

OEA

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In this issue

Teacher of the Year
Finalists Profiled
Pages 4 & 5

State's Rising Stars
are OEA Members
Page 6

PEAL Finds Relevance
in Fund-raising Efforts
Pages 7

Stipend Imposed
Upon Mid-Del ACT
Page 8

Checking Your Check
Page 12

Staples Donates to
School Foundations
Page 16

Periodical
Post Paid at
Okla. City, OK

The Education Focus
OEA's all-member publication

The Education Focus

For the membership of the Oklahoma Education Association

November 2003

True Calling Found A World Away

Muskogee's Ball Named Teacher of the Year

By Doug Folks

Cindy Ball left teaching, entered politics and traveled halfway around the world before she discovered her true calling in life really is teaching.

That realization wasn't evident, though, until Mother Teresa asked her to feed a dying man one afternoon in Calcutta, India.

Jump forward about 15 years to September 2003 when Ball was named Oklahoma's State Teacher of the Year in ceremonies at the State Fair. For the next year, she will serve as the state's ambassador for the teaching profession. The award brings with it a truckload of prizes, including use of a car for the year, \$6,000 in cash, tuition waivers from state universities, a laptop computer, and a leather sofa, just to name a few.

While the prizes she received were grand and appreciated, the fourth grade teacher at Muskogee's Sadler Arts Academy will tell you the greatest gift she ever received was spending that day with Mother Teresa. Before you hear that story, you need to know how she got there.

After graduating from the University of Oklahoma in 1973, Ball taught two years in Wayne and two more at McKinley Elementary in Norman. She then wound up in Wyandotte in northeast Oklahoma as a counselor for a year and a half.

When Ball's college friend, Mike Synar, ran for Congress, Cindy helped him campaign. He won the seat and asked her to serve on his Oklahoma



Teacher of the Year Cindy Ball asks Tiffany Harris questions about her science demonstration during her fourth grade class at Muskogee's Sadler Arts Academy.

staff as a field representative and campaign manager. That started a 15-year career in politics and out of education.

One of Synar's congressional assignments was serving on a committee on hunger. That took him and some of his staff, including Ball, to some of the world's poorest countries to see that U.S. donations of food and supplies were actually reaching people in need.

"When we were planning to go to India, I asked Mike for a day off the tour so I could spend a day with

Mother Teresa in Calcutta," Ball said. "She was probably the most famous woman in the world and someone I really admired, and I thought I just couldn't pass up the opportunity if I was going to be so close."

Synar agreed and joined Ball for a day at Mother Teresa's Center for the Destitute and Dying, as did Congressman Dick Durbin of Illinois and Bob Weinberg, a businessman from Chicago. When they arrived in Calcutta, they found that Mother Teresa was in

See "Volunteering" on Page 3

Moving Test Dates Will Help Teachers and Students Both

By Marty Bull

Over the years, Oklahoma teachers have used standardized tests as a tool to assess their curriculum and how well their students mastered specific objectives. These tests have been administered in late February and early March to meet state requirements.

Unfortunately, students were tested on the entire year's curriculum when

there were at least two months of school left. The majority of teachers felt testing students that early in the school year did not give as clear a picture of the students' abilities or the effectiveness of a course of study. So when House Bill 1414 changed the testing dates from early March to the middle of April, teachers got the class-

See "HB 1414" on Page 2

Are You Ready?

By Roy Bishop
OEA President

This is one of the most challenging times to be a teacher in Oklahoma. With the budget shortfall and the legislature continuing to fall farther behind in funding programs for kids and benefits for teachers, it would be easy to sit back in our classrooms and wait for it to happen.

Some of you have told me that you're tired of the way that you're being treated and tired of fighting for everything that is important to the success of Teacher Quality, High Standards and Respect for our profession.

While it may be easy to say that, what kind of message will we send to our patrons who are ready to be mobilized for action on behalf of their children, their teachers and their schools?

How do I know that they are

ready to be mobilized? In the latest Phi Delta Kappa Gallup Poll of America's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, there are a number of surprises for educators and politicians alike.

The poll found that people have a high regard for our public schools. They want needed improvement to come through those schools and not through vouchers or any for-profit companies. They want their current schools to succeed.

The public is also "concerned about getting and keeping good teachers" and that "teacher salaries are too low."

People are also having serious concerns, as we do too, about Pres.

Bush's No Child Left Behind. Most people don't understand the law, and polling shows that when they do understand it, they still don't like.

How can we not get excited about what's happening here? The public –

not just our patrons – supports our schools. We have an obligation to them to get them involved more than ever.

Getting the concerned public involved has got to go to a greater level than volunteering. It means getting them to be advocates. Getting them to understand what it takes to accomplish what they want for their schools.

Our patrons are waiting to be mobilized. They want their schools to be the best because they send us their most precious gift — their kids. We have a responsibility to provide them with the best possible education.

We also have the responsibility to educate parents so that they can help pass legislation that will bring about the best possibilities for making their schools great.

I'm imploring you to not "sit this one out." We have too much at stake. We have too much to do, too much to accomplish. It's time to identify and mobilize your supportive patrons.

They're there; they can be found in your classrooms, in your PTAs and all



OEA President Roy Bishop

around your schools and districts.

Get them involved. Let them know what's going on when it comes to your challenges in providing the best education for their children. If you don't have a local coalition, create one. Our patrons are looking for guidance. We need to provide it for them. Are you ready to be there for them?

Hand in hand, we have the ability to change the way Oklahoma deals with education. We have the opportunity to change the culture of education in Oklahoma. Together we will make history.

HB 1414 Sets Tests for April 12-23

Continued from Page 1

room instruction time they wanted.

According to Lynn Stockley, Tulsa Carver Middle School counselor, the additional time on task is beneficial to both student and teacher.

"It's frustrating to be tested on material that hasn't been covered. Any additional time gives the teacher more time to cover the curriculum," she said.

"If it were possible, I'd give the tests the last week of school," said Liberty Mounds fifth and sixth grade reading teacher Margaret Burrows. "It was unfair to test students over a full year's curriculum with a third of the year still ahead. The extra four to five weeks will help us get a truer picture of our student's abilities."

Chickasha High School math teacher Phyllis Jefferson thinks the change will assist students who are required to take end of instruction tests.

"The additional time will make these tests true end-of-instruction evaluations. When there was two months left in the year, we didn't cover everything the test covered," Jefferson said. "I'm glad the change happened."

Todd Richards, Comanche special needs teacher, says the change doesn't affect his students either way.

"Many of my students don't have the skills necessary to be successful on these paper-and-pencil exams, no mat-

School Law Books Only Available on the Internet

The Oklahoma State Department of Education (DOE) no longer publishes a "hard copy" of the school laws book, but it can now be accessed by everyone by visiting the DOE Web site at www.sde.state.ok.us.

