

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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Charters risk to deal, LR schools tells court (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

The Little Rock School District is asking a federal appeals court to reverse a lower court decision that cleared the state of violating a 1989 desegregation agreement when it approved the establishment of nearly a dozen independently run, publicly funded charter schools in Pulaski County.

Attorneys Chris Heller and Clay Fendley for the Little Rock school system argued to a panel of the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals at St. Louis that the lower court must protect the school desegregation remedy in Pulaski County by imposing conditions on the charter schools to ensure that they don't adversely affect magnet schools and majority-to-minority inter district student transfer programs.

The inter district student transfer programs were incorporated into the 1989 desegregation agreement between the state and the three Pulaski County school districts to remedy racial segregation in the three Pulaski County school districts.

"LRSD does not seek to 'bar' charter schools from Pulaski County," the attorneys said in a written brief to the appeals court. "LRSD does not expect the district court to order charter schools shuttered. LRSD has simply requested that the district court impose terms and conditions on charter schools as necessary to prevent a negative impact on the M-to-M and magnet programs."

Those conditions might include requiring the state and charter schools to provide free transportation to the charter schools, the attorneys said, and the use of a weighted lottery system to increase the percentages of black students at what the attorneys called "magnet" charter schools that feature special academic programs and are drawing white students and more affluent students away from the traditional school districts.

"These types of terms and conditions will not result in the loss of the State and/or Charter intervenors' investments," Heller and Fendley said.

The Little Rock School District filed a federal court challenge in 2010 to the state Board of Education's approval of charter schools without regard to the effect the new schools would have on the school desegregation programs that the state had committed to support in the 1989 agreement.

U.S. District Judge D. Price Marshall Jr. ruled in January that the establishment of the charter schools did not violate the 1989 settlement.

The judge said the 1989 settlement did not address charter schools, that the charter-school enrollment in Pulaski County has had minimal effect on student participation in the magnet and majority-to-

minority student transfer programs and that the Little Rock district waited too long to challenge the charter schools, the first of which opened in 2001.

The Arkansas attorney general's office and an attorney for the Pulaski County charter schools that intervened in the case are defending Marshall's ruling at the 8th Circuit.

Aaron Sadler, a spokesman for the attorney general's office, and Jess Askew III, the attorney for the charter school intervenors, declined to comment Tuesday about the Little Rock district's written arguments.

The attorney general's office and the charter school intervenors will submit a response to the 8th Circuit by June 10.

The attorneys for the Little Rock district noted in their 60-page legal brief that the 1989 agreement remains a valid and enforceable contract between the parties, as well as an order of the district court, until the state proves it has complied with it.

And they said the state "is a constitutional violator," in part because of its past support for segregated schools and neighborhoods.

But instead of taking steps to increase participation in the majority-to-minority and magnet school programs - which lost enrollment while charter-school student counts grew - the state created a competing system of charter schools.

State officials should have obtained district court approval before authorizing the establishment of open-enrollment charter schools in Pulaski County, Heller and Fendley said.

And the judge should have put the burden on the state and charter schools to prove that the charter schools would have no negative effect on the desegregation programs.

The attorneys further argued to the 8th Circuit that the lower-court judge erred in failing to "view the evidence in the light most favorable" to the Little Rock district, and that the evidence presented to the judge should have resulted in a trial on disputed facts rather than the judge's granting of summary judgment in favor of the state and charter schools.

The attorneys said the judge's finding in the January order that the 1989 settlement contains no bar against charter schools "fatally infects" the court's entire decision.

"The state had a duty to more than 'not interfere materially' with the remedy it agreed to," Heller and Fendley said. "The state had a duty to 'promote' the interdistrict remedy, including working to increase participation in the M-to-M and magnet programs."

Magnet schools - six in Little Rock - offer special programs to attract a 50-50 racial mix of students to a school that would be difficult to desegregate.

The majority-to-minority transfer program permits students to transfer from a Pulaski County district in which their race is in the majority to a district and school in the county where their race is in the minority.

