

# ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

April 8, 2013

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## **Teachers Get Students Excited for Benchmark Exams (KARK, channel 4)**

*Video available at [http://arkansasmatters.com/fulltext/?nxd\\_id=651722](http://arkansasmatters.com/fulltext/?nxd_id=651722)*

JACKSONVILLE, AR - "We hope the students will, rock the test!" say Susan McClain and Jessica Scott. Both are interventionists in math and literacy for Murrell Taylor Elementary School, a school that's been classified by the state as a focus school.

"That means our scores are generally lower," explains McClain.

They work with teachers and alongside students who may have had trouble with the state's benchmark test in the past, but McClain and Scott have a different approach to learning.

They made a YouTube video with students to the tune of Joan Jett's "I Love Rock n' Roll," with the lyrics changed to reflect the benchmark exam.

"As an educator I just feel sometimes the fun is just taken out of education," says Scott.

Doing well on tests these days requires more than having your pencils sharpened. These two believe you have to get the attention of students, and they work tirelessly at doing that.

"Testing can be stressful on our students," McClain says. "This just eased their nerves and calmed them and will help them take the test Monday," adds Scott.

They'll do whatever it takes to see the school's students do well.

"Bridge the achievement gap and get kids where they need to be," says McClain.

Even if that means donning spandex and pink wigs along the way.

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## **Trial set for ex-Bryant teacher charged in sex-with-student case (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)**

BENTON — A former Bryant High School teacher accused of having sex with a 17-year-old student will stand trial on sexual-assault charges in August, a judge ordered Monday.

Courtney Speer, 31, is facing six counts of second-degree sexual assault in the case, which was filed in October after her husband walked in on her with the juvenile, court records show.

Speer appeared with her attorney, Jack Lassiter, but didn't speak during the brief hearing and declined comment afterward. Judge Gary Arnold set the jury trial for Aug. 7-8 and also scheduled a June 10 hearing.

Speer, who had worked as a ninth-grade English teacher before resigning as charges were pending, previously entered an innocent plea.

According to an affidavit filed in Saline County Circuit Court, Bryant Police Department investigators questioned the 17-year-old victim, who acknowledged having sex with Speer multiple times at her home in Benton.

Speer's husband, also questioned by authorities, told detectives he returned home on Sept. 30, 2012, and found Speer and the 17-year-old both naked from the waist down in the couple's master bedroom, according to the affidavit.

Speer was formally charged Oct. 3. She resigned from the school district two days earlier.

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## **School-mill rises sought in Independence County (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)**

Two Independence County school districts are seeking millage increases Tuesday to help fund projects aimed at improving school security.

The Cedar Ridge School District - made up of campuses in Newark, Oil Trough and Cord in eastern Independence County - is seeking a 1-mill increase so administrators can hire a second resource officer and upgrade security cameras in buses and school buildings. The district now collects 38.2 mills.

Batesville School District is asking for a 1.25-mill increase to pay for the installation of magnetic key-card entrances to all buildings, security cameras, fencing and communication systems to the county sheriff's emergency dispatch. The district now collects 38.75 mills.

The superintendents of both districts - Ann Webb at Cedar Ridge and Randy Willison at Batesville - said their plans to heighten security were tied to the fatal shooting in December of 20 children and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn.

"We live in a different world," Webb said. "We need more security at our schools."

About 50 people have cast votes daily since early voting began last Tuesday, an Independence County clerk's deputy said.

Willison said he made sure he was the first one to cast a ballot during early voting in his district.

"I got there and waited for them to open the first day," he said. "My position is that we need to do all we can for the safety of our students and the adults in our schools. We need to create an environment where kids can be safe and they can focus on learning."

If the 1-mill proposal passes in Cedar Ridge School District, the increase would generate about \$142,000 annually, Webb said. Home owners whose homes were assessed at \$100,000 would see a yearly tax increase of \$20, she said.

The funds would be used to hire an additional resource officer who could be stationed at the district's three campuses at various times.

"I watched reports about Newtown," Webb said. "The principal [at Sandy Hook Elementary] did everything right. They had the locked entrances and checked to see who was coming in."

She said an extra resource officer could deter problems at her school.

Webb has already seen the success of having an officer on her campus.

Resource officer Rob Leonard, who is also an Independence County sheriff's deputy, was working in his office at the high school in Newark at 3 a.m. Jan. 11, when he noticed smoke. When he investigated, he found the school's computer laboratory was on fire. Leonard called fire fighters, and they put the blaze out.

