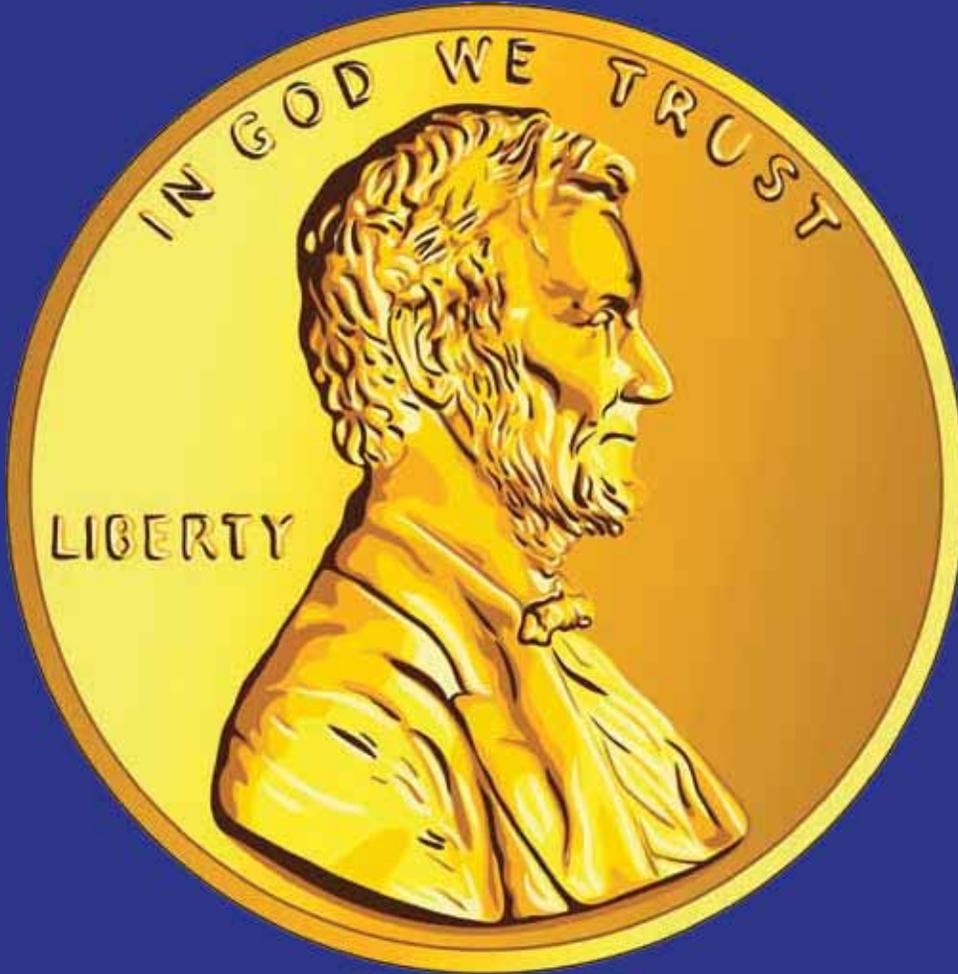


**The
Education**

FOCUS

For the membership of the Oklahoma Education Association • December/January 2015-16

Can a 1-cent sales tax fix the teacher shortage?



Even good schools struggle to find teachers

Comparing two districts shines a light on disparity

Teachers, students give back during the holidays

RAA Poster Contest winner announced

Putting education first

4-5 And the winner is...

More than 700 Oklahoma students entered OEA's revamped Read Across America poster contest. Look inside to see who took home the top prize.

6-9 Fixing the teacher shortage

New revenue must be pumped into public education to help schools attract and retain quality teachers. Can a proposed 1-cent sales tax cure our teacher shortage problem?

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Teachers and students take time to help others during the holidays.

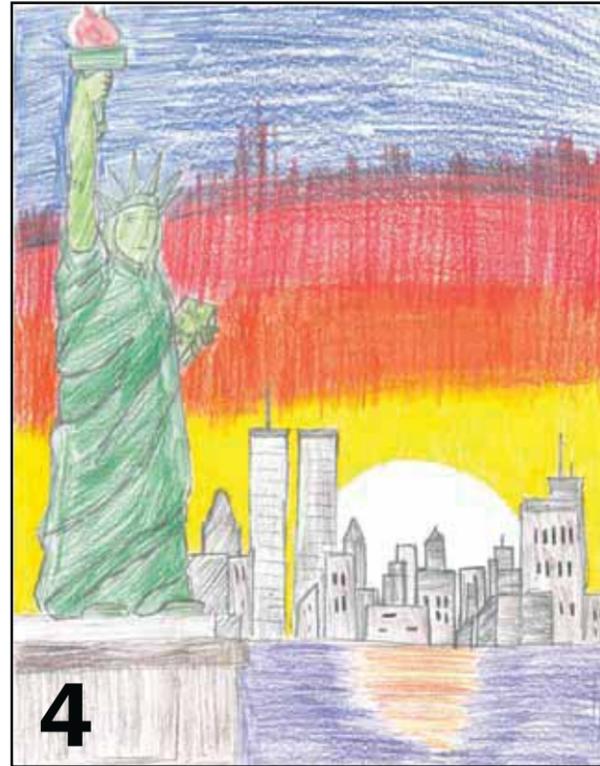
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It's time to find a new route

By Alicia Priest
OEA President

As I was driving to work recently, I heard Bob Long from Chapel Hill United Methodist Church give his daily "Perceptions" on the radio. The story was about June McCarroll, who is credited for getting the yellow center-lane striping on highways. You see, she was tired of being run off the road by large trucks. She noticed that when there was a bump in between sides of the highway, trucks seemed to stay on their side.

She took her idea of highway striping to her local city leaders who ignored her. So, she worked through women's groups. It took seven years for them to get the city council to agree to stripe two areas of highway. When the number of accidents in those areas drastically decreased, yellow center-line striping became the norm.

I can't help but relate that story to what is and what has been going on in public education. Whether it's at the local, state or national level, education employees have ideas to improve education, to make things better for our students. For whatever reason, those ideas often fall on deaf ears.

