

OEA

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The Education Focus

For the membership of the Oklahoma Education Association

February 2003

Gov. Henry Says It's Time To Invest in Education

By Doug Folks

Governor Brad Henry told an overflow crowd that it's time to invest in education, capping an Education Summit that Oklahoma Education Coalition officials called an overwhelming success.

More than 300 of Oklahoma's 543 schools districts were represented at the January 14 Summit. An urgency brought on by the school financial crisis attracted nearly 1,100 teachers, administrators, school board members, civic leaders and parents to the day-long event in Oklahoma City.

Several state legislators attended the Governor's closing-session speech and other parts of the day's program, including Speaker of the House Larry Adair (D, Stilwell), Rep. Barbara Staggs (D, Muskogee), House Common Education chair; Penny Williams (D, Tulsa), Senate Education Committee chair; Herb Rozzell (D, Tahlequah), Senate Education



Governor Brad Henry visits with audience members after his the closing keynote address at the Oklahoma Education Coalition's Summit 2003. Henry outlined his goals for education and promised that Oklahoma has "... a friend in education."

Appropriations Subcommittee chair; Debbie Blackburn (D, OKC), House Appropriations and Budget Subcommittee chair; and Danny Hilliard (D, Sulphur), House Speaker Pro Tempore.

"It was an incredible day," said Carolyn Crowder, Coalition chair and

president of the Oklahoma Education Association. "I think everyone left the meeting better prepared to tackle our financial problems at home and at the Capitol."

It was Henry's first official policy remarks after taking the oath of office

See Gov. Henry on Page 2

Schools Prepare for February 12 Rally

Local Coalitions from across the state are making plans to attend the Oklahoma Education Coalition "Save Our Schools" rally scheduled for February 12 in Oklahoma City.

"The current education crisis demands immediate attention," said OEA President and Coalition Chair Carolyn Crowder. "We want all Oklahomans who care about kids to show their support by attending en masse."

The Rally is one of several events planned by the Coalition to maintain

pressure on lawmakers and the governor to deal with this crisis sooner rather than later.

"The education shortfall may exceed \$200 million for common ed alone this year," said OEA Executive Director David DuVall. "Some project that next year's shortfall could be even worse. If that happens, it could take years for Oklahoma's schools to rebound from this devastating loss of revenue. We just can't let that happen."

Recognizing the need for immediate action, many school boards from across the state have already voted to close schools so that their teachers, students and parents can attend. Rally organizers expect every school district in Oklahoma to be represented. After the rally, individual legislators will be lobbied to bring about immediate and effective results.

"We must find short-term and long-term solutions to our funding crisis,"

See Rally Parking on Page 4

Oklahoma's schools have been cut \$158 million since the beginning of this school year. By July, projections show these cuts could exceed \$200 million.

So, what do you think? Do you believe we will have enough

people show up at our February 12, "Save Our Schools" Rally to convince legislators to address the education crisis quickly and thoroughly? Do you think we can get the necessary 75 percent of legislators to vote for a revenue increase to save school dis-

tricts from running out of money and thousands of school personnel from losing their jobs?

Basically, all we need is a miracle!

I Believe In Miracles

By Carolyn Crowder, OEA President

But, that's okay – I believe in miracles. I'm a fifth grade teacher. I've seen 11-year-olds actually grasp the concept of mixed fractions.

I believe in miracles because I've seen OEA members come through time after time. Prior to the H.B.

1017 rally, even supporters were afraid only 500 people would show up. Instead, 10,000 showed up the first day, and it grew from there until

we saw legislative success.

Prior to the rally of 2000, people said, "You won't get the response you got during H.B.

1017." You proved them wrong when 30,000 education supporters showed up to witness the passage of a \$3,000 teacher raise.

Last year, many people believed the insurance town hall meetings wouldn't work because, "Education people will not take time to come out

Gov. Henry

and celebrating his inauguration as Oklahoma's 26th governor on January 13. During his speech, Henry outlined his plans for education for the next four years, including:

- Focus on early childhood education programs;
- Emphasize parental involvement;
- Catch at-risk students "before they fall through the cracks;"
- Put technology in all classrooms, including a statewide fiber optic network;
- Pay teachers a competitive salary; and
- Tuition-free college for Oklahoma high school graduates.

"These are all bold suggestions. I know that, but that's what I mean when I say we have to be smarter and invest in our education system,"

"You have a friend in education . . . I'll be there for you."

Governor Brad Henry

Henry said. "It won't be easy, almost impossible, if we don't pull together as one voice."

The governor had high praise for Oklahoma's education system and its accomplishments. He pointed out that Oklahoma teachers are among the best prepared, that state ACT scores

are tops in the 14 southern tier states; that Oklahoma ranks in the top 10 in nationally certified teachers; and that the state offers the best career tech system in the country.

"I want to dispel a common myth.

We get a great bang for our education buck in Oklahoma," he said, contrasting the accomplishments with the state's low per-pupil expenditures and teacher salaries.

Henry promised to pass a legislation petition for a lottery with proceeds earmarked for education, and then to put the measure to a vote of the people "as soon as possible." His research indicates the state could raise as much as \$300 million annually



Members of Chickasha's delegation to the Education Summit begin making plans of how to communicate their district's message during the financial crisis.

with a lottery.

"Even if it's only \$50 million, that's \$50 million for education we don't have today," he said.

For the first time in eight years, Oklahoma's top elected official pledged full support of public education and a desire to improve the system without destroying it.

"We can't do all we want to do this year, but we can lay the foundation. I don't expect miracles; I demand excellence," Henry said. He added that his office would always be open to educators and asked for their input.

"The only thing that holds us back is our mindset," he said. "You have a friend in education . . . I'll be there for you."



at night." As you know, we had standing room only crowds across the state.

