2014 Legislative Preview

Face-to-face lobbying
Sifting through 2,000 bills
Linking Educators and Democracy game board

Plus, a pull-out
Read Across America poster
Putting education first

2 Up close & personal
Mid-Del ACT’s Stephanie Bailey says all teachers should lobby their legislators – it reminds them who put them in office.

3 Sifting through 2,000 bills
Associate Executive Director Amanda Ewing covers the three most important education topics of the 2014 legislative session – pensions, testing and funding.

4 Become a LEAD educator
Find your Linking Educators and Democracy game board inside.

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Pg 6-7 – Your very own pull-out Read Across America poster, featuring Oklahoma City Thunder mascot Rumble the Bison
Pg 8 – Setting sites on a Guinness world record – RAA poster contest is back

On the cover – a replica of The Guardian, which sits atop the State Capitol Dome, on the second floor of the Capitol. Photo by Doug Folks.

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The legislature needs to STOP testing Oklahoma’s students to the point of frustration. Instead of helping testing companies prosper, legislators need to listen to the experts in public education – specifically, educators who are in the classroom every day – about what over-testing is doing to our students. They need to listen to parents as they voice their concerns about what over-testing is doing to their child. It’s time to put the children of Oklahoma first.

We all need to use Caution! as we face the upcoming election cycle. We need to stay informed. Watch for what candidates “say” they stand for versus what their actions show. We need to put political parties aside and vote for the candidates that support public education.

We need the legislature to GO forward with public education funding. Oklahoma is 49th in the nation in what we spend per pupil to educate our children. 49th isn’t good enough in sports, and it certainly shouldn’t be good enough for our children’s education. Can you imagine anyone in Oklahoma saying it’s okay if we are beaten by Texas, Kansas or Iowa State in football? Yet, it seems OK for 48 other states to beat us in what we pay to educate our children. This legislature needs to take the steps necessary to improve funding.

The legislature needs to GO for a raise for teachers and support professionals. It has been seven years since there has been an across-the-board raise in salary. We are 47th in the nation in teacher pay. Once again, that isn’t acceptable. Competitive salaries are needed to retain and recruit quality teachers.

If we follow this “legislative traffic light” we will avoid wrecks involving public education and ensure we arrive at the end of the 2014 Legislative Session having protected and improved public education.

Thanks for all you do!

By Linda Hampton, OEA President

The New Year has started off well for you and yours. As with any new beginning, 2014 begins with hope for a better year. There is the very realistic hope that 2014 can be the year public education and its employees are valued and respected. The year public education friendly candidates are elected. And the year the Oklahoma legislature works with teachers, support professionals and administrators instead of placating testing companies and for-profit businesses. The 2014 Legislative Session and the upcoming statewide elections have the potential to make these a reality.

As the legislative session and the election cycle begin, there are some signs of caution we need to heed from everyday traffic light – red for stop, yellow for caution and green for go.

The legislature needs to STOP trying to change our teacher retirement system from a defined benefit to a defined contribution. Just like the red light prevents car wrecks, there’s legislation we need to stop so we don’t end up wrecking our pension system. Changing the pension system is a gamble – a $22 billion gamble which would leave the taxpayers to foot the bill if it doesn’t work.

We need the legislature to GO forward with public education funding. Oklahoma is 49th in the nation in what we spend per pupil to educate our children. 49th isn’t good enough in sports, and it certainly shouldn’t be good enough for our children’s education. Can you imagine anyone in Oklahoma saying it’s okay if we are beaten by Texas, Kansas or Iowa State in football? Yet, it seems OK for 48 other states to beat us in what we pay to educate our children. Our legislature needs to take the steps necessary to improve funding.

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Thanks for all you do!
Face-to-face lobbying makes all the difference

By Chancen Flick and Ivy Riggs

Face to face meetings with policy makers can seem like a daunting experience. But it is also one of the most effective methods to impact decisions that affect your school district and individual classrooms.

