

THE EDUCATION

FOCUS

FOR THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE OKLAHOMA EDUCATION ASSOCIATION - FALL 2017



TOGETHER
WE ARE
STRONGER!

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On the Cover – Candis Ryczkowski, Mustang ESP was one of several members to appear in OEA's fall membership media campaign. (Photo provided by Staplegun.)

The Save Our State Coalition is hosting community meetings across the state in October to discuss the state budget. The meetings include an overview of state finances by David Blatt, executive director of Oklahoma Policy Institute, and a panel of local residents. There is also time saved for questions from audience members like Linda Alexander (above), a member of the Oklahoma Retired Education Association, who spoke at a meeting in Lawton. (Photo by Doug Folks.)

We must seize this opportunity to unite

By Alicia Priest
OEA President

Together we're stronger. My first realization of this message came from reflections during a youth group mission trip and thinking that I hadn't accomplished much with the job I had been assigned. Then, I looked around at what the group had done collectively and was in awe.

The next memory I have of the power of collective action is of watching and listening to my dad talk about why he had switched from being the voice against being a union shop to being the pivotal person in the shop to speak up and vote the union in. You see, he saw lack of pay increases, increased issues of safety and unfair labor practices going on in his workplace that weren't happening in the same company's unionized factories. He could no longer ignore the power of standing in solidarity.

HB 1017 has been talked about a lot lately – probably because we have experienced rollbacks of so many of the best practices it created. However, the stark reality of the phrase “together we're stronger” was never more evident than when, at the call of then OEA President Kyle Dahlem, schools began to shut down as educators flocked to march around the Capitol for four cold rainy days in April 1990. On the first day, there were 8,000;

but by the last day, over half of all teachers in the state were marching and chanting in unison.

Many may not know that Republican Gov. Henry Bellmon had called for a Legislative Special Session that started the HB 1017 ball rolling. You see, he talked with what he figured would be an adoring group of Republican teachers who would be thrilled that education had received some funding that session. Instead, he was met with teachers “...furious at their low level of compensation, shortage of funds for textbooks and supplies, and the lack of significant progress in education funding throughout their careers,” Bellmon wrote in his memoirs.

Does this sound familiar to you?!? We continue to see that when opportunity arises and good plans are put forth, many of our elected leaders choose to decrease revenue, cutting funding for education and other core services. It is time to stand in solidarity and let our communities know what is happening and why it has happened; tell the stories of our students and link those stories back to legislative decisions. Our funding issues aren't because schools have a spending problem. They don't stem from out-of-proportion administrative costs or lack of consolidation.

Reality check – we have a revenue shortfall that is directly linked to failed leadership and policy decisions of some of



President Alicia Priest

our elected leaders. We have a REVENUE issue in our state.

We must take the opportunity to unite, to stop letting others throw out divisive labels. It doesn't matter who is a Democrat, Republican or independent; man or woman; aspiring educator, teacher, support employee, administrator or retired educator. We need to set aside whatever has been causing us to not vote for our professions and the students we serve – or to not vote at all. Our careers, our students, our communities and our future depends on unified action.

This will take a commitment to being engaged, involved and communicative with colleagues, parents and community members. Remember, when we stand (or shut schools down and march around the Capitol) with a unified voice, we all win because TOGETHER WE'RE STRONGER!

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Oklahoma Education Association
putting education first

Emergency Services

Carla Young helps emergency and alt cert teachers get off to a good start

By Doug Folks

Oklahoma's teacher exodus has reached record numbers, and school districts are scrambling to find qualified professionals to enter the profession.

Before schools across the state even started the 2017-18 academic year, the State Department of Education had already granted nearly 900 emergency certificates. By October, the number had reached 1,674, far outpacing last year's record 1,160 emergency certificates for the entire year.

In early October, a University of Oklahoma professor released a poll of some 250 former Oklahoma teachers who said low pay was a major determining factor in leaving Sooner State classrooms. On average, they were able to make \$19,000 more annually than they made teaching in Oklahoma.

Theresa Cullen, an associate professor in the OU College of Education who conducted the survey, was quoted in a *Tulsa World* article as saying, "I feel as though we're losing out on some really productive members of society that could be part of our communities ... There's a certain work ethic about being a teacher. There's a reason that you become a teacher, and it's a commitment to your community."

While the results of Cullen's survey are admittedly not scientific, the answers reflect the stories OEA staff and elected leaders hear over and over – Oklahoma is not competitive with teaching salaries in surrounding states or other industries. The result is that a sizeable number of teachers are leaving our schools for retirement or teaching jobs in other states, and districts are scrambling to fill vacancies.

At Putnam City West High School in far west Oklahoma City, instructional coach Carla Young sees the struggles of all the new teachers in her building and helps them overcome the difficulties they encounter while starting their careers.

Young says that, most of the time, emergency and alternatively certified teachers both come to the profession with a strong knowledge base of the subject matter.

