

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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Alternative learning teacher is Conway's Teacher of the Year (Log Cabin Democrat, Conway)

Trinina Pouncy's students know where her heart is, and they love her for it, said Ruth Doyle Middle School Principal Debi Avra.

Pouncy, a middle school Alternative Learning Environment teacher, was selected first by her peers to represent Ruth Doyle Middle School and then by a committee to represent the Conway School District in the Arkansas Teacher of the Year competition, a part of the National Teacher of the Year program.

"She has a heart for her kids, but she doesn't let them off the hook. They respect her because they know where her heart is," said Avra.

Pouncy learned of the selection last week, she said, when district and school administrators surprised her with the announcement in front of her class.

Avra said she had a feeling Pouncy, who has been teaching for just three years, would be chosen to represent the district.

"She is wise beyond her years. This is her third year but you'd never know, and it's because of her life experiences," Avra said.

Avra said before Pouncy came to Ruth Doyle Middle School one year ago, she had her eye on her.

"We wanted her," Avra said.

Pouncy was an ALE teacher at Carl Stuart Middle School before the district's grades were restructured. Alternative learning for middle-schoolers is now at the Ruth Doyle campus.

Before she began teaching in Conway, Pouncy was a captain in the Army National Guard.

Her last position in 11 years of military service was as a military training officer.

"Yeah, I can handle it," she said of teaching middle-schoolers.

"That's what gets people. When they see my short stature, they ask me if I'm OK teaching middle school ALE. They get rowdy, but I can get them on track easily," Pouncy said.

As the school day was winding down Tuesday in the last week of school before summer break, about a dozen of her students were playing a learning game together. Students who went out of turn or didn't play by the rules did not receive a point.

The last week of school is an easier-going, more relaxed time for most students, but Pouncy said her classroom must stay structured.

She said her students, about 21 of them, are those middle-schoolers who have been placed in the program because they've struggled in a typical classroom setting due to learning, emotional and behavioral challenges.

Pouncy said she thinks she was chosen by peers and the committee because of the compassion she "can't help but have" for ALE students.

"A lot of people have written off ALE kids. I won't. They still have a future, and we can still shape and mold them and teach them right from wrong," she said. "I haven't given up on them."

Pouncy said her students are ones who have been called "at risk youth."

"The reason I'm passionate about them is because I guess I was one," she said.

She said she had a bad attitude and suffered in school. Her first child was born when Pouncy was 17.

"People wrote me off. They thought I was done for," she said. "I overcame that and I want the same for my students."

Pouncy's classroom differs from others on campus because she and her students spend most of the school day together while other students rotate classes.

"We make the best of being in here all day together. Because we're together, we form a family where everyone has a role," she said.

Avra said Pouncy is integral to the success of the district's ALE program.

"Just watching what she has done with the program makes me proud to have them on campus," Avra said. "I've seen the program elsewhere, and I haven't seen the success like I have with this one."

Of Pouncy's title, Conway Superintendent Dr. Greg Murry said, "Trinina is an outstanding teacher who will represent all of our teaching staff well as Teacher of the Year for 2013-14. Her passion for her students shows through in everything that she does. She is more than capable of bringing out the best in her students, and that is evidenced through the great strides she has made with some very challenging students. We are extremely proud of her and her work."

Pouncy said her goal is to see her students succeed.

"Every teacher has their own philosophy for teaching. Mine is: Failure is not an option."

Pouncy teaches fifth- through eighth-graders literacy and social studies.

Kathy Powers, a teacher at Conway's Raymond and Phyllis Simon Middle School, was selected as Arkansas' Teacher of the Year in 2010. Her tenure was July 2011-July 2012.

Students will win, Commentary by Gary Ritter (nwaonline.com)

Recently, my colleagues, Bill McComas and Chris Goering, wrote a thoughtful essay questioning the rationale for the nationally respected Teach for America (TFA) as well as spinoffs such as our own Arkansas Teacher Corps (ATC), developed in the past year to serve Arkansas students and schools.

While I appreciate their views, obviously I disagree with their conclusion that such programs are harmful. I believe that such programs are helpful and necessary.

After acknowledging that Arkansas schools face significant teaching shortages in some subjects, the authors criticize alternative-preparation strategies as a shortsighted attempt to address this problem by lowering the bar. Nothing could be further from the truth. The alternative-preparation strategy which I favor seeks out committed and talented applicants, screens them thoroughly, and accepts only a very small fraction to undertake the critically important task of educating our state's students. Our first class of 21 Arkansas Teacher Corps Fellows includes those who have taught science at the college level, students with excellent GPAs in rigorous majors and two students who received Ph.D. degrees at the University of Arkansas this May. I certainly do not believe that placing a newly minted Ph.D. in chemical engineering in high school math and science classrooms represents a lowered bar. Nor do parents. Nor do school superintendents in low-income areas.

