

# ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

March 13, 2013

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## **Coach arrested on drug charges (Maumelle Monitor)**

The second Maumelle High School girl's basketball coach has been arrested on drug charges within barely a year. Arkansas State Police said Lauren Buckner, 46, of Jacksonville was arrested March 4 and charged with alleged possession of a controlled substance, DUI, and careless and prohibited driving.

ASP spokesman Bill Sadler said the report from the state crime lab has not returned yet on the substance suspected to be a controlled substance.

The arrest followed a single car accident on U.S. Highway 67 North.

Pulaski County Special School District officials say Buckner has been suspended without pay from the school.

Buckner was the head girls basketball coach at MHS and in January 2012, her assistant Brittany Burns, 35, was arrested for possession of drugs as she left the Maumelle campus. Burns was arrested again last summer on additional drug possession charges following a traffic stop.

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## **Vilonia moving forward with new school plans (Log Cabin Democrat, Conway)**

VILONIA — With a \$12.1 million base figure in hand, officials in the Vilonia School District will move forward enforcing the plans to build a new intermediate school.

Architect Steve Elliott and Lance Wright, an engineer with Nabholz Construction Services, met with the Vilonia Board of Education Monday night and provided a bid summary and a base bid of \$12.1 million to build a new Intermediate School. Originally, it was projected the district's wish list for the building could reach \$15 million. The board began to re-configure, cut and strategize allowing the project to stay under budget. However, on bid day, Elliott said, there were a tremendous number of bidders resulting in "good prices," better than projected resulting in good news for the district.

"We hit the market perfect," Elliott said. "People were looking right now for what they wanted to this summer."

The lower bids resulted in the board, Monday night, adding back some of their previous cuts including curb and gutter, ceramic tile in the bathrooms and a flag pole and adding on a few other additions. Almost an hour of discussion, the board also requested pricing for other projects. It was said they will move forward adding and refiguring until they reach their goal of spending about \$13.6 million on the project with \$9.6 million being derived from state participation.

Superintendent Frank Mitchell said he is pleased with the bids and the work that has been done on behalf of the district.

"I feel like we are in pretty good shape on this now," he added. Both Elliott and Wright, he said, have been working diligently to help the district to reach their goal.

"They have worked hard," he said. "Funny thing is....the harder they work to get us a better price, the less money they are going to make. They work on percentages."

In other business:

- Approved the Vilonia Ministerial Alliance sponsoring the senior breakfast set for May 3 and baccalaureate set for May 5.
- Approved refinishing the high school, middle school and old gymnasium floors at a cost of \$16,677 with Stride Services.

Reports:

- Teacher Chere' Beavers provided details regarding the district's gifted and talented K-12 program. Currently, she said the program serves 238 identified gifted students in grades 3-12. The students are in classrooms for 150 minutes per week. The students are identified through a process of referral from parents, teachers, counselors and community members and testing. The screening committee, Beavers said, do not know the identity of the students during the process.

High school gifted and talented students, she said, have the opportunity to take seven pre-AP courses, 13 AP classes and three concurrent college credit courses. More than 130 AP exams will be given during the spring.

- Wright said the saferoom at the Primary School is proceeding. Footings are being installed now, he said. He anticipates the project to be completed by July.
- The district has received an Arkansas Career Education grant for \$58,000 to begin an engineering program, said teacher Joshua Lieblong. The classes, he said, will help the students prepare for college. The curriculum, he said, will include aerospace engineering, civil engineering and architectural engineering. Those components, he anticipates, will be the most advantageous for students. He plans to begin offering it to 11th and 12th graders in the next school year.

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### **Ark. panel backs change to charter school process (KFOX, Channel 14, El Paso, TX)**

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — A House committee has approved legislation that would change the way Arkansas approves charter schools applications.

The House Education Committee on Tuesday advanced legislation that would designate the state Education Department and not the Board of Education as the primary authorizer of charter schools. The proposal by Republican Rep. Mark Biviano of Searcy now heads to the House for a vote.

Biviano's proposal would require the state education commissioner to appoint a panel of his staff to review and approve charter school applications. The Board of Education would have the power to review that panel's decisions.

Biviano had originally proposed legislation that would have taken the power to approve charter schools from the state board and would have created a new independent commission to consider applications.

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## **Pine Bluff School Board votes to close Greenville (Pine Bluff Commercial)**

The Pine Bluff School Board voted unanimously Tuesday night to close Greenville Elementary School at the end of the 2012-2013 school year citing a continuing decline in district enrollment and a consequent decrease in revenue.

"It does sadden us that we need to do this," board member Phyllis A. Wilkins said after the vote. "We don't like to close a school and we do not do this easily."

The vote came after a series of public meetings hosted by Superintendent Linda Watson and her administrative staff over the past month in which the administration laid out the reasons behind its recommendation to close Greenville.

