October 12, 2011

From the OEP

This week, we present our next installment of the 2011 OEP Awards: High Achieving Elementary Schools. So far, we have presented the overall top performing schools in Arkansas on the Benchmark and EOC examinations and schools that are “Beating the Odds” in which students in schools with at least 2/3 of the student enrollment receive a free or reduce-priced lunch, are reaching high levels of achievement.

This week, our report focuses on the top performing elementary schools by taking a deeper look at those schools that serving students in grades 3-5. We provide a breakdown by each grade, by each region, and by each Benchmark subtest. Congratulations to all the OEP award-winning elementary schools!!

Click here if you ONLY want to read the latest OEP Awards installment on High Achieving Elementary Schools.

-or-

Click here if you want to read the entire OEP Awards report.

News from Around the Natural State

Arkansas to Pursue Relief from ‘No Child Left Behind’

The Arkansas Department of Education will apply for relief in early 2012 from the federal law that requires all public school students to be proficient in math and literacy by 2013-14, state Education Commissioner Tom Kimbrell said. The state will seek waivers from some of the terms of the decade-old No Child Left Behind Act using guidelines issued last month by the U.S. Department of Education. The waivers will affect 1) standards and assessments 2) the manner in which the state addresses low-performing schools and 3) teacher evaluations. If the state is successful in obtaining waivers, the state’s 239 school districts and its charter schools could avoid the dilemma of having to test students on the basis of the state’s current set of math and literacy standards to meet the requirements of the federal law while putting into place the new national Common Core State Standards and accompanying testing system. (Click here to read the OEP Blog Post about NCLB Waivers) More than 400 of Arkansas’ nearly 1,100 schools are already on the state’s list of schools needing improvement because of low scores earned on Benchmark and End-of-Course exams. Waivers could keep additional Arkansas schools from being labeled and sanctioned should their students fall short of proficient — or grade level — on state exams by 2013-14.

Springdale Teacher Surprised with $25,000 Milken Award

Gov. Mike Beebe surprised Andrea McKenna during an assembly at J.O. Kelly Middle School, telling her she was the only educator in Arkansas this year to receive the prestigious Milken Educator Award. Beebe said McKenna is a great example of the American dream. “Her parents were uneducated. They knew that the value of education was going to be important for their children. They wanted to make sure their kids got an
education. She worked hard and got an education and decided she wanted to give back,” Beebe said. Now, she’s helping her students achieve their dreams, he said.

**Little Rock Middle Schools Aim for Consistency, Broader Curriculum**

After nearly three years of community and district task-force meetings to identify problems and possible fixes to the city’s middle schools, the Little Rock School Board has adopted a multi-pronged approach to revitalize the schools - to make the schools more effective academically and more attractive to parents and students. In large part the initiative calls for the schools - which serve about 5,200 sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders - to broaden their efforts beyond just trying to raise math and literacy scores on the state Benchmark and End-of-Course exams.

**Skyline Heights Elementary School Featured on National Television**

We were recently notified by one of our constituents that Skyline Heights Elementary School was featured on an episode of TLC’s “19 Kids and Counting,” the television reality show featuring the Duggar family of Springdale, Arkansas. Last May, the Duggar family visited Harrison, Arkansas, and spent the morning at Skyline Heights Elementary School. During their visit, the Duggars participated in a PTA-sponsored “International Festival,” an event that provided students with a hands-on opportunity to learn more about three countries: France, Mexico, and China. While at Skyline, every member of the Duggar family was paired with a “Skyline Student Ambassador.”

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

**News from Around the Nation**

**Senate ESEA Draft Bill Would Scrap Adequate Yearly Progress**

The accountability system at the heart of the No Child Left Behind Act would be completely reinvented under a draft reauthorization proposal released by U.S. Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, the chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee. The measure, which is already being decried by civil rights groups as a giant step backwards when it comes to accountability for poor and minority children, would scrap the 10-year-old law's signature yardstick known as Adequate Yearly Progress or AYP. Instead, states would have to ensure that all students are making “continuous improvement” in student outcomes.

**The Truth About Testing Costs**

While states vary considerably in the amount, type, and quality of their testing programs, no state comes even close to spending 1 percent of total per-pupil expenditures on testing. A 2010 study by the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education, or SCOPE, led by professor Linda Darling-Hammond, noted that in per-pupil terms, testing costs “substantially less than that of a new textbook, a typical student’s school supplies for the year, or almost any educational intervention.” A random sample of states, small and large, confirms SCOPE’s findings.

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 24: House and Senate Education Committee Meeting, NWACC, Bentonville, AR 9:00 AM  
Tuesday October 25: House and Senate Education Committee Meeting, NWACC, Bentonville, AR 9:00 AM  
Tuesday October 25: A Town Hall Meeting: Parental Choice in Public Schools, M.L. Harris Auditorium Philander Smith College, Little Rock, AR 600-8:00 PM (Reception Following)  
Wednesday October 26: APSRC Fall Conference, Double Tree Hotel and Robinson Center, Little Rock. Click Here for More Information.

**Final Thought(s)**

“I wasn’t the [gifted and talented] student in my school. I wasn’t the best athlete of the year. I wasn’t asked to prom. I want to tell you that this is such an awesome experience to just be a teacher and to love you and to let you know that dreams come true.” - J.O. Kelly Middle School teacher Andrea McKenna on receiving the Milken Educator Award.

**Thanks for reading! See you next week!**

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