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Periodical
Post Paid at
Okla. City, OK

The Education Focus

OEA's all-member publication

Stepping up for the children

3 school districts, OEA sue for proper education funding

By Doug Folks

The Oklahoma Education Association took a bold step on behalf of the children of Oklahoma when it filed a lawsuit in early January against the Oklahoma State Legislature.

Citing costing-out studies similar to an unreleased study commissioned by the Legislature, the OEA is asking the courts to find that common education is underfunded by as much as \$1 billion and, therefore, unable to meet the mandates of the state and of the Oklahoma Constitution.

"This lawsuit is the right thing to do because every child deserves a quality education," said OEA President Roy Bishop.

"This suit is about children learning in classrooms full of mold. It's about children trying to achieve the highest standards while relying on out-of-date textbooks and material. It's about children in overcrowded classrooms unable to get the individual attention they

deserve," he said.

The OEA is joined in the lawsuit by three diverse school districts:

- Foyil Public Schools, a rural district with 700 students in Rogers County;
- Jenks Public Schools, one of the state's larger districts with 9,284 students located in suburban Tulsa; and
- Western Heights Public Schools, a mid-sized district with nearly 3,000 students in far west Oklahoma County.

In November 2004 and April 2005, the Oklahoma Legislature received the results of a costing-out study con-

ducted by Augenblick, Palaich and Associates, an education consulting firm in Denver. But legislative leadership has chosen not to release the results and the study is not subject to the state's Open Records Act.

The OEA suit is based on results of similar costing-out studies completed by the National Education Association on OEA's behalf in November 2003 and June 2005. Also, the OEA commissioned Augenblick to conduct a separate analysis that compares similar studies from

See "Four separate studies" on Page 3

She's one of our own!

Congratulations to Jennifer Berry, 2006 Miss America. Not only is she an Okie, but an elementary education major at the University of Oklahoma and a member of OU's Student OEA Chapter. During interviews in the days just after becoming Oklahoma's fifth Miss America, Jennifer said her dream was always to be a teacher. She said she plans to use the \$30,000 scholarship to finish her master's and get her teaching degree after her reign is complete. (Photo courtesy of the Miss America Pageant.)



Legislative agenda seeks \$241 million for schools

By Doug Folks

Maintaining and improving health insurance coverage for education employees and continuing the march to the regional average for teacher salaries top the Oklahoma Education Association's 2006 legislative agenda.

"Research consistently shows that the most important factor in providing a quality education for children is to provide a quality teacher in every

classroom," said Roy Bishop, OEA president. "Better pay and benefits are vital to keeping our great teachers in Oklahoma and attracting top-notch young people into the profession."

The OEA Legislative Committee has developed a \$241 million agenda for the second session of Oklahoma's 50th Legislature.

In addition to salary and insurance for teachers, the OEA will be pushing for:

- Giving support professionals a 5 percent across-the-board raise,
- Adding 25 percent family coverage for education employees who subscribe to the state health insurance plan,
- Improving retiree benefits by blending insurance rates with active employees and providing a five percent cost-of-living (COLA) raise,

See "2006 Legislative" on Page 5

It's for the children

By Roy Bishop
OEA President

I've always been proud to be an OEA/NEA member. I am continually humbled and inspired by the dedication of teachers all across our country who do everything in their power for children.

That's why we do what we do – the children. To see their eyes light up when a concept hits home. To get a warm thanks from a parent who knows you've helped her child reach his potential. To see a former student years later and have her tell you about how you inspired her to become a teacher, and you never even realized it.

We work long hours grading papers, we rack our brains to find new methods of reaching the "unreachables," and we share tears and laughter in the lounges because we want the best for our students.

OEA members care deeply for their students, and they have the courage to do whatever it takes to provide a quality education for those kids.

Those very reasons are why OEA members have chosen to seek what our children deserve through the Adequacy and Equity lawsuit. Foyil, Jenks, and Western Heights Public Schools have joined us in asking the courts to determine exactly what's needed to properly fund a quality education for every child.

The litigation is not just for students in those three diverse districts. It was filed on behalf of every student in Oklahoma public schools. Don't let the detractors fool you; the A&E lawsuit is not a knee-jerk reaction to get more

money for education. Quite the contrary, it is about years and years of neglect by the Oklahoma Legislature that pushed us into this action.

For decades our schools have been underfunded. Our children fund-raise for basic school supplies. They attend school in overcoats and gloves during the winter because the heaters don't work. They sit in overcrowded classrooms and don't get the individual attention that they need.

We have teachers looking through dumpsters behind retail outlets, looking for classroom materials. And all the while, these same teachers and students are expected to meet the highest of standards.

The A&E Project, which resulted in the filing of this lawsuit, began three years ago at Delegate Assembly. Our members wanted the OEA to find a long-term solution to education funding and to stop begging for short-term bandages.

We have four separate studies that all say our education system is terribly underfunded. Don't let anyone tell you this lawsuit is a tax increase in disguise. It is about priorities. Common education's share of the budget was at 39 percent after HB 1017 passed in 1990. Now, K-12 schools get only 35.7 percent. Had we maintained 39 percent of the budget, the three school districts and the OEA would not have filed this lawsuit.

The A&E suit *does not* call for school consolidation either. Only the *Oklahoma Legislature* can consolidate schools; not the courts and certainly not the OEA.

We are facing some strong opposi-

NBCT Summit to discuss high needs schools

Oklahoma's Nationally Board Certified teachers are invited to attend the NBCT Summit, March 30, at St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Oklahoma City.

Sponsored by the Oklahoma Education Association, the summit will give NBCT's a chance to discuss ideas for improving high needs schools. The ideas generated at the summit will be shared with policymakers in an effort to help guide their efforts to improve education. To register, visit www.okea.org/NBCTSummit.



President Roy Bishop

tion to our A&E Project. Newspapers and politicians alike say we shouldn't be suing the state, that we're taking the process out of the hands of the legislature. But you must have noticed that no elected leader has said education is properly funded.

I know you may feel a little bruised right now, but remember we are the right people to be making this happen. When you step to the podium to call roll, or open that school bus door to let another group of kids on the bus, or when you serve breakfast to kids who can't get breakfast at home, look in those faces and know we are doing the right thing for all the right reasons.

It's for the children, and no one else.

Portion of dues is tax deductible

Members who itemize their tax returns can deduct most of their membership dues when they file income taxes this spring.

All but that portion of membership dues spent on lobbying are deductible. Members should also check with their local Association to determine how much of their local dues are tax deductible.

Tax deductible portion of 2004-05 dues

Full-time Active Certified	\$365.15
Halftime Active Certified	\$187.87
Full-Time Active Support	\$193.37
Halftime Active Support	\$102.23
Substitute	\$127.58
Reserve Certified	\$179.58
Reserve Support	\$92.79

The Education Focus

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Need Help?

Do you need assistance with a personnel matter? Would you like to invite an OEA Teaching and Learning Specialist to provide a training in your building? Does your local Association need organizing help? Call your regional office and ask for help.

