

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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Bill aims to help dyslexic children (Log Cabin Democrat, Conway)

Seven-year-old Noah Head is learning how to write in cursive, but like many children his age he would rather play outside than work on schoolwork. His mother, Kim Head, said that he excels at athletics and enjoys a lot of outdoor activities.

Kim said that many children who have dyslexia like Noah stand out in athletics and the arts. Dyslexia is a brain-based learning disability that makes it hard to read, and often children have a hard time learning if the dyslexia is not addressed or recognized.

Kim is part of the group who started The Dyslexia Project, a community organization operating under the nonprofit, Community Connections. The Dyslexia Project works to educate people on the symptoms of dyslexia and share proven treatments to help children with the condition thrive.

“To reach all kids in a classroom, you have to teach them to read before they can read to learn,” Kim said. “We need to identify the kids with Dyslexia and then give them skills they need to be successful.”

Children like Noah learn best by breaking everything down, “almost decoding the language,” Kim said.

Through networking with teachers and professionals within the state, Kim has been part of what she described as a “grassroots effort” to get legislation on the books that would help identify and aid dyslexic children in the public school system.

“It’s a shift in education reform,” she said.

Several other states have laws on the books regarding dyslexia. Texas’ education code, for example, states that “students enrolling in public schools in this state shall be tested for dyslexia and related disorders” and “the board of trustees of each school district shall provide for the treatment of any student determined to have dyslexia or a related disorder.”

Senate Bill 33 is currently going through the Arkansas State Capitol. The goal behind the bill is to ensure children with dyslexia get what they need from the public school system to be successful students. The bill would require screening for dyslexia and related disorders in public school students in kindergarten through second grade, and then the schools would have intervention and treatment options for those students.

Sen. Joyce Elliott, D-Little Rock, is the bill’s sponsor, and she said the bill has been received well by her fellow legislators.

“There are several members who have expressed support and wish to be a cosponsor,” she said.

Elliott said in her 30 years as a high school teacher she saw students struggle and sometimes wondered if dyslexia was behind the problems.

“Generally, I believe we should provide every student whatever accommodations and interventions necessary to make sure all student have the ability to meet their potential,” she said.

A similar bill failed in 2010 because of the fiscal impact. Elliott said this year’s bill has an “excellent chance” of being passed and they are working through the technicalities of developing the services lined out in the bill.

Mitchell heading into final year of career at Vilonia (Log Cabin Democrat)

Dr. Frank Mitchell, superintendent of the Vilonia School District, has a few important things to get done between now and the end of the 2013-14 school year — when he plans to retire.

Mitchell submitted his letter of resignation Monday night to the Vilonia Board of Education effective at the end of the 2014 school year — more than a year away. He wanted to give plenty of time, he said, for finding his replacement as well as replacing assistant superintendent Gary Lambert, who announced at last month’s meeting he will retire at the end of this school year. Another thing, Mitchell said he wants to stay another year to see the completion of the new intermediate school.

“I think that will be a good transition time,” he added. Mitchell has been in the education field since 1965 — 48 years. He has been superintendent at Vilonia for 27 years.

“I have been fortunate to be at a place that long,” he said. “It’s really a good place to work and live.”

From an early age, Mitchell said he knew he wanted to go into the education field — working as a teacher, principal and curriculum director. His first job was at White Hall and later at Foreman, Arkansas. Each place where he served, he said he learned something to help him along his way.

“Some of the places, I liked more than others but I’ve always been appreciative of where I worked and I always learned something new,” he added. He has seen a lot of changes during his tenure especially in technology and teaching techniques.

When asked what he will do after retirement, he said, he has no idea.

“I was told that I should have something to retire to,” he said. “I like to fish but that gets to be work. I don’t know yet. I’ve had a job since I was 10 or 11, I’m sure I will be able to find something to keep me busy.”

As well as heading up the district, Mitchell serves in the community volunteering in various capacities.

“There is one thing that I can guarantee,” he said. “I won’t sit around the house. I am not the type to just sit down and do nothing.”

Coach hired; ALE students to go to Lonoke (Carlisle Independent)

Brandon Barbaree was hired as the new Carlisle High School football coach by the Carlisle School Board at their meeting Monday night.

Superintendent Jason Clark said Barbaree gets the students respect. Barbaree said he would do the best he could and he loves the students.

