

2014

Arkansas Commission on Closing the Academic Achievement Gap

2014 Annual Report

The Arkansas Commission on Closing the Academic Achievement Gap presents its annual report each November. Our goal is to bring about awareness of the current research and strategies that have been successful in closing the academic achievement gaps that still persist in today's public schools. As a state commission, we serve as both a resource and advocacy group, ensuring that school districts get the assistance and guidance necessary to equip students with the skills they need to succeed both in, and out of, the classroom.

Dr. Dawn Tirado Simpson
Microsoft
11/3/2014



Arkansas Commission on Closing the Achievement Gap Annual Report

Mission

Originally created by Act 1777 in 2003, the GAP Commission's primary purpose was to work with educators from across the state who worked first-hand in addressing the academic disparity that we continue to see among various disadvantaged groups. As such, we are committed to working along-side school districts to ensure that all students are given the support they need to succeed in school, and we are also committed to provide any assistance we can on the state level to make real progress in closing the academic achievement gap here in Arkansas.

Specifically, the Commission is mandated by legislation (HB 2164) to focus on these 5 key issues:

- *To develop a plan designed to enable all public school students to meet the state's student academic achievement standards while working towards the goal of narrowing the achievement gaps in public schools, for both economically disadvantaged students, as well as students from major racial and ethnic groups.*
- *To monitor the Arkansas Department of Education's efforts to comply with federal guidelines on improving the academic achievement of the disadvantaged, specifically including, but not limited to, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.*
- *To monitor the department's identification of population groups to be motivated in closing the academic achievement gap efforts.*
- *To receive national school lunch data and reports biennially from the Arkansas Department of Education.*
- *To interface with local school district achievement gap task forces to provide data on the achievement gap, as well as intervention strategies.*

Legislation

The Arkansas Commission on Closing the Achievement Gap has been re-constituted, and is now composed in accordance with two powerful pieces of legislation enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Arkansas: Act 949 (HB 2163) and Act 1314 (HB 2164) of 2009 as approved on April 6, 2009 and April 9, 2009 respectively.

In accordance with Arkansas Code 6-15-1601 (b) concerning membership on the Commission, the body includes eleven (11) Commissioners in total: Five Commissioners appointed by the Governor, three (3) by the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, and three (3) by the Speaker of the House (**see attached legislation**).

Commission Meetings: 2014

Since submitting our last annual report in 2013, the Commission has met on 7 separate occasions, which includes not only our Commission meetings, but also our educational symposium. Although we are only required to meet no less than 4 times a year, we as a Commission believe that there is too much important work to be done to only meet on a quarterly basis. As such, we met each month, beginning in January, taking breaks in the summer and the beginning of the school year.

2014 Meeting Dates:

- January 16, 2014
- February 20, 2014
- March 20, 2014

- May 15, 2014
- April 17, 2014
- October 16, 2014

2014 *Bridging the Gap* Annual Educational Symposium

- June 12, 2014

Website Link

<http://www.arkansased.org/divisions/policy/arkansas-commission-on-closing-the-achievement-gap>

It was the Commission's recommendation back in 2011 that the Arkansas Commission on Closing the Academic Achievement Gap be given a website link on the Arkansas Department of Education's website. Our vision was that by doing so, we would not only be more visible as a state commission, but that as a result of that visibility, those interested in learning more about this issue would have access to our research, reports, presentations, etc., and be able to contact us for further information, and/or to answer any questions.

As a result of collaborating with the Arkansas Department of Education's web master, our website link has enabled us to reach out to educators, administrators, community leaders, and parents across the state. As the Chairman, I have received numerous emails and phone calls from those interested in learning more about our organization, including TV interviews by KARK in their *Education Matters* segment, as well as educational organizations, such as Scholastic, Incorporated, who are interested in partnering with us for future events.

Additionally, pictures of each Commission member are posted, along with relevant contact info for each member. Additionally, the website link includes the following:

- Current Membership List
- Relevant Legislation
- Annual Reports
- Meeting Agendas
- Meeting Minutes
- Presentations
- Research

However, as a result of recent changes to the website, the Commission's website is not as accessible as it once was. In fact, finding the Commission on the ADE homepage is nearly impossible - you have to go the ADE homepage, then go to *ADE Divisions*, then go to the *Policy* tab. Also, the website address above is lengthy and not very user-friendly.

Committee Work

The Commission currently has a total of five Standing Subcommittees aimed at developing a state plan to close the achievement gap for Arkansas students statewide. These committees examine issues that have been tied to closing the academic achievement gap among the various subpopulations, as documented by current research. These subcommittees include the following:

- Bridging the Gap Annual Educational Symposium
- Common Core and its Impact on Achievement
- Evaluation of Yearly Progress in Closing the Academic Achievement Gap

- Parental Involvement and its Impact on Student Success
- Scholastic Resources and ACSIP – Evaluation of a Future Pilot Program

Below are the findings of each Sub-committee:

Subcommittee: Bridging the Gap Symposium (Formerly known as Interfacing with Local Task Forces)

- ***Chairman, Dr. Dawn Tirado Simpson***
- ***Site Coordinator: Dr. Luis Restrepo***
- ***Committee Members: Dr. Jesse Hargrove and Mr. Jon Fulkerson***

Third Annual Educational Outreach – Bridging the Gap

On June 12, 2014, we hosted our Third Annual Educational Symposium series, *Bridging the Gap*, at the Jones Center for Families in Springdale, Arkansas (**see attached flyer**). Our vision in hosting these educational symposiums is to invite educators from each Congressional District who work first-hand in addressing the academic achievement gaps in their local schools. As a Commission, we emphasized that we were ready to work along- side school districts to ensure that all students are given the support they need to succeed in school. Additionally, we as a Commission are committed to provide any assistance we can on the state level to make real progress in closing the academic achievement gap in Arkansas.