"We are a rural school district with three campuses in a 25-mile radius," Webb said. "Having another officer on the campus would help us."

In Batesville, where voters narrowly passed a countywide sales tax in November to help fund the county's 15 fire departments but turned down measures for the city's parks, streets and jail, Willison said the 1.25-mill increase would raise about \$300,000 each year. Owners of homes appraised at \$100,000 in the district would pay an additional \$25 a year in property taxes, Willison said.

If approved, the millage would fund salaries for four more resource officers and pay for additional security measures.

Willison, like Webb, was motivated to seek the increase after the Newtown shootings.

"The genesis was, 'What if it were to happen here?'" Willison said. "We made a list of things we should try to do. I soon wondered how we would pay for it, and a millage increase was the only way."

Plans call for installing magnetic key locks, audible alarms on all outside doors, "panic buttons" linked to the county's 911 center, additional cameras at each of the district's eight campuses and a security fence at the high school campus.

Both superintendents have touted the millage in the weeks leading to the election in public meetings and in news accounts in a local newspaper and on the radio.

"My position is that everyone is well-informed about this," Willison said. "We made it plain we're asking for a tax increase, and that may not be popular for everyone. But they know what it will pay for. I am leaving it up to the voters."

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## **Jacksonville gathers signatures for new school district (Little Rock Daily Record)**

The city of Jacksonville has begun a drive for signatures on a petition to form a new school district separate from the Pulaski County Special School District (PCSSD). City officials held a meeting at the Jacksonville Community Center to provide supporters of the new district with information about what needs to be done in order to implement the process of forming a new district. The community will need to collect between 2700 and 3000 signatures from qualified residents of the proposed area for the new school district. These signatures will go to the Arkansas Department of Education and will be used to support a case before a federal judge.

This new district would include the North Pulaski area, along with Jacksonville. Jacksonville Mayor Gary Fletcher stressed that he believes that North Pulaski and Jacksonville are part of the same community, and that for North Pulaski to remain a part of the PCSSD would unnecessarily divide the two communities. Fletcher said he expects the new district to be a "mid-sized school district" with between 4,500 and 4,700 students (compared to 16,000 in the PCSSD).

Proponents of creating a separate district believe that being a part of the PCSSD has had a negative impact on growth in the area, due partially to the fiscal issues that led to the PCSSD being taken over by the state, rather than run by the district. Fletcher brought up the issue of Air Force families who choose not to live in Jacksonville because schools in surrounding districts have better amenities and more modern facilities.

The new school district, if it becomes a reality, will be run by officials elected by voters within the district, and will operate just as other public school districts. Fletcher stressed the importance of accountability within schools on all levels: from teachers to students to administrators. Fletcher stated that he believes the new district will become a reality because it is what "makes sense for the children and the community."

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## **PCSSD Mom: Photo of Snoozing Students Results in Threats from School Staff (KARK, Channel 4)**

PULASKI COUNTY, AR -- The mother of a Pulaski County Special School District high school student believes a Facebook post meant to spotlight kids' educational needs ended up placing her daughter in the spotlight instead.

"It really aggravated me so I put it on Facebook," mom Amy Beard said, referring to the photo she posted last week. "I don't send my kids to school to sleep."

The photo she posted, with a call for other parents to take action, featured a classroom at Joe. T Robinson High School with students snoozing in their seats.

"My main concern is for the kids' education," she said. "That's the reason I wanted others to know. I wanted other parents to be aware of what was going on in class."

But that became secondary, she said, when her daughter called from school the next day.

"She called me upset and wanted to leave school, because a teacher had come up to her asking why she put it on Facebook," Beard said.

According to Beard, it went even further with students and staff comments ultimately leaving her 10th grade daughter anxious and uncomfortable.

"A teacher came up to her and said that snitches get stitches," Beard said. "And it really bothered her for a teacher to say that."

The Pulaski County Special School District spokesperson told us the allegations from the mother aren't true.

According to the district, when it comes to explaining the sleeping students, a substitute was teaching class that day and had completed the lesson. That left free time at the end of the period. Still, the spokesperson told us, the issue was reported to the principal and human resources to allow for a follow up with the substitute.

"I went to school there and we weren't allowed to sleep," Beard said.

According to Beard, it isn't the first complaint she's had about the educational environment of Joe T. Robinson High School, but it may be the last. She's debating removing her daughter from the school after this experience.

