From the OEP

Once again, the OEP would like to invite you to our “teacher quality” conference on April 28th. We have space for a few more people, so if you would like to attend, please send an e-mail to oep@uark.edu by Wednesday of next week. The flyer is attached for details about the topics, speakers, and times.

There were over 100 education acts passed during the legislative session, including the state-run lottery bill, the establishment of a common spring break, and the new requirements for End-of-Course exams, among many other things. We are in the process of writing our next newsletter, which will focus on several of these education acts in more detail. Please keep your eye out for this valuable newsletter to be coming soon.

We are releasing an Arkansas Education Report called “Putting ‘Teaching to the Test’ to the Test.” We’ve taken our best shot at wrestling with this controversial issue. From our perspective, the concern over harmful effects of standardized testing may be misplaced…At least in Arkansas! Take a look at the newest OEP report and let us know what you think!

On Friday, Education Commissioner Ken James met with school personnel from around the state to discuss the stimulus funds being distributed to education. In response, we have written a policy brief to summarize how these funds will be allocated in Arkansas. You can view the “ARRA Spending on Education in Arkansas” policy brief here.

News from Around the Natural State

**State Sets Terms for Schools’ Stimulus**
Arkansas Education Commissioner Ken James on Friday laid out the terms for distributing hundreds of millions of federal stimulus dollars for public school instruction and campuses across the state over the next two years.

**Lottery on Track for Fall Start**
State lawmakers say they are confident the work they accomplished this session has put the Arkansas’ state-run lottery on track for a fall start.
**Oklahoma: House Passes School Deregulation Bill**
Legislation that would allow 20 percent of public schools to operate as charter schools free of many state school mandates was approved by the Oklahoma House.

**Rhee Works Overhaul of Teacher Evaluations**
While talks between D.C. Schools Chancellor Michelle A. Rhee and the Washington Teachers’ Union remain stalemated over salary and job security issues, one critical question is not even on the bargain table: how the District’s educators will be evaluated.

**Education Standards Likely to See Toughening**
President Obama and his team have alternated praises for the goals of President George W. Bush's NCLB law with criticism of its weaknesses, all while keeping their own plans for the law a bit of a mystery. But clues are now emerging, and they suggest that the Obama administration will use a Congressional rewriting of the federal law later this year to toughen requirements on topics like teacher quality and academic standards and to intensify its focus on helping failing schools.

**Site Seeing**
The Thomas Fordham Institute hosted a panel on “Can Budget Cuts Foster Education Reform” on April 9. C-SPAN’s archived video from the event is available online. The event featured a presentation by Marguerite Roza of the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington, and comments from Michael Casserly for the Council of the Great City Schools; Dwight Holmes of the National Education Association; and Michael Petrilli of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. You can access the footage by clicking here.

**Mark Your Calendar**
April 28th. The OEP conference, “Preparing Highly Qualified Teachers for Arkansas,” will begin at 8:30 at the Peabody Hotel in Little Rock. For more information, visit the OEP Calendar.

**Final Thoughts**

“While one of the main goals of the stimulus funds as a whole is to create and save jobs, the education portion of ARRA has an equally important goal of improving student achievement.” –Dr. Ken James, Arkansas Commissioner of Education

**Thanks for reading! See you next week!**
If you would like to be added or removed from this list, please send an e-mail to oep@uark.edu.