

# OEA

An affiliate of the  
National Education Association

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**The Education Focus**  
OEA's all-member publication

# The Education Focus

For the membership of the Oklahoma Education Association

August 2004

## Help is only a phone call away

*Marlow teacher overcomes serious accusation with quick help*

*By Doug Folks*

With nearly 20 years of experience teaching first grade and special education, Marlow Elementary teacher Terrie Keck knew how to handle children with behavioral problems and how to work with their parents.

She had always received good evaluations and had never had problems that required a plan for improvement or even a disciplinary discussion with her principal. That all changed in a heartbeat when the school secretary showed up at her classroom door.

"It was about 10:30 in the morning, just before lunch," Keck said. "The secretary came to my room and said the principal and the superintendent needed to speak to me immediately."

It was the meeting every teacher fears. A parent had contacted the school district and accused Keck of abusing her child. While the charge was a shock to Keck, she wasn't surprised an accusation had been made. The child had been involved in a number of discipline issues and the mother had been resistant to discuss the problems or the source of the behavior with Keck.

"The superintendent told me that the mother was going to file charges," Keck said. "The child's mother said I had grabbed him and slammed him against the wall once and that I had slammed him to the ground during recess.

"I said, 'I guess I better call the OEA for help,' and my principal said that would be a good idea."

Keck immediately contacted an OEA staff person, who in turn put her in touch with the Association's Center for Legal and Corporate Services.



*Marlow's Terrie Keck faced a teacher's worst nightmare – an allegation of child abuse – but she found out that immediate help from OEA is just a phone call away.*

Over the next hour, OEA staff and attorneys spoke with her several times to determine the seriousness of the charges and plan a strategy to handle the situation.

The ordeal was obviously unnerving for Keck. But after speaking with

OEA legal staff, she pulled herself together and did the things she needed to do to help resolve the issue.

"I was trying to get my wits about me," she said. "I gathered up all the documentation I had on my dealings

*See "Attorney" on Page 3*

## *Join your professional association today!*

Today is a great day to join the Oklahoma Education Association. Just like doctors belong to the American Medical Association and lawyers are members of the Bar; teachers, education support professionals and administrators should belong to *the* strongest voice and advocate for public education – the OEA.

If you already belong, thank you for being part of Oklahoma's strongest education association. If you aren't a member, we invite you to join us. This issue of *The Education Focus* is full of sto-

ries of how members utilized OEA services, stories of how the Association works for you and your students, and lists of products and services that can be accessed only by OEA members.

For membership information, see the OEA representative in your building, visit our website at [www.okea.org](http://www.okea.org) or call us at 800/522-8091.

If you aren't a member, join us today. If you are a member, tell a colleague about how the OEA has improved your life.

# August brings great opportunity

By Roy Bishop  
OEA President

August is a busy and exciting time of year for those of us in education. We're all getting ready for the new school year and the opportunity to inspire a new class of students.

It also provides an opportunity to share the benefits of OEA membership with prospective new members. I hope you will take time to remind people of the importance of being a member in their professional association.

This issue of *The Education Focus* details many of the reasons that membership in the OEA makes a difference in peoples' lives – both professionally and personally. It is a tremendous resource that I want you to use in your buildings as you tell people why you belong to the OEA, the strongest voice in Oklahoma's education community.

You're going to read articles in this publication about people who have benefited from the Association in a variety of different ways. These are real-life, true experiences in which the OEA made a difference.

You will find listings of our Centers and the services that they provide. Knowing who is there to serve you from both governance and staff is at your finger tips.

You will find information about NEA Member Benefits programs and OEA discount programs that will save you money in a variety of ways. This information will allow you to show colleagues that not being a member actually costs them money.

When talking with nonmembers – and even fellow members – remember that last spring the OEA enjoyed one of the most successful legislative sessions in the history of the Association. In collaboration with Governor Brad Henry, we were able to provide all education employees with state-paid, single premium health insurance; a five-year salary plan to take us to the regional average; continued support of

the National Board process; and the equalization of benefits for those people who fall under the rule of 90 in the Teacher Retirement System.

In addition, the largest revenue producing bill for education since 1990 was passed pending passage this fall by a vote of the people.

Our work falls outside the legislative process as well. Last fall, we were the only statewide teacher's association working with the State Department of Education on the Oklahoma HOUSSSE definition of "Highly Qualified." It was through our work that a checklist was established to keep teachers from having to take a test to prove that they were highly qualified.

OEA has been instrumental in the training of teachers to meet the demands of changing certification and strategies in teaching through our professional development institutions.



President Roy Bishop

And where are we headed? This year, the Delegate Assembly passed our Adequacy and Equity Program. We will be investigating whether or not Oklahoma adequately funds our schools. While we believe that Oklahoma hasn't adequately funded education, our program will help provide the

evidence and a definition of what adequate funding is.

Remember that your OEA governance and staff representatives want to hear your questions, concerns and comments. Please call or email us when you have something you need to talk about. Providing information to you and coming up with workable solutions is the best way to handle any issue that might occur in your building or local. Let us be of service.

The areas we provide benefits to you are numerous. Please share copies of this issue and your own personal experiences with potential members. Ask them to join.

Membership is the lifeblood of the Association. A strong and active membership is the reason that we are the Association that makes the difference.

Have a great year.

