Report Card
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Marvell-ous!

Marvell-Elaine Elementary has gone from occupying a permanent spot on the state’s school improvement list to scoring an A on the state’s report card by focusing on literacy during the school day, after-school and throughout the summer. Sixth-grader Kylon Jacobs is OK with that.

Story and photos by Melissa Brawner
For more than seven decades, Stephens has been the leader in financing Arkansas education projects. Since 1990, we have consistently led the state in providing financial advisory services to local school districts, helping raise more than $6.5 billion for education-related facilities. Our clients know we put them first, and deliver honest, forthright opinions, insights, and advice.

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The next time he replaces this bulb, she will have grown from pigtails to PhD.
Districts retool, respond to change
Conversion charters, waivers, and after-school programs were topics at ASBA’s Summer Leadership Conference.

Cover / A Marvell-ous improvement
This summer at Marvell-Elaine Elementary School, half the students spent their summer not sitting at home watching TV but actively engaged in learning. The school offered morning classes followed by afternoon enrichment activities led by college interns. The school must be doing something right. Once on school improvement for six years, it scored an “A” on the state’s school report card this year. Scores are way up in the district. Teachers say summer school students retain more knowledge than those who spend those months at home.

Celebrating healthy schools
Four school boards were recognized by the Arkansas Department of Education’s Office of School Health Services with the 2015 Healthy School Board Award.

Executive Session with Fort Smith’s Jeannie Cole

Coding classes attract thousands
In the first year of Gov. Asa Hutchinson’s computer coding initiative, many districts are taking advantage of the state’s Virtual Arkansas program, while 62 are teaching the classes in house.
September is ‘Take Your Legislator to School Month’

School districts are encouraged to find creative ways to bring lawmakers onto their campuses during September as part of “Take Your Legislator to School Month.”

The designation is the result of House Concurrent Resolution 1008 by Rep. Charlotte Douglas, R-Alma. Douglas is a member of the House Education Committee and a retired anatomy and physiology teacher who taught for 25 years at West Memphis, Sparkman, Fort Smith and Van Buren.

The resolution encourages public school districts to make their campuses available to members of the General Assembly, develop special events that increase awareness of the schools’ achievements and challenges, and foster positive working relationships between school officials and legislators.

During a kickoff event at the Capitol Aug. 10, Douglas said, “We want the schools to bring out challenges that they face. We also want to let the schools brag about what they’re doing successfully. ... But then at the end of the conversation, we want solutions, and if we start talking about those solutions in the interim right now, then when we get to the session, we feel like that we will have a good package of things to bring to the legislation.”

ASBA encourages board members and local school officials to reach out

For more information about AdvancED Arkansas and the AdvancED Accreditation Process, contact:

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Daryl Blaxton, Superintendent
Pocahontas School District

The AdvancED process has been a key ingredient in our district’s efforts toward continuous improvement. Through the self-assessment, collaborative planning, surveying of stakeholders and peer review phases of the process, we have gained valuable insight into the strengths of our district as well as key areas on which we can focus in the coming years to continually move us forward in our efforts to provide a quality education to our students.”

Daryl Blaxton, Superintendent
Pocahontas School District

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Letter from the Executive Director

A thank-you for all our advocates

by Dr. Tony Prothro

Most professions have provisions for their members to participate in professional development activities as part of their work duties. Other professions might not compensate for professional development, but it’s a requirement for licensure or certification that directly impacts income.

School board members are in a totally separate category. You are required to have a minimum of six hours of professional development per year, but you do not receive any compensation for it. As a matter of fact, many board members use vacation time or miss income while improving their skills.

Student achievement is my passion, but it’s also my livelihood, so I’ve always been compensated for my work. I am often amazed at how some board members are so committed that they attend dozens of hours of professional development activities – far more than required – in order to advance their knowledge and be a resource for their school district. Here are a couple of the professional development activities that were offered this summer.

The Summer Leadership Institute took place in Hot Springs on June 18-19. Board members from all parts of the state attended this second annual event. A wide variety of topics were presented – all with a student-focused approach. Many of the topics centered around best practices of school districts, such as dyslexia intervention, awarding associate degrees in high school, and the conversion charter school application process. Many attendees expressed a desire to continue this type of state conference in upcoming years.

Last year’s 2014 Southern Region Conference was the last one of its kind. In the past all Southern Region states took a turn in hosting this conference. However, last year the conference was discontinued. In the aftermath, many Arkansas board members expressed a desire to continue some sort of regional conference, so our state subsequently partnered with Mississippi and Louisiana in 2014 to explore the possibility of a regional three-state conference.

The planning came to fruition on July 19-21 when all three states met in Biloxi for the first Southern Regional Leadership Conference. More than 650 board members participated from Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana. The conference was packed with informative presentations to assist board members in their governance role. The conference exceeded expectations both in its overall quality and in the number of attendees. The conference will move to New Orleans in 2016 and to Hot Springs in 2017.

These are just a couple of exciting opportunities for board members. ASBA has multiple conferences in the upcoming year listed on its website. I encourage all board members to participate as time and resources allow. Some school boards send one or two representatives on a rotating basis to attend these types of conferences and bring back information to their districts.

The value of networking and comparing issues and remedies with board members from other states cannot be accurately measured. It allows board members to gain insight not only on a local level but also from a regional and national perspective. As education management expert Dr. Vaughn Lauer said, “One of the best parts of learning is sharing what you know.”
to their legislators to build relationships and inform them of the needs in their district and the state. Planning an event that brings legislators on the campus is a way to do that. School districts are asked to keep ASBA informed about their activities both before and after they happen.

Douglas encouraged school districts to invite legislators into environments that will “cater to (their) strengths.” For example, schools should invite legislators who are bankers to an economics class, and legislators who are farmers to an agriculture class. Because of her background, she said she often hears from educators, but some legislators don’t, and their personal experience with local school districts is minimal.

“I think some legislators feel like maybe going to school and doing a check presentation is telling the story of that school, and I think this broadens what those activities are going to be,” she said.

ASBA creates affiliate opportunities

ASBA now has separate partnership levels for commercial affiliates.

Premier partnerships include, among many other benefits, a complimentary exhibit booth at ASBA’s Annual Conference, an opportunity to join the conference’s vendor networking lunch on Dec. 9, and a chance to provide ASBA-approved breakout sessions at the Vendor University, also on Dec. 9.

ASBA’s premier partners so far are First Security Beardsley Public Finance; BancorpSouth Insurance Services, Inc.; Educational Benefits, Inc.; and The Interlocal Purchasing System (TIPS/TAPS).

Exhibiting partnerships include a complimentary exhibit booth and the opportunity to attend the vendor networking lunch, among other benefits.

Supporting partnerships include a listing on ASBA’s website, in Report Card and on select materials, among other benefits.

ASBA News and Notes continued on page 7

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Four students earn annual ASBA scholarships

Four Arkansas high school seniors recently received $650 scholarships from the Arkansas School Boards Association Educational Foundation.

The scholarships are awarded to graduating high school seniors who are children of Arkansas school board members and who will attend Arkansas institutions of higher learning in the fall. The awards are based on a student’s academic record and leadership potential. One award was made in each of the four congressional districts. This is the 22nd consecutive year for the awards.

Recipients were: Paisley Pratt, Midland High School, daughter of Midland School Board member Andy Pratt; Caleb Reinhart, Manila High School, son of Manila School Board member Tracey Reinhart; Rebekah Schmitz, Charleston High School, daughter of Charleston School Board member Michele Schmitz; and Hannah Young, Van Buren High School, daughter of Van Buren School Board member Carman Young.