"I'm not saying my daughter is perfect. She's been suspended for a fight she was in. I don't think any student is perfect," Beard said. "But I just can't imagine going to school in a situation like that, where fighting is common and the kids seem out of control."

According to the Pulaski County School District handbook, student possession and use of cell phones are prohibited on school property.

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## **Eye Clinic Opens at Lavaca Schools (KFSM/KXNW Channel 5, Fort Smith)**

Lavaca Public Schools now has an optometrist on campus to go along with an already practicing medical clinic and dental office.

The school-based health project recently celebrated a two-year anniversary.

"By adding an optometrist to the clinic we can now truly educate the whole child by meeting their medical, mental, dental and optometric needs," said Cristi Cleveland, Lavaca Public School's Director of Coordinated School Health.

Dr. Hon Chung is an optometrist from Van Buren who will practice at the Lavaca Wellness Center every Monday, according to a news release from the school district. Students and teachers are able to be seen by medical personnel during a brief break from the school day without having to miss hours or even an entire day.

The Lavaca Eye Clinic is also a convenience to busy parents who work in other cities.

Patients should call (479) 674-4321 for an appointment. The school's wellness clinic is one of 14 school-based health centers in Arkansas.

Currently, the school is receiving \$525,000 in grant funding over a period of three years to support building the infrastructure for the Wellness Center.

The center is entering its third and final year of the grant.

Once the grant funding runs out, the doctors involved will pay rent/utilities to the district for the spaces occupied, creating a funding stream supporting the school, according to the school district.

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### **Bryant High offers concurrent credit (Little Rock Daily Record)**

Beginning in the fall of 2013, the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and the Bryant School District will pair up for a concurrent credit program, which will allow qualifying students to earn college and high school credits simultaneously. Concurrent classes will be taught on campus and will cost students \$50 per 3 credit hours. The additional cost of tuition for college credit hours (almost \$700 more than concurrent credit) will be taken care of by scholarships provided by the University, making the concurrent credit program a very smart financial move for students planning to later attend college.

In order to participate, students must submit their applications for the program with parent signatures to the front office at Bryant High School by April 30, and they must also complete UALR's online application. Students who intend to enroll in fall concurrent classes must also take one of the following tests: ACT, SAT, or Compass. Students must submit their scores from these examinations to both UALR and Bryant High School, and they must have taken the test by June 30, so that the schools receive a student's scores prior to August 1.

In order to qualify for concurrent credit classes, a student must have a Composite ACT score of 21 or a 3.0 Grade Point Average. Students must score at least a 19 on both reading and English, and a 21 in Mathematics in order to take concurrent math classes. Students who have a 3.0 but who do not qualify based on the Composite score of 21 may take the Compass Exam in an attempt to qualify. Guidelines surrounding SAT scores are not available as part of the High School's "Concurrent Credit New Student Packet," though this information may be available from either of the schools.

Grades earned in concurrent credit classes will be part of a student's permanent college transcripts, which means they will show up when a student applies to future colleges. Students are responsible for checking their UALR transcripts along with their high school report cards at the end of each semester.

It is also the student's responsibility to make sure they receive the appropriate college credit at the end of each semester by reporting any transcript inaccuracies immediately.

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## **Ed Board places one district on fiscal distress, two on academic distress (Pine Bluff Commercial)**

LITTLE ROCK — The state Board of Education on Monday placed one school district on fiscal distress status and two districts on academic distress.

The board also allowed an open-enrollment charter school to stop serving high school grades and approved the voluntary surrender of a conversion charter that it granted earlier this year.

In a voice vote, with no "no" votes heard, the board added the Hughes School District to the list of fiscally distressed districts because of repeated audit findings.

The board also voted to place the Lee County and Strong-Huttig districts on academic distress status. Again, no "no" votes were heard.

Under legislation that was signed into law by Gov. Mike Beebe last week and took effect immediately, school districts in fiscal or academic distress have five years to get out of that classification or face mandatory consolidation or annexation to one or more nearby districts. Previously, districts had two years to fix their problems.

Also Monday, the board voted unanimously to renew the charter of Covenant Keepers College Preparatory Charter School in Little Rock and allow the open-enrollment charter school to change its location from 8300 Geyer Springs Road to 5615 Geyer Springs Road and begin serving grades 6-8 instead of grades 6-12.

The school had request renewal of its charter for seven years, but the board granted renewal for three years.

