

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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Decatur aims for cool summer school (nwaonline.com)

Donia Uribe stood in pitch black darkness for a moment Friday during a field trip to War Eagle Cavern in Rogers.

“You couldn’t go anywhere,” said Donia, 12, who completed sixth grade in May. “You could bump into stuff.”

Don Locander, a tour guide for the cavern, told one group of 16 Decatur schoolchildren, including Donia, to imagine what American Indians, Civil War soldiers and other cave visitors experienced prior to the addition of the electric lights that now illuminate the limestone cavern.

“This is cool,” several children in the group said while standing in the dark.

The promise of field trips spurred children from Decatur Public Schools to participate in a new summer learning program the school district offered this year for about 90 elementary and high school students. The district plans two three-week sessions.

Children who have completed the fourth, fifth and sixth grades spend one week learning about a topic and finish the week with a related field trip. Friday field trips took them to Terra Studios in Fayetteville and the cavern. They will end the first session with a trip to the Tulsa Zoo next week.

Donia described Decatur as a small place with a handful of stores. Most of the activities for children center around a park and a community pool, she said. She asked her mom to participate in the summer learning program because of the field trips.

“I told my mom it was better than being home bored,” she said.

Superintendent Larry Ben noticed that children in Decatur wanted more options for activities during the summer. So he began working with his staff and community members to create the summer program.

“What I really like about it is the focus on the projects, experiences and hands-on activities,” Ben said.

The district covers the \$42,500 cost of the program with funds from a variety of sources.

This week, teacher Jennifer Kinder spent time teaching children about caves to prepare for their visit to War Eagle Cavern. On Tuesday, activities focused on speleothem - structures formed inside a cave from

minerals deposited by water. Stalactites and stalagmites are examples of speleothem and are numerous inside the cavern.

Kinder led the children in an experiment to grow crystals, simulating the formation of stalagmites. Working in groups of four, each member of the group took turns gathering ingredients. Wearing latex gloves, safety goggles and eyeglasses, the children filled pie pans with charcoal briquettes. They dissolved Epsom salt in boiling water and then added dog shampoo and ammonia to the solution. Their teachers poured the solution over the charcoal. Each group then added food coloring.

Kinder told them the crystals would take several days to form.

War Eagle Cavern, on property owned by Dennis and Vicki Boyer, opened with tours for the public in 1977, Dennis Boyer said. The cavern temperature stays at a cool 58 degrees and draws about 30,000 visitors a year, he said.

During the tour Friday, Don Locander took his group into one room of the water-carved limestone cavern where it could see stalactites and stalagmites. Locander said an easy way of differentiating the two is remembering that stalactites hang "tight" to the ceiling, but stalagmites grow up from the floor.

"They are live and growing," Locander said. The formations stop growing if touched because of oils in people's skin.

Children also saw orange cave salamanders with black spots and brown camel crickets. They spotted fossils and waterfalls. And they quieted down to listen to water flowing through the cavern.

Locander pointed a flashlight at the ceiling to show the children water droplets that sparkled in the light. Most of the time, the ceiling is dry, but the water droplets formed after a spring rain a couple of weeks ago. Some droplets fell on the children's heads during their visit. Toward the end of the tour, Locander blew on the water droplets to make them fall. He called them "lucky cave drops."

At one point, Lilly Carmean, 9, counted seven drops on her head. Lilly, who just finished fourth grade, wore glow-in-the-dark bat ears for the occasion. She remembered visiting the cave as a second-grader.

"They have a lot more lights," she said.

Darius Gonzalez, 9, likes science, he said. He liked spotting crystals on the walls of the cavern and enjoys spending time with his friends and going places, he said.

"I really had nothing to do," he said. He asked his parents to participate. "I asked them to and thought it would be fun, and it really is."

Report ranks Arkansas 40th in well-being of children (Pine Bluff Commercial)

LITTLE ROCK — Arkansas ranks 40th among the states in the overall well-being of its children, though nearly 30 percent of children in the state live in poverty, according to a national child advocacy group's latest report.

The annual Kids Count Data Book, released Monday by the Annie E. Casey Foundation of Baltimore, moves Arkansas up two spots from its overall ranking of 42nd in last year's report.

The 56-page report ranks states based on their performance in 16 indicators across four domains: Economic well-being, education, health, and family and community.

New Hampshire topped the list, followed by Vermont and Massachusetts, while New Mexico was at the bottom of the list, with Mississippi 49th and Nevada 48th. It's the first time in the 24-year history of the annual Kids Count Data Book that Mississippi is not ranked at the bottom, according to the report.

Gov. Mike Beebe said Arkansas' move up in the Kids Count rankings is a direct result of where the state invests its resources.

"We've emphasized spending in areas that can have the most direct impact for children, education and health care, and we've seen improvements as a result," Beebe said. "As our stable state economy continues to strengthen, we will see comparable benefits elsewhere as more families climb out of poverty."

