

OEA

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National Education Association

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The Education Focus

For the membership of the Oklahoma Education Association

November 2004

"HOPEful" teaching guides Illgen

Grove educator named State Teacher of the Year

By Marty Bull

When Oklahoma State Teacher of the Year Susan Illgen heard her name announced as this year's recipient, her first response was genuine disbelief.

"Of course I was thrilled, but I was really shocked," said the Grove Lower Elementary kindergarten teacher. "Throughout the process, I had grown to have complete admiration and respect for all the candidates, and to be chosen from that group was quite an honor."

The mother of four was chosen from a field of 12 candidates who were selected at their respective district and regional levels and at the state level by a panel comprised of business

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Thrilled and shocked

Grove kindergarten teacher Susan Illgen is overwhelmed with surprise immediately after being named State Teacher of the Year at a ceremony in late September. Congratulating her are finalists Diane Keene of Crosby Park Elementary in Lawton (left) and Leah McDonald of Cross Timbers Elementary in Edmond.

Oklahoma's AYP list more than doubles

By Stacy Martin

Oklahoma's list of schools failing to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) more than doubled over last year, according to a list recently released by the State Department of Education.

There are 107 Oklahoma elementary and middle schools on the "needs improvement" list, up from 46 last year. The list of high schools to fall on this year's "needs improvement" list had not been released as of press time.

Schools make the list after failing to make improvements for two consecutive years. Four schools fell on Year Five of the latest list, which requires major restructuring of the school.

AYP is one of the most troubling tenets of President Bush's so-called "No Child Left Behind Act"



(NCLB). It requires every school to show improvement through test scores in each of 11 subgroups.

Oklahoma statistically mirrors the national trend. This year, 6,794 schools failed to make AYP, up from 3,605 schools last year.

Roy Bishop, president of the Okla-

homa Education Association, said the organization and its nearly 40,000 members support the ideals and goals of NCLB. However, OEA leaders say the law is overly complex, under-funded and often misguided in its approach.

"Our greatest concern is that this confusing law will divert attention from the schools and students who truly need help," said Bishop. "That is where the focus should be."

"In its present form, this law fails to give parents and educators a fair and accurate picture of how schools are performing and why. It has a rigid set of standards, testing and sanctions that do little to support real achievement among schoolchildren."

The year-to-year trend of more schools showing up on the needs im-

See "Changes" on Page 14

This election is our chance

By Roy Bishop
OEA President

In a few days, Oklahomans will have the ability to change the direction of education through the electoral process. On this year's ballot, there are four state questions that will have an impact on education.

State Questions 705, 706 and 712 will provide badly needed revenue for our schools. They will do so without raising taxes while capitalizing on the popular and growing gaming industry.

These activities are not going away. If these questions fail, Oklahomans will still continue driving to other states to buy lottery tickets. They will continue visiting Oklahoma's 80-plus Indian ca-

sinos to spend their entertainment dollars. Their money will go to support schools in Kansas and Texas instead of here at home.

The passage of these questions will result in education receiving, in conservative estimates, well over \$200 million per year.

In addition, the passage of State Question 713, the tobacco tax, will provide legislators with revenue that can be used for state obligations without taking revenue from kids, teachers and schools.

The Oklahoma Education Association has fought battle after battle in the legislature when it comes to funding. We have proposed reprioritizing the

budget, constitutional amendments, additional sales taxes and taxes on services. None of those ideas generated majority support in the legislature.

The time has come for us to decide the direction of our state. Isn't it time for us to honor Governor Henry's vision? For years we have talked about a commitment to education. Now that the opportunity is here, we must be ready to vote to support our schools.

In this issue, you will find information about the State Questions (Pages 9 and 11) and candidates for political office (Pages 7-10). This information will help you make in-



OEA President Roy Bishop

formed decisions for education.

As always, the choice you make is yours alone. Voting yes on SQs 705, 706, 712 and 713 will ensure a stronger commitment to education. It's our time, and together we can make a difference.

Students can cast ballots in mock election

Oklahoma students will have a chance to cast their ballots in the 2004 election by taking part in a mock election on October 28.

The Oklahoma Education Association has joined *The Daily Oklahoman* to give students an opportunity to experience the importance of voting. Students will be able to vote online for the candidates for U.S. president and Oklahoma's candidates for U.S. Senate. Results will appear in the November 3 issue of *The Oklahoman*.

Other partners in the project are the State Department of Education, State Farm Insurance, the League of Women Voters, NewsOK.com, KWTN NEWS 9, and the National Student/Parent Mock Election.

As of press time, nearly 90,000 Oklahoma students had been enrolled to participate in the mock election.

To register your class for the student mock election and to download teacher materials, visit www.newsok.com/features/nie/enrollment.

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Illgen trades her pursuit of vocal performance degree for early childhood education

Continued from Page 1

people, community leaders and journalists. The state committee chose Illgen based on a personal interview, a roundtable discussion, a portfolio and a video of her teaching.

