From the OEP

Good afternoon! We are excited to be posting a newsletter covering the “teacher quality” conference held in April. Here is the letter from the editor:

_______________

Dear Colleagues,

In this issue of Education Policy News, we highlight presentations made at our Teacher Quality conference last April. The conference attendees were treated to several interesting sessions and many provocative ideas raised by our speakers. Here are just a few:

• Senator Joyce Elliott made the call for a revamped teacher compensation system, one which incorporated some measure of teacher effectiveness.
• Bill McComas and Quentin Suffren made strong arguments in favor of more specific guidelines in the Arkansas frameworks for science and language arts. These two also argued that Arkansas should take the lead in developing regional or national standards.
• Scott Shirey urged policymakers to allow school administrators more flexibility in teacher hiring, so that he could hire excellent but uncertified teachers when needed.
• Sandra Stotsky encouraged our state education leaders to ensure that our teacher licensure exams are based on a very solid foundation of content knowledge.

And these comments only represent the tip of the iceberg. Please read through this issue to learn more from our excellent set of speakers. And, we hope to see even more of you next spring at our 3rd annual OEP conference. The theme will be school leadership...We will again be inviting an exciting set of speakers. We will share more information as it becomes available.

We hope you are enjoying the beginning of the school year. As always, thanks for your interest and support.

Respectfully,
Gary Ritter
Director, Office for Education Policy

You can view the newsletter here. You can always view past releases by visiting the publications section of our website.

We hope you enjoyed reading last week’s release of the Outstanding Educational Performance Awards, in which we highlighted the top elementary and middle schools across the state. In case you missed it, the report can be found on our website at
On September 16, we will add to this report and highlight schools that are “beating the odds” – schools that are performing at high levels while serving a high percentage of low-income students. In the following weeks, we will focus on grade level performance and schools by each region. Stay tuned for the latest on this evolving report!

**News from Around the Natural State**

**Number of Students Taking AP Courses Increases**
Arkansas, oft-cited as a national model for providing public school students with access to Advanced Placement (AP) courses, saw another increase in the number of public school students taking AP examinations in the 2008-09 school year as well as an overall better performance on those tests, the College Board announced. Those trends were pronounced in African-America and Hispanic student populations.

**Experts Advise New LR Literacy Strategy**
Consultants to the Little Rock School District on Monday suggested replacing the reading and language arts program in elementary and middle schools.

**News from Around the Nation**

**A New Assignment: Pick Books You Like**
Last fall, for the first time in 15 years, Ms. McNeill did not assign “To Kill a Mockingbird” – or any novel. Instead she turned over all the decisions about which books to read to the students in her seventh- and eighth-grade English classes at Jonesboro Middle School in a south Atlanta suburb.

**California Actions on ‘Race to the Top’ Scrutinized**
Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger’s decision to call a special session to better position California for Race to the Top funds may be the highest-profile test yet of whether proposed federal requirements for the coveted grants are likely to significantly reshape state policy.

**Site Seeing**
Today we would like to highlight a few recent reports from the *American Educator* that you might be interested in adding to your reading list:

**Reading Richmond: How Scientifically Based Reading Instruction Is Dramatically Increasing Achievement**
**A Measured Approach: Value-Added Models are a Promising Improvement, but No One Measure Can Evaluate Teacher Performance**
**A Teacher Wonders: Can Grading Teachers Work?**

**Mark Your Calendar**
September 9, 10:00 AM Joint Education Committee Meeting, Room 171, State Capital Building
Final Thought

“It’s good to know that students are taking more courses that will prepare them for college. We’ve been talking about the importance of higher education in the 21st century economy for some time now, and it appears that the message is getting through.” – Dr. Jim Purcell, Director of the Arkansas Department of Higher Education

Thanks for reading! See you next week!

The Office for Education Policy
University of Arkansas
Director: Gary W. Ritter
Research Associates:
Nathan Jensen
Caleb Rose
Bentley Kirkland
James Shuls

If you would like to be added or removed from this list, please send an e-mail to oep@uark.edu.