From the OEP

This week, we are bringing the OWL to you a little early in recognition of the shortened work week. This is the time of year where we customarily give thanks – and we at the OWL have a lot to be thankful for. We are thankful that we have had another year to be an educational resource for the great state of Arkansas. We are thankful that we were able to host two conferences in 2010 which we hope helped equip educators in our state with more tools to continue doing the work of educating students in our state…and most importantly, we are thankful for you and all of the hard work you put forth working to improve educating Arkansas’ students. We look forward to the coming year.

In education news, we are highlighting a report by the Brookings Institution Brown Center Task Group on Teacher Quality regarding the role of value-added measures in evaluating teachers. The report “Evaluating Teachers: The Important Role of Value-Added” highlights and defines the concept of value-added teacher evaluation (that is, the evaluation of teachers based on the contribution they make to the learning of their students). The following four areas of value-added are discussed:

- Value-added information and the uses to which it can be put.
- The consequences for teachers vs. those for students of classifying and misclassifying teachers as effective or ineffective.
- The reliability of value-added measures of teacher performance and the standards for evaluations in other fields.
- The reliability of teacher evaluation systems that include value-added vs. those that do not.

In illustrating the fourth point - reliability of teacher evaluation systems that include value added measures vs. those that do not – the authors cite a study commissioned by the Urban Institute using data from the New York City Public Schools. This study examines whether it is better to lay off teachers based on seniority, or instead on teacher value-added. The value-added model, based on students’ math and English Language Arts achievement, was based on 4 years of data, specifically looking at 4th and 5th grade teacher performance. The authors concluded that many more effective teachers would be retained if layoffs were based on teacher value-added rather than seniority.

Although the authors do not advocate using value-added measures alone when making decisions about hiring, firing, tenure, compensation, placement, and developing teachers, they do note the following, which seems quite salient in regard to this debate:

“Teachers differ dramatically in their performance, with large consequences for students. Staffing policies that ignore this lose one of the strongest levers for lifting the performance of schools and students. That is why there is great interest in establishing teacher evaluation systems that meaningfully differentiate performance.”

News from Around the Natural State

First El Dorado Promise Fulfilled
Ashley Baldwin Milam celebrated a milestone Aug. 6 when she put on a cap and robe to collect her degree, but it was more than just a personal accomplishment. Baldwin Milam was the first student to graduate with a bachelor’s degree using money from the El Dorado Promise scholarship program that started in 2007 - an open scholarship endowed by Murphy Oil Co. and available to any student who attended four years of high school in El Dorado.

Arkansas Students Trail U.S. on Nation's Report Card
Arkansas’ high school seniors in 2009 scored below the national average on both the math and reading sections of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a testing program also known as the Nation’s Report Card. Arkansas was one of 11 states that volunteered to have its state results extracted from the national data and reported. About 2,700 Arkansas high school seniors were tested in each subject. The testing occurred in about 100 Arkansas schools, but the individual school results are not disclosed. Thirty percent of the Arkansas test-takers and 36 percent of test-takers nationally scored at proficient or advanced levels on the reading test. In math, only 15 percent of the Arkansas test-takers and 25 percent of test-takers nationally scored at proficient or advanced levels.

State Calls in Cash From Schools
State Education Commissioner Tom Kimbrell said Friday that for years his department has erred in calculating how much money some districts should have and is now asking four districts to pay the state nearly $2.6 million combined. Kimbrell said his staff concluded in June that the districts - Armorel in Mississippi County, Eureka Springs in Carroll County, West Side in Cleburne County and Fountain Lake in Garland County - had too much money. He said it’s the first time the issue had been flagged by the department.

Union Fears Little Rock School Chief’s Job Topic of Sessions
The Little Rock School Board has met in executive session three times in as many meetings with little explanation, angering teacher leaders who support Superintendent Linda Watson and fear the board is working to remove her even before the June 30 expiration of her contract.

News from Around the Nation
Seniors' Reading and Math NAEP Scores on Rise
Whereas Arkansas’ students are trailing the national average in mathematics and reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), nationally, twelfth graders’ reading and mathematics scores on the NAEP have improved only modestly in the past four years, prompting renewed recognition that too few students leave high school well equipped for a promising future.

Economists Call for End to Teachers' Degree Bonuses
Every year, American schools pay more than $8.6 billion in bonuses to teachers with master's degrees. Despite more than a decade of research showing the money has little impact on student achievement, and questions about whether a higher degree makes a teacher more effective, state lawmakers and other officials have been reluctant to tackle this popular way for teachers to earn more money.

At a speech to the Council of Chief State School Officers, Bill Gates took aim at school budgets and the master's degree bonus. "My own state of Washington has an average salary bump of nearly $11,000 for a master's degree — and more than half of our teachers get it. That's more than $300 million every year that doesn't help kids," he said.
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 (ADE) Grant Office has compiled a list of Grant Opportunities that are available to districts, schools and individual educators. Also available are a list of grants awarded by the ADE and a list of grants for which the ADE has applied. This effort will include national, state, public and private organizations and foundations. To further assist our constituents, ADE will provide training on grant writing for interested educators.

The following grant opportunities announcements will remain available on this site until the closing dates. Listings are updated whenever a grant opportunity opens or closes. Please read each grant opportunity for the closing date and other information for proposal preparation.

Mark Your Calendar
Nov 30: Joint House and Senate Education Committee, 1:30 PM - State Capitol Room 171
Dec 1: Joint House and Senate Education Committee, 9:30 AM - State Capitol Room 171
Dec 13: Arkansas State Board of Education Meeting, 9:00 AM – Arch Ford Education Building

Save the Date!
University of Arkansas Department of Education Reform Conference:
Showcasing Effective Instructional Practices in Arkansas
Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, AR
February 24, 2011

Final Thought
“Before the Arkadelphia Promise, it was difficult for me because of the financial problems I was going to have. It was hard to think about, because my parents didn’t have the money, so I was going to go to a less expensive program even though it wasn’t what I really wanted in the long run ... with this money, I can go to a four-year school. I can get my business degree and hopefully own my own business someday.” – Sara Hart, Arkadelphia High School Senior on receiving her Arkadelphia Promise Scholarship

Thanks for reading!  See you next week!

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If you would like to be added or removed from this list, please send an e-mail to oep@uark.edu.