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Periodical
Post Paid at
Okla. City, OK

The Education Focus
OEA's all-member publication

Governor's budget gives education \$256 million



Governor Brad Henry gives a thumbs up to his family during his State of the State address in early February. Henry announced a \$256 million budget plan for education during the address.

Teacher raises, remediation major portions of package

By Adrienne Covington

The Oklahoma Education Association is looking forward to seeing Gov. Brad Henry's education budget become a reality. In his fourth State of the State address, the governor outlined more than \$256 million for public school classrooms, teachers pay raises, college scholarships, state universities and the Oklahoma career technology system.

OEA President Roy Bishop said, "I believe the governor is moving in the right direction with his education budget. We need to work to ensure that our children receive the funds they need and deserve to receive a quality public education in Oklahoma."

Henry's program would provide K-12 public schools a \$156 million budget increase for the next fiscal year. The total includes a major investment in classroom resources and funding for the second-year of the governor's four-year program to raise teacher pay to the regional average. It also includes funds to help finance remediation programs that are part of Henry's Achieving Classroom Excellence (ACE) initiative that was approved last year.

"It makes great sense to invest in our teachers and students, particularly when our growing economy is producing new revenues for the state," Henry said.

See "Senate Democrats" on Page 3

Payroll glitch overpays \$1 million in FICA taxes

By Doug Folks

A simple check-reading presentation in Lawton last fall uncovered a startling accounting error that resulted in the discovery of more than \$1 million in overpayment of taxes.

The overpayment was discovered when David Williams, Oklahoma Education Association (OEA) advocacy specialist, found an accounting error that caused Lawton Public Schools to withhold too much money for FICA from teachers' checks since September 1998. FICA, the Federal Insurance Contributions Act, is withholding from an employee's paycheck for Social Security and Medicare.

See "Lawton district asking" on Page 8

Tax fever hits legislature

By Roy Bishop
OEA President

At the start of the legislative session last year, I wrote a column that talked about the record number of bills filed and the record number of bills that wanted to cut taxes. To borrow a quote from Yogi Berra, "It's deja vu all over again."

Over 3,000 bills have been filed this year. And with 2006 being an election year, many of our politicians are running on cutting taxes. After all, it's great public relations for them. Unfortunately, what we really need is a different type of PR, one that can be found in statesmen and not politicians. This type of PR is one that would make a difference for all of Oklahoma and would truly move our state forward. I'm talking about a commitment to priorities and responsibilities.

It takes a statesman to stand up for the state of Oklahoma as our state continues to try to meet the needs of its citizens. On the other side of the coin, trying to placate a select group of people by saying that you favor lower taxes is nothing but being a politician out to get votes in the next election.

A politician supporting lower taxes must be asked the tough questions: At what cost to our state is this a good idea? What happens to our children, our elderly and our veterans? How are their needs met?

Politicians have failed to consider the full picture when they say decreasing our state income tax will increase our economy like it does in other states. Oklahoma's tax structure is not similar to other states, in fact, it's not even close. Those other states have higher property taxes and taxes on goods and services that Oklahoma doesn't have. Unless Oklahoma is willing to adopt a similar tax structure as those other states, comparing their income tax to ours and its affect on the economy is

comparing apples to oranges.

Research shows that a 2 percent increase in education funding in Oklahoma creates a *net increase of 1,300 jobs* while a 2 percent decrease in taxes results in a *net loss of 1,300 jobs*. It's easy for a politician to stand up and say something that may sound good to voters, but it takes a statesman to stand up for all of Oklahoma and talk about what's right.

A politician will tell you that government grew last year in Oklahoma, which is true, but we're still behind what we were just a few years ago. A statesman will remind you that Oklahoma suffered massive cuts in all of its programs over a number of years. Those cuts devastated programs and the state has been unable to replace the funding, let alone keep up with the rising costs of those services.

Our energy resource revenues are at an all time high. And as we look at the issues that have gotten us to these record revenues, we must remember that there is no guarantee they will stay that high. As a social studies teacher, I know that those who don't learn from the lessons of history are destined to repeat its mistakes.

A number of years ago, the price of energy resources was at an all time high, too. There seemed to be an endless stream of revenue. Politicians



President Roy Bishop

talked about and enacted tax cuts because our success was going to last forever. That didn't happen.

If we don't learn from history, we will find ourselves in a situation that we will be forced to acknowledge – Oklahoma's ability to provide the services our people depend on won't be able to continue. We will need a massive tax increase to meet the needs of Oklahoma; all because we allowed politicians to talk us into tax cuts.

At that time, true statesmen will have to stand up for Oklahoma and tell the truth about the condition of our state. Let's hope and pray that doesn't happen because the true statesmen will provide us with positive PR, by talking about priorities and responsibilities and not just something that sounds good as they run for office in 2006.

\$75 million added to state budget

Just before press time, the State Board of Equalization certified an additional \$75 million for fiscal year 2006-07 appropriations. The figure would raise available funds to \$389 million for the legislature to appropriate this session.

Gov. Brad Henry wants the entire \$75 million to go toward education, specifically teacher salaries and higher education. The additional \$75 million would accelerate Henry's plan to take teacher salaries to the regional average, funding all of year two and part of year three of his four-year plan.

In other news from late February, the Senate Democrats's plan for a \$3,000 across-the-board raise for teachers passed out of the Senate Education Committee. Passage allowed the proposal, Senate Bill 1644, to move to the Senate floor for debate and a vote. It would then have to pass through the House before landing on the governor's desk for his signature.

The Education Focus

Volume 23, No. 5
A production of OEA's
Communications Center

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The Education Focus (ISSN 1542-1678) is published nine times annually with issues in September/October, November, December/January, February, March, April, May, June/July and August for \$5 by the Oklahoma Education Association, 323 E. Madison, Oklahoma City, OK 73105. Periodicals postage paid at Oklahoma City, OK, and additional mailing offices.

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

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

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OEA

Oklahoma Education Association

Senate Democrats want \$3,000 raises for teachers

Continued from page 1

“We must continue to invest in the classroom and keep the commitment we made to raise Oklahoma teachers’ salaries to the regional average. Oklahoma produces some of the best and the brightest teachers in the country. It’s time that we paid them a competitive salary,” he added.

Henry’s higher education agenda includes an \$86 million increase for the state’s colleges and universities. Oklahoma’s career technology system would also receive a \$14 million boost.

“Given its overall importance to our state, public education must be our top budget priority. Oklahoma has many other needs that should and will be met this year, but our students and teachers must come first,” concluded Henry.

Just weeks before the beginning of session, Senate Democrats announced their commitment to making our state better through increased education funding. Senate President Pro Tempore Mike Morgan, Education Committee chair Susan Paddack, Appropriations Subcommittee on Education Chair Stratton Taylor and many of their colleagues held a press conference to outline a plan to increase common education funding by almost \$200 million for Fiscal Year 2007.



