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Arkansas Scholars

A program of the **Arkansas Business and Education Alliance**

Looking for a way to develop cooperation between schools and businesses, as well as motivate high school students to work harder and learn more? The answer could be Arkansas Scholars™, a program supported by the Arkansas Business & Education Alliance (ABEA).

Adapted from a similar initiative in Texas, the program began in Arkansas' Independence County in 1994. In 1997, ABEA assumed statewide management of Arkansas Scholars, and over 130 Arkansas school districts have adopted the Arkansas Scholars program. In 2001, more than half of the state's 8th graders were shown the Arkansas Scholars presentation.

The Arkansas Scholars program encourages academic achievement by high school students (grades 9 - 12). It begins with in-class presentations by local business leaders to second semester eighth graders (or beginning ninth graders). Through a PowerPoint presentation and discussion, these students are told what businesses look for in employees, the salaries for various jobs, and the importance of doing well in school.

In the presentations, students are shown an image of life after their high school education is over, including the example of a household budget based on

an income of \$1,833 per month. These young teenagers quickly see that, even at incomes well above the minimum wage, making ends meet is difficult. The importance of training or education beyond high school and attainment of a marketable skill becomes clear.

As part of the eighth grade presentations, the Arkansas Scholars achievement program is specifically introduced. Students are asked to reach the following four goals for the ninth through twelfth grades:

1. To make semester grades of "C" or above in all academic courses.
2. To achieve a 95% or better attendance record.
3. To take the Smart Core curriculum to graduate from high school and to prepare for post secondary education or technical training, including:
 - English I, II, III, IV
 - 3 units of science (from biology, chemistry, physics, and physical science, lab based).
 - 4 units of math (algebra I, geometry, algebra II and an advanced math course)
 - 3 units of social studies (to include world history, U.S. history, civics/government)
 - Complete the balance of state mandated high school graduation requirements.
4. To complete high school in eight consecutive semesters.

Graduating seniors who achieve all of these specific goals are designated as Arkansas Scholars and invited to a recognition event. Certificates of achievement are presented. Also, participating local employers agree to request high school transcripts and recognize the Arkansas Scholars designation on students' school records. With this growing practice, Arkansas Scholars becomes a factor in employment decisions.

Parents of eighth grade students are provided with information about Arkansas Scholars criteria and are asked to support their children's academic efforts over the coming four years.

Arkansas Scholars is beginning to make a difference. More students are taking advanced courses and school attendance by participating students has improved.

The subtle results from Arkansas Scholars are even more significant. A large percentage of "average" students begin to see themselves in a different light. Academic achievement is no longer the exclusive domain of the top students. Further, by taking more challenging courses and working to make acceptable grades, these teenagers are in a better position to consider college or technical training after high school.

The key to success for this program is cooperation. Business and education leaders work together to deliver a clear, effective message to students. Local Chambers of Commerce provide the energy and coordination to get it all done. Stronger ties develop between the business community and schools as a result of this experience.

Presented by hundreds of business people each year, the Arkansas Scholars presentation is made to thousands of eighth graders and that number continues to grow. More importantly, it helps young people understand the importance of doing their best in high school.

If you would like more information about Arkansas Scholars, please call the Arkansas Business & Education Alliance at 501-514-5556. You can also find information at www.arkansasscholars.org.

The Arkansas Business & Education Alliance