Since we are already mandated by current legislation to interface with the local achievement gap task forces in each of the four congressional districts, we believe that hosting the *Bridging the Gap* symposium gives our Commission the opportunity to meet educators, parents and community stakeholders from across the state that are interested in this vital issue – plans are already underway to host next year’s symposium at the Arkansas Career Training Institute, in Hot Springs, Arkansas

Purpose of the Symposium/Educational Outreach

- Establish rapport and partnership with those around the state who are interested in closing the gap.
- Increase the visibility of the Commission and emphasize our advocacy and dedication to work alongside school districts across the state.
- Collect information from different constituencies across the state as to what the achievement gap looks like in their region and what attempts have been made to close it.
- Compile the information from meetings around the state and develop an overall report (annual report) authored by this Commission.

Structure of the Symposium/Educational Outreach

- Our goal was to host one of these symposiums in each of the Arkansas’ four congressional districts, and we have been successful in that endeavor. Beginning our journey in Blytheville, AR, our second symposium was held in Pine Bluff, AR, and this year’s event was held in Springdale, AR.
- Co-sponsored by the University of Arkansas’ College of Education and Health Professions and Diversity affairs, our site coordinator was Commissioner, Dr. Luis Restrepo. Plans included an Opening Session, Keynote Speakers and Breakout Sessions held by key educators and legislators (**see attached agenda**).
- Keynote speakers included Keith Jackson, former NFL player, broadcast announcer for the Arkansas Razorbacks and founder and president of PARK (Positive Attitude Reaches Kids), and Dr. Gary Ritter, professor and endowed chair in Educational Policy Department of Education Reform from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. Breakout sessions included members of the Gap Commission, along with key educational leaders and members of the community. Legislators interested in shedding light on the academic achievement gap issues were also present, such as Senator Joyce Elliot, who also served on one of the breakout session panels.

- Professional development credit was offered through the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville for all those who qualified, and the symposium ran from 8:00 AM until 3:00 PM, with lunch being served.

Subcommittee: Common Core:

- **Chairman, Mrs. Kathy Powers**
- **Members: Dr. Jesse Hargrove, Dr. Luis Restrepo, and Dr. Vera Lang Brown**

Even in the wealthiest areas of Arkansas, there exists an academic achievement gap between and among Arkansas's ethnic and socioeconomic groups and sub-populations. Members of this Commission have been working for the past two years to find and enact system change to address this issue. The philosophy of the Commission is to “ensure that all children have an opportunity for an education that will focus on equity as a means to achieve a closure in scores between and among diverse learning communities of students.” The Common Core State Standards provide a structure which supports students from poverty and helps to close the academic achievement gap.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were created in 2009 in response to the fact that not every student in the United States had access to a great public school with rigorous coursework necessary to allow students to transition smoothly to postsecondary educational options without remediation. Graduation rates were improving incrementally, but achievement gaps and increased dropout rates that fell along socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial lines persisted. If students in this country were going to be equally ready to be globally competitive in the future, we needed a set of consistent learning standards that would ensure that ALL students had access to the same increased rigor no matter where they lived (**for further information, visit <http://www.corestandards.org>**).

A group of state and educational leaders developed the common core state standards for Mathematics and English Language Arts. In Arkansas, Common Core became fully implemented in fall 2014. The standards were designed to be fewer in number, clearer, encompass broad academic goals, integrate content area instruction, and to prepare students for a variety of postsecondary experiences. Today, forty-three states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) have adopted the Common Core State Standards.

The CCSS provide a historic opportunity to improve access to rigorous academic content standards for ALL students in Arkansas. School districts have the freedom to select curriculum and programs for delivering the standards. Individual teachers have the flexibility to use professional judgment to design instruction for how the standards would be best taught to his or her students. This includes designing modified instruction necessary to support and accommodate students with disabilities, English language learners, and impoverished students. Students who are raised in poverty are not disabled, but come to school with distinct disadvantages. Ruby Payne’s research on poverty states that kindergarten children come to school with one half of the listening and speaking vocabulary that other classmates possess and that children in poverty have a huge deficit in the area of background knowledge(**for further information visit <http://www.ahaprocess.com/who-we-are/dr-ruby-payne/>**).

Robert Marzano’s work states that what works in schools for struggling students and students from poverty is direct instruction in vocabulary and providing background knowledge. The Common Core English Language Arts standards promote both rich vocabulary instruction and paired fiction with related nonfiction texts. This pairing of texts provide background knowledge to the reader where no prior knowledge exists. All students can discuss the text and provide evidence for their arguments from “right-there” texts no matter the depth of their previous background knowledge on the subject. The research of Marzano and Payne also suggest that instructional strategies such as cooperative learning structures, thematic, integrated approaches, and work with peers also support learners from

poverty. The Common Core ELA standards have these support structures built by design (see attached report, **The Art and Science of Teaching**).

Having common standards also benefits Arkansas teachers. Professional development workshops, training, and materials can all be focused on common standards; not just designed for the old state standards of the larger educational markets like Texas and California. Teachers from all over the nation can collaborate online and share best practices centered around our now common standards- especially ideas for how to raise the achievement level of our students living in poverty. The Common Core State Standards are a systemic change that will help to narrow the academic achievement gap.

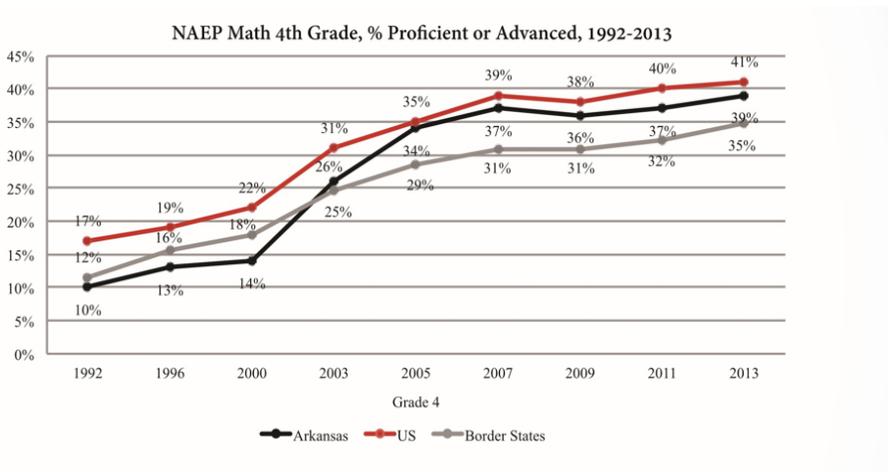
Subcommittee: Evaluating Yearly Progress in Closing the Academic Achievement Gap in Arkansas