Grassroots lobbyists

OEA President Roy Bishop visits with members during a Grassroots Lobbying Training in Norman. From left are Bishop, Gayla Mears, vice president for the Professional Educators of Norman (PEN); Bryan Young, PEN president; and Mary Lee and Stephanie Angier from Irving Middle School. OEA’s Legislative and Political Organizing Specialists conducted Grassroots Training throughout the state in January and February. The trainings were designed to give members the basics on lobbying their state-elected officials and to assign one or two members to serve as primary lobbying contact for every state representative and senator.

The proposal, now included in Senate Bill 1644, includes a \$3,000 across-the-board salary increase for all of Oklahoma’s full-time teachers; doubling of the annual stipend from \$5,000 to \$10,000 for nationally board certified teachers over a two-year period; greatly increased funding for the state’s mentor teacher, parents-as-

teachers and Sooner Start programs; and a \$15 million public-private investment in a broad-based early childhood education program.

OEA sincerely appreciates the courage of Senate Democrats to stand up and fight for Oklahoma’s most vital program – public education.

“This proposal will work to bring

Oklahoma’s teachers’ salaries much closer to the regional average and most importantly, will give every Oklahoma full-time teacher a salary increase,” said Bishop. “For too long our teachers have been underpaid and underfunded and this plan by the Senate Democrats will immediately allow teachers to reap the rewards for their hard work.”

In addition to the governor’s education budget and the Senate Democrats’ salary proposal, there are several pieces of legislation that will potentially affect education. At this early point in the session, it is hard to identify specific bills because many of them will be combined to eliminate redundancy. However, the issues to watch closely are any bills pertaining to tax cuts, the 65 Percent proposal, the Educator’s Extended Service Incentive Program (EESIP, aka the retirement Wear Away Plan), and the OEA’s Adequacy and Equity lawsuit.

For the latest legislative action, read the OEA’s weekly Legislative Update at www.okea.org, or call 800/522-8092 for the weekly legislative hotline update. Both messages are normally changed by 4 p.m. each Friday during the session.

EESIP would greatly enhance “Rule of 80” retirement

Three bills have been introduced at the start of the 2006 legislative session calling for enactment into law of the “Educators’ Extended Service Incentive Plan,” or EESIP.

EESIP would enable more than 20,000 active Rule of 80 members of the Teachers’ Retirement System who achieve a final average salary of more than \$40,000 at any time during their working careers to improve their retirement benefits by working beyond their normal retirement date.

HB 2986 by Claremore Republican Tad Jones, HB 2968 by Tulsa Republican Daniel Sullivan, and SB

1866 by Seminole Democrat Susan Paddack would help overcome the negative impact on retirement benefits for these “over \$40,000” educators – mostly teachers – caused by certain provisions of current law.

OEA President Roy Bishop said the Association supports the bills, but recognizes they are likely to undergo considerable change during the protracted legislative process. HB 2986 and SB 1866 are substantive bills, while HB 2968 is in shell form (without content) at this time.

HB 2986 and SB 1866 provide for an increase from 7.05 percent to 7.80

percent in the employer payroll tax as a means of paying the estimated \$23.5 million annual EESIP cost.

“We think the increase in the employer payroll tax is an appropriate mechanism to ensure that TRS receives adequate funding for EESIP,” Bishop said. “But we believe strongly that the legislature must commit to provide annual funding for the plan.”

OEA will not support EESIP legislation if payment for the program is shifted to local school districts, Bishop added.

If your local Association would like to see a presentation on EESIP and how it would affect retirement, call

your regional advocacy or legislative and political organizing specialist.

Contact your state representative and senator today urging support for EESIP, paid for with state-appropriated funds.

Contacting your legislators

By Telephone –

State Senate, 405/524-0126
State House of Representatives,
405/521-2711, or 800/522-8502

By Email

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

Members write letters supporting A&E lawsuit

By Doug Folks

In the days and weeks after the Oklahoma Education Association (OEA) filed its Adequacy and Equity lawsuit, some media outlets and a handful of stunned legislators lashed out at the OEA. Many said the courtroom was not the place to find solutions to education's funding problems. Some even made wild, untrue claims that the OEA wanted to "line its own pockets," consolidate schools, or bankrupt the state.

None of that is true, of course.

The OEA wouldn't see a penny if, some day, the courts tell the legislature

it has grossly underfunded education and to do something about it, pronto.

The lawsuit does not suggest that school consolidation is a remedy. In fact, only the legislature – not the courts and certainly not the OEA – can consolidate schools.

While studies commissioned by the OEA say the state is underfunding education by nearly \$1 billion, and another \$3 billion is needed for infrastructure, we know that whatever amount the court identifies as needed for schools, the legislature won't be forced to immediately hand over ev-

ery penny at that moment. The court will likely direct the legislature to come up with a long-range plan on how to correct the underfunding. In Arkansas, for instance, the courts approved the legislature's five-year plan to remedy its inadequate education funding situation.

Of all the verbal and written barbs hurled at the OEA, perhaps the most disappointing was the tactic taken by Congressman and gubernatorial candidate Earnest Istook. He accused the OEA of attacking democracy. Istook's solution? Change the state constitution

to say "...that education funding levels are decided only by the people and their elected officials and that the courts cannot usurp that authority."

Interestingly, almost none of the shots taken at OEA tried to argue that education receives too much funding. They just didn't like the idea of OEA stepping to the plate and demanding the legislature meet its constitutional requirement to properly fund education, and to put some heat on that demand by forcing the issue to court.

Many of our members, even some people not associated with the OEA, sent letters to the editor in response to not only Istook's remarks, but also those made by editorial staffs of various newspapers. Sadly, we know that most of our members' letters never made it to print. But a few did, and a sampling of those letters and a couple from some nonmembers appears below.

How dare anyone be content for children to be forced to meet tomorrow's challenges with yesterday's tools. How dare anyone complain when a champion steps forward to pick up the slack for leaders who merely 'want' to fund education." Charlsie Allen, Ardmore

"As a social studies teacher, I was under the impression that there are three branches of government. When the legislative branch fails to follow the constitution, the judicial branch is used. Istook's desire to bypass that branch is the true attack on our democracy."

Rick Borrer, Putnam City

"With the patience of a kindergarten teacher we waited ad infinitum for the Legislature to vanguard for our state's greatest resource (our children) and it did as little as possible. The wait is over. Using the gift of democracy and our First Amendment, we are calling to question the lack of action by state leaders in a place called court."

