

In this issue

Governor proposes
EOI accountability
Page 4

Alternatives offered
to NCLB testing
Page 5

Teachers applaud
governor's plan
Page 5

Check stub review
finds surprises
Page 6

Locals sign up for
Great Public Schools
Pages 8

Earned Income
Credit often missed
Page 11

Periodical
Post Paid at
Okla. City, OK

The Education Focus
OEA's all-member publication

Insurance stings the paycheck



Family insurance premiums take nearly one-third of Trish Ranson's paycheck, right off the top. Sitting here with her daughter Jenna, Ranson says legislators need to find a way to pay for family coverage.

Teachers tired of high premiums overriding salary increases

By Stacy Martin

Sometimes, Stillwater music teacher Trish Ranson longs for the days when she was teaching in Connecticut, just a few short years ago. There, teachers enjoyed fully paid family health insurance and one of the nation's highest average salaries.

Here, there is one other thing that sets Oklahoma apart: the people. The Ponca City native returned to Oklahoma due to a parent's illness. At Stillwater's Westwood Elementary, she has found colleagues who are second to none. Working side-by-side with them brings joy to her life as an Oklahoma educator.

Still, it stings when her employer pulls \$738 out of her \$2,259 gross monthly pay for dependent health insurance. That health insurance tab is higher than her rent. Fortunately, she is able to supplement her income by consulting on the side.

Even taking into account Connecticut's higher cost of living, Ranson's family was better off there. She will never forget the day she filled out her paperwork to teach in Oklahoma and realized the size of the family health insurance bite.

"I said, 'you mean all that is coming out of my pay?'" she said. "It took everything I had to keep from crying in front of the HR person."

Ranson is married, and the couple has a three-year-old daughter

See "Rising insurance" on Page 3

Good, bad and downright appalling

Legislature's record 2,140 bills offer pluses, minuses for education

By Stacy Martin

In just the second week of the 50th Oklahoma Legislature, teachers and local Associations are already under attack.

A record 2,140 bills greeted the lawmakers when they began their work at the State Capitol on February 7. Several bills would improve education and teacher pay and working conditions, but unfortunately, many of the proposals would erode teachers' job rights

and protections. Others seek to cut government revenues – a move that would undermine school funding.

At the first meeting of the House Education Committee, House Bill 1620 by Phil Richardson (R, Minco) passed out of committee to the full House. It would strip career teachers' rights to appeal wrongful termination to District Court, known as *trial de novo*.

SB 850 by Scott Pruitt (R, Tulsa)

would make teacher due process a local option that could be bargained, and would prohibit bargaining locals from negotiating extra duty compensation schedules.

"These measures must be killed or teachers' jobs will take on a new level of vulnerability," said Oklahoma Education Association President Roy Bishop. "There are changes being considered that would threaten rights

See "Some laws" on Page 12

1 step forward, 2 back?

By Roy Bishop

OEA President

The 2005 Legislative Session begins with a great deal of promise as well as a great deal of trepidation.

We're fresh off the fall election victories when Oklahomans continued their support for education by passing the Education Lottery and Indian Gaming Compact state questions. But, there seem to be mixed signals coming from the Legislature on the direction our elected officials want to move Oklahoma.

On the one hand, there appears to be bipartisan support for funding the first year of the four year plan to reach the regional average in teacher salaries. There is also support to continue funding the insurance obligation for teachers and support professionals.

The OEA and Governor Henry have introduced legislative agendas that will increase the respect for our profession, and continue our commitment to high standards, as well as enhance teacher quality in Oklahoma. The programs that we need to continue or implement cost money. Whether it's all-day kindergarten, the new math initiative, salary increases, restoring class size mandates or providing means for remediation of students, it all costs money.

On the other hand, the old adage "be careful what you ask for, you just might get it" comes into play. We can't ask for increased funding for our school communities and in the same breath ask for tax cuts. What kind of message does that send to Speaker Todd Hiett and Senate Pro Tem Cal Hobson?

This year there are 260 tax cut bills to be considered by the legislature. What many Oklahomans don't realize is that when you cut money from these areas, you cut specific funding to our schools. Our schools get money from a variety of sources including car tags, property taxes and other ad valorem measures.

In one bill alone, there is an attempt to cut 40 percent out of the largest local revenue source for schools. That's terrible public policy. It will devalue and devastate our public schools just when we are starting to gain back some respect nationally.

"We face a self-serving movement that ignores the needs and the growth of Oklahoma."

Roy Bishop,
February 2005

There is also a movement to pass the "Taxpayer Bill of Rights," or TABOR. What a great choice of words for a title. What the proponents of this measure won't tell you about TABOR is that it's creating a funding nightmare in Colorado that helped cost Republi-

cans their majority in the Colorado House and Senate. TABOR even has a Republican Governor trying to modify its limitations. Don't be fooled by catchy words and phrases.

It's sad to say there are people in our state who don't feel they should be responsible for investing in Oklahoma. Despite the fact that our parents and grandparents invested and helped plan for our state's future, there are people out there who feel they shouldn't be held accountable.

What kind of message does that send to our children? What kind of message does that send to businesses wanting to come to Oklahoma? It says that we don't care about our kids and we sure don't care about their future.

Our message needs to be loud and clear. Oklahomans support education so much in our state that they would pass



President Roy Bishop

three state questions to move our state forward. Education was the winner in the fall election. Oklahomans know that the way for all of our citizens to prosper economically is to fund education.

Sending mixed messages is never a good sign. Two hundred sixty tax cut measures in a state that is in the bottom five in per capita taxes isn't a good sign. We face a self-serving movement that ignores the needs and the growth of Oklahoma.

Labor/Management Conference returns to OKC

A mock discharge arbitration and grievance mediation will highlight the seventh annual Labor/Management Conference, April 20-21 at the Holiday Inn Airport, 2101 S. Meridian in Oklahoma City.

Conference registration is \$95 if received by March 21, and includes conference materials, continental breakfast and soft drinks during breaks. Registration after March 21 is \$120.

Arbitrator Francis Quinn will open the conference on April 20 with a keynote address, followed by Grievance Arbitration 101. After lunch, a mock

discharge arbitration will be presented, with a decision and synopsis at the end of the afternoon session.