- **Chairman, Dr. Luis Restrepo**
- **Committee Members: Dr. Dawn Tirado Simpson**

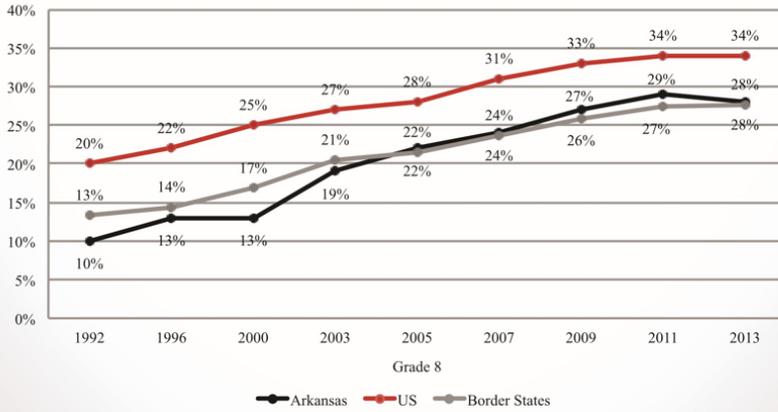
The Commission seeks to evaluate yearly progress in closing the academic achievement gap in Arkansas. Following the *2008 Report Education in the Post-Lake View Era: What Is Arkansas Doing To Close The Achievement Gap?* written by Jay Barth and Keith Nitta, the Commission focuses on 1) economically disadvantaged students, identified as those eligible for free or reduced –price lunches under the federal school lunch program and 2) students from major racial and ethnic groups in Arkansas. Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) identifies four major ethnic groups: White, African American, Latino, and Asian/Pacific Islander. The Barth and Nitta Report recommended measuring the achievement gap between these groups with (1) standardized test scores, (2) graduation rates, (3) remediation rates, (4) access to advanced coursework, (5) school discipline rates, and (6) college-attendance rates. Based on state and national data and reports, this 2014 Commission Report indicates that although there has been considerable progress in educational equity in Arkansas, there are still significant educational disparities that need to be addressed.

1. STANDARIZED TEST REPORTS

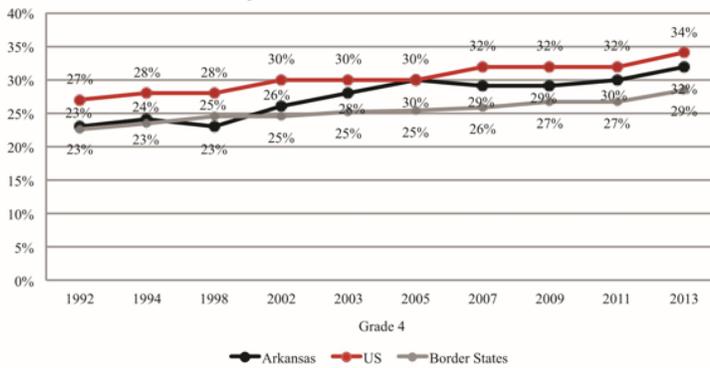
To better determine the educational disparities in Arkansas and the progress alleviating them, it is important to provide a national perspective and some historical data. The 2013 Arkansas Report Card by the University of Arkansas’ Office of Educational Policy provides a historical perspective student performance in reading and math based on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) from 1992 to 2013 for the nation, Arkansas and its surrounding states (Tennessee, Missouri, Texas, Oklahoma, Mississippi, and Louisiana). There has been a significant increase in the percentage of students scoring at the proficient or advanced levels in both Math and Reading in the past two decades at the national and state levels both for 4th and 8th graders.



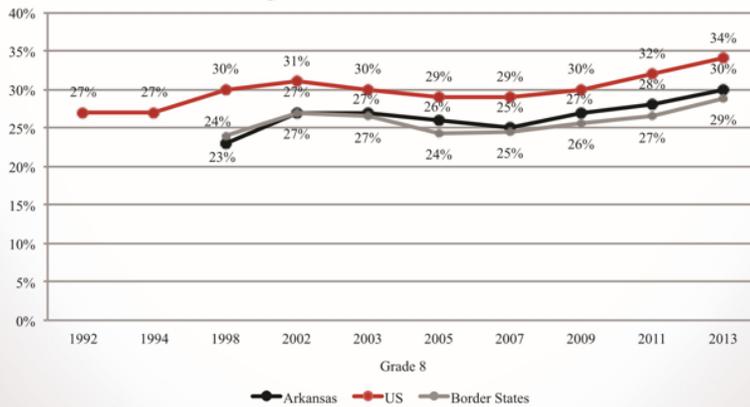
NAEP Math 8th Grade, % Proficient or Advanced, 1992-2013



NAEP Reading 4th Grade, % Proficient or Advanced, 1992-2013



NAEP Reading 8th Grade, % Proficient or Advanced, 1992-2013



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However, despite the increasing percentage of students scoring at the proficient or advanced levels, Arkansas students continue to place some points below the national average, most noticeably in Math. The percentage of Arkansas students proficient or advanced in Math was to six points below the national average (OEP 2013 Report). See Annex I for the 2013 Arkansas Report Card.

The achievement gap for the target sub groups in Arkansas is documented by the *Performance of All Student Subgroups: Moving Beyond the Achievement Gaps (2014)* report by Gary Ritter and Sarah Burks of the OEP:

In 4th and 8th grade, Arkansas' subgroups experienced positive growth in performance between 2000 and 2013 on proficiency levels and scale score points. The achievement gap between black and white students grew over time in respect to the percentage of students scoring proficient or higher (+14 percentage points in 4th grade and +8 percentage points in 8th grade), as the percentage of white students reaching proficiency increased more rapidly over time. However, in respect to scale score points, the gap between black and white students slightly decreased (-8 scale score points in 4th grade and -10 in 8th grade) as the average scale score of black students increased more rapidly during this time period. The achievement gap between Hispanic and white students slightly grew in 4th grade between 2000 and 2013, as the percentage of white students reaching proficiency increased over time. However, in 8th grade, the gap between Hispanic and white students slightly decreased (-1 percentage points), as the percentage of Hispanic students reaching proficiency increased slightly more rapidly over time. Compared to the nation, Arkansas' gap between black and white students and Hispanic and white students were moderately smaller than the average gaps of the nation on grade 4 and 8 math in respect to performance as measured by average scale scores and proficiency levels. (OEP 2014 p.8-9). See Annex II for the *Performance of All student Subgroups: Moving Beyond the Achievement Gaps (2014)*.