Oklahoma City Metro and Southwest Teams

800/522-8091 or 405/528-7785

Northeast and Tulsa Metro Teams

800/331-5143 or 918/665-2282

Northwest Team

800/439-0393 or 580/256-0071

Southeast Team

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Join today!

Membership in the OEA provides security, symbolizes professionalism and brings with it a wealth of benefits.

Visit www.okea.org for more information, and call 800/522-8091 to find out how to join today.

OEA

Oklahoma Education Association



"The stakes are very high. We do believe it is our professional and moral obligation to advocate A&E for all children of Oklahoma, not just for those of Western Heights."

Lisa McLaughlin
Assistant Superintendent
Western Heights Public Schools



"There is a perception across this state that Jenks Public Schools is a wealthy district. That is not true. We are very, very fortunate that we have stakeholders in our district – patrons and business leaders – that assist us in passing bond issues."

Nancy McKay
Chief Financial Officer
Jenks Public Schools



"I have been in education for 30 years. We have always been inadequately funded. Now, our percentage of the budget is almost five percent below what it was just a few years ago."

Mike McGregor
Superintendent
Foyil Public Schools.

Four separate studies say Oklahoma education is grossly underfunded

Continued from Page 1

two other states with the district financial data and demographic information from Oklahoma school districts.

In each study, it was determined that Oklahoma education funding was close to \$1 billion short of what it actually takes to educate every child in Oklahoma.

A fourth study conducted by Augenblick determined that state schools need as much as \$3 billion to repair and renovate current infrastructure as well as build classrooms to house future students.

Nowhere is it clearer than in Foyil that additional funding is needed for capital improvement.

"I've been in education for 30 years and we have always been inadequately funded," said Mike McGregor, Foyil superintendent.

"We are maxed out (on bonded indebtedness) and will be for the next four or five years," he said. "Yet we continue to grow and we've got to come up with a way to add more classrooms so we can add the teachers we need."

Nancy McKay, chief financial officer for Jenks Public Schools, says that the perception of Jenks as a wealthy district is not true. The district receives great support from the community in passing bond issues, but bond issues cannot be used to pay teachers, add teaching positions or enhance classroom programs.

"For too long, schools have been mandated every year at the end of the legislative session to do more with less money," McKay said. "Even though there are only three districts involved in



OEA President Roy Bishop takes questions from the media after the OEA announced it was suing the State of Oklahoma to properly fund public education.

this lawsuit, we feel like we represent all of the kids and teachers in Oklahoma."

Co-counsel Joe White, of The White and Weddle PC Law Firm, says education would not be in its current funding shortfall had the Legislature continued to fund education at the same levels over the last 15 years.

"In 1990, HB 1017 became law and with that law came certain standards," White said. "At that time, we were receiving about 39 percent of the gross budget. Notwithstanding those standards and additional standards for teachers and students to adhere to, education's funding percentage has dropped to 35 percent.

"If we were still at 39 percent or greater, I do not believe we would be here today."

White added that without proper funding, schools can't meet the standards required of them.

"It is impossible, in my opinion, to expect teachers and students to adhere to all of these standards – which by the way we have readily adopted and are following," White

said. "Yet the money continues to be siphoned off by the legislature."

President Bishop believes now is the time to change the funding debate from how much the Legislature should give education to exactly what is needed to provide a quality education.

"That debate has not been going on at the Capitol," Bishop said. "If the legislators will look at the reliable data they paid for, then they will find that education is \$1 billion short of providing the quality education every child in our state deserves."

Crocker earns certification

Congratulations to Ann Crocker, a history teacher at Norman High School, for earning National Board Certification. In last month's issue of the *Education Focus*, Crocker's name was inadvertently left out of the Class of 2006 list.

Oklahoma ranks 9th nationally with 1,289 Nationally Board Certified Teachers. As a percentage of total teachers, the state ranks 5th in national board credentials.

A Q & A on the Adequacy and Equity Lawsuit

Q – Why did the three school districts and the Oklahoma Education Association file the A&E lawsuit?

A – Three years ago, the Delegate Assembly charged the OEA with finding a long-term solution to the education funding question. They wanted to shift the discussion from partisan politics to what it actually costs to adequately fund a child's education. Following a year of research, the Adequacy and Equity project was developed and approved by the 2004 Delegate Assembly.

Q – Who is paying for this lawsuit?

A – The members voted in 2004 a \$5 dues add on for a three-year period to fund the project. We are in the second year of the add on.

Q – In how many other states have there been A&E lawsuits?

A – There have been approximately 30 other states where adequacy lawsuits have been considered in the last 15 years. Our suit is based on similar data used in successful adequacy law-

suits in Wyoming and Kansas as well as suits pending in Nebraska and Colorado.

Q – The OEA is the first NEA affiliate to be one of the original plaintiffs in such a lawsuit. Why the OEA?

A – It's the right thing to do and we're the right people to do it. Who knows better the needs of our schools than teachers and support professionals, the very people on the front line of education? Also, the fact that the OEA is a statewide organization helps in making the case that the state funding levels are inadequate.

Q – Is the OEA suggesting school consolidation as part of this lawsuit?

A – No. Only the legislature can consolidate schools. The courts don't have that power, and the OEA certainly will not offer consolidation as a solution. OEA is opposed to forced consolidation of schools.

Q – Weren't schools consolidated in Arkansas as part of the adequacy lawsuit?

A – No, the courts did not suggest or require school consolidation as part of the judgment. Arkansas' governor at the time pushed the consolidation as a remedy to the judgment, but it failed in the legislature. There has been some school consolidation since then, but it was largely unrelated to the Arkansas school funding litigation.

Q – How much will the lawyers make on this case?

A – OEA General Counsel Richard Wilkinson is co-counsel along with Joe White, of The White and Weddle, PC Law Firm. This suit will just be part of Mr. Wilkinson's responsibilities with the OEA. Mr. White is being paid a flat fee for his services by the OEA. This is not a contingency fee lawsuit and the attorneys *will not* receive a portion of any money allocated to schools if we win this suit.

Q – Why have only three school districts joined the lawsuit?

A – A small number of schools

were invited and others may still join, but Foyil, Jenks and Western Heights all showed an immediate interest in being part of the suit. They represent three very different districts in not only size and location, but also in needs and funding shortfalls.

Q – Did the OEA expect such negativity from the legislative leadership?

A – Yes, we did. This lawsuit takes partisan politics out of the education funding equation and forces the Legislature to meet the constitutional needs of school funding.

Q – Is the Education Coalition behind the OEA in this lawsuit?

A – Members of the coalition support our efforts but have not chosen to join the suit at this time.

Q – Is the OEA advocating a tax increase by filing this lawsuit?

A – No. In fact, we think if education's share of the state budget had not shrunk over the last 15 years we wouldn't have needed to file such a lawsuit. In 1990, common education received 39 percent of the state budget. Today, it receives about 35 percent, representing hundreds of millions in lost revenue.

Q – So if OEA wins this lawsuit, where will money come from for the additional funding?

A – That's for the Legislature to decide. In similar A&E judgments, the courts have initially required legislatures to develop a plan. They could reprioritize the current budget or redirect current revenue streams to education to address the underfunding problems.

Q – What's next for the lawsuit?

