



MANAGEMENT ANALYSIS & PLANNING, INC.

**Preparing for an Era of Excellence:
A Management Appraisal of
The Arkansas Department
of Education**

Submitted to the
State of Arkansas
Bureau of Legislative Research
and
Department of Education

James R. Smith
Gerald C. Hayward
Margaret E. Torrey

November 20, 2004

Acknowledgments

Without the cooperation and candid observations of all the Arkansans we interviewed, and the willingness of ADE managers and employees to direct us to documents and other resources, this report would not have been possible. We are grateful to all who assisted. We want to specifically acknowledge the assistance provided by Bobbie Davis, Gale Gumholtz, Kim Chavis, Keller Noggle, and Representative Leroy Dangeau, all of whom went out of their way to see that we got the information we needed in a timely manner.

Introduction

Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) is confronted with the necessity to dramatically change its behavior and relationship with local school districts. State departments of education across the nation are facing similar changes; but in Arkansas, primarily because of a long tradition of local control of school districts, this change may be more abrupt and difficult for some ADE staff and local educators.¹

The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and recent Arkansas legislation, especially Act 1467 and Act 35, make clear that school districts will be held accountable for producing high quality student outcomes. Arkansas law and NCLB set forth an accountability system that requires clear statements of expectations in the form of state standards, frequent assessment of student progress in meeting those standards, public reporting of student outcomes, assistance for schools and districts struggling to produce desired outcomes, and real consequences for schools and districts unwilling or unable to produce desired outcomes. This system is a dramatic departure from a system when local districts set their own curriculum, operated with little intervention from the state level, and suffered few consequences if students failed to achieve.

In this environment, state departments of education must play a pivotal role—a role for which many ADE employees are not well prepared. Department staff must be able to help failing schools align curriculum with state standards and train local educators in instructional practices that will deliver that curriculum to a diverse student population in unique settings. One size no longer fits all, and none of this can be reduced to a checklist. Department employees have to be change agents and experts in curriculum and instruction.

Arkansas law makes clear the expectations for ADE. Code section 6-15-1006 requires:

- [The Department] shall be structured to provide leadership, service, and support to public schools.
- Staff shall demonstrate mastery of knowledge in learning theory, best educational practices, resource utilization, research and data analysis, school law, instructional leadership, and school administration.
- Staff shall conduct, sponsor, participate in, and support continuing education and professional development.

¹ All elements of the public school system are now accountable for producing high student outcomes. This is a fundamental shift from the current practice of measuring and monitoring inputs. Heretofore school districts could be in compliance with all laws and regulations, and still produce inferior student performance.

- [Staff] shall provide leadership in marshalling support for a quality and equitable educational system in the state.²

Arkansas expects much from its students, educators and schools. It is clear from recent increased per pupil spending that Arkansas is willing to pay more to bring about improved student outcomes. It also is clear from current student achievement that Arkansas still has a long way to go. It is MAP's assessment that the legal framework and basic resources are in place to move the state's education system forward. It also is our assessment that significant progress is unlikely without an appropriately staffed, adequately resourced, and well managed Department of Education.

We offer here a word of caution. Much of what follows is critical of the Arkansas Department of Education. This is largely because MAP used as its standard the type of organization that will be necessary for Arkansas to bring about the dramatic improvement in student outcomes the state wants and expects. Without a doubt, many ADE employees are talented, hardworking, and dedicated. In fact, from our experience working in and around state agencies across the nation, we find that ADE is probably no worse than the average state department of education or other state agency nationwide.

Background

Recognizing the important role of ADE in the changed education environment, the Legislature in Act 64 (2003) authorized an audit of the staffing needs of the Department of Education. On June 28, 2004, the Bureau of Legislative Research contracted with Management Analysis and Planning, Inc. (MAP) to conduct a management study of the Department. This report presents the results of that study.

MAP began this study by reviewing relevant laws, regulations, department budgets, annual reports of cooperatives, previous management studies of the department, and other relevant documents. During the week of July 11, three MAP consultants conducted interviews of ADE managers and staff. Approximately 130 broadly representative employees were interviewed. Tentative conclusions resulting from our review of documents and interviews of ADE employees were reported in the July 27, 2004 Preliminary Report to the Legislature. Lists of individuals and groups interviewed and interview questions were presented in that report.

Interviews of stakeholders, including legislators, legislative staff, business and community members, representatives of professional education associations, and state board of education members, were conducted the week of September 20, 2004. Lists of

² No interviewee mentioned this code section, leading us to surmise that its import is lost in the blizzard of code sections listing the duties, functions, and responsibilities of ADE. A summary of those code sections was prepared by the Legislative Research Bureau and is presented in Appendix A.

individuals and groups interviewed, and samples of interview questions are presented in Appendix B.

Beginning on September 20, 2004, the University of Arkansas, Little Rock, conducted a telephone survey of school district administrators. All district superintendents were contacted and invited to participate in the survey. A broadly representative sample of school principals also were contacted and invited to participate. Complete survey questions and results are presented in Appendix C.

Context

Most Arkansans we spoke with were optimistic about the future of public education in the state. Educators responding to the survey echoed this optimism, with approximately 90 percent of the respondents saying that public education in Arkansas had improved or greatly improved, and over 80 percent indicating that schools were in good or very good shape to deliver the quality education students will need 10 years from now.³ That optimism notwithstanding, Arkansas has a long way to go and faces significant challenges.

Many Arkansas schools enroll substantial populations of students that typically present unique teaching problems and concerns. Over half of Arkansas students are eligible for federally subsidized meals,⁴ and nearly 40 percent are minorities.

In 2003, student achievement in Arkansas lagged behind the national average on NAEP:⁵

- On the 4th grade mathematics assessment, the Arkansas state average of 229 was 5 points below the national average, and reading was 1 point under the national average.
- On the 8th grade mathematics assessment, Arkansas lagged the nation by 10 points, and reading lagged by 3 points.
- Science (2000) and writing (2002) scores were below the national average by 6 and 10 points, respectively.

Interestingly, nearly every department employee and lay stakeholder whom we interviewed rated the current general quality of education in the state at about a C grade, while nearly 80 percent of the superintendents and two thirds of the principals responding to the survey rated the general quality an A or B.⁶ We are not sure what to make of the disparity between the perceptions of local educators and the reality demonstrated by

³ Appendix C, survey questions 2 and 3.

⁴ Eligibility for federal free or reduced price meals is a generally accepted measure of poverty.

⁵ The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), as the only measure common to all states, is the best metric to compare relative performance.

⁶ Appendix C, survey question 1.

NAEP scores. Clearly there currently is more room for improvement than one would expect to find in a system rated A or B.

Even though Arkansas students consistently score below the national average on all NAEP tests, there is evidence that mathematics and reading scores are headed in the right direction. Fourth grade mathematics scores have increased 19 points since 1992, 8th grade mathematics scores have risen 10 points since 1990, and reading scores have risen by 3 points and 2 points over similar periods.⁷

While no causal relationship to student achievement should be implied, Arkansas's expenditure per pupil is consistently below the national average. Even including the significant infusion of funding for the current year, it is likely that Arkansas spends roughly \$1600 per pupil less than the national average.⁸ This implies that Arkansas school districts and ADE need to focus on cost-effective interventions, with little margin for error. The Department and local districts will need to cease low-payoff activities and redirect resources to activities that are more likely to produce improved student outcomes. It further implies that ADE and local districts will need to better manage the resources available.

Another contextual issue that is seen by some as an impediment to progress is governance. Governance of education in Arkansas is complex, and determining clear lines of authority and responsibility is not always easy. Factors complicating Arkansas's governance structure include:

- There is apparently some confusion among district administrators about the role of the State Board of Education. A majority of superintendents and principals (56 percent and 55 percent, respectively⁹) reported that the roles and responsibilities of the State Board had not been clearly communicated to them.
- Unlike most other states, Arkansas has a separate Department of Workforce Education and Career Opportunities, headed by a Director responsible to and working under a separate board. This splitting of the vocational and technical education responsibilities apparently causes little concern with the field. Almost two-thirds of the Superintendents and over half the principals rated these dual roles as either effective or very effective.
- Recently the Legislature introduced further complication by establishing a separate Division of Public School Accountability with a Director not accountable or responsible to the Director of Education, but selected by and

⁷ <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/states/profile.asp>

⁸ Differences among states in spending should be viewed in the context of relative costs, and Arkansas's cost of living, being among the lowest in the nation, causes this number to be somewhat overstated. The fact remains that Arkansas does spend significantly less per pupil than the national average.