Illgen postponed her pursuit of a degree in vocal performance to be a full

time mother, but after graduating from Northeastern State University in Tahlequah with a degree in Early Childhood Education, she was ready to join her husband in the teaching ranks. Joel Illgen is the assistant band director at Grove Middle and High Schools.

“I was well aware of the time and

energy it takes to be a good teacher,” she said. “I was ready to take it on.”

Over the years, the couple and their four children – Joel, 14; Taylor, 13; Janey, 11; and Ty, 6 – have become an active part of the community.

“Susan has been a wonderful addition to our school,” said Patti Smith, Grove CTA president and Illgen’s building colleague. “We are very proud of her. She will represent Oklahoma teachers well.”

Illgen gives credit for her success in the classroom to “HOPEful” teaching.

“I’m a people watcher,” said the fifth-year teacher, “I’ve taken what made an impact on me as a student and the common threads between all good teachers and formed the teaching strategy HOPE.”

According to Illgen, HOPEful teaching requires discipline and commitment as well as:

- Happy learning experiences,
- Opportunities for every child to experience success,
- Positive community role models, and
- high Expectations that stretch student learning.

Over the next year, Illgen *hopes* to share her techniques with as many teachers, students and administrators as possible.

“I am looking forward to not only sharing my successes but learning new things as well,” said Illgen. “I know I will gain as much or more from this experience than anyone who I meet along the way.”

Illgen will represent the state in the national competition, with the announcement of the National Teacher of the Year expected next spring.

At the state ceremonies in late September, Illgen was presented with a framed certificate from the State Department of Education and the State Fair of Oklahoma, as well as numerous gifts including cash prizes, the use of a vehicle for one year and a free OEA membership presented to her by OEA President Roy Bishop.

Since that time, Illgen has begun the process of scheduling appearances across the state. She hopes to offer words of encouragement to teachers and potential teachers alike.

“To be a great teacher you must have a love for students and a love of learning,” she said. “Take it one subject at a time and you can succeed. You’ve got to dream big and give it all you’ve got.”

To schedule Susan Illgen to speak at your school, contact Linda Ruhman at the Oklahoma State Department of Education at 405/521-4527.



Grove's Susan Illgen addresses a packed room at the State Fairgrounds after being named 2005 Oklahoma Teacher of the Year.

4 questions with Teacher of the Year Susan Illgen

Q – Why did you join OEA?

SI – “I think it’s important to be a part of a group of professionals who seek out some of the issues we need to deal with as educators. I see OEA as a support group that’s aware of current trends and what’s going on at the legislature. I think it’s essential that every teacher join a group that supports them.”

Q – Who inspired you to be a teacher and why?

SI – “My father inspired me to choose a profession with a direct impact to help people. Teaching is how I chose to fulfill that inspiration. My father grew up not only impoverished, but with a severe stuttering problem. Two nuns took it upon themselves to work with him after school to help him overcome his speech problem. Because of their work, he ended up succeeding, not in a material way, but as a minister. He was always generous with his time and talents and encouraged my two brothers and me to do the same.”

Q – What represents the biggest challenge in classrooms of today?

SI – “One of today’s biggest challenges is having the time or the wherewithal to deal with individual student needs. We have greater demands in literature and math, increased accountability and a greater burden to really zone in on an individual student’s needs. We must be more aggressive and assess and identify a student’s needs and modify our techniques.”

“School funding is also a big issue. With smaller classes and innovative materials you can do so much more. I have taken advantage of community grant programs and encourage others to do the same. But I know we need more funding to have the best possible programs.”

“We also need a positive perception in our communities – if they have a negative outlook, parents won’t help. It’s really important that we let parents see what fantastic things are happening in our schools. Ninety-eight percent of Oklahoma teachers are highly qualified. We’re prepared and we’re doing a great job.”

Q – If you weren’t a teacher, what other job would you want?

SI – “When I first went to college, my major was in vocal performance. I’ve always been involved in music, especially in a church setting. But I couldn’t imagine myself as anything else but a teacher. It’s just a natural fit for me. Teaching is the best thing next to mothering. Mothering always comes first.”

Teacher of the Year Finalists

Discovery leads to a change in career

By Doug Folks

Diane Keene started her teaching career in a regular elementary classroom. But with the discovery of a hidden talent and encouragement of a former principal, she moved to special education and this year was named a finalist for State Teacher of the Year.

Keene teaches a self-contained, special education class at Crosby Park Elementary in Lawton. Most years, she has fourth through sixth graders, but this year's class is just sixth grade. She has only nine students, but she has to teach six different grade levels of math and reading.

At the beginning of her career, Keene showed a special talent for working with learning disabled students. Lynn Fitts, her principal during those first five years at Crosby Park, encouraged her to move into special ed. She took the test and received the certification after moving across town to Western Hills. When that



Lawton's Diane Keene helps students Will Ashcroft (left) and Deaquan Wojcieowski work on a class project.

school was closed, she came back to Crosby Park in her current position.

Keene says a special ed teacher has to have the patience to repeat concepts over and over until the students "get it." But when they do, the reward is brilliant.

