

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

April 6, 2013

Dollarway to host public forums (Pine Bluff Commercial)

The Dollarway School District will hold two public forums next week. The first will be held at 6 p.m. Tuesday at Altheimer Martin Elementary School, 106 Orchard in Altheimer. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the future of the Altheimer Martin Elementary School.

The second public forum will be held at 6 p.m. Thursday at James Matthews Elementary School, 4501 Dollarway Road. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the future of the Arkansas Better Chance Pre-K in the Dollarway Schools.

Fort Smith Superintendent Donates Stipend For Scholarships (Southwest Times Record, Fort Smith)

The leader of both Fort Smith schools and administrators across the country is earmarking a stipend of thousands for high school graduates seeking higher education.

For his role as this year's president of the American Association of School Administrators, Fort Smith Superintendent Benny Gooden receives a stipend of \$50,000.

Minus expenses for the superintendent, Fort Smith School Board and other staff to attend an installation ceremony in Washington, D.C., \$38,056 is left, according to Gooden.

He proposed the remaining funds be deposited into an endowment scholarship account with the Fort Smith Public School Foundation, and that proceeds from the investment income be awarded as scholarships "to deserving graduates in need to further their higher education."

"This truly represents 'found money,'" he said. "I think we'll have an opportunity to help some needy young people."

Gooden noted the scholarship will represent "some vestige of the fact I had the privilege to serve as AASA president."

"It's my intention to add to that as time goes on," he added.

The Fort Smith School Board has granted his request to create the scholarship account.

In July, Gooden was installed as president of the 14,000-member AASA at a ceremony in Washington, D.C., before close to 200 people including his family and six members of the school board.

The AASA represents senior executives of public school districts around the country.

Gooden, superintendent of the Fort Smith School District since 1986, was president of the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators from 2007-08. An AASA member since 1980, Gooden was honored in 1992 as Arkansas' superintendent of the year.

UCA thinks retention (Log Cabin Democrat, Conway)

Student retention and graduation rates became the focus of much of the discussion during the UCA Board of Trustees budget workshop on Friday, April 5.

The board met to discuss the budget for the next academic year, 2013-2014. They reviewed a variety of potential budget scenarios that included tuition increases and other budget modifications. During their discussion, the board also discussed current and potential graduation and retention rates for students.

"We are here to educate and graduate students, and we can't do that if we can't keep them here," Victor Green, chair of the Board of Trustees said. "That's one of our primary goals moving forward."

Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Steve Runge reviewed future outlooks for increasing student numbers, as well as goals the university might set over the next decade.

"It's important to me that we set some goals that are aggressive," Brad Lacy, member of the Board of Trustees, said during the discussion.

Runge cited greater access to online learning, such as more programs that are offered fully online, as a means to increase student numbers. He also noted that several undergraduate programs are poised for growth over the next few years.

"Overall, this is the most important thing we can do for Arkansas," Lacy said, adding that increasing the numbers of Arkansas with undergraduate degrees directly relates to economic and health statistics.

Raising the rates of students staying and graduating from the university also helps build the school's coffers. "It addresses a lot of funding issues that we have that would allow us to pay our employees more and do some other things," Lacy added.

The board will adopt a budget for the 2013-2014 fiscal year at their May meeting.

Prior to the start of the workshop, the Board of Trustees also took the following actions:

· Approved a resolution allowing the university to enter into an exclusive contract with Adidas. The contract would allow the university to purchase all athletic apparel, footwear, and uniforms from the company. The five-year contract begins on July 1, 2013. The board voted unanimously.

· Approved a resolution to move forward with a feasibility study to obtain a loan to pay the UCA Foundation, Inc., for skyboxes and weight training facility. The university can now seek approval from the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board to obtain a loan of no more than \$3 million to pay for the skyboxes and weight training facility. Currently, the UCA Foundation, Inc., holds the construction indebtedness, and the university pays the foundation. Six board members voted for approval. One member, Elizabeth Farris, abstained.

House passes 'digital learning' bill for public schools (Northwest Arkansas Times)

The Arkansas House voted Friday afternoon to pass a bill that would require a class in each public school in the state to contain one digital component.

House Bill 1785 passed 84-1 during the session.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Dan M. Douglas, R-Bentonville, is intended to encourage schools to use online elements to further students' educations.