"Sometimes they tend to struggle more with taking what they know so well and breaking that down to a more student-friendly level," said Young, who taught science at PC West for more than 10 years before stepping into her current role.

A lack of classroom management skills is an obvious issue, but Young says every first-year teacher needs help with classroom management, whether they come through a traditional path to the classroom or an alternative path.

Devan Lynch, a second year, emergency certified geometry teacher, agreed. She attended OU on an ROTC scholarship and then served eight years as an army officer. She majored in meteorology and minored in math, so when she left the service, Lynch saw teaching as a good career path.

"I had a minor in math from OU, so I thought, 'I can teach math. I like math. Math is awesome. So, let's do this,'" Lynch said. "As far as difficulties (at the beginning), it wasn't so much the subject

matter. That was fine. I mean, I can do geometry. It's more, just the classroom management stuff. That's where the difficulties were.

"I did try to read some books (on classroom management), but it's more live and learn."

While college education majors have a good background of what to expect in the classroom, and even some practice with

creating lesson plans, emergency and alternatively certified teachers can find themselves overwhelmed by the things they don't know.

"... Sometimes, just the sheer volume of things that are required of you just as soon as walk in the classroom, like building relationships with your students, and then writing lessons plans (can be overwhelming)," Young said. "And knowing how to align the standards with what you're doing in the classroom..." can trip up emergency and alternatively certified teachers.

See "Mentorship" on Page 12

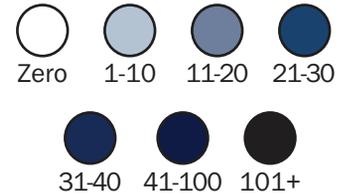
“Sometimes emergency and alternatively certified teachers tend to struggle more with taking what they know so well and breaking that down to a more student-friendly level.”



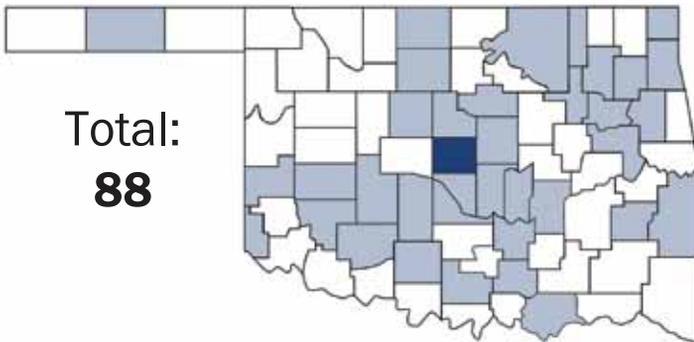
Emergency certified geometry teacher Devan Lynch (right) tells Putnam City West High School instructional coach Carla Young about her first day as a teacher. Lynch is in the process of earning her teacher certification after leaving a career as an army officer. (Photo by Doug Folks.)

Emergency-certified teachers

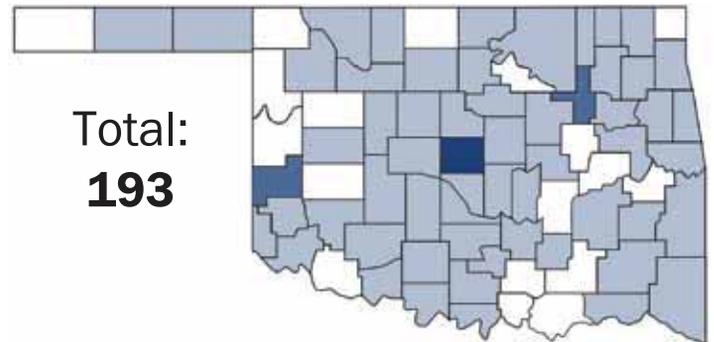
A map showing the growth of emergency certifications in Oklahoma classrooms spurred a lengthy discussion on the OEA Facebook page recently. Here's a look at how emergency certification has grown in the past five years and what it looks like so far for this school year, according to data from the Oklahoma State Department of Education. The total for this year is expected to grow before next summer.



