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The Education Focus
OEA's all-member publication



25,000 Storm the Capitol

Gov. Henry Pledges to Find Education Funding

By Doug Folks

February 12 was a beautiful day for Oklahoma public education.

Under gloriously blue skies and unseasonably warm temperatures, some 25,000 teachers, support professionals, administrators, school board members, parents and students were welcomed to the state Capitol by Gov. Brad Henry and members of the 49th State Legislature.

In spite of a fair amount of negative publicity by public education critics leading up to the Save Our Schools rally, it was an immense success, drawing one of the largest crowds ever for an education rally. While some of those critics tried to paint the event before hand as a rally to raise taxes, it was clearly about creating the best funded education

possible for our Oklahoma students.

"For the first time, I feel like we finally have the people of Oklahoma focused on education," said Linda Harrison, an eighth grade English teacher from Woodward Middle School South. "The focus (of the rally) stayed on the kids. Nobody tried to change the focus to administrators or teachers. I think we all want what's best for kids."

People from around the state started assembling on the south steps of the Capitol by 8:45 a.m. By 10:30 a.m., the scheduled starting time of the rally program, hundreds of attendees were still on shuttle buses navigating heavy traffic. As the crowd began to swell, they were entertained by the Roundup Boys, a country-western band from Tulsa; a

performance by fourth grade students from Muldrow; and chants and cheers led by OEA staffers Floyd Cox and Bonnie Hammock.

The program was kicked off with a presentation of the colors by ROTC students from Oklahoma City's Northeast Academy, the flag salute, and a stirring rendition of the national anthem by state Teacher of the Year James Kerr from Union High School. Rep. Opio Toure (D, Oklahoma City) welcomed the crowd to their state Capitol and opened the program with an inspiring devotional.

Gov. Henry and Sen. President Pro Tem Cal Hobson (D, Lexington) received some of the day's largest ovations. Speaker of the House Larry Adair (D, Stilwell) was also well re-

See Members Encouraged, Page 2

A love song from the 70s, “We’ve Only Just Begun,” keeps going through my head, and I don’t think it is just because I’m writing this col-

“We’ve Only Just Begun”

By Carolyn Crowder, OEA President

umn on Valentine’s Day. It has more to do with what happened this week when many of you — 25,000 to be exact — came to the State Capitol and expressed your love for a quality education system and your willingness to fight for what you believe in.

They said you wouldn’t come; that once classes were cancelled, teachers and other education employees would take the day off and stay at home or

go shopping. **They were wrong — you came!**

They said you wouldn’t accomplish anything, that legislators al-

ready knew about the problem and there wasn’t much that could be done about it. **Wrong again!** In an unprecedented move, our governor and the majority and minority leaders of the House and Senate announced they would remove \$25.5 million from the state Rainy Day Fund to meet some of our schools’ immediate needs! Now this hasn’t ever happened before, not this early in the session and

certainly not with bipartisan support!

They said our call for a revenue increase wouldn’t be considered by any of the state’s leaders. **Once again, wrong!** Cal Hobson (D, Lexington), the Senate President Pro Tempore, announced to the crowd that he was willing to go beyond filling in funding cuts, that he wanted to raise enough revenue to improve teacher’s salaries! He promised to gather support for this idea from the members of his caucus and challenged Senate Minority Floor Leader James Williamson (R, Tulsa) to do the same!

They said all we wanted to do was take off school and spend one day on the issue instead of the consistent



Carolyn Crowder

week-by-week work of phone calls, e-mails, letters and legislator home visits. **One more time — wrong!** You pledged to do whatever it takes for the rest of the session to restore cuts for this year, retain our education quality for next year and improve Oklahoma’s education system for years to come!

So here’s my final message to those who continue to try and discourage us: Like it or not, We’ve Only Just Begun!

Members Encouraged by Positive Rally

Continued from Page 1

ceived. Henry was clearly impressed and excited by the large turnout.

“I am so proud of you,” he told the crowd, and welcomed them as had Rep. Toure. “I am your friend. I am with you in this struggle.”

During his speech, Henry announced that his lottery bill had passed out of committee by a 5-4 vote. The bill would allow Oklahomans to vote on creating a lottery that Henry said would be earmarked exclusively for education. The crowd roared when he added that the bill contains language preventing the legislature from decreasing regular state appropriations to education if the lottery is approved.

The day before the rally, Henry and the legislative leadership agreed to send \$25.5 million in rainy day funds to public education.

Sen. Hobson used his time at the podium to challenge his Republican colleagues to join him in passing a temporary one-cent sales tax and get funds rolling back into education by July 1. He said the measure would raise \$320 million.

Sen. James Williamson (R, Tulsa), senate minority floor leader, and Rep.

Todd Hiatt (R, Tulsa), house minority floor leader, both called for the legislature to fund education now at the same level as the 2001-02 appropriations. Sen. Williamson did not take Hobson’s challenge, calling the one-cent sales tax a “partisan proposal” and a nonstarter for the budget process.

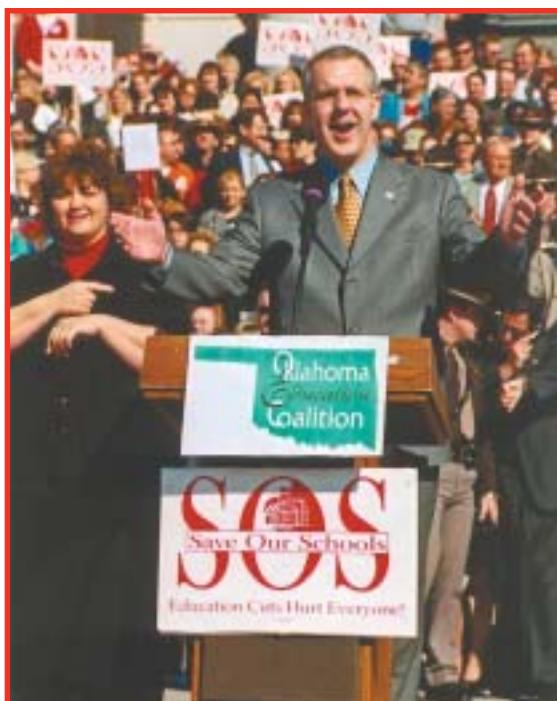
Fran Gardner, a fourth and fifth grade special education teacher from Jay, was encouraged by what she heard.

