

# FOCUS

FOR THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE OKLAHOMA EDUCATION ASSOCIATION - AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2016

ESSA Brings New Opportunities

## JUMPING BACK INTO SCHOOL

Record Number of OEA Members Running for Office



**6 WAYS**  
to stay  
inspired



## THE EDUCATION FOCUS

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Audra Cornett, Inola ACT president, with Michelle Norman, colleague and 4th grade language arts teacher.



Photo by Lauren Burkholder.

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# Back-to-school rituals reach Olympic proportions

By Alicia Priest  
OEA President

Many of us began the school year already in a sleep deficit because of the Olympics – staying up way too late, eyes glazed over, yet glued to the TV as we cheer on the Final Five, Michael Phelps and others. None of our Olympic athletes got there by chance. They had a family, coaches and some amazing inner drive.

As I watched, I noticed most of them have some quirky pre-competition rituals. Have you seen them? Phelps flaps his arms the same way before each race. Gymnast Aly Raisman mentally acts out each tumbling pass before a routine. You can see her work through it as she bobs her head around. There's a diver who does a little dance before and after each dive. Usain Bolt, cocky in his routine, is still fun to watch (he can afford to be cocky with his record).

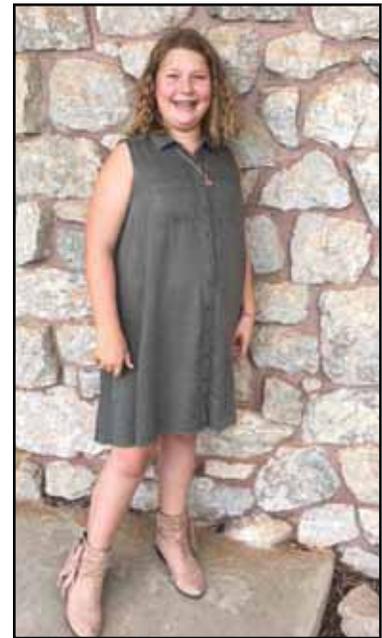
Rituals or superstitions that revolve around winning aren't unique to the Olympics. My husband has a ritual of when we leave, where we park, eat and the path we walk to every single OU home football game – for the last 23 years! I can't tell you the specifics because it may ruin the season and I just can't take that kind of heat.

But, I digress. Traditions, rituals and superstitions also come into play in our jobs in the education community. I've seen many discussed on social media beginning with the school-related dreams popping up a few weeks back, to the traditional first-day-of-school pictures posted for ourselves and our kids.

I asked on Facebook for input on back-to-school rituals. Here's what some of you said ... naps, new outfits, dancing with students and nothing, because each year is unique. However, a couple struck me. One from a parent who carried forth a now third generation tradition of singing a certain song on the first day. My friend Alison reflected on how she dreaded the song as a child; but now finds it a treat to wake her kids up with it. What a great tradition!

Another that came up multiple times was prayer for students, staff and community. This hit home with me as I had an amazing group of mentors who gathered at Myers Elementary in Yukon to begin each year in prayer. I hope this tradition continues as retirements and school moves have changed the face of the faculty there.

All of the back-to-school posts fill my spirit and fuel my passion to start my 23rd year in public education. As I crisscrossed the state at all of the local association



*First day of seventh grade for Kenna Priest.*

events in August, I was excited about the potential for this school year. You all remind me about all of the good that is done in our schools each and every day! The excitement in your eyes about the potential in your students charges my enthusiasm and makes me miss being in the classroom and taking part in our school culture of camaraderie.

My resolve to make a difference by talking about what is going on in education is set. With that comes my pledge to walk/call/talk about and VOTE for pro-public education candidates and SQ 779. I hope you'll join me and set aside time to add this to your routine this school year.

As you go through your rituals and routines this year, remember that what you do matters. You are educating, feeding and transporting the next doctor, plumber, NBA all-star, cook or teacher. OEA, let's make this the BEST YEAR EVER!!!

## The Education Focus

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# 6 ways teachers can stay inspired

By Barbara Blackburn

*Originally printed by MiddleWeb.com on July 26, 2016.*

Too often, I talk to teachers who have lost their motivation. They are overwhelmed by paperwork, frustrated with discipline problems and feel as though no one values their expertise – evidenced by the fact that they are told more than they are asked.

You can stop the negative before you sink too far, but you must focus on yourself. Taking care of ourselves means taking time to rest, getting enough exercise and having balance in our lives. But it also means being inspired about who we are and what we do. Here are six key ways I incorporate inspiration in my life.