PCSSD Reporting Significant Financial Strides (KARK, Channel 4)

Video available at http://arkansasmatters.com/fulltext/?nxd_id=662942

PULASKI COUNTY- The Arkansas State Board of Education voted to keep control of the Pulaski County Special School District, extending its fiscal distress status by one more year.

Superintendent Dr. Jerry Guess says this isn't discouraging news. The board originally took control of the district two years ago. Dr. Guess says under his leadership with the Arkansas Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Tom Kimbrell, the district has made significant strides and things can only get better. "This is very helpful news. This is very positive news. We've made great improvements in the 2 years we've been working on the fiscal distress issues of the district, but this gives us a chance to continue to make changes."

PCSSD is gearing up to hire nearly 200 positions from employee retirement or resignation. Dr. Guess says the goal is stay on course and concentrate on improving safety and technology, making upgrades for the students' environment. "Parents really need to understand another year if fiscal distress is an opportunity to continue in the right direction."

Rodney Dardenne has had children in the district for 6 years and says he would rather have a school board of elected positions representing the people, but he also says he hasn't been impressed by previous board leadership.

"I'm excited about this. I think Dr. Guess and his team are doing an extremely good job based on the finances we have. We're having to fight back from years of fiscal irresponsibility."

Dardenne hopes more parents will get involved and support the efforts the district is making. "Stay engaged. You can't sit on the sidelines."

PCSSD's enrollment increased this year by 400 students, and Dr. Guess expects to see continued growth for the 2013-14 school year.

PCSSD Gets 3rd Year On State's Fiscal Distress List (KLRT, Fox 16)

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Arkansas Educators Group Names Principal, Assistant Principal of the Year (KLRT, Fox 16)

LITTLE ROCK, AR - The Arkansas Association of Middle Level Administrators (AAMLA) has named its principal and assistant principal of the year.

The principal honor goes to Kathy Hopson of Meekins Middle School in the Stuttgart School District.

The awards are given each year to school administrators who are respected by students, colleagues, parents and the community at-large; show a strong commitment to his/her professional growth; show strong educational leadership by setting high expectations for school staff and students; and maintain an orderly, purposeful learning environment.

Kathy Hopson is in her 12th year as principal, serving the last five years in the Stuttgart School District, and seven years prior to that in the Clarendon School District. Before becoming a principal she taught for 12 years in Stuttgart and Clarendon and served as Assistant Principal in Stuttgart for two years. Hopson is a Master Principal, is involved with numerous professional organizations and is very active in her community. She notes her most significant accomplishment as a Principal "is the relationship I have with my students and staff."

The assistant principal honor goes to Dr. Steven Wise, Assistant Principal of Pulaski Heights Middle School in the Little Rock School District.

Dr. Wise is in his sixth year as assistant principal at Pulaski Heights Middle School. Prior to that he served as assistant principal of J.A. Fair High School for 2 years and Forest Heights Middle School for

three years. Dr. Wise has five years of teaching experience and served two years as GT Coordinator. Dr. Wise is involved with numerous professional organizations and is very active in his community. For the last four years he has dedicated one hour each month to mentor new and transitioning teachers at his school free of charge.

Hopson and Dr. Wise were presented with their awards at their schools on Monday.

Mrs. Beebe brings books to Maynard Elem. students (KAIT, Channel 8, Jonesboro)

Video available at <http://www.kait8.com/story/22250401/mrs-beebe-brings-books-to-maynard-elem-students>

MAYNARD, AR (KAIT)- Arkansas' first lady "booked" it to Region 8 Tuesday.

Around 1 p.m., an Arkansas State Police chopper set down on the ball field beside the Maynard elementary school and First Lady Ginger Beebe stepped off bearing gifts.

After a program and presentation by the kids, Mrs. Beebe gave each student two new books to keep.

Kindergarten Teacher Cassie Damon says this is great for their students. Damon says, "With Kindergarten being the first step in the basic foundation of their educational career, then we want them to be excited about this to encourage them to want to learn to read, want to continue reading and love to read."