"When the light bulb finally comes on, it's lit with a 5,000-watt bulb," she said.

Under her guidance, the Crosby Park community sees her class as just

another sixth grade class. Her students recently decided to send Halloween goody bags to Fort Sill troops in Iraq. When the other Crosby Park classes learned of the project, they joined in and together the school sent 483 bags to U.S. soldiers.

Now, Keene's class and the rest of Crosby Park are planning to send care packages overseas during other holidays.

Relevance is the key, says Durant's Kelley

By Doug Folks

Jan Kelley was teaching forensic science long before characters like Gil Grissom and Horatio Caine made it cool on CBS's CSI franchises.

Kelley, who teaches forensic science and basic chemistry, is the ninth State Teacher of the Year (TOY) finalist from Durant in the last 15 years, and the third from Durant High.

She and colleague Melanie Meredith, another former TOY finalist, started the forensic science class in 1997, team-teaching 13 students. To-



Durant's Jan Kelley

day, Kelley teaches three sections of the class with 84 total students.

While television has helped make forensics more popular, Kelley says the key to any class is relevance.

"Overall, kids are kids. Sure, some of them are more interested and self-motivated than others," she said. "Relevance has always been the key. They all want to know, 'How does that affect me?'"

Kelley thinks the relevance of forensics as well as the observation techniques they learn help students not only learn science, but also a good deal about life.

"Forensics makes these students increasingly aware of what's going on in the world around them," she said. "It makes them better citizens because they are aware of the legal world and their surroundings. I think it helps keep them safe. It helps them avoid being victims."

Bruce loves the constant challenge of teaching

By Patti Razien

Looking back through papers from her junior high school days, Judy Bruce came across a story she'd written that talked about how her 4th grade teacher had asked her to help with the first grade class so the teacher would have time to eat lunch.

That was the beginning of her desire to become a classroom teacher and Bruce has excelled in that quest for the past 18 years.

"The thing I love most about teaching is that it is a continual change and challenge. Education is constantly changing. What works one year may not work the next year. You just have to find the right key to unlock problems," says Bruce. "Seeing that light come on is what it's all about. And I have to continually be learning as well."

Bruce is a reading specialist for

grades one through three at Mustang Valley Elementary. She is a strong believer in early intervention and finds it to be far more successful than remediation in later years.

Bruce also finds time to serve on various state committees and is currently a candidate-in-waiting for Na-

tional Board Certification.

"Teaching gives me an opportunity to make a difference. We too often sit back and voice our opinions about what we don't like," she said. "I try to take the opportunity to make my voice heard and hopefully change those things for the better."



Teacher of the Year finalist Judy Bruce works with Krystin Hurst and Ally House to improve their reading. Bruce, a reading specialist at Mustang Valley Elementary, is a strong believer in early intervention.

Teacher of the Year Finalists

Finding the musician in every child

By Stacy Martin

Leah McDonald's passion as a teacher is to help her students discover the musician each has deep inside.

"Each one of them walks into my class a musician" she said. "It's my job to develop that and to help them discover that."

What she loves most about being an educator is being able to marry her primary passions – teaching, music and children – into one job.

The Edmond educator teaches grades 1-5 at Cross Timbers Elementary School. She has taught for a little over five years. The Teacher of the Year finalist's first job was directing a children's church choir.

She has found positive by-products of her teaching methods. Not only do her students learn to appreciate

music, but they gain self-esteem from discovering the music in their souls.

One might say that McDonald's profession almost seemed preordained.

She came from a family filled with educators, so she had numerous positive role models to set examples for her. Her father is a history professor at the University of Oklahoma and an amateur musician. Her mother was always singing around the house. Consequently, McDonald learned to enjoy music from a very young age.

McDonald is married to Kevin McDonald, last year's Teacher of the Year for Guthrie Public Schools (but who now teaches in Edmond).

"We have the advantage of being able to go home and bounce things off each other," she said.



Edmond music teacher Leah McDonald shows her students how to blow into a recorder. The dots on her arm allow her to demonstrate how to properly play the musical instrument without a roomful of noise.

McClaren's family is rich source of inspiration

By Jeff Savage

Claremore's Jan McClaren has found a number of sources for career inspiration through the years.

Family stories told to her by her dad about her great grandfather and the "Run of '89" inspired her love of his-

tory. Saturday morning family outings to historical societies brought history to life, and her love of history was fostered early in her life by some really remarkable teachers in Oklahoma City Public Schools. Together, they all made for a lifelong impact on her personally

and in her career.

McClaren, a National Board Certified teacher, has over 19 years in the classroom teaching various history and humanity courses. The State Teacher of the Year finalist has taught at Claremore High School for the past four years.

McClaren places a strong emphasis on the trait of being of service to others. She said this was instilled in her by a principal that believed it was essential to take a leadership role.

She has passed this life theme on to her students as she teaches them the responsibility of becoming active citizens in their community. Service to others is put into practice by her students' involvement in community projects.