On April 21, the morning session will feature a discussion on "Grievance Mediation/How it Works and Conflict Management Skills." A labor law update will wrap up the conference that afternoon.

Conferees should make their own lodging arrangements by calling the Holiday Inn at 800/622-7666 or 405/685-4000. To receive the special conference rate of \$62 plus tax, make reservations by March 21 and tell the reservationist

you are attending the "Oklahoma Labor/Management Conference."

The Labor/Management Conference is presented in cooperation with the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service and the Greater Oklahoma Chapter of the Industrial Relations Research Association.

For registration forms, call Jackie Davis at OEA's Southeast Region Office in Shawnee at 800/563-4230 or 405/275-4060.

For other conference information, contact Fred Moore at 405/760-0932.

OEA

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Rising insurance costs worry Stillwater educator

Continued from Page 1

and four-year old son. Her opera singer husband commutes to California in pursuit of his career. Ranson worries about being exposed to various illnesses among the 400-plus children she teaches daily.

The Westwood Elementary music teacher concedes she is often so pre-occupied by financial matters that she worries she is not as effective as she could be.

Not only do her insurance costs concern her, the health of her family worries her too. Going to the doctor often means going not once, but two, three or four times, which strains her modest paycheck even more.

What does Ranson say to Oklahoma legislators who say they don't have the money for teachers' dependent health insurance?

"They can find it," she said.

Ranson isn't alone. Thousands of educators across the state are struggling – or rejecting – their costly health insurance for dependents.

Yukon educator Candi Smith faces more than just the unhappy circumstance of paying \$790 monthly for her dependent insurance coverage for her husband and two children, daughters ages 6 and 8.

To add insult to injury, she's unnecessarily paying \$300 a month. Since October, Smith has found herself in insurance purgatory, unable to drop her husband's coverage when he picked up coverage through his job. The paperwork was either mishandled or unacceptable, leaving the family stuck paying for him anyway. Of course he has insurance at a fraction of that amount through his employer.

Smith can never find adequate time during her work day to straighten out the problems. Her plan time just doesn't seem adequate.

"Not only is it outrageously high, it's been a nightmare," said the 19-year teacher, now teaching 3rd grade at

Yukon's Myers Elementary School.

Beyond that, Smith believes it is only fair for teachers to receive the same level of health insurance benefits as state employees.

"Insurance just keeps going up and up," Smith said. "I know it's not something anybody has control over. But I think we should have the same benefit as state employees."

Smith was referring to the fact that State of Oklahoma employees receive better health care benefits than education employees. In addition to fully paid individual health care premiums, state workers receive 75 percent of their families' premium.

Things could be much worse for Smith and Ranson and every other Oklahoma teacher. Last year, OEA worked closely with the governor and House and Senate leadership to finally pass legislation that pays 100 percent of all teachers' individual health insurance premiums.

Still, things could be much better. An important piece of the OEA legislative agenda for 2005 is to fund at least 25 percent of teachers' family insurance premium, with a goal to someday obtain fully state-paid family insurance.

"We think it is vital to the quality of our teaching pool to treat education employees like the professionals they are. If competitive salaries and top-notch benefits are good enough in the private sector – and other state employees – those same benefits ought to be good enough for teachers," said Roy Bishop, OEA president.

Senate Bill 359, OEA's bill that would pay 25 percent of teachers' family premiums, is being carried by Kenneth Corn (D, Howe). As of press time, Sen. Corn was trying to get the bill out of committee.

Higher and higher

It is said death and taxes are the only two certainties in this life, but it would appear that annual increases in health insurance premiums could easily be added to the list. The chart below shows the percentage of increases education employees have had to cover over the last one, five and 10 years.

It should be noted that blame for the rapid increase cannot be placed on the Oklahoma State Employee and Education Group Insurance Board (OSEEGIB), but rather on factors that are hitting all Americans in every industry. Simply put, rising health insurance costs are hurting everyone and all types of employers are struggling to deal with the effects.

The problem for school employees is that they have had to pay out of their own pockets for these increases, while many employees in the private sector have most or all of their insurance covered by their employers.

Insurance rate increases

Comparing today's rates with those of 2004, 2000 and 1995.

Plan	1 Year Ago	5 Years Ago	10 Years Ago
Individual	7.29%	79.10%	126.53%
Spouse	13.37%	116.14%	227.08%
Child	12.52%	93.57%	159.33%
Children	10.79%	80.30%	109.43%
Family of 4	10.79%	94.19%	156.34%

Teacher pay increases

Comparing today's average teacher salary with 2004, 2000 and 1995.

	1 Year Ago	5 Years Ago	10 Years Ago
Percent increase	2.5%	4.2 %	27.6%

Federal government increases loan forgiveness limits

Attention teachers: Do you teach math, science or special education? Have you taught for five years in a Title I school?

If you answered yes to both of these questions, the U.S. Department of Education would like you to know that you may be eligible for new loan forgiveness limits recently signed into law by President George W. Bush.

The Taxpayer-Teacher Protection Act (P.L. 108-409) authorizes up to \$17,500 in loan forgiveness to eligible,

highly qualified math, science and special education teachers. This dramatic increase of \$12,500 above the previous loan limits is meant to ease the shortage of teachers in key subject areas.

The increased amount of teacher loan forgiveness is available to new borrowers (teachers with no outstanding loan balances prior to Oct. 1, 1998, who borrow eligible loans prior to Oct. 1, 2005). The additional loan forgiveness will provide substantial relief for existing teachers and an incentive for

prospective teachers to teach in subjects and schools that have difficulty hiring highly qualified candidates.

For detailed information on the program and to find out if you qualify for the loan forgiveness, please call the Department's Federal Student Aid Customer Service hotline at 800/433-7327.

More information on the loan forgiveness limits is posted at www.ifap.ed.gov/dpclatters/GEN0414.html.

Governor wants students held accountable for EOI tests

By Stacy Martin

It doesn't seem to matter whether Oklahoma public school students are from a privileged or a low-income school environment, they care little about end-of-instruction tests as they are presently administered, students and educators say.

Oklahoma Governor Brad Henry has proposed changes in end of instruction tests that would make students accountable. Now, only teachers and schools are accountable.