When we planned the January 14 Coalition Summit, we were hoping for 500 participants. We had to start a waiting list after 900 people had registered, and we wound up with 1,100!

I know OEA members will do what they have to do to make our rally a success. Then we'll do what we have to do the rest of the session until this situation is alleviated.

I believe in miracles — because I believe in you!

OEA

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Summit Draws Standing-Room-Only Crowd

From Staff Reports

January 14 may well prove to be the beginning of a bright new chapter in Oklahoma public education thanks to the success of the Oklahoma Education Coalition's Summit 2003. The event brought together an unexpectedly large crowd of teachers, adminis-

Representatives of each district also huddled together and began making plans for local coalition activities based on information they had received throughout the day.

Attendees rotated through five different workshops during the morning sessions. Each session was designed

to inform participants about how schools are funded and how they are run, including unique reform ideas. Following are synopses of those breakouts:

Federal Funding For ESEA/IDEA

Presented by Katie Dunlap, assistant state superintendent; and Karl Springer, superintendent of Mustang Schools.

One of the major goals of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is to attract more parental involvement.

"The purpose of all this is to raise the bar for students, to increase expectations of students and to reach higher standards of proficiency in reading/language arts and math."

Springer, a former special education teacher, talked in depth about the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). He said too many children are falling between the cracks.

"During this budget crisis we need to be sure and continue our school improvement plan, not abandon it. Don't let class size get out of hand," he said. "This is a great piece of legislation, but we must stick together. It's all about the kids."

Ad Valorem Issues, Exemptions and Protests

Presented by Jeff Spelman, Oklahoma Tax Commission, and Mary Jane Bias, superintendent of Bixby Schools

The Ad Valorem Reimbursement Fund (AVRF) was started 20 years ago to provide tax incentives for companies building new facilities in state. It was established and funded with moneys from state income taxes to

reimburse ad valorem coffers decreased by the tax break for businesses.

For the first time, this fund is insufficient to meet its intended needs of schools and aspects of local and county governments, such as libraries, emergency medical services, sinking funds and others. The outlook for the fiscal year 2003 is a \$26.5 million shortfall. It gets worse in 2004 with a \$34.8 million shortage, and in 2005 when a \$42.3 million shortage is foreseen. Spelman said the legislature has the responsibility for the funding.

Building Successful Partnerships in Your Community

Presented by Cathy Post, president of the State Parents and Teachers Association, Jean Hendrickson, principal of Oklahoma City's Will Rogers Elementary; and Jack Parker, Perry Schools superintendent.

Presenters emphasized the need to



Stillwater delegates plan their local coalition efforts.

trators, school board members, civic leaders and parents to discuss ways of overcoming the state's financial crisis and to begin local coalition planning. It was concluded by Governor Brad Henry's encouraging keynote address

During initial planning for the Summit, the Coalition expected to attract about 500 participants from the state's larger school districts. Instead, the Summit brought in nearly 1,100 people representing more than 300 of the state's 543 school districts.

The crowd heard unscheduled remarks by Frosty Troy, a former OEA and NEA Friend of Education and editor of the "Oklahoma Observer," and Speaker of the House Larry Adair prior to the governor's visit.

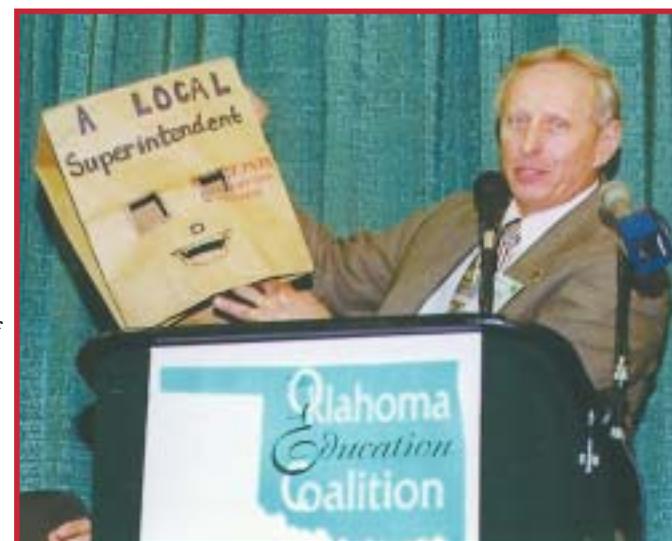
The conference featured presentations on community involvement by school superintendents from three different size districts: Cathy Burden, from Tulsa's Union Public Schools; Lee Roy Pettyjohn, Silo Schools; and Lloyd Snow, Sand Springs.

to inform participants about how schools are funded and how they are run, including unique reform ideas. Following are synopses of those breakouts:

State School Funding Formula

Presented by Steven Crawford, Byng Schools superintendent, and Harriot LaGrone, assistant state superintendent for financial services.

Schools are funded through various state and local taxes as set by the state. A student-weighted formula is used to distribute funds to the various school districts. This formula provides for equal funding for equal students and additional revenue for more expensive students, such as special education students. The average daily membership of students and a teacher index for the years of teaching experience are also figured in with some additional calculations for small schools. State aid is based on the highest, weighted average daily mem-



Sand Springs Superintendent Lloyd Snow brought some humor to the Summit when he shared the gift his teachers gave him on the way to the event.

communicate the needs of the school to the patrons in the community through a variety of activities including one-on-one contact with parents and business leaders, presentations to civic organizations and organized town hall meetings. A clear picture of the situation and the steps needed to

See Summit Workshops on Page 4

'03 Legislative Agenda Seeks New Funding Source

By Stacy Martin

At the top of the Oklahoma Education Association's 2003 legislative agenda is achieving an immediate revenue source to correct a \$158 million common education shortfall, OEA leadership said.

