

# ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

June 16, 2013

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## School Choice Changes Mean District Switches ([nwaonline.com](http://nwaonline.com))

Act 1227 went into effect April 16 of this year, redefining school choice and repealing the Arkansas Public School Choice Act of 1989.

Under the old rules, students transferring between districts couldn't upset the racial balance of their new district. Minority numbers in the school district were to mirror those of the county, leaving some students without transfer options. Board-to-board transfers — where a student had to be released by his or her resident district and accepted by their district of choice — were the primary option for school choice, and transfers could be denied.

Tom Kimbrell, Arkansas education commissioner, said in a meeting Thursday board-to-board transfers are still an option.

Twenty-two districts in south and east Arkansas, around Little Rock and outside Memphis, have filed as exempt from school choice, because of a desegregation clause, according to the Arkansas Department of Education, but race no longer plays a part in school choice transfer in Northwest Arkansas. Even with the school choice deadline pushed up to June 1, school districts took in many transfer applications this year. Districts have until Aug. 1 to notify families if they have been accepted.

"There haven't been a lot of substantive changes. The big change was the racial component," said Brad Reed, Bentonville director of student services.

Bentonville administrators look at each case individually, Reed said, but the 67 students who requested to transfer out will be approved. The one elementary student who applied to transfer into the district was refused because of capacity issues, Reed said.

"We have no reason to stop anybody from leaving. It's up to those districts they applied to," he said. A demography student in the Bentonville School District estimates elementary schools in the district will grow by an average of 25 students next year and predicts nearly 800 new students will arrive in the school district this fall.

Springdale administrators think they will have 600 more students this fall than they did last year. Fifteen of those new students could come from transfers, said Kelly Hayes, Springdale comptroller. Eighteen students applied to leave the district, but 33 want to transfer in. Those numbers are higher than in the past. Fewer than 10 students transferred into the district last year, Hayes said.

All of the transfers were approved, Hayes said.

"We can't promise them that they'll attend a particular school, but we'll find them a place at their grade level," he said of students coming into the district.

Springdale opened an elementary school last year and will be opening a new middle school this year and a new junior high school the next year, said Rick Schaeffer, Springdale communication director. "We're OK on growth," Schaeffer said.

Parents want their children to go to school close to where they work and live, and Springdale will accommodate that, he said.

"We have some neighborhoods in our district that are really in Fayetteville," Schaeffer said. Fayetteville sent out provisional acceptance letters June 1, said Ginny Wiseman, associate superintendent.

The law allows districts to refuse a transfer if it would require additional staffing at the district. Fayetteville administrators will look through transcripts and other records for each of the students who applied to decide if adding those students would require hiring more personnel to accommodate them, Wiseman said. She estimated final notifications will go out in mid-July.

Rogers School District officials will also review individual applications to see if adding those students will require more teachers and classrooms, said Ashley Kelley Siwec, communications director. A timeline hasn't been set, but administrators will meet the Aug. 1 deadline set by the law, she said. "In between now and then, we'll be looking at our enrollment. If we have the capacity we'll accept them," she said.

Eleven students applied to transfer into the district and 20 applied to go elsewhere.

Some of the students leaving the large districts are transferring to smaller schools. Both Gravette and Pea Ridge had applications from more than 30 students. A staff member in Pea Ridge said most of the transfers in were from Rogers and Bentonville.

Small districts in Washington County are trading students.

This year 48 of the 69 transfers out of Greenland are Winslow residents transferring to West Fork, said Charles Cudney, Greenland superintendent. Greenland closed Winslow High School a year after annexing it in 2004, but Winslow was almost annexed by West Fork.

The problem for small school districts is a 3 percent cap in the number of transfers allowed out of a district. Some of the Greenland students will not be able to leave because of that cap which leaves room for about 32 transfers, Cudney said.

A family counts as one transfer, but it was unclear how many of the 69 students who applied for a transfer were related or related to students already in West Fork. Cudney estimated 25 of the 69 may be unable to transfer out.

