From the OEP

The OEP is pleased to kick off this school year by recognizing the achievements of schools and districts across the state in our Annual OEP Awards.

As you may recall, we started the OEP Awards two years ago to highlight successful districts and schools in the state. As in previous years, the OEP Awards top schools on the Benchmark and End of Course Exams for the 2010-11 academic year. Categories are grouped by each region, by each school level, and by schools with a high population of low income students. In the coming weeks, we will release additional OEP Awards that specifically highlight high performing elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and schools serving low-income students that are “beating the odds” by performing well on state assessments. We plan to release a new installment of the OEP awards every other week. Enjoy the first installment of the Annual OEP Awards!

News from Around the Natural State

Arkansas Board Looks at Academic Distress Rule Changes

The Arkansas Board of Education will begin talks on ways to make it easier to label school districts as academically distressed in response to complaints that the criteria for that label are too lax, the state's education commissioner told lawmakers. Commissioner Tom Kimbrell said the state Board of Education would begin discussing the changes at a work session in Little Rock. Kimbrell has said he wants to bring a recommendation on proposed changes to the board sometime in December. Click here to read the OEP Policy Brief on academic and fiscal distress in Arkansas.

Both statewide and national news outlets have reported numerous charter school news stories over the past week. In Arkansas, this is likely because of the approaching due date for applications to start both open enrollment and conversion charter schools. That said, many of our featured news stories this week are charter-related.

Seven New Charter Schools Sought for Six Cities in State

Nonprofit groups have applied for seven new charter schools to open in six Arkansas cities in the 2012-13 school year. The Arkansas Board of Education must now decide whether to approve the proposals for open-enrollment charter schools in Little Rock, Jonesboro, West Memphis, Texarkana and Marianna, as well as in Osceola where two new schools are envisioned. Five of the proposed schools would serve high school students. Two would serve either elementary or elementary and middle school pupils.

Fifteen School Districts Apply to Convert Schools to Charters

Fifteen Arkansas school districts have notified the Arkansas Department of Education of their preliminary plans to start one or more charter schools within their districts in the 2012-13 school year. Nearly all 16 of the proposed conversion charter schools in the 15 districts would focus on
science, math and technology education, according to letters of intent to apply for charter status. The Pulaski County Special School District has proposed two charter schools. The full conversion charter school applications are due Oct. 31 and will be considered by the Arkansas Board of Education over the winter. In contrast to publicly funded open-enrollment charter schools that are operated by nonprofit organizations, conversion charter schools are run by traditional school districts. There is no cap on the number of conversion charter schools approved by the state Board of Education.

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

**News from Around the Nation**

**Teachers Combat Summer “Brain Drain” as School Year Begins**

Despite their fresh notebooks and a ready supply of sharpened pencils, many students didn’t start this new school year prepared to move ahead. Research shows that many of them, particularly low-income students, are starting school months behind where they were last spring, causing teachers to spend weeks of the new academic year going over content instead of tackling new material. A [report released by the RAND Corporation](http://www.rand.org) this summer found that high-quality summer learning programs can curb these losses and even boost student achievement. For more on this topic, [click here](http://www.oepblog.org) to read the OEP policy brief on summer learning loss and the case for extended time in Arkansas’ schools.

**Urban Charters Outstrip Performance of Nonurban, Study Finds**

A new Massachusetts study suggests that charter schools located in urban communities there significantly improved their students’ mathematics and language arts performance on state assessments, while nonurban charter schools did not, and, in some cases, even appeared to hurt students academically. The findings come in a [working paper by researchers with the Cambridge, Mass.-based National Bureau of Economic Research](http://www.nber.org). In the paper, the researchers trace the greater student academic growth in urban charter schools to the “no excuses” instructional approaches typical of urban charters in that state. The Massachusetts study may help explain the mixed record for charter school performance, which has been noted in previous studies by NAPCS researchers and other scholars.

**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**

For those of you accustomed to using the Arkansas Department of Education’s Website ([www.arkansased.org](http://www.arkansased.org)), they are currently gathering user information in a new Web Survey of the ADE Website. [Click on this link](http://www.arkansased.org) to take the survey.

**Mark Your Calendar**

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)

“What a child can do today with assistance, she will be able to do by herself tomorrow.” - Lev Vygotsky.

Thanks for reading! See you next week!

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