It is proposed that the Legislature quickly pass a temporary, one-cent sales tax to accomplish this goal. This remedy would bring the fastest relief to Oklahoma schools, pumping \$25 million a month into districts within 90 days of implementation. It would take at least a year for virtually any other solution to do so.

"We must deal with this like the crisis it is," said OEA President Carolyn Crowder. "Things probably will get worse. The education shortfall

could increase to \$200 million by July 2003, the end of the fiscal year."

She said the OEA is concentrating on this year's goal with unparalleled energy and fervor. The Association has joined forces with its allies in the Oklahoma Education Coalition. In turn, the Coalition's powerful backing is generating education community and grassroots support statewide.

The OEA and OEC are working toward a February 12 crescendo, when thousands of education supporters will mount a history-making rally on the south steps of the State Capitol. Their mission will be to convince lawmakers that their issue cannot be ignored or put on the back burner.

"We are asking schools across the state to join us for this critical event,"

said Crowder. "They are answering our call, sending dozens, hundreds of teachers to be by our side."

But the OEA also has a legislative agenda beyond the rally.

"We have a four-year plan designed to significantly advance the education profession," said Crowder. "At the end, Oklahoma educators will be earning much more competitive wages and benefits."

To that end, the Association's priority will be to raise the salary of certified personnel across-the-board a total of \$8,000 over four years. The cost of the program would be \$110 million annually. Education support personnel would receive 5 percent salary increases in each of the four years as well, at a cost of about \$25

million annually.

The plan also calls for funding increases in the state-paid portion of educator health insurance to 100 percent. Currently, the state pays 58 percent of all certified employees' individual premium. The employee and/or the district pick up the rest.

The money would offset premium increases or additional benefits.

Part-time education support personnel would receive a total of \$15.5 million in funding toward their flexible benefit allowance during the four-year period.

The legislative goals also call for restoring money to the ad valorem reimbursement fund, which has suffered reductions under the present education funding crisis. The plan calls for adding \$28 million in year one, \$36 million in year two and \$44 million in the third year.

Also, the plan calls for a 10 percent yearly increase for school district operating expenses.

Summit Workshops

effect change must be articulated.

Including all shareholders in the action plan is necessary for real change to take place. To meet the challenges of the current funding crisis and to continue school improvements, presenters said the legislature must take action. An informed constituency will have a better chance of bringing about a positive result.

Governance of a School District

Presented by David Sawyer, Tulsa Public School superintendent; and Tony Thomas, Mid-Del Schools board member

This workshop discussed the roles of school administration and the school board. Thomas said effective public education requires a strong school board, superintendent leadership and the working relationship the two maintain. He stressed the importance of the role of each in order to

run the best school district possible.

Among the school board's most important responsibilities are hiring the superintendent, establishing district policy, holding the superintendent responsible for proper school district administration, and supporting the superintendent's efforts.

From the superintendent, school boards should expect professional advice on district matters, including hiring, firing and fiscal decisions. The board should also expect the superintendent to interpret district needs.

Rally Parking

said Crowder. "We believe that our citizenry is prepared to do whatever it takes to keep our schools moving forward."

The Rally will start 10:30 a.m. on the south steps of the State Capitol.

Due to the lack of parking in the Capitol complex, Rally officials are



Media from around the state covered the Coalition's Education Summit throughout the day. Here, Durant EA's Joyce Northcut visits with Bill Bateman of KTOK, an Oklahoma City news/talk radio station.

encouraging use of off-site parking facilities and taking shuttles to the Capitol. Parking will be available at Crossroads Mall at I-35 and I-240, Tinseltown Theatre at I-44 and Martin Luther King Blvd. and Remington Park Race Track, located on Martin Luther King Blvd. just south of I-44.

Other parking areas are expected to be added before the Rally.

Round trip shuttles from each parking area will be available for \$1 per rider.

For more information, visit www.okea.org.

From Your Counsel

April 10 and the “Continuing Contract” Statute

By *Richard Wilkinson*

Most educators are aware of the significance of the April 10 deadline contained in Oklahoma’s “continuing contract” statute, 70 O.S. § 6-101 (E), and the requirements of a local board of education to avoid the automatic renewal of a certified teacher’s contract for the ensuing fiscal year. However, the continuing contract statute is often confused with other statutes designed to ensure due process protections for probationary or career teachers and the significance of the April 10 deadline is sometimes overlooked.

The continuing contract statute specifically states, in part:

“If, prior to April 10, a board of education has not entered into a written contract with a regularly employed teacher or notified the teacher in writing by registered or certified mail that a recommendation has been made not to reemploy the teacher for the ensuing fiscal year, and if, by April 25, such teacher has not noti-



*Richard Wilkinson
OEA General Counsel*

fied the board of education in writing by registered or certified mail that such teacher does not desire to be reemployed in such school district for the ensuing year, such teacher shall be considered as employed on a continuing contract basis and on the same salary schedule used for other teachers in the school district for the ensuing fiscal year, and such continuing employment shall be binding on the teacher and on the school district.”

If a teacher does not receive writ-

ten notice of a recommendation not to reemploy from the local board of education that is sent prior to April 10 by certified or registered mail, they will be deemed automatically renewed for the ensuing fiscal year unless the teacher submits a resignation to the clerk of the local board of education by certified or registered mail prior to April 25. Absent either of these two conditions, a binding contract is established between the teacher and the local school district for the ensuing fiscal year.

Once a continuing contract is established, a teacher who wants to subsequently resign from employment with a school district must submit a resignation, and the local board of education has the sole discretion to accept or reject the resignation. If the local board does not accept a resignation submitted after April 25 from a teacher employed under a continuing contract, the teacher cannot enter into a teaching contract with another school district and must honor the

contract that is created by the continuing contract statute.

The continuing contract statute applies only to certified teachers and is not applicable to the continuing employment of administrators or education support professionals. Unlike certified teachers, education support professionals cannot enter into a written contract with a local board of education until the beginning of the fiscal year for which the contract applies.

