From the OEP

School’s out for summer…and it is our hope that the many of you who are currently enjoying your summer vacation, are reading this OWL on your smart phone or laptop while sitting next to the pool, sipping drinks with little umbrellas in them. Meanwhile, back at the OEP, we are hard at work scouring the news hoping to keep you informed and provide you with some summer reading.

In Arkansas, there has been considerable buzz about the release of the 2009-10 Arkansas Benchmark and grade 11 Literacy End of Course exam results. The OEP breaks down this year’s student performance in our new policy brief Test Scores Show More Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced in 2010. The news is good according to Arkansas Education Commissioner Tom Kimbrell: “More students scored proficient and advanced for another annual increase in math and literacy performance and, for the fourth year in a row, the achievement gap between white students and students of color continued to narrow.”

The education world has also been a’buzz with stories about teacher pay. Recall our own Report on teacher salaries in Arkansas, which was reported on in a Northwest Arkansas Times article. Teacher salaries also made the news in Denver, Colorado where a new report on the Denver ProComp alternative teacher compensation system was released indicating that mathematics and reading achievement scores have increased substantially since 2002-03 and that teachers generally exhibit positive attitudes toward the program. More information is included in the Education Week story linked in our News from Around the Nation section below.

As always, you can keep up with education news on the In the News section of our website.

News from Around the Natural State

Charter schools’ effect on LR slim, state argues
In a move to fight the Little Rock School District in the desegregation case, the state attorney general’s office discarded the district’s notion that charter schools have a serious financial impact on the city’s schools. The state also disputed the district’s claims that the state Board of Education violated a 1989 financial settlement agreement in the Pulaski County school-desegregation case, according to a 43-page motion filed in U.S. District Court.

Gubernatorial Candidate Jim Keet Wants Consolidation Law Revisited
Republican gubernatorial candidate Jim Keet said today he wants the Legislature next year to revisit the state’s 2003 consolidation law. Small school districts that perform well but fall below the state-imposed minimum enrollment threshold should not be forced to merge with neighboring districts, Keet said. “We need to take it up at the next legislative session. We need to employ some common sense,” he said. Gov. Mike Beebe said
later that meddling with the consolidation law would invite court challenges that could reopen litigation against the state’s method of funding public schools.

Little Rock Test Scores See Ups, Downs
This year’s results on the Arkansas Benchmark Exam proved to be a mixed bag for the Little Rock School District. On one hand, district students scoring at proficient or better levels on the state math and literacy tests were 7 to 20 percentage points lower than the statewide averages. On the other hand, more than two thirds of students statewide scored at grade level or better in nearly every tested grade, Little Rock students only topped the 50 percent mark in every grade except one where the proficient level in math was at 43 percent. Proficient is considered grade-level achievement.

News from Around the Nation

KIPP Middle Schools Found to Spur Learning Gains
Students’ gains in mathematics after three years in a charter school run by the Knowledge Is Power Program, or KIPP, are large enough in about half of schools to significantly narrow race- and income-based achievement gaps among students, according to a study of 22 KIPP middle schools in nine states: Arkansas, California, the District of Columbia, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Texas. KIPP Delta College Prep in Helena, AR was one of the 22 KIPP schools included in the study. The success of KIPP Delta College Prep in Helena has resulted in the expansion of the KIPP Network in the Natural State when a new KIPP School opens its doors in Blytheville, AR this July.

Research Finds Vouchers Boost High School Graduation Rates
Students in Washington, D.C., who used a federally funded voucher to attend a private school were more likely to graduate from high school than students in a control group that did not take part in the voucher program, according to the latest evaluation of the program by an Arkansas-led team. This is the first study in the United States to use rigorous experimental methods to determine the effect of school vouchers on graduation rates.

ProComp May Have Boosted Teacher Selection, Retention
Denver’s ProComp pay program may have helped attract more-effective teachers to the district and boosted retention in hard-to-serve schools, according to a report on the much-discussed system released recently by the University of Colorado at Boulder. Teachers opting into the program also appear to be slightly more effective on the whole.

Site Seeing
Our featured website for this issue of the OWL is The Arkansas Department of Education website on Testing which includes links to the 2009-10 Benchmark exam scores for each District in the State. There are also comparisons to test scores in previous years as well as Power Point presentations describing student performance for the past academic year. If you want to view the data in a different format, here is an alternative to the District Level Benchmark Performance Database we created on the OEP Website.
Mark Your Calendar
June 28-July 2, 2010: Comprehensive Intervention Model Institute sponsored by the Center for Literacy at UALR, Hilton Little Rock Metro Center, more info here.
July 6-8, 2010: Beginning Administrator Induction Training, Holiday Inn - Airport, Little Rock AR, more info here.
July 12, 2010: State Board of Education Meeting.

SAVE THE DATE: October 28, 2010 - Annual OEP Conference in Little Rock, Arkansas. This year’s Conference topic is Assessment and Accountability and will feature Keynote Speaker Raymond Simon who was the Commissioner of Education in Arkansas from 1998 to 2004 before being appointed as the Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education in 2005. Please note that this is the annual OEP Conference that we have typically held in the Spring for the past 3 years, but have decided to hold this year’s conference in the Fall so that we do not conflict with the Arkansas State Benchmark and EOC testing dates. We hope you will consider attending. More information coming soon!

More information is available on the OEP Calendar.

Final Thought
“When you have the achievement gap closing while scores of each student subgroup improve, you know that the system is working together to produce the right results. You can’t ask for a much better trend than that.” - Tom W. Kimbrell, Arkansas Commissioner of Education

Thanks for reading! See you next week!

The Office for Education Policy
University of Arkansas
Director: Gary W. Ritter
Research Associates:
Nathan C. Jensen
Caleb P. Rose
James L. Woodworth
If you would like to be added or removed from this list, please send an e-mail to oep@uark.edu.