Teaching high school is the perfect job for Evans

By Patti Razien

Karen Evans describes her job teaching chemistry and physics at Yukon High School as the perfect job. She believes so not only because of her love for the physical sciences, but also for the fact that she loves working with high school students.

"Whether it's subject matter or just matters of life, I love the challenge that this age group presents," said Evans. "I've learned to listen without criticizing and to be respectful in my responses to my students."

Evans grew up with a great respect for teachers having had a mother, two

uncles and several cousins who were educators. Her inspiration to teach came not only from them, but from teachers throughout her school days who always showed how much they cared.

Inspiring students, in turn, inspires Evans. As an example, Evans related the story of a troubled, overly energetic, sixth grade boy who had already earned a reputation as rather unruly. She encouraged him to channel some of that energy into running track. After becoming the cross country state champion two years in a row he went on to college where he continued to run track.

"I still have his senior picture where he wrote on the back, 'To Miss Evans: the one teacher who really cared about me,'" she said. "It is that kind of thing that makes me love my job."

"There is nothing else I would rather be doing," she added enthusiastically.



Yukon's Karen Evans



Claremore's Jan McClaren

While attending OEA's Teacher of the Year luncheon after the ceremony at the State Fairgrounds, McClaren was pleasantly surprised to see her high school typing teacher, Evelyn Williamson, a former State Teacher of the Year, taught McClaren when she was a student at Northwest Classen in Oklahoma City.

Teacher of the Year Finalists

Lillard is another TOY finalist in Byng's impressive history

By Bruce Treadaway

Glenda Lillard, first grade teacher at Byng's Francis Elementary for 28 years, joins a long line of Teacher of the Year finalists from Byng.

Last year, Byng Junior High's Leahna West was a finalist. In 2001, it was Deborah Cornelison. Other finalists have been Juanita Matthews and Todd Crabtree.

Before coming to Byng, Lillard spent four years teaching in Vanoss. She's a graduate of East Central University (ECU) and Stonewall High School.

She was Teacher of the Year for Francis Elementary in 1987, has been listed in "Who's Who in American Teaching," and has served as an of-

ficer and leader of the Byng Education Association. She has also served on the Reading Council at ECU.

Lillard says good teachers love children and want them to succeed.

"I feel that public schools and public school teachers are a port in a storm for students," she said. "We have to weed through the baggage that our students bring to the classroom, and then we have to teach from our hearts. Education is not a priority in many homes, but it should be."

OEA membership has been an integral part of Lillard's professional life. She says that membership is important to the teaching profession, and that she's kept informed and included.



Glenda Lillard and some of her students at Byng's Francis Elementary.

Smith turns cancer experience into a teaching moment

By Patti Razien

Walking into Bettye Smith's Family and Consumer Sciences classroom at Watonga High School makes one feel immediately at home. The warmth and consideration that Smith uses to teach are reflected in the design of her classroom.

Smith lost her nose to cancer this past year and has used her experience to teach her students how to make good of the worst situations. For instance, while awaiting her nose prosthesis she wore a mask that a friend made, earning Smith the nickname, "The Lone Ranger's Wife."

Through her "Coping with Cancer" lessons, she has taught her students to face reality with both humor and compassion.

"You will set the tone for how people react," Smith said.

Her love for teaching grew from her junior high years where she was a national 4-H winner. After receiving bachelor's and master's degrees from Oklahoma State University, she taught for 10 years before becoming a stay-at-home mom for her children. Then, after 12 years, she returned to the classroom where she is in her



Watonga's Bettye Smith

21st year of teaching.

"Kids don't seem to get enough praise. It gives me such a good feeling to work with students and see them succeed. It may be the smallest of small successes for some, the biggest for others," Smith stated.

As for the future, Smith hopes to continue her hands-on style of teaching where she can continue to reach out to her students and instill in them the desire to always think positively and make the best out of what life has in store for them. It can certainly be said that she leads by example.

Pryor's Jackson looks forward to students' end-of-year recital

By Jeff Savage

Roy Jackson, following in the footsteps of a former trumpet instructor and band director, is now teaching in the very room that first inspired him to be a teacher.

At that time, those influential people instilled in Jackson a love for music and the importance of relating to people. He has now taught and inspired sixth through 12th grade students for 26 years, with 22 of those years being in Pryor Public Schools.

Jackson took the time as a Teacher of the Year finalist to look at what other educators are doing successfully in their classrooms.

"It has opened my eyes to all the outstanding teachers we have in Pryor and across the state," he said.

After 26 years, Jackson continues to look forward to the end of the year when sixth graders give their first real concert for parents. Parents listen to their child practice all year, and then

hear the band perform together. Afterward, parents ask in amazement, "How did you get all those kids to come together and make music?"

It is inspirational to hear the excitement and pride in the parents' voices about what their kids have learned and what they are about to embark on in band. And the circle continues, as one teacher inspires other future teachers.



Pryor's Roy Jackson

Voting yes for education

State questions could raise at least \$220 million annually for schools

By Doug Folks

Oklahoma voters will have an opportunity on November 2 to enact two new laws that will produce new streams of revenue for education for the first time in more than a decade.