Oklahoma Education Association (OEA) member Dr. Julia Tiller teaches at Stand Watie Elementary, an inner city Oklahoma City elementary school. There, students do not seem to understand the importance of EOI tests, she said.

"Some of my students, due to home situations or attitude, do not seem to care how well they perform on EOI tests," said Tiller. "Often, there is little or no support at home or language is a barrier.

"With some students, it is a combination of factors which impede the importance of the EOI tests," Tiller said.



Dr. Julia Tiller, a fifth grade teacher at Oklahoma City's Stand Watie, and her daughter Glenda look differently at the governor's proposed end-of-instruction tests.

"The most important factor is not just the EOI test, but the emphasis that some children and their families place on education as a whole.

"Making students accountable may help some Stand Watie students but not all," said Tiller. "Their problems run far deeper. Parents are going to have to become much more involved in their students' education before I believe we will see much change. It is more than an educational issue, it is a societal issue."

Tiller's daughter, Glenda, attends Putnam City North High School, where many students land on the opposite end of the economic spectrum.

There, too, apathy pervades the student body when it comes to EOI tests, said the 15-year-old freshman, an honor student who plans to become a physician.

Glenda said she has seen frustrated teachers admit on one hand that the tests do not count, and then try to

convince students to apply themselves on the other hand.

"During our biology EOI test, half the students just went through and marked answers (randomly)," Glenda said. "They said it didn't matter anyway."

But for her studies, Tiller would prefer to work hard and reap the rewards.

"On my last EOI test – I wish it would follow me," she said. "I think I did fairly well."

Clearly, this Putnam North student's attitude does not reflect those of some of her peers.

"I don't think they should count EOI tests," said Brandon Lewis, an 8th grade student at Brink Junior High in Moore. "They didn't in the past, and they shouldn't start now."

Brink freshman Austin Dieu, 15, disagrees.

"If you're making a bad grade, the end-of-instruction test might give you a chance to bring it up," said Dieu, who is considering studying engineering in college.

As for the practice of counting EOI tests results for teachers but not for students, Dieu said, "For students, it's a choice whether they pay attention in class. It shouldn't reflect on the teacher if (the students) choose not to (pay attention)."

Adding high school testing to NCLB is premature

President Bush recently announced plans to add high school testing to his so-called No Child Left Behind education plan. While the National Education Association (NEA) and its state affiliates, including the Oklahoma Education Association, insist on high standards and rigorous academics, it would be premature to add these tests.

The NEA believes that for U.S. high schools to continue meeting the changing needs of a changing student population, reform must be built on what teachers know works.

Following are some proven strategies for making our public high

schools the springboard for lifetime success every high school should be.

The Need – America's high school students need coursework that is relevant to their future as students in community colleges, vocational and technical schools, colleges, universities or the workforce.

To Meet the Need –

- Federal funding should be focused on classroom resources, not bureaucracy and paperwork.
- Federal laws and funding that encourage high school students to get college credit, better linkages between high schools and community and four-

year colleges and vocational and technical curriculum that is relevant.

The Need – Aggressive dropout prevention and re-entry efforts that help every single student achieve his or her potential in school, and in life.

To Meet the Need –

- Federal funding should be focused on dropout prevention programs that work and meet the individual needs of a diverse student population.
- Accountability systems should include dropout rates as a measure of school success, so schools can better meet the needs of every student and a high school diploma carries meaning

for those who earn it.

- Schools and school districts should include re-entry plans that focus on the individual needs of students so they have the tools and resources necessary for success.

The Need – Smaller schools and learning communities for high school students so they don't slip through the cracks.

To Meet the Need –

- Federal funds should be focused on programs like Smaller Learning Communities so students get more individualized attention.
- Federal funds for support services and personnel, such as career counselors, should be focused on high schools.

Teachers like what they hear

Gov. Henry's education improvement plan receives applause

By Stacy Martin

Oklahoma teachers are cheering Gov. Brad Henry's \$114 million education improvement plan, which he outlined during his State of the State address in early February.

The Achieving Classroom Excellence (ACE) plan would be financed with growth revenue, plus gaming and lottery proceeds. It proposes allocating \$55 million to fulfill the state's first-year commitment to begin raising teacher salaries to the regional average by 2007-08, and includes \$12.8 million previously committed to pay the increase in teachers' individual health insurance premiums.

In the most recent statistical year available (2004), Oklahoma teachers' average earnings were \$35,061 while their regional counterparts averaged \$38,993 – nearly \$4,000 more.

Overall, Henry's education agenda would raise common education's appropriation by 4.6 percent.

Improving the quality of education is a focus of the governor's plan. He proposes raising standards by increasing the emphasis on math and by making students accountable for end-of-instruction (EOI) tests. And, Henry also wants to invest millions to fund all-day kindergarten for every district in the state.

The added accountability in EOI tests is a positive, according to OEA leadership and members alike.

"This would be a welcome improvement for EOI tests," said Bishop. "Historically, teachers and schools have been accountable, but not students. Closing the loop is long overdue."

Tahlequah educator Jeannie VanVeen likes what she hears about the governor's plan.

"This is wonderful – I hope he can get the money for it," said VanVeen, who teaches at Tahlequah's Central Elementary School. "I love the part about holding the students accountable."

"What I really wish is that they could hold the parents accountable. Sometimes we feel like we're carrying the weight of the world on our backs. They expect us to do everything without enough funding and with too many students in our classes."

The harried special education teacher said she recently spent an entire day filling out required paperwork for her students. If she hadn't had a professional day, she doesn't know how she would have accomplished it.

Harrah 4th grade teacher Betty Brownfield is particularly glad to see the salary increase plan start becoming a reality.

Brownfield, president of the Harrah

Association of Classroom Teachers, is dissatisfied with the pay and the manner of compensation in Harrah.

"I'm thankful first and foremost for the salary increase, especially in Harrah," said the 20-year educator.

The governor's plan also proposes appropriating \$25 million to reimburse school districts for reductions in ad valorem local revenue resulting from economic development incentives.

Following are other line items in the governor's education package:

- ☛ \$4,522,275 for the National Board Certification teacher bonus of \$5,000.
- ☛ \$2 million for middle school math labs.
- ☛ \$700,000 for Advanced Placement programs throughout the state.
- ☛ \$500,000 for alternative education programs throughout the state.
- ☛ \$500,000 for the Parents as Teachers program.
- ☛ An additional \$837,500 for mentor teacher stipends.

