

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

June 7, 2013

Learning from the landscape -- literally (The Lovely Citizen)

Students in Chris Fischer's part of the after-school program know which end of a shovel is which. And they know how to use it, along with rakes, trowels, pickaxes and wheelbarrows.

For the past two months, the students have been building butterfly gardens on the grounds of the elementary school. They finished the first one a month ago, and last week, were putting the finishing touches on the second.

"Within hours of planting the first garden, we had butterflies fluttering about," Fischer said.

Funded by a mini-grant from the Arkansas Department of Education, the gardens are a play-yard science learning project, Fischer said. It was divided into two phases, education and implementation.

"We learned about the natural and manufactured materials present on the school campus, observed storm water and erosion patterns and considered the inventory of flora and fauna on the campus," Fischer said.

The students also took walks around campus as the new high school was being finished, and visited the forested ridge and ravines of the school's 50-plus acre property, he said. In all, 55 elementary and middle school students participated, deciding to create gardens that attract butterflies and create habitat areas for insects and birds.

"We titled the project 'Learning with the Landscape: Going Outdoors to Natural Classrooms,'" he said.

Using a landscape-architect approach, the students developed plans for two gardens, measuring the space and estimating how much the soil and mulch would be needed. Then they selected dogwoods, redbuds, butterfly bushes and other trees, shrubs, perennials and herbs from Bear Creek Nursery. They also did some excavation and clearing, placed the straw bales for edging, filled the beds with soil, planted and fertilized.

In addition to butterflies, the gardens have attracted bees, salamanders and moths, Fischer said. Students said they enjoyed building the gardens because they liked nature and helping.

"We're hoping this project helps launch many more greening efforts at the school," Fischer said.

The project augments the nature-themed programming that Fischer have been working with for the 21st Century Community Learning Center. The concept of the grant was to develop student-driven

projects that support STEAM activities -- science and technology interpreted through engineering and the arts, all based in mathematical elements.

AGFC converts the Monticello School District pond into community fishery (Advance-Monticellonian)

With school out for the summer, it might be a good time to take the kids fishing.

Brett Timmons with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC) said Monticello is now home to a community fishery.

“The pond, located on the property owned by the Monticello School District, is open for fishing when school is not in session,” Timmons said.

Since there are no students in school due to summer vacation, Timmons said the pond can be fished throughout the day starting immediately. However, he said he and the district have not discussed any impact the daytime fishing might have on summer school.

“If fishing during the day causes a problem during summer school, we are going to have to restrict fishing during summer school too,” Timmons said. “The school owns the property and we have to go by the rules set forth by the superintendent and the school board.”

Timmons said the pond was stocked in March and is stocked monthly to keep the stock up. Approximately 500 pounds of catfish are released into the pond monthly.

“We will be adding large mouth bass and brim to the pond at some point,” Timmons said. “It will be catch and release on the large mouth bass.”

He said in order to add a different variety of fish into the pond, he will have to inventory it to see how many of what kinds of fish are inside the pond to make sure the environment will support the bass and brim.

Timmons said the pond hosted a fishing derby in March.

“We had a really good turnout at the first derby,” he said. “I’d guess about 200 people showed up.”

Timmons added that he hopes to have another fishing derby in the fall. He said he also plans to use the pond to host fishing clinics.

Timmons said the commission wanted to access the pond in order to bring more community fisheries to Southeast Arkansas.

“Right now the closest ponds we have that are stocked monthly are in Eudora and El Dorado,” he said. “We do stock a few ponds in this region of the state for tournaments, but this pond is stocked more regularly,” he said.

In January, Timmons said the pond will be included on the AGFC website. It will be classified as a fishery for kids under 16 and seniors over the age of 65.

“Right now it’s open to the general public but in January the only residents who can fish there legally are children under the age of 16 and residents over the age of 65,” Timmons explained. “Certainly if you are there with your child, parents may fish in the pond as well.”

Timmons added that anyone fishing in the pond over 16 years old must have a fishing license.

“If you are at the pond and your hand touches the pole, you need a fishing license,” he said. “If you don’t, you could be ticketed by Game and Fish officers.”

He said fishing licenses can be purchased for \$10.50 at any Walmart.

Timmons said fisherman need to respect the school’s property. He also said parking on the grass is strictly prohibited.