To access the information, click on "Publications" on the lefthand side of the DOE Web site's opening page, and scroll down to 2003 Law Books. From

ter what day they are given," he said. "It's unfortunate that we try to use a one size fits all test to assess a school's ability to educate its students."

HB 1414 mandated testing to occur between April 12 and April 23, but its main intent was to schedule the additional testing required in Pres. Bush's No Child Left Behind Act.

For more information on required testing, log on www.sde.state.ok.us and click on Student Assessment.

there, you can search the site for specific topics, read through the publication chapter by chapter, or open a complete, PDF version.

The site features an updated version of state school laws, and can often answer a variety of questions. Local leaders are encouraged to make this site one of their "favorites" so that they have quick and easy access.

OEA

The Education Focus

Volume 21, No. 2
A production of OEA's
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The Education Focus (ISSN 1542-1678) is published nine times annually with issues in September/October, November, December/January, February, March, April, May, June/July and August for \$5 by the Oklahoma Education Association, 323 E. Madison, Oklahoma City, OK 73105. Periodicals postage paid at Okla. City, OK, and additional mailing offices.

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

Volunteering With Mother Teresa Changes Ball's Life

Continued from Page 1

Armenia and no one knew when she would be back. They were told to come for mass the next day at 6:30 a.m. As fate would have it, Mother Teresa returned overnight and helped serve communion at mass.

After mass, the four American visitors spent an hour with Mother Teresa in her parlor. When Ball asked Mother Teresa where she found her inspiration, she said "Five fingers." Then, holding her hand with her fingers pointing skyward, she touched each finger with her thumb as she recited, "You did it to me." Mother Teresa was referring to Matthew 25:40, which says, "... Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me."

After their visit, Mother Teresa gave each of them a volunteer job.

"Mike was told to empty bed pans. Dick Durbin was asked to help carry a

dead man out of the hospital and Bob went to wash dishes," Cindy said.

Ball's job was to feed a very ill man who was horribly bent by disease and coughing up blood. When she told Mother Teresa that she wasn't sure she could feed the dying man, Mother Teresa just looked at her and held her hand up with her fingers together,

pointing up. Cindy fulfilled her task, feeding, singing to and doing whatever she could to soothe the dying man.

"It was truly a humbling experience," she said. "It took me an hour and half. (Afterwards) I realized that it became my honor to feed this man. I was truly serving God."

Before traveling to India, Ball was

having nagging feelings of "a need to make more of a difference." After that day with Mother Teresa, she began to feel "a strong need to serve people." She says she fought the impulse to go back into the classroom, instead opening her own special events consulting firm and volunteering for Special Olympics.

But after a couple of years, she came to a point where she wanted to travel less and spend more time at home with her children. In 1994, she gave up her business and found herself back home – back in the classroom.

"I dearly love teaching," Ball said. "I feel very fortunate to be at a school that uplifts children at every turn."

Just as she poured herself into the job of a political staffer and one-day volunteer for Mother Teresa, Ball has reinvested herself in education. Since returning to the classroom in 1994, she has attend over 400 hours of staff development workshops; earned national certification; attended Great Expectations, Williamsburg, the Oklahoma Bar Association's PACE and A+ School summer institutes; and served as a mentor and on school improvement and long range planning committees for Muskogee schools.

Her students certainly feel fortunate that Ball found her way back to the classroom. As a state Teacher of the Year – and as a quality teacher in the classroom – Oklahoma is much richer as well.

Thank you, Mother Teresa, for sending Cindy Ball home.

Scheduling Cindy to Visit Your School

State Teacher of the Year Cindy Ball is available to speak or conduct workshops at schools and for local OEA affiliates throughout the state. Her specialty is a hands-on workshop of how to incorporate the arts into the curriculum in elementary and middle schools. She can also speak on her experience with Mother Teresa or about education in general.

To schedule Ball for your event, call the State Department of Education Teacher of the Year Program at 405/521-4527.



Cindy Ball asks her class what causes the ice to stick to the string during William Growcock's science experiment.

5 Questions

Teacher of the Year Cindy Ball Answers Timely Questions

1) According to Pres. Bush's No Child Left Behind Act, are you "highly qualified?"

CB – "I have a bachelor's and a master's that will not count (toward highly qualified status). I have a national certification, but it will not count either. I will have to meet the criteria of the state's HOUSSSE (High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation). It astounds me that all my education and experience doesn't count. I don't feel the need to be a specialist in what I teach. I feel the need to be a specialist in teaching children, and I am. It's 'intriguing' that a master's and national certification don't make me highly qualified."

2) How do you feel about high stakes testing?

CB – "I refuse to allow high stakes testing to determine the merit of my students or of my fellow teachers. There is so much more to life than a high stakes test. It should be just one tool, not the whole ball of wax."

3) Because you worked for a congressman and as a teacher, you have a unique perspective on politics. What is your take on our elected leaders, in general?

CB – "They have their hearts in the right place, but they are misguided. Our government is only as good as those who go out and vote. We often get what we ask for."

4) What do you tell new teachers just coming into the profession?

CB – "Look into your heart before you step into a classroom. Make sure your purpose is to serve children. Are you willing to do anything you can to make learning uplifting? If not, then you should do something else. There is nothing more important than the life of a child."

5) Why are you an OEA member?

CB – "Because of all my years in politics, I saw how important it is to have advocates. I don't have the time or the inclination to lobby or to communicate on behalf of teachers. By pooling our resources we have a stronger voice. I'm a strong believer in the union."



Eight of the Very Best TOY Finalists Speak Out

Nine of this year's Teacher of the Year finalists are OEA members, including State Teacher of the Year Cindy Ball. You can read about her on page 1, and the other eight tell you about their teaching philosophies on these two pages.

Stories by Stacy Martin.

Eric Fox Jenks High School

Jenks educator Eric Fox's most lasting life lessons came from two sources during his childhood: first, his grandparents and mother, whose powerful examples of character, knowledge and hard work fired his quest for learning.

Second, his brother committed a violent crime, then committed suicide. The experience marked Fox forever. From then on, he would seek to build bonds among those he would meet throughout life.

He sees his role as helping students build connections - emotional, intellectual and physical. He sees an effective analogy in the wheel.

"I would rank the wheel among mankind's greatest achievements," Fox said. "But it must be connected to something, an axle, a board. Without being connected, the wheel's ability to be of use to society is greatly diminished. Without connections, a student's capacity to contribute to society after school is as diminished as the wheel that stands alone."

Fox delights in helping his students, both personally and academically. He finds it easy to make personal connections with students when they have a personal adversity in common. He doesn't separate these triumphs from scholastic accomplishments.

In his classes, Fox often challenges his students' logic to help them think more deeply and critically about their answers.