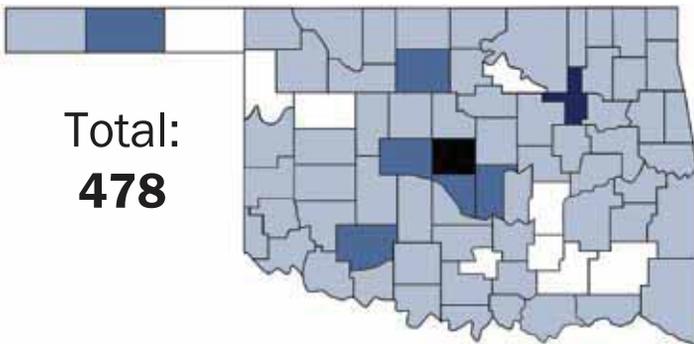
2012-2013



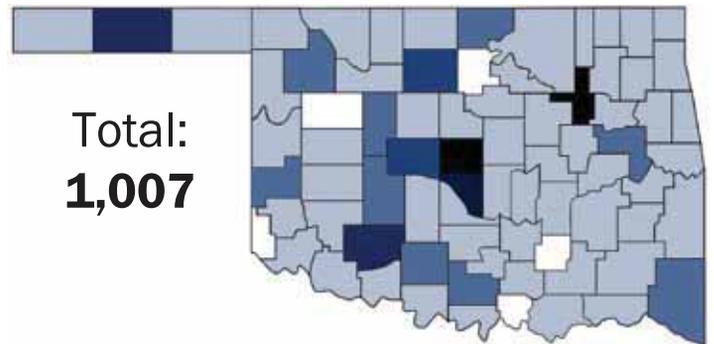
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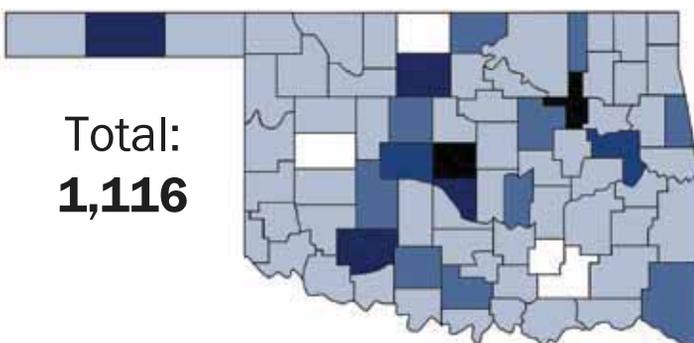
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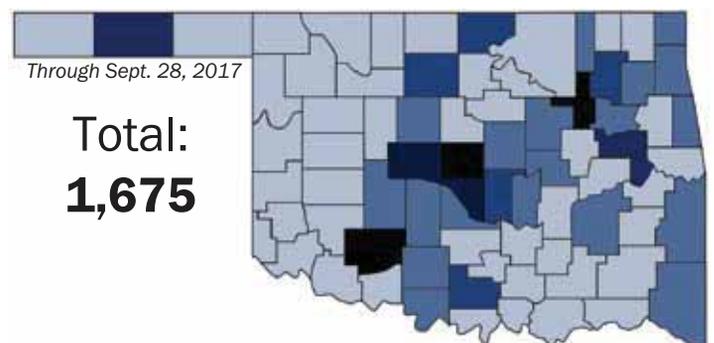
2015-2016



2016-2017



2017-2018



A bold approach

Together We're Stronger initiative seeks \$1.5 billion for Oklahoma's children

By Doug Folks

We all know the statistics. It's been 10 years since teachers and support professionals have had a state-paid raise and schools received additional operations money. Retired educators haven't received a cost-of-living adjustment in 10 years, either.

Under legislators' false assumption that government can cut its way to prosperity, our health and human services state agencies are finding themselves in dire straits. Corporate welfare and generous tax incentives have joined a downturn in the oil and gas industry to push our state into a dangerous spiral of shrinking revenue.

When State Question 779 failed last November, most people insisted that a penny sales tax was not the answer because it is the Legislature's job to fund education. At the same time, several education candidates ran for office and several were elected on the promise of raising teacher pay.

In spite of their best efforts, that didn't happen. Instead, the Legislature passed a cigarette tax that proved to be unconstitutional and used one-time money to balance the budget. The governor called for a special session to find answers. So far, not even an empty promise has come out of the State Capitol, and no budget solution is on the horizon.

So where do we go from here?

The OEA Board of Directors and the OEA staff have developed the Together We're Stronger Campaign. The plan is designed to place increasing pressure on the legislature to find solutions this spring to fund education, raise salaries, give retired educators a cost-of-living increase and better fund core state services and state employee salaries.

"Together We're Stronger is a bold plan to address an appalling situation. Our state is fed up with poor leadership, and it's time the legislature find solutions now," said Alicia Priest, OEA president. "I know our members are angry with the inability, or lack of desire, to improve education funding."

In all, Together We're Stronger is calling for \$1.5 billion in new revenue to better fund public education and core governmental services. There are four components to the plan.

Give pay raises to teachers and ESPs – \$740 million over three years



Lawmakers have ignored pay for far too long. The OEA calls for a \$10,000 pay raise for certified employees and a \$5,000 raise for full-time education support professionals.

When accounting for inflation, the starting salary on the minimum salary schedule of \$31,600 has lost \$6,000 in value over the past decade. In other words, a starting teacher today needs

a \$6,000 raise just to be able to afford what a starting teacher on that salary could afford 10 years ago. There was a time when a \$3,000 or \$5,000 raise would have been acceptable, but that time is gone.

The average salary of a full-time ESP in Oklahoma is \$19,500. Considering Oklahoma's cost of living, our ESPs without children are not quite making a living wage. If they have children, their pay is far below what is necessary to provide for their families without having to find a second job. It is unacceptable that working in a public school means you have to get a second or even third job to make ends meet.