Education is the key to all our futures (Advance-Monticellonian, Commentary by State Rep. Sheila Lampkin)

Greetings! Although I’ve already said that I surmised that health care reform, Big River Steel, tax cuts and the veterans home were some of the key issues in the 89th House of Representatives, education is always a top priority in the Arkansas legislature.

I personally believe that education is the key to all our futures. A better educated workforce is essential to economic growth and development and a brighter future for all of us. The legislature’s support of this is evident in our \$4.9 billion dollar state budget which diverts over \$2 billion of General Revenue funds to education.

That said, many days I felt like public education was under assault. Often it seemed like we had more trying to take public education down, rather than lift it up in improvement.

Four or five major educational issues occupied most of our time and energy. Over the next few weeks I will try to enlighten you on some of our more crucial activities. The House Education Committee worked late several times a week as the session neared the end. We had several “big” issues facing us, including a court decision regarding school choice and passing an increase in per student funding.

You may recall that a federal judge ruled last year that the state’s 1989 school choice law is unconstitutional because of a provision based on race. That ruling was appealed to the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals and arguments were heard in January. While the appeal still has not been ruled on, the legislature believed we should address the present situation to give students and parents some guidelines in preparing for the next school year.

Although a bevy of bills were brought forward, Act 1227 was the final version passed. This law removes the racial component and caps the number of transfers allowed from one district in a year to no more than 3 percent of the district's student population. It bars transfers that would conflict with an existing desegregation order. The law went into effect immediately, as I said, to allow planning for the upcoming school year. (You may have noticed the recent "advertising" by local schools to entice more students.)

In anticipation of an upcoming court decision, Act 1227 stipulates that this new school choice law will expire on July 1, 2015, to allow lawmakers to review the legislation in light of the 8th Circuit Court's eventual ruling and compliance with its determination. The law will then be extended or rewritten, but it is a solution to the problem for now.

The other big educational topic was Adequacy. In educational terms, adequacy is the amount of money per pupil deemed necessary to educate a child in Arkansas' public schools. A 2002 state Supreme Court ruling requires Arkansas to appropriate sufficient money for schools to provide every student the opportunity for an equitable and adequate education.

A study is conducted every two years and the per-pupil adequacy amount must be adjusted, based on student needs and inflation, not on the amount of money the state has.

There is a complicated formula used to determine this adequacy to be provided per pupil. Each biennium the House and Senate Education Committees hold a month-long "adequacy study" of the Arkansas education system that looks at technology costs, utilities costs, teachers' salaries, transportation costs and other expenses to determine the per pupil amount necessary, in accordance with present spending and the projected inflation rate for the next two years. In the 2012-13 school year school districts received \$6,267 per student.

Last fall the House and Senate Education Committees undertook the lengthy study for the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years. After careful review and upon the recommendations from BLT (Bureau of Legislative Research), the committees voted to recommend a spending increase of 1.8 percent to 2.5 percent to keep up with the estimated rate of inflation for those upcoming years.

During the session the full House then voted unanimously to increase school funding. HB1774 increases per-student funding for public schools from \$6,267 to \$6,393 for the following school year (2013-14). In 2014 - 15, the amount increases to \$6,521 per student.

This was not a hasty decision. Next session we do need to work on disparities for busing in terms of lengths of routes and miles traveled. Adequacy, like educational opportunities, is an ever-changing reality, but our "kids" are worth it! I serve on the House Education Committee this biennium.

Next week I'll discuss more educational issues of the 89th General Assembly.

Speaker tells kids about career in gas and oil (Van Buren County Democrat)

Paige Miller with Arkansas Independent Producers and Royalty Owners and the Arkansas Petroleum Council spoke recently with Shirley Elementary students about the oil and gas industry and employment opportunities within the field.

She told students that currently America's oil and natural gas industry supports 9.2 million American jobs.

There are more than 22,000 total jobs supported by Fayetteville Shale project alone, Miller said. Arkansas ranks eighth in natural gas production among states and 17th among oil producing states, she said.

In addition students discussed the different methods that energy is used such as transportation, heating and cooling, cooking, and lighting.

Miller talked with students about the different types of jobs within the industry and the importance of studying in school and developing the ability to work well with others.

Throughout the school year Shirley Elementary students have been encouraged to seek opportunities to find new interests and set goals in order to achieve success not only in school but in their future careers. If you would like to educate students about your career and the steps taken to achieve your goals, contact the Elementary Counselor's office at (501) 723-4905 to present during the 2013-2014 school year.