Another standardized test that indicates the educational disparities is the ACT exam. This is an important college admission test and common scholarship eligibility measure. According to the *2014 ACT Profile Report for Arkansas*, there is a significant achievement gap between White students and African American and Latino students. In 2014 White students ACT average score was 22.3 (out of 36) compared to 16.9 for African Americans and 18.8 for Hispanic/Latino students. See Annex III for the full 2014 ACT Profile Report for Arkansas.

Table 1.5. Five Year Trends—Percent and Average Composite Score by Race/Ethnicity

	2010			2011			2012			2013			2014		
	N	%	Avg												
All Students	24,578	100	20.3	27,020	100	19.9	26,058	100	20.3	25,875	100	20.2	26,821	100	20.4
Black/African American	4,415	18	16.6	4,880	18	16.6	4,677	18	16.9	4,403	17	16.7	4,452	17	16.9
American Indian/Alaska Native	269	1	20.6	274	1	19.8	178	1	19.7	161	1	19.5	138	1	19.8
White	17,027	69	21.4	17,526	65	21.1	17,282	66	21.4	16,784	65	21.4	17,181	64	21.6
Hispanic/Latino	1,116	5	18.6	1,666	6	18.5	1,776	7	18.7	2,005	8	18.9	2,179	8	18.8
Asian	462	2	22.0	492	2	21.4	433	2	21.3	416	2	22.1	466	2	22.3
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0	0	.	19	0	19.3	28	0	18.9	37	0	18.2	54	0	17.2
Two or more races	367	1	20.3	601	2	20.6	758	3	20.7	920	4	20.8	942	4	20.8
Prefer not to respond/No response	922	4	19.4	1,562	6	18.1	926	4	19.3	1,149	4	19.0	1,409	5	19.1

2. GRADUATION RATES

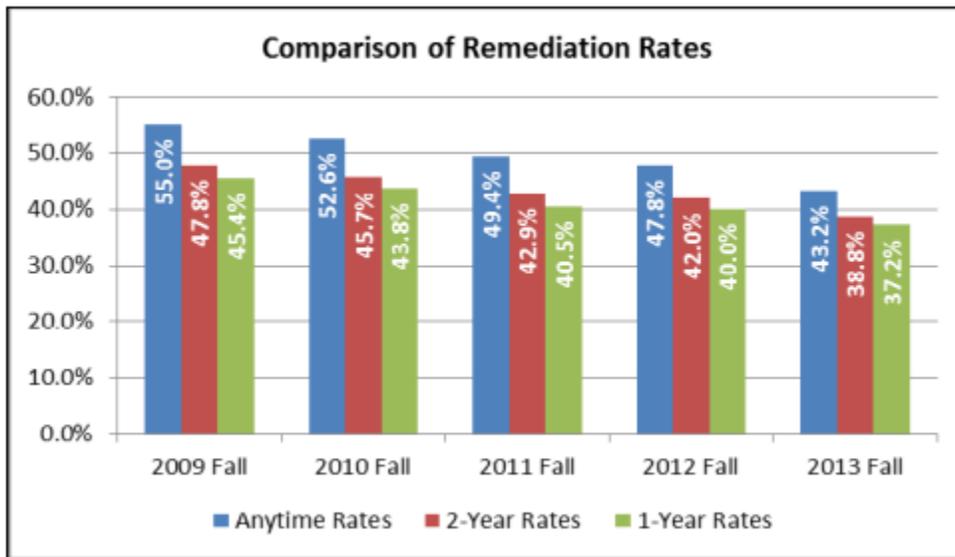
The OEP report on Graduation Rates for the 2013 school year indicates that TAGG groups (Targeted Achievement Gap Group) is 83%, five percentage points below those of the general student population, with 87% graduation rates, based on a four year adjusted cohort graduation rate measure. See OEP 2012-2013 Graduation Rate Report (**for further information, visit <http://www.officeforeducationpolicy.org/arkansas-schools-data-graduation-rate>**).

Table 2: Statewide four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (2011-12 and 2012-13)

	2011-2012	2012-2013
Arkansas Overall	85%	87%
Targeted Achievement Gap Group (TAGG)	80%	83%
Students eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (FRL)	80%	83%
Limited English Proficient Students (LEP)	78%	84%
Special Education Students	79%	82%
African American Students	79%	82%
Hispanic Students	79%	84%
White Students	87%	89%

3. REMEDIATION RATES

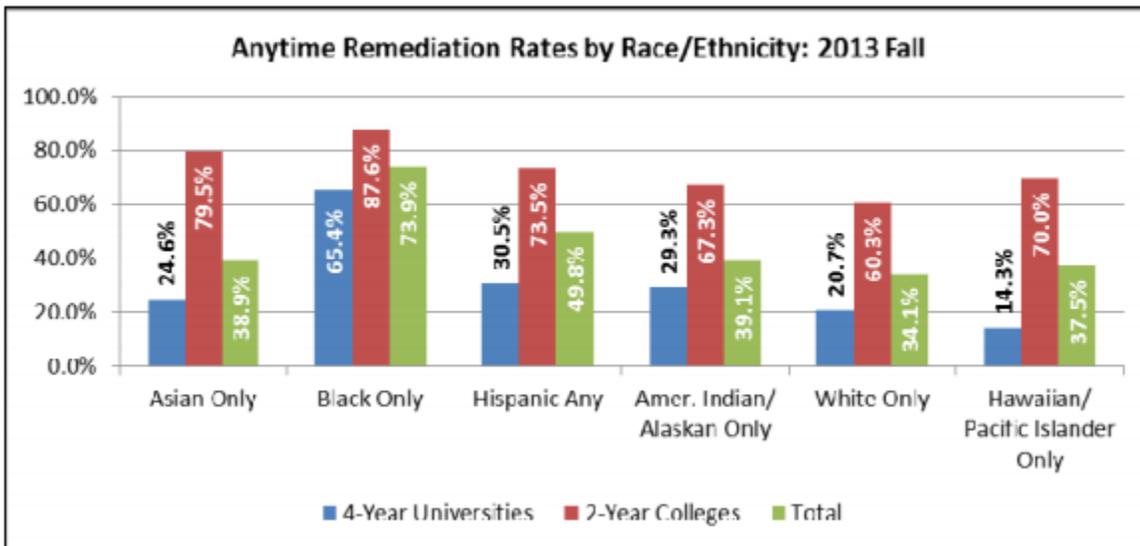
According to the ADHE Annual Report on First-Year Student Remediation, released January 31, 2014, there is a steady decrease in remediation rates since 2009.