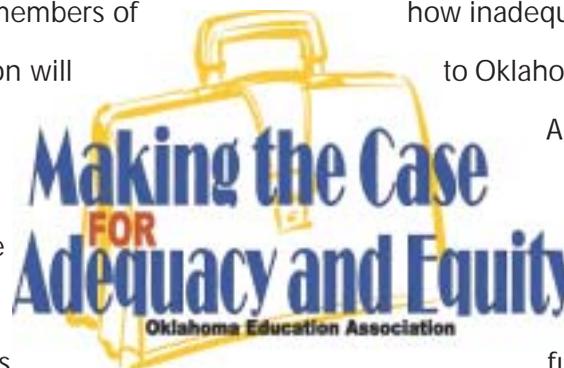
## Help Us Make the Case

As the new school year opens, members of the Oklahoma Education Association will

begin working on a very important project. We're looking to make the case for an Adequate and Equitable education for every Oklahoma child, and you can help. Our goal is

to have one Legal Liaison in every school building in Oklahoma. The Legal Liaison will communicate directly with the OEA Legal staff, sharing stories that illustrate

how inadequate funding has been detrimental to Oklahoma students.



All you need to be a Legal Liaison is a home phone number, a home email address and a willingness to help us identify where adequate funding will make for improved education opportunities.

For more information on the A&E Project or to volunteer to be a Legal Liaison, visit [www.okea.org/A&E](http://www.okea.org/A&E).

# OEA

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# Attorney meets with Keck just hours after her first telephone call to OEA

*Continued from Page 1*

with this parent and her child.”

It would later prove to be important that she had kept track of her encounters with both the student and the parent.

“At 2:30 that afternoon, the school secretary came back to my room and said I had another visitor. He offered to wait until school was out to meet with me,” Keck said.

The visitor was an OEA-provided attorney from the White Law Firm, which became involved in Keck’s case because it involved potential criminal charges.

The issue took several months to clear. Keck met several times with her attorney, the principal and a local investigator who was looking into the case. An eye witness for the parent

had seen an incident between Keck and the student, but the situation wasn’t what it seemed to be at the time. And on the day Keck was alleged to have thrown the child to the ground at recess, Keck wasn’t on playground duty or even outside of the building.

What helped Keck the most was that she was innocent. It also made a huge difference that OEA was with her through the entire ordeal.

“While I may have been a little nervous about the situation, I never felt really worried because I knew I was innocent and I knew the OEA would take care of me,” Keck said.

The charges were eventually dismissed because the investigation found no evidence of wrongdoing on

Keck’s part.

“It didn’t cost me a dime, and many times my attorney dealt with different issues and I didn’t even have to spend my own time to deal with it,” she said.

One could assume that because of the incident, Keck would never drop her OEA membership to insure she always had that security. But for her, membership is much more than liability protection.

“My membership was important to me to begin with,” Keck said. “I’ve always believed that I should belong to

my professional association. I cherish my membership because of the friendships I have developed and the opportunities I’ve had.

“Having immediate help when I needed it most just adds to the value of my membership.”

Terrie Keck’s story, while admittedly dramatic and rare, is all too real. It points out that even the best teachers can face adversity, but only OEA members have access to immediate help just a phone call away.

## “Oh my! What do I need to do first?”

Only a small percentage of OEA members ever need legal help, but when a situation arises take comfort that someone is there to help.

If you have a work-related problem and need help, call the Advocacy Specialist in your geographic region first (see the box below).

If the matter requires a lawyer, the OEA staff person will inform Legal

and Corporate Services of your situation, and an attorney will contact you.

If you need legal help for a situation away from work, access the Personal Legal Services Program by calling Legal Services at OEA Headquarters in Oklahoma City at 800/522-8091, or 528-7785.

However large or small the problem, help is only a phone call away.

# A good building rep is the key to Association success

*By Patti Razien*

The Building Representative (BR) is the foot soldier of the Oklahoma Education Association.

The most important work of the Association is carried out by this person. He or she has the responsibility to communicate messages of the local, state and national organizations on a one-on-one basis; listen to the concerns of members in the building; and to recruit new members while retaining veteran members.

In fact, the BR is most often the one person who has the greatest ability to be a successful organizer. Most people buy a product or participate in an event because of who asks them, and the BR knows that to join an organization you must first be asked.

All it takes to be a successful BR is to be organized and take a little time to talk with and listen to the



*Mustang’s Paula McCullough*

members in a building.

Paula McCullough has been a teacher at Lakehoma Elementary in the Mustang school district for 19 years. She cares about her profession and she cares about the issues. Not only is she a career-long member of the OEA, but McCullough

has chosen to be more involved by serving as a BR (for many years) and currently serves as the vice president of the Mustang Education Association (MEA).

McCullough’s commitment to her profession is thus reflected in her commitment to her professional organization.

As Lakehoma’s BR, she passes out membership information to all members

in her building and then makes contact with new teachers and teachers who have not previously joined the OEA.

“I personally visit with every non-member,” McCullough says of her recruiting tactics. “Then, I assign teams of two or three teachers to go by and visit with the nonmembers in their

*See “Followup” on Page 4*

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# Yukon's Priest discovers hidden talent in lobbying

By Stacy Martin

Yukon Spanish teacher Alicia Priest never cared a lot for politics.

