

# ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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## **Bentonville District Wins Gold Medallion (nwaonline.com)**

BENTONVILLE — The Bentonville School District is one of this year's three winners of the National School Public Relations Association's Gold Medallion Award.

The award is the association's top program award honoring superior educational public relations programs. Bentonville received the honor for its promotion of its bicycle physical education program called "Trail Time," which started in December.

Each of the 17 schools in the district received 30 high-end Trek bicycles last fall. Bentonville High School also opened a bike shop, which is managed by students.

The School District's Communications Department led the way in conceiving and implementing the program, according to a report on Trail Time written by Mary Ley, communications director.

Donors, led by the Walton Family Foundation, gave \$159,986 for the program. Volunteers spent 467 hours assembling the donated bikes t, according to the report.

The program was inspired by a desire to encourage bicycling among youth, to take advantage of Bentonville's 38 miles of bicycle trails and to reduce long car lines at schools during pick-up and drop-off times.

The association selected three Gold Medallion winners from 66 applications throughout North America, according to a letter written to Ley by executive director Richard Bagin.

The awards will be presented July 10 at the association's national seminar in San Diego.

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## **Prairie Grove Seeks Property Tax Increase For New School (nwaonline.com)**

PRAIRIE GROVE — Residents in the Prairie Grove School District could be paying higher school taxes next year if a millage increase passes voter approval later this year.

The School Board voted Tuesday to ask voters for an increase amounting to 6 mils to finance construction of a primary school addition at the intermediate school; a storm shelter built to federal standards for the primary and intermediate school; and a new 1,400-seat gym.

Total cost of the package is \$15.8 million. The district has received almost \$2.4 million in state partnership money and another \$940,000 in a grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency for the storm shelter, leaving \$12.4 million to be paid by the district.

If approved, a 6-mil increase will cost a taxpayer \$120 a year or \$10 a month on a home valued at \$100,000, Superintendent Allen Williams said.

The election will be Sept. 17.

Eric Walker, a board member, said the project had been discussed for three years.

“We’re tired of talking,” Walker said.

Shawn Shrum, board president, said, “We’ve been talking a long time and I feel like we’re where we need to be.”

Williams noted the district is growing and projections show some 300 to 400 more students in the next two years. The enrollment is 1,840 students in kindergarten through 12th grade, he said.

William Dick said less expensive housing has contributed to the growth in Prairie Grove and the district.

The last tax increase was in 2002 when a 4-mil increase was approved to build the high school, which opened in 2004. Other projects, such as an activity gym at the high school for physical education, have been paid for without tax increases.

Williams said the construction projects are expected to be completed by the start of the 2015-16 school year, if the millage is approved. Construction could start next March, he added.

“We’ve got needs, lots of kids and old space,” said Lanny Rice, a board member.

The primary school would be demolished as part of the project. The building is about 50 years.

Williams said representatives from the Arkansas Division of Public School Academic Facilities and Transportation suggested a new building would be better than renovation of the old one, which was estimated by architects at about \$2.5 million.

Prairie Grove has the smallest millage rate, at 36.9 mils, among school districts in Benton and Washington counties.

Dick said millage rollbacks to comply with state laws in recent years has pushed the millage back to nearly the level it was in 2002 before the 4 mils was approved. If approved the new millage will be 42.9 mils, about two-tenths of a mil higher than neighboring Farmington and about three-tenths of a mil higher than Lincoln.

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## **State's Loss of Top Education Officials Not Unusual, Kimbrell Says (KARK, Channel 4)**

The Arkansas Department of Education is losing two of its five assistant commissioners as well as its chief of staff, but Education Commissioner Dr. Tom Kimbrell said Tuesday that turnover is simply part of what happens at the department.

Dr. Laura Bednar, the state's assistant commissioner for learning services, is leaving to become a deputy superintendent at Pulaski County, while Jared Cleveland, assistant commissioner for fiscal and administrative services, will be a deputy superintendent at Springdale.

Bednar is being replaced by Dr. Megan Witonksi, Elkins superintendent, while Cleveland is being replaced by Mike Hernandez, superintendent at Danville.

These are two high profile positions. Bednar has been the state's point person in its transition to the Common Core State Standards, an ongoing process that has taken several years and is not yet completed. Cleveland has been in charge of ensuring districts are fiscally sound. His office's calculations can determine whether a school district is placed on the fiscal distress list.

Kimbrell said Witonksi has been involved in the Common Core transition as part of a guiding coalition of educators working with Bednar and as part of a coordinating council working with education leaders from other states.