The Legislative and Political Organizing Center began small group lobby days during the previous legislative session. OEA’s LEAD (Linking Educators and Democracy) Lobby Days allow for members to meet specifically with their legislators to discuss issues that relate directly to their school district. It also allows legislators to receive first-hand knowledge and contacts regarding education issues.

Stephanie Bailey, a national board certified science teacher at Midwest City High School, has lobbied her leg-islators to discuss issues that relate directly during the previous legislative session.

The Legislative and Political Organizing Center has been involved in small group lobby days

“I try to be informed of current legis-lation by looking up some bills on my own and seeking information from websites about Oklahoma’s total tax burden and current position on teacher pay and school funding to support my position,” she said. “However, OEA always provides participants with an in-formative flier and a discussion group to help everyone understand the issues and a potential means of how to approach one’s legislator.”

A LEAD Lobby Day begins around 9 a.m. at OEA headquarters, located across the street from the State Capitol. LPO staff will meet with members over a light breakfast to discuss what issues are most important to their district, what items legislators are focused on for that day or week.

Members and LPO staff then go to the Capitol to meet with legislators. These meetings usually occur in the legislators’ offices and allow members to have a one-on-one discussion with their elected official. Meetings can be set with a mem-ber’s own legislators or with the legisla-tors that represent the school district. If desired, committee meetings and floor hearings can be at-tended as well.

“This is everybody’s job to be informed of current legislation,” Bailey said. “Another positive was when the Legis-lature’s own data findings supported one position I was taking. I realize I keep mentioning ‘data,’ but to me, numbers supply support to an issue.”

Bailey admitted that while data can be manipulated, it does allow for a discussion around the central question, “Is this really good for public education in Oklahoma?”

LEAD Lobby Days are also advan-tageous to legislators. It allows them to spend time with their constituents and gain valuable information on the opin-ions of their voters. As most legislators have to be a ‘jack of all trades’ on a See “Everyone” on Page 12

Sifting through 2,000 bills

By Amanda Ewing
Associate Executive Director

In the weeks leading up to the legislative session, your staff in the Legislative and Political Organizing Center has been hard at work reading the more than 2,000 new bills filed this year. It seems that nearly every legislator has a plan to “im-prove” your schools or one way or another.

Some are truly trying to provide solutions to problems, such as Sen. Gary Stanislowski’s bills to amend the Reading Suc-ciency Act. Senate Bills 1348 and 1349 would exempt English Language Learners and students on IEPs from 3rd grade reten-tion as long as they are receiving any necessary remediation.

Other bills leave us questioning whose best interests are be-ing served, as with the voucher bill from Reps. Jason Nelson and Tom Newell. This time around, it’s called an “Education Savings Account,” (HB 3398) but make no mistake, it’s yet another effort to move public tax dollars out of our already financially strapped public schools to private entities with no oversight or accountability.

PENSIONS: The biggest topic on legis-lative leadership’s agenda this session is pension reform. So far there have been 55 bills filed on the topic! Most of them have no lan-guage yet; they are just place-holders or “shell” bills that will be available to add language to in the future. Your LPO staff will be watching each one closely.

The most recent statements from leadership and the gov-ernor’s office were that all school employees should be moved to defined contribution schemes. This session we are go-ing to fight to preserve good pensions for ALL – current and fu-ture – education employees. Furthermore, even if the proposed changes were only made to future employees, we still haven’t seen a plan that allays our concerns about the effect that would have on current employees’ pensions.

TESTING: Any sports fan knows that playing defense isn’t enough to win the game – you’ve also got to go on the offense and score some points. So while we’re fending off legislation “reform,” let’s work together to take back control of your pro-fession! We will be working to improve our out-of-control test-ing situation by supporting several bills. In response to a vote at the 2013 Delegate Assembly, we’ll advocate for Sen. Dan Newberry’s SB 1827, which would allow parents to opt their children out of taking standardized tests.

We are also work-ing with Rep. Gus Blackwell on HB 3170 which would lower the number of EOF’s high school students may take. We also support Sens. Earl Garrison and Rep. Lisa Billy also have bills we’ll support (SB 1169 and HB 2492, respec-tively) that prevent the State Department of Education from changing the cut score for a test in the same year the test is administered.

