

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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Education notebook (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LR School District intervenes in suit

The Little Rock School District is supporting a tiny north Arkansas school district's legal argument that it should be allowed to challenge the adequacy of the state's school-funding system.

The Deer/Mount Judea School District filed a complaint in Pulaski County Circuit Court contending that the state had fallen out of compliance with the requirements for operating a constitutional public school system.

The circuit court dismissed the case, saying Deer/ Mount Judea was barred from raising in a new lawsuit claims that were settled in the earlier Lake View school-funding case that was decided by the Arkansas Supreme Court.

Deer/Mount Judea has appealed the circuit court decision to the state Supreme Court. The Little Rock district received permission last week from that court to submit a brief in support of the smaller district's right to raise the claims.

"The circuit court's reasoning would preclude any Arkansas school district from raising any constitutional claim concerning the State's funding of public education, even if the State falls as far from constitutional compliance as it was when the Lake View litigation began," wrote Chris Heller, an attorney for the Little Rock district.

"The constitutional right of Arkansas students to an adequate public education can be protected only if school districts such as Deer/Mount Judea can have their day in court," he wrote.

The Little Rock district is not taking a position on the merits of the Deer/Mount Judea claims.

Walton foundation donates \$8 million

The Bentonville-based Walton Family Foundation announced last week that it is increasing its support for the Students First organization with an \$8 million contribution over two years.

The foundation has previously provided \$3 million to the organization, which was founded and is run by Michelle Rhee, a former chancellor of the Washington, D.C., public schools. Students First champions the establishment of public policies that enable parents to choose among publicly funded school programs for their children.

LR administrator wins leader award

A Little Rock School District administrator has received a singular national honor, while another has announced retirement plans.

Sadie Mitchell, the district's associate superintendent for elementary education, is the recipient of the Reading Recovery Council of North America's Teacher Leader Award. The honor recognizes commitment to the short-term Reading Recovery intervention program for first-graders who struggle with early reading and writing skills.

David Hartz, the Little Rock district's associate superintendent for human resources and government liaison, has announced he will retire from the school district after eight years of service.

Also, Vanessa Cleaver, the Little Rock district's director of mathematics, was recently elected to a two-year term as president of the National Benjamin Banneker Association, an affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. The 300-member association works to promote greater achievement of math skills among all students, particularly black students. Marcelline Carr, lead math teacher for grades nine through 12 in the Little Rock district, was elected treasurer of the association.

UALR program taking applicants

The University of Arkansas at Little Rock's 33-year old summer academic program, Summer Laureate University for Youth, or SLUFY, is now accepting applications.

The program offers experiential learning to high-achieving pupils in kindergarten through eighth grades in a challenging but fun environment.

Students applying for the program must include a teacher recommendation and scores from a national or state achievement or aptitude test.

The application fee is \$25. Tuition is \$275 for the July 8-19 program, to be held at Booker Arts Magnet School in Little Rock. A total of 30 classes will be offered in subjects ranging from Pixar animation to the superheroes and villains of Greek mythology.

Scholarships are available. The scholarship application deadline is May 13. Application are online at ualr.edu/slufy.

2 state pupils named Presidential Scholars (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

Kylie McClanahan of Maumelle, a senior at Central Arkansas Christian School in North Little Rock, and Fred Pohlman, a Prairie Grove High School senior, are Arkansas' 2013 U.S. Presidential Scholars, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced Monday.

McClanahan and Pohlman are among 141 seniors from the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and U.S. families living abroad to be recognized this year for their accomplishments in academics or the arts. The program - created in 1964 - honors at least one male student and one female student from each state. Additional students are selected at large for academic success and artistic skills.

All of the Presidential Scholars were asked to name their most influential teacher. McClanahan selected Melissa Leverett of North Little Rock.

Pohlman named Dickie Thomasson, also of North Little Rock, according to information from the Education Department.

The White House Commission on Presidential Scholars, appointed by President Barack Obama, annually selects students to be honored. To date, more than 6,000 top-performing students have been presented the Presidential Scholar Medallion at ceremonies in Washington, D.C.

The 2013 event will be June 16.

LR district names top teacher of '13 (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

Holly Brown, a third-grade teacher at Terry Elementary, is the Little Rock School District's 2013 Teacher of the Year.

Brown was presented with the title and the Marian G. Lacey Award on Monday at the district's annual Crystal Awards Ceremony at the Embassy Suites hotel. The award is named for a former longtime Little Rock educator and principal.