## 1. Build a Positive Memory File

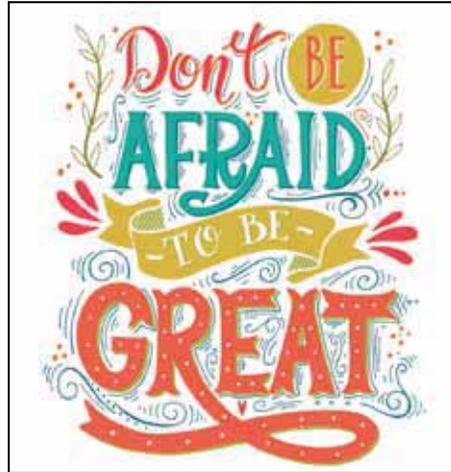
You've probably received a thank-you note, a card or a picture drawn by a student. Did you save it? I kept a file folder in my desk with those and other reminders of times students gave me positive feedback. I remember one time it was just a scrap of paper with a smile drawn on it given to me by one of my most mischievous students. My first teaching job after graduation was with sixth graders. I still have a note from Tara, who mailed me a letter thanking me for being such a good teacher and helping her learn.

Start today building a memory file with pictures, emails, notes or anything that acknowledges the good work you do as a teacher. Then on those days when things get tough, go to your file and look through it.

## 2. Read Books That Inspire You

When I was teaching, I kept a copy of "The Thread That Runs So True" on my desk. It is Jesse Stuart's true story of his teaching career. I originally read it because my dad told me to read it, but I re-read it because it taught me about all the power of being a teacher.

The reason I kept it on my desk and read selected portions regularly was because it reminded me that, on my toughest day, it could be worse. Jesse Stuart stumbled into being a teacher after accidentally going into the wrong room at his high school. Instead of his regular class, the room was being



used to administer the teacher's exam; so he took the test and passed.

Then he asked to be placed in the one-room school where his sister had taught. She left her job after she was physically beaten by one of the students. Jesse faced the same challenge: a 16-year-old first grader who believed this was his school and no teacher would tell him what to do. To keep his job, he had to fight the student after school, help bandage the hurt student and clean up the blood because there was no custodian.

Although I would never condone physically fighting with a student, by the end of my second year of teaching, I realized that every teacher has to fight to do the job effectively. You may have to fight paperwork, unmotivated students or even your own feelings of frustration and depression.

## 3. Watch Movies That Inspire You

I also love watching movies about teachers and students to be reminded that teachers make a difference. My favorite two movies are older: "Conrack," Pat Conroy's story of his teaching experiences on an island off the South Carolina coast, and "The Sound of Music," in which a nontraditional teacher taught children in one family about music and life.

A more recent favorite is "The Emperor's Club," which I saw at one of the lowest points in my university teaching career. A student plagiarized a project. The student was my advisee, and I was supervising her final project.

Watching "The Emperor's Club" was cathartic. In the movie, Kevin Kline plays a private school teacher who deals with a

similar issue with his students. It profiles a situation with students competing for a prize; then the movie fast forwards a number of years when Kline's character realizes that the student made a choice. It really was the student's choice, not his.

It was an epiphany for me: As teachers, we have tremendous positive influence over our students, but there are limitations to that influence. Students can and do make their own way, sometimes because of our influence, and sometimes despite our influence. And the joy and sorrow of teaching is exactly that; we do all we can do, and sometimes our hearts break.

## 4. Find Everyday Heroes

When you were growing up, did you have a hero? In a world full of negativity, we all need heroes. You can motivate yourself by reminding yourself of the everyday teacher-heroes in your life.

The teachers I work with regularly are heroes who daily do whatever they can to make a difference with their students. Although there are too many to list, I want to tell you about Marie. She came into my class one night and was quieter than usual. That day she had found a flip book in which someone had written death threats to the teacher. She was convinced that the student in whose desk it was found was innocent, but she couldn't imagine who would have done this.

The notebook was filled with comments no teacher should ever have to read. I sent her home and talked with her every day that week. What struck me the most was that, throughout all of her fear and frustration, she still was optimistic about that student's potential. She never really considered not teaching her students.

## 5. Surround Yourself With Motivating Thoughts

Another important thing I do is create an environment filled with motivating thoughts and pictures. I collect quotes by famous and not-so-famous people on a variety of topics such as persistence, success and focus. I write some of them in my journal, I put some up on my bulletin board or my computer screen, my file cabinet, desk – anywhere I will see them regularly.