Pat Cagle, Library Media Specialist, says, "I think it's a wonderful program. I think the children think it's a wonderful program and if it instills just one child into reading, I think she's done her job."

The program was made possible through Scholastic. The program is also a collaborative effort with the Scholastic publishing company to promote literacy and reading.

Van Buren School Board Expels Students Accused Of Threats (Southwest Times Record)

Without discussion Tuesday, the Van Buren School Board expelled the four students arrested in April for allegedly making unfounded bomb threats at district schools.

After the meeting, given federal student privacy law, Superintendent Merle Dickerson declined to give information regarding the minor students' ages, grades or names. He said the four had been expelled from school for a full year.

On April 12, Van Buren police announced they had made four arrests out of the seven bomb threat incidents that had disrupted Van Buren classes since March. An eighth unfounded threat occurred in late April.

The four arrested and expelled students face felony charges of communicating a false alarm.

According to police information, an adult convicted of the charge could face up to six years in prison and up to a \$10,000 fine. A minor could be sentenced to up to 90 days in a juvenile detention center, be placed on probation for two years, be sentenced to community service, electronic monitoring, mental health evaluations and counseling, fines, boot camp, restitution for emergency response time and costs and more. And the Arkansas statute of limitations for charging suspects with the crime lasts at least three years.

The expelled students are alleged to have been involved with unfounded bomb threats made March 14 at Van Buren High School, March 25 at Northridge Middle School, April 8 at Parkview Elementary School and April 10 at the Freshman Academy.

MHS awarded \$30K grant (Maumelle Monitor)

Maumelle High School was awarded a \$30,000 grant for the 2013-2014 school year to plan and implement wall-to-wall, career-college academies. The Arkansas Department of Career Education (ACE) Career Academy Initiative encourages high schools to embrace the National Career Academy Model as a proven means to improve attendance, increase student participation, increase graduation rate, improve school climate, improve standardized test scores and decrease discipline/behavior problems.

ACE provides grants to progressive, innovative Arkansan high schools that show promise toward building effective high school career academies. The first year grant will allow Maumelle High School to visit nationally recognized high schools that have created model career academies and to attend the National Career Academy Conference.

Maumelle High School will restructure itself into two academies for the incoming freshmen class: STEM Academy (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) and Business Humanities. Each career academy is a small school within a school with a small group of students who are served by the same small group of teachers. Rigorous and relevant academic activities are organized around career related themes.

Successful academies are characterized by having strong business partnerships and numerous enrichment experiences that prepare students for life after graduation.

According to ACE, grant funds will enable Maumelle High School to take the next step in exploring potential life-changing experiences for students, increase student achievement and provide students with a meaningful purpose for attending school.

Lockdown at Gravette Schools after Shooting Two Blocks Away (KLRT, Fox 16)

GRAVETTE, AR - Four public schools in Gravette are on lockdown after a shooting two blocks from the campus.

The school superintendent tells Fox 16 News sister station KNWA in Fayetteville that the lockdown is only a precaution.

According to the superintendent's office, Glenn Duffy Elementary, Upper Elementary, Gravette Middle School & the High School are the schools on lockdown.

Gravette Police say a man has been shot and the gunman is still on the loose.

The school is asking parents NOT to try and pick up their children.

Once officers give the all clear, the school says it will release students to parents and the buses will run as usual.

Heber Springs Woman Admits To Stealing From School Fund (KLRT, Fox 16)

HEBER SPRINGS, AR -- A woman in Heber Springs has admitted to stealing more than \$15,000 from a fund for elementary school students and then spending it on luxury items.

37-year-old Pauline Johnston would not open the door when we showed up Tuesday afternoon at her home of Case Street in Heber Springs to ask about the theft charge she pleaded guilty to May 2nd.

Johnston was the treasurer of a parent booster organization called AGATE that raises money for students at Heber Springs Elementary.