We must take a lesson from Mrs. McCarroll. We must not give up. We must

find a way to be heard. The way to do that is to regroup and go a different route.

Take a look at education funding. We – the OEA – tried the Adequacy and Equity lawsuit and SQ744 and requiring the funding of education by April 1. We staged rallies, requested a change in the tax structure for wealthy corporations and suggested increasing the tax base. All of these efforts seem to have hardened the hearts of many legislators against giving public schools what they need to support our students.

Now, another group has arisen to support public education – Oklahoma's Children, Our Future. They are promoting a one penny sales tax that will benefit our neediest students by funding early childhood education and providing support for early reading interventions required in the Reading Sufficiency Act (RSA). It will give teachers AT LEAST a \$5,000 raise. It also supports career tech and higher education, which will use the money to help keep the cost of tuition more affordable.

Can you imagine? Can you seriously imagine what \$5,000 would do for your family or for your community where you would spend your money – most likely supporting local businesses?

It's time we as Oklahomans support



President Alicia Priest

our children. I hope when the petition comes around, every education employee signs it and encourages friends and family to do the same. In fact, I encourage every OEA member to fully engage in the campaign and circulate a petition by getting their family, friends and neighbors to sign.

Let's keep the conversations about what we know to be true – our schools are underfunded and our students deserve to have quality teachers in the classroom, class sizes that enable one-on-one interaction, current learning materials and technology and curriculum that helps develop creative problem solvers and builds skills necessary for jobs we can't imagine.

As NEA President Lily Eskelsen-Garcia expressed recently, "We expect public schools to do a whole heckuva lot, and the least we can do is understand and provide support for all of that hard work." By supporting Oklahoma's Children, Our Future, we are saying that pro-public education policy and funding should be the norm.

Agenda set for Organizing Conference

Purposeful conversations, power mapping and organizing for bargaining and political action highlight the agenda for "It Begins With Me: Turning Talk into Action," the OEA Organizing Conference, February 5-6, at the Reed Conference Center in Midwest City.

The conference, which is the result of a new business item at last spring's Delegate Assembly, will share organizing tactics and strategies for growing stronger local associations and empowering members.

During the opening session on Friday evening, February 5, Pres. Alicia Priest and Executive Director David DuVall will discuss why OEA membership is so critical. Then, staff members from the Colorado Education Association will share the organizing successes of CEA members who last fall defeated Tea Party

candidates for school board elections in several communities.

The general session on Saturday, February 6, will include a discussion of purposeful conversations before attendees split into smaller groups to practice those conversations.

Three sessions of breakout workshops will include topics such as organizing around issues and for bargaining, power mapping for finding local leaders and for political action and a session on organizing for education support professionals.

Registration is \$35, which includes a continental breakfast and lunch on February 6 and all training materials.

Attendees can find a complete agenda and links to register for the conference and make hotel reservations at okea.org/organizingconference.

The Education Focus

Volume 33, No. 2

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Awards nominations due Jan. 15

Deadline comes earlier this year

Mark your calendars! The deadline for submitting nominations for the Oklahoma Education Association's annual awards has been moved to January 15, 2016.

Each award is listed separately on the OEA website (okea.org/ocaaawards) and each nomination form can be filled out online before printing and mailing.

Each year, OEA honors those who promote and support public education, members who exemplify greatness in the classroom and local affiliates who excel for their members.

Nominations must be received at OEA Headquarters by 5 p.m. January 15. Send nominations so that they arrive by the deadline to OEA Awards, PO Box 18485, Okla. City, OK, 73154; or overnight or hand-deliver them to the OEA at 323 E. Madison, Okla. City, OK, 73105.

Following is an overview of OEA's many awards.

Board of Directors Awards

Nominations for the following awards must come from a current member of the OEA Board of Directors.

Friend of Education – OEA's highest award, the Friend of Education honors a person who has made significant contributions to the betterment of public education.

Claude A. Dyer Memorial Award – Given to an Oklahoma educator who has worked to bring about legislative action for equitable salaries and desirable working conditions, and has rendered leadership and direction in efforts to protect and advance the civil and human rights and responsibilities of educators.

Political Activist Award – Given to an individual or organization who exhibits a willingness and determination to promote the goals of the OEA through activities in the political arena.

Outstanding Legislator – Presented to legislators for outstanding support of public education and education employees.

Human and Civil Rights Awards

Kate Frank Award – Presented to the OEA member and/or local Association rendering outstanding and significant service to advancing the cause of member welfare, rights and professionalism.

Tuskahoma Brown Miller Award – Presented to a business or group which has contributed significantly to the improvement of education.

F.D. Moon Educational Award – Presented to the person who has contributed significantly to the advancement of education for students.

Glenn Snider Human Relations Award – Presented to the school district, individual or organization best exemplifying the practice of effective human relations and concerns for human rights.

Instructional Excellence in Education

Teachers Teaching Teachers and Teachers Teaching Students – To recognize individual OEA members for outstanding contributions in instructional excellence, both with students and colleagues. The awards acknowledge the fact that the quality of education in this country can rise no higher than the quality of teaching.

Miscellaneous Awards

Advocate For Academic Freedom – Honors a person or organization whose contribution to the safeguarding of academic freedom has had a significant im-

act on the public schools in Oklahoma and the nation.

OEA Collective Bargaining Award – Presented to an individual or group making a significant contribution to the advancement of education through the collective bargaining process.

Education Support Professional Award – Honoring an individual ESP member whose activities reflect the contributions of an educational support professional to public education.

Communications Awards

Marshall Gregory Awards – Recognizing Oklahoma reporters and broadcasters and their newspapers, radio and television stations for significant efforts to provide continuing and accurate coverage of public schools, current education issues and the OEA. Categories for professionals and for high school journalists are offered.

Golden Apple Awards – Recognizing OEA local associations for their consistent efforts to provide quality communications to all of their audiences, including members and other education personnel, local school administration, parents and the community in general.

Local Affiliate Awards

5 Star Local Awards – The OEA 5 Star Local Program is intended to strengthen local Association programs and to recognize locals who meet the criteria in each program area. Application deadline for recognition at Delegate Assembly is March 15. The application deadline is June 15 for recognition at a summer leadership event. Five Star Local nomination forms can be found at okea.org/5starlocal.