*See "Motivation" on Page 11*



get  
**connected**



Lauren S. Burkholder  
Social Media Specialist  
lburkholder@okea.org

## Keep Your Classroom Connected: Best Apps for Classroom Communication

Organization and communication are key for back-to-school preparation, and OEA wants to help you start off on the right foot. Social media can be a great tool, but if you have ever attended a professional development seminar on the subject, you also know it can be misused and misinterpreted. That's why we have put together this list of the best functional, user-friendly and FREE platforms you can use to effectively and legally communicate with your students and their parents.



### **BuzzMob:**

- Use push notifications to share assignments
- Chat with parents using multi-language translation
- Available on all smartphones, tablets and desktops
- Send updates and reminders for homework and exams
- Add and share events with parents by uploading photos and videos



### **ClassDojo:**

- Students can create a digital portfolio
- Send students feedback on their assignments
- Teachers and parents can privately message each other – no need to exchange phone numbers
- Give individual students a “digital high-five” for class participation or reinforce classroom and school values



### **Remind:**

- Send daily homework assignments
- Schedule and send reminders for classes, clubs or sports
- Schedule and send assignment deadline reminders
- Send permission slips and classroom documents directly to students' and parents' devices



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# Passage of ESSA brings prospects

## Local associations need to open dialogue with districts now

The December 2015 Congressional passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) comes at an opportune time for state educators. The measure will provide additional support for the Oklahoma Education Association's ongoing statewide initiatives to address Oklahoma's punitive and fiscally wasteful achievement testing regimen, inadequate funding for public schools and serious shortage of teachers.

ESSA is the reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and replaces No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Under the new federal education requirements, students will have more opportunities for support, tools and time to learn. It provides educators with an unprecedented multitude of ways to make sure that educators have the resources needed to make sure their students learn and achieve in a great public school, no matter their ZIP code.

OEA has been a voice and stakeholder for many years to make sure that legislation passed at the federal and state level is implemented focusing fully on the needs of every student. In the recently completed session of the Oklahoma Legislature, OEA members were active participants in helping pass legislation that eliminated End of Instruction (EOI) exams and reduced the amount and severity of consequences of student achievement tests. Also, members helped pass legislation that removes the quantitative portion of test results from consideration in teacher evaluations. Yet, work remains to be done.

It is vital that locals and members begin conversations in their districts now to ensure that the "committee of practitioners" ESSA calls for is created in each community and that every aspect of the law is implemented with fidelity, including full participation from educators, parents and community members.

In January 2016, OEA President Alicia Priest created the ESSA Advisory Panel, composed of association leaders, members and staff, cochaired by OEA Vice Presi-

dent Katherine Bishop and Mid-Del Association of Classroom Teachers President Lori Burriss. Their charge is to provide information and support for OEA members and local association action around ESSA. The panel has met regularly in both face-to-face and virtual sessions, working to provide focus on important aspects of ESSA pertinent to all OEA members, including the following issues:

### What are some of the major changes reflected in ESSA?

Annual yearly progress (AYP) has been removed from ESSA, and labeling schools as "failing" or other derogatory titles used by the federal government have been eliminated. Interventions that lack research-backed evidence of effectiveness and are rigid in nature have been eliminated. The "race to the top" initiative has been eliminated. No longer will accountability measures be based solely upon standardized testing.

### What about teacher evaluation?

A major piece of ESSA is bringing decision-making and control to the state level. Student outcomes designated under previous federal law are no longer required as the core measurement system. Under ESSA, states will determine if and what student performances are to be implemented in teacher evaluation systems.

### How will ESSA impact student assessment?

State-level testing of students in the areas of reading and math will occur in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school. ESSA retains the required 95 percent benchmark for participation in state-level testing, but testing results and data will be better segmented at the school level to provide teachers with rich data to guide instruction. Further, data from subgroups of students will be provided. Examples include ESL, exceptional education, ethnic minorities and students living in poverty.

### How have accountability systems changed?

States will design accountability systems under ESSA that must include some core assessments, achievement measures, English proficiency and student support indicators. States are required to set college and career-ready standards with associated goals and targets. School improvement plans and interventions must be evidence-based and address resource inequities. Finally, ESSA prohibits the U.S. Secretary of Education from mandating accountability parameters.

### How does ESSA define and contribute to teacher quality?

The descriptor "highly qualified" is now a thing of the past. The former Teacher Incentive Fund, now called the Teacher and School Leader Innovation Program, will provide grants to districts

*Continued on next page*



# Filling a need

## Inola teacher opens learning center after district moves to four-day week

By Lauren Burkholder

When facing the impossible choice between increasing class sizes or switching to a four-day school week, Inola Public Schools chose what it saw as the lesser of two evils. The Rogers County school district joined about 130 Oklahoma schools that will hold classes four days a week this year.

