

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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1,200 teachers to converge on Hot Springs (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

HOT SPRINGS — More than 1,200 Arkansas teachers are expected in Hot Springs for a technology symposium.

The Hot Springs Technology Institute runs Monday through Thursday at Hot Springs High School.

The event is marking its 20th anniversary. Organizers say about 350 teachers are to attend workshops Monday and Tuesday, with the rest coming in for the Wednesday and Thursday events.

The Sentinel-Record reported that more than 200 sessions will be available for educators at the conference.

Teachers are able to acquire in-service hours required by the Arkansas Department of Education.

Also, more than 100 vendors are expected to be on hand.

District Doesn't Offer Continuous Learning (nwaonline.com)

SPRINGDALE — The Springdale School District has more students than any other Northwest Arkansas school district, but it doesn't offer one thing other large districts do: a continuous learning calendar school.

A continuous learning calendar school is similar to a year-round school, but has a slightly longer summer break, said Stacy Marx, assistant principal at Happy Hollow Elementary School in Fayetteville. Happy Hollow is a continuous learning calendar school.

Continuous learning calendar schools have a six- to seven-week summer break, 3½ weeks shorter than traditional schedule schools, Marx said. Every nine weeks the students and staff get a week off .

"About the time everyone needs a break, we have one," she said.

The breaks are beneficial to students who need help academically because it gives them time to catch up during the school year instead of catching up in summer school, Marx said. The breaks also help teachers by giving them time to prepare for upcoming lessons and activities.

While the remediation aspects at continuous calendar schools are beneficial, the additional bus use and utility expense can cause the schools to cost more than traditional schools, said Hartzell Jones, deputy superintendent for personnel for the Springdale School District. Principals at these schools also get less time off because of the shorter summer break.

“Somebody’s got to be there in charge of the school,” he said.

A shorter summer break also gives the district less time for upgrades and construction, Jones said. Sports and extracurricular activities are affected in secondary schools.

The different schedules can be a challenge during competition seasons for sports. This is why most continuous calendar schools are at the elementary level, he said.

Springdale officials considered continuous calendar schools at least eight years ago, Jones said. They researched the schools and surveyed parents to find out if they were interested.

“We were pretty serious about looking into it,” he said.

Officials decided to not offer a continuous calendar school, Jones said.

At least 600 students were needed to start a school, but officials didn’t see enough interest from them or their parents.

Officials haven’t considered continuous calendar schools since, he said.

The community has to want a continuous calendar school for it to work, said Laura Bednar, assistant commissioner of learning services at the Arkansas Department of Education. The concept works better in some communities than others.

Happy Hollow has been a continuous calendar school for about 14 years and has about 450 students, Marx said.

The school was originally on a traditional schedule. It was easier to switch the schedule than start a new continuous calendar school because they already had relationships with the parents, she said.

“You definitely have to have the parent support to do it because it’s different,” she said.

The Springdale School District has 19,804 students, Rogers School District has 14,456 students, Bentonville School District has 14,729 students and Fayetteville School District has 9,102 students, according to district officials. Rogers has one continuous learning calendar school, Bentonville has two and Fayetteville has two.

The Fayetteville School District might Owl Creek School to a continuous schedule during the 2014-15 school year, Marx said.

To better educate (Editorial, nwaonline.com)

Recent commentaries written by current and former faculty members at the University of Arkansas have opined about teacher preparation. One criticized nontraditional teacher-preparation programs; another challenged the quality of traditional programs.

As dean of the College of Education and Health Professions at the University of Arkansas, I know teacher preparation is indeed one of the most important components of a good preschool-12 education system and, ultimately, a P-16 education system. Without well-trained teachers, students are at a disadvantage and less likely to reach their maximum potential. Numerous studies have found that the most important variable in a child's education is the quality of the teacher in the classroom. This fact has been echoed numerous times by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. Therefore, our goal must be to prepare the very best teachers and school leaders we can while carefully considering any models that may help us meet this goal, albeit through different approaches.

I question whether generalizing about the quality of all teacher-preparation programs is useful. I do agree that there is limited evidence that anyone graduating from a traditional teacher-preparation program is superior to teachers coming from other programs. There are obviously excellent teacher-preparation programs, as well as programs that need significant improvement. Some of the excellent ones are traditional programs, found in colleges of education, and some are nontraditional programs, such as Teach for America and our own Arkansas Teacher Corps. There are also traditional programs and some alternative programs that need significant improvement.

We at the University of Arkansas are addressing some of the common criticisms of traditional teacher-preparation programs. We have increased our admission requirements to our programs, resulting in our current students being very similar in their academic qualifications to students in other colleges on our campus. We also require a full-time, one-year internship, which addresses a common criticism that internships or student teaching are too limited.

Without question, there is a significant need for more, better-trained teachers for our schools. I fully agree with Dr. Samuel Totten's statement that "there is a dire need for as much innovation as educators and others in the United States can come up with, including outstanding cutting-edge alternative programs." Teacher-preparation programs must continue to develop innovative and better ways of preparing teachers and school leaders.

In an attempt to do so, the College of Education and Health Professions at the University of Arkansas has embarked on two exciting, innovative initiatives. The first is the Arkansas Teacher Corps. While previous commentaries have spoken strongly both for and against Teach for America and similar programs, I believe that some of these models do prepare excellent educators and school leaders.

The criteria for selecting individuals for Teach for America and the Arkansas Teacher Corps are extremely high. These are individuals who did not plan on being a teacher but have determined, after receiving their degrees, that they would like to teach. We believe that many of these will become excellent teachers, especially after they complete our intensive summer teaching institute and have experienced mentors throughout their time as a teaching fellow.

We are also working with the Fayetteville School District to submit a proposal for a conversion charter school that the college and the school district would operate collaboratively beginning in the fall of 2014. This conversion charter school will focus on several innovative ideas, including a nongraded curriculum, emphasis on STEM education, and a language-immersion program with the goal that students would have a mastery of conversational Spanish by the time they move to the next level. If Germany, Russia and other European countries can teach their children to converse in English during the early grades, there is no reason we cannot do the same with a foreign language.

The conversion charter would also be used as a training ground for elementary teachers from the university to enable them to see how children can be educated in different ways. It is anticipated that a cohort of our elementary education students would earn their degrees and certification through a great deal of internship time at the school rather than in traditional college classrooms.

On a personal note, I have recently joined a group of education deans from several key universities, including the University of Virginia, University of North Carolina, University of Southern California, Johns Hopkins University, and the University of Washington, to look at how teacher-preparation programs can make significant changes in how teachers and school leaders are prepared. This group plans to discuss and develop innovative and bold changes in the preparation of these professionals.

Programs to prepare teachers and school leaders must change. Traditional programs must look for new and better ways of preparing these professionals, while at the same time work with and develop alternative preparation programs to provide teachers and school leaders that all of our children and youth deserve.

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Tom E.C. Smith is dean of the College of Education and Health Professions and university professor at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville.