November 22, 2011

From the OEP

Happy short week to everyone. We hope any and all celebrations you participate in during this time of year are full of family, fellowship, and copious amounts of tryptophan.

This week, we are releasing the next installment of the OEP Awards: High Achieving High Schools. In this section, we list the top performing schools based on student performance on each of the End of Course (EOC) exams in Algebra, Biology, Geometry and Grade 11 Literacy. Congratulations to all of the high schools receiving an OEP Award!! Click here to read the latest section: High Achieving High Schools – or - click here to read the entire OEP Awards report and stay tuned in a few weeks as we wrap up this year’s OEP Awards with our final section highlighting the most improved schools in Arkansas!

Also, don’t forget that last week we also released 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 Nationally Norm-Referenced Tests.

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

History Teacher Wins State Award

Lisa Lacefield, a sixth-grade social studies teacher for the Nettleton School District in Craighead County, has been chosen as the 2011 State History Teacher of the Year, the Arkansas Department of Education announced. The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History presented Lacefield the award during a ceremony at Nettleton Middle School. She received a check for $1,000, several books and other historical resources. State winners compete for the institute’s national history teacher of the year. Applicants are judged on their deep commitment to teaching American history, evidence of creativity and imagination in the classroom, and close attention to documents, artifacts and other primary sources.

Education Leaders Tap Crowd for No Child Left Behind Ideas

Two options regarding a student-achievement deadline under the federal No Child Left Behind Act were explained to a crowd of about 100 at Alma Middle School, but most in attendance seemed still to be digesting the information. The No Child Left Behind Act includes an overarching requirement that all public school students perform at grade level in math and literacy by 2013-14. The federal government in September gave states the opportunity to waive that requirement in favor of other options. The first option involves reducing by half the percentage of students who are considered “not proficient” in math and literacy within six years, the end of the 2019-20 school year. That would apply to the overall student
body at a school and each federally defined subgroup of students — white, black, Hispanic, poor, disabled and non-native English speakers. The second option is for the state to have 100 percent of students scoring at proficient levels by the end of the 2019-20 school year. The afternoon meeting was the first of two held Monday in Alma. About 50 people attended a second meeting Monday night at which department officials explained the state’s possible options to modify its requirements under the act.

**Initial Deal Made Over School Tax-Bill Error**

Garland County and Fountain Lake School District officials reached a preliminary agreement this week about the county’s portion of undercharged property taxes that make up the district’s funding. The school district that straddles the line between Garland and Saline counties rolled back its millage rate from 34.8 mills to 34.7 mills before 2011 tax bills were mailed to residents. The mistake cost the district about $35,000. The preliminary agreement would call for the Garland County assessor’s office to pay the district about $4,000 from a partly discretionary fund and for the county to provide manpower and labor for several road projects that would improve school bus routes.

**Project-Learning Schools Described for Little Rock Board**

Little Rock School District leaders toured project-based-learning schools in Arkansas and Texas, liked a lot of what they saw, and are now exploring ways to offer it in the state’s largest school system. Dennis Glasgow, associate superintendent for accountability, described for the Little Rock School Board the visits to Manor New Tech High School near Austin, Texas, and Cross County High School, based in Cherry Valley near Jonesboro. At those schools, students work in groups to research, develop and present multiple, hands-on projects in all of their academic subject areas. That is accomplished in part because each student has a computing device, be it a laptop or a tablet. Additionally, academic course work is integrated so that English and social studies might be taught together as one class and math and science might be combined as another.

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

**News from Around the Nation**

**States Urged to Promote Union-District Cooperation**

From the offices of the U.S. Department of Education come appeals for union-district collaboration. From local school districts come examples of labor and management working through divisive issues, in areas such as performance pay and teacher evaluation. But what about at the state level? To read recent headlines, the idea of state leaders building stronger bonds between district leaders and unions on critical issues seems far-fetched, with two-fisted battles between unions and elected officials, mostly Republicans, having erupted this year in Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana, and other states. Despite the apparent long odds, a number of observers today are arguing that states can, and should, play a more active role in bridging those long-standing divides. They believe that state officials—school chiefs, governors, lawmakers, and others—cannot only use the bully pulpit to encourage cooperation on issues that can improve student achievement, but that they can also use the resources of their offices to bring complicated and controversial policy changes to scale across many districts. Others are more skeptical, saying state efforts to meet union concerns result in watered-down policy.

**Student-Teachers Curbed in Some Tennessee Schools**

Tennessee's new teacher evaluation system has prompted at least one school district to ban student teachers from working in core high school subjects, college education officials say. Recent changes in state law—including teacher evaluations and toughening the curriculum—allowed
Tennessee to win $500 million in the national Race to the Top education grant competition. At the end of this school year, principals will compile assessments on every Tennessee teacher: 35 percent from learning gains, 15 percent from other student selected data and 50 percent from classroom observations. Teachers can lose tenure if they score in the two lowest ratings two consecutive years and can gain tenure only if they score in the top two ratings two consecutive years.

**Nation's Biggest Teacher-Prep School Revamps Training**
School after school in the Phoenix area has a banner hanging on the side of the building: iTeachAZ. It's shorthand for Arizona State University's new flagship undergraduate teacher education program, which integrates several high-profile—and hotly debated—reforms to teacher preparation today. Under the program, which debuted formally this school year, ASU requires a yearlong student-teaching apprenticeship for all undergraduate education majors, during which time they must demonstrate mastery of specific teaching skills as measured by a popular teaching framework.

**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**
Monday November 28: House and Senate Education Committee Meeting, State Capitol Complex, Room 171, 10:00 AM  
Tuesday December 6: House and Senate Education Committee Meeting, State Capitol Complex, Room 171, 10:00 AM

**Final Thought(s)**
“We're having to talk about how to balance poverty while two-thirds of our kids live in poverty. That's difficult to do. We've got to make it better.” – Springdale Superintendent Jim Rollins on the racial and socioeconomic balancing proposal of Springdale Schools

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

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