

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

March 18, 2013

Police: Teen had handgun on school bus (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

A 15-year-old student in Cleburne County is accused of carrying a handgun on a school bus.

The Cleburne County sheriff's office said deputies responded Friday to a Concord School District bus heading from school to the teen's home. Authorities found the teen on board and seized a handgun he had, according to a news release.

The teen was taken to the White River Juvenile Detention Facility on a preliminary charge of possession of a firearm on school property, a Class D felony, which is punishable by up to six years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.

The teen's name was not released.

Education notebook (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

Registration dates posted to Internet

The Pulaski County Special School District has announced March and April school-registration dates and places for new and returning students for the 2013-14 school year.

The times and dates are listed on the district's website at www.pcssd.org.

Parents and guardians should register their children at the schools the students will attend, except for fifth-grade students, who may check in at their elementary schools, said Brenda Bowles, the district's assistant superintendent for equity and pupil services.

Documents necessary for registering students returning to the district include a current proof of residency - such as a recent utility bill, a Little Rock Air Force Base housing verification form, home-purchase closing papers or lease agreements.

Required documents for registering a new student in the district are a birth certificate or an appropriate substitute, such as a registrar statement, baptismal certificate, passport or military identification. Also required are previous school records, immunization records, a transcript or last report card and Social Security card. Proof of residency must also be provided. Parents who do not wish to reveal their child's Social Security number will be provided an alternate number for their child.

More information about school registration is available by calling the Office of Equity and Pupil Services at (501) 234-2020 or (501) 234-2021.

Fort Smith chief joins U.S. board

Benny Gooden, superintendent of the Fort Smith School District, was elected to the board of directors for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, which is based in Arlington, Va.

The National Board is responsible for awarding national certification to eligible teachers.

National Board certification requires that teachers demonstrate advanced teaching knowledge, skills and practices.

A total of 2,329 Arkansas teachers have achieved National Board certification.

In addition to his Fort Smith job, Gooden serves as president of the American Association of School Administrators.

Gooden previously was a superintendent in Boonville, Mo., and Crawford County, Mo. He has also served as an assistant superintendent, high school principal, assistant principal and secondary vocal and instrumental music instructor. He is a former Arkansas Superintendent of the Year, an award from the Association of School Administrators.

Gooden joins a prestigious group of education professionals on the National Board's board of directors, including former West Virginia Gov. Bob Wise and the presidents of the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association.

School violence an old evil, Editorial (Siftings Herald, Hope)

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Hope -- Preventing "active shooter" situations in schools is considered impossible, because it is a problem which has been around since before the United States was a nation. Understanding the dynamic of what occurs on a school campus from a law enforcement perspective is much newer.

And, that is where the concept of the school resource officer has become part of a prevention philosophy that centers around the students themselves.

"It is a larger society problem," Hope Police Chief J. R. Wilson said. "It involves bullying; I think that is a big issue of major interest. Anything that makes a person feel less connected to a group, or someone pushed away from a group, I think that is a likely outcome.

"Mental illness is another issue; identifying kids who need help and assistance with some incapacity or mental illness and helping them integrate into society is important," he said. "This is something that we are never going to be able to prevent 100 percent. But, we have to be prepared and work as hard as we can mitigate this."

The most recent school shooting incident in Southwest Arkansas occurred in 1997 in Lafayette County at Stamps High School, when Joseph Colt Todd lay in a sniper nest just off the campus and used a .22 caliber rifle to shoot LaTishia Finley, 16, and Grover Henderson, Jr., 17, once each in the hip.

Todd was 14-years old at the time. He was subsequently arrested and convicted in Lafayette County Circuit Court of two counts of first degree battery and sentenced to two concurrent five year prison sentences, with two and a half years of each suspended.

He testified at trial that he had been bullied.

"I was really angry at what was going on, picking on me," Todd told the jury at his sentencing hearing. "I really didn't want to go back to school... I figured the best way to not go back to school was to shoot someone."

Wilson said research shows that the incidence of school shootings is nothing new.

"I was looking back at some cases; in the 1700s there was a school shooting case, in the 1800s, and early 1900s," he said. "One was in 1764, in Pennsylvania, where some Lenape warriors shot a teacher outside a classroom. Another in 1890, in South Carolina, where someone was shot at a school. In 1853, in Kentucky, a student was shot; 1891 in New York, 1946 in Brooklyn. This is not a new phenomenon."

A particular difference today is the high-capacity nature of the firearms which are available, Wilson said.

"I was looking at one case some time ago, where someone was shot at a school and the shooter didn't have time to reload before people were able to subdue him," he said. "So, the amount of damage one was able to do at that time was not as great."

The development of the school resource officer as an outreach to public school students is not entirely designed to act as a deterrent to school violence, Wilson said.

"The concept of the school resource officer as it has been developed nationally has a three-pronged approach to the job," he said. "They act as a law enforcement officer; but, two they act as a teacher with courses for the students, whether it's DARE or they develop their own course; and, the third thing is to be an advisor-mentor."

Most of the emphasis is placed on the teaching/mentor aspects of the relationship.

"We want them to see who we really are," Wilson said. "A child may have misconceptions because they see a police officer in their home for five minutes arresting their mother or father; so, we want them to police officers in a larger perspective."

Stationing armed police officers on every campus in Arkansas is essentially a local decision.

"Every school district is an entity to itself," Wilson said. "They control their own property, much like a private business, but they also have laws to follow that are set by the state legislature. They have a mission and a job to do; they control their facilities, and I think, across the nation, they do a good job."

Funding and the dynamics of a police presence are key problems which have been tailored locally to the mission of the City's officer on the Hope High School campus and the County's DARE program.

