From the OEP

We hope your week has been treating you well. It’s been a busy few weeks for the OEP as we continue to cover the Legislative Session in Little Rock. This week, we are releasing a new policy brief on Summer Learning Loss among low-income students. The brief was developed in response to a bill before the Senate Education Committee (SB267) that would allow schools in year 1 (or higher) of school improvement to elect to increase their school year to 200 days. The extended school year would be a mechanism to increase achievement levels of students in these schools, thus removing the school from the School Improvement list. One of the justifications for an extended school day is the need to extend educational opportunities to needy students. We explore this issue in our brief and conclude that extended school days and years may constitute an effective strategy to enhance the educational performance of economically disadvantaged students. Click here to read more!

Also, don’t forget to check out our other news from around the state and nation…

News from Around the Natural State

Rogers Assistant Principal Named State's Top Assistant Principal

Jeff Wasem, a Rogers School District assistant principal who school leaders credit with strengthening relationships between parents, students, teachers and administrators, was named Arkansas Assistant Principal of the Year. He has been assistant principal at Greer Lingle Middle School since 2006, and a teacher in the district since 2000. Wasem said he was humbled and surprised by the award, which is given by the Arkansas Association of Middle Level Administrators. The award is for assistant principals of schools with upper elementary or middle school grades.

New Goals Pave Way for Fayetteville School District

Tracking students' success before and after graduation, developing their personal skills, and making sure the annual budget stays focused on the educational mission will be key to the success of the Fayetteville School District. Those elements and others are part of a refined set of goals developed and adopted by the Fayetteville School Board to guide the work of educators as they move the local education system into the future. At a recent meeting, school board members revised eight previous goals into four, following the recommendation of Phi Delta Kappa International, a group that compiled a nearly 200-page curriculum audit in 2010. These new measures will also help the district prepare to implement the Common Core Curricular standards in the coming years.

Springdale School District Sets Millage Election

School district residents will vote May 10 on a tax increase to build a middle school and junior high school. The School Board recently approved holding the election. Voters will be asked to approve a 1.9 mill property tax increase. The increase would cost the owner of a $100,000 home an
additional $38 a year. One difference between this millage increase and one that failed last year is that the current proposal will not approve the construction of new sporting facilities in the district.

**State Lawmakers OK Bill for Elective Bible Course**

Arkansas lawmakers have advanced a bill to lay out guidelines for public schools that want to offer elective courses on the Bible. The proposal, which passed by a voice vote in a House education committee, would discourage teachers from using such a class as a pulpit. But several lawmakers voiced concern that the bill might not prevent teachers from injecting their own religious views into the classroom. The bill does not deal with other religious texts, such as the Quran or the Torah. The bill now heads to the House for a vote.

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

**News from Around the Nation**

**US DOE Administration Pushes Teacher-Prep Accountability**

Federal officials plan to overhaul the reporting requirements for higher education-based teacher preparation in favor of leaner, outcome-based indicators of program quality, according to plans outlined in the president's fiscal 2012 budget request. To bolster the overhaul, the budget also proposes a $185 million new formula grant program. This program, dubbed the Presidential Teaching Fellows, would give money to states for scholarships to high-quality teacher-candidates—in exchange for the development of accountability systems that do a better job of distinguishing between exemplary and lackluster preparation programs and routes.

**In Florida, Push to Link Teacher Pay to Student Performance Resurfaces**

The Florida Legislature, convening its 60-day session, quickly set its sights on measures that would link the pay of new teachers to student performance and allow school boards to fire teachers more easily for mediocre results. The final bill is expected to clear the Legislature. Unlike last year, when similar legislation was vetoed by former governor Charlie Crist, who considered it too extreme, this slightly softened version is expected to win Gov. Rick Scott’s approval easily.

**Memphians OK Plan to Fuse School Systems**

City voters chose to dissolve the Memphis school system and force Shelby County - whose students are accustomed to much more academic success in the wealthier suburbs - to take over education for the city. With all 185 precincts reporting, about 67 percent of voters approved the furiously debated referendum to disband, while 33 percent voted against. It means voters have confirmed the city School Board’s decision to combine with Shelby County schools despite strong opposition to the merger among suburban communities. Only city residents decided the issue, which angered county officials.

**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**
The OEP has been closely monitoring the Legislative Session this year. Each week, relevant education bills are discussed in committees and then debated on the House and Senate floor. The Arkansas House of Representatives has been broadcasting some committee meetings as well as the session. If you can't make it to Little Rock, this is the next best thing. Just click here and look for the "live" designation on the right-hand side menu.

**Mark Your Calendar**

March 10: House Education Committee Meeting, TBA, State Capitol Complex Room 138 (Room Subject to Change)
March 15: Education Caucus, 8:00 AM, State Capitol Complex Room 138
March 9: Senate Education Committee Meeting, TBA, State Capitol Complex, Room 171 (Room Subject to Change)

**Final Thought(s)**

"I respect the fact that parents know their children the best, and we have to work together." – Arkansas Assistant Principal of the Year Jeff Wasem commenting on trying to get everyone involved in education.

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

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