⁹ Appendix C, survey question 55.

reporting to the State Board of Education. Almost two-thirds of the superintendents found this arrangement to be ineffective or very ineffective. Principals were more optimistic; over half thought this arrangement could be effective or very effective.¹⁰

- The Legislature has also created a separate Division of Public School Facilities with a director not accountable to or responsible to the Director of Education, but selected by and reporting to the State Board of Education. Superintendents and principals felt very differently on this issue as well. Two-thirds of superintendents rated it as ineffective or very ineffective, while principals were more sanguine, with almost 60 percent rating it as effective or very effective.
- Finally, multi-county Education Service Cooperatives carry out some state functions and house some ADE employees. These regional cooperatives have proven very popular with superintendents and principals: Over 90 percent of each group rated the cooperatives as very useful or somewhat useful in assisting school districts to improve student achievement. When asked to rate the current situation, in which the co-ops are not a part of the department, more than 75 percent¹¹ of the respondents found the current arrangement either effective or very effective.

Ideally, lines of authority and accountability would be clearer. The responsibilities of the State Board of Workforce Education and Career Opportunities could be shifted to the State Board, and the director's position could be eliminated, giving clear authority to the Director for all of K-12 education. The new and separate divisions for accountability and facilities and the new director positions could be eliminated, thus giving clear lines of authority and responsibility to the Director of Education for the overall operation of the agency. The Education Service Cooperatives could be more closely linked with the Department of Education, performing as a truly intermediate unit between the state and local districts.

On the other hand, districts and schools (as represented by their administrative leaders) have little concern about the separate Department for Workforce Education and Career Opportunities. They are also pleased by the current arrangements with Education Service Cooperatives. While districts and schools share concern over the new Divisions of Accountability and Facilities, legislators with whom we spoke were equally convinced that the new configuration would be salutary.

The complex lines of authority and difficulty affixing responsibility are not unique to Arkansas. For example, compared to California, which has a Secretary of Education appointed by the governor, a Superintendent of Public Instruction elected by the people, and a State Board of Education appointed by the governor that oversees the superintendent but not the secretary, the Arkansas system is a model of clarity. It is often

¹⁰ Appendix C, survey question 53.

¹¹ Appendix C, survey question 51.

tempting to identify these kinds of arrangements as the source of all problems and to recommend wholesale governance changes. However, our experience in other states has led us to be cautious about recommending changes in governance for two reasons. First, governance arrangements are often not the real problems but mask the underlying problems that most often reflect lack of mission clarity, and management and communication problems. Secondly, changing governance arrangements may be the most tempting solution, but it is among the most difficult to enact. Governance arrangements often reflect long-standing practices or firmly held beliefs. One observer has likened changing governance arrangements to “relocating a cemetery.”

Basic Principles

MAP believes there are several basic principles that are fundamental to effective state educational organizations. First and foremost, they must focus specifically on *teaching and learning* and must develop all organizational features and strategies around the mission of achieving quality in those two areas.

Secondly, schools and districts need *strong state leadership and assistance* to redesign their instructional and curricular activities to meet the goals of better teaching and higher levels of student achievement. Educational reform legislation at both the federal and state levels mandates higher achievement for all students and substantially raises the stakes for educators. Therefore, Department of Education leadership and support activities must target building local capacity specifically to meet those requirements. This implies an educational system that invests heavily in ongoing, in-depth training of its employees.

All Department personnel must have:

- An internalized understanding of the Department’s shared mission
- Leadership that guides all of activities and resources in this direction
- Expertise in curriculum and instructional best practices
- The ability to share that expertise with other adults who have varying abilities and resources

ADE’s laser focus on improving teaching and learning also will inevitably result in the significantly changed priorities for how resources are used. All efforts must be concentrated on that goal, and not diluted by assessing, monitoring, and reporting less important requirements.

Professional development programs need to focus specifically on helping teachers learn and teach the new standards. This requires extensive training geared to the specific subject matter and grade level. This change is not just one more issue to include in one more class; it is the new curriculum for all professional development offerings.

ADE is likely never to have sufficient resources to be the sole provider of professional development to local educators, nor is there a good case for them to be the only provider. Thus ADE has a crucial role to play in helping multiple providers update their programs, infuse the new standards, and focus on student achievement gains. An important part of the Department's delivery strategy needs to be aimed at providing the necessary training, materials, and support to cooperatives and others to ensure that all service providers are delivering reinforcing messages. ADE should make every effort to ensure that all organizations providing assistance to local districts deliver a common message about teaching and learning, and subscribe to the same high standards of content and delivery.

ADE cannot afford to treat all districts the same. Not all school districts have the same level of need. It is almost certain that many school districts need little assistance from the Department. (Some may even serve as exemplars for the Department and other districts.) Other districts exhibit extreme need. Given inevitably limited resources, ADE must target the schools and districts most in need of assistance. Performance results should determine priorities. Little attention and few resources should be devoted to high performing schools and districts.

Current capacity of ADE

There is strong consensus among educators in the Department and other stakeholders that ADE is not well positioned to provide the support school districts need to meet the expectations implied by current state and federal laws. This consensus was reinforced by responses to the survey. Only 36 percent of the surveyed superintendents thought the Department was in good or very good shape to influence the quality of education students will need 10 years from now. Principals were more confident, with 59 percent selecting good or very good shape.¹²

But ADE did not score highly on even the basic functions that one would expect from any state agency, let alone a state agency expected to improve student outcomes. Sixty-two percent of superintendents and 43 percent of principals rated the competency and professionalism of the Department as average or poor.¹³ Eighty percent of the superintendents and 67 percent of the principals rated the Department as average or poor at providing timely and accurate information¹⁴.

Similar responses were given to a series of questions regarding the basic functions of the Department, with superintendents being slightly more critical than principals. In general, the ADE was viewed as average or poor on each function. These are basic bureaucratic functions, not the high-level teaching- and learning-related functions that the Department must ultimately master. It is apparent that the ADE is not perceived as an effectively

¹² Appendix C, survey question 6.

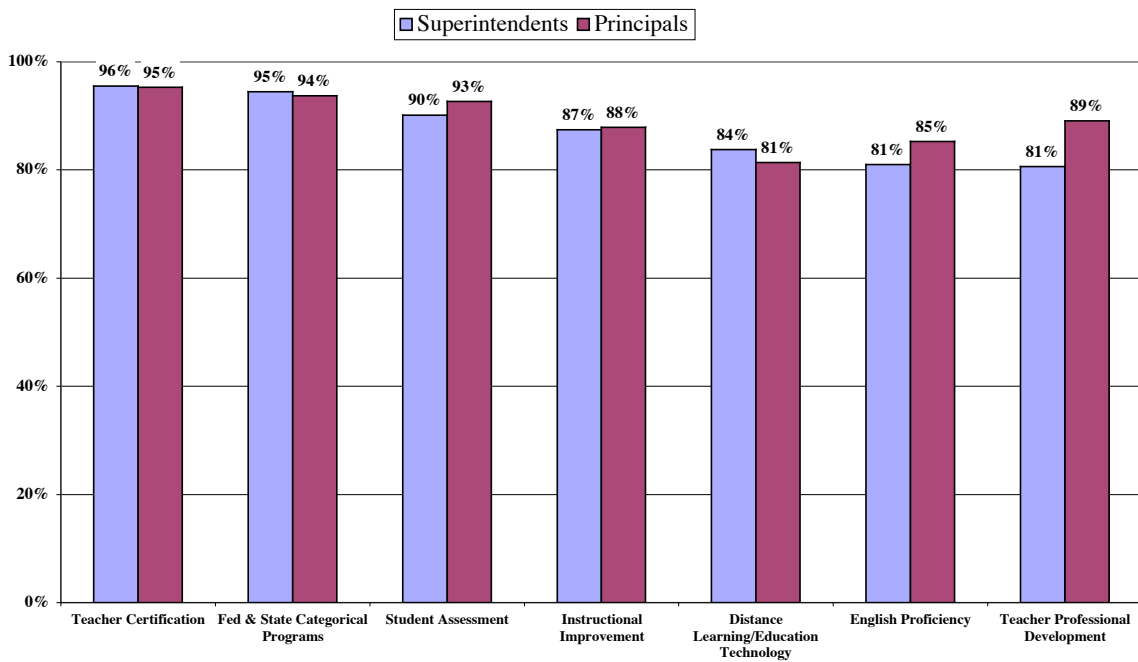
¹³ Appendix C, survey question 7.

¹⁴ Appendix C, survey question 11.

managed organization. If the State is to hold school districts to high standards of management, it is only appropriate that the Department of Education exemplify those standards.

While local educators indicated concern about ADE’s effectiveness, they clearly expressed a strong degree of need for assistance from ADE¹⁵. Among the areas where assistance was desired was professional development, budgeting and accounting, student assessment, distance learning, curriculum, and instruction. Local educators need help and look to ADE to provide it. This perceived need is undoubtedly motivated by local educators’ realization that they are now accountable for student performance and accurate fiscal reporting and management.