Meanwhile, Kimbrell is looking for a chief of staff after Phyllis Stewart announced she was leaving the department to become communications director of the Arkansas School Boards Association. Kimbrell said he has been talking to potential replacements and hopes to make an announcement soon.

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## **Arkansas education board elects new officers (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)**

Two former state lawmakers have been picked as officers of the Arkansas Board of Education.

This week, the board elected former state Sen. Brenda Gullett of Fayetteville as its chairman. Former state Rep. Sam Ledbetter of Little Rock was elected vice chairman.

They will hold the positions through June 2014.

Gullett is the owner and operator of Brenda Gullett Associates, which offers corporate training in customer service, communications and leadership development. She has been a member of the state board since 2007.

Ledbetter is an attorney and has served on the state board since 2008.

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## **Board Approves Bond Refinancing, Anticipates \$639K Savings (Southwest Times Record)**

The Van Buren School Board approved 6-0 Tuesday refinancing \$5.04 million in tax-exempt bonds at an interest rate enabling an estimated \$638,775 in savings over three years.

Dennis Hunt, Stephens Inc. senior vice president, told the board Ross Sinclair Associates offered the best of three bids received with an interest rate of 2.713 percent.

Hunt said Stephens Inc. worked with the Arkansas Department of Education to pass Act 110, to help ensure school districts won't miss making timely payments and losing their credit ratings, an important factor in bank decisions to invest in school bonds. The Van Buren district, he said, has an AA2 rating, just a notch below the state's credit rating.

He asked the district to adopt a resolution amending payment provisions for its outstanding, rated tax-exempt bonds to the Act 110 provisions. The board, after listening to Hunt's explanation, approved the resolution 6-0.

Hunt said Moody's, an investor and analytic service, decided it would not rate districts that missed payments or had no underlying credit rating. However, Hunt said, state Department of Education officials were uncomfortable with making the new state law retroactive, so Van Buren's participation is voluntary. Choosing not to do it could drive away potential investors, he noted.

"(I)f the district doesn't do it ... Moody's will remove its rating, dropping potential sales revenues for investors of the bond," Hunt said.

Van Buren is the first Arkansas school district to refinance bonds under the changed rules.

Under the act, school districts agree to make their bond payments 15 days in advance. Hunt said if a district cannot make the timely payment, the Arkansas Department of Education would make it for the district, then seek repayment from the district.

School Board President Jamie Hammond asked if the 15 days would make a difference to the district's finances.

Superintendent Merle Dickerson said it would not.

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## **State board places 7 PBSB schools on probation (Pine Bluff Commercial)**

The majority of schools in the Pine Bluff School District were placed on probation by the Arkansas State Board of Education on Monday for violations of state standards.

All six of the district's elementary schools were placed on probation after an instructor who provided gifted and talented services to all six failed to meet state licensure requirements, according to the state board.

Pine Bluff High School also was placed on probationary status after an instructor teaching a survey course failed to meet licensing requirements.

PBSD Superintendent Linda Watson said Tuesday that the Monday events have redoubled her resolve to ensure that all instructors have the required certifications necessary for their jobs.

"I am making sure that this August before classes start all of those people who are supposed to be teaching classes have licenses that line up with what they are teaching ahead of time," Watson said. "If you're supposed to be in classes required for a particular certification, then you'd better be in those classes."

Watson said the situation with both teachers that resulted in the standards violations is frustrating to her because they could have been easily avoided.

"I have a district-level employee who provided services to our six elementary schools," Watson said. "He is a certified teacher who was supposed to take some classes to get full licensure in his field. That person decided to move to another state and didn't take those classes. They didn't see the impact their decision would have on the whole school district."

Watson said the director of the program in question for the upcoming school year will be certified and will fulfill all of their duties.

"As concerns Pine Bluff High School the course at issue was one that we didn't have to offer," Watson said. "The person teaching it had to fulfill the requirements of adding that licensure and they didn't do it. We could have avoided the whole problem because it was a survey course and wasn't required."

Watson said neither of the instructors involved will be teaching in the district any longer.

The schools placed on probationary status are Broadmoor Elementary, Greenville Elementary, Oak Park Elementary, 34th Avenue Elementary, Southwood Elementary, W.T. Cheney Elementary and Pine Bluff High School.

All schools in the PBSD remain accredited but each of the schools placed on probationary status will be open to more serious actions if any of them are found to violate accreditation standards in the next school year.

Two consecutive years of probationary status for Dollarway High School led the state board to take over the Dollarway School District one year ago.