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Periodical
Post Paid at
Okla. City, OK

The Education Focus
OEA's all-member publication

Reading Frenzy

OEA's Read Across America Reaches Record 39,000

By Bruce Treadaway

So many places to go and so little time!

This year's OEA-NEA Read Across America program was the biggest yet. Highlighted with First Lady Kim Henry reading at the Shawnee Mall and at North Rock Creek on one of the OEA South team's major stops, this year's Catavan visited more Oklahoma students than ever before.

So far, OEA's celebration of Dr. Seuss has reached about 39,000 students, with other visits still scheduled.

With the OEA state RAA sponsors Bob Moore Saturn, Staples stores, the Christmas Connection, Blunck's Studios and the Hometown Buffet, the Cat in the Hat, Sam I Am, the Grinch, and Thing 1 and Thing 2 captivated the imaginations of children wherever they stopped.

OEA President Carolyn Crowder participated with the North team while OEA Vice President Roy Bishop led the South team. Major stops for the North team were at Stilwell, Fort Gibson, Justus-Tiawah, Collinsville, Glenpool, Guthrie, Piedmont, and Edmond's John Ross and Washington Irving Elementaries. The South team made stops at Jones, North Rock Creek, Putnam City, Indianola, Wilburton, Newcastle, Altus, Ardmore, and Anadarko.

In addition to the major stops, other OEA stops were made at Dewar, Eu-

See *Seuss Characters*, Page 7



All Smiles

Cat in the Hat, aka OEA Teaching and Learning Specialist Floyd Cox, makes a new friend in Justice-Tiawah. Cox and other OEA staff members visited schools and performed at shopping malls during early March as part of the state's largest-ever Read Across America, an event that celebrates reading and Dr. Seuss's birthday.

Legislature Has Yet To Find Immediate Funding Solutions

By Stacy Martin

While the lottery bill appears headed to a vote of the people, one critical fact remains frighteningly clear: The Legislature has offered no solution to address the immediate education funding crisis.

Ironically, while the education lottery bill successfully struggled through the House of Representatives, giving a glimmer of hope that a new funding stream looms, the financial picture worsened. Common education took another \$37 million funding cut on March 10, more than erasing the \$25.5 million in Rainy Day aid schools had just received.

OEA President Carolyn Crowder

says such across-the-board cuts likely will continue until the Legislature acts to stop it.

"The magnitude of this crisis and the damage it is doing in our schools cannot be overstated. Any funds generated by the lottery are at least one to two years away," Crowder said. "Meanwhile, Oklahoma schools face massive layoffs for the upcoming academic year. Several schools have already implemented reductions in force (RIF), and many other schools have made announcements or are planning RIFs to reduce budgets. We estimate as many as 5,000 education employee jobs could be lost."

See *Immediate Funding*, Page 4

Where's the Conductor for This Train?

By Carolyn Crowder
OEA President

Oklahoma's public schools are headed for a train wreck. This wreck has been predicted by the OEA since the beginning of this school year. We have been saying all along that allowing the continuation of deep budget cuts to schools without creating a new revenue stream would eventually cause a train wreck.

This collision is already happening as schools are announcing personnel layoffs for next year as well as the elimination of programs. Support professionals, teachers and administrators are losing their jobs; class sizes are climbing; and vital curriculum offerings have been sacrificed.

What is the solution? Again, OEA has been pushing all year for



Carolyn Crowder

our state leaders to avoid the deterioration of our education system by creating new revenue streams to replace the \$169 million worth of cuts that schools have faced this year. This new revenue would need to come in as soon as possible to address this year's immediate needs, next year's needs and our future needs.

We got some relief on our immedi-

ate needs when Governor Henry announced the day of our rally that an agreement had been reached to take \$25.5 million out of the state's Rainy Day Fund to be distributed to schools. But, with the March 10 announcement of an additional \$37 million cut to schools, the gains from the Rainy Day Fund have been wiped out.

We were given a possibility of new funding in the future when the legislature voted to send the Education Lottery to a vote of the people. But even if this issue passes a vote of the people, the funding generated will not avoid the catastrophes we are facing this year and next.

The OEA has suggested several "new revenue stream" options to our legislators: a penny sales tax, a removal of some tax exemptions, "sin" taxes, a renegotiation of Native

American gaming compacts, etc. So far, none of these ideas have been taken seriously, and the April 10 deadline to renew all certified personnel contracts is approaching.

Please go to www.okea.org and e-mail a message to your legislator today. Also, talk to your legislators when they are at home on weekends. Arranging a meeting of your local coalition and your legislators would be a great idea. This issue will have to be won in our communities before it can be won at the state legislature.

You can rest assured; the OEA will continue to do whatever it takes to find a conductor who has the courage to change the direction of this train before all of the gains we've fought for are obliterated in a massive collision.

Little River Zoo Will Bring The Field Trip to Your Classroom

With budget cuts placing a hold on field trips, the Little River Zoo south of Norman is helping teachers bring zoo trips to the classroom.

The Little River Zoo has designed programs for all ages and group sizes. For only \$1 per student, teachers can schedule a "trip" without ever leaving the school grounds. Each program lasts approximately one hour with no mileage fee charged for schools within a 50-mile radius of the zoo. A \$70 minimum does apply.

"The Zoo has a variety of special field trips designed to fit the individual needs of your classroom or school," says Angie Savage, humane education coordinator for the Little River Zoo. "Included with each 'field trip' is a special teacher's packet, containing hand-out sheets and lesson plans to

ensure that the students receive the maximum experience on the topic of choice. It's really a great way for teachers and schools to show students how we can all make a difference."

The Little River Zoo, a nonprofit zoological and educational facility open to the public since 1996, is located on 50 acres near Lake Thunderbird and promises a unique, nontraditional family adventure and educational experience – both at the zoo and in the classroom.

For more information about the field trip package programs or about



The Little River Zoo in Norman will bring a field trip to your school, giving your students a chance to meet exotic animals like Moby the coatimundi.

the Little River Zoo, contact Savage at 405/366-7229, or visit the Web site at www.littleriverzoo.com.