Barbaree was the Carlisle Junior High football coach and the high school defensive coordinator this year. Before coming to Carlisle, he was the England High School football coach. He played four years of football at the University of Central Arkansas and received his masters in educational leadership from Harding University.

Alternative Learning Environment [ALE] students next school year will go to Lonoke for a special ALE program.

The board approved to purchase five seats for \$33,250 to expand their ALE for 6th through 12th grade students.

Clark said ALE students are students that struggle to learn, have behavior or emotional problems.

He said ALE gives the student a second chance instead of expulsion.

Currently, he said, ALE students are in one classroom that is in the middle of the school, teachers rotate teaching subjects and they still interact with the other students at lockers and in the cafeteria. He also said the same teachers who taught the students the first time, are now using the same strategies to teach them in ALE. So, at Lonoke, the teachers are specialized in teaching ALE students.

Carlisle will bus the students to and from Lonoke.

The program is called CORE, which stands for "Commit to other routes of education."

"The vision of the program is to provide students with a learning environment designed to provide guidance, counseling and academic support necessary to enable students who are experiencing emotional, social or academic problems to continue to make progress toward educational goals appropriate to each individual student's specific situation, characteristics, abilities and aspirations," Clark told the board.

He said the teacher would understand lecture and drill is not the best way to reach these students. The program would provide intervention services designed to address a student's specific educational and behavioral needs and the students would have access to school counselors, mental health professionals, nurse and support staff.

In other business: the board approved resignations of kindergarten teacher Mary Kelly, who served in the district 33 years, high school Family Consumer Science teacher Debbie Tyler, who served 17 years, high school math teacher Tim Hill and bus driver Les Bengé.

The board approved the 2013-14 school calendar. According to the calendar, the first day of school is Aug. 19 and the last day is May 30. Thanksgiving holiday is Nov. 25-29, Christmas break is Dec. 23-Jan. 3, Martin Luther King holiday is Jan. 20, President's Day is Feb. 20, Spring break is March 24-28 and high school graduation is May 18.

Clark said fall parent-teacher conferences were moved up to Sept. 24 to get a head start on any struggling students. Clark said President's Day would be used as a snow day if needed and the other snow days if needed would be made up at the end of the school year. Clark also said Thanksgiving break would be five days, instead of three days.

The board approved to receive bids to demolish the old high school home economics building. Clark said the single stand-alone building is free and clear of asbestos and people have vandalized the building by knocking in the doors, bursting holes in the sheet rock and putting graffiti on the walls.

"I think it's in the best interest to start tearing it down," board member Cliff Schafer said.

Clark gave board members an update on sells from the regional basketball tournament.

He said 3,216 tickets were sold for a total of \$16,080 in ticket sells, but all ticket sales would go to the Arkansas Activities Association. He said \$2,580 worth of t-shirts were sold and gross concession stand sales were \$11,659. Clark thanked everyone who helped with the tournament. Clark also thanked school board member Bryan Olinger for working as the disc jockey during the four-day tournament.

Clark told board members that Steve and Bill Reed sponsored the elementary school receiving a \$500 Exxon grant to purchase science materials and Clark said he received a check for \$2,516 from the Carlisle Lions Club from football concession stand sells.

Clark announced parent teacher conferences would be from 2:30 to 7:30 p.m. Thursday, March 14.

Clark also announced that Mayor Ray Glover asked him if the city could rent the old high school gym — Raymond H. Brown Gymnasium — as a wellness center for citizens to exercise and walk around an indoor track. The board agreed for Glover to speak to them at the April board meeting.

The next school board meeting will be held at 7:30 p.m. on April 8 in the administration building.

Groups say bill to siphon millions (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LITTLE ROCK — A loose-knit coalition of groups representing education, child-welfare and health-care interests rallied Wednesday against a bill that they say would siphon millions of dollars in general revenue to state highways with “catastrophic” consequences.

Under House Bill 1418 by state Rep. Jonathon Barnett, R-Siloam Springs, a small percentage of the growth in revenue from the state sales tax would be steered to the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department.

Supporters of the bill say it would only take the growth from sales taxes on road-user items, such as new and used vehicles. The growth money would be phased in gradually over 10 years once sales tax revenue meets pre-set targets.

About 100 people, mostly from higher-education institutions, crowded into the Old Supreme Court Room on the second floor of the state Capitol to hear state Sen. Joyce Elliot, D-Little Rock, and others stress the “catastrophic” impact they say Barnett’s proposal would have on education and social services.