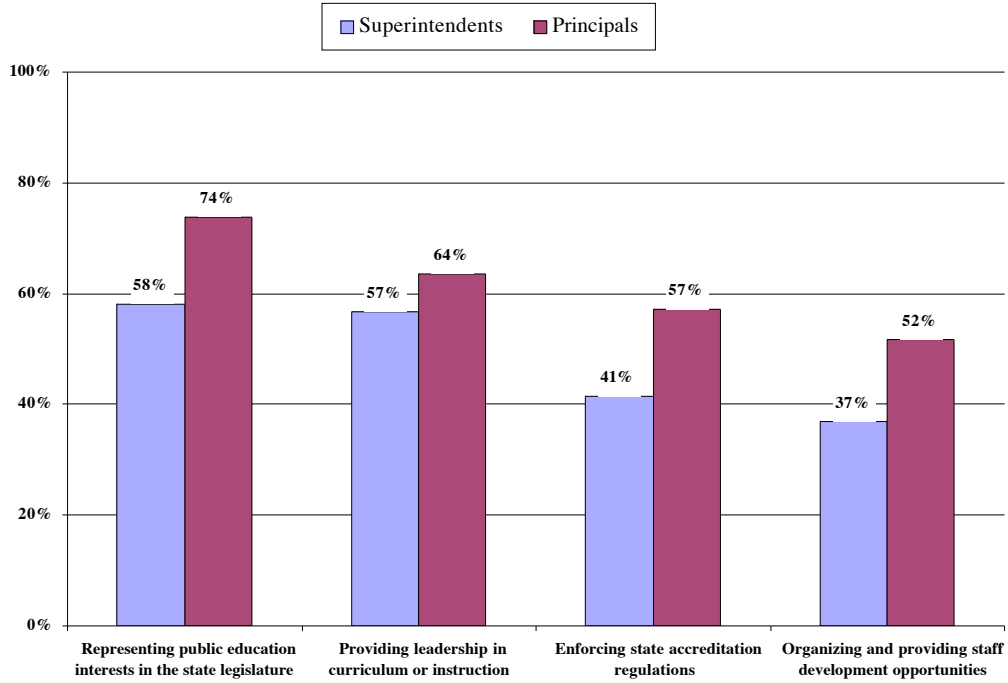
Figure 1: Areas in Which ADE Assistance is "Very Needed" or "Somewhat Needed"



¹⁵ Appendix C, survey questions 61 through 78.

Figure 2¹⁶ similarly demonstrates that local educators look to ADE for leadership and assistance in several other key areas.

Figure 2: ADE Functions That Should Be a "Very High Priority"



¹⁶ Appendix C, Survey questions 17 through 27.

Findings

Below we report what we believe are the most important findings resulting from our study. We have attempted to restrict the list to a manageable number and to focus on the issues that are most critical to improving the effectiveness of the Department of Education. The findings are listed in approximate descending order of importance and priority.

Finding: ADE salaries are too low to attract and retain quality personnel.

Code section 6-15-1006¹⁷ is a very good description of the skill set ADE employees will need if they are to provide the support necessary to meet citizens' expectations for improved student outcomes and improved fiscal management. It is likely that some ADE employees working with schools do not possess these skills, and quite clear that ADE is unable to offer salaries that will attract and retain personnel with the expertise and experience to meet the expectations of Code section 6-15-1006 and to improve student outcomes in Arkansas schools.

Act 90, Section 3 (a)(3) (C) requires that "Qualifications and salary levels of the department's staff shall be comparable to those of similar employees in school districts or in other state education agencies." A review of ADE's recent attempts to hire Grade 21 personnel indicates that it is likely that Office of Personnel Management and the Personnel/Pay Plan Subcommittee of the Joint Budget Committee consider almost exclusively the last six words of that requirement and give short shrift to any comparisons to the qualifications and salary levels in school districts.

A relevant comparison group for any ADE staff charged with providing substantive assistance to local school districts, especially assistance aimed at improving teaching and learning, is elementary and secondary school principals and perhaps assistant superintendents. Only rarely would classroom teachers possess the requisite skills, knowledge and experience. It is principals and assistant superintendents who, by virtue of their duties, are likely to possess the skill set described in 6-15-1006. It is for that reason

¹⁷ Code section 6-15-1006 requires:

[The Department] shall be structured to provide leadership, service, and support to public schools.

Staff shall demonstrate mastery of knowledge in learning theory, best educational practices, resource utilization, research and data analysis, school law, instructional leadership, and school administration.

Staff shall conduct, sponsor, participate in, and support continuing education and professional development.

[Staff] shall provide leadership in marshalling support for a quality and equitable educational system in the state.

that ADE needs to offer salaries at least competitive with salaries paid principals in Arkansas school districts.

Table 1: Salaries paid in Arkansas districts with enrollments of 3,000-3,999

	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
HS Prin	\$ 63,772	\$ 67,532	\$ 69,541	\$ 71,905	\$ 74,284
HS AP	\$ 50,944	\$ 54,506	\$ 56,914	\$ 59,095	\$ 59,660
JH Prin	\$ 57,261	\$ 60,378	\$ 62,774	\$ 65,607	\$ 65,753
JH AP	\$ 47,630	\$ 50,435	\$ 51,799	\$ 54,568	\$ 55,749
Elem Prin	\$ 53,438	\$ 56,427	\$ 58,133	\$ 59,618	\$ 60,815
Elem AP	\$ 43,688	\$ 44,707	\$ 46,483	\$ 49,160	\$ 51,163
Average	\$ 52,789	\$ 55,664	\$ 57,607	\$ 59,992	\$ 61,237
Teacher	\$ 35,118	\$ 35,769	\$ 37,167	\$ 37,769	\$ 38,813
Annualized	\$ 42,142	\$ 42,923	\$ 44,600	\$ 45,323	\$ 46,576

Source: Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators

In 2000-03 high school principals in medium sized (3000-3999) school districts were paid, on average, \$74,284, middle school principals were paid \$65,753, and elementary principals \$60,815. The average salary of all school-level administrators in these school districts, including assistant principals was \$61,237.¹⁸ Classroom teachers were paid \$38,813 for approximately 10 months. An annualized salary for teachers would be \$46,576.¹⁹

¹⁸ Policymakers should keep in mind that salaries set at an average of comparison groups will, all else being equal, attract individuals paid at less than average. Such a practice thus attracts those who are less experienced and less qualified than average. It is not a strategy to attract and retain the best.

¹⁹ It is unrealistic to expect a teacher who is paid \$38,313 for 10 months to work for the same amount or only slightly more for 12 months. The only rational choice, if the goal is to hire qualified personnel, is to compare annualized salaries.

Table 2: Average salaries paid Grades 21 and 22 in Arkansas Department of Education

	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
Grade 21	\$ 43,280	\$ 44,183	\$ 44,601	\$ 45,557
Grade 22	\$ 48,872	\$ 50,145	\$ 50,767	\$ 51,920

Source: Salary data provided by Andrew Bass, Bureau of Legislative Research

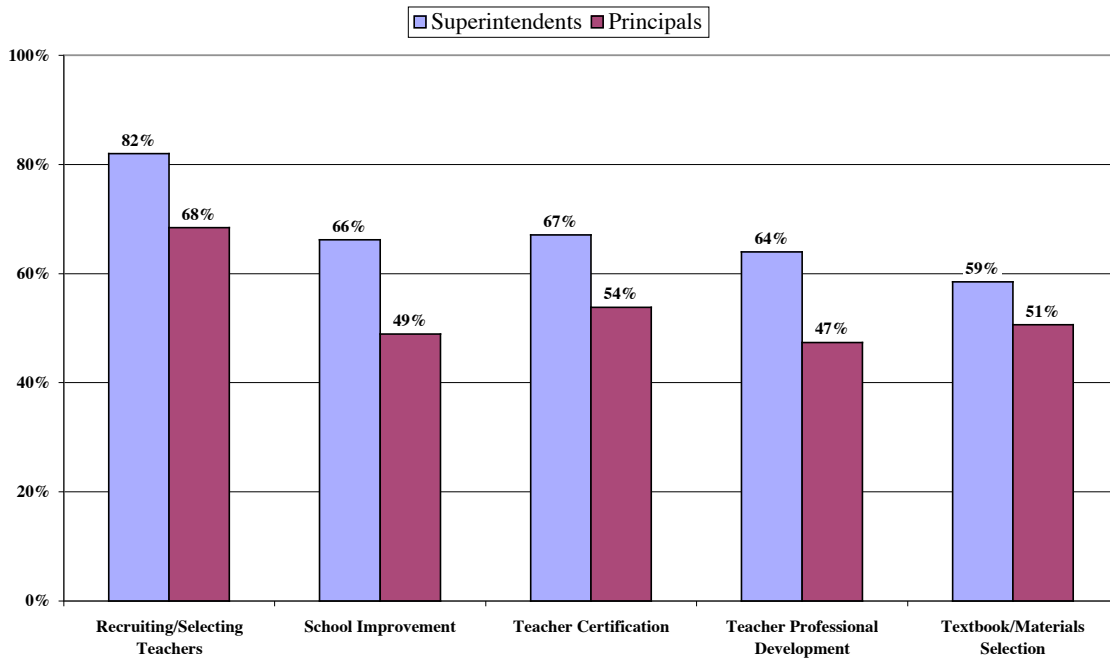
Grade 21 typically is the state rank of professional educators who work with local school districts. Grade 22 typically is the state rank for first-level supervisors. Table 2, above, displays the average annual salary paid by ADE to Grades 21 and 22 for the current and previous three years. It is apparent that the average salary paid ADE Grade 21s is not even competitive with the average annualized salary for classroom teachers in medium-sized districts.