ADHE calculates remediation rates according to the following formula:

1. Anytime Rates – rates in which the high school graduation date is ignored
2. 2-Year Rates – rates in which the student graduated high school in the previous 2 years
3. 1-Year Rates – rates in which the student graduated high school in the previous 1 year

Remediation rates by student ethnicity shows some disparities that need attention. In 2013, African American students had a 73.9% rate of remediation compared to 34.1% for White students. Hispanic students also had high remediation rates at 49.8% (see chart on p. 9).



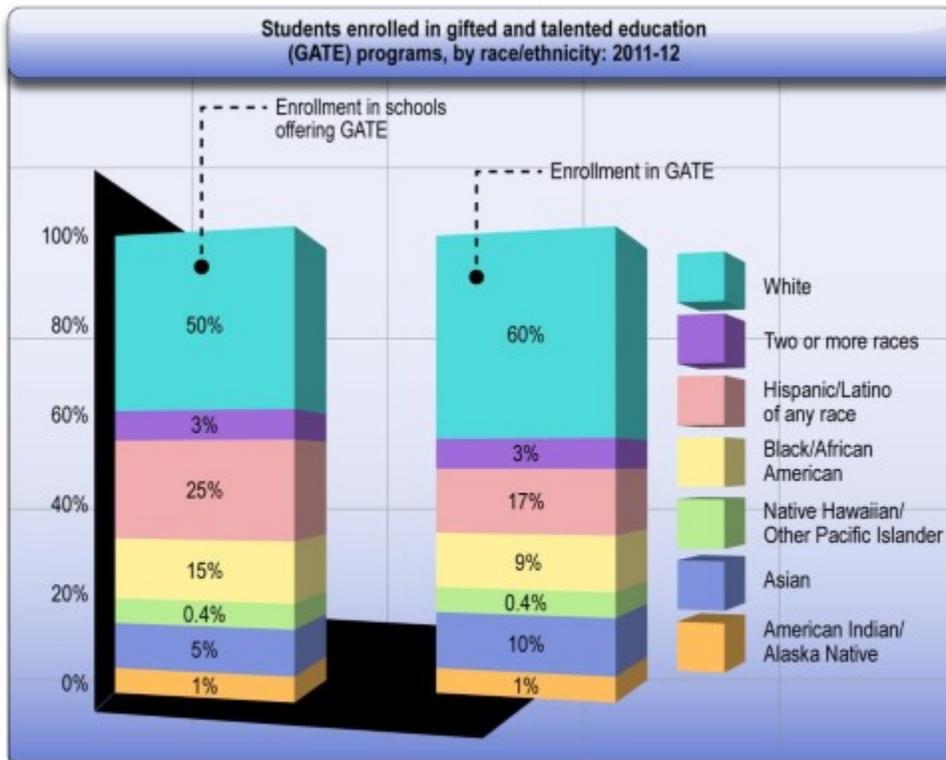
4. ACCESS TO ADVANCED COURSEWORK

Two important sources document the disparities in academic opportunities for the TAGG groups in Arkansas. The first one is the U.S. Department of Education Civil Rights Office 2014 Issue Brief No. 3, College and Career Readiness. According to the report, Latinos and African American students have less opportunities to take college preparation courses such as algebra, calculus or participating in Gifted and Talented programs. At the national level, some of the highlights of the Civil Rights report are the following:

- Limited access to high-level math and science courses: Nationwide, only 50% of high schools offer calculus, and only 63% offer physics.
 - Significant lack of access to other core courses: Nationwide, between 10-25% of high schools do not offer more than one of the core courses in the typical sequence of high school math and science education — such as Algebra I and II, geometry, biology, and chemistry.
 - Even less access for black, Latino, American Indian, and Alaska Native students: A quarter of high schools with the highest percentage of black and Latino students do not offer Algebra II; a third of these schools do not offer chemistry. Fewer than half of American Indian and Native-Alaskan high school students have access to the full range of math and science courses in their high school.
 - Growing opportunity gap in gifted and talented education: Black and Latino students represent 26% of the students enrolled in gifted and talented education programs, compared to black and Latino students' 40% enrollment in schools offering gifted and talented programs.
 - Advanced Placement (AP) course enrollment and testing: o Black and Latino students make up 37% of students in high schools, 27% of students enrolled in at least one Advanced Placement (AP) course, and 18% of students receiving a qualifying score of 3 or above on an AP exam.
- * English learners represent 5% of high school students, 2% of the students enrolled in at least one AP course, and 1% of the students receiving a qualifying score of 3 or above on an AP exam.

* Students with disabilities served by IDEA represent 12% of high school students, 2% of students enrolled in an AP course, and 1% of the students receiving a qualifying score of 3 or above on an AP exam.

The following chart details the participation in gifted and talented programs by ethnic groups:



NOTE: Detail may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Figure reflects 33 million students enrolled in schools offering gifted and talented education (GATE) programs and about 3.3 million students enrolled in GATE programs.

