From the OEP

We hope everyone had a relaxing Thanksgiving Break. This week, with many school-related organizations and statewide offices closed, we have a light news week. However, in case you missed some of our releases from past weeks…

We recently released 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 that received 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 we 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

Study: More Schools Heed Law to Curb Child Obesity

A growing number of schools are complying with a state law that aims to curb child obesity by pulling the plug on vending machines, offering healthier lunch options and expanding opportunities for physical activity during the school day, a study by the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences found. Arkansas Act 1220 of 2003 became a forerunner for policies that other states launched to tackle what many public health professionals view as an epidemic. Signed into law by then-Gov. Mike Huckabee, the act removed vending machines from elementary schools, limited their contents in upper grades, set higher nutrition standards for cafeteria food and required schools to measure and report students’ body mass indexes.

State Argues Case to Keep School Cash

The state is not disobeying a judge’s order by holding more than $500,000 that two school districts say is theirs, the state attorney general’s office said. Earlier this month the Fountain Lake and Eureka Springs school districts filed a request to hold the state in contempt for continuing to withhold the money, saying that it was “blatantly” violating a judge’s order. At issue is property tax revenue collected under “the uniform rate of tax,” which is a 25-mill tax on property mandated by the state constitution in every school district for the maintenance and operation of schools.
News from Around the Nation

Line Grows Long for Free Meals at U.S. Schools
Millions of American schoolchildren are receiving free or low-cost meals for the first time as their parents, many once solidly middle class, have lost jobs or homes during the economic crisis, qualifying their families for the decades-old safety-net program. The number of students receiving subsidized lunches rose to 21 million last school year from 18 million in 2006-07, a 17 percent increase, according to an analysis by The New York Times of data from the Department of Agriculture, which administers the meals program. Eleven states, including Florida, Nevada, New Jersey and Tennessee, had four-year increases of 25 percent or more, huge shifts in a vast program long characterized by incremental growth. Click here to view an interactive map that shows the change in percent of students eligible for a free or reduced lunch from 2007 to 2011.

Study Links Academic Setbacks to Middle School Transition
While policymakers and researchers alike have focused on improving students’ transition into high school, a new study of Florida schools suggests the critical transition problem may happen years before, when students enter middle school. The study, part of the Program on Education Policy and Governance Working Papers Series at Harvard University, found that students moving from grade 5 into middle school show a “sharp drop” in math and language arts achievement in the transition year that plagues them as far out as 10th grade, even risking thwarting their ability to graduate high school and go on to college. Students who make a school transition in 6th grade are absent more often than those who remain in one school through 8th grade, and they are more likely to drop out of school by 10th grade.

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 December 6: House and Senate Education Committee Meeting, State Capitol Complex, Room 171, 10:00 AM
Monday December 12: State Board of Education Meeting, Arch Ford Building, State Capitol Complex, 9:00 AM

**Final Thought(s)**

“It is noble to teach oneself, but still nobler to teach others--and less trouble.” – Mark Twain (in honor of his 176th birthday on 11/30/2011)

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

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