It also is unlikely that a professional paid for skills commensurate with a \$45,000 salary will command the respect of a high school principal paid for skills commensurate with a salary of \$74,000, even if the principal's school is failing. The ADE employee is expected to possess the superior skills necessary to support and assist a principal in a failing school, but it is rare that a person willing to work for \$45,000 will possess those skills. ADE Grade 21 and 22 salaries are significantly lower than the average of all school level administrators in medium-sized districts.

Comparisons with salaries paid by larger districts are even starker. It should come as no surprise that ADE staff are not perceived as possessing the skills necessary to assist local educators with critical functions, that highly skilled ADE employees leave for jobs in local districts, and that ADE is unable to fill several vacant positions. In fact, educators responding to the survey generally rated ADE employee expertise in key areas as average or poor.²⁰

²⁰ Appendix C, survey questions 28 through 42.

Figure 3: "Average" or "Poor" Ratings of ADE Staff Expertise



MAP discovered a unique situation related to salary constraints. Even though the state is extensively involved in developing and implementing a very sophisticated testing system, there are no psychometricians²¹ employed by the Department. ADE relies entirely on testing contractors for that expertise and receives no independent advice on the technical properties of the testing system. Given the high stakes consequences associated with student assessment, this seems to be a major vulnerability for the state. Because psychometricians are highly skilled and are in high demand, it is unlikely that such experts could be attracted to ADE at even the top salary in Grade 21.

With the exception of the director, the salaries of highest-level administrators in the Department are fairly competitive with those in local districts. Assistant directors are paid \$84,307, which compares favorably with the \$86,099 paid to assistant superintendents in the largest districts, as well as the \$76,409 paid to assistant superintendents in medium-sized districts. The director's salary is more problematic. In order to attract Dr. James from his previous employment, a group of private individuals provided funding to augment his \$119,768 state salary. We know of no precedent for such an arrangement, and caution that it may have unforeseen ramifications if permitted to continue.

A corollary problem is that the state personnel system permits limited opportunity for salary increases once an employee is hired. There exists no incentive for employees to improve their worth to the organization. The range of Grade 21 is \$29,540 to \$56,564,

²¹ Testing experts

and there are ADE employees paid at every point in between. It was reported to us that it is not uncommon for two employees with nearly identical responsibility to receive significantly different salaries. Even when exceptional employees are rewarded with a promotion, their salary increase cannot exceed 8 percent. Thus, an employee hired at the low end of a range is forever relegated to that relative salary regardless of enhanced experience, greater responsibility, or improved productivity. At the very least, this situation creates morale problems.

ADE managers are painfully aware of the dysfunctional salary system, but are powerless to ameliorate its effects. All salaries above the lowest ranges in each grade must be approved first by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), and subsequently by the Personnel/Pay Plan Subcommittee of the Joint Budget Committee. It appears as if the former is unwilling to consider real market comparisons when recommending salaries, and the legislature generally accepts the recommendation of OPM.

Finding: ADE probably has authorized sufficient positions to fulfill its mission.

For at least three reasons, this finding is tentative. First, inadequate basic management tends to render personnel utilization inefficient. Second, too many personnel resources are devoted to low-payoff activities and not enough to high-payoff activities. Finally, some employees probably lack the necessary skills to engage in high-payoff activities. Until these three issues are sorted out, any estimate of the number of personnel required must be tentative.

The above notwithstanding, ADE-authorized positions have grown from 319 in 1999-2000 to 408 in the current year. This number is somewhat misleading since some positions remain unfilled at any given time. However, given the size of Arkansas, the number of employees in the state education agency compares favorably with that of other states.²²

Finding: The Department's management falls short of the excellence required for the future on a number of important dimensions.

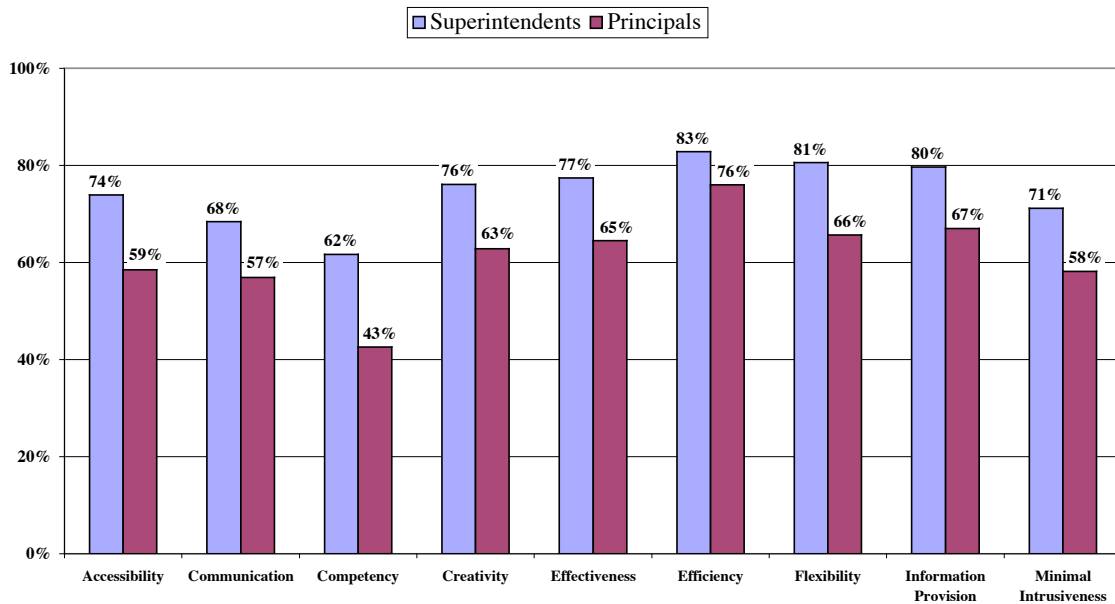
The State is clear that it expects excellence from its school districts and students. It should expect no less from the Arkansas Department of Education. Although the Department has many dedicated staff, few, even within the Department, rate the Department's overall performance as "Excellent." In the field, only 1.4 percent of the superintendents and 4.2 percent of the principals gave the Department an "A" grade in

²² Cross-state comparisons are very difficult because of the different functions housed in the department of education. For example, in most states, vocational education would be contained in the department of education. In some states, employees of special schools would be part of the state education agency.

overall performance.²³ In helping districts and schools provide high-quality education to their students—the most important task in which the Department can be engaged—only 1 of the 222 superintendents in the state said the Department was doing a “Very Good Job.”²⁴ Only three of the superintendents and fewer than 6 percent of the principals thought the Department “Is in Very Good Shape” to influence the quality of education students will need 10 years from now.”²⁵

Our purpose here is not to criticize the many dedicated, hardworking, and competent professionals in the Department, but to show that the distance is great between current perceptions and the conditions necessary for the Department to play its role in improving student outcomes in Arkansas. On any number of dimensions, a large number of respondents rated the department as average or poor (as opposed to excellent or good):²⁶

Figure 4: "Average" or "Poor" Ratings of ADE Characteristics and Practices



If Arkansas expects its schools to achieve, the Department of Education must demonstrate a higher level of performance. As our interviews reflected, there are many capable and dedicated employees and managers in the department. However, their

²³ Appendix C, survey question 4.

²⁴ Appendix C, survey question 5.

²⁵ Appendix C, survey question 6.

²⁶ Appendix C, survey questions 7 through 16.

potential may not be fully realized given the current structure and operating procedures within the agency. Even the best orchestra cannot make beautiful music without sheet music and leadership.

In the sections that follow, MAP breaks down this general finding into discrete findings related to the most pressing management-related barriers to excellent performance. These include: vision, mission, planning, budgeting, supervision, personnel strategies, organizational structure, assessment, data collection, accountability, and communication. The Recommendations section will address each of these issues separately.

Finding: Planning, budgeting, and supervision at ADE do not appear to be driven by a clear, universally shared vision or sense of mission.

While ADE employees seem to share a desire to help local schools improve, our interviews indicated that no clear vision or mission drives day-to-day actions of units and individuals. Each unit (and in some cases each individual) tends to determine a separate vision and mission. For example, federally funded units tend to be guided by federal requirements, rather than viewing federal programs as supportive of an overall mission to improve instruction for eligible students, consistent with Arkansas standards and strategies.

Nowhere was the lack of guiding vision and mission more apparent than in the basic functions of planning, budgeting, and supervision. Our interviews revealed that some units carefully planned projects and activities, while others did not. In either case, almost universally, the plans of units were not seen as an integral part of a whole. We found that unit budgets were “assigned,” rather than being developed to reflect overall ADE priorities. It was reported to us that some unit managers paid little attention to their budgets, and over-spent with full anticipation that any shortfall would be made up from elsewhere. It was further reported that supervision and expectations for employees tended to vary from manager to manager.

