



Testimony for Senate Subcommittee on Communication, Technology and the Internet  
Little Rock, Arkansas  
August 19, 2013

I am Allen Weatherly, Executive Director of the Arkansas Educational Television Network, a statewide public media service with six transmitters covering our state. I am completing my thirteenth year as the Director of AETN and have been in educational television for thirty-three years.

On behalf of the AETN and America's 361 public television stations, we appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony for the record on the importance of local public television stations - in partnership with PBS and others - in providing needed educational services to the students, teachers and parents of Arkansas and beyond.

The range of distribution options remains an important part of our services - from broadcast - becoming even more relevant in an age when so-called "cord cutters" are returning to over the air for their local station options - cable, satellite and, importantly, online, which is crucial for state networks like AETN to reach schools all across the state with our Arkansas IDEAS professional development service delivered free in a partnership with the Arkansas Department of Education. Currently about 47,000 Arkansas teachers are registered for the service with more than 30,000 using Arkansas IDEAS on a regular basis.

Obviously, broadband capability is very important to us as we continue to find ways to expand our services to teachers, parents and students through Arkansas IDEAS, the AETN/PBS Learning Media (delivering thousands of video learning objects for teachers to utilize in their teaching), AETN's mobile learning labs, kid's camps and much more.

AETN also serves our state through broadcast and online capabilities to help showcase citizens from every part of Arkansas and their work through innovative projects such as "In Their Words" - an extensive archive of interviews with nearly 600 Arkansas World War II veterans- and LOUPE, an interactive portal showcasing arts and artists in Arkansas.

And I have not mentioned the tremendous and targeted programs and services AETN and other public stations provided throughout the year, from "Downton Abbey" to "Sesame Street" and "NOVA" to Ken Burns and our own popular programs like "Exploring Arkansas with Chuck Dovish", "Arkansas Week" and many others designed to entertain and to educate.

I should mention here that the general audience programming on AETN described above is for the most part paid by contributions from thousands of Arkansans, not from the state or federal grants that support infrastructure, technology and the educational services, which will be highlighted in more detail below.

Federal funding of \$445 million in two-year advance funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) is crucial and while a blip on the radar, if that, in the federal budget is very important to rural state networks like AETN and hundreds of other public media stations across the country. As an example, while the funding AETN receives as a result of federal grants is an important part of our funding mix it amounts to something like 13 seconds of annual federal spending.

Local stations and networks like AETN continue to serve as the treasured educational and cultural institutions envisioned by their founders, reaching America's local communities with unique, essential and unsurpassed programming and services.

Local stations treat their audience as citizens rather than mere consumers, providing essential services to all Americans, not just the 18-49 year olds to whom advertisers hope to appeal. We serve everyone, everywhere, every day, and for free.

Federal support for CPB and local public television stations has resulted in a nationwide system of locally owned and controlled, trusted, community-driven and community responsive media entities that form an incredibly successful public-private partnership. At an annual cost of about \$1.35 per year for each American, public broadcasting is a smart investment creating important economic activity while providing an essential educational and cultural service.

I should mention here that Congress eliminating the Public Telecommunications Facility Program, or PTFP, was a significant blow to all public media stations. Technology infrastructure is extremely important for stations, especially rural stations like AETN, and the lack of federal grants and state technology funding is a difficult hurdle to try to jump - especially since, as mentioned before, we use member contributions for programming services.

Unlike many other broadcast organizations, PBS and public media are seeing growth across all of our platforms. PBS has seen a 5% increase in primetime viewership compared to last year, and had six out of the top ten shows for moms with young kids in June. For 6 months running, PBS.org has been the most highly trafficked broadcast website.

All sources of funding, federal funding included, for public broadcasting is important because we are part of the nation's public service infrastructure, just like public libraries, public schools and public highways.

Now, if I may, I would like to describe in a bit more detail how AETN is using rural connectivity in providing targeted educational services to educators - public, private and home-schooled - all across our state. Efforts like what I describe, in various shapes and sizes, are happening across the country at public media stations when mission trumps demographic audience targeting in order to maximize profit potential. Nothing wrong with that, of course, but I believe our primary goal is to serve and we will continue to stretch every resource we have to accomplish our promise to our citizens.