NBCTs – Save the Date!

Seize the Profession

Oklahoma's National Board Certified Teachers' Summit

8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m. • February 16, 2016

Francis Tuttle Technology Center, Bruce Gray Campus • Oklahoma City

An NBCT Celebration – Find Your Voice, Tell Your Story • Create an NBCT Network Plan • Advance an Excellence-in-Education Plan
Facilitated by the Okla. Office of Education Quality & Accountability and the OEA



Lauren S. Burkholder
Social Media Specialist
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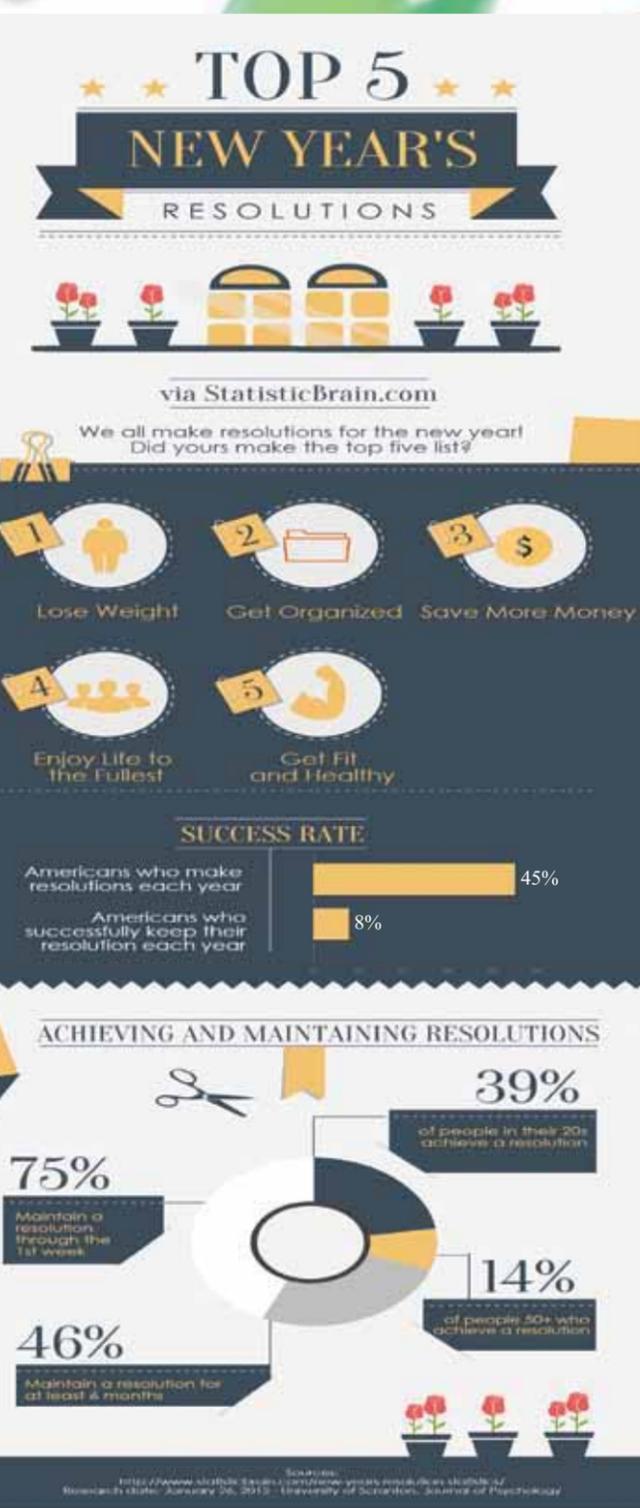
Happy Holidays from OEA!
We asked our members on social media to tell us about their favorite holiday traditions. Here is what they said!



Follow us at
pinterest.com/okeapins

If you're looking for some fun holiday classroom inspiration, check out OEA on Pinterest! Our "Happy Holidays" board will hopefully inspire some unique decorations that will put everyone in your classroom in the holiday spirit. We also feature boards about classroom management, project-based learning and our always hilarious "Friday Funny" pins.

FOLLOW OEA on Facebook and Twitter for daily news, professional tips, classroom ideas and more. Connect with other members, share ideas and ask questions to get the most out of your membership.



Oklahoma.Education.Association



@OKEA

2016 Read Across America Poster Contest Winners

With over 700 entries this year, it was a record year for Read Across America poster art submissions! This year, the poster contest was open to all students in Oklahoma with the theme of "Oh, the places you'll go!" Thank you for being part of this great tradition! Read Across America Day will be celebrated on Wednesday, March 2, 2016.

Kindergarten - 2nd Grade Winners



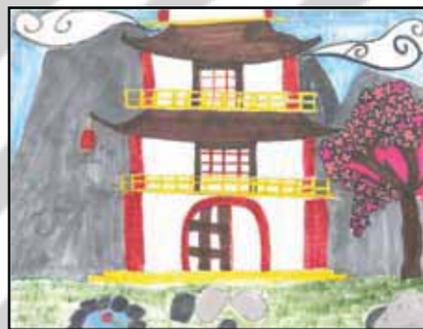
1st Place - Candyland
by Molly Vega
2nd grade, Greenwood Elementary
Tahlequah, OK



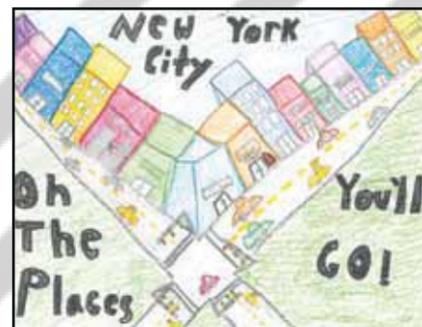
2nd Place - Mexico
by Ava Upchurch
2nd grade, Northridge Elementary
Oklahoma City, OK



3rd Place - Mexico
by Violet Shriver
2nd grade, Northridge Elementary
Oklahoma City, OK



