

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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New Safety Procedures Considered for El Dorado School District (KARK, Channel 4)

Video available at http://myarklamiss.com/fulltext?nxd_id=204172

EL DORADO, AR - A new safety procedure called "Hall Pass" is something that El Dorado school officials will be considering as part of their efforts to step up the district's school safety.

The new procedure will require any school visitors to enter their names into a computer database, where it will show if they have a criminal history, before entering the building.

School district safety director Nelson Post says that the program is an important preventative measure for school safety.

"We feel like we need to improve our preventative- those things that we can do to prevent that occurrence and "hall pass" is one of those things," Post says.

Some of the other things that the El Dorado School District has already implemented to improve school safety includes locking all of the doors to the schools except for the main entrance, upgrading the classroom locks and upgrading cameras, as well as conducting a safety assessment on the schools.

"We're wanting to not just have a wide open campus where anybody at anytime can come into that building," Post explains.

Post says that the new safety measures being considered aren't expensive. However, restructuring the schools' layout plan will be the expensive part of incorporating Hall Pass, but the district believes the expense is worth it.

"There probably isn't a higher priority than school and student safety, so the district is committed to it," says Post.

The El Dorado School District superintendent says he will recommend the new safety procedures to the school board.

The board will take up the new procedures at a future meeting.

Watson Chapel board hears about new breakfast program (Pine Bluff Commercial)

The Watson Chapel School District Board of Directors was urged to consider adopting a new student meal plan with a history of increasing the number of children who eat breakfast during its regular monthly meeting Monday night.

Vivian Nicholson with the Share Our Strength No Kid Hungry Campaign told the board that the program has been adopted in a number of other school districts in Arkansas and that its has the full backing of Gov. Mike Beebe and Arkansas Department of Education Commissioner Tom Kimbrell.

“The Arkansas Alternate Breakfast Program includes Breakfast in the Classroom, which is most used in elementary school, Grab and Go, which is popular with middle school students, and the Second Chance Program, which gives high school students who otherwise would not get breakfast the opportunity to do so,” Nicholson said.

Nicholson said that according to data from the 2011-2012 school year only 20 percent of Watson Chapel students who get either free or reduced price lunches ate breakfast.

“Under the alternate breakfast program we want to serve 50 to 70 percent of these students,” Nicholson said. “Students that eat breakfast every day do better in school according to the research that has been done.”

Board president Sandra C. Boone asked how much money the district would have to pay to take part in the program.

“The only cost component involved goes to buying supplies,” Nicholson said. “And those supplies are paid for with non-competitive grants that we help the district apply for. You would actually get more food under this program due to increased participation rates and since the district receives reimbursement for these meals the district actually ends up with more money by taking part in this program.”

Nicholson said the program does not require additional staff since the meals are not eaten in the cafeteria.

“We do advise that a district either utilize this program or stick with the program they have as opposed to trying to do both because that would increase your costs,” Nicholson said.

Property offer

District superintendent Danny Hazelwood told the board that the owner of a piece of property located at Oakwood and Sulphur Springs Road is interested in selling it to the school district.

"This is the land that the owner had asked the planning commission to rezone commercial last year and that the district opposed," Hazelwood said. "He sent me a letter Friday offering to sell us the property and the house on it for \$125,000 plus taxes and closing costs."

Hazelwood told the board that he did not recommend moving toward a purchase of the land.

"I don't believe the district is in a position to spend \$125,000 on a piece of property that we don't have a use for," Hazelwood said. "It would not be beneficial to us, I don't think."

The board appeared to agree with Hazelwood's position.

Personnel

The board approved Hazelwood's recommendation to renew the contracts of all certified staff except for those retiring or resigning for the 2013-2014 academic year; and to hire Dorothy Jean York as a substitute cafeteria worker.

Hazelwood received retirement notices from Pam Bennett, Gwendolyn Peebles, Jeannie Eastwood, Donna Kerr and Rita Smith.

Hazelwood received a letter of resignation from Sam Hill.

Finances

Hazelwood said the district received \$1,946,583 in March and spent \$1,957,388; leaving an ending balance of \$8,483,662.