Additionally, Mary Anne Struthers from Williams Elementary School was named elementary teacher of the year. Kasey Miller Neal of Horace Mann Middle School was named the middle school teacher of the year, and Ryan Parson of Parkview High School was announced as the high school teacher of the year.

Brown, the recipient of a crystal trophy, a laptop computer and \$1,000, will represent the district at the state level in the Arkansas Teacher of the Year competition.

The teacher of the year program starts each year with the nominations of teachers by their peers.

20 Arkansans receive \$2,500 merit awards (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

Twenty Arkansas high school seniors are among 2,500 students named recipients of \$2,500 National Merit Scholarships this week.

The winners are the finalists in each state determined to have the strongest combination of accomplishments, skills and potential for academic success. The number of winners named in each state is proportional to the state's share of the nation's overall class of graduating seniors.

The National Merit Scholarship Corp. finances most of the \$2,500 awards. In limited cases, the awards are underwritten by corporations and company foundations.

The scholarship recipients and their high schools are:

Edward D. Thompson of Benton, Episcopal Collegiate School in Little Rock.

Indran Kamalanathan, Bentonville High.

William Z. Bumpers of Conway, home school.

Peter Peizhe Du, Fayetteville High.

Anders N. Flashnick of Fayetteville, Haas Hall Academy charter school.

Rebecca L. McCann, Fayetteville High.

Kylie A. Dickerson of Hackett, Greenwood High.

Andrew C. Powell, Heber Springs High.

Thomas R. Selig of Hot Springs, Lakeside High

Elaine Ruth Boe of Little Rock, Mount St. Mary Academy.

David H. Chen, Little Rock Central High.

Caleb W. Delon of Little Rock, home school.

Ishmael T. Gray of Little Rock, home school.

Marie V. Kressin, Mountain Home High.

Michele L. Dobbins, Mountain View High.

Sonia H. Pascale of Pine Bluff, Episcopal Collegiate School in Little Rock.

Meredith M. Breach, Rogers High.

Kaylee G. Harper of Rogers, Providence Classical Christian Academy in Rogers.

Jason P. Townsley, Rogers Heritage High.

Bradford H. Harper of Sherwood, North Little Rock High.

Spa City school praised (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

The Arkansas School for Mathematics, Sciences and the Arts, a residential school in Hot Springs for the state's talented juniors and seniors, is one of the nation's best public high schools, ranking 13th in a newly published list of the country's top 2,000 schools.

Eleven other Arkansas schools also were included among the best 2,000 schools for producing college-ready students as ranked by Newsweek and The Daily Beast, a news and opinion website.

Haas Hall Academy charter school in Fayetteville was the next highest ranked Arkansas school, coming in at 83rd.

Fayetteville High was ranked 799th. Bentonville High was ranked 915. LISA Academy charter high school in Little Rock came in at 1,181, followed by Fort Smith's Southside High at 1,222 and KIPP Delta Collegiate High charter school in Helena-West Helena at 1,235.

Little Rock's Parkview Arts and Science Magnet High is ranked 1,258 on the list of 2,000 best schools, followed by Little Rock Central High at 1,492, Benton High at 1,641, Pea Ridge High at 1,757 and Dardanelle High at 1,998.

Schools were judged on six components: graduation rate, college acceptance rate, percentage of students enrolled in at least one Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate course, Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate tests taken per student, average scores on Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate exams, and average college entrance exam scores.

The Arkansas math and science school had a 100 percent graduation rate, 100 percent college-acceptance rate, an average ACT college entrance exam score of 26.7, average SAT college entrance exam score of 1779, an average of 1.7 Advanced Placement tests given per student, and an average Advanced Placement score of 4.1 on a scale of 1 to 5.

Bob Gregory, interim director of academic affairs and a mathematics instructor at the Arkansas math and science school, called the school's ranking a "validation of the hard work put in by the school's teachers and students every day."

He said the school's talented faculty produce an exciting learning environment for students.

"It is great to teach at a place where learning is valued and hard work is the norm."

Corey Alderdice, the school's director, said the ranking "is a reflection not only of the education students have received at ASMSA, but of the strong educational foundation students built in their home districts.

“At the core of its mission, ASMSA acts as an extension of the work of each and every high school in the state of Arkansas,” Alderdice said in a prepared statement. “These students excel not only because of the opportunities they have been provided by ASMSA but also because of the preparation and experiences they have pursued at the elementary, middle and early high school level in their home districts.”