Restore public education funding – \$200 million over three years



Public education is in a state of crisis. This is unquestionable and undeniable. Student enrollment is growing, class sizes are skyrocketing, and funding has not kept up. Oklahoma must do better.

5% COLA for retirees – no cost



The average pension benefit for a retired Oklahoma teacher is about \$1,600 a month. While the costs of everything around us rise, our pension benefit stays the same unless the legislature passes a cost-of-living adjustment.

We believe the cost for a COLA is zero because the state can responsibly pay for it out of each of the defined-benefit pension systems without raising any new revenue. Each of the six defined-benefit pension systems, including the Teachers' Retirement System, have been doing extremely well in recent years, seeing good returns on investments.

Fund core state services for all – \$500 million over three years.



We need new, recurring revenue to fund the services Oklahomans need, such as health care, public safety and child nutrition. The Legislature must fully staff state agencies and give state employees a \$7,500 pay raise.

Budget cuts to the Department of Human Services, the Mental Health Department and the Department of Health translate into a real-world crisis for our students and their families. The 33,000 state employees of Oklahoma and their professional association, OPEA, will be fighting alongside us in this campaign. They also need a significant pay raise in their fields to recruit enough employees to provide Oklahomans the services they need.

See "Where" on Page 8

Here's what the education funding crisis looks like in

Oklahoma public schools.

In the past five school years, Oklahoma schools
have seen more students with more needs.



Total
Enrollment
UP 4%



Special Needs
Enrollment
UP 24%



Gifted
Enrollment
UP 5%



Bilingual
Enrollment
UP 24%



Economically
Disadvantaged
UP 4%

With more students, unfunded mandates and stagnant state
revenue, Oklahoma public schools are facing tough choices that are
crippling our classrooms.



Emergency
Certifications
UP 1,626%



State Formula
Funding
FLAT AT 0.12%

This is a statewide crisis. Oklahoma children deserve better.

Learn more about budget details, our legislative
campaign and what we're doing together at

okea.org / **stronger**

Battling the budget crisis

Education employees at every level are finding it tougher and tougher to do their jobs thanks to nearly 10 years of legislative neglect to education appropriations. ❖ No increases to the state minimum salary schedule for teachers since 2008. ❖ No money put toward education support professional salaries during the same time. ❖ No operations money sent to school districts. ❖ No cost-of-living adjustments for retired education employees. ❖ Through it all, OEA has provided leadership and support.

Kandee Almgren – glue and packing tape

In Alva Public Schools, students are feeling the budget pinch. Kandee Almgren, high school media specialist, says her colleagues have trouble finding enough textbooks, and there aren't enough instruments for all the band students.

“Donations have helped, but how many people have a spare clarinet or trumpet, in a usable condition, just lying around?” she asked.

Building a library worthy of her students has been difficult as well.

“The biggest impact of the lack of funding in my library is the horrible shape some of the books are in. I have used two bottles of glue and numerous rolls of tape to repair library books that should really just go in the garbage. Some have been pieced together multiple times after so many years of use, even without being abused,” said Almgren, president of the Alva Education Association.



“I am having to remain very selective on the books I order and cannot just order on a whim because one or two students have the desire to read a book or want a

particular series. Students make requests daily for new books to read, and I just cannot immediately order what they are asking to read.”

Through her OEA membership, Almgren has been able to make connections with other school library media specialists who face the same trials.

“We have shared ideas on decorating inexpensively and finding the best book vendors with the best book deals on prices as well as shipping. I know many teachers who have turned to Facebook for help with classroom items. Many, including myself, have created projects through the DonorsChoose.org website ... yet I do not feel that we as teachers should have to beg for items that we need to use in classrooms and libraries. Schools should have the funds for supplies that teachers need for students.”

By Doug Folks

Stephen Smallwood – retiree goes back to the classroom



Stephen Smallwood has retired from teaching in both Oklahoma and Texas, but he's back in the classroom full-time. He saw a need in Rattan, a small rural school in far Southeastern Oklahoma, and his salary helps offset expenses at home where he cares for his 100-year-old father in the evenings.

While Smallwood needed “a productive outlet,” he feels the sting of an Oklahoma retirement which hasn't offered retirees a cost-of-living adjustment in eight years.

“Everything we do as active educators is tenuous because long-term planning cannot be accomplished due to the continued budget cuts and failure of the legislature to adequately fund education,” he said. “Our kids suffer. Small, poor, rural schools who depend on state aid often

have to cut services, go to the four-day week or find ways to ‘make do’ with the resources we have.

“Often, this means that our students are under-served. We do not have money for textbooks or other updated materials and teachers, who haven't had a raise in years, generally fund all of the ‘extras’ that go with providing a 21st century education.”

Smallwood says that being an OEA retired member means he is assured that his best interest is being represented.