Many people might see that fifth day as an extra day off, but not Audra Cornett, a special education teacher for 3- through 9-year olds at Inola Elementary. After realizing the lack of child care options in Inola, Cornett felt a tug on her heart and knew she could make a difference in her community.

“After meeting with one of my student’s parents and hearing about her concerns of the upcoming shortened school year and child care for her son, I felt the impact this would have on our community,” said Cornett, president of the Inola ACT. “I drove by the old day care building several times and went home and told my husband I needed to do this.”

With the support of her family, she established a limited liability company and began work on the JumpStart Learning Center with her friend and colleague Michelle Norman, a fourth-grade language arts teacher in Inola. Open to kindergarten through sixth graders, the center is open from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. every Monday, with additional hours before and after school the rest of the week. The center had 18 students enrolled to start the year, but hoped for more in the coming weeks.

A shorter school week also meant extending the school day until 4:15 p.m. and longer holiday breaks, requiring parents to make arrangements for those days as well. JumpStart will be open to cover the extra days of fall break, Thanksgiving and winter breaks.



Photo by Lauren Burkholder.

*Audra Cornett works with kindergartner Ashton Clodfelter on the first day of classes at the JumpStart Learning Center.*

Cornett and her husband invested some of their own money into the facility, and their families have pitched in to prepare the center for students. But when the community found out what she was doing, donations came pouring in to make sure students had everything they needed to start the school year. Toys, school supplies, books, blankets, pillows and furniture began showing up.

Cool Enterprises, a local air conditioning company, donated its services to get the heat and air in the facility back in working order. The school district also has offered the center several of its

**See “JumpStart offers” on Page 11**

### *Continued from previous page*

for implementing performance pay and other programs designed to promote teacher quality improvement. In addition, ESSA provides a research-based definition of professional development constructed by teachers, and literacy and STEM resources are included for providing additional assistance and training for teachers.

### **How does ESSA address public school funding?**

ESSA gives local educational agencies (initially, up to 50 approved by the U.S. Secretary of Education) flexibility to consolidate a significant share of state and local education funding, along with certain federal dollars, to create a single school funding system based on weighted

per-pupil allocations for low-income students, students with disabilities, English-language learners and otherwise disadvantaged students. Additionally, the Title I funding formulas remain intact, while changes have been made to Title II funding, which benefit states with large rural populations. Maintenance of effort will remain in place, requiring states to maintain appropriate investment in order to receive federal funds.

### **ESSA Resources/Opportunities**

- The National Education Association’s website provides abundant ESSA resources, including [nea.org/essabegins](http://nea.org/essabegins) and [getessaright.org](http://getessaright.org).
- NEA edCommunities – [mynea360.org](http://mynea360.org) – is an online community of associa-

tion members where information can be shared about a wide array of education topics, including ESSA.

- A survey about ESSA and other resources on the Oklahoma State Department of Education website, [sde.ok.gov/sde/essa](http://sde.ok.gov/sde/essa).
- The U.S. Department of Education provides comprehensive ESSA resources at [ed.gov/essa](http://ed.gov/essa).

*If you have questions regarding ESSA or need help making sure your local association and community become integral partners with your district in the implementation of ESSA, contact OEA Vice President Katherine Bishop at [kbishop@okea.org](mailto:kbishop@okea.org) or 800/522-8091.*

# The Education Caucus

An unprecedented number of candidates running on a pro-public education platform filed for state legislative races this year. In fact, more than 70 pro-public education candidates filed for office, including nearly 20 with direct ties to the Oklahoma Education Association, the Oklahoma Retired Educators Association or the Student Oklahoma Education Association. Some candidates didn't make it out of the primary election, but on the next three pages you'll find a photo, some biographical information (including websites where you can register to volunteer or donate to the candidate) and a short statement from those still in their respective races. All of these candidates are members, were lifelong members before retiring or, in a couple of cases, are married to current members. This information does not reflect recommendations for any these candidates. The OEA Fund for Children and Public Education is in the process of interviewing candidates, and we will share the Fund's recommendations in the October/November issue.

## Karen Gaddis (D)

OREA Member

HD 75, Tulsa County

Retired teacher, Tulsa Public Schools;  
karengaddis.com

*Karen will face Rep. Dan Kirby (R) in the general election.*



"What has education done for me?