"I got passionate when I heard these opportunities ... can help [high-school dropouts]," Douglas said when addressing the legislature. Douglas added that it will benefit students "in real-life situations."

The bill will now go to the Senate Education Committee for approval, followed by a Senate vote.

If the bill is implemented, it would start as a pilot program. After the trial period, all public school districts and public charter schools would be required to have one digital learning course in their curricula starting in the 2014-15 school year.

Speaking against the bill, Rep. John Payton, R-Wilburn, said the online component would be tough to implement in certain schools that have limited or no Internet access.

"The problem with this bill is it has great intentions and needs to be done, but it's going to put a huge burden on those school districts," he said.

Rep. Ann V. Clemmer, R-Benton, and Rep. Mark Biviano, R-Searcy, spoke for the bill.

"Kids get to college and they don't know how to attach a document," Clemmer said.

Lawmakers twice vote down bill to save Weiner High School (KAIT, Channel 8, Jonesboro)

WEINER, AR (KAIT) – A bill that would have prevented the closure of Weiner High School has failed in the Arkansas House.

Lawmakers voted twice on House Bill 1938, which would have halted any school closures for two years pending studies in consolidated school districts.

It was first voted down Wednesday, but failed again after it was brought back for reconsideration on Thursday.

Weiner High School supporters had lobbied legislators hard to approve the bill, which was filed after the State Board of Education decided March 11 to close their school.

"At first, I was heartbroken. Now, I'm mad," Michelle Cadle said. "We're going to dig our claws in and we're going to hang on, and we're just more determined than ever before."

Defeat is unacceptable to Cadle and the others fighting to keep the doors of Weiner High School open.

The proposal, sponsored by Republican Rep. Randy Alexander of Springdale, stated that "the state board would not administratively reorganize a school district or school campus...after January 1, 2013, and before April 30, 2015, for reasons other than academic distress, fiscal distress, or failure to comply with state accreditation standards."

The proposal fell two votes short of approval Thursday.

"I feel that only 49 stood for their convictions and for what was right for the state of Arkansas," Cadle said.

The bill would have ultimately benefited any schools in the state ordered to consolidate or annex under Act 60, which mandates that for a school or district with an enrollment of 350 students or less.

The Weiner School District consolidated with Harrisburg in 2010 after its enrollment fell below that threshold.

Cadle says the fight that she and her group called "Friends of Weiner School District" have waged has focused on ending Act 60, a policy that she says is misguided and harmful to small rural communities.

Thirty legislators decided to abstain Thursday from even voting on HB1938. That included Republican Rep. John Hutchison of Harrisburg, whose district includes Weiner.

Cadle says she believes people were threatening him ahead of the vote.

"That's wrong for people to put him in that position because the right thing to do was to push that green button and vote yes," she said. "He has a very troubled heart right now, and I think those people should be calling and apologizing to him."

Rep. Hutchison did not immediately return a request for comment.

Cadle and other supporters are now considering filing a lawsuit so that they can keep up the fight to save their school.

"We believed at the time that we were doing right by addressing this legislatively," Cadle said. "We tried to work with [lawmakers], and we feel like we were strong-armed and so obviously we still have the legal route to pursue."

Senate committee votes no on Bible-in-school bill (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

A bill that would codify the ability of a school district to adopt curriculum standards for an academic course on the Bible failed Friday to get out of a Senate committee.

House Bill 1017 by Rep. Denny Altes, R-Fort Smith, lost on a voice vote in the Senate Education Committee. Similar legislation died in the same committee in 2011.

The Arkansas effort coincides with a national trend to incorporate the Bible into public school instruction. At least five other states - Arizona, Georgia, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Texas - have passed similar legislation. North Carolina lawmakers also are considering a similar bill.

Supporters say that even though studying the Bible as a literary or historical document is already allowed in public schools, codifying it in state law would erase any doubts.

"A lot of public school boards and parents are unaware" that courses on the Bible can be taught in schools, said Sen. Gary Stubblefield, R-Branch, a former school board member, told the committee.

Through the years, they have been "led to believe you can't take a Bible to school, you can't pray in school," he said. "A lot of those things are legal."