- ☛ \$363,264 for the costs associated with testing.
- ☛ \$39,768 for the School Lunch Matching Program.
- ☛ \$225,000 for the Great Expectations Program.
- ☛ \$567,517 for SoonerStart Early Intervention Program.
- ☛ \$2,543,654 for the implementation of the Student Information System (The WAVE).
- ☛ \$300,000 for the Neuro-developmental Learning Differences program.
- ☛ \$2 million for the Middle School Math Initiative.
- ☛ Estimated lottery revenue of \$3,113,571 for Elementary and Secondary Education Consolidation.
- ☛ 5 percent of lottery revenue for the Teachers' Retirement System, an estimated \$3,113,571.
- ☛ \$222,000 to the Vision program to help fund student information costs.



Gov. Brad Henry



Putnam City's political "party"

Legislators and members of Putnam City ACT got together to share ideas prior to the legislature opening in early February. Stopping to pose a group shot are (from left) PCACT President Jan Sands; Putnam City School Board member Jerry Cramer; PCACT Secretary Judy Berger; Sen. Glenn Coffee; and PCACT Treasurer Candye Chavez. (Photo courtesy of Barbara Anderson of the Bethany Tribune.)

Check, please!

Reviewing pay stubs sometimes finds unwelcome surprises

By Doug Folks

Helping teachers understand how to read their paycheck stubs recently has become a popular service provided by Oklahoma Education Association (OEA) Advocacy Specialists.



Wendi Tejada knew there were problems with her paycheck, but she never suspected that those mistakes could have come back to haunt her years from now when she tried to retire.

All employees want to know exactly how much they are being paid, but just as important, they need to know *how* they are being paid. The problem lies in trying to decipher just what all those figures mean, and trying to sort out the various abbreviations and acronyms in the headings.

“Everywhere I go, teachers have trouble understanding how they are compensated and how to read their paychecks,” said David Williams, advocacy specialist for OEA’s Oklahoma City Metro Team. Williams has become the staff expert on reading checks. But, even with all his experience, some check stubs still require concentrated study and a calculator with fresh batteries to sort it all out.

“Two school systems can use the same software, have the same compensation schedule, and the numbers

on the pay stubs will look different because both districts can calculate payroll differently,” he said.

Williams and other OEA advocates have been especially busy reading pay checks this school year due to the state

fully paying individual health care premiums. The confusion has centered on how districts distributed money to employees that was once paid to them as an insurance premium supplement or as cash for those not taking insurance. In some instances, a district could recoup

as much as 17 percent of what it paid toward employee insurance last year. In other cases, everything a district paid above what the state paid had to be given back as salary to employees.

The changes in state-paid insurance

“The (payroll) mistake could have had a tremendously negative impact on my retirement.”

Wendi Tejada

for 2004-05 created a unique, one-year transition that has been complicated and, at times, controversial. Problems have been found in the payroll calculations of several districts, and in most cases the situations were easily rectified.

Wendi Tejada had been with Oklahoma City Schools for 12 years, but was being paid on Step 8. She asked Williams to compare her pay stub to

“What we avoided by finding this (payroll) glitch ... was a real headache that (teachers) would have discovered 10 or 15 years from now when they tried to retire.”

OEA Advocate David Williams

the district’s salary schedule and determine if she was being paid correctly.

Because of various incarnations of the salary schedule through negotiated agreements over the years, Tejada was being paid at the correct step. But through his investigation of the check, Williams found that the district had not sent enough retirement on Tejada’s behalf to the Oklahoma Teachers’ Retirement System (TRS).

A glitch in the district’s payroll software had shorted TRS \$2.51 per paycheck between January and June 2004 for Tejada. According to OKC Schools officials, the glitch affected about 625 other certified employees not taking state insurance. The district is still trying to confirm if the shortage happened to each of those employees.

The total retirement underpayment for each employee was only \$30.12, but the potential ramifications could have been much larger.

“We met with district officials and they agreed that a mistake had been made, and they are working to make the proper payment to TRS,” Williams said. “What we avoided by finding this glitch, which we found almost by accident, was a real headache that Wendi and the other teachers would have discovered 10 or

15 years from now when they tried to retire.”

Had the underpayment not been found, Tejada and the others would not have been notified of the shortfall until they applied for retirement. At that time, TRS would tell those employees that their full contributions for 2004 were not met. That year would not count toward retirement until fully paid,

meaning some might not be able to retire with full benefits that year.

The unknown question is: If Williams had not found the glitch, how many years would have passed until someone tried to retire and found the problem?

The cost for Tejada to buy back that year would include the shortage amount plus 8 percent interest compounded yearly. Not buying back the year could also have greatly reduced the amount of retirement because it could have changed the formula that determines the employee’s retirement amount.

“Thank God for OEA and David Williams. See *“What lessons” on next page*



OEA Advocacy Specialist David Williams

OEA is only state affiliate leading the A&E charge

To date, 45 states have been involved in litigation similar to the Association's Adequacy and Equity Project. What is different about the Oklahoma Education Association (OEA) effort is that it is the only National Education Association (NEA) state affiliate to initiate such an endeavor and take the lead in litigation.

Planning and early coordination continues on the A&E Project, including building the Legal Liaison network which will gather the evidence needed to make the case for adequate and equitable funding for public schools. In addition, the OEA monitors A&E developments in other states.

A good resource is The ACCESS Project website (www.accessednetwork.org), which chronicles state funding issues in every state. The mission of the ACCESS Project is to promote access to meaningful educational opportunities for all children.

OEA staff continues to recruit members to serve as Legal Liaisons, who will share their findings of inad-

equately school resources directly with the OEA Center for Legal and Corporate Services.

Please use the following recommendations to help build your local Association Legal Liaison network:

- Level I, Small Locals (up to 15 faculty members), 1 Legal Liaison;
- Level II, Medium Locals (16-100 faculty members), 3 Legal Liaisons (one each at Elementary, Middle School and High School levels), and
- Level III, Large Locals (101 or more faculty members), 1 Legal Liaison per work site.