Board communications

Board vice president Robin Barker praised Watson Chapel High School students for their performance of Nifty Fifties and the staff and students of Watson Chapel Junior High School for the Benchmark Blowout they held last week.

Boone said she had recently spoken with Watson Chapel alumnus Adam Ladd.

"I spoke to Adam recently," Boone said. "He is a state boxing champion and he is coaching boxing at the Merrill Center Monday through Thursday at 6 p.m. He is doing it as a service to the youth of Pine Bluff and he encourages anyone who is interested to stop by."

No Track For Maumelle High Students (KLRT, Fox 16)

Tevonshe Hines, ran track at Oak Grove, now he brings his sprinting skills to Maumelle High.

"We work pretty hard over here," said Hines.

His teammate Caroline Sweet is projected to go to state in the 800 meters.

"It's exciting as a 9th grader that I have that chance," said Sweet.

They along with 73 other students make up the Maumelle High School Track and Field team.

Head Coach Grover Garrison said a record number this year, 175 students tried out, 75 made the cut.

"I think the kids were able to see we do a lot of training, some of them want to improve themselves and I think they saw someone whose willing to put in the extra time, on the weekends to reach their goals," added Garrison.

The state championship is the height they hope to reach, but will do it without a track to practice on.

"It hurts because a lot of times when you try to explain some things pertaining to an event, it's hard for the kids to really envision what you're saying," said Garrison.

"We all gonna try our best anyways, but without the track, I think it pushes us to work harder to prove you don't have to have the facility to be the best," said Sweet.

So they modify, from sprinting and jumping hurdles on the hardwood, to practicing passing the baton on the blacktop.

Deb Roush, Public Information Officer, for Pulaski County Special School District, said it's a funding issue.

"Maumelle High School was built just two years ago and in the final planning stages there were some financial cuts that had to made, unfortunately the track was one of those," said Roush.

"Maybe Maumelle High will one day get a track, but whether they do or not, I hope we go to state and we win it all, we just strive to be the best, with or without the track," added Hines.

Hughes School District labeled fiscally distressed (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

The Arkansas Board of Education on Monday classified the Hughes School District as a district in "fiscal distress" because of audit findings of financial mismanagement.

The board also classified the Lee County and Strong-Huttig school systems as districts in "academic distress" because fewer than 50 percent of their students scored at proficient or better levels on state exams in recent years.

Each of the three districts must now work with the Arkansas Department of Education to show improvement or face state takeover or reconstitution of their districts.

State law has permitted state takeover of a distressed district at any time but required state action after two years. The law has been adjusted during the current legislative session to allow a troubled district to remain in the distress program for up to five years if determined necessary by the Education Board.

The 389-student Hughes district was cited in its 2012 state audit for problems that included failing to prevent, detect and correct accounting errors totaling more than \$1.1 million in the district's general fund and exceeding its Title I federal funds budget by more than the allowable 10 percent without state Department of Education approval.

Besides Hughes, other districts classified as fiscally distressed are Alpena, Bismarck, Brinkley, Cutter-Morning Star, Drew Central, Hartford, Helena-West Helena, Hermitage, Mineral Springs, Pulaski County Special and Western Yell County.

The 427-student Strong-Huttig district in Union County and the 920-student Lee County school system are the first districts to be given the the state's academic-distress label in several years. That's because the state Education Board recently strengthened the definition for the academic distress designation.

In Lee County, fewer than half of students -47.64 percent - achieved at a proficient level or their grade level on state tests. That's an average for the past three years.

In Strong-Huttig, 45.44 percent of students - also less than half of test-takers - did the same.

NRA school violence study fails to provide practical solutions (Pine Bluff Commercial, Commentary by Roy Ockert)

The National Rifle Association rolled out its hired gun, former Arkansas Congressman Asa Hutchinson, last week to present a \$1 million study done in the wake of the December grade school massacre at Newtown, Conn. To no one's surprise, the study said we need to have more guns in schools to prevent similar tragedies.

The best recommendation in the study says that schools should use more school resource officers — sworn police officers — to improve school safety. Several Jonesboro area schools have used SROs, in collaboration with law enforcement agencies, since the 1998 shooting at Westside Middle School, one of the first of many such tragedies.