Pratt graduated first in her class of 32 with a 4.11 grade point average with plans to study biology (pre-pharmacy) at Williams Baptist College in the fall. She served as president of the senior class, treasurer of Future Business Leaders of America, and captain of the volleyball, basketball and softball teams. She achieved district, region and state honors in softball and was named the 1A softball MVP in 2014. She was active in Student Council, Senior Beta and Quiz Bowl. She was named “Teen of the Month” by the Batesville Optimist Club and crowned Miss Midland High School. She is a member of the Independence Missionary Baptist Church.

Reinhart graduated first in his class of 85 with a 4.16 grade point average with plans to study chemistry at Arkansas State University in the fall. He has been an active member of Beta Club, Family Career and Community Leaders of America, French Club, Future Business Leaders of America, Future Farmers of America, Gifted and Talented, Quiz Bowl, and the Mississippi County Youth Leadership Program. He served as a class officer for four years and participated in baseball, basketball, cross country, football and golf. He has been a volunteer for the Manila Fire Department, Manila Park and Recreation Association, and the Manila Lions Club, and he tutored at Manila Elementary School.

Schmitz graduated eighth in her class of 72 with a 4.02 grade point average with plans to study communication science and disorders at the University of Central Arkansas. She was president of Future Business Leaders of America and Beta Club secretary. She was active in Family Career and Community Leaders of America, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and Search Team. She was a member of the dance team and yearbook staff, and she competed in National History Day. She has been an active member of various church and community organizations, including serving as president of the local Catholic Youth Ministries. She has participated in Susan

Savings Report for Shopping at Arkansas’ Federal Surplus Property

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G. Komen Race for the Cure and Walk for Life. She raised funds for Arkansas Children’s Hospital, volunteered for the True Grit Bike Race, and donated hair to Locks of Love. She was also a photojournalism finalist in two categories of the Spring Creek Photography Contest.

Young graduated first in her class of 391 with a 4.31 grade point average with plans to study biomedical or chemical engineering at the University of Arkansas in the fall. She has been an active member of the National Honor Society, Mu Alpha Theta and Future Business Leaders of America. She is a softball four-year letterman and has participated in Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Timothy 4:12, Cultures in Action and Partners Club, and was crowned Miss Crawford County Teen. She traveled to Haiti on a mission trip and has been actively involved in her church youth group. As a community volunteer, she has planted flowers for the mayor and participated in Paint the Park Pink.

**Dates for regional meetings are set**

ASBA Fall Regional Meetings will be Oct. 19-27. Elections will be held in Regions 1, 2, 3, 5, 7 and 10. Dates and locations are as follows.

**Region 1** – Oct. 26, Springdale High School Cafeteria

**Region 2** – Oct. 27, Flippin High School / Middle School Cafeteria

**Region 3** – Oct. 26, Westside Fine Arts Center, Westside High School campus, Jonesboro

**Region 4** – Oct. 27, Van Buren High School

**Region 5** – Oct. 20, Dardanelle High School

**Region 6** – Oct. 22, Batesville High School Cafeteria

**Region 7** – Oct. 19, Blytheville Primary School Multipurpose Building

**Region 8** – Oct. 20, England High School Fine Arts Building

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People facing change can either retreat and resist, or they can retool and respond, keynote speaker Randy Frazier said at ASBA’s Summer Leadership Conference. Attendees during the rest of the conference June 18-19 heard from schools that are dealing with a changing education landscape by becoming charter schools, obtaining waivers, and starting innovative after-school and summer school programs.

Frazier, who served as an Arkansas State Parks superintendent for 30 years, said people responding to change should create prioritization strategies, including focusing on what is important but not urgent in order to stay out of crisis mode. Responding appropriately is especially important during a time of exponential change, when there is no roadmap forward. To succeed, rely instead on principles that don’t ever change, he said.

Dr. Debbie Jones, Arkansas Department of Education assistant commissioner for learning services, said that, in addition to obtaining conversion charters, schools also can take advantage of the state’s schools of innovation offering, which is a different path to accomplishing many of the same goals. Or they can make use of a law passed this year that lets school districts apply for the same waivers that are granted to open enrollment public charter schools that draw students from their district.

“If your school has a good idea, there is probably a way to do that,” she said.

Among the presenters was Kathy Cornish, assistant principal at Eastside Elementary School in the Warren School District, which this year became the state’s first district that is entirely conversion charter after the high school gained that designation. The district features learning levels rather than grade levels, meaning students advance based on their mastery of the material rather than seat time. Moreover, the district abandoned traditional letter grades and moved to a system where students start at a “1” and then advance to a “3” or “4” based on their knowledge and understanding. The change required new mindsets and educating the community, particularly parents, who want their children always to be a “4.” She said a continual tension exists between vision and current reality – like a rubber band that can’t be stretched too far without breaking. “Any time you go to make a change and are going through different things, you’d better have a good process for solving problems, because you’re going to run into them,” she said.

Dana Brown, principal of Mountain Home High School Career Academies, described the journey of her district, which in 2003 became a conversion...
chart school without hiring new staff or constructing new facilities. The district has three academies: one for communications, arts and businesses; one for agriculture, construction, manufacturing and engineering; and one for health and human services.

At Mountain Home, freshman students choose a pathway and commit to an academy starting as sophomores. To help them make that decision, they’re asked about their learning styles and interests, not what they want to be when they grow up. The curriculum in each academy is designed to be flexible so students aren’t locked into a path. They can change after one year, but only about 10 each year do. “We make sure that the learning is flexible, but the key thing is, is that the kids identify how they fit into the curriculum and make choices,” she said.

The schools are designed to show the relevance of learning, which it accomplishes partly through real-world opportunities in the community. The first Wednesday of every month, more than 100 business partners come onto campus and mentor students. Students can intern in their chosen areas. The process helps them begin to decide what to do with their lives – or not to do. One student who wanted to own a day care, after a short stint as an intern, questioned if she even wanted children. “That was really valuable, so now she’s doing something totally different,” Brown said.

Mountain Home educators chose this route after listening to the community. For example, the health and human services academy came about after the hospital expressed concerns about its retiring workforce. Before making the change, educators and community partners visited a Texas district with a similar model. Meanwhile, the district made sure it was ready to show the larger community why it wanted to convert: Test scores were too low, dropouts were too high, and students weren’t engaged enough. “Everything has to be research-based, so any time that you want to make a change, and you want to talk to your community about it, you have to make sure that you show them why it is that your doing it, your data,” she said.

Fountain Lake Charter High School has also become a district conversion charter school in its effort to meet its mission: “Every student graduates. Every student prepared.” Principal Donald Westerman said the school was performing well on many of the metrics by which schools are measured. However, educators knew that students were graduating unprepared, especially when he saw them back home after one semester at college working in a restaurant. To stop that from happening, the Fountain Lake Middle School Digital Prep Academy opened its doors in 2014 with a focus on project-based learning, while Fountain Lake Charter High School received its charter in March.

The charter is built on five pillars: having a personalized success plan for all students beginning in middle school that outlines classes through high school and continues two years afterwards; students graduating with college credit and/or an industry recognized credential; work-based learning; numerous programs of study including automotive service technology, medical professions and pre-engineering; and employability skills. “When we talk with employers, when we talk to business and industry in the Garland County area, they made it very clear to us that those are the things that they’re looking for on the front end with new employees with new hires,” he said. “It’s the ability to get along, the ability to work in teams, the ability to show up for work, to be sober – important things like that.”

Westerman said the district asked Scott Warren with the Southern Regional Education Board about the characteristics of a successful high school. Warren told him that all students should have a goal for success beyond high school, a plan to achieve that goal, an adult support system in place, and quality instruction that leads to the goal. Partnerships have been a key component of developing the school’s programs.

Westerman said that while state waivers were needed in areas such as class size and school day length, moving to a charter did not require hiring new staff.
Social media: Friend or foe?

It depends on how well you use it, and on whether you follow the rules

Is social media – Facebook, Twitter, etc. – your school district’s friend or your foe? Yes.

