From the OEP

Happy New Year! We trust that you all had a safe and restful Holiday break. As is typical this time of year, many of us are trying to keep our New Year’s Resolutions. Here at the OEP, we are honoring ours by launching our new OEP Blog!! Our blog is on the web at www.officeforedpolicy.com and we hope you will add us to your web-browser’s bookmarks and/or your RSS Feed. Part of our plan is to incorporate the OWL (OEP Web Links) into the OEP Blog; however, this week we are still releasing this OWL in its familiar format so that none of our readers will be caught off guard. But please note: we are simultaneously posting a blog version of this same OWL on the OEP Blog so that you can do a comparison of the new version versus the old. It’s a New Year, and we hope to bring many new things to you through the OEP. Please check out the Blog Links at the end of each news section below to compare the old OWL with the new blog version.

With our new Blog format, you will still receive a weekly email from the OEP which will include pertinent education news from the state, region, and nation…it will just come to you in a slightly different format. We are also including a poll on the OEP Blog asking for your input on the new blog format. We want to know if you embrace this change or would rather keep things as they are. We want to make sure that we are getting the news to you in the most digestible format. The OEP Blog will allow us to further separate out relevant information as it pertains to education. For example, the OWL section of the OEP Blog will still bring you news stories, but we are also including separate areas for Legislative Updates that will impact education in Arkansas, as well as a section (the actual blog itself) that contains our perspective on the news, legislation, and other important topics in the field of education. We will also use this space to report on and discuss newly released OEP Publications.

One reason we are moving to this format is because we like the idea of the blog format providing our readers a simple mechanism for communicating with us through the comment areas featured in each section of the OEP Blog. We would like to hear more from you. We want your perspectives and your input. We think the OEP Blog could serve as a mechanism for generating a larger dialog among educators in our state and with our Office. We hope you enjoy the new OEP Blog!

News from Around the Natural State

Public Schools in Arkansas Garner Low B in Annual Quality Counts Report
Arkansas’ public education system ranks sixth in the nation with a grade of a low B - 81.4 percent - in the annual Quality Counts report, a national report card that tracks policy and performance in six broad categories in the 50 states and Washington, D.C. Arkansas overall grade of B- was unchanged from last year’s grade but still for both the Quality Counts 2010 and 2011 rankings, Arkansas grade was above the nation’s grade of C.

Little Rock School District Chief’s Supporters Talk of Walkout
Supporters of Little Rock School District Superintendent Linda Watson shed tears and prayed out loud Thursday in an effort to persuade the School Board to reverse its Dec. 1 decision to buy out Watson’s contract, effective Jan. 15. But the board didn’t agree to the request at a special
meeting held in response to a petition from community members, prompting the parent leader of a loosely organized citizens’ group to suggest that a more public demonstration may be necessary.

‘It’s been a pretty intense 6 months,’ Pulaski County Special Schools Chief Says
Since taking charge as superintendent of the Pulaski County Special School District on July 1, Charles Hopson has done some shaking up of the 17,500-student district.

Click here to check out these news stories on the new OEP Blog!!!

News from Around the Nation

New York City Schools Can Release Ratings of 12,000 Teachers, Judge Rules
The New York City school system can publicly release performance ratings for more than 12,000 teachers based on their students' test scores, in what would be the largest such disclosure in the country, a Manhattan judge ruled Monday. The interests of parents and taxpayers outweigh the privacy rights of public employees, said Manhattan Judge Cynthia S. Kern.

Study Calls for Better Identification of ELLs for Federal Funding
Federal support of programs for English-language learners depends on a formula based on the number of ELL students in each state and district, but a long-awaited national study suggests officials need a more comprehensive way to identify the students who need help. The final report, developed by Washington-based National Research Council for the U.S. Department of Education, calls for federal policymakers to change the funding formula for ELL grants to incorporate state-level counts of students with limited English proficiency in addition to the Census Bureau data now used to identify them.

