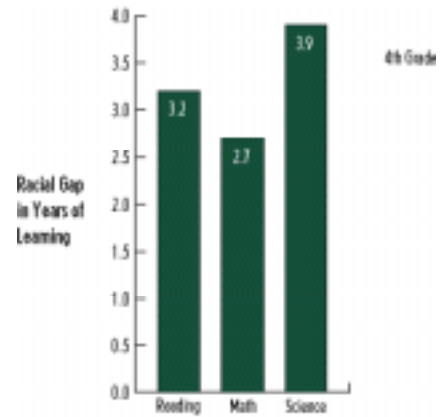
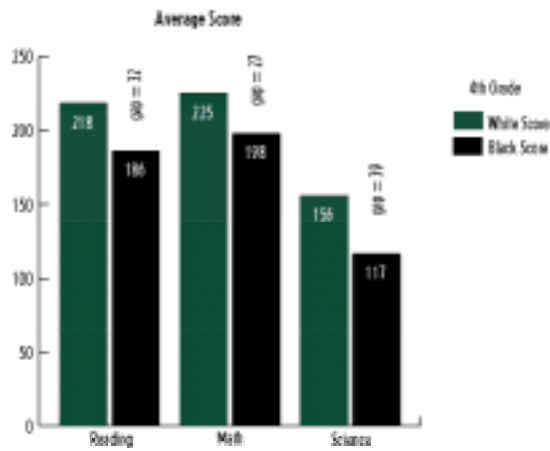
Year: 2001

"Very few problems of our State can be separated from the kind of education we offer. Education is our best investment in the future, ourselves, and our children." Gov. Dale Bumpers, January 12, 1971



Racial Gap in Education Performance

Percent of Students by Race Scoring Proficient or Advanced in NAEP Tests
4th and 8th Grade



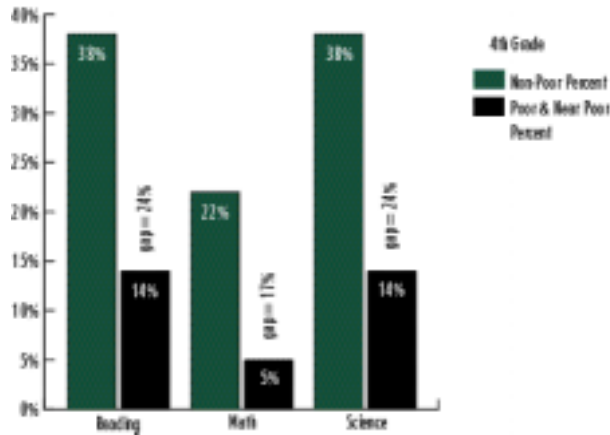
NAEP reading and writing scores for year 1998; math and science scores for 2000.

racial gaps

income gaps

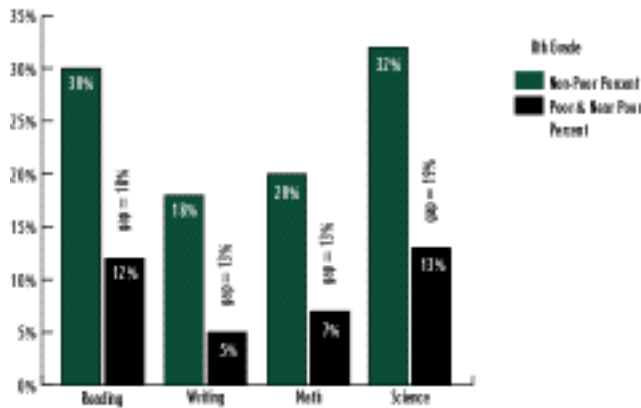
Income Gap in Education Performance

Percent of Students by Income Scoring Proficient or Advanced in NAEP Tests
4th Grade



Income Gap in Education Performance

Percent of Students by Income Scoring Proficient or Advanced in NAEP Tests
8th Grade



