From the OEP

Happy November. We hope everyone is still consuming the loads of leftover Halloween candy that seems to continually find a way into the Office for Education Policy. But we need the sugar rush as we have a lot of news to report!

First, we have a new Northwest Arkansas Report Card to share with you. Being located at the U of A in Fayetteville, we have a number of constituents in the area asking about local school district performance. Therefore we are also releasing our annual Northwest Arkansas Report Card this week highlighting and comparing characteristics and academic performance of the “Big 5” Northwest Arkansas school districts, as well as the 10 rural school districts in Washington and Benton counties.

Second, in national news, the latest National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results were released this week revealing marginal gains in mathematics, stagnant reading scores, and persistent achievement gaps. This has not changed from the previous administration. We have both a state and national story linked below and have also published a blog post discussing Arkansas NAEP Performance.

Phew! That is a full slate! Happy reading!

News from Around the Natural State

State Students’ Test Scores Flat

Reading and math scores earned by Arkansas fourth-graders and reading scores earned by eighth-graders on the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) were stagnant and below the national average, while students across the country made headway in most areas. Only Arkansas eighth-grade math students showed a statistically significant 3-point gain over 2009 results on the 2011 test known as the “Nation’s Report Card.” But that, too, fell short of the country’s average. Click here to read the Nation’s Report Card for Reading and here for Math. To read national press coverage of the Nation’s Report Card by the Huffington Post, click here.

Four School Districts Make ‘Honor Roll’ for Advanced Placement Performance

The College Board listed four Arkansas school districts on its “AP Honor Roll,” citing significant increases in participation in Advanced Placement classes and improvements in scores on Advanced Placement tests. The Bryant, Crossett, Greenbrier, and Monticello districts qualified for the honor. “Students, teachers and administrators in Bryant, Crossett, Greenbrier and Monticello should be proud of this award,” Education Commissioner Tom Kimbrell said in a news release. From 2009 to 2011, Bryant, for example, increased the number of students participating in Advanced Placement classes from 356 to 439, while improving the percentage of students earning AP Exam scores of 3 or higher from 28 percent to 40 percent.
Interim ADE Assistant Commissioner for Finance Named

Arkansas Education Commissioner Dr. Tom Kimbrell has named Kathleen Crain as the ADE's interim assistant commissioner for the Division of Fiscal and Administrative Services. Crain is a veteran of the department with years of experience in budgetary matters. Crain has worked for the ADE since 1995 and is the division's director of financial applications and support. She previously worked in finance for the Union Camp Corp. in Monticello; for Jefferson County; and for the University of Arkansas at Monticello. She is a graduate of Little Rock Central High School and received an accounting degree from UAM. She replaces Bill Goff, who recently took a similar position with the Pulaski County Special School District.

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

News from Around the Nation

Study Warns of Limited Savings from Closing Schools

Closing schools does not save very much money in the context of an urban district’s budget, and selling or leasing surplus school buildings tends to be difficult because they are often old and in struggling neighborhoods, a recent report from a Philadelphia research group says. On the positive side, however, the study finds that students appear to make it through a school closure with minimal effects on their academic progress. The report, released by the Philadelphia Research Initiative to foreshadow what the 154,000-student Philadelphia district can expect over the next few years as it plans to close a number of schools because of declining enrollments, looks at school closings in Chicago, Detroit, Kansas City, Mo., Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, and the District of Columbia. Each of those districts has closed at least 20 schools in the past decade, and most of the buildings have been shuttered in the recent past.

Charter School Report: The Effect of Charter Schools on Student Achievement: A Meta-Analysis of the Literature

Charter elementary schools are, on average, outperforming traditional public schools in reading and in mathematics, and charter middle schools are doing better in math, according to a new study from researchers at the University of Washington's Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE). Economists Julian Betts and Emily Tang of the University of California, San Diego, reviewed 40 existing studies on charter school achievement and scientifically combined the results from each study. Their analysis also found that there is no substantial difference on average in math or reading achievement between traditional and charter high schools or in reading achievement at the middle school level.

Teach For America Teachers Outperform Counterparts, Report Says

Teachers certified through Teach for America (TFA) and Lipscomb University in Nashville outperform veteran teachers, according to the Tennessee state card on teacher training. The report, produced by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, shows which of the state's teacher programs tend to produce highly effective teachers and which do not. Teach for America in Memphis and Nashville produced more highly effective teachers than traditional college programs and alternative certification programs statewide. In Memphis, where TFA members make up 3 percent of the city schools faculty, the teachers showed "statistically significant positive difference" over both veteran and new teachers and ranked high in the top quintile of teachers across Tennessee in reading, science and social studies.
Site Seeing

Last June, the OEP presented at the UCA Summer Learning Institute on our Arkansas Education Report titled “Spotlights on Success: Traits and Strategies of Five High-Growth Schools in Arkansas.” AETN was there to film our presentation and have graciously offered to host the videos on their website. The videos are linked below:

Session 1, Video 1: Introduction and Overview
Session 1, Video 2: Panel Discussion with School Leaders
Session 2, Video 3: Characteristics of Successful Schools
Session 2, Video 4: Situating the Case Study, Results in the Broader Research

Mark Your Calendar

Tuesday November 8: House and Senate Education Committee Meeting, State Capitol Complex, Room 171, 10:00 AM
November 9-10: Arkansas Rural Education Association Fall Conference, Clarion Resort, Hot Springs.
Monday November 14: House and Senate Education Committee Meeting, Durand Center, NorthArk College 1:30 PM
Tuesday November 15: House and Senate Education Committee Meeting, Durand Center, NorthArk College 9:00 AM
Thursday November 17th: Common Core: Learning from the Experts with David Coleman, Sponsored by the APSRC, Clinton Presidential Center – Great Hall, 9:30 AM – 3:30 PM
Tuesday November 29: House and Senate Education Committee Meeting, State Capitol Complex, Room 171, 10:00 AM

Final Thought(s)

“Students, teachers and administrators in Bryant, Crossett, Greenbrier and Monticello should be proud of this award. We need to continue to provide avenues all across Arkansas for students to take rigorous classes as they prepare for college and careers.” - Commissioner Tom Kimbrell on the Advanced Placement “Honor Roll” Award given to four Arkansas School Districts.

Thanks for reading! See you next week!

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