The History

Over the last thirty years, education in Arkansas has changed drastically. In 1983, the Arkansas Supreme Court in Dupree v. Alma School District No. 30 found Arkansas' school funding system unconstitutional under the equal protection clause of the state constitution. The court found no legitimate state purpose and no rational relationship to educational needs in the state's method of financing public schools. The ruling rejected "local control" as a possible justification for the disparities of funding and educational opportunities in the state's school districts.

After the 1983 court decision, the state revised its funding statutes, but plaintiffs challenged the revised system. In the 2001 Lake View School District, No. 25 v. Huckabee case, an Arkansas trial court declared the state's education funding system unconstitutional:

> The school funding system now in place… is inequitable and inadequate under… the Arkansas constitution… Too many of our children are leaving school for a life of deprivation, burdening our culture with the corrosive effects of citizens who lack the education to contribute.

The Arkansas Supreme Court upheld the lower court's finding in 2002 and charged the state with providing adequate funding to allow students to achieve the expected outcomes.

The Arkansas courts based their decisions in large part on the 1985 Kentucky court ruling, Rose v. Council for Better Education, which enumerated seven learning goals for "each and every child." These learning goals are:

1. Sufficient oral and written communication skills to enable students to function in a complex and rapidly changing civilization;
2. Sufficient knowledge of economic, social, and political systems to enable the student to make informed choices;
3. Sufficient understanding of governmental processes to enable the student to understand the issues that affect his or her community, state, and nation;
4. Sufficient self-knowledge and knowledge of his or her mental and physical wellness;
5. Sufficient grounding in the arts to enable each student to appreciate his or her cultural and historical heritage;
6. Sufficient training or preparation for advanced training in either academic or vocational fields so as to enable each child to choose and pursue life work intelligently; and
7. Sufficient levels of academic or vocational skills to enable public school students to compete favorably with their counterparts in surrounding states, in academics or in the job market.

Rose is an important piece of the Lake View story because its language explicitly ties responsibility for educational outcomes to the state. If students are not achieving the desired educational outcomes, it is the responsibility of the state to provide the resources necessary to the districts and teachers for students to achieve.

Post - Lake View

Since the 2002 Lake View ruling, Arkansas has made significant improvements to its education system.

- The U.S. Department of Education has recognized Arkansas for its leadership in implementing rigorous curricular standards.
- Arkansas has provided over $100 million a year for quality preschool. The National Institute for Early Education Research ranks Arkansas among the nation's leaders in the quality of its early childhood educational standards.
- State per pupil funding for public education has increased dramatically since the Lake View decision; for the 2011-2012 fiscal year, foundation funding for each student int he state is $6,144.
- Since 2007, the state has appropriated over $675 million dollars to improve school facilities.

More importantly, the benefits of the increased attention and investment to public education have already begun to manifest themselves.

- Education Week's 2011 Quality Counts study ranked Arkansas 5th in the nation for overall educational quality.
- In 2001, just 42% of fourth graders scored at proficient levels on the math portion of the Arkansas Benchmark Exam. In 2011, 81% were proficient on an even more difficult test.