If you have questions or need additional information, please contact your OEA Regional Team at www.okea.org/Info/address.htm. Legal Liaison names with home phone numbers and home email addresses may be sent to Debbie Moore, OEA network administrator, at dmoore@okea.org. (Note, only home contact information can be accepted – *and not* school site addresses, email or phone numbers.)

What lessons were learned?

Continued from previous page

Williams. The mistake could have had a tremendously negative impact on my retirement," said Tejada. "Thanks not just for me, but for very employee in Oklahoma City Schools.

"The shortage could have potentially cost us tens of thousands of dollars."

Tejada's situation is but one example of how payroll mistakes can go undetected and cause employees problems in the future. So, what should education employees learn from her experience? Williams lists the following:

1) Review your pay stub each month

and become familiar enough with it so that you will notice any changes,

2) Stay up-to-date on laws that affect your income, your retirement contributions and other factors that could change your compensation,

3) Occasionally, ask TRS for an audit of your account to see if your retirement contributions have been properly made, especially as you begin seriously considering retirement, and

4) Call your OEA regional advocacy specialist if you have questions about how you are being paid.

OEA Advocacy Conference

April 8-9, Waterford Marriott Hotel
6300 Waterford Boulevard, Oklahoma City, OK
(East of Pennsylvania Ave. and South of 63rd Street)

Conference Agenda

Friday, April 8

Registration – 6:30 p.m.

Opening Session – 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, April 9

Registration and Continental Breakfast – 8 a.m.

Keynote Session – 9 a.m.

Breakout Session Times

10:30 a.m., 1 p.m., and 2:30 p.m.

Registrations are due by Friday, April 1, 2005

Register online at www.okea.org/AdvocacyConference, or complete this form and mail it to Advocacy Conference, c/o Melanie Engh, Oklahoma Education Association, PO Box 18485, Oklahoma City, OK, 73154. Cost is \$25 per person for certified employees, \$10 per person for support professionals, with the third person from the same local attending free. Registration includes continental breakfast and lunch on Saturday, April 9, and all conference materials.

Lodging

Conference participants are expected to make their own lodging reservations directly with the Waterford Hotel at a special rate of \$69, single or double occupancy, by calling 800/992-2009 or 405/848-4782.

The special rate is good only for reservations made prior to March 25. Space is limited, so call today.

For more information about the OEA Advocacy Conference, contact Melanie Engh at OEA Headquarters, 800/522-8091, 405/528-7785, or via email at mengh@okea.org.

Registration Form

Name _____

Home Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Home Phone () _____ School Phone () _____

Home Email address _____

Local Association _____

OEA Region _____

Building great public schools

Eleven local affiliates targeted for leadership, membership growth

By Marty Bull

Local Associations from each Oklahoma Education Association (OEA) region have been chosen to participate in the NEA Great Public Schools Action Plan.

Introduced by NEA President Reg Weaver at the 2003 NEA Representative Assembly, the initiative is devised to work with state affiliates to recruit, retain and activate members – for the purpose of strengthening their ability to advocate for members and children.

“President Weaver has asked us to harness the anger and frustration over ESEA compliance as well as all the other challenges school employees face and use that energy to organize and mobilize members as never before,” said OEA President Roy Bishop. “We’re very excited to have the opportunity to partner with NEA on this project.”

Associate Executive Director Charles McCauley, who is overseeing the implementation of the plan, sees it

as an ideal way to engage members.

“This plan calls on each and every member in the targeted locals to become more active,” said McCauley. “We want our members to educate and activate their colleagues, families and elected officials and enhance our capacity to promote teacher quality, high standards and respect for public education.”

The GPS Action Plan calls for the work of OEA to be focused within three major areas: membership development, organizational development and leadership development. The plan also provides additional support and assistance to members and staff in their efforts to respond to the issues raised in the implementation of the OEA Adequacy and Equity litigation as well as meeting OEA legislative goals.

Eleven local affiliates were targeted for organizational and membership growth. Each local agreed to work with its regional team to formalize a long-range plan that energizes mem-



Shawnee ACT president Sabra Tucker (left) leads a Great Public Schools planning session with members of her local, including Jean Swinney (Center) and Linda Hazelwood.

bers through activities designed to improve organizational structure and increase membership. Grant money is also available to help subsidize the cost of training and recruitment.

The locals invited to participate are Broken Arrow EA, Tulsa CTA, Bartlesville EA, Shawnee ACT, Yukon EA, Moore ACT, Putnam City ACT, Mid-Del ACT, Professional Educators Association of Lawton, Support Employees of Edmond, and Union Support Professionals Association. Over the next three issues, the *Education Focus* will cover these locals and their involvement with the project.

Bartlesville, Broken Arrow, Shawnee, and Tulsa locals hold planning sessions

It’s always an honor when the OEA President asks you to be a part of a major project. But according to BAEA President Greer Nichols, this time the honor was bittersweet.

“We were asked to participate because we have a good organizational structure, but we were also chosen because our membership (number) isn’t as high as it could be,” said Nichols. “But I immediately saw this as an opportunity to re-examine how we do business and to hopefully help us move forward.”

Nichols set the plan into motion by

appointing a membership committee and held two separate planning sessions facilitated by the Tulsa Metro Regional Team.

“Our team did an outstanding job in helping us look at ourselves from an organizational aspect,” said Nichols. “We not only formulated a great action plan, we also identified new leaders. This process helped me see a bright future for BAEA.”

Shawnee ACT President Sabra Tucker was thrilled with the renewed sense of purpose the process offers.

“This project gives us a genuine opportunity to activate members who haven’t been participating for awhile,” said Tucker. “This may be just what we need to get us fired up.”

Bartlesville’s Cindy Dronyk was pleased not only with the opportunity to participate in the overall project, but the specialized training was just what her local Association needed to step up its organizational efforts.

“We knew what we needed to do, we just weren’t doing it,” said the president-elect. “This was just the shot in the arm we needed to become more proactive.”

Both Dronyk and Tucker appreciated the information presented during their prospective trainings.

“We have reps who want to ask

See “TCTA” on next page



Greer Nichols, Broken Arrow EA president, calls the Great American School program “... an opportunity to re-examine how we do business and to hopefully help us move forward.”