Students serve as governor for a day (Pine Bluff Commercial, Commentary by Steve Brawner)

For two days last week, two teenagers served as governor of Arkansas.

Well, not really. Mike Beebe remains governor, unless he is traveling out of state, in which case Lt. Gov. Mark Darr is the state's chief executive.

The "governors" were Abby Hutton from Springdale, a student at Shiloh Christian High School, and Scott Sims from McGehee High School. The two were elected to their positions at Arkansas Girls State and Arkansas Boys State.

The week-long camps teach nominated high school seniors about government and politics. Boys State, sponsored by the American Legion, is hosted by the University of Central Arkansas in Conway, while Girls State is sponsored by the American Legion Auxiliary and is held at Harding University in Searcy.

The students spend the week hearing speeches, going to sessions, and politicking. They're divided into two parties, where they run for many of the same local and state offices for which adults compete. At the end of the week, those elected to state offices descend on the Capitol to serve for a few hours in those positions. While Abby and Scott were sitting in the governor's office, some of their fellow

students were voting on various laws as state legislators. Two from each camp are elected to later serve as delegates to Boys Nation and Girls Nation in Washington, D.C.

How important a training ground are Boys State and Girls State? President Clinton was serving as a delegate to Boys Nation when that famous photograph of him and President Kennedy was taken. Mike Huckabee was governor of Boys State before he was governor of Arkansas. Mack McLarty, who served as Clinton's chief of staff in the White House, also was a Boys State governor. Seventeen legislators in this year's General Assembly had attended Boys State or Girls State.

I attended Boys State in 1990. I had a great time even though I didn't campaign for any offices.

Abby occupied the governor's office in the Capitol on Thursday, May 30, while Scott took his turn the next day. As soon as she was elected, she was whisked away from her fellow delegates and asked to appoint about 30 of them to various offices. Some, such as the director of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, were easier because she was familiar with that state agency. Others were harder.

"I didn't know that I needed a director of the department of Social Security disability benefits," she said. "That was interesting."

Abby said she was already politically aware – she calls herself "kind of a states' rights person" who believes in a small federal government – before she arrived at Girls State. She's a Student Council president who is active in her church and community. She knows what she wants to do in life – work as an industrial engineer. She's also a pilot who volunteers at the Veterans Administration hospital with her dog, Annie.

Scott, meanwhile, is a good student with a 31 on his ACT who is still mulling his options for college and career. He was not particularly politically aware before arriving at Boys State. Instead, he's been preoccupied with excelling in school and growing up – which is exactly what he is supposed to be doing. "Before Boys State here, I would have probably told you I don't have much of an opinion," he said. "Between football and ... my four AP classes, I haven't really had time to keep up with politics or anything. It's hard to find time to breathe and sleep."

Neither had thought much about running for office before this summer, but after their weeklong immersions into government and politics, both are interested now. But neither point to particular issues that would motivate them. Instead, they're more concerned with the character of elected officials. Abby referenced the current IRS scandal and the legal travails of Arkansas' former treasurer, Martha Shoffner.

She said that, in her election, she received a standing ovation after a speech where she said she would govern with a servant's heart, with Jesus as her example.

"He would bend down and wash dirty, dusty, awful feet, and I think that's the spirit each of our politicians have to have," she said.

A servant's heart. Who would vote against that?

Eureka Springs students head to SkillsUSA nationals (The Lovely Citizen)

Two Eureka Springs students will compete in the web design competition at the National Leadership and Skills Conference in Kansas City, Mo., the last week in June.

Cheyenne Pierce and Brittany Tapia qualified by winning the web design contest at the Arkansas SkillsUSA conference in Hot Springs in April. Working on the floor of the conference center while other competitions went on, Pierce and Tapia redesigned three pages of the Pine Bluff city website in four hours, scoring 480 out of 500 possible points. In Kansas City, they will compete against teams from 48 states and three territories.

"Everyone there is more advanced than we are," Pierce said. "We compete against colleges, too."

Pierce, who graduated from Eureka Springs High School in May, said computers were her 'worst enemies' before she took a computer applications class her junior year from business education teacher Sherry Sullivan. Then Pierce started working before and after school with Sullivan, learning the Dreamweaver website-building program, Photoshop, Illustrator and Aftereffects graphics programs, and Microsoft Word, Excel and Powerpoint. For the state competition, Pierce and Tapia redesigned the heading of the Pine Bluff website, rearranged the layout and added graphic effects.

