

# ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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## **Incoming superintendent: Dollarway needs ‘sense of urgency’ (Pine Bluff Commercial)**

Bobby Acklin stands ready to assume the post of superintendent of the Dollarway School District on July 1 with a strategy focused on fostering individual accountability for corporate success.

Acklin will succeed Superintendent Frank Anthony, who notified Arkansas Department of Education Commissioner Tom Kimbrell in an April 24 letter of his intent to resign effective June 30.

The state took over the Dollarway district in June 2012, after Dollarway High School failed to meet accreditation standards for two consecutive years.

Acklin, who is currently assistant superintendent of the North Little Rock School District, has served that district since 1989 in capacities that also included classroom teacher, coach, assistant principal and principal.

“You hope that people understand that after a state takeover there is no business as usual,” Acklin said Tuesday afternoon. “That’s what my charge is. I plan to make sure that we are all accountable for what we are supposed to be doing. I plan to be a part of the district and of each school as well. Before we can make things better or enhance what is already working I will need to see what people are doing.”

Acklin said that he will be meeting on a daily basis with Anthony starting June 10 through the end of Anthony’s tenure on June 30.

“He and I have done quite a bit of communicating,” Acklin said. “I plan to be here every day starting June 10. I did not know much about Dollarway so I have been going in and out of the district over the past few weeks. I have seen the challenges ahead as well as some bright spots.”

Acklin said part of his job will be assessing the attitudes of district personnel.

“I will be looking at and observing the urgency of the people,” Acklin said. “The district is not doing well, so they need to have a sense of urgency.”

Acklin said he intends to earn the trust of staff, teachers, other district personnel and the students.

“My goal is to get them to trust me,” Acklin said. “I will take as long as is needed to get through to them so that the community can take ownership of the district again. In my mind it’s the truth. I want to be open to them and to be an open book for them.”

Acklin said that during his time in the North Little Rock School District he learned to work with low-income students and families.

“I have a very diversified skill set,” Acklin said. “I have worked with needy students and needy communities. I have listening ears and I bring a consistency to what I do.”

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## **Pine Bluff School Board honors district teachers (Pine Bluff Commercial)**

The Pine Bluff School District Board of Directors joined with district superintendent Linda Watson on Tuesday night to honor the instructors chosen by their peers as teachers of the year.

Board president Piccola Washington announced the names of the winner from each school in the district as well as Jenny Tucker, a teacher at Thirty-Fourth Elementary School who was selected as the district teacher of the year.

Watson presented the winners at the school level with checks for \$100 each while the district winner received a check for \$1,000 and the first runner-up received a check for \$250.

The winners included Pine Bluff High School building principal Carl Lott Jr., who is retiring this year after 37 years with the district; Southeast Middle School teacher LaTonya Rawls; Jack Robey Junior High teacher Billie Dorn; Tucker; Southwood Elementary teacher Nicole Anderson; Broadmoor Elementary teacher Elizabeth Taylor; W.T. Cheney teacher Susan Townsend; Oak Park Elementary teacher Marwa Crater; Belair Middle School teacher Tammy Russell; and Forrest Park pre-school teacher LaJoyce Banks.

### **Salary Inequities**

In other business the board approved a recommendation to give Watson the authority to resolve existing salary inequities for certified and classified staff.

“The current salary scale has so many inequities,” Watson said. “I want to have the authority to resolve the salary inequity in the current salary scale before moving to another salary schedule. We have had grievances filed and lawsuits filed because of these inequities.”

“Over the past two to three years several grievances have been filed with the district regarding the salary inequities because employees are doing similar jobs but paid at different rates,”

Watson said. “Some of the individuals may have more experience but are still being paid at lower rates or with smaller stipends.”

## Bid approval

The board approved a bid submitted by Contract Paper Group for 840 cases of copy paper at a price of \$19,816; and bids for various custodial supplies from five vendors at a total price of \$102,410.

## Greenville

The board approved a recommendation from Watson to restructure Greenville Elementary School into a pre-K center for the 2013-2014 school year.

“We will move the pre-K program from Forrest Park to Greenville,” Watson said. “We will also look at possibly adding the HIPPY program or a 3-year old program as well.”

## Personnel

The board approved the resignations of classified personnel Glenda Bradley as a bus attendant effective April 25; and Marynell Cardin as an APSCN Elementary registrar effective May 17.