TCTA sees positive results

Continued from previous page

people to join but aren't always sure what to say," said Tucker. "The information our team provided will definitely give them more confidence as recruiters."

No one recognizes the importance of a strong local membership more than the Tulsa CTA Leadership Team. In fact, several years ago, when the release time officers wanted to connect the membership, they implemented a plan similar to the NEA-GPS

plan and saw positive results.

"This project not only helps us expand our recruitment and organizational activities but gives us an opportunity to let our members know that our parent organizations – OEA and NEA – care what happens to teachers in Tulsa, Oklahoma," said TCTA President Steve Stockley.

Next month, Support Employees of Edmond and Union Support Personnel Association will be featured.



Charles McCauley, OEA associate executive director; Steve Stockley, Tulsa CTA president (seated) and Denzel Kesterson, Tulsa CTA vice president, look over TCTA's strategic plan to increased membership and leadership within the local.



Past, present and future Bartlesville EA presidents Cindy Gronyk, president-elect; Lisa Hudson, president; and Bonnie Moore, past president; huddle during its planning session for Great Public Schools.



Great Public Schools for Every Child

Caldwell finds a new home at OEA

Dottie Caldwell has been named associate executive director in charge of the Oklahoma Education Association's Centers for Teacher and Learning and Communications, announced Executive Director Lela Odom.

Caldwell comes to the OEA from the Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Preparation where she was director of professional development. Her responsibilities there included coordinating training and support services and seeking scholarship funding for National Board Certification candidates. Caldwell also designed and implemented plans for statewide Professional Development Institutes and worked with legislators on Commission issues.

"Dottie brings a great deal of experience and talent to the OEA," Odom said. "She will be a tremendous asset to our members."



Dr. Dottie Caldwell

Caldwell received a bachelor's (elementary education), a master's (elementary administration) and a doctorate (instructional leadership and academic curriculum) from the University of Oklahoma (OU).

She taught third grade and gifted and talented students at Eisenhower Elementary in Norman in the 80s, and

later served 13 years as principal at Norman's Jackson Elementary. To maintain touch with the classroom, Caldwell taught math classes throughout her career as a principal.

Prior to her course work and her positions in Norman, Caldwell worked in private sector finance and as a branch manager for a savings and loan in Oklahoma City. But her heart led her to the teaching profession.

"I always felt like I wanted to be some kind of advocate for children," she said. "Teaching provided that opportunity. I've been able to continue working for children in a variety of avenues throughout my career."

During her tenure in Norman Schools, Caldwell worked part-time for OU's College of Education as an adjunct professor and as supervisor of student teachers. She also accepted three special assignments to teach 10-

day courses for master's candidates at U.S. military installations in Germany as part of joint effort between OU and the military.

Most recently, Caldwell ran for an office in the Oklahoma House of Representatives, losing to Doug Miller (R, Norman) in the general election. The campaign helped her realize how much she wanted to be an advocate for public education, and her new position with OEA allows her to enter that arena with a more focused effort than what a state agency job would allow.

"Here at the OEA, we're moving in a direction that will allow me to speak out and be part of the voice of public education," she said.

Caldwell has two children. Ashley, 26, is a third year student at the OU School of Medicine; and Michael, 19, is a sophomore engineering student at Arizona State University.

Calendar promotes Year of Languages

A calendar featuring colorful artwork created by students from all over Oklahoma is bringing attention to foreign languages while generating scholarship money for students and teachers.

Del City High School senior James Hock has partnered with the Oklahoma Foreign Language Teachers' Association (OFLTA) to publish a calendar that promotes The Year of Languages.

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages has designated 2005 as The Year of Languages. The initiative is designed to promote the study of world languages and urge policymakers to place more emphasis on language study.

Hock is an advanced studies Spanish student of Desa Dawson, an OEA member and the Southwest Conference on Language Teaching (SWCOLT) Foreign Language Teacher of the Year who will be competing for National Foreign Language Teacher of the Year in November. The calendar project met a requirement for

his diploma of merit from the Midwest City-Del City School System.

Several sponsors joined Hock's project, including Integris Health, which donated the printing of the calendar.

Hock received 547 entries. He chose 50 finalists, which were then judged by Dawson and Del City colleagues Linda Bahan, French teacher; Nancy Spencer, art teacher; and Aracely Reyna, a Fulbright Exchange teacher. (Reyna had traded places with Del City Spanish teacher Judith Starr, who was teaching Reyna's Mexican classroom at the time of the judging. See the February 2005 issue of *Education Focus* for the story on Starr's experience.)

The winning entries appear in the calendar, which Hock is selling for \$4 each. Proceeds go to OFLTA's scholarship fund, which awards grants to students entering college and to teachers wanting to participate in continuing education.

For more information on OFLTA or to order a calendar, visit www.learnalanguage.org/oflta.



Lisa Phan, a student at Mustang High School, drew the winning entry in Oklahoma's Year of Languages calendar art contest. Phan's drawing graces the cover of a calendar published by James Hock, a senior at Del City High School, and the Oklahoma Foreign Language Teachers Association. Nearly 550 students from all over Oklahoma submitted artwork that depicts the rewards of learning a world language.



Del City High School senior James Hock (red jacket) gets help from DCHS faculty members (from left) Nancy Spencer, Aracely Reyna, Principal Annette Nantois and Desa Dawson judging entries in a calendar art contest he organized as senior project for his diploma of merit. French teacher Linda Bahan, who also judged the contest, is not pictured.

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Are you taking advantage of the Earned Income Tax Credit?

By Brandon Webb

Associate General Counsel

Once again, the April 15 tax deadline is fast approaching. Utilizing all available tax deductions and credits can add up to big savings.

Government studies indicate that millions of Americans fail to claim billions of dollars in tax credits every year. One of the most overlooked credits is the Earned Income Tax Credit. It is estimated that nearly 70 percent of Oklahomans who are eligible to receive the Earned Income Credit do not even apply for it.

A tax credit reduces your tax obligation dollar-for-dollar. If your tax credit is \$1,000 and your tax obligation is \$1,000, you will owe nothing. However, the Earned Income Tax Credit goes

From Your Counsel

further. If the Earned Income Credit is greater than your tax obligation then you will receive the additional amount as a refund.