“Everyone is just waiting to see what will happen,” she said. “I’m feeling very optimistic that we will see something before the end of this school year. We better be back in a couple weeks if nothing happens.”

Charlene Moore, a fourth grade teacher at Newcastle Elementary, was encouraged after the rally, but was keeping a wait-and-see attitude.

“I feel they are going to do something to help us,” she said. “I think the rally was a good way to show that the teaching profession is unified and that there is a serious problem in our schools.”

Leaders of the Oklahoma Education Coalition (OEC), which orga-



Gov. Henry energizes the crowd during the Save Our Schools rally.

nized the rally, came away feeling confident the event was a success.

“It is always inspiring to see the dedication of Oklahoma education employees,” said Carolyn Crowder, OEC chair and president of the Oklahoma Education Association. “We had about 25,000 people ignore the pressure placed on them by those who want to see public education suffer. With that many people coming from all over the state, we sent a very clear message to the legislature that education is not just our priority, but the priority of Oklahoma.”

OEA

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Solving the Funding Crisis is No Easy Chore

By Stacy Martin

The school funding crisis has done more damage than feared. What's more, solving it will be a far more difficult and complex undertaking than most people realize, a school finance task force recently found.

State Schools Superintendent Sandy Garrett formed the task force in November to study Oklahoma public school funding issues. The group recently completed its work and submitted its findings to the Legislature.

The task force examined how the school funding crisis has hurt schools, and reviewed old and new revenue sources and cost-cutting initiatives.

Among the task force's major conclusions were: the budget crisis is urgent and demands an immediate solution; the State of Oklahoma should diversify revenue sources; and the state should shield education funding in the future by adopting revenue-stabilizing strategies.

The task force broke into several subcommittees that met on multiple occasions. It delved into various issues now being discussed in legislative and education circles.

Cutting school administrative costs has been rapidly gaining favor among the public. The task force report neither advocates nor opposes consolidation. Its work merely offers findings for policymakers' review.

"This task force came up with some constructive ideas to save money," said Carolyn Crowder, Oklahoma Education Association president. "However it's important to remember that public schools have lost roughly \$250 million since early 2002. That's a substantial hole to fill."

The report showed schools have made dramatic cutbacks and plan more that are equally significant. Schools have reduced personnel by 2,331 so far. In the next year, they be-

lieve another 2,331 jobs will be cut.

The task force also established several positive attributes characteristic of the state's public education system. Most notably, Oklahoma is now among

the top 10 states in academic standards, professional teaching standards and accountability systems.

The task force consisted of 75 members, including OEA local full-time release presidents, Crowder and Executive Director David DuVall. Other members included superintendents, school business managers, teachers, leaders in private business and others interested in education.

Its charge was to examine the cutbacks public schools have experienced and look at ways schools could operate more efficiently.

The full-time release presidents serving were Roma Clark, president of the Moore Association of Classroom Teachers; Steve Stockley, president, Tulsa Classroom Teachers Association; Jamie McCoy, president of the Mid-Del Association of Classroom Teachers; Jan Sands, president



While school districts across Oklahoma are watching every penny, the School Finance Task Force found it a difficult job to find answers to the funding crisis. The task force looked at a variety of cost-saving measures, including everything from reducing administrative costs to eliminating entire districts.

of the Putnam City Association of Classroom Teachers and Sherri Childress, president of the Professional Educators of Norman.

Moore President Clark found her experience as a task force member educational and, in some ways, encouraging.

"The most important thing I took away from this experience is that these people (referring to task force members) truly care about public education," she said.

Clark said she believes that it is inevitable that policymakers will trim school overhead. Thus, she reasons, it is better to have a hand in the process than be subject to the decisions of others.

The task force examined the necessity of expenses such as administrative overhead and state mandates.

Drastic measures such as closing

entire school districts were discussed. But it is generally believed that policymakers who follow through on such a dramatic move would face strong opposition from affected communities.

Without closing school districts, policymakers could save \$14 million if districts with less than 1,000 students shared administrators

The task force also reviewed state and federal mandates.

Administrative costs have caps under Oklahoma State law. Currently, the cap is 6 percent of the budget for school districts with more than 1,500 students, 8 percent for schools with 500 to 1,500 students, and 10 percent for districts with fewer than 500 students. Currently, no school district is exceeding its administrative cost cap. In fact, administrative costs have been on a downward trend, falling from 4.16 percent in 1995-96 to 2.90 percent for the 2000-01 year.

Education comprises about 55 percent of the state budget. The breakdown is about 36 percent for common education; 15 percent for higher education; and 5 percent for CareerTech.

The task force also examined the impact of state and federal mandates. School districts must pay for mandated items, but they may only be partially funded or unfunded by government sources.

Key state mandates studied included the teacher's \$3,000 raise; the teachers' flexible benefit allowance, and the retirement contribution. The most costly of these is the retirement contribution, at \$135 million. The task force recommended finding an alternate source to fund the teachers' retirement obligation.

"State mandates associated with teacher compensation are not negotiable," said Crowder. "We would not support any proposal that would jeopardize or diminish them."

Budget Savings Found in Teacher Layoffs

A telephone poll of state superintendents by the School Finance Task Force found the state has 2,331 fewer school employees this year, and there are plans to cut an equal amount before next year.

Nearly 77 percent said their schools would reduce staff next year by a total of 2,331 positions: 943 probationary teachers, 844 support professionals, 414 career

teachers and 130 administrators.