It’s your friend when it’s used to build community engagement, share positive news, and foster open communication. It’s your foe when it’s used to foster inappropriate relationships and share harmful or false information.

Social media is simply a tool. Like a hammer, it can very effectively drive a nail, or it can very effectively smash your thumb. Surprisingly, it appears that many people are becoming worse, not better, at using this tool. In the last five years, probably half of the employee discipline cases with which I’ve been involved have related to inappropriate use of social media.

How can your district make social media your friend? Follow these rules.

**Rule 1: School policies should strongly encourage educators to maintain professional relationships with students, both inside and outside the classroom.** Under ASBA’s Model Policy 3.45, “Staff members are discouraged from creating personal social networking sites to which they invite students to be friends and followers.” Social media offers too many opportunities for the teacher-student relationship to move from caring but professional to inappropriately informal. Or worse.

**Rule 2: Know what’s protected, and what’s not.** When it comes to educators, the First Amendment protects speech regarding “matters of public concern” that does not disrupt the school’s operation. If they want, educators can comment about public issues ranging from school safety to corporal punishment to transgender issues, so long as their comments don’t disrupt school.

But not protected are comments about private concerns, such as criticisms of colleagues or anything having to do with individual students. Of course, in a free country educators can say almost anything they want without worrying about going to jail. But they’re not free to make those comments and still keep their teaching jobs.

What’s on the internet is on there forever, and it can affect your school district for a long time. That’s why school districts must hold educators to very high standards. Under the Arkansas Teacher Fair Dismissal Act, teachers can lose their jobs by engaging in conduct that compromises the performance of their duties. One teacher lost her job because her ex-boyfriend posted sexually explicit photos of her that had been taken while they were dating. The teacher did not authorize the release of this so-called “revenge porn,” but she did consent when the photos were taken. She lost her job, and rightfully so.

**Rule 3: Electronic communications between educators and students should always be TAPed: transparent, accessible, and professional.** In other words, maintain openness, visibility and accountability; consider all electronic communications to be a matter of record; and use correct grammar and tone. If your school district’s staff members don’t understand this rule, they need to learn it. If they violate it, your district has grounds to dismiss them, and may have no choice.

**Rule 4: Before hitting “send,” taking a photo or allowing one to be taken, “liking” something on Facebook, or forwarding a joke, ask yourself two questions. First, how would you feel if what you just did were published on the front page of the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette? And second, what would your mother say if she knew?**

This last rule is so important that I often call it (jokingly) “The Bequette Rule.” It applies to all of us, not just educators. As a lawyer, I can’t always find case law that explains exactly what’s appropriate, but most of us know based on how we would respond if the world, or if our mothers, knew of our actions. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart once wrote of pornography, “I know it when I see it.” The same applies to what’s appropriate on social media.

Here’s a quick list of social media do’s and don’ts for educators.

**Do:** Post positive updates and comments; connect with colleagues with whom you feel safe; think twice about connecting with parents; control privacy settings; be careful about posting photos of others; disconnect from negativity and negative Facebook “friends”; show what you’re proud of.

**Don’t:** Follow students on Facebook; comment on students’ status updates; drink and tweet or post; post party pictures or beach pictures on social media; overpost; post during work hours. Finally, don’t let the pitfalls I’ve described scare your district into inaction. Social media is part of the way the world works now. Properly used, it can be a transformational tool in the education of students. Rest assured that people are using those platforms to discuss your school district, sometimes by sharing bad information. It’s best for everyone if your district joins the conversation.

Educators have a special role to play. They are supposed to devote their lives to their students, but they are not supposed to be their friends, especially not their Facebook friends. They are supposed to engage their community, but do it in a positive way. Others might say outrageous things in order to get attention. Educators – and school board members – want the attention focused on their districts. These days, whether that attention is positive or negative often depends on whether you make social media your friend or a foe.
or a complete restructuring. The school colors and mascot weren’t changed, and students weren’t required to wear uniforms. “Simply, becoming a conversion charter was a way that we were able to ask the state for permission to operate in a little bit different way and to get them to pay for it,” he said.

As part of a law passed in 2013, all Arkansas school districts are required to screen young students for dyslexia. The Flippin School District, which was featured in the June 2015 Report Card, responded by dedicating staff members and using the Susan Barton method to focus on those students through direct, multisensory instruction. Early on, the district worked with 107 students with dyslexia over eight weeks during summer school. Eighty-six percent of them increased their reading levels from one month to 26 months. As the district has refined its program, it’s seen amazing results among students, many of whom are highly intelligent but have struggled in school because of the way their brains are wired. Literacy teacher Amy Gilley said the condition is not rare and that children who have dyslexia aren’t lazy, they won’t outgrow it, and they won’t be helped by being flunked. In addition to academic achievement, the district has seen significant decreases in social and behavioral issues. Superintendent Dale Query called it the most important program he has seen for struggling learners in his 41-plus years of education.

Greenbrier Public Schools Collegiate Academy, which was featured in the March 2015 Report Card, now offers so many concurrent credit classes through the University of Arkansas at Little Rock that students can graduate high school with an associate’s degree. Superintendent Scott Spainhour said the program enables students to graduate with a head start on their college educations. His own son graduated high school with 41 college credit hours. Moreover, the $50 per class cost is also saving families money that would be spent on college tuition costs. Spainhour said school districts need credentialed staff – teachers must have a master’s degree, including 18 hours in the content area – a willing partner like UALR, board support, and time.

Dr. Tony Prothro, ASBA executive director, warned attendees that legislators are questioning districts’ use of hundreds of millions of state dollars based on the number of students receiving free and reduced meal prices through the National School Lunch Act. The money is meant to be used to close the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and others but instead is used by many districts for general needs. Prothro said some legislators aren’t convinced by the argument that money used for all students helps disadvantaged ones, too. Some say the money should be legislatively targeted to research-driven programs closing the achievement gap. Others want to cut it entirely. Either way, ASBA’s legislative team is having to answer difficult questions from both the left and right during legislative committee hearings.

One thing that has been proven to close the gap is effective after-school and summer programs, Prothro said, because that money is targeted to that population. ASBA is encouraging districts to start those programs and communicate all success-es on closing the achievement gap to the association so that it can then communicate them to legislators.

Attendees heard from two districts with such programs, including Marvell-Elaine Elementary, which is featured as this issue’s cover story. Clinton Junior High counselor Brandy Alexander and Senior High counselor Kristie Hensley described their schools’ before-school and after-school programs.

In Clinton, the before-school program this past year focused on specialized tutoring in Algebra I in both the junior and senior highs. At the junior high level during the after-school program, the first hour focused on homework tutoring, while the second hour focused on theme and enrichment with programs such as robotics and directed physical activities. A walk-run activity led to a 5K run, with running shoes provided by the community for those who finished the race. The junior high program focused on entrepreneurship during the first two years of the program, followed by health and wellness in year three and community service in year four.

Alexander said the activities must be monitored and adjusted and are often led by students based on their interests. “They have to have ownership of the program,” she said. “They have to be involved. They have to feel like it belongs to them. ... If you don’t cater to the needs and the interests of the junior high kids, then you’ll see real quick that your numbers will begin to fall.”
Students, teachers and the community are hyped at an eastern Arkansas school that focuses on literacy all day, every day, throughout the year.

By Melissa Brawner
Contributing Writer

It’s a beautiful July morning at Marvell-Elaine Elementary School, where students gather in a large circle in the cafeteria and sing, dance, gesture and answer calls from Freedom School site coordinator Aaron Glass.

“Freedom School is what?” Glass’ voice booms.

“Red hot!” students answer, their voices echoing off the cafeteria walls.

“Are you ready? Are you ready?”

“Yeah, I’m ready! Yeah, I’m ready!” they cheer.