A – This litigation will probably take about three years to complete. There will likely be an appeal to the Oklahoma Supreme Court on the legal issues in this case and, depending upon what juncture in the litigation that occurs, a trial on the merits would likely occur in about a year.

RAA grant helps member stock library's shelves

Regina Hartley (center), librarian at Putnam City's Mayfield Middle School, was recently awarded a \$5,000 grant from the National Education Association's Read Across America program. Mayfield is one of 36 schools nationwide to receive the grant, and the only Oklahoma school on the list. Hartley has already purchased over 400 books for the school's library.

Congratulating Hartley are Putnam City ACT president Jan Sands (left) and David Kueter, OEA legislative and political organizing specialist for the Oklahoma City Metro Team. (Photo courtesy of Barbara Anderson, *Bethany Tribune*.)



2006 Legislative Agenda

supporting OEA's core values

Continued from Page 1

- Creating a retirement incentive plan that rewards veteran teachers for postponing their retirement,
- Providing school districts with \$32 million through the state funding formula and \$16 million for increasing transportation costs, and

- Closing the achievement gap through an Ethnic and Economic Diversity Professional Development Institute.

“This legislative agenda supports our core values of teacher quality, high standards for students and education employees alike, and respect for Oklahoma’s education employees,” said Bishop.

“The OEA is committed to creating a world-class education experience for Oklahoma’s students. We think this program will help us reach that goal.”

Teacher Salaries \$69 Million

In this legislative session, lawmakers will be appropriating money for the third year of Gov. Brad Henry’s five-year plan to raise Oklahoma’s teacher salaries to the regional average.

The OEA agenda calls for sending \$57 million to schools for teacher salaries. According to the latest figures, Oklahoma’s average teacher salary is \$37,141, compared to the regional salary of \$40,042.

“The regional average is a moving target, but \$57 million would help us close the gap. It would mean an average raise of about \$1,300 for our teachers,” Bishop said.

In addition, the OEA proposes adding five steps to the state’s minimum salary schedule for a total of 30. Until the late 1990s, the state salary schedule had only 15 steps. Increasing to 30 steps is another way OEA fights for veteran teachers.

“Most teachers work 30 to 35 years before retiring; some even longer,” Bishop said. “We have many veteran teachers who have been off the schedule for several years and haven’t received raises like younger teachers have.”

Support Raises \$23 million

Bishop said that there has never been a consistent plan to improve support professionals’ pay. While paying 100 percent of the individual health insurance premium was a big benefit for support professionals, the last significant pay raise for those employees came in the early 90s.

“It has been at least a decade since the state provided money for support raises,” he said. “The state needs to better provide for these professionals who are so important to the education experience.”

Health Insurance \$29 million

The OEA agenda proposes to maintain fully paid individual health insurance premiums for education employees, and add state payment for 25 percent of the family premium.

State employees have 75 percent family coverage paid by the state in addition to fully paid individual premiums. OEA has long maintained that education employees should receive the same benefit.

Retirement Issues \$72 million

A good amount of buzz has been generated at the Capitol to improve retirement benefits for Rule of 80 employees (education employees who can retire with full benefits when their age combined with their years of service

equals 80). The proposed plan, The Educators Extended Service Incentive Program (EESIP), would encourage Rule of 80 employees to stay in the classroom longer. In return, they would receive dramatically increased retirement benefits.

“EESIP won’t financially harm the Teachers Retirement System, will not compete with the interest of current retirees, and will slow down the brain-drain of veteran teachers leaving for other states to finish their careers,” Bishop said.

For current retirees, the OEA is proposing \$13 million to blend insurance rates with active employees who participate in the Oklahoma State and Education Employee Group plan. Blending the rates would decrease the premiums for thousands of retirees while raising the premiums for active employees.

Active employees would not be harmed since the state pays 100 percent of the individual premium.

In addition, the OEA is asking the legislature to set aside \$35 million to provide retired education employees with a five percent COLA.

District Operational Expenses \$32 million

“The cost of providing a quality education continues to rise and so does the cost of supplies and services to keep schools running,” Bishop said.

Higher utilities have affected schools just as much as the average citizen. Also, textbooks, paper, printing and the cost of competing with other industries to attract and maintain a quality workforce take a bite out of school district budgets. Adding \$32 million to the funding formula would help districts offset a number of costs.

Increase Transportation Costs \$16 million

Anyone who drives an automobile knows the impact the war in Iraq and Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have had on fuel prices. You know how much more it costs to fill up the tank in your car. Now think about how much that translates to fill up a fleet of school buses which require up to 65 gallons of diesel fuel per tank. The OEA is asking the state to help offset the cost of transporting our children to and from school.

Closing the Gap PDI \$500,000

One of the most critical aspects of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is closing the achievement gap between ethnic and economically disadvantaged students and wealthier students. When teachers have a better understanding of how to work with children from poverty or from different cultures, they have a better chance at closing the achievement gap.

The OEA is asking the legislature to fund a professional development institute that would give teachers the understanding and the skills to help children who may be more concerned with where their next meal is coming from than completing today’s math assignment.

“We all know that education has many needs,” Bishop said. “This legislative agenda will help schools and educators meet those needs. I think this plan shows how OEA members want quality teachers, demand high standards, and deserve the respect they’ve earned.”

Association promises to fight anti-education bills

By Doug Folks

While the Oklahoma Education Association will be working diligently for better pay and benefits for state education employees, the Association will also be watching for bills that could be harmful to education.

“Sometimes, the work we do to keep some bills from becoming law is more important than what we do to pass the ‘good’ bills,” said Becky Felts, OEA vice president.

Felts said OEA members can expect to see bills this session aimed at removing the rights of local bargaining units, reducing teacher due process rights, and measures that would greatly reduce state revenue and education funding.

Last spring, the inappropriately titled Teacher Protection Act failed to garner enough votes for passage. The bill, which could resurface this session, would have actually provided veteran teachers with fewer rights than probationary teachers.

“Teachers have worked long and hard to gain the protections of teacher due process,” Felts said. “We cannot allow those rights to be taken away.”

Current provisions in law see that the interests of the teacher and the employer are fairly served. Contrary to critics of education, poor teachers can be removed from the classroom. The due process law protects good teachers from being unfairly dismissed.

65% leaves out counselors, librarians

Oklahoma legislators will consider a controversial school funding proposal that is sweeping the nation. Known as the “65% Solution,” it is an idea that sounds good on paper, and even receives support from some education circles before the facts are fully known. In truth, though, the devil is in the details and schools lose when forced to adopt the law.

The “Solution” requires 65 percent



*The Oklahoma Capitol Rotunda.
 (“LongShots By Stuart Ostler.”)*

of a school district’s budget be devoted to the classroom. That sounds great on the surface, but defining the classroom is the telling issue. Administration is obviously not considered part of the classroom, but neither are counselors, librarians, school nurses, bus drivers or cafeteria workers.

“Can you imagine designing a classroom education for a child without including a counselor and a librarian as parts of the puzzle?” asked Felts. “The 65 percent proposal doesn’t address the size of the pie; it just decides how schools should cut the pie. It removes a great deal of local control and forces a one-size-fits all formula.