Twenty-nine of the survey's 541 respondents said their schools did not have enough money to finish the year and would have to go to judgement.

Complete survey results can be found in the School Finance Task Force Report on the State Department of Education's Web site, www.sde.state.ok.us.

Rescinding These 7 Mandates Would Be Assault on Teachers

By Stacy Martin

Several school administrators recently began circulating a list of seven state mandates they claimed were making it difficult to balance school district budgets.

Administrators alleged that these mandates were either under-funded or unfunded by the state. Further, they suggested, loosening requirements to pay these so-called unfunded mandates would ease financial pressures.

“The argument that these are unfunded or under-funded does not hold up under closer examination,” said Bruce Hunt, associate executive director, Legislative and Political Organizing Center for the Oklahoma Education Association (OEA). “The fact is state aid has been cut across the board. In most instances, funds are not specifically earmarked for these mandates, but there are funds to pay them if they are a priority.”

The state mandates continue to receive attention as education administrators and lawmakers grapple with ways to save money. OEA profes-

sional staff and local OEA leaders have been battling for months to protect the items, sometimes referred to internally as “the seven deadly sins.”

OEA lobbyists will vigorously oppose HB 1382, a bill introduced by Rep. Larry R. Ferguson (R, Cleveland) that would allow districts to temporarily suspend funding of state mandates during a “financial crisis.”

“OEA and its members must help legislators understand that this is an unacceptable assault on teacher compensation,” Hunt said.

On the other hand, there is HB 1767, introduced by House Speaker Larry Adair (D, Stilwell), which would preserve the current requirements to fund the state mandates. OEA strongly supports this bill.

Following are the seven state mandates some administrators have put on their hit list and an explanation of why they should be maintained:

1. Class size mandates to meet student population growth. An important tenant of HB 1017 was smaller class sizes. Research shows

more and higher quality learning happens in smaller classes. Current law already allows flexibility during a budget crisis. Through December, 193 districts met one or more of the law’s penalty exceptions. This represents over 421,000 students or 68 percent of Oklahoma’s public school population. It would be detrimental to students to further weaken the law.

2. Flexible benefit allowance increases from 2002 and \$3,000 across-the-board teacher pay raise from 2000. These are two of the best gains for teachers and support professionals in years. Oklahoma teachers are already near the bottom nationally in pay and benefits. Support professionals have seen little in additional salary over the years, and the flexible benefit allowance of nearly 100 percent means many now have access to health insurance.

3. Alternative education expenditures. Dropping alternative education means dropping students with the greatest needs. The success of these programs can be seen in the numbers

of students graduating who never would have without the program.

4. District contribution to the Teacher Retirement System. A two-year suspension of payments to the Teachers Retirement System would prove disastrous. At best, a two-year suspension would add nine years and \$9.7 billion to the cost of fully funding the system. At worst, it could cripple TRS so severely it might have to be liquidated to pay its obligations.

5. Textbook funding. The State Department of Education data shows that most school textbooks cost less than the state allocates. The state uses the Average Daily Membership (ADM) to determine the number of textbooks needed per district. The legislative appropriation was increased from \$32 to \$55 per book in 2002. Books that cost more are typically used by a minority of the student population, such as those in upper level chemistry or literature.

6. Teacher salary schedule. Oklahoma’s teachers are some of the best prepared in the country. School district recruiters from other states say they love to hire new Oklahoma graduates because they can step right into the classroom and be successful. With Oklahoma teacher pay ranked 46th in the country, we can’t afford to ignore an already low salary schedule. The increased exodus could be catastrophic.

7. Health insurance premium contributions. HB 1968 included language that said a district must continue to pay additional insurance in 2002-03 if it was paying that dollar figure or percentage last year. The reason for that language was to prevent schools from cutting salary and benefits already in place.

“Understandably, school districts are having great difficulty funding most of their obligations, since common education has lost approximately \$250 million in funding since early 2002,” said Hunt. “However, these items warrant a closer look to fully understand the facts.”

After the Rally, What Do We Do Now?

Now that OEA members successfully staged the Save Our Schools Rally at the State Capitol, does that mean our legislative push is over? Far from it; the work has just begun.

It is true that Oklahoma’s elected leaders are working to return \$40 million to common education. That is only part of what is needed. Common education has lost \$250 million in state funding since early 2002.

We must build upon this success without delay. Now, more than ever, OEA members are needed to continue lobbying lawmakers to do what’s right for education – “fund it best,” as Speaker of the House Larry Adair said during the rally.

At this very moment, critical education bills are being considered in the Oklahoma State Legislature. We must urge lawmakers to take action that will result in increasing revenue for education.

Here are steps OEA members can take to assure that education remains a hot topic at 23rd and Lincoln in Oklahoma City:

- Blanket editorial pages of local newspapers with letters to the editor. Tell personal stories of how the budget cuts have affected your classroom and your district.
- Write, call and e-mail your lawmakers.
- Discuss and emphasize the im-

portance of our issue on the sidewalks, street corners and coffee shops of our state. Tell our story to anyone who will listen.

Some of the viable options to end this crisis include a temporary penny sales tax; fuel, tobacco and soft drink tax increases; a renegotiation of the Native American gaming compact, a lottery and the lifting of some tax exemptions.

The message of OEA and its members is this: Public education cannot survive without adequate funding. We must restore the cuts and implement long-term plans to provide stable, sufficient revenue to run our schools.

Budget Crisis Forces Young Teachers To Make Tough Life Decisions

By Marty Bull

When Union CTA member and entry year teacher Mandy Puett's apartment lease recently came up for renewal, she had a difficult decision to make. She could either pack up her belongings and move back home with her parents or face the possibility of a monthly debt she could not afford.

Because of the state budget crisis, Union schools cannot guarantee that she will have a job when the school year ends. The district may have to cut staff to meet obligations. In that light, Puett chose to move back home.