Carol Martin Gatton Academy of Mathematics and Sciences in Bowling Green, Ky., was the top-ranked school in the nation.

7 schools receive grants for health centers (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LITTLE ROCK — The state has awarded \$1 million in grants to seven Arkansas schools for the creation of school-based health centers in their districts beginning next school year.

Each district will receive \$150,000 during the first year of the five-year grant, and the award amounts will decrease each year thereafter.

The grants will allow the schools to offer clinical services through a health provider, such as a hospital or community health center. The grant also calls for schools to establish a mental health program and promote overall school health through educational outreach.

The schools receiving the grants are: Cedarville Elementary School, Washington Middle School in El Dorado, Franklin Elementary School in Little Rock, Siloam Springs Intermediate School, Gene George Elementary School in Springdale, Waldron Middle School and Yellville-Summit Elementary School.

NLR district administrator to lead Dollarway schools (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

Bobby Acklin, a veteran North Little Rock School District administrator, will become the superintendent of the state-controlled Dollarway School District in Pine Bluff effective July 1, Arkansas Education Commissioner Tom Kimbrell announced late Tuesday.

Acklin will succeed Frank Anthony. Anthony, a former superintendent in Pine Bluff, came out of retirement last summer to manage the 1,299-student district, where the high school had failed to meet state accreditation standards for two consecutive years. The violations included the employment of at least one noncertified teacher and incorrect student transcripts.

Acklin, 57, is a former teacher, coach, assistant principal and principal, and is currently assistant superintendent for desegregation. He has served in the North Little Rock School District since 1989.

“His heart is in the right place; he’s about kids,” Kimbrell said of Acklin in a statement. “His understanding of the educational process and his ability to build and sustain trusting relationships within a community will drive improved student and educator performance.”

Acklin said his passion to see students and teachers succeed and his desire to interact with the community caused him to consider the Dollarway job.

“When this opportunity came about, I knew my goal would be to get Dollarway to a position where kids have a chance to realize their dreams. That’s what it’s all about,” Acklin said.

Acklin was a candidate earlier this year for the North Little Rock superintendent position, but the North Little Rock School Board chose Kelly Rodgers of Terrell, Texas, for the job.

During Acklin’s tenure in North Little Rock, the district was declared unitary in December 2011 by the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis and was released from any further federal court supervision of its desegregation efforts.

Acklin’s blunt and passionate court testimony in January 2010 has been viewed as central to the district’s release from court monitoring.

A 1975 graduate of Mayflower High School and 1979 graduate of Hendrix College with a degree in health and physical education, Acklin has a master’s degree in educational administration from Arkansas State University in Jonesboro.

He started his career in 1979 as head basketball coach at East Junior High School in the West Memphis School District. He became the school’s assistant principal in 1980 and has been an administrator ever since. He is a former assistant principal at Conway Junior High School and from 1983-89 was principal of Conway Middle School and Conway Junior High School.

In addition to his district duties, Acklin has been a pastor of Samaritan Hill Missionary Baptist Church for 20 years.

Acklin and his wife, Pam, have two adult children and two grandchildren.

The Arkansas Board of Education voted in June to take over the Dollarway district, dismissing then-Superintendent Bettye Dunn-Wright and dissolving the locally elected School Board, after learning of the high school’s failure to meet accreditation standards.

RSD to implement summer program (Russellville Courier)

This summer, Russellville School District hopes to redefine the meaning of summer school as they implement a summer enrichment program providing educational opportunities to children during summer break.

The program, called Exploring L.I.F.E. (Learning Is Fun and Exciting), will be held from June 10 through June 28 from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. each weekday at Oakland Heights Elementary School. A total of 150 students district wide have been selected to take part in the three units the summer school offers: exploring nature, exploring numbers, and exploring nutrition.

The program was piloted by Krista Malin and Krsytal Shipp, two kindergarten teachers at Crawford Elementary, who worked with assistant superintendent Alene Bynum and Jenny Barber, the district supervisor of federal programs and pre-school. Exploring L.I.F.E. was a product of research Malin and Shipp conducted at Arkansas Tech University's Center for Leadership and Learning.