Greenland officials will give preference to transfers if the applicant student already has a sibling in West Fork, Cudney said and he is working with West Fork Superintendent John Karnes to review each application. West Fork received 57 applications for transfers into the district.

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## **Educators studying new evaluation rules (nwaonline.com)**

Teachers across the state are devoting time this summer to studying a new teacher evaluation system that schools will begin using during the 2013-14 school year.

“I do feel like it’s going to be a more effective means of evaluating the effectiveness of teachers in the classroom,” said Staci Mann, a teacher at Ramay Junior High in Fayetteville who attended a training session last week on the new evaluation system. “A lot of this is what we’re already doing. It’s more focused and more organized. It makes us more accountable.”

The standards for grading a teacher’s preparation and performance in the classroom will encourage more professional conversation about characteristics of quality teaching, administrators and teachers said. It will also give a teacher more time to reflect on how his classroom practices compare with the standards set under the new evaluation system, they said.

Teachers receiving the highest score - distinguished - on their evaluations will have classrooms where students take initiative in their learning.

The 2013-14 school year is a pilot year for all state districts to begin using the Teacher Excellence Support System, said Karen Walters, assistant commissioner of human resources, licensing and educator effectiveness for the Arkansas Department of Education.

Some districts will test the system by including only some teachers, but others will include every teacher. In 2014-15, all districts are required to evaluate teachers using the new system unless an alternate method of evaluation has been approved.

### **FOUR RATINGS**

The Teacher Excellence and Support System was created by Act 1209 of 2011. The system is based on the work of Charlotte Danielson, an educator who has become a national teacher-quality consultant. She specializes in design of teacher-evaluation systems. She advises state education departments in the United States and overseas, and has developed a standards framework of 22 components of instruction.

Teachers will receive one of four performance ratings - unsatisfactory, basic, proficient or distinguished - on each of the 22 components. Those ratings will be combined to give an overall rating.

“This takes a lot of the subjectivity out of evaluation,” Walters said. “If a teacher falls into a basic category, they can look to see what they need to do to be proficient.”

Most teachers will be evaluated on all 22 components every three years, but teachers new to the field or who need more intensive support will have a full evaluation every year.

Teachers can face termination if they need intensive support for two years, Walters said.

During the interim years, teachers on the three-year rotation will focus on goals set during the evaluation, such as improving their level of questioning or classroom management, Walters said.

Districts are required to provide three hours of training on the new evaluation system by Aug. 31, but the Education Department aims for everyone to finish the training before the school year starts, Walters said. Districts also have the option of using an online tool, which gives teachers access to videos showing how an administrator would grade teachers on the new evaluation form.

## BENEFIT TO TEACHERS

The Fayetteville School District handed out books in the spring to introduce teachers to the new evaluation system. Now it is offering 10 two-day workshops for teachers to complete the three-hour training and delve into the new standard, said Marianne Hauser, the district's director of professional development and career education.

During the first hours of a two-day training session that started Wednesday for 94 teachers from the Fayetteville School District, Owl Creek School Principal Kristen Champion discussed documentation that teachers should collect ahead of their evaluations under the new system.

One component of the evaluation focuses on communicating with students. A proficient teacher clearly communicates the purpose of the lesson to students, gives clear instructions and connects what students are learning with their knowledge and experience, according to the evaluation standards. The Department of Education listed examples of documentation that a teacher can provide to show his proficiency on this component. They include lesson plans, units of study, worksheets that help students organize their thoughts, charts detailing expectations for learning and examples of student presentations.

Mann, an English as a second language teacher, said teachers already produce much of the documentation suggested in the examples. She said she posts objectives in her classroom and could include those as part of her documentation.

"Students are aware of what they're going to be learning and why they're learning it and how it's relevant to their lives outside the classroom," she said.

Mann said the system will be beneficial to all teachers because they will have a detailed description of what a proficient teacher is as compared with a distinguished teacher, for example.

In the past, administrators based evaluations on quick visits to classrooms, with little discussion about what she was trying to accomplish with her lessons, Mann said.