OEA

The Education Focus

Volume 20, No. 6
A production of OEA's
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The Education Focus (ISSN 1542-1678) is published nine times annually with issues in September/October, November, December/January, February, March, April, May, June/July and August for \$5 by the Oklahoma Education Association, 323 E. Madison, Oklahoma City, OK 73105. Periodicals postage paid at Okla. City, OK, and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER:
Send address changes to
The Education Focus
PO Box 18485
Oklahoma City, OK 73154

Schools Aren't Waiting For April 10 Deadline

RIFs Take Durant Jobs, But Marlow Members Avoid The Ax

As the state budget crisis continues to cripple public schools, the number of districts deciding to cut staff through reductions in force (RIF) climbs each week.

Few districts are planning for 2003-04 without some kind of staff reduction. Many districts will not be

to lose their jobs along with five other Marlow teachers. Prater is a technology education teacher with five years experience in the district. Peck is the wrestling coach and a physical education teacher with 16 years in Marlow. Both teach in the middle school.

During their preparation for the

Few districts are not planning cutting staff, whether it's through Reductions in Force (RIF), nonrenewal of temporary contracts or natural attrition. It is believed that as many 5,000 employees could lose their jobs as districts cut budgets for 2003-04.

renewing employees on temporary contracts, and some will use attrition through retirements and resignations to save money by not filling those positions. In all, OEA leadership believes as many as 5,000 school employees could lose their jobs as districts cut budgets to match appropriations and local revenue.

State law requires school districts to notify certified employees by April 10 whether they will be rehired for the following year. Hugo, Liberty in Sequoyah County, Woodward and Oklahoma City Public Schools have already laid off employees either for this school year or next. Chisholm, Little Axe and Moore are among districts that have notified employees of RIFs and set hearing dates.

Two districts in southwest Oklahoma didn't wait for the April 10 deadline. In February, Marlow and Durant identified certified and support professionals to be reduced for next year and held hearings in mid-March. OEA was able to save jobs in Marlow, but was not so fortunate in Durant.

Supreme Court Rulings Save Marlow Members

In Marlow, OEA members Jeff Prater and Mike Peck were targeted

hearings, OEA Advocacy Specialist David Williams and Teaching and Learning Specialist Bonnie Hammock reviewed the master schedule for next school year. They discovered that both Prater and Peck were qualified to teach computer classes scheduled to be taught by probationary teachers. According to the State Department of Education, computer classes do not require teachers with any particular age-level or subject-specific certification.

Before the hearing started, Williams met with Marlow Superintendent George Coffman and pointed out that the district's 03-04 master schedule violated the Supreme Court decisions in *Barton* and *Babb*. In those two rulings, the Court held that tenured teachers have priority for renewal over nontenured teachers in reductions in force.

Coffman met with his counsel in private, and when the meeting started the board immediately voted to go into executive session to discuss Prater's and Peck's situations. When the board returned, the members voted unanimously to rehire Prater and Peck for 2003-04, and tabled the rest of the RIFs.

It is expected that Marlow will reconstruct its RIF plan and eliminate positions.

Durant Eliminates PE and Tech Ed

Durant Superintendent Dr. John Jackson recommended cuts of administration, certified and support personnel totaling more than \$1.2 million. During his presentation at the RIF hearing, Jackson said the district had lost about \$1.7 million this year, leaving \$500,000 in cuts yet to be made.

His RIF recommendations included seven positions in administration and 18.5 teacher assistants – all in their first year with the district – in the support ranks. The Durant Board approved closing George Washington Elementary in late February. While the principal for that school was not retained for next year, all teachers in the school were reassigned.

Jackson recommended the RIF of 14 teachers, including:

- the district's entire physical education program (eight teachers);
- five vocational education positions;
- a part-time gifted education position; and
- the middle school choir director.

Five OEA members were among the certified employees targeted for

nonrenewal. OEA SW Team members Norman Cooper and Doug Folks represented the three members that requested a hearing.

Keith Kennedy and Jerry Arthur teach seventh and eighth grade technology education, respectively, and their programs were cut in the RIF. A case was made that their programs offer career exploration and hands-on experience that middle school students can find no other place in Durant Public Schools or at the nearby Kiamichi Technology Center. It was also noted that the tech ed programs offer hope for students who may not be college bound and that even special education students find success in their classes.

April Raines, in her first year as Durant's middle school choir director, lost her job in the RIF. While the program wasn't eliminated – the high school assistant director was reassigned to the middle school – OEA argued that the secondary choir program would be crippled by reducing the staff to two instructors.

Like the tech ed classes, Raines pointed out that she had students from *See "Outstanding Teachers" on Page 5*



Blood Donor Wins a New Car

Enid EA's Heather McDaniel recently won a new Saturn Ion from Bob Moore Saturn in Oklahoma City and the Oklahoma Blood Institute following a statewide blood drive. McDaniel and her husband Glenn were two of 4,674 donors in this year's drive, compared to only 444 last year. According to the Blood Institute, this year's drive was the nation's most successful, with 5,463 people volunteering to donate blood. Standing with Heather, Glenn and their daughter Reagan is Bob Grant (second from right) and Kevin Volk (right) of Bob Moore Saturn, which is also a sponsor of OEA's Read Across America.

Immediate Funding is OEA's No. 1 Priority

Continued from Page 1

Earlier in the session, the OEA advanced one solution that would meet the need – a temporary, one-cent sales tax increase. Within 90 days, such a tax would begin pumping \$25 million monthly into Oklahoma schools. But that bill died in committee. There are other viable solutions though, including renegotiated Native American gaming compacts, lifting tax exemptions or increasing certain state fees and/or property taxes.

“Our No. 1 priority remains finding a revenue source to fix the current crisis,” Crowder said. “There is nothing more urgent on our agenda.”

Once that is done, the OEA leadership will press for short-term and long-term revenue answers.

“Since last fall, we have repeated this message at every opportunity,” Crowder said. “We must act now to save our schools. Many of these people being laid off will forever leave their professions – or even our state. We cannot afford such a drain of valuable employees.”

Unfortunately, bills offering revenue to education are far outnumbered by bills threatening educator gains of recent years. Lawmakers are working to pass legislation that jeopardizes salary gains, health and retirement benefits and contractual rights for teachers.

The OEA urges all members and friends of public education to lobby legislators regarding the following significant education bills pending at the Legislature as of mid-March:

Say No To These Negative Bills:

SB 287 by Sen. Charles Ford and Rep. Fred Morgan would allow schools to pay teachers less than their contracted salary and benefits in times of economic shortfall.

