



ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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LITTLE ROCK: Dr. Ken James, Arkansas Commissioner of Education, today announced his resignation from the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE), after five-plus years of service as the state's chief school officer. Dr. James' final day with the state department will be June 30.

"Ken James has played an invaluable role in moving Arkansas's education system out of the courtroom and onto the path of excellence," Governor Mike Beebe said. "The educational advancements he oversaw have already produced measurable improvements for our students, but the true extent of those advancements will be revealed further with each additional school year. On behalf of all Arkansans, I thank Ken for his tireless, single-minded efforts to improve the education of our children."

Dr. James said the decision was not an easy one. "After a great deal of thought, introspection, and discussion with family, I have decided it is time to move on with the next phase of our lives," he informed ADE employees in an e-mail distributed shortly after 9 a.m. this morning. "This has been a very difficult decision, as I love my work and the state of Arkansas."

Dr. James will sit down with reporters to discuss his resignation at noon today in the Commissioner's Conference Room at the Arkansas Department of Education, Four Capitol Mall, Little Rock. Reporters may also join the discussion via a conference call by dialing (712) 432- 0600. The conference number you will be asked to enter is 1064632 followed by #.

Dr. James said he has made no final decision regarding his future, though he is considering several options.

Dr. James was reappointed as Commissioner by Gov. Beebe soon after the governor was elected to his first term in November 2006. Former Gov. Mike Huckabee initially appointed Dr. James to the position of ADE Director, now called Commissioner, in May 2004. Prior to working for the state of Arkansas, Dr. James had worked as superintendent in Lexington, Ky., Little Rock, Van Buren and Batesville.

In 2007, Dr. James was elected president-elect of the Council of Chief State School Officers, the national professional organization of his counterparts across the nation. He has served as president of the organization since November 2008 and in that role has advised President Barack Obama's education team on education policy and, earlier this month, testified before the House Labor and Education Committee regarding the need for the creation of voluntary, state-led national standards. He also serves on the board of directors of the Southern Regional Education Board.

When Dr. James assumed his position with ADE in 2004, the state legislature had recently enacted broad-ranging and sometimes controversial education reforms. Dr. James' first meeting of the Arkansas State Board of Education, in fact, lasted more than 11 hours as the initial round of "Act 60" consolidations of districts with fewer than 350 students took the state from 310 school districts to 254 in one day.

Over the next five years, forced consolidation under Act 60 would be only one of the challenges that Dr. James and the department would manage. Six school districts classified in fiscal distress required takeover by the state during that time. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita brought more than 3,000 displaced school children and teachers to the state in 2005. And a 2004 managerial audit of the education department enabled Dr. James to implement a major reorganization of ADE units and staff the following year.

Also during Dr James' tenure, Arkansas has gained the attention of various national organizations because the state, propelled by Dr. James' push-the-envelope leadership style, has been one of the first to apply for many significant national education efforts. For example, Arkansas was one of the first states to:

- receive a \$2 million National Governors Association grant to implement high school redesign;
- receive a \$3 million technology grant (and then a second, \$ 5 million technology grant) from the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE),
- gain approval for a growth model approved by USDOE for use in calculating adequate yearly progress under No Child Left Behind
- gain approval of a differentiated accountability system (Smart Accountability) for use with schools classified as "schools in need of improvement" under No Child Left Behind
- receive a \$13.2 million grant from the National Math and Science Initiative to increase access and achievement in mathematics, science and English Advanced Placement courses
- join a consortium to administer a common Algebra II end-of-course exam
- join a consortium to develop voluntary, state-led national standards

Additional national recognition for the state has come from Education Week, which has ranked Arkansas among the top 10 states in terms of quality education policy for the last two years in its Quality Counts publication; Education Trust, which has lauded Arkansas for significant improvement among minority and low-socio-economic scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress

(NAEP); the national Data Quality Campaign, which named Arkansas one of the first four states as having all 10 necessary elements for a quality education data system; and the Education Commission of the States, which recognized Arkansas for being the only state to have all 10 of the necessary components for a successful and accessible Advanced Placement program.

“If I could choose my legacy as Arkansas Commissioner of Education, it would be that each step I took was to make a positive impact on the academic success of Arkansas students,” Dr. James said. “Sometimes that meant stretching in new and not always comfortable directions. At others it meant stubbornly holding firm to the progress the state had made and staving off attempts to weaken effective policies. Looking at the upward trend of our student benchmark scores and those of other indicators, I am proud of the impact that educators all across this state have achieved during my years as Commissioner.”

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.