



# Advocates for Community and Rural Education

## Tiny Kingston claims bragging rights on achievement

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"I'm not much for bragging," the assistant superintendent of the Jasper School District in charge of the Kingston campus said recently. Nevertheless, Earl Rowe, previously the superintendent of the approximately 200-student school, outlined a list of impressive accomplishments for Kingston High School.

Kingston has a senior class of 16 students. On the ACT exam, they have two 32s, one 30, one 27, two 25s, one 21, one 20, and one 16. Two of those students have also qualified as National Merit Semi-Finalists.

On state tests, Kingston had 100% proficient or advanced in EOC algebra; 78% proficient or advanced in EOC literacy; and 89% proficient or advanced in geometry.



Kingston teacher Pam Estes' math class.

Kingston's FFA did well last year at district and regionals, and nine competed at the state fair. The FCCLA team did extremely well at regional and state competition and took 100% gold medals at national competition in Chicago.

Kingston's basketball team racked up its own successes this past year, winning both the district and regional tournaments and coming in

third in the state.

So what is Kingston's key to success? Media specialist Debra Warren says a variety of factors contribute to Kingston's academic accomplishments.

Kingston has small classes, experienced teachers, and good administrators. Having a small, close-knit, collaborative faculty has allowed them to closely align curriculum. Teachers teach to standards and prepare students for state tests, and students write "a lot" in every class.

A small, isolated campus in Madison County about 20 miles over mountainous roads from Huntsville in one direction and Jasper in the other, Kingston was annexed into the Jasper School district last spring by Act 60. Its longest bus ride is an hour and a half one way.

**On state End of Course tests, Kingston students scored 100% proficient in algebra, 78% proficient in literacy, and 89% proficient in geometry.**

Right: Mrs. Jean Fitch with her fourth grade class at Kingston.



## About those small-school science programs....

### GILLETT TEACHER STANDS UP FOR SCIENCE INSTRUCTION

Late last spring, Gillett science teacher Dorothy Hubsch had finally had enough of the condescending attitude of the state-wide press toward those who work and learn in small schools. She wrote the following letter, part of which was published in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*.

*I am the high school science teacher at Gillett High School. It's time that I stand up for myself and all the other science teachers at small high schools.*

*You have often mourned in your editorials about the sad situations in small schools in which chemistry and physics are not taught every year. You have bemoaned the idea that small schools just cannot have well-equipped labs in which students are challenged by highly qualified teachers.*

*You used the words of one of my students to condemn what you assume we don't offer at Gillett High School. You used this young man's words unfairly, without investigating the curriculum at Gillett High School. You did not check with our high school to find out about the science courses we do offer.*

*I teach physics and chemistry every year. I also teach a course in human physiology using a college text, at a college level. Our science lab is stocked with every instrument normally found at any large high school and this equipment is used frequently. I introduced horizontal gel electrophoresis in my tenth-grade biology class several years before most other high schools in Arkansas.*

*We will be offering advanced-*

*placement biology next year. (I am qualified to teach advanced placement biology.) This will alternate with the human physiology class so many of my students have found beneficial in college as they prepare for the medical fields. (All three sisters of the young man you quoted were my students and all three have found success in medical fields.) Many of my students have gone on to find success in various science fields.*

*We have 25 seniors this year. Twelve of those will graduate with five science credits. Seventy per cent of the class of 2003 graduated with five science credits. (The state requires only three science credits.) Beginning with the class of 2006, Gillett High School students will have the opportunity to graduate with six science credits. That's not bad for any high school, no matter the size.*

*I have a degree in chemistry and worked several years in that field. I have taken all the education classes required to be certified by the state of Arkansas. I have attended science workshops every summer to further my knowledge and my teaching art. I am either certified or approved to teach twelve different science courses.*

*I love to teach science. I often tell my students I have the best "toys" on campus and I love to share those "toys" with my students.*

Hubsch is herself the mother of three Gillett graduates. "We have a good school at Gillett," she says. "I'm proud of the education we give our kids." Of Hubsch's children, one

works as a paralegal for Rusty Berry, the brother of U.S. Rep. Marion Berry, another has a degree in social work and is working on an education degree, and the third is at UCA majoring in physical therapy.

Says Hubsch, "Our children feel safe and secure, and they know that they are cared for by the faculty."

Like many small-town schools, Gillett has tremendous support from the community. Gillett's famous "Coon Supper," rated by a national magazine as one of the top ten political events in the nation and attended by thousands, is put on by its Farmers and Merchants Association to provide supplemental moneys to the school and recognize the achievements of its students.

Located in the heart of the Delta in Arkansas County, Gillett has a K-12 enrollment of about 200 students. At the end of the 2003-04 school year, it was consolidated into the DeWitt School District by Act 60.

#### From the Arkansas School Study Council:

"The amazing thing about 2004 so far is that one state's decision makers remain non-believers in the results of competent educational research.

For example:

- \*Children learn better in small schools.
- \*There is no educational value in busing.
- \*Massive fiscal inequity still exists. The differential in teacher salary is 10 to 12 thousand dollars more than before the Lake View decision.

## Armored: Big achievements for littlest school in county

With a K-12 enrollment of just 413 students, Armored is the smallest school district in Mississippi County.