Fox is nationally board certified in Adolescent and Young Adulthood, Social Studies.

Brian Jones Western Heights Middle School

A trip to Brian Jones' history class at Western Heights Middle School is nothing short of an adventure.



The Oklahoma City middle school teacher is variously described as eccentric and "thinking out of the box" and the best teacher his colleagues have seen in many years.

Jones brings his subject to life for his students in myriad ways. He might use a teddy bear to serve as an example of mummification when studying ancient Egypt. For Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," he is likely to greet his kids dressed as Juliet. That's right - Juliet, not Romeo.

Western Heights Middle School principal Dewayne White describes the seven-year teacher's methods as creative and innovative.

Naturally, students love to be in his class because they never know what new and different things will happen in Jones' class.

Jones said it was exciting to be a Teacher of the Year finalist. A true teacher, he said if he had won he would have counted the days until he could return to the classroom.

Karen Rogers Cedar Heights El., Woodward

Karen Rogers has been a second grade teacher for 15 years at Cedar Heights Elementary School in Woodward. Prior to that she taught in Luther and Moore.

Raised one of eight children on an Oologah farm, Rogers learned that to accomplish things, we must work hard, share tasks and support each other. Those concepts help her in her classroom to this day.

During her junior year in high school at Oologah, she became an aid for the elementary school's learning disabilities teacher. Ultimately, her admiration for that teacher led her to become a learning disabilities educator.



Rogers instills a love for reading in her students by reading to them often and explaining to her students the many reasons to love literature.

She is deeply aware that helping her students to overcome their disabilities in order to learn can be an important building block of self-esteem.

"Believing in my students could mean the difference in whether or not they succeed," Rogers said.

She believes every child has unique gifts that can be brought out with sufficient encouragement.

Denise Lovell Atoka Schools

Denise Lovell understands both the task at hand as well as the bigger picture when it comes to teaching.

She teaches middle and high school choir for grades 7-12 in Atoka. She loves the challenge of making music come to life for a variety of youngsters.

"All my students can achieve," said Lovell. "My responsibility is to put them in a situation where they can. We're a team. I try to get them to get up and be active. If they can get the physical aspect of it, they can learn it."

For instance, when learning about measures recently she taught her kids to do dance steps. That concept was applied to the idea of a musical measure.

Her favorite quotation is: "Tell me and I'll forget, show me and I may remember, involve me and I'll understand."

She believes strongly in mentoring. "As older teachers, we get comfortable where we are," she said. "It's very important for us to help younger teachers see how they can make a difference in the lives of students."



Nancy Spencer *Del City High School*

Art teacher Nancy Spencer became vividly aware of the bridge between lives and education about a year ago.

She had assigned her students to bring photographs to school for a class assignment, and one boy brought violent depictions of the damage his home suffered in the May 3, 1999, tornado. The student applied the pictures to white paper, using a red wash over the top to symbolize a wound.

In shock, Spencer surveyed the dramatic photos. The moment left her feeling inadequate, wondering if she really made a difference.

On another occasion, Spencer gave encouragement and support to a young brother and sister. The sister had endured abuse at home. Several years later, the girl returned to express her appreciation, radiating confidence and triumph.

Both instances were stark reminders of how the harsh realities of home show up in the classroom.

As a teenager, Spencer didn't see herself as a teacher. Instead, she envisioned tooling around in a "red sports car" with a "big-time career and a fat paycheck."

"Now, much later, I smugly smile, completely sucked in, living the good life, cruising to work," said Spencer, who is nationally board certified in Early Adolescence Through Young Adulthood Art. "I (am) not in the sports car I imagined, but I (am) thrilled to go to work in a dynamic field where this big-time career girl makes a difference."



Kelly Persinger *Broken Bow H.S.*

Broken Bow art teacher Kelly Persinger has learned that the most effective teachers inject a little something extra into their classrooms.

"I believe that learning must be fun," Persinger said. "Teachers today don't necessarily need to be entertainers, but they must teach from a creative standpoint and be willing to accommodate different student needs and learning styles."

Persinger is in his ninth year of his second career. His first career was as a pipeline manager. Financially more secure but unfulfilled, he did an about-face and became a teacher.

The Broken Bow teacher sees himself as being responsible for reaching every student he can as well as for character development. Essential to that goal is serving as a positive role model, he believes.

Persinger is active in his church, community and various organizations. His interests often create common ground with his students. This, in turn, allows him to relate better to children



and develop productive relationships with them.

Leahna West *Byng Junior High*

Byng Junior High School Spanish teacher Leahna West believes that all students can learn.

"It is our responsibility as educators to find ways in which to reach all students," she said.

West is deeply involved in her community, professional development activities as well as her church.

At the heart of West's teaching approach is the belief that teachers should be committed to continual pro-



fessional growth. It is important to model that behavior for students so they will adopt the same attitude. Additionally, West believes in fostering strong parental and community involvement in the learning process.

"Teaching is a lifelong journey that should be full of goals, accomplishments, creativity and change," West said. "We should be the ultimate example of striving for lifelong learning."

A 10-year educator, West became nationally board certified in World Languages Other than English in 2002, and also serves as the children's pastor at Victory Life Fellowship Church.



Robin Dyer *Bixby North El.*

The hardest part of Bixby elementary teacher Robin Dyer's job each year is knowing that she must say good-bye to the students she has taught that year.

"I spend a great deal of time developing a relationship with each of my students," Dyer said. "I consider my students to be my children and love them as a mother would her own. But knowing that in a few short months I will have 23 new lives to sharpen makes it easier to endure."

She is in her eighth year teaching first grade at Bixby.

Dyer participates in professional development and follows technological advances in order to keep her teaching skills sharp. Her teaching style encompasses a multifaceted approach: visual, auditory, technological and hands-on learning. Dyer is becoming proficient in Spanish to better aid her bilingual students.

Regardless of the challenge, Dyer's enthusiasm is clear and consistent.

"I think outstanding teachers are teachers for life," she said. "They delight in seeing students reach their potential."

"Good teachers look for a miracle. Great teachers make a miracle one student at a time."

Mary Hatwood Futrell

Amy Smith Macomb Elementary

It's easy to see what makes Amy Smith so special. In fact, it's immediately obvious – unbridled enthusiasm, a positive attitude, boundless energy and a genuine affection for her students and colleagues.

However, the Macomb kindergarten teacher is quick to credit everyone else for her recent honor: supportive administrators, the larger community, mentor teachers and an outstanding paraprofessional in her classes. Smith said she has been blessed with incredible students each of her six years at Macomb.

“We’re looking at staying here,” she said. “It’s exciting watching former students as they grow up. My first class is in fifth grade now. It’s fun watching them play basketball, go out for cheerleader, all those kinds of things.”

