

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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National Spelling Bee starts with 1st-ever vocabulary test (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

OXON HILL, Md. — The 86th Scripps National Spelling Bee is under way, with 281 youngsters taking the first vocabulary test in the history of the competition.

Spellers arrived Tuesday morning to take a 45-minute computer test that probes their knowledge of both spelling and vocabulary. The results will be combined with Wednesday's on-stage round to determine which spellers will advance to the semifinals Thursday.

The finals take place Thursday night, with the winner taking home more than \$30,000 in cash and prizes.

Organizers announced the addition of the vocabulary test last month, saying it reinforces the bee's mission to encourage students to improve their spelling and broaden their knowledge of the English language.

Spellers have mostly supported the change, although some say they wish they had learned about it sooner.

Youths in lockup get GEDs, brighter futures from education program (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

FORT SMITH - Doors that close behind youthful offenders as they enter the Sebastian County Juvenile Detention Center can also open a new future for the youths.

Capt. Fran Hall, the lockup's administrator, said 72 youths sentenced to the center this year and 61 last year earned their General Educational Development certificates.

"Education is how you get out of poverty, it's how you get out of delinquency, it's how you get out of a lot of things," said Randy Bridges, director of student services with the Fort Smith School District.

Nearly 800 young offenders have earned their GED certificates since Sebastian County Circuit Judge Mark Hewett began a program 16 years ago of ordering 16- and 17-year-olds in his court to earn the certificates.

The juvenile detention center, which is run by the county and funded by the state through the Fort Smith School District, has two certified teachers, Russell McPhate and Beau Pumphrey, both of whom have master's degrees. Former detention center deputy Renee Winegardner is the lockup's paraprofessional, formerly called a teacher's aide, Hall said.

The inmates get intensive, one-on-one attention from the teachers and from a small but dedicated group of tutors who volunteer, Hall said.

"We have highly qualified people in here working with the kids," Bridges said.

Hewett said he is not surprised by the GED success rate. Many young people who appear before him have the ability to succeed, he said. They just don't like to go to school.

Often, he said, young offenders will progress three grades during a 90-day incarceration period.

Hewett orders the youths to get GEDs while in the detention center if they are habitual truants or have already dropped out of school. Under the law, Hewett can order those youths to be held in the juvenile lockup for as many as 90 days.

Often, though, Hewett said, he releases a youth as soon as he earns the certificate. He recalled one who was able to get his GED in two weeks.

McPhate, who works with the youths studying for their GEDs, said they often are frustrated at first and think they are not up to the task. But he tells them they are not stupid; they just haven't been going to school.

PLENTY OF TIME TO STUDY

Clarissa Slate, 21, was in the Sebastian County Juvenile Detention Center in 2008 because of curfew violations and contempt of court because she wouldn't go to school.

She said she might have had too much freedom and not enough structure in her life.

"Maybe I needed to be somewhere where I had to study all the time," she said.

She's glad she got her GED at the lockup. She said she got extra help with her schoolwork and had plenty of time to study.

"She brought the smarts with her, too," Winegardner said.

Hall said she was so proud of Slate that she hired her in March as a deputy at the center and hopes she will set an example for the female inmates.

There are several reasons students don't succeed in school, Bridges said. Some use drugs and alcohol. Some have poor medical services or have experienced physical or sexual abuse, he said.

The juvenile lockup can be an oasis where youths can gain self-esteem and self-confidence in an atmosphere that allows them to focus on their studies, Hall said.

“One thing they are provided here that many of these kids don’t come in with is hope,” Bridges said.

They can focus on their studies because there is little to do except exercise, read or watch television, Hall said. The center offers a good learning environment because of the lack of distractions and disruptions, Bridges added.

“This is the safest classroom in Arkansas,” he said.

EDUCATION A PRIORITY

Many youths in the state system choose to earn GEDs rather than traditional high school diplomas, said Amy Webb, a spokesman for the Division of Youth Services in the Arkansas Department of Human Services. For some, she said, the traditional classroom setting might not be the right path.