However, education support professionals are entitled to written notice of “reasonable assurance” of employment for the subsequent school year prior to June 1 or 10 days after the effective date of the education appropriation bill, whichever is later. This notice requirement for education support professionals does not otherwise alter the due process or hearing procedures that are afforded full-time support employees who have been employed by a local school district in excess of one year.

Contract Surprise Regenerates Crooked Oak Support Local

By *Stacy Martin*

As did the mythical phoenix, the Crooked Oak education support local has risen from its own ashes to reestablish itself for the first time since 1996.

The southeast Oklahoma City district is home to roughly 36 support employees in various capacities, from janitor to administrative office employee to cafeteria manager.

The revitalization of the support local began last fall when support employees discovered their 2002-03 contracts contained an addendum that jeopardized their due process rights. The new language was discovered only when employees received con-

tracts to sign.

Oklahoma Education Association (OEA) advocate Pam Westbrook instructed Crooked Oak’s OEA members to insert a handwritten clause stating the employee did not intend to surrender these rights. This allowed workers to sign their contracts.

Soon, word spread about the district’s ominous clause. Support employees flooded OEA with requests to join. Within weeks, membership grew from two to 27.

OEA trained the budding local in the steps needed to reestablish itself. At its first gathering, the group elected Imogene Whitaker, a teacher’s aid at West Oak Park El-

ementary School, as president. Other officers are Vice President Margaret Brill, an administrative office employee, Secretary Mendi Dawley and Treasurer Carolyn Lohr.

“The Crooked Oak support professionals have done the best thing,” said OEA President Carolyn Crowder. “Education support employees have been a vulnerable group in the current education funding crisis.”

In the coming weeks, the OEA support members will hold an election to become the legally recognized bargaining agent for Crooked Oak support employees. Shortly thereafter, OEA will advise the new local in bargaining a new contract to better protect its members.

“We realize economic times are



Officers for Crooked Oak’s support professional local are (clockwise from top left) Mendi Dawley, secretary; Carolyn Lohr, treasurer; Margaret Brill, vice president; and Imogene Whitaker, president.

extremely hard,” said Whitaker. “But fairness to all employees should be foremost in the handling of all personnel matters.”

One of the Best, Anywhere

Smallwood Makes Finals for NFIE's Largest Award

By Marty Bull

Broken Bow teacher Stephen Smallwood was recently honored as one of five finalists for the NEA Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence at a gala held in Washington, D.C.

Nominated by their respective state Associations, the finalists were chosen by an independent committee. The award was designed to recognize, reward and promote excellence in teaching and advocacy for the profession and is open to all active NEA members.

Smallwood teaches speech, drama and debate at Broken Bow High School. Prior to joining the Broken Bow faculty in 1991, he taught for seven years in Perry and eight years in Lawton. He also lived for six years in New York City, where he was a personnel officer for Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company and writing instructor for foreign students at the American Institute of Banking.

"It was a great honor to represent our state and the outstanding teachers of Oklahoma," said Smallwood. "And the fact that a teacher from a rural area, that to some people may appear economically deprived, could receive national recognition for excellence in teaching made it even more of an honor."

Through his teaching, Mr. Smallwood helps his students discover that, indeed, "all the world's a stage." In 2002, Broken Bow students won the state one-act play competition and represented Oklahoma in the American High School Theater Festival sponsored by the International Fringe Festival in

"It was a great honor to represent our state and the outstanding teachers of Oklahoma,"



Broken Bow's Stephen Smallwood directs student Joe Ben Daniel during classroom rehearsals. Smallwood, OEA's senior NEA Director, was a recent finalist for NFIE's Award for Teaching Excellence.

Edinburgh, Scotland.

Drawing on his personal experience as a member of the Choctaw Tribe, this former Oklahoma Teacher of the Year creates a classroom environment that recognizes, respects and capitalizes on the diversity represented in the student body and in the

community. A nationally-recognized leader in his field, he shares examples from his own background to encourage students to broaden their horizons when considering options for careers and postsecondary education.

Smallwood is a political activist and advocate for public education at the

local, state and national levels. He is currently serving as mayor of his hometown of Rattan. He served two terms as president of the Broken Bow Classroom Teachers' Association, as well as two terms on the board of directors of both the OEA and the NEA.

OEA President Carolyn Crowder illustrates Smallwood's influence by noting that she "cannot go anywhere in Oklahoma without running into one of Stephen's former students. Without fail, they approach him with a display of respect and love and they flourish under his caring hand."

Every fall, five national finalists are chosen for the NFIE Teaching Excellence award based on their outstanding instructional expertise; creativity and innovation; attention to diversity; and individual student needs, learning styles and experiences; leadership in professional development; dedication to lifelong learning; and ability to engage parents and the community.

This year's recipient was Katherine Wright Knight, Arkansas Education Association. Other finalists included Anita Gibson, Alabama Education Association; Jennifer Lynne Williams, Idaho Education Association; and Judie Woodhouse, Minnesota Education Association-Minnesota Federation of Teachers (MEA-MFT).

Knight received a cash award of \$25,000, while all finalists received the Horace Mann-NEA Foundation Awards for Teaching Excellence, which included \$10,000 and financial support to attend the gala from The Horace Mann Companies.



Clusters Offer Norman Middle Schoolers Unique Classroom Experiences

By Doug Folks

Middle school students in Norman get to take some pretty unusual classes. For instance, Alcott Middle School offers Beads, Beads, Beads; Juggling; Self Defense, Intro to Robots and the World of Silent Film, to mention a few.

Actually, the classes aren't part of the normal curriculum, but for part of the year Alcott students explore a subject just for the fun of it. While the topics may not sound very rigorous, Norman teachers find sneaky little ways to inject real learning.

