



ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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LITTLE ROCK: Arkansas schools will be receiving up to \$569.9 million over the next six months as part of President Obama's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Today, Dr. Ken James, Arkansas Commissioner of Education, met with more than 1,000 school district, charter school and education cooperative personnel to share the Arkansas Department of Education's (ADE) guidance for wisely investing those funds. The meeting was held at the North Little Rock High School East Campus Auditorium.

"Both President Obama and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have stated very clearly to state school chiefs that the federal government will be watching states to see how wisely the ARRA dollars are invested," Dr. James said. "While one of the main goals of the stimulus funds as a whole is to create and save jobs, the education portion of ARRA has an equally important goal of improving student achievement."

The Arkansas Department of Education will release estimates of allocation of funds to school districts by the end of next week. The ARRA funds are being made available to the schools via the state departments of education in three main funding categories: Title I, A; IDEA, B and State Fiscal Stabilization Funds.

Fifty percent of the \$111.1 million will be available this spring/summer and the remainder will be available in the fall. All of the Title I funds will be distributed to school districts and charter schools -- local education agencies -- using the current formula for Title I. Local education agencies (LEAs) may use this money only to invest in those items or programs already approved as Title I, Part A expenditures, which focus on improving student academic performance and narrowing the achievement gap.

Fifty percent of the \$117.7 million of the IDEA -- or Individuals with Disabilities Education Act -- funds will also be available this spring/summer and the remainder will be available in the fall. All of the IDEA funds will be distributed to LEAs using the current formula for IDEA, Part B. LEAs may use this money only to invest in those items or programs already approved as IDEA, Part B expenditures. IDEA, Part B funds should be used to provide special education and related services to students with disabilities.

The third pot of funds dedicated to education is 81.2 percent of the State Fiscal Stabilization Funds. These monies -- \$341.1 million -- will be distributed using the formula for Title 1 funds, but they can be invested in any expense authorized under

ESEA, IDEA, Perkins and Adult and Family Literacy Act. Stabilization funds may also be used for new construction, modernization, renovation and repair.

“This section of the law provides an opportunity for leaders to think of creative and innovative ways to change their facilities in such a way that it will lead to academic achievement for all students,” Dr. James said.

The Arkansas Department of Education’s ARRA guidance suggests that school personnel use four “filter” questions when deciding on how to invest their ARRA funds. These questions reflect the four principles set forth by the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE):

1. Spending funds quickly to save and create jobs.
2. Improving student achievement through school improvement and reform.
3. Ensuring transparency, reporting and accountability.
4. Investing one-time ARRA funds thoughtfully to minimize the “funding cliff.”

Once those questions are satisfied, the district is to assure the Arkansas Department of Education that the expenditure will lead to advances in one of the following four areas:

1. Making progress toward rigorous college- and career-ready standards and high-quality assessments that are valid and reliable for all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities.
2. Establishing pre-K to college and career data systems that track progress and foster continuous improvement.
3. Making improvements in teacher effectiveness and in the equitable distribution of qualified teachers for all students, particularly students who are most in need.
4. Providing intensive support and effective interventions for the lowest-performing schools.

The ARRA is not a facilities bill, though it can be used for certain facilities expenditures. The guidance tells districts who want to use this money for facilities to think about how such projects will transform their schools into high performing schools that will lead to high performing students, such as fully equipping science laboratories or creating high-tech media centers.

School districts will submit statements of assurance as well as fulfill planning and tracking requirements through a computerized system to meet the ARRA transparency requirements. While the Arkansas Department of Education will not approve or disapprove projects, it will provide feedback to local education agencies regarding the appropriateness of the investment when judged by the USDOE’s and ADE’s guidance.

This step is a means of protection for the state. As the U.S. Secretary of Education recently told Education Week, “We’re putting out literally billions of dollars. We’re also holding back billions of dollars. If we see states doing things that don’t make sense and aren’t in the spirit of what this [stimulus aid] is all about, they would put themselves in jeopardy of receiving the second set of money.”

The Arkansas Department of Education strives to ensure that all children in the state have access to a quality education by providing educators, administrators and staff with leadership, resources and training.