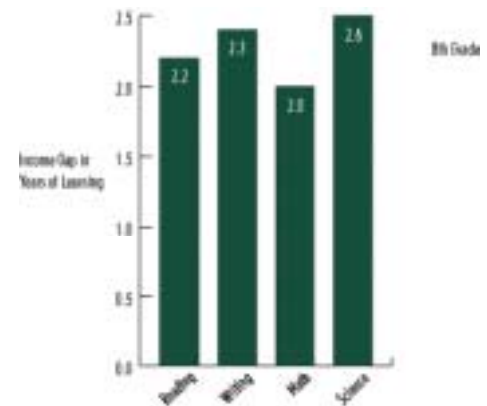
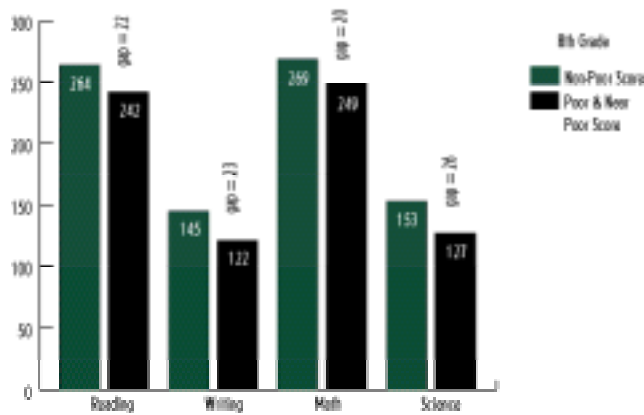
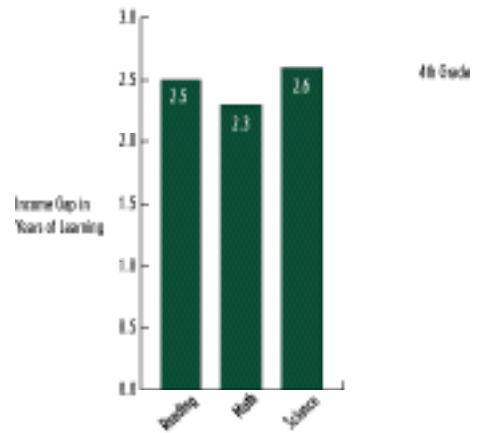
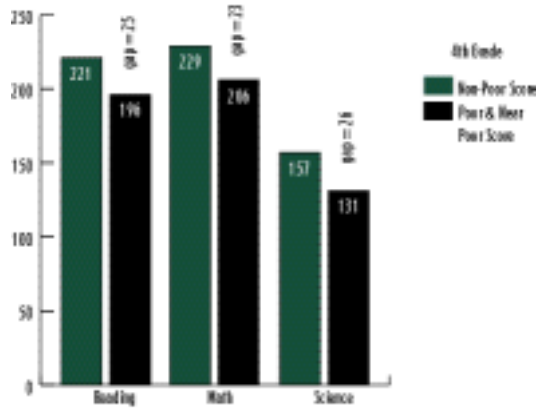
NAEP reading and writing scores for year 1998; math and science scores for 2000.

There are also important differences in school performance by income. In Arkansas, a poor student is usually 2 to 4 times less likely to score as “proficient” or “advanced” in science, math, reading, or writing as a non-poor student. In the 4th grade in 2000, for example, 14 percent of Arkansas’ poor students scored proficient or above on national science tests, while 38 percent of the non-poor students did that well. Using average score as a measure, Arkansas’ poor student is from 2 to 2 1/2 years behind the more affluent student in a mastery of all basic school subjects. In addition, in 1998, Arkansas’ low-income students received the nation’s second lowest scores for writing.

The gaps in education performance continue into high school. For example, the racial gap in scores on the 2001 SAT9 persisted into the 10th grade. White students were 3 times more likely than African Americans to score at or above the national average in reading. Only 15 percent of Arkansas’ 10th grade black students scored in the top half, in contrast with 52 percent of their white classmates. Seventy-one percent of white 10th grade students were in the top half of SAT9’s science test, but only 25 percent of the black students scored at that level. (State test scores by income levels were not available.)

Income Gap in Education Performance

Average Score By Income on NAEP Tests
4th and 8th Grade



NAEP reading and writing scores for year 1998; math and science scores for 2000.