"It was busy and hard to find information," Pierce said. "We made it more organized so you can find stuff faster."

Tapia, a senior at ESHS, also started taking computer classes her junior year. She teamed up with Pierce, who was president of the school's Future Business Leaders of America club, after Pierce discovered that Tapia did 'amazing' graphics and when faced with a project, never gave up. Tapia is also a fast learner.

"I learned fading on the day of the competition," she said, referring to a captions effect.

Sullivan said both students are very talented and very dedicated to have come so far in two years. She will accompany them to the National Leadership and Skills Conference, a five-day event with 5,600 students competing in 94 trade, technical and leadership fields. Next year, Pierce will attend Oklahoma State University Institute of Technology. Sullivan has asked Tapia to help her teach the digital communications class at ESHS next year.

For more information about SkillsUSA, go to www.skillsusa.org.

High school adds vocational classes (The Lovely Citizen)

Eureka Springs High School will offer classes in sports marketing and the hospitality industry starting next fall.

The classes will be taught by Sherry Sullivan, the school's certified Career and Trades Education teacher. Sullivan said she will teach sports marketing fall semester and hospitality the second semester, and keep adding classes.

"The second year I'll teach travel and lodging," she said.

Sports marketing will focus on marketing a business and how to market merchandise. Hospitality will introduce students to working at a front desk or other areas. Sullivan said that high school vocational programs related to tourism are prevalent in Arkansas.

"I have wanted to do it for years," she said.

Principal Kathy Lavender made it possible for her to have the time to teach the classes, Sullivan said, and to schedule classes that run one semester. Many Eureka Springs students are looking for career options, and want to do something in the business world, she said.

"We have to give them an idea of what there is to do," she said. "They have no idea until they see what's out there."

Sullivan said she hopes to get students into internships that will show them what a job involves, and give them one-to-one training and hands-on experience.

"It looks great on a resume and improves their chances of getting a job," she said.

Sullivan will attend workshops through the Arkansas Hospitality Association's Education Foundation, which sponsors vocational programs in travel and tourism. She has also talked to local leaders in the hospitality industry and plans to use them as guest speakers during the school year.

Hodges wins teacher scholarship (North Little Rock Times)

Heather Hodges, a teacher at Amboy Elementary in North Little Rock, has been awarded a scholarship by the Arkansas State Teachers Association (ASTA).

Hodge's scholarship will go towards her last class in her Teaching People of Other Cultures program of study at Henderson State University. The class will allow her to better understand and teach her students.

ASTA is committed to offering individual educators various avenues for improving effectiveness in the classroom. "ASTA commends the dedication that Ms. Hodge has demonstrated in securing funding for her scholarship," said ASTA Executive Director Michele Linch.

The scholarship and grant competition is held twice a year in the fall and spring and is open to all Arkansas educators. The fall deadline is Oct. 31.

For more information about ASTA or the Arkansas State Teachers Association, visit www.astapro.org

McCollum's Column: Change in testing schedule could start dominoes moving (Commentary by David McCollum, Log Cabin Democrat)

NORTH LITTLE ROCK — Dominoes are about to fall that will alter the spring sports schedules for high schools in Arkansas.

Lance Taylor gave the Arkansas Activities Association's board of directors a heads-up and warning at the group's spring workshop.

The AAA calendar is set by numerical weeks in the month each. It places regional and state tournaments in soccer, softball, track and field and baseball in early to mid-May.

School officials almost always have to work around graduations and AP testing, which is not that big of a deal. Persons can pay a \$25 late fee if AP testing conflicts with championship competition. In the past, soccer players from El Dorado, who were at Mountain Home for a state tournament, took their AP tests at Mountain Home.

No more. AP testing has to be done at the school in which the student is enrolled. One complication.

But what can really upset the scheduling applecart — and disrupt part of the summer for school officials — is end-of-course testing, which is likely to be moved by the state board of education from April to May, at the request of teachers and administrators. The theory, and a valid one, is that teachers can have more time to prepare their students for testing in various subjects, the students can have a greater chance to perform well on the tests and more schools can avoid being put into distress because of low test scores.

Taylor said the situation is still in the conceptual and discussion stage, and the windows to schedule events around testing are uncertain. "But it is coming down eventually that we will have to make some decision to accommodate end-of-course testing with our schedule and calendar," Taylor said

What this means is seasons for baseball, softball, track and field and soccer may be extended with state tournaments in late May or June.