The weakness of the study, titled "The National School Shield," could be attributed, in part, to the fact that not a single member of the 12-man task force (yes, all men) that produced it is an educator. Several educators, as well as the Los Angeles School District and the National Association of School Resource Officers, are listed as contributors.

SROs do much more than guard against outsiders trying to wreak havoc in our schools. On a daily basis they get to know the students, build relationships that lead to better understanding of law enforcement and deal with violence and other crimes within the schools.

We'd do well to put an SRO in every school. Unfortunately, that's not going to happen because we're reluctant to pay the costs.

As pointed out in the NRA study, the Clinton administration created the Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) in 1994, partly in reaction to school violence. A key program in the initiative was called Cops in Schools (CIS), which beginning in 1999 helped place more than 6,500 specially trained police officers in schools around the country.

That program worked well, but the Bush administration had other priorities, and funding was cut in 2006. While we were cutting taxes and fighting two wars in foreign countries, our schools were left to seek funding for maintaining their SROs. Some, including Jonesboro, were able to work something out; others didn't.

CIS needed to be expanded. Instead it was reduced.

The Newtown Middle School had an SRO on duty on Dec. 14, and he was one of the first three police officers to reach the scene of the massacre. If Sandy Hook Elementary School had had an SRO, maybe some of the 20 first graders and six adults would be alive today.

But the NRA offers no help for funding more SRO positions, instead simply acknowledging some efforts to obtain local funding.

Instead, "The National School Shield" offers 10 findings as the basis for eight specific recommendations for schools and school districts to take action on their own, most of which are not new.

One finding, the study asserts, is that school staff members can be allowed to carry firearms "in order to provide an additional level of protection for the students and staff in the event of a violent incident on school property.

Even that suggestion sounds rather lukewarm: "The school staff generally receives authorization from law enforcement as a reserve deputy or authorized security officer, even though the training is inconsistent and often inadequate." The study offers a model state law to provide for the arming of school staff members.

Of course, the ideal law would require training such personnel and conducting background checks before entrusting them with guns on campus. At least the NRA task force backed off NRA Executive Director Wayne LaPierre's ridiculous suggestion that parents and other volunteers might serve as school guards.

However, as Hutchinson knows well, our national system of background checks is woefully inadequate. It does not require checks to be done when gun purchases are completed at gun shows or through the media. Worse, the FBI system does not even include data about people judged as mentally ill in 10 states, including Arkansas, and such information from other states is often slow and incomplete.

In other words, someone like Adam Lanza might have passed a background check to become an armed school guard.

Yet the NRA opposes expanding our national system of background checks for gun purchases. Even the NRA's hired gun knows that's a hypocritical stand. In an interview with CNN after presenting the study, Hutchinson said in answer to a question, "Yes. Absolutely. I'm open to expanding background checks."

If you can't be sure the people you're arming on a school campus are neither criminals nor insane, you're not providing a solution but rather a recipe for disaster.

And even if the school guard is properly trained and screened, you're still offering a half-baked security measure. The person you're arming, whether a teacher, administrator or janitor, is going to have other duties that may interfere with carrying a gun, even a small handgun, or more than a minimum supply of ammunition. That's some protection, but not much.

Most of the school shooters have been well armed, much better than a school guard would be, and they operate with the advantage of surprise on their side.

A much better idea is to find the funding to expand greatly the number of school resource officers. Is there a better use of our taxpayer dollars than to protect our children and grandchildren?

Note: The full NRA study can be found at www.nra.org.

School district offering free breakfast for benchmark testing week (Channel 40/29, Fort Smith-Fayetteville)

Video available at <http://www.4029tv.com/news/arkansas/river-valley/School-district-offering-free-breakfast-for-benchmark-testing-week/-/14498626/19657952/-/15fd19/-/index.html>

Students in Arkansas will begin a full week of benchmark testing.

Fort Smith Public Schools officials hope their students will arrive early this week for free breakfast.

Teachers and students all across the area spent the last few weeks getting ready for the state's benchmark test.