Smith would seem to have an indomitable spirit. But, as all teachers know, things have been difficult for public education the last two years. Smith is Macomb’s only kindergarten teacher. Not surprisingly, her class has ballooned to 28 youngsters – which sometimes makes it hard even for someone with such a positive outlook.

“The way I look at it, you can either worry about it and fret, or you can just go on and do the best you can.”



Rising Stars

Each year, the State Department of Education honors four young Oklahoma teachers as Rising Stars. They each have five years or less experience and were their districts’ teachers of the year. And this year, they are all OEA members. The Teacher of the Year judges identified these young professionals as outstanding after reviewing their portfolios for the Teacher of the Year competition. Stories by Stacy Martin.

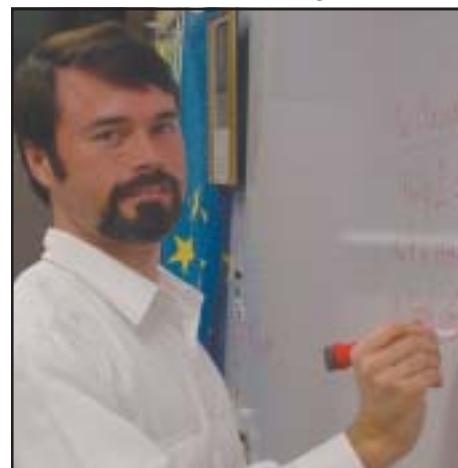
John Waldron Booker T. Washington High School, Tulsa

Although he arrived there in a roundabout way, Booker T. Washington social studies teacher John Waldron said fate probably led him to the Tulsa high school.

The New Jersey native taught in the Washington, D.C. public schools prior to coming to Oklahoma. He said one could easily characterize D.C. schools as being among the nation’s roughest districts.

Five years ago, Waldron relocated to the magnet Tulsa school where he found the ideal school for his teaching style. He also met the woman he would marry.

Waldron believes good education is student centered, and requires a high level of teacher competency in the subject area. He loves magnet schools because of the diverse course offerings. “When students have a choice, they’re more committed,” Waldron said.



After witnessing troubled youth in Washington, D.C., Waldron became actively involved in facilitating mental health services. The link to mental health experts helps identify problems before they boil over, he said.

“The students are not just brains, they’re hearts too,” he said. “You have to look after those as well.”

Shawn Blankenship Prairie Vale Elementary, Deer Creek

Assimilating physical fitness into life is the goal for Deer Creek Prairie Vale Elementary physical education teacher Shawn Blankenship.

He doesn’t merely think outside the box. He thinks all over the map.

For starters, Blankenship incorporates core curriculum subjects into his kids’ fitness activities. A running exercise might illustrate the metric system.

Blankenship urges his young charges to see physical fitness as a lifestyle, not an occasional 45-minute activity.

For instance, fitness activities don’t have to be limited to traditional competitive sports. Rather, they can include more unorthodox activities such as tae kwon do, orienteering, hiking, cheerleading and rock climbing – in other words, virtually anything that lends itself to fitness.

An emphasis on noncompetitive sports helps more children feel included because there are no winners or losers, he said.

To support his students, Blankenship committed to attending these extracurricular activities – a promise he admits leaves him little free time. Prairie Vale has about 535 students.

“Children need to have a vision for the future and understand that PE is a way of life, and not just a class,” said Blankenship.



Dana Lineback Longfellow Junior High, Enid

On paper, Dana Lineback teaches English language learners at Longfellow Junior High in Enid. In reality, she does so much more.

Lineback’s primary responsibility when she came to Longfellow four years ago was to establish a strong English Language Learner (ELL) program to serve a growing migrant population. She created a model program from scratch.

She began by carefully assessing the needs of both the migrant students and her fellow teachers. That gave her program a clear direction

“It’s easy to be a rising star when you’re surrounded by teachers who are phenomenal, creative, dedicated and inspiring,” said Lineback. “A lot of what I do is try to help kids succeed in mainstream classrooms. My job would be impossible without a wonderful staff.”

She quickly found she was needed by more than just the migrant student population. Also in need were students at risk of academic failure due to language deficiencies – so they were included. As it turned out, families of migrant students also needed help communicating with the district.

“As the ELL teacher at Longfellow, I am a voice for people who cannot yet speak English, a resource for teachers struggling to meet the needs of a diversified student population and an educator in charge of an exciting dynamic new program.”



Lawton Local Finds Relevance In Fundraising

By Doug Folks

By day, Mrs. Runnels is an easygoing, soft-spoken math teacher at Lawton's Tomlinson Junior High. She quietly goes about her business of teaching seventh graders how to plot points on a graph, how to multiply fractions and master other math skills they need to know.

After school, in the evenings and on weekends, she transforms into Judy Runnels, president of the Professional Educators' Association of Lawton (PEAL). In this role, she quickly loses her mild manner. As she talks about her members and the local Association's work for them, she grows more and more passionate. She has an unblinking dedication to the teachers of Lawton.

"I think it's our job to protect them, to take care of them," she said. "Whether it's providing workshops to make them better teachers or, sometimes, just listening."

When Runnels was elected president three years ago, PEAL had about 400 members. Since then, the local has had as many as 482 bona fide members.

The state budget shortfall has hit Lawton hard, though. While the district has brought back most of the teachers who lost jobs from a reduction in force or the nonrenewal of temporary contracts, Lawton has 70 fewer teaching positions compared to last year. The loss of personnel has affected PEAL, which is down to about 450 members. That's not good enough for Runnels, who is somewhat embarrassed that not all of Lawton's teachers are members. But she also sees the situation as one of great potential.

Since PEAL doesn't bargain a contract, some might think the local has an uphill battle to show relevance to its members. With Runnels at the wheel, the local is finding new ways to do just that. She continually talks to members and asks what they need. With PEAL's executive board working just as hard, the organization is finding unique avenues to help members through a variety of fund-raisers.

- **AmeriPlan** – When Runnels asked her members what PEAL could do for them, many said they needed help with insurance costs. Runnels investigated AmeriPlan, an OEA endorsed company that offers discounts on dental, vision, prescription and chiropractic services. PEAL is now promoting the company and receiving a percentage of the monthly payment for every new member they sign up for the service.

- **Staples** – Runnels has established a solid relationship with the local Staples office store, which donated 50 \$10 gift cards for PEAL to give to all new hires this year. The store is now piloting a new toner cartridge recycling program in which Lawton schools compete for a cash prize.



PEAL officers hope to raise enough money to establish a scholarship fund for members' children. Executive Board members include (l-r) Pam Ramey, Ruth Ritter, President Judy Runnels, Vice President Dorothy Bradley, and Secretary Patsy Stoll. Not pictured are Treasurer Gary Smith, Catherine Fowler and Amanda Campbell.