Then, one day, the Yukon Professional Educators Association (YPEA) member realized her job is controlled by those who participate in the political arena.

Priest has been an educator and an Oklahoma Education Association member for 10 years. She is president of YPEA and a newly elected member of the OEA Board of Directors.

Priest never realized how well-suited she is for the responsibilities she has as a member lobbyist.

Grace under pressure? She has it.

Priest is not easily flustered. She was recently caught in a savage hail-

storm. She watched inside as it pelted her late model Honda's windshield and body with \$7,000 worth of damage.

Persistence? There's plenty of that, too.

Priest's wispy-haired, blond seven-month old daughter Kenna resulted from six grueling years of never-give-up infertility treatments.

You can bet that when Priest hits the State Capitol with her calm-yet-steel determination, those legislators listen.

Priest learned about member lobbying by watching and working with former Yukon president Carolyn Balsam. Her respect for Balsam began to light a fire in Priest for the importance of lobbying work.



Grace under pressure and persistence help Yukon's Alicia Priest serve OEA as an effective hometown lobbyist.

"I'd sit and listen to her in awe of how much she knew and how eloquent she was," Priest said. "I started studying it, and really learning about it. I loved it. And I've never had a problem giving my opinion."

Priest concedes that the OEA's successful legislative session helped make the experience even more enjoyable. She counts attending Gov. Brad Henry's signing of the health insurance bill as one of "the top five cool things

she discovered many unexpected bonuses from lobbying. When she returned to her local to report on State Capitol activities, her members gained an even greater trust in her. The bottom line was it deepened the rapport with her members.

While her members don't always agree completely on the issues they do concur on one thing: they all want what's best for schools and for kids, Priest said.

I've ever done. "Having a governor who is so supportive of teachers is overwhelming," the Yukon educator said.

She has found that she has been able to establish productive relationships with lawmakers, even when there is disagreement on how to solve an issue.

Priest said

## Following up crucial to recruiting

Continued from Page 3

grade level to share their stories and invite them to join."

McCullough designs a flyer targeted for those teachers who have never joined as another follow up to encourage their involvement and invites them to come to her with any questions and concerns they might have about the Association.

Each month, members in her building are treated to little goodies thanking them for their membership. These incentives can range anywhere from a chocolate mint with the attached slogan, "You are worth a mint to MEA/OEA;" to a packet of flower seeds stating, "Come grow with us."

McCullough also keeps the Association bulletin board updated with information and sends information to the Association's webmaster concerning celebrations, activities and information

about local members at Lakehoma.

She attends MEA meetings where she voices any concerns of the members in her building.

"As a Building Rep I feel like my main job is to be the 'go between' between members and our local officers," McCullough said. "I try to keep everyone aware of current issues and any problems that we may be experiencing. I'm the voice of our building when I attend local executive meetings."

McCullough believes that being a building representative really doesn't require a lot of time.

"I like to have a voice in my professional organization," she says proudly. "I would encourage anyone to do this. You have such an opportunity to learn more about the benefits of being a member and become more knowledgeable about our profession."

## PLSP -- unique legal assistance

The OEA is the only state organization in the NEA family to offer legal assistance to its members for off-the-job legal problems. Through the Personal Legal Services Program (PLSP), members have access to free legal services, or services at discounted costs.

If you need help for one of the following services, call OEA's Center for Legal and Corporate Services at 800/522-8091, or 528-7785 in central Oklahoma.

### Free services include:

- ▼ Wills, including amendments;
- ▼ Name changes;
- ▼ Uncontested modifications to divorce decrees;
- ▼ Defense of misdemeanor charges;

- ▼ Paternity support enforcement;
- ▼ Powers of attorney;
- ▼ Uncontested divorces;
- ▼ Uncontested adoptions (step-parent adoptions only); and
- ▼ Consultation and assistance in creditor disputes.

**Other situations allow a member five hours of free legal service**, with any additional time covered at a reduced rate. Those situations include:

- ▲ Personal injury;
- ▲ Felony charges;
- ▲ Contested modifications to divorce decrees;
- ▲ Wrongful death;
- ▲ Nursing home neglect;
- ▲ Contested divorces; and
- ▲ Contested adoptions.

## *Voluntary donations, not dues, elect friends of education*

Friends of public education need the support of those they intend to help in order to win political office.

Thus, the Oklahoma Education Association provides members a way to make voluntary donations through the OEA Political Action Committee (OEA-PAC), and the National Education Association offers the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education (FCPE).

OEA members may voluntarily become more influential in the political process by choosing to make political contributions to candidates through the PAC. The funds are entrusted to the OEA-PAC, which uses the money prudently to help elect friends of education to state and local offices.

The NEA fund uses donations to elect friends of education to federal offices.

Member dues are never used for contributions to political candidates.

OEA and NEA are nonpartisan

organizations representing members with a broad range of differing views. The one binding element is that all members support public education causes.

Because a variety of politicians hold pro-public education positions, OEA and NEA routinely recommend Republicans, Democrats and Independents for office. Selection is based strictly on the candidate's worthiness as a friend of public education.

Both the OEA-PAC and the NEA FCPE interview qualified political candidates and study their track records. After concluding this exhaustive process, candidates are recommended to members for their support.

Donations can be made in cash or by payroll deduction.