Armored is surrounded by much larger schools of 3,232 students; 1,407 students; 1,348 students; 581 students; and 1,641 students. By the conventional wisdom of the legislative/business/press coalition that pushed through last year's consolidation of all schools under 350 enrollment, one would not expect it to dominate. But it does.

The other five schools in the county scored a combined 49% proficient on 4th grade math benchmarks. Armored scored 75%. In 4th grade literacy the others scored 63%; Armored scored 85%. In 6th grade math the others combined for a score of 25%; Armored's score was 41%. In 6th grade literacy, all others scored 31% while

Armored scored 63%. In 8th grade math the others scored a combined 16%; Armored scored 37%. In 8th grade literacy the others schools scored 40%, while Armored scored 81%. A similar pattern follows for End of Course scores in algebra, geometry, and literacy, where Armored scored 72%, 43%, and 75% respectively.

Also last year 3 of Armored's 31 seniors scored 32 on the ACT. A curriculum that emphasizes high achievement includes AP English, AP American History, and AP calculus. They also teach advanced biology, three years of Spanish, and four vocational programs. Students can get concurrent credit at Arkansas Northeastern College for business courses.

Superintendent Chuck Hanson modestly attributes Armored's success

to small classes and a low poverty rate in the district. His school population is about 87% white, 10% African-American, and 3% Hispanic with only about 20% below poverty level. If there is an achievement gap, though, he says it exists with students who transfer into the district through school choice.

Armored receives one of the lowest amounts of aid in the state while maintaining a millage rate of 34 mills. The district had one of the lowest Facilities Condition Indexes in the state, a fact Hanson attributes to a school board which has been careful to maintain high-quality facilities over the years.

Where will Armored be after the 2004-2005 school year? Let's hope the Legislature doesn't decide they're too small to be any good.

## Successful AP program in small rural high school

Who says small high schools can't offer a high quality curriculum?

Whoever it is, they aren't buying it at Valley Springs. With 250 students in their high school, they offer a wide range of advanced classes, including AP English, AP government, AP calculus, Pre-AP English, Pre-AP Biology, and college algebra. In addition to physical science, biology, chemistry, and physics, they also offer environmental science and anatomy and physiology.

Students can also take three years of Spanish, psychology, sociology, and contemporary American History in addition to the core cur-

riculum. AP classes are popular at Valley Springs, with more students taking the advanced option than the regular English and government classes.

The secret to successful AP programs in small schools, say the teachers, is inclusiveness. Rather than restrict their classes to an elite few, they allow any student who wants to take on the challenge into their classes.

Does this decrease the success rate on AP exams? "Possibly it will," says AP English teacher Lavina Grandon, who has the most AP and Pre-AP students. "But they will learn more and be better prepared for college than if they hadn't taken the classes. How could we deny them the opportunity?"



Above: AP government students learn to write bills. Below: Pre-AP English students compose magnetic poetry on books they've read.



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# Grain of salt called for with facilities study

Yes, we spent nearly 10 million dollars to assess the condition of facilities in Arkansas public schools.

And, yes, that is a nice 71-page booklet with all kinds of graphs, tables, and color illustrations.

But before we start making a golden calf of the Arkansas Statewide Educational Facilities Assessment, let's take a look at its veracity.

Remember, this document was created and compiled by teams of architects, technicians, and interns who spent a few hours on each campus, most of the time without so much as discussing a water fountain with the people who run that school.

Maybe before we get too carried away we should ask some people on the ground just how accurate the data is.

At my school the third-best building according to the study (at 13% FCI) is one of the oldest buildings which architects recently told administrators was in danger of falling down! This old gymnasium built in the 1940's was even rated sounder than its newer

counterpart built in 1986.

In addition, the two worst buildings on the survey with FCI's in the 60% range are actually scheduled to be torn down and realistically will not be adding to renovation costs of that school.

One of the most inexplicable ratings was the evaluation of buildings on the school's farm, maintained for the use of the FFA and vocational agri program.

According to the facilities study, the school needs to put \$9,662 into a new hog barn that they built in 2003, \$13,473 (FCI 11.13%) into a hay barn, and \$15,763 (FCI 13.03%) into a cow barn. By definitions in the manual, that hay barn would cost \$121,051 to replace, while the cow barn could be replaced for a mere \$120,974. Around here, that would buy a barn and a nice farm to go with it! Lacking familiarity with hay bales, pigs, and cows, did our out-of-state experts just assess them at the same cost as children?

I wonder how many times this scenario is repeated in the state's 254 school districts and how many millions

have thus been inappropriately assigned to improvement costs?

To those who see consolidation as the solution to everything, I would suggest a closer look at the truthfulness and the assumptions of the study.

They should also consider these **Five Principles That School Facilities Policy Should Support:**

1. **Arkansas students should be able to go to good, safe schools close to home.**
2. **Facilities should support educational practices of proven value, especially team teaching, broader grade span configurations, multi-age classrooms, and flexible scheduling.**
3. **Technology that liberates teachers, students, and the curriculum from both the "four walls" and the highway.**
4. **Not how big a school has to be to be cheap but how small it has to be to be effective.**
5. **Equalization of state aid to provide access to adequate facilities, conditioned on local contribution to capital and local contribution to maintenance of effort.**