Debbie Bailey, a teacher at Lawton's Eisenhower Junior High, signs in at El Chico with help from PEAL executive committee member Pam Ramey and President Judy Runnels. PEAL sponsors a fund-raising evening once a month at the restaurant and uses the proceeds to help members with classroom supplies.

- **PEAL Golf Tournament** – Even though no one on PEAL's Executive Committee plays golf, the group organized a golf tournament as a fundraiser. The first two tournaments have raised about \$5,000 and they already have commitments for more sponsors for next year's tournament than they had last year.

- **El Chico** – Runnels and her husband, Jerry, ate at the Lawton El Chico one evening with the intent of asking the manager to be a golf tournament sponsor. Instead, the restaurant now hosts PEAL Night once a month, with a portion of the evening's proceeds going to the local Association.

- **Aubrey Chevrolet** – Runnels was in the market for a car, so she asked Aubrey Chevrolet for their best deal because she was going to com-

pare it to one from Mark Heitz Chevrolet in Norman. When owners David and Todd Aubrey found out OEA members could get a car at Mark Heitz for \$175 over invoice, they immediately met the offer. Runnels saved \$8,000 on her Tahoe, and now all OEA members can take advantage of the same offer.

Runnels said that PEAL will use the money raised from these various efforts to pay building rep incentives for attendance at Association meetings and for recruiting new members. The local has also developed an account from which PEAL members can receive grants for classroom supplies.

The eventual goal, Runnels says, is to offer college scholarships to children of the local's members.

In addition to helping members, all the activity is paying off in a better image for PEAL around the community.

"I've been working very hard since I came on as president to improve our image," Runnels said. "The golf tournament has done so much for us because we've spent so much time explaining who we are. When we first started asking businesses to sponsor the tournament, we had to explain who we were and what we were doing.

Now, people all over town know we're

See "Fundraising Efforts" on Page 14

Imposed Stipend Ends Mid-Del Impasse

Teachers Frustrated by Outcome, Offended by District's Hired Negotiator

By Doug Folks

The Midwest City-Del City Board of Education imposed on its teachers a stipend instead of a permanent salary increase at its October 13 meeting.

The imposition ended an impasse and came after the Mid-Del Association of Classroom Teachers filled the

“Our teachers recognize the importance of the board hearing directly from the professionals in the trenches. Procedures for hearing the public on the board agenda states that the board members do not have to respond. However, due to the depth of the frustration demonstrated, some statement

permanent part of the compensation schedule.

Mid-Del teachers see the offer as a slap in the face.

“Other districts clearly were willing to make a commitment to their faculties to show that they value and respect them. But not us,” McCoy said.

Moore, Norman, Edmond, Lawton, Broken Arrow, Jenks and Owasso, all districts of similar size to Mid-Del, gave step movement to their teachers. Of those schools, only Lawton had a larger carry-over than Mid-Del. Norman

Public Schools advanced its teachers two steps on the schedule this year after freezing them last year.

Mid-Del teachers received step raises prior to 2002-03 when the district's fund balance was at \$3.7 million and schools were already receiving cuts in state aid. This year, Mid-Del

ally agreed with the district's position. OEA Advocate David Williams, who represented the ACT at the fact finding hearing, refused to sign the agreement and wrote a dissenting opinion.

“I think we clearly showed that the district had more than enough money to provide step movement for its teachers,” Williams said.

Adding insult to injury, the district's hired negotiator attacked the ACT in a column in the *Oklahoma School Board Journal*. He accused the local of being “... irresponsible...,” “...unrealistic...,” “...dishonest...,” “...leading its membership down the wrong road...,” “...tainting the good and honest work of other affiliates...,” and “...adversarial.”

“Going to impasse is not a declaration of war, as the district's hired negotiator put it,” McCoy said. “It is simply the process we have access to that settles differences at the table.

“Our teachers are disappointed that we will receive a stipend and not a permanent salary increase. But we are absolutely offended at how the district's hired negotiator has treated us throughout this process and how he tried to pit our bargaining team against



Mid-Del ACT members packed the district's October board meeting to show support for its bargaining team and to show the school board members they felt disrespected for not receiving step raises. Even though the district had a higher fund balance this year and fewer employees, the board refused to give step raise. Instead, it offered stipends equal to a step to be given at year end.

board room and clearly stated its feelings on the matter. A dozen ACT members addressed the board during the public comments portion of the meeting, each receiving an emotional ovation from the audience. Following the open comments, the board adjourned to executive session. When they returned, they quickly approved the imposed contract 4-1.

Even though teachers had a chance to speak their minds during the meeting, Mid-Del ACT President Jamie McCoy said the board missed a chance to ease the frustrations.

“Our members were able to share their personal frustrations. They were able to give firsthand experiences of the impact of earlier board decisions and their worries of future impact on their personal and professional lives,” McCoy said.

of reassurance from the board could have been therapeutic.”

When the two sides began bargaining in August, agreement was reached on several nonmonetary items and the amount of additional money available for raises. The teachers asked for step movement, \$100 to be added to each step and that an additional step be added to each compensation schedule. But the district's final offer was a stipend equal to a step, which would become permanent only if state budget cuts did not reduce the Mid-Del budget and if the Ad Valorem Reimbursement Fund is fully funded for the entirety of the 2003-04 school year.

As things stand now, the teachers will not see the stipend until the end of the school year, and will not know until that time if the money will become a

“... we are absolutely offended at how the district's hired negotiator has treated us throughout this process and how he tried to pit our bargaining team against the entire faculty.”

**Jamie McCoy
Mid-Del ACT President**

Schools entered the school year with a \$4.86 million fund balance. Also, at the time of its final offer, the district had 109 fewer teachers, representing a \$4 million savings in payroll for the coming year.

Impasse was declared in mid-August. Stillwater attorney Sharon Scott served as the fact finder and eventu-

the entire faculty.”

