From the OEP

Welcome back for the 2010-2011 school year. We here at the OEP hope everyone has had a smooth start to the school year. Now that the kids are getting settled in and schedules are falling into place, we want to start the year off by acknowledging the accomplishments made by many schools in our state over the last academic year with the release of the first section of our Annual OEP Awards. As you may recall, we started the OEP Awards last year to highlight successful 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. In the coming weeks, we will release additional OEP Awards that specifically highlight high performing elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and schools serving low-income students that are “beating the odds” by performing well on state assessments. We plan to release a new installment of the OEP awards every other week.

Also in the queue for the fall is our new 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 districts and between a school and its district. The database will provide a user-friendly tool that allows you to compare your district’s performance and demographics with that of districts across the entire state.

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 national education news, the U. S. Department of Education (USDOE) has released the list of Race to the Top: Round 2. The winners were: Massachusetts, New York, Hawaii, Florida, Rhode Island, District of Columbia, Maryland, Georgia, North Carolina, and Ohio. These are in addition to Delaware and Tennessee which received funding in Round 1. The USDOE press release listed three commonalities among the winners. All the winning states adopted the Common Core State Standards coordinated by the National Governors’ Association and Council of Chief State School Officers, instituted incentive programs to put the most effective teachers in high-need schools, and instituted alternative certification programs for teachers and principals.

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 Tuesday November 9th. 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**

**$40.2 Million to aid State's Direst Schools**
The Arkansas Department of Education will receive $40.2 million in federal grants to improve performance in the state’s lowest-performing schools, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced August 18, 2010. The funds are part of $3.5 billion in school-improvement grants funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and from money set aside from the 2009 federal budget.

**25,445 to Get State-lottery Scholarships 54,533 Applied; Total Cost Estimated at $125 Million**
With colleges and universities set to open within the next two weeks, less than half of the students who applied for Arkansas lottery-financed scholarships will get them.

**Springdale School District Ready for More Students**
Springdale school district keeps growing and growing, and Superintendent Jim Rollins said he expects enrollment in grades K-12 to be about 18,900 students this year. That would be an increase of almost 700 from last school year.

**Parents Advised of School Changes**
Parents of Berryville High School students received a letter from the school August 12, 2010 saying it had replaced three English teachers and three math teachers and is making other changes it hopes will bring test scores up to meet state and federal requirements. Green Forest is in the same situation with its high school, Superintendent John Calaway said.

**Teachers Reject Policies, Bonuses 84% of Votes Counted Oppose Plan**
Teachers in the Pulaski County Special School District overwhelmingly rejected personnel policies that would have immediately replaced their union-negotiated contract - despite the promise of a $1,100 bonus each.

**Vocational Partnership in the Works**
Discussions between Northwest Arkansas Community College and the Bentonville and Rogers school districts could mean enhanced career and technical training for high school students.

**Capacity Ongoing Issue**
When students returned to schools across Northwest Arkansas for the 2010-11 school year, some of them attended classes in portable buildings or open spaces.

**News from Around the Nation**

**Nine States and the District of Columbia Win Second Round Race to the Top Grants**
U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced August 24, 2010 that 10 applicants have won grants in the second phase of the Race to the Top competition. Along with Phase 1 winners Delaware and Tennessee, 11 states and the District of Columbia have now been awarded money in the Obama Administration's groundbreaking education reform program that will directly impact 13.6 million students, and 980,000 teachers in 25,000 schools.

L.A. Times Creates Controversy by Releasing Teacher Value-Added Data
The Los Angeles Times recently released Who's Teaching L.A.'s Kids. The report analyses the classroom teacher performance based on value-added, how much a student grows each year, measures of 6,000 third- through fifth-grade teachers. In response to the report, the Los Angeles teachers union president said August 15, 2010 he was organizing a "massive boycott" of The Times. The issue of using value-added measures as part of teacher evaluations has sparked a firestorm. For more details, review the National Public Radio interview with the L.A. Times’ article’s author Jason Felch.

Given Money, Schools Wait on Rehiring Teachers
Unlike Arkansas schools, which have generally avoided statewide layoffs, other states handed out pink slips to teachers this spring. These states made a beeline to Washington to plead for money for their ravaged education budgets. But now that the federal government has come through with $10 billion, some of the nation’s biggest school districts are balking at using their share of the money to hire teachers right away.

Utah Eyes Edujobs Cash to Fill State Budget Holes
State lawmakers are considering cutting in half the amount of federal money Utah school districts could receive to hire extra teachers.

What's Missing for Back-to-school? 135,000 Teachers
While Arkansas schools are tightening their belts to deal with current fiscal issues, other school districts across the country are dealing with tight fiscal times by forcing administrators to lay off teachers, enlarge class sizes, cut programs and charge for services that were once free.

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

Site Seeing
The Arkansas Department of Education Commissioner’s Memos are available on the web. This site allows users to keep up with the most current information from the ADE.

Mark Your Calendar
Aug 23-25 Pathwise Training Southeast Arkansas Co-op
Aug 26 Pathwise Recalibration - DeQueen-Mena Coop
Aug 30 Beginning Admin Induction
Sept 1-2 Pathwise Recalibration - Van Buren High School
SAVE THE DATE: **November 9, 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**

“The community is starved for people to run the shop, tune the machines and build the houses. We need people who make the country work vs. manage the country.” - Steve Gates, Senior Vice President of the Office of Advancement NWACC

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

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