From the OEP

Welcome back from what we hope was a restful holiday break. This week we would like to highlight a very special group of people who are an invaluable asset to our work in the OEP: The OEP Advisory Board ([click here to see The OEP Advisory Board](#)). Our Advisory Board is composed of education practitioners, researchers, and policy makers from the state of Arkansas that provide us with thoughtful information about how we can better serve the education leaders in our state. We are fortunate to have a diverse group serving on our Advisory Board who can offer a variety of viewpoints from their station in the education arena.

For example, recently we featured a report by the Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families (AACF), an organization home to OEP Advisory Board member Laura Kellams, highlighting the unspent National School Lunch Act (NSLA) funds in Arkansas. The report generated a great deal of discussion across the state, and we were fortunate to have another member of our Board provide a response to the report. Dr. Richard Abernathy, Executive Director of the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators (AAEA), also an OEP Advisory Board member, wrote a response to the AACF report in an attempt to further clarify how NSLA funds were spent in Arkansas.

We welcome such discussion from members of the OEP Advisory Board at our annual meeting. Through this discussion, we hope that our Board Members will suggest ways the OEP can better serve as a resource to state lawmakers, educators, administrators, and other leaders by researching and disseminating information on current national, state, and regional education matters. We further hope that these stakeholders will then use this knowledge to support and promote thoughtful decision making concerning K-12 education.

At our recent Advisory Board dinner on November 8th, 2010, our Board discussed the benefits and pitfalls associated with extending the school year or school day. We also discussed what types of research our office should be conducting that will help educators and policymakers in making data-driven decisions in education policy. However, we are sure that other important topics have yet to be discussed. That said, we would like to echo here what we said to our conference attendees:

**If you have an idea for a research project at your school or in your district – no matter how large or small – please consider the OEP as a resource and/or research partner.** We have worked with a number of districts in the past of varying size (Bentonville, Rogers, Hughes, Helena/West Helena) on programs and projects of varying scales (e.g., analyzing student data or evaluating school programs). We are eager to discuss any potential research ideas you have for your school or district. We are a simple phone call (479-575-3773) or email (oep@uark.edu) away.

As always, thanks for reading and see you next week!

**News from Around the Natural State**
Little Rock School Chief Agrees to Resign
Little Rock School District Superintendent Linda Watson will step down from her job as chief of the 26,000-student district on Jan. 15 after a “separation agreement” approved by a 5-2 vote of the School Board at a special meeting Wednesday. The board did not discuss the appointment of any interim or long-term replacement for Watson but could do so as soon as Dec. 9 when it meets for a regularly scheduled agenda meeting.

Deer/Mt. Judea District Vows Suit if Schools Combined
The superintendent of the Deer/Mt. Judea school district in Northwest Arkansas alerted legislators Wednesday of his intent to sue the state to prevent his district from being consolidated with the Jasper school district. Superintendent Richard Denniston said his district has barely more than 350 students and will likely drop below that in a few years. Denniston told the House and Senate Education Committees that his district would file suit within 10 days.

On Trip to China, 8 Pulaski County Special School District Leaders Seek Teachers
Leaders in the Pulaski County Special School District are looking for Mandarin Chinese language teachers, and they are taking their search to the People’s Republic of China. Superintendent Charles Hopson and School Board member Tim Clark are part of an eight member Pulaski County Special district delegation that also includes four principals, a teacher, and a curriculum director who will leave shortly on an eight day trip to Beijing and Zhengzhou.

Screens Extend Learning to Buses
Students riding the bus to school in Pope County can now watch the Discovery Channel’s Myth Busters and other math and science programming on five, customized computer screens mounted on the bus ceiling. Riding the outfitted bus to and from school can mean as much as two hours a day of extra math and science for 50 students in kindergarten through 12th grade.

Weiner Merger Suit Dismissed
A federal judge dismissed a lawsuit filed by a group of Weiner school supporters who argued that the state mandated merger of the small town’s school district into the nearby Harrisburg School District threatened the agriculture of the rice producing region and, ultimately, national security. U.S. District Judge James Moody wrote in his ruling Monday that the group could not prove the harms it claimed would result from the merger of the two districts.

News from Around the Nation
Kindergarten Program Boosts Students' Vocabulary in 1st Grade
A new randomized control trial in the Mississippi Delta has found that a good kindergarten literacy program can boost disadvantaged students' vocabulary in kindergarten by as much as an extra month of school. Early childhood programs like Mississippi's have focused heavily on early vocabulary for decades, with growing urgency since a seminal 1995 University of Kansas study showed children of parents on welfare enter school knowing about 525 words, less than half of the 1,100-word vocabulary of children of parents in professional jobs. The Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast, housed at the SERVE Center of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, evaluated the Kindergarten PAVEd for Success program, which trains teachers to supplement their normal literacy instruction. Teachers trained in the program
were significantly more likely than the control-group teachers to include activities focused on students' vocabulary and comprehension development, but they did not show significantly more instructional or emotional support for students.

**Study Points to Fewer 'Dropout Factory' Schools**

After decades of flat-lining graduation rates, states finally have started to turn around or close hundreds of so-called “dropout factory” schools and recover some of the thousands of students who had already given up, according to a new study. The Washington, D.C.-based policy firm Civic Enterprises, whose 2006 report, “The Silent Epidemic,” helped galvanize state and federal attention on high school dropouts, reported that most states have gained momentum in improving graduation rates, but will need to improve at least five times faster to meet a national goal of 90 percent of students graduating on time by 2020.

*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**

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**

“I like the computers being on the bus because I have a long bus ride home and our bus used to be really loud. It keeps everybody calm. Most of us listen. We listen to it and talk about it. Everybody at school asks us about it. ‘What did you all watch on the bus?’ My
parents ask me what I watched on the bus when I get home.” – Kaitlinn Bailey, 8th grade student talking about the “Mediascreen School Bus.”

Thanks for reading! See you next week!

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