

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

February 6, 2013

Redfield council joins push for charter school (Pine Bluff Commercial)

REDFIELD – The Redfield City Council on Tuesday evening agreed to petition the White Hall School Board to turn over Redfield Middle School at the end of the school year to a non-profit organization for use as a proposed open charter school.

In the event the charter school “misfires,” the middle school, constructed in the late 1930s by the WPA, would revert to the municipality, the proposal stated.

The Keep Redfield Middle School Task Force is seeking 503(c)(3) nonprofit status under the Internal Revenue Code to operate a charter school, task force chairman Todd Dobbins told aldermen.

The White Hall School Board voted Jan. 8 to close the Redfield school at the end of the current school year and transfer Redfield students to White Hall Middle School.

Dobbins said earlier that opening a charter school may be the community’s best option for keeping a middle school in Redfield. Sponsors of a charter school must submit a letter of intent to the state by June 1, he added.

Task force members met Friday with Arkansas Department of Education officials to review the options, Dobbins said, and realize that “we will have lost our school for a year” with the White Hall board’s decision.

It would be the 2014-2015 school year before an open charter school could become operational in Redfield, he added.

An August opinion issued by the office of Arkansas Attorney General Dustin McDaniel in response to a question from a Dover state representative indicated there is no “simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ (answer)” to the question of a school district selling, donating or leasing abandoned buildings and property to non-profit organizations and government entities.

A district can donate a building no longer in use under a number of circumstances, the opinion stated.

Aldermen voted to ask to address the school board Feb. 12 and submit a request that the school building be donated to “Keep Redfield Middle School 503(c)(3)” for use as a charter school.

The council voted 5-1 to take the proposal to the school board. Alderman Diann Smith cast the only “no” vote, saying she wanted more time to digest the seven-page legal opinion.

The council also held a called meeting a week earlier in the quest for keeping a middle school in the community.

Aldermen also discussed a sales tax on prepared food – frequently called a “hamburger tax” – at the request of Mayor Tony Lawhon. He said he wanted aldermen to consider a tax for municipal revenues, encouraging the six to ask residents if they would be in favor of a levy to benefit municipal services.

City Attorney Margaret Dobson recommended that the council take time to look at all the potential options involving a tax, adding that feedback from residents is crucial

Mercy invests \$7M in health education (Carroll County News)

BERRYVILLE -- For the first time in our nation's history, children can expect to live shorter lives than their parent's generation. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control continues to publish shocking statistics that paint a gloomy picture of our children's future health. To help reverse the tide, Mercy has invested \$7 million for years of health education in schools in Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma.

The health literacy program now offered to the schools at no charge is called HealthTeacher, and it provides online health lessons and resources for educators focused on improving health literacy from kindergarten through 12th grade. For more than a decade, HealthTeacher has been used with great success in some of the nation's largest school districts.

Mercy's partnership was a first for HealthTeacher -- partnering with an entire health system. Recently, over 100 educators from the Berryville Public School District were trained on the program. Eureka Springs and Green Forest schools began using HealthTeacher in the 2011-12 school year.

"It is great to be part of an organization that is so concerned about the health of our kids," said Kristy Estrem, president of Mercy Hospital Berryville. "The money contributed to secure the licensing for schools to access the many tools of this program is incredible. I've seen some of the lessons, and they are wonderful in teaching valuable health information."

HealthTeacher now reaches more than 800,000 students in the four states Mercy serves. In Northwest Arkansas, Mercy shares the associated costs with Arkansas Children's Hospital. In this co-branded area, Mercy and Arkansas Children's Hospital sponsor HealthTeacher in 87 districts, 462 schools, with the potential of reaching 210,100 students.