“The 65% Solution is too vague, too restrictive, and not appropriate for all schools.”

Most Oklahoma districts currently spend about 57 percent of their bud-

gets on the classroom. If the bill becomes law, many of our schools will have to move at least 8 percent of their budgets to the classroom and the OEA fears support professionals will suffer the consequences. Schools will have to decide how to provide transportation, food services and counseling on a drastically smaller budget.

Protecting current revenue streams

OEA has long maintained that it would oppose the reduction of local and state revenues. Education is already underfunded, so it doesn’t make sense to let loose of current revenue streams, which include reducing property taxes, handing out tax rebates that put little in peoples pockets but represent millions in state funds, and local tax reduction measures.

“It is nearly impossible to raise taxes in Oklahoma. It takes either a three-fourths vote of the legislature or a vote of the people to implement a new tax,” Felts said. “Because of those circumstances, education can’t afford any more tax decreases, especially when we are one of the least taxed states in the country.”

A petition drive to get the so-called Taxpayers Bill of Rights (TABOR) on a ballot had not been certified as of press time. TABOR puts a cap on state revenues and drastically reduces funding for all segments of government. Meanwhile, fees and licenses increase tremendously. In Colorado, the only state to have a TABOR law, parents were forced to spend hundreds of dollars a year for their children to take part in extracurricular activities. In short, TABOR creates a pay-as-you-go system, which means only wealthy students get to participate.

If the TABOR drive is ruled invalid, the issue could surface in this session of the legislature.

Staying connected

During the legislative session, the OEA provides a weekly legislative hotline message and publishes a weekly update on its website. Both messages are normally changed every Friday by 4 p.m.

Visit www.okea.org for the weekly legislative update, call 800/522-8092 for the weekly hotline message, or, call your regional Legislative and Political Organizing Specialist.

Make sure they know how you feel

It is important for teachers and support professionals – the people in the trenches of education – to maintain a continual dialog with their local legislators. Politicians work hardest for the constituency groups that maintain the highest level of communications, so it is vital they hear from you on a regular basis.

The OEA website includes a number of links to local, state and national elected leaders. You can even find out who your state representative or senator is by typing in your nine-digit zip code or your street address and zip code.

From www.okea.org/LPO/index.htm, you can access websites for the Oklahoma House of Representatives or Senate and send email to legislators and the governor as well as other state elected officials.

Phone numbers

State Senate, 405/524-0126

State House of Representatives, 405/521-2711, or 800/522-8502

Email

Visit www.okea.org/LPO/index.htm and click on “Contact your legislators and the governor” for access to the directory.

Important websites

www.okea.org

House – www.lsb.state.ok.us/house/ohorpage.htm

Senate – www.oksenate.gov/

Governor Brad Henry – www.governor.state.ok.us

Catavan prepares for annual reading initiative

By Bruce Treadaway

For several years now, the Oklahoma Education Association's Read Across America has been recognized as one of the outstanding reading initiatives in America. And 2006 promises another banner year for the Cat in the Hat and all his friends in Oklahoma.

OEA's Catavan is once again planning Major Stops throughout the state, and it will be joined by OEA President Roy Bishop and Vice President Becky Felts.

Two teams will once again cover the state during the last week of February, celebrating the birthday of Dr. Seuss and encouraging the act of reading. The culminating event will be at the Oklahoma History Museum in Oklahoma City on March 2, and the top readers from the OEA/Saturn Reading Challenge will be honored at that event.

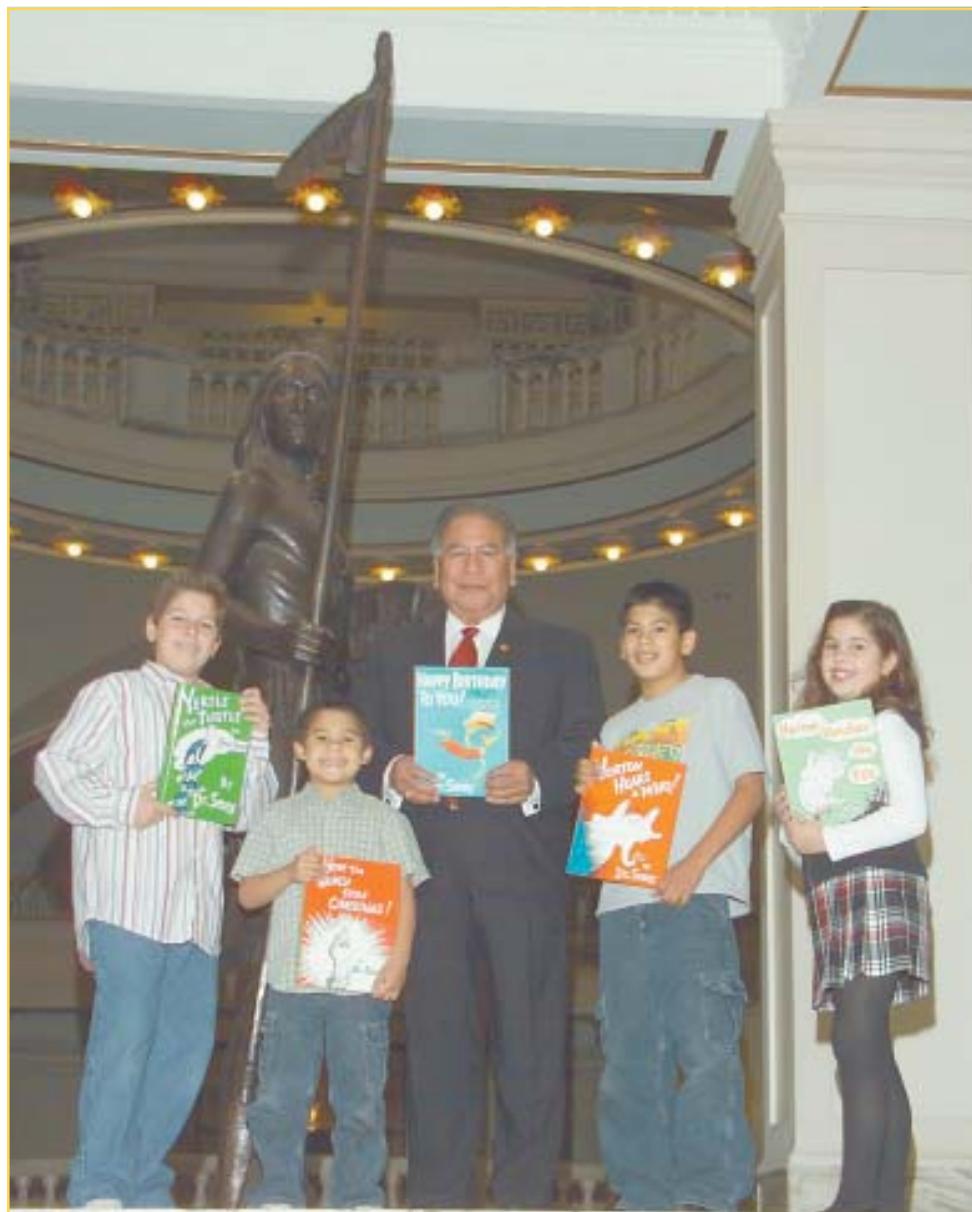
Last year, over 45,000 students were visited by the Catavan and over

2,500 books were given to public school libraries. OEA's partners in RAA are the Christmas Connection, Saturn, Staples, and Dillard's.