Del Patterson, Sapulpa

"I feel that instead of deliberate intent, legislative leaders have operated under a philosophy of 'benign neglect,' hoping the problem would somehow get 'fixed' before it blew up in their faces. It hasn't worked out that way for them. The day of accounting is at hand ... However you feel about the lawsuit, the children of this state deserve to have educational opportunities that enable them to succeed in today's and tomorrow's society, and teachers, administrators and support staff deserve adequate compensation for the jobs they do. That is what it is all about." Jerry Combrink, retired superintendent of Boswell, in an op-ed published in "The Oklahoman" on February 5.

"Istook said the OEA has 'attacked democracy' by suing over education funding and that it is 'time for democracy to attack back.' Since when is filing a lawsuit - guaranteed by the American system of democracy - an attack on democracy?"
Editorial from the Tulsa World

"As a veteran history and government teacher and lifelong Republican, I question the thinking of U.S. Rep. Ernest Istook on the school funding lawsuit. I agree that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, but I disagree with his recommendation for prevention... A court challenge should never be considered an attack on democracy; it should be considered a strength of democracy."

Jack Tinsley, Seminole

"No, teachers are not trying to bankrupt the state. No, we are not trying to force consolidation. No, we're not a bunch of liberals trying to advance an agenda. We simply want the state to fund education in an adequate and equitable manner... No, it's about quality education and quality resources."

Michael Walcutt, Muskogee

Ethics report: Outsiders paid for TABOR drive

By Doug Folks

Who knew one could find irony while reading an ethics commission report?

Oklahomans In Action, Inc. (OIA), the organization which circulated an initiative petition calling for a statewide vote on a so-called Taxpayers Bill of Rights (TABOR), claimed its cause was something Oklahomans wanted. But according to its own report to the Oklahoma Ethics Commission, very few Oklahomans cared enough to help fund the project.

In fact, OIA reported only \$6,718.65 in contributions by individuals for the campaign, which raised more than \$1.22 million. The December report included a list of 46 Oklahomans, listing only first names along with addresses, who donated a total of \$3,475 in increments of \$50 to \$100 with one \$200 donor.

The bulk of money raised to pay for the petition drive came from out-of-state organizations which sponsor such antitax and anti-public education ideals.

Out-of-state organizations and their donations listed in the December report were:

- Americans for Limited Government, Glenview, Ill., \$350,000;
- National Taxpayers Union Foundation, Alexandria, Calif., \$180,000;
- Legislative Education Action Drive, Glenview, Ill., \$70,000;
- Americans for Tax Reform, Washington, D.C., \$225,000;
- Colorado Club for Growth Issue Committee, Colorado Springs, Colo., \$200,000; and
- National Taxpayers Union Foundation, Glenview, Ill., \$180,000.

The Americans for Tax Reform, Colorado Club for Growth, and the National Taxpayers Union Foundation are all antitax organizations that lobby for smaller government.

On its website, the Americans for Limited Government, says, "Both (political) parties are corrupt. Their del-

Secretary of State lists petition irregularities

The State Supreme Court certified nearly 300,000 valid signatures on the so-called Taxpayers Bill of Rights (TABOR) initiative petition on February 8.

With the Supreme Court's ruling, opponents of the petition have 10 days to file a challenge, and officials for the Stop SQ 726 Committee said they expected one or two individuals to do so.

The challenge will likely be based on the language of the initiative and on invalid signatures. At press time, volunteers for Stop SQ 726 were pouring over the names on the petition sheets, searching for irregularities.

Secretary of State Susan Savage was responsible for counting the signatures to determine if enough were gathered. Nearly 220,000 signatures were needed to qualify the question

for the certification. Savage counted 299,029 signatures on 16,995 individual sheets which were passed by Oklahomans in Action, the group which sponsored the drive.

Savage's responsibility was to merely count the number of signatures, not verify if they were valid signatures. But in a somewhat unusual circumstance, she listed several different irregularities found during the counting, including:

- Circulators listing out-of-state addresses or multiple addresses;
- Various circulators listing the same address;
- Two different notarizations appearing on the same affidavit;
- Two different notary seals appearing on the same affidavit;
- Circulators' signatures and ad-

resses marked through with different addresses added to the affidavit; and

- Printed names on the face or signature side of the petition that appear not to match the signature name as signed on the petition.

The most interesting irregularity was found by a temporary employee hired by Savage's office to assist with the counting. The employee found her address on a petition sheet with someone else's name next to it.

According to state law, petition signature gatherers must be residents of the state and at least 18 years of age. At least one petition passer was arrested during the drive for violating both of those regulations. The 16-year-old listed a Massachusetts address where there was an outstanding felony warrant waiting for him.

egations to Congress are corrupt. They don't honor their own principles or platforms ... We use direct initiative to circumvent politicians, whose self-interest is anti-liberty."

The Legislative Education Action Drive (LEAD) is a promoter of vouchers. As stated on its website, its mission is to "...encourage legislation in all states to provide for Universal Tuition Tax Credits, which would enable all children the freedom to pursue an education in the primary and secondary institution of their own choosing."

"If LEAD is contributing to a TABOR petition drive, it must see TABOR as a program capable of destroying public schools," said Roy Bishop, OEA president.

By contrast, the Stop State Question 726 Committee raised \$45,600 to fight the petition drive. Members of the Committee include the OEA, the Oklahoma Public Employees Association (OPEA), the AFL-CIO, and the Oklahoma Hospital Association.

TABOR is a misguided attempt to drastically reduce state government through a constitutional amendment. It is designed to reduce state revenue through a formula that considers the state's Consumer Price Index (CPI) and changes in population. In

\$1,000 scholarships available for young entrepreneurs

Tomorrow's businessmen and businesswomen can accelerate their path to achievement and success by taking advantage of scholarships offered through Oklahoma's and America's largest small-business group.

The Young Entrepreneur Foundation of the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB), in conjunction with NFIB/Oklahoma, awards \$1,000 scholarships annually to high school seniors who have demonstrated entrepreneurial initiative. Seniors who have launched a small enterprise, have solid

Colorado, the only state to implement TABOR, the measure's cost to higher education, health services, local and country governments and common education has been so devastating, citizens recently voted to suspend TABOR for five years.

test scores and/or have been active in civic organizations are excellent YEF candidates.

Applications will be accepted between now and March 15, 2006. Students can get a head start today by logging on to www.NFIB.com/YEF for more details. Applicants must be nominated by one of NFIB/Oklahoma's 6,000 small-business members.

A list of NFIB members in particular communities can be obtained by calling NFIB Member Care Center at 800/NFIB-NOW.

Choctaw member overcomes serious charges

By Adrienne Covington

As a teacher, you never think the day will come when a student or parents of a student will file criminal charges against you. Unfortunately, that day came after 16 years of teaching for Dyana Dixon, a sixth grade teacher at Choctaw-Nicoma Park Intermediate in eastern Oklahoma County.