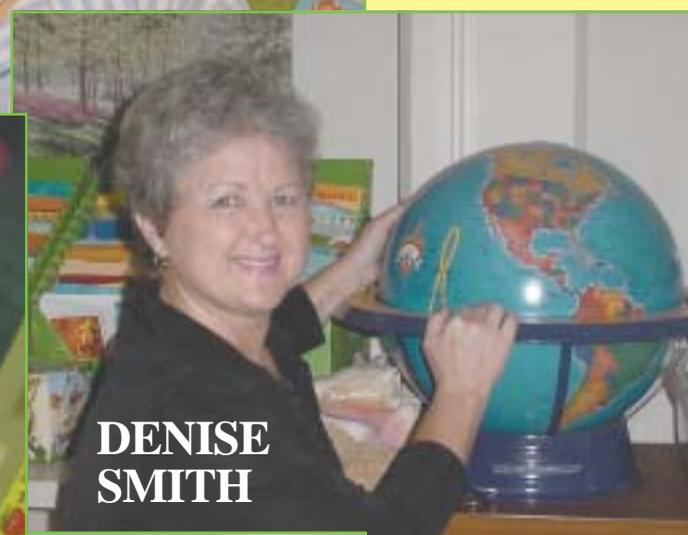
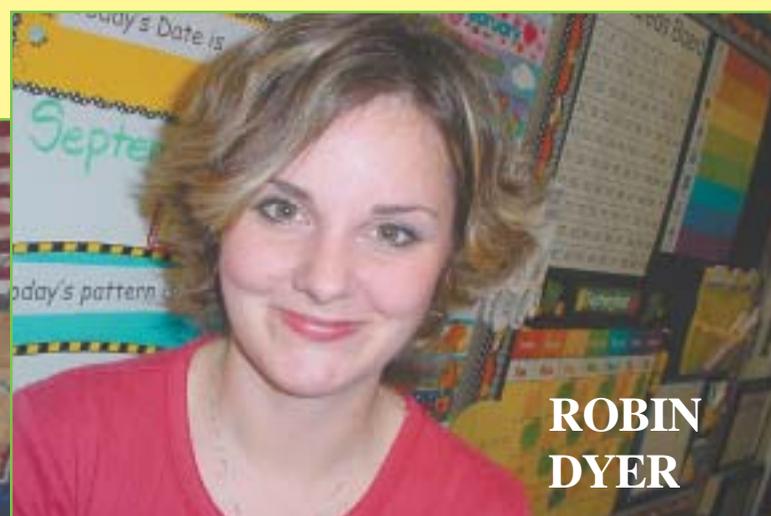
Some of the teacher speakers at the October 13 board meeting took exception to the remarks made by the district's hired negotiator and others strongly assured the board that the Mid-Del bargaining team acted appropriately and exactly as the membership asked it to.

KBEZ's Teacher Feature Puts the Spotlight on OEA Members

The Oklahoma Education Association and Tulsa's KBEZ radio are recognizing Tulsa area teachers for their outstanding work in the classroom. OEA members from six different local Associations were selected to be featured on KBEZ's morning show.

Chosen at random, each teacher was given the opportunity to voice his/her views on such areas as the importance of education and parental involvement as well as why they chose teaching as a profession. Morning show DJs, the ever popular Steve and Cindy, use the information to pay tribute not only to the featured teacher but to educators in general.

The six OEA members will receive a prize package that includes two tickets to "Seussical the Musical" and dinner at Pearl's. The winners are also featured on the OEA Web site, www.okea.org.



Salute Public Schools During American Education Week

Nov. 16-22 will mark the 83rd annual observance of American Education Week, which salutes our public schools and the importance of relationships forged among the teachers, students and parents in them, Oklahoma Education Association leadership announced.

The theme of this year's celebration is "Great Public Schools for Every Child – America's Promise." It reflects the public's commitment to all students.

"Helping students achieve is the cornerstone of our work as educators," said OEA President Roy Bishop.

"We're proud of this work, and this week is the time to celebrate that."

Today's teachers do so much more than teach basic skills. They nurture and inspire children. They provide en-

couragement and support.

Parents and communities are encouraged to show their appreciation for educators during this special event. Public schools across the state and the nation have various activities planned to mark the occasion, said Bishop.

Due to budget cuts, Oklahoma schools continue to have many needs, including supplies, materials, volunteers and helpers of all kinds. Any kind of assistance is deeply appreciated, the OEA leader said.

In addition, Nov. 19 during AEW will mark the 16th annual observance of Education Support Professionals Day, and Friday, Nov. 21 as Substitute Educators' Day. It is a time to salute the contributions both groups make to

the education process.

The National Education Association has provided a National Education Week section on its Web site,

www.nea.org/aew. It covers some of the many ways to celebrate AEW and includes downloadable art for local promotions.





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Schools Attuned Identifies How Kids Learn

To date, 837 educators across Oklahoma are finding success in Schools Attuned, a professional development program that provides a framework and tools to understand and manage differences in learning for all students.

Oklahoma Schools Attuned is a statewide initiative first introduced in June 2002. It is based on the work of Dr. Mel Levine, founder of the non-profit All Kinds of Minds Institute and author of the best selling book, *A Mind At A Time*.

(Levine is scheduled to give a free public lecture at 10:30 a.m., Friday, November 21, in the Hardeman Auditorium at Oklahoma Christian University in Edmond.)

"I have seen students who were struggling at the beginning of the school year become successful by the end of the year. It really works," said Chris Smith, an OEA member with 30

years experience who serves as a Schools Attuned profile advisor.

Oklahoma Schools Attuned has a 40-hour core course for teams of K-12 educators. Each school is encouraged to send four to six participants, including an administrator, to create a strong in-school support network. The program includes a minimum of 10 hours of follow-up experiences during the school year.

Schools Attuned recognizes that teachers, administrators, and related service professionals are in the best position to observe and manage students with learning differences. The program helps teachers understand how the brain is "wired," various ways that students learn, patterns of students' differences in learning and how students' strengths and affinities can be used to overcome weaknesses in

the classroom.

"This is a huge opportunity that the state is giving teachers to keep kids from falling through the cracks," said Sonya Waldrip, 5th grade teacher at Monroe Elementary in Enid.

The Schools Attuned approach includes:

- **Management by profile**, a process whereby educators use comprehensive observations to understand students' learning behaviors and create an educational plan that addresses learning strengths, weaknesses and affinities;
- **Demystification**, a unique process that allows students to understand and talk about their learning difficulties while appreciating their strengths and realizing their potential;
- **Classroom accommodation strategies** that build on a student's

strengths and work around weaknesses;

- **Interventions** that educators can use to facilitate the strengthening of weak functions at the heart of a student's learning difference;

- **Strengthening strengths and affinities**, where students experience success and develop expertise in areas about which they are passionate.

In 2001, the Oklahoma legislature provided funding for up to 2,000 teachers to be trained in Schools Attuned from 2002 to 2004. Oklahoma is one of two states to lead the nation in adopting this innovative educational initiative for public schools.

For more information, contact Velta Johnston, state director of Oklahoma Schools Attuned, at vjohnston@allkindsofminds.org, or call her at 405/823-8226.

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The Importance of Checking Your Check

By Heath Merchen
Associate General Counsel

With educator pay in Oklahoma sitting below the national average, few teachers in our state can afford to be shorted on their paychecks. Unfortunately, districts often miscalculate years of experience, fail to appropriately calculate extra duty compensation, and sometimes simply add incorrectly. These mistakes, if unnoticed by the employee, can result in substantial underpayments and the amounts involved can be staggering, sometimes topping \$10,000. Fortunately, OEA has taken steps to unearth these errors and our legal staff is well versed in how to recover funds once problems are discovered.