The board approved the resignations of certified personnel Laura DeJarnette as a first-grade teacher at Oak Park Elementary effective May 31; Monica England as an AP world history/history teacher at Pine Bluff High School effective May 31; Annette Esquibel as an English teacher at PBHS effective May 31; Tiffany Gathen as an English teacher at PBHS effective May 31; Harold Gordon as an art teacher at Southwood Elementary effective May 31; Betty Gray as an English teacher at First Ward Learning Center effective May 31; Melissa Hammond as a PE teacher/coach at Belair Middle School effective May 31; Rachel Maslakov as a kindergarten teacher at Oak Park Elementary effective May 31; Kaitlin Parker as a sixth- and seventh-grade English teacher at Southeast Middle School effective June 1; LaShundra Parks as a kindergarten teacher at Oak Park Elementary effective May 31; and Beverly Ruthven as Assistant Superintendent of Learning Services effective June 30.

The board approved the retirements of classified personnel Charlie Jackson as a dispatcher/driver effective April 26; Harlan D. Jackson as maintenance supervisor effective June 30; and

Lillie Mae Scarver as a food service assistant effective May 31.

The board approved the retirement of Sharon Blankenship as a guidance counselor at W. T. Cheney Elementary effective May 31.

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## **Guest opinion: Thoughts from the new guy by R. Wayne Fawcett, Paris School Superintendent (Paris Express)**

Anytime a person moves into a new community there is a period of reflection that is objective. One really has not learned the distinctive qualities of the place they now reside.

It is simultaneously a benefit and liability to not know the family trees that are common knowledge to long-time residents, to not have pre-conceived notions about people, events, or

programs, or to believe that things can or cannot be done. That is the position I have found myself in for the last 11 months. So, allow me to share with you my observations:

The students in the Paris School District are easily some of the most respectful, dedicated, resourceful I have observed. The children in the elementary are friendly, look me in the eye, and say “yes sir” without prompting. Middle school students wash clothes for people once a month in the “Loads of Love” program. High school students attend school every day with a work ethic that many adults don’t have. They are one of the principal reasons that Paris High School was recently recognized as a Silver Medal School in US News and World Report.

Most of us have heard someone lament the future observing today’s youth. If all students in the United States were like those in Paris we would have nothing to worry about.

However, I can’t give all of the credit to the kids. Someone taught them the skills of respect, community and work ethic before they attended school. Parents are critical to any success that students or the school district may have. We are all aware that Paris is not immune to the societal issues common today. Paris is not considered an affluent community; we do have single parent and no parent homes, drug and alcohol problems in some families, physical and mental considerations, and unemployment. But, the vast majority of parents persevere and rise above those circumstances to support their children, knowing that education is the opportunity for them to have successful and productive lives.

The success of the Paris School District is critically tied to parent involvement.

The enrollment of the Paris School District is approximately 1,120 students in grades K-12. This is considered a medium to small school district in Arkansas. However, I can safely say that the quality of teachers in this district is far above the norm for a school district this size.

As I have visited buildings and classes (my goal is to double my visits next year) it has been my observation that the level of instruction is excellent. Teachers challenge students, assess progress, make adjustments and build on previous learning. They are really good at what they do and want to improve, not just for themselves but for their students.

There is also a tremendous support system in place for the teachers and students. The building principals are all dedicated, hard-working, intelligent professionals that want to improve student achievement and teacher skills. Instructional facilitators, counselors and librarians work collaboratively with teachers to meet the needs of the students. Athletic coaches, physical education, music, art, vocational, gifted and talented and special education teachers all provide instruction that complements the curriculum. Every person is important and committed to what they do.

Often an overlooked part of the school community is the support staff. Bus drivers are the first, and last, faces seen by many students every day: they set the tone for the day. A friendly greeting early in the morning may not seem that important but it represents the first opportunity for us.

Custodians strive to keep an environment clean, safe, and conducive to learning. How would you like to clean where 1,100 kids tread every day? They do it cheerfully and with purpose.

The cafeteria staff prepares and serves over 1,000 meals per day under increasingly strict nutritional guidelines. That translates to over 200,000 meals in a school year. They do this daily task with a smile and a dedication that no child will have to learn while hungry.

Our maintenance staff insures that the lighting, plumbing, heat and air and grounds are operational and well maintained. They take an extreme pride in the grounds, buildings and infrastructure so that teachers can teach and kids can learn.

And finally we have the benefit of a resource officer that takes school safety seriously. He is vigilant in protecting anyone associated with the Paris School District. Let me assure you that it is not that way in some districts that I have visited.

We are fortunate to have all of these people working for the Paris School District.