The quick, informal visits will continue, but administrators also will conduct 45-minute observations, she said. The new system requires conferences between the teacher and administrator before and after the longer observation.

## AN EVOLVING PROCESS

Barb Macken, counselor at Northside Elementary School in Siloam Springs, said she noticed little difference between the evaluation system used in Siloam Springs and the new evaluation system because both are based on Danielson's work. During training this week in Siloam Springs, teachers watched videos of evaluations and discussed each of the 22 components in the evaluation system.

"It pulls us together as a district," she said. "It gets us all on the same page of exactly what the expectations are."

The new evaluation standards will provide feedback for teachers and counselors about where they are strongest and where they can grow, she said. The training spurred Macken to consider how she will assist classroom teachers in meeting the evaluation standards, such as in building rapport with students.

The new system is one more step in a shift occurring in education that gives students more responsibility for learning, said Bill Keaster, principal of Harrison High School.

Student participation in learning is a focus of the Common Core State Standards that schools are implementing statewide.

A growing number of teachers also is incorporating project-based learning, an approach that encourages students to pursue skills and knowledge to solve a problem or answer a question.

"The student is the one that is creating," Keaster said. "The student is analyzing, evaluating and it's not as much of the teacher standing up there lecturing or doing a worksheet. The student is engaged in the learning process."

Under the new evaluation system, teachers will earn the highest marks when their students extend the content of a lesson, explain concepts to their classmates, formulate questions, and assess and monitor their understanding.

"We're slowly changing," he said. "Teachers are becoming the facilitators. They're having to let go a little bit, and the students are the ones that are evaluating and creating. That's a big change for teachers. It is the right direction."

Some educators are fearful of the new system, said Donna Morey, president of the Arkansas Education Association. With the Teacher Excellence Support System, both the evaluator and the person being evaluated know the expectations.

"I think it's a very fair system," Morey said. "The whole point is to help children be more proficient."

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## **Four Schools Placed On Probation (nwaonline.com)**

BENTONVILLE — The Arkansas Board of Education placed four Bentonville schools on probation last week for exceeding class size limits.

The violations occurred in music and art classes at Bentonville High School, Old High Middle School, Ruth Hale Barker Middle School and Bright Field Middle School, according to Superintendent Michael Poore.

The classes were supposed to have no more than 28 students, Poore said, but the schools at times exceeded the limit by no more than two students.

“We did not think we were doing anything wrong,” Poore said. “This year the state pointed out we were in the wrong. We adjusted as quickly as we could.”

The practice had been going on for at least the past four years, Poore said. Poore became superintendent in July 2011.

The state Board of Education put 26 other schools on probation Monday for violations of various standards. Those schools remain accredited but could face more serious sanctions if they are found in violation of accreditation standards during the next school year.

In those cases the state Board of Education must take one of eight actions against the school. Those actions include removing the district superintendent and merging the school with another one.

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## **LR, state schools do worse on tests (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)**

Average achievement rates for students in the Little Rock School District and across the state dropped in most grades on the math and literacy sections of the Arkansas Benchmark Exam, according to preliminary results released by the Little Rock district.

The declines in the state’s largest district and in the state overall - which includes the other 238 school districts and 17 charter schools that recently received their results from the April exams - are not a surprise to education leaders.

State and district education leaders attribute the downturn in what was a general upward trend in achievement to the state’s elementary and middle-school teachers having shifted from lessons based on state math and literacy standards to lessons based on new national “common core” standards.

Common-core lessons were put into place in kindergarten through second grades in 2011-12 and in grades three through eight this past school year. Public high schools will incorporate them in the coming school year. But students will continue to take the state Benchmark and End-of-Course exams

that are based on the old education standards until schools use new, online assessments rooted in the common-core standards.

Students will take those new tests for the first time in the 2014-15 school year.

“Be prepared for seeing what we call an implementation dip,” Laura Bednar, state Department of Education assistant commissioner for learning services, told the state Board of Education last week about student performance on state tests this year and in 2014.

