Good Afternoon! For those of you who signed up for the Office for Education Policy Conference next week (April 16th), we are looking forward to meeting with you and exchanging ideas on effective school leadership in our state. Those who have registered for the conference should have received an attendance confirmation email from the OEP on April 7th titled "OEP Conference April 16" with a Conference Flyer & Schedule attachment. If you registered to attend our conference but did not receive this email confirmation, please contact us at oep@uark.edu.

Next week, in anticipation for the OEP Conference, we will be releasing an OEP publication every day leading up to the conference on Friday, including two OEP Policy Briefs on the 2009 NAEP Reading Results and Reauthorizing the No Child Left Behind Act under the Obama Administration. The NAEP brief highlights Arkansas' performance on the NAEP Reading subtest. In addition to the most recent NAEP Reading scores, we also provide an overview of Arkansas NAEP Reading performance over time as compared to the nation, highlight performance on the NAEP Reading exam according to student subgroups (race and socioeconomic status), compare Arkansas' reading exam performance to that of Arkansas' neighboring states, and we examine national trends. The NCLB brief will take a look at the history of NCLB and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as well as the proposed changes in the latest reauthorization. Stay tuned next week to read more about these two topics as well as our “to be announced” publications.

As always, we also have a number of interesting news stories to keep you apprised of educational happenings in the state, region, and nation. We hope you will enjoy the stories we compiled for you this week.

If we don't see you at the OEP Conference, we'll see you in your inbox!

**News from Around the Natural State**

**District Scores Inverse to Cash**
Data presented to legislators Tuesday reveal that school districts with high poverty levels get extra state and federal dollars but also have the lowest standardized test scores. Legislators said that doesn’t mean the state is spending too much on low performing districts. Paul Atkins, an analyst at the Bureau of Legislative Research, told legislators he reached no policy conclusions in his data. He said his goal was to provide legislators data to help them make decisions for funding schools as the 2011 legislative session approaches.

**Searching for Scholarships**
The excitement of leaving the nest for the first time also brings the pressures of paying for housing and college. Students still have some time to apply for scholarships. In some cases, it could pay their entire tuition.

**News from Around the Nation**

**Pay For Performance Proposals in Washington DC and Florida Make National News:**

Two national headlines offer a glimpse into the controversial education reform initiative of implementing pay for performance programs in schools. In Florida, teachers and their unions are pitted against the Florida state legislature over a statewide pay for performance plan. In the nation's capital, Washington DC Public Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee and President of the American Federation of Teachers Randi Weingarten have reached a tentative agreement after two years of negotiations on a new teacher pay contract which will include a pay for performance component. Both officials agree that everyone "[comes] out ahead" as a result of this deal.

**$3.4 Billion Is Left in Race to Top Fund**

By selecting just two states as first-round Race to the Top winners, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan is leaving $3.4 billion on the table for the remaining states to vie for in round two. Delaware and Tennessee beat out 14 other finalists last week to win the first grants awarded in the $4 billion Race to the Top Fund competition. Secretary Duncan challenged states to compete as vigorously for round-two grants, saying there could be 10 to 15 winners. Applications are due June 1, and the awards will be made in September.

**States Skeptical about "Race to Top" School Aid Contest**

A dozen governors, led by Bill Ritter Jr. of Colorado, sat with Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in a hotel ballroom in Washington a few weeks back, praising his vision and gushing with enthusiasm over a $4 billion grant competition they hoped could land their states a jackpot of hundreds of millions of dollars. But for many of those governors, the contest lost some sizzle last week, when Mr. Duncan awarded money to only two states — Delaware and Tennessee.

**ELL's Math, Reading Proficiency Rises, Study Finds**

The percentage of English-language learners nationwide attaining proficiency in reading and mathematics on state tests increased in many states from the 2005-06 through the 2007-08 school years, says a report released by the Washington-based Center on Education Policy. That increase was present at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, though it was less prevalent in high school than at the other levels, according to the center's analysis.

**Site Seeing**

In preparation for the OEP Conference on Effective School Leadership next Friday, our featured website this week is the National Center for School Leadership; a website "dedicated to assisting public schools and school districts to improve educational outcomes for students."

**Mark Your Calendar**
June 15: **“Common Standards, Common Sense: What the Common Core State Standards Mean for Arkansas”** hosted by The Learning Institute at Bryant Middle School, 9am – 3:30pm. Contact Quentin.suffren@tli.net for more information.

More information is available on the **OEP Calendar**.

**Final Thought**

'In fact, leaders... that go from good to great start not with 'where' but with 'who'. They start by getting the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats... first the people, then the direction’. - Jim Collins

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

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