The AAA sets up its schedule to allow as many students as possible to participate in as many extracurricular activities as possible. But they cannot interfere with testing. That means the start of spring seasons, most of which start in late February or early March, cannot be moved back and the state tournaments and spring championship events held earlier

If the seasons and tournaments are moved ahead, it could mean that the seasons for some spring sports may not even begin until after spring break.

Extending seasons into June would affect spring football, 7-on-7 football, vacations, summer baseball and other amateur sports and teacher contracts.

Quandary ahead.

School-choice plaintiffs jumping gun, court told (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

Attorneys for the Blytheville School District asked a judge Thursday to dismiss a federal lawsuit filed by a group of parents and grandparents that challenges the district's claim that it is exempt from allowing transfers for the forthcoming school year under the Arkansas Public School Choice Act of 2013.

The plaintiffs have not exhausted their remedies in the law, attorneys Jay Bequette and Robert Coleman wrote in a motion to dismiss filed in the U.S. District Court of the Eastern District of Arkansas. The plaintiffs' applications to transfer their students have not yet been denied, and they have not appealed those decisions to the state Board of Education, as the law allows, the attorneys wrote.

The 2,500-student Blytheville district said it is exempt from the law, which allows students to transfer out of their resident school districts, because of a stipulation that allows a district to annually opt out of the School Choice Act's provisions if it "is subject to the desegregation order or mandate of a federal court or agency remedying the effects of past racial segregation."

The law requires districts to report exemptions to the state Department of Education by April 1. But, because the Public School Choice Act of 2013 wasn't signed into law until April 16, the Education Department collected exemptions until May 17, the agency has said. Twenty-three of Arkansas' 239 school districts claimed exemptions by that deadline.

Attorney Jess Askew III, who sued on behalf of the plaintiffs, argued that Blytheville's exemption isn't valid because it notified the department after the date set in the law and because it relied on outdated and irrelevant legal cases when it approved plans to opt out.

But Bequette and Coleman wrote in their Thursday filing that the state Board of Education has the authority under state law to "promulgate rules to implement the act."

And the case should be heard in state courts because it's a matter of interpretation of state law, not a federal civil-rights issue as plaintiffs allege, the school district's attorneys wrote.

"The issues presented by this case are solely or predominantly state issues which are not even ripe for adjudication in a court of law," Bequette and Coleman wrote.

In addition, the grandparents listed as plaintiffs in the suit do not have standing to sue because they do not have custody of their grandchildren, Bequette and Coleman wrote.

Askew had also filed a previous challenge to the previous version of the Arkansas Public School Choice Act.

A federal judge struck down the Arkansas Public School Choice Act of 1989 in June 2012 after deeming unconstitutional a racial restriction that barred transfers if the percentage of enrollment for the student's race in the new district exceeded that percentage in the student's resident district.

The plaintiffs in that case - whose white children were denied transfers from the Malvern School District to the Magnet Cove School District because of the restriction - sought to have only the race-based provision removed from the law.

Finding that he couldn't strike down the race rule independently without disturbing the intent of the law, U.S. District Judge Robert Dawson declared the entire 1989 law unconstitutional. His decision drew appeals from all parties, including the state, which argued that the racial restriction was necessary because of Arkansas' history of desegregation issues.

State lawmakers have since repealed the 1989 law and replaced it with the Arkansas Public School Choice Act of 2013.

Judges with the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis, hearing appeals of Dawson's decision in the original case, have asked attorneys involved if those appeals should now be considered moot since the law in question has been repealed and replaced. In briefs filed May 23, only Askew argued that the case should continue.

Alec Gaines, who also represents the plaintiffs in the Blytheville case, is married to Eliza Gaines, assistant publisher of the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette.

'Mr. Moore' retiring after 37 years (Lonoke Democrat)

After 37 years, 31 of which were principal at Lonoke Primary School, Ross Moore has decided to call it a career.

Moore will retire when his contract expires at the end of June.

During his tenure at Lonoke, Moore taught Arkansas History, civics and American History at Lonoke Junior High from 1976-1980; Moore went to Lonoke High School in the fall of 1980, where he was the GCE (General Cooperative Education) coordinator and worked halftime in the office as an administrator.

"We didn't have an assistant principal back then so I did some of those functions," Moore said. He did that for two years before getting the "call" to be a full-time administrator in August 1982.