A school official said this yearly test provides an assessment on how well their students are learning in the classroom.

New this year, Fort Smith Public Schools, is offering free breakfasts at their elementary schools.

Officials hope students are fired up for the week of testing.

"Students were able to write skits and songs, so we try to put a fun theme to it so the children know that it's –you know we can have fun with it. So, hopefully that helps with anxiety," said Fairview Elementary Principal Peggy Walter.

Students who prepared for this week's exam said they're excited about the test.

"The benchmark test is where you have to show what you've learned throughout the year," said Fairview Elementary fifth-grade student Jykeriyah Hardwick.

Walter said the free breakfast will allow students to eat a healthy meal before they go into testing.

"This is a great incentive to get the kids here early, get them ready, get them prepared to do their best," said Walter.

Walter said parents need to exercise with their kids when they get home. In addition to exercise, she said a good night's rest helps with the next day of testing.

Oklahoma schools will begin the core of their testing Wednesday, April 10.

Awarding upcoming teachers (Log Cabin Democrat, Conway)

University of Central Arkansas student Kelsey Randell has been named a Nancy Larson Foundation scholar and awarded a \$1,000 scholarship for her academic record and community service, according to a news release.

Randell is among seven recipients selected from the hundreds of applicants received by the foundation.

The Nancy Larson Foundation supports students majoring in elementary education across the country by awarding scholarships to deserving students each year.

While attending UCA, Randell has made the Dean's List and also has been named a Presidential Scholar. In addition to becoming certified in Early Childhood Education, Randell has tutored at a local elementary school, volunteered at a hospital and worked at a day care.

"Kelsey is the type of aspiring teacher that we want to nurture and support.

"Our classrooms need intelligent, energetic, young educators who can provide the best possible learning environment for elementary students," said Nancy Larson, who established the foundation in 2006.

Larson is the author of two nationally successful curriculum programs: "Nancy Larson Science" and "Saxon Math K-4."

Juniors, seniors and graduate students who have declared an elementary education major are invited to submit a personal story about what three traits they believe they have that will make them an excellent teacher. Applicants also are asked to include community service activities and experiences they have had working with children.

Larson, a former teacher and curriculum director, has dedicated her life to advancing elementary education. Her original “Saxon Math K-4” program was developed because teachers needed a classroom-tested math program.

Letters: NEA Forgetting About Students (Southwest Times Record, Letter to the Editor)

Unions were once very necessary. Union membership is rapidly decreasing for several reasons, but mainly because of corruption in leadership. Members, in general, do not condone violence and unfair practices. How fair is it for a person to pay dues that are, in turn, given to a corrupt political party that you don’t support and whose politics are anti-Biblical?

I was once a member of perhaps the largest union in our country, the National Education Association. It has become too large and too powerful. The NEA has largely become an advocate for its members and is doing, in my opinion, very little for the education of children and youth. Its leadership is far left, or about even with the president, and we can all see the kinds of people he has chosen. I would like to see the teachers abandon the NEA and form an association of educators whose only focus is on the education and welfare of their students.

Does the Bible have anything to say about unions? Matthew 20:13-15 tells about employer/employee relations. Matthew 21 and Mark 12 tell how laborers united, then threatened to take over the company that pays their wages. Those thugs destroyed their own livelihood. Could unions be the greatest reason that the economy of the U.S. has gone south?

The Bible, my authority for all of life, has many other instances of people uniting for corrupt reasons and practices. Matthew 26 is the most notable, using union-style tactics by a mob in the arrest, false accusation and murder of Jesus Christ.

I received a letter from an Arkansas Education Association aspirant for the presidency here in Arkansas. This person listed five goals she would pursue, if elected. None of them mentioned the education nor welfare of the students.

Bill Freeman
Fort Smith

Scaled-back LR school wins charter renewal (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

The Arkansas Board of Education on Monday approved a three-year renewal for the southwest Little Rock-based Covenant Keepers College Preparatory Charter School - but next school year, the school will scale back the grades it serves and operate at a new location.

The decision to grant a three-year renewal of the charter was bittersweet for school operators, who hugged and wiped away tears, celebrating the board’s unanimous renewal approval but mourning an end to the high school grades.