SB 328 by Sen. Robert Kerr

Potential Revenue Solutions

This chart shows the revenue producing solutions that the OEA has suggested to the Legislature.

Revenue Type	Revenue Generated	Required for Passage	Time Line
Education lottery	\$100-300 million	Legislature + vote of people	1 or 2 years
User fee increases	\$65-200 million	Legislature	3 months
Temporary 1 cent Sales Tax	\$320 million	¾ vote of Legislature or Vote of people	3 months November 2004
Removal of sales tax exemptions	Up to \$2 billion	Legislature	3 months
Tribal compacts	\$100-600 million	Agreement of Tribal Relations Committee	3 months
Nonchargeable property tax increase (SJR 11)	Up to \$167 million	Legislature + vote of people + vote in school districts	1 year

and Sen. Raymond McCarter would prevent the increase in health premiums from 58 percent currently to 83 percent promised for the 03-04 school year.

SB 235 by Sen. Penny Williams and Rep. Judy McIntyre, HB 1646 by Sen. Larry Ferguson and Sen. Kathleen Wilcoxson and HB 1382 by Sen. Ferguson and Sen. Wilcoxson would all allow schools to ask the State Board for exemptions from mandates which may include health insurance benefits and other laws which benefit classroom teachers and students.

HB 1390 by Rep. Gus Blackwell and Sen. Randy Brogdon would remove the cap from the amount of funds a district can

carry over each year. The OEA believes this bill would greatly reduce any chance of future salary and benefit increases at the local level.

Say Yes to These Positive Bills:

SJR 11 by Sen. Mike Johnson and Rep. McCarter would allow for a vote of the people to permit a district to raise up to an additional non-chargeable 10 mills. This would raise around \$167 million over the state if completely implemented. This bill did not make it out of committee, but it could resurface.

HB 1278 by Rep. Ron Kirby and Sen. Cal Hobson and SJR 22 by Sen. Hobson would allow a vote of the people on an Education Lottery

and establish a constitutional amendment that guarantees lottery proceeds will go to education.

As of mid-March, both Gov. Brad Henry and the Republican leadership had proposed fiscal year 2004 budgets. Both raise a limited amount of revenue via fee increases and/or state agency cuts. Neither meaningfully restore the cuts education has experienced in the last 18 months. As of mid-March, Democratic leadership had not yet offered a budget proposal.

“Our hardest work lies ahead,” said Bruce Hunt, associate executive director for OEA’s Legislative and Political Organizing Center. “We will be at the State Capitol daily, but grassroots lobbying will be the key to our success.”

UCO Named Outstanding Student Chapter



The University of Central Oklahoma was named outstanding Student Chapter at March's Student OEA Conference in Oklahoma City. The chapter gained more than 50 new members this year, rejuvenating the organization. Accepting the award from OEA Student OEA organizer Floyd Cox (fourth from left) are (from the left) Marla White, Michelle Monastra, Amy Hill, Nela Foster, Ruth Kliever, Dr. Malinda Green, LeeAndra Canaan, Tina Hale and Cathy Hume.

House Finally Sends Lottery on to the Senate

Despite a few bumps, the education lottery bill (HB 1278) made substantial progress at the Oklahoma Legislature in mid-March, increasing the chances it will be sent to a vote of the people.

The Senate Finance Committee passed the bill on to the full Senate on March 18 by a 8-5 vote. SJR 22, a companion bill that would establish a constitutional amendment to guarantee lottery proceeds would go to education, was also moving forward.

The Oklahoma Education Association has not taken an official position

on the lottery issue. However, the Association did take the position that the people have the right to vote on it.

OEA President Carolyn Crowder says the Association has concerns regarding an education lottery. At best, it would take one to two years to implement, so any lottery proceeds would not be realized quickly. Secondly, it remains unclear how much revenue the lottery would generate and how much it might fluctuate year to year.

“Regardless of these variables, education can ill afford to turn down

any new revenue sources,” said Crowder. “Still, we are confident that elected leaders will work to ensure that the lottery will have a positive impact on public education.”

Gov. Brad Henry was the initial proponent of the lottery. The first-year Democratic governor stipulated that the lottery would include a constitutional amendment to ensure lottery proceeds are not used to supplant regular education funding.

The bill was authored in the House by Rep. Ron Kirby (D, Lawton) and by Sen. Angela Monson (D, Oklahoma City) in the Senate. The legislation initially failed to pass in the House, but was heard again about a week later, passing by a close margin. A flood of constituent calls to state representatives apparently changed the minds of several legislators.

The bill initially called for lottery proceeds to be split among common education, higher education and CareerTech. However, proposed Senate amendments promised to link its revenues more closely to common

education.

Under the terms of the bill, Oklahoma’s lottery would be modeled after the Georgia state lottery, with some alterations to “tighten up” the legislation. The bill includes a provision that would essentially dismantle the lottery law if it is found that the law allows the operation of other types of Class III tribal gaming in Oklahoma. This provision was not found in the Georgia law.

The following is how lottery proceeds would be allocated according to HB 1278:

- 45 percent of the proceeds would go to common schools.
 - 45 percent would go for tuition, grants and scholarships for state residents to attend Oklahoma colleges, universities and CareerTech centers. Also included would be funding for capital expenditures for high technology for common schools, four-year institutions and CareerTech centers.
 - 5 percent to the School Consolidation and Assistance Fund.
 - 5 percent to the Oklahoma Teacher Retirement System Dedicated Revenue Revolving Fund.
- There is a movement at the State Capitol to accelerate a people’s vote on the lottery to this summer rather than during the next general election in November 2004.



OEA Member Hosts Governor’s First Bill Signing Ceremony

Gov. Brad Henry (right foreground) signed his first-ever piece of legislation in the classroom of OEA member Terry Crowder (center). The emergency funding bill sent \$25.5 million in Rainy Day funds to common schools. Crowder, who is married to OEA President Carolyn Crowder, teaches history at Oklahoma City’s Emerson Alternative School. Henry’s office requested the site for his first bill signing. The event was covered by media from around the state and was attended by Emerson students and faculty and Oklahoma City Public Schools officials.