The board also voted unanimously to accept the South Pike County School District's surrender of its charter for Murfreesboro High School. On Jan. 14, the board had granted the district's request to turn the high school into a conversion charter school, but on Feb. 2 the district's school board voted not to move forward with the charter school.

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## **Teacher Charged with Striking a Student Gets July Trial Date ((KFSM/KXNW Channel 5, Fort Smith)**

A July trial date was set Monday (April 8) for the former Benton County teacher accused of striking a student last year.

A jury trial is set to begin July 9 for Pamela H. Nelson, who has been charged with second-degree battery, a Class D felony, said Van Stone, Benton County prosecuting attorney.

Nelson, 57, appeared at a pretrial status hearing Monday before Benton County Circuit Judge Brad Karren. The jury trial is scheduled to be held in his Division 2 courtroom.

On Nov. 13, Nelson, a middle school choir and computer keyboarding teacher at the Benton County School of the Arts in Rogers, pleaded not guilty at her arraignment in Benton County Circuit Court to striking a student, officials said. Not guilty pleas are standard at arraignments to allow the case to proceed.

Nelson was arrested in October and was fired from the school after a 12-year-old male student said she hit him on the back. She was released from the Benton County Jail on a \$5,000 bond on Oct. 3, one day after being booked into jail, records show.

The board's decision in early October to fire Nelson, who was making \$33,000 annually in her first year teaching at that school, came at the recommendation of Superintendent Paul Hines. Hines has since announced he is stepping down from his post.

Nelson has denied striking the student.

"I would never strike a child. I've been a teacher for over 30 years," she said. "I have children, and I would never strike a child."

The Rogers Police Department issued a news release at the time, saying it received a report of suspected child abuse at the school. The Arkansas State Police Child Abuse Hot Line was notified of the incident, the release states.

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## **Help on the Way for Low Performing Schools in Arkansas (KARK, Channel 4)**

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Help is on the way for low performing schools in Arkansas.

Today, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced that Arkansas will receive \$5.3 million to continue efforts to turn around its persistently lowest achieving schools through the Department's School Improvement Grant (SIG) program.

Arkansas is one of 13 states that will receive SIG funding. Six of the states will receive awards to run a new competition for previously unfunded schools, and seven states, including Arkansas, will receive continuation funds for the third year of implementing a SIG model.

In addition to Arkansas, other states receiving continuation awards are: Delaware--\$1.4 million; Florida--\$26.8 million; Montana--\$1.5 million; New Jersey--\$10.4 million; Oregon--\$5.4 million; and Washington--\$7.8 million. The states receiving new awards are: Georgia--\$17.2 million; Illinois--\$22.2 million; Kansas--\$4 million; Massachusetts--\$7.2 million; Nevada--\$3.8 million; and North Carolina--\$14.3 million.

"When schools fail, our children and our neighborhoods suffer," Duncan said. "Turning around our lowest-performing schools is hard work but it's our responsibility. We owe it to our children, their families and the broader community. These School Improvement Grants are helping some of the lowest-achieving schools provide a better education for students who need it the most."

Grants are awarded to State Educational Agencies (SEAs) that then make competitive subgrants to local educational agencies (LEAs) that demonstrate the greatest need for the funds and the strongest commitment to use them to provide adequate resources, in order to substantially raise student achievement in their lowest-performing schools.

Under the Obama Administration, the SIG program has invested up to \$2 million per school at more than 1,300 of the country's lowest-performing schools. Early findings show positive momentum and progress in many SIG schools. Findings also show that many schools receiving SIG grants are improving, and some of the greatest gains have been in small towns and rural communities.

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## **Beebe announces 35 appointments to boards, commissions (Pine Bluff Commercial)**

LITTLE ROCK — Gov. Mike Beebe announced 35 appointments to state boards and commissions Monday.

Those appointed:

— Joy Blankenship, Pine Bluff, reappointed to the Arkansas Motor Vehicle Commission. Appointment expires Jan. 14, 2020.

— Ronald Laurent, Pine Bluff, reappointed to the Arkansas Project Graduation Commission. Appointment expires August 20, 2014.

— Ray Vester, Stuttgart, reappointed to the State Plant Board. Appointment expires March 17, 2015.

— Mary Anne Salmon, North Little Rock, to the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Council. Appointment expires May 1, 2015. Replaces Bob Burns.