- Raised me out of poverty
- Opened doors of opportunity to me
- Broadened my horizons and life experiences
- Provided me a satisfying career that has opened doors for others
- Provided me leadership opportunities

This is why I am willing to step forward and work for the betterment of education at all levels in Oklahoma. Funding education must be our #1 priority. Save Our Schools!"

## Rhonda Harlow (D)

OEA Board Member

SD 19, Alfalfa, Grant, Garfield and Kay Counties

Instructional coach, Enid Public Schools; harlow4oksenate.com

*Rhonda will face Roland Pederson (R) and Whitney Hall (I) in the general election.*



"I believe elected officials are tasked with making Oklahoma a better place, and under our current leadership it is not happening. Education is foundational to a productive and thriving society, and building an economy depends on it. Oklahoma is in crisis mode and must look not only for short-term fixes but also for long-term solutions. It is time to focus on Oklahoma's future – our children – and fully fund and support public education."

## Michelle Bray, (D)

OEA Member

HD 49, Carter, Love and Marshall Counties

Social studies teacher, National Board Certified, Madill High School;  
michellebraydistrict49.com

*Michelle will face Rep. Tommy Hardin (R) in the general election.*



"I am Michelle Bray, and I want to be an agent of change in the Oklahoma Legislature. My goals to make education the number one priority are: 1) increasing per pupil spending; 2) promote and encourage the teaching profession by respect and increasing teacher pay; 3) creating an environment for career opportunities for all Oklahomans. Our education system is what attracts industry. Let's make Oklahoma the place where we put our children first."

## Macy Gleason (D)

SOEA Member

HD 29, Creek and Tulsa Counties  
Education Major, Oklahoma State University; macygleason.com

*Macy will face Kyle Hilbert (R) in the general election.*



"I am running for the Oklahoma House of Representatives because I have given my heart to serving students. Education is central to creating a healthy economy, job market and future for our state. In order to provide our students with a great education, we must devote ourselves to finding responsible solutions for fully funding our Oklahoma schools. I look forward to not only making a difference in my classroom, but at the Capitol as well."

## Judy Mullen Hopper (D)

OREA Member

SD 47, Oklahoma City

Retired special education teacher, Putnam City; judymullenhopper.com

*Judy will face Sen. Greg Treat (R) and Steven Weber (I) in the general election.*



"I am Judy Mullen Hopper, Democratic candidate for Senate District 47. As a veteran special education teacher of 35 years, I will take my knowledge and experience to the Capitol. I will diligently search for new sources of revenue to adequately fund public education. I will strive to make changes to our current accountability of students and educators, providing a more creative environment for learning."

## Kevin McDonald (D)

OEA member  
SD 41, Oklahoma County  
English teacher, Edmond Memorial  
High School; mcdonaldforok.com  
*Kevin will face Adam Pugh (R) and  
Richard Prawdzienski (L) in the  
general election.*



“My first goal for education in Oklahoma would be to stop the legislation that has created such concern and heartache for teachers over the last several years, instead focusing on the reforms that educators actually want. This will allow teachers to spend their spring teaching instead of having to guard themselves against harmful policies. Then we must address the difficult task of creating revenue equal to state services and solve the funding challenges facing education.”

## Charles L. Murdock (D)

OREA Member  
HD 51, Grady, McClain and Stephens  
Counties  
Retired athletic director/  
assistant principal, Marlow;  
facebook.com/people/  
Charles-L-Murdock/100011804592404  
*Charles will face Rep. Scott Biggs (R)  
in the general election.*



“Charles Murdock is a retired 32-year veteran educator as a classroom teacher, coach and administrator, retiring from and still living in Marlow. He is running on an education-based platform, including adequate raises for teachers and support personnel. He is firmly committed to long-term, sustainable funding for public schools. He is equally committed to fending off various agencies wanting to divert teacher retirement funds for their own uses.”

## Darla Milligan (D)

OEA Member  
HD 12, Wagoner County  
2nd Grade teacher, Okay Elementary;  
darlamilligan.com  
*Darla will face Kevin McDugle (R) in  
the general election.*



“As an educator in the state legislature, I would work to promote a greater understanding of the struggles that teachers face in the classroom and that our students face without the resources they deserve. Our leaders must take responsibility for ensuring that our schools and educators are well funded, but also that they are valued for their service to our communities, and that’s why I am running for State Representative.”

