Save the Date: The OEP will host our annual conference on April 16 at the DoubleTree Hotel in Little Rock. This year the conference will focus on school leadership in Arkansas. Representatives from local school districts, universities, and the legislature will share ways to look for and improve school leadership. Education Commissioner Tom Kimbrell will be with us to share his thoughts on Arkansas’ future as well. So mark this on your calendars and send an e-mail to oep@uark.edu if you plan to attend! See the attached agenda for more details.

As always, you can find a list of more news stories on the “In the News” section on the OEP website.

Restrictions Lifted on School for Boys
An independently run charter school for boys that is set to open in August in Little Rock no longer has to meet state-imposed restrictions on family income and student achievement levels. Arkansas Education Commissioner Tom Kimbrell told the board that enrollment limits on the Urban Collegiate School – which is designed to serve up to 696 boys in kindergarten through eighth grades – were counterproductive, a logistical nightmare to carry out, and not good for children. He also announced plans to establish a charter school review council, stating that the department’s current process for reviewing applications and existing charter schools is inadequate. The OEP is currently in the process of writing a policy brief examining the use and effectiveness of charter school review councils; look for the report to be posted next week.

2 School Districts to Shed State Reins
The Greenland and Decatur school districts will be free of state control beginning in October, giving their local communities the power to run those school systems again.

Weiner, Delight Agree to Consolidation Plan
The ability to administratively consolidate with a district 200 miles away was “an answer to a prayer,” Weiner school board president Susan Johnson said Wednesday.
**News from Around the Nation**

**Obama to Seek $1.35 Billion Race to Top Expansion**
President Barack Obama will seek $1.35 billion in next year’s budget to expand the Race to the Top competition, paving the way for the popular economic-stimulus grant program to become a permanent part of the administration’s education arsenal.

**All But 10 States Throw Hats Into Race to Top Ring**
Forty states and the District of Columbia applied for the first round of $4 billion in the Race to the Top Fund competition, which pits states against each other for desperately needed money, bragging rights, and leverage to implement controversial education reforms such as merit pay for teachers.

**Quality of Questions on Common Tests at Issue**
Most experts in the testing community have presumed that the $350 million promised by the U.S. Department of Education to support common assessments would promote those that made greater use of open-ended items capable of measuring higher-order critical-thinking skills.

**School Adds Weeding to Reading and Writing**
Those who believe trends start on the West Coast and are perfected on the East Coast might add to their argument a garden planned for an elementary school in Brooklyn. This summer, supporters will tear up a quarter-acre of asphalt parking lot behind P.S. 216 in the Gravesend neighborhood and start building the first New York affiliate of the Edible Schoolyard program, developed by the restaurateur Alice Waters of Chez Panisse.

**Site Seeing**

**State Charter Law Rankings Database:** A new database from the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools ranks each state according to the 20 components the Alliance laid out in a model policy they developed in 2009.

**Mark Your Calendar**

**January 22:** Lecture Series – Thomas Dee, Associate Professor of Economics and Director of Public Policy Program, Swarthmore College – Graduate Education Building 343, 12:00pm

**January 19:** State Board of Education Meeting at the Arch Ford Building Auditorium, 9am

**January 29:** Lecture Series – Lori L. Taylor, Assistant Professor in the Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A&M – Graduate Education Building 343, 12:00pm

**February 19:** Literacy and Arts Conference – “Enriching Literacy with Arts, Enriching Arts with Literacy” at the Jones Center for Families in
Springdale. Contact David Jolliffe (djollif@uark.edu) for more information.

**February 26:** 2nd Annual ESL Symposium at the Clarion Inn, Fayetteville

**March 3 and 4:** 3rd Annual ASD Symposium at the Fayetteville Continuing Education Center. March 3 from 7:00 – 8:30pm is a free community meeting on “Meeting the Needs of Persons with ASD.” Contact Barbara Gartin (bgartin@uark.edu) or Tom Smith (tecsmith@uark.edu) for more information.

**April 16:** OEP Conference – “Preparing Effective School Leaders for Arkansas” at the DoubleTree in Little Rock

More information is available on the [OEP Calendar](#).

**Final Thought**

“It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.” – Aristotle

**Thanks for reading! See you next week!**
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