To learn how you can donate to the OEA-PAC or the NEA FCPE, contact the legislative and political organizing specialist in your region (see box at right).

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# TCTA plan fosters better communications and increases membership

By Marty Bull

Whether you have 50 members or 2,200 members, one of the most important characteristics of a strong local is the ability to effectively communicate the activities of the Association to its membership.

Every local Association should take the time to examine its individual communication needs and take steps toward improved communications between the leaders and members.

Several years ago, when the Tulsa Classroom Teachers Association (TCTA) leadership was faced with this dilemma, they took the problem head on and developed a plan that not only improved communication but fostered membership growth. Funded by an NEA grant, the ongoing plan has helped TCTA leadership develop a strategy that offers members a variety of communication avenues.

After a comprehensive survey of the executive committee and board members that assessed TCTA leadership's communications needs, focus groups were formed to ask members what they wanted.

"Too often we try to make decisions based on what we think our members want instead of talking to them directly," said OEA Advocacy Specialist Linda Hendrix. "Our focus groups were valuable in determining what steps we needed to take to improve communications with members."

Utilizing the focus group information plus other time honored organizing techniques, the plan improved communications in a number of different ways.

"Historically, TCTA has sent out some sort of newsletter throughout the school year, but not on a consistent basis," said TCTA President Steve Stockley. "For the past two years, our members have been receiving monthly

updates through the *TCTA Connection*. We felt it was important that our members receive some sort of printed information in a timely manner."

Just last year, the TCTA website ([www.tulsateachers.org](http://www.tulsateachers.org)) was launched, offering up-to-date information that is relevant to the members' needs.

"Electronic communication has helped us disseminate information at a much faster rate," said Stockley. "The site has also broadened our ability to communicate a wider range of information. We also use email to alert our building reps to call our office or to check the website for detailed information."

Although print materials and electronic communications are valuable communication tools, nothing takes the place of face to face meetings with members at the building level.

## NEA honors students with literacy grants

Third and fourth graders are providing books and story hours to children in homeless shelters in Connecticut and teens are teaching moose safety to young children through literature in rural Alaska.

These and other youth-led literacy service projects were recognized last spring by the National Education Association (NEA) as part of the organization's commitment to literacy and public service. Since 2000, the NEA has awarded grants to student-led programs through Youth Leaders for Literacy, a joint initiative of the NEA and Youth Service America (YSA).

Traditionally, literacy service projects begin on NEA's Read Across America Day (March 2) and continue through YSA's National Youth Service Day in April.

This year, 21 grants totaling more than \$10,000 were awarded to youth



Leaders of the Tulsa Classroom Teachers Association saw a need for better communications and developed a plan to consistently and frequently talk with their members. In this photo, TCTA President Steve Stockley (center), Vice President Denzel Kesterson, and OEA Advocacy Specialist Linda Hendrix look over the local's website.

"One of the most important aspects of the plan was a concerted effort to visit every work site in the district over the course of the school year," said Stockley. "It gives both the member and (TCTA leadership) the opportunity to make a connection that just can't happen with a piece of paper."

Stockley recognizes the advantage that release time officers have in making more personal contacts, but he recommends every local take the time to

devise a communication component that fits their needs.

"Don't let yourself be overwhelmed with fancy newsletters or complicated websites," said Stockley. "Find a way to communicate with your members and you will be a stronger local for it."

If you would like assistance in developing a communication plan for your local, please contact the OEA Communications Specialist in your region (see the box below).

projects across the nation.

"While NEA is privileged to recognize their efforts with these awards, we cannot match with dollars the value these young people will bring to their communities or to themselves as productive citizens," said NEA President

Reg Weaver.

To learn more about Youth Leaders for Literacy grants, visit [www.nea.org/readacross/volunteer/youthleaders.html](http://www.nea.org/readacross/volunteer/youthleaders.html). For information on this year's grant winners, visit [www.nea.org/readacross/volunteer/yllwinners04.html](http://www.nea.org/readacross/volunteer/yllwinners04.html).

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# Connected Math makes for better teachers

## Cache teacher finds fresh ideas in OEA's Math PDI

By Doug Folks

Val Mullinex says she wasn't exactly angry at being required by the state to attend a Math Professional Development Institute (PDI) in 2002. But she was frustrated and more than just a little put out that she was being forced to attend the intensive training session.

After all, she had 17 years of experience teaching all of the elementary grades, at one time or another, in

that new certification."

OEA's Math PDI uses Connected Mathematics to teach teachers how to incorporate a problem-centered curriculum in their classrooms. For many teachers, it's an entirely different way to teach math. With few exceptions, participants leave the PDI completely energized with the new method.

"I've always liked projects and activities that reinforce the lesson,"

attitudes toward math, she said.

"I had one student who told me, 'Ms. Mullinex, I'm a math atheist. I don't believe in math,'" she said. "But by the end of the year, he was doing well and enjoying the class."

Mullinex is attending her second OEA Math PDI. The first one was geared toward individuals looking to gain a middle school math endorsement. The second PDI is geared to-

ward vertical math teams in a district or a school. Mullinex is attending along with Cache Middle School's seventh and eighth grade math teachers, and the school's special education and Title I teachers.

The OEA was chosen through a competitive bid process by the Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Preparation

to deliver the state-legislated Math PDI to 150 fifth through eighth grade math teachers. The PDI is a three-year program that allows teachers and their schools to create and sustain an exemplary math program.