HealthTeacher is the interactive leader in youth health, creating games, apps, and educational resources to make health awesome for kids. This even includes emotional health. For example, last fall Mercy and HealthTeacher launched the anti-bullying mobile game, "Awesome Upstander!" It is designed for elementary-aged children, and it encourages them to race through a school cafeteria and bathroom to help rescue a target from a bully. Along the way, players must collect enough friends to stand up to the bully together. The adventure introduces the concept of "upstanders" -- people who safely and positively intervene in a bully situation -- through a fun and entertaining play experience.

HealthTeacher's research-based products are designed to get kids moving and to develop healthy behaviors that last a lifetime. Reaching over 6 million kids through its fast-growing network of 11,000+ schools, HealthTeacher's interactive products are used by teachers, parents, and kids to address important youth health issues, including physical activity, nutrition, and social and emotional well-being. "The HealthTeacher program has been a wonderful resource for our staff all across the district," said Dr. Randy Byrd, superintendent of Berryville Public School District. "It enables the teaching staff to target areas of concern and provides detailed lessons to address those concerns."

Former Bryant Teacher Pleads Not Guilty to Student Sex Assault (KARK, Channel 4)

A former Bryant High School teacher pleaded not guilty on Tuesday to charges that she had sex with a student.

Police say Courtney Speer had a relationship with a 17-year-old student.

If convicted, she could face up to 30 years in prison.

Speer's next court date is scheduled for April 8.

Parole Denied for Former Teacher Convicted of Sexually Assaulting Students (KARK, Channel 4)

An Arkansas teacher convicted of sexually assaulting students will remain behind bars for another year.

The Arkansas Parole Board unanimously voted to deny parole for inmate Brian Floss, who was sentenced to prison for assaulting third-grade students inside his Fordyce classroom.

The victim's family testified last month, asking for Floss to remain in prison, but he will be up for parole again next year.

The board cited his position as a teacher and the age of his victims as reasons for the denial.

Paying for the Future: Funding Arkansas Schools (KARK, Channel 4)

Video available http://arkansasmatters.com/fulltext?nxd_id=634882

Nestled between Sheridan and Malvern, the town of Poyen has one of the poorest school districts in the state.

But if you walk through the halls and into the classrooms, you can't see the income disparity. Students type away at new Apple computers. A teacher walks students through an AP Biology lesson.

No matter how poor the district is, the now famous Lakeview court case mandates every district must spend an equal minimum, just over \$6200, on each of its students.

"Lakeview took a long time to get settled," Poyen Superintendent Jerry Newton explained. "Years and years. "

Lakeview set the funding formula for Arkansas schools. Currently there are three streams of revenue: state sales tax, state income tax and local property tax.

Each district is required levy a 25-mill tax on local property and that's where the disparity begins.

One mil in Poyen brings in about \$11,000.

One mil in South Side Bee Branch, which is roughly the same size district as Poyen, brings in nearly \$200,000.

To make up for the difference, Lakeview mandated the state to kick in extra money to every district that needs it in order for all districts to reach that state minimum.

Still, an equal education for all Arkansas students can be a challenge.

"I'll know I've done my work when no matter the school district in the state, I'd feel comfortable putting my child in that school. And we're not near there, not even close to that," Arkansas Education Commissioner Tom Kimbrell said.

Kimbrell said while Lakeview provided a foundation for equity in education, a recent Arkansas Supreme Court ruling allowing wealthier school districts to keep extra money in their district could disrupt that.

"That foundation, in my opinion is really, really, shaky now.," Kimbrell explained.

South Side Bee Branch is one of the eight districts in the state able to raise above the minimum for its students.

With an increase in property value, South Side now has just over \$9,000 per student.

"There are so many different projects that we would like to do, we plan on doing if we can keep that money." South Side Superintendent Billy Jackson said.

The Supreme Court ruling means they can keep the money.

Jackson would love to see an upgrade in facilities and increased security for his hundreds of students.

So far the district has not used any of the extra funds as they wait for property values to stabilize.

And less wealthy districts can appreciate the desire to give students the best.

"I don't begrudge anybody anything," Newton said.