The Earned Income Credit is provided to qualifying individuals based on their earned income and the number of children in the household. For the 2004 tax year, the maximum Earned Income Credit is \$4,300.

To be eligible for this refundable federal tax credit, you must file a tax return, and you must have earned some income but not more than;

- \$34,458 if there is more than one qualifying child (\$35,458 if married filing jointly), or
- \$30,338 if there is one qualifying



Brandon Webb

child (\$31,338 if married filing jointly), or

- \$11,490 if there is no qualifying child (\$12,490 if married filing jointly).

This year, the Internal Revenue Service has created a convenient online questionnaire to help individuals deter-

mine if they are eligible for this important benefit. The IRS has online tools to assist taxpayers in determining their correct filing status, whether children meet the tests for a qualifying child, and estimate the amount of credit that may be received.

Additionally, if you are paying off student loans, don't forget to check out the available tax deductions. According to the IRS, you can deduct up to \$2,500 for interest paid in 2004 on qualified federal student loans. This deduction can be taken in combination with any other deduction such as the lifetime learning credit or the tuition-and-fees tax deduction.

To access the Earned Income Tax Credit Assistant, visit www.irs.gov/eitc. For additional information about student loan deductions, visit www.irs.gov and enter a search for "IRS publication 970" or "Tax Benefits for Education."

Blood drive shatters national donation record

By Bruce Treadaway

With more than six times last year's donations, the blood drive that kicks off Oklahoma's Read Across America (RAA) has set a national record for the third straight year.

The blood drive, sponsored by the Oklahoma Education Association, the Oklahoma Blood Institute and Saturn of Oklahoma City, collected 33,202 actual donations. Two years ago, the

drive collected a then-record 3,000-plus donations. Last year, over 5,000 donations were collected.

When the three groups met to plan this year's drive, their goal was 10,000 donations, but that figure was passed early in the drive and the only suspense was how large the donation total would go by February 12.

Three cars were given away by Saturn to encourage donations. Student do-

nors at the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University were eligible for a car as was one person from the general public including OEA members. Student winners of Saturn IONs were Ty Formby, OU; and Hailey Sparks, OSU. Ronald Bagby of Oklahoma City

won a new Saturn VUE

The OEA has used the blood drive for the last three years to kick off the Association's RAA effort. Saturn of Oklahoma City, with Bob Grant as the point person, is a longtime partner of RAA.

OEA ballots coming in March

Election ballots for 11 seats on the OEA Board of Directors and at-large representatives to Delegate Assembly and the NEA Representative Assembly will be mailed to local leaders during the week of March 7.

All completed ballots must be delivered by 5 p.m. April 1 to OEA Headquarters, 323 E. Madison, in Oklahoma

City. For more information, contact Janice Dealy at 800/522-8091, 405/528-7785 or jdealy@okea.org.

Races will held for board seats in zones Northeast B, Northwest B, Northwest D, Oklahoma City Metro B, Oklahoma City Metro D, Southeast B, Southeast C, Southwest E, Tulsa Metro B, Tulsa Metro D and Tulsa Metro E.

UCO offers Educators' Leadership Class

Applications are available for the 2005-06 Educators' Leadership Academy Class at the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond. The program is designed to help educators from common education, higher education and

CareerTech schools improve their leadership skills and methods in teaching and administration. Completed applications must be postmarked by March 15. For more information call 405/947-5560 or visit the website at www.ucok.edu/ela.

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Some laws threaten the rights teachers worked hard to win

Continued from Page 1

that teachers have fought long and hard to attain.”

The big picture during the 2005 legislative session is a mixed bag – very much like the title of an old Spaghetti western movie. But in this case, there’s good, there’s bad, and then there is downright appalling.

The good

Gov. Brad Henry recently unveiled an education plan focusing on teacher compensation, school improvement and student performance (see story on Page 5). The plan would increase education spending 4.6 percent over 2004 levels.

OEA members generally support Henry’s initiatives, particularly plans to fund the first year of the four-year salary increase plan, all-day kindergarten, greater emphasis on math and increased student accountability.

Additionally, Senate Pro Tem Cal

Hobson (D, Lexington) has hinted that the Senate may consider following other states in “opting out” of the No Child Left Behind Act.

“A number of states have opted

“OEA strongly believes it is inappropriate to cut state revenues when education funding is inadequate. Revenue cuts may be politically expedient, but politics do not always consider what’s best for children.”
OEA President Roy Bishop

out of the federal program because the money was not provided and some of those (states) are so-called red states,” Hobson has said.

The bad

There are an astounding 260 bills that would reduce revenues coming into the state, a move that is temporarily politically popular. However, its effect on government services such as public education would be devastating.

“OEA strongly believes it is inappro-

priate to cut state revenues when education funding is inadequate,” said Bishop. “Revenue cuts may be politically expedient, but politics do not always consider what’s best for children.”

There are six bills whose effect would be to increase the money a district can carry over, all of which the OEA opposes.

“Experience has shown us that when this happens, fewer dollars flow into the classroom, where it’s desperately needed,” said Bishop.

There is a measure proposing to change the retirement plan to defined contribution from the current, defined benefit. In short, this could make the monthly benefit amount more volatile, OEA leaders warn. And it means at the

end of a teacher’s career, there would be no guaranteed retirement amount.

The appalling

Several bills have been filed that aim to weaken teachers’ job rights and protections. Here’s what could happen if some of the proposed measures pass:

➤ It would be easier to fire teachers and teachers would have fewer rights in the termination process.

➤ Probationary teachers could have more protections than career teachers.

➤ It will be more difficult for educators to bargain their employment contract, particularly when there are issues in disagreement.

➤ Hurdles will be added that will make it more difficult to ratify a local bargaining unit’s negotiated agreement.

“Clearly, this is an attempt to erode the rights and protections that OEA has worked hard to gain,” said Bishop. “It is critical that our members let their lawmakers know it is totally unacceptable to strip teachers of the protections they need to perform their jobs.

“Without the structured processes that OEA has put in place such as the collective bargaining law, educators’ jobs and working conditions would be subject to the whims of outside forces.”