For more information on Connected

Math and the OEA Math PDI, contact your regional teaching and learning specialist (see the box below).

### Professional development opportunities

In addition to the Math PDI, OEA's Center for Teaching and Learning provides members with a wide variety of professional development opportunities. Following is a partial list of workshops and seminars we can bring to your district or your building.

To schedule a training, contact the T&L specialist in your region (see the box below).

- Birth Order
- Bullying/Harassment Prevention
- Communicating With Families
- Cooperative Learning
- Dealing With Angry Students
- Dealing With Difficult People
- Gung Ho!
- I Can Do It!
- Keeping Schools Safe
- Leadership Styles
- Mentoring
- Resident Teacher Training
- Seven Habits of Highly Effective People
- Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens
- Stress Management
- True Colors
- Who Moved My Cheese?



Cache Middle School math teacher Val Mullinex teams up with Dillon Bryant (right) to play a factor game against Hyley Ryder (left) and Carly Ward. The math game is one of the Connected Math tools Mullinex uses in her classes.

Cache Public Schools west of Lawton. But after moving to the middle school to teach math, she found that she no longer met state requirements for secondary math certification. That meant she could take a state-mandated test or attend a PDI.

"I was frustrated that the state was changing my certification. It was something that I had worked very hard for," she said.

However reluctantly, Mullinex signed up for the Oklahoma Education Association's (OEA) Middle School Math PDI. It didn't take long for her to change her mind about the training. In fact, before the first day was over, she became a believer.

Mullinex said. "OEA provided us with a continuing education opportunity, a service that would also help us meet

Mullinex said. "I don't like to just make assignments out of the text book. Connected Math is an investigative approach. Students learn different strategies that reinforce the concepts I'm teaching."

Mullinex saw immediate changes in her students after implementing the concepts she learned at OEA's PDI.

"I'm not driven by test scores. I don't check (student achievement test) scores. But, yes, I can tell students are learning more now that I'm using Connected Math," she said. "I've seen students that have gone home and taught their parents what we're doing in class. I've had students go home and research perfect numbers on the Internet when it wasn't an assignment, and bring their findings to class the next day."

The method even changes student

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# Representing every OEA member

## *Bishop is a relentless advocate*

*By Stacy Martin*

As President of the Oklahoma Education Association, Roy Bishop knows exactly what his purpose is as the organization's leader – to advocate relentlessly for OEA members, children and public education.



*OEA President Roy Bishop*

He knows that representing teachers and support professionals is an honor and a privilege that he takes seriously.

President Bishop takes members' messages to many venues that include the State Capitol, the nation's Capitol, the National Education Association, the Oklahoma Education Coalition and before the media.

In order to communicate the importance of public education to all Oklahomans, Bishop maintains a heavy speaking schedule, addressing groups such as educators, OEA members, and civic and business leaders.

His commitment to members' priorities goes into his work helping develop policy, strategy and plans at OEA. Ultimately, member input leads to a number of positives for Oklahoma education including opportunities for student success, teacher compensa-

tion, improved working conditions, more effective local associations, and greater professional development opportunities.

Bishop developed his passion for members' needs in the trenches. He taught history and world geography

in Stillwater for 13 years. He was a local president, building representative and committee chair in the Stillwater EA. He also served on the OEA Board of Directors and on the NEA's Resolutions Committee.

Besides working in Stillwater, Roy worked in

the Oklahoma City School district. He has seen declining student enrollment force job elimination, including his own. He understands the ups and downs that teachers face each day.

Bishop served six years as OEA vice president, chairing key committees such as budget, convention and the Insurance Task Force. 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.

Each month Bishop distills his many experiences and encounters with members into columns for the OEA website (okea.org) and *The Education Focus*.

The many challenges Bishop faces are done so with the heart of a classroom teacher as he continues to try to make a positive difference in people's lives.

## *Accessibility is important to Felts*

*By Stacy Martin*

Oklahoma Education Association Vice President Becky Felts wears many hats while juggling the numerous tasks of her office.

Accessibility to members is among Felts' highest priorities. At every opportunity, she visits school sites and works with classroom teachers on critical issues. She drives countless miles to attend building, local and zone meetings across the state. Every group of Oklahoma public school employees is important to Felts, no matter how large or how small. She is always available to members, whether in person, by phone or email.

Felts' rich background includes 27 years of teaching in the Tahlequah area, two years as a commissioner on the Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Preparation, plus six years on the National Education Association Board of Directors. She has first-hand knowledge of student achievement and quality teaching issues.

Currently, Felts serves as chairperson of the OEA Convention Committee and



*OEA Vice President Becky Felts*

the OEA Budget Committee. Being a good steward of Association dollars, Felts' charge is to ensure that OEA provides programs and services to members that are of high value and benefit.

In addition to her duties with members, Felts can be found speaking to groups outside of education, lobbying state-elected officials and legislators, and providing interviews to news media outlets on a wide range of education topics.

Ultimately, members' needs drive Felts' time and schedule. She recognizes and is committed to the dedicated and hardworking school employees of Oklahoma.

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# 'Team NEA' leaves RA re-energized

*Members mobilize to fix NCLB flaws, close achievement gap*

More than 9,000 delegates of the National Education Association (NEA) united in early July to recommit themselves to ensuring that every child in the country has an opportunity to attend a great public school.