To assist education employees in finding pay discrepancies, OEA recently helped push through Senate Bill

From Your Counsel

715, which requires districts to provide detailed payroll information to employees. The bill requires districts to delineate each item of pay, separating minimum salary schedule payment, additional salary, benefits and extra duty pay. Districts must also set out how much is paid for each benefit and identify which benefits are paid by the state versus the district.

While the information provided under the bill will hopefully help school employees uncover errors in their pay, it is important to point out that the district may be legally prohibited from simply writing a check if the error occurred prior to the current fiscal year. The employee may need to file what is generally known as a “friendly” lawsuit

in which the district agrees to the amount owed and judgment is entered by the court.

Filing this type of suit normally requires retaining an attorney, but for OEA members, legal representation is provided free of charge. This is no small matter, as attorneys’ fees range from \$1,000 to \$5,000 for uncontested cases and can easily exceed \$10,000 in contested cases.

Not only can it be expensive, but the process can get even more complex after the court rules. Once judgment is entered, the amount owed plus interest is put on the tax rolls and collected by the district from the taxpayers over a three year period. The district then forwards payment to the employee as the tax dollars are received.

Fortunately, employees may sell or

assign the judgment for face value. Local banks or individuals will often offer to buy the judgment since the interest rates earned on judgments are usually higher than what is available from certificates of deposit and many other investments. However, the sale and assignment must be carefully documented to ensure enforceability. Once again, the legal services necessary to document such a transaction are provided free to OEA members.

As with any type of litigation, it is easier to recover amounts owed if it is brought to the attention of our legal staff quickly. Oklahoma’s statute of limitations restricts the time period for recovery and evidence to support your claim can become much more difficult to gather as time passes. So, read your contract and your checks carefully, and call your advocate if you discover a problem. The information provided under SB 715 can empower employees and ensure accurate pay – but only for those who pay careful attention.



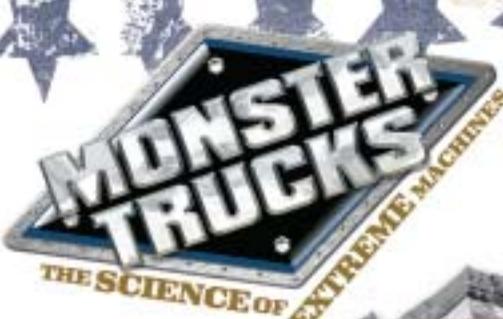
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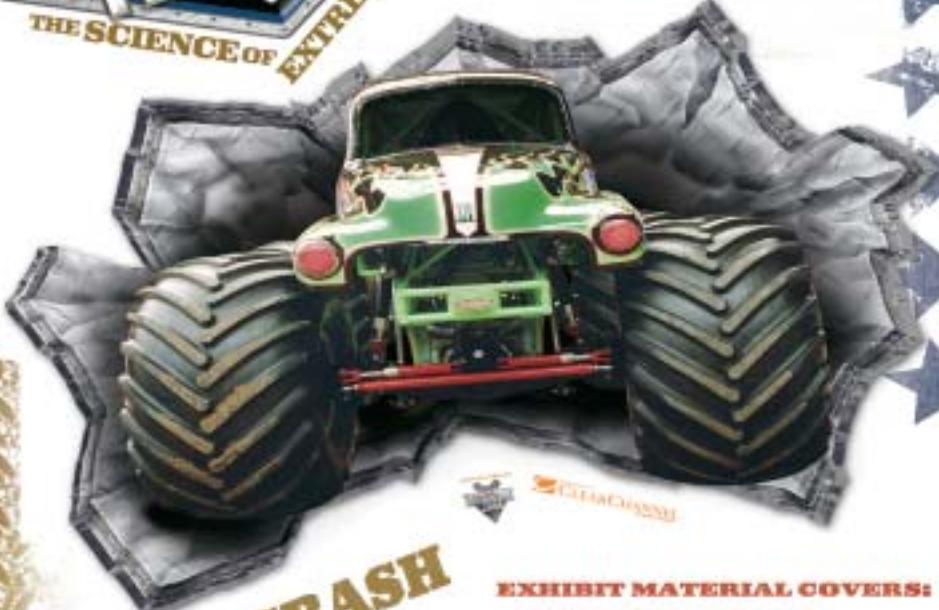
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You Decide

A monthly column of member opinion.

This issue's question:

"Pres. Bush's omnibus No Child Left Behind education bill requires all teachers to be highly qualified by 2005-06. Does meeting the standards as written in NCLB prove you are highly qualified?"



By Cheryl Dowell
Comanche Public Schools

I have a master's degree in special education and I have taught special education for 14 years, but according to President Bush's No Child Left Be-

Why Doesn't Experience Count?

hind Act (NCLB), I am not a highly qualified teacher. Having certification as an elementary teacher with an endorsement in language arts and holding certifications in both learning disabilities and mental retardation doesn't seem to make me highly qualified.

According to the *World Book Dictionary*, to be qualified means "to have the desirable or required qualifications or to be competent." It would seem that our colleges and universities, not Washington bureaucrats, know best how to prepare teachers to have the necessary credentials and required

qualifications to become a good teacher.

Friends who have taught 27-plus years aren't highly qualified under NCLB simply because they graduated from an Oklahoma college or university with an education degree before 1982. Why would a teacher not be highly qualified simply because he or she graduated before 1982? However, students who graduated this past May and who have absolutely no classroom experience magically become highly qualified.

In college, I jumped through the ap-

propriate hoops. I took the tests, turned in projects and completed graduation requirements. Is this not good enough for me to be considered a highly qualified teacher? It seems that each year more and more demands are being placed upon teachers, and I feel that Oklahoma has a long-standing commitment to high standards and excellence in teaching.

Perhaps we just need a better method to show that our teachers already meet those standards of being highly qualified.

NCLB is Just Bureaucratic Meddling

By Randell Hurst
Wewoka Middle School

I am a special education teacher. I teach in a small town here in southeast Oklahoma. In Oklahoma, teachers are known for the quality education and

training we have received.

I attended the University of Central Oklahoma, which was founded to train teachers many years ago. Other states recruit heavily (and very successfully, I

might add) in this state. It took me five years to complete my degree. I then had to take three certification tests, complete student teaching and jump through an additional number of "hoops of fire" before I was employed as a teacher.

I have had to teach math, English, reading, applied geometry, algebra, writing skills, study skills, social studies and more. If that's not "highly qualified," I'll eat my hat.

It is also insane to think that *all* students can read on grade level and unfair as well as unwise to require this of them. How is a student with a 54 I.Q. (which is what one of my students scored this year) supposed to read on her grade level, which is 8th grade? She currently reads on the first grade level. It is like asking a person confined to a wheelchair to get up and run a foot race with non-disabled people and require that he or she finish in equal time with them.