Fortunately, Dyana is a member of the Oklahoma Education Association and was acquitted of her charges

every day to find out what was going on with my case. During that time, it wasn't just about me; it involved every teacher in this building."

Dixon then went to court and pleaded "not guilty." She learned that the little boy alleged the bruise marks on his arm were made by the OEA member and then he later confessed that the marks were made by an earlier fight with his brother. Dixon was then acquitted of her charges but decided to press on with her case against

**"(We) went to the police department a few weeks after I first learned of the child abuse charges and they read me my Miranda rights. That was the lowest point of my life."
Choctaw-Nicoma Park's Dyana Dixon**

thanks to the legal expertise provided. It all began when she broke up a fight in the hallway after school. One boy was on top of another boy, hitting him. Dixon pulled the boy off the other, took their names and sent them home.

The next morning she was called into her principal's office and was told that child abuse charges have been filed against her and that the student's parents were waiting to speak with her. The mother of the boy began to yell at Dixon and then threatened her life. Dixon then called the police department to file charges against the parent and called OEA for assistance. Within 15 minutes of her phone call to the Association, she received a return call from Joe White, the attorney who handles OEA's personal legal matters.

"I broke up a fight; it was what I was supposed to do. Joe and I went to the police department a few weeks after I first learned of the child abuse charges and they read me my Miranda rights. That was the lowest point of my life. I will never forget the moment that made me think that I had failed as a teacher and was instead, a criminal," said Dixon.

"I talked to Joe White just about ev-

ery day to find out what was going on

the parent who threatened her life. "I decided to go on with my charges because again, it wasn't just my fight. It was everybody here, it was *our* problem. It could have happened to any teacher here," said Dixon.

The veteran teacher has indicated that the experience has changed the way she interacts with her students and says that all teachers are very limited in how they can control behavior issues.

"It was an eye awakening experi-

Zoo offers unique spring break experience

While some parents might wonder if they can survive spring break with their kids at home for a week, the Little River Zoo east of Norman will give kids a chance to see they could be a survivor in the wild.

While hiking on trails in the forests of the zoo, Junior Zookeepers will learn about the special abilities and adaptations that animals have in order to survive. Different daily activities will encourage Junior Zookeepers to discover many lessons that can be learned about life from the animals.

"During one activity," says Stuart Campbell, humane education coordina-



Dyana Dixon faced child abuse charges after breaking up a fight between two intermediate school boys, but with the help of the OEA she was cleared of all charges.

ence. I never thought it could happen to me. The teachers and I all saw that OEA/NEA does take care of us and if it hadn't been for Joe White, I would have been a basket case.

"I also have not seen any bills or pa-

tor, "the kids will pretend to be lost in the woods and have to create methods of surviving without the daily comforts they are used to. We find that they can be very creative."

Each day will present a new challenge to children ages 6-15, as they do a variety of keeper work and enrichment projects with cougars, foxes, monkeys and wolves. Junior Zookeepers will get up close and personal with a wide variety of zoo animals, and will also be doing a traditional "Early Easter" project that includes creating and hiding special prize eggs for the monkeys.

perwork from this ordeal. It has all been covered. This is something that could happen to any teacher and to know that OEA/NEA is behind you is a great comfort," concluded Dixon.

"The kids also enjoy doing art projects that deal with nature," says Campbell. "We collect things from nature and do a large collage to display at the zoo."

The Spring Break Junior Zookeeper session runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., March 16-18. The price for all three days is \$80 and concessions will be available for Junior Zookeepers who prefer not to bring a sack lunch.

For more information, explore the Junior Zookeeper section of the Little River Zoo's website and enroll online at www.littleriverzoo.com, or call the Zoo for more information at (405) 366-7229.

When students attack

By Heath Merchen
Associate General Counsel

Consider these two scenarios:

1) You've just had a student slug you in the face – you're shocked, injured, angry, scared and very possibly about to take another blow. No one is calling the office; there isn't another adult in sight.

2) You come upon a crowd of students yelling and screaming at something going on in the

center of the group. You push through and find two students, both of whom outweigh you, fighting violently.

These are not far fetched hypotheticals – they are realistic examples of some of the more volatile situations faced in Oklahoma schools. Unfortunately, there is little or no training in most teacher programs regarding how to respond to student violence and often no help to be found at the building level. In hopes of offering some assistance, this article provides some general guidelines to follow when faced with student violence.

First, call 911. If you are assaulted by a junior high or high school student, call the police and notify your building administrator. If you fail to report the assault immediately, the student may call to report you first and you will be the one that ends up getting criminally charged. Telling your administrator gives him or her the opportunity to impose discipline and ensures he or she isn't surprised when a squad car pulls up in front of the building.

Second, defend yourself, but don't go overboard. When attacked, you have the right to use reasonable force, which means the force necessary to overcome the attack. However, it does not include the right to beat the snot out of the student once he retreats or lets up. Sadly, most staff members

From Your Counsel

don't know how to effectively defend themselves which is why obtaining some type of restraint or martial arts training is important. The purpose is not to make you the deadliest teacher in the world – but instead, to learn to

When attacked, you have the right to use reasonable force, which means the force necessary to overcome the attack.

effectively respond to an attack while maintaining emotional control so you don't either curl up in a fetal position crying or inflict serious injuries after losing your temper.

Third, keep records. For instance, if a special education student is repeatedly assaulting you as a result of his disability and causing injury, report each instance as a worker's compensation claim. This creates a record of the frequency and severity of each injury and puts the district on notice that you are continually in danger. In addition, in the special education context,

ask the district to convene an IEP meeting to address strategies and placement issues, bringing the injury documentation with you.

Fourth, intervene immediately. If you see a fight between students, never walk away. If you aren't comfortable physically intervening, then intervene by yelling loudly or blowing a

whistle and dispersing the crowd around the students. Send a student you trust to get an administrator. If one of the students is in serious danger, you may need to physically intervene even if you aren't comfortable doing so, as your first concern must be the safety of the students under your care. If you are worried about having to physically intervene, then get training in how to restrain a student so that you are prepared to respond.

Fifth, be present. The most important step in preventing student violence is staff presence; stand in the doorway during passing times so that you can see what is going on and so students



Heath Merchen

know you are watching; if you see a confrontation developing between students or students and a staff member, go towards it immediately. You want to be the type of staff member who is rushing to address the problem rather than one who is rushing away to avoid it. The higher the number of staff who go towards the problem, the easier it will be to prevent or resolve.

It's important to remember that there is no fail-safe way to protect yourself from liability or injury when students get violent. However, if you keep student safety as your first priority and follow these guidelines, it will help. If you have additional questions or concerns about specific student violence issues, be sure to contact your regional advocacy specialist.