State honorary chairs for this year's RAA are the leaders of four of the Five Civilized Tribes in Oklahoma. Lending their support are Bill Anoatubby, governor of the Chickasaw Nation; Kelly Haney, Chief of the Seminole Nation; Gregory E. Pyle, chief of the Choctaw Nation; and Chad Smith, principal chief of the Cherokee Nation.

RAA posters (see pages 8-9) will be distributed Native American facilities across Oklahoma and to all of Oklahoma's public libraries.

In conjunction with RAA, the OEA/Saturn of OKC-Edmond Reading Challenge is completing its third straight year in the Midwest City-Del City, Moore, and Putnam City school districts. With the assistance and direction of the leaders of the three ACTs,



Kelly Haney, chief of the Seminole Nation and one OEA's cochairs for Read Across America, join Native American students in front of a replica of *The Guardian*, which sits atop the State Capitol dome. Haney designed the sculpture, which includes facial features of each of his own children.

the Reading Challenge has seen unequalled success over the last two years, with over 250,000 books having been read by the three district's elementary students.

Cash prizes will go to three of the top readers in each district. Three OEA teacher members in each participating district will also receive prizes, and the three schools of the winning students in each district will receive gift cards for books.

Another event associated with RAA is a blood drive sponsored by the OEA, the Oklahoma Blood Institute, and Saturn of OKC-Edmond. This blood drive has led the nation in blood donations for the last four years, and early results show that over 9,000 donations have already been made this year.

New Saturns will be presented to lucky winners in a drawing in mid-February. OEA members who donate blood during the drive will have their names put into the drawing extra times. An addition to this year's drawing will be the presentation of one new Saturn to a lucky recipient of an organ transplant. One Saturn will be presented to a student from either the University of Oklahoma or Oklahoma State University, depending on which campus donates the most blood during the drive.

With Seuss, the OEA, the Cat in the Hat, the blood drive, and the Reading Challenge there is a veritable smorgasbord of activities for OEA members to be involved in during this year's Read Across America.



President Roy Bishop (second from left) joins three of Oklahoma's 2006 Read Across America honorary cochairs in front of a replica of *The Guardian* at the State Capitol, including Chickasaw Gov. Bill Anoatubby (far left), Cherokee Principal Chief Chad Smith (second from right) and Choctaw Chief Gregory E. Pyle.

Need ideas for your school's Read Across America Program? Visit www.nea.org/raa or call your OEA regional communications specialist.

RAAF

Poster

NEA training is helping Putnam City teachers close the achievement gap

By *Adrienne Covington*

Closing the achievement gap is an urgent goal of The Oklahoma Education Association (OEA) and National Education Association (NEA).

In an effort to achieve this goal, the two organizations have given the faculty of Putnam City's Tulakes Elementary access to a new professional development workshop entitled "A Framework for Understanding Poverty" through the North Carolina Teacher Academy.

The faculty serves a diverse student population as well as contends with a high mobility rate, with more than 50 percent of its student body transferring each year.

The workshop, created by education expert Dr. Ruby Payne, will help Tulakes Elementary teachers and leaders to develop strategies to increase

achievement among students from impoverished backgrounds.

North Carolina schools experienced great success after developing a better understanding of the culture of poverty through this workshop. Carolyn Crowder, NEA executive committee member and a teacher at Mustang Valley Elementary, helped link Tulakes with the Academy. The workshop provides teachers with the resources necessary to address the daily challenges associated with preparing disadvantaged students with success in and out of the classroom.

Teachers and other school leaders at Tulakes Elementary will attend several training sessions, which began January 4, to offer insight into the culture of poverty by identifying obstacles that prevent students from succeeding in the classroom. Educators will learn



North Carolina's xxx xxxx (right) makes a point during "A Framework for Understanding Poverty" workshop at Tulakes Elementary. The training session was provided through a cooperative effort between the NEA and the OEA.

what they can do to eliminate barriers to student success and how to create a school climate where students learn to utilize their resources and overcome economic limitations.

Tulakes has continued to show academic success, despite the large amount of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Last year alone

Tulakes Elementary students made significant academic gains to qualify the school for Adequate Yearly Progress under the No Child Left Behind law.

Success at Tulakes shows that if students are given the opportunity and the knowledge to succeed and the teachers are given the necessary resources, any obstacle can be overcome.

Stop the lies from spreading

In mid-January, the *Wall Street Journal* published a vicious attack on the National Education Association. *The Daily Oklahoman* used pieces of the article in an anti-OEA article as did the executive director of a small teachers' organization in columns she distributed throughout the state.

Information for the WSJ article was taken from a financial report that all unions must now submit to the U.S. Department of Labor. It is a very comprehensive report – about 1,400 pages of detailed explanation for every expenditure.

The *Journal* accused the NEA of donating more than \$65 million last year to "dozens of advocacy groups" and spending too much on executive salaries. However, the *Journal*, as

well as the *Oklahoman* and others, did not do their homework. Sadly, the facts were right under their noses, available for anyone to see on the Department of Labor's web site.

The \$65 million figure the attackers used was actually the total amount the NEA spent on all of its grants, each of which supports public education programs. Of that amount, \$64.2 million – about 98 percent – went straight to state and local affiliates for education programs and member services. In fact, the OEA was the recipient of more than \$1.2 million of that money for cooperative projects we were developing with the NEA.

Of the remaining 2 percent of NEA's total project grants, it is correct that money went to outside groups to work on educational issues.

Some of the grants included safe schools and bullying prevention programs in the classroom, as well as minority community outreach and parental involvement. Those were \$5,000 grants each, not \$65 million.

Those programs are footnoted and spelled out, in plain English, in the disclosure document submitted to the Department of Labor. The information was right in front of the editorial writers, who apparently chose to mislead readers. So, after hearing of the *Journal's* mistakes, was there ever an apology by the *Oklahoman* or the other so-called education group's leader? No, they continued to use the false information in an attempt to discredit the good work of OEA/NEA members.

In addition, the *Journal* and others

grossly exaggerated NEA officers' salaries. Their accounts included salaries and reimbursement for the costs of relocating to Washington to serve as officers of the NEA.

Worse yet, the articles counted funds used for travel as officers met with members all across the country. Those are not dollars they receive as income. Quite the contrary, those are funds they pay to conduct Association business and are later reimbursed to them. It was inaccurate and misleading to portray those funds as income.

It just goes to show you what lengths NEA detractors will go to distort the truth. If you hear people in your building quoting from these articles, don't let them continue bashing your Association. Share the truth with them. If you aren't sure how to answer the questions, call OEA Headquarters at 800/522-8091 or call your regional OEA office.