Colleagues became suspicious earlier this year when they learned a \$3,000 check from a Christmas fundraiser was never deposited.

"By the time we completed the investigation, we determined that they were actually missing a little over \$15,000," said Detective Ron Wildman with the Heber Springs Police Department.

Johnston admitted to stealing the money from the fundraiser said she needed it to buy food for her kids, pay an electric bill and buy Christmas presents.

But police say the money was actually used on luxury items for Johnston and her family including an expensive ring and out-of-state trips.

The money was supposed to be used for school functions like field trips.

"Pretty low life to steal money from kids," said Shelby McCann, a parent who has a nephew at Heber Springs Elementary. "I don't know how someone could do that."

As part of a plea agreement Johnston will serve five years probation. She'll also have to pay back the money she stole.

Voting Results Now Final Across Central Arkansas (KLRT, Fox 16)

LITTLE ROCK, AR - Results for races across Central Arkansas are now final:

Sherwood Electric Issue

For: 1964, Against: 867

Following a petition drive, Sherwood voters decided whether they wanted the city council to retain an agreement with North Little Rock Electric to provide electricity to part of the city. With the measure passing, voters approved ordinance 1953. The energy issue will not be revisited.

White Hall Bond Issue

For: 464, Against: 45

The bond issue will fund the construction of a community center. The \$4.5 million bond is designed to help fund a facility that would house conference rooms and meeting halls as well as family-oriented fun such as a pool, splash park, slides, and rock-climbing walls.

Watson Chapel Elementary School Millage

For: 588, Against: 326

Voters in the Watson Chapel School District went to the polls to decide whether to increase their millage rate by 2.3 mills to build a new elementary school. The approved rate increase will result in roughly \$23 in additional payments annually.

Hot Springs Governing Issue

For: 242, Against: 2,720

Hot Springs residents went to the polls to decide whether the way their city is governed should be changed. With the "against" vote winning, that means the current system of a city manager and board of directors stays in place. A "for" vote would've transitioned Hot Springs to a mayor-city council setup.

Voters OK district mill raise (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

PINE BLUFF - Watson Chapel School District voters approved the school system's first millage increase in nearly four decades.

Complete but unofficial results for the 2.3-mill increase were:

For.588

Against326

The increase takes the district's total millage rate to 34.1.

Money from the increase will be used to construct a new building to replace the outdated Edgewood Elementary School, district officials said.

Watson Chapel Superintendent Danny Hazelwood said Tuesday night that he and others “are thrilled to death,” adding that “this is a great accomplishment for our community. We had a nucleus of people who worked extremely hard to get this done.”

Starting early Tuesday morning, volunteers held brightly colored signs along U.S. 79 just past the Watson Chapel campus. The signs asked people to “vote yes for our children.”

Built in 1959, the school has wiring problems as well as outside-access doors to all classrooms, which Hazelwood said is a security concern.

A new school is expected to cost \$10 million, with the district kicking in about \$4 million, Hazelwood said. The rest of the funds would come from state and federal sources.

The district’s current millage rate is 31.8. A person with a home in the district valued at \$50,000 pays \$318 in school taxes per year. With a 2.3-mill increase, he would pay an additional \$23 annually.

Even with the increase, Watson Chapel would have the lowest millage rate in Jefferson County.

The highest millage rate in the county is in the Pine Bluff School District, where residents pay 41.7 mills, according to the Jefferson County clerk’s office.

Residents in the Dollarway School District pay 40.8 mills, and those in White Hall School District pay 39.2 mills.

A mill is one-tenth of a cent and generates \$1 in property taxes for every \$1,000 of assessed value. A county assesses property at 20 percent of its appraised value, and the assessment is multiplied by the millage rate to determine the taxes owed.

Watson Chapel voters denied a 5-mill increase in April 2012 and had not approved additional mills in nearly 40 years.

Jennifer Barbaree, principal of Edgewood Elementary School, said Tuesday night that her students “deserve this building. For the sake of our students, this is the greatest feeling. I am very excited about this.”