Still there is a hesitation.

"It's pretty difficult to explain to parents and kids how our students or somebody else's students have an equitable and equal education if they're able to build many, many more buildings and many, many more computers," he continued.

Now the quest continues to find out what equitable and equal mean outside of the courtroom and in the classroom.

Educators, Law Enforcement Get Crisis Training (KARK, Channel 4)

Professionals from across the state are taking a class in Little Rock to help them prepare for crises in schools.

The devastating school shootings in Jonesboro in 1998 and Colorado's Columbine High School in 1999 called for action within the University of Arkansas System and prompted the Criminal Justice Institute to roll out its Safe Schools Initiative class.

"Schools are very interested in keeping their students and their faculty safe," said Division Administrator Lorance Johnson.

Educators and law enforcement from across the state packed one of the sessions on Tuesday.

The group learned that one of the key elements in effectively responding to a threat on a school campus is a unified response.

Dana Brown, Principal at Mountain Home High School, says unity is why their plan is considered one of the best in the state.

School resource officers, who are armed police placed on school campuses, agree.

"Collaboration between first responders is imperative, it's a great time to come together," said Lt. Jenceson Pate of the Bryant Police Department.

A great time to come together now, in case of a crisis later.

Superintendent list of 9 revealed (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LITTLE ROCK — The superintendent's job in the 25,000-student Little Rock School District attracted nine applicants from nine states, including Sadie Mitchell, the district's longtime associate superintendent for elementary education.

The other applicants include two superintendents -one from Youngstown, Ohio, and the other from Springfield, Ill. Other applicants are from Memphis, South Carolina, Minnesota, Georgia, Louisiana and Indiana.

Three of the nine applied for the position when it was last open in 2011.

The Little Rock School Board is seeking a successor to Morris Holmes, whose two-year contract expires June 30. Holmes is paid an annual salary of \$215,000 as the chief executive of the district, which has a budget of about \$345 million.

The McPherson & Jacobson executive recruitment and development firm of Omaha, Neb., is assisting the board in the superintendent search. Dianne Curry, the School Board president, has said that on Feb. 18 the firm will recommend a small number of finalists from the pool of applicants.

The board has set aside time during the week of Feb. 25 to interview finalists and possibly select a superintendent on March 4.

The pool of applicants is about half of what it was when the board selected a superintendent in 2011. That year 17 people applied. More recently 24 applied in December for the superintendent's job in the neighboring North Little Rock School District that used the same search firm.

The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette filed Arkansas Freedom of Information Act requests for release of the applications Friday and Monday. Job applications are public under state law.

On Monday, Curry had objected to the firm releasing the applicant names to the newspaper before the board's scheduled meeting of Feb. 18.

"That's only fair to us as a board," she said Monday.

Curry acquired the list of applicants from the search firm Tuesday for the newspaper, releasing the applicants' names through the school district's attorney.

She did not return a phone message early Tuesday evening.

Little Rock School Board member Jody Carreiro said Tuesday that a citizens advisory committee will assist the board in the selection process. Each of the seven board members has proposed members for the committee, which will interview each finalist on the same day the finalist is interviewed by the board. The committee's views on the candidate will be forwarded to the board, Carreiro said.

The applicants for the Little Rock job are:

Wanda Andrews, assistant superintendent for personnel and pupil services in the 7,200-student Spartanburg, S.C., School District No. 7. She also has been an elementary school principal and a classroom teacher. Andrews is a former educator in U.S. Department of Defense schools in Spain and Germany, according to her biography on the Spartanburg district website.

Terrence Brown, regional superintendent of Memphis City Schools in Tennessee, where he is also on a regional advisory board for Teach for America, according to the organization's website.

Connie Hathorn, superintendent of Youngstown City Schools in Ohio since September 2010. Hathorn previously worked as executive director for student support at the Akron City School District in Ohio.