Beginning with the 2013-14 school year, the school will serve only grades of six through eight and will do so at the Greater Second Baptist Church site, 5615 Geyer Springs Road. The nearly 5-year-old Covenant Keepers charter school, now at 8300 Geyer Springs Road, serves 233 students in grades six through 12. It has state approval to enroll up to 380 students.

“We feel like it’s been a journey,” Valerie Tatum, founder and superintendent of the independently run public charter school, told the Education Board about the history of the school.

The school has struggled with academics and a few financial glitches in the past.

“It’s been a lesson learned,” she said of the school that is operated by the nonprofit City of Fire Community Development Inc.

Some of the toughest lessons were about operating a high school, which has suffered from teacher turnover and a highly transient student population, including pregnant girls and other students who come and go from nontraditional institutions such as juvenile-detention centers and mental-health treatment programs.

“The high school has created too many problems,” Tatum said. “It has impeded our middle school growth.”

The middle school has retained more teachers, and its pupils have made gains on state literacy test scores, she said, adding that the school is committed to continue serving pupils in the 72209 ZIP code that encompasses southwest Little Rock. Ninety-eight percent of the students at the school this year are black or Hispanic and more than 80 percent are from low-income families.

Pam Adcock, a former state legislator and a southwest Little Rock community leader, called the school a godsend for her eighth-grader who struggled at previous schools. He and his problems were welcomed at Covenant Keepers, and he is now earning B’s, she said.

“I would love for you to encourage Covenant Keepers to keep the high school,” Adcock told the state board. “There are problems, but they can be addressed.”

Board member Toyce Newton of Crossett asked school leaders about assisting the approximately 100 affected students in finding new high schools, especially since some of the students have special needs and are more difficult to serve.

Newton said the trauma of losing the opportunity to attend Covenant Keepers might be enough to cause some high school students to abandon school.

“It’s disheartening to let the high school go,” Tatum acknowledged. “But we have come to a point where we can’t manage. The problems are insurmountable,” she said. Her voice cracked with emotion as she recalled that some of the high school students have been with the school since its inception.

Principal Kasey Porchia told Newton that school leaders are continuing to work with students and parents to find schools that “fit” the individual students.

Not all students can succeed in a traditional school setting, Porchia said. Covenant Keepers leaders are in communication with the Word of Outreach, a private school, and Premier High School, an open-enrollment charter school that will open for the first time in the 2013-14 school year on the campus of Arkansas Baptist College, about the possible enrollment of some Covenant Keepers students.

State Education Board member Jay Barth of Little Rock asked whether the loss of the high school and a move to a new location might result in a decrease in middle school enrollment, fewer state dollars and a possible budget crunch.

Tatum predicted the elimination of the high school and the move to a new location with more room, including a gym, won’t cause financial or enrollment problems. The school is budgeted on the basis of the enrollment of 215 students, but the enrollment is projected to be about 240, she said, and the school has an ongoing recruitment campaign to ensure enrollment is as high as possible.

School leaders had asked for a seven-year renewal, but the Arkansas Department of Education Charter Review Council recommended the three-year term, which the state board accepted.

That was based in part on the middle school being classified by the state’s accountability system as a “priority” school, which means it is one of the lowest scoring 5 percent of Arkansas public schools on state Benchmark Exams.

However, the middle school is also classified as an “achieving” school by the state in both math and literacy because it met its state-set achievement targets on state tests last spring. If it repeats that feat this spring, the school will drop the “priority” label.

Gary Ritter, director of the Office for Education Policy at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, told the Education Board that his analyses showed “a school that is struggling a little bit in math and knocking it out of the park in literacy.”

Between 2008-09 and 2011-12, the percentage of sixth-through-eighth-graders scoring at proficient and above in literacy improved by 28 percent, Ritter said, going from 37 percent proficient to 65 percent over four years, while the surrounding Little Rock School District grew by 2 percentage points, from 52 percent to 54 percent proficient.