"The district needs to operate more efficiently to remain fiscally sound," Watson said in explaining the rationale to the board. "In order for the district to operate more efficiently, it needs to close at least one school for the next school year. The district has determined that Greenville is the most logical school to close in light of repairs and renovations that are needed and the fact that a smaller number of students, teachers and staff will be affected by closing this school versus others in the district."

In a related move, the board voted to adjust the attendance zones in the district to reflect the Greenville closing.

"The administration has reviewed and revised the current elementary school attendance zones so that no one school would be burdened with an excessive number of students," Watson said.

### **Superintendent contract**

In other business the board voted unanimously to give Watson a new two year employment contract that will be effective until June 30, 2015.

"An employment contract for Superintendent Watson has been presented to the board for its review," board president Piccola Washington said prior to the vote. "Several changes and corrections were inserted into the contract which extends her current contract for two more years."

### **Math**

The board voted to approve the adoption of new mathematics textbooks for the 2013-2014 school year for grades K-12.

"Did the math teachers get to talk to you and provide their input?" Wilkins asked Assistant Superintendent for Learning Services Beverly Ruthven.

"The math coaches spearheaded the effort to review the textbooks and the teachers got to vote on which books would be adopted," Ruthven said.

### **First readings**

The board approved a series of board policies for the first reading that include school district legal status; general organization of the local board of education; school board meetings; board officers; unexpired term

fulfillment/vacancies; school board member code of conduct; board member removal from office; and board powers and responsibilities.

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“Periodically, policies need to be revised to meet legal requirements and district needs,” Watson said. “The administration is in the process of revising and developing the Board policies.”

The board approved a series of classified personnel policies for the first reading that include classified employee sick leave; classified personnel grievances; classified personnel level two grievance form; classified personnel computer use policy; classified personnel acceptable use and internet safety policy; classified personnel internet use agreement; workplace injury/disability and reasonable accommodations policy; school bus driver’s use of cell phone; classified personnel cell phone use; and classified reduction in force.

The board also approved a series of certified personnel policies for the first reading.

#### Personnel

The board voted to re-hire certified and classified employees as well as administrators and principals for the 2013-2014 school year.

“The Pine Bluff School District requires that district personnel be rehired in March every year in order to plan adequately for the upcoming school year,” Watson said. “State law requires that certified employees be rehired by May 1 and that classified staff be rehired by June 1.”

#### Finances

District director of business and finance Pam Winkler presented the financial report for the month of February.

“For the month ending Feb. 28 the district had a beginning balance of \$13,391,509; current month receipts of \$2,532,658; current month expenses of \$3,108,676; an amount available for operating of \$15,710,336; and a total balance for all funds of \$19,774,751,” Winkler said.

#### Pen or Pencil

Rev. Jesse C. Turner, program director of Pen or Pencil, spoke to the board about the work done by the program for district students.

“Pen or Pencil promotes education and the reduction of delinquency using effective mentoring and positive youth development practices,” Turner said. “The idea is to shift a student’s trajectory away from the penitentiary and instead towards the pencil and an education. The program uses civil and human rights to educate students. Attorney General Eric Holder is concerned about gun violence and he has invited young people from our program to come to a regional gun violence summit that will be held in Little Rock this summer. We have programs at Robert F. Morehead Middle School in the Dollarway School District as well as Jack Robey Junior High here in the Pine Bluff School District.”

Turner thanked the district for allowing the program to work with district students.

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## **Longer time sought to fix ailing schools (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)**

The Arkansas Education Department needs the option of holding school districts in distress for longer than two years, Education Commissioner Tom Kimbrell told a House committee Tuesday.

The legal limit of two years can be enough to fix many woes, but the short duration leaves some communities unprepared to retake control of their school systems, Kimbrell told members of the House Education Committee.

The committee passed House Bill 1770 sponsored by Rep. Mark Perry, D-Jacksonville, which would allow the department to classify a district or a school as being in academic, fiscal or facility distress for up to five years.

Currently a school district designated as being in distress has no more than two years to correct deficiencies or face penalties - such as a state takeover or annexation into another district.

The state Department of Education can take over a district at any time if progress isn't made on correcting problems.

Kimbrell said the department would determine each year whether the district or school is still in distress.

"The first year is triage, the second year is [when you] begin to do the first aid and then the third year is when you really begin the healing process, you begin to really do that diagnostic work that you need to build a program and build a plan," Kimbrell said. "Two years has not been enough, these are complex issues, they are not simple issues."

Department spokesman Phyllis Stewart said after the meeting that 11 districts are classified as being under fiscal distress. That includes situations such as missing money, too much debt or not reconciling bank statements. They are Alpena, Brinkley, Bismarck, Cutter Morning Star, Drew Central, Hartford, Helena-West Helena, Hermitage, Mineral Springs, Pulaski County Special and Western Yell County.