FUNDING: Last, but certainly not least, is our statewide effort to increase education funding. If we’re going to be successful, you and your colleagues must be at the Capitol on March 31!

This session the legislature will decide the fate of the hori-zontal drilling tax credit ($300 million a year) that is set to expire next year and the franchise tax (another $60 million). That’s a lot of money, and it will be directed somewhere. Whether it is directed into your classroom, however, is up to you. Talk to your colleagues, your administrators and your school board now about how your school is going to help. Improving testing, increasing funding and fighting off a myriad of legislative attacks this session is not going to be an easy feat. But you didn’t join this profession to accomplish easy feats; you joined it to make a difference in children’s lives. If we work together, the changes we make this session will make a big difference in the quality of education we pro-vide Oklahoma’s students.

Stay in touch during the session

2014 OEA Legislative Agenda

Funding
• Increase Common Education funding to fiscal year 2008 level (approximately $300 million).
• Improve current tax structure to achieve proper education funding.

Recruitment and Retention – Quality Teachers and Support Professionals
• Protect current and future education employees’ pensions by preventing harmful changes to the Oklahoma Teachers’ Retirement System.
• Increase teachers’ salaries by $2,000 across the board.
• Increase education support professionals’ salaries by $1,500 across the board.
• Increase the state minimum salary lanes for higher level degrees by 20 percent.

School Culture
• Provide sufficient alternative education settings to address chronic classroom discipline issues at all grade levels.
• Provide adequate personnel for the delivery of counseling services and other strategies to minimize disruptive and violent behavior.

Classroom Instruction – Standards and Accountability
• Allow parents to opt their child out of some or all high stakes testing without penalty to the student, teachers or school district.
• Repair or replace the A-F school grading system.
• Restore the class size requirements currently in state statute.

OEA Legislative Committee
Rene Allen, Putnam City, Committee Chair
Linda Ogle, McLoud, Board Liaison
Maschalls Blakefield, Yukon
Lisa Cobb, Seminole
Teri Gray, Choctaw-Nicoma Park
Patti Green, Ardmore
Lawrence Lane, Choctah
Lynn Stockley, Tulsa
Cristi Thomson, Hilldale
John Waldron, Tulsa
Amanda Ewing, Associate Executive Director, Legislative and Political Organizing Center, Staff Liaison

The following teachers earned new national Board Certification in 2013:
Oklahoma City Metro Region
Cathy Murphy, Western Oaks Middle School, Putnam City
Northeast Region
Kymberly Tinsley, Greenwood Elementary, Tahlequah
Southwest Region
Tiffiny Bray, Lone Grove Primary El.
Laura Payne, Mountain View-Gotebo Elementary
Southeast Region
Starla Howard, Will Rogers Elementary, Shawnee

Corin Grady Oppel, Edmond Memorial HS
Carl Ray, Townsend Elementary
Kortni Magdalene Torralba, Moore HS
Elizabeth Mossier, Cleveland Primary
Shereen Rasor, Mustang Creek Elementary
Gregory Richard Oppel, Edmond Memorial HS
Southwest Region
Pat Green, Charles Evans Elementary, Ardmore
Jennifer Garrett, Norman North HS
Jamie Johnson, McKinley Elementary, Norman
Misti Michelle Smith, Cleveland Elementary, Norman
Amanda Urquiart, Norman North HS
Tulsa Metro Region
Susan Collier, Jenks Middle School
Patricia Duncan, Hale HS, Tulsa
Kari Eddy, Cedar Ridge Elementary, Union
Christina Leach, Jenks West Elementary
Shelley Zevnik, Eighth Grade Center, Union

The OEA family said good-bye to a dear friend on New Years Eve. Former Associate Executive Director Charles McCauley passed away after developing an infection while undergoing cancer treatment.

Charles was a light that shined upon everyone he knew. He was a beacon on the hill, above the fray of petty grievances.

