

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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Educators to discuss School Choice (KNWA/KFSM)

Video available at <http://www.4029tv.com/news/arkansas/educators-to-discuss-school-choice/-/8897494/20494726/-/u38a7dz/-/index.html>

The Arkansas State Board of Education will discuss School Choice -- a law passed this session allowing a certain number of students each year to transfer to any school.

The Public School Choice Act of 2013, or School Choice, allows parents to decide where their kids should go to school, regardless of district boundaries.

The law repeals The Public School Choice Act of 1989. The revised school choice policy allows school transfers regardless of race.

Some districts have already opted out of the school choice policy, though none are in Northwest Arkansas or the River Valley. For a list of those districts, [click here](#).

Kathy Harmon, a grandparent in Springdale said parents should be able to choose where they send their kids to school.

"Should they choose - the parents, for whatever reason to place their child into another school and they accept the responsibility of getting that kid to that school, then they are to have that choice," Harmon said.

Some of the new law's critics said it could hurt struggling schools by allowing bright students to move to better schools.

Other parents like Crystal Downs said they aren't sure whether School Choice would help or hurt schools.

"You want your kids to get the best education possible," Downs said. "But you have these schools that I don't think get the equipment or the things necessary to teach your kids what they need to know."

The State Education Board meeting is at 9 a.m. Monday in Little Rock. To watch the live stream, [click here](#).

Schools Prepare For Loss In Federal Poverty Money (nwaonline.com)

The future of Title I instructional assistants, the aides who help students with math and reading, are in limbo in the Rogers School District, officials said.

Asbell Elementary School in Fayetteville may not be able to buy as many school supplies that previously were distributed free to students.

School officials across Northwest Arkansas are preparing spending plans for the next fiscal year while trying to figure out how much less Title I federal money they will receive because of mandatory budget cuts.

They want to keep instructional services but that may not be possible. The jobs of 58 instructional assistants are undecided, said Monica Avery, federal program coordinator in Rogers. She hopes contracts will be issued later this month. Some have taken jobs elsewhere and others won't be rehired because of the loss of funding.

"They are a vital part of the instructional program," Avery said. The assistants are assigned to 14 of the district's 16 elementary schools. "It would be a detriment to the students who need the help," she said.

Title I, the largest federal aid program for elementary and secondary schools, is targeted to high-poverty schools or districts to provide services to students who are disadvantaged or at risk of failing to meet state standards.

Arkansas receives about \$55 million in federal grants, according to Brandon Sharp, administrator of the budget division for the state Department of Finance and Administration. Sharp has said \$20.4 million of the money is for Title I and special education programs.

More than 18,000 students were identified as poverty students this past school year in Bentonville, Rogers, Springdale and Fayetteville. Rogers and Springdale have the highest number, according to figures from the Arkansas Department of Education.

The amount of Title I cuts are: Bentonville, \$220,000; Rogers, \$183,431; Fayetteville, \$281,230; and Springdale, \$288,000. Estimates are Springdale will receive 99 percent of what it received last year and the others will get about 88 percent to 90 percent.

Several factors are not yet known, federal program coordinators said. The cuts could amount to more or they could extend beyond the next fiscal year.

Vicki Thomas, Fayetteville superintendent, told the School Board last week more cuts are being discussed in Congress.

"They continue to talk about more cuts. We may be in line for more cuts," Thomas said.

The state has stepped in by securing a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education, said Bobby Lester, federal programs director at the state Department of Education. In the past, the federal education department has allowed school districts to carry over up to 15 percent of its title funds from year to year.

The waiver gives school districts permission to carry over more than 15 percent without penalty. If a school district tried to carry over more than 15 percent, it would be forced to return the money to the federal education department, he said.

“We knew there would be cuts. This will supplement shortfalls next year if the district asks for a waiver,” Lester said.

Rogers received the waiver, Avery said.

“We have funds in reserve and don’t expect any impact for this year,” said Kelly Hays, controller in the Springdale School District.

Kimberly Glass, Springdale’s federal programs coordinator, said the reserve will offset the amount of any cut the district experiences.

Sterling Ming, executive director for finance in Bentonville, said the district will lose \$220,000, which includes salaries for three full-time employees who work with children in poverty and special education. Those employees have been rehired for next year using money from the general operation budget, Ming said.

The number of residents living in poverty is used to calculate the amount of Title I money a district will get, Lester said. Springdale will lose less in Title I money because the city had more people living in poverty according to the 2010 Census, Lester said.

“The hardest thing is the waiting,” said Kathy Hanlon, treasurer for the Rogers School District. “It’s hard on the employees.”

Rogers is taking a cautious approach to its budget and is looking at the staff openings to determine if any can go unfilled, she said. There won’t be any cuts to building budgets, as in Fayetteville, and there won’t be any raises, either.

Bentonville, Rogers and Fayetteville have said they won’t offer raises to employees other than the annual increases based on experience.

