

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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Gates targets education policy (Linking and Thinking on Learning, an education blog)

The Gates Foundation, with a whopping \$37 billion in assets, is spending more to influence education policy, writes Joy Pullman in Heartlander Magazine. The foundation funds “myriad seemingly grassroots” advocacy groups. That’s causing concerns, she writes.

“Philanthropists, unlike teachers unions, they don’t have an obvious constituency,” said Sarah Reckhow, a Michigan State political science professor. “Teachers unions represent teachers. Who does the Gates Foundation represent?”

Gates has spent \$173 million to develop Common Core State Standards and to persuade 46 states to adopt them, writes Pullman. At an Indiana legislative hearing, 26 of the 32 people who testified against a bill to withdraw Indiana from the Core are members of organizations the Gates Foundation funds.”

“The Gates Foundation completely orchestrated the Common Core,” said Jay Greene, who runs the University of Arkansas’ department of education reform. Still, Greene thinks the foundation is following education reform trends already adopted by the “D.C. elite,” not setting them. Gates and the U.S. Department of Education are together “push[ing] down into states and localities the consensus they have already arrived at,” he said.

The Gates Foundation’s agenda has become the country’s agenda in education,” Michael Petrilli, vice president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, told the Puget Sound Business Journal in 2009 after four Gates employees moved to the U.S. Department of Education.

Kevin Welner, who directs the National Education Policy Center at the University of Colorado-Boulder, worries that Gates has too much influence.

“I’d like others—particularly [in] the communities that are impacted by the most high-profile school policies—to have at least an equal voice to those from the outside,” he wrote in an email to School Reform News.

Nearly everyone Pullman interviewed “agreed Bill and Melinda Gates and their foundation’s employees are, as Greene put it, ‘good people trying to do good things.’ But that does not quell their concerns.” (She must not have talked to Diane Ravitch.)

There are people who think Bill Gates is trying to get even richer by giving billions of dollars away. I think that’s crazy. But I do worry about the foundation’s enormous clout in education debates.

Conspiracy theories about nefarious philanthropists are “laughable,” writes RiShawn Biddle. There’s nothing stealthy about the Gates Foundation’s role in advocating for the Common Core, he adds. Bill and Melinda Gates are “doing nothing more than what any of us would do if we had the cash: Using their dollars and influence to engage in efforts to improve the world in which they live.”

The American Federation of Teachers gave \$6 million to advocacy groups and charities in 2011-12, reports the Education Intelligence Agency. The largest donation was \$1.2 million to Californians Working Together, which backed a state ballot measure that raised taxes to fund schools.

Most of the donations were ho-hum, but I was a bit surprised to see \$10,000 went to the American Friends of the Yitzhak Rabin Center and another \$9,155 to the Center for Citizenship Education in Mongolia. I like Rabin. I favor good citizenship in Mongolia. But is this why teachers pay union dues?

Pulaski County Special School District Starts Recycling Program (KARK, Channel 4)

Video is posted at http://arkansasmatters.com/fulltext/?nxd_id=637212

The Pulaski County Special School District has started a new recycling program.

The initiative will not only help the environment, it will also help the district save hundreds of thousands of dollars.

First on the list of items to recycle will be milk cartons, plus, styrofoam trays are no longer being used.

Students leaving the cafeteria will now place paper products in the recycle bin.

District officials say it's been costing more than 354-thousand a year to throw stuff away.

Air Ambulance Job Fascinates Van Buren Students (Southwest Times Record, Fort Smith)

"Air medical is kind of like an ambulance on steroids. We see the sickest patients," Air Evac Lifeteam 22 program director Rick Rauser told Van Buren Northridge Middle School seventh-graders Wednesday.

Although the students were a little disappointed they couldn't explore an actual Air Evac helicopter immediately, they listened intently to Rauser's presentation about air medical career opportunities. Rauser is father to Northridge seventh-grader Ethan Rauser.

Rauser, who works from the Air Evac base at Paris, told the students the pilots fly visually, and the base ceiling — the clouds — was a little too low for good visibility Wednesday. The helicopter visit would be rescheduled soon, he said.

Students' parents provide career presentations during the seven-week career activity class. Computer technology/career orientation teacher Lisa Robinson said she arranges the visits because students no longer job shadow in eighth grade and having parents discuss what they do allows students to consider various career opportunities.