"This is a time I should be on my own," said the Clark Elementary first grade teacher. "But without a job, I just didn't see any other alternative."

Puett's parents know full well the dilemma their daughter is facing. Don and Glenda Puett are both teachers in the Union district, and Charlotte is president of Union CTA.

Like many teachers around Oklahoma, Mandy Puett has felt the budget crunch in her classroom. With building level budgets cut, she and her colleagues have either had to do without certain items or pay for them out of their own pockets.

"At the beginning of the year, I spent over \$500 getting my room ready for my students," said Puett. "With the cuts, I am buying materials that were paid by the district in the past."

The Union High School graduate didn't set out to be an educator. When



"Teaching is what I do. I wouldn't think of doing anything else — it's a part of me. I don't want to leave Oklahoma, but if I have to, I will."

Mandy Puett

1st Year Teacher and Union CTA Member

she first enrolled at Northeastern State University, she chose sports medicine as her major.

"I was doing fine in my classes and it was a career I found interesting," said Puett. "But it wasn't until I started taking education courses that I realized that teaching was where I belonged."

She graduated with an elementary teaching degree and was hired on a temporary contract with Union Public Schools.

"I knew I was taking a chance with a temporary contract," said Puett. "But historically, Union has rehired most of its teachers. Right now no one is sure that will happen."

With all the insecurity surrounding her current job status, Puett finds her classroom the best place to keep her mind off her troubles.

"When I hit the door, all of my focus is on my students. This has been an amazing year. I have learned so much and know I made the right decision," she said.

Away from the classroom it's a different story.

"When I'm in the car driving to

and from school it hits me that I might not be in this classroom after this year," said Puett. "I just hope something is done so I won't have to face this same situation year after year."

Thousands of first, second and even third year teachers are facing the same dilemma as school budgets across the state are cut to the bare bones.

"Without some immediate relief to the current funding crisis, superintendents are going to be mailing out RIF notices to an estimated 5,000 teachers this year," said OEA President Carolyn Crowder. "This not only disrupts their lives as individuals, but sets the stage for a loss to the profession. If teaching positions are not available, we may lose many of these well-trained professionals to other states or even to other professions."

Puett is hoping and praying for the best.

"Teaching is what I do," she said. "I wouldn't think of doing anything else — it's a part of me. I don't want to leave Oklahoma, but if I have to, I will."

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Members Give Thoughts On Budget Crisis

OEA members weighed in recently on a number of issues surrounding Oklahoma's education funding crisis, via an e-mail survey. They think a lottery could help education, but it isn't the only answer; administrative costs could be reduced in their districts; and not paying the district's portion to teacher retirement would be an unhealthy mistake.

The survey was e-mailed to 5,000 OEA members in December, over 10 percent of those e-mailed responded within three weeks. While the survey was not a scientific sampling, OEA leaders believe the results is a fair representation of what most teachers and support professionals think.

The SOS Rally brought 25,000 public education supporters the Capitol to lobby for education. The poll predicted the rally's success when 75 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I am willing to close schools and attend the rally on

A one-cent temporary sales tax would help solve the funding crisis in Oklahoma.

71% Agreed or Strongly Agreed



A lottery would help solve the funding crisis in Oklahoma.

59% Agreed or Strongly Agreed



Other means besides the lottery should be sought to solve the funding crisis in Oklahoma.

91% Agreed or Strongly Agreed



February 12." That question was backed up by 97 percent who agreed that "Legislators must meet with local school district representatives to learn about their particular funding problems."

Also, 90 percent said they would participate in local meetings with legislators to discuss local issues.

Eighty-three percent of the respondents agreed that, "Administrative costs could be reduced in my dis-

trict;" and 85 percent agreed that administrative reorganization should be required.

On questions surrounding education funding, 71 percent said a temporary one-cent sales tax would help solve the funding crisis. Fifty-nine percent agreed a lottery would "...help solve the funding crisis...", but 91 percent felt that "other means besides a lottery should be sought" to help solve the funding problem.

Some school administrators and legislators believe one possible answer to help schools this year would be to stop paying the district portion to the Teacher Retirement System. The OEA survey respondents had a strong opposition to this solution: 78 percent disagreed, with 55 percent strongly disagreeing to the concept.

The OEA has warned of the loss of good teachers to other states if the funding crisis isn't solved quickly. The survey confirmed that fear when 52 percent agreed with the statement, "If the funding situation in Oklahoma doesn't improve, I will seek employment in another state or another career."

If you would like to be part of future e-mail surveys, send a home e-mail address to Brenda Snider at bsnider@okea.org. (School e-mail addresses cannot be used for Association communications.)



*By Brandon Webb
OEA Associate General Counsel*

The Oklahoma Attorney General has stated that e-mails can be subject to the Open Records Act and therefore open to the public. Moreover, it has long been established that computers at schools are district property and are not for the personal use of the employee.

Members should carefully read district e-mail and Internet policies

From Your Counsel

Your E-mails From Class Are Not Private

in order to find out if it is permissible to use the school's computer and network for personal use, or if employees are only allowed to use the system for school business.

Whether you are using a school computer for personal reasons or school-related business, a superintendent can look at any e-mail you send or receive on a school computer and can also find out every Internet site you have accessed.

If you are using a school computer or laptop at home, the computer is still the district's property and subject to complete review. Even if you are using your own personal computer, at home or at school, but you are using the district's networking system to access the Internet, the district may

have the right to look at any e-mail or Web site that was accessed through the school's computer network.

It is important to note that even after an e-mail or Internet site has been deleted a record of each e-mail or Internet address may still be stored on the computer's hard drive or maintained in the district's central network server.

Not all Internet problems relate to offensive or questionable material. A teacher who has 10,000 hits on a Beanie Babie© site, or has sent and received 5,000 e-mails, may be subject to allegations of using the computer too much during class time.

