From the OEP

Good afternoon! Today we are posting the 2009 Report Card on Arkansas Public Schools. This annual report highlights Arkansas’ student performance on standardized assessments, achievement gaps between our students, how our students fare when they leave secondary school, and school and student characteristics. Here is a sneak peak from “The Director’s Note”:

Thank you for reading the 2009 Report Card on Arkansas Public Schools. There is much good news to report, such as the greater number of Arkansas students reaching proficiency on state assessments and taking Advanced Placement courses. However, there are certainly areas for improvement, particularly the achievement gaps facing our minority and poverty students. We are proud of the progress our students, educators, and policymakers have made in 2009. We also know we must continue to work hard in making sure all students in Arkansas have adequate opportunities to succeed.

We hope you enjoy reading the 2009 Report Card. We appreciate your support and interest in the students of Arkansas!

This week we have another edition of the new “Report from the Capitol,” where you can read information about the most recent State Board of Education meeting. Be sure to read through the section below for an update.

Next week, we will post a policy brief about the “Algebra-for-All” movement. (There is a news article in the national section below, as a matter of fact.) This movement continued to come to our attention and we decided to tackle the topic. In the policy brief we will highlight the debate, what the research says, and what this means for Arkansas. Be sure to look for this policy brief next week.

News from Around the Natural State

Panel Rejects Weiner-Delight Merger
The Arkansas Education Board says the Weiner and Delight school districts are too far apart for a long-distance consolidation to work.

Board Takes Over, To Split Twin Rivers School District
The Arkansas Board of Education has voted to take over the Twin Rivers School District in northern Arkansas.

State 5th, With 34% Taking Hard Test
Arkansas’ 2009 public high school graduating class ranked fifth in the nation in its percentage of students who took at least one Advanced Placement exam, according to a report released Wednesday.

**News from Around the Nation**

‘Algebra for All’ Push Found to Yield Poor Results
Spurred by a succession of reports pointing to the importance of algebra as a gateway to college, educators and policymakers embraced “algebra for all” policies in the 1990s and began working to ensure that students take the subject by 9th grade or earlier.

With Federal Stimulus Money Gone, Many Schools Face Budget Gaps
Federal stimulus money has helped avoid drastic cuts at public schools in most parts of the nation, at least so far. But with the federal money running out, many of the nation’s schools are approaching what officials are calling a “funding cliff.”

Disadvantaged Students Continue AP Climb
Continuing a pattern from recent years, more students from low-income families are taking—and earning what is considered a passing score on—at least one Advanced Placement exam, a new analysis of results for the public high school graduating class of 2009 shows.

**Report from the Capitol**

For the second week in a row, the OWL flew down to the State Capital in Little Rock, this time to attend the monthly State Board of Education meeting, Monday February 8th. Scroll down to the bottom of this message to view all of the details.

**Site Seeing**

The 6th Annual AP Report to the Nation has been released by the College Board. You can view the report here or use the website to find additional information, such as subject-specific data, state reports, and key findings.

**Mark Your Calendar**

**February 12:** Lecture Series – Christopher Berry, Assistant Professor, The Harris School, University of Arkansas – at the Graduate Education Building at the U of A, 12:00pm

**February 16:** Arkansas Education Committee Meeting, Room 171, 10:30am

**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**: 2\textsuperscript{nd} Annual ESL Symposium at the Clarion Inn, Fayetteville

**March 3 and 4**: 3\textsuperscript{rd} 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. Send your RSVP to oep@uark.edu

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

**Final Thought**

“Arkansas has done a really excellent job of opening the doors to AP classes for all students.” – Susan Landers, executive director of the College Board’s AP program

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

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`Report from the Capitol, continued`

Notable agenda items considered were the voluntary consolidation of the Delight School District with the Weiner School District (which, if approved would be renamed the Arcadia School District); a proposed increase the enrollment caps on all three (elementary,
middle and high) e-STEM public charter schools, the conversion public charter school application for the Cloverdale Aerospace Technology Conversion Charter Middle School in the Little Rock School District; and finally, the accreditation for the Twin Rivers School District.

The majority of the meeting was spent discussing the voluntary consolidation of two "non-contiguous" (not adjacent to one another) school districts: Delight and Weiner. Under the Arkansas law, non-contiguous school districts can voluntarily consolidate if the State Board of Education finds that the consolidation or annexation will result in the overall improvement in the educational benefit to students in all of the school districts involved. This is the state's first petition to the State Board for approval of a non-contiguous consolidation.

Despite being over 200 miles apart and located in two different counties (Delight in Pike County and Weiner in Poinsett County), each district school board approved the consolidation unanimously. There is immediacy for action as both school districts have fallen below the 350 student minimum required by the state to continue operating. Testimony by attorneys, teachers, administrators and superintendents from both districts all praised the voluntary consolidation and were eager to be among the forefront of schools implementing distance learning technology to teach their students. In addition, school officials claimed that not consolidating locally (with a neighboring district) would save the state approximately $11-12,000 in transportation costs, as well as an unspecified amount of salary savings (down-sizing from two part-time technology coordinators - one for each district - to one full time technology coordinator for the new Arcadia School District).

The Board, however, questioned why an agreement between each school district and a neighboring, contiguous, district was not being entertained. The Superintendents from the Murfreesboro School District (neighboring Delight) and the Harrisburg School District (neighboring Weiner) both testified that consolidation would have negative fiscal impacts on their own districts. In addition, the Delight Superintendent claimed they would "lose students" because some "would not attend a school district called Murfreesboro." After testimony and questioning, Board member Jim Cooper moved to deny the request for consolidation. The Board then voted unanimously with Cooper's motion. Reasons given were that 1) there were better options for annexation, 2) disbelief that this consolidation would result in academic enhancement for the students, and 3) that the consolidation would not allow for voluntary decision making due to a board comprised of members from the two separate school districts.

After a brief recess, Chairman Williams decided to postpone the meeting on account of the increasingly worsening weather outside. All meeting attendees were dismissed while the Board remained gavelled into session to hear testimony regarding the accreditation of the Twin Rivers School District. After continuing in accredited-probation status for two years, the State Board, upon recommendation from Commissioner Tom Kimbrell, moved for the ADE to take over the Twin Rivers School District. An administrator will be placed in the district to work with building level administrators, then the Board will review a plan for consolidation into one or more
contiguous school districts by July 1. After this ruling, the meeting was officially adjourned without hearing the remaining agenda items. As such, the Board will reconvene on Friday February 19th to finish hearing the unaddressed agenda items, including the request to expand the e-STEM enrollment caps and the pending approval of the Cloverdale Conversion charter school. You can be sure that the OWL will be in attendance to report back on these remaining items.