Bednar said state and school district leaders need to be assertive in explaining to parents and community leaders what is happening with the transition to common-core lessons, which state education leaders describe as more challenging than the previous curricula.

“I do think next year it will be even more important that we have a clear and concise communications plan to help communities and help people understand what this means and why this is a natural occurrence when you switch to something such as this,” Bednar said.

“You will have pockets of excellence across the state as we always do, but I think our story will be what we projected it would be - you can’t do something of this magnitude and expect [scores] to continue to climb constantly.”

The 2013 results available to date are preliminary. Results from special-education portfolios and from the End-of-Course exams are yet to be included in the results. The state Education Department will release final 2013 achievement results after July 1 to give the districts time to review their test data and identify any glitches.

State achievement rates in math fell this year by as many as 6 percentage points in five of the six Benchmark-tested grades when compared with the previous year. The state literacy scores fell in five of the six tested grades.

The state achievement rates ranged from 65 percent of eighth grade test-takers scoring at proficient or advanced levels in math to 86 percent proficient or better in the third grade. In literacy, state average achievement rates ranged from 73 percent of sixth-graders scoring at proficient or better, to 85 percent of fourth-graders performing at those levels.

Students who score at proficient levels are considered to be achieving at their grade level or demonstrating mastery of the course material.

Little Rock School District achievement rates, which continued this year to trail state averages, declined by as many as 7 percentage points in four of the six tested grades when compared with 2012 results.

The Little Rock results in math ranged from 44 percent proficient or better in eighth grade to 76 percent proficient or better in third grade. In literacy, the averages ranged from 52 percent proficient or advanced in sixth grade, down 6 percentage points from the previous year, to a high of 76 percent proficient or better in fourth grade, down 1 percentage point from 2012.

Dennis Glasgow, the Little Rock School District's assistant superintendent for accountability, pointed to the transition from state standards to common-core education standards as a likely reason for the downturn in student performance.

"We were true to common core," Glasgow said of the district's focus. But he also said an attempt was made to "push in" the teaching of some material not included in the common-core curriculum but subject to state testing.

"That meant we were trying to do two things, and we didn't really have time to do both curricula," he said. "In my opinion, the declines are related to that. But hopefully we will be prepared for the common-core exam when it comes."

The district's Benchmark results in math dipped further than the literacy results.

Vanessa Cleaver, the Little Rock district's director of mathematics, offered examples of the differences between what was taught and what was tested in math this year.

The eighth-grade math classes incorporated more algebra I concepts this year, Cleaver said. Lessons in adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing fractions that were previously taught in eighth grade were pushed down to sixth grade. The material, however, remained part of the eighth-grade Benchmark math exam.

Most geometry concepts previously taught in sixth through eighth grades have been moved into the high school geometry course as a result of the common-core standards, Cleaver said. But some geometry concepts are covered on the Benchmark test. Similarly, measurement concepts are not a large part of the common-core curriculum in the middle school grades, yet they remain on the state test, she said.

"We knew which standards were missing in the common-core curriculum and we tried to embed them during the year, and at the end of the year we made a big push for teachers to cover the material as much as they could," Cleaver said. "But it added a lot to their curriculum."

The results from the Benchmark and End-of-Course exams will be used to determine whether Arkansas public schools met their annual achievement goals.

Most schools and districts will be labeled by the state Education Department as either "achieving" or "needing improvement" based on whether they accomplished the annual goals customized to their schools by the state's new school accountability system. The U.S. Department of Education approved the accountability system last year as part of the state's request for a waiver from the terms of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. That act calls for all students to achieve at their grade level on state math and literacy tests in 2013-14.

The new accountability system identifies the lowest 5 percent of schools in terms of achievement as priority schools. Additional schools are labeled as "focus" schools because of large achievement disparities between their at-risk students - who are from low-income families, are non-native English speakers or special-education students - and the group of students not in those categories.

Priority and focus schools must carry out improvement plans to raise achievement. Priority schools in particular must work with state improvement specialists and outside educational consultants or put their districts in jeopardy of being classified as academically distressed and subject to state takeover.