McComas and Goering state that the "research on TFA has taught us that these smart individuals may make a difference in student achievement-but they don't stay long in the profession." I agree that alternatively certified teachers from such rigorous programs will make a positive academic difference for kids. Indeed, we should not be surprised that the most talented students with rigorous majors earned from selective institutions turn out to be good teachers. But how long will these teachers stay? Good studies seem to indicate that the attrition of TFA teachers is roughly equal to that of other teachers in high-need schools. In any event, we would also like effective teachers to stay in the classroom, so we require a commitment of three years for our ATC fellows.

McComas and Goering venture into the unknown, claiming that the "research doesn't show how damaging it is that such programs imply that anyone can be an effective teacher with little or no teacher preparation." I agree. The research reveals no evidence of any alleged damage, likely because there is no such thing. The existence of selective programs like our ATC does not suggest that "anyone" can become an effective teacher. In fact, in this first year of the ATC, we've accepted fewer than 25 of 135 applicants, selected based on their ability and commitment after comprehensive half-day interviews that included a one-to-one discussion, a group activity, and a teaching audition. I doubt many traditional programs in our state can afford to be this selective!

McComas and Goering reference the fact that ATC fellows will serve high-need communities, and they make the implausible claim that, as a consequence of programs like the ATC and TFA, “the disparity in student achievement already seen across Arkansas will grow.” It seems silly to argue that disadvantaged students will face greater achievement gaps because they are exposed to talented teachers such as those provided by Teach for America (with its Ivy League pipeline) or the Arkansas Teacher Corps. This outrageous claim reveals a lack of understanding of the challenges facing school leaders in high-need areas, where there are vacancies in key high school courses and no long line of traditionally trained teachers waiting in the wings.

We certainly expect that students will be better off for having ATC teachers in the coming years and that ATC will reduce achievement gaps. However, we do not simply rely on faith. We will carefully study the effectiveness of ATC teachers and are willing to pull the plug if McComas and Goering are right.

Finally, McComas and Goering offer up their own strategy for addressing targeted teacher shortages—scholarships for potential teachers, tuition waivers and the like. While I do not oppose these ideas, they have a mixed record in Arkansas, as colleagues Bob Maranto and James Shuls reported in the most recent issue of *The Rural Educator*, where they evaluated existing efforts to attract teachers to high-need areas.

I applaud our university, the College of Education and Health Professions, and Professors McComas and Goering for training sufficient numbers of certified teachers for our relatively affluent districts in Northwest Arkansas. I do not believe, however, that we are effectively serving students in the more economically depressed regions of the state. Thus, I am very pleased that our college (albeit not all of our faculty) is supporting the Arkansas Teacher Corps as a strategy for serving students we’ve previously ignored.

With all due respect to our colleagues, instead of waiting a few years to see if their ideas bear fruit, we’re going to dismiss their criticisms and get back to the important work of training and supporting our very talented first class of ATC fellows who will do their best to provide quality instruction to students in more than 20 classrooms across Arkansas this fall.

Gary Ritter is a professor of Education Policy at the University of Arkansas and one of the directors of the new Arkansas Teacher Corps.

Lifetime Honor for ATU Official from International Honor Society in Education (KARK, Channel 4)

RUSSELLVILLE, AR (News Release) - An official at Arkansas Tech University (ATU) in Russellville is set to receive special recognition from an international honor society in education.

Dr. Sherry Field, dean of the ATU College of Education and professor of curriculum and instruction, has been elected to the honorary Eleanor Roosevelt Chapter of Kappa Delta Pi.

Election into the lifetime honorary chapter is limited to 100 living members. Field will be formally inducted into the Eleanor Roosevelt Chapter of Kappa Delta Pi during the organization's 49th biennial convocation Oct. 24-26 in Dallas, Texas.

According to Faye Snodgrass, executive director of Kappa Delta Pi, the Eleanor Roosevelt Chapter was established to "recognize men and women who have made significant contributions of service to the society and exemplified its ideals of excellence and education."

Founded in 1911 as an honor society for educators, Kappa Delta Pi has 600 chapters and more than 40,000 members around the world.

Field has been a member of Kappa Delta Pi since 1989. She has served as chapter counselor for Kappa Delta Pi at three universities: the University of Colorado at Denver, the University of Georgia and the University of Texas at Austin. Field was vice president for Kappa Delta Pi International from 2002-04 and a charter recipient of the O.L. Davis Jr. Chapter Counselor of Distinction Award in 2009.

Field joined the Arkansas Tech faculty as professor of curriculum and instruction and dean of the College of Education on Sept. 1, 2012.

She previously served as associate dean for teacher education, student affairs and administration in the University of Texas at Austin College of Education.

