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 we propose a 1-cent sales tax cure our teacher shortage problem?

1-cent sales tax FAQ – Pg 6
Even great schools struggle to fill jobs – Pg 7
A tale of two districts – Pg 8
Task force looks to solve teacher shortage – Pg 9

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

Also....
Pg 2 – Awards nominations due Jan. 15
Pg 3 – Get Connected
Pg 11 – Holiday traditions are precious
Pg 12 – Not all insurance policies are created equal

4

It’s time to find a new route
By Alicia Priest
OEA President

A s 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 McCr Carroll, 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 highways. 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. McCr Carroll. 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 SQ 744 and required 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 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 DaVall 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/ conference.

Oklahoma Education Association
December/January 2015-16 / Pg 1
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/oeaawards) 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 to them at 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 in the political arena.

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.

Tuskeahoma Brown Miller Award – Presented to an individual 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.

Glen 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 impact 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.

Five 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.
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

3rd - 5th Grade Winners

1st Place - Japan
by Katolonna Rambach
5th grade, Burns Elementary
Oklahoma City, OK

2nd Place - New York City
by Cailyn Bach
5th grade, Mannford Elementary
Mannford, OK

3rd Place - Egypt
by Eanest Mowad
4th grade, Northridge Elementary
Oklahoma City, OK

9th - 12th 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 - Egypt
by Easton Memoli
4th grade, Northridge Elementary
Oklahoma City, OK

6th - 8th Grade Winners

1st Place - Japan
by Kataleena 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

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

Special thanks to OEA members & art teachers Katy Cook, Broken Arrow EA, and Sherry Brady, Claremore CTA, for judging this year’s poster contest.
Tough competition

Even great schools struggle to fill teaching jobs

By Doug Folks

C ompetition 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 Muskogee — a project-based learning site where students learn curriculum by creating projects or solving problems. Research shows that 95 percent of students who graduate from New Tech schools are hiring people they would not have interviewed just a few short years ago.

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Jennifer Beutelschies was born and raised in Pocola, a town of about 4,000 people, located just south of the Arkansas state line. Co-President of Pocola CTA and past president of the Muskogee Education Association, 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)
Giving back

OEA members and their students take time to help others

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 Bandendisel. This marks the second year for the program, coordinated by TCTA 2nd Vice President and OEA Zone Director Jennifer Thornton. Also pictured is Noble Education Support Professional Association’s Mattie Smith-Broom, United Sapulpa ESP member and OEA Human and Civil Rights Committee member Mattie Smith-Broom.

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 CTAs 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. 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 Bandendisel. This marks the second year for the program, coordinated by TCTA 2nd Vice President and OEA Zone Director Jennifer Thornton. Also pictured is Noble Education Support Professional Association’s Mattie Smith-Broom, United Sapulpa ESP member and OEA Human and Civil Rights Committee member Mattie Smith-Broom.

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.

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

“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 pickled 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 raize 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 time 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.

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
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 sure 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 home-owner’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. If you do 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, should it 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 protection” 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.

Helping to secure OEA Members’ Financial Security Since 1960
American Fidelity Assurance Company is committed to the education community. We are proud to offer the following products and services to Oklahoma Education Association members:

- Cancer Insurance*
- Accident Only Insurance**
- Life Insurance***
- Tax-Deferred Annuities**
- Disability Income Insurance
- Section 125 Plans

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*These products may contain limitations, exclusions, and waiting periods.
**Not eligible under Section 125
***This product is inappropriate for people who are eligible for Medicaid coverage. All products may not be available in all states.
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- **Exclusive discounts** not available to the general public.
- **WOWPoints** for purchases that you can redeem like cash.
- **NEA Click & Save** benefits to share with 4 friends and family.