Hertica Martin, executive director of elementary and secondary education at the 16,000-student Rochester public schools in Minnesota. Martin applied for the Little Rock job in 2011 and the Pulaski County Special School District superintendent's job in 2010. While serving as an elementary school principal in 1996, Martin won a Milken Family Foundation national educator award.

Walter Milton Jr., superintendent of the Springfield School District in Illinois, one of four finalists in Little Rock's previous superintendent search, before the board voted to hire Holmes. Milton was a superintendent in Flint, Mich., and in the Fallsburg Central School District in New York. He was a principal in Rochester, N.Y., and a teacher and a coach in at least two New York school systems.

Mitchell, the Little Rock district's associate superintendent for almost 20 years, most recently spearheaded the districtwide effort to stem student bullying. She was the first principal of the Little Rock district's Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Magnet Elementary School and a former principal of Cloverdale Elementary School, which no longer exists. Chelsea Clinton, daughter of former President Bill Clinton and former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, was among Mitchell's first-grade pupils at Forest Park Elementary School.

Stefanie P. Phillips, deputy superintendent of the 52,000-student Clayton County, Ga., public school system. The county is home to Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson Airport. She has worked in the Georgia system since 2009, coming from the post of assistant superintendent of business services in the Ontario-Montclair, Calif., school system.

Julian Stafford of Marrero, La., vice president of marketing for Modern Parents Magazine, which showcases effective instructional strategies and techniques. When he applied for the Little Rock job in 2011, he was listed as the former executive director of research and evaluation for the Washington, D.C., office of the state superintendent of education.

Dexter Suggs Sr., chief of staff for the 32,000-student Indianapolis School District. He has worked in the district since 1994 as a teacher, coach, assistant principal, principal, director of operations and

communications/transportation, and chief information officer/transportation. While serving as a high school principal, he received a 2007 Milken Family Foundation national educator award. He is a Persian Gulf War veteran of the U.S. Army, according to his biography on the Indianapolis School District website.

Campuses in Hope shut after threats (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LITTLE ROCK — Hope School District officials briefly locked down all of the district’s campuses Tuesday morning after a student reported seeing a man with a gun in his waistband outside of the high school, Hope Superintendent Bobby Hart said.

The student notified the school’s assistant principal that the man attempted to gain access to the building through the west side doors, but they were locked, Hart said.

The district, which has 2,500 students, immediately went on lock down about 10:30 a.m., Hart said.

Hart said police responded quickly, searching the area, but no one was found.

A message left at the Hope Police Department was not returned Tuesday.

Hart said some parents decided to check their children out of school for the day, but all classes resumed by early afternoon.

Separately, the University of Arkansas Community College at Hope dismissed students and staff just after noon Tuesday over what officials said in a news release was “a credible threat.”

It was unknown Tuesday if the community college shutdown was linked to the alarm at Hope High School.

“During the lock down, [campus police] and local law enforcement agencies secured the campus and insured the safety of all students and staff,” the news release said.

“No acts of violence was reported or occurred on the campus today. Today’s actions were strictly preventative measures to a possible threat.”

Guns-in-pews bill breezes to Beebe (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LITTLE ROCK — The Senate on Tuesday sent the governor a bill to end the state’s prohibition against concealed weapons in churches, and a House committee blocked legislation that would have barred most abortions in the state.

Legislation to increase penalties for human trafficking, strip custody rights from rapists in certain cases and allow family members of murder victims to attend executions advanced in the Legislature on Tuesday.

With Sen. Linda Chesterfield, D-Little Rock, dissenting, the Senate voted 34-1 to send legislation to the governor that would allow congregations to determine who may carry a concealed handgun into their place of worship.

The legislation is Senate Bill 71, sponsored by Sen. Bryan King, R-Green Forest.

Beebe will sign the legislation soon, but he's reviewing the possible need for other legislation to clarify the liability of churches, said Beebe spokesman Matt DeCample. It takes effect the day that the governor signs it into law.