The Lee County and Strong Huttig districts are in academic distress, she said. Districts are in academic distress for reasons that include large numbers of students failing to score at grade level their displeasure at the news of a possible closure; however, there was no display of opposition to the closure at Tuesday's meeting.

Greenville Elementary was chosen for possible closure because the school needs expensive repairs, Watson said last month at one of the community meetings. For one, the school needs a new heating and air conditioning unit, which could cost more than \$100,000. The building also needs a new roof. That's another \$120,000, she said.

Students who attend Greenville will have the opportunity to choose where they will attend classes next year, according to the district.

The transfer choices will be Broadmoor Elementary, Oak Park Elementary, Southwood Elementary and 34th Avenue Elementary.

Greenville has 310 kindergarten through fifth-grade pupils and 35 faculty members. The district typically loses about 40 teachers annually because of retirement or other reasons, district officials said, so they anticipate no layoffs.

Once the school closes, its staff and faculty members will be reassigned to other schools, district officials have said.

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### **Bill on move, shifts charter-school clout (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)**

A bill shifting authority to approve new charter schools from the state Board of Education to a panel inside the state Department of Education sailed through an Arkansas House committee Tuesday.

Also Tuesday, the 58th day of the session, legislation to limit most local elections to May or November cleared the House, and a bill to allow the open carrying of firearms in rural areas failed again to clear a House committee.

Bills to shield the names and addresses of minors in a motor-vehicle accident report from public disclosure and to automatically enroll new state employees in the state's deferred compensation plan flew through the Senate.

The nine-member state Board of Education appointed by the governor has the authority to approve charter schools under state law. The House Education Committee approved House Bill 1528 by Rep. Mark Biviano, R-Searcy, to transfer the authority to a charter panel that would be created in the Department of Education. The state board would be able to ask the panel to reconsider decisions within 30 days.

Biviano had also introduced House Bill 1040, which would have created a five-member charter-school commission to authorize all contracts for public charter schools and set graduation requirements, among other things.

But Biviano said there wasn't enough support to create a separate charter school board.

"There were a lot of questions about it, setting up a separate commission, and obviously people don't want to lose control. So it was a compromise," Biviano said of his HB1538.

### **VOTER IDENTIFICATION**

House Speaker Davy Carter, R-Cabot, referred a bill requiring photo identification to vote to the House Rules Committee on Tuesday after a representative questioned whether it had received enough support in the Senate to pass.

Rep. Jim Nickels, D-Sherwood, objected to consideration of Senate Bill 2 by Sen. Bryan King, R-Green Forest, saying it needs to be approved by two-thirds of the legislators to become law. King and others say it only takes a majority vote.

Nickels said that is necessary because the bill would change Amendment 51 to the Arkansas Constitution and would therefore require a two-thirds vote to pass each chamber.

The Rules Committee meets today and can decide whether it takes a super majority to pass the bill.

Carter said if the committee decides that the bill needed a two-thirds vote he will send it back to the Senate, which voted 23-12 to approve the bill.

He said it'll be a tough call for the Committee: "I don't think there is an easy answer to it." **SPECIAL ELECTIONS**

The House reconsidered its rejection of a bill that limits most special elections to May or November.

The House voted 68-22 to pass HB1357 by Rep. Allen Kerr, R-Little Rock.

On Monday, the House rejected the bill. On Tuesday, the House voted 74-18 to reconsider the bill after Kerr promised to change it so that school districts would still be allowed to hold millage elections in September.

Rep. Reginald Murdock, D-Marianna, said the representatives should have time to review the changes Kerr wants to make to the bill before the House sent the bill to the Senate.

Kerr said House members will have a chance to vote on the bill again if it comes back from the Senate.

He said cities and counties have abused the privilege of holding a special election whenever they like by arranging elections for days when voter turnout will be low.

“They’ve abused those privileges over the years having elections on holidays, days after holidays, trying to time them in such a way to control the outcome of the election, and in my opinion that’s completely un-American and just wrong,” Kerr said.

The House also voted 89-4 to expunge its earlier vote rejecting HB1329 by Rep. Andrea Lea, R-Russellville, which would reduce the fee for a concealed-weapons license. The bill was sent back to the House State Agencies Committee.

#### OPEN CARRY

For the second time, a bill to allow the open carrying of firearms in rural areas failed to clear the House Judiciary Committee.

House Bill 1408, sponsored by Rep. Sue Scott, R-Rogers, failed by one vote to clear the committee.

The measure included an amendment to remove cities and towns from places where a concealed-carry licensee could carry a handgun concealed or openly. The original bill would have allowed open carry in both rural and urban areas.