“Are you hyped? Are you hyped?”

“Yeah, I’m hyped! Yeah, I’m hyped!”

They are hyped, and so are teachers and administrators after Marvell-Elaine Elementary School received an “A” on the state’s report card last year and became an achieving school. Prior to that, it had spent six years on the state’s school improvement list and then became a focus school when the state changed its accountability system.

Marvell-Elaine is not a wealthy district. Of its 200 students, 98 percent come from low-income families. The ethnic breakdown is 80.7 percent African-American, 12.9 percent Caucasian, and 6 percent Hispanic or other.

With determination, creativity, and an amazingly dedicated teaching staff and administration, the school is succeeding. A quick glance at test scores on the Arkansas Department of Education’s website shows fifth grade literacy results rose from 59.5 percent proficient/advanced in 2009-10 to 80 percent proficient/advanced in 2013-14. Third grade math scores moved from 64.9 percent to 93.8 percent proficient/advanced over that time period. Fifth graders’ math scores soared from 51.6 percent to 97.2 percent proficient/advanced.

How is Marvell-Elaine Elementary doing it? It’s a culmination of several factors, including its summer school efforts. This summer between 70-80 students attended — almost half the school’s enrollment.

“The biggest thing is that there’s no slide in their reading levels,” said teacher Karen Sefers. “If their (literacy) level was at a 20 at the end of the year, it may have fallen back to 16 (by the time school starts in August). But the ones who have been in the summer school program, they will have maintained or gained where they were. ... They seem more motivated.”

“And eager,” added Brenda Woodyard, a teacher for 34 years.

After being served breakfast every morning, students stand in a circle to dance, clap, sing and chant encouraging words to build motivation and confidence. The songs are specifically chosen.

READING IS FREEING. Zach Jackson, an intern with Marvell-Elaine Elementary’s Freedom School, reads to JaMarion King, left, and Anren Nelson, center.
Continued on next page

to encourage as well as to energize them.

“(Superintendent Joyce Cottoms) gets right in the circle, and she claps with them and gets down on her knees with them, and does all of it, so the kids can see that she’s in there with them. It’s very encouraging,” said math teacher Delores Thrower.

Students take turns leading from inside the circle, which Thrower said helps shy ones gain confidence before the school year begins.

“Students will say, ‘Mrs. Thrower, we learned this in Freedom School. And this is how we did it,’” she said.

The summer program occurs in two phases. The morning program, funded by a 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant, is more like traditional summer school. Teachers conduct sessions where students focus on math, language, and extra projects involving Spanish, music, physics and botany lessons. Teachers enjoy being able to spend more one-on-one time with students than with regular school. Teacher Stephanie Hoskins gave high-fives to students Jordan Jacobs and Eric Perry as they circled prepositions and objects on the whiteboard. A math teacher worked with one student studying mean and average math problems while another student studied angles on a computer. There’s more time for more interactive learning, friendly competitions, games and hands-on projects. Elena Hinderer, who teaches music and Spanish and directs the band, introduced students to Spanish using games like Spanish bingo.

“They have to figure out what word I’ve said,” she said. “And sometimes they find it, and sometimes they can’t figure it out. Like ‘ojo’ (pronounced ‘o-ho,’ meaning ‘eye’) has a ‘j.’ But there’s usually someone who will figure it out and tell everyone else. They’ve been having a lot of fun with that. “When we have this small of a group, we can do this.”

Hinderer wants the students to learn about life in addition to academics.

“These students live in the country, but they couldn’t name the types of birds or of insects because, in our modern society, you stay indoors all of the time,” Hinderer said. So she teaches students how to plant seeds and baby plants.

After lunch comes the more relaxed Freedom School, a national program funded by the Children’s Defense Fund that is focused entirely on literacy. Students participate in question-and-answer sessions, write a poem about what they’ve read, perform a skit or write a song, but there are no paper exams.

Classes are taught not by teachers but by college interns, almost all of whom graduated from the Marvell-Elaine district themselves.

“It’s not necessarily (only) teaching children to read, but it’s fostering a want to read,” said Glass, who coordinates the day-to-day activities as well as field

In Arkansas, contact Mickey McFatridge at 870.926.9250.
trips, food deliveries, morning motivation time, and whatever else needs to be done.

An Elaine alumnus and University of Central Arkansas graduate, Glass started as an intern with the program in 2007 when it was still housed at the Boys & Girls Community Development Center.

“Basically, what we do is take what they’ve built upon in school, and we just build upon it,” Glass said.

Not all of the college interns were education majors. One was studying engineering, while another was studying criminal justice, though she was toying with the idea of changing to an education degree.

“The way we are with them is a little bit different than your typical student-teacher relationship. With us, we don’t want (students) to feel like they feel in (regular) school, but we try to be an extension of the classroom teacher as well,” said Glass. “So, it’s a fine line we walk. We want to have fun, but do it within the parameters.”

Linda Coates, third grade teacher, has taught summer school three years.

“The college students, to me, are great role models,” Coates said. “Especially for the males, they’re great role models.”

Student Kalliyah Willis said students like the college interns, but they like the teachers, too.

“We work real, real hard and do our best in the classrooms. Sometimes, we do brain breaks,” she said.

What’s a “brain break”? Kalliyah described it as “kind of like Zumba.” When studies get too intense, teachers take a “brain break” for students to move and dance.

Student Nitillya Johnson likes summer school better than regular school, “Because it’s fun!” Allyson Nelson, on the other hand, likes both. Both girls enjoy breaking into small groups to do science projects. The two of them described in great depth a recent experiment involving a tornado.
While those girls were talking, several boys wiped off the cafeteria tables after lunch. Barely taller than the tables themselves, they stretched to reach the middle of the tabletops. “Work together!” one cheered. Amid the laughing and goofy jokes, the soapy tables were as clean as any adult could do.

Eight-year old Joshua Caffey’s favorite part of Freedom School is recess, of course, but he said that the most important thing he’s learned this summer is his multiplication tables.

“They explained it to us; then it got fun when I learned more,” he explained.

“I love math!” Ledarius Wilson interrupted, with a voice that’s contagiously enthusiastic. “It’s really good, because we have all the greater than, lesser (than), equal, addition, subtraction, and multiply and division, and there is one more ... um ... there’s like that ‘o’ on the top and that line and that ‘o’ on the bottom ...”

“He’s talking about the percent sign,” said Joshua.

One student said she likes the summer program because it’s fun, but added, “I don’t have nowhere else to go.”

“Around here that is really true,” said Hinderer, the Spanish teacher. Marvell is a small farming community located 45 minutes from the nearest movie theater, and most parents work outside of the home. Parents can choose to send students to the morning program only or to both phases. Students are fed breakfast and lunch plus an extra snack if they stay through the afternoon.

“So, my parents really don’t have to worry about their children, making sure they have something to eat, something to do, making sure they stay cool,” principal Sylvia Moore said.

**Literacy focused**

During the regular school year, the doors open early at Marvell-Elaine Elementary. Students who have signed up for the Accelerated Reader program, funded by a 21st Century grant, begin walking through the door at 7:30 a.m. As a result of the program, the school has several students who’ve read 100 books, including one kindergartner.

“Our students love to read,” said Moore.

That’s her goal, or maybe “obsession” would be a better description. Moore wants the entire school day – science, music, everything – to be literacy based. “If they can’t read, they can’t do...” Continued on next page
the math, they can’t do the science, they can’t do the social studies. If they can’t orally express, they can’t write,” Moore said. “The teachers believe in that, so we do a lot of writing.”

Students write daily in a personal journal. During Black History month, their writings lined the hallways. They’ve grown to expect their principal’s unusual hallway greeting, “Got a book? Wha’cha’ readin’?”