King has said that he wrote the bill because churches in the state have been the victims of break-ins, disturbances and other crimes. He wanted to give them the option of permitting concealed handguns because some houses of worship are in remote locations, far from police services, he said.

DeCample said the governor's office and some lawmakers are looking at possible legislation "to address some concerns that we have heard from the faith community, particularly about liability worries."

King said he told Beebe on Tuesday that he would try to address the issue, and he's obtained information from the National Conference of State Legislatures about similar laws in other states.

But he said he doesn't yet see a need for liability legislation; his legislation could lower risks, not raise them, he said.

"Now you could have a church that could possibly have protection from a retired law enforcement officer, an active or retirement military person [with a concealed weapon permit], so could you say maybe liability will go down," King said.

FETAL HEARTBEAT

After a bill restricting abortions once a fetal heartbeat can be detected was held up in a House committee Tuesday, sponsor Sen. Jason Rapert, R-Bigelow, said he plans to amend his bill to specify that the heartbeat should be found using an abdominal ultrasound, the traditional ultrasound most pregnant women undergo.

He said that ultrasound can detect a heartbeat about 10 or 12 weeks after conception.

The bill, Senate Bill 134, stalled in the House Public Health, Welfare and Labor Committee on Tuesday morning over concerns that women seeking an abortion would have to undergo a transvaginal ultrasound, where a wandlike probe is inserted into the vagina to detect a heartbeat as early as six weeks.

Before debating the bill, the committee "tabled" Rapert's bill.

When a bill is tabled in committee it takes approval from a majority of the committee members in the room to bring the bill back up for consideration.

Most of the time a committee skips over bills that aren't ready to be considered without taking a special vote to table the bill or to bring the bill back up for discussion.

Rapert said the move surprised him. By the end of the day, Rapert said he had worked with the committee chairman, Rep. John Burris, R-Harrison, to make the bill more acceptable to committee members.

Rapert said he expects the committee to consider the bill by the end of next week. The Senate voted 26-8 to approve the legislation Thursday.

Doctors who violate the law would be guilty of a Class D felony, punishable by up to six years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.

“We want to save lives and we want to do it the right way and we want to do it rationally,” Rapert said. “We’re trying to strike a balance here.”

About 31 percent of the 4,033 abortions performed in Arkansas in 2011 occurred at 10 weeks or later, according to the Department of Health.

The American Civil Liberties Union has threatened to sue if the bill becomes law, saying it unconstitutionally blocks abortions before the fetus is considered viable. In 1973, U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Roe v. Wade* that states have an interest in restricting abortion once the fetus is viable, or can live outside the mother.

Gov. Mike Beebe and Attorney General Dustin Mc-Daniel have both said they have concerns about the constitutionality of the bill.

Burris said legislators can’t let the threat of a lawsuit determine what they pass, though he said he expects the amended bill would still draw a challenge.

“There’s probably a chance for litigation. When you start tampering in the first trimester is when you start striking to the heart of the ’73 decision,” he said. “If it’s a legitimate bill that I think needs to be litigated, you know, I’m OK with it. The threat of litigation is not a reason to not pass a bill.”

WITNESSING EXECUTIONS

The Senate voted 30-1 to approve a bill that would allow family members of murder victims to attend the killer’s execution.

Sen. Bart Hester, R-Cave Springs, the sponsor of Senate Bill 52, told senators that he proposed the legislation at the request of the parents of a girl who was killed.

They want a family member to attend the execution of the person who committed the crime

The bill would allow a spouse, any parent or stepparent, any adult sibling or stepsibling, and any adult child or stepchild who is related to a victim of a crime for which the person is being executed to attend the execution.

HOME-SCHOOLERS

The House Committee on Education rejected House Bill 1076 by Rep. James Ratliff, DImboden, which would allow school districts to count home-schooled students in their districts toward their average daily enrollment. The districts would not receive per-pupil state funding for the home-schooled students. Ratliff said the districts would have to raise that money themselves.