The unique classes are part of Norman's middle school Clusters, a program of the district's gifted and talented program. Some of the schools offer the classes every day for two weeks, or like Alcott, twice a week for five weeks. During Cluster periods of the school year, each class is cut five minutes, making Cluster classes 45 minutes.

"Clusters allow us to provide a gifted and talented program to all students, not just to students identified as gifted and talented in a pullout program," said Jimmy Lou Stice, Alcott's gifted and talented teacher.

At the beginning of each year, the

teachers compile a list of unusual subjects they'd like to teach. The students then pick which classes they'd like to take during Clusters. Occasionally, a class doesn't get enough interest to "make," but the response to the program is impressive.

"We conduct an evaluation after each session, with the students grading their Cluster on a scale of one to five," Stice said. "Most of our classes get 4s and 5s, with nothing ever averaging less than 3.5."

This year, for the first time, Alcott held a culminating activity for Clusters. Production classes, such as beading and model building, displayed their completed projects in the library. Performance classes, such as juggling and jazz band, performed for the entire school at an assembly.

Yvonda Sieber, Alcott's home economics instructor, teaches a beading class during Clusters and finds it offers some interesting opportunities for her students.

"By its nature, beading is attractive to some of the quieter students," she said. "My Cluster allows some really quiet students to help others."

During this year's Clusters, Sieber ran into a former student who is now

in high school and making and selling beaded creations as a part time job. She brought the student into her Cluster as a guest speaker, and it inspired one of Alcott's students to try the same thing.

"Through my beading class, I exposed my students to research, how to start a small business and gave some of them an opportunity to teach others. How can you get any better than that?" she asked.

Dana Loy had juggled some on her own and decided to offer it this Cluster.

"I just thought that juggling, as an ancient circus art, might appeal to our kids," she said. "(Juggling) had a freedom and looseness to it. It wound up being a relaxing activity."

Clusters also offer teachers a

chance to learn something new. For example, Loy incorporated giant puppets as part of the performance.

"I was able to grow in something I was interested in, too," Loy said of creating the large masks.

Stice and Sieber agreed that Clusters create a larger community in the school. Kids from all grade levels come together in a class, maybe with a teacher they might not ordinarily have. In fact, Sieber had two students transfer into her regular home ec class after taking her beading Cluster.

She added that, without the pressure of a grade, learning comes easy.

"Clusters give us a chance to be positive for some kids who don't necessarily get a lot of positive feedback," Sieber said. "I have very few discipline problems in my Cluster."



Alcott Middle Schooler Trey Gaylord (top photo) displays the robot he built. Above, (from left) Summer Nolan, Kara Willyard, Dillon Summers and Rafael Powell, all students in Dana Loy's juggling class, show off their newly developed skills during a December performance. The unique classes are just two of Norman Public Schools' Cluster program, which provides enrichment opportunities to all middle school students.

Saturn of Oklahoma City Plays Santa Claus

Saturn of Oklahoma City provided a much needed Christmas gift for local schools just before the winter holiday break. Bob Grant, a salesman for the Saturn dealership and OEA's contact for corporate promotions, delivered 10 cases of paper with instructions for OEA staff to deliver it where needed.

Floyd Cox, OEA teaching and

learning specialist, offered a case of the paper to Lake Park Elementary in Putnam City at the end of a staff development workshop in early January. As it turned out, that school had all but run out of copier paper and the staff was wondering how they were going to start the second semester.

The Reluctant Author

18 Years Later, Hobbs Publishes Her Book

By Doug Folks

Phyllis Hobbs never intended to be a writer of children's books. In fact, you might say she fought pretty hard to avoid being an officially published author.

Now, though, the computer science teacher and school newspaper sponsor at Merritt High School has one book for sale and another is being copyrighted.

Hobbs' first book, "Lisa and the Dancing Shoes," was recently published and released by Vantage Press. It can be found at Hooked on Books in Weatherford, and maybe in a bookstore near you. But this wasn't a typical lifelong dream of finally finding an audience. The book was written in 1984 just for a grade in a graduate class. Since then, Hobbs has been pushed and pulled (perhaps kicking and screaming?) into the world of publishing.

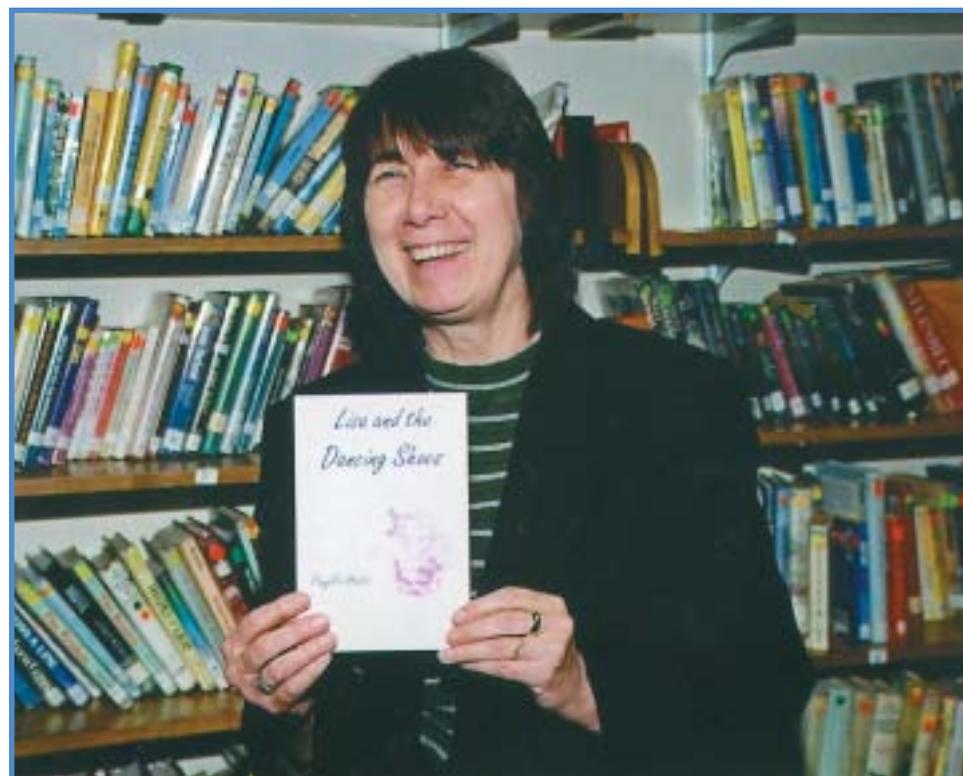
"I didn't set out to be an author. It just happened," Hobbs said. "I didn't

do it to make money. I just did it because my daughters encouraged me."