1st Place - Japan
by Katalena Bandasack
5th grade, Barnes Elementary
Owasso, OK



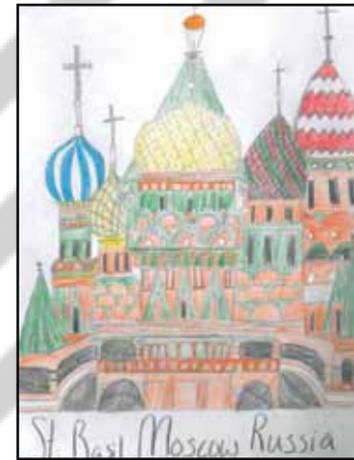
2nd Place - New York City
by Caitlyn Burk
5th grade, Mannford Elementary
Mannford, OK



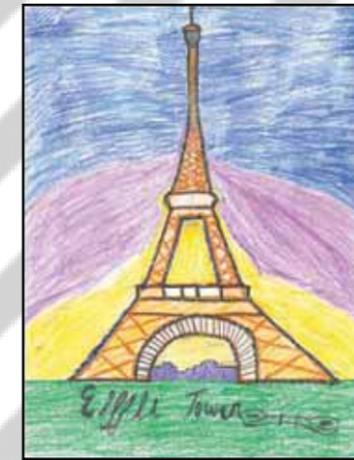
3rd Place - Egypt
by Easton Memoli
4th grade, Northridge Elementary
Oklahoma City, OK

Special thanks to OEA members & art teachers Katy Cook, Broken Arrow EA, and Sherri Braly, Claremore CTA, for judging this year's poster contest.

3rd - 5th Grade Winners



1st Place - Russia
by Jordyn Greenwood
6th grade, Bristow Middle School
Bristow, OK

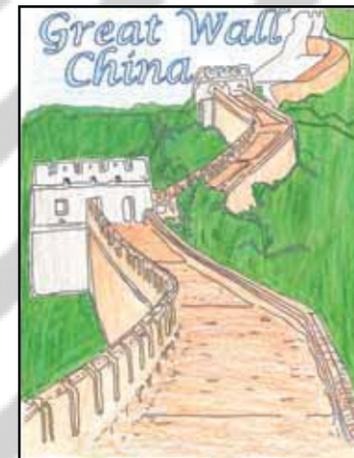


2nd Place - Paris
by Adelyn Warner
6th grade, Bristow Middle School
Bristow, OK

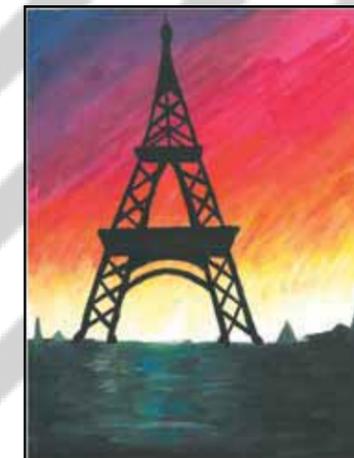


3rd Place - Mexico
by Madison Savage
6th grade
(school not given)

9th - 12th Grade Winners



1st Place - China
by Jessica Treat
12th grade, Muldrow High School
Muldrow, OK



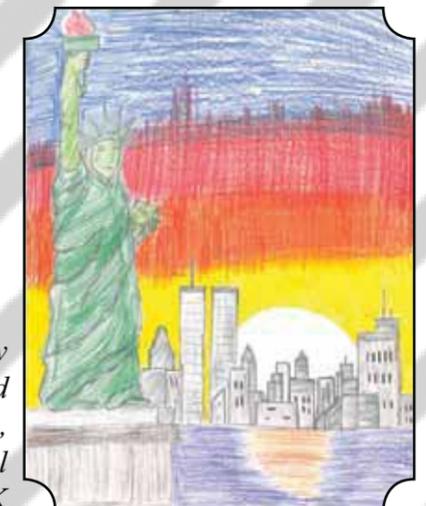
2nd Place - Paris
by ShaiAnne Warner
12th grade, Memorial High School
Tulsa, OK



3rd Place - London
by Abigail Taylor
12th grade, Coalgate High School
Coalgate, OK

Best in Show and the 2016 Read Across America Poster Contest Winner

New York City
by John Windland
12th grade,
Muldrow High School
Muldrow, OK



1-cent Sales Tax FAQ

Oklahoma's Children, Our Future (OCOF) has filed a petition that will raise millions of dollars for public education, specifically to raise teacher pay. At press time, the group was waiting on the State Supreme Court to rule on challenges to the petition filed by the far-right wing think tank the Oklahoma Council on Public Affairs.

It is expected that the challenge will fail and OCOF will begin collecting signatures on an initiative – now known as State Question 779 – that would give the people of Oklahoma a chance to vote for a permanent, statewide 1-cent sales tax. Following are answers to Frequently Asked Questions about the petition and the proposal.

Why do we need this initiative?

We all know Oklahoma teachers are some of the lowest paid in the country. We're 49th in teacher pay, dead last in our region. Our education college graduates are better trained than most and are taking jobs in other states for much better starting pay. Our experienced teachers are leaving as well, either for better money teaching in another state or for better paying jobs in other professions.

Funding for education has been eroded by cutting the income tax rate and tough economic times. The only way to give education more money will be to identify another funding source. The statewide penny sales tax provides that source.

If passed, what will the proposed law do for education?

The 1-cent sales tax is expected to raise an estimated \$615 million annually, which will be directed to the newly created Education Improvement and Reform Fund. Common education would receive 69.5 percent of the total funding (an expected \$426 million), with *all* teachers receiving raises of at least \$5,000 (not just those on the State Minimum Salary Schedule). School districts would also receive funding for differential pay plans to address teacher shortages, money to implement legislative reforms aimed at increasing reading in early grades, high

school graduation rates and college and career readiness. How that money is used would be subject to bargaining for locals who negotiate.

In addition, higher ed would receive 19.2 percent of the tax collections to address rising tuition costs and increase college completion rates; career tech would receive 3.25 percent to increase workforce readiness and industry certifications for Oklahoma businesses; and the State Department of Education would receive 8 percent of the money to award grants for early learning opportunities for low-income and at-risk children.

