

Chalkboard

By

Dr. Randy C. Barrett, Superintendent
Gentry Public Schools

Testing students' knowledge and academic ability is here to stay in Arkansas public school education. In Arkansas, testing is melded to the issue of school accountability. Specifically, I quote from the Arkansas Department of Education's web site at <http://arkedu.state.ar.us/actaap/> where it says, "The Arkansas Comprehensive Testing, Assessment and Accountability Program (ACTAAP) encompasses the state's **Smart Start Initiative**, which focuses on Grades K-4; the state's **Smart Step Initiative**, which focuses on Grades 5-8; and education for grades 9-12. ACTAAP represents the culmination of extensive planning and discussion by Arkansas educators, policymakers, and school patrons. The authority to implement ACTAAP is firmly established in legislation by Act 99 of 1999. ACTAAP is a comprehensive system that focuses on high academic standards, professional development, student assessment, and accountability for schools."

My next quote comes from part of a message by our State Commissioner of Education, Dr. Kenneth James, whose complete comments can be read at http://arkedu.state.ar.us/actaap/director/director_message_p1.htm. Dr. James, states, "ACTAAP is not a fad or new innovation to which teachers and students have so often been subjected. It focuses on strong accountability with an emphasis on well-defined, high educational standards in reading, writing and mathematics. These standards have been clearly communicated to administrators, teachers, students, parents, and the general public in each school district.

Arkansas classroom teachers have been at the center of these reform efforts. The teachers, principals, superintendents, and curriculum supervisors have taken advantage of numerous professional development offerings featuring some of the finest, most successful educators in Arkansas and the United States.

With the focus on high expectations for our students, it is imperative that the general public, particularly parents, understand that their involvement and support within their local districts are crucial. Reading, writing, and mathematics are key skills that all of our children must master early and continue to master throughout their educational experience. We

continue to see evidence that our efforts through Smart Start and Smart Step are paying great dividends in helping to achieve the goal of 100% of Arkansas' children acquiring grade level performance in these three areas. While we have a long way to go, more of our educators now believe the state is serious in its expectations and that accountability for results are real and here to stay.”

From his remarks I ask you to especially note where he says, *“it is imperative that the general public, particularly parents, understand that their involvement and support within their local districts are crucial.”* One major task you could undertake as the next round of testing begins is to encourage your child to do his or her very best work. Your children hear that plea from their teachers regularly but that is not the same as hearing it from you, the parents of our district.

Following is the calendar of tests our district will be using in the next few months. Please use it to help us help prepare your child. I say “Thank You” in advance for your efforts.

Excerpts from Commissioner’s Memo LS-06-040- “The norm-referenced testing for grades 3 – 9 has been expanded to include the Complete Battery of the Iowa Test. The testing window for the Complete Battery (reading, mathematics, language, science, social studies, and sources of information) will be April 10 – April 21, 2006. Make-up testing must be completed during the weeks of April 10 – April 21, 2006.

Benchmark writing prompts will be administered separately from the remaining portions of the Benchmark Exams. The ACTAAP testing dates for the 2005-2006 school year are as follows:

February 22-23, 2006 – Benchmark Writing Prompts in Grades 3-8
(Wednesday-Thursday)

March 6, 2006 – Science Field Test in Grades 5 and 7 (Monday)

March 7-9, 2006 – Benchmark Exams (Reading, Writing multiple-choice and Math) in Grades 3-8 (Tuesday-Thursday)

March 8 - 9, 2006 – Grade 11 Literacy Exam (Wednesday-Thursday)

March 20 - 31, 2006 – (Window) Iowa Test of Basic Skills for Grades K-2

April 3 – May 12, 2006 – (Window) MAC II Assessment for LEP students
K-12

March 24, 2006 – Alternate Portfolios due date (Friday)

April 10 - 21, 2006 – (Window) Iowa Tests Complete Battery for Grades 3-9

April 25 – 26, 2006 – End of Course Algebra I Exam (Tuesday-Wednesday)

April 27 – 28, 2006 – End of Course Geometry Exam (Thursday-Friday)