

MEETING SUMMARY
JOINT MEETING
OF THE
HOUSE AND SENATE INTERIM COMMITTEES ON EDUCATION

Tuesday, December 1, 2015
1:15 P.M.
First Ward Alternative Learning Center
1300 East 5th Avenue, Pine Bluff, Arkansas

Representative Bruce Cozart, the Chair of the House Interim Committee on Education, called the meeting to order at 1:15 p.m.

MEMBERS OF THE SENATE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION IN ATTENDANCE: Senator Jane English, Chair; Senator Alan Clark; Senator Bobby J. Pierce; and Senator Eddie Joe Williams.

MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION IN ATTENDANCE: Representative Bruce Cozart, Chair; Representative Charlotte Vining Douglas; Representative Jon S. Eubanks; Representative Mark Lowery; and Representative Mark McElroy.

OTHER MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN ATTENDANCE: Senator Stephanie Flowers; Representative Kenneth B. Ferguson; and Representative Mike Holcomb.

Remarks by the Chairs

Representative Bruce Cozart and Senator Jane English, the Chair of the Senate Interim Committee on Education, welcomed legislators and other interested parties to the meeting, the focus of which would be the impact of the Teach For America (TFA) Program.

Welcome and Overview of Pine Bluff School District and the role played by Teach For America (TFA) Arkansas

Presenters:

Mr. Eric Elders, Principal, First Ward Alternative Learning Center

Mr. Jared Henderson, Executive Director, Teach For America Arkansas

Ms. Melissa Walsh, Manager, Community Investment and Government Affairs, Teach For America

Rev. Dr. Hank Wilkins, Pastor, St. James United Methodist Church, and Former Member of the Arkansas House of Representatives and the Arkansas Senate

The Honorable Stephanie Flowers, State Senator, District 25, was recognized. Senator Flowers welcomed legislators to Pine Bluff, the heart of Senate District 25. She stated that TFA is much needed in Pine Bluff, and has become a part of the community. She noted the First Ward Alternative Learning Center is housed in one of the oldest educational facilities in Pine Bluff. Senator Flowers commented on the need for certified teachers, and positive, innovative approaches to education for children.

Points Included in the Overview:

- understanding the role of TFA in the context of other forces at work in education,
- understanding educational needs, especially in poverty districts,
- utilizing a different perspective in order to be effective,
- impact of having a strong education system,
- what TFA is doing to make a difference in student learning and achievement,

- teachers extending their commitment to TFA,
- First Ward Alternative Learning Center to be recognized by the Arkansas Department of Education as one of the model alternative learning environments in the state, and
- acute need for certified teachers in Arkansas.

Classroom Visits and Rotations (Three (3) Groups on a 35-Minute Rotation)

The legislators and other guests divided into three (3) groups and rotated through classrooms, hearing presentations and participating in discussions.

Classroom 1: Student Panel and Q&A with TFA Alum, **Adrian Dhanaraj** – Met current students and learned about the Pine Bluff School District and the First Ward Alternative Learning Center

Classroom 2: Teach For America Overview and Information – Heard a brief summary of TFA’s basic operations and growth plans, and learned about unique aspects of TFA’s work in Arkansas

Classroom 3: Serving beyond the two-year commitment – Learned about the impact TFA professionals have on Arkansas education after their initial commitment

Panel Discussion

Participants:

Mr. Jared Henderson, Executive Director, Teach For America Arkansas, **Moderator**

Mr. Brad Bateman, Teacher, First Ward Alternative Learning Center

Mr. Maurice Carlton, Project Specialist/Job Developer, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff

Mr. Deunta Davis, Former Student, First Ward Alternative Learning Center

Ms. Annette Dove, Chief Executive Officer, TOPPS, Inc.

Mr. Eric Elders, Principal, First Ward Alternative Learning Center

Ms. Marjie Hart, What’s Next Pine Bluff (WNPB), and Former Elementary School Teacher, Pine Bluff School District

Ms. Yvonne Humphrey, Jefferson County Assessor, Pine Bluff

Ms. Alesia D. Smith, Chief School Reform Officer, Pine Bluff School District

Mr. Henderson initiated the panel discussion by posing the question of what is one thing legislators should know about Pine Bluff that would help them strengthen both education and the community, given their role or perspective in this community.

Issues Included in the Discussion:

- need for financial backing and making resources available for children,
- agencies and the community working together,
- legislators taking time to actually visit schools,
- providing exposure to a better life in order to uplift students and make them want to do better,
- doing a needs assessment of what students need in today’s society,
- taking a systemic approach to looking at how to serve schools with the greatest need,
- implementing Aggression Replacement Training (ART) life skills strategies,
- year-round schooling,
- importance of pre-K,
- recognizing the role of social agency that schools play in providing services to students; children today are not those of 1969; education needs to change,
- providing skills and alternative career paths to that of college,
- breakdown of families; impact of grandparents raising their grandchildren,

- impact of technology and the digital age on students,
- becoming aware of what students have to deal with,
- the thin line between handicapping and helping students, and
- applying skills learned in the classroom to working in the community.

Handout:

Teach For America Folder: Agenda, Teach For America Education Day
 Building the Movement for Educational Equity in Arkansas
 Meet Our Team
 Teach For America Arkansas
 What's Next Pine Bluff

Next Scheduled Meetings:

Monday, December 14, 2015, at 1:30 p.m. in Committee Room A, MAC Building, Little Rock
Tuesday, December 15, 2015, at 9:00 a.m. in Room 171 of the State Capitol in Little Rock

Adjournment:

The meeting adjourned at 4:12 p.m.

Approved: 12/14/15