March 3, 2011

From the OEP

Happy March! After last Sunday’s flurry of thunderstorms and earthquakes, we seem to have settled down, bringing the month in like a lamb. But here in the OEP, we have been roaring around the past two weeks. We apologize for our absence last week, but the OWL was flying all over the state visiting the legislative session, and in attendance at the What Works in Arkansas Conference in Jonesboro. This week, we are releasing a new policy brief highlighting Arkansas’ involvement in new test development under the Common Core Standard’s Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers – or PARCC.

The PARCC Brief outlines how the development and delivery of K-12 assessments will change once states adopt the Common Core Standards. In addition, we highlight the pros and cons of switching to a new test format, the impacts to k-12 education nationwide, and more specifically, how k-12 education and testing will be impacted in Arkansas once the PARCC initiatives are implemented by 2014. Click here to read more!!!

We are also working trying to update the OEP Blog. If you have been following it, or if you are signed up to the RSS Feed or for email updates, we apologize for the lack of action. We are currently having some technical difficulties with the administrative site, but hope to have things worked out later this week. Enjoy the news storied below!

News from Around the Natural State

LR School Board Votes for 1.5% Raise in District
The Little Rock School Board voted 7-0 for a 1.5 percent pay increase for teachers and most other district employees but not without expressing dismay that the new pay plan does little to move the starting salary closer to the district’s goal of $40,000. The salary increase was proposed by representatives of the district and the Little Rock Education Association. The board also approved an increase in the district’s health-insurance premium contribution for teachers and all support and administrative employees except the superintendent, who has a separate contract with the board. The board did not act on a proposed $1,000 bonus for teachers and $500 bonus for support staff, choosing to get more information on the federal funding for the bonuses before acting on the recommendation of Interim Superintendent Morris Holmes.

El Dorado Promise Scholarship Not Stemming Off Exodus of Residents
With the closure of four major employers in Union County leading to almost 3,000 job losses over the past decade, the El Dorado Promise scholarship program hasn’t been enough to stave off a steady population decline. The population of El Dorado dropped more than 12 percent, or by about 2,650 people, in the past decade, according to 2010 Census figures released this month. Overall, Union County lost nearly 4,000 people (almost 9 percent), according to the census numbers. However, officials with the school district, city, county and economic development agencies
said the population would have declined more without the college scholarship program, which offers to pay up to 100 percent of tuition and fees for qualifying high school graduates.

$800,000 Awarded in Scholarships to Little Rock Students Who Attended "Racially Identifiable" Schools

More than $800,000 in college scholarships have been awarded to date to about 350 Little Rock School District high school graduates who, as young children, attended “racially identifiable” elementary schools for three or more years. The racially identifiable schools are those elementary schools that had a 90 percent or higher black enrollment. Eligible students this year can receive a partial scholarship of $1,975 if they attended the school at least three years and the full scholarship amount of $2,820 if they attended the school for six years. In the high school class of 2010, 111 students were eligible and 84 students were awarded the money. Students who are awarded can use the scholarship at any in or out of state 2 or 4 year college. More information about the scholarship can be found here.

Public Input Sought in Little Rock School Chief Hunt

The Little Rock School Board’s effort to involve as broad a swath of the public as possible in the search for a new superintendent has produced plans for more than two dozen forums next week. Eight of the forums, which will be facilitated by representatives of the McPherson & Jacobson executive recruitment firm, are to be held at schools and community centers throughout the city. Also, special-interest sessions are scheduled for groups such as Little Rock School District employees, the PTA Council, the League of Women Voters, state legislators, the city Board of Directors, the Coalition of Little Rock Neighborhoods, the NAACP and the Arkansas Interfaith Alliance.

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

News from Around the Nation

Stopgap Bill Slashes Aid to Literacy Programs, TFA

The stopgap federal spending bill that President Barack Obama signed into law almost certainly spells the end of federal funding for more than a dozen education programs (including Teach for America, The National Writing Project & Reading is Fundamental) - at least until the end of the current fiscal year, and quite possibly for good. The bill would scrap all federal funding for the current year for a number of programs that were considered "earmarks" under congressional rules, because they got non-competitive funds, directed just for them. Some senators protested on behalf of the groups, but it may have been too late—the cuts went through anyway.

Obama's 2012 Plan Shelters Education

In the federal budget proposal for fiscal year 2012, President Barack Obama singled out education as an area crucial to the country’s economic future. He called for bolstering programs he deems critical to his vision for a renewed Elementary and Secondary Education Act and proposed new ones in research, early-childhood education, teaching, and efforts to close achievement gaps.

Losing States in Race to Top Scramble to Meet Promises

As the winners in the Race to the Top competition start spending their $4 billion in grant money, the U.S. Department of Education’s first such education reform contest has left nearly three dozen losing states with ambitious blueprints and no federal cash to put them into action. What
happens now in the 35 states that applied and came away empty-handed may vary greatly, but many report they intend to stick with their plans even if it means accomplishing the promised changes at a far slower pace.

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

**Final Thought(s)**

"Who dares to teach must never cease to learn." -- John Cotton Dana

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

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