**AETN and ArkansasIDEAS: An Important Tool for Educators and Students.**

AETN continues to do some incredible work with quality production related to Arkansas, community outreach, and award-winning and popular programming from PBS and other sources. All this, in addition to the outstanding educational services described below, is due to the infrastructure and people throughout AETN.

Specifically for this message, education has always been at the heart of AETN services for nearly fifty years - both formally through education services and informally through all network services directly related to meeting AETN's stated purpose and promise:

**PURPOSE (Mission):** The purpose of the Arkansas Educational Television Network (AETN) is to enhance and empower the lives of all Arkansans by offering lifelong learning opportunities through high-quality educational television programs and services.

**PROMISE (Core statement):** The Arkansas Educational Television Network (AETN) fulfills its purpose by providing: educational resources to schools and all educators; innovative and high-quality public media television programs and services that illuminate the culture and heritage of Arkansas and the world; and opportunities to engage and explore new ideas. This relevant AETN content will expand the minds of children,

inform Arkansans about public affairs and current events in our state, highlight arts and culture, and invite Arkansans to explore the outdoors and the world around them.

With this in mind, here are some things we would like you to know about the unique partnership between AETN and the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) known as ArkansasIDEAS.

ArkansasIDEAS is now the largest, state-funded online professional development portal in the nation. Through the visionary leadership of its parent organizations, the Arkansas Educational Television Network (AETN) and the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE), ArkansasIDEAS has successfully supported educators for another fiscal year.

Our annual report to the state shows that the number of registered ArkansasIDEAS users has never been higher (46,697), and our course offerings (both online and face-to-face) have undergone exponential growth.

As in years past, ArkansasIDEAS has sought new ways to strengthen the types of professional development resources offered to educators all while maintaining the superior level of service our users have come to expect from AETN.

With the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in the upcoming school year, our Common Core micro site is one of the most popular services ArkansasIDEAS administers. Arkansas educators trust the site, which contains a plethora of Common Core State Standards resources, as the most reliable source of CCSS updates and information.

Indeed, the site is so popular that people from every state in the nation have accessed it.

The site can be searched in a number of ways, though the English Language Arts and Mathematics. Mathematics-Trainer of Trainers sections are most common. Much of our education-specific in-studio work over the past fiscal year became video links that are now housed on the ArkansasIDEAS Common Core micro site.

In addition to the enactment of new standards for teaching and learning, the teacher evaluation system is undergoing a complete overhaul for the 2013-2014 school year.

This sweeping reform is the result of the 2011 General Assembly's passage of the Teacher Excellence and Support System (TESS). TESS, based largely upon Charlotte Danielson's work, *A Framework for Teaching* (Danielson, 2007), divides a teacher's work into four domains.

Each domain includes subcategories that further dissect the specific tasks associated with each domain.

A rudimentary checklist will no longer evaluate a teacher's work. Rather, the work of an educator will be thoughtfully analyzed according to the educator's performance both in and out of the classroom.

During the last fiscal year, the ArkansasIDEAS staff has spent hundreds of hours preparing for TESS and is currently supporting TESS through a variety of means.

First, ArkansasIDEAS at AETN constructed a TESS support site. Teachers use this site as a gateway to the TESS professional development training they are required to obtain before being evaluated by their administrators in the upcoming school year. The mandated tutorials can also be accessed directly via the ArkansasIDEAS portal.

Second, the TESS site is enhanced with a reporting feature that enables Arkansas administrators to get a snapshot of the amount of time their teachers have spent training for TESS. This component is crucial for

administrators who are required to verify that the educators assigned to their building have completed TESS training.

Managing these snapshot reports requires an enormous amount of effort from the IT department at ArkansasIDEAS and AETN and will continue to dominate a large portion of our time in the future.

Even before the TESS website went live, ArkansasIDEAS was proactive in their approach to TESS.

Our experienced team of licensed educators assigned a domain and sub domain to every course on the ArkansasIDEAS portal.

The current ArkansasIDEAS course catalog includes these Arkansas Department of Education-approved domain assignments. In addition, the TESS site also includes a search-by-domain feature. Now, when an administrator evaluates a teacher and documents a deficiency in a particular domain, they will have a collection of free, online professional development offerings from which to choose that will help support that teacher.

This prescriptive-based professional development is perhaps the most significant change in the new teacher evaluation system.

