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## ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

*Tony Wood, Commissioner*



August 14, 2014

### State Board of Education Joins Strategic Partnership with Foundations to Improve Educational Opportunity in Arkansas

**LITTLE ROCK** – The Arkansas Board of Education on Thursday voted to establish a strategic partnership with the state's two leading foundations committed to increasing educational attainment. Through the ForwARd initiative, the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation and Walton Family Foundation will lead the development of a comprehensive plan to strengthen public education in the state targeted on recommendations for academically distressed schools and districts.

"Every Arkansas student should graduate high school fully prepared for success in college and the workplace," said Sam Ledbetter, chairman of the Arkansas State Board of Education. "The time is now to develop an actionable plan that will involve multiple stakeholders in communities with schools or districts in academic distress to push our state forward to ensure high-quality educational opportunities for all Arkansans."

According to recent [research](#), the economic impact of ensuring all Arkansas students graduate high school prepared for college would save the state approximately \$50 million annually in college remediation costs and lost earnings. This research demonstrates that the future success of Arkansas's economy begins with the success of the state's students.

"At the center of any vibrant community is a strong public school system with high achieving students, engaged parents and residents, dedicated teachers, and visionary school leaders," Ledbetter said. "The strategic recommendations of the ForwARd initiative will allow our state to create one of the finest public education systems in the nation."

Later this fall, the ForwARd initiative will release "The State of Public Education in Arkansas," a report featuring baseline data on the state's educational outcomes. The ForwARd initiative also will begin to convene educators, parents, educational advocacy stakeholders, and policymakers in support of a strategic planning process. The comprehensive strategic plan is scheduled to be completed by summer 2015.

For more information about this partnership and the ForwARd initiative, visit [here](#).

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## About the Arkansas Department of Education

The Arkansas Department of Education is a dedicated service agency that provides leadership, resources and technical support to school districts, schools and educators. ADE serves students, parents and the general public by protecting the public trust through adherence to laws, strong stewardship of public funds and accountability for student performance. <http://www.arkansased.org/>

## About the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation

For nearly 40 years, the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation has helped to build and sustain the organizations that serve and strengthen Arkansas. Through grantmaking and strategic partnerships, we are working hard to help close the economic and educational gaps that leave too many Arkansas families in persistent poverty. [www.wrfoundation.org](http://www.wrfoundation.org)

## About the Walton Family Foundation

When Sam and Helen Walton launched their modest retail business in 1962, one of their goals was to increase opportunity and improve the lives of others along the way. This guiding principle has played a pivotal role in the phenomenal growth of their small enterprise into a global retail leader.

This principle also drives the philanthropic mission of the Walton Family Foundation. Today the foundation is more focused than ever on sustaining the Walton's timeless small-town values and deep commitment to making life better for individuals and communities alike. By working with grantees and collaborating with other philanthropic organizations, the foundation is dedicated to making a positive difference in three focus areas:

- K-12 education reform
- Freshwater and marine conservation
- Quality of life initiatives in our home region

During 2013, the foundation invested more than \$325 million in domestic and international projects that addressed significant social and environmental issues, and sought to create exciting new opportunities. The foundation continues to implement and expand grant making to fund a positive difference in many diverse communities and in the lives of the people who call them home.

[www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/](http://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/)

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