STATE OF ARKANSAS
House of Representatives

Newsletter From Rep. Sonia Eubanks Barker
District 96

September 5, 2025

Update from the Education Committee

This week, the House and Senate Education Committees took a deep look at how Arkansas schools are preparing students not just for tests, but for life after graduation.

On Tuesday, members reviewed statewide assessment results and updates on the new school accountability system. After two years of consistent testing, Arkansas students are showing steady gains. Math proficiency is up nearly three percent, science more than two percent, and reading continues to improve. Leaders emphasized that while scores have not fully returned to pre-pandemic levels, Arkansas is holding firm on rigorous expectations rather than lowering the bar. The return to end-of-course exams in algebra, geometry, and biology is also helping ensure assessments align directly with what students are learning.

Just as important, the committees examined how schools are being graded. The new accountability model focuses on achievement, growth, and graduation, giving parents and communities a clearer picture of school performance. It also rewards students who go beyond minimum requirements by earning college credit, passing AP exams, or completing industry credentials. Those efforts are recognized with new honors: a **Diploma of Merit** and a **Diploma of Distinction.**

Career readiness was another major theme. Under *Arkansas LEARNS*, schools must now offer at least three career pathways, with one tied to high-skill, high-wage, high-demand jobs. This ensures students leave high school ready to enroll in college, enlist in the military, or step directly into the workforce.

On Wednesday, the committees traveled to Pine Bluff to tour Friendship Aspire Academy Public Charter School and review charter school quality and applications. Seeing classrooms firsthand reminded lawmakers of what's at stake: ensuring every Arkansas student graduates prepared for the future.