When he joined the Oklahoma Education Association in 1972, he was the first black professional staffer and later became the first black manager in 1977.

He honored each God-given breath by being a man of integrity and truth, not harboring a single grudge in his soul. The light in his eyes truly warmed the heart and we will rejoice and celebrate the man he was.

During his nearly 37 year career at OEA, he shined his light on dark places and we were all able to see his good works and benefit from his contributions to the success of public education.

Congrats to the NBPTS Class of 2013

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1944 – 2013

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GRAB YOUR HAT on Monday, March 3, 2014 ... and READ with THE CAT

Special thanks to honorary chair Oklahoma City Thunder and Rumble the Bison, with students from Bethel, Kiefer, Moore, Oklahoma City and Western Heights Public Schools.

Photo courtesy of Munda’s Studios • Moore, Oklahoma
Setting sites on a record

Guinness officials approve world record attempt

Oklahoma’s 2014 Read Across America (RAA) celebration promises to be record setting. Guinness World Record setting, that is! On Monday, March 3, the Oklahoma Education Association and 10 local associations from around the state will attempt to establish the “Most Children Simultaneously Wearing Cat-in-the-Hat Hats” while reading a book. OEA’s goal is to have more than 2,000 children take part in the attempt.

Participating locals are Broken Arrow EA, Professionals Educators’ Association of Lawton, McAlester ACT, Mid-Del ACT, Moore ACT, Professional Educators of Norman, Putnam City ACT, Tahlequah EA, Tulsa CTA, and Woodward EA.

In addition, the NEA Cat-a-van will make stops in Shawnee and Mid-Del on February 28. OEA recently won an NEA grant to provide books to the 10 participating locals in the Guinness attempt, hats for the students and funding to verify the record with Guinness, which has already given OEA’s goal of 2,000 children a tremendous celebration of reading.”

Linda Hampton. “Read Across America is in the Guinness record book, but we’re especially proud of what we’re accomplishing with Guinness, which has already given us the honor of being included in the Guinness attempt, hats for the students, and funding to verify the record.”

Prizes will be awarded in four categories – kindergarten through 2nd grade, 3rd-5th grade, 6th-8th grade, and 9th-12th grade. First place in each division will receive a $75 VISA gift card, second place winners win a $50 VISA gift card, and honorable mention winners will receive a certificate.

The winners will be featured in the April-May issue of the Education Focus and on our website, okea.org.

Contest Rules:
- All students of OEA members are eligible to enter the contest.
- Pictures will be judged on creativity, use of color and content.
- Entries must be submitted on white, unlined 8 ½ x 11 paper. DO NOT FOLD.
- On the back of each entry, list the book that inspired the drawing, student’s name, age, grade, name of school and teacher, and a school phone number.
- All entries will become the property of the OEA and must meet all contest rules to be eligible for prizes.
- All entries must be received by Monday, March 14.
- Mail them to OEA Focus on Reading, PO Box 18485, Oklahoma City, OK 73154, or hand-deliver over night entries to OEA Headquarters at 323 E. Madison, Oklahoma City, OK 73105.
- Late entries or entries from non-OEA members will not be judged.

For more information, contact Editor Doug Folks at 800-522-8091, 405-528-7785, or dfolks@okea.org.

Picture this – RAA poster contest

If a picture is worth a 1,000 words, then a good book is worth countless pictures in our minds. It is those visions inspired by reading that fuels OEA’s Read Across America poster contest. Oklahoma students are invited to draw or paint a picture inspired by one of their favorite books. Entries for the contest are due by Friday, March 14.

Prizes will be awarded in four categories – kindergarten through 2nd grade, 3rd-5th grade, 6th-8th grade, and 9th-12th grade. First place in each division will receive a $75 VISA gift card, second place winners win a $50 VISA gift card, and honorable mention winners will receive a certificate.

