August 11, 2010

From the OEP

Across the state, students, teachers, and administrators are preparing for the coming academic year. The OEP has been working through the summer to bring you education news across the state, region, and nation…and to welcome you back, we are planning to release a set of new publications to kick off the school year. Our 2010-11 kickoff on Wednesday, August 25th, will also mark the end of the OWL’s summer vacation and the return of the OWL as a weekly e-blast.

First, we plan to release our Annual OEP Awards which will highlight the top performing districts and schools in the state. Like last year, we note the top schools on the Benchmark and End of Course Exams for the 2009-10 academic year across the entire state, in each region, by each school level, and by schools with a high population of low income students. Look for the first installment of the OEP Awards Wednesday August 25th. Just as our students and educators begin the year, we want to bring attention to the great work being done in so many schools across our state.

New this year to our web-based resources is a set of “lookup databases” which will allow users to quickly pull up performance and demographic data related to their school or district, and make performance and demographic comparisons between a given school/district with another school/district. Our database will also allow you to compare your school/district’s performance and demographics with the entire state. We are adding the final touches to these web data resources, but will release them fully for public consumption in early September.

In-between releasing OEP Awards and Databases, we are also planning to release a few Policy Briefs which focus on End of Course Exam performance across the state and school consolidation, among other issues. Look for these Policy Briefs throughout the fall.

In other news, we are excited to inform our OWL readers and OEP Annual Conference attendees that the final venue and date of our annual conference has been confirmed. Please mark your calendars to reflect that the OEP Annual Conference will be held at the Clinton Presidential Center in Little Rock on Wednesday November 10th. We hope you will double-check your availability as we have considered a few different dates for our conference.

We are looking forward to having the conference in this venue and are lining up a very impressive set of speakers, highlighted by former Commissioner of Education, Ray Simon. We have updated our SAVE THE DATE information below to reflect the confirmed date and venue. We hope to see you there!

News from Around the Natural State

State Revokes Osceola District Charter School
The Arkansas Board of Education on Monday revoked the charter for an Osceola School District charter school at a meeting in which the Osceola School Board attorney asked state officials to fire Osceola Superintendent Milton Washington. The state board revoked the charter for the 507-student Academic Center of Excellence program because it failed to meet state accreditation standards regarding teacher licensure in each of the past three school years.

**Senate Takes Aim at Junk Food in Schools, Adopts Lincoln Bill**
The Senate unanimously approved Sen. Blanche Lincoln’s $4.5 billion child-nutrition legislation Thursday aimed at banishing junk food from school vending machines and establishing nutritional guidelines for school lunches.

**Pulaski County School District Details Steps to Mend its Violations**
Pulaski County Special School District leaders on Monday detailed the steps they’ve taken - including the hiring of a new principal and a human relations consultant - to remedy three years of standards violations at Northwood Middle School.

**Put Learning First: Standards Outdated**
So why did the Arkansas Department of Education put some of the best public schools in the state on a watch list for putting student needs ahead of bureaucratic box checking?

**News from Around the Nation**

**Obama Signs $26 Billion Bill to Curb Layoffs**
The House on Tuesday pushed through an emergency $26 billion jobs bill that Democrats said would save 300,000 teachers, police and others from layoffs. President Barack Obama immediately signed it into law.

**Schools Are Given a Grade on How Graduates Do**
This year, for the first time, it has sent detailed reports to all of its high schools, telling them just how many of their students who arrived at the city’s public colleges needed remedial courses, as well as how many stayed enrolled after their first semester. The reports go beyond the basic measure of a school’s success — the percentage of students who earn a diploma — to let educators know whether they have been preparing those students for college or simply churning them out.

**Little as They Try, Students Can't Get a D Here**
Under the old system, students could pass with a 65 — 389 of the 1,500 students at Mount Olive High had a “D” on their final report cards in June — but now anything lower than a 70 will be considered failure.

**Don’t forget, you can always keep up with more education news on the In the News section of our website.**

**Site Seeing**
The Smithsonian Education website is the central education website of the Smithsonian Institution. It includes information and resources for educators, families, and students.
Mark Your Calendar

SAVE THE DATE: November 10, 2010 - Annual OEP Conference at the Clinton Presidential Center 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. We will be working to allow professional development hours credited to teachers and administrators for this conference. More information coming soon!

More information is available on the OEP Calendar.

Final Thought
"Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it." - Marian Wright Edelman

Thanks for reading! See you next week!

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