In math, Covenant Keepers’ middle school pupils improved by 1 percentage point, moving from 38 percent in 2008-09 to 39 percent last year, Ritter said. The Little Rock district improved by 2 percentage points - from 52 percent proficient to 54 percent proficient. The overall state improved by 5 percentage points, going from 73 percent proficient or better in 2008-09 to 78 percent four years later.

In the high school grades of nine through 12, 18.8 percent of Covenant Keepers students most recently scored at proficient or better on the state’s 11th grade literacy test and 20 percent scored at proficient

or better on the Algebra I End-of-Course test, according to data compiled by the Arkansas Department of Education.

The school showed a growing year-end balance, a sign of stability. The end of year balances went from \$64,029 in 2011 to \$86,965 in 2012. Balances of \$143,520 are projected for this year.

The Covenant Keepers' five-year lease for the Greater Second Baptist Church school facility will cost \$142,560 in rent the first year and will grow to \$160,346 by 2017-18.

The Greater Second Baptist Church site is the former home of the Dreamland Academy of Performing and Communications Arts charter elementary school that the state Education Board voted to close in June 2012.

At the same meeting, the state Education Board accepted the surrender of a conversion charter it awarded just weeks ago to the South Pike County School District, which had planned to incorporate a national New Tech project-based learning program at Murfreesboro High.

The South Pike County School Board has since decided against establishing the New Tech program because of a failure to generate sufficient grant money to support the new program, Superintendent Roger Featherston told the Education Board.

At eStem, Stodola preaches safety of walkers downtown (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

Little Rock officials are hoping to raise awareness of pedestrian safety on the city's downtown streets.

Mayor Mark Stodola, along with Downtown Little Rock Partnership President Sharon Priest and eStem Public Charter Schools officials, spoke Monday at the first of four news conferences that will highlight the challenges and importance of pedestrian safety at a different downtown intersection each week in April.

The news conference Monday at the corner of Third and Louisiana streets highlighted the issues of safely getting students to class in an urban school environment. Several times during the school day, children and teenagers who attend the three eStem public charter schools in downtown Little Rock flood the sidewalks on their way to class, to lunch or to their parents' waiting cars after school.

"We are excited that eStem is downtown. The school has provided an injection of life that this area hasn't seen in awhile," Stodola said.

"When you get in your car, you get a little isolated, whether you're on your way to work, thinking about that first meeting ... But we need to pay attention and make sure we are aware there are many, many people on these streets."

About 30 of the schools' more than 1,400 students lined up behind the speakers Monday. John Bacon, chief executive officer of eStem Public Charter Schools, said the schools' downtown setting provides a living laboratory for the children, but safety is one of the first things staff members think about daily.

"We use this corner and area on a daily basis," he said. "We love being and having our students downtown. But, daily, our staff focuses on providing a safe and secure environment for our students to learn and attend class. We appreciate all of the city's efforts to increase downtown pedestrian safety."

Downtown Little Rock Partnership staff members said they are working with city officials on obtaining school-zone designation for the intersection, which would more clearly post the speed limit and carry heftier fines for speeding or traffic violations in the intersection.

The pedestrian safety awareness campaign is part of an effort of the Downtown Little Rock Partnership's Main Street Revitalization Committee, specifically the pedestrian safety subcommittee. The subcommittee has been looking at a number of ways to make people feel safer downtown, including increasing police presence and helping to start the Food Truck Fridays events that aim to draw more people into and familiarize them with the heart of the city's downtown.

The news conference Monday took place just two blocks from where a man was struck and killed by a Central Arkansas Transit Authority bus while crossing the street in November 2011.

Subcommittee chairman Stan Dimitrov said focusing on interactions between cars and pedestrians makes sense.

"We want everyone downtown to feel safe when crossing intersections, whether they are on their way to work, walking to get lunch or just needing a break in the afternoon," he said. "Unfortunately, downtown Little Rock has been designed with a focus on getting cars and buses quickly out of the area, and the needs of pedestrians and bikers have become an afterthought."

Dimitrov and Stodola said the changing face of the city's downtown needs to be considered moving forward. Stodola said about \$60 million in ongoing construction along Main Street and nearby streets is designed to draw people downtown, and the city hopes to provide a safe environment for pedestrians to take advantage of the new amenities.

