From the OEP

The OWL has a New Year's Resolution for 2010 - and that is to be more present in the state meetings listed under the "Mark Your Calendar" section. Therefore, we have added a new section to the OWL titled “Report from the Capitol.” This section will feature a recap of the discussions and decisions at monthly legislative meetings focusing on education, as well as State Board of Education meetings. Our first "Report from the Capitol" highlights discussions from the Joint Adequacy Evaluation Oversight Subcommittee of the House and Senate Interim Committee on Education related to the increases to the per pupil foundation aid amount, proposed regulations governing fiscal and academic distress, and finally, ARRA expenditures to date, as well as the uncertainty of future funds allocated to k-12 education. You can find the "Report from the Capitol" section below, under "News from Around the Nation."

News from Around the Natural State

Arkansas Places Second in New Data Quality Campaign Report
A new Data Quality Campaign report finds that Arkansas places second among states for taking the necessary steps to ensure that longitudinal data systems are used to improve student outcomes and system-wide performance. The results are based on a survey of all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

Panel: Lottery-Funded Scholarships Should Be $5,000 for Four-Year Schools
The legislative committee that oversees the state lottery decided today to recommend that lottery-funded college scholarships be set at $5,000 per year to attend a four-year school and $2,500 per year to attend a two-year school.

School Hearing Keys on Discipline
An attorney for black students known as the Joshua intervenors on Wednesday hammered North Little Rock School District administrators with questions about their choosing not to analyze or put into writing some of their practices on student discipline and financial assistance.

News from Around the Nation

States Said to lag in Using Data Systems Well
States have made progress in building data systems that track student performance over time, but are behind the curve in sharing the information in a way that leads to meaningful decision-making, according to a national survey released today.

**State School Boards Raise Questions About Standards**
States that adopt proposed common academic standards must use the entire document word for word, leaders of the initiative said this week.

**School Districts Scramble to Help Homeless Students**
As job losses and home foreclosures have pushed families into homelessness, school districts are struggling to cope with an increasing number of students with no permanent home.

**Report from the Capitol**

Earlier this week, the OWL flew down to Little Rock for the Joint House and Senate Adequacy Evaluation Oversight Subcommittee of the Interim House and Senate Interim Committee on Education to fix our wise eye upon the discussions before the Legislators on this Subcommittee.

In fiscal news, the new per-pupil foundation funding amount and example funding matrix was proposed to the Subcommittee. The per pupil expenditure (PPE) amount proposed for the 2010-11 school year is $6,023 (up from $5,940 in the 2009-10 school year) - a 2% increase. Also of note is that the 2010-11 school year will be the first year where Arkansas will have $0 allocated from "Enhanced" funds, a budget category created from when Arkansas had a budget surplus. We report this because in spite of all dire economic forecasts - and cuts elsewhere - our lawmakers have found a way to increase education funding each year. These increases have been consistent since the 2004-05 school year, when the state legislature increased the foundation funding PPE to $5,400 (resulting not only from the historic Lake View v Huckabee ruling, but also from the Oden-Picus adequacy study). The increases are illustrated in the following table.

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundation Funding</td>
<td>$5,400</td>
<td>$5,528</td>
<td>$5,662</td>
<td>$5,719</td>
<td>$5,789</td>
<td>$5,905</td>
<td>$6,023</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Secondly, the Subcommittee was presented with the proposed rules for identifying and governing how the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) will "assess, evaluate, identify, classify and address those school districts and educational service cooperatives in fiscal distress." The OWL was happy to see our legislators ask keen questions such as whether school superintendents are given specific training on fiscal matters (answer: they are!). However, some were surprised to learn that there is no current method for assessing whether the superintendents are retaining the knowledge learned in these trainings (other than whether or not their district is in fiscal distress!).

In addition, the Subcommittee was presented information on the rules governing how the state identifies school districts as being in "academic distress." Legislators questioned why the "bar" for identifying a school district as being in Academic Distress was set so low (currently, a school
district is identified as being in Academic Distress if 75% of their students are scoring at the "Below Basic" level on the Arkansas Benchmark Exam. After some background research into the statute that was thought to have set this figure in place (and would have been set prior to many of the current Subcommittee members' service in the legislature), it turns out that this "75% Below Basic" figure was not a statute, and can likely be changed with approval of the ADE. Our Legislators and some members of the ADE believe that a new number should be set in accordance with the US Department of Education definition of academic distress (though a quick perusal of the US DOE website did not readily produce such a definition). We did learn that under the current rules (75% of students performing at the Below Basic level on the Arkansas Benchmark Exam), there are NO Arkansas school districts in academic distress. However, if this percentage were to be raised to 25% of the students were performing at the Below Basic level on the Arkansas Benchmark Exam, ADE officials "guesstimated" that about 10 school districts would then be classified as being in academic distress (however, changing this figure to 25% was not officially proposed). In the end, the ADE and legislators agreed to spend more time on the issue of changing this percentage to create a more rigorous standard for Arkansas, or at least a more clear definition of academic distress.

Finally, the legislature was presented with the state's current expenditures of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds for education. Arkansas has spent $124,434,901 of the estimated $576,056,602 available ARRA funds. The report, authored by the Bureau of Legislative Research, also claims that these additional funds are responsible for the creation and saving of 731 education jobs across the state. You may recall that when the US DOE first sent ARRA funds to states, they initially sent 67% of a state's total allocation, asking each state to distribute the money to their LEA's and spend that money quickly adding that once the 67% was exhausted, the remaining 33% would be sent. The chamber was abuzz with questions about a rumor that k-12 education would only be receiving a portion of the remaining 33% because some of it was being re-allocated to higher education to offset more drastic budget cuts. However, even some clarification from Education Commissioner Tom Kimbrell did not seem to answer all of the questions in the room regarding schools or districts that may have already committed their portion of the remaining 33% of ARRA funds.

You can be sure that the OWL will continue to visit these meetings to follow up on these proposals and hopefully get some answers to these lingering questions…

**Site Seeing**

The Data Quality Campaign (DQC) is a national, collaborative effort to encourage and support state policymakers to improve the availability and use of high-quality education data to improve student achievement. Above we referenced an article about Arkansas’ ranking in the recent survey results. To view more details about Arkansas’ ranking, as well as the results of other states, visit [http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/](http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/)

**Mark Your Calendar**

**February 8**: State Board of Education Meeting at the Arch Ford Building Auditorium in Little Rock, 9:00am  
**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\(^{nd}\) Annual ESL Symposium at the Clarion Inn, Fayetteville

**March 3 and 4:** 3\(^{rd}\) 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**

“*Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence.*” – Robert Frost

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

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