Teachers throughout the school teach literacy at the same time each day. The schedule shows when to do whole group activities, small group reading activities, phonemic awareness, and writing components. In addition, beginning at eight o’clock in the morning, the school has a three-hour, uninterrupted block of time when no one is allowed to enter classrooms, including parents or visitors.

“That has worked for us,” Moore said. “This will be going into our sixth year. That was one of the first things that I implemented when I came here, and teachers love it because they know that nobody’s going to interrupt them for anything during that time.”

A literacy-focused schedule is just one of the many changes Moore implemented when she began serving as principal in the 2010-11 school year.

“IT took my teachers a little while to get that, that literacy encompasses every discipline that we teach,” Moore said. “I had to build trust with them. We’re all learning. When they found that I will support (them) and (my approach is), “I’ll support you, and if we run into a problem, we’ll work it out together,’ we had that trust.”

Hinderer is on board. She has a passion for increasing students’ vocabulary. She remembers, years ago, teaching a group of fourth-graders who were reading but not comprehending.

“The more they read, the more I realized: You can’t read when you’re reading totally in a foreign language,” she said. “They could sound it out, and maybe be successful (at that). But they didn’t know what the words meant. So what good was it?”

During summer school, she read students “The Boxcar Children” by Gertrude Chandler Warner. The book has clues to teach students thinking skills and vocabulary words they wouldn’t normally hear.

“The culture in this school has changed tremendously,” said literacy coach Liz Easley. “Five years ago, you could have asked a student, ‘What are you reading?’ And they would give you this deer-in-the-headlight look, like,
‘Reading?’ (Now) I see kids getting off the school bus with a book, reading.”

As the school’s full-time literacy coach, Easley analyzes each student’s test scores and works with teachers to find the most effective ways to focus on those who need extra help. Teachers meet with Easley weekly in professional learning communities to consider students’ most recent assessments. Easley also analyzes each of the test questions. If a question was missed by many students, teachers will be asked to cover that area more thoroughly. She asks them, what do you see? What are the strong points? What are the weak points? What do we need to change?

“I’ve been in those meetings,” Moore said. “The teachers will talk about, ‘I taught that skill, but my kids didn’t get it. I think this time, I’ll use this process.’ My teachers have become self-evaluating and they’ve become doctors of prescription.”

When students are found deficient in a certain area, literacy interventionists take them out of the classroom and work with them one on one. P.E., art and music teachers along with the school’s

PLENTY TO EAT. A Marvell-Elaine student eats lunch in the middle of summer school activities. Students are fed breakfast and lunch. For a time, a local church was providing supper for the after-school program.

Continued on next page
librarian do interventions during their free period. Interventionists use response to intervention techniques, or RTI, in small groups with students who have similar obstacles to overcome.

“The next time they’re assessed on it, most of the time they’re 80 percent or 90 percent on that skill,” Moore said.

The same process is taken with special education students as well.

“We’ve actually had a lot of our special ed kids test out of special ed over the last five years,” Moore said. “They became proficient and advanced on their Benchmark test. And when that happens, we reassess, and nine times out of 10 they come out of special ed. They don’t need those services anymore. We’ve had several kids do that. I’m very proud of that.”

The school utilizes its Great Rivers Cooperative in Helena for math specialists, literacy specialists, and professional development – the most recent of which was a training session on working with kids with dyslexia.

“We’re thinking now that some of the kids that we have had discipline problems out of, and some children that aren’t moving, that at one point in time were placed in special ed, they don’t even need to be there. ... So, we’re going to look at those students. We realize now that this is deeper than what we thought. This (dyslexia) may be part of their problem.” Moore said.

The school offers an after-school program for 80-100 students four days a week. Funded by a 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant, the Freedom School network, and the Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, that program focuses on science and math, but all activities also revolve around literacy. The numerous hands-on learning projects are followed by written or oral reports.

“You can make it fun for them,” said Linda Coates, third grade teacher. “Then it doesn’t feel like work. And I’m the same way. We all are. If it’s fun, then I want to do it.”

Like summer school, the program helps parents as well. Buses run additional routes to take students home afterwards. The school provides a snack for students, and at one point a local church voluntarily brought a full dinner for everyone each day.

“They know that if they don’t get off work until 5, our program doesn’t end until 5:15, so they’ve got that time for somebody to pick them up,” Moore said. “Or they know that the bus is going to run and take them home. So by the time they get home (from work), the kids are home, and they know they’ve been somewhere safe. They haven’t had to try to find a babysitter. So, it’s a win-win situation for parents and for the students and for us.”

Saturday field trips
One Saturday a month, students take a school field trip. Moore has asked museums, theaters and children’s theaters to keep her abreast on what’s available. Usually there are writing activities or sequencing activities associated with the field trips. Before going to the Pink Palace in Memphis to see the movie “Flight of the Butterflies,” students researched butterflies and moths and their stages of development.

“When we go to the museum, they know what we’re going for,” said Moore. “We talked about it beforehand, and they could give me the names of what the stages were.”
During one field trip, the children went to a restaurant for a lunch buffet. Teachers quickly noticed that the children didn’t know how to conduct themselves. Before the next field trip, students were taught to make food choices, how to go around a buffet table, the fact that once you put something on your plate, you can’t put it back, and other courtesies.

“We’ve done it long enough now that they know what to do,” Moore said.

The next step was to teach students how to behave at a more formal, sit-down restaurant. Each student was allotted a certain amount to spend. The school printed the restaurant’s menu, which was distributed to each of the teachers, who then went over the cost of each item with the students. Math teachers taught students how to figure sales tax on a dining tab, and students were responsible for figuring out exactly what they could afford to eat, including tax. Once at the restaurant, each child ordered what they had decided upon beforehand.

“We try to make sure that whatever we do applies to life or has academic background to it,” Moore said.

At Marvell-Elaine Elementary, class time is treated as a precious commodity. Moore spearheaded a deal with local health care providers so that if a student has an appointment, the local clinic tries to get them in right away so they can return to school. One dentist was willing to clear a spot on her schedule each week to see students only. Parents have all signed waivers allowing the dentist to pick up students at the school and then return them, usually within the hour, and it never conflicts with literacy or math.

Moore has a vision of a wellness center on campus and is working with the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation to try to access funding. Because the local clinic can’t care for every need, many sick children must travel out of town to Helena or to Memphis, which means they’re out of school half a day.

“If I have a wellness center here on campus, it will be as simple as saying, ‘If you could go right next door, there’s a nurse there, or there’s a dentist, and they can fix it,’ and the student can get back in school,” Moore said.

Parents on board

Each month, the school holds a Parents Night informing parents what’s going on at school. Students from different grades perform and sing to entice their parents to come. Moore talks to parents about the importance of good attendance, arriving on time, and about the school’s various programs. In addition, the school also hosts a Literacy Night for parents one semester and a Math & Science Night the next. Moore’s ultimate goal is to encourage parents to take advantage of the opportunities for their children on campus.

“We want to give the parents an idea of, when we say ‘literacy circle,’ what that’s all about,” she said.

Ultimately, Marvell-Elaine Elementary’s efforts are not about creating programs, obtaining grants or even raising test scores. They’re about doing whatever is necessary to help students achieve. One fourth grader who read only 40 words per minute on her DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) exam was given special attention to help her improve her phonics.

“I kept telling her that if she got to at least a 100 (reading words per minute), which to me was going to be a huge jump, I would have pink polka dots in my hair,” literacy coach Liz Easley said. “She came in two to three weeks before school was out and said, ‘Ms. Easley, (my teacher) tested me, and I got up to 100 words.’ I said, ‘OK!’ And so the next day, I had pink polka dots in my hair. She did it! She was so proud of herself.”

Teachers noticed that the student began to raise her hand during class to answer questions and seemed to have more confidence.

