From the OEP
We hope everyone is settling into the new school year with ease. The OEP is still a ‘buzz gathering news stories, posting to the OEP Blog, and preparing to publish the first installment of the 2010-11 OEP Awards (click here to see last year’s OEP Awards).
This week, we keep it light with web links to education news stories across the state, region, and nation. We are working on a full roster of publications in the OEP lab, and will be posting them in the OWL and on the OEP Blog in the coming weeks.
If you want to be notified immediately after we publish a policy brief, Arkansas Education Report, or other publication new to our website, visit the OEP Blog and sign up to receive an email from us when new information is posted. While you are there, leave us a comment and let us know how we can better serve you. Until next time, enjoy some news links below.

News from Around the Natural State

Pulaski County Special School District Starts Year on High Note
Two months after the state took control of the financially troubled Pulaski County Special School District — dismissing the superintendent and dissolving the seven-member school board — the district has started the 2011-12 school year with a new superintendent, two new schools and, despite everything, an enrollment increase. Jerry Guess, who was called on by state Education Commissioner Tom Kimbrell to quit his job as a 13-year superintendent in the Camden-Fairview School District to guide the state’s third-largest system out of fiscal problems, said that he’s been pleased with the way the new school year has started. Guess has a one-year, $215,000 contract, but the district could remain under state control for up to two years before the Arkansas Board of Education is obligated by law to take further action if financial problems aren’t resolved. That state action could mean merging the district with one or more other districts. On Wednesday, the eighth day of school, the district recorded 17,689 students in prekindergarten through 12th grades, which was an increase of 387 over last year’s count of 17,302.

Candidates Vie For School Board Spot
A rocket scientist, a financial consultant, and a school administrator are competing for a spot on the Springdale School Board. Voters will choose among Edge Nowlin, Kevin Ownbey and Donald Johnson to fill the Zone 1 position. The elected candidate will have a five-year term on the board. Only voters in Zone 1 may vote for a candidate in the Sept. 20 election. Most of Zone 1 is west of Interstate 540. Board member Jim Bradford, the only member of the seven-person board whose term is expiring, chose not to seek re-election because of personal reasons.

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

News from Around the Nation

Common Standards Assessment Consortium Releases Math Content Specifications
The SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium has released its content specifications in math. The group has now issued drafts of what it believes are the types of evidence of learning that students will have to demonstrate to show they’ve mastered the common standards in math and English/Language Arts. This release is one in a series of documents that have come out this month that begin to fill in the space between common standards and the tests being designed for them. The standards are being released by two federally funded groups of states that are designing tests for the common standards. SMARTER Balanced is one of those groups. The other is the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, or PARCC. Arkansas is part of the PARCC Consortium.

Feds Loosen Rules on Cutting Special Ed. Spending
School districts that want to reduce special education spending from one year to the next without restoring what was cut, now have the blessing of the U.S. Department of Education. In the past, federal law was interpreted to mean that once a district set its special education budget, it could not be reduced permanently except for very specific reasons. But a letter to the National Association of State Directors of Special Education in June from the Education Department, now says otherwise. A school district “is not obligated to expend at least the amount expended in the last fiscal year for which it met the maintenance-of-effort requirement.” The shift has special education advocates worried.

Chicago Schools to Extend Day by 90 Minutes, 2 Weeks a Year
Chicago Public Schools launched its plan to extend students’ time in the classroom by 90 minutes each day and by two weeks each year, as well as setting up an advisory committee to figure out how it will be done. However, Chicago Teachers Union President Karen Lewis said she would reject an invitation to serve on the committee stating, “This news has nothing do with helping our children and everything to do with politicizing a real serious problem.” Mayor Rahm Emanuel has been a long supporter of the idea, saying Chicago’s school day is the shortest in the nation. Legislation passed in June allows the district to implement a longer school day in the fall of 2012 regardless of union opinion.

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
Arkansas Department of Education web data resources Hive and Quick Looks are now incorporating the Student Growth Percentile (SGP) into several of the visualizations on these sites. Hive is an online community for educational practitioners to share and discuss student achievement data collected by the Arkansas Department of Education. With hive, stakeholders in our youths’ education have the power to construct powerful visualizations that provide a meaningful representation and context for student achievement data.

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
Friday September 9: UA Dept. of Ed. Reform Lecture Series; William Fischel, Graduate Education Building 343, 12:00 PM
Monday September 12: Arkansas State Board of Education meeting, Arch Ford Building Auditorium, 9:00 AM
Thursday September 15: UA Dept. of Ed Reform Screening and Panel Discussion of Waiting for Superman, Union Theater, University of Arkansas 6:00 PM
Final Thought(s)

“It’s just been refreshing to me to see the kids, the parents, the teachers, the administrators, the support staff — everybody — just working really hard.” - Pulaski County Special School District Superintendent Jerry Guess remarking on the start of the new school year.

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
Alexandra M. Boyd
Gregory F. Michel
Outreach:
Misty Newcomb

If you would like to be added or removed from this list, please send an e-mail to oep@uark.edu.