The Little Rock School District has eight of the 48 priority schools. Glasgow said he is optimistic that the state will remove at least one - Wilson Elementary - from the priority list and maybe two schools from the "focus" list once officials finalize state exam results.

Most Little Rock parents will receive their children's test results when students return to class in August after the summer break, Glasgow said.

Bednar, the assistant education commissioner, told the state Board of Education members that there is still much to do to transition from the state standards and state tests to the common-core standards and new tests, and that there will be some resistance to the changes.

"Number one, it's difficult," she said of the transition. "Number two, it is not the norm, and number three there are those who are clearly against college and career readiness in terms of the new standards and new assessments.

"Stay the course," Bednar advised. "We are on a great path. Keep learning and sharing with each other, and we will get there."

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## **Education notebook (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)**

### Lack of clause in law stalls petition

The lack of an emergency clause in a 2013 piece of legislation kept Jacksonville leaders from proceeding with plans to ask the state Board of Education last week for a special election on creating a new Jacksonville school system.

The new system would be detached from the larger Pulaski County Special School District.

Act 1274 of 2013 would require planners for a new school district to present a petition bearing a number of signatures equal to at least 10 percent of the number of voters who participated in the most recent general election in the affected community. Under that law, the Jacksonville planners would need 1,268 signatures.

However, the law doesn't have an emergency clause and doesn't go into effect until August, Daniel Gray, a leader of the effort, said last week.

Under existing law, the planners need a number of signatures equal to at least 10 percent of registered voters in the area that would make up the new district, making the required number at least 1,869. The planners have 1,669 already verified signatures from registered voters out of an initial collection of about 2,100 signatures. They are continuing to collect more.

Gray said the plan is to present the petition for a special election at the July 8 meeting of the state Education Board.

State officials are expected to then ask the federal judge presiding in the long-running Pulaski County school desegregation lawsuit for guidance in light of ongoing desegregation obligations on the part of the Pulaski County Special School District.

Information about the Jacksonville school district plans are on the Jacksonville Education Corps' website: [www.ourowndistrict.com](http://www.ourowndistrict.com).

Bentonville grad wins merit award

Neeraj Bajpayee, a recent graduate of Bentonville High, is the latest student to receive a National Merit, a single-payment \$2,500 scholarship.

Bajpayee plans a probable career in business.

The National Merit Scholarship Corp. issues a series of announcements through the spring and summer of scholarship winners.

LR board aims to boost schools

The Little Rock School Board is taking steps to continue doing business with a testing company and a "school turnaround" education consulting company - all geared to raising student achievement in the state's largest school system.

The board Thursday approved a 2013-14 contract with Pearson School Achievement Services to work with the district's state-labeled "priority" schools, which are among the lowest-achieving schools in the state. The contract calls for Pearson consultants to work a total of 800 days at the schools at a total cost to the district of \$1,680,000. That is down slightly from this past year's contract of 888 days for \$1,862,821.

The School Board will vote later this month on renewing the district's contract with The Learning Institute in Hot Springs to continue producing tests that are given throughout the school year to gauge student preparedness for state exams. The tests, given in grades two through 12, are commonly referred to within the district as SOAR tests, which stands for Student Online Achievement Reports.

The proposed contract would cost the district \$320,900 in the coming school year, which is lower than the 2012-13 contract of \$322,500.

Ex-senator to serve on education board

Brenda Gullet of Fayetteville, a former state senator, will serve as chairman of the Arkansas Board of Education through June 2014.

Gullett was elected by her colleagues on the nine-member board to succeed Jim Cooper of Melbourne as chairman. Cooper's gubernatorial appointment to the board expires this month.

Gullett is owner of Brenda Gullett Associates, a company that provides corporate training in customer service, communications and leadership development. She has been on the state board since 2007.

The board's vice chairman is Sam Ledbetter of Little Rock, a former state representative and an attorney with the MacMath Woods law firm. He has been on the board since 2008.