"Mr. Sagely called me one August morning and said 'would you like to be principal at the primary school?'" Moore said, referring to former Lonoke superintendent Maurice Sagely. "I said yes."

Moore said he thought he would be the high school principal at some point early on.

"I thought I would work with high school kids," he said. "But it was [a perfect fit]."

Moore said he's enjoyed seeing the students at the primary school learning.

"There is just something about them coming in to us and they didn't have a lot of experiences, some of them," he said. "Some of them had a lot of experiences."

"[It was] all those light bulbs when they come on," Moore added. "When you go into a classroom and the teacher asks questions and the kids respond. It's the good camaraderie between the teacher and the kids and the feel that we are making a difference for the kids."

Moore said Lonoke is a diverse place.

"We have a huge spectrum of socio-economic levels," he said. "It's good to see we are making differences with kids that might not have had an opportunity to be successful without school. And we're making a difference for them and they can be as successful as the child who is exposed to so much because the parents have that opportunity."

Moore said the students begin to learn and take advantage of what school is giving them very quickly.

"Gosh, they are so eager to learn," he said. "They are so appreciative of learning. That excites me. I love nothing more than being in the classroom and watching kids learn. That is what makes it so special about being a principal."

Moore said he had opportunities to do different things in his career.

"But that is not what I wanted to do," he said. "I wanted to be where the kids were, be where the teachers are."

Moore said he has no regrets for being at the primary school for 31 years but will definitely miss some things when he's gone.

"I'm going to miss contact with the kids, and the people that I work with," Moore said. "I'm going to miss the kids the most."

"When you live in the town of the school where you work, I've gotten to be the principal of the mom and the dad and now the kids and I may be working on a third generation," he added. "Getting to see those kids and make those relationships that you do with people and the trust that people have put in me ... that has been a blessing to know that I had the opportunity to help their kids be successful."

Moore is a 1971 graduate of Lonoke High School. He attended school here his entire time.

He received his bachelor's degree from the University of Central Arkansas and his master's degree from the University of Arkansas.

During Moore's career, he had worked for seven superintendents. They are Sagely, Charles Knox, Dee Human, Dwain East, Sharron Havens, John Tackett and now Suzanne Bailey.

Moore said he thanks the people of Lonoke for their support over the past 37 years.

"Thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve the people of Lonoke in the capacity of being the principal at the primary school for all these years," he said. "I truly believe you are a servant in this role or any role as a teacher."

Moore and his wife of almost 33 years, Brenda, have two sons. Josh graduated in 2001 from Lonoke High School; Jordan graduated in 2006. Brenda taught for 38 years before retiring a year ago.

Arkansas No Kid Hungry Campaign Kicks off Summer Meals Program (KARK, Channel 4)

Video available at http://arkansasmatters.com/fulltext/?nxd_id=669692

LITTLE ROCK, AR - Children out of classes for the summer break who count on school breakfast and lunch can still get those meals thanks to the Arkansas Summer Food Service Program.

It's a partnership that includes the Arkansas Department of Human Service's Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education-Health and Nutrition unit, the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, Share Our Strength, and the USDA.

First Lady Ginger Beebe joined representatives from those groups as well as community leaders at this morning's kickoff of the summer meals program at the Arkansas Dream Center in Little Rock.

For many kids, summertime means food, friends and fun. For families who count on school breakfast and lunch, however, the summer months can be stressful with food budgets being stretched even further than usual.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers free summer meals to children ages 18 and younger who come to a summer meals site. Share Our Strength's Center for Best Practices reports that in Arkansas, only 13.8 percent of children who receive a free or reduced-price lunch participated in free summer meal programs in 2012. That means many Arkansas children may be at higher risk of food insecurity during the months when school is not in session.

Families may call 1-866-3-HUNGRY, 1-877-8-HAMBRE, [click here](#) or text "FoodAR" to 877-877 to find a site near them.

Tonight at 7:00 at the Market Place Cinema off Rodney Parham on Merrill Drive, the Arkansas organizations host a free special screening of *A Place at the Table*. It's an acclaimed documentary film focusing on hunger through the eyes of three people from different parts of our country who are unsure where their next meals will come from. A Q&A discussion of hunger in Arkansas follows the screening. (This is a free event but seating is limited to the first 200 people. You must RSVP by email with subject line: TABLE to Nancy Conley at nconley@arhungeralliance.org.)

Even Some College Means a Higher Paycheck (Arkansas Business)

A recent study by the Arkansas Research Center in Conway shows that students who completed even a few college courses will make more money than if they never went to college.

