From the OEP

Part of our goal at the OEP is to produce meaningful and informative educational resources. For example, when writing a Policy Brief, we gather as much relevant information as we can gain access to and consolidate that information into a short, digestible 2-4 page document with the most pertinent facts. Recently, we received a call from one of our constituents asking us a simple question: “How does my local school compare to the surrounding schools and districts in my area?” This constituent remarked that data to answer this question does exist in various places, but that it was not that easy to digest (for example, information is primarily separated by grade level. This is helpful in some cases, but not to answer this particular question).

We are happy to release some new OEP Databases for Demographics and Academic Performance for the 2010-2011 academic year. Our demographics databases include school- and district-level data (such as enrollment, race, free & reduced lunch) and our Academic Performance databases include academic measures such as percent of students scoring in each performance category of the Arkansas benchmark, end-of-course (EOC), and Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

Click here to visit the OEP Arkansas School Data Web Page and click on the various tabs to access links to the appropriate databases!!

News from Around the Natural State

State Pulls 2 Districts off Fiscal Distress List
The Arkansas Board of Education removed the Armorel and Yellville-Summit school districts from the state’s fiscal distress program, returning control of the finances to the local school boards and administrators. Yellville-Summit, with 813 students enrolled, was put into the distress program in December 2009 after legal balances had dropped by nearly half, from just more than $1 million to $563,700 in 2009-10. The amount has since grown to about $925,000. The 454-student Armorel district in Mississippi County was in the fiscal distress program a shorter time, having been classified as distressed in May 2010 after balances of $1.1 million dropped to $361,606 and then were plumped back up to $1.1 million in 2009-10 only with the addition of a $750,000 cash flow loan.

Plans for Three Charter Schools Shot Down
The Arkansas Board of Education on Tuesday rejected proposals for open-enrollment charter high schools in Texarkana, Jonesboro and West Memphis, assuring that no more than one new school will be approved in a year in which lawmakers had relaxed the long-standing cap of 24 charters statewide. The Education Board voted 4-3 against the proposed Premier High School of Texarkana, a plan proposed by an established charter-school organization in Texas, and 6-0 against both the Diploma School of Jonesboro and the Diploma School of West Memphis. All three proposals were to target high school students at risk of dropping out or who have already dropped out. The action came on the heels of the board’s vote against the KidSmart Bilingual Public Charter School, an elementary school proposed for southwest Little Rock, and a vote to delay until
January a decision on the proposed Special Training in Remedial Instruction and Vocational Education (STRIVE) Institute of Technology in Marianna.

**KIPP Gets $25.5 Million Grant from the Walton Family Foundation**
The Walton Family Foundation is announcing its plans today to donate $25.5 million to the Knowledge is Power Program, or KIPP, charter network. The Bentonville, Arkansas-based foundation, created by Wal-Mart founders Sam and Helen Walton, has been a longtime supporter of KIPP schools. But this award is the foundation’s largest gift to KIPP so far. It’s intended to provide support to help double the number of students attending KIPP schools by 2015, raising the number of children enrolled from 32,000 this year to 59,000. In Arkansas, there are three KIPP open-enrollment charter schools in Helena-West Helena and one in Blytheville. The four schools have a combined enrollment of nearly 900 students. All of those schools are overseen by the KIPP DeltaPublic Schools organization, which announced in 2008 plans to expand to 12 schools in the Delta region by 2019.

Other good news for KIPP Delta: KIPP DCPS Director Scott Shirey was recently named in Forbes Magazine as one of Wendy Kopp’s Top 7 Most Powerful Educators. [Click here to read more.](#)

**Troubled Schools in State Rise to 480**
Nearly 45 percent of Arkansas’ 1,071 public schools have failed to meet minimum achievement requirements on state exams for at least two years, according to a state Department of Education report. A total of 480 schools must take steps - which include providing tutors, offering school transfers, changing faculties and/or employing consultants and specialists - to raise student scores. The 480 schools is an increase of 60 schools over the previous year. The total includes 35 of the Little Rock School District’s 45 schools; 20 of the 36 schools in the Pulaski County Special School District; 16 of 19 schools in the North Little Rock district; 13 of 26 schools in Fort Smith; and at least nine of the 25 schools in Springdale.

[Click here to check out these news stories and more on the OEP Blog!!!](#)

**News from Around the Nation**

**Teacher Layoff Numbers Overstated? Survey Suggests 'Yes'**
A new survey attempts to shed light on the number of teacher layoffs around the country—and suggests that the number of educators sent packing may not be as bad as some say. The survey of 74 large urban school districts in 42 states found that school systems reported laying off 2.5 percent of their teachers. The survey was conducted by the National Council on Teacher Quality, in Washington. While NCTQ, which collected information from the past two years, acknowledges that the survey isn't a representative sample, it believes it's a telling one, given that "it's usually the large urbans who feel the pain of financial cuts most acutely."

**Study Highlights 'Power of More Time' for Science Learning**
A new report makes the case for restructuring the school calendar to allow more learning time for science, and through a set of case studies seeks to explain promising approaches to make the most of that extra time. "Together, these schools offer a glimpse of what is possible when schools and districts make science a priority and when they furnish students and teachers with the time they need to build dynamic science programs," says the report from the National Center on Time & Learning, a research and advocacy group. The report issued today by the National Center on Time
Learning laments the science achievement levels of U.S. students overall and cites studies suggesting that science instruction in the elementary grades has increasingly been squeezed out of the curriculum.

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

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

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
Monday November 28: House and Senate Education Committee Meeting, State Capitol Complex, Room 171, 1000 PM

Final Thought(s)

“We the day the excuses stop is the day that the solutions start.” – Mike Feinberg, KIPP Co-founder

Thanks for reading! See you next week!

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