State Question 705, if passed, will create the Oklahoma Education Lottery, which will dedicate 35 percent of all ticket sales to education. Its companion question, SQ 706, is the so-called “lock box” provision. If it passes, it will amend the Oklahoma Constitution to create the Oklahoma Education Lottery Trust Fund.

SQ 706 will also guarantee that the lottery proceeds will be in addition to, and not replace, current state funding for education.

SQ 712 creates the State-Tribal Gaming Act, which will allow Native American casinos to offer patrons dif-

ferent types of electronic gaming machines and some card games. It will also allow three Oklahoma horse race tracks to offer the same machines.

The compact will allow the state to regulate Indian casino gaming and share in the profits. Most of those proceeds will go to education. Just as important, it is believed passage of SQ 712 will save some 50,000 jobs in Oklahoma’s horse industry and keep the state’s horse racing tracks from going under.

State officials conservatively estimate that SQs 705 and 712 could mean as much as \$220 million a year or more for education, said Roy Bishop, OEA president.

“That kind of additional funding for education could help make a world of difference to schools all over Oklahoma,” said Bishop.

Cindy Ball, the 2004 state teacher

of the year, was asked to appear in television commercials supporting SQ 712 and she gladly agreed.

“I support 712 because I support just about any issue that would provide additional funding to education,” said Ball, who teaches at Muskogee’s Sadler Arts Academy. “The bottom line for me is: The kids deserve it. We need to do everything we can to provide the best education possible for our students. We need to take advantage of this opportunity.”

During her tenure as Oklahoma’s education ambassador, Ball traveled all over Oklahoma. She will tell you she met many high quality teachers, and she also saw many schools in bad need of additional funding.

“Some schools are bursting at the seams. Some schools are years and years and years old and need to be



Muskogee’s Cindy Ball

completely refurbished,” she said. “There are some schools with a real lack of adequate technology. Many schools are using textbooks that are incredibly out of date.”

Ball said teachers deserve higher pay, and the lottery and gaming issues

See “Voting” on Page 16

State-paid insurance affecting districts differently

*By David Williams
OEA Advocacy Specialist*

Even though the passage of Senate Bill 1106 meant fully-paid individual health insurance for Oklahoma teachers, the impact of the law hit individual educators differently.

It all depended on how their individual school districts paid for insurance during the previous year. In districts like Harrah Public Schools, the new legislation provided not only increased state dollars for health insurance but money for much needed salary increases.

During 2003-04, school districts were required by law to pay 75 percent of a teacher’s individual health insurance. State law allowed a district to use the Flexible Benefit Allowance (FBA, 58 percent of the HealthChoice High Option individual premium) to meet the district’s part, thus reducing its obligation to 17 percent, or \$571.42.

Most districts provided the 17 percent or more to their teachers as either health insurance or as cash if an employee didn’t take state insurance. Since

all the teachers in these schools received the same amount of money – either as insurance or in cash – the amount could not be reduced, according to state law, unless their duties or hours were reduced proportionately.

Districts like Harrah paid its obligated 17 percent only to teachers taking health insurance, creating a take-it-or-lose-it fringe benefit. Since teachers taking health insurance in ’04-05 would now receive fully-paid health insurance from the state (a yearly increase of over \$1,700 in the FBA), SB 1106 allowed “take it or lose it” districts to reduce these teachers’ total compensation by the 17 percent

By law, Harrah was obligated to disperse only \$99,792 to its faculty. But the HACT bargaining team was able to get \$61,512 more for teacher compensation.

state obligation. In turn, districts had to “pool” that money and use it for instructional costs, which could include text books, or additional teachers, or as increases for current faculty.

The Harrah Association of Classroom Teachers (HACT) had successfully bargained an agreement earlier where the money paid to employees taking health insurance totaled \$1,833 per teacher during the 2003-04 year. This annual total included \$127 for dental insurance, \$572 for the district’s 17 percent obligation, and \$1,134 representing the dollar amount paid above Harrah’s 17 percent obligation.

Under the provisions of SB 1106,

Harrah’s pool of money to disperse on the ’04-05 contract did not include the dental insurance or the 17 percent district obligation. This pool of money became extremely important in a year when the state provided no new money for teacher raises.

By law, Harrah was obligated to disperse only \$99,792 to its faculty. But thanks to the efforts of the HACT bargaining team, the district added \$61,512 more, increasing the total compensation of every teacher in the district.

The total amount provided step raises plus an additional \$620 for every teacher. And, HACT was able to add two steps to its compensation schedule along with a \$332 stipend for off-schedule teachers.

If you have questions about how your district has dealt with insurance and compensation now that the state pays for individual insurance, call your regional OEA Advocacy Specialist.

Science project earns Sand Springs seventh graders national recognition

By Marty Bull

Sand Springs Education Association member John Gisler is always looking for an activity that will encourage his students to reach for the stars. So when he spotted a small ad in *Education Week* announcing the Christopher Columbus Awards, he decided to challenge his students to enter.