The OEA lobbying team is monitoring all these bills – good, bad or worse. Weekly updates will be printed on the OEA website at www.okea.org, and on a hotline at 800/522-8092. In the event member action is needed, the OEA’s weekly e-newsletter, *The Insider*, or other forms of email will be used to alert members.

In the meantime, members are encouraged to hold frequent conversations with their legislators.

A visit with Lawton legislators



The Professional Educators’ Association of Lawton (PEAL) held a legislative social and issues forum prior to the opening of the 50th Oklahoma Legislature. Reps. Abe Deuschendorf and Joe Dorman participated as did freshman Sen. Randy Bass (left photo). In photo at right, a Lawton teacher asks a question of the visiting legislators.

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For more information about the Schools Attuned Program, Oklahoma visit: www.allkindsofminds.org/sa/stateprogram_ok.aspx

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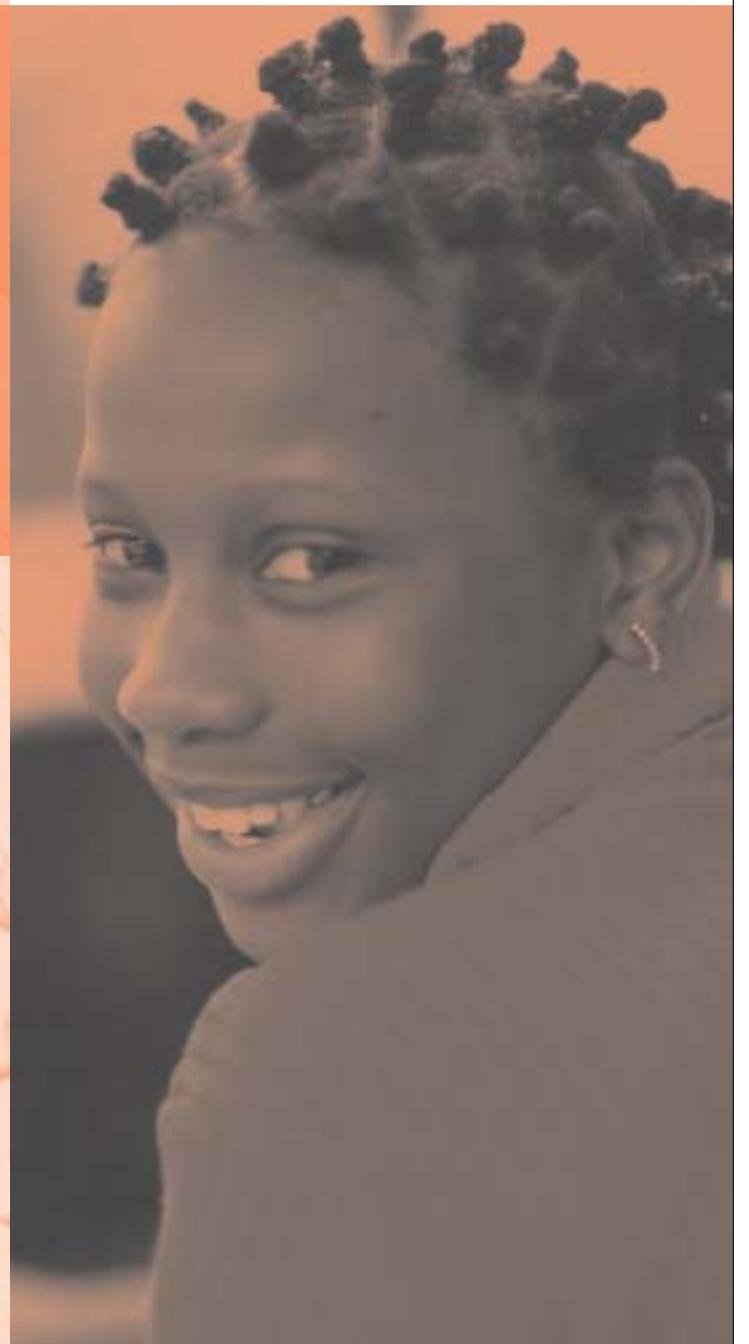
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CD390305

Endothermic or Exothermic? Describing a chemical reaction

By Tammy Delmedico
 Ft. Gibson Middle School

My 8th grade science students are responsible for keeping a journal. It is to include their chapter notes, terminology, and lab information. I have discovered that keeping a journal makes it easier for students to keep all their coursework organized, and I teach them how to use those notes to study for our tests. Hopefully, this will prepare them for high school.

We do a lot of lab activities because students remember the steps in the scientific method and better retain scientific process skills if they practice them on a regular basis.



Tammy Delmedico discusses findings of a science project with one of her 8th graders.

“Endothermic or Exothermic? Describing a Chemical Reaction,” modified from “Science Voyages” by Glencoe.

Day 1, Pre-Lab – Recognize the Problem: Does a reaction give off heat if it is exothermic or endothermic? What evidence can you find to show that a reaction between hydrogen peroxide and liver or a potato is exothermic?

Form a Hypothesis and Test It: Working in groups, students discuss how they are going to test their problem. If most groups are having trouble, we work our way through the procedure (experiment) as a class, using these directions:

1. Decide what procedure to use to test the hypothesis and what measurements to make.
2. Decide how to measure the heat

released to the environment while a reaction is going on.

3. Determine how many measurements are needed to make during a reaction.

4. Remember that several trials will help obtain more accurate data.

Students write their hypothesis and steps in the experiment along with any data tables that they are going to use in their journals. I usually conduct pre-lab about 25-30 minutes at the end of class

on Day 1. That way students come in the next day ready to get to work with minimal instruction.

Day 2: Students conduct their experiment and record results.

If there is time, they analyze data and draw conclusions. I have found that giving them questions help them learn how to process what they've just done. All responses are written in complete sentences.

Analyzing Data

1. Can you infer that a chemical reaction took place? If so, what evidence did you observe? Identify the variables in this experiment.

Drawing Conclusions

1. Do your observations allow you to distinguish between an exothermic reaction and an endothermic reaction? Use your data to explain your answer.

2. Where did the energy in this experiment come from?

3. Suppose you had used smaller pieces of potato and liver. Predict what changes you would have observed.

Day 3 – I discuss with the class their data analysis & conclusions to make sure everyone completed the assignment, and it helps any students who may have had difficulty with the lab.