Easily the most thankless job associated with schools is that of board member. They serve with no pay, make weighty decisions every month, periodically endure a fair amount of criticism and give up many hours of their time all because they are committed to making the schools and community better places. All one has to do is read the state wide newspaper to see dysfunction, hidden agendas and personal vendettas being played out in school board meetings while supposedly doing what is best for the students in their district. Your board does not operate like that. To the person they have one goal: Make the Paris School District better. Their focus is on the students. Each decision is grounded in this belief, "do what is best for kids."

Certainly the Paris School District is not perfect. Recently I gave the board a mid-year review of the district. I shared with them my analysis and began to establish a vision for the future.

The most critical improvement needed is in the area of technology. Not just to have computers to play with. We must put devices in the hands of students and utilize them in learning. That is now the new normal. Whether a student aspires to attend college, go directly to work, or the military, virtually every aspect of society requires technological skills that are ever changing and progressing. We have to use technology to teach students to learn how to learn. Many of today's students will be in careers and occupations that are not even invented at this point.

This will require a paradigm shift in how we teach. Straight rows with a teacher behind a podium handing out work sheets has been proven many times to be a very unproductive way to teach. Come visit some of our classrooms. Watch students work collaboratively, produce results, assess, revise, etc. Watch our teachers guide, question, challenge and facilitate individual learning.

We have to increase our broadband capabilities, boost the number of wireless ports in our buildings and obtain more devices for student use with a goal of 1:1: one device for each student

K-12. Today many students have cell phones that have greater capabilities than some of our oldest computers still in use in our schools. This is critical.

The Paris School District encompasses 233 square miles. We travel and put approximately 1,000 miles on our bus fleet each day. Our bus mechanics are geniuses at keeping them safe

and operational. But, buses do wear out. If the district is to continue door-to-door service, we have to replace and buy buses. New buses cost on average \$100,000. At those prices it

doesn't take long to spend a substantial amount of money.

We must increase the opportunities for students to advance beyond high school while still in high school. Concurrent college classes that allow students to receive credits toward graduation

while simultaneously obtaining college hours is an immediate goal. Working with local colleges and universities, we will attempt to expand those offerings.

Additionally, expanding vocational opportunities giving students skills that are in immediate need is paramount to their and our success. If our local industries and businesses need

employees with specific skills it is incumbent upon us to develop partnerships with them so that we can be the conduit for that work force.

Students graduating from Paris will not only compete and be prepared for jobs in Paris but globally. Schools and businesses MUST work together to prepare, improve, and sustain a

workforce productive in primarily the U.S. economy but also secondarily in the global economy.

There are many other issues to be addressed and it is a mathematical certainty that when one problem is solved another appears. Many future issues will emerge that we can't even

fathom at this time. When Paris Middle School was built no one even knew what a wireless port was much less how to plan for it. It is a process. Thankfully many of the pieces to achieve success are already in place.

Paris has a very good school system.

I pledge to offer leadership to address the present and future of Paris Schools and I consider it an honor to be in this fortunate position. My door is open. If you have comments, suggestions, criticisms, or questions please always feel free to address those to me.

You are an important part of the Paris School District.

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## **Schools Review Tornado Response Plans (KFSM/KXNW, Fort Smith)**

Video available at <http://5newsonline.com/2013/05/22/schools-review-tornado-response-plans/>

Schools in the River Valley and Northwest Arkansas are evaluating safety procedures in light of the tragedy this week in Oklahoma. Two schools in Moore, OK were pounded by a tornado, costing seven children their lives.

The Fort Smith school district has 23 safe rooms located at elementary and junior high schools throughout the district.

“These buildings are constructed out of pre-cast concrete,” said Superintendent Benny Gooden. They are designed and engineered to FEMA standards to withstand an EF-5 tornado. I am told that they will resist a 250 mile an hour wind at the ground.”

Gooden said the buildings are used for a variety of activities throughout the year, including hosting gym class when the weather outside isn’t favorable. He estimates the buildings are used as safe houses about two or three times each year when a tornado warning sounds during school hours.

“We feel much more secure than we did trying to shelter students in classrooms or corridors in an elementary school or secondary school that certainly was not built to these standards,” said Gooden.

However, not all schools have storm shelters available on campus.

According to Theresa Ragsdale, superintendent for Hartford Schools, they prepare students for tornadoes the old-fashioned way.

“We have the students go into the hallways where the walls are closer together, crouch down facing the wall and put a book over their heads,” she said. “Since this disaster in Oklahoma we will be visiting that procedure to see if that’s the safest thing to do.”

Hartford Schools cannot afford a storm shelter because they are in “fiscal distress,” according to Ragsdale.

“There is funding available through the state, matching funding, but we don’t have the funds to match it,” she said.