The delegates, including more than 100 from Oklahoma, were attending the NEA's Representative Assembly (RA), the world's largest democratic body, in Washington, D.C.

In his Independence Day keynote address to the assembly, NEA President Reg Weaver affirmed that "our goal is for every child to achieve and succeed.

"Team NEA, we are the foot soldiers for democracy's foundation – public education – and we are on the move!" said Weaver, a middle school science teacher from Harvey, Ill. "Defend democracy, defend public education and defend the opportunity for all children to have access to a quality public education."

Modifying the so-called No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law to make it workable is one of NEA's top priorities, with members in full agreement that the law must be fixed and fully funded for its promise to become reality.

One key element of NEA's strategy to ensure that every child has access to a great public school is to elect a pro-public education president of the United States in November. NEA delegates overwhelmingly recommended John Kerry as the association's candidate (see Page 5), based on the Massachusetts senator's long record in support of public education, support for fixing and fully funding NCLB, and opposition to school vouchers.

NEA also kicked off an unprecedented, nationwide effort to host "house parties" and other get-togethers to raise the profile of education issues in the upcoming election and beyond. More than 2,000 NEA delegates, including several Oklaho-



*Putnam City's Katherine Bishop offers a friendly amendment during discussions on NEA's Legislative Goals during July's Representative Assembly. Bishop and members of the Oklahoma delegation and the national IDEA Cadre had to work fast to present the amendment, which eventually passed to provide for a proactive stance in lobbying for changes to the reauthorization of IDEA. Moore's Roma Clark spoke to the motion while other Oklahoma delegates helped draft the language and secure microphone time to present the amendment.*

mans, have already signed up to host parties on Wednesday, Sept. 22.

OEA members interested in attending or hosting a House Party should contact OEA Associate Executive Director Charles McCauley at 800/522-8091, 405/528-7785 or [cmccauley@okea.org](mailto:cmccauley@okea.org).

The event is expected to be the largest one-day discussion of education in the nation's history.

During the RA, 25 state affiliates and more than 150 delegates participated in dialogues focused on their experiences with the NCLB law and innovations that would help close the achievement gap. Oklahomans attending the meeting included Sheri Childress, Norman; Bonita Gay, Muskogee; Jamie McCoy, Mid-Del; Rick Moulton, Enid; Steve Stockley, Tulsa; and Lisa Yahola, Tahlequah.

Delegates adopted a report that calls for additional study on issues affecting the achievement gap. The report by NEA's Professional Standards and Practices Committee's reiterated

that in order to close the achievement gap among their students, educators and schools need more support for methods and practices that work to boost student achievement. These include smaller class sizes, teacher training, increased parental involvement, enhanced early childhood and after school services, updated textbooks and materials, and adequate support for children and families outside of

school.

The RA passed a number of New Business Items, calling on NEA to take action on issues in the near future.

Among the most significant was a statement in opposition to federal funding for the American

Board for Certification of Teaching Excellence, a competitor to the National Board for Professional Standards. In addition, the delegates stated their opposition to tests that, by themselves, are barriers to grade promotion or high school graduation.

The RA adopted its Resolutions, statements of the NEA's philosophy that covers a broad range of issues including children's health and well-being, quality and access to public

education, the rights of education employees, and standards for those working in education professions. Among significant changes in the Resolution language were amendments placing NEA in support of strengthening standards for charter schools so that they are held accountable for meeting their goals, strengthening teacher standards such that "testing only" routes were not allowed by states, and calling for schools to adopt stronger policies and programs to eliminate bullying.

Delegates amended a policy statement on early childhood education to reinforce the organization's belief that pre-kindergarten teachers should be fully licensed and certified.

Also, delegates overwhelmingly adopted a strategic budget that directs resources to enhance teaching and learning, advocate for children and members, and build partnerships with organizations and individuals who support public education.

Delegates made a commitment to NEA's fight for public education by continuing a program to help state af-



*OEA Vice President Becky Felts, Tulsa Metro D Director Ted Auwen (left) of Union (Tulsa) CTA and Bartlesville EA's Gerald Thompson attended the NEA Human and Civil Rights Banquet prior to the Representative Assembly in Washington, D.C.*

filates with ballot measures and legislative crises and to support national and state affiliate media campaigns to advance the cause of public education.

The 2005 NEA Annual Meeting and RA will be held in Los Angeles.

# Supreme Court avoids Pledge of Allegiance ruling

By Richard Wilkinson  
OEA General Counsel

It was supposed to be a ruling to settle one of our country's most controversial issues: Is the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag constitutional with the words "under God" included?

In late June, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled, in effect, that the pledge is constitutional, but in actuality it sidestepped the question by dismissing the case on a technicality unrelated to the core issue

Under California law, "every public elementary school" must begin each day with "appropriate patriotic exercises." The statute provides that the "giving of the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United

States of America shall satisfy" this requirement. The Elk Grove Unified School District implemented California law by requiring that "each elementary school class recite the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag once each day."

Michael Newdow is an atheist, as well as an emergency room physician and a licensed attorney, whose daughter participates in that daily exercise along with her kindergarten classmates in Elk Grove. Because the Pledge contains the words "under God," Newdow viewed the district's policy as a religious indoctrination of his child in violation of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Newdow initiated legal action

against the district on behalf of his daughter. The 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals agreed with him, holding that the words "under God" in the Pledge violated the First Amendment.