In actuality, this is cruel, unjust and



unfair. I see this NCLB stuff as just more bureaucratic meddling by people who know the least about education – *politicians*. We need to keep the federal government out of the classrooms and let the state and local people decide what is best for our children's education.

Do You Know Your Credit Score?

Does your credit score say you are credit worthy?.

A credit score is a number that reflects your credit risk level. It is generated through statistical models using elements from your credit report. Banks, credit card companies, insurance companies, auto dealers, retail stores and most other lenders that issue credit or loans use credit scores to quickly summarize a consumer's credit history, saving the need to manually review an applicant's credit report and provide a better, faster risk decision.

There are primarily two types of scores, generic bureau-based scores and custom scores. Among bureau-based scores, the most widely used score in the financial service industry

is the FICO score generated by the Fair, Issac Company. The bureau-based credit scores draw on statistics from a large number of consumers across a variety of accounts.

Scores are not just used to rate the credit worthiness of consumers. Lenders also use scores to predict consumer response to offers sent in the mail, the likelihood that account holders will file for bankruptcy or that a consumer will move their loan to another lender.

If credit scores is a topic that you would like more information about, contact NEA Member Benefits' Liz Picone, 800/609-6580, or by e-mail at Lpicone@neamb.com, to schedule a workshop on this subject.

Next Issue's Question:

"Which is a better instructional method: student centered or teacher directed?"

Columns should be 250-300 words. E-mail your responses to Patti Razien at prazien@okea.org or mail them to her at OEA Northwest Office, 2315 Downs Ave., Woodward, OK, 73801.

The deadline is December 1.

Fundraising Efforts Improve Local's Image

Continued from Page 7

trying to help teachers."

PEAL became a 5 Star Local at last April's OEA Awards Banquet. Lawton Superintendent Barry Beauchamp later honored the local at a school board meeting for earning 5 Star status. During his remarks, he told the audience how strong and how important the relationship is between his office and PEAL.

Runnels' commitment and the fact she isn't afraid to ask a business to

help teachers is giving PEAL a unique presence. She sees the job as president of PEAL as vital to its members. So important, she and the executive committee plan to file for a release time grant from the NEA.

Can anyone imagine what Runnels can do as a full-time president? It boggles the mind.

Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation (Required by 39 USC 3685)

The publication's title is The Education Focus (Publication No. 1542-1678). The filing date of the statement is October 2003. It is published monthly, with the exception of three issues which are published bimonthly. Nine issues are published annually, in September-October, November, December-January, February, March, April, May, June-July and August. The annual subscription price is \$5.00. The complete mailing address of the known office of the publication and of the General Business Office of the Publisher is: Oklahoma Education Association, 323 E. Madison, Oklahoma City, OK 73105. Doug Folks (phone number 405/528-7785) is the contact person. The publisher is the Oklahoma Education Association, P.O. Box 18485, Oklahoma City, OK 73254. Doug Folks is the Editor and Lela Odom is the Managing Editor. Owner of the publication is the Oklahoma Education Association, P.O. Box 18485, Oklahoma City, OK 73154. There are no bondholders, mortgagees, or other security holders owning or holding one percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities. The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax have not changed during the preceding 12 months. The name of the publication is The Education Focus. The issue date for the circulation data which follows is August 2003. The data is classified as follows: a. the average

number of copies of each issue during preceding 12 months, and b. the actual number copies of the single issue published nearest the filing date. Total number of copies: a. 24,561; b. 26,500. Paid or requested circulation through (1) outside-county mail subscriptions stated on Form 3526: a. 23,529; b. 23,237; (2) in-county subscriptions: a. none; and b. none; (3) through dealers and carriers, street vendors, counter sales, and other non-USPS paid distribution: a. 817; b. 3,048; (4) other classes mailed through the USPS: a. none; b. none. Total paid and/or requested circulation: a. 24,346; b. 26,285. Free distribution by mail for (1) outside-county: a. 115; b. 115; (2) in-county: a. none; b. none; (3) other classes mailed through the USPS: a. none; b. none. Free distribution outside the mail: a. none; b. none. Total free distribution: a. 115; b. 115. Total distribution: a. 24,461, b. 26,400. Copies not distributed (office use, leftovers, spoiled): a. 100; b. 100. Total printed: a. 24,561, b. 26,500. Percentage of paid and or requested circulation is: a. 99.53% and b 99.56%. The statement of ownership will be published in the November 2003, issue of the publication. I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions. Doug Folks, Editor.



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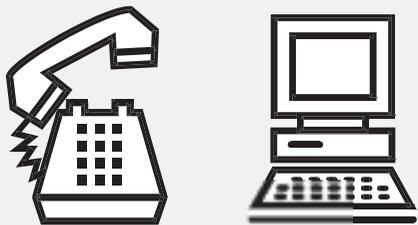
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Inspiration and Professional Development

OEA's 2003 Convention attracted nearly 5,000 teachers from around the state for a day of inspiration and professional development.

Above, students from Muldrow High School leading the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance during the morning's opening session. From left, Cassia Gray, Kyle Alderson and Natalia Morgan participated in OEA member Niki Alderson's Ed Fair booth, explaining how they use the puppet show "Saving Timmy: School Bus Safety Awareness Campaign" in Muldrow schools.



At right, members talk with keynote speaker Jim Stoval following his uplifting lecture on going after your dreams now and not later.

Staples Donates \$9,000 to Education Foundations

Staples' inkjet cartridge recycling program recently paid off for nine public school foundations, and provided the first donation to the recently created Oklahoma Education Association Foundation.

Joe Lada, regional manager for Staples Oklahoma, presented the \$1,000 checks to the Norman, Shawnee, Mid-Del, Moore, Lawton, Oklahoma City, Putnam City and Edmond school foundations during a special ceremony at the Oklahoma City Zoo's educational auditorium. Lada also presented a \$1,000 donation to the OEA Foundation.

The money came from the Recycling for Education effort that Staples stores rolled out last February. Other businesses and associations have joined the project, which was originally developed to help public schools during

the state's financial crisis. What began in Oklahoma as a germ of an idea between Lada and OEA staffer Bruce Treadaway is now a nationwide effort with some proceeds earmarked for the National Education Association Foundation.

Lada said that there will be more donations to Oklahoma schools in the future, with foundations for Tulsa, Ponca City and Bartlesville Public Schools expected to receive checks next.

All local OEA affiliates are encouraged to take used inkjet cartridges to their local Staples stores, and then to apply for the grants that will be forthcoming through the program. For more information on the Recycling for Education project, contact Treadaway at btreadaway@okea.org or call him at 800/522-8091, or 405/528-7785.