

# ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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## **Invest in Human Capital (Editorial) (Arkansas Business)**

This week's issue is dedicated to the topic of Arkansas' workforce. It's a big topic and we've only scratched at it, but there's enough to be able to make this statement: While the unemployment rate remains higher than anyone would like, there are good jobs going unfilled.

The lack of human capital is as detrimental to a business that wants to grow as the lack of financial capital. Employees sometimes think it's just cheerleader talk, but business executives know that people — the right people — really are the key to business success.

Meanwhile, at the Arkansas General Assembly, yet another attempt to continue the education of the children of illegal immigrants died in committee. Youngsters who were brought to our state through no fault of their own and who have been ours to educate K-12 were once again told that our colleges and universities can't consider them to be Arkansans.

It reminded us of a comment by former state Rep. Bob McGinnis of Marianna to an audience in northwest Arkansas more than 10 years ago:

"Educate your minorities. Don't make the same mistake we did in east Arkansas. We didn't, and now we can't attract any industry because we don't have an educated workforce."

His words were uncomfortably paternalistic and not altogether true; the Delta is attracting industry, in part because of renewed efforts at education over the past decade. But it is still good advice that we wish the Legislature would heed. Punishing students for the misdeeds of their parents is a textbook example of throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

Immigration reform is coming from Washington, as the Republican Party can read exit polls and demographic trends. And when it arrives, Arkansas will have already missed several chances to get ahead of the trend. Some things, unfortunately, never change.

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## **Shut school, Dollarway chief says (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)**

PINE BLUFF - Since his appointment last summer by the Arkansas Board of Education to run the Dollarway School District in Pine Bluff, Frank Anthony has been working to improve the district's financial and academic standings.

Part of that management now includes a recommendation to close the financially strapped Alzheimer-Martin Elementary School.

The state board voted June 11 to take over the Dollarway district, dismissing Superintendent Bettye Dunn-Wright and dissolving the School Board after Dollarway High School failed to meet state accreditation standards for two consecutive years.

Anthony said recommending the elementary school's closure is one of the toughest decisions he has had to make since taking the district's reins.

"It is emotional," he said. "It impacts and affects people directly, but we are trying to operate this district in the most efficient way possible. And, unfortunately, declining enrollment equates to declining revenue."

But before the school can be closed, Arkansas Education Commissioner Tom Kimbrell must approve.

Kimbrell said Friday afternoon that he has not received Anthony's formal recommendation, but "I have been aware that discussion about closing [Alzheimer-Martin Elementary School] has taken place."

The commissioner said he was unsure when he and Anthony would speak about the closure.

At a public meeting held last week, Anthony presented his case for shuttering Alzheimer-Martin.

Since 2010, the school - which houses students in kindergarten through fifth grade - has seen a decline of 34 students. That means a loss of about \$213,000 in state funding, according to district documents.

Anthony said the school receives \$6,267 in state funding for each student enrolled. The school now has 78 students, amounting to more than \$488,000 in annual funds.

The school has \$1.2 million in projected expenses for next year, a figure Anthony said could not be met with just 78 students. The school is a \$700,000 annual drain on the Dollarway School District's coffers, Anthony said.

Alzheimer-Martin has seven full-time teachers and nine part-time teachers. There are 13 other employees who work as paraprofessionals and in maintenance, clerical and food service positions.

Anthony said he would prefer that all of the jobs be relocated elsewhere in the district, but "the reality is that some jobs will be lost if this school is closed."

Alzheimer-Martin students would be bused to the district's three other elementary schools: Townsend Park, Townsend Park North and Matthews Elementary.

Patrica Walker, who has two children who attend Alzheimer-Walker, said news of the possible closure has her "heartsick."

"This is such a good school, and the teachers really care about the kids," Walker said. "I hate to see this happen. I want my kids to get the best education they can, and I believe they are at this school."

The Pine Bluff School District recently announced the closure of Greenville Elementary School for much the same reasons.

Pine Bluff School District Superintendent Linda Watson said at a March School Board meeting that in addition to a loss of students at Greenville, the building is in need of repairs that are too expensive for the district to finance.

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## **New law lets GED cost fall on test-takers (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)**

A bill approved Wednesday by the Arkansas Legislature will open the door for the General Education Development test, which has long been paid for by the state, to cost students as much as \$120.

Act 1063, which was introduced March 11 as House Bill 2201, grants the Department of Career Education the authority to determine fees for the test, which must then be approved by the State Board of Career Education.

Though the department has paid the existing \$20.46 cost of the test, the act allows the department to charge students the higher cost of the GED Testing Service's examination beginning Jan. 1, 2014, when the nationwide program is scheduled to shift from pencil-and-paper format to computer-based system.

James Smith Jr., the department's deputy director of adult education, said that the rate increase is attributed mostly to the cost of developing and administering the test. Smith also said that he and other officials are looking into the feasibility of creating a private foundation to underwrite the program if department funding falls through.

"We're looking at various options to help provide some funding for that, but as of right now we're not sure if [students] will have to pay the full amount or not," Communications Director Deborah Germany said.

The department is seeking appropriations to cover a portion of the cost in hopes of easing students' financial burdens, but the legislation has prepared for a scenario in which they are forced to foot the bill, Smith said.

"If individuals need to get a GED, they're going to need to do that to advance in their career, get a job or whatever," Germany said. "Certainly \$120 is a barrier to some people. So while we would hope not, we have to be realistic that going from a free test to one that will cost as much as \$120 certainly will have an impact on some people."

Germany said the transition to a digital format will not affect the cost of GED preparation courses, pre-tests and practice tests, which will remain free.

The content of the test will also be updated to reflect core competency standards in the state, but Germany said this change will be minimal and would occur regardless of the format change.

Arkansas GED testing centers are fully equipped to offer the new test when the change occurs in January, according to Germany.

Jason Willett, who worked with bill sponsor Rep. Harold Copenhaver, D-Jonesboro, and the Adult Education Department on HB2201, said that \$120 gets students five sections of test content - social studies, science, reading, mathematics and writing - and that he considers the bill to be "a housekeeping item."

"They basically struck old language and replaced it with new language that can adapt to the changes," Willett said. "The reality of it is ... years from now they're more than likely going to increase it again and if they do, this gives us the ability for the laws to adapt to what they set as the price of the test."

Legislation passed during this session provides up to \$200,000 for adult education programs - including GED testing - through the Department of Career Education. However, the department's ability to pay for the testing is dependent on House Bill 2134, which proposes that the Department of Career Education be authorized to pay for one GED test per student. The bill, which is sponsored by Rep. Kim Hammer, R-Benton, was introduced March 11 and is on the agenda for the House Education Committee meeting Tuesday.

The Arkansas GED program is offered to residents who are 16 or older, have not graduated, are not enrolled in high school, and who meet other eligibility criteria.

"We want to let our current and prospective students know, and those who might have started and not completed their GED credential, that there's still time for them to complete it before the change," said Arkansas GED Administrator Janice Hanlon in the release. She said that students currently enrolled in the program must complete the test by Jan. 1, 2014, or restart the process.