Additionally, before sending an e-mail to a student or parent, make sure school policy allows this type of

communication. It is advisable to only discuss school-related materials and refrain from addressing personal matters when communicating with parents and students via e-mail. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that the person on the other side of the e-mail is actually the student or parent they purport to be.

For maintaining student privacy, please make sure you are sending an e-mail to the correct person and no one else has access to that correspondence.

Remember, prior to using any school computer or network server for personal e-mails or Internet surfing, always review school policies to find out what is allowed and what is prohibited.

ESEA Criteria Threatens To Leave Schools Behind

By Doug Folks

Implementing the federal government's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is proving to be no easy task for Oklahoma. Proponents of the bill have labeled it the "no Child Left Behind" act. Education practitioners, though, are beginning to believe the bill is designed to "leave schools behind."

While the law has passed its first anniversary and schools are already required to meet certain requirements, the federal government and the states have yet to write all regulations on how schools will abide by the law.

OEA President Carolyn Crowder has a front row seat to Oklahoma's efforts to meet ESEA's requirements. She has been appointed to sit on Oklahoma's Committee of Practitioners by state Superintendent Sandy Garrett. It is the committee's charge to write regulations for this state's compliance of ESEA.

Crowder says the federal law is a scary proposition, with some fairly draconian requirements.

"The more I learn about this law and its unrealistic expectations and hard sanctions, the more I think it was written to make it appear public schools are failing. Or, at least, ESEA is setting us up to fail," she said.

While working with Congress to change the act, Crowder said the OEA and its parent organization, the National Education Association, are also working to influence implementation at the state level. Four areas in particular are of great concern, and all are receiving serious attention from Association leaders. They are:

1) Federal funding, which doesn't come close to paying for the requirements ESEA asks schools to meet;

2) Title I paraprofessionals, who all must have two years of college, a two-year college degree or meet locally set standards by 2004;

3) Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which requires all schools to show improvement or face sanctions; and

4) Teacher Quality, which says all Title I teachers must be certified immediately, and all teachers must be certified in the subject areas they teach by 2005.

Both the OEA and the NEA are working with state and federal education departments, respectively, to write regulations that will guide schools on how to meet the act's re-

quirements. And both Associations are lobbying to correct measures within ESEA which are seen as unfair or unreasonably difficult to enact.

The NEA is lobbying Congress to fund ESEA properly or eliminate some of the mandates. In Oklahoma, the OEA is lobbying the state to provide training options to paraprofessionals to help them prepare for new certification standards.

The AYP and Teacher Quality issues are areas of great concern to the national and state organizations.

Testing Drives AYP

The toughest portion of ESEA is the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) indicator. AYP requires *every* school to show academic progress, based mostly on test scores. By 2013-14, states must have 100 percent of all

students — including students in identified minority categories — performing at proficient levels in math and reading.

Failure to meet AYP for two consecutive years places a school on a School Improvement list and it must follow a set of guidelines, including notifying parents and offering public school choice and transportation to move interested students to their new school choice. Continued failure to meet AYP brings additional, more intense sanctions.

"Under ESEA, we think half of our 1,800 schools could fall onto that School Improvement list," Crowder said. One reason, she said, is that the

"The more I learn about (ESEA) and its unrealistic expectations and hard sanctions, the more I think it was written to make it appear public schools are failing."

Carolyn Crowder, OEA President

act requires schools to include test scores of special education students in the results. And those students are being required to meet the same standards as all other students.

"Special education students' test scores have never been counted before," she said. "In the regulations we're writing, we are trying to change the benchmark for special education students."

Crowder added that the NEA is trying to remove this piece of the legislation or to make it a diagnostic tool and not a punishment.

Dennis Van Roekel, NEA vice president, says ESEA makes some unrealistic assumptions.

"This law assumes that every child learns at the same rate at the same time," Van Roekel said. "It would make sense if every child learned to

walk and talk at the same time. And it only measures which kids are good test takers."

Proving Veteran Teachers Are Highly Qualified

ESEA requires all teachers to be "highly qualified" by 2005-06, ensuring that all teachers are certified in the subject areas they teach. Newer teachers coming out of Oklahoma education colleges who have passed the General Education, Pedagogy and Content tests are considered "highly qualified." However, veteran teachers who entered the profession before the mid-1980s may have problems because they didn't have to take those three tests.

The act says secondary teachers with a master's degree are highly qualified, but it does not extend the same privilege to elementary teachers. Unless the state builds a HOUSE (Highly Objective Uniform Standard of Evaluation) with acceptable alternative criteria, elementary teachers have to pass the Pedagogy and Content tests.

At Crowder's insistence, Oklahoma is building a HOUSE.

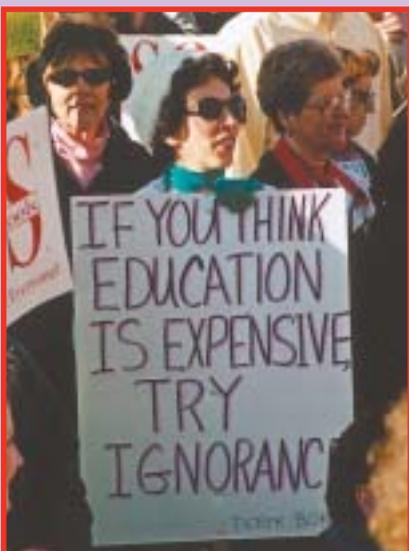
"We want a third option for teachers," she said. "We want some kind of training program — like the middle school math Professional Development Institute we offer — to count toward 'highly qualified' status."