In the South Arkansas Youth Services facility in Magnolia, one of the eight facilities the division runs across the state, 40 of the 44 inmates who finished their schooling this year received GEDs, Webb said.

The important thing is that they receive their educations.

“Education is a high-priority focus of what we do in the Division of Youth Services because education is the path to success,” she said.

The GED program is not the only schooling that the staff at the Fort Smith detention center provides. The state requires that youths continue their studies while incarcerated.

Although the space is cramped and inmates are at different levels of learning, each is taught math, science, English, social studies, art and physical education, Bridges said.

The inmates are tested when they enter the facility to determine their grade levels, Hall said.

McPhate said the inmates get about 80 percent of their instruction from teachers. The other 20 percent comes from computer programs that allow them to study different subjects at their own pace, moving up to new levels as they master old ones.

“They’re pretty proud of themselves,” Winegardner said. “They’ll say, ‘Renee, I need more math.’”

The small classroom area crammed into the corner of the detention center can be hectic at times, Hall said. In addition to the separation requirements that must be maintained in the center - boys from girls, delinquents from truants - inmates are entering and leaving all the time.

A new education facility is being completed across the street from the detention center that will provide multiple classrooms to satisfy the separation requirements. It also will be equipped with video

screens to allow inmates to hear lectures from other locations and to interact in discussions, Pumphrey said.

The classrooms are located in part of a large building that the county bought several years ago.

The classroom project, costing about \$390,000, has been ongoing for the past two years, Sebastian County Judge David Hudson said.

"It's been a fairly significant project," he said.

Teaching, Learning Continue Until The Last Bell (nwaonline.com)

FAYETTEVILLE — Summer vacation for most of the students in Fayetteville schools starts Friday but until then teachers say it will be business as usual in their classrooms.

Even if fun events are scheduled, an element of learning will be involved, such as the economics skills third-graders learned at Vandergriff Elementary School. Students will have a competition to sell the most lemonade at a field day Thursday. The competition developed after they read "The Lemonade War."

Ashley Osburn laughed when told a common perception is students watch movies or play games during the last few days of school.

Not in her first-grade classroom at Owl Creek School, she said last week while supervising sack races during field day for students in kindergarten through fourth grade.

"This is probably one of the busiest weeks of the year," Osburn said.

"I'll be doing the same thing I do all year," said Deena Brown, another first-grade teacher at Owl Creek. She and Osburn said they will continue with reading and phonics instruction. The important thing is to keep the classroom schedule or routine going.

"If I'm still teaching, they're still engaged," Brown said.

Richard Armendariz, physical education teacher at Owl Creek said, "I will keep my nose to the grindstone until 3 p.m. on the 31st, even in PE and health. There are nutrition and fitness needs." And, instruction will continue in the fundamentals of baseball in his classes this week.

"We're trying to develop some baseball players," he said.

Ashley Jones, a second-grade teacher at Holcomb Elementary School, said activities are planned throughout her school to keep students engaged while providing some fun in a learning environment.

While activities such as field days or variety shows provide fun activities and a break in the day, the students settle right back into the routine of their classrooms.

In her class, students write letters to next year's second-graders to explain what to expect. They also write letters to their third-grade teacher telling a little bit about themselves.

"We also play review games. They're fun but students are also learning," Jones said.

One day, students will bring their favorite book and will spend the day reading in the classroom.

There will be some science experiments as well, Jones said. Last week, the students made ice cream in a bag. It was a lesson on how liquid can be changed to a solid.

Bill Maxey's students in his seventh-grade science class are studying weather this week, such as hurricanes and tornadoes. His social studies students are delving into the Renaissance, Enlightenment and Reformation periods, based on a curriculum from the History Channel.

"We're scheduled to work until the end of the year," Maxey said.

"There is emphasis on collaboration and reflection and expression in their writing," he said.

Carri Finley's fifth-graders in language arts will finish planning philanthropic projects, some of which will extend through the summer vacation. The projects, developed by students working alone or in small groups, are the conclusion of the fourth quarter study on making a difference in the world.