“Outstanding Teachers” Lose Jobs in Durant

Continued from Page 3

all walks of life. She and high school choir director Carolyn Wilkins told the board that losing Raines would probably force the elimination of the middle school and high school show choirs because two instructors just wouldn’t have time to sponsor all that was offered this year.

In the end, the Durant Board met in executive session for about 45 minutes and unanimously approved

Jackson’s recommendations.

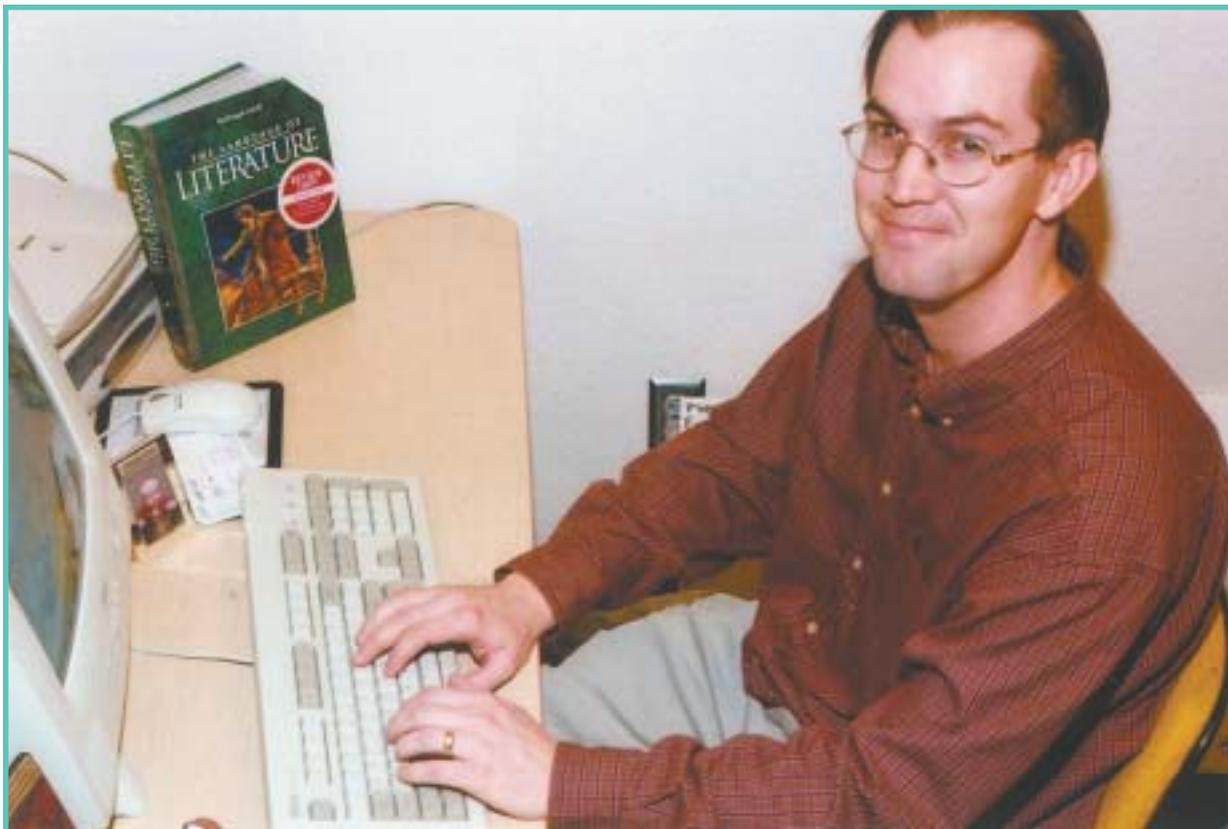
“The shame is we’re losing some really outstanding teachers,” said Nancy Johnson, Durant EA bargaining team spokesperson. “We lost programs that children can utilize regardless of their needs. They are programs that impact their careers, programs from which they gain life skills. Durant is a small community, and RIFing 14 will be hard on us.”

Keep Up the Communication!

With more and more school districts cutting teachers and support personnel through reductions in force and attrition, it has become increasingly important to communicate with your legislators. They are the only ones who can turn this situation around.

Here is what we need to be reminding our elected officials:

- Education must be the top priority.
- Education is not a partisan issue – both Democrats and Republicans must work together to find solutions.
- Public schools need immediate funding to replace the \$169.4 million in cuts for this year.
- Public schools need short-term funding, including appropriating adequate amounts for next year so that schools can re-establish the quality programs they have had to cut this year; and
- Public Schools need long-term funding to bring us out of the cellar in per pupil expenditures and teacher pay. Restoring the more than \$370 million in tax cuts we have had over the past 10 years would be a start.



Jim Rainey says he can contact 10 parents through e-mail in the same amount of time he can make two phone calls. But with only about 50 percent of his students' parents online, he still sends out a quarterly newsletter.

E-Mail Changes How Teacher Reaches Students and Parents

By Marty Bull

As a teacher of adolescents, Moore Central Junior High's Jim Rainey has his share of discipline problems. To help maintain discipline through cooperation with his students' parents, he has spent countless planning hours talking to parents on the telephone – time he could have spent preparing lesson plans, grading papers or developing new curriculum.

So when the district went online and opened up the Internet as a way to connect with both parents and students, he jumped at the chance to set up an informational Web site as well as to utilize e-mail as a communication tool.

“When we started this program two years ago, only about 10 percent of our parents were online,” said Rainey. “Now we have e-mail access to almost 50 percent of our parents. And we believe that number will continue to increase.”

After participating in the district-offered training, the Long Beach, Calif., native went about setting up his Web site. The site lists class assign-

ments, upcoming events and even practice quizzes. As more and more students access information on the Web site, Rainey has seen a positive increase in retention as well as higher grades.

“When students who were not utilizing the practice quizzes saw how it could improve their test scores, they started looking for places to access

the Web site,” said Rainey. “I would estimate that 90 percent of my students use the practice quizzes either at home, at a friend's house or at the public library.”

E-mail addresses obtained at enrollment are forwarded to the students' teachers. The ability to instantly communicate with parents appeals to the eighth and ninth grade

English teacher.

“E-mail is so quick and easy,” said Rainey. “When my only contact was by phone, I averaged about two calls a plan time, but with e-mail I can contact as many as 10 parents in the same amount of time.”

But he does caution teachers about security issues.