Nonbargaining locals also have access to searchable database

Bargaining locals – as well as nonbargaining locals – have an incredible resource available to them through the Oklahoma Education Association's (OEA) Microsearch Online Documents website.

The site houses the negotiated agreements of most of Oklahoma's bargaining locals, as well as other valuable financial resources such as the OEA Green Book and the Oklahoma School Law Book.

Microsearch also offers a dynamic search engine on the site that allows

users to search contracts for specific language, compare language on the same topic in a number of different agreements, or look at entire agreements for any local in the database.

Presidents and bargaining chairs of bargaining locals and presidents of nonbargaining locals have access to the site simply by registering with and receiving a password from the OEA.

To register, go to www.okea-research.org and click on the "New User Registration" link. There, you fill out a simple form that is sent automati-

cally to Debbie Moore at OEA Headquarters, and returns the email with a password.

Bargaining locals that send their negotiated agreements electronically to the OEA are eligible for a \$1-per-member rebate. Email your negotiated agreement (preferably in Microsoft Word) or send it on disk or CD to Debbie Moore at dmoore@okea.org, or to OEA, PO Box 18485, Oklahoma City, OK, 73154. For more information on the Microsearch website, contact your regional advocacy specialist.

Lawton district asking IRS for refund

Continued from Page 1

As a result of the glitch, Lawton teachers had nearly \$523,000 too much deducted from their paychecks. An equal amount was paid on the district's part as well, bringing the total to an estimated \$1.046 million.

About 1,300 teachers were affected in each year the overpayment occurred. Individual FICA overpayments ranged from about \$5 for an entry year teacher to nearly \$108 per year for a 25-year veteran each year.

The miscalculation was directly related to paying FICA on the Oklahoma Teachers Retirement System (TRS) Offset, which went into effect in 1998. At that time, every district in the state was withholding FICA not only on teachers' 7 percent retirement contribution, but also on the TRS Offset.

However, the OEA insisted at the time that employees should not be paying FICA on money paid on their behalf by the state. The OEA asked for a ruling by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) in early 1998. In what is believed to be one of the quickest responses to a ruling request, the IRS issued a statement just a few weeks later agreeing with OEA's assessment.

Teachers' Retirement sent a letter to all school districts on June 8, 1998, that said, in part, "FICA taxes should not be paid or withheld on the State's contribution to each eligible employee's TRS account beginning with the 1998-99 school year." The letter went on to say a procedure for correcting FICA amounts withheld from January 1, 1998, through June 30, 1998, would be developed. TRS also wrote about the decision in its October 1998 newsletter, *Trends*.

While the withholding error went on for more than seven years, IRS regulations only allow challenges for the three previous years. While contract law says employees can obtain reimbursement from an employee for the

Lawton attorney files class action lawsuit

While the FICA overpayment in Lawton Public Schools (LPS) occurred between the fall of 1998 and October 2005, the Internal Revenue Service allows appeals and reimbursement of overpaid taxes for only the three previous years.

As soon as OEA Advocacy Specialist David Williams found the FICA overpayment on Lawton teachers' paychecks, he began working with the Lawton administration to correct the problem. It was always part of OEA's goal to try and get the district to use the money it would be reimbursed by the IRS to pay back teachers for the overpayments between 1998 and 2001.

However, before any such settlement could be negotiated between the OEA and LPS, a Lawton attorney filed a tort claims action against the district for money the IRS would not refund.

The lawsuit, filed by Chris Meyers of the O. Christopher Meyers Inc. law firm, is seeking about \$240,000 plus interest, which Meyers believes could be as much as \$250,000 or more.

According to the Governmental Tort Claims Act, LPS was allowed 90 days to respond to the claim. LPS chose not to

respond by the mid-February deadline, believing Meyers's claims will not hold up in court.

Next, Meyers will file an amendment to the petition claiming negligence and failure to uphold contractual responsibility by the district, and ask the court to certify the suit as a class action. The court will then rule whether the suit should be a class action or that each of the 1,700 teachers affected should file suits individually.

Meyers expects a class action certification by mid-March. If the suit is certified as a class action, Lawton teachers affected will not have to do anything to be part of the suit. However, those wishing to opt out of the suit will have to complete paperwork.

Meyers' co-counsel in the suit are Robert Schacher, Joe Hamlin and Nick Garrett. Meyers said this case is not a contingency case and he is not charging teachers to represent them. However, he said the suit will ask the court to require LPS to pay attorney's fees.

last five years, the courts generally follow IRS guidelines and only hold schools accountable for three years on salary reimbursements.

Lawton teachers have already been reimbursed \$61,485 for 2005's extra withholdings, and the error was corrected on paychecks beginning in No-

vember 2005. LPS has already filed to collect \$442,854 from the IRS for 2002, 2003 and 2004 – \$221,427 for both the district and for teachers.

Lawton support employees taking retirement were not affected by the mistake because they were not (and still are not) eligible for the TRS credit.

Marilyn Kitzrow, director of business operations for Lawton Public Schools, says the overpayment occurred because a number of things happened about the same time. LPS didn't pay retirement for employees in

the late '90s, and considered it a fringe benefit for tax purposes. An IRS ruling intended for schools that did pay retirement caused some confusion, the new TRS credit became law, and Kitzrow's predecessor retired all about the same time. In all those changes at LPS's central office, the correct method for

withholding FICA was missed.

"It was an unfortunate thing; a very

unfortunate thing actually," Kitzrow said of the overpayment.

OEA's Williams discovered the FICA discrepancy while preparing a check-reading workshop.

"I just wanted to offer the workshop as a service to our members," said Judy Runnels, full-time release president for the Professional Educators' Association of Lawton (PEAL) who had asked Williams to conduct the popular workshop. "Everyone should know how they are compensated.

"It's just amazing how this all came

to light. David saw the discrepancy immediately when he couldn't make the numbers add up on a check stub."

As soon as Williams found the mistake he began working with Kitzrow and Lawton Superintendent Barry Beauchamp to remedy the situation. From the very beginning, it was OEA's goal to help LPS identify the mistake and seek a resolution that would return teachers their money without placing the district in a financially impossible situation.

"The OEA was supportive that we were going to do what we could to resolve the whole ordeal," Kitzrow said.

While the situation has been stressful for everyone, Runnels said the relationship PEAL has with Beauchamp has allowed OEA, PEAL and the district to work cooperatively to find a solution.

"From the very beginning, Mr. Beauchamp has said he only wanted to do what was right for our teachers," Runnels said. "At no time did the district act like it wouldn't do whatever it could to get our teachers their money back."