The partnership will hold three more conferences this month at intersections with pedestrian importance. The locations will be released a few days before the events, partnership staff members said.

Education notebook (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

Tests set for many students in state

Arkansas public school students in grades three through eight will be taking the state's Augmented Benchmark Exams in math and literacy this week. Fifth- and seventh-graders will also take state science tests.

The augmented test is a combination of Benchmark questions, which measure mastery of skills and concepts that Arkansas teachers have identified as important to know, and Iowa Test of Basic Skills questions. The Iowa test, a national test that is not specifically based on Arkansas' math and literacy standards, is used to compare the achievement levels of Arkansas students to students nationally.

Results from the annual state tests are used in part to determine whether individual students need academic improvement plans and remediation. The test results also are used to categorize schools as "achieving" or "needs improvement" schools.

The Augmented Benchmark will make its final appearance in the spring of 2014. After that the state will go to an online exam system that will be based on the new national Common Core standards.

There are additional state exams on the horizon.

End-of-Course geometry exams are set for April 16-17, End-of-Course biology exams are April 23-24, and End-of-Course algebra I exams are May 7-8. First-, second- and ninth-graders took the Iowa Test of Basic Skills exams last week.

Schools official set for June exit

Linda Remele, deputy superintendent of learning services and chief academic officer in the Pulaski County Special School District, has announced she will resign at the end of June.

Remele, who said she needed to be able to spend more time with her family, has held the position for nearly two years.

She is a former teacher, counselor, assistant principal, principal and director of elementary education in the district. Remele had retired from the district in December 2004.

She returned to the system after the state Department of Education took control of the district in June 2011, when the state dissolved the School Board and dismissed the man who was superintendent at the time.

U.S. grant expands to aid 10 districts

A \$2.3 million federal Partnership for Transition to Teaching Grant awarded to the University of Central Arkansas in 2011 to prepare math and science teachers for two school districts has now been expanded to serve eight more school districts.

The U.S. Department of Education originally awarded the grant to the University of Central Arkansas to prepare math and science teachers for the North Little Rock and Little Rock school districts.

The newly expanded grant permits the preparation of English and language arts teachers in addition to math and science instructors. The additional partnership school districts are the Carlisle, Dollarway, El Dorado, Harrison, Pine Bluff, Watson Chapel, West Memphis and White Hall school districts.

The grant supports efforts to recruit mid-career professionals and recent graduates with degrees outside of education and then help the recruits become teachers through alternative certification routes. Teacher candidates enrolled in the 36-hour Master of Arts in Teaching program at UCA can receive up to \$5,000 in tuition.

Courses for the Master of Arts in Teaching program are offered primarily online. The deadline to apply for the Partnership for Transition to Teaching tuition grants is May 1.

“We are excited about the prospect of serving more school districts and students in different areas of the state of Arkansas,” Carolyn Williams, College of Education professor and principal investigator for the Partnership for Transition to Teaching grant, said.

“We are also looking forward to receiving funding applications from prospective English and Language Arts teachers,” Williams said.

The participating teacher candidates will earn preliminary teaching license and credentials while working as university intern teachers in the 10 targeted partnership school districts. After earning master’s degrees using the grant funding, teachers are required to teach at least three years in high-need schools.

More information about the Transition to Teaching program and the Master of Arts in Teaching is available on the website uca.edu/MAT, by e-mailing transition@uca.edu or calling (501) 450-5443.

Programs to help kids, adults read

The University of Arkansas’ Conference Services section will offer eight summer reading-skills programs for children, beginning at age 4, through adults.

Tuition and materials fees vary by program level. The programs will begin the week of July 11 and will be at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock.

The programs for younger children are designed to build comprehension and teach phonics and fluency skills. Programs for older students and adults are geared toward improving comprehension and study skills, vocabulary and speed reading. The skills taught in the classes reinforce the importance of reading for pleasure and developing a lifelong love of books.

The programs, offered since 2003, are taught by instructors from the Institute of Reading Development.

Registration and other information is available at (888) 201-2448 between 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday-Friday and 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturday-Sunday.