“Yesterday’s education is not good enough for today’s complex problems.” Gov. Sidney S. McMath, January 11, 1949

performance gaps

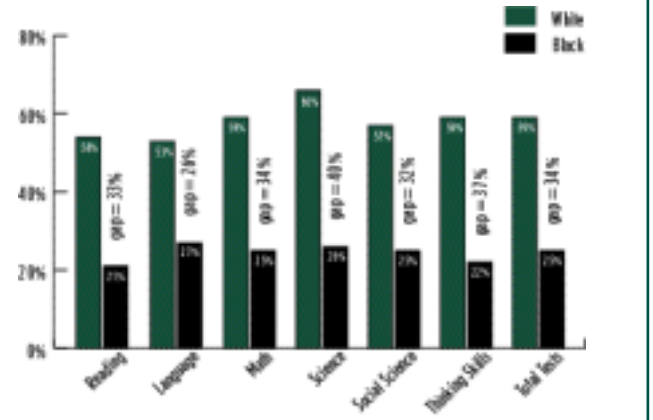
The gap by race and income also is evident near the end of high school. On the 2001 ACT, the college admission test, Arkansas' white students scored an average of 20.9. African American students scored 16.5. Students from families with over \$50,000 of income scored on average 21 to 22.7, while students from families with less than \$18,000 scored 18.1 on the ACT.

Arkansas' rate of high school graduation – 73 percent of all students – is above the national average; however, African American students graduate at a rate of 69 percent. Stated differently, more than one fourth of all students and nearly a third of all African American students fail to complete high school with a diploma.



Students Scoring at National Average or Above

Stanford 9 Tests
7th Grade

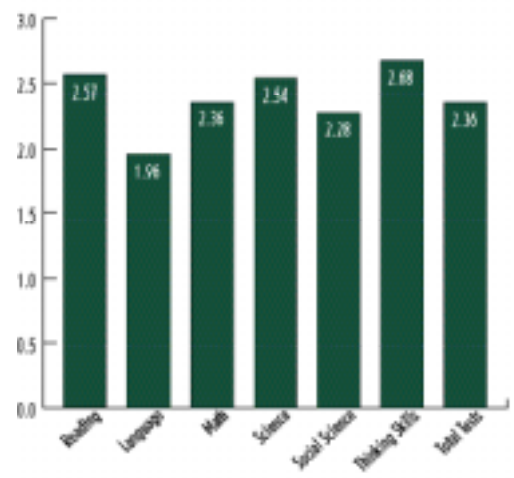


Year: 2001

Students Scoring at National Average or Above

Stanford 9 Tests
7th Grade

How Many Times More Likely Were Whites Than Blacks To Score Average or Above:



Year: 2001

“The most costly burden that we can impose on the future of the state is the inferior education for our young people. That is a “tax” that they go on paying for the rest of their lives... Quality education pays for itself many times over...”

Gov. Winthrop Rockefeller, January 10, 1967

Colleges and Universities

Far too many students in Arkansas today end their education in high school – either with or without a high school diploma. Arkansas’ rate of college students is near the bottom in the nation, and the fall-off is especially deep and disastrous for African American as well as poor students, black and white. Only 39 percent of all Arkansas’ 9th grade students are enrolled in college 4 years later. Among Arkansas’ students graduating from high school, 54 percent of the white students go on to college the next year, as compared with 41 percent of the African American high school graduates.

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. On average, only 16 percent of Arkansans between the ages of 18 and 24 from low-income families participated in college during the 1990s. Only four other states had worse records in assuring that students from poor families continue their education into college.

Staying in college is also a challenge for many of Arkansas’ students. Inadequate academic preparation is one of their problems. Over half of all Arkansas freshmen students require “remediation courses” to supplement the knowledge and skills they brought from high school. In 1998, for example, 54 percent of white college freshmen and 88 percent of African American freshmen were in a remediation course.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Historically Black Colleges and Universities have helped to play a pivotal role in the higher education of African Americans, especially in the Southern states. For several generations these were the only institutions where young African Americans could gain an education in the South beyond high school. Operating with scarce resources and very large challenges, HBCUs gave the South’s black youth a chance for the American promise of education during decades when Southern states actively opposed equal opportunities in higher education for all citizens.