The report is used by lawmakers and child welfare advocates across the country to measure the success of their efforts to improve the lives of children and to promote additional improvements.

"I think our overall improvement was really driven by improvements in the health area, and I think it again shows that some of the investments we have made in the last 10 years in terms of the Arkansas Better Chance Program and Medicaid Arkids First have really paid off," said Rich Huddleston, executive director of Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families.

In 2007, Gov. Mike Beebe successfully pushed for a \$40 million increase in funding for the Arkansas Better Chance early childhood education program, which is open to children whose family income is less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level. The increase brought funding for the program to \$111 million, an amount that Beebe said would ensure access for all eligible children.

ARKids First is a medical insurance initiative created for families who don't qualify for Medicaid and can't afford private insurance.

The number of children without health insurance in Arkansas has dropped from 9 percent in 2008 to 6 percent in 2011, according to the Kids Count report. Nationally, 7 percent of children did not have insurance, according to the report.

Among the four individual categories in the report, Arkansas ranked in the bottom 10 nationally in just one — family and community at 45th.

The state ranked 39th in economic well-being, 36th in education and 30th in health.

Huddleston said the number of children struggling economically in Arkansas because of the recent recession is troubling.

The report found that the number of children in poverty rose to 28 percent in 2011, the last year of data available, from 25 percent in 2005. Children whose parents lack secure employment also rose to 36 percent, from 32 percent in 2008, and children living in households with a high housing cost burden rose to 32 percent, up from 29 percent in 2005.

“Anytime you have 28 percent of your kids living in poverty that has huge implications because I think the research is pretty clear that the longer a child spends in poverty the more likely they are to be at risk with all the bad outcomes that we associate with poverty across education, emotion and social development ... make it more likely the child is going to be at risk.” he said. “Even beyond that, I think, of course, it even impacts the future of the state’s work force as well.”

“I think it’s pretty clear that we need to continue to maintain the investments that we have made in kids over the years,” Huddleston said.

Nationally, most states saw improvements in education and health and declines economic well-being and family and community.

“First, we see lingering effects of the recession and continued high unemployment,” Casey Foundation President and CEO Patrick T. McCarthy wrote in the report. “Second, disparities among children by income and family structure continue to grow. Third, our nation’s youngest children are disproportionately affected by these negative trends.”

Arkansas performed better than the national average in a number of areas, including children living in households with a high housing cost burden, with 32 percent, while the national average was 40 percent.

Arkansas also performed better than the national average in children not attending preschool, 52 percent to 54 percent nationally; children without health insurance, 6 percent compared to 7 percent nationally; teens who abuse alcohol or drugs, 6 percent compared to 7 percent; and children in families where the household lacks a high school diploma, 14 percent to 15 percent nationally.

Arkansas showed improvement over previous years in nine areas measured in the report, including teens not in school and not working; children not attending preschool; eighth graders not proficient in math; low-birth weight babies; children without insurance; child and teen deaths per 100,000; teens who abuse alcohol or drugs; children in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma; and teen births per 1,000.

The state dropped in six categories, including children in poverty; children whose parents lack secure employment; children living in households with a high housing cost burden; high school students not graduating on time; children in single-parent families; and children living in high-poverty areas.

Arkansas rates remained unchanged in fourth graders not proficient in math.

Berryville School Board tables talk of principal job (Carroll County News)

BERRYVILLE -- Talk of naming Berryville High School Assistant Principal Owen Powell as the new high school principal was tabled during an early regular meeting of the Berryville School Board Monday night.

Board members also acknowledged on Monday that -- although interviews have already been conducted not only for the principal's position but also for Powell's position, in case he is promoted -- neither job has been posted publicly as required.

The principal position will be posted today on the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators website, officials said Monday evening.

Powell has been the assistant principal for more than eight years and so far is the only candidate interviewed for the job, said Superintendent Randy Byrd.

He also confirmed that teachers John McClellan and Donela Armstrong have been interviewed for Powell's current job as assistant principal, but no one has interviewed to take Powell's place as the director of athletics and transportation.

The board will not post Powell's current job or conduct any more interviews for the assistant principal position until a decision has been made about the principal job, board members said Monday.

The Berryville School Board held its regular monthly meeting a week early in order to discuss hiring new personnel before other schools made the candidates an offer, Byrd said.

Also discussed at the meeting were school vehicle insurance renewal, the completion of the gym renovations and updates to the student handbook.

The district's property insurance was renewed for one year starting July 1 at the same premium as last year, \$62,347.

The district's vehicle insurance also was renewed with some slight savings, for a period of one year starting also on July 1.

The vehicle insurance will cost \$14,299, a little less than last year's premium of \$14,926. The total medical coverage per bus is still at the state standard of \$25,000, Byrd said.

The decrease in the premium stems from the school removing three vehicles from the policy: an old truck, the drivers' education car and a totaled bus.