## Jack A. Reavis (D)

OEA Member  
SD 9, Cherokee and Muskogee  
Counties  
History teacher, Muskogee High  
School; jackreavis.com  
*Jack will face OREA member Dewayne  
Pemberton (R) in the general election.*



“The current budget issues are driving this campaign season and public education is not the only core service that is being catastrophically impacted. The current leadership has driven our state to near bankruptcy and if teachers and people who truly support public education do not get out and vote then we can only blame ourselves. I will advocate for reducing and the removal of corporate incentives which will generate more money for public education.”

## Shawn P. Sheehan (I)

OEA Member  
SD 15, Cleveland and Oklahoma  
Counties  
Special education teacher, Norman  
High School; facebook.com/  
sheehanforok  
*Shawn will face Sen. Rob Standridge  
(R) in the general election.*



“This election, we as educators have a chance to make real change for the direction of our state. I encourage educators across the state to get involved, volunteer, donate and most importantly to vote on November 8th. We have to support our candidates across the state who are working hard to make a difference for our schools, our kids and our profession.”

## John Waldron (D)

OEA Member  
SD 39, Tulsa County  
Social studies teacher, Booker T.  
Washington High School, Tulsa;  
waldron4ok.com  
*John will face Dave Rader (R) in the  
general election.*



“I want to see support for public education restored in Oklahoma. That means hiring back teachers to reduce class sizes, compensating teachers at the regional average and halting the flood of anti-teacher and anti-public education bills. I will oppose further reductions in the common budget, excessive testing requirements, class size increases, reductions in textbook and technology resources and other unnecessary barriers to education success. We must guarantee all students access to high-quality public schools.”

## Tom Bates (D)

A former history teacher in Edmond, Tom's wife, Marsha, is a 34-year member of OEA and an elementary media specialist in Bixby. She also is a past president of the Bixby EA.

HD 80, Tulsa

[bates4ok80.wixsite.com/2016](http://bates4ok80.wixsite.com/2016)

*Tom will face Rep. Mike Ritze (R) in the general election.*



"I want Oklahoma teachers to be treated as professionals, paid at least the regional average salary and have all their current benefits continued, if not improved. Our Oklahoma Teacher Retirement System should be fully funded and allowed to remain autonomous. Our student-to-teacher ratios needs to be reduced and eliminated academic and extra-curricular programs reinstated. I also will not support vouchers or ESAs. Nothing less than a first rate commitment to public education is acceptable."

## Other members running for office

**Mike Bounds (D)**, Yukon, is running against Rep. John Paul Jordan (R) in HD 43. Mike's wife, Debbie, is a third-grade teacher at Parkland Elementary in Yukon.

## Glenda Puett (D)

Lifelong OEA member

HD 76, Broken Arrow

Retired elementary teacher, Broken Arrow; [glendapuett.com](http://glendapuett.com)

*Glenda will face Rep. Dave Brumbaugh (R) in the general election.*



"After spending 39 years in public school classrooms (Mid-Del, Norman, Watonga, Cleveland and Tulsa Union), I retired in 2012 to run against my anti-public school legislator David Brumbaugh in Broken Arrow. I have a retired teacher husband, children who teach in Owasso and five grandchildren. Even though I lost twice, I am running again to say to him ENOUGH of partisan politics. Teachers don't quit! Children and public schools are too important!"

**Dewayne Pemberton (R)**, a retired administrator and coach and a member of OREA, is running against OEA member Jack Reavis (D) in SD 9.

HD 15 incumbent **Ed Cannaday (D)**, a retired principal and OREA member from Porum, is running against Don Herrold (R) in the general election.

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# Six OEA members named TOY finalists

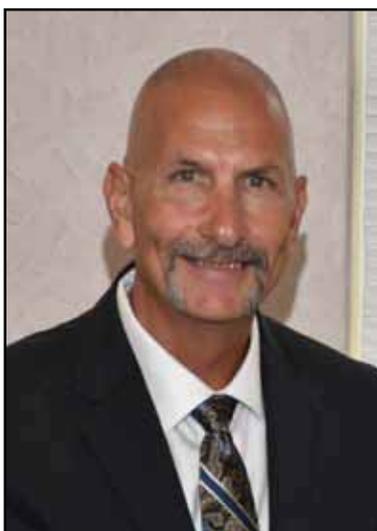
Congratulations to the six members of the Oklahoma Education Association who were among the finalists for State Teacher of the Year, as well as Jamie Aguilar, one of six Rising Stars (chosen from district Teachers of the Year with five or fewer years of experience). The ceremony announcing the 2017 winner was scheduled for August 30, after this issue went to press.