“If you save money for one year, it only helps for the next year,” Hanlon said, indicating the future of the federal cuts could extend beyond next year.

“We want to affect children the least,” Hanlon said.

The fiscal year in Arkansas begins July 1. All school budgets must be finalized and submitted by Sept. 15 to the state Department of Education.

State revenue trending higher (Column by Roby Brock, Log Cabin Democrat)

Arkansas' revenue picture looks strong as the state heads into the final month of its fiscal year as individual income taxes and sales taxes were strong in May. State gross revenues cleared the \$5 billion mark for the first time and net revenues are poised to do the same by the time the state's fiscal year closes at the end of June. Year-to-date net available general revenues totaled \$4.48 billion, up 5.6 percent above year-ago levels and four percent above expectations, while gross revenues for the year topped \$5.59 billion.

Former USA Drug magnate Stephen LaFrance dies unexpectedly

Retired USA Drug magnate Stephen LaFrance, Sr. of Pine Bluff passed away in his sleep Tuesday night unexpectedly. LaFrance, 71, had sold his massive USA Drug franchise and warehousing business last July for \$438 million to Walgreen's. The transaction included 144 stores operating under the USA Drug, Super D Drug, May's Drug, Med-X and Drug Warehouse stores located in Arkansas, Kansas, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, Oklahoma and Tennessee.

KATV chairman Dale Nicholson dies at 74

Legendary KATV Channel 7 chairman and former general manager Dale Nicholson died at his home in Little Rock Saturday night. He was 74 years old. Nicholson began his broadcasting career in El Dorado in 1962 and served as the general manager of Channel 7 for decades as it became a ratings powerhouse.

Former State Treasurer Shoffner indicted on 14 charges

Former Arkansas Treasurer Martha Shoffner was indicted on federal charges Wednesday. Shoffner, 68, faces a 14-count indictment, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office. The charges include seven counts of receipt of bribes by an agent of state government receiving federal funds, six counts of extortion, and one count of attempted extortion. Last week, a federal judge in Little Rock rejected Shoffner's guilty plea in the case.

Beebe says unemployment fund in the black, paying back FED debt

Nearly two years after the state's unemployment insurance (UI) trust fund found itself \$360 million in the hole, Gov. Mike Beebe says the jobless safety net has paid back half its federal debt and is operating in the black.

"Two years have passed, and we've reached an important milestone. We are still paying back the federal government, but the total has dropped by almost half to \$193 million. Meanwhile, the Trust Fund has been replenished and now has a \$205 million balance," Beebe said.

Five insurance carriers to compete for Arkansas exchanges

Five insurance carriers submitted letters of intent to participate in Arkansas' forthcoming health insurance exchanges, according to the state Insurance Department. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arkansas, Celtic/Novasys, QualChoice of Arkansas, and national Blue Cross Blue Shield met a Monday, June 3 deadline to announce their plans to bid for the state's insurance exchange, known as the Health Insurance Marketplace (HIM). United Security Life and Health Insurance Co. submitted a letter of intent after the deadline, but insurance officials said they would extend the period to allow United to qualify.

Jay Shue named Arkansas Medicaid Inspector General

Gov. Mike Beebe named Jay Shue of Little Rock as Medicaid Inspector General. The position was created by the 89th General Assembly to oversee an independent office that will work to prevent, detect and investigate Medicaid fraud. Shue, 43, has directed the Medicaid Fraud Control Unit at the Arkansas Attorney General's Office since 2007. Prior to that, he spent 10 years as a deputy prosecutor for the Sixth Judicial District.

Tyson Foods acquires California-based food processor

Tyson Foods, Inc. will acquire the assets of Claridge Corp.'s Circle Foods, LLC, a producer of frozen and refrigerated handheld Mexican foods, uncooked tortillas and Indian flatbreads. Terms of the deal were not disclosed. California-based Circle Foods has been in business for 25 years and operates a state-of-the-art plant in San Diego, and also produces private label products for various customers.

UALR launches 'Game Changing' Emerging Analytics Center

UALR launched the George W. Donaghey Emerging Analytics Center (EAC), a program that state and higher education officials describe as a "game changer." The EAC, located on the fourth floor of UALR's Engineering and Information Technology building, features data visualization systems that are among the first of their kind in the world.

These systems, including the trademarked EmergiFLEX and the Mobile EmergiFLEX systems, were custom designed and built for UALR by Mechdyne Corp, a leading provider of visual information technologies headquartered in Marshalltown, Iowa. UALR officials say the EAC will serve in partnership with business, sciences, healthcare, education, and engineering fields.

Gerber expansion could add 90 jobs in Fort Smith

More jobs are expected to come to Fort Smith thanks to continued expansion at the Gerber plant on the city's north side. Gerber is expanding operations to add a cereal line which could lead to 90 new hires.