The wages of teaching

By Anna Quindlen
Newsweek

A couple of years ago I spent the day at an elementary school in New Jersey. It was a nice average school, a square and solid building with that patented classroom aroma of disinfectant and chalk, chock-full of reasonably well-behaved kids from middle-class families. I handled three classes, and by the time I staggered out the door I wanted to lie down for the rest of the day.

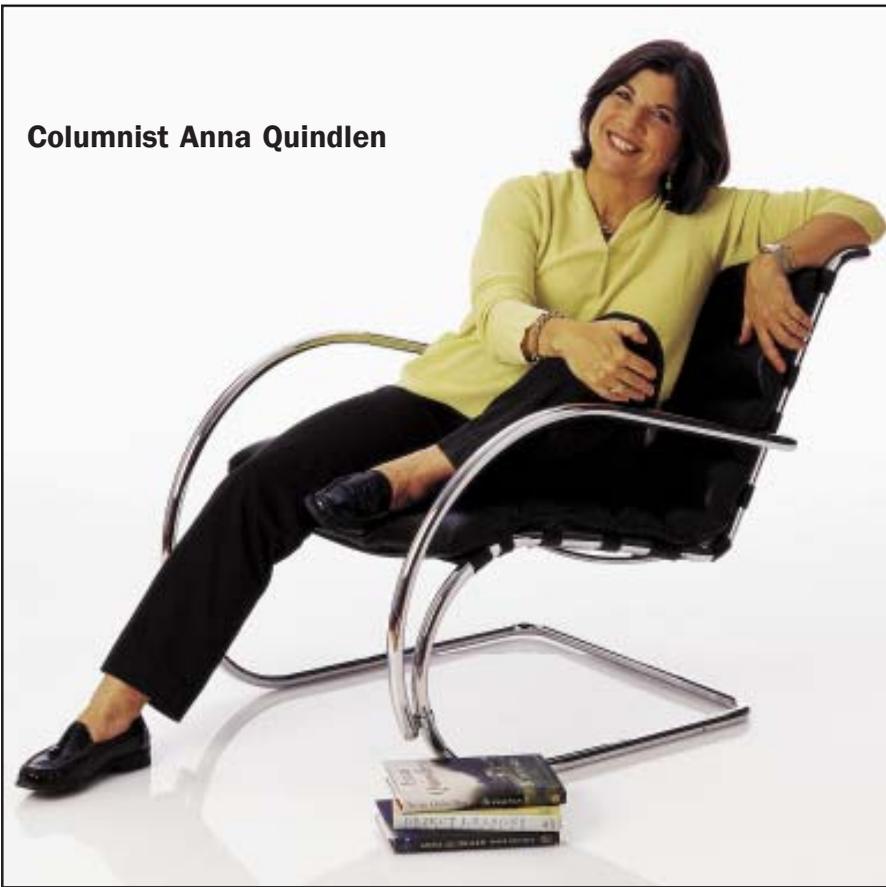
Teaching's the toughest job there is. In his new memoir, "Teacher Man," Frank McCourt recalls telling his students, "Teaching is harder than working on docks and warehouses." Not to mention writing a column. I can stare off into the middle distance with my chin in my hand any time. But you go mentally south for five minutes in front of a class of fifth graders, and you are sunk.

The average new teacher today makes just under \$30,000 a year, which may not look too bad for a twentysomething with no mortgage and no kids. But soon enough the newbies realize that they can make more money and not work anywhere near as hard elsewhere. After a lifetime of hearing the old legends about cushy hours and summer vacations, they figure out that early mornings are for students who need extra help, evenings are for test corrections and lesson plans, and weekends and summers are for second and even third jobs to try to pay the bills.

According to the Department of Education, one in every five teachers leaves after the first year, and almost twice as many leave within three. If any business had that rate of turnover, someone would do something smart and strategic to fix it. This isn't any business. It's the most important business around, the gardeners of the landscape of the human race.

Unfortunately, the current fashion-

Columnist Anna Quindlen



No school administrator should ever receive a percentage raise greater than the raise teachers get. Neither should state legislators.

able fixes for education take a page directly from the business playbook, and it's a terrible fit. Instead of simply acknowledging that starting salaries are woefully low and committing to increasing them and finding the money for reasonable recurring raises, pols have wasted decades obsessing about something called merit pay. It's a concept that works fine if you're making widgets, but kids aren't widgets, and good teaching isn't an assembly line.

McCourt's book is instructive. Early in his 30-year career, he's teaching at a vocational high school and realizes that his English students are never more inspired than when forging excuse notes from their parents. So McCourt assigns the class to write excuse notes, the results ranging "from a family epidemic of diarrhea to a 16-wheeler truck

crashing into the house." Pens fly with extravagant lies. You can almost feel the imaginations kick in.

The point about tying teaching salaries to widget standards is that it's hard to figure out a useful way to measure the merit of what a really good teacher does. You can imagine the principal who would see McCourt's gambit as the work of a gifted teacher, and just as easily imagine the one who would find it unseemly. Tying raises to pass rates is a flagrant invitation to inflate student achievement. Tying them to standardized tests makes rote regurgitation the centerpiece of schools. Both are blind to the merit of teachers who shoulder the challenging work of educating those less able, more troubled, from homes where there are no pencils, no books, even no parents. A teacher whose Advanced Placement class sends everyone on to top-tier col-

leges; a teacher whose remedial-reading class finally gets through to some, but not all, of a student group that is failing. There is merit in both.

The National Education Association has been pushing for a minimum starting salary of \$40,000 for all teachers. Why not? If these people can teach 6-year-olds to add and get adolescents to attend to algebra, surely we can do the math to get them a decent wage. Since the corporate world is the greatest, and richest, beneficiary of well-educated workers, maybe a national brain trust might be set up that would turn a tax on corporate profits into an endowment to raise teacher salaries.

Maybe states and communities could also pass regulations with this simple proviso: no school administrator should ever receive a percentage raise greater than the raise teachers get. Neither should state legislators.

In recent years teacher salaries have grown, if they've grown at all, at a far slower rate than those of other professionals, often lagging behind inflation. Yet teachers should have the most powerful group of advocates in the nation: not their union, but we the people, their former students. I am a writer because of the encouragement of teachers.

Surely most Americans must feel the same, that there were women and men who helped them levitate just a little above the commonplace expectations they had for themselves.

At the end of his book McCourt, who is preparing to leave teaching with the idea of living off his pension and maybe writing – and whose maiden effort, "Angela's Ashes," will win the Pulitzer – is giving advice to a young substitute. "You'll never know what you've done to, or for, the hundreds coming and going," he says. Yeah, but the hundreds know, the hundreds who are millions who are us. They made us. We owe them.

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Dover case sets strong precedent to keep ID out of science classes

By *Brandon Webb*
Associate General Counsel

In 1925, Tennessee biology teacher John T. Scopes was fined \$100 for violating a state law that prohibited teaching evolution. The Tennessee Supreme Court reversed his conviction on a technicality, and the law was repealed in 1967.

Eighty years after the Scopes Monkey Trial, the fight continues to evolve. In October 2004, the Dover Pennsylvania School Board instituted a policy mandating the teaching of intelligent design in ninth grade biology classes. Intelligent design, or ID, holds that the universe is so complex that it must have been created by a higher power.