**Mona Schmitz**  
3rd grade, Highland  
Park Elementary School,  
Woodward



**Kristen Dover**  
4th grade, Cache Intermediate  
Elementary School



**Jon Hazell**  
Anatomy, Physiology,  
Biology, Environmental  
Science, Durant High School



**Lisa Pitts**  
5th grade science and reading,  
Jones Elementary School



**Adam Mewhorter**  
High school instrumental  
music, Southmoore High  
School, Moore



**Kay Morris**  
K-3 Reading  
Verdigris Lower Elementary



**2016 Rising Star  
Jamie Aguilar**  
Kindergarten,  
Garfield Elementary  
School, Enid

# Members have access to great legal protection for issues on or off the job

By Richard Wilkinson  
OEA General Counsel

**B**ack-to-school events occurring this time of year invariably involve questions about what kind of legal services and legal protection OEA provides its members. In other words, what else am I getting for my dues dollars?

If for some reason belonging to an organization that believes public education is the cornerstone of a democratic society, whose vision is a great public school for every student and who believes that individuals are strengthened when they work together for the common good is not incentive enough to be a member, hopefully the following overview of the legal services available to every OEA member will close the deal.

First and foremost, OEA members receive completely free legal advice and defense when facing disciplinary action and employment-related disputes – no deductibles, no cost to members, no referring of cases to inexperienced counsel or attorneys without education law experience. Instead, we employ attorneys who

have decades of experience successfully representing teachers and dealing with education issues. We win or successfully settle 75 percent of the cases we litigate, and our in-house attorneys handle the majority of claims.

Our attorneys are in-house and full-time. OEA doesn't have to promise that your calls will be returned within 24 hours because there is a dedicated legal services staff always available to answer your call when you need legal assistance. Unlike the benefits provided by other organizations, disciplinary defense doesn't have a dollar limit. We have expended hundreds of thousands of dollars in fees and costs on numerous individual cases – with the member paying only their annual dues and nothing more.

We also litigate issues that have statewide impact for all education professionals, from protecting the due process rights of all education employees to ensuring that your rights are protected in the event of a reduction in force.

Second, OEA members receive an incredibly valuable set of benefits for legal services not related to their employment.

Through the Personal Legal Services Program (PLSP) a member can receive an individual or joint will, power of attorney, uncontested divorce, representation of misdemeanor charges, in-state child support enforcement, assistance with juvenile proceedings, and uncontested stepparent adoptions – all at no charge. The PLSP program is much more than simply a list of attorneys practicing in Oklahoma who perform these kinds of services – which is the so-called “personal legal services” program provided by other organizations. The value of any one of the free legal services under the PLSP program is a great deal more than the annual dues.

Third, for personal legal matters not covered by the PLSP program, such as real estate and probate matters, we have agreements with a statewide network of attorneys who will accept referrals at a discounted hourly rate and who will provide consultations free of charge. That program is funded by the NEA and administered by the OEA at the state level. The NEA Attorney Referral Program is provided to members as part of OEA membership.

Finally, we also provide insurance coverage that protects teachers from personal liability and provides legal defense in the event a teacher faces criminal charges for occurrences arising out of their educational employment activities. These coverages are over and above the general legal services described in the preceding paragraphs. The coverages are transparent and we believe exceed those of any other competing organization.

Our coverage documents are available for anyone to review – and before believing the promises of any other organization or any quotes relating to how much insurance they have, ask for a copy of their coverage agreement. If a document isn't forthcoming, don't believe what you don't receive. If a document is available, any staff member will be happy to review it with you and do a line-by-line comparison of what OEA offers.

OEA has a long and proud history of providing legal assistance to its members and in litigating issues that are critical to its members and the protection of public education. In short, there is no other organization, plan or benefit that provides the quality and quantity of legal protection and services available to OEA members.

## Experience matters – legal help second to none



*Richard Wilkinson*  
General Counsel  
32 years' experience



*Heath Merchen*  
Associate General Counsel  
21 years' experience



*Tim Melton*  
Associate General Counsel  
30 years' experience

# Motivation is a critical part of your job

*Continued from Page 2*

I receive a daily motivation quote by email, which guarantees that no matter how much junk e-mail I get, no matter how many problems people want me to solve, I always get at least one encouraging e-mail per day.

## 6. Keep a Success Journal

Journaling is a practice that I still struggle to incorporate in my life, but I have found it to be one of the most critical parts of self-reflection. If the idea of

writing pages and pages of daily events doesn't thrill you, don't worry. That's not what I'm talking about.