Field holds a bachelor's degree in elementary education from Texas Tech University, a Master of Education degree from Stephen F. Austin University and a Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction from the University of Texas at Austin.

A member of the University of Texas faculty from 2001-2012, Field was the Catherine Mae Parker Centennial Professor in Education on the Austin campus.

She has taught and served as an administrator in K-12 education in Arkansas and Texas. Her previous faculty appointments included stints at the University of Colorado-Denver and at the University of Georgia, where she earned a Glickman Fellowship in 2000.

Field is a former editor of Social Studies and the Young Learner and a former chair of the College and University Faculty Association Executive Board of the National Council for the Social Studies.

Redfield Middle School Prepares for Closure (KARK, Channel 4)

Video available at http://arkansasmatters.com/fulltext?nxd_id=667672

REDFIELD, AR -- The summer break at Redfield Middle School is bittersweet for students and teachers. Friday, May 31 is not just the last day of school. Redfield Middle will be closing for good.

Earlier in the school year, White Hall School Board members voted to close the school, saying it's too expensive to make major repairs on the 75-year-old building.

The more than one hundred students from the school will be going to White Hall Middle School next year.

Those who fought to keep the doors open believe this move will produce negative results.

"A lot of kids are going to have problems with it because they've never seen anything of that magnitude. It's always been small community development," Greg Farley said.

Some parents have expressed support in opening a charter school to keep the students in the town.

AR Schools Receive Awards from Delta Garden Study (KARK, Channel 4)

LITTLE ROCK, AR -- Three Arkansas schools have been selected to receive \$7,000 awards from the Arkansas Children's Hospital Research Institute (ACHRI) Delta Garden Study to support vegetable gardens and garden-based education programming during the coming school year.

The state's largest garden-based childhood obesity prevention research study, funded by USDA, and in collaboration with Bank of America, accepted competing applications for the awards earlier this year and made selections based on specific criteria. The schools that qualified will receive financial assistance to build and maintain an on-campus vegetable garden, as well as training for teachers and garden participants on how to integrate the garden into science and other curriculum.

The Delta Garden Study and ACHRI Childhood Obesity Prevention Research Program teams will also make site visits to assist with the garden's design and build out, provide technical support and offer materials ranging from garden recipe books to study guides.

The schools that will receive Delta Garden Study support are:

- Access Academy in Little Rock: The 120-student campus offers a horticulture program, including a greenhouse and garden area with propagation, for its students with developmental delays and learning disabilities. With the Delta Garden Study assistance, Access Academy hopes to expand to include a vegetable garden as a "launch point for food and nutrition education for individuals with special needs."
- Bayyari Elementary School in Springdale, Ark.: The elementary school which serves 650 children from preschool through fifth grade sits in the middle of a "food desert" with no grocery stores located within a short driving distance, and 94 percent of students live in poverty. The grant application explained that many of the families the school serves "are on an extremely limited budget and unable to purchase fresh vegetables, fruits or adequate proteins." With Delta Garden Study funds Bayyari's leadership plans to start a school garden to serve its students, as well as the surrounding community. The team has begun strategy and development, but will draw on the resources from the Delta Garden Study to make the garden a reality.
- Mansfield High School in Mansfield, Ark.: The 290-student high school sits in a rural district serving a 250-plus square mile area. More than half of its population is on free and reduced lunch and at least a third is classified as overweight or obese, many coping with diabetes and high blood pressure.

Mansfield will use its Delta Garden Study funding to support the construction of an on-campus greenhouse that will be used as a teaching tool, as well as for after-school programming with students and families. According to Principal Tina Smith, the garden and greenhouse will give the school an "opportunity for students to be active while learning a valuable, life-long skill."

The Delta Garden Study measures the impact of school gardens on youth fruit and vegetable intake, physical activity, academic achievement and school bonding, and obesity rates. Since 2010, the Delta Garden Study has built and maintained seven school garden programs in Arkansas.

National bee's computer test trips state's spelling champ (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. - Under the glare of television lights Wednesday, Little Rock seventh-grader Chythanya Murali spelled two words correctly in the Scripps National Spelling Bee, but she did not score high enough in the competition's written test to proceed beyond the preliminary round.

Chythanya, a 13-year-old student at LISA Academy charter school in Little Rock, sat with her mother and father, Vineetha and Elambilan Murali, and her English teacher, Judy Knieling, as the spellers who made it to today's semifinal round were announced.

As the last of the 41 students, out of the original 280 competitors, made their way to the stage at the front of the suburban Washington hotel ballroom, it became clear that Chythanya had not made the cut.

Vineetha Murali, a research scientist at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, put her arm around her daughter and gave her a big kiss on the cheek.

Smiling, Chythanya seemed unfazed.