“Our students are very computer savvy,” said the seven-year teaching veteran. “It's very important to make sure you're actually talking with parents and not an innovative student.”

Rainey continues to utilize traditional methods of parent contact through a newsletter distributed at the beginning of each nine weeks and even gives out his cell phone number so that parents can reach him at their convenience.

“I use e-mail religiously, but I don't want to leave anyone out,” said Rainey. “Until everyone has access to a computer, I'll continue to use more traditional methods, but e-mail as a way to connect with parents has made a positive difference in my classroom.”

General Rules for Effective E-mails

Using e-mail to communicate with students and parents, as well as colleagues and supervisors, is quickly becoming the norm and not the exception. There are a few simple rules to remember when using e-mail. Following is a list of suggestions from the NEA's Works4Me Web site.

- ☞ TYPING IN ALL CAPS is perceived as shouting.
- ☞ Limit line length to 65-70 characters across. Otherwise some e-mail programs will wrap the text at wrong points or not wrap it at all.
- ☞ Put the most important content at the beginning of your e-mail, be-

cause recipients don't always scroll down to the end.

- ☞ Consider carefully what you write; it's a permanent record and can be easily forwarded to others.
- ☞ Write succinctly. Don't waste bandwidth. E-mail may be inexpensive to most, but not to all.
- ☞ Don't attach large files (over 50K) without getting permission from your recipient first. Some e-mail clients do not support large attachments and some e-mail providers block large attachments.
- ☞ Write descriptive subject lines. Many busy people will only open messages with captivating subject lines.

Think creatively.

- ☞ When forwarding messages, put your own comments at the top of the message.
- ☞ Don't overuse acronyms or education jargon. Not everyone is experienced with this jargon and they may not want to admit their confusion – possibly missing your point.
- ☞ Read over your e-mail before you send it. Although e-mail is more informal than writing a letter, be sure you make your points clear and concise.
- ☞ Proofread! Always review your message before pressing Send.

Seuss Characters Perform at Kids World and Shopping Malls

Continued from Page 1

faula, Edmond's Ida Freeman Elementary, Kinta, Ryals, Haworth, Moyers, Coalgate, Ada, Winds West in the Western Heights district, Macomb, Maud, Wanette and Oklahoma City's Lee and Parmelee Elementaries.

The Kids World of Fun at the Oklahoma State Fairgrounds in Oklahoma City was again a haunt of the RAA characters as 10,000 children and their parents passed through the turnstiles. Students from the UCO Student OEA chapter donned the costumes and assisted OEA staffers Pam Westbrook, Stacy Martin, Maureen Peters, Cindy Manning and Bruce Treadaway as they read and gave away books to the children who attended the event.

At Crossroads Mall, Heritage Park Mall, Quail Springs Mall and the Shawnee Mall, OEA locals worked with OEA staffers in conducting huge events on March 1. Local celebrities took part in the mall events that attracted more than 6,400 people.

Around the State

While OEA's Catavans were crisscrossing the state, local Associations conducted their own reading celebrations.

In Enid, the Enid Education Association had members dress as Seuss characters and roam the town. When students spotted the characters, they then called a local radio station to report their sightings, and they were rewarded with books donated by an Enid banker.

In Tulsa, the Hispanic community and the OEA staff worked with the public library to conduct a reading event for

Hispanic children.

In Norman, the Professional Educators of Norman kicked off RAA in late February to avoid testing in the district during the first week of March. OEA's state honorary RAA chair Sherri Coale, women's basketball coach at the University of Oklahoma, participated, reading at Washington and Adams Elementaries. Student OEA members from the University of Oklahoma participated, and Superintendent Joe Siano and Sen. Jonathan Nichols (R, Norman) administered reading oaths.

Dr. Seuss Turns 100 Next Year

RAA 2003 has barely ended and the OEA is already making plans for 2004, Dr. Seuss's 100th birthday celebration. Governor Brad Henry and his wife Kim have agreed to serve as OEA's honorary RAA chairs for next year. OEA staff will be working with the Asian community in Oklahoma City to conduct a wonderful reading activity that will benefit hundreds of Vietnamese children, similar to the Hispanic event in Tulsa.



As always, the theme of the RAA is for reading to be fun and enjoyed by children. Begin making plans now for 2004. If your local hasn't reported its activities on the NEA Web site yet, please do so by visiting www.nea.org/raa/states.html. The OEA's RAA program is recognized as one of the premier reading events in the nation, and your local can and should be a part of it.



(Top photo) Sherri Coale, OU women's basketball coach and OEA's honorary chair for Read Across America, reads to students at Washington Elementary in Norman; (middle photo) OEA Vice President Roy Bishop visits with Jones pre-K students during a South Catavan visit; (above) OEA President Carolyn Crowder makes a friend during a North Catavan visit in Collinsville; and (left) Shawnee Mayor Chris Harden reads with a couple of firefighters at the Shawnee Mall's celebration of Read Across America.



Reading Ac



A happy reader in Wilburton.



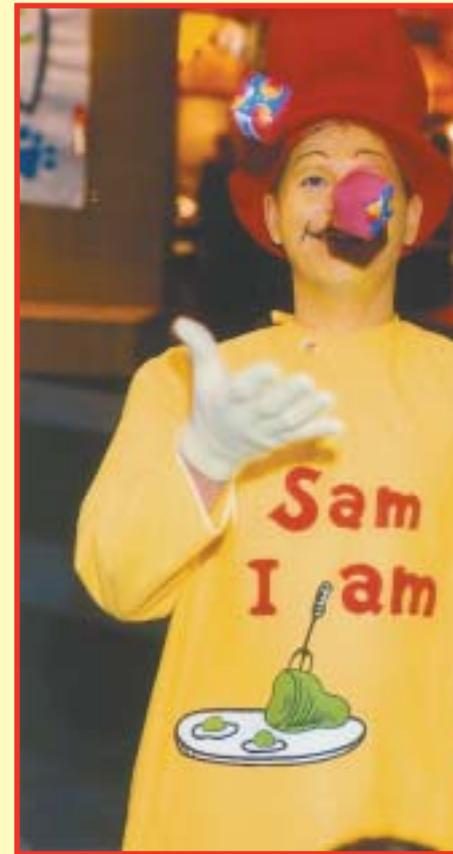
First Lady Kim Henry reads in North Rock Creek.