Rural superintendents spoke in favor of the bill, saying it would help them keep enrollment above 350 students.

School districts must voluntarily merge with another district or be subject to a state-ordered consolidation with other districts if their the average enrollment is fewer than 350 for more than two consecutive school years.

The attorney general’s office, the Arkansas Education Association and Department of Education Director Tom Kimbrell all said they are concerned the bill could lead to situations where districts won’t receive enough funding to provide an adequate education to those students who do attend public school.

RAPISTS' CUSTODY RIGHTS

The House unanimously approved a bill that would strip rapists of any custody rights upon conviction when the rape results in a pregnancy.

House Bill 1002, proposed by Rep. John Edwards, D-Little Rock, would eliminate all rights to custody and visitation immediately after the father's rape conviction. It passed 96-0.

Edwards said that he has amended the bill to allow a mother to petition the court to reinstate custody rights of the father or obtain child-support payments.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The House Judiciary Committee passed a bill that would increase the penalties for human trafficking and provide resources for victims.

House Bill 1203, proposed by Rep. David Meeks, R-Conway, would make trafficking a minor for labor or sex a Class Y felony. Human trafficking is currently a Class A felony.

The bill also creates defenses against charges of prostitution and sexual solicitation for victims of human trafficking and allows victims of human trafficking to bring civil action against former traffickers.

House panel rejects school-consolidation bill (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LITTLE ROCK — An Arkansas House panel has rejected a proposal to change the criteria for determining when a school district should face consolidation.

By a 5-12 vote, the House Education Committee on Tuesday turned down a bill that would change the formula for calculating the number of students in a school district for the purposes of consolidation.

School districts with fewer than 350 students are currently placed on the consolidation list.

Democratic Rep. James Ratliff was proposing to include home-schooled students in that count. He said the bill would help prevent rural school districts with low student populations from being consolidated.

Opponents argued that allowing school districts to have fewer than 350 students would create funding challenges and could expose the state to lawsuits about the adequacy of education.

Hot Springs High School named STEM contest finalist (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

Hot Springs High School is among 15 across the U.S. that have been named finalists in a contest focusing on how science and mathematics can be used to help the environment in their communities.

In August, more than 1,600 schools entered Samsung's "Solve for Tomorrow" contest, by writing essays on how science, technology, engineering and math, or STEM, can be used.

Mike Vincent, Hot Springs High School environmental and spatial technology facilitator, said the decision to enter was last-minute.

Vincent wasn't aware of the contest until the week of the entry deadline, when a parent told him about an e-mail she received about the competition.

"It's interesting: It almost didn't happen, and we're in the finals now," Vincent said.

Seventy-five semifinalists were chosen, with 25 each from urban, suburban and rural areas.

Hot Springs and the other semifinalists received a Samsung camcorder, laptop and Adobe editing software to create a video for the next part of the competition, which determined the finalists.

Hot Springs High School's video can be seen [here](#).

Each finalist school received \$40,000 in technology. The grand-prize winners will each receive \$110,000 in prizes from Samsung, the Adobe Foundation and DirecTV.

Three grand-prize winners will be named by a group of judges at the South by Southwest Interactive Conference in March. A fourth grand-prize winner will be chosen by Samsung employees, and a fifth winner, the Community Choice Award Winner, will be chosen by a public online vote.

"We are very excited about our finalists and congratulate them for the creativity and hard work they showed through their entries," Executive Vice President of Corporate Strategy of Samsung Electronics North America David Steel said in a statement.

Vincent said the students are excited about the distinction of being finalists in the competition.

"After viewing other videos, they really feel like they have a decent chance of winning one of the top five spots," Vincent said.

The online voting is open until 10:59 p.m. Central time on March 4. Voting is available at www.samsung.com/solvefortomorrow and the Samsung Facebook Solve tab at www.facebook.com/SamsungUSA.