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AG Opinion supports OEA’s position on TRS payment responsibility

Transferring sick leave and national certification stipends also covered

By Richard Wilkinson
OEA General Counsel

The Oklahoma Attorney General (AG) has issued three opinions over the last several months that impact education employees and school districts. The AG has issued opinions dealing with creditable service from the Oklahoma Teachers’ Retirement System (OTRS) for school employees who receive employment assistance from the School Consolidation Assistance Fund (Fund); the transfer of accumulated sick leave from one district to another and the carryover of unused personal leave; and the applicability of the moratorium on bonuses for National Board Certified Teachers to speech-language pathologists, audiologists and school psychologists who become nationally certified under a different statutory scheme.

Who’s Responsible for TRS Payments?

Attorney General Opinion 2013-3-9 dealt with two separate, but related issues: 1) Who is responsible for payment of the creditable year of OTRS retirement service for employees who receive employment assistance from the Fund; and 2) Whether an employee who receives employment assistance from the Fund but who was employed by a different school district for the successive school year is eligible to receive the creditable year of retirement service from OTRS.

School employees who are employed by a school district are consolidated or annexed by another school district and who are not employed by the consolidating or annexing school district the following year are eligible for employment assistance from the Fund. School employees who receive assistance from the Fund are also entitled to accumulate one year of creditable service for retirement purposes from OTRS, regardless of whether they were re-employed by a different school district the year following the annexation or consolidation.

OEA represented two employees before the OTRS with these issues. One sought the additional year of creditable retirement service from OTRS even though she had been re-employed by a different school district the following year. The other sought the additional year of creditable retirement service from OTRS although she had not been reemployed by any school district the following year following the annexation or consolidation. OTRS denied the request for a year of creditable retirement service in the first instance and granted the request for a year of creditable service in the second instance, but billed the employee for the full contribution amount for the service credit.

The AG interpreted the relevant statutes and ruled that any employee who had been employed by a school district that had been annexed or consolidated and who received employment assistance from the Fund was entitled to an additional year of creditable retirement service from OTRS, regardless of whether or not the employee was employed by a different school district for the following school year. The AG also ruled that – contrary to the OTRS position – employees who are eligible for the additional year of creditable retirement service are not responsible for paying any statutory contributions to OTRS on the amount of the employment assistance received.

Transferring Unused Sick Leave and Unused Personal Business Leave

Attorney General Opinion 2013-26 also dealt with two separate, but related issues: 1) whether a school district must accept the transfer of unused sick leave from another school district when the teacher left the prior school district without finishing the full school year; and 2) whether unused personal business leave may carry-over from one school year to subsequent school years.

In this opinion, the AG also interpret the relevant statutes and ruled that a school district must accept the transfer of accumulated sick leave if the leave was accumulated during any portion of a prior year and the transfer request occurred during the subsequent school year. The opinion also held that it is permissible for a locally negotiated leave policy to allow the carry-over of unused personal business leave from one school year to subsequent school years.

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AG rules on stipend moratorium

Continued from previous page

The AG Opinion held that it is permissible for a locally negotiated leave policy to allow the carry-over of unused personal business leave from one school year to subsequent school years.

Most of your dues are tax deductible

Members who itemize deductions and meet the two percent requirement for allowable miscellaneous deductions are able to deduct most of their membership dues.

For additional help, contact your tax professional.

Full-time active certified $436.05
Half-time active certified $229.52
Full-time active support $237.98
Half-time active support $130.74
Substitute $154.12
Reserve certified $206.52
Reserve support $107.51
Student member $24.17
Retired-Lifetime member $250.00

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Zone Director Positions

All eight OEA Board positions are for three-year terms, which expire in 2017. These board members will serve as NEA Delegates in 2015 and 2016.

Southwest B, representing Cleveland and McClain Counties.

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Eight open board seats highlight elections

Eight open board seats highlight elections

Filing is open February 1-21 for the open spots as well as delegate at-large spots to the OEA Delegate Assembly and the NEA Representative Assembly.

The elections, to be held in March, will be conducted with online voting.