Gooden said the storm shelters on Fort Smith campuses cost about \$1 million each. He said the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) covers about 75 percent of the allowable cost.

Ragsdale believes Hartford’s location in the valley between Poteau Mountain and Sugarloaf Mountain helps protect the area from tornadoes, but she says, “We know we’re not immune.”

The state requires school’s to hold a certain number of drills throughout the year for emergency situations. Ragsdale said they run the drills so often, the students can complete them

quickly and efficiently.

“As far as the confidence we have on whether the students are prepared, they’re as prepared as we can get them to be at this time,” she said.

In the Fayetteville school district, students are taken to interior areas of the concrete and steel buildings during tornado warnings, according to a spokesman.

A spokesman in Springdale said the school’s don’t have storm shelters, but the buildings are designed to withstand severe weather.

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## **DC board approves bid to update school’s fire alarms (Advance-Monitcelloian)**

The Drew Central School Board voted to approve a bid to upgrade the fire alarm systems in all school buildings.

Superintendent Mike Johnston said the bids are for the upgrade of some of the equipment and the replacement of other equipment.

“Some of the panels and things have to be completely replaced while other equipment can just be updated to be brought up to code,” he said.

The board accepted a bid for \$99,500 from Alarm Tech, who will bring the school’s fire alarms up to Arkansas State Fire Code standards.

Johnston has been working with the state fire marshall and the local fire department to get the system up to code.

He said last fall some of the system works while other parts don’t work properly.

“I don’t think the students are in immediate danger, but this is something we need to get done as soon as possible,” Johnston said about the project last fall.

Johnston said Friday that the Department of Education has approved the project for partnership funding, which means that the school will be reimbursed a portion of the total project cost.

In other business, the board voted to approve a new dress code policy for faculty and staff. The biggest change is the shirt length will be required to be below the fingertips when wearing leggings, and no one should wear a t-shirt to school unless it’s a school spirit shirt or about the teacher’s subject matter such as a chemistry teacher wearing a t-shirt with the periodic table on it.

The board voted to increase the school lunches 15 cents, from \$1.60 to \$1.75 and to renew the contract with Health Special Risk, Inc. for students insurance for the 2013-14 school year.

It was also announced that the Parent Teacher Organization will be purchasing awnings to cover the walkways from the middle school to the kindergarten classrooms.

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## **DC School Board approves 2013-2014 tobacco grant (Advance-Monitcelloian)**

The Drew Central School Board approved a grant for just over \$45,000 Thursday to continue the tobacco prevention education program in the schools as well as the community.

The program has shifted from a coordinated school health grant to focus on tobacco prevention and education. The new program is called the Academic Youth and Young Adult (K-24 years old) Community Focused Tobacco Prevention and Education Program.

Kayla Middleton, the current coordinated health director who will serve as coordinator, said the program's goals have shifted from health education and promoting a healthy school environment to preventing tobacco in the school community.

"It's totally on tobacco education and prevention," Middleton said. "In the past, the focus has been on overall health of the school. That's the biggest change in the grant. The program's mission statement is to reduce disease, disability and death related to tobacco."

Middleton said the new program will have four major objectives: to prevent initiation of tobacco use among youth and young adults; to eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke; to promote quitting among young people and adults; and to identify and eliminate tobacco-related disparities.

Middleton said the new program will target all grades at Drew Central, K-12, as well as reach out to the community through the program's partners, which include Hope Place, Inc.,

Southeast Arkansas Educational Cooperative, the UAM Football Program, Hearts for Tomorrow Ministry, Y.E.S. Team at Drew Central High School, SODA Club at Drew Central High School, and the Drew Central Parent Teacher Organization.

"The new focus of the program lets us work with community partners to make a difference in our community as well as our school," She added.

The total grant award is \$45,820.99, administered through the Arkansas Department of Health.

"The money that funds this grant comes from the master tobacco settlement dollars and tobacco taxes," Middleton said.

Her goal is to keep the community connected with the program in order to provide tobacco education and let the community know how those dollars are being spent.

Some of Middleton's plans for the program include introducing expectant mothers to the Arkansas Quit Line; having middle school students to participate in an anti-tobacco advertising campaign competition; hosting a Great American Smoke-Out event in November; and paying travel and entry

fees for the SODA Club to attend the Arkansas Pride Youth Conference in Hot

Springs and for the club to participate in “Kick Butts Day” at the capitol in Little Rock, where students across the state show lawmakers how they are committed to staying tobacco free.

“These are just a few examples of what this grant will enable us to do in our school and our community,” Middleton concluded.