The report, "Education & Wage Outcomes for the Arkansas Workforce," identified nearly 70,000 Arkansans who stopped their formal education in 2006 and then averaged out what their wages were in 2011, said ARC Director Neal Gibson.

The study showed that those people who either dropped out of high school or only finished high school will have a tough financial road ahead of them. Their average wage after five years was just \$12,500.

"Can you imagine trying to make a living with \$12,500, especially if you have children and especially if you're a single mom?" Gibson said. "The future's pretty bleak."

The good news is that more education means more money. The average wage for someone with even a little college after five years was \$23,000.

"There is some value in getting 30 hours or 60 hours [of college credit] rather than not to go at all," said Greg Holland, director of research at ARC.

Those who finished a bachelor's degree in 2006 on average earned \$38,900 five years later, and those who completed more than a bachelor's degree earned \$52,500.

Gibson said the point of the study was to get the word out to high school students that they probably will struggle financially in Arkansas if they don't get more education or some sort of credential.

"Every high school student should be made aware, in as practical terms as possible, exactly what their economic future will look like if they do not graduate high school and they do not continue their education," the report said. "Arkansas should be committed to encouraging current workers to continue their education as well."

A Matter of Timing

The study looked at 69,515 Arkansans who stopped their education in 2006, when the economy was thriving thanks to the housing bubble.

"The relative boom simply seemed the new normal," the report said. "In addition, work was just beginning on what would be another economic driver in the state: fracking of the Fayetteville Shale."

So there were plenty of jobs for people who just had a high school diploma or less. "Any deficiencies in skills a worker might have could quickly be made up on an actual jobsite," the report said.

In 2006, more than a third of the sample, or 36.9 percent, stopped going to school after receiving their high school diplomas — or didn't bother to complete high school at all. Another 31.3 percent stopped after attending some college but without completing a certificate or degree program, while the remaining 31.8 percent completed a certificate or degree in 2006.

But in the five years after 2006, the country experienced the Great Recession and its sluggish recovery.

“Could we have convinced a graduating senior in 2006 that if they did not continue their education their expected annual salary would be only \$12,499 five years later?” the report asked.

Gibson told Arkansas Business that he would like the statistics to be turned into posters and placed in high school counselors' offices. “So when kids come in to talk about their future, they can see what kind of wages they can expect for that future,” Gibson said.

In 2011, the difference in average wages between an Arkansan who got his bachelor's degree in 2006 compared with someone who stopped after graduating from high school that year was \$38,872 vs. \$14,972.

High School Dropouts

The high school seniors who dropped out of school in 2006 were earning an average of \$11,254 five years later. And those who didn't complete the ninth grade were earning less than \$7,000 annually.

But if a person received a GED diploma in 2006, the average wage was \$15,620. That was slightly more than the \$14,972 earned by the workers who had completed high school in 2006, but those who got GEDs in 2006 were, on average, 10 years older than those who graduated from high school. They had been in the workforce longer, which explained why they have a larger paycheck, the report said.

Still, “five years after their last education attainment, these Arkansas workers are making very low wages, and the prospects for a higher paying job given this level of educational achievement are very low,” the report said.

Holland said the point of the study was to look only at the wages made, not what industries the people went into. He said he hopes to expand the study later to include more information.

College Dropouts

The numbers indicate that the longer students stay in college — even if they have no credentials or degrees to show for it — the better off they'll be financially.

The salary for someone who quit after one year of college was a little more than \$21,000 five years later. But someone who quit college as a senior in 2006 earned an average of \$31,500 five years later.

“Unfortunately, almost 70 percent of this group is made up of those who went to college for a single year or less,” the report said.

Those college freshman, however, are earning more than \$6,000 a year more than those who stopped going to school after receiving their high school diplomas. “That’s kind of shocking,” Gibson said. “We don’t have enough details to understand everything that’s going on there, but it is interesting.”

He said the study didn’t try to determine whether going to college was worth the investment. However, the Hamilton Project at the Brookings Institution of Washington, D.C., calculated that the return on the investment of a bachelor’s degree was 15.2 percent.

“We can have this debate on whether college is worth it or not,” Gibson said. “The grim truth is if you’re a high school graduate five years later only making \$15,000, people need to be aware of that.”

The Arkansas Research Center was established in 2009 using funding from a National Center for Education Statistics grant to the Arkansas Education Department.