As we discuss elsewhere, ADE employees consistently told us that they had little idea of what other units did or even what Department policy was on particular issues. This is a direct consequence of employees not knowing and internalizing a shared vision and mission.

Finding: The Department does not have a comprehensive personnel strategy.

An education agency’s most important asset is its people. It is impossible to conceive of an excellent operation without excellent staff working in an environment that fosters excellence. Much of the department’s personnel problems are a function of its inability to attract the best possible staff due to its inability to offer competitive salaries and working conditions. But in addition, MAP finds that the lack of an integrated, aggressive human resources strategy that promotes excellence is a major hindrance to improved

performance. Generally speaking, our interviews and observations found that the Department lacked the following components of a human resource development plan for improving the capacity of its employees.

- **Recruitment.** This report documents the difficulty in hiring qualified employees because of salary differential (see pages 11-13). That condition makes a strategy of recruiting employees especially important. We saw no evidence of a strategic plan for the recruitment of new employees.
- **Induction.** New employees are rarely introduced to or enlightened in any way about their general duties, expectations, or to others within the agency when they are hired. As one interviewee described it, “We just show up and are expected to induct ourselves.” New employees are not systematically given information about what is expected of them as department employees, and some are not even adequately introduced to the tasks they are expected to perform. The agency supposes, at least implicitly, that induction is a process of osmosis and that employees will learn by trial and error. The period shortly after hiring is the most productive time to introduce the agency’s vision, its mission, how the division the employee works for fits into the total organization’s picture, and most importantly, how the employee’s job fits into the total agency picture. That opportunity is missed in ADE.
- **Professional Development.** Professional development opportunities for ADE employees are woefully inadequate. The state requires that teachers receive a minimum of 60 hours of professional development per year. Apparently, the state has adopted a similar requirement for credentialed employees of the department. However, we know of no strategic department-wide plan to implement this requirement in a manner consistent with the Department’s mission. There were almost universal complaints about the quality of the few professional activities that are available. Our interviewees often reported that professional development activities are low level and are not aligned with the Department strategic goals, or with substantially improving the quality of the agency’s workforce.
- **Performance Appraisals.** Agencies that expect to be excellent must conduct honest, frequent, fair, and consistent employee evaluation policies that result in consequences, both positive and negative, for employees. MAP’s interviewees reported decidedly uneven evaluation practices. Some employees reported that they received annual evaluations that helped them make improvements. Others reported evaluations that were rare or even nonexistent. (One employee of 12 years had yet to be evaluated.) Others reported that the evaluations were conducted, but were “pro forma” and had no direct link to improving employee performance. Still others objected to the inconsistency between different divisions in the standards used for evaluation. Finally, a few employees reported that they were ineligible for bonuses because their supervisor had failed to evaluate them.

- **Promotion.** Employees also reported that promotional opportunities were limited, and that systematic career ladders were nonexistent. As one employee noted, “Where you are hired is where you stay.”

Finding: The Department’s organizational structure does not appear to be based on logical grouping of functions.

The ADE’s organizational structure and reporting relationships, rather than following a logical grouping of functions, appear to have evolved under the influence of other factors (such as personal relationships, perhaps). Special Education and Child Nutrition report to the assistant director for Internal Administration. The Academic Standards and Assessment unit primarily is concerned with curriculum and assessment, but is currently housed in the Accountability Unit. Similarly, Professional Quality Enhancement and Teacher Recruitment are located in the Accountability Unit. The Charter Schools unit is located in Information and Technology, but the Arkansas Public School Comprehensive Network (APSCN) is housed in Internal Administration. Little in the current organizational structure implies that teaching and learning are the central mission of the Department.

Finding: Assessment efforts are fragmented across several different units and organizations, and no one at the Department has the expertise to oversee testing contractors or analyze assessment results.

Testing is important in Arkansas. Arkansas mandates a statewide assessment program, administered annually to measure reading, writing, and mathematics, including developmentally appropriate assessments in kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd grades; criterion-referenced testing in grades 3 through 8; norm-referenced testing in grades 3 through 9; end-of-course exams for Algebra I, Geometry, and literacy; and participation in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

A number of high-stakes decisions rest on these test results: school and district report card ratings, individual academic plans, school improvement plans, the determination of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), and the development of relevant remediation at every level. Ratings on the report cards will be based on test score improvement, and on actual annual test performance.

The determination of AYP is based on graduation rate and the percentage of students in a number of separate categories scoring proficient on end-of-course tests in high school. In grades 3 through 8, AYP depends on attendance and the percentage of students (again, in a number of categories) scoring proficient on the state criterion-referenced test. Performance on AYP goals is determined in the School Improvement and Instruction division of ADE.

The determination of schools in academic distress is based solely on the criterion of having 75 percent or more of students scoring below basic on the state criterion-referenced test and are identified by the Accountability division of ADE.

Clearly, testing is important for decision-making at ADE. However, ADE does not employ a single psychometrician, or individual with specific expertise in this area. Contracts with various testing companies are monitored in-house by ADE staff without such expertise, and student achievement data are housed and analyzed at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville.

Finding: The current arrangement and number of parties involved in data collection, storage, and use often result in inconsistent answers to data requests from schools and the Department, as well as a limited ability to analyze and work with student achievement information.

Entities involved in data collection and analysis include the Arkansas Public School Comprehensive Network (APSCN) in the Internal Administration Unit at ADE; the Office of Research, Management, and Evaluation (ORME), located at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville; and the Information and Technology (IT) unit of ADE. Not only are the players located in different organizational units both inside and outside the ADE, but they are all in different geographical locations. The responsibilities of these entities break down as follows:

- APSCN connects all schools with the ADE; maintains district and school financial information and the student management system that includes information on student attendance, discipline, transcripts, report cards, and demographics; contains no student achievement data from standardized testing; collects data from schools and districts seven times a year; and pulls data used for annual reports and sends it to the IT unit.
- The IT unit receives financial and student management data from APSCN and posts it on the Web, creates programs to generate pre-packaged reports for Web users, and receives student achievement data CDs from the testing contractor, which it then sends to ORME for analysis.
- ORME analyzes student standardized testing data for such purposes as report card ratings and AYP.

This complex arrangement causes problems for two main reasons:

1. Specific data requests cannot be processed by the Department or by Web users without the involvement of ORME. For example, it would be impossible to compare the achievement of male African-American 8th graders at two middle schools with data housed at ADE. The ADE data set could compare the number of African-American males at each school, but not their achievement levels.

2. Information requests from external constituents often result in inconsistent answers. For example, if the same information is requested from a school and the department on the same day, answers may be different because at that point in time, the two sets of data are different. APSCN and IT update data only seven times a year (at data collection times), while, schools update their information continually, reflecting changing enrollment numbers.

Finding: There appears to be some ambiguity about the role of the Division of Public School Accountability established by Act 90.

Act 90 requires that a Division of Public School Accountability be created and that a director be hired by October 1, 2004. The new division will report to the State Board of Education, and will be created by transfer of positions from the Department of Education. At the time of this writing the director had not been named and the division had not been created. Based on extensive interviews with legislators and ADE administrators, there are fundamental differences of understanding about the meaning of the role and duties of the new division enumerated in Act 90.²⁷ Until these differences are resolved or the ambiguities are removed, it is unlikely that the new division will operate in the manner intended by the Legislature.

Finding: The Department lacks an adequate communication strategy

In every aspect of MAP's study, communication was cited as a major problem that permeates and negatively impacts all the activities in which the Department is currently engaged. ADE's communication problems are manifest in at least three ways. First there is a failure of top management to effectively communicate with lower levels in the organization (commonly described as vertical communication). Second, there is a problem of horizontal communication between and among units within the department. Employees in one unit rarely have any idea of what goes on in another unit elsewhere in the department. The third communication problem is related to ADE's ability to convey messages to important constituencies outside of the department.

ADE interviewees consistently told us that decisions made by the director and assistant directors rarely were conveyed to lower levels of the organization. In some cases, this may be a result of lack of trust of lower level employees; probably more frequently, it is a function of upper-management workload and a lack of systematic procedures for communicating decisions and policies.

²⁷ Local educators have expressed reservations about spinning off the accountability function to another division. More than 65 percent of superintendents responded in the survey that they thought the arrangement would be somewhat or very ineffective. Principals were less concerned, with only 41 percent responding similarly (Appendix C, survey question 53).

Stakeholders of all types reported to MAP what some called the “bouncing” problem. Typically, an individual would call the department with a problem and be bounced from one division to another until either an answer was given or the caller gave up in frustration. In one case, a superintendent recounted six different references ending with being bounced back to the original contact person in the department. Another reported problem occurs when districts or schools “shop” among staffers in the Department until they receive an answer to their liking. Such situations are symptoms of inadequate attention to vertical and horizontal communication.

Educators alone cannot bring about the necessary changes in student performance. Parents, legislators, employers, foundations, and other citizens all play a role in this important process. Improving student outcomes is a societal issue that requires the support of informed citizens. Currently the department does not have a coherent strategy for informing and garnering the support of important constituencies.