Gisler knows first hand how important it is to expand your horizons. Hearing impaired since birth, he has met obstacles throughout his life, but gives credit to teachers who helped him along the way.

“Besides my mother, Eva Gisler, who is an educator, teachers such as June Barber and Karen Dawson at Patrick Henry Elementary (Tulsa) were instrumental in enrolling me in mainstream programs,” said Gisler, who teaches at Clyde Boyd Middle School in Sand Springs. “Their confidence in me helped me reach my goals. I want to pass some of that confidence along to my students.”

Open to 6th through 8th grade students, the Columbus Awards competition is based on identifying community issues



Designing safer schools

John Gisler's seventh graders designed an alarm system that can be seen and heard by all students and school employees, even hearing impaired people like Gisler. The Sand Springs student team was among eight national finalists for the Christopher Columbus Award. Pictured with Gisler (right) are (from left) Laura McGee, Austin McGinis, Jennifer Proctor and Dylan Nall.

that affect people's daily lives while proposing solutions to the problems.

“Since I began teaching science, I have pushed students to participate in activities that give them experiences outside the classroom, and sometimes even outside of the community,” said the fourth-year teacher. “This competition was a great opportunity to do both.”

Gisler tossed out the idea to his 7th

“These kids did an awesome job. They worked very hard at all levels of the process.”

John Gisler

grade Advanced Placement class and four students took the challenge. The students not only came up with the project idea but were required to research what financial support or expert advice they might need.

“I wanted them to utilize the scientific method to determine what their project would be and how it could be implemented,” he said. “I believe this strategy was one of the reasons we were chosen as finalists.”

For the project, the students designed an alarm system that would benefit hearing impaired individuals. Influenced by their concern over Gisler's inability to hear the alarms, the students researched the problem and discovered that there were some areas in their own school where the alarms could not be heard and the project was born.

The students met on their own time often before and after school and even on weekends. The competition's rules were very specific: The sponsor was only allowed to offer advice; the students had to do all the work.

“These kids did an awesome job,” said Gisler. “They worked very hard at all levels of the process.”

The proposal called for a system that would alert both hearing and hearing impaired people to three possible dangers – fire, tornado and unauthorized intruders – through a colored light and letter system. A local security system company donated the equipment and helped the students wire the prototype.

The competition entry required teams to submit a written proposal outlining the benefits of their project to the community. The Sand Springs team was one of the eight finalists (out of 400 entries) who were flown to Florida for National Championship Week.

“It was really a, ‘We're going to Disneyland!’ moment,” said Gisler. “The success of this team is proof that if you reach for the stars you never know what will happen.”

Gisler named finalist for Riley Award

While working with the Christopher Columbus event organizers, John Gisler made his own discovery. The Frieda J. Riley Award, for which he had been nominated three years in a row, was under the same umbrella of programs as the Columbus Award competition.

The Riley award recognizes an American teacher who has overcome adversity or made enormous sacrifice in order to positively impact students. The award is named after the teacher who inspired *The Rocket Boys*.

Gisler was recently notified that he is one of this year's finalists.

With the Sand Springs team's success and Gisler's Riley Award nomination, the organizers recruited the Clyde Boyd Middle School teacher to be the Oklahoma Ambassador for their nationwide project.

“I want other Oklahoma students to have the same opportunity to expand their horizons,” said Gisler. “I challenge other middle school science teachers to recruit students and enter. You never know what you can achieve until you try.”

To find out more about the Christopher Columbus Awards, visit www.christophercolumbusawards.org or email Gisler at gislerj@sandites.org.

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Are you allowed time to vote?

By Richard B. Wilkinson
OEA General Counsel

From Your Counsel

As the November 2 election nears, a frequent question from teachers and education support professionals is: "Does my school district have to allow me time to go to the polls and vote?"

Like most legal questions, the answer is a resounding "it depends."

Oklahoma employers are required to provide time for employees to cast a ballot under certain circumstances, some of which may be applicable to education employees.

Oklahoma statutes (Okla. Stat. tit. 26, § 7-101) require an employer to provide an employee who is a registered voter two hours of time while the polls are open in which to vote IF (and there is always an if):

1) The work day of the employee does not begin three or more hours

subsequent to the opening of the polls, or the work day of the employee does not end three or more hours prior to the closing of the polls; and

2) The employee provides oral or written notification to the employer on the day preceding the election of his or

Oklahoma employers are required to provide time for employees to cast a ballot under certain circumstances . . . This statute applies to all elections, including school board and bond elections.

her intent to be absent for voting purposes pursuant to this statute.

This statute applies to all elections, including school board and bond elections.

So, if a workday starts after 10 a.m. or ends before 4 p.m., an employee is not entitled to take the additional two hours to cast a ballot. If the workday begins or ends outside of those time periods, an

employee is entitled to take the additional two hours if the employee provides oral or written notice to the employer the day before the election. If a school or the district has scheduled additional duties on the day of an election, such as a faculty meeting or parent/teacher conferences, the time required to perform such additional duties should be counted when determining whether the statute applies.