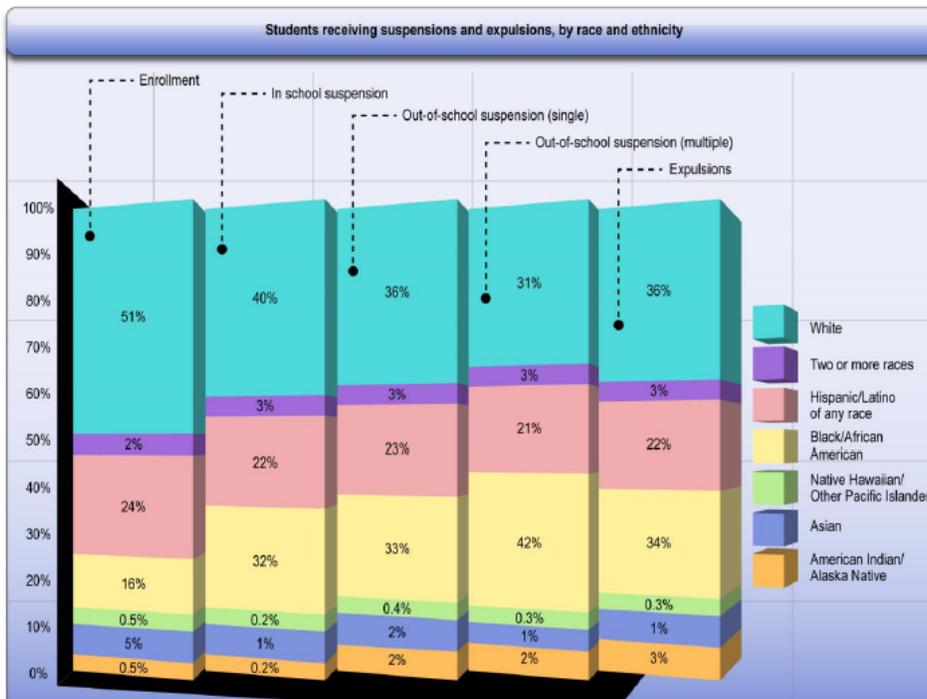
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011-12.

At the state level, the Civil Rights Office Issue Brief includes Arkansas as one of the states with the highest percentage of African American students in GATE Programs (8%). Arkansas is one of the states with the highest percentage of high schools offering math and science courses, Algebra II (96%), Geometry (96%), Biology (97%), Chemistry (90%) and Physics (86%).

In addition to the Civil Rights Office Brief, another important indicator of disparities in academic opportunities is *College Board's 2014 AP Report to the Nation*. The state supplement for Arkansas indicates that although there is an increasing number of TAGG students taking AP courses, there is a significant gap compare to White students AP course participation rates and success. For example, 70.2% of graduating White students took at least one AP course and 78.6% of these scored a 3 or more in an AP exam. In contrast, of the 60.5% low income students in Arkansas, only 32.9% took an AP course and just 23.6% scored 3 or more in an AP exam. There are also equity gaps in AP participation and success for African American and Latinos in Arkansas. 14% of graduating African Americans took an AP course of which only 4.9% scored a 3 or more in an AP exam. Of the 1,792 African American students that took AP courses, only 215 achieved a successful score. In a similar way, of the 1,060 Latino students that took one AP exam, only 390 scored 3 or more.

5. SCHOOL DISCIPLINE RATES

The U.S. Department of Education Civil Rights Office published a report this year (2014) based on data from every public school in the nation (approximately 16,500 school districts, 97,000 schools, and 49 million students) with a 98% responding rate. Alarming, at the national level, students of color are disciplined at significantly higher rates than White students.



NOTE: Detail may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Totals: Enrollment is 49 million students, in-school suspension is 3.5 million students, single out-of-school suspension is 1.9 million students, multiple out-of-school suspension is 1.55 million students, and expulsion is 130,000 students. Data reported in this figure represents 99% of responding schools.

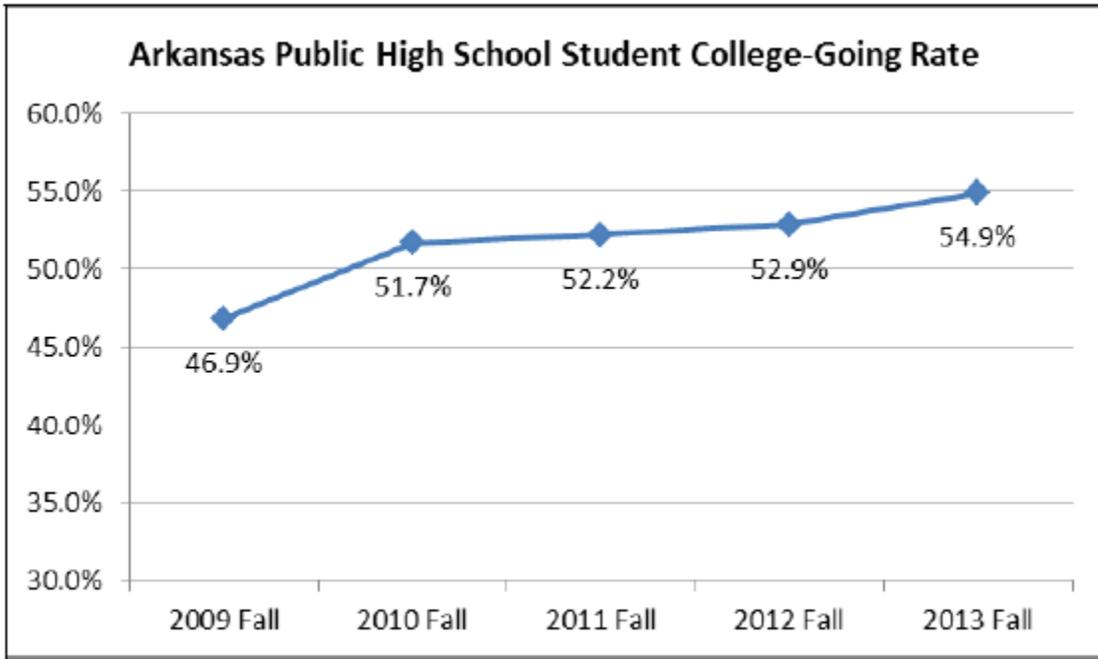
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011-12.