Is there money designated for education support professionals?

The initiative does not specifically require money to be set aside for ESPs. It is our belief, though, that the sales tax will pump enough money into schools that they will have funds to improve support salaries.

What will keep the legislature from cutting education funding since it will be receiving new money through the sales tax?

The proposal, which will change the Oklahoma Constitution, specifically spells out that the money may not be used to supplant legislative appropriations to education.

When will I be able to sign the petition?

A challenge to the petition has been filed by the Oklahoma Council for Public Affairs, an extreme think tank that routinely bashes public education and pushes for vouchers. If the State Supreme Court finds in favor of OCOF, the group will have 90 days to gather signatures.

How many signatures will be needed?

Approximately 124,000.

Does OEA support the effort?

The OEA Board of Directors debated the pros and cons of the proposal at its October 31 meeting. The Board voted unanimously to support the petition.

Is the OEA concerned this is a regressive tax?

The Board discussed the ramifications of a sales tax on all income levels of Oklahomans. But we know that the legislature has not been willing and shows virtually no interest in developing a more fair tax plan. This proposal goes

around the legislature and lets the people of Oklahoma

vote to improve teacher pay. Money from the sales tax will help us recruit and retain great teachers, which in turn improves our schools.

We know that a good education is the best path out of poverty, and we realize that SQ 779 is the only legitimate proposal to add a new revenue stream dedicated to education.

How will OEA members be involved in the effort?

Our members will be asked to help gather signatures on the petition and to encourage their friends and family to vote for the measure once it appears on a ballot. Our hope is that all of our members will gather at least the signatures of friends and family, but there may be opportunities to collect signatures from the general public, as well. The good news is that OEA members will be paid for the signatures they collect, just the same as the professional signature gatherers will be paid. During the petition drive for SQ 744 in 2010, our members collected 25,000 signatures. If we can do that again, it will provide a big boost to the campaign.

Tough competition

Even great schools struggle to fill teaching jobs

By Doug Folks

Competition to hire quality teachers has never been tougher. For some schools, just finding someone willing to take on the job of working with children every day is nearly impossible.

For the second year in a row, Oklahoma started the school year with more than 1,000 teaching vacancies. The State Department of Education had approved nearly 1,000 emergency certificates this school year. And as the fall semester races to the winter break, schools are still trying to fill openings.

Oklahoma's teacher shortage has indiscriminately affected every district at every level. Math, science and special education are still hard positions to fill, but even elementary jobs are lacking candidates. In the past, elementary principals have had deep stacks of resumes from which to choose a quality teacher. Now, those same principals are hiring people they would not have interviewed just a few short years ago.

As teaching jobs go, working at Alice Robertson Junior High (ARJH) in Muskogee is a primo assignment. The district pays teachers better than most and ARJH has a committed, supportive faculty. The school is the only New Tech school in Oklahoma – a project-based learning site where students learn curriculum by creating projects or solving problems. Research shows that 95 percent of students who come out of a New Tech school graduate from college.

Principal Peggy Jones makes sure every new teacher has a mentor and the district provides them with five more days of professional development than veteran staff are required to attend.

"Our whole staff tries to take people in and nurture them and offer them a place," said Jones, who has more than 30 years of experience as an administrator and teacher. "We have a teacher trainer on staff, and a behavior interventionist and

we have help with classroom management. We have a real sense of community, a sense of family."

Even at such a wonderful, innovative school, Jones had difficulty trying to fill her school's open positions this fall.

"We were staffed for 650 students, but we had 710 enroll," she said of the beginning of school in August. "The first days of school we were bursting at the seams, so the district let me bring in another teacher. But this person had to be multi-certified and I had to create a class to handle the overflow."

Jones considers herself lucky to have filled the openings. "We have been very fortunate here to find some people who were moving back to this area (due to family issues or things that have allowed us to bring in good people," she said.

One of her teachers moved to Muskogee to be closer to his mother who was having health problems. He was an administrator in a New Mexico public school.

Charles Woodridge is a retired pediatrician from Chicago. Now he's teaching social studies and science at ARJH.

Social studies teacher Steve Thomas retired from Georgia Pacific, but always wanted to teach.

Jones started the year with some substitutes and one teacher on an emergency certification. One of her history teachers went to Austria over the summer and never came back, never even called. The school has only one counselor for all 710 students, but has someone who is expected to receive

an emergency certification in counseling very soon.

Jim Wilson, assistant superintendent for personnel, said MPS has two long-term subs working in the district and seven teachers on emergency certifications. He had four substitutes grow tired of long drives from other communities and quit.

Muskogee is well placed when it comes to recruiting college graduates. Babcock College has a teacher education program and sits in Muskogee city limits. Just 29 miles away in Tahlequah you'll find Northeastern State University, one of the state's bigger teacher education colleges. Attend a job fair at NSU and you'll find representatives not only from the larger Tulsa metro districts, but also schools from Arkansas, Texas and Kansas.

"Las Vegas recruits heavy from this area. So does Colorado," Jones said.

"Low pay; lot of stress," she says, pointing out the obvious reasons for Oklahoma's teacher shortage. "Teaching is not

See "Better opportunities" on Page 9



Alice Robertson Junior High Principal Peggy Jones and Muskogee EA building representative Mark Peters say the teacher shortage and cuts to education funding have created crowded classrooms. (Photo by Doug Folks)

A tale of two districts

Comparison shows Pocola at a big disadvantage

By Doug Folks

Jennifer Beutelschies was born and raised in Pocola, a town of about 4,000 people, located just south of I-40 and only a mile or so from the Arkansas state line. Co-President of Pocola CTA and now in her 10th year as a kindergarten teacher, teaching is all Jennifer ever wanted to do.

Julie Lang teaches fifth grade math and science down the hall from Jennifer at Pocola Elementary. She didn't realize she wanted to be a teacher until her son was born, and now she is in her 16th year in the classroom (12 in Pocola after four in Hulbert).

Jennifer and Julie both love their jobs, love Pocola and the kids they teach. As moms, they want only the best teachers for their own children, as well.