Her daughters, who are now grown adults, as well as colleagues and friends, have been trying to talk Hobbs into publishing the book for years. Her daughters loved the story growing up. Hobbs turned the class assignment into a book by cutting out drawings to match the story and placing it in a photo album.

The journey to publish the book took several years. At the suggestion of a friend, she began searching the Internet for a publisher, but everywhere she looked the sites said that no new authors would be accepted. She found Vantage Press Inc., which expressed an interest in publishing "Lisa." But Vantage splits the cost of publishing with the author, so Hobbs dropped the idea for two years.

The encouragement from her daughters and friends didn't stop, so Hobbs decided to move forward. She paid \$6,000 to get "Lisa" published



It took Phyllis Hobbs' daughters and friends years of encouragement to get her to publish a children's book she wrote as a class assignment in graduate school. She'll soon start a search for a publisher for her second book.

and will receive 40 percent of all proceeds. Vantage helped her find an illustrator and handled the layout and printing of the book.

Hobbs said the book is available in Weatherford, and the publishing company has offered it to stores in Oklahoma City, including Barnes and Noble and Zany Brainy. Also, Vantage has sent copies to stores in Texas, Iowa, Missouri and New York, she said. The book's title appeared on a list of books offered by Vantage in

an ad in the "New York Times."

The experience has motivated Hobbs to write another book. "The Magic Fishing Pole" is written in couplets (every two lines rhyme) and the lesson is not as subtle as the one in "Lisa." The new book is being copyrighted, and she will soon begin the search for a publisher.

This time, though, Hobbs is a little more willing to acknowledge she's an author. And this time, she's shopping around as a *published* author.

Staples Wants to Turn Old Copier Cartridges into Cash for Schools

In a joint effort with the OEA, Staples office supply stores are looking to recycle ink printer cartridges into cash for schools.

On February 2, Staples stores will begin a promotion of recycling copier ink cartridges. The company will donate \$1 to education for every empty printer cartridge turned in to its Oklahoma stores.

Ditch Witch Industries has donated receptacles for the cartridges.

The initial promotion will roughly coincide with Gov. Brad Henry's first 100 days in office. The office supply chain hopes to raise at least \$100,000 for use in public schools. No ending date has been set, but a check pre-

sentation to Gov. Henry is being planned.

Staples is piloting this project in Oklahoma with hopes of taking it nationwide. It has 16 retail outlets around Oklahoma, including two stores in both Oklahoma City and Tulsa, as well as stores in Ada, Ardmore, Bartlesville, Chickasha, Enid, Shawnee, Lawton, McAlester, Muskogee, Ponca City, Stillwater and Yukon.

Staples is also a sponsor of OEA's annual Read Across America program, and has offered special promotions to teachers including the Teachers' Reward program.

Missing Darth Vader Shoes Serve As Author's Inspiration

In the early 80s, Phyllis Hobbs was a manager for Southwestern Bell Telephone. But when the Clinton office closed, she decided to pursue a dream to teach and went back to college. She had planned to teach elementary school, but was encouraged to use her undergraduate degrees in accounting and secondary education to teach high school.

In one of those master's level literature classes, she chose to write a children's book for one of her class projects. The idea for the assignment sprung from an incident at home.

"My daughter had a pair of Darth Vader shoes. She lost them and I made her buy a new pair with her birthday money," Hobbs said. "I used that to create the story of Lisa."

"Lisa and the Dancing Shoes" is geared for high-first grade readers, but Hobbs' intent was to get parents involved and maybe to teach a lesson.

"I wanted to write a story that parents could read to their kids," she said. "And, I wanted a little bit of moral underneath the story. The moral tells kids not to lose their shoes."

Merritt High School will sponsor a book signing by Hobbs as a fund-raiser from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Friday, February 7, at the high school. Proceeds will purchase new books for the library.

You Decide

A monthly column of member opinion.

This issue's question:
"Should the State of Oklahoma
institute a lottery to benefit education?"

A Lottery Is No Silver Bullet for Education Woes

There may very well be an Easter Bunny, a Tooth Fairy and Santa Claus, but there isn't a Silver Bullet fast enough or powerful enough to ease the financial crisis about to befall employees of public education. We can "buy" into the myth that a lottery will solve our problems; unfortunately, it will not.

A quick glimpse into Oklahoma's past should be all we need to remind us that no matter the promise for more monies to common schools, the promise faded faster than the ephemeral May fly:

- Liquor-By-Drink
- Thoroughbred horse racing
- Pari-mutuel betting

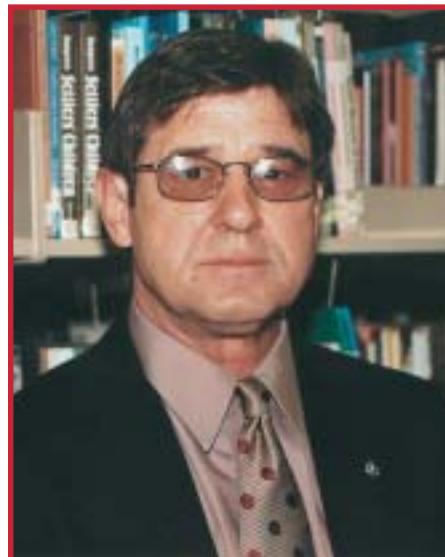
These supposed money makers have not solved many ills for this state. In fact, the horse racing industry is all but a shadow of its once powerful self, and it can be argued that education saw little if any of the taxes it raised.

