

Dear Parents, Families, and Members of the Community:

When you were a child, did you dream? Did you use your imagination? We all did...it is a natural part of being a child.

I am going to ask you to go back to your childhood and use your imagination. Imagine a toolbox. What is in your toolbox? Do you have a hammer in your toolbox? What would you use that hammer to do? Do you have a wrench? A screwdriver? A saw, a measuring tape, or maybe pliers? How might you use those tools? Think about that for a moment; I will come back to this topic later.

The 2017-18 school year has been a landmark year for education in Arkansas and the nation. We have observed the end of the federal law known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the beginning of its replacement, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Great opportunities for our students are available under ESSA. The NCLB law required considerable focus on regulatory compliance and standardized test scores, and this focus was often out-of-balance with other critical aspects of education. While ESSA still requires annual testing, the Arkansas ESSA plan places a greater emphasis on student growth and school quality indicators that will foster greater student achievement. Now educators and communities have more flexibility to create educational opportunities that truly meet the needs of students.

Today you are reading the 2017 Arkansas School Performance Report. The Arkansas Department of Education publishes this report annually, and it provides important information about each school and school district including test performance, graduation rate, school quality, and student success. It also provides information about how well schools are meeting the educational needs of special populations of students.

Now, let us recall our imaginary toolbox. When it comes to the education of our students, the Performance Report is a tool. It is a multi-purpose tool. It is designed to help open the lines of communication between educators, parents, and the local community. It should prompt constructive discussion on how all stakeholders can work together in pursuit of excellence in our local schools. When used correctly, the Performance Report should drive positive conversations about continuous improvement of schools and equity for all students.

Greater involvement from parents results in better outcomes for students, and we trust the information included in the 2017 Arkansas School Performance Report will encourage you to become even more engaged in your child's education. As you read the report, you may encounter some terms and phrases that are unfamiliar to you. To help you understand the report, you can visit <http://www.arkansased.gov/divisions/public-school-accountability/every-student-succeeds-act-essa/informational-documents> to access a variety of information including documents, presentations, and webinars.

Shall we imagine one last time? Imagine being first in the nation. Imagine an Arkansas education system that *leads the nation* in student-focused education. Imagine every student in the state, regardless of race, sex, family income or zip code, leaving high school fully prepared for college, career, and community engagement. That is my vision; I hope that is yours as well. For more information, I encourage you to visit <http://www.arkansased.gov>

Respectfully,  
Johnny Key  
Commissioner of Education