On an instruction sheet Robinson sends home with students at the start of the course, she asks parents if they would be willing to speak in the classroom about their careers. Among parent-speakers visiting the class this session are a post office worker, a banker and a Holiday Inn Civic Center staff member. Robinson said a nurse will present next week.

Because the Air Evac helicopter visit spurred wide interest, Rauser gave his presentation in the cafeteria to five seventh-grade classes.

“I’ve really been blessed to find something to do that makes me happy. If you’re happy, you’re already wealthy,” Rauser said, stressing that wealth is about more than money.

Rauser told students that after being invited to ride in a land ambulance he was inspired to take emergency medical technician training. Then while working as an EMT on an ambulance, he went on to paramedic school. A friend convinced him to go to nursing school with him, so six months after graduating from paramedic school, he entered nursing school.

“I’m very glad I did it. The education and nurses are in high demand, and I’ll always have a job,” Rauser said.

Rauser worked simultaneously as an emergency room nurse and as a ground ambulance paramedic until 12 years ago when he went to work for Air Evac Lifeteam at the company’s Springdale base.

The O’Fallon, Mo.-based company started with six bases and now has 110, Rauser said, showing students slides of scenes involving emergency responses by the helicopter crew, some involving landing in people’s yards. The crew consists of a pilot, nurse and paramedic, he said. The Paris base serves a 70-mile radius, although crews fly farther, such as to Arkansas Children’s Hospital in Little Rock, when necessary.

Air ambulances are more about serving rural communities, Rauser said, noting that people who become seriously ill or injured in cities like Van Buren or Fort Smith are usually very close to a hospital. He said the helicopter can usually get anywhere within its 70-mile radius coverage area within 25 minutes.

About two-thirds of the calls received by Air Evac crews are for patient transport, for example, from a small rural hospital like that at Ozark to a larger hospital such as those in Fort Smith. The rest of the crews’ duty involves scene work, responding to the scenes of serious accidents, for example, Rauser said.

A student called out, “How much does fuel cost?”

Rauser said \$5 a gallon. The helicopter flies 130 mph and burns about 250 pounds of fuel an hour, he said.

He said Air Evac uses Bell 206 Long Ranger helicopters, and owns 120 of them.

“You can get a 400-pound patient in there. That’s our maximum patient load, and they fit easily,” Rauser said.

Air Evac buys used helicopters, strips them to bare metal and rebuilds them at the rate of about one every six weeks at the O’Fallon facility. Training, which includes flight and accident simulation, is also conducted at O’Fallon, he said.

Another student asked if the helicopters had ever been tagged.

“Tagged like painted? No,” Rauser said, laughing. “But we have been shot at. ... not here, in Alabama. You’ve got to watch for that in Alabama.”

Air Evac pilots average 5,700 hours of flight time, and must have at least 2,000 hours to be considered for employment.

Air Evac nurses must have at least three years experience in ER, intensive care or ambulance service to qualify for employment. The nurses average six years clinical experience, Rauser said. The paramedics average 10 years actual pre-hospital emergency care experience, he said.

The helicopters are satellite-tracked so that Air Evac dispatchers can determine the closest helicopter to an emergency and get help there quickly, Rauser said.

Another student asked what the crew would do if the helicopter had engine failure while a patient was aboard.

“The same thing as if we didn’t have a patient on board,” Rauser said, talking through the process. The pilot would perform an auto-rotation, and if he lands it right, it looks like a regular landing. Helicopters don’t just fall from the sky if the engine quits, he assured them.

Students also wanted to know the crew’s work schedule.

Rauser said the nurses and paramedics work 24-hour shifts, and the pilots work 12-hour shifts. Four emergency calls a day would be a lot, he said.

Rauser gives presentations regularly at area schools.

Van Buren School Board OKs Outsourcing Substitute Teacher Hiring (Southwest Times Record, Fort Smith)

Obligated now to provide health insurance benefits for substitute teachers who work more than 100 days for the district, the Van Buren School Board approved 7-0 outsourcing its hiring of substitutes to a private business.