Upon proof of voting, the employee cannot be subject to any loss of compensation or other penalty for such absence. An employer shall select the hours during which eligible employees are allowed to "attend such elections" and employers may also change the work hours on the day of an election to allow the three hours before the beginning of work or the three hours after work in order to comply with the statute.

Oklahoma recognizes the public policy inherent in allowing its citizens a



Richard Wilkinson

full and fair opportunity to cast the ballot of their choice, and this statute is designed to afford both employees and employers an orderly process for exercising this important right.

If you need assistance in determining whether the "time to vote" statute applies to you, or if your employer fails to provide the required two hours to attend the election and vote, be sure to contact your regional OEA Advocacy Specialist for additional help.



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- 1 Science Rocks!

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Changes to NCLB affect AYP scores

Continued from Page 1

provement list could have been worse if the rules hadn't been relaxed slightly, said Larry Miller, OEA teaching and learning specialist for the Southeast team who monitors NCLB.

"Compliance and sanctions called for in the law are expensive," Miller said. "The law is a huge, under-funded mandate. Fiscal year 2005 funding stands at \$24.9 billion, which is woefully short of the \$34.3 billion promised by the White House."

There were several key changes in the law this year. The following is a brief overview of the primary alterations:

- Federal rule changes. This is the first effective year of changes involving students with disabilities, English language learners and the 95 percent test participation rule. The changes were not retroactive, resulting in fewer schools failing AYP this year.

- State accountability plan changes. Many states, with federal approval, amended Title I accountability plans and implemented changes that also make it statistically easier to make AYP.

- Meeting the same threshold. In every state, there were no changes in the percentage of students required to score at or above proficient on the

state reading and math tests. Thus, when the same proficiency requirement is combined with two sets of easier ways to meet that requirement, more schools met the standard.

Unfortunately, the outlook is not rosy. The achievement bar will continue to rise, causing an increasing number of

schools to miss the mark, Bishop said.

"More and more schools will face this predicament in the coming years," he predicted. "The OEA and the National Education Association will continue working to see that this law is fixed and funded to help it become realistic, practical and effective."

Celebrate American Education Week November 14

By Bruce Treadaway

"Celebrating the American Dream" is the theme of this year's American Education Week, which will be celebrated nationwide November 14-20.

Public school educators and school staff are recognized during AEW, with November 17 set aside as Education Support Professional Day. November 19 is Substitute Teacher Day.

NEA was one of the creators and original sponsors of AEW. The NEA



AEW was first observed in 1921. A year later, the U.S. Office of Education joined, and the National PTA came on board in 1938. Sev-

eral other sponsors have joined since then with a total of 12 sponsors now. For ideas on how to celebrate AEW at the local site, contact either the regional OEA office or go to www.nea.org/aew.

and the American Legion were concerned that 25 percent of America's WWI draftees were illiterate and 29 percent were physically unfit, so in 1919, both groups met to generate support for public education.

For ideas on how to celebrate AEW at the local site, contact either the regional OEA office or go to www.nea.org/aew.

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Two workshops have been scheduled and are open for registration. However, if you cannot make these dates or locations, we encourage you to schedule a workshop in your area. To schedule or register for a workshop or for more information, contact Mindy Burney (800) 664-1301 ext. 230 or mburney@oerb.com.