ArkansasIDEAS is also reaching out to pre-licensed educators across the state.

Working with the ADE Office of Professional Licensure, ArkansasIDEAS and AETN has created an open-access portal for non-licensed teachers.

This non-licensed portal was created on June 26, 2012 and is utilized by the Teach for America program, several masters of teaching degree programs, the Non-Traditional Licensure program at ADE, and anyone applying for an Arkansas teacher's license through reciprocity. It provides the necessary professional development requirements of Act 969 of the 2013 General Assembly.

An example of a course offered on the pre-licensed portal is the child maltreatment course. This course fulfills the requirements of Act 1236 of 2011, an act that mandates all educators to have training in child maltreatment awareness. The course is also offered on the licensed-side of the portal and hundreds of Arkansas educators have taken it to-date.

During the last quarter of the past fiscal year, ArkansasIDEAS and AETN lent its talent and resources to the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Foundations Institute.

This institute took place on June 6, 2013 and was a culminating event for the ArkansasIDEAS production team, working with the professional staff and infrastructure provided by AETN. Prior to the daylong event, producers captured exemplary STEM lessons in several schools across the state OF Arkansas.

Experts in the field of STEM education highlighted each of these lessons on the day of the institute. Breakout sessions were recorded on the day of the training as well. The ArkansasIDEAS team of educators, producers and IT analysts are using this footage to create seven courses, one for each of the seven STEM frameworks, housed on the ArkansasIDEAS portal maintained through AETN.

ArkansasIDEAS continues to look for ways to serve Arkansas educators.

We now offer a dedicated library of Disciplinary Literacy courses. This library is especially helpful for educators wishing to add an area of licensure to their teaching certificate.

The Disciplinary Literacy Library contains forty-five hours of ADE-prescribed, professional development courses all of which are offered on the ArkansasIDEAS portal. Upon completion, teachers can submit this credit, along with appropriate Praxis scores, to the Office of Professional Licensure at the Arkansas Department of Education for approval and add an area of certification to their teaching license.

Expanding the number of high-quality professional development courses and resources offered on the portal continues to be a top-priority at ArkansasIDEAS.

In the past fiscal year alone, 253.5 hours were added to the ArkansasIDEAS portal, and many of these courses were produced and created by the ArkansasIDEAS team at AETN.

In addition to the work done in-house, ArkansasIDEAS maintains a constant presence at educational conferences around the state.

AETN and ArkansasIDEAS education professionals often present at these conferences while our production teams continue to be in demand filming keynote addresses and breakout sessions - later used to create ArkansasIDEAS courses or resources.

ArkansasIDEAS provides technology training to schools that need it and have even acquired as a service that we now offer to educators who request it.

ArkansasIDEAS acquired two mobile labs that we have loaned to educational conferences and schools. Both the iPad and MacBook labs are equipped with stand-alone, Wi-Fi capability. It is our hope that these transformational tools will be utilized in professional development trainings and checked out to school districts who want to provide their teachers with technology training but lack the resources available to do so.

ArkansasIDEAS, a partnership of the Arkansas Educational Television Network (AETN) and the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) has been a leader in providing educational resources during the past year and will continue to stay ahead of the upcoming educational changes as we seek out new ways to support Arkansas educators.

AETN is also expanding services that are important to Arkansans both rural and urban by developing an agricultural project and a public safety statewide first responder system utilizing our transmitters located throughout the state, just to cite two examples.

Across every platform, public media stations are working with PBS and others partners providing new resources for children to learn, and giving all Americans access to the dramas, documentaries, history, news and public affairs, and arts' programming that expands their horizons and opens up new vistas free and accessible to all.

This is what sets us apart, and that's why I am honored to be a part of a public media system that continues to serve all citizens with educational - and, yes, even entertaining programs and services. Connectivity is a crucial player in all this, especially for a rural state like Arkansas.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. It has been a pleasure.