Eight families from Dover sued their school board after it required biology teachers to inform students about intelligent design and state that Charles Darwin's theory is "not a fact," has inexplicable "gaps," and to refer students to the textbook "Of Pandas and People" for more information.

In December 2005, following a six-week trial, U.S. District Judge John E. Jones III ruled that "it is unconstitutional to teach ID as an alternative to evolution in a public school science classroom."

In a carefully reasoned and highly detailed opinion, Judge Jones concluded that intelligent design was not science, and therefore, science class was not the proper forum for this discussion. Even the supporters of ID ad-

mit that the very definition of science would have to be profoundly altered in order to include the concept of intelligent design

Judge Jones wrote, "To be sure, Darwin's theory of evolution is im-

From Your Counsel

perfect. However, the fact that a scientific theory cannot yet render an explanation on every point should not be used as a pretext to thrust an untestable alternative hypothesis grounded in religion into the science classroom or to misrepresent well-established scientific propositions."

When questioned as to how to determine who the designer is, supporters of ID said that science on its own cannot answer that question, but must leave it up to religion and philosophy. Moreover, witnesses in favor of ID remarked that even though proponents of ID occasionally suggest that the designer could be a space alien or time-traveling cell biologist, no serious alternative to God as the designer has been proposed.

The contention that ID was being used to improve science education and encourage critical thinking was a sham in the eyes of the court. Nevertheless, Judge Jones expressed, "We do not question that many of the leading advocates of ID have bona fide and deeply held beliefs which drive their scholarly endeavors. Nor do we controvert that ID should continue to be

studied, debated, and discussed. As stated, our conclusion today is that it is unconstitutional to teach ID as an alternative to evolution in a public school science classroom."

Much of Judge Jones' decision was predicated on the 1987 Supreme Court case *Edwards v. Aguillard*, which maintains that biblical creationism cannot be taught as science in a public school. The decision did leave open the possibility for teaching a variety of scientific theories regarding human origins as long as they are implemented with a clear, secular intent. Judge Jones expressed his concern with the ID supporters who claimed that the book "Of Pandas and People" was a textbook about intelligent design and not a textbook about creationism. Judge Jones chronicled the history of ID and found that after the Supreme Court's ruling in 1987, the authors of "Of Pandas and People" removed the words "creationism" from the textbook and inserted the words "intelligent design" in its place.

Judge Jones spoke about board members who had lied during depositions to hide how they had acquired money to purchase the "Pandas" textbooks for the school. He also found that the board members had very little knowledge about intelligent design and was extremely troubled that supporters of ID repeatedly lied under oath to cover their motives while professing religious beliefs.

Upset that individuals would bare false witness, Judge Jones wrote, "It is ironic that several of these individuals, who so staunchly and proudly touted their religious convictions in public, would time and again lie to cover their tracks and disguise the real purpose behind the ID policy."

Far from a liberal activist judge, Jones is a lifelong Republican who was ap-



Brandon Webb

pointed to the federal bench by the current President Bush. Judge Jones avowed that the real activists in this case were ill-informed school board members, aided by a public interest law firm, the Thomas More Law Center.

Even Rick Santorum, a Republican Senator from Pennsylvania, told newspapers that he was troubled by the testimony of ID supporters. The day after Dover's policy on ID was ruled unconstitutional, Santorum, who had earlier praised the school for its ID policy, stated he would withdraw his affiliation with the More Law Center.

While the decision is only legally binding on school districts in the middle district of Pennsylvania, the 139-page ruling may serve as a deterrent to other school boards considering the teaching of ID as an alternative scientific theory.

It is unlikely that the decision will be appealed. In November, voters came down hard on the school board members who backed ID and removed eight of the board members from office. The current school board members have stated that they would respect the decision of the Court and not seek an appeal.

In concluding the opinion, Judge Jones stated, "The breathtaking insanity of the board's decision is evident when considered against the factual backdrop which has now been fully revealed through this trial. The students, parents, and teachers of the Dover Area School District deserved better than to be dragged into this legal maelstrom, with its resulting utter waste of monetary and personal resources."

Still time to register for Advocacy Conference

Registration is still being accepted for the 2006 Advocacy Conference, which is set for February 24-25 at the Waterford Hotel in Oklahoma City.

Cost is \$25 per person for certified employees and \$10 per person for support professionals, with the third person from the same local attending free.

The conference features an opening session at 7:30 p.m. on Friday the 24th. After a general session at 9 a.m. on the 25th, participants will have three sessions of breakouts covering bargaining and member rights.

For more information, visit www.okea.org/AdvocacyConference.

Outreach will benefit Westwood Elementary

By Adrienne Covington

Westwood Elementary will receive a makeover in March, courtesy of the Student Oklahoma Education Association (SOEA).

The refurbishing project known as "Outreach to Teach" kicks off the annual two-day SOEA Convention,

which is set for March 3-4 in Oklahoma City. On Friday the 3rd, SOEA members will make improvements inside and out of the Oklahoma City elementary school. On the second day, Saturday the 4th, SOEA members will receive quality professional development during a traditional day

of workshops.

The work day has been designed by SOEA President Katy Cook after she attended an "Outreach to Teach" event sponsored by the National Education Association Student Program in Washington, D.C. in 2004. This year's Outreach follows in the footsteps of

last year's work day, which made improvements to Willow Brook Elementary and received national honors.

Student members will make improvements to Westwood's landscaping and playground as well as various projects inside the building. Not only do the improvements enhance the school's outside beauty, but last year's project proved that the work of the SOEA also improves student and teacher morale.

This year, SOEA has received two grants to help fund Westwood's much-needed makeover: a \$1,000 NEA CLASS (Community Learning through America's Schools) grant and a \$1,000 grant from Women of the South (Oklahoma City). Cook and other SOEA officers are working with officials at Westwood to develop a list of repairs that need attention during the work day.

On March 3, First Lady Kim Henry is scheduled to speak with SOEA members while the second day of the convention will consist of workshops and presentations from nationally recognized speakers. The workshops include "Teaching Diverse Students/International Education," "Ag in the Classroom," "Political Action for Student Members," along with math, science, history and reading content sessions.

Speakers on Saturday will include Mandy Plucker, chairperson for NEA's student program; Lindsey Hewitt, student member of the NEA board of directors; and Jill Rumbaugh, an Oklahoma Milken Award winner and middle school math teacher in Edmond.

Convention registration and meals are provided free of charge to SOEA members, who must cover the cost of lodging. Students who are interested in attending the conference should contact their local campus chapter advisors or student officers, or visit www.okea.org for registration information.

Are there mistakes on your credit report?

By Liz Picone
NEA Member Benefits

Consumer groups state that problems with credit reports are not uncommon. A survey last year by the U.S. Public Interest Research Group found that 79 percent of credit reports contained errors, and 25 percent contained mistakes serious enough to prevent the individual from obtaining credit.

