From the OEP

This week, we are releasing our second OEP Policy Brief of the academic year focusing on Kindergarten Readiness. In recent years, the standards in Arkansas for child entry into kindergarten underwent changes that can be difficult to understand. Across the nation, states have increased the minimum age of entry into public schools, and Arkansas is no exception. Recently, a policymaker in our state asked the OEP to look into the research surrounding the question of raising the kindergarten entry age. This policy brief discusses the new requirements as well as the impact of these requirements on families and children in the short and long term by looking at recent changes in Arkansas law and studies concerning the effect of entry age on student achievement.

Click here to read our policy brief on Raising the Kindergarten Entry Age!!!

News from Around the Natural State

Four Schools in State Get National Honor
The U.S. Department of Education has named four Arkansas public schools as Blue Ribbon schools. They are:
Bellview Elementary School in Rogers.
Forest Heights Elementary School in Harrison.
Jim Stone Elementary School in Conway.
Richland Elementary School in West Memphis.
Nationally, the federal education agency selected 305 schools for the honor. The national Blue Ribbon program honors elementary, middle and high schools where students achieve at high levels or where the achievement gap is narrowing. Blue Ribbon schools will be honored at a Nov. 14-15 conference and awards ceremony in Washington D.C.

Judges Hear Case on State’s School Aid
A three-judge panel of the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals quizzed attorneys in the Pulaski County school desegregation lawsuit Monday about how long they expect $70 million a year in state desegregation aid to continue and on standards for releasing the Pulaski County Special and North Little Rock districts from further court supervision. At issue Monday was U.S. District Judge Brian S. Miller’s May 19 court order ending much of the state desegregation aid paid to the three districts and withholding full unitary status from the Pulaski County Special and North Little Rock school districts. Miller’s order to stop the funding was stayed pending the outcome of Monday’s appeal, but it has raised the potential for budget cuts, layoffs and changes — if not an end — to the six original magnet schools in Little Rock that are open to students throughout Pulaski County.

Court Finds for School Districts in School Millage Lawsuit
Sixth Circuit Judge Timothy Fox weighed in favor of the Eureka Springs and Fountain Lake school districts in the lawsuit over excess school tax millage. The joint lawsuit against the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) and the state treasurer on behalf of both school districts was filed May 6 in Pulaski County by Hatfield & Sayre of Little Rock. The suit asked for declaratory judgment and injunctive relief from the state's demand that these school districts remit what it considers to be "excess" revenues from a 25-mill property tax that exceed the state's foundation funding per student of $6,023 for the 2010-2011 school year. For Eureka Springs, that amount was $824,916 and for Fountain Lake, $1,387,567.

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

News from Around the Nation

Early Achievers Losing Ground, Study Finds

A new study finds that many high-performing students lose ground from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school, and the authors ask what that means for America’s role as a world leader in innovation. The study, released by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, raises questions about whether in the era of the No Child Left Behind Act and the widespread dismantling of policies that group students by ability, public schools have been forced to make a trade-off, said Michael J. Petrilli, the executive vice president of the Washington think tank and a former U.S. Department of Education official under President George W. Bush. “Is helping kids at the bottom improve hurting kids at the top?” he said, acknowledging that bringing up that point as a topic of discussion can be difficult, but argued that it’s necessary.

Twenty States Named to Help Craft New Science Standards

Twenty states will lead the development of a new set of common standards in science, according to an announcement from Achieve, a Washington-based nonprofit managing the effort. Participating states span the country, from California and Arizona to Michigan and Maryland. They will help craft what have been dubbed the Next Generation Science Standards based on a framework developed by a panel of the National Research Council earlier this summer. The new standards are expected to be completed before the end of 2012.

Are Technology Initiatives in Schools Paying Off?

As more and more money is spent on technology in schools, some are beginning to wonder if additional technology is having a positive effect on student achievement. Schools around the country are investing money in outfitting schools with technology, an effort further encouraged by last year’s White House initiative called the National Education Technology Plan. The plan was designed to bring “state-of-the-art technology into learning to enable, motivate and inspire all students.” A recent article in the New York Times, and review by Joanne Jacobs, describes a high-tech classroom in one of Arizona’s Kyrene School District schools where students are studying Shakespeare’s As You Like It by using laptops and utilizing Internet technologies such as Facebook and the music of Kanye West.

Click here to check out these news stories and more 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
For those of you accustomed to using the Arkansas Department of Education’s Website (www.arkansased.org), they are currently gathering user information in a new Web Survey of the ADE Website. Click on this link to take the survey.

**Mark Your Calendar**

Monday October 10: State Board of Education Meeting, Arch Ford Building Auditorium, State Capitol Complex, 9:00 AM  
Tuesday October 11: Joint House and Senate Education Committee Meeting. State Capitol Complex Room 171, Little Rock, AR 10:00 AM  
Tuesday October 11: Education-House, Vocational-Technical Institutions Subcommittee Meeting. State Capitol Complex Room 171, Little Rock, AR 10:00 AM

**Final Thought(s)**

“The mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled.” – Plutarch

**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.