"About five years ago, the school board, the city board and police department all hashed out our problems on the resource officer," Wilson said. "After that time, we have worked out those issues and are kind of on the same page."

Funding remains a problem, as demonstrated by the reduction in the number of resource officers from time to time based upon the availability of federal and state grant funds.

“It's all tax funding,” Wilson said. “There are so many things everybody wants to do; and, the question was how to best allocate our resources.”

Ultimately, how an on-site resource officer is used depends upon mutual policies established by schools and law enforcement that determine how an officer operates while on campus, but within the confines of the duties of a sworn officer of the state.

“We have a good understanding of the law, where it requires us to take a child into custody and all of that,” Wilson said. “I think all of us would like to see it expanded, but funding is an issue.”

The advantage for Hope is response capability, he said.

“Even if we were there, could these kinds of things still happen? The answer is 'yes,’” Wilson said. “There are people who attack police when the officer is right there. But, ultimately, I think a law enforcement presence is a good thing, and I think our community thinks it's a good thing.”

House OKs \$10 million tax cut; Senate rejects school choice bill (Pine Bluff Commercial)

LITTLE ROCK — The House on Monday approved a \$10 million tax exemption for the agriculture industry.

A bill to require school districts to honor future transfers by the siblings of students who changed districts under a stricken school choice law narrowly failed in the Senate.

House Bill 1039 by Rep. Jeff Wardlaw, D-Warren, passed the House 90-0 and goes to the Senate. It would create a tax exemption for utilities on certain agricultural, horticultural and aquacultural structures and equipment, including commercial chicken houses.

“This bill would directly benefit 56 counties of this state because it’s going to help every one of our poultry farmers,” Wardlaw told House members.

The Beebe administration opposes the tax cut, which is not part of Gov. Mike Beebe’s balanced budget proposal. House Speaker Davy Carter, R-Cabot, has said he supports passing up to \$150 million in tax cuts this session.

The House also approved HB 1690 by Rep. Debra Hobbs, R-Rogers, which would require a minute of silence at the beginning of each school day in Arkansas public schools. Students could use the time to pray, reflect or engage in other quiet activity.

The bill passed 79-4 and goes to the Senate.

The Senate rejected HB 1294 by Rep. Kim Hammer, R-Benton, a school-choice bill that would allow a student approved for transfer to a non-resident district under a provision of law that is later struck down or repealed to finish school in the new district. It also would allow current and future siblings of the student to attend the receiving district.

The vote was 17-6, with 18 votes needed for passage.

Last year, a federal judge struck down Arkansas’ school choice law, ruling that race-based restrictions in the law violated the equal-protection clause of the Constitution. The decision is on appeal.

Sen. Johnny Key, R-Mountain Home, asked Monday if Hammer's bill could be viewed as "ammunition for those who want (the Legislature) to wait" on addressing the school choice issue until after a ruling by the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Key and Sen. Joyce Elliott, D-Little Rock, have filed separate bills to address the school choice issue. Both those measures are currently before the Senate Education Committee.

Higher education director

The Senate passed SB 812 by Sen. Jeremy Hutchinson, R-Little Rock, which would change the job description of the director of the Arkansas Department of Higher Education. The bill passed 26-2 and goes to the House.

The law now requires, among other things, that the director have experience as a teacher on a college campus. Hutchinson's bill would change the law to require the director to "demonstrate competence" in agency management or related skills.

Hutchinson said management skills are key to the job. He said the current requirement of experience in education is unnecessary and has driven up the cost of hiring a qualified candidate.

Sen. Jane English, R-North Little Rock, spoke against the bill. In 2011, English sought an attorney general's opinion on whether Gov. Mike Beebe followed the law in recommending interim Higher Education Director Shane Broadway get the job permanently.

The attorney general said that because Broadway did not have experience as an educator on a college campus was not qualified for the position.

Voter ID bill delayed

Meanwhile, the number of votes needed to approve legislation to require voters to show photo identification at the polls came into question again Monday.

Senate Bill 2 has passed the Senate and the House and was back in the Senate for concurrence in a House amendment Monday when Sen. Stephanie Flowers, D-Pine Bluff, sought a ruling on whether the measure originally needed a simple majority or two-thirds majority vote to pass the Senate. The bill was referred to the Senate Rules Committee, which will consider the question Tuesday.

The House Rules Committee last week rejected a House member's argument that the bill would alter voter registration requirements in the state constitution and, therefore, required a two-thirds vote in both chambers for approval. The House then passed the measure 51-44, with no votes to spare. The bill previously passed the Senate 23-12, one vote shy of a two-thirds majority.

Court fund

Also Monday, Sen. Jason Rapert, R-Conway, asked that his SB 838, which would restructure the office of the state treasurer, be sent back to the Senate Insurance and Commerce Committee for an amendment.

He told reporters later his amendment would require only the office's investment officer to report directly to an expanded state Board of Finance.

Other bills that passed in the House on Monday included:

- HB 1366 by Hammer, which would require that the Court Reporters Fund, the Trial Court Administrative Assistants Fund and the Arkansas District Judges Council receive priority in distributions from the state Administration of Justice Fund. The bill passed 93-0 and goes to the governor.
- HB 1503 by Rep. Justin Harris, R-West Fork, which would make it a Class D felony to provide false information to a gun dealer or private seller in order to procure a firearm or ammunition. The bill is part of the National Rifle Association's legislative package and is designed to prevent gun-control activists from conducting sting operations not sanctioned by law enforcement. The bill passed 78-1 and goes to the Senate.
- HB 1708 by Rep. Prissy Hickerson, R-Texarkana, which would make possession of body armor during the commission of certain felonies, or after conviction of certain felonies, a Class D felony. The offense is currently a Class A misdemeanor. The bill passed 81-0 and goes to the Senate.