“OEA is an advocate for me when I can't be. Their advocacy is encouraging to all educators in that informed leadership represents the least of us. OEA's education of teachers to be active in their own fight for equity is priceless.”

By Doug Folks

Sheila Clay – bargain hunting for supplies

Tahlequah ESP member Sheila Clay says Oklahoma’s school funding crisis makes it tougher and more challenging to provide the supplies and resources that students and teachers need to succeed. As Greenwood Elementary School’s office manager in charge of requisitions, placing and checking in orders, it’s the worst she’s seen in her 26 years on the job there.

“It takes more effort to shop around, looking for the best price for the best product,” Clay said. “You have to work hard to get as much as you can for each dollar.” The school hosts fund-raisers to overcome the limit on district funds to purchase supplies, but also tries to keep from over-burdening the parents who support them.

“The district works really hard to shield the parents from the effects of inadequate state funding,” Clay said, “but there are often unintended consequences from some of those efforts.”

The district has outsourced custodial

and cafeteria services, which Clay concedes does save money, but that results in lots of ESP turnover and a lack of continuity because of frequent building-to-building transfers.

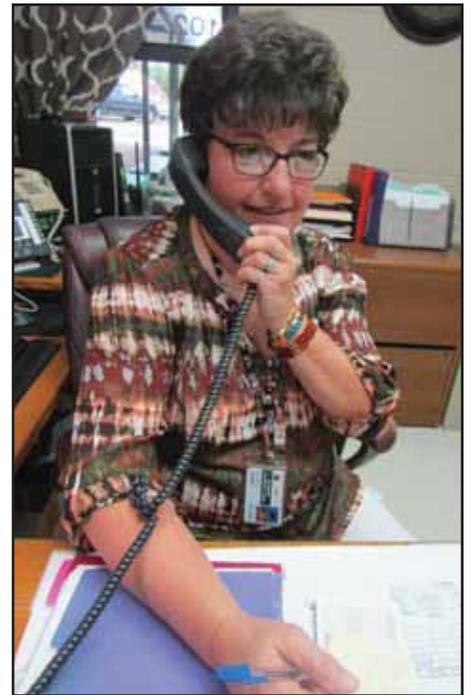
“Once you begin to outsource, you can lose staff who take pride in the district. We work hard to encourage all ESP employees to feel that they are part of the family, but these circumstances make that harder to accomplish,” she said.

Clay, who serves as Tahlequah ESP local president, says OEA affiliation is vital.

“Because we have fewer employees now and increased duties, OEA is our go-to support. I couldn’t and wouldn’t do this job without the information, resources and support our members get from OEA staff and the organization as a whole.”

For ESP members in Tahlequah, this year’s OEA membership theme, “Together We’re Stronger!” isn’t just a slogan. It’s a crucial day-to-day lifeline.

By Bill Guy



Todd Crabtree – “beyond frustrating”

“I have seen a decline in state aid to public schools in each year of my 10-year tenure as an administrator for Byng Public Schools,” said Superintendent Todd Crabtree, also an OEA administrative member.

“It is beyond frustrating to have the governor and public officials speak about education being a priority for growth and expansion of our state, yet embracing tax cut after tax cut.”

Despite the lengthy chronology of budget cuts, Crabtree says Byng educators have continued to provide a quality education for the community’s students, but at the cost of increasing class sizes and putting greater burdens on district employees.



“Due to East Central University being local, we have had ample candidates for jobs in the past,” Crabtree said, “but fewer and fewer students are studying to become teachers because of increased tuition costs. The few education graduates coming out of ECU are signing with Texas and other out-of-state schools at campus job fairs.”

This is Crabtree’s 37th year to work at Byng Public Schools as an OEA/NEA member, and he was a student OEA member before that.

“OEA has given me a network of friends and colleagues across the state. Membership in my professional organization has provided networking, mentoring and, at the most basic level, has helped me maintain hope for the future of public education,” he said.

By Bill Guy

Numerology

#1

Oklahoma’s rank in education funding cuts since FY 2008 – 23.6%.

17.8%

Alabama’s percentage of funding cuts since FY08, ranking second.

\$2.05B/641,712

Oklahoma education funding vs number of students FY08.

\$1.83B/692,750

Oklahoma education funding vs number of students FY16.

2%

Amount oil and gas companies pay Oklahoma in gross production tax for product pulled from the ground during first two years.

8.3%, 12%, 13.3%

Amount oil and gas companies pay for product pulled from ground in Texas, Arkansas and Louisiana, respectively.

Source: Oklahoma Policy Institute

Where will the money come from?

Continued from Page 4

Last spring, OEA joined the Save Our State Coalition, a variety of nonprofit and professional organizations representing hundreds of thousands of Oklahomans on the front lines of public service. The coalition includes nearly 50 OEA local associations as members along with Stand for Children, Oklahoma Public Employees Association (OPEA), the Oklahoma Policy Institute, Oklahoma Science Teachers Association, the Mental Health Association of Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers and others.