"[I]n light of the obvious importance of that decision," the Supreme Court granted certiorari to review the First Amendment issue surrounding the content and the mandatory recitation of the Pledge in the Elk Grove School District.

The Supreme Court issued its opinion on June 24. In an 8-0 decision, it held that Newdow did not have proper legal standing to pursue the constitutional challenge on behalf of his daughter. Although Newdow shared "physical custody" of his

daughter with Sandra Banning, the daughter's natural mother, Banning had obtained a court order granting her "exclusive legal custody" of the child which included the "sole right to represent [the daughter's] legal interests and make all decision[s] about her education" and welfare. Banning objected to her ex-husband's litigation on behalf of their daughter.

The Court ruled that under California law, Newdow had no status as either "next friend" or as a natural parent to pursue legal action on behalf of his daughter. The Court did not reach the legal merits of the case: Does the phrase "under God" contained in the Pledge violate the



General Counsel Richard Wilkinson

First Amendment? However, the effect of the Court's decision reversed the decision of the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals, which held that the Pledge was unconstitutional.

Justice John Paul Stevens delivered the majority opinion and three justices authored opinions concurring in judgment, but expressing various views about why the Pledge should be deemed constitutional under the First Amendment. The "split" in the Court followed recent tradition on such issues with Justices Anthony Kennedy, David Souter, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer joining

Justice Stevens in the majority opinion. Justices William Rehnquist, Sandra Day O'Connor and Clarence Thomas shared opinions which concurred in the judgment, but dissented from the majority decision not to review the constitutional issue presented.

The concurring justices argued in their concurring opinions that the Pledge of Allegiance is constitutional, but for differing legal reasons. Justice Antonin Scalia took no part in the consideration or decision of the case, removing himself because of his public comments in support of the Pledge prior to the grant of certiorari by the Court.

So, the current recitation of the Pledge is constitutional for now, pending a subsequent challenge by other litigants and another grant of certiorari by the Supreme Court.

Although there are no current cases challenging the Pledge that are pending in any of the Circuit Courts of Appeal, there are several anticipated cases that will probably be filed soon and the issue will likely be before the Supreme Court in the foreseeable future.

*The Court did not reach the legal merits of the case. However, the effect of the Court's decision held that the Pledge is constitutional.*

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# Standing proud and tall in Pittsburg County

## McAlester ESP form active local

By Bruce Treadaway

The McAlester Support Personnel Association (MSPA) hasn't been around as long as some local Associations, but it has a remarkable history and has accomplished a great deal in a short time.

The MSPA was formed in 1985 when an OEA professional staffer, working in conjunction with OEA UniServ director Jerry Johnson (who is now a legislative and political organizing specialist for the Southeast Team), came to McAlester and explained the benefits of organizing and speaking up for themselves.

In 1991-92, MSPA negotiated its first contract. Early leaders of MSPA were Don Brewer, David Smart and Jan Harrington.

The early membership was comprised mostly of custodians, bus drivers and maintenance workers. Once the MSPA began negotiations, the McAlester Board of Education and administration had to come to the table and discuss work place issues with employees for the first time. Before that, the Board could make arbitrary decisions without input from its employees.

Problems over working conditions were the first issues that actually brought about the formation of MSPA, and from there the local has progressed to the point where there is a fully negotiated contract in place.

Jim McFarland is the MSPA president this year. The vice president is

Kevin Stone, and the secretary/treasurer is Sherry Truitt. Membership in MSPA holds steady at close to 30 and includes at least one member of every classification of ESP in McAlester.

Early bargaining successes by the MSPA included:

- One sick leave day for each month of employment;
  - 12 month employees were given leave during spring break;
  - 16 paid holidays;
  - Grievance policy;
  - Disability policy; and
  - 100 percent school-paid retirement.
- Pressing issues for this year are:
- Three additional holidays for bus drivers;
  - Better salary steps;
  - Increasing beginning salaries

(McAlester has the lowest starting pay of any district in the region); and

- Seniority receiving more vacation days (figured on five year increments).

"Protection while on the job was and continues to be the most important function that MSPA performs," said former member and activist Sandy Trousell. "Jim McFarland makes sure that the membership is continually educated on what is happening in Oklahoma, both in the legislature and within the OEA itself."

Truitt added, "We've educated ourselves in the law. We want our board and administration to know that we know what's happening and that we're updated and knowledgeable. Just be-



Officers for the McAlester Support Professionals Association are, (from left) Kevin Stone, Gary Short and Jim McFarland. The local has been able to accomplish a great deal for its members in spite of a short history of existence.

cause we don't have college degrees doesn't mean we're not educated.

"Almost all of us are certified in the areas where we work, and we have a vast amount of experience also," she said. "We are proud of what we've accomplished as an association, but it

is a constant challenge to keep our members informed and active. We are always working on increasing our membership, and with the recent successes that the OEA has had at the legislative level, we hope to sign up more members this fall."



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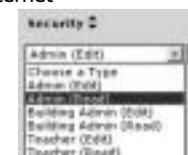
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## Yes! ESP are invited to join OEA!