Less than seven miles away sits Elmer H. Cook Elementary School, one of 19 elementary schools in the Fort Smith Public School System. With 563 students, Cook is about 125 kids

larger than Pocola Elementary.

Look a little deeper and you find some significant differences in the two schools, mainly how much more teachers make in Fort Smith. New teachers at the Arkansas district start out making \$6,900 more than their Pocola counterparts, who are paid on the State Minimum Salary Schedule. While Oklahoma teachers can expect no more than a \$375 step each year, Fort Smith teachers move up the schedule at \$650 more at each step.

A teacher paid on the Oklahoma mini-



Jennifer Beutelschies stays at Pocola Elementary because it's home and she wants the best for her son, Aiden Bynum (right) and student Carlli Taylor. (Photo by Doug Folks)

mum will need to reach step 14 – \$37,650 – in order to make more than a first year teacher in Fort Smith.

With those facts in mind, it's easy to see why Pocola loses three or four teachers a year to Fort Smith public schools. The numbers also point out just how important it is that Oklahoma find some solutions to its dismal teacher pay problem.

"They don't even move," Jennifer says of the Pocola teachers who take jobs in Fort Smith. "The past three (colleagues who left) have said, 'I just couldn't turn down the money.'"

Julie agrees, "...every year we lose excellent teachers who cross over the state line."

A young girl from Kansas once famously said, "There's no place like home," and that's what keeps Jennifer and Julie from making the move to Arkansas.

"It's home for me. I was born and raised here; I went from pre-K all the way through high school graduation. My husband has begged me to go to Ft. Smith, actually," Jennifer said. "(But) it's just not the same. I feel at home here. Having great peers here is amazing."

While Julie loves her home, she worries about the effect low pay and Oklahoma's growing teacher shortage will have on her own children.

"I'm worried about the teacher shortage; teachers leaving the profession or leaving the state. I have four children and Jennifer has six; we want good, high-quality, caring teachers for our own kids, even if we're not the highest paying state. Our

kids still deserve the best," she said.

Julie points out several of her colleagues work full-time jobs to supplement their teaching incomes. Knowing that Fort Smith schools pay so much better, she believes the Oklahoma's Children, Our Future's proposed 1-cent sales tax could be a savior for Pocola Public Schools.

"I think (the measure) might help people choose to stay here," Julie said.

Fort Smith vs Pocola

6.9 – Miles between Pocola Elementary to Elmer H. Cook Elementary in Fort Smith, Ark.

\$37,500 – Beginning pay for a first year teacher at Fort Smith South High School

14 – Years it takes to make \$37,650 on the current Oklahoma Minimum Salary schedule

193 – Days in a teacher contract year in Fort Smith Public Schools

\$62,350 – Annual salary on step 21 (the top of the schedule) for a teacher with a master's degree in Fort Smith Public Schools

\$42,250 – Step 21 with a master's on the Oklahoma Minimum Salary Schedule

Task force looks to solve teacher shortage

By Doug Folks

Oklahoma's teacher shortage didn't happen overnight, so finding solutions quickly makes for a daunting challenge.

With school districts across the state reporting a combined 1,000 teaching vacancies to open the 2015-16 school year and an alarmingly high number of requests for emergency certificates, State Superintendent Joy Hofmeister had no time to waste. She convened the Teacher Shortage Task Force in late September, recruiting more than 80 people from education, business, government, philanthropic foundations, city and state chambers of commerce, Native American tribes and education associations.

The task force was given three charges:

- 1) Study the feasibility of proposed strategies,
- 2) Explore successful strategies from other states, and
- 3) Establish recommendations for legislation, policy and procedure at the state, regional, local and institution levels.

While the task force is a 12-month assignment, the most ambitious charge was to complete enough of its work by December so that appropriate bills could be written and introduced in time to be heard during the 2016 legislative session.

To reach its goals, three working sub-

groups were formed: Community, Internal State Department of Education/State Board of Education and Legislative/Regulatory. The groups first started meeting in early November and were scheduled to meet a dozen times by January.

Task force members were allowed to sit in on the subgroup of their choice. Vice President Katherine Bishop, OEA's representative on the task force, has chosen to sit in on every subgroup's meeting.

"A lot of times we hear the same issues when it comes to the teacher shortage," Bishop said. "It's interesting to hear what the community members are saying about their concerns compared to teacher certification issues and legislative issues. We know that money is absolutely the top priority. Teacher salaries are huge."

Other issues that have appeared to help the teacher shortage have their own hurdles to clear, she said. For instance, superintendents are finding some people they want to hire on emergency certificates are lacking specific requirements to gain an alternative certification.

"People with a degree in liberal arts or general studies don't have a pathway to alternative certification. That means those people have to go back to the college of

education for a waiver and the colleges are unwilling to allow that waiver because they have their own accreditation standards to meet," Bishop said.

"There has to be a point where you have standards," she said. "The level of standards for teacher certification shouldn't be lowered. We want the best qualified teachers in our schools."

Task force members were told how alternative certification is hurting colleges of education because students can bypass student teaching and other traditional teacher ed requirements and still gain a teaching license.

“The level of standards for teacher certification shouldn't be lowered. We want the best qualified teachers in our schools.”

"College students see 'alt cert' as an easy path. But we're having to spend more time and more resources to prepare them once they get into the classroom because they're lacking basic experience," Bishop said.

The work of the task force is important and urgent, she added, and time is short to find answers.

"It's finally hit that we've got to make some changes or we're going to continue going down this road of not attracting people into the profession," she said.

Better opportunities take good teachers away from education

Continued from Page 7

a job anyone goes into for money or prestige. Teachers who come and stay, it's on their heart, it's their calling. Most of my teachers have after-school responsibilities, or they tutor, or they have summer jobs."

In order to stay, teachers have to be willing to do what they can to survive on a teacher's salary.

"Unfortunately, some of the young people just wear out," she said. "They go into other things. And the other states around us pay more."

Mark Peters, a building representative and past president of the Muskogee Education Association, agrees.

"There are other opportunities that pay more right out of college," he said. "Today's college graduates have a lot of debt

and they have to figure out how to pay off that debt. They're willing to move."