"I need to study harder," said the expert speller, who also holds a second-degree black belt in karate.

Chythanya, whose trip to Washington was sponsored by the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, qualified for the 86th Annual Scripps National Spelling Bee when she won the Arkansas State Spelling Bee in March.

During two oral rounds of competition Wednesday, she was flawless.

She reeled off her first word, "perestroika" without hesitation during the first round.

During the second round, she stood about 15 paces behind the speller who preceded her - Samuel Yeager, a 14-year-old from Chinle, Ariz., who was given the word "yannigan," which is defined as a member of a scrub team in baseball. When Samuel spelled it incorrectly - "yannagan" - a high pitched bell dinged, signaling his error.

Chythanya looked up for an instant at the ceiling and then strode purposefully to the microphone and waited for the contest's official pronouncer, Jacques Bailly, to give her a word.

“Senary,” Bailly said, evenly, before explaining that the word means “of, based upon, or characterized by six.”

“May you use the word in a sentence, please,” Chythanya said.

“Jethro experimented with music using a senary scale,” Bailly said.

Her hands clasped in front of her and her hair tied in braids, Chythanya recited the proper spelling in a strong voice.

When Samuel missed his word, Chythanya said she briefly envisioned herself in his place and then erased the thought from her mind and concentrated on Bailly.

“I went up hoping I’d get a word I know,” she said.

“Senary” was one of the thousands of words she and her father had practiced in the weeks leading up to the competition.

“As soon as he said the meaning of the word, I knew I had it,” said Chythanya, who was born in India and moved to the United States when she was 2.

Despite her perfect record in front of the cameras, which were filming the preliminary rounds for ESPN3, Chythanya did not score high enough on a computer test that combined spelling with vocabulary knowledge.

It was the first time in the Bee’s history that spellers were asked in the computer portion to provide definitions of words.

The change threw her off, but her father, an accountant, reminded her that each speller had to deal with the rule change.

“I told her, this is applicable to everyone, not just you,” he said.

As an eighth- grader, Chythanya will still be eligible for the Bee next year.

Knieling, her teacher, predicted Chythanya will be ready.

“She’s very calm under pressure,” she said.

NLR School District, city file to end tax district suit (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

Attorneys for the North Little Rock School District and the city filed a joint motion Wednesday to officially end a 4-year-old lawsuit between them over a downtown development proposal that never materialized.

The awaited motion - both sides had agreed earlier this year to end the lawsuit - was filed in Pulaski County Circuit Judge Chris Piazza's court.

The lawsuit followed a Dec. 31, 2008, action by the North Little Rock City Council to form a tax increment financing district in the city's downtown by combining the tax revenue from three individual tax districts in order to draw a bigger revenue share from a property redevelopment.

Tax increment financing districts, commonly referred to as TIFs, divert an increase in property-tax revenue that a school system normally would receive from redevelopment of the property. Instead, the new revenue goes to pay for improvements that benefit the TIF district.

The school district filed its lawsuit Jan. 30, 2009, charging that the city council hadn't followed state requirements for forming such a tax district.

The city's proposal had called for the city's share of the diverted funds from the TIF district to be used for a public parking lot that would have been next to a privately built hotel. Neither project moved forward once the lawsuit was filed.

Newly elected Mayor Joe Smith made getting rid of the lawsuit a priority when he took office Jan. 1, saying then that he didn't want the lawsuit "hanging over our heads."

On Smith's urging, the city council voted unanimously Jan. 14 to revoke the 2008 proposal to combine TIF districts that led to the lawsuit. The North Little Rock School Board then voted unanimously Jan. 17 to direct its attorney to drop the lawsuit.

"It was time for it to go away," Smith said Wednesday.

Smith added that he didn't know if the lawsuit harmed city government's relationship with either the school district or school board, but "it just kept our relationship from getting better."

"I think now we can take this partnership to another level," he said.

"I think it's one thing the school board and the mayor had agreed it was time to end," school Superintendent Ken Kirspel said.

"Hopefully everybody's happy."

Property tax revenue from the three individual TIF districts has been held in escrow since the council's 2008 action to combine the tax districts. The joint motion asks that upon dismissal, those taxes collected be disbursed "according to the applicable millages."

The total in escrow, as of Wednesday, was \$291,587.57, excluding May collections, according to the Pulaski County Treasurer's office.

Based on that amount, totals that would be disbursed to each of the affected taxing entities, according to the treasurer's office, would be: \$98,694.33 to the school district; \$74,765.41 each to the general

funds of North Little Rock and Pulaski County; and \$21,681.21 each to the Pulaski County Road and Bridge fund and the North Little Rock Road and Bridge fund.

The North Little Rock School Board has previously directed that the school district use its share of the money to give employees a small bonus.