“We all appreciate the good value of highways,” said Rich Huddleston, executive director for Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families. “But robbing Peter to pay Paul and creating this perfect storm is not the way to do it.

“This is money basically to keep us even,” he said. “We need to find a better way to pay for highways and roads, one that doesn’t undermine other parts of the budget.”

Barnett amended his bill Wednesday morning to make clear it wouldn’t affect the Educational Adequacy Fund and the Educational Excellence Fund, two funds that earmark general revenue to secondary education and higher education, respectively.

In an interview, Barnett said the bill wouldn’t cut any program already receiving general revenue.

“We are not asking for any money they currently have,” he said.

Barnett said he will amend the bill to remove tires, batteries and automotive services from the bill and to delay its implementation two years to 2017. The amendments underscore the former Arkansas Highway Commission member and chairman's desire to help highway funding in the long term.

The latest fiscal impact statement from the Arkansas Finance and Administration Department shows that the bill, in its current form, would steer \$33 million to the Highway and Transportation Department on state sales tax revenue of \$2.3 billion in fiscal 2015, \$81.6 million in fiscal 2016 and \$126 million in 2017. By 2024, that amount would grow to \$516.7million, or about 17 percent of the \$3.02 billion the state projects in state sales tax revenue that year.

More than \$1.4 billion would go to highway maintenance and construction over that 10 years; another \$600 million would be evenly split between cities and counties under the traditional way money for road work is divided, with 70 percent to the state and 15 percent each to cities and counties.

Barnett and other proponents wanted the bill now so that the 10 years would lapse about the same time that a \$1.8 billion road-construction program voters approved in November will be completed and a half-percent sales tax dedicated to the program expires.

"I'm trying to be fair," he said. "The important thing is for highways to get into the revenue stream. The flat gas tax doesn't work anymore. There's no growth money for highways. Now [gas tax revenue] is starting to go down."

Craig Douglass, who is coordinating a coalition of business interests backing the bill, said the coalition, called Move Arkansas Forward, has tried to work with bill opponents, but said "it's hard to work with folks that can't even entertain any compromise."

House takes up charter school law changes (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

The Arkansas House is taking up legislation that would change the way the state approves charter schools.

The House on Thursday was scheduled to vote on a bill by Republican Rep. Mark Biviano of Searcy that would designate the state Education Department and not the Board of Education as the primary authorizer of charter schools.

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.

Legislators debate contested student-transfer (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LITTLE ROCK — The Senate Education Committee on Wednesday continued debating what the Legislature should do this session about a challenged law that allows students to switch school districts.

After hearing oral arguments Jan. 17 in St. Louis, the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals is considering whether the Arkansas Public School Choice Act is legal. There is not a deadline for the court to rule.

While the attorney general's office and some education groups have urged lawmakers to wait for the 8th Circuit's decision, legislators are weighing several proposals to change the law this session.

The law allows students to transfer out of their resident school districts with a few exceptions. Those exceptions include a prohibition of such transfers if the percentage of enrollment for the student's race in the new district exceeds that percentage in the district where the student lives.

The Arkansas Department of Education has said 13,666 Arkansas students attended school outside of their resident school districts in the 2011-2012 school year. A majority of students transferred under the School Choice Act, though an exact number is not available, the department has said.

In June, U.S. District Judge Robert Dawson struck down the law, calling the racial restriction unconstitutional. Dawson later stayed his decision while the 8th Circuit deliberates.

The committee Wednesday did not vote on Senate Bill 65 by Johnny Key, R-Mountain Home, despite nearly two hours of discussion. Key's bill removes the race exemption from the law, the section that Dawson said was unconstitutional.

Key didn't press the committee Wednesday to reach a decision.

"I can count to five," Key said referring to the number of votes needed to pass the bill out of committee.

School superintendents told the committee that some racial restrictions are necessary to prevent affluent, white students from switching districts and resegregating areas of the state.

El Dorado School District Superintendent Bob Watson said he has seen that flight firsthand in his 39 years with the district.

He said some parents say their children are transferring for better athletics or attendance problems, but "I hear race quite frequently" as a reason.

Key said the state cannot assume districts will become segregated.

"I have more faith in society as a whole today than to make that decision now that that's what's going to happen," Key said.