Finding: The current district and school monitoring system is not cost-effective.

School districts and schools must submit annual evidence of compliance with standards for accreditation. This is largely a “checklist” process of measuring the existence of various inputs. It is not an evaluation of the quality of education provided in Arkansas schools. There is no practical experience or research evidence that the variables currently monitored will produce improved student outcome.

On-site reviews for compliance are made every two years, or more frequently if the ADE has reason to believe that the school or district has fallen below standard. Accreditation standards cover all policies mandated by statute or regulation. They include everything from judging the grade level appropriateness and relevance to standards of the academic materials being used, to determining whether the building has a flag out front. Schools or districts that fail to meet standards may be cited or put on probation based on the severity of the unmet standard and/or the time elapsed since the standard was last met.

The current system looks at too many relatively unimportant requirements, leaving far too little time and resources to focus on the priority issues of quality teaching and improved student learning. A school can fly the flag at the appropriate place and time and have bullying posters in place, but still have a curriculum not aligned with state standards and an instructional program that fails to meet the needs of its student population.

The current monitoring system’s attempt to look at the “age appropriateness” of instruction and materials through limited classroom visits is insufficient. The current monitoring staff does not appear to have the necessary expertise in subject matter, curriculum, and instruction to make the critical judgments necessary to evaluate instructional programs, let alone provide the kind of technical assistance to improve teaching and learning.

Finding: Monitoring of various programs is not coordinated and can unnecessarily disrupt instruction.

Each federal program requires some level of site monitoring. Currently each program operates on its own schedule of site visits. Schools can have instruction disrupted four or five times per year, as they're monitored by four or five separate programs.

Finding: Accreditation visits are conducted without consideration of school district need.

All school districts are monitored every two years. Some school districts face far greater need for close oversight than others and possess too few resources to make necessary program improvements. While it may be necessary to monitor all school districts, based on experience, it is predictable that some are more likely to be compliant than others. It is not a prudent use of limited state resources to treat all districts as if they had the same level of need for state oversight.

Finding: The ADE facilities located on Capitol Mall are crowded, lack adequate storage, and are not designed to accommodate modern technology.

Most ADE personnel are housed in three buildings on Capitol Mall, and most of them are in spaces designed for fewer people and far less technology. As a result, most units are in cramped, inefficient space with far too little storage space. Several units are located in six other facilities in and around Little Rock. For the most part, these facilities are more modern and more efficient than those on Capitol Mall.²⁸ Approximately 33 ADE employees are out-stationed in cooperatives or school districts. MAP did not visit these locations. Apparently the nature of the facilities in which a unit is housed has more to do with funding sources than any other factor. Typically, federally funded programs allow rent charges, and for that reason, for example, Special Education and Child Nutrition are at remote locations. We did find, however, that virtually all employees had access to adequate computers and other technology.²⁹

We do not want to imply that state employees should be housed in luxurious facilities, but crowding, lack of storage, and similar problems tend to cause problems in both efficiency and morale.

²⁸ A possible exception is the Executive Building, 2020 W. Third Street, which houses the Child Nutrition Unit. This facility is approximately as crowded and outdated as the Capitol Mall buildings.

²⁹ We did note that at the time of our interviews, the Department's e-mail system was not fully functional because of technical problems with the State system.

Finding: Educational Cooperatives play an important role in the delivery of support to local districts.

ADE provides nearly \$34 million in grants and houses approximately 30 staff in cooperatives. In addition to this substantial amount provided by the state, cooperatives generate revenue from local school districts by “selling” services needed by the districts. The regionally located cooperatives appear to be a cost-effective and popular service delivery mechanism that offers ADE the potential of leveraging its limited resources. Almost 94 percent of superintendents and 91 percent of principals responding to the survey rated cooperatives as very or somewhat useful in helping school districts improve student achievement.³⁰ Approximately 85 percent of the superintendents and 75 percent of the principals found the current relationship very or somewhat effective.³¹

While there is, for the most part, a close working relationship between the Department and the cooperatives, the cooperatives are not managed by ADE. In spite of the strong endorsement by educators responding to the survey, our interviews suggest that the quality of services from cooperatives is not uniformly high. Cooperatives are a valuable source of assistance to local districts, and it is essential that they, like ADE, focus their resources on improving teaching and learning and improved fiscal management and reporting.

³⁰ Appendix C, survey question 50.

³¹ Appendix C, survey question 51.

Recommendations

Recommendation: Conduct a study to determine the market-rate salary for employees who possess the skills specified in 6-15-1006 and provide ADE management sufficient autonomy and flexibility to hire personnel with the requisite skills.

As asserted previously, it is essential that ADE offer salaries that are adequate to attract and retain employees with the skills, knowledge, and experience necessary to credibly help local educators improve teaching and learning in schools large and small, urban and rural, with diverse student populations. We recommend both short-term and longer-term actions. First, the department has an immediate need to hire personnel with the skills specified in 6-15-1006. Therefore, we recommend that the legislature direct OPM to conduct a study to determine market-rate salaries of school and district administrators with these skills, and to use the results of that study to authorize the department to offer competitive salaries for all currently unfilled authorized positions.

We also recommend a longer-range strategy. Once the director demonstrates effective management of the organization and its resources, we recommend that the legislature allocate a salary budget, authorize the total number of positions, and then free ADE management to pay salaries and fill positions consistent with agreed-upon priorities and market conditions. The only constraints would be total budget and total authorized positions. The department could hire more lower-paid, lower-skilled employees or fewer but higher-paid employees, depending on the skills needed. Under this arrangement, the department would be held accountable for producing outcomes mutually agreed to by the director and the legislature. Continuation of the arrangement would be contingent upon demonstrated performance.

Recommendation: Change ADE staffing levels only after department management has demonstrated that the organization is well managed and resources are focused primarily on cost-effective activities aimed at improving teaching and learning in local schools.

Before any reasonable recommendation can be made to increase or decrease the level of staffing in the department, it is essential to redirect personnel from low-priority activities, such as accreditation and compliance monitoring, to higher-priority activities associated with improving teaching and learning, and to significantly improve management of the department.

We raise here an important caveat. While improved management is quite possible in the relatively short run, redirecting personnel likely will take longer. Personnel tend not to be interchangeable. Those currently assigned to lower-priority activities may not possess the skills and knowledge required by the higher-priority activities. It generally is not feasible

to replace large numbers of employees in a short time. A more likely scenario is extensive retraining of redirected staff and replacement primarily through attrition. It may take several years to fully redirect staff; in the short run it may be necessary to maintain staffing at a level that is higher than optimal.

Recommendation: The director and assistant directors should develop and implement systematic planning, budgeting, and supervision procedures that are driven by a clearly articulated vision and mission.

Department top administrators must devote significantly more attention to the basics of management. Time, energy, and resources must be allocated to articulating a clear vision of how the department will improve teaching and learning in all schools. Every employee must understand how what he or she does fits within that vision. Every unit must develop and implement an annual plan that is an integral part of a department-wide plan and that clearly supports that vision. Budgets must be allocated in ways that reflect priorities that support the vision. Finally, all employees must be held accountable for producing outcomes consistent with the vision and a department-wide standard of professional behavior.

Effective planning can be a powerful lever to ameliorate many of the communication problems described in this report. A department-wide mission- and vision-driven planning process could go a long way toward communicating policy throughout every level of the organization as well as informing every employee of where other units and the entire department are headed.

An effective planning approach would involve the entire department in developing a strategy to improve teaching and learning in specific disciplines. For example, leadership could designate improved science and mathematics as the theme for the next two years. The first year could be dedicated to analysis of student performance in each area, identification of needs, revision of standards and assessments, and training ADE employees in the substance of these disciplines. In the second year, every unit would be required to allocate resources in support of an overall strategy to improve teaching and learning in science and mathematics. For example, Title 1 funds could be used to develop training materials for Title 1 parents, special education funds could be used to develop instructional materials and teacher training materials for specific groups of eligible students, and educational cooperative funding could be targeted to teacher and principal training in these two disciplines. In short, this would be a department-wide effort in support of a state-wide strategy. Every unit would be required to contribute in some appropriate manner.

Recommendation: The Department should adopt a comprehensive, strategic human resources plan.

If the Department is to improve its performance, it must have in place an aggressive and comprehensive human resource plan. The plan must have integrated strategies for all the following components: recruitment, induction, professional development, performance appraisals, and promotion.

Recommendation: The Department should commit resources to aggressively recruit new employees.

Inadequate salaries hinder the Department's ability to hire qualified employees. The standard posting and notice of job availability also is insufficient to acquire the talent that is needed.

Recommendation: The Department should provide a systematic way of inducting new employees into the agency.

Besides the standard information about agency operating procedures (which apparently are not now provided), the plan should include an introduction to the agency vision and mission, standards of behavior, how the division the employee works for fits into the total organization picture, and most importantly, how the employee's job contributes to the Department's overall mission.