— Liz Adams, Maumelle, reappointed to the Arkansas Independent Living Council. Appointment expires Feb. 1, 2016.

— Andy Altom, Little Rock, reappointed to the Child Welfare Agency Review Board. Appointment expires March 1, 2017.

— James "Richard" Bailey, Harrison, to the Auctioneers Licensing Board. Appointment expires April 15, 2017. Replaces James Shaddox.

— Josh Blevins, Little Rock, reappointed to the State Board of Private Career Education. Appointment expires April 15, 2020.

- Dr. Charles Bower, Little Rock, reappointed to the Universal Newborn Hearing, Screening, Tracking and Intervention Advisory Board. Appointment expires Jan. 14, 2016.
- Rick Bransford, Lonoke, reappointed to the State Plant Board. Appointment expires March 17, 2015.
- Kari Coffman, Barling, to the Arkansas HIV/AIDS Minority Task Force. Appointment expires Feb. 1, 2014. Replaces Sylvana Niciteretse.
- Lowell Coomer, Fort Smith, to the Arkansas Home Inspector Registration Board. Appointment expires Jan. 26, 2015. Replaces Daniel Broughton.
- Al Davis, Little Rock, reappointed to the Arkansas Fire Protection Licensing Board. Appointment expires April 1, 2018.
- Dr. John Dornhoffer, Little Rock, reappointed to the Universal Newborn Hearing, Screening, Tracking and Intervention Advisory Board.  
Appointment expires Jan. 14, 2016.
- Adren Duncan, Little Rock, reappointed to the Arkansas Independent Living Council. Appointment expires Feb. 1, 2016.
- Charles Flynn, Little Rock, reappointed to the Child Welfare Agency Review Board. Appointment expires March 1, 2017.
- Gary Dan Futrell, Nashville, reappointed to the Arkansas Motor Vehicle Commission. Appointment expires Jan. 14, 2020.
- Jan Haven, Forrest City, to the East Arkansas Community College Board of Trustees. Appointment expires Dec. 31, 2018. Replaces Oral Edwards.
- Carl “Ned” Hendrix, Winthrop, to the Board of Trustees of the State Police Retirement System. Appointment expires July 1, 2019. Replaces Kirk Bradshaw.
- Brent Howton, Palestine, reappointed to the East Arkansas Community College Board of Trustees. Appointment expires Dec. 31, 2018.
- Sheriff Bobby May, Forrest City, reappointed to the East Arkansas Community College Board of Trustees. Appointment expires Dec. 31, 2018.
- Ronald Ocker, Van Buren, to the Burial Association Board. Appointment expires Dec. 31, 2015. Replaces David Powell Jr.
- Terry Lee Purvis, Fouke, to the Arkansas Division of Volunteerism Advisory Council. Appointment expires Jan. 7, 2016. Replaces Sherry Bell.

- Mahdee Raiees-Dana, Mount Pleasant, to the Arkansas Independent Living Council. Appointment expires Feb. 1, 2016. Replaces Brenda Stinebuck.
- Dr. Jennifer Rigsby, Maumelle, reappointed to the Universal Newborn Hearing, Screening, Tracking and Intervention Advisory Board. Appointment expires Jan. 14, 2016.
- Dr. Duane Thomas, Siloam Springs, reappointed to the Veterinary Medical Examining Board. Appointment expires March 1, 2018.
- Eric Treat, Conway, reappointed to the State Rehabilitation Council. Appointment expires Feb. 1, 2016.
- Dr. Keith Vire, Springdale, to the State Rehabilitation Council. Appointment expires Feb. 1, 2016. Replaces Lynn Carver.
- John Wyrick, Mabelvale, reappointed to the Arkansas State Spinal Cord Commission. Appointment expires Jan. 14, 2023.
- David Zakrzewski, North Little Rock, reappointed to the Petroleum Storage Tanks Advisory Council. Appointment expires Dec. 31, 2016.

To the Criminal Detention Facility Review Committee:

Judicial District #1

- Bryant Wilson, Helena-West Helena. Replaces Cecilia Baker.

Judicial District #8 South

- Deborah Veon, Texarkana, reappointment.

Judicial District #11 West

- Dr. Kaleybra Morehead, Pine Bluff, reappointment.

Judicial District #14

- Lucy Mothershead, Flippin, reappointment.

Judicial District #17

- Brenda Pruitt, Judsonia, reappointment.

These appointments expire Jan. 14, 2017.