"From the very beginning, Mr. Beauchamp has said he only wanted to do what was right for our teachers. At no time did the district act like it wouldn't do whatever it could to get our teachers their money back."

Judy Runnels, PEAL President

OEA election features Board, NEA Director races

Members will vote in March for 11 new zone directors as well as delegates-at-large for Delegate Assembly and the NEA Representative Assembly (RA). Voting will also take place for president and vice president, though neither incumbent President Roy Bishop or Vice President Becky Felts drew an opponent.

There will be a race for Oklahoma's junior NEA Director. Mustang's Greg Johnson is running for a second term. He will face Checotah's Lawrence E. Train Lane. NEA Directors represent the state from which they are elected on the NEA Board of Directors. In addition to conducting NEA business, the directors lobby

their Congressmen and women on education matters.

Ballots will mail the week of March 6 and must be *delivered* no later than 5 p.m. April 7 to OEA Headquarters, 323 E. Madison, Oklahoma City, OK 73105.

Positions for the OEA Board of Directors to be voted on include seats for Zones Northeast A, Northeast C, Tulsa Metro A, Tulsa Metro D, Tulsa Metro E, Southwest A, Southwest D, Northwest A, OKC Metro A and OKC Metro C, and Administrator At-Large, which is a statewide race.

Three races will take place for 2006 Delegate Assembly Delegates-At-Large: Minority, Retired and Ad-

ministrator. One or more Retired Delegates-At-Large will be elected for the 2006 NEA Representative Assembly. Category I Delegates-At-Large for the 2006 NEA RA will be

elected for the Tulsa Metro, Southwest, OKC Metro, Northeast and Northwest Regions.

According to bylaws of the Oklahoma Education Association constitution, candidates for president, vice president and NEA Director are allowed to publish a 75-word statement in an Association publication. Those statements appear below.

Those elected will assume office on July 15.

DA credentials due March 15

Credentials for local delegations to the 2006 Delegate Assembly are due at Oklahoma Education Association headquarters by March 15.

Local Associations are allowed one delegate for the first six to 60 members, and additional delegates for every major fraction of 60 members afterward.

The 2006 Delegate Assembly will be April 28-29 at the Clarion Meridian Conference Center, I-40 and Meridian Ave. in west Oklahoma City.

For more information on Delegate Assembly, contact OEA Associate Executive Director Charles McCauley at 800/522-8091, 405/528-7785, or cmccauley@okea.org.



**Roy Bishop
President**

As we continue to move the issues that affect our children, our teachers, our school employees, and our schools, I want to thank you for once again supporting me. It is truly an honor and a privilege to represent you.

Keep the faith.

Roy Bishop, Stillwater EA



**Becky Felts
Vice President**

Serving as vice president of the Oklahoma Education Association is an honor and privilege. My continuing commitment to work on your behalf is heightened by your support and involvement. Your devotion to public education, your work in the schools, your relationships with students, parents, and community members matter tremendously! Know I am here on your behalf. Thank you for entrusting me with this responsibility. Together we make OEA's voice for public education in Oklahoma strong.

Becky Felts, Tahlequah EA



**Greg Johnson
For NEA Director**

Thank you OEA members for your commitment to improving the Great Public Schools we have in Oklahoma. It has been a great honor to represent you on the NEA Board of Directors and at the Capitol in Washington, D.C. Your support and trust has been amazing!! I am committed to working for you and for the students of Oklahoma. I respectfully ask for your support and the opportunity to serve you again.

Greg Johnson, Mustang EA



**Lawrence E. Train Lane
For NEA Director**

As an experienced educator and activist, I believe that my leadership, vision, and dedication can enhance our state association and our goals. With the challenges that face OEA and NEA, a committed and thoughtful voice for all members needs to be heard.

Listening to our members concerns and desires, I feel I can be that voice. My name is Lawrence E. Train Lane and I would appreciate your vote for NEA Director.

Lawrence E. Lane, Checotah EA

Stone brings Africa to state classrooms

By *Adrienne Covington*

A Midwest City-Del City science teacher and an Oklahoma Education Association member has taken her experiences in Africa and brought them into her classroom.

Leslee Stone, 8th grade science teacher at Monroney Junior High School, visited rural regions of Kenya in the summer of 2005. During her travels, she met a Kenyan professor who has dedicated his life work to helping children in his native country and preserving East Africa's ecosystem.

Meitamei Olo-Dapash runs a non-profit organization based in Washington D.C. – the Maasai Environmental Resource Coalition (MERC). Stone asked him to visit her classroom the next time he was in the states. To her surprise, Stone received a phone call just months later from Olo-Dapash indicating that he would be available to speak with her students in early November 2005.

“Many of my students do not have

the opportunity to travel and do not have a concept of the world outside of their reality,” said Stone.

“Meitamei came in to the classroom and told my students of their great opportunity to a free education and told them that not every Maasai child is entitled to an education.”

Stone learned that the Maasai people rely on the land to survive and only a handful of them ever receive an education. Instead of going to school every day, many Maasai children work with their families as herders or help their mothers run the household.

“Many (American) kids take for granted their opportunity for an education and Meitamei's visit helped my eighth graders to understand that they have a unique opportunity here in America – one that not every child in every country receives,” said Stone.

The Maasai are an indigenous group that lives in East Africa. Olo-Dapash founded the MERC foundation in 1987 to stop the illegal appropriations and

destruction of the Maasai people's traditional lands as well as to provide children in Maasailand with an opportunity to receive an education.

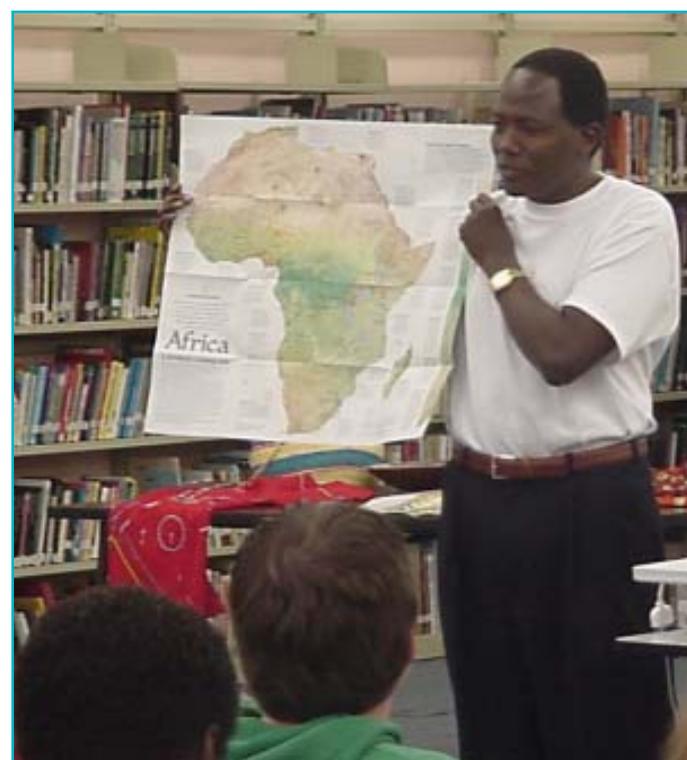
As a result of Olo-Dapash's visit, Stone's honor students are in the process of adopting a child in Maasai-land. The Mid-Del students will provide Maasai students with basic school

supplies as well as a school uniform.