At-large delegates to the Delegate Assembly and NEA RA will serve at this year’s meetings. The OEA annual meeting is April 25-26 at the Sherraton Oklahoma City Hotel and the RA is set for July 1-6 in Denver.

Filing forms are available at okea.org. OEA Headquarters in Oklahoma City and at the OEA regional office in Tulsa.

For more information on the election process or filing forms, contact Rheta Kennedy at 800-522-8091, 405/328-7785 or rken nedy@okea.org.

The AG Board of Directors is designated to represent members at the grassroots level. Each school district is made up of at least 1,000 Association members who elect their representative on the board. The newly elected Zone Directors will take office on July 1.
Advocacy Conference breakouts offer variety

School finance, smart practices for Other Academic Measures (OAM) and a special session for education support professionals highlight the breakouts scheduled for the 2014 Advocacy Conference, February 21-22 in Oklahoma City.

“Back to the Future” is the theme for this year’s conference, which returns to the Waterford Marriott Hotel in Oklahoma City. Online registration is now available from a link on the OEA homepage (okea.org) and at http://14advconf.eventbrite.com. Joe Bonkhe, ombudsman and outreach manager for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, will provide a keynote presentation on the morning of the 22nd. His presentation, “Social Media: Technology and Ramifications in the Workplace,” covers the hazards of social media for education employees and how to avoid them.

Breakout session topics during the afternoon of the 22nd will include:

- The Power of WE, a special support professional workshop with Liz Picone, organizing specialist for the NFAE;
- School Finance, with Lori Smith, chief financial officer for Edmond Public Schools;
- Smart OAM Practices for the Future, with Jana Burk, executive director of Tulsa Public Schools’ Office of Teacher and Leader Effectiveness, and Linda Hendrix, OEA Advocacy Specialist;
- Can I Grieve This? with Sheri Childress and Cal Ware, OEA Advocacy Specialists;
- Ask a Lawyer, a question and answer session with OEA General Counsel Richard Wilkinson and Associate General Counsel Heath Merchen; and
- Local Bargaining, a two-part session with federal mediators John Doern and Bobby J. Thompson. They will cover The Mediator’s Role in Negotiations and Your Roles and Responsibilities at the Bargaining Table.

The conference will kick off Friday the 21st at 7 p.m. with a forum on the A-F Grading System, with Pres. Linda Hampton, Vice Pres. Alicia Priest and Executive Director Lela Odom and discussion and feedback from the audience.

“Everyone needs to lobby”

Continued from Page 2

variety of issues, meeting with education professionals allows them access to a unique form of expert, one that practices the policies that are decided upon at the Capitol.

“I truly believe everyone needs to lobby – it is the way our system works,” Bailey said. “Bodies of government need to be reminded as to who put them there and that they are supposed to ‘serve the people.’ When you show up in their office or call them or email them, that is recorded as a position on legislation. When it comes time to vote on bills, those numbers should have influence.”

Bailey feels it’s important for new faces to lobby each year so that legislators know they aren’t hearing just from a vocal minority.

“If you are passionate about public education, your profession, and you’re concerned about what our kids will experience while in our classrooms, get involved in the legislative process. I’m sorry, but you cannot just go into your classroom and teach – the powers that be are not going to let that happen.”

Special ed programs eligible for Nigh Foundation grants

Grants up to $8,000 are available annually to public school special education programs from the Donna Nigh Foundation.

In 1985, friends of the then First Lady formed the foundation as a birthday present and in recognition of her commitment and work on behalf of the state’s developmentally disabled residents. While touring state facilities with her husband, George, during his tenure as lieutenant governor, she discovered a calling to help disabled Oklahomans become thriving, contributing citizens.

The Foundation was established to serve as a bridge between the public and private sectors to help with programs that government agencies are unable to provide. Funding through the grants are available for environmental and recreational adaptations, classroom cognition and developed equipment, and sheltered workshop equipment and activities.

For more information, visit occf.org/NighFoundation.html or contact Cher Golding at the Oklahoma City Community Foundation, 405-606-2920 or c.golding@occf.org.

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