The Civil Right Data Collection (CRDC) report reveals that “Black students represent 16% of the student population, but 32-42% of students suspended or expelled. In comparison, white students also represent a similar range of between 31-40% of students suspended or expelled, but they are 51% of the student population” (Issue Brief No.1, released March 1, 2014).

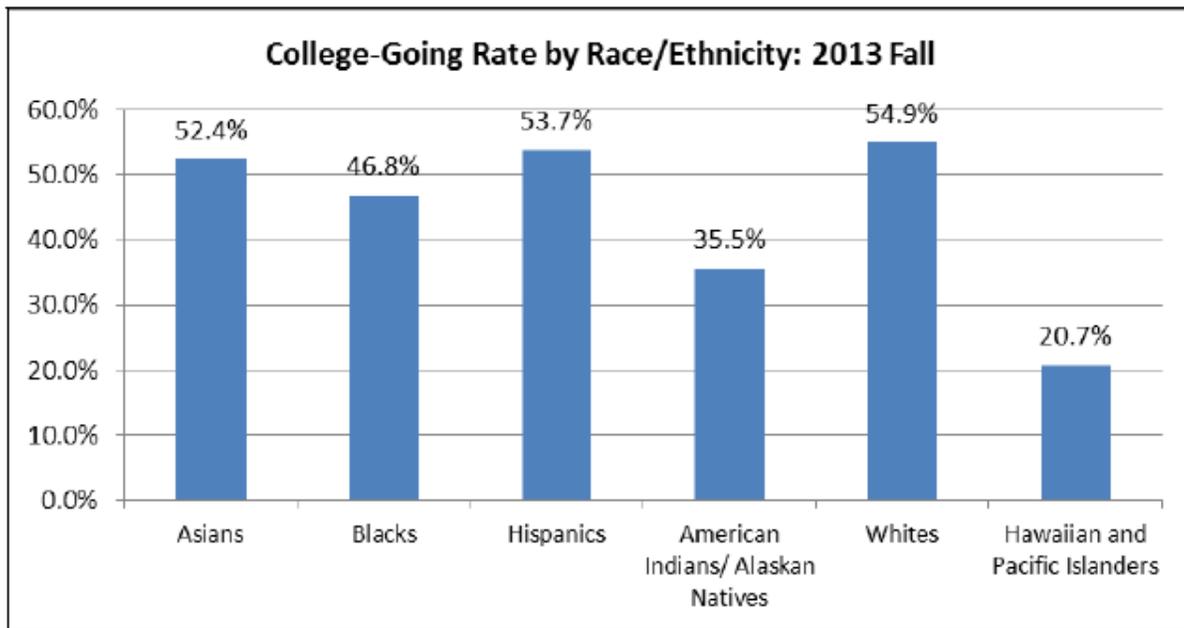
Arkansas is highlighted in the Discipline Report, as one of the eleven states with higher gaps between the suspension rates of black students and white students. The Arkansas out of school suspension rate for black males is 24% compared to 20% nationally. The out of school suspension rates for Whites in Arkansas is 8%, compared to 6% nationally.

6. COLLEGE ATTENDANCE RATES

The Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE) 2014 Report on the College Going Rate for Public School graduates, there is a steady increase in college attendance, from 46.9% in 2009 to 54.9% in 2013. However this figure is below the national college going rate, at 62% in 2012, according to the ADHE report (see chart on p. 12).



When considering the TAGG students, there still is significant gap between the rate of college-going African American, American Indians, and Pacific Islander students compared to Whites. Hispanics and Asians, on the other hand, have nearly the same attendance rate as Whites.



Subcommittee: Parental Involvement:

- ***Chairman, Mr. Jon Fulkerson***
- ***Committee Members: Rev. Charles Killion and Senator Jack Crumbly***

The Commission would be remiss if we did not mention the great importance that parental involvement has upon the overreaching impact of the academic achievement gap. It is the opinion of the sub-committee that a parent/guardian will have a continued educational impact upon a child as being their first educator from birth until school age. In addition, parental support within the school (throughout the day and at school events), as well as their continued support at home, is absolutely essential.

Additionally, the subcommittee has researched the role parents play upon the education of their child extensively over the past year. In addition to data that is already widely known and understood pertaining to parental involvement, the issue of the lack of ability to communicate quickly and efficiently with parents is also a large problem facing schools in Arkansas.

Inaccurate telephone numbers, addresses and no immediate access to internet making email a less reliable form of communication is a problem for many educators trying to keep parents and guardians as active participants in the education of their children. Lack of communication with parents and guardians is a key issue this subcommittee will be addressing in the coming year as we continue this particular research interest.

Transportation is also a concern for parents at or below the poverty line. Getting students to and from school events where bus services are not available is a concern for many schools. Parents with a lack of transportation do not have the same opportunities to volunteer in schools, at school events or attend parent/teacher conferences. The commission will continue to study transportation as a direct impact on parental involvement and in turn student success.

Subcommittee: Scholastic Resources/ACSIP

- **Chairman: Dr. Vera Lang Brown**
- **Committee Members: Dr. Luis Restrepo and Rev. Charles Killion**

The ACSIP Subcommittee, which has been charged with not only reviewing the ACSIP plans, but also in evaluating its impact on scholastic resources, has reviewed online materials about the new ACSIP (Indistar) Pilot process and timeline. The Chair of our Subcommittee, Dr. Vera Lang Brown, has emailed Senator Joyce Elliott informing her of her interest and willingness to work with the Senate committee to review and gather any data on the impact of the new ACSIP Pilot. Dr. Debbie Jones, Assistant Commissioner for Learning Services reported in an update on CCSS, PARCC, and School Improvement that "thirty-five schools and two charter schools" were selected to participate in the pilot. November 1st was the first submission due date for the pilot school improvement plans.

Information from the timelines indicated that training occurred to prepare school representatives on the process and use of the software for the year 2014-2015. I am providing a timeline of actions that have occurred with the pilot. I am going to make phone calls to find out if I can attend at least one of the meetings in my zone to learn more about the school improvement plans and its impact on teaching, student success, and budgetary spending.