Recommendation: It is essential that the Department establish an aggressive professional development program that permits employees to improve their professional skills to meet the demands of their new roles.

Department employees need worthwhile professional development opportunities that are aligned with the Department's vision and mission. Elsewhere in this report we have made a number of recommendations, which, if adopted, will require that a significant number of Department employees no longer will be doing some of the tasks they currently perform—the Department must have a plan in place to promote that transition.

Recommendation: The Department must require uniform, periodic, fair, honest, and consistent performance appraisals at every level of the organization.

The attitude that these appraisals are important must start at the top and permeate the agency. Management at each level must conduct the evaluations and require that their subordinates be evaluated partly on how well they appraise the performance of the employees they supervise.

Recommendation: The Department needs to develop and be explicit about career ladders within the agency and other opportunities for advancement.

Concomitant with better recruitment, induction, and evaluation mechanisms, employees need the assurance that in the long term, the Department will offer them the chance to advance in role and status when and if they demonstrate greater worth to the organization.

Recommendation: Restructure the department's organization to more logically group similar functions and to reflect an emphasis on teaching and learning.

The director needs to completely rethink the current structure of the department; first to reorient personnel and units to reflect a focus on teaching and learning, and second to account for functions that will be transferred to the new Division of Accountability. The following recommendations are intended to be more illustrative than prescriptive,³² but do address some of the anomalies in the current organization. Not all unit titles are entirely consistent with the functions they perform, and should be changed so that a citizen reading the department's directory could easily determine which unit should be contacted with a specific question.

The following functions could be transferred to the new Accountability Division: Coordinated Compliance Reviews, Education Accountability, Desegregation Monitoring, Standards Assurance, and the capacity to review and report student assessment data and to produce School Report Cards.

Teaching and learning functions could be housed in the current School Improvement Office and a newly created Office of Curriculum and Assessment. The former could house Gifted and Talented, Special Education, Title 1, Title V, LEP, Cooperatives, Teacher Recruitment, Charter Schools, Home Schooling, Student Support Services, Professional Quality, Professional Licensure, and Special Grants/Early Childhood. The latter would house Academic Standards, K-12 Literacy, Math/School Improvement Instructional Support, and a newly created unit charged with Student Assessment.

The current Internal Administration Office could be retained and house Central Services, Child Nutrition, Finance Management, Human Resources, and Maintenance.

³² Here we want to illustrate the types of functions that might be grouped, not to assert that the named units be moved intact. As we have argued elsewhere, we recommend that several of these functions and units be dramatically reduced and redirected. In particular, we recommend that the units transferred to the Accountability Division be significantly smaller than they are currently, and that newly created units be staffed by the redirection of existing personnel.

The current Information and Technology could be retained and house APSCN, Data Administration, Distance Learning, Information and Reporting, Network Support, Desktop Support, and Infrastructure and Technology Planning.

The current functions located in the Office of Public School Finance and Administrative Support could remain unchanged.

Finally, the following functions could report directly to the director: Deputy Director,³³ State Board Support and Special Projects, Legislative Services, Statistics and Research, Legal Services, and Communications.

Recommendation: The Department needs to acquire the in-house expertise to monitor assessment contracts, to analyze and use assessment information, and to ensure alignment among the various ratings, report cards, continued monitoring, and prioritized technical assistance based on need.

All policies need to be aligned to reduce confusion and ensure that resources and assistance get targeted to students who need them the most. An improvement rating and an absolute rating based on test results are both useful—recognizing both desired movement and actual performance. However, academic distress should no longer be a separate designation, and the relationship between meeting AYP and the improvement and performance ratings needs to be determined and clearly articulated. A trained measurement staff that includes at least one psychometrician can easily oversee such alignment.

A testing contractor develops Arkansas’s criterion-referenced test, end-of-course tests, and other measures. It is essential that personnel with measurement expertise oversee these agreements to ensure continued validity, reliability, and alignment of these testing systems with state standards.

Finally, if the Department is to provide in-depth instructional support based on school and district performance, the study and use of assessment information is critical. These activities also require the knowledge and skills of a psychometrician and an assessment unit within the Department and the Division of Accountability. Data analysis and reporting need to be continual and “on demand” as the Department focuses on improved teaching and student learning.

³³ Because the director must spend much of his time dealing with the external environment, it logically falls to the deputy to provide strong leadership in the day-to-day organization and management of the department. For the deputy to be effective, it is essential that he and the director speak with one voice.

Recommendation: The Department should have both a comprehensive data set and the expertise in-house to analyze and use the information.

Department staff need to work with all kinds of data every day, from financial reports to student test scores. The current division of the data across different units within ADE and the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville make their accessibility and use cumbersome at best. ADE's credibility has been severely damaged because of incorrect, inconsistent, slow responses to information requests. A comprehensive, accessible database with the expertise to use it would go a long way toward addressing this problem.

Also, with the focus on student achievement and high-quality teaching, the Department must be able to provide timely, in-depth instructional support based on school and district performance results. Arkansas students can benefit from testing only if the results are used to improve instruction. Therefore, the study and use of assessment information is critical. Department staff must be able to easily identify student weaknesses at both the school and district levels and to provide professional development targeted to those needs. ADE staff also must be able to produce and interpret all relevant reports needed for this effort, rather than continuing to rely completely on outside expertise.

Recommendation: The Legislature should clarify the role and duties of the Division of Public School Accountability, its director, and its relationship to the Department of Education.

MAP recommends that the new division be restricted to monitoring local district compliance with state and federal categorical programs,³⁴ review of fiscal reports from local districts, and reporting student outcome data. While personnel from this division should chair and lead site visit teams, teams should be comprised of temporarily reassigned employees of ADE who possess program-specific expertise. The Accountability Division should not become a shadow ADE.

The Department of Education should retain all responsibility for developing and implementing programs, and developing instruments used by Accountability to monitor local districts. ADE should develop student assessments, and create and monitor contracts for student assessments, but data produced by the assessment contractor should be analyzed and reported by the Division of Accountability. All assistance related to academic programs and fiscal management should be conducted by ADE. All sanctions and consequences for inadequate academic or fiscal performance should be under the purview of the Department of Education and the State Board of Education.

³⁴ As we have argued elsewhere, site visits should be consolidated and resources dedicated to this function should be significantly reduced from present levels.

MAP has conducted a preliminary analysis of relevant statutes and recommends that the following be transferred from ADE to the Accountability Division: 6-15-203, 6-15-206,³⁵ 6-15-425, 6-15-803, 6-15-1402, 6-15-1704, 6-15-2102, 6-15-2105, 6-15-2401, 6-18-1007, 6-18-1008, 6-18-1105, 6-20-1909, and 6-61-221. It is important to note that we do not represent this analysis to be exhaustive, but offer it only as an illustrative starting place for a more thorough review of relevant statutes.

One final note: It is essential that responsibility for deciding the number, and specific individuals to be transferred be fixed. We recommend that the State Board of Education be the final arbiter for all such decisions.

Recommendation: Develop and implement a strategy for communicating with important constituents.

In addition to the capacity to communicate newsworthy information such as test scores and new legislation, the department should regularly communicate constituent-specific information about standards, assessment, teaching, and learning to parents, students, teachers, administrators, employers, school boards, and others. For example, for each group there should be a plan to inform them about what is expected of students in each of the disciplines, what the department's strategy is for improving student outcomes in each discipline, and what that group's role could be in supporting the strategy. Thus, there may be a video presentation on primary grade reading for parents, a brochure on algebra for employers, a workshop on science standards for school boards, and so on.

Recommendation: Develop and implement procedures to ensure that all employees are informed of upper-management decisions and policies.

While there are a number of mechanisms, such as Web pages and newsletters, that can inform and reinforce vertical internal communication, there is no substitute for managers at all levels being responsible for ensuring that all their subordinates are well informed. Good managers perform the function routinely and hold subordinates accountable for keeping well informed.

Recommendation: Eliminate compliance monitoring for all items not related to student outcomes or required by federal law, and redesign compliance monitoring to minimize disruption of instruction.

The current accreditation instrument is a checklist with 118 items. Most items, such as the required posting of bullying posters and flag flying, have little impact of student

³⁵ However, as we have noted elsewhere, the current onsite reviews are conducted too frequently for most school districts and address too many low-payoff activities and policies.

achievement. Items that may have a measurable effect on student performance, such as checking for developmentally appropriate instruction, tend to be given short shrift. Few if any measures of educational quality can be reduced to a yes/no answer. Every district is subjected to an accreditation visit every two years.

In addition to accreditation, the federal programs are monitored on idiosyncratic schedules. It is possible for a district to receive four or five such visits in a single year. Each time an ADE team visits schools or districts, the attention and energy of local educators are diverted from the main mission of delivering instruction. Every effort should be made to minimize such disruption.

We recommend that the accreditation instrument be dramatically reduced, if not eliminated. Superintendents could be required to annually certify compliance with most items. To ensure that certification is taken seriously, the legislature could impose a civil fine for noncompliance or misrepresentation.