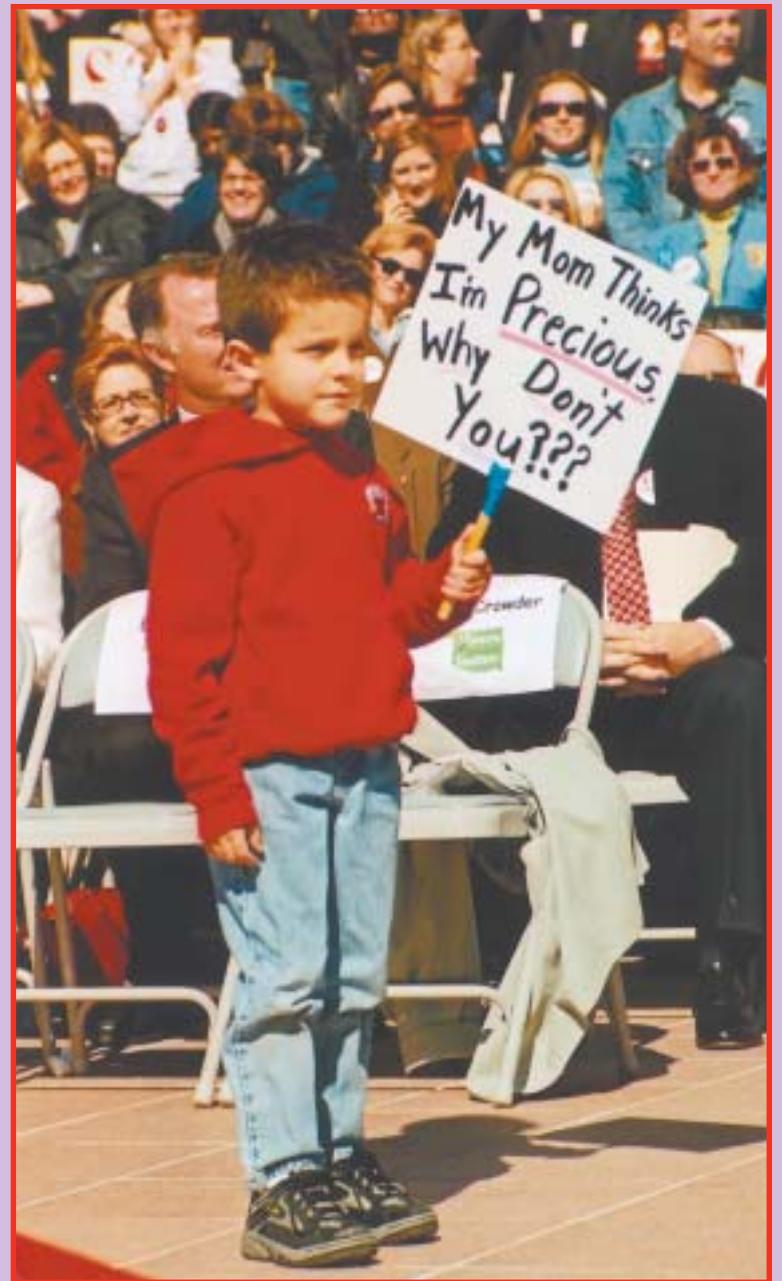
As states work through implementing ESEA, it will be important for all education personnel to stay informed on the development of regulations and the full enactment of the law. For updates on ESEA, visit the NEA's Web site at www.nea.org/esea.

Crowder added that education employees should also stay in contact with their congressmen and keep them informed of how the act affects learning in Oklahoma.



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A Day at the Capitol



Clockwise from upper left: An aerial view of 25,000 education employees and supporters at the Save Our Schools Rally; an up-close view of the crowd on the south steps of the state Capitol; a future public school student holds a sign that asks legislators a pointed question; OEA President Carolyn Crowder closed the rally by leading the crowd in a Save Our Schools chant; fourth graders from Muldrow entertained the crowd prior to the rally program; Oklahoma Observer editor Frosty Troy addresses Durant's delegation at lunch after the rally. The Olivet Baptist Church donated the meal for Durant, which brought most every certified employee and conducted professional development on the bus ride to Oklahoma City and with Troy at lunch; second-year teachers from the crowd lead an impromptu cheer; homemade signs added a strong flavor to the event; and Rep. Abe Deuschendorf (D, Lawton) visits with Lawton teachers after the rally.



Meet the Candidates

For OEA Vice President



**Roma Clark,
Moore ACT**

I have served as local full-time release president for seven years, negotiated 12

contracts, and served as member rights chairperson for 12 years. As president, I inherited a huge budget deficit. I was able to create a healthy carryover and raise membership ten percent. Now I want to bring my experience to OEA as your Vice President. I believe passionately in public education. We cannot wait any longer to provide professional compensation to education employees.



**Becky Felts,
Tahlequah EA**

I believe in the work of OEA! Our members standing together are an unbeatable combination!

Together, we can ensure

quality schools for our students and quality support for school employees.

My entire career, I've fought for our principles – successful learning experiences for our students and respect for those who work in Oklahoma's public schools.

To you, I offer my experience, my energy, and my loyalty! From you, I ask for your support and vote.



**Greer Nichols,
Broken Arrow EA**

During my twenty-two years in education, I have proudly served our Association on the

local, state, and national levels. For the last seven years I have served as president of the Broken Arrow Education Association, one of OEA's fastest growing locals.

The OEA is the true champion of Oklahoma's children, but to be effective, we must grow stronger still. As Vice President, I promise to work tirelessly to bring every educator into the OEA family.

For NEA Director



Shelly Cherry, EA Oklahoma City

Shelly Cherry is on the Executive Board of OEA/OKC. Shelly has been teaching for three years and is presently the Technology Coordinator for Sequoyah Elementary, OKCPS. Shelly has taught in different educational settings from three year-olds to sixth graders in the last 10 years. Shelly earned her Bachelor's

degree from the University of Central Oklahoma and will receive her Masters of Education in Instructional Media this fall from the University of Central Oklahoma.



Dr. Karen Dawson, Tulsa CTA

Advocating for teachers for 29 years with experience and dedication.

