April 28, 2011

From the OEP

Don’t forget, the OWL is also a feature on the OEP Blog. If you prefer to get all of your OEP News and Commentary in one place, click your way over to the OEP Blog and subscribe for email updates each time we make a new post. You can subscribe by scrolling to the bottom of the blog page and entering your email address under the “Email Subscription” section on the bottom left.

Click here for the OEP Blog -- read our Weekly OWL News and Legislative Updates

Last week, over on the OEP Blog, we were happy to see a record number of hits from our readers!! Therefore, this week, we continue our in-depth review of the education legislation that resulted from the 88th General Assembly 2011 session. Our first new post, Spend Your Time Wisely, reviews those bills that specifically addressed how time is spent in schools, whether in the classroom, or how we handle those students who are not spending enough time in their seat due to excessive absences. Our second post, Safety First, reviews the bills that address safety in- and out of school such as cell phone usage when driving through school zones, harsher penalties for committing a crime in proximity to a school, and new playground safety measures. We hope to see even more blog readers this week! Click here to visit the OEP Blog!

If you prefer reading the OWL News in email format, continue reading...

Turning to upcoming national laws, our UA colleague Sandra Stotsky wrote a piece outlining Ten Steps to a Better ESEA which highlights her views on how we can re-authorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (more commonly known as No Child Left Behind Act) so that it “might actually upgrade k-12 education.” Do you have your own ideas regarding how we should change the ESEA? Visit the OEP Blog and leave us a comment!

On a final note, our thoughts this week are with our friends and colleagues who have been affected by the recent damaging storms and flooding that has recently impacted the state and region. We hope you stay safe and that your recovery is swift.

News from Around the Natural State

Plan for North Little Rock School Facilities Gets Yes

The North Little Rock School Board approved a $261 million, five-year facilities plan with some uncertainty over how the district will fund the proposal. The board will determine by June if it will ask voters in the fall or spring to approve a 7.4 mill school property-tax increase that will be necessary to fund the proposal. The district’s current rate is 40.9 mills. The approval would set into place five years of construction that would update, close, or redirect nearly every building in the district.
Studies: State Desegregation Aid Being Used for "Other Purposes"

Over the past five years, the Pulaski County Special and North Little Rock school districts used millions of state-provided desegregation dollars for other purposes, including general-operating expenses, according to financial studies commissioned by Arkansas Attorney General Dustin McDaniel’s office. The Attorney General’s office released findings from the studies done by Navigant, a New York-based company contracted for $250,000 last year to determine, in part, how state desegregation funds are spent in the three Pulaski County school districts. Navigant is also analyzing desegregation spending done by the Little Rock School District, which receives more than half of the annual state desegregation aid going to the three Pulaski County districts. No date has been set for the release of that Little Rock report.

Click here to read the Navigant Report on PCCSD
Click here to read the Navigant Report on North Little Rock

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

News from Around the Nation

Teacher-Evaluation Logistics Challenge States

In the coming months, more states—especially those that won grants through the $4 billion federal Race to the Top initiative—are expected to put out requests for proposals for such details as overhauls to the data systems that store student and teacher information; the provision of “value added” analyses of teacher performance; and the reporting and professional development that help teachers and principals use the information from the systems. In sum, states and districts must construct integrated systems for teacher-performance management—no small challenge in a field in which few good examples exist. “States and districts are going to need considerable amounts of technical expertise,” said Brian M. Stecher, the associate director of RAND Education at the Santa Monica-based RAND Corp., a nonprofit policy-research organization.

State GOP Lawmakers Push to Expand Vouchers

Republican governors and lawmakers are pushing for a major expansion of voucher programs that in some cases seek to give taxpayer money for private school tuition to a much larger swath of the population, including middle-income families. Many of those legislative endeavors come as no surprise, given that GOP candidates for state office made historic gains across the country last fall, in many instances after promising to expand school choice—a longtime priority for many Republicans.

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

Interactive Map: Adults with College Degrees in the United States by County

While the primary source for these data is the U.S. Census Bureau, this interactive map makes use of historical Census data provided by the Minnesota Population Center's National Historical Geographic Information System.
Mark Your Calendar

April 29 (TOMORROW!): Arkansas Association of Curriculum and Instruction Administrators Conference, Hot Springs Convention Center
May 4-6: Arkansas Association of Federal Coordinators (AAFC) Conference, Hot Springs Convention Center
May 11: School Law Conferences sponsored by the AAEA and APSRC (two, one-day drive-in conferences) Click here for more info!
May 16: State Board of Education Meeting, 9:00 AM, Arch Ford Building, State Capitol Complex
May 17: Joint House and Senate Education Committee Meeting, TBA

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)

“Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education. The human mind is our fundamental resource.” – John F. Kennedy

Thanks for reading! See you next week!
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