He said interest in the Bible was profound, pointing to a recent series on the Bible on The History Channel that attracted 14 million viewers.

"The producers were asked why," Stubblefield said. "They said there was a real hunger for this type of study in the United States."

But critics contend the bill is unnecessary because school districts already can offer academic, nonsectarian courses on the Bible, subject to Arkansas Department of Education approval. Singling out the Bible in law over other religious texts, such as the Koran, may expose the state to litigation over the establishment clause of the U.S. Constitution, they say.

“Enshrining one [religious text] in the law and not another gives me pause,” said Sen. Joyce Elliott, D-Little Rock, a former teacher. “When we start picking and choosing, I think as a legislative body, we should be careful about that.”

Scott Richardson, an assistant Arkansas attorney general, said, “We don’t think there is any reason to open the state to litigation, especially when school districts can do this, and are doing this, right now.”

Three of the state’s 239 school districts are now approved to offer elective courses on the Bible, according to Phyllis Stewart, chief of staff for the Education Department.

They are Cabot, which offers a course on the Bible and its influence; Little Rock, which offers a course on the Bible as literature and in literature; and Foreman, which offers a course on the Bible as literature.

Applications have been filed but not approved by three other districts: Jonesboro Westside, Texarkana and Sheridan, Stewart said in an e-mail.

Department staff confirmed that no school district had applied to teach a course on any other religious text besides the Bible, she said.

Altes’ legislation would allow the “non-sectarian, nonreligious academic study of the Bible and its influence on literature, art, music, culture and politics.” The elective course would have to offer “academic rigor and [meet] curriculum standards of other elective courses approved by the state board and requirements of the Arkansas Constitution and United States Constitution.”

Whoever would teach the course would have to be licensed to teach in Arkansas and couldn’t be assigned to teach the course based on any “religious test, profession of faith or lack of faith, prior or present religious affiliation or lack of affiliation or criteria involving particular beliefs or lack of beliefs about the Bible.”

The Little Rock School District believes it is the first district in the state to offer a course on the Bible as literature, first writing its curriculum in 2001, said Pamela Smith, the district’s communications director.

“Ours is described as a well-defined ... literature class,” she said in an e-mail. “We do not teach any religion. It is to study the themes that are alluded to throughout all literature and arts; we look at the sonnets, the poetry, the themes in the Bible and then more modern pieces of literature based on the themes.”

Teachers never refer to religious beliefs or any discussion about denominations, she said. The Bible isn’t even used as a textbook.

Instead teachers rely on a textbook “designed to teach this exact class,” Smith said. “We attend to the government guidelines for religion in the public classroom and.... [respect] Separation of church and state, etc.”

The class is offered in several schools in the district, Smith added.

18 eStem instructors win grants for projects (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

Eighteen faculty members at eStem Public Charter Schools in Little Rock are recipients of the Spring 2013 Innovative Teaching Grants, announced John Bacon, chief executive officer of eStem Public Charter Schools.

The grants, which total \$5,000, are for interactive student projects that emphasize core academic concepts. Individual teachers were eligible for \$500 awards, and teacher teams could receive \$1,000 grants.

The recipients, along with the name and a brief description of their projects, are:

Chris Forster and Katie Stalcup, \$1,000 - Wii are Innovative - EAST lab students will build portable, multi-touch devices that are similar to interactive white boards. High school students will then teach kindergarten teachers and pupils to use the devices for instruction.

Teresa Munoz, \$500 - Seed Money - Sixth-graders will study plant growth from seed to sales. They will sell their product to the public to fund the next round of the project.

Ashley Cullum, \$500 - Mythological Film Festival - Students will work collaboratively and creatively to transfer writing, planning, editing, and publishing skills into a 21st Century genre film.

Laura McCammon and Ebony Wade, \$1,000 - K-8 Special Education Social and Functional Skills - This project will develop a replicable model for teachers to use in integrating students on the autism spectrum into regular classroom and social settings. Digital technology and specific social goals will be used to improve the quality of the educational experience for these students.

Sarper Turker, \$500 - eStem Mets Robotics - The purpose of this on-campus workshop is to provide hands-on experiences for students that mimic the opportunities they will encounter outside of school.