Currently, states involved with a

lottery experienced a huge "spike" in consumer purchases within the first three years of operation, followed by subsequent declines. Usually, these states found themselves entangled with advertising gimmicks designed to create more purchases of tickets that somehow did not manifest themselves in a high return on the dollar.

Proponents of the lottery would lead us to believe that the Silver Bullet lottery system will take aim at education and relieve it of its financial stress. What they fail to tell us is that the thirty recognized Native American Tribes within this state will also be entitled to engage in the lottery business if the state is allowed to do so. If educators believe in the Silver Bullet lottery, they should prepare themselves for the painful shot in the foot that will only cripple public education.

Should we have a lottery? Sure. Maybe. Who cares? If it comes to fruition, we should demand that its revenue not be allocated to education.



Del Patterson
History Teacher, Sapulpa Middle School

Next Issue's Question:

Everyone seems to have an idea of how Oklahoma can cure its education financial crisis, but the fact remains that the state budget needs a new source of revenue. Next issue's question is:

"Do you believe the legislature should institute a temporary sales tax to benefit education? If not, what would you suggest?"

Send your responses by February 7 to Patti Razien via e-mail at prazien@okea.org or mail them to her at OEA Northwest Office, 2315 Downs Ave., Woodward, OK, 73801.

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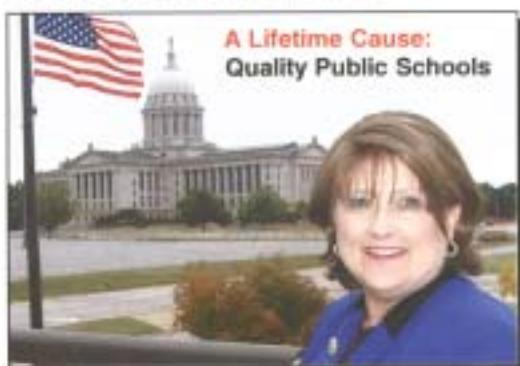


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Wal-Mart Names Muskogee Educator As Its National Teacher of the Year

By Jeff Savage

A local honor has blossomed into national recognition for Muskogee's Cindy Ball and her school, the Sadler Arts Academy.

Ball was recently named Wal-Mart's National Teacher of the Year. The fourth grade teacher won local and state honors from the retailer as well, and Sadler has received \$15,500 in cash awards in Ball's name.

Her only knowledge of the Wal-Mart program was that Ball had nominated several local educators for the award in the past. Wal-Mart store associates in Muskogee selected Ball as the local teacher of the year after she was nominated by a student's father. The \$500 local prize was used to remodel two rest rooms and the teachers' workroom.

It took a great deal of persistence from the assistant manager of Wal-Mart to convince Ball to complete the comprehensive nomination form for the statewide competition. The Oklahoma Chapter of Phi Delta Kappa selects the state winners.

"When they called me and told me I won the state teacher of the year award, I was just floored," exclaimed Ball. "My principal was turning flips because we received \$5,000 for the state award. That money was used to establish an artist-in-residence fund."

State winners are automatically submitted for the National Teacher of the Year program, whose winners are also selected by Phi Delta Kappa.

When notified of the national award, Ball said she was speechless.

"I don't get it," she said, referring



to why she won over other nominees. "I guess I have a knack for pouring my heart out on paper."

The national title included a \$10,000 prize for Sadler.

Ball, who is uncomfortable with being in the spotlight, is confident of her abilities yet very humble about the recognition brought on by the awards. "I am a good teacher. I love my kids. I work hard," she said. "I have a good philosophy about teaching. I make learning fun for my kids, but so do a lot of other teachers in my building, my town, my state, (and) the rest of this country."

"I am only a representative for committed educators," she said.

Ball teaches from the heart. She



Cindy Ball was speechless after learning she had been named Wal-Mart's National Teacher of the Year. Her school, Muskogee's Sadler Arts Academy, received \$15,500 after Ball won local, state and national awards and she was recognized on a billboard in town.

feels strongly about teaching kids how to be better people and to develop their capacity to care as much as their capacity to learn. With that philosophy, is there any wonder she's a nationally recognized educator?



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OEA Election Filing Opens Feb. 1; 10 Board Seats Up for Grabs

Filing opens February 1 for 10 open seats on the Oklahoma Education Association Board of Directors, as does filing for statewide positions for at-large delegates to the OEA Delegate Assembly and the NEA Representative Assembly.

The filing period closes February 28. Ballots for the 2003 elections will be distributed no later than the third week of March with newly elected board members taking office July 15.

One OEA board member is elected for every 1,000 Association members to allow an increased opportunity to participate in Association decision making by providing representation closer to the grass roots level. Every geographic region has two open seats except for the Southeast region, which has none.

Filing forms are available on the OEA Web site (www.okea.org), at OEA headquarters in Oklahoma City and at OEA regional offices in Shawnee, Tulsa and Woodward. For more information, call Charles McCauley 800/522-8091.