In many schools, education support personnel (ESP) are not aware that they can join the OEA, but ESP is a growing segment of OEA membership. ESPs receive the same benefits as certified employees while paying about half as much for membership.

Support employees may join OEA

at any time during the year. If a district has a certified unit that bargains, ESPs join independently and do not have to form a bargaining local to belong.

For more information, call your regional office (numbers are listed on

Page 8).

# Membership brings wide range of benefits, discounts

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*For more information, contact your NEA Member Benefits Consultant:*

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### NEA Member Benefits Member Service Center

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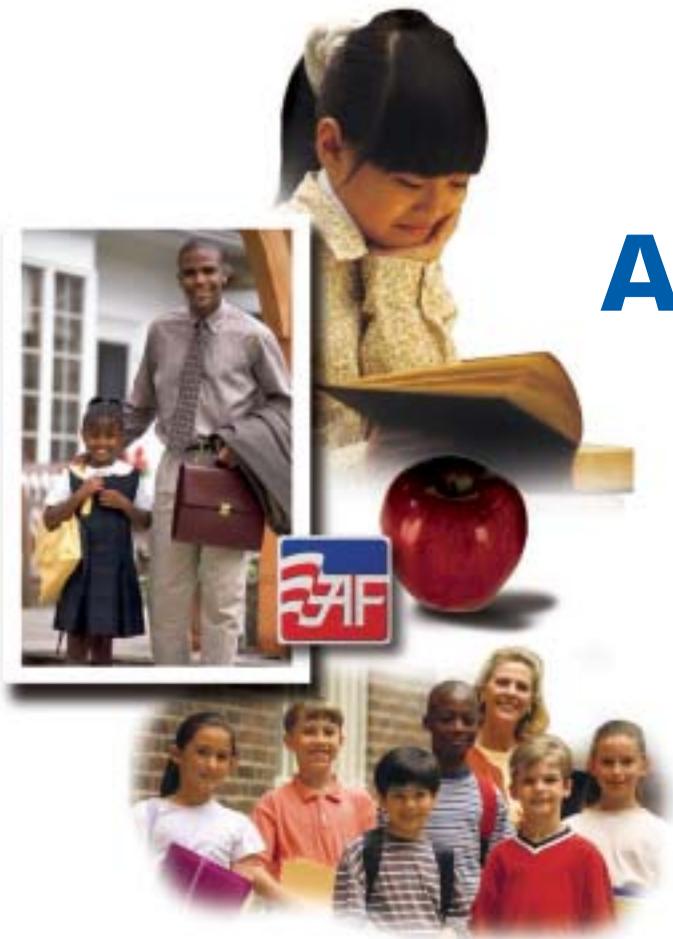
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# Okmulgee drama teacher wins NEA Fine Arts grant

OEA member Shae Factory was recently named one of 10 teachers nationwide to receive a prestigious grant from the National Education Association (NEA) Foundation.

Factory was awarded one of the \$2,000 grants given to secondary fine arts teachers to create and implement programs that promote learning among students at risk of school failure.

For the second year, the NEA Fine Arts Grants program is honoring all art forms, including painting, sculpture, photography, music, theater, dance, design, media and folk arts. Eligibility for the grants has alternated between elementary and secondary fine arts specialists who are members of the NEA.

Factory, a seventh and eighth grade drama teacher at Okmulgee Middle School and a member of the Okmulgee Classroom Teachers Association, introduces her disadvantaged students to theater. They study the history of theater and explore stage designs used during several eras.

Focusing on the Middle Ages, Factory's students build their own stage and perform period dances at a local Renaissance fair.

Other grant winners included Linda Cohen, San Diego; Christine Patella, Bridgeport, Conn.; William Hartenberger, Rockford, Ill.; Ellen Taylor, Olathe, Kan.; Peggi Stevens, Brooklin, Maine; Sally Schendel, Sheridan, Mont.; Joanne Arnold, Binghamton, N.Y.; Melinda Chaney, Chattanooga, Tenn.; Christine Turner, Milwaukee, Wisc.

The NEA Foundation regularly offers hundreds of grants each year to fund innovative or professional development projects. Grants are available for all subjects, including the arts, literature, science, mathematics, social sciences and technology. All practicing U.S. public school K-12 teachers, education support professionals, and higher education faculty and staff are eligible to apply.

Visit [www.neafoundation.com](http://www.neafoundation.com) for grant guidelines and an application or call 202/822-7840.

The NEA Foundation inspires public education employees to ensure that all students succeed. Created by the NEA in 1969, the foundation makes grants to improve public education nationwide.

## *Start the school year right with a grant from the NEA Foundation*

There's still time to submit a grant application by the September 15 review date to The NEA Foundation.

Applications are accepted on an ongoing, year-round basis for both Innovation Grants and Learning & Leadership Grants, so it's never too late to apply. If you apply by September 15, you will know if your grant is approved by February 15.

If the September date is too early for you, start working on a proposal now for the next review date of February 1. Grants fund activities for 12 months from the award date.

Innovation Grants and Learning & Leadership Grants are available for all subjects, including the arts, literacy, science and technology.

All members who are practicing K-12 public school teachers, education support professionals, or higher education faculty and staff at public colleges and universities are eligible.

Applying for a grant is easy, so why wait? Visit [www.neafoundation.org](http://www.neafoundation.org) today for more information, including guidelines and an application, or call 202/822-7840.