According to the Federal Trade Commission, under the Federal Credit Reporting Act, credit-reporting agencies and companies that provide information about you are responsible for correcting inaccurate or incomplete information. The following are some tips on disputing mistakes on

your credit report:

- **Put it in writing.** The credit-reporting agencies allow you to dispute errors online, by phone or through the mail. If the error is serious, write a letter and send it via certified mail. Include copies – not originals – of supporting documents, such as police reports and handwriting samples.

- **The letter should include your name and address, and identify each item in the report you dispute.** Explain why you dispute the information and request that it be removed or corrected. You might want to include a copy of your report with the items in question circled.

- **Send a letter to the lender or**

business that provided the inaccurate information to the credit bureaus. Include copies of documents that support your position.

- **Keep accurate records.** Create a folder for each of the credit-reporting agencies. Keep a log of all communications. This can be time-consuming but will help ensure the credit bureaus meet their deadlines for investigating complaints.

- **If you are unable to resolve the dispute, you can ask that a statement be included in your file and future credit reports.** However, if the error has reduced your credit score, the dispute letter won't change it.

- **Beware of "credit repair" businesses that claim they can remove negative information from your report that is true.**

Only time can erase such blips from your report. A credit bureau is permitted to leave negative information, such as late payments, on your report for seven years. A bankruptcy filing will remain on your report for 10 years ... sometimes longer.

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Members to elect 11 new board members

Delegate at-large positions also open for Delegate Assembly, RA

Filing opens February 1 for 11 seats on the Oklahoma Education Association board of directors along with a handful of positions for at-large delegates to the Delegate Assembly and the NEA's Representative Assembly.

The filing period for the election closes February 24. Ballots for the 2006 elections will be distributed no later than the third week of March. Newly elected board members will take office on July 15.

One director is elected for every 1,000 OEA members to allow an increased opportunity to participate in Association decision making by providing representation closer to the grassroots level.

Filing forms are available on the OEA website at www.oeka.org/elections and at OEA headquarters and OEA regional offices. For more information, call Janice Dealy at 800/522-8091 or at 528-7785 locally in central Oklahoma.

Following is a listing of all open positions:

Statewide Openings

OEA Board of Directors:

Administrator-at-Large

OEA Delegate Assembly Positions for 2006:

OEA/NEA Retired Delegate(s)-at-Large to OEA/DA

OEA Administrator Delegate(s)-at-Large to OEA/DA

OEA Ethnic Minority Delegate(s)-at-Large to OEA/DA

NEA Representative Assembly Positions for 2006:

NEA Retired Delegate(s)-at-Large to the NEA/RA

2006 Regional Positions OEA Board of Directors

Northeast A, two-year unexpired term, expires 2008, NEA Delegate 2007 (Craig, Delaware, Nowata and Ottawa Counties)

Northeast C, three-year term expires 2009, NEA Delegate 2007, 2008 (Adair, Cherokee and Mayes Counties)

Tulsa Metro A, three-year term expires 2009, NEA Delegate 2007, 2008 (Tulsa CTA)

Tulsa Metro D, three-year unexpired term, expires 2008, NEA Delegate 2007 (Oral Roberts University, Tulsa Community College, Tulsa Technology Center,

Union CTA, Union ESP, University of Tulsa, OSU-Tulsa/Langston)

Tulsa Metro E, three-year term expires 2009, NEA Delegate 2007, 2008 (Berryhill, Bixby, Broken Arrow, Glenpool, Jenks CTA, Jenks ESP, Leonard, and Liberty Mounds)

Southwest A, three-year term expires 2009, NEA Delegate 2007, 2008 (Cyril EA, Beckham, Caddo, Cotton, Greer, Harmon, Jackson, Kiowa, Tillman and Washita Counties, Comanche County except Lawton)

Southwest D, three-year term expires 2009, NEA Delegate 2007, 2008 (Bryan, Carter, Garvin, Johnston, Love, Marshall and Murray Counties)

Northwest A, three-year term expires 2009, NEA Delegate 2007, 2008 (Alfalfa, Beaver, Cimarron, Custer, Dewey, Ellis, Garfield, Grant, Harper,

Major, Roger Mills, Texas, Woods and Woodward Counties)

OKC Metro A, three-year term expires 2009, NEA Delegate 2007, 2008 (Crooked Oak, Harrah, Moore, Oklahoma City Community College)

OKC Metro C, three-year term expires 2009, NEA Delegate 2007, 2008 (Edmond, OEA-OKC, University of Central Oklahoma)

Category I Delegate-at-Large 2006 NEA Representative Assembly

Tulsa Metro Region

Southwest Region

OKC Metro Region

Northeast Region

Northwest Region

(No Category I election in the Southeast Region)

Scholarship exam deadline approaches for state students

The deadline for the Oklahoma Heritage Association's annual Oklahoma Heritage Scholarship Competition is Friday, March 17.

Students in grades nine through 12 are eligible to take the examination based on Oklahoma history and geography, on Saturday, April 1, at 12 test sites statewide. Multiple scholarships are available for students in every county of the state.

Students will be competing for cash scholarships and tuition waivers totaling \$400,000. General information and

registration forms have been mailed to school districts statewide. Students must be preregistered to participate.

Students should contact their guidance counselor, history teacher or principal to obtain the scholarship information.

Registration forms also may be requested by telephone in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area at 235-4458, toll free at 888/501-2059, or by downloading the forms from the Heritage Association's website at www.oklahomaheritage.com.

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Barbara Crisp's song, "Building a Future" was adopted as the theme for the Learning Disabilities Association of Oklahoma fall conference.

Student's composition helps her build a future

By Marty Bull

Music has always played an important part in Student OEA member Barbara Crisp's life. But the self-taught keyboardist was in for a surprise when her love of music led her to the love of teaching.

In her role as a software consultant in the Lawton area, Crisp was providing services to a private Christian school. When the principal mentioned they needed a music teacher to begin the school year, Crisp volunteered to substitute until a permanent replacement could be found.

"I had taught music through our church for years," said Crisp, a student at Northeastern State University's Broken Arrow (NSU-BA) campus. "From the first day, I knew I had found my calling."

Apparently, the school administration agreed and Crisp was asked to teach on a permanent basis.

But when her husband's retirement from the military brought them back to the Claremore area, she thought her teaching days were over.

"I didn't need teaching credentials in the private school and we had always been a two-income family," said the mother of two. "So I started looking for a

job back in the software industry."

Luckily, her husband Tim had a different idea.

"Tim told me he had never seen me so happy in a job and that I should go for it," said Crisp. "With his support I enrolled at NSU-BA and, as they say, the rest is history."

Even though she has chosen elementary education as a major, music still plays an important role in Crisp's life. In fact, her use of music in a lesson plan designed to encourage the inclusion of special needs students caught the "ear" of Jenks' Linda Modenbach, then-president of the Learning Disabilities Association of Oklahoma (LDAO). Modenbach was so impressed with Crisp's work she asked the LDAO board to make her original song, "Building a Future," the theme of their annual fall conference.

Crisp not only recorded CD's for distribution, she arranged for a group of Claremore students, including her own children Junior and Ashley, to perform her song at the conference.

"It was a great honor to work with an organization that does so much for kids with special needs," said Crisp. "I will remember it as one of the highlights of my teaching career."