

Chalkboard

By

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If this article was a television program I would be billing today's piece as the much-awaited conclusion of the two-part series on educational reform and it's effect on Gentry students. Is this not our world's marketing strategy? Just put in enough facts to support the supposition. Sorry, but that's not my style; the truth is easier to remember.

Unless you were a parent acquiring new information, last week's article was as exciting as watching grass grow. Today's article will be equally thrilling. Nonetheless, sometimes the transmitting of knowledge sans personal philosophy is a must. So stated, here is the rest of the story.

Last week's article was mostly excerpts from proposed rules written by State Board of Education to implement recent legislation. It dealt with the consequences of students failing to achieve the proficient level on state exams (Want to read all the rules verbatim? Go to:

http://arkedu.state.ar.us/rules_regs/rules_regs_pg1.html#May 12 Listing).

If you read the article, you know the most serious consequence for the student, being retained in the current grade level, applies to students in grades 1 to 6 in 2005-06 and the range of grades increases by one each year until all are included through the eighth grade. You also know that, beginning the same year, older students who do not reach proficient on the End-of-Course tests or on the Grade 11 Literacy test, shall participate in a remediation program to receive credit for the corresponding course. Now read what lies ahead for the earliest grades.

“Section 8.0 Reading Deficiency for Students in Kindergarten through Grade Two 8.01 Beginning with the 2005-2006 school year, any student who exhibits a substantial deficiency in reading shall be given intensive reading instruction based on research-based comprehensive reading instructional strategies as recommended by the Department of Education. 8.01.1 During the 2004-2005 school year, the State Board of Education shall establish substantial deficiency in reading based on performance levels as set from the Kindergarten – Grade Two assessments. 8.02 The parent or guardian of any student identified with a substantial reading deficiency shall be notified in writing to include the following: 8.02.1 That the child has been identified as having a substantial deficiency in reading; 8.02.2 A description of the current services that are provided to the child; and, 8.02.3 A

description of the proposed supplemental instructional services and supports that will be provided to the child that are designed to remediate the identified area of reading deficiency.”

Now you have the skeleton plan for all grades. Let me cut the remainder of flesh off those elite bones and summarize. “We, the school staff, are going to teach your child to the very best of our ability. Then we are going to test him with a state mandated exam each year. If she scores proficient, all is well. If not, you and the school staff will jointly develop an Academic Improvement Plan (AIP) for him to learn that which we were obviously unable to teach him the first time. If she chooses not to participate in the AIP then we will retain her until she either participates in the plan, scores proficient on the test, or gets old enough to drop out of school. If enough of her counterparts perform in an unsatisfactory manner, the school itself will be put on an AIP-type plan. If that fails to improve the school, then the final option will be to close it or put it under new management.”

I hope my summary did not sound too jaded. In fairness, there is nothing in the conceptual realm here for educators to whine about. Every educator wants all the students to perform to the highest of their respective abilities. Likewise, I hope that I am not being naïve in believing that the great majority of teachers in Gentry and in Arkansas have always wanted that regardless of, and sometimes in spite of, whatever politician was or is in office.