Funding cuts to education and the teacher shortage mean larger class sizes at Robertson Junior High.

"We're so crammed into classrooms we're tripping over kids and backpacks," Peters said. "I've got six or seven more desks in my room this year than in recent years. And students realize there is less time for one-on-one help."

The Oklahoma's Children, Our Future coalition is hoping to give Muskogee and every other Oklahoma public school a better chance at recruiting and retaining great teachers. The group is proposing a change to the state constitution by adding a state-wide 1-cent sales tax dedicated to public education, and specifically raising teacher

Giving back

OEA members and their students take time to help others

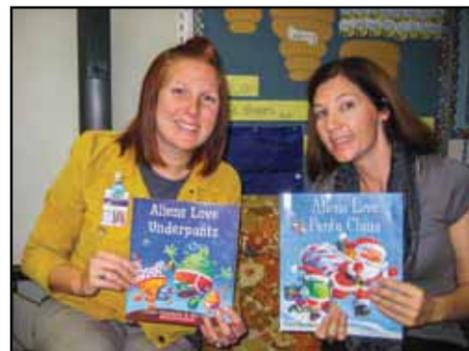


Tulsa Edison Preparatory School senior Maima Clarke is holding one of 500 "Tommy's Elves" that will be created by students in the school's leadership program for holiday distribution to students who attend Tulsa's McClure Elementary. This marks the second year for the program, coordinated by TCTA member Susan Griffin.

This fall marked the first time members of the Noble Education Support Professional Association donated a gift basket for auction at Hubbard Elementary School's Fall Carnival. Proceeds from the basket and from candy sales by NESPA members will go toward the school's seasonal canned goods drive and for supporting the high school's food closet. School counselor Susan Winkler is pictured auctioning off the NESPA gift basket held up by Noble high school student Matthew Baudendiseel.



Laura Franklin and Patty Winegardner, Duncan Education Support Association members who work at Duncan Middle School, show off a selection of puzzles and games that will be included in contributions by DESA members from the district's middle and high schools for distribution in Duncan nursing homes during the holiday season. DESA members in the city's elementary schools will be donating a variety of supplies and food cards to a children's shelter.



Tulsa CTA members Sara Smith and Lisa Williams hold the books they read to their Kendall-Whittier Elementary pre-K classes as part of a seasonal charitable project in which their students donate new underwear to the Tulsa Day Center for the Homeless.



TCTA 2nd Vice President and OEA Zone Director Jennifer Thornton counts change donated by Emerson Elementary students for the Grinch Project. For 12 years, students have given pocket change to buy stocking stuffers, pajamas, socks, underwear and a holiday meal voucher for a needy family selected by one of Emerson's social workers. Photo by Mike Simons, Tulsa World.



Sapulpa High School NAACP student chapter members get into the holiday spirit by collecting socks and canned goods that they donate to the city's needy during the season. Pictured (left to right) Breion Williams, Abigail Darden, Breanna Lindsey, Taylor Watkins and Nancy Valdez. United Sapulpa ESP member and OEA Human and Civil Rights Committee member Mattie Smith-Broom is a chapter sponsor who coordinates the project.

Holiday traditions are precious

Family time is the best tradition for Alicia

"Tradition" – my favorite song from "Fiddler on the Roof," an important word in Oklahoma football, what reminds us of the love of family and friends. I hold a good many traditions dear – especially around the holiday season.

When we were young, my three brothers and I colored ornaments for our Christmas tree. Those ornaments have been carefully placed on the tree and then packed up each year for more than 35 years. As new members married into the family, we had them color something for the tree. Of course we didn't tell my sister-in-law Jennifer what it was for and she colored the Cathedral of Notre Dame, which we still razz her about as she puts it on the tree – hey, it's tradition!

Now, for the actual decorating of the tree (except for my brother Chris and his family, who live in Florida) we still gather at Dad's house, have pizza, move the mouse in the pocket of the countdown calendar (because it drives Justin, the baby of the family, CRAZY – so now it's a tradition), and decorate the tree.

As we pull out the ornaments, we remember our grandparents with ornaments inherited. We remember school teachers like Mr. McGargle as we hang school-made projects. And we honor each other by filling hearts with the love and laughter of true family togetherness. Finally, it's the traditional picture time – and I won't even describe my brothers' annual candy cane photos! As we drape tinsel on the tree and ourselves, dad gathers us together and snaps the traditional tinsel-head photo.



Alicia's brothers, from left Justin, Nick and Greg, with Alicia, her daughter Kenna, husband John and sister-in-law Jennifer.

As I reflected for this article, I realized my favorite holiday tradition is the extra family time we get to spend together. Decorating the tree at dad's, extra phone calls to get info on "the perfect gift," Christmas Eve candlelight services together (and lighting an extra candle to represent Chris and his family), spending time with my husband's family in Pawhuska, and the slowing of busy work and school schedules that free up the time to truly BE with family ... FAMILY TIME is my favorite tradition.

By President Alicia Priest

Santa's visit goes back 70 years for Katherine's family

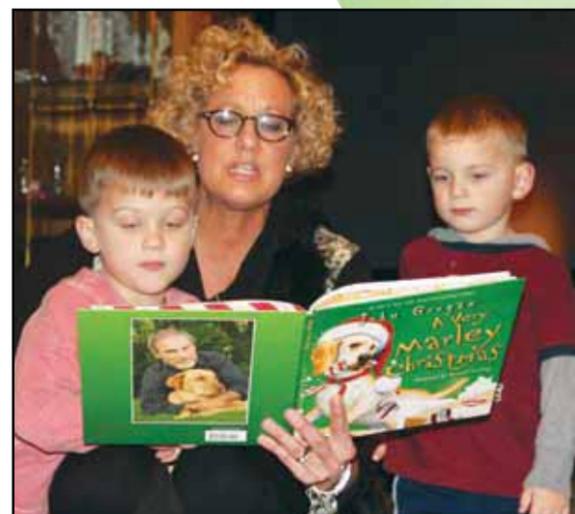
Rap, rap, rap at the door meant one thing – Santa Claus! This has been a family tradition for more than 70 years and started when my mother was a young girl. Every Christmas Eve my family would journey to my grandparent's farm in Checotah to be with all of our relatives. The smells and sounds of this special time are embedded in my mind.