J.R. Hankins, the eastern region commander of the state police Highway Patrol Division, said his agency and the Arkansas Association of Chiefs of Police were against the bill, and that his agency opposed open carry under any conditions.

With Tuesday’s vote, the bill cannot be brought up again in the committee.

#### FOI EXEMPTION

The Senate unanimously approved a bill to exempt the name and address of a person under 18 in a motor-vehicle-accident report from disclosure to the public under the Arkansas Freedom of Information Act.

Under Senate Bill 225 by Sen. Eddie Joe Williams, R-Cabot, the name and address of minors in a motor-vehicle-accident report would be available to the minor’s parent, legal guardian or legal custodian or a representative of an insurance company that insures a person involved in the accident.

Williams told reporters that he proposed the bill because of an incident in Cabot about two years ago. A school bus with about 20 students on board was in a minor accident, he said. Afterward, parents received solicitations from chiropractors that “were written in such a way to make the parents feel guilty if they didn’t bring their kids into this particular chiropractor’s office to have manipulations done.” DEFERRED COMP FOR STATE EMPLOYEES

In a 35-0 vote, the Senate passed legislation to automatically enroll new state employees into the state’s deferred-compensation plan.

Under Senate Bill 232 by Sen. Johnny Key, R-Mountain Home, state employees hired after Jan. 1 would have 3 percent of their salary placed into the Arkansas Diamond Plan. They would be allowed to opt out of the program.

#### ABSENTEE BALLOTS

Absentee votes cast by Arkansans who die prior to Election Day would still be counted under legislation that unanimously passed the Senate.

House Bill 1283 by Rep. Doug House, R-North Little Rock, would allow the county clerk to accept such a ballot if it is signed, dated, postmarked and mailed before the date of the voter’s death, or signed, dated and delivered by a designated bearer, authorized agent or administrator before the date of the voter’s death, or if the ballot of a member of the armed services in active duty is executed before the date of his death.

#### DRY AND WET ELECTIONS

A Senate committee endorsed a bill that would allow county quorum courts to set a special local option election for a dry township, city, ward or precinct of a county located within a wet county if the “dry” law was passed by a voting district that is no longer in existence.

Lobbyist Justin Allen, speaking for the Jacksonville, North Little Rock and Sherwood chambers of commerce, said the townships of Bayou Meto in Jacksonville, Gray in Sherwood, Parkhill in North Little Rock, and Union in southwest Pulaski County voted themselves dry years ago, but none of these voting districts exists anymore. Senate Bill 374 by Sen. Jane English, R-North Little Rock, would allow voters in these areas to decide whether to become wet, Allen told the Senate State Agencies and Governmental Affairs Committee.

#### TICKETED EVENTS

A bill that would have barred candidates for elected office from using campaign funds to buy tickets to other candidates’ fundraisers failed to clear the Senate State Agencies and Governmental Affairs Committee in a voice vote.

Sen. Bruce Maloch, D-Magnolia, said his Senate Bill 59 “is a matter of integrity” with the public.

But Sen. Bryan King, R-Green Forest, said it helps his campaign to contribute to other candidates who think like he does or have similar goals.

In December, the Arkansas Ethics Commission fined Republican Sens. Eddie Joe Williams of Cabot, Michael Lamoureux of Russellville and Johnny Key of Mountain Home for breaking state ethics laws when they took money from their own campaigns and donated more than the ticketed price or suggested amount at fundraising events for fellow Republican candidates.

## DEBT DISCLOSURE

The Senate State Agencies and Governmental Affairs Committee endorsed Senate Bill 345 by Sen. Jane English. It would require public officials and candidates who owe money to the government to disclose the debt. The bill would require this information to be on their annual Statement of Financial Interest.

## HIV TESTING

The House Judiciary Committee passed a bill that would allow the state Department of Correction to stop testing inmates leaving prison for HIV.

Department spokesman Dina Tyler said Senate Bill 654, sponsored by Sen. Jon Woods, R-Springdale, would save the state more than \$100,000 a year.

Tyler said the department has performed about 36,000 tests for the virus that causes AIDS since 2007 and only two have resulted in positive results.

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## **Arkansas panel debates school-choice law rewrite (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)**

A lawmaker says removing race as the main factor in deciding whether a student can transfer to another district would give parents more control on educational choices for their children, but opponents warn the idea could lead to segregation.

The Senate Education Committee on Wednesday debated Republican Sen. Johnny Key's proposal to rewrite a 1989 school-choice law that a federal judge struck down last year. Key's proposal removes the part of the law that the judge rejected.

Key said he'd wait until a later date before asking the panel to vote on his proposal. The committee has heard a competing proposal from Democratic Sen. Joyce Elliott would allow districts to exempt themselves from the school choice program if they believe it would lead to racial segregation.