The bus was bought in 1999 when it was brand new. It caught fire last year with no one injured or deemed at fault, and the insurance company awarded the school more than \$10,000 for the loss. The school board did not address buying a new bus at Monday's meeting.

"It's probably going to happen soon, but last time we bought a bus we didn't sell one so we have spares," Byrd explained.

In an update on renovations to Bobcat Gym, the board learned that the floor has been finished and the school now awaits bleachers and wall pads to complete the project. The school gym was estimated to be completed in early July of this year by Doug Harris, department of facilities and special programs for the school.

The student handbook was updated to state specifications on Monday as well. The update was small and was mostly comprised adding and identifying excused and unexcused absences, Byrd said.

In other school board news, the board approved two summer fundraisers for the senior high cheerleaders, the first of which is to sell ad space in the football programs and keep half the proceeds for uniform costs.

The second fundraiser will be the "Miss Summer Spirit Pageant." The pageant has categories for women of all ages and the proceeds will also cover cheerleader uniform expenses. The cost for attendance is \$5 for adults and \$3 for students. Participation fees are dependent upon age group but range from \$20 to \$30.

For more information about either fundraiser, call Cheer Coach Cassie Raulston at 870-688-6612 or visit www.bobcatcheer.weebly.com

The school board's next regular meeting is scheduled for July 15, they will continue to be on the third Monday of every month.

Lawmaker leads suit against LR schools (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

Civil-rights attorney and state Rep. John Walker, D-Little Rock, is the plaintiff in a new lawsuit against the Little Rock School District and some of its leaders over information Walker requested June 5 and has yet to receive.

The lawsuit, assigned to Pulaski County Circuit Judge Collins Kilgore, was prepared by attorney Bridgette Frazier. The defendants are Little Rock Interim Superintendent Marvin Burton and David Hartz, who is retiring as the district's senior director of human resources.

“Eight days after the plaintiff’s request, the attorney for the LRSD emailed the plaintiff’s assistant informing her that the material was not ready, and would not be ready for at least another week,” the lawsuit said.

“At no time did the defendants claim that the materials were exempt [from the Freedom of Information Act],” the suit said. “Further, the defendants did not claim that any of the records were in active use or storage.”

The lawsuit asks that district officials be ordered to provide the requested public records.

Attached to the lawsuit is the June 5 e-mail to the district requesting a dozen different pieces of information. That included a request for a list of all principal and assistant principal vacancies since Jan. 1, 2011; the applicant pool for each of those vacancies; and the criteria for selecting persons to be interviewed.

Walker also requested a list of all people who applied for other administrative positions in the district since January 2011, including directors, coordinators and coaches.

Governor Applauds Little Rock's Museum of Discovery for Summer Learning Programs (KARK, Channel 4)

LITTLE ROCK, AR - Governor Mike Beebe's weekly column and radio address for June 22: Summer Learning.

The Museum of Discovery, a Science & History museum in downtown Little Rock, is known for its kid-friendly, hands-on exhibits. I attended the opening of their latest exhibit this week. When you see kids interacting with the exhibits, they don't look like they're learning; they look like they're having fun. In reality, they're doing both.

It's an effective teaching method, and the museum has gained some prestigious recognition for its efforts. Earlier this month, The Museum of Discovery was named one of the top-10 science museums in the country by Mensa, the world's largest and oldest high-IQ society.

I mention the museum this week not for this accolade, but to highlight it as a source of summertime learning for students. While having fun is the focus of any child's summer break, keeping intellectual stimulation as part of their routine is important for their future educational success. Research has shown time and again that children involved in summer learning activities are better at retaining the knowledge they're taught at school. According to a RAND Corporation report, students may lose a month or more of grade-level equivalency in math and reading during the summer without learning options.

As a State, we've worked to keep students academically stimulated once school lets out. By keeping minds active while students are out of the classroom, we put them in the best position to learn when they return in the fall.

Museums, libraries, summer camps, arts classes and programs through other organizations are great opportunities for summer learning. But many parents can also find opportunities for their kids within their local school districts. The Arkansas Department of Education coordinates the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, which complements regular academic lessons during non-school hours. Some school districts' community learning centers remain active during the summer months. Parents may contact their local school district's office to see if this or something similar is available where they live.

The Arkansas Out-of-School Network also can help parents identify school-based or school-linked programs in their area. The Network is a sponsored initiative of Arkansas State University's Childhood Services. For parents who may not have direct access to summer learning programs, the Arkansas Educational Television Network also offers an array of broadcasting and online resources.

All of these initiatives can help students expand the knowledge and skills they have gained over the past year, and they can enjoy the experience while doing so. Learning isn't something you do only in school; it's a lifelong experience and a year-round endeavor. The importance of this becomes more evident as technology continues to advance and the economy becomes increasingly global. By keeping our children intellectually engaged in the summer, we can strike a healthy balance of learning and leisure, having fun while keeping their minds active.