School Superintendent Merle Dickerson said the current substitute cost is \$70 for a certified substitute teacher and \$60 a day for a substitute who doesn’t hold a teacher certification. [SubTeach USA](#), an eastern Arkansas-based company, charges the substitute pay plus a 35 percent markup — \$94.50 for a certified substitute teacher. Dickerson said the cost is significantly less than when factoring in the district’s staff costs.

The company ensures all required background checks are performed, does all the training, and provides all the staffing using the same computer system the district now uses, Dickerson said. The district remains in control of which substitutes are allowed in its classrooms, he said. The move eliminates the health insurance benefit expense because the substitutes become employees of SubTeach rather than the district.

Deputy Superintendent Kerry Schneider said the contract would be effective on July 1, the start of the 2013-14 school year.

Dickerson said SubTeach does business with many Arkansas school districts. He said administrators spoke with other schools who use the company and heard only good recommendations.

In other business, the board unanimously approved:

- The school administrators’ contracts for the upcoming school year.
- Extending Dickerson’s contract for another year — through June 30, 2016.

Prosecutor won't charge Hoxie teen as adult (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

HOXIE — Prosecutors say a 16-year-old student who took a flare gun to Hoxie High School won't be charged as an adult.

Prosecutor Henry Boyce says the male student will be charged in juvenile court with taking a prohibited article to school.

Police say the teen brought a pistol-style, German-model flare gun onto the Hoxie campus Jan. 29.

Authorities said the teen didn't threaten anyone and told police that he took the flare gun to school by mistake.

The Jonesboro Sun reported that the teen has a previous criminal history and officials say he likely won't return to Hoxie High School.

Since the incident, the district has increased its school security efforts. Officials say the school is considering drills to simulate an active shooter on campus.

Bill refiguring scholarships on fast track (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LITTLE ROCK — Legislation revamping the Arkansas Academic Challenge Scholarship sailed through an Arkansas House committee Wednesday, though a few representatives worried that the measure, House Bill 1295, would hurt students at the state's four-year universities.

In the coming school year, first-time recipients of the scholarship would receive \$2,000 as freshmen, \$3,000 as sophomores, \$4,000 as juniors and \$5,000 as seniors at the four-year universities.

Under the legislation, sponsored by Rep. Jeremy Gillam, R-Judsonia, new scholarship recipients enrolling in two-year colleges would get \$2,000 a year for both years.

Currently, students who were first awarded the scholarships in the 2010-11 school year each receive \$5,000 a year to attend universities and \$2,500 a year for community and technical colleges. Those who were first awarded the scholarships in the 2011-12 or 2012-13 school years get \$4,500 a year at universities and \$2,250 at colleges. These amounts won't change for students as long as they remain eligible for the scholarships.

This year, 27,088 lottery scholarship recipients are attending universities and 5,741 are enrolled in colleges, according to the state Department of Higher Education.

Gillam said his bill is the result of a lot of hard work by Sen. Johnny Key, R-Mountain Home, Arkansas State University System President Charles Welch and Arkansas Association of Two-Year Colleges Executive Director Ed Franklin.

He added that his bill will increase the cap on the amount awarded to nontraditional students who don't attend college directly out of high school from \$12 million to \$16 million starting in the 2014-15 school year.

There are 2,348 of these students getting scholarships at universities and 1,294 at two-year colleges, according to the Department of Higher Education.

But Rep. Darrin Williams, D-Little Rock, said the constitutional amendment that authorized creation of a state lottery for college scholarships “was sold” to voters in 2008 as a way to increase the number of recipients of four year degrees in Arkansas.

“Do you think your tiered approach is consistent with what was sold the people when they voted [on the constitutional amendment],” he asked Gillam during the House Rules Committee’s 12-minute consideration of the bill.

Gillam replied, “Absolutely I do,” adding that his bill would increase the number of college graduates in Arkansas.

He said his bill also would ensure that the Legislature wouldn’t have to lower the scholarship amounts every two years.

But Williams said, “It appears that the hit here is being felt much more deeply by our four-year institutions.”

Gillam said the Academic Challenge Scholarship that is funded with lottery proceeds and \$20 million a year in state general revenue is not the only scholarship available to students at four-year universities.

He said 90 percent of scholarship recipients at universities also receive other financial assistance.

Gillam said he doesn’t think his bill would have the effect on universities that Williams is concerned about.

Nonetheless, Rep. Mark Perry, D-Jacksonville, said, “It seems like you would be penalizing kids and almost forcing them to go to a twoyear college because of the funding [under the bill]. Is that the intention?”

Gillam replied, “No sir, not at all.

“The point of this was to put the decision back to the student as to where they went. It wasn’t about the institutions at all. It was about what the students of Arkansas deserve out of the lottery scholarship,” he said.

“This [scholarship] is just one aspect of their financial package, if they choose to go to a four-year institution, and the numbers bear that out,” Gillam said.

Gillam’s bill represents a modification of a proposal that Key unveiled in September.

In the fall, Key proposed that future first-time scholarship recipients at two- and four-year schools get \$2,000 in the first year, \$3,000 in the second, \$4,000 as juniors and \$5,000 as seniors.

At that time, former Lt. Gov. Bill Halter of North Little Rock, who led the 2008 campaign for the lottery amendment, told reporters that Key’s proposal “is in no way what was described to Arkansas voters in the campaign for the scholarship lottery.” Halter is now running for the Democratic nomination for governor in 2014.

In December, the Legislature’s lottery oversight committee recommended that the Legislature cut the amounts of scholarships for first-time recipients to \$3,300 a year at the universities and \$1,650 a year at the two-year colleges.

The cuts were necessary because the state had too many scholarship recipients and not enough lottery proceeds, the committee said.

Committee co-chairman Sen. Robert Thompson, D Paragould, said Wednesday that he's decided not to introduce legislation to cut the scholarship amounts like the committee recommended.

"I am supporting the compromise that was reached in the House Rules Committee," he said.

Thompson said he's not heard about any opposition to Gillam's legislation in the Senate.

Key, who was co-chairman of the lottery oversight committee when it recommended the cuts in December, said, "We always recognize that's a recommendation and is not necessarily set in stone.

"This will keep us from having to come back in a year or two years and possibly lowering [scholarship amounts] again based on leaving the structure the way it is now," he said.

Shane Broadway, interim director of the Department of Higher Education, said department officials project that the scholarship program wouldn't fall short of the cash needed to make the scholarship payments to students through fiscal 2018, assuming the lottery raises \$90 million a year for scholarships.

Broadway, who hasn't taken a position on the legislation, said there is no way to know whether Gillam's bill will affect enrollment at the two-year and four-year schools unless it is implemented.

Becky Paneitz, president at Northwest Arkansas Community College, said the bill "levels the playing field for entering freshmen who may have a better opportunity for success if they begin at a community college where they can benefit from smaller class sizes and more personalized instruction."

At the Arkansas State University System, Welch said he supports Gillam's bill.

"While the bill is not perfect, and I would prefer higher amounts for students in the freshman and sophomore years, I am mindful of the financial limitations and realities we currently face."

He said he's pleased that the bill allows for a \$4 million increase in scholarship funds for nontraditional students.

At the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, Chancellor G. David Gearhart understands that lawmakers had a difficult decision to make and "accepts" the compromise made under Gillam's bill, said university spokesman John Diamond.

"The most important thing is to continue to provide financial assistance to make and keep higher education accessible to Arkansans," Diamond said.

District arrests stir hiring review (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LITTLE ROCK — The arrest this week of a security guard on a sexual-assault charge, the second such arrest and charge in 15 days in the Little Rock School District, has prompted the district to re-examine its pre-employment screening process, a spokesman said Tuesday.

On Monday, Miguel Cazares, 43, a substitute security guard, was arrested at his workplace at Henderson Middle School and charged with second-degree sexual assault, stemming from accusations in 2011 and 2012 involving a 7-year-old girl, according to Little Rock police arrest reports.

Cazares, of 7416 Shady Grove in Little Rock, was hired by the school system on Jan. 31, between the time that police investigated the allegations and the time the Pulaski County prosecutor's office filed charges, according to arrest affidavits and police officials.

His arrest followed the Jan. 29 arrest of Robert Myles, 39, who was hired as a substitute school security guard on April 11, on two counts of second-degree sexual assault after two students at Horace Mann Middle School told police that he had fondled them while on school grounds in November, according to Little Rock police reports.

District spokesman Pamela Smith said school officials have begun "extensive conversations" about the hiring process to see where the district can improve.