Today there are four Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in Arkansas. Three are private schools, and the fourth is public, the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. They continue to play a major role in educating the state’s African American youth. In 1996 (the latest year for available data), for example, these four schools enrolled one-third of all African American undergraduates in Arkansas.

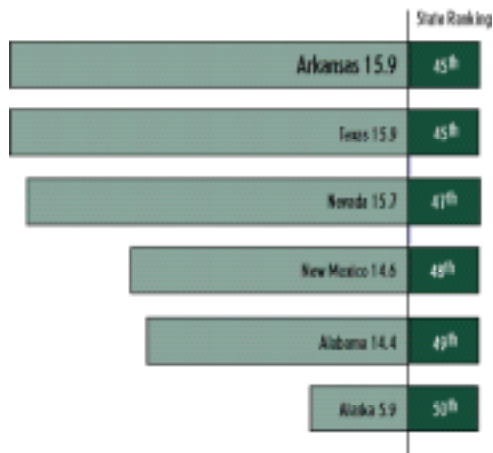
In addition, these four HBCUs in 1996 employed more than half of all full-time African American faculty members teaching in the state’s colleges and universities. In our 1998 regional report, *Miles To Go*, SEF stated: “HBCUs remain essential to providing access for large numbers of black students.... In building desegregated and opportunity-driven systems of public higher education, states must invest in these institutions and their students.” No less is true today.

colleges and universities

degrees

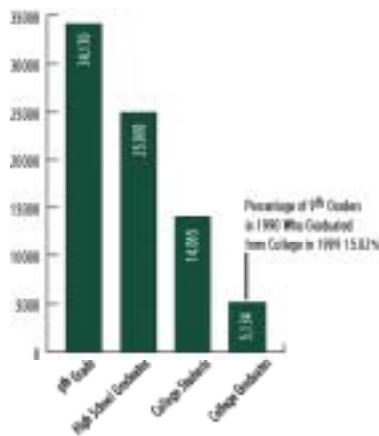
Income Gap in Education Performance

College Participation for Students from Low Income Families
Average State Rates



Cumulative Data, 1992-1999

Estimated College Graduation of Arkansas' 9th Grade Class of 1990



Another major problem is money. 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 small when compared with most states or in comparison with need. Recently, Arkansas ranked 7th in the nation in the percent of college students in need of financial aid. At the same time, federal assistance for attending college has declined in the last several years, and in 2001 the state of Arkansas suspended its principal need-based scholarships.

These problems help to account for the state's disturbing rates of college retention and graduation. Too many college students, especially African Americans, do not make it successfully through their first year of college. It is a disparity that grows with each year. Barely more than one-third of Arkansas' college students graduate with a degree after 6 years. Even fewer African American students – barely more than one out of every 5 students – graduate with a bachelor's degree after 6 years.

"We have ample means ... to insure universal education to the youth of our country. Knowledge is power. It is the lever that sways every thing...." Gov. James Sevier Conway, September 13, 1836

As a result, Arkansas has the nation's lowest levels of college achievement across the contiguous United States. Only 18 percent of Arkansas adults today hold a bachelor's degree.

Even more disturbing, Arkansas is apparently not improving – even among the most recent graduates. In 1990, for example, about 34,000 students were in 9th grade in Arkansas schools. Roughly 25,000 graduated from Arkansas high schools in 1993. About 14,000 went to college, and, after 6 years, only about 5,000 had graduated in 1999 with a bachelor's degree. In other words, an estimated 15 percent of the state's recent students are getting a college degree – a level no better than the average among all adults in Arkansas.

Based on national ratios, these data suggest that no more than seven to ten percent of the African American and the low-income white students in today's 9th grade classes in Arkansas will graduate from college over the next decade. If this estimate becomes reality, it will be an utter disaster for the entire state's economic and civic future.