Word scramble helpers in Glenpool.



Word scramble in Piedmont.



Eddie Grooms juggles for the crowd at Crossroads Mall in Oklahoma City.



The South Catavan team and friends from Anadarko (from left), Pam Westbrook, Anadarko EA President Pam Martin, Sheyanne McGlouthin as Thing 1, Bruce Treadaway and Maureen Peters as the Grinch.



Newcastle teachers perform the "3 Piggy Opera" during the South Catavan stop.

cross Oklahoma



Monique Reed, Bruce Treadaway, Lesa Rohrer and Stacy Martin at Putnam City Central Middle School.



Miss Altus Ashley Bledsoe reads to first graders during the Catavan stop in Altus.



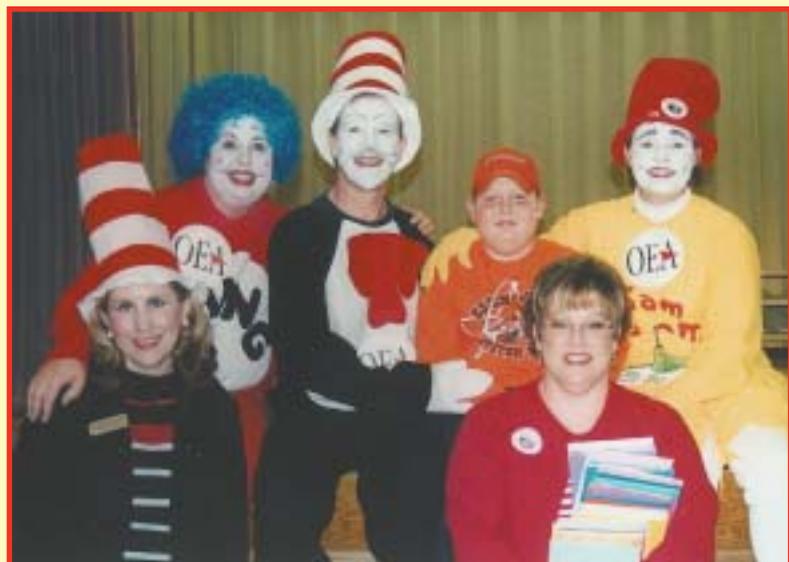
Cindy Manning as Sam I Am at Quail Springs mall in Oklahoma City.



A huge crowd spent the afternoon with the Cat in the Hat and Sam I Am at Quail Springs Mall in Oklahoma City.



Debbie Stine, as Thing 2, introduces her new partner in Guthrie.



The North Catavan team (from left) of Carolyn Crowder, Debbie Stine, Floyd Cox and Sharon Moore pose in Guthrie's Lisa Williams and her son, xxx.



Sharon Moore as Sam I Am dances with new friends in Stilwell.

Board of Directors Asks Locals to Increase Minority Recruitment

The Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Education Association is asking local Associations to increase efforts to recruit ethnic-minority members to participate and take leadership roles at local, state and national levels.

To be in compliance with NEA By-law 3-1(g), the OEA is looking to achieve representation on all three levels at least proportionate to the ethnic-minority population of Oklahoma, which is 26 percent.

“Each February, the OEA submits a plan for NEA Minority Compliance

designed to increase the ethnic-minority participation in the OEA,” said Roy Bishop, OEA vice president. “We have provided our presidents with a list of minority members in their locals and asked them to actively seek out these members to become more involved.”

The Board urges local Associations which qualify for three or more representatives to the OEA Delegate Assembly or the NEA Representative Assembly to elect at least one minority delegate or the number of minority delegates proportionate to the ethnic-

minority membership of their Association, whichever is greater.

In addition, the Board’s plan suggests the following activities to increase minority involvement:

- Conduct at least one training session at each Zone Council or regional seminar focusing on a critical issue impacting ethnic minorities.
- Establish a goal to achieve at least 10 percent ethnic-minority participation at all major OEA meetings.
- Encourage the recognition of eth-

nic minorities for OEA Awards.

- Provide information to members on ethnic observances in OEA Publications.
- Encourage ethnic-minority students to join Student OEA Chapters.
- Target ethnic-minority education support professionals to join OEA/NEA and take active leadership roles in the organization.

For more information on ethnic-minority participation or to request a copy of the OEA Board’s “Plan for Minority Involvement in the Local,” interested members should call Charles McCauley at 800/522-8091 or 528-7785 (in central Oklahoma), or e-mail at cmccauley@okea.org.

Clustering Allows Smaller Locals to Participate in NEA RA

Forms registering clustered locals for this summer’s NEA Representative Assembly (RA) are due at OEA headquarters by April 10.

The NEA’s 141st Annual Meeting and 82nd Representative Assembly (RA) are scheduled for July 1-6 in New Orleans.

Local Associations are allowed one delegate to the RA for every 150 active members or a major fraction thereof. Locals with fewer than 76 Active members may join together to form membership units for the purpose of participating in the RA.

Each local in a cluster of two or more must have less than 76 members. Allocation of credentials for such locals are based on a ratio of

1:150 active and life members or major fraction thereof.

The first two days of the annual meeting are devoted to discussions, conferences and exhibits, but the highlight is the four-day RA. The meeting is the NEA’s highest decision-making body. With over 9,000 delegates, the RA is also the world’s largest democratic, deliberative body. Delegates debate issues that impact American public education, elect top officers and set policy for the 2.7 million-member Association.

For more information on clustering or RA credentials, contact Charles McCauley at 800/522-8091, 528-7785 (in central Oklahoma), or at cmccauley@okea.org.

Education Car Tag Now Available

A new specialty license plate for vehicles gives Oklahomans a chance to display their commitment while contributing to Oklahoma public schools.

The cost for the tag is \$25, with \$23 of the proceeds going to the Education Reform Revolving Fund, the Higher Education Revolving Fund, the

State Vocational-Technical Fund and the Teachers’ Retirement Benefit Fund. The other \$2 goes to the Ad Valorem Reimbursement Fund.

To receive an application, visit www.sde.state.ok.us or, contact Mark Mann at 405/521-3331, or e-mail at mark_mann@sde.state.ok.us.

Governance Dates To Remember

Five Star applications are due at OEA Headquarters by April 1.

OEA Election Ballots must be delivered to OEA Headquarters by 5 p.m. Friday, April 4.