After reviewing some ACSIP materials, It is the belief of the Subcommittee that the new ACSIP process will prove to be more user friendly in assisting me in identifying and understanding the following:

- What schools are doing linked to teaching and student learning
- Schools plans of actions
- Interventions being used and cost if any
- Services being used from in and out of state agencies/consultants plus cost
- Determine if services are addressing school needs and results
- Inequities of educational services/resources across districts
- Whether ACSIP plans are driven by test results and/or determinations by schools

For further information, the Subcommittee Chair has provided the following links:

- Commissioner's Memo dated June 11, 2014 (LS-14-084)

<http://www.arkansased.org/divisions/public-school-accountability/school-improvement/related-commissioners-memos>

- ACSIP Pilot Map

<http://adesharepoint2.arkansas.gov/memos/Lists/Approved%20Memos/Attachments/>

- ACSIP Pilot Timeline

<http://adesharepoint2.arkansas.gov/memos/Lists/Approved%20Memos/Attachments/>

Special Presentations

For the first time since the Arkansas Commission on Closing the Academic Achievement Gap's inception in 2003, we had the opportunity to present our Annual Report as a group to the House and Senate Joint Committee on Education. In that meeting we presented our 2013 Annual Report and were available to answer questions about our findings.

Summary & Recommendations

Summary

As a result of the research conducted as a Commission throughout the year, and through the various discussions that we have been privy to, we have seen both the educational and economic impact the achievement gap can have across our state. There is no question that closing the academic achievement gap among those groups who are currently struggling to do well in school can greatly impact the number of schools that are currently in academic distress. According to the State Board of Education, 26 schools are currently classified as being in Academic Distress (**see attached ADE 2011-2013 Three Year Proficiency Report**).

As a Commission, we believe working to reduce the academic achievement gap, and therefore, the number of schools in academic distress can bring about a multitude of positive effects, and as such, we suggest that the following factors be considered in moving forward:

- Sharing best practices with professionals from other states
- Pursuing online collaboration with other Common Core Teachers
- Raising achievement levels of students living in poverty
- Providing AR with the systemic change necessary to help narrow the academic achievement gap

- Examining the how/why graduation rates among high school are improving, while drop-out rates persisted and fell along socio-economic lines

All of these factors greatly affect student success among Arkansas high school students, which in turn, can greatly impact the number of remediation classes Arkansas graduates will have to take to even be prepared to further their education at the post-secondary level. The current remediation costs for the Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE), is staggering, as student need for these courses continue to rise. According to the ADHE 2012-2013 annual report on remediation rates, the current cost to the state of Arkansas is \$19,011,075.00 (**see attached ADHE Remediation Report**). The Arkansas Department of Higher Education runs this report on an annual basis each December, and will be updating the Commission upon the release of this year's findings.

Recommendations

One of the most important aspects of serving on The Arkansas Commission on Closing the Academic Achievement Gap, is that we are authorized to make recommendations to our governing officials and key educational leaders – as such, we as a Commission would like to make 3 recommendations that, if followed, could impact the effectiveness of our future work as a Commission, as we work alongside school districts on this vital issue:

1) **Speaking to the Joint Committee on Education on an Annual Basis** – we as a Commission would value the opportunity to speak to both the House and Senate about an issue we believe so wholeheartedly in. I have served on the Commission since its inception in 2003, and over these past 10 years, we have seen great strides in the progress we have made as a state, particularly when we compare these results from where we started. Arkansas has led the way in recent years in bridging that gap, and we would like to provide any assistance we can in ensuring that we continue to do so. Having the opportunity to discuss these issues and get feedback on an annual basis regarding where we are, and where we would like to go, could help us tremendously as we continue on this journey.

2) **Adding an Annual Budget of \$2,500.00 per Congressional District** – This idea was presented last year to the Joint Committee on Education, and although there was agreement that this was important, a suggestion had been made to the then Commissioner of the Arkansas Department of Education, but no monies have been allotted to the Commission at this time. Without an operating budget, we are limited on what we can do. Even with elaborate collaboration and financial partnerships, most educational conferences, even with charging a small registration fee, will cost approximately \$7,000.00 (**see attached Final Attendance, Income and Expenses report from this year's symposium**). An annual budget of \$2,500.00 per Congressional District, or \$10,000.00 a year, would allow the Commission the ability to accomplish the following:

- Invite both state, and nationally recognized, keynote speakers
- Provide the necessary educational materials for our annual symposium attendees
- Reimburse the travel expenses for our Commission members who would be presenting at the conference.

We strongly believe that Arkansas has made great strides in examining this issue and we also believe that we could continue to be on the forefront of academic progressiveness. As such, we as a Commission could become the model for other states to follow, demonstrating first-hand how a state commission can serve as both an educational resource and an advocacy group. The focus of our work would be centered around working alongside local school districts across our state in taking a more pro- active, rather than a re-active, stand on this very important issue.

3) **Expecting School Districts to Follow the Local Achievement Gap Task Force Mandate** - School districts and their Superintendents should take heed that local gap task forces charged with examining the academic discrepancies among their school sub-groups should already be in place. Codified on April 24, 2012, we discovered this year that few school

districts are implementing this requirement. We were able to present our concerns to the Committee and we were tasked with identifying the schools that currently have local task forces in place – ADE has provided us a current list, and at this time, only 12 school districts have local Gap committees specifically examining this issue (**see attached list of school districts**).

4) **We would also recommend the following changes to our Website link:** First, it is our recommendation that our website link be placed under *Popular Links* on the ADE homepage, rather than where it is currently.

- As mentioned earlier, you cannot find our website link unless you go to *ADE Divisions*, and then click on the *Policy* tab.
- Changing the location to *Popular Links* on the ADE homepage and would also be more aligned with what we are and what we do, since we truly are not an ADE division and we are not solely dedicated to policy making.
- Also, on the ADE homepage, there is an alphabetical list of topics, and if you were to try to access our website utilizing the A through Z tabs, you can't find us under **A** (*Arkansas, Academic, Achievement*), **C** (*Closing, Commission*) or even **G** (*Gap*). As the Arkansas Commission on Closing the Academic Achievement Gap, those letters would most likely be the way the public would try to access our information.

Commission Composition

The Arkansas Commission on Closing the Achievement Gap consists of the following members:



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2013 Academic Achievement Gap Commission Members



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