The Need for Diversity in Arkansas Teaching

Information about the racial composition of Arkansas' 31,000 public school teachers and 4,000 instructors in higher education has been hard to come by. But the absence of available data can not obscure the fact that Arkansas has too few African American teachers at any level. And that the numbers are not growing.

According to a variety of estimates, African Americans make up somewhere between 7 and 11 percent of all Arkansas public school teachers today. This range is unusually low for a school system with 23 percent African American students. And, quite clearly, the percentages are not enlarging. According to testimony presented by state representatives at an SEF hearing in 2000, African Americans were only 8 percent of the graduates from teacher education programs in Arkansas. This low level of graduation from education teacher schools has persisted "for the last five years." In a state suffering from an overall shortage of qualified teachers, the under-representation of African American teachers is both counterproductive and contrary to the state's best interests.

Data on teachers by race for higher education is not much better. According to one study, African Americans comprise 7 percent of all public college and university instructors, full-time and part-time, in Arkansas. Only 3 percent of the instructors at the state's 2-year colleges are black. Seven percent of the instructors at Arkansas' four-years schools are African American. When the faculty of Arkansas' public HBCU is excluded from calculations, however, the percent of black faculty (full-time and part-time) at 4-year colleges drops almost in half.

"A true test of the progress and civilization of a people is the amount of money spent for education. Until within the last half century in Arkansas education was confined to a 'favored few' ... Now it is conceded that free education is for the common good and should be furnished at public expense." Gov. Thomas Chipman McRae, January 10, 1923

conclusions

Conclusions

The facts tell a harsh, undeniable reality: the state of Arkansas is failing to adequately educate most of its children. What is generally less clear – but no less essential – is the fact that Arkansas will not correct this failure nor improve its overall education performance if the state does not improve the education of African American and poor children, black, white, and brown. It will be virtually *impossible* for Arkansas to make major gains in overall education in the future *if* the state fails to narrow or close the educational gaps by race and income. By 2010, almost 40 percent of K-12 students in the state will be African American, Latino or poor – black, brown and white. This segment of the student population is too large to ignore. They will be a growing majority of all students in many Arkansas counties. For this reason, the state as a whole will not be able to improve its overall educational achievement so long as the gaps by income and race persist in identifying the beneficiaries of educational achievement and resources.

The entire population of the state will pay a very high price if Arkansas fails to meet this challenge. Gone are the days (if ever they actually existed) when most people in a state could prosper if only a small percentage of adults and their children were adequately educated. Today, as in the past, education is the engine of progress. In the future, Arkansas' educational achievements must become much deeper, broader, and higher than in the past.

If the equity gaps close, all of Arkansas gains. A national report last year estimated that Arkansas would realize a gain of over \$1.6 billion in personal income and more than \$543 million in additional tax revenue if and when all of the state's racial and ethnic groups have roughly the same levels of educational achievement and the subsequent earning power

that advanced education produces. Over the next ten years, these numbers can start to become a reality – or remain a wasted opportunity.

In 1930, Arkansas provided its white children no more than 8 years of free schooling. Black children were offered much less. Forty years later, by 1970, the state required that all children go to school, and most children had 12 years of education in order to accelerate the state's progress and prosperity in modern times. 2010 will mark the end of another span of 40 years.

Can anyone truly doubt that a majority of Arkansas' children will need, at minimum, to have 14 to 16 years of adequate education in order to maintain the state's engine of progress?

Today the economic difference between a high school education and a college education is huge for individual families. Soon, on average, an Arkansas family with a parent who earns a bachelor's degree will have almost twice the annual income of a family with a parent who has only a high school diploma. That gap has been growing and will continue to enlarge. By the same token, states with higher levels of education today generally have the highest per capita incomes, the shortest recessions, and the lowest unemployment over time. During the next ten years, the advantages of a college degree will be much greater, and the disadvantages of lower levels of educational achievement will be much harsher.

Can anyone in Arkansas sincerely doubt that the state must ensure that far more than one-sixth of the 9th grade class of 2002 graduate from college in ten years, if both individuals and the state of Arkansas as a whole are to progress?