Allen Weatherly  
AETN

IDEAS Website ([ideas.aetn.org](http://ideas.aetn.org))

|                         | 1st Quarter | 2nd Quarter | 3rd Quarter | 4th Quarter | Annual Data |
|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Total Visits            | 43,940      | 27,523      | 29,909      | 124,770     | 226,142     |
| Unique Visitors         | 23,672      | 14,895      | 17,047      | 64,199      | 119,813     |
| Unique <u>Pageviews</u> | 61,507      | 39,232      | 63,572      | 43,089      | 207,400     |
| Returning Visitors      | 56%         | 56%         | 53%         | 55%         | 54.95%      |
| New Visitors            | 44%         | 44%         | 47%         | 45%         | 45.05%      |

Visitor Demographics

1. Arkansas 89%
2. Texas 2.71%
3. Louisiana 1%
4. Oklahoma 1%
5. Missouri 1%

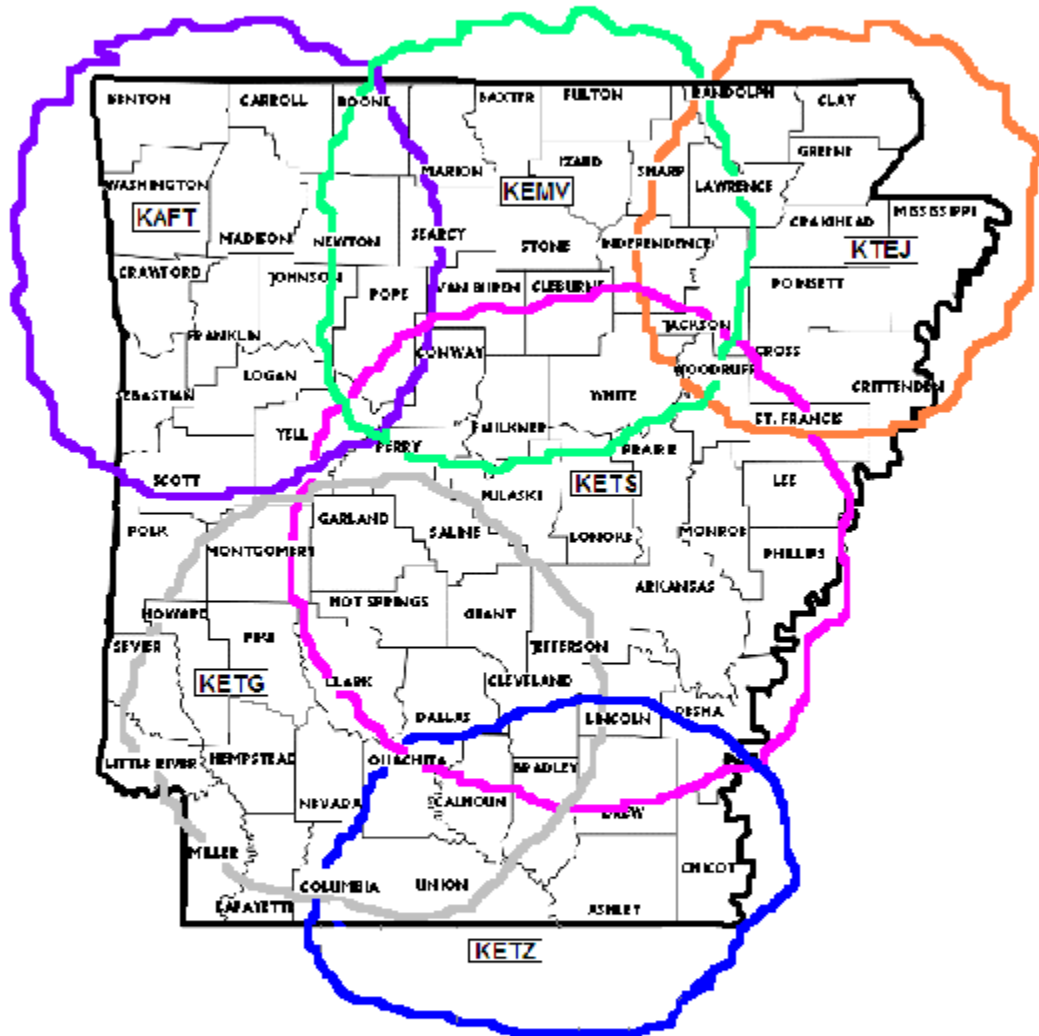
Interactive

Homepage video – 239 unique plays (297 total plays)

Search

184 unique events – (234 total)

## AETN Transmitter Over-the-Air Coverage Areas



## Arkansas Educational Television Network Coverage Areas

*(Created: 09-01-2010)*