The arrests came on the heels of the district's decision to add 11 unarmed guards to its 119-guard force to fill manpower needs identified in a districtwide security audit.

The district uses a fourpronged system to check the backgrounds and criminal histories of all applicants - from janitors to teachers, according to Superintendent Morris Holmes. The district contracts with CS Background in Batesville to do preliminary checks for any arrests and convictions.

An applicant who passes the preliminary check can start work on a probationary basis while his information is put through criminal checks with the Arkansas Department of Education, the Arkansas Department of Human Services and the Arkansas State Police.

Myles and Cazares had both been investigated on sexcrime allegations before the cases that led to their recent arrests, according to arrest affidavits and police reports, but since they were not arrested or charged in those earlier cases, their names wouldn't have been flagged in preliminary background checks, according to Department of Education officials.

The preliminary background check rarely misses detecting any arrests or convictions, Holmes said, but he plans to review the district's hiring process to see if there is any way that the backgrounding process can detect accusations that did not lead to arrest.

"We will be asking all of those questions and looking for ways we can provide additional protection to keep people who have demonstrated the proclivity in showing pedophilia," he said. "We are accountable to children and parents."

Cazares and Myles have been fired by the school district, Smith said. Myles' complete background investigation had not been finished as of Tuesday, according to Katherine Donovan, a staff attorney with the Department of Education. But district officials said preliminary tests detected no problems.

As for Cazares, Donovan said she had no record of any background investigation.

Cazares passed the preliminary background check, Smith said, but had yet to be put through a complete background check.

It's been a "standard operating procedure" to hire a teacher or security guard on a provisional basis after the preliminary check, especially to fill manpower gaps, Smith said.

But those preliminary checks, or the subsequent checks done by state agencies, wouldn't have disqualified either Cazares or Myles, who had not been arrested or charged in regard to previous sexual assault complaints, Donovan said.

State police spokesman Bill Sadler said his agency's identification bureau, which conducts the background checks, looks for any felony or misdemeanor convictions in the state, as well as arrests in which cases are pending in the courts, and uses information from the FBI for a broader background investigation.

The state police forwards its findings to the Department of Education, which determines whether a job candidate is barred from Education Department employment under state law for either pleading guilty, being found guilty or pleading no contest to a range of violent, property and drug crimes, Donovan said.

The Education Department then notifies the school district whether an applicant is eligible for hire.

If the applicant was the subject of an investigation, Donovan said, it would be hard for background investigators to know that and for her to reject an applicant who has not been arrested or charged.

"We could not use that information as a disqualifying factor," Donovan said. "By law, that's how the statute's written."

In April 2012, Cazares was named as a suspect of sexual assault after the young girl's mother called police and her daughter told officers that Cazares made her sit on his lap and watch pornography in his bedroom, where he assaulted her twice, once in late 2011 and again in March 2012, according to police reports.

During the investigation, detectives learned that Cazares had been questioned in a sexual-assault allegation in Texas, though he was never charged, affidavits said.

Myles was first accused of a sex crime in 2010 when a teenage boy's mother called the state's child-abuse hot line and said Myles had inappropriately touched her son, according to a Little Rock police report.

When Little Rock police looked into the teen's allegations, investigators learned that two other people also had called the child-abuse hot line and made sexual-assault allegations against Myles involving teenage boys.

Those reports had been "screened out," meaning they did not trigger an investigation, police spokesman Sgt. Cassandra Davis said. The 2010 police report didn't state why they were screened out, but Davis said that can happen because investigators may not have been able to identify a child victim or the alleged abuse may not have warranted a charge.

State police maintain the hot line, and hot line call-desk operators make the decision on whether to forward a call to a local law enforcement agency or screen it out, Sadler said. Supervisors randomly follow up on the calls, he said.

In the 2010 investigation of Myles, police didn't have enough evidence at the time to make an arrest, and that case is still under investigation, Davis said.

New allegations against him surfaced on Nov. 28, when Little Rock police were called to Horace Mann Middle School where a teenage boy reported that Myles sexually assaulted him three times on two days. While detectives were investigating the Nov. 28 sexual assault, another teenage boy stepped forward, saying Myles touched him inappropriately at least twice, usually after tussling with him, police said.