April 14, 2011

From the OEP

This week, we received great news from our friend Alice Mahoney, a member of the OEP Advisory Board and of the State Board of Education. We learned through Alice that El Dorado Schools recently received three prestigious awards:

- The El Dorado School District is one of 388 in the nation (and of only two in Arkansas) recognized by the College Board for significant gains in AP success and performance
- Barton Junior High School received the National Center for Educational Achievement (NCEA) Award and was named to the 2010 NCEA Higher Performing Schools List
- The Accelerated Academy was recognized by the American School Board Journal’s 17th annual Magna Awards Program for helping close the achievement gap among El Dorado’s neediest students.

We have more information about El Dorado’s education successes posted over at the OEP Blog. We hope you will visit the blog and join us in congratulating the school district on their success.

As a reminder, last week we released the OEP's 2010 Report Card. We are happy to see that some local news outlets have highlighted the Report Card in their headlines. Although some of these headlines focus on the low NAEP test scores among Arkansas students, the report card also includes positive news. For example, more Arkansas students are scoring at proficient and advanced levels on the Arkansas benchmark exams in math and literacy…and Arkansas teachers have the highest average salary among our neighboring states when adjusted for cost of living.

We hope you read the OEP 2010 Report Card and find the information it provides informative and useful. If you have comments, visit the OEP Blog and let us know what you think. Have a great rest of the week!

News from Around the Natural State

Charter School’s Expansion Rejected

The LISA Academy charter school in west Little Rock cannot add elementary grades to its middle and high school program. The Arkansas Board of Education decided voted 6-2 against the expansion plan after raising concerns about below-par achievement levels of black and low-income students in high school math. LISA leaders asked the state board for permission to expand the sixth- to 12th-grade campus to include fourth- and fifth-grades and to increase the student enrollment cap from 600 to 800. But the high school program at LISA is on “alert” status right now because black students and students from low-income families have failed, on a three-year average, to meet the state’s minimum achievement requirements on End of Course exams in algebra I and geometry.

Two School Districts Classified as Fiscally Distressed
The state Board of Education voted to classify the Dermott and West Side Cleburne County school districts as fiscally distressed because of declining fund balances. The Dermott School District had an unrestricted fund balance of more than $1 million as recently as the 2008-09 school year, but that balance has dwindled to $14,947. Declining enrollment has led to a reduction in the district’s funding. Additionally, the West Side Cleburne County School District had an unrestricted fund balance of $3 million in 2007-08, $2.1 million in 2008-09 and $909,103 in 2009-10. Its current balance is $633,359. Neither school appealed the classification but West Side Superintendent Steve Lucas did inform the board the district has a plan for turning its finances around.

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

News from Around the Nation

The Knowledge Is Power Program: Preparing Youth for College Success
Mathematica Policy Research (MPR) Inc., an independent research firm, gave two presentations this week at the Annual American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference in New Orleans based on its ongoing evaluation of KIPP Middle Schools. The two presentations focused on student characteristics and attrition at KIPP and on student achievement benefits of the KIPP schools. The papers suggest that KIPP schools are doing quite well. In short, MPR reported that KIPP students on average experienced academic impacts that were "positive, statistically significant, and educationally substantial." Regarding student characteristics and attrition, the authors reported that the prior achievement levels of KIPP students and attrition rates of KIPP schools were nearly identical to those in the surrounding area. The full report is available online, and additional information has been reported in this article by Education Week.

NAEP Study Finds Jump in Students Taking Tough Courses
Students who take more rigorous courses in high school are more likely to perform well on achievement tests, according to a National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) study released showing more students are doing just that. The 2009 NAEP High School Transcript Study reveals that the percentage of high school graduates completing a “rigorous” curriculum, with higher-level mathematics and science curricula, jumped from 5 percent in 1990 to 13 percent in 2009. Those who took a “midlevel” curriculum increased from 26 percent to 46 percent in the same period. In addition, the study found a link between students’ enrollment in challenging classes and their higher scores on the math and science NAEP in 12th grade. Because it is difficult to classify the rigor of English classes, compared with progression in science and math, the study did not look at the possible connection between English curriculum and NAEP reading scores.

Unions Move In at Chicago Charter Schools, and Resistance Is Swift
Teachers at 12 of Chicago’s charters have formed unions over the past two years, and the Chicago Teachers Union is seeking to organize all 85 of the schools. This is a unique trend as compared to other charter schools across the country.

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 15: University of Arkansas Department of Education Reform Lecture; Rick Hess, 12:00 PM, Graduate Education Building Room 343
April 15: Registration Deadline for Decision Making for Results: Data-Driven Decision Making/Data Teams sponsored by the Center for Applied Studies in Education, University of Arkansas, Little Rock
April 15: Issues in Transition to Pension Reform Conference sponsored by the Department of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas. Click here to register

**Save the Date**

June 10, 2011: 2011 Summer Leadership Institute sponsored by the University of Central Arkansas; 8:30 AM – 3:30 PM, Brewer-Hegeman Conference Center

**Conference Theme:** Closing the Achievement Gap

**Keynote Speaker:** Dr. Joseph Murphy, Associate Dean at Peabody College, Vanderbilt University

Click here for more information and to Register for the Leadership Institute

**Final Thought(s)**

“Teachers open the door, but you must enter by yourself” – Chinese Proverb

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

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