One of the first efforts of SOS was to present a Blueprint for a Better Budget to the legislature. It outlines a list of potential revenue sources that, if implemented, would fund the components of OEA's Together We're Stronger plan. Highlights include raising the gross production tax, raising the motor fuel tax, limiting wind tax exemptions and miscellaneous fees, and eliminating the capital gains deduction. You can see the complete list of revenue ideas and read more about the SOS Coalition at saveourstateok.org.

How do we get there?

To be successful, every OEA local association needs to be involved, Priest said. OEA staff is already reaching out to targeted locals that are represented by legislators who can make this plan a reality.

"Our efforts need to start as a steady drum beat, growing louder and stronger between now and the end of the 2018 legislative session," Priest said.

The association surveyed members in early October and the results are being shared with the targeted locals. Each local is being asked to complete a commitment card (*see the box to the right*) that outlines the types of activities they will engage their members with during the coming weeks.

You can stay current on events and successes of the campaign by bookmarking okea.org/stronger. For more information on how your local can be involved, contact a member of your regional OEA team.

Local affiliate commitment is key to success

- Involve our superintendent/board of education/PTA in the campaign
- Develop a local coalition with civic groups, churches and businesses to help carry the message
- Place informational flyers in school employee mail boxes
- Hold a legislative event in our community (forum, town hall meeting, personalized legislator event)
- Engage the public and legislators on social media
- Create a local lobby team and schedule visits to the Capitol during the session
- Host legislators for a day in the classroom
- Establish a communications plan for contacting legislators (postcard parties, email campaign, phone calls for specific bills)
- Stage a walk-in or conduct an informational picket at our school(s)
- Display signs/stickers in cars
- Notify media of all our activities
- Promote/participate in a statewide Together We're Stronger tele-town hall meeting in early February
- Other _____



Spiro's love for an ag program outweighs the budget crisis

Community raises \$40,000 to save a teacher and a program

By Carrie Coppernoll Jacobs

It's Friday, and football players sport their jerseys. Cheerleaders don their uniforms and camo pants. Students have tiny footballs painted on their faces. Girls wear maroon and white bows in their hair. It's game day, and Acie Conrad is getting his ag students to shift focus from who's driving to the game in Stigler to what the parts of a plant are.

Kids settle into their desks – some of the same desks Conrad sat in as a student nearly 20 years ago. Someone asks him about show chickens.

"You won't believe the number of people that have asked me about stinkin' chickens," he laughs. "And that ain't even my deal."

Conrad runs the sheep and cattle operations, and the other two Spiro ag teachers handle the hogs and goats.

Last year was Conrad's first as a teacher, but it was nearly his last.

Conrad graduated from Spiro in 1998. He was an active member of FFA when he was in school. He showed livestock, learned responsibility, learned ag mechanics. He got a bank loan to start a herd of cattle. He's run his hay operation since he was 13.

Conrad went on to earn his bachelor's degree in Agriculture Education from Oklahoma State University. After college, all three ag positions were filled at Spiro, so Conrad found other work.

"I always said if I was going to teach, it was going to be here at home," he said. So he made a detour, working for the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission for more than 13 years and waiting for an ag spot to open up in his hometown.

Last year, he had the chance to finally get into the classroom. He loved it.

"I do it because of these kids," Conrad said. "Last year was the most en-



Acie Conrad (right) waited nearly 20 years to become an ag teacher at his alma mater, but the state's budget crisis nearly ended that dream after just one year. (Photo by Carrie Coppernoll Jacobs.)

joyable year of work that I've had in a long, long time."

But the state budget crisis was pushing down on Spiro, just like school districts across the state. The district lost eight positions, including Conrad's.

"I didn't think I was ever going to do anything else," Conrad said. "I mean, I have pretty strong Christian faith, and I was told this is what I was supposed to do. When the superintendent called me over there and told me (the program was to be cut) I said, 'OK. No big deal.' There was something that told me it's not done."

FFA is more than a big deal in Spiro. About 180 students are members, Conrad said. In the ag building, trophies are packed into glass cases. Dozens and dozens of plaques line shelves on the wall in all the classrooms and the hallway. The awards run the gambit of competitions: farm shop, electricity, sporting clays, floriculture, nursery landscape, agronomy, ag communication and farm business management.

When it became common knowledge that Spiro's ag program was about to be cut, the community's love for the program

far outweighed the state financial crisis. A few of Conrad's classmates partnered up with other community members to host fund-raisers, including a team roping contest, an auction and a coach-pitch baseball tournament.

Conrad is quick to point out the effort to save ag was all about the students in his classroom.

"I wanted it made clear from the beginning that none of this was about me," Conrad said. "This was about the position staying here. Our ag chapter has a rich, rich background."