To meet the challenge, Arkansas must find new ways in the next few years to increase its investments in education and to assure that other education resources are adequately and fairly available to all students. This mandate will require more of many: more money for education, more parental involvement, more effective teaching, more community support, and more political wisdom to act in the best interests of the entire state.

As a prime guide for this new effort, Arkansas must make the successful education of African American students and poor students in grades K-12 a top priority, in fairness to these students and for the sake of the whole state's future. It is surely not the wish of Arkansans as a people that a person's chances for a good education and a good life should be decided at birth. It will be disastrous for all of Arkansas if the state's equity gap continues to widen in the future.

This pattern of low achievement is within the power of Arkansas to correct. For example, if the state's African American students in the 8th grade learn to write as well as black students in neighboring Texas, Arkansas' African American students as a group would out-perform Arkansas' white students. There is nothing separating the African American children of Arkansas and Texas except an invisible state line that creates differing policies, practices, and priorities.

In addition, the state of Arkansas should establish policies and practices that will provide every child in Arkansas with an *opportunity* to graduate with at least 16 years of adequate education. Seventy years ago in Arkansas, less than 8 years of education was the norm. Forty years later, in 1970, 12 years of education was necessary for both an individual's personal

reward and the state's whole progress. By 2010, after another 40 years, most Arkansans will need 14 to 16 years of education to keep pace.

There are, of course, several problems that students face in going onto college in Arkansas, but inadequate amounts of money for a college education is a factor that goes a long way in explaining Arkansas' failing rates of college retention and graduation. A recent study by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education reiterates the fact that students with "big aid packages" are four times more likely to graduate than others. Indeed, one study showed that 77 percent of students graduated from college in Arkansas when adequate financial assistance was available for 4-5 years. Therefore, finding ways to increase and to sustain need-based financial assistance, including an increase in grants and no-interest loans, must be another top priority for the state in the future.

Recommendations

This report does not offer a long list of specific recommendations for good programs and good public policy. Those are necessary for the state in order for education to improve, and this report's conclusions have identified changes that need support and attention. The greater task, however, is for the state to set a new enduring direction – to identify a few, fundamental goals which will guide education in the state as Arkansas parents, residents and public officials consider and adopt new policies and practices in the future. No single governor, no one legislative session, no one group can accomplish this new direction. Arkansas' leaders in government, education, business, community and the other sectors of civil society must come to an agreement on a few fundamental, long-range goals and maintain them as the enduring, defining terms for educational policy and practice in the state over the next decade.

We urge all of Arkansas as well as current and future leaders to consider the necessity and wisdom of three simple, overarching goals for Arkansas to achieve in ten years – by the year 2012:

- Close the educational resources gap by income in these areas:
 - per pupil expenditures
 - effective teachers and student support
 - challenging curriculum
 - teacher salaries
- Reduce by 75 percent the racial and income gaps in average test scores for writing, reading, math and science by the 4th, 8th and 10th grades.
- Double the percentage of college graduates in Arkansas from all population groups.

If Arkansas will consider and measure all public policies and practices by how well state leaders and educational systems pursue and progress toward three basic goals, Arkansas can begin to address the most vexing and dangerous problems in the state's future.

There are strategies that will help the state achieve these three goals. These strategies, too, can be simple but far-reaching. Among the most important strategies are:

1. Create a comprehensive, measurable “P-16” system of education that monitors and supports students' achievement from pre-school through college;
2. Improve teacher quality and supply;
3. Strengthen students' college readiness;
4. Assist financially needy students;
5. Establish a unified system of higher education.

The echoes of Arkansas' past can be heard today. The most valuable resource in Arkansas' future is already in the state. It is the human capital and the good citizenship that future generations can bring to the state's economy, politics, civil society, and communities. It is a resource that must not be limited by race or income, but it can be wasted by inaction, evasion, or business-as-usual. More than ever before, the entire state's future depends on how well Arkansas educates all of its children in the decade ahead.

recommendations

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Southern Education Foundation, Inc.
135 Auburn Avenue, N.E. Second Floor
Atlanta, Georgia, 30303
404-523-0001
www.sefatl.org