Leadership: Vice President TCTA, President TCTA, President Tulsa Counselors' Association, President NE Region Counselors, NEA Delegate 25 years.

Awards: OEA Excellence Award for Teachers, NE Region Counselor of the Year; Mayor's Pinnacle Award, OEA Political Action Award.

I care about YOU, dedicated Oklahoma teachers and I will represent YOU and the quality YOU stand for. VOTE KAREN DAWSON.



Marilyn Jackson, Okmulgee CTA

I have been and always will be a strong supportive member of an organization that I believe to be the lifeline of the education profession, the OEA/NEA. As a local leader and as an OEA Board of Director for six years, I know the value of what the OEA/NEA does for public education and its members. I have the experience and the desire to work for you in making the OEA stronger for all members.



Greg Johnson, Mustang EA

Public education is one of the cornerstones on which this great country stands. As your NEA Director, I will work to further strengthen the role of public education in our communities and throughout the entire state. Working together, we will spread the message that this association is our association. The NEA is you, me and other committed professionals who are in our schools everyday. We are the NEA.



Vicki Vaughan, Putnam City ACT

For the last 10 years I have worked hard to learn enough about the Association to serve as one of your NEA Directors. Having been elected as local president of the Putnam City Association of Classroom Teachers for 6 years, serving on local and state bargaining teams and representing Zone OKC-B on the OEA Board of Directors for four years, I am ready and would consider it an honor to be an

Oklahoma NEA Director.

Bishop Wins President's Office By Acclamation

Roy Bishop has been elected president of the Oklahoma Education Association after not drawing an opponent for the race.

Bishop is ending his second and final term as OEA vice president. He will take office as president in mid-July, following the NEA Representative Assembly.

Ballots for other races, including vice president, NEA director, and several board positions around the state will go out to local Associations in mid-March. Runoffs, which would be conducted in April, are possible for vice president and NEA director due to the number of candidates.

As vice president, Bishop has chaired the OEA's Budget Committee, Convention Committee and the Insurance Task Force, which has kept close tabs on actions of the Okla-



OEA President-Elect Roy Bishop

homa State Education and Employee Group Insurance Board (OSEEGIB) and the legislation surrounding insurance benefits for education employees. He has also served as president of the Oklahoma Commission on Educational Administration (OCEA)

and is OEA's liaison to the Oklahoma Retired Educators' Association.

Before taking office as vice president, Bishop taught junior high history and geography in Stillwater for 13 years. He served as golf coach and sponsor of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. As a local leader, he served as Stillwater EA president, building representative and on vari-

ous committees. He also served on OEA's board of directors and on the NEA's Resolutions Committee.

Bishop and his wife, Katherine, live in Oklahoma City. She is a special education teacher at Lake Park Elementary in Putnam City and serves on the NEA cadre for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Delegate Assembly Credentials Due in Oklahoma City by March 15

Credentials for local delegations to the 2003 Delegate Assembly are due at Oklahoma Education Association headquarters by March 15.

Local Associations are allowed one delegate for the first six to 60 members, and additional delegates for every major fraction of 60 members afterward. Delegate training will be offered around the state in late March and early April.

Times, dates and places for training will be mailed to delegates.

The Delegate Assembly will be held April 25-26 at the Clarion Meridian Conference Center, I-40 and Meridian Ave. in Oklahoma City.

For more information on Delegate Assembly, contact OEA Associate Executive Director Charles McCauley at 800/522-8091, 405/528-7785 or at cmccauley@okea.org.



Shawn Blankenship tries to attend every athletic activity of all 465 of his students at Deer Creek's Prairie Vale Elementary in Edmond. His drive to go beyond the normal call of duty for his students earned Blankenship the Physical Education Exemplary Program Award from the Oklahoma State Department of Education.

Deer Creek PE Instructor Goes Above and Beyond

By Stacy Martin

In the ideal world of Deer Creek physical education teacher Shawn Blankenship, every one of his students and their parents would engage in regular physical activity.

As a PE coach, he believes it's his job to show an even greater commitment by going to watch every one of those kids and their parents engaging in their sporting endeavors. Since he has 465 students at Prairie Vale Elementary that means he rarely goes home before 10 p.m. most nights.

"I do a lot of research before I try something," Blankenship said.

"There is a strong link between parental involvement and higher grades, good behavior, self-confidence and self-esteem."

Blankenship's unconventional and successful teaching methods have gained him recognition statewide as an innovative teacher. Last fall, he received a Physical Education Exemplary Program Award from the Oklahoma State Department of Education. Soon

after came a site Teacher of the Year Award.

Blankenship's current thrust is helping children learn that fitness is a lifetime goal, not just a class. His strategy is to help expose his students to activities beyond those characteristic of the school setting – basketball, baseball, football, etc. He is teaching his kids to think of endeavors such as floor hockey, golf, rock-climbing, taekwondo, cheerleading, orienteering, badminton, dance and others. The idea is to expand the child's physical activity options to increase the odds of lifelong participation.

"My role as an educator is to inspire children to make healthy life-style choices for now and in the future," Blankenship said. "I introduce activities and ideas that students can do for a lifetime of healthy living."

Blankenship works to avoid allowing the physical education experience to hurt children's self-esteem by classifying them as winners and losers. Instead, he works to build their confidence and to serve as a supportive and positive role model.

His creative approach also incorporates cross-curricular learning into the physical education environment. For instance, he teaches children to use math and geography skills to chart their progress in PE activities.

The third year teacher has taught

at Prairie Vale since the beginning of his career. He joined the Oklahoma Education Association as soon as he was hired. According to Barbara Davis, president of the Deer Creek Association of Classroom Teachers, OEA membership at Prairie Vale is very high – about 82 percent.

"There's no way I'd teach without OEA membership," said Blankenship.

He was born and raised in Sasakwa, but moved to Konawa for his final year of high school. He attended East Central State University, where he fulfilled his lifelong ambition to become an educator.