I suggest keeping a list of your successes, a log of good things that happen. Challenge yourself to write down something positive every day. Even if it's nothing more than that you survived to tell about it, write it down. Maybe Billy smiled at you for the first time, or Hakim showed up, or Serena brought her homework. Keep the list and keep writing.

Keeping yourself motivated is a criti-

cal part of your job. If you aren't motivated, you will burn out and you won't be able to positively impact your students. These six strategies will help you incorporate inspiration in your life and help you stay motivated.

*Barbara Blackburn is a best-selling author and a nationally recognized expert in the areas of rigor and motivation. Barbara can be reached at her website, [barbarablackburnonline.com](http://barbarablackburnonline.com); through her blog, [rigorineducation.blogspot.com](http://rigorineducation.blogspot.com); or on Twitter, @BarbBlackburn.*

## JumpStart offers academic agenda, not just day care

*Continued from Page 5*

surplus items to keep costs down.

"The day after Cool Enterprises came to fix our heat and air system, the owner called to tell me they had ripped up the check," she said. "I couldn't believe it. Our community members and businesses have been so supportive and we couldn't

do this without them."

Audra and Michelle have established JumpStart with an educational focus (not just as a day care). Each day, students are divided into groups for reading, spelling and vocabulary exercises with lists provided by Inola teachers. In the afternoon, students study math, science and social

studies. Older students are paired with the younger children to mentor them by reading with them.

Although Cornett has made sacrifices with her own family to provide this service to the community, she said she wouldn't have it any other way. Knowing that her students are cared for and happy is more than enough assurance that she is right where she is supposed to be.



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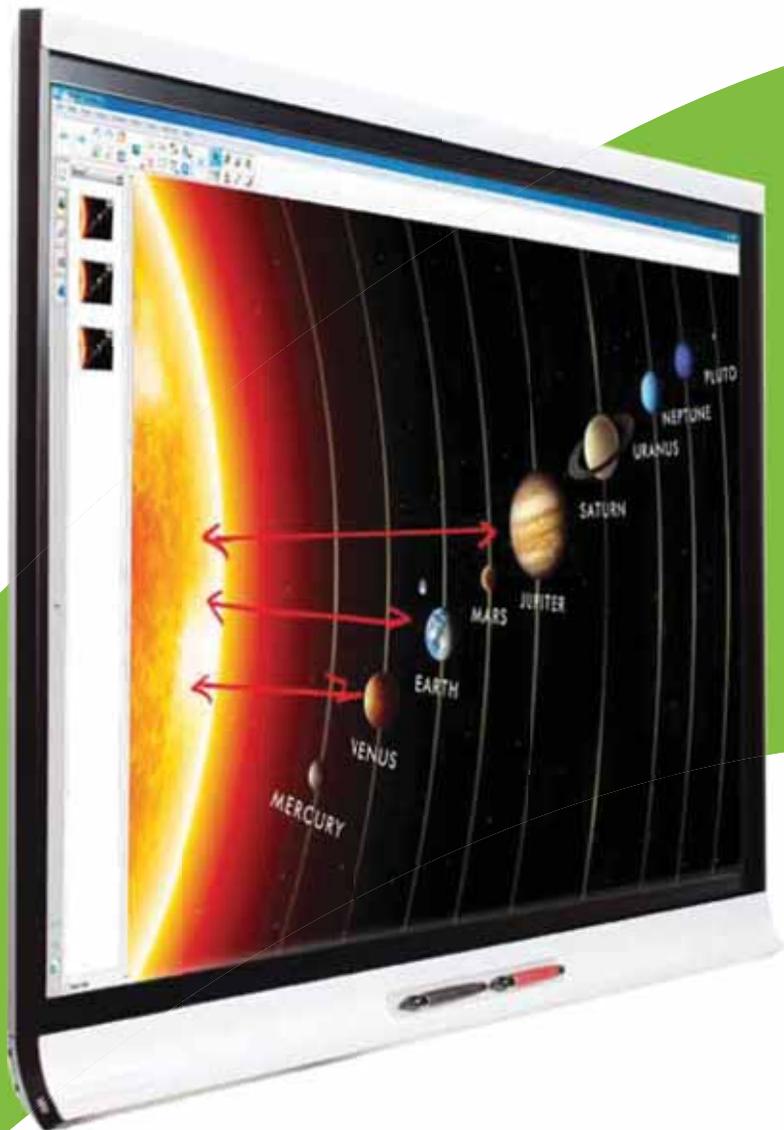
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