We recommend that monitoring for compliance with all federal programs, along with spot checks for accreditation, be streamlined into a single instrument and a single site visit by a single consolidated team. Such a process has worked well in California and other states for over 25 years. We further recommend that site visits be conducted every five years, unless serious issues of noncompliance indicate otherwise.

Finally, we recommend that policy and instrument development related to this process be the responsibility of ADE, but that the actual site visits be conducted under the supervision of the Division of Accountability.

Recommendation: Monitor student achievement and allocate assistance resources based on demonstrated need.

ADE should develop and allocate resources to a three part strategy for improving teaching and learning in local schools. First, it should have a general strategy for such activities as dissemination of curriculum documents or holding regional information dissemination workshops that addresses all schools. Secondly, it needs to develop a site-specific strategy to allocate resources aimed at providing long term, hands-on assistance to the lowest-performing schools. In the foreseeable future it is unlikely that ADE will employ sufficient numbers of highly skilled experts in curriculum and instruction to assist all of the districts that need or want their services. Therefore, it will be necessary for ADE to conduct “triage” based on student test scores. Finally, ADE should allocate resources to assist and support cooperatives, universities, professional associations, and others who are willing and able to provide general or site-specific assistance consistent with ADE’s mission.

Recommendation: Develop a long-range plan for housing ADE employees.

The state should develop a long-range plan with a goal of consolidating all ADE employees in the same building or at least in close proximity. In addition to providing for adequate storage space and modern technology for all employees, attention should be paid to equity of amount and quality of space.

Recommendation: ADE should ensure that cooperatives receive materials and training that reinforce the Department’s mission of improving teaching and learning.

Cooperatives provide an example of resources available to ADE that offer the potential for leveraging ADE’s limited resources. It is essential, however, that the Department view cooperatives as partners and provide them with the resources (training and materials) that will help the cooperatives reinforce the Department’s mission. The cooperatives should assist local educators to plan instructional programs consistent with state standards, develop curriculum consistent with those standards, and train local educators to implement instructional strategies necessary to ensure that local students master state standards. This will require collaboration that recognizes and capitalizes on the strengths of both entities. The Department enjoys the imprimatur of the State and economies of scale associated with a state agency. Cooperatives enjoy trust and ongoing relationships with local educators. The effect can be powerful when both parties focus all of their energies on improving student outcomes through higher-quality teaching and learning.

Concluding Observations

This report’s title, “Preparing for an Era of Excellence,” represents both the challenges and the opportunities now facing both Arkansas education in general and the Arkansas Department of Education in particular. Promoting a culture of excellence that permeates everything the department does is the overarching theme of this report.

The report contains some difficult news: On a number of dimensions, Arkansas education generally and the Arkansas Department of Education have a long distance to travel to reach a state of excellence. But it also contains some good news. The legislature and Governor have been willing to invest in the prospect of increasing student achievement. They have also created a legal framework that could serve as a model for other states. Virtually everyone we interviewed thought the state was making progress and was hopeful about the future. The stakeholders we interviewed recognized the crucial role the Department must play if schools in Arkansas are to be truly excellent, and they generally gave high marks to the new director. These factors bode well for positive change.

This report's numerous findings and recommendations can be boiled down to three general imperatives: a focus on teaching and learning, expanding personnel capacity, and greater trust and accountability.

A focus on teaching and learning

An excellent Arkansas Department of Education will display a laser-like focus on what's most important—teaching and learning. Achieving excellence in these two areas must be *the* driver of all the Department does. A clearly articulated vision and mission that reflect the emphasis on teaching and learning should drive planning and budgeting priorities and supervision procedures. Communicating the vision and mission clearly within the department, and with districts and schools, policymakers, and the general public, may be the most important job of the director.

Expanding personnel capacity

New demands on the Department require the development of expanded capacity of its personnel. First and foremost, MAP recommends that new salary levels, concomitant with the new kinds of tasks the Department faces, be established. The Department must pay better attention to the whole human resources function, improvement in every aspect is important, but professional development for existing staff will be critical to the Department's efforts to achieve excellence.

Greater trust and accountability

Finally, a new era of excellence also requires a new era of trust and accountability. The Director must be given additional resources to do his job—most importantly, competitive salaries, but also flexibility in staffing the agency to best meet the challenges he faces. If the legislature constrains the operation of the Director and Department by being overly prescriptive and limiting his options to do the job effectively, he cannot truly be held accountable for his performance.

Appendix A and Appendix C are attached as separate documents.

Appendix B

Individuals and Groups Interviewed³⁶ September 20-24, 2004

Argue, James	Legislator
Arnall, Kim	Legislative Staff
Barnhill, Kay	OPM
Beene, Linda	Director, Department of Higher Education
Caldwell, Jonell	Chair, State Board of Education
Chadwick, Dale	North Little Rock, Secondary Education Curriculum
Chavis, Kim	Legislative Staff
Dangeau, Leroy	Legislator
Englehart, Linda	Legislative Staff
Farley, Dr. Dan	Executive Director, Arkansas School Boards Association
Floyd, Steve	Deputy Director, Department of Higher Education
Hardy, Terri	Governor's Staff
Hillman, Shelby	State Board of Ed. member and former Chair
Hudson, Mark	Legislative Staff
Hussman, Walter	Publisher
Johnson, Janet	Legislator
Mahoney, Jodie	Legislator
Martin, Letitia	North Little Rock, Federal Programs
Nagel, Rich	Executive Director Arkansas Education Association
Noggle, Keller	Director, Arkansas Education Administrators Assn.
Pickett, Betty	Legislator
Pittman, Stacey	Board Chair Arkansas Chamber of Commerce
Porter, Tawana	OPM
Russell, Ron	President Arkansas Chamber of Commerce
Stark, Gary	Director, Arkansas Educational Accountability Project
Arkansas Education Administrators Association Executive Committee	
Arkansas Education Administrators Association Legislative Committee	

³⁶ In addition MAP consultants conducted follow-up interviews with several ADE managers and visited each facility where ADE employees were housed.

Questions for Stakeholders
9/13/04

Name:
Title:
Organization:

1. Describe briefly your current position and how you come into contact with the ADE. How long have you worked in your current position?
2. How would you evaluate the quality of K-12 education in AR? What grade would you give it (A-F)?
3. Are you optimistic or pessimistic about where the quality of public K-12 education in Arkansas is headed? Is it improving, slipping or staying about the same?
4. How important is the work of the ADE to providing quality education in the state?
5. How would you assess the quality of the overall job of ADE? What grade would you give the Department (A-F)?
6. What do you see as the major strengths of the ADE as it exists today? (What are those things that it does best?) Why?
7. What do you see as the major weakness of the ADE as it exists today? (What are those important things it doesn't do well or not at all?) Why?
8. How effective is the ADE in communicating its priorities and efforts to state policy-makers and to the general public? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?
9. How well does the ADE collaborate/cooperate with you on education issues you care about?
10. How credible are data and information ADE presents to policy-makers? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?
11. From your perspective, is the Department adequately funded to carry out its responsibilities?
12. From your perspective, is the Department able to attract and retain sufficient quality staff to do its job well?

13. Given all the current functions performed by the Department, which are essential to the improvement of student achievement in Arkansas?
 - Do they allocate adequate personnel and other resources to these functions?
14. Given all the current functions performed by the Department, which are least essential to the improvement of student achievement in Arkansas?
 - Could they reduce personnel and other resources in these areas?
15. From your perspective are there important functions within the Department that are not adequately performed?
16. Do you have any advice to offer on the way the ADE should be organized?
17. Is there anything else I need to know that would be helpful in making ADE a more effective organization?

School Administrators Association
9/13/04

Committee:
Date:

1. What do you see as the major strengths of the ADE as it exists today? (What are those things that it does well?)
2. What do you perceive as ADE's greatest weaknesses as it exists today?
3. What do you see as the three biggest challenges your districts are likely to face over the next 4-5 years? Are these fairly typical of school districts state wide?
4. What role(s) should the ADE play in assisting your district address those challenges?
5. How effectively does the ADE communicate with local districts? Do you get the information you need when you need it?
6. How effective is the ADE in communicating its priorities and efforts to state policy-makers and to the general public? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?
7. From your perspective, is the Department adequately funded to carry out its responsibilities?
8. From your perspective, is the Department able to attract and retain sufficient quality staff to do its job well?
9. Given all the current functions performed by the Department, which are essential to the improvement of student achievement in Arkansas?
10. Do they allocate adequate personnel and other resources to these functions?
11. Given all the current functions performed by the Department, which are least essential to the improvement of student achievement in Arkansas?
12. Where could they reduce personnel and other resources?
13. How would you describe the nature of data and information requests from ADE? (E.g. User friendly, excessive, unpredictable, predictable?)

14. How would you describe the various monitoring activities of ADE?
(E.g. Coordinated, redundant, superfluous, useful?)

15. Do you have any advice to offer on the way the ADE should be organized?

16. Is there anything else we need to know that would be helpful in making ADE a more effective organization?

Appendix A and Appendix C are attached as separate documents.