“I really think Meitamei's visit had a positive impact on my students. They are now working to help a student in Kenya receive an education and understand the privileges they receive as a student in America,” said Stone.

Stone was not the only teacher to receive a visit from Olo-Dapash during his time in Oklahoma. Her mother, Lee Ann Stone, a kindergarten teacher in Woodward, also had the opportunity to have the Maasai native visit her students the following day.

“My kids were studying the letter ‘Aa’ so Meitamei's visit fit in perfectly. I wanted them to be exposed to a person from a different world and the students learned that people from Kenya are in some ways very different from them, but in a lot of ways, they are the same,” said the kindergarten teacher.



Kenyan Meitamei Olo-Dapash shares a geography lesson with students of Mid-Del's Leslee Stone. Olo-Dapash also visited students in Woodward in Lee Ann Stone's classroom. Lee Ann is Leslee's mother.

“They loved hearing stories about what children in Kenya do every day.

“Meitamei's visit did have an impact on my classroom in that my kids were able to learn about a different culture and learned a new respect and interest about people from different places other than Oklahoma. My students still talk about Meitamei.”

Leslee Stone has been invited back to Africa this summer to help in a classroom and is being sponsored by Olo-Dapash's foundation, MERC.

Moroccan adventure awaits

The Fulbright Teacher Exchange Program is currently seeking applicants for a job-shadowing exchange in Morocco.

Fulbright is looking for high school (grades 9-12) teachers of English as a second language, French or Arabic for the three or six-week exchange during Fall 2006. The trip will be preceded by a three-day, in-country orientation. In Spring 2007, the U.S. teacher participants and their schools will host their Moroccan teacher hosts for a six-week job-shadowing exchange in the U.S.

The purpose of the exchange is to offer Moroccan teachers the possibility to watch different language teaching

and learning styles at the high school level and compare them with local practices. Also, it will allow the participants to build communication networks between high schools, teachers and students aimed at fostering innovation in language teaching; will identify shared problems in language teaching and work on possible solutions; and foster cultural and educational exchange between Moroccan and U.S. high school teachers.

For more specific information and a link to the application, visit Fulbright's website under the “Other Opportunities” page at www.fulbrightexchanges.org/View/ViewOtherOpps.asp. The deadline for application is March 24.



Mid-Del's Leslee Stone displays some of the souvenirs she brought back from a trip to East Africa

OEA welcomes two new staff members

Two new employees have been added to the professional staff of the Oklahoma Education Association, and both have extensive experience working with politicians at the State Capitol.

Adrienne Covington has taken the communications specialist position with the Oklahoma City Metro team while Daniela Newville is now legislative and political organizing specialist for the Northwest Team.



Adrienne Covington

Among her duties, Covington will be responsible for media relations surrounding OEA's governance and legislative programs. She'll also write for *The Education Focus*. In addition to her statewide communications responsibilities, Covington will provide communications expertise to OKC Metro locals and assist with various team activities in the region.

Covington comes to the OEA after working nearly six years as a communications specialist in the Oklahoma State Senate Media Office. She is an adjunct professor in the social sciences division of Oklahoma State University's Oklahoma City campus. She has a bachelor's in administrative leadership and a master's in human relations from the University of Oklahoma, and an associate degree in public service from OSU-OKC.

Adrienne and her daughter Darian live in Oklahoma City. Darian attends Cleveland Elementary where Adrienne is a vice president of public relations for the school's Parent Teacher Asso-

ciation. She is also a vice president for the Oklahoma City Parent/Teacher Council and a volunteer for the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation of Central Oklahoma.

Newville has spent much of her career in politics, which will no doubt give her an edge in her new position at OEA. In addition to serving as primary contact for schools in Zone Northwest C (Blaine, Canadian and Kingfisher Counties), she will coordinate grassroots lobbying efforts in the western half of the state.

Prior to joining the OEA, Newville was executive director of the Oklahoma House Political Action Committee where she assisted Democratic candidates for the House with fund-raising, campaign training and consultation. She developed strategic plans for the PAC for the 2002 and 2004 election cycles.

Newville was finance director for Laura Boyd's run for governor in 1998 and worked for Congressman Dave McCurdy in his Norman and



Daniela Newville

Washington, D.C., offices between 1988 and 1995.

Daniela was born in Germany and grew up in Lawton. Her husband Kevin is a commercial electrical contractor, and they live in Norman with their 10-year-old daughter Talor, who attends Truman Elementary. Daniela also has a daughter, Amber, who is married to Josh Fulks, and they have two children: four-year-old Raven and newborn Lennox.

Native American issues conference coming in June

By Bruce Treadaway

Oklahoma Education Association members and teachers statewide will have a unique opportunity to attend the American Indian/Alaska Native Issues Conference June 2-4.

The conference, sponsored by OEA and the National Education Association, will be held at the Embassy Suites Hotel, 1815 S. Meridian, in Oklahoma City. The issues conference will be held in conjunction with Oklahoma City's Red Earth Festival, an annual exhibition of Native American dance, art and culture.

A reception and dinner will open the conference on June 2. The issues conference will take place on Saturday the 3rd when the American Indian Issue/Alaska Native Status Report will be

presented. This report will include how to prepare American Indian and non-Indian educators to be effective with native students, and also how to engage American Indian communities in their children's education and the schools they attend.

National and Oklahoma educators will share information about the status of No Child Left Behind as it relates to the American Indian student. A panel of local leaders and tribal educators will discuss the effects of No Child Left Behind at their individual sites.

Hotel reservations made by May 5 will receive the \$102-plus-tax rate for the conference. Early conference registration of \$85 is due by April 15. After April 15, the conference registration

will be \$100. Student registration is \$70 before April 15 and \$75 after April 15.

Professional development scholarships are available from the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence at www.ofe.org or by calling 405/236-0006. Also, OEA members are encouraged to contact local professional development committees to apply for

conference funding.

To register, make checks payable to the NEA-AI/AN Caucus and mail to Debbie Hogue-Downing, AI/AN Secretary, 5936 N. Sapulpa, Oklahoma City, OK 73112.

OEA members can also contact Debbie at 405/948-7123 for further information.

