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ForwARd Arkansas Reports on Statewide Outreach Efforts
Public Encouraged to Participate at ForwardArkansas.org

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (Feb. 3, 2015) – ForwARd Arkansas today provided an update on its progress and additional details on its statewide outreach plan. Online surveys, live call-ins, a statewide listening tour, planned discussions and focus group meetings are among the ways ForwARd is reaching out to as many Arkansans as possible.

“ForwARd seeks to develop a comprehensive strategic plan for P-16 education by Arkansans for Arkansans,” said Sherece West-Scantlebury, president and CEO of the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation and ForwARd steering committee member. “ForwARd is a partnership of parents, education, business and community leaders committed to improving public education in the state.”

“Your voice is important. We need input, ideas and suggestions from everyone to inform and guide the comprehensive plan for education in Arkansas,” said West-Scantlebury. “The goal of our outreach strategy is to get input from students, parents, educators, employers and all Arkansans to ensure the plan has solutions to improve education in our state.”

ForwARd’s work completed to date and in progress includes:

- The ForwARd steering committee is encouraging Arkansans to provide feedback about the state's education system through its online surveys. More than 6,500 Arkansans have completed surveys to date. The public can access the community survey in Spanish or English at ForwardArkansas.org through the end of February.
- Last week the group released *The State of Education in Arkansas* report. It provides extensive research on school performance, student demographics, test scores, graduation rates and other education metrics. The report is one of several data sources that will be used to help inform, guide and focus the ForwARd steering committee’s strategic planning in the coming months. This report can also be found at ForwardArkansas.org.

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- Following the report’s release, KATV-7 provided a two-hour “town hall” opportunity for public feedback with a live call-in format throughout the evening news telecasts. More than 100 Arkansans called into the program with steering committee volunteers documenting the ideas and feedback received.
- ForwARd is pursuing ongoing outreach with statewide media outlets to communicate with stakeholder groups and the public at large, including Spanish media.
- Focus group interviews are being scheduled and arranged across the state throughout the month of February. These sessions invite students, parents, educators and community members to contribute to a holistic plan to strengthen public education in Arkansas. Over 30 discussion and focus group sessions are currently scheduled.
 - Working in partnership with the Rural Community Alliance, more than 20 sessions are scheduled in some of Arkansas’ most rural communities including Earle, Marianna, Strong, Waldo, Carlisle and Valley Springs.
 - Feedback from discussion and focus groups is also planned in urban areas such as Little Rock, Pine Bluff and Springdale. Engagement groups include teachers, parents, students and school administrators.
 - Additional feedback is being sought from policy, advocacy and civic organizations.
- ForwARd will continually engage Arkansans in the process through Facebook, Twitter, infographics and e-newsletters. A full Spanish website is now available at es.ForwardArkansas.org or AdelanteArkansas.org.
- Other planned online outreach efforts include Google Hangouts, Facebook Q & As and Twitter Town Halls.

The ForwARd steering committee is a diverse group of Arkansas leaders with 209 years of experience working in education leadership, 162 years of classroom experience, 30 years on local school boards, but with one goal in mind – to help all Arkansas students succeed. The committee plans to complete and release a comprehensive strategic plan by late spring 2015.

About ForwARd Arkansas

ForwARd Arkansas was established as a strategic partnership of the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, Walton Family Foundation and Arkansas Board of Education to help enhance student outcomes and educational opportunities. ForwARd aims to develop a comprehensive plan to guide state policy for P-16 education with specific recommendations for schools and districts in academic distress. For more information, visit ForwardArkansas.org.

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