Welcome Back From the OEP!!!

Although many traditional public school districts have already been in school for over a week, we just kicked off our fall semester at the OEP, and wanted to wish you all a warm welcome to the 2011-2012 academic year. We are looking forward to a productive year! Stay tuned to weekly OWL releases for information on the following upcoming events and reports:

- The 2011 OEP Awards
- The Fall 2011 OEP Conference
- New OEP Databases
- OEP Policy Brief’s and Arkansas Education Reports
- Weekly OEP Blog Posts on relevant education news in the state, region, and nation.

As always, we will also be bringing you web links to education news stories across the state, region, and nation. Stay tuned to your inbox or visit the OEP Blog and sign up to receive an email from us when new information is posted.

While we’re busy generating the bullet points above, enjoy some education news links. If you have anything to add to these stories, visit the OEP Blog and leave us a comment or twelve!!!

News from Around the Natural State

Pilot Project to Focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Education Preparing Students for Job Demands of the Future

Governor Mike Beebe and his Workforce Cabinet announced a pilot program — STEM Works — focused on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) education in high schools and universities, so that the state’s workforce will be able to meet the escalating demand for employees in high-tech fields. STEM Works specifically seeks to overhaul the ways in which Arkansas high school students receive STEM education and to increase the number of well-qualified STEM teachers.

Founder of Harlem Children’s Zone Speaks in Little Rock, Urges Education Reform

The only way to improve the country is to drastically reform the nation’s education system, the founder of Harlem Children’s Zone told a crowd of more than 1,200 at the Statehouse Convention Center. “I’m convinced that if our nation continues down the same (education) path with our children, we’re going to destroy this country’s future,” said Geoffrey Canada, founder of the education reform project designed to help break the cycle of poverty for children in some of New York City’s poorest areas. Canada made his comments during a day-long event about education strategies called “from cradle to career.” The event was sponsored by the state Department of Human Services’ Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education, the Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters program and Arkansas Children’s Hospital.
Fort Smith School Makes The Grade: Off Improvement List

Morrison Elementary on the city's north side is no longer on the school improvement list. Teachers and students achieved state standards in only five years. Yet in 60 short months they managed to turn the school around. With the help of two consultants, teachers at Morrison Elementary changed their approach--especially for students learning English.

Seven of the Fort Smith School District's 19 elementary schools remain on school improvement. However, two are close to being removed from the list. Sunnymeade and Sutton each missed the mark by one student sub-population. Sutton needed five more students proficient in literacy.

Students’ Scores on ACT Fall in State

Arkansas high school students in the Class of 2011 took the ACT college entrance exam in record-breaking numbers, and their average composite score fell to 19.9 when compared with the previous year's 20.3. The Arkansas score dropped while the national ACT composite score ticked up a 10th of a point, rising from 21 in 2010 to 21.1 for the 2011 class. The exam is scored on a scale of 1 to 36. The exam results showed that about 1 in 6 Arkansas test-takers in the class — 17 percent — were prepared for college success in all four ACT tested subjects that make the composite score: English, reading, mathematics and science. Nationally, 25 percent of students are considered prepared for college success, up from 24 percent the year before and 23 percent the year before that.

3,875 School Pensioners Back on Payroll

Nearly 4,000 members of the Arkansas Teacher Retirement System have retired, then returned to work at a system employer to draw both a pension check and a paycheck with taxpayers footing the bills. That’s more than the number of employees drawing two checks in state government apart from the education field. This two-checks arrangement is called “double dipping” by some of its critics, who say it’s inappropriate and an abuse of the taxpayers, though it’s allowed by law and has remained so through several successive Legislatures. According to the system, which covers teachers and other school district employees, 3,875 of its members were retired and worked at a system employer in the year that ended June 30.

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

News from Around the Nation

Oklahoma’s Online Schooling Revolution

More and more Oklahoma students are using online programs to do their schoolwork, a new report shows. A Tulsa World analysis of state records shows that the number of Oklahoma public school students doing schoolwork through computer-based programs has increased nearly 400 percent over the last three years, writes Andrea Eger at Tulsaworld.com. “The state’s most recent official count of virtual students for 2010-11 was 5,429. That’s about the combined student population of Tulsa Hale, Jenks and Broken Arrow high schools.” While the programs are offered at no cost to students, most are operated by for-profit companies that contract with public school districts.

ACT Report: Massachusetts Top While Michigan Struggles

Using the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks and ACT test scores, the Condition of College & Career Readiness reports provide national and state snapshots of college readiness of the graduating seniors of the class of 2011 who took the ACT in high school. The ACT Profile Reports present data about the performance of each state’s 2011 graduating seniors who took the ACT as sophomores, juniors, or seniors. Analyzing the report, Deborah Netburn at the LA Times says that only one-fourth of seniors ready for college.
U.S. Math, Reading Proficiency Falls Short in Global Analysis
You've heard it before: Student achievement in the United States trails that of many industrialized nations. Well, results of a new study summarized in the journal Education Next, takes a fresh look at recent data to gauge the proficiency rates of U.S. students in comparison to their international peers. Not surprisingly, the results are much the same. The United States is well behind many countries. U.S. students rank 32nd in mathematics and 17th in reading.

Click here to check out these news stories on the 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 Kingsbury Center at NWEA leverages the most extensive collection of student growth data in the United States, NWEA’s Growth Research Database (GRD™), to produce high quality research for educators, policymakers and researchers. The Kingsbury Center Data Gallery is an interactive experience that goes beyond research papers and offers visitors the opportunity to see firsthand the data and results from our studies.

Mark Your Calendar
Thursday September 1: Joint House and Senate Education Committee, Arkansas State Capitol Room 171, 10:00 AM
Tuesday September 6: Joint House and Senate Education Committee, Arkansas State Capitol Room 171, 10:00 AM
Monday September 12: Arkansas State Board of Education meeting, Arch Ford Building Auditorium, 9:00 AM

Final Thought(s)
“The STEM fields offer stable, well-paying careers for the 21st century, and the demand continues to grow at a rapid pace. These are positions that companies are struggling to fill, even in tough economic times. If we are to continue to attract these types of companies to Arkansas, we must prepare our young people with high-tech skills and build a workforce that will help our state prosper.” Governor Mike Beebe announcing the STEM Works pilot program

Thanks for reading! See you next week!
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