Milwaukee Public Schools Voucher Students Boost Graduation Rates
High school graduation rates increased for both Milwaukee Public Schools students and low-income city children using vouchers to attend private schools in 2008-'09, but voucher students are still more likely to graduate than their public school peers, according to a study by University of Minnesota sociologist John Robert Warren. The latest findings add a seventh year of data - for 2008-'09 - to a study that has followed the graduation rates of both groups of students since 2002-'03. Because the latest graduation rate went up 5 percentage points from the previous year for both Milwaukee Parental Choice Program and MPS students, the report contends that choice (also called voucher) students were 17% more likely to graduate from high school than children in MPS over the past two years of the study.

Click here to check out these news stories on the new OEP Blog!!!

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

Site Seeing
As our New Year’s Resolution, the OEP is launching the OEP Blog! The Blog will feature all of our weekly news stories seen here in the OWL as well as Legislative Updates, and a running commentary (the actual Blog itself) from OEP Staff on news stories, legislation, and other pertinent topics in education. We hope you enjoy it!
Mark Your Calendar

House Education Committee Meeting: Thursday January 13, 2011, 10:00 AM, State Capitol Building room 138
RESCHEDULED State Board of Education Meeting: Friday, January 14, 2011, 9:00 AM, Arch Ford Building, State Capitol Complex

Save the Date!
University of Arkansas Department of Education Reform and Arkansas State University Conference:
Showcasing Effective Instructional Practices in Arkansas
Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, AR
February 24, 2011
Cost is FREE!
CLICK HERE TO REGISTER!!!

Final Thought
“We’re proud to be ranked there. Overall, we’re continuing to see improvement in education in policy, reform issues and performance.” - Arkansas Education Commissioner Tom Kimbrell on Quality Counts’ ranking Arkansas sixth in the nation, which is an improvement from over the past two years when the state ranked 10th.

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.
News from Around the Natural State:
Across Arkansas this week, educators are reacting to the Quality Counts report released by Education Week. Quality Counts assigns a grade to each state based on performance in six broad sub-categories. Arkansas’ overall grade held steady from the Quality Counts 2010 report, earning a B- (81.4%), which is above the C (76.3%) grade earned by the nation. Stay tuned for a detailed Policy Brief coming from our office, similar to the brief we released last year, which breaks down Arkansas’ grades in each of the featured sub-categories.

It’s been relatively quiet around the state, save for the continued turmoil across the three big districts in Central Arkansas. For example, supporters of Little Rock School District Superintendent Linda Watson are talking about potentially staging a walk-out as a demonstration of protest for Watson’s recent ousting by the School Board, and Charles Hobson, the Superintendent of Pulaski County Special School District reflects on a tumultuous six months as the school district head.

News from Around the Nation:
Across the Nation, in addition to the Quality Counts report, there is news out of Milwaukee reporting that high school graduation rates increased for both Milwaukee Public Schools students and low-income city children using vouchers to attend private schools in 2008-'09. The study, by University of Minnesota sociologist John Robert Warren, also reported that voucher students are still more likely to graduate than their public school peers.

On the value-added front, a New York judge ruled on Monday that the NYC Department of Education’s ratings for 12,000 teachers must be released to the public. This looks like something we saw in 2010 when the LA Times released the value-added scores of teachers amid a great deal of pomp and circumstance.

And if you are interested in looking at the public records lying around in your own state, the ADE release the Teacher Salary Schedule Analysis for School Year 2010-11 this week. The non-weighted state average for a newbie teacher is $31,592. Teachers in Arkansas top out on average at about $48,710.

Finally, we learned that Michelle Rhee has released a plan to fix the public education system. Her policy agenda is a pretty thick document (about 20 pages long), but Ms. Rhee boils her plans down to three categories: 1) Elevate the teaching profession by valuing teachers’ impact on students; 2) Empower parents with real choices and real information; 3) Spend taxpayer resources wisely to get results for students.

Interesting links this week, what do you think: can Michelle Rhee save education? Is her policy agenda appropriate? Should we create value-added scores of teachers? Are Arkansas teachers paid sufficiently? We’d love to hear your thoughts. Leave us a comment.