All told, the community raised about \$40,000 to pay Conrad's salary, but he said the efforts saved much more. The loss of Conrad's position would have had a compounding effect on the program, he said. Quite a bit of Career Tech funding would have disappeared, and the district would have had to start at the end of the waiting list if the position was ever added again. Even then, they would receive less money than now. Some federal dollars would evaporate, too.

See "Committed" on Page 11

Broken Arrow educator named State Teacher of the Year

Broken Arrow's Donna Gradel was named the Oklahoma 2018 Teacher of the Year at a September ceremony at the State Fairgrounds in Oklahoma City.

An environmental science teacher at Broken Arrow High School, Gradel has made numerous contributions within her community. She promotes environmental education programs through Project Learning Tree and helps monitor water quality for local streams through the Blue Thumb Program. She is working with local officials on Broken Arrow's Monarch Initiative and the design of the city's first ecological green park. With her students, Gradel built an outdoor ecological classroom and planted dozens of trees with Up with Trees.

She distributes hundreds of backpacks and supplies to local schools and distributes food and bicycles to foster children at Christmas. A



Donna Gradel is the second consecutive science teacher named State Teacher of the Year. (Photo by Doug Folks.)

breast cancer survivor, Gradel strives to increase awareness as a KTUL Channel 8 Buddy Check Survivor and as a 12-time Race for the Cure participant. Her other volunteer work includes proj-

ects with Meals on Wheels, Night to Shine Special Needs Prom, Salvation Army, Gateway Foundation, Broken Arrow Neighbors and Habitat for Humanity.

Gradel will remain in her classroom for the rest of the current school year. Beginning July 1, 2018, she will assume full-time Teacher of the Year duties, which include speaking engagements and serving as Oklahoma's teacher ambassador, encouraging others to enter or remain in the profession. She will succeed 2017 Oklahoma Teacher of the Year Jon Hazzell, a science teacher from Durant High School, who will continue to tour the state until July.

Congrats to OEA member finalists

Six of the state finalists are OEA members: Jill Andrews, Claremore; Rob Davis, Yukon; Janet Johnson, Sand Springs; Dionne Liebl, Deer Creek; Christine Mueller, Moore; and Laura Smith, Byng.

Haley Price, a member of Newcastle ACT, was one of four Rising Stars.



Get on board with reading!

2018 RAA Poster Contest



Draw a picture that incorporates a mode of transportation for a chance to win a cash prize.

All public school students are eligible!

Prizes for Award of Excellence and Award of Distinction for Kindergarten-2nd Grades, 3rd-5th Grades, 6th-8th Grades and 9th-12th

Grades, plus a grand prize for Best in Show.

Pictures will be judged on creativity, use of color and content. All entries must be received by 5 p.m. Wednesday, January 31, 2018.

You can find all contest rules and specific entry information at okea.org/RAA2018.



Does the district really know you?

Double-check personal information on district documents to protect yourself

By Tim Melton
Associate General Counsel

The Oklahoma school code requires that a teacher's contract contain specific information regarding the individual teacher, the teacher's salary and the teacher's benefits. You should take the opportunity each year to ensure that the information your school district has about you is accurate.

The law requires that your contract include the following information about you: your name, the degree you hold, your years of teaching credit and your step on the salary schedule. The required salary information is your base pay, any district salary supplement, any extra duty or extracurricular salary amounts, any other salary, your total salary and the amount of salary divided into cash versus fringe benefits, with the benefits itemized.

Benefit information must include your flexible benefit allowance amount, district-paid retirement contributions, district-paid health insurance (in excess of any amount paid as part of salary), any other itemized benefits (both district-paid

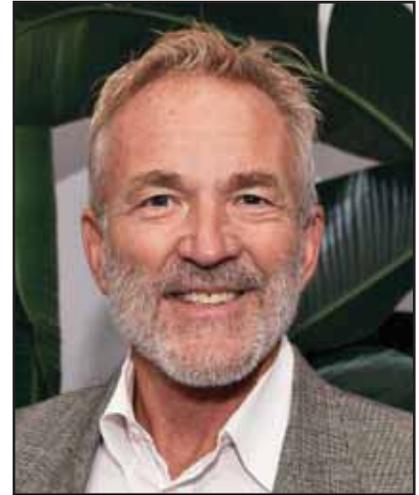
and employee-paid), and a total of the district-paid benefits.

As of the 2016-17 school year, school districts have also been required to annually provide an employee information worksheet containing all of the information required to be in a contract before the first payroll in November. Also, there must be a person designated to review the worksheet with any teacher who requests it.

We recommend that you take this opportunity to carefully review your information and ensure its accuracy. Each year we see a number of cases of teachers having been underpaid. However, at best, it is a lengthy process, because prior-year obligations cannot be paid out of current year funds, which means that any payment from previous school years must be reduced to a court judgement against the school district.

In a number of cases, school districts have taken the position that, if they paid the individual teacher accurately according to records held by the State Department of Education, they are not liable for any underpayment.