“Those are the kinds of things we do with our kids. We basically pinpoint what the problems are. We plan almost like an individual plan for each one of the students,” Easley said.

“The teachers meet with the interventionist, I meet with the interventionist, and we talk about, ‘OK, are these interventions working in your classroom?’ Yes? OK, then let’s move on to the next thing. If it’s not working, let’s find out why.”

There is no substitute for books in the life of a child - Mary Ellen Chase
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22 September 2015  Report Card
ADE honors Healthy School Boards

Healthy Schools. Top, ASBA Executive Director Dr. Tony Prothro stands with Cedar Ridge’s Susi Epperson, elementary principal and coordinated school health coordinator; Brittany Bennett, school-based health center coordinator; and KTHV’s Tom Brannon. Second photo, Prothro and Brannon are with Lamar’s former superintendent, Roy Hester, and Michele Brown, school-based health center coordinator. Third photo, Prothro and Brannon are with Benton School Board members Jeff Morrow and Jackie Sasfai. Bottom photo, Prothro and Brannon are with Mary Miller, Springdale coordinated school health coordinator.

Four school districts recently were awarded the Healthy School Board award by the Arkansas Department of Education’s Office of School Health Services for developing programs, policies and partnerships to support safe and healthy school environments. Winners were:

- Districts under 1,000 enrollment: Cedar Ridge School District, which has leveraged grant money and local partnerships to create an elementary school running and walking program; a 24-hour fitness room for school staff and the community; a program serving students a healthy snack every afternoon; and a school-based health center serving all students, their families and school staff.

- District enrollments from 1,001-5,000: Lamar School District, which supports employee wellness with a fitness center, a walking program and circuit training program, and volleyball. It had a 43 percent staff participation rate in the Blue and You Fitness Challenge. It also coordinated with the local hospital to provide a mobile mammography unit for staff and also has a school-based health center.

- District enrollment from 2,501-5,000: Benton School District, whose programs include a teaching garden and safe and accessible playground equipment at elementary campuses. Staff members are trained in crisis management and response drill training.

- District enrollment of more than 5,000: Springdale School District, which uses state and private funding to provide access to physical activity facilities, including 20 walking/running trails and outdoor fitness equipment. Other programs include Breakfast in the Classroom, FoodCorps volunteers to manage school gardens, and school-based health centers on multiple campuses.
Jeannie Cole isn’t one to sit on the sidelines. When the Fort Smith School Board member first ran for office unopposed in 1997, she already had been a city PTA president, and she would become a national president from 2001 to 2003 while serving on the board. She’s been an active advocate for public education on the state and national levels.

Getting in the game can be challenging. The Fort Smith School Board found itself at the center of controversy when it proposed and then voted to change the Southside High School’s rebel mascot and “Dixie” fight song in the wake of the murders of nine African-American church members by a white supremacist in Charleston, South Carolina. Many in the community supported the decision, but others believed their heritage was being unfairly attacked. Ultimately, the board voted July 27 to move forward with the change, and the school is considering its new mascot.

How has Cole’s PTA experience helped her as a school board member? What happens after a divisive but important community controversy? And what are some of her district’s unique challenges and opportunities? Report Card visited Cole to find out.

**Why make the jump from PTA to school board?**

“Well, I enjoyed working with this administration. I saw what good they were doing, and they were easy to work with as a (PTA) city council president, and they were very encouraging to me to keep that parent involvement active in Fort Smith, so I worked with that. An opening came up on the school board and there were other national PTA leaders who do the same thing, so ... one fed the other.”

**Did you find that having that PTA experience helps you with school board service?**

“Yes, I think it made it easier for me to not come in as that raw, green rookie. ... And then when I went to the state School Boards Association meetings, I was familiar with a lot of the vernacular already, so it made it pretty easy. ... “At national PTA, I learned a lot about advocating and went to Washington, D.C., with the PTA, and went to our congressmen’s offices and all of
that, and I just kind of picked up that fervor of us needing to be vocal about local schools. As I transitioned into the School Boards Association, Carol Brown, of Wynne who was a national president for the School Boards Association, invited me to go to Washington with the state delegation one year, and I’ve been going ever since with them. So the two just kind of dovetail really easily.”

Is advocacy something that school board members still are a little reluctant to do?

“When you go to (the National School Boards Association’s annual Advocacy Institute), a lot of states will have big delegations – you know, 20, 50 members going to see their legislators, and Arkansas, I don’t think we’ve ever had more than 10 go. There’s been a couple of years I was the only one staying to go to the offices of our congressmen. Really. (Laughs at editor’s incredulous response.) It felt important to me. It’s always felt important to me to let them know how their laws were playing out in the school districts, and what changes we needed to make.”

Is there just something about the culture in Arkansas, that we’re too nice to lobby people?

“Perhaps they’ve just not understood the need to tell our lawmakers what we think. The lawmakers deal with so many different aspects of living that they can’t keep their pulse on everything down to details, and so I think it’s important for us to go give them the details so that the education will benefit.”

Seems like Arkansas school board members are better about talking to their state legislators.

“I agree. Yes. Yes. ... I think we made a difference this year. The bill that came up about the school board elections, I think we pushed that the way we needed to push that and kept that from being disastrous, and other bills as well, so yes. I think we’ve done a good job with that network.”

Have you seen an improvement with Arkansas school board members advocating with the state Legislature?

“Yes, the way I think we’ve got it structured now with designating someone in each of the districts to be that point person, I think that helps for someone to pick up and say, ‘I’ll take that and run with it.’”

You’ve been in office 18 years. What have been some of the biggest challenges you’ve faced?

“We teach to students that come from 40 different languages, so probably one of our biggest hurdles is the diversity that we have. We have to put some resources into that to overcome those obstacles. And the poverty level. We’ve got close to 73 percent free and reduced lunch, and that has grown over my tenure. I think when I started as a school board member, it was less than 50 percent, and now we’re up to over 70 percent, so that’s a struggle for us.”

Fort Smith has seen some large manufacturing losses with the closing of the Whirlpool plant. How have you handled that?

“Well, we’ve grown some of that back. I don’t know that we’ve made it all the way back to where we were, but we’ve certainly picked up some other businesses and things that have helped. But as far as the economy goes, we’re struggling on that, and that affects our education. We know that education is the way out of that poverty, so it’s very important for us to get that right.”

But you’ve no doubt lost property taxes on some of these things that have closed down. What did y’all do?

“We’re still working with it. We have not raised our millage since 1986, so we’re due for a raise. Our growth has not been outstanding, but it has been growing every year. We were up over 1,400 students in the last decade, so you can’t just keep expanding that waistband without letting the belt out.

Continued on next page
Fort Smith people love this city. It’s vibrant. There’s a lot going on. There’s opportunity for growth. When I-49 comes through, we think it will be the crossroads in Arkansas, so we’re excited about that and eager to push that as well with our legislators.”

There’s not a city in Arkansas like Fort Smith, in that really most of Arkansas is considered the South, but Fort Smith is really the West.

“We are. We’ve been rated the number one Western town in the nation (by True West magazine), and we still are right up there in that top five list of that. We have that frontier heritage that is unique to Fort Smith. We’re getting the national marshals museum that will be built in a year or two, and it’s certainly exciting for us to see that happening.”

So how does a frontier heritage affect the culture of Fort Smith and therefore affect schools?

“I think it helps to make history come alive for the students. We’re getting the museum downtown. We’ve got the national historic site down here, and our students take field trips down there. We have some citizens who will re-enact and portray those important people – Bass Reeves (one of the first African-American deputy marshals west of the Mississippi) or (Hanging) Judge Isaac Parker and his wife, who will come into our schools and just tell the students what that life was like. And we have a historical section of neighborhood down here that is certainly exciting to see.”

Does having two high schools make it harder to create community support for the district when you’re cheering for different teams on Friday night?