"Our research found that students who had no access to enrichment activities like summer camp, it creates an academic gap between those students and the students who have those opportunities during the summer," Malin said. "The summer school is based on the five tenets of the whole child. The child should be healthy, safe, engaged, challenged, and supported. [RSD] does a great job of meeting those needs, but our concern is what happens to those kids in the summer months who don't have those needs met."

While summer school has traditionally been considered classes for those struggling in academics, Exploring L.I.F.E. seeks to redefine the term.

"Summer school has a negative connotation, but this is the total opposite," Malin said. "It teaches hands-on learning and real-world application, and teaches these kids life skills that will benefit them."

For example, the "exploring numbers" unit teaches kids how to budget their money, and Malin and Shipp are looking for local businesses to partner with for the unit.

"For example, we're going to do a life-skill budgeting, so a student would be learning about the difference between a need and a want," Shipp said. "But instead of just doing an activity in a classroom, we want to take them to a business and let them buy a need and a want with real money. We would like local businesses to contribute \$20 gift cards per student to purchase items with."

They're also looking at partnerships in their other units, including taking students to a restaurant and teaching them table manners for the exploring nutrition section, and partnering with a state park for the exploring nature unit.

Malin said RSD will be one of the first districts in the state to experiment with summer enrichment programs.

"Other than Alma, we don't know of any other school in the state that is doing this," she said.

For more information about partnering with the Exploring L.I.F.E. Program, contact Shipp at (479) 264-2927.

Tracey Yates-Thompson named Adviser of the Year (Northeast Arkansas Town Crier)

Tracey Yates-Thompson, journalism teacher at Buffalo Island Central High School, has proudly sat and applauded as her students have been recognized at the annual Arkansas Scholastic Press Association (ASPA) over the years. Just this year alone, they brought home numerous awards including four honorable mentions, four excellent, and two superior awards for the school newspaper and nine excellent

and four honorable mentions for their yearbook. Her yearbook editor, Jillian Key, won yearbook Editor of the Year and Katie Bibb was recognized as second runner-up Photojournalist of the Year.

This year Yates-Thompson joined her students in the award recognition as she was named the 2013 Adviser of the Year. She knew her students had nominated her but was completely surprised to take the honor.

"I have only taught 12 years and I didn't think it would be long enough to win," she said. "Having my students nominate me made the award even more special."

She received the award at the annual banquet at the state convention held in Rogers on April 18.

Her students know the amount of time and energy she puts into the program. One of her students is also her son, Greydon Williams, and he knows firsthand that she goes above and beyond.

In one of the nomination letters, her students pointed out that Ms. Yates has a photography business of her own and uses her equipment to take school pictures including Santa Claus, Easter Bunny, sports, homecoming, etc., and all of the money goes to the journalism program for equipment and enrichment opportunities.

"This helps us attend the ASPA yearly," the student submitted.

Yates-Thompson has a newspaper background as she worked for the Town Crier Newspaper before going back into the education field.

"I did enjoy working for the newspaper," she said. "The time I spent at the Town Crier helped me to teach my students how to prepare to do more than one job. There is writing, photography, sales, layout and design."

Yates-Thompson said the journalism staff works hard. The publications are done by the students.

"I am here to advise; I don't write their stories," she said. "There is no value for them if I do the work."

She is especially proud of the fact that several of her former students have gone into journalism or have worked on publications staffs in college.

"I took journalism my senior year I high school because by two best friends were in the class," she said. "Ever since then I have been involved in journalism or photography. My first year of college I was majoring in journalism and then changed to education and now getting the best of both."

She said her first year as an adviser they were shooting with film and spent about \$1,000 just on film. During her second year they went with the digital cameras and have continued to upgrade.

"For a small school we do a great job," she said. "People don't realize how many scholastic journalism powerhouses there are in the state. Our school competes well with the larger schools. For the resources we have, we do a good job in the newspaper and the yearbook. It takes a lot of work to do a

journalistic yearbook. Most of the larger schools just do a high school yearbook. We do pre-k through high school and we are on different campuses. We do the job with a small staff. The yearbook sales would probably be the same if we just posted the photographs but we want emotion filled pictures. We strive to try to get every student in the yearbook at least three times but it is not easy with four campuses and four kids. The staff works hard. It meant a lot to me to have my students take time out of their busy schedules to nominate me, and my involvement with ASPA over the years made recognition by them such an honor. We are fortunate in our state to have an organization like ASPA."

In addition to journalism, Yates-Thompson teaches English, Speech, and Drama.