Moreover, since the statute now requires that you be provided a worksheet, it is possible that in the future a district might take the position that a teacher's failure to point out inaccurate information absolves the district from any past underpayment liability. If the mistake goes uncorrected for long enough, you may never recover the underpayment, due to statutes



Tim Melton

of limitations which impose time limits on recovering old debts.

On the other hand, we have also seen cases where an individual is inadvertently overpaid. This can result in the uncomfortable situation in which an employee owes the employer a large sum.

OEA recommends that you take the time to carefully review your statement of salary and benefits each year to catch any mistakes. You should also check your cumulative retirement benefits with the Oklahoma Teachers' Retirement System, for all the same reasons.

If you have questions or concerns about the information your district provides, contact your regional Advocacy UniServ Specialist.

Committed community saves opportunities for its students

Continued from Page 9

Conrad teaches animal science, plant and soil science, ag communications and ag exploration. If he was laid off, several of those courses would have been eliminated.

Thanks to a committed community, he's still teaching, which means his students still have the opportunities they had last year. Conrad said he's humbled and grateful for what the community did, but he's even more grateful his students can

continue learning about agriculture.

"One of the kids asked me yesterday or the day before, 'What does home mean to you?' This is home. I've got roots. I don't have any plans of going anywhere," he said. "I'm honored. I feel honored and privileged to be here. I'm not a good teacher. I don't claim to be. But I do the best job I can do. I care about each and every one of these kids, and I think they know that."



Spiro's Acie Conrad

Mentorship, coaching help address new teacher struggles

Continued from Page 2

As an instructional coach, Young's biggest challenge is helping new teachers prioritize everything they have to do and then assisting them through the process.

"Just really helping them prioritize what's most important for us to do right now. They get a lot of things thrown at them; (they) need to put grades in the grade book, and they need to take this tutorial, and turn in this, and they need to do that. The majority of the time, it's the lesson planning and saying, 'Here are my standards. I know this is where my kids have to be. Now, how do we get them there?' For veteran teachers, they've done it so much, the scaffolding comes naturally to them."

Instructional coaches aren't the only resources for new Putnam City teachers. At the beginning of the year, Putnam City conducts New Teacher Academies that help rookies understand the basics, like the evaluation process and classroom management. Every new teacher is assigned a mentor in the building where they teach.

At PC West, Young meets with all new teachers every day during the first week of school to talk about areas where they struggled. They discuss methods to fix the problems and she asks what they need from her for support.

During the next six weeks, Young meets with all new teachers every Wednesday to talk about areas in which they're still having problems.

"We even talk about the stuff that gets overwhelming – the paper work. How do you work your grade book, how do you take attendance, what are the policies on this, whom do I contact for help," she said.

Young spends most of her time with first and second year teachers. She observes them in their classrooms, gives feedback and helps with lesson planning. Sometimes, she co-teaches with them to give real-time examples of how to run a classroom.

Thanks to that kind of support, Devan Lynch has found a home in the classroom, and she encourages other non-traditional teaching applicants to take the leap.

"I definitely say, 'Go for it,' but making it through the first year is probably going to be tough. Just don't give up. Just take it one day at a time. Just stay positive," Lynch said.

"Everyone told me the second year would be better, and it really, really is. There were many times I wanted to give up, but I'm glad I didn't."

Education Focus now quarterly, digital

You may have noticed this issue of *The Education Focus* is the Fall 2017 edition. A budget change approved at Delegate Assembly last spring changed the publication schedule for the printed version of the magazine to a quarterly publication.

In addition to Fall, Winter, Spring and Summer print editions, we will be publishing digital-only issues in November, December, March and June. All members will receive an email with a link to view the digital issues as a PDF on our website.

If you have questions, contact *Education Focus* Editor Doug Folks at dfolks@okea.org.

Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation

(Required by 39 USC 3685)

The publication's title is *The Education Focus* (Publication No. 1542-1678). The filing date of the statement is September 15, 2017. It is published bimonthly, with the exception of two issues which are published monthly. Seven issues are published annually, in October-November, December-January, February, March, April-May, June-July and August-September. The annual subscription price is \$5.00. The complete mailing address of the known office of the publication and of the General Business Office of the Publisher is: Oklahoma Education Association, 323 E. Madison, Oklahoma City, OK 73105-3117. Doug Folks (405/523-4355) is the contact person. The publisher is the Oklahoma Education Association, P.O. Box 18485, Oklahoma City, OK 73154-0485. Doug Folks is the Editor and Amanda Ewing is the Managing Editor. Owner of the publication is the Oklahoma Education Association, P.O. Box 18485, Oklahoma City, OK 73154-0485. There are no bondholders, mortgagees, or other security holders owning or holding one percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities. The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax have not changed during the preceding 12 months. The name of the publication is *The Education Focus*. The issue date for the circulation data which follows is August 28, 2016. The data is classified as follows: a. the average number of copies of each issue during preceding 12 months, and b. the actual number copies of the single issue

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