“I think there would be people that argue on both sides of that. Certainly, it would be easier to have one talent pool for our sports, but at the same time, when we divide them up, we give opportunities to have two quarterbacks in town and that kind of thing, so I think there’s pluses and minuses to it. We like having our high schools between that 1,200- and 1,500-student size simply because we think we can offer everything possible to them and still have enough opportunities for students to develop their leadership and to be involved in activities and not get lost as they would in a bigger school. We’re already over that 1,500 in both of our schools, so that’s why we would like to open a third high school at some point.”

Does that make it harder to have unified community support?

“No, I don’t think so. I haven’t felt that at all. I think there are some who just love Northside High School, and there are some who just love Southside High School, and it certainly makes the rivalry exciting when we get together.”

We can’t talk about Southside without talking about the situation. How difficult is it to change a mascot?

“For those who wanted to keep the mascot, it is difficult. But as we went through the process, where they had a month to get their head wrapped around this idea, we started getting more and more support from the community as they really stopped and considered this.

“I can tell you the school board has been throwing it around forever since I’ve been on the school board, that we really would like to change that, and we were just looking for a good opportunity for that to happen. And then certainly after the shootings happened at the church (in South Carolina), we started getting some messages from some of the alumni and from the community that we really needed to consider changing this, and we thought, ‘Well, with that impetus, that will help us move along and be able to do that.’ So we brought this up, and the email messages and Facebook messages that we were all getting were 70 to 80 percent positive – yes, let’s make this change. And certainly there were...
those who were against it. Our principal, Mr. (Wayne) Haver, has been excellent at keeping it all about school spirit and not making it a racist issue, so the students there have never felt like they were being racist, but yet we know that was the perception from those outside looking into Southside. So it was time to make that change so that our future students don’t have that stigma attached to them.”

**How much of that 20 to 30 percent was very negative?**

“I didn’t see any hostility toward the school board. You know, we had that public meeting, and there were some who were very passionate about it, about, ‘This is not who we are. We’re not racist. This is about school, and don’t take this heritage away from me.’ And I certainly understand that. It’s sad that we had to take that action, but we felt like it was necessary.”

**Is it hard to watch the community divide over this and then bring it back together? Is that what you have to do as a school board member?**

“That certainly is a challenge. They certainly divided last month and have been all month, and I think as we start the process of choosing this new mascot, hopefully we will choose something that will be a good rallying point, and that we can all be proud of, so I think it will be unifying again. We’ll certainly do everything we can to bring it back and be a cohesive district again.”

**Did you feel any frustration, as in, ‘Where were you when we were doing our budget? We want community involvement all the time, but it only occurs when everybody gets riled up.’**

“You know, that was very interesting. At the meeting we had Monday, a number of people said we need to be attending our school board meetings more often, and not just on this issue but on a number of things because they’re working with the fate of our students. I think it was an eye-opener for the community that they have just kind of been letting us slide through and doing what we know to do, and I think we’ve done a good job with what we’re doing, but they certainly have not been extremely involved as far as decision-making. Our community is very involved in our schools. We have one of the best Partners in Education departments in the state, I think, and probably in the whole region. Our foundation is up and very active and does a good job, and then our PTAs are just excellent here in Fort Smith, so we get the parent involvement, and we get the community involvement. They’re involved in the schools. They just haven’t been watching the school board activities that closely, but I think this will revive interest again. (Laughs). And certainly a couple of the board members have an opponent this year, so we’ll get the community back involved in the schools with this. (Laughs).”

**Speaking of getting attention, your superintendent, Dr. Benny Gooden, is very outspoken and a national leader on certain issues. What does the school board do when your superintendent is that outspoken?**

“Dominant personalities like to solve problems. They are good organizers, innovative, fast thinkers, action-oriented and are willing to challenge the status quo when necessary. These are all qualities that serve a CEO and a superintendent well. Dr. Gooden personifies this personality. He is tenaciously focused on personal and academic success for all Fort Smith students. When board decisions have to be made, he often presents us with the pros and cons of multiple options for our consideration. Fort Smith board members are successful when we acknowledge his leadership qualities and learn how best to insert our ideas and challenges into his way of thinking.

“The district has benefited from Dr. Gooden having served as president of the American Association of School Administrators. I trust he well served all public education in his term. He understands that our students benefit when he takes the time to educate our legislators and administrators.”

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First Security can help districts save energy with new HVACs

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First Security Beardsley Public Finance has financed these projects, both large and small, using lease-purchases or bonds. Projects funded with lease-purchases are for a term of up to 10 years, unless it is a guaranteed energy savings project, which may have a term of up to 20 years. Contact your financial advisor at First Security Beardsley Public Finance for more information at 1.800.965.4644.

EBi announces four promotions of veteran team members

EBi has promoted Bran Carroll and Randy Suggs as territory sales managers, Scott Allison as client manager, and Shane Pennington as sales executive. All four have been with the employee benefits company for at least nine years. EBi can help schools with all employee benefits, including those associated with the Affordable Care Act. For more information, call 800.824.5022.

Van Horn serving as Dover Middle School’s construction manager

Van Horn Construction is serving as the construction manager for Dover Middle School. The project, totaling 74,000 square feet, includes renovation of the existing 16,000 square-foot facility as well as a 58,000 square-foot addition. The finished structure will offer the school a new gymnasium with dual basketball courts along with a safe room and additional classroom space.

Working hand-in-hand with Fennell Purifoy Architects, Van Horn Construction anticipates completing the $9.3 million project by September 2016.

Stephens reminds districts to file financial disclosures

Continuing disclosure agreements required by the Securities and Exchange Commission require school districts that issue bonds to provide certain financial information to investors, usually within 90 days of the district’s fiscal year-end. Districts that fail to do so may face civil penalties if no actions are taken to correct disclosure noncompliance.

Stephens Inc. assists its clients with their continuing disclosure requirements and is the only Arkansas financial advisory firm with a dedicated disclosure service practice that serves school districts. Disclosure professionals work closely with districts to prepare and file the appropriate reports. To learn more, contact Michele Casavechia of Stephens Public Finance at 800.643.9691 or go to www.stephenspublicfinance.com.

In other news, Leigh Ann Biernat has joined the firm as senior vice president in the Public Finance Division.

Biernat brings 20 years of experience as a CPA working primarily for state and local government entities. Most recently, she was senior vice president of finance and administration for the Little Rock Advertising and Promotion Commission. Previously, she was the Arkansas Development Finance Authority’s vice president of finance and administration for 14 years.

Dennis Hunt, executive vice president and manager of public finance, said, “Leigh Ann brings a wealth of experience in all facets of municipal finance, bond issuance and underwriting, legislation, compliance and regulations. Many of our clients in central Arkansas and our staff know Leigh Ann, and we are thrilled to welcome her to our team. She will be working closely with Jack Truemp, also a senior vice president with the firm.”

Entegrity helping schools in Marshall, Paragould save money

Entegrity Partners was awarded energy efficiency projects with Searcy County Tech Schools in Marshall and Greene County Tech Schools in Paragould in early summer 2015. Combined, these projects will deliver over $3.4 million in lighting, HVAC, and water conservation measures, with annual savings of nearly $300,000 for the two districts. For more information, call Entegrity at 800.700.1414.
Coding classes attract thousands

In the initiative’s first year, many districts are taking advantage of the state’s Virtual Arkansas, while 62 are teaching it in house.

Hundreds of students got a taste of computer coding at the Clinton Presidential Center Aug. 15, days before thousands more students begin taking high school classes on the same subject.

Using laptops donated by the AT&T Foundation, students at the Head of the Class Bash performed elementary coding techniques at the website Code.org using its Hour of Code offering.

