April 1, 2011

From the OEP

Happy April! This week, there has been little fooling around as we've been busy preparing for next week's release of the OEP's 2010 Report Card. Released annually, the Report Card highlights the condition of Arkansas education in several areas of interest to parents, educators, and policymakers. In past years (click here to see last year's report card), we've examined not only test scores, but also such topics as graduation rates, school accountability, and teacher pay. This year, we update some areas we've examined previously and introduce a few new topics. We highlight the most recent state benchmark results, as well as updating results for end-of-course exams and state ACT results. New to this year's Report Card, we examine achievement gaps between various subgroups on the reading portion of the NAEP, levels of educational attainment for Arkansans as a whole, patterns of education spending for Arkansas and surrounding areas, and changes in the demographics of Arkansas students over the last ten-plus years.

Stay tuned early next week for our release of the OEP 2010 Report Card. We hope you will find it informative and useful. Have a great weekend!

News from Around the Natural State

School funding Stalemate Averted
Gov. Mike Beebe and legislators reached an agreement to avert a potential House-Senate stalemate over school funding. The House and Senate passed different versions of legislation setting minimum state aid to school districts. Beebe supports the House version, House Bill 1921, which calls for a 2 percent across-the-board increase in per-student funding for next fiscal year. The Senate version, SB 821, provides slightly less of an increase in per-student funding and allocates additional funding for districts with high transportation costs. However, the governor also said that anything less than full 2 percent for every district would be unconstitutional and could lead to a reopening of litigation against the state.

Rogers Schools Offer Buyouts, to Shed 89 Workers Before Fall
The Rogers School District is losing 89 teachers, administrators and other employees before the start of next school year, the result of a one-time buyout program. An estimated 180 employees are expected to take a buyout, saving the district an estimated $4.47 million over eight years. Under the buyout program, teachers and other certified employees with at least five years in the district and 10 years in the state retirement system were eligible for a $40,000 buyout. Classified employees were eligible for a buyout equal to their salary up to $15,000.

Click here to check out these news stories on the new OEP Blog!!!
News from Around the Nation

House Votes to Reinstate D.C. Voucher Program
The U.S. House of Representatives voted to reinstate school vouchers for District of Columbia students, reviving the only program that uses federal tax dollars to subsidize private-school tuition. The bill introduced by Republican House Speaker John Boehner would provide up to $12,000 a year for needy students to attend private schools of their choice. It was approved 225-195, largely along party lines. Democrats opposed it as an inappropriate use of federal funds and an unwelcome intrusion into local affairs. "There's no controversial idea here," Boehner said. "It's the American way."

Ohio Legislature OKs Collective Bargaining Limits
Labor stronghold Ohio took center stage in the fight over collective bargaining rights for public workers as the state Legislature sent the governor a bill that was in some ways tougher than that seen in Wisconsin. Amid shouts and jeers in both chambers, the House passed a measure that will sharply curtail collective bargaining efforts for 350,000 public workers on a 53-44 vote, and the Senate followed with a 17-16 vote of approval. Republican Gov. John Kasich is expected to sign the bill. Senate President Tom Niehaus threatened to clear the chamber ahead of final legislative action on the bill as pro-labor protesters shouted insults at senators and threatened to unseat them in the next election.

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 floors. 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
April 1: House Education Committee Meeting, at the Call of the Chair, State Capitol Complex Room 138
April 1: University of Arkansas Department of Education Reform Lecture: Maria Ferreya, 12:00 PM, Graduate Education Building Room 343

Final Thought(s)
“We’ve got to make sure whatever we do we don’t get us right back in the Supreme Court by violating adequacy,” – Gov. Mike Beebe discussing the school funding bills before the Arkansas House and Senate

Thanks for reading! See you next week!
The Office for Education Policy
University of Arkansas
Director: Gary W. Ritter Ph.D.
Research Associates:
Nathan C. Jensen
Caleb P. Rose
James L. Woodworth
Jeffery R. Dean
Outreach:
Misty Newcomb
If you would like to be added or removed from this list, please send an e-mail to oep@uark.edu.