"I strongly believe in the saying, 'To teach is to touch a life forever,' and I strive to make this a reality," Blankenship said.



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Becky Felts
for OEA Vice President

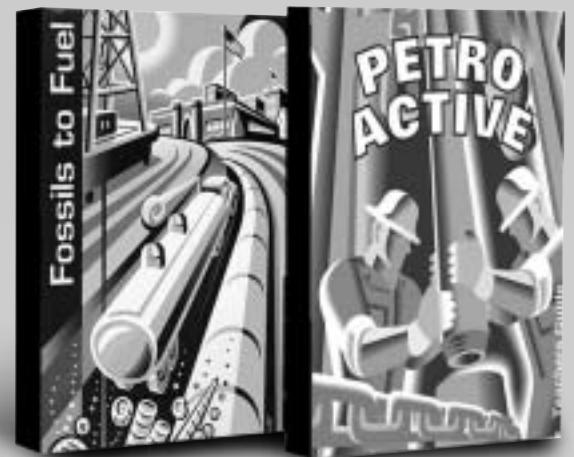
panel for by the committee to elect Becky Felts, OEA Vice President

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You Decide

A monthly column of member opinion.

This issue's question:

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

Yes, Our Schools Need Immediate Help

*By Pam McAnally
Ketcham Schools*

I say, "Let's vote yes on a temporary penny sales tax for education." We need to help our schools, and they need help right now! Many of our schools are in trouble due to the revenue shortfalls and the lack of proper funding for public education. Several schools across the state are already issuing 'no fund' warrants for payroll because they do not have the funds available.

The temporary sales tax is a quick fix for our schools in trouble. The money collected from such a temporary measure would be available for use in approximately ninety days. I see this as a way to help those schools hit hardest by the budget



*By Linda Broughton
Tulsa Public Schools*

No, I do not believe a temporary sales tax should be implemented because it is temporary. We need a long-term commitment.

1) I am in favor of charging a \$25 tag fee for all trailers (horse, boat, etc.). Presently, trailers are not tagged in Oklahoma. Just count trailers on the highway for five minutes and multiply the dollars for education. When I have offered this suggestion in the past, I've been told rural legislators can't be reelected if they pass such a measure.

2) Raise the fee for dumping toxic waste in western Oklahoma and designate that raise for education. The State of Oklahoma charges much less than any other state to take these hazardous materials. Not only will we increase money for education, perhaps it may encourage this waste to be sent elsewhere.

3) Charge a \$1 enrollment fee for each child registered in public school. This could be like a towel fee, or gym fee, or shop fee and the profits could be designated for supplies for the classroom.

4) Instead of going into competition with the Indians for gaming money, a plan should be worked out where a percentage of their profits were assigned to education. The Cherokee Nation recently donated a large sum of money to the schools in the 14-county area of the Cherokee Nation. This money came from the sale of car tags. It was interesting to read a larger return was given to schools from the sale of Cherokee

cuts. No one wants to see their schools in such dire straits or be unable to pay its employees.

If the children in our state are the most important asset that we have, then we should not mind helping in a crisis such as this. The one-penny sales tax could help save our schools.

However, it is only a 'temporary' measure. Sure, I think we should vote yes on this sales tax for a penny. I also know that quick fixes are just that. Public education needs to be fully funded. This will help us have a bit of help while new legislation is passed and implemented to fully fund our schools in the future. Our schools are our future!

No, There Are Other Ways to Raise Money



tags than was rendered from the sale of state tags. If the Cherokees are willing to become involved, other tribes may be waiting to be asked.

It's time we put politics aside, pull out the calculators and check to see how every item on the budget will affect education.

The legislature must designate dollars for the classroom. It is imperative the children of Oklahoma receive the benefits.

Next Issue's Question:

According the Elementary and Secondary Education (ESEA) act, schools must show academic progress every year or face severe sanctions (see Page 7). With that in mind:

"Should schools and teachers be held accountable for achievement test scores?"

Send your responses by March 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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Catavan Getting Ready To Hit The Highway

By Bruce Treadaway

After six years of the NEA-OEA's Read Across America program, one would think that the OEA staff, leaders, local members and students would have gotten enough of the Seuss characters.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Once again, OEA is sponsoring this outstanding reading program, taking characters to schools throughout the state to help them celebrate

Dr. Seuss' birthday. This year's "major stops" of the OEA Catavan are:

March 3 – Jones, North Rock Creek, Stilwell

March 4 – Fort Gibson, Justus-Tiawah, Putnam City

March 5 – Indianola, Wilburton, Collinsville, Glenpool

March 6 – Guthrie, Piedmont, Newcastle, Altus

March 7 – Ardmore, Anadarko, John Ross and Washington Irving (Edmond)

In addition, there will be intense Read Across America activity at Crossroads, Quail Springs and Heritage Park Malls in Oklahoma City and the Shawnee Mall in Shawnee. Locals from the different mall areas are working with the malls in conducting their celebrations of reading.

For the second straight year, the OEA will be working with the Kids World Of Fun February 22-23 at the Oklahoma State Fairgrounds.

The OEA is encouraging its locals to have something positive said about the act of reading from local church pulpits on Sunday, March 2, and then to encourage



their fellow church members to go home that afternoon and read with their children and grandchildren.

For more information on this activity, contact the regional OEA office in your area.

Sherri Coale, OU women's basketball coach, is the 2003 honorary RAA chair for Oklahoma. She will be participating at Washington Irving Elementary School in Norman on February 28.

Sponsors for OEA's Read Across America are Staples, Saturn of Oklahoma City, Christmas Connection, Hometown Buffet and Blunck's Studios. Their assistance and support have made OEA's Read Across America the outstanding state association reading event in the United States.

Make sure and plan activities at your local. For more information, check out the NEA's Web site at www.nea.org/readacross, or contact Bruce Treadaway at 800/522-8091 or at btreadaway@okea.org.