The Legislature this year required all Arkansas high schools to teach a computer coding class, a cornerstone of Gov. Asa Hutchinson’s campaign. More than 1,300 students were scheduled to take the course online through the state’s Virtual Arkansas. The course will be offered on site at 62 schools.

At the Hour of Code, students used coding techniques to animate characters from the movie “Frozen” and from the game “Angry Birds.”

Hutchinson spent a few minutes at a laptop himself. Afterwards, he described how a student struggled to show him how to work the program but then performed well on his own.

“It’s about touch,” he said. “It’s about feel. It’s about familiarity with coding that the new generation’s so terrific at.”

He later added, “Our education system really needs to catch up with the incoming students and the next generation of coders.”

Among the volunteers helping the students was Ella Beth Wengel, Hutchinson’s granddaughter who was featured in his 2014 campaign commercials. Her father, Dave Wengel, founded iDatafy, which builds databases that help prevent fraud.

Wengel said his daughter said she wanted to build a phone app for her grandfather’s 2014 campaign for governor. When no one at his company knew how to do it, she found a website and learned it herself. The app included a biography, pictures that linked back to the campaign website, and a link to the events schedule.

“It was something that three years ago, five years ago, you would have had to pay a professional $5,000 to do, and she was able to build an app with functionality in a day,” he said. “And then that got her really excited about doing other things, and it got the governor excited about, why aren’t more kids doing this?”

CRACKING THE CODE. Ella Beth Wengel, right, who created a phone app for her grandfather Gov. Asa Hutchinson’s campaign, helps Mattie Brawner of Benton learn some basic coding skills during the Hour of Code at the Clinton Presidential Center Aug. 15.
East Harding builds tornado shelter for McCrory High

East Harding Construction is currently building a tornado shelter for the McCrory High School. The tornado shelter will be used as the high school band room throughout the school calendar year and will provide protection for approximately 510 people from the surrounding community. In addition to this project, East Harding Construction is also completing several upgrades for McCrory High School, including HVAC and data/communication system upgrades. For more information, go to www.eastharding.com or call 501.661.1646 or 479.287.7333.

Hight-Jackson designing school for Bentonville district

Hight Jackson Associates of Rogers is designing a new 96,138-square-foot K-4 elementary school for the Bentonville School District. The facility for 700 students includes classrooms, administrative spaces, media center, kitchen and dining commons. The building is being designed for a future grade 5-6 addition. The school site is located off of Featherston Road and SW 28th Street, and site construction is scheduled to begin January 2016, followed by building construction in March 2016, with completion in June 2017. For more information, go to www.hjarch.com or call 479.464.4965.

Crafton Tull staffers sponsor student supply event

Crafton Tull Young Professionals along with the Faulkner County Library teamed with local and national businesses to sponsor a Back to School Bash in Conway Aug. 7. Approximately 400 adults and children were treated to a cookout, bounce house, crafts, face painting, snacks, safety demonstrations, and more. In addition to free back-to-school haircuts, 300 bags of school supplies were given to students in grades K-12 so they would have the resources they need to succeed in school. For more information, contact Crafton Tull at 479.636.4838, or visit craftontull.com.

Schools undergo training with Arkansas A+ Schools network

Arkansas A+ Schools hosted three schools new to the ARA+ network for a five-day training institute in June at the Holiday Inn Airport in Little Rock.

In July, 10 schools returned for their second year of training consisting of a three-day conference. In late July, ARA+ fellows and staff traveled to Northwest Arkansas to train Arkansas Arts Academy (K-12) teachers and principals with content that was specifically developed for each school’s needs.

Arkansas A+ Schools uses creative expression and personalized learning to help students achieve. For more information, call 501.353.0832 or go to www.arkansasaplus.org.

AdvancED to hold fall November conference; to honor districts, schools

AdvancED’s Fall Conference will be at Little Rock’s DoubleTree Hotel Nov. 9. Dr. Mark Elgart, AdvancED president and CEO, will deliver the keynote address. Districts that completed the external review process this year will be recognized along with the 2015 Excellence in Education Award winner, Fort Smith’s Dr. Benny Gooden. The Governor’s Office and the Arkansas Department of Education will report on educational issues, and breakout sessions about continuous improvement strategies will be presented by AdvancED and the following districts: Trumann, Hermitage, Prism Education Center of Fayetteville, Arrie Goforth Elementary School in Norfork, Russellville, Westside School District in Jonesboro, Springdale School of Innovation, and Weiner Elementary School of Innovation. For more information about registration, contact Carol St. John at 888-413-3669, ext. 5687.

TIPS/TAPS adds new vendors for office products, tires

TIPS/TAPS has added two new vendor offerings. B&B Solutions, Inc., a provider of office products in Arkansas for 34 years, has added its online catalog of more than 44,000 items with TIPS pricing and free delivery anywhere in Arkansas. B&B Solutions currently has TIPS contracts for deluxe sideline chairs for arenas, printing for e-finance, and uniforms. Contact Fred Mooney at 800.527.1843 for more details. Southern Tire Mart is an independent dealer and the largest manufacturer of retread tires in the United States. It has seven locations in Arkansas: Batesville, Fort Smith, Hope, Little Rock, Searcy, Springdale and West Memphis.

For more information about TIPS/TAPS, contact Mickey McFatridge at 870.926.9250.
This is my first correspondence to Arkansas board members since becoming your president after the resignation of our former president, Jerry Don Woods. Jerry Don resigned from the Dardanelle School Board because he didn’t want to stand in the way of family members getting a job with the school district. I promise to strive to serve you as well as my principled predecessor by promoting student-focused leadership within our organization.

I am reminded of my experiences with fellow board members in the McRae and Beebe School Districts during my tenure of more than 20 years. Some of those board members were stellar representatives of the communities they served. I considered the qualities and characteristics of some of those remarkable people. What made them good board members? Several common traits began to stand out. Here are a couple of them:

- **Great board members always put students foremost in decision making.** It is obvious when board members have a heart and mind for the students in which they are entrusted. I have seen board members sacrifice much in order to meet the needs of students. Time spent away from home due to board meetings, suffered friendships due to an employee hire (or lack of hire), and a lack of sleep and sanity during controversial times are just a few of the sacrifices I have witnessed over the years. I have also seen positive consequences of student-oriented board meetings. Raising a salary schedule to have the ability to hire and retain quality teachers, student recognitions during award assemblies, and a student “making it” in spite of all odds are some of those apparent rewards for student-centered decision making.

- **Another common trait of exceptional board members is their emphasis on board professional development.** Most of the best board members weren’t born good board members. Being a school board member is different from almost any other type of elected office. The best board members spend much time in training developing their craft. This is accomplished by learning new information and corresponding with others who have been “in the trenches.” I can testify that I have learned much from my fellow board members in my district, board members from across the state, and even from board members from other states. The collective wisdom of those conversations with my fellow servant leaders has immensely aided my service to our district.

I encourage you to emulate the aforementioned traits of student-centered decision making and an emphasis on board training. There are opportunities at every board meeting to put students first. There are also many training opportunities that may be accessed from the ASBA website during the fall season.

**Felix Frankfurter, U.S. Supreme Court justice said, “The public school is at once the symbol of our democracy and the most pervasive means of promoting our common destiny.”** I would like to thank you as board members for serving, supporting and preserving our public education system. I look forward to serving with you.
At First Security Beardsley Public Finance, back to school is a big deal. Why? Our team is committed to meeting the needs of local school districts, providing funding solutions that turn into progress, innovation and opportunity for all students. If your school district needs help reaching its financial goals, we want to hear from you. Contact us today!

HAVE A GREAT SCHOOL YEAR!

At First Security Beardsley Public Finance, back to school is a big deal. Why? Our team is committed to meeting the needs of local school districts, providing funding solutions that turn into progress, innovation and opportunity for all students. If your school district needs help reaching its financial goals, we want to hear from you. Contact us today!