Statewide Openings

OEA Board of Directors, Administrator-at-Large
2-year unexpired term, expires 2005
2003 OEA Delegate Assembly Positions:

OEA/NEA Retired Delegate(s)-at-Large
OEA Administrator Delegate(s)-at-Large

OEA Ethnic Minority Delegate(s)-at-Large

2003 NEA Representative Assembly Positions:

NEA Delegate(s)-at-Large, Category II
NEA Retired Delegate(s)-at-Large

2003 Open Regional Positions

OEA Board of Directors

Northwest A, 3-year term expires 2006, NEA Delegate 2004, 2005 (Garfield, Grant and Kay Counties)

Northwest B, 2-year unexpired term expires 2005, NEA Delegate 2004 (Lincoln, Logan, Noble and Payne Counties)

OKC Metro A, 3-year term expires 2006, NEA Delegate 2004, 2005 (Crooked Oak, Harrah, Moore locals)

OKC Metro C, 3-year term expires 2006, NEA Delegate 2004, 2005 (Edmond, OEA-OKC locals)

Southwest A, 3-year term expires 2006, NEA Delegate 2004, 2005 (Beckham, Caddo, Comanche [except Lawton Schools], Cotton, Greer, Harmon, Jackson, Kiowa, Tillman, and Washita Counties)

Southwest D, 3-year term expires 2006, NEA Delegate 2004, 2005 (Bryan, Carter, Garvin, Johnston, Love, Marshall and Murray Counties)

Tulsa Metro A, 3-year term expires 2006, NEA Delegate 2004, 2005 (Tulsa CTA)

Tulsa Metro E, 3-year term expires 2006, NEA Delegate 2004, 2005 (Berryhill, Bixby, Broken Arrow, Glenpool, Jenks, Leonard and Liberty Mounds locals)

Northeast A, Three year term expires 2006, NEA Delegate 2004, 2005 (Craig, Delaware, Nowata and Ottawa Counties)

Northeast C, Three year term expires 2006, NEA Delegate 2004, 2005 (Adair, Cherokee and Mayes Counties)

(The Southeast Region has no Board of Director openings.)

Category I Delegate-at-Large 2003 NEA Representative Assembly

OKC Metro Region
Tulsa Metro Region
Northeast Region
Southwest Region

(Southeast and Northwest Regions have no openings in this race.)

OEA Constitution Requires Ethnic and Administrator Representation

The Oklahoma Education Association Constitution requires local affiliates to elect ethnic minorities and administrator delegates to the OEA Delegate Assembly in proportion to the membership in the local. The number of At-Large Delegates elected at the state level to be seated at the OEA Delegate Assembly will be determined after local election results are reported.

A major goal of the OEA is to increase minority participation at all levels of the Association. The NEA Constitution/Bylaws 3-1 (G) states, "It is the policy of the Association to achieve ethnic-minority delegate representation at least equal to the proportion of the ethnic-minority population in the state."



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Three Oklahoma City Schools support professionals recently won their reduction in force (RIF) hearings when the OEA proved the men were being wrongly recommended for termination.

In early December, 63 Oklahoma City support professionals were recommended for termination due to a reduction-in-force. Three electronic technicians – OEA members Jack Adkins, Ernest Goforth and Frank Hayslip – were included in the RIF recommendation. They immediately notified OEA because they felt they had more seniority than other employees not targeted for termination.

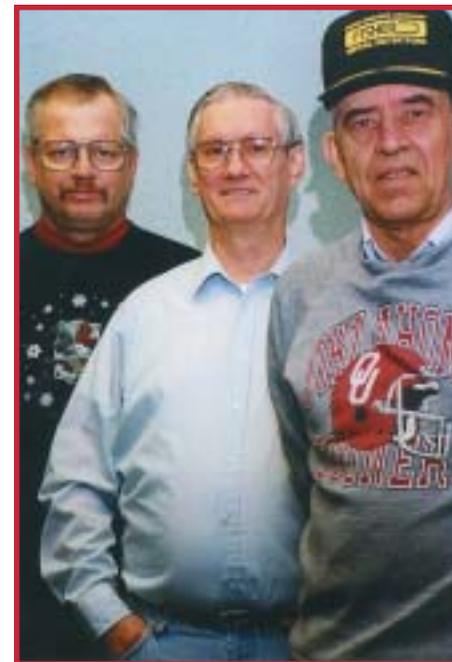
Also, the district's recommendation stated the three only repair small appliances. In fact, they repair school intercoms, emergency signal systems and public address systems; work on telephone cables; and repair VCRs and televisions.

"There was no doubt the district had to do something immediately because of the huge financial deficit it was facing due to cuts in state aid," said Pam Westbrook, advocacy specialist for OEA's Oklahoma City Metro team.

"With our members, we knew the issue was not money, it was fairness and equity. Furthermore, it was also about the cost to the district to subcontract the kind of work these men did for the schools," she said.

To further complicate the issue, the administrator who recommended eliminating the three positions was no longer with the district. That meant the only people who could change the recommendation would be the Board of Education.

Only 14 of the 63 RIF'd employees requested a hearing. Many resigned and forfeited the right to a hearing because the district promised two weeks severance pay, accrued sick leave and vacation time only if the



After OEA's presentation at the RIF hearing, Oklahoma City electronic technicians (from left) Ernest Goforth, Jack Adkins and Frank Hayslip were told to go back to work.

employee resigned. Many simply could not afford to gamble thousands of dollars to have a hearing. Adkins, a 31-year employee, resigned because he stood to lose approximately \$10,000.

Oklahoma City held all the hearings on a single day. Since the electronic technicians were the only people who had representation, they were left until last. After OEA's three-hour presentation, the Board spent only 30 minutes in executive session.

"To everyone's surprise, the board announced there would be no finding of facts because the district had not done its homework," Westbrook said. "They looked at our members and said, 'Go back to work!'"

Their manager, who is not an OEA member, had a hearing scheduled immediately after the OEA members. Because his case was so closely tied to the OEA case, the Board told him he did not need a hearing, and he too was told to return to work.

"He paid lawyers thousands of dollars to represent him, but OEA retained his job," Westbrook said. In light of the presentation, the Board has also agreed to rescind Adkins' resignation.