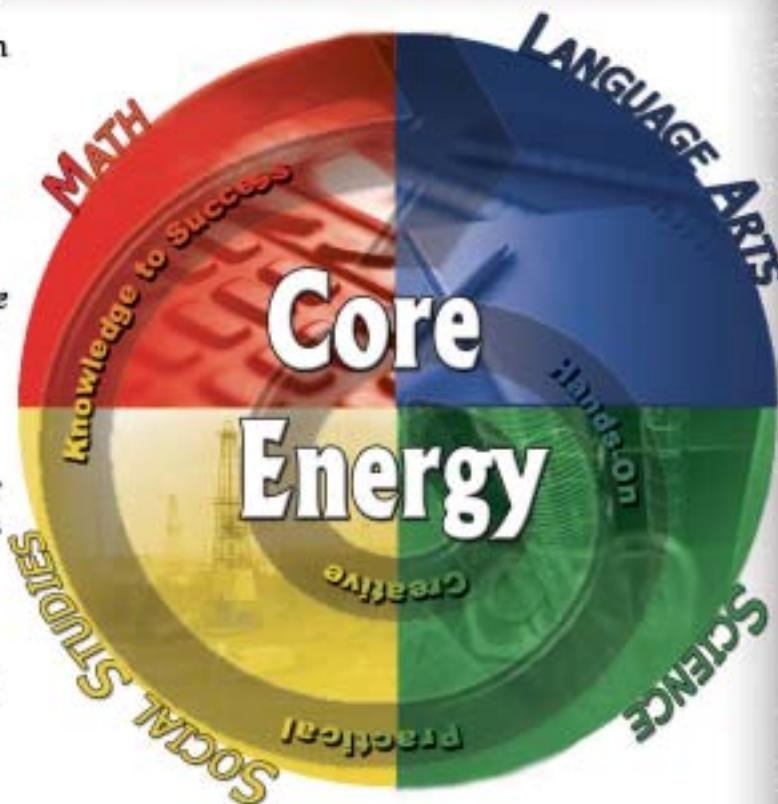
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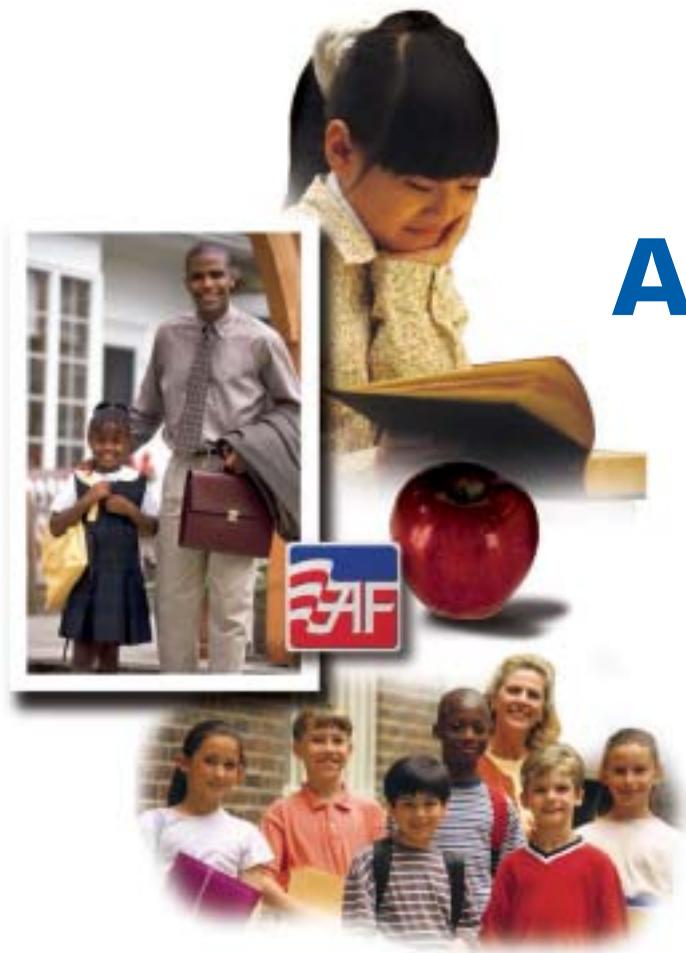
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Cheryl Burchett and Wyatt Riggs sort buttons during one her first graders' favorite lessons, which helps the students meet PASS skills in science and math.

The Button Lesson

Cheryl Burchett has been a longtime OEA member and one of the first in the Mustang School system to achieve national board certification. The "Button Lesson" she shares below is a favorite of her class. This lesson could easily be adapted to meet the needs of all lower elementary grade levels.

By Cheryl Burchett
Lakehoma Elementary, Mustang

As part of our teddy bear unit and our first quarter math and science activities, my first grade students sort our classroom button collection into groups by identifying the attributes of the buttons.

After reading the book "Corduroy" and the chapter "The Lost Button" from "Frog and Toad Are Friends," small groups of my students choose their own sorting rules and divide the buttons by such attributes as size, color, texture (bumpy or smooth) or the number of holes in the buttons.

This sorting and classifying activity aids my students in meeting the first

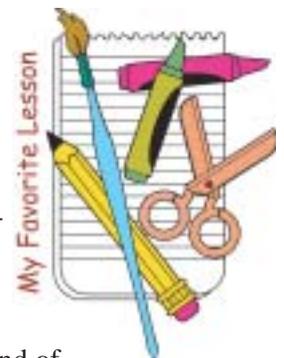
grade science PASS objectives. They learn that objects have properties that can be observed

and described and of utilizing the senses of sight and touch to group the objects.

Our button sorting activities also involve the math PASS objectives of identifying two-dimensional geometric shapes (round or square) and objects in everyday situations, and sorting and identifying congruent shapes when they sort the buttons by size.

Later in the year we will have fun with sorting our classroom collection of lids and bottle tops.

If you'd like to share your favorite lesson, send a description to Patti Razien at prazien@okea.org.



Voting no is a vote against education funding

Continued from Page 11

have the opportunity to infuse the state with new money without raising taxes.

"Recent studies show Oklahoma ranks first in early childhood education and we're 8th nationally in the number of nationally certified teachers," Ball said.

"Yet, we're 50th in teacher pay. Our students are getting quality teaching, but our teachers aren't getting paid what they're worth."

For Ball, it's a question of helping education. She pointed out that a vote against SQ 712 wouldn't close one casino, it would just prevent education from gaining new revenue.

"I think that when people realize that it's not a yes or no question on gaming, but a yes or no question for additional education funding, they will support SQ 712," she said.

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