Our day was full of children playing, men playing dominos and my grandmother, mother and aunts cooking. After dinner concluded, we would gather around my mother as she read a special book and then we would sing our favorite Christmas carols. When we started singing "Here Comes Santa Claus" this was our signal that our guest of honor was about to arrive. The door would open with a loud swoosh and a hearty "Ho-Ho-Ho." Then the man in the red suit would walk through the door.

Santa was masterful as he handed out goodies to the small children and gave hugs and warm wishes to everyone. As quick as he came – he would be gone.

Today, we gather at my parents' house, and even though it is not at the farm, Santa still knows where to stop by for a visit. Christmas is such a special time of the year and I hope that your family traditions bring you all the love and joy of the season.

By Vice President Katherine Bishop



Katherine Bishop reads to her grandsons, Lincoln (left) and Ralston Stepanek.

Not all insurance policies are created equal

Research the power of the liability coverage

By Heath Merchen
Associate General Counsel

(This is the second article in a two-part series on educator liability insurance. You can read the first article, "Uncovering the truths of liability insurance," in the Legal & Advocacy section of okea.org.)

If you were comparing pickup trucks, two particular models might both be just as pretty on the outside, but before buying, you would surely look under their hoods to see which one has more power. The same kind of care should be taken when comparing educator liability insurance. Before committing to the ride, you should look under the hood of that policy.

The first thing you should do is ask for a copy of the insurance policy. You would not buy a homeowner's or automobile insurance policy without first obtaining a copy of the policy and its terms – and an educator employment liability (EEL) policy is no different, except that there are vast differences in what various EEL policies provide and what they cover.

You should not settle for a "summary" or a "comparison" of a specific policy – you should obtain a copy of the certificate of insurance or the declarations contained in a particular policy. An insurer is required to provide to its insured the terms and conditions of the coverage bargained for in the insurance contract. So, it should immediately raise a red flag if you are told that you can't get a copy of a certificate of insurance.

The NEA EEL policy is provided to every member as part of their OEA membership and to every prospective member that wants a copy of the policy. There is nothing

to hide and the certificate of insurance is relatively easy to read and understand.

Second, you should review what is covered and the policy limits for the various coverages contained in the policy. For example, the NEA EEL policy provides coverage up to \$1 million per occurrence for any claims against a school employee that arise out of their education employment activities. There are no aggregate limits to this coverage. In other words, if somehow a judgment was entered for \$1 million against every OEA member in a particular year, the NEA EEL policy would cover all of those judgments, regardless of the cumulative total.

Other policies contain an aggregate limit for the amount of judgments that will be paid in a particular year. For instance, an EEL policy offered by the American

Association of Educators

(AAE) and underwritten by Savers Property &

Casualty Insurance Company contains a \$2 million aggregate for all acts and omissions during the policy period. So, if somehow a judgment was entered for \$1 million against every person covered by that policy, the policy only pays claims up to the \$2 million aggregate, not the total amount of claims made. So, while you may think you have \$2 million in liability protection; that is true only if no other claims are made during the policy period. Aggregate policy limits are common in these policies and it is important to understand what coverages are limited and how.

Third, you should be wary of any "comparisons" of the "legal protection" afforded by an insurance policy with the other legal services provided by the OEA. Those comparisons likely mean that the other group is offering its "legal protec-

tion" through an insurance policy and not through the organization. For example, the AAE policy mentioned above contains coverage for defense against adverse employment action, with relatively low limits of coverage. Under that policy, you are limited in the amount of fees that are available for having an attorney attend a due process hearing before a local school board and you are limited in the amount of fees that are available to pursue additional legal action.

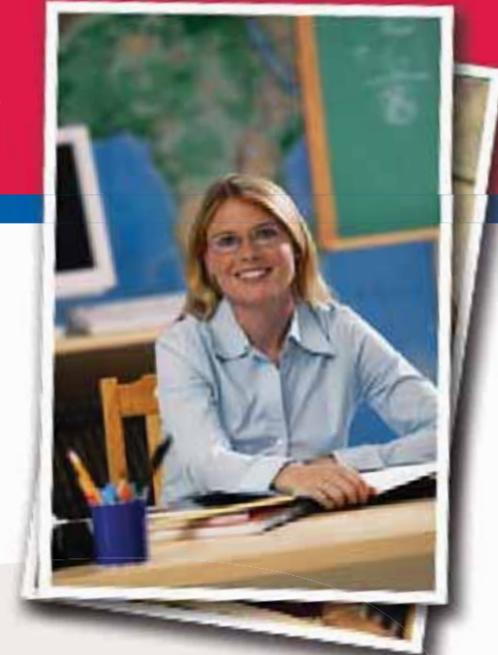
Contrast those limitations to the legal services that are provided to OEA members for defense of adverse employment action through the Kate Frank/DuShane Legal Services Program. Frank/DuShane has no limits to the amount of fees available for a board hearing or other litigation. Knowing that may be why other groups want to provide a "comparison" instead of the actual EEL policy language.

The legal services provided by the OEA to its members are not provided through an insurance policy; they are provided by and through the OEA and those services are not diminished by coverage limits that may be contained in an insurance policy. The legal professional and personal legal services offered by OEA to its members are totally separate from the NEA EEL policy that provides for the liability protection available to every OEA member. You should make sure that you are comparing "apples to apples" when reviewing an EEL policy and/or any comparison of the OEA legal programs to the "legal protection" that is supposedly available with other groups.

Finally, like most anything else, the age old adage that "you get what you pay for" is equally applicable when reviewing these policies and any comparisons of the legal protection that is available through the OEA and other groups or organizations. Protect yourself – ask the right questions and understand what those policies provide – and you will be thankful in the event you ever need those protections.

If you have questions about any of the coverages contained in the NEA EEL policy or any of legal programs offered by the OEA to its members, contact the Center for Legal and Corporate Services or your Regional Advocacy UniServ Specialist.

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