Local affiliate delegate and

successor report forms and cluster registration forms for the 2003 NEA Representative Assembly are due at OEA Headquarters by April 10.

OEA Awards Banquet ticket purchases are due by Friday, April 18, 2003.



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At Narconon Arrowhead, more than 70% of our graduates remain drug free for over 2 years after program completion. For more information about our rehabilitation program visit www.stopaddiction.com.

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Avoid Placing Yourself in Risky Situations

By Heath Merchen

OEA Associate General Counsel

You are alone in your room with a student who is making up late assignments. She appears to be doodling so you walk up behind her, put your hand on her shoulder, and ask her to get back to work. She yells, "Get your hands off of me," and runs out of the classroom.

The next thing you know, your Superintendent and a police officer are in your room stating that the student filed a report that you, "rubbed up against her back and grabbed her," while she was working.

This scenario is not nearly as far fetched as most would hope, and contrary to popular belief, it isn't just male teachers who can be accused. Media attention stemming from cases like Mary Kay Letourneau have moti-

vated administrators and police officers to react with extremes to any student allegation of teacher misconduct, sometimes without ever getting the teacher's side of the story. Hence, it is more important than ever to ensure that you are not placing yourself in a vulnerable position.

The following pointers are designed to help you avoid some of the more prevalent risks facing Oklahoma teachers in the realm of sexual misconduct allegations.

The vast majority of accusations against teachers stem from interactions where the teacher and student are alone together for a prolonged period. Hence, the first rule is to avoid being alone with a student, whether he or she is taking a test in your classroom or asking for a ride home after a game. If you can't avoid the

situation, let your principal and staff members nearby know ahead of time why the student is there and what he or she is doing.

If a student drops in unannounced, call the office to let them know a student has stopped by or at the very least make a nearby staff member aware of the student's presence. Additionally, avoid offering rides to students. In the event there is no other alternative, ask another staff member to ride with you, request that the student sit in back while you sit in front and call both your principal and the parent.

Second, maintain consistent and firm social boundaries with students, always remembering that you are their teacher, not their friend. If you fail to make that distinction clear to the student, the student may perceive a romantic relationship.

Unrequited student crushes can lead to some horrifying accusations. Be especially cautious about student contact outside of the schoolhouse. Being seen in a social setting alone with a student of the opposite gender will start a torrent of rumors in the community, no matter how innocent the interaction may have been. Make sure you have your principal's permission for out of class activities and have another staff member of the opposite gender present at all times.

Similarly, don't joke or talk with students about intimate or sexually oriented events in their lives or your own. Becoming a student's confidant is dangerous territory: if they reveal abuse allegations, failing to report it to the authorities can land you in jail.

Finally, maintain consistent and firm physical boundaries with all students. If you are a "close talker" or a person with a habit of putting your hands on students' shoulders or leaning on or over them while looking at



Heath Merchen
OEA Associate General Counsel

their papers, KNOCK IT OFF! This is especially true if you are alone with a student and applies to both casual and disciplinary situations, since even a light tap on the shoulder will be interpreted as a shove by a student, (and surrounding witnesses), when it is accompanied by a raised voice and angry look.

There simply is no such thing as a "safe" touch where students are involved. Remember, there are inevitably students in your class experiencing physical or sexual abuse at home, and some will interpret even the most innocuous touch as either sexual or threatening because of their background. If you respect their space, and make them respect yours in turn, it will avoid any possibility of misinterpretation.

The job you do, and the difference you can make in the lives of students, is one of the most important and profound in our society. As with any great responsibility, however, it comes with risk. The goal of this article is to help you minimize that risk to ensure that it doesn't interfere with your primary mission: educating Oklahoma's children. Maintaining social boundaries, taking precautions about being alone with students, and setting firm physical boundaries will help keep you focused on that mission and out of harm's way.



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Tech Ed Award Winner Encourages Hands-on Problem Solving

By Patti Razien

Twenty-four years ago, when Darrell Jones began his teaching career in Woodward, “technology” referred to the Industrial Arts program of leather crafts and woodworking. Today, it refers to an award-winning, innovative program he runs for his 6th through 8th grade classes.

Jones, technology education teacher at Woodward Middle School, was recently named the winner of the Teacher Excellence Award presented by the International Technology Education Association (ITEA) for the Middle School Division for the State of Oklahoma. Jones was selected from nominees from across the state at the OTEA summer conference. He will now be competing at the international conference held in March in Nashville, competing against winners from across the United States as well as several countries from throughout the world.

Jones has written and received grants from the State Department of Career Tech totaling \$15,600 in four of the past five years. That money, along with monies earned from student projects he has directed, has

gone towards purchasing and upgrading equipment for his technology education lab.

Eager young students pile into Jones’ classroom anxious to get started on their latest assignments. Those can range from hands-on problem solving projects such as mass producing rockets, designing CO2-powered cars to PowerPoint presentations and video editing.

Besides being the technology teacher, Jones also coaches wrestling, football and track.

“I feel like I can make the greatest impact and help kids of this age through these sometimes difficult years,” Jones says. “I’ve chosen this profession because I want to be where I can make a difference.”

Judging from the faces of the kids around him he definitely has found his place.

Darrell feels that belonging to professional organizations has significantly furthered his knowledge of teaching and learning. He has been a member of OEA since he began teaching and holds membership in ITEA, the Association of Career and Technical Education and the Okla-



“Each day I am challenged to learn and to develop professionally,” says Darrell Jones, tech ed teacher at Woodward Middle School

homa Coaches Association, to name just a few.

“Each day I am challenged to learn and to develop professionally. The rapid and relentless pace of technological changes in our world demands it,” said Jones. “To fully support my

students, my peers and my own growth I must be a willing, responsible and active participant. Only in this way will I continue to grow professionally. I can then model for my students that learning never ends – it’s a life-long process.”



Woodward’s Darrell Jones, seen here with one of his technology education classes, was recently named winner of Oklahoma’s Middle School Teacher Excellence Award by the International Technology Education Association. Jones has written grants for his program totaling \$16,500.

Solid Retirement Strategy a Must

In uncertain economic times when the markets seem to be up one day and down the next, it’s never been more important to develop a successful strategy to save for retirement. The first step is to meet with a financial professional.