Mandy Ellis, \$500 - Experiencing Ellis Island - This project, based on the third-grade national Common Core literacy standards, is designed to engage students in lessons on American immigration in the early 20th century. The project will include simulating the Ellis Island experience as "immigrants" are screened and asked questions about their health, education level and career skills. The adult volunteer "screeners" will then decide if the student qualifies to immigrate to America.

Mary Smith, Anna Walthall, Lauren Kelso, Ashley Cullum, Cindy Kilpatrick, Rhonda Langrell, Emily Hester, Denies Matlock, Thom Asewicz, Faith White, \$1000 - eStem Community Voices - This project will develop and pilot 10 modules that engage upper-elementary and middle school pupils in literacy activities that promote respectful and responsible communities. The project will partner with Clinton School of Public Service and Just Communities of Arkansas. Student work will be shared in a community blog, and all activities will culminate in an event sponsored at Clinton School of Public Service.

The next round of competitive grants will be offered in August. The Innovative Teaching Grant Award is funded by money raised at the school's annual STEM Soiree event. This year's event is scheduled for May 11, and more information is available by calling the school at (501) 748-9269.

Desegregation hearings set (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

U.S. District Judge D. Price Marshall Jr., the presiding judge in the 30-year-old Pulaski County school desegregation lawsuit, on Friday announced dates for a series of court hearings to take place before the end of the year.

The topics of the various hearings fall into two categories: the Pulaski County Special School District's request to be released from court supervision of some of its desegregation efforts, and Arkansas' request to be released from the multimillion-dollar payments and other obligations imposed in a 1989 settlement agreement with the three districts in Pulaski County.

The first of the hearings on the Pulaski County Special District's request for partial unitary status and release from court supervision will focus on the district's efforts in the areas of special education. That court hearing will be Aug. 20-22.

The second hearing will be Sept. 3-5 and will focus on the district's steps to address the use of one-race classrooms in the 18,000-student system.

The third hearing will be Sept. 17-19 on whether the Pulaski County Special District has met its desegregation commitments in regard to staffing and personnel.

The fourth in the series of hearings will be Oct. 1-3 and will be on the district's compliance with the secondary gifted education program and Advanced Placement program provisions in its desegregation plan.

In the order, Marshall also sets dates for the parties to engage in "discovery," or collecting information for their cases, and he set dates for the parties to exchange their exhibits and the lists of people they will call as witnesses.

He scheduled a 1:30 p.m., pretrial conference meeting with the attorneys for Aug. 6.

The Joshua intervenors, who represent the black students in all three Pulaski County districts, are opposing Pulaski County Special's request for partial unitary status.

Regarding the state's motion to be relieved from the 1989 financial settlement agreement, a two-week hearing is set for Dec. 9-20.

A pretrial conference is scheduled for 9:30 a.m. Nov. 22.

As a result of the decades-old settlement, the state is now paying the three Pulaski County school districts a combined \$70 million a year, with about \$40 million going to the Little Rock School District for the operation of magnet schools and the majority-to-minority interdistrict student transfer program, as well as teacher health insurance and retirement costs.

The Little Rock School District is leading the opposition to the state's efforts to be released from the 1989 settlement.

The state has argued that it should be released in part because the Little Rock and North Little Rock districts have been declared unitary and released from court supervision of their desegregation efforts. Attorneys for the district have countered that the state must prove it has remedied its constitutional violations that resulted in the state payments.

District passes on 3 for principal job (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

BENTONVILLE - The Bentonville School District won't hire any of the three finalists interviewed for the Bentonville High School principal's job.

"We're exploring another option and we should know something early next week," said Galen Havner, district director of human resources.

Havner declined to release additional details Friday.

The finalists were Tracy Allen, principal of Sylvan Hills High School, part of the Pulaski County Special School District; Doug Marvin, an assistant principal at the Early Childhood Academy in the Sheldon School District in Houston, Texas; and Craig Smith, an assistant principal at Woodland Junior High in Fayetteville.

Bentonville High School is the largest high school in the state with about 3,900 students. Principal Kim Garrett is leaving at the end of the school year to take an assistant-superintendent job in Springdale.

Grant Lightle, a School Board member, served on one of the interview committees. He said the ideal candidate would have appropriate experience, skills and education, as well as a record of success in a similar role at a large secondary school with high levels of academics and student engagement.