The projects range from raising awareness about ovarian cancer and diabetes to operating lemonade stands to fighting childhood cancer, selling Compliment Grams throughout the school and collecting school supplies to send to Moore, Okla.

"The intent is to teach them to participate in lifelong philanthropy, to be good people," said Finley. "These students are 10 and 11 years old and they can't dream too small."

Michelle Hayward, principal at McNair Middle School, said the seventh-grade celebration on the last day at her school is a reward because students have worked so very hard as sixth and seventh-graders and this allows the students to strengthen their bonds as they prepare to move to junior high.

Still, the seventh-graders know they have to take final exams and finish projects before they can celebrate, Hayward said. At the same time, the sixth-graders are writing personal reflections, making a video to help incoming sixth-graders or visiting with students about their math or literacy performance.

"We never quit," Hayward said.

At A Glance School's Out

Most Fayetteville schools will finish the school year Friday. Asbell and Happy Hollow elementary schools will be in school another two weeks. They operate on a continuous learning calendar and open about two weeks before traditional schools and end about two weeks after.

Source: Staff Report

From Bentonville To Nashville (nwaonline.com)

BENTONVILLE — Now that Tom Chester is done with microscopes and textbooks, he can turn his attention to the bright lights of Nashville.

Chester finished his second year as a biology and anatomy teacher last week at Bentonville High School. Now he and his brother, Hebron Chester, are moving to Nashville in pursuit of a musical career.

“I have to explore this,” Tom Chester said. “It’s an adventure. I would really love for it to work.”

The brothers have a band known simply as Tom and Hebron. They released an album in November titled “Ridgerunner” that charted among the top 200 rock albums on iTunes.

Tom Chester, 25, double-majored in biology and psychology at the University of Arkansas, but said he couldn’t sustain a dual career.

“I’ve really tried it, but I’ve lost a lot of sleep trying to be a teacher by day and a musician by night,” he said.

“What I hope is I can do music for a living. That’s what I love. I would love to perform the songs I write, but I’d also love just to write songs.”

Hebron Chester, 22, just graduated from the University of Arkansas with a degree in English and a minor in business.

“I’m excited about getting started in Nashville and I just think it’s what we should be doing,” he said.

Both brothers have difficulty defining the genre of their music.

“I usually just say rock, because that covers basically everything,” Hebron Chester said. “Hopefully it’s just a new sound. I can’t really describe it. We have influences from different places.”

The band plans to finish its second album by the end of this summer, then see if a record company is interested in marketing it for them.

“Everyone who’s heard us says, “You don’t need luck, you just need the right person to listen to (the music),”” Tom Chester said.

The Chester brothers grew up in Pocahontas, a small town in northeast Arkansas. They began playing music together at an early age.

Tom and Hebron took about a year and a half to write and record the songs for “Ridgerunner.” The album’s title track is dedicated to a homeless man Tom Chester met while he was in college. The man’s nickname was Ridgerunner.

Besides teaching science, Chester also co-directed the high school's Bible Club along with math teacher Joe Wilson.

"He's amazing," Wilson said about Chester. "He works hard. He is passionate about the kids."

Nick Van Slooten, a freshman, was in Chester's biology class this school year.

"He went really in depth on the concepts and went slow enough so that everyone could understand," Nick said.

Chester proved popular with other students as well.

"He's not just a teacher, he's a friend to the students," said Ashley Wright, also a freshman.

Tom and Hebron played a benefit concert earlier this month at the high school that attracted several hundred kids. The concert raised more than \$500 for a mission trip sponsored by a local church, Chester said.

Chester said he'll miss the students, but not the stress that came with being a teacher.

"Teaching is a 100 percent full-time job," he said. "It completely consumes you. So I'm looking forward to having time to myself again."

At A Glance

Jamnesty

Tom and Hebron Chester will do one more show in Northwest Arkansas before their move to Nashville. Their band will be one of several at Jamnesty, a fundraiser to promote awareness of human rights. Surf de Soleil and A Complicated Creature are two of the other bands scheduled to perform. Jamnesty is at 6 p.m. June 7 at Bentonville High School's Arend Arts Center. Tickets are \$5.

Source: Staff Report