Your NEA Valuebuilder financial counselor can help you evaluate your unique situation. He or she will help you determine your tolerance for risk, examine your retirement time frame and evaluate how much you will need to save for the style of retirement you want.

An annual review is also an excellent opportunity to look at your total retirement program to determine if other investment opportunities might be right for you. Regardless of your retirement goals, your NEA Valuebuilder financial counselor will help you put a plan together to meet your objectives.

For the name of a financial counselor near you, please call 1-800-NEA-VALUE (800/632-8258) or e-mail lpicone@neamb.com with your name, school district and contact information.

You Decide

A monthly column of member opinion.

This issue's question:
"Should schools and teachers be held accountable for achievement test scores."

Don't Hold Teachers Accountable by Using an Invalid System

By Kim Morris
Mannford Lower Elementary
Mannford, OK

I do not think that schools and teachers should be held accountable for achievement test scores because the tests are not valid tests.

I say this because if you read the beginning of the 3rd grade Stanford Objectives book it tells you that the 3rd graders are being tested on material that should be learned mid-year third grade to mid-year 4th grade. When are these children taking the test? Mid-year third grade, so, all of the topics have not even been taught. It infuriates me that the students are being set up for failure before they even take the test.

My administrator called the State



Department of Education to inquire about the statement in the objectives book and was told that the test has always been set up this way so that the results create a bell curve. All the test is doing is making our schools and children look like failures if they can't test on work that is above their grade level.

If we are going to test 3rd grade it should be on 3rd grade objectives, not 4th grade.

Next Issue's Question:

As districts across the state face severe budget cuts, administrators and school boards are looking at every program for money savings. Sports programs will no doubt feel the pinch one way or another. With that in mind, next issue's question is:

"Should athletics be moved outside the regular class day?"

Responses should be 250-300 words in length. E-mail your responses to Patti Razien at prazien@okea.org or mail them to her at OEA Northwest Office, 2315 Downs Ave., Woodward, OK, 73801. The deadline is April 9.

ESP Grant Deadline Nears

The grant application deadline for the NEA's 2003-04 ESP Technology Grants is April 15, 2003. Contact your regional Advocacy Specialist for a grant application, or visit the NEA Web site at www.nea.org/esphome/members/howtoapp.html.

Military Dues Waiver Offered

The OEA has implemented the Military Leave dues waiver for members called to active duty. OEA will waive the balance of dues until military personnel return. Those who qualify should notify their local so that payroll deduction can be stopped. Call Brenda Snider at 800/522-8091, or 528-7785, for more information.

Tying Accountability to Test Scores Is not a Black and White Issue

Paula McCullough
Lakehoma Elementary
Mustang, OK

As a veteran teacher I can see both sides of this topic. I do believe that teachers should be held accountable to some degree, but do not believe that this is strictly a black and white issue.

There are too many extenuating circumstances to contend with that a yearly achievement test cannot measure. As teachers we understand that not every student may show a year's academic growth when having to deal with outside pressures such as divorce, death in the family, abuse or behavioral and learning disabled problems. These factors can play a very significant role in a child's ability to grow academically.

However, a student's progress could be measured by having a pre-test when entering a grade level and a post test to measure what they have acquired academically during that particular year. This might prove to be a truer picture of the learning that has taken place during a specific year.

It also would enable testing scores to be viewed by the administration in a more realistic light. Some teachers may have a larger number of students with special problems during a school year, and therefore regular

achievement testing results could look rather low, when in reality those students have progressed according to their capabilities. Without knowing the dynamics of each individual in a classroom, test scores could be misinterpreted by anyone other than the classroom teacher.

Yes, we need a measurement of academic learning. I'm just not convinced that teachers should be held accountable for achievement test scores as we have them today.

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HF390403

Many Teachers Are Overlooking Tax Break for Earned Income Credit

By Brandon Webb

OEA Associate General Counsel

With the April 15 tax deadline fast approaching, it's important to remember to take advantage of all tax deductions and credits. Remember to save those receipts for classroom books and supplies.

For the 2002 tax year, eligible educators can deduct up to \$250 for qualified education expenses. You can receive this deduction even if you do not itemize your deductions.

standard deductions and the \$1,200 Child Tax Credit.

A single individual with two children making \$18,600 per year could receive an Earned Income Credit of \$3,065. This can be in addition to your standard deductions and the \$1,200 Child Tax Credit.

In order to receive the EIC you must fill out **Line 64** on your **Federal 1040 Tax Return Form** and attach a separate form, **Schedule EIC Form**, if you have a qualifying child.

In Oklahoma City alone, an estimated 77 percent of individuals eligible to receive the tax credit do not even apply for it. A single parent with two children could receive an Earned Income Credit of \$3,065.

Additionally, the IRS reports that one of the most overlooked and missed tax credits is the Earned Income Credit (EIC). The EIC is a credit eligible workers receive based on their income and family status. It is estimated that 77 percent of individuals in the Oklahoma City area who are eligible to receive the EIC do not even apply for the credit.

Working families can receive *both* the EIC and the Child Tax Credit for the same year. The Child Tax Credit pays up to \$600 above your regular deduction for each qualifying child.

You may qualify for the EIC if you earned less than

- \$33,178 and have more than one qualifying child, or \$34,178 if married and filing jointly;
- \$29,201 and have one qualifying child, or \$30,201 if married and filing jointly, or
- \$11,060 and have no qualifying child, or \$12,060 if married and filing jointly.

A single individual with two children making \$28,300 per year could receive an Earned Income Credit of \$1,022. This can be in addition to your

You can also receive a smaller EIC from your state tax return. However, you must file the EIC on your federal tax return in order to receive the credit on your state tax return.

If you have already filed your return for the 2002 tax year, or past years, you can file an amended return to receive the EIC. Individuals are normally allowed to file amended returns for the past two or three years. You will need to contact your local tax preparer or the IRS in order to receive the proper forms and find out how many years you may go back to file an amended return.

1040 forms, 1040 instruction books, and Schedule EIC Forms, can be found at most post offices. Furthermore, at multiple locations statewide, volunteers have been trained to prepare basic returns at no cost for individuals with income less than \$35,000.

Information on page 43 of the 1040 Instruction book will tell you about the Earned Income Credit. Likewise, you can visit www.irs.gov or call 800/829-1040 to find out more about the EIC or free tax return preparation.