From the OEP

It’s the middle of the week and we hope that you are having a good one! This week, we are releasing our first Policy Brief of the year Act 60: The Past, Present, and Future of School Consolidation. Act 60 has had a major impact on the smallest school districts in Arkansas in that it requires all school districts with an enrollment fewer than 350 students for two consecutive years to be consolidated. This policy brief reports the number and types of schools and districts that have been affected since the passage of Act 60. In addition, we evaluate the enrollment trends in an attempt to predict which schools are “at-risk” of being consolidated for dropping below the 350 student threshold established by Act 60.

The figures presented in this policy brief are based on data that has been excerpted from a larger OEP Education Report on the impact of Act 60 which we plan to release in early 2011. Keep your eyes peeled for it next year!

In other education and political news, for those of you who may be following the political primary season, The Washington DC Mayor, Adrian Fenty, who was responsible for hiring the news-making DC Public Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee, lost his primary bid for re-election. The winning nominee, Vincent Gray, when asked if he would keep Rhee on board as Chancellor simply replied: “We’ll see.” We too will see as we continue to monitor this situation in our nation’s capital as it could have dramatic effects on the DC public school system.

Have a great rest of the week!

News from Around the Natural State

U.S. Honors 4 Arkansas Schools
Four Arkansas public schools are among more than 300 nationwide recognized as 2010 Blue Ribbon Schools for academic achievement. All 304 schools - 254 public and 50 private - that received the designation announced by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan will be recognized Nov. 15-16 in Washington, D.C.

Beebe: Schools Can Use Stimulus Money for Capital Improvements
Gov. Mike Beebe said today he believes federal money being distributed to states to support education jobs can be used by Arkansas schools to fund capital improvements — at least indirectly. U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan announced Monday evening that Arkansas will received $91 million from a $10 billion education fund approved by Congress and signed into law last month.

8% Fewer Students Take SAT
Fewer Arkansas high school seniors took the SAT college-entrance exam this year, leading education officials to wonder whether a new testing law, a new scholarship lottery and the recession could be triggering a waning pursuit of out-of-state colleges.
Helena School District Again in Fiscal Distress
The Helena-West Helena School District - taken over by the state in 2005 and returned to local control in 2008 - is once again in financial straits. The Arkansas Board of Education on Monday voted unanimously to classify the 2,374-student district as fiscally distressed, obligating system leaders to develop and comply with a state-approved financial improvement plan and barring them from incurring expenses without state approval.

ACT Scores Beat Average; Fayetteville Students Excel
Fayetteville students scored above the state and national averages on the ACT college entrance exam given during the 2009-10 school year, Fayetteville School District officials said Wednesday. The composite score of the 379 students taking the test was 23.9. The Arkansas composite average was 20.3 whereas the national average was 21.0.

News from Around the Nation

Los Angeles Unveils Teacher Evaluation Plan
Los Angeles Unified officials have released a detailed proposal for overhauling the district's teacher evaluation system, including the broader use of student test data and establishing incentive pay programs. Under the proposal, employee attendance, classroom observations and student test scores would be among the measures used to evaluate teachers and administrators. The system would also include a self-assessment from every educator.

Washington D.C. Releases Details of Teacher Bonuses
D.C. school officials have released details of how teachers can qualify for performance-based pay raises that could make them among the best-paid public school teachers in the country. The increases will go toward teachers who get the best evaluations. Those ranked highly effective may be eligible for a one-time bonus of up to $25,000. And those who maintain that ranking for two straight years could see their base pay rise by as much as $26,000 a year.

Racial Disparity in School Suspensions
In many of the nation’s middle schools, black boys were nearly three times as likely to be suspended as white boys, according to a new study, which also found that black girls were suspended at four times the rate of white girls.

Few Changes on SAT Posted by Class of 2010
Scores on the SAT improved a little in mathematics in the past year, but remained flat in reading and writing, results released today show. Students in the graduating class of 2010 who took the college-entrance exam sometime in high school produced an average score of 516 in math, 1 point higher than in each of the previous three graduating classes, but still 4 points lower than the decade’s high point, 520 for the class of 2005, according to results released by the College Board, which sponsors the SAT.

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

Site Seeing
On Tuesday September 14, 2010, President Obama addressed the Nation from a podium at Julia R. Masterman Laboratory and Demonstration School in Philadelphia, PA with his annual “Back to School Speech.” The video streamed live from whitehouse.gov which we are re-linking here. In addition, you can also read the text from the President’s speech.

**Mark Your Calendar**

- **Sept 16** Pathwise, Day 1, Harding University
- **Sept 17** Arkansas Association for Gifted Education Administrators Conference, Holiday Inn, Little Rock, AR 8:30 AM - 3:30 PM
- **Sept 21** Deadline to register for training session for Childhood Obesity Grant
- **Sept 28** Training session for Childhood Obesity Grant

**OEP Conference Reminder: November 9, 2010** - Annual OEP Conference at the Clinton Presidential Center in Little Rock, Arkansas. This year’s Conference topic is Assessment and Accountability. The keynote speaker will be Raymond Simon, Arkansas Commissioner of Education from 1998 to 2004. He was appointed Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education in 2005. Rather than holding the conference in the spring, as in years past, we are now holding it in the fall to avoid 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.

We are also happy to announce this week the confirmation of speaker Susan Bonesteel from the Arkansas Department of Education. Prior to her appointment at the ADE, *Ms. Bonesteel was a regional representative under former Secretary of Education Rod Paige*, playing an important role as a liaison to schools, colleges, and parent groups in disseminating information about the No Child Left Behind Act. She has served as an external provider for schools on School Improvement Status in Arkansas and other states. Her role as the Director of the National Center for Educational Achievement has given her ample experience in using longitudinal data to increase student achievement. Her **topic at the Conference** will be on **using data to increase student achievement and promote successful instructional practice.**

More information coming soon!

**Final Thought**

“And I’m absolutely confident that if all of our students -- here at Masterman and across this country -- keep doing their part, if you guys work hard and you’re focused on your education, you keep fighting for your dreams and then you help each other reach each other’s dreams, then you’re not only going to succeed this year, you’re going to succeed for the rest of your lives. And that means America will succeed in the 21st century.” - President Barack Obama addressing the students of Julia R. Masterman Laboratory and Demonstration School in Philadelphia, PA September 14, 2010.

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

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