NEA Member Benefits announces new annuity

NEA Member Benefits recently announced the new Retirement Income Director variable annuity.

The NEA Valuebuilder Retirement Income DirectorSM is a variable annuity that guarantees all or a portion of a member's initial investment at a future date selected by the client, allowing it to grow until the member chooses to take distribution.

The annuity is available to OEA/NEA members and their spouses through NEA Valuebuilder financial advisors nationwide. For further information, contact your NEA Valuebuilder representative, check the NEA Member Benefits website at www.neamb.com/neavbrid, or call toll-free, 1-800-NEA-VALU.

Cherokee speech coach credits students, community for award

By Patti Razien

Last fall, in an awards ceremony in Edmond, the Oklahoma Speech, Theatre and Communication Association (OSTCA) named Cherokee High School speech and debate coach Jason Paris its Outstanding Young Speech Teacher.

Each year, Oklahoma's high school and university speech and communication instructors honor a high school teacher in the first seven years of his or her career, recognizing the

teacher's excellence in the field of forensics education.

Paris was extremely surprised and thrilled, but modestly said, "I think it's much more a reflection upon the students at Cherokee High School, as well as the school and community of Cherokee."

"The interesting thing about Cherokee is that in prior years it was a legendary 'speech town,'" said Paris. "They have tremendous community support because of this past success.

It's just been a breeding ground for speech."

Paris began as Cherokee High School's speech coach four years ago, and since that time the team has improved its competitive success. His teams have won three Regional One Act trophies, one State One Act trophy, numerous Regional All-Star recognitions, four Regional speech trophies, one State speech trophy, countless Regional and State speech finalists, two theatre all-state winners and four State speech champions/All-State winners.

"Success breeds success," says Paris. "This year we have two senior All-Staters, Brent Bowers and Shannon Lavicky. These kids work diligently along with all the other outstanding students to make our program top-notch."

Originally from Alva, Paris earned his bachelor's in English from Northwestern State University with a minor in speech and enough hours to almost earn a minor in music. He began his career in Wood-



Cherokee's Jason Paris

ward before leaving for Cherokee.

In addition to his speech and debate coaching responsibilities, Paris teaches general humanities and 7th and 8th grade reading.

The coach and his students are gearing up for the remainder of the year and more qualifying District contests in early March, then Regionals later that month, and finally the state tournament in April.

"Watching these kids develop into something extraordinary has been the real honor," says Paris.

After talking to Jason Paris one can certainly understand the genuine love he has for his students, his school and the community. Perhaps simply put, "extraordinaire breeds extraordinaire."

Labor/management conference to explore good relationships

The 8th Annual Oklahoma Labor-Management Conference is just around the corner, and it promises to assist both labor and management in their day-to-day decision making.

The conference is scheduled for April 19-20 at the Holiday Inn, 2101 South Meridian in Oklahoma City.

The task of establishing and maintaining a good working relationship between management, labor and arbitrators can be difficult and this conference will supply those who attend with the information and resources necessary to make the working relationships strong.

Scot Beckenbaugh, acting deputy director for the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, will present the keynote address during the morning session on April 19.

An overview of interest based bargaining will last throughout the morning session and continue after lunch, followed by a presentation on workers' compensation. April 20th's morning session will consist of a three-member panel regarding just cause, termination or just fired scenarios and will be followed up with a question and answer series over just cause elements of discipline in the workplace.

Early registration is \$95 and is due by March 20. Registration after the early bird date is \$120. The registration fee covers conference materials, continental breakfast and drinks during breaks.

The Holiday Inn is offering a special conference rate of \$62 plus tax per night, and hotel reservations are due by March 20. Call 800/622-7666 or 405/685-4000 to make reservations.

To obtain a conference registration form or for more information, call Southeast Advocacy Specialist Jackie Davis in Shawnee at 800/563-4230 or 405/275-4060.

An advertisement for a book titled "SAVINGS 101" by the Oklahoma Education Association. The book is shown open to Chapter 5, "Show Your Card". The left page (page 54) contains the chapter title and a list of three steps: 1. Present your card (and coupon, if necessary) at a participating merchant at the time of purchase. 2. Receive the advertised discount. 3. Go home happy! The right page (page 55) features a photograph of a smiling man in a light blue shirt at a store checkout counter, holding a card. The text "THE SUBJECT OF SAVINGS" is at the top right of the right page.

It's show time. Log on to www.okea.org and discover discounts of up to 50% off at over 100,000 locations nationwide.





Chickasha's Donya Shaffer leads her teammates in an exercise that required planning and teamwork. It was just one of several teambuilding activities at the Mid-Winter New Leaders Retreat.

Sharpening new skills

Some of the participants of last summer's New Leaders Training reunited in late January for a chance to continue sharpening their emerging skills.

OEA staff and presidents from a few of the locals represented joined the emerging leaders at the Crown Plaza Hotel in Oklahoma City for a day and half of activities.

Participants received an Association update from President Roy

Bishop and took part in activities that develop leadership and team-building skills. They also talked about what makes a great leader, and met in regional teams to discuss future leadership opportunities.

The OEA's Teaching and Learning Center is planning another New Leaders Training prior to the 2006 Summer Leadership Academy, which is scheduled for July 25-27, at the Cherokee Casino and Resort in Catoosa.

Policy summit to identify critical education issues

By Adrienne Covington

Calling all National Board Certified teachers! The Oklahoma Education Association (OEA), in conjunction with several statewide partners, is gearing up for the first National Board Certified Teachers (NBCT) Policy Summit on March 30th.

The all-day event will take place at St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Oklahoma City and all state NBCT's are encouraged to attend this important summit.

Oklahoma's education system and serve an important role in deciding the state's future education policy. As a leader in their schools, districts, and communities, they should plan to attend the policy summit to serve as a spokesperson for strengthening the teaching profession.

Governor Brad Henry is scheduled to participate in the morning general session. In addition, Bishop will give the welcome, and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Sandy Garrett will

"The NBCT Policy Summit will prove to be a great resource and important influence on future policy-making procedures."

OEA President Roy Bishop

A coalition of major Oklahoma education organizations is hosting the NBCT Policy Summit on Supporting and Staffing High-Needs Schools. The Summit will allow teachers with an opportunity to hold discussions with their peers and administrators from across the state for the purpose of addressing critical educational issues. Those discussions and recommendations will then be shared with state policy makers at the Summit and later in a published report.

"This Summit will not only allow NBCTs to get their ideas on how to improve education to state leaders, they also will have an opportunity to hear ideas from teachers that represent a completely different student body," said Roy Bishop, OEA President.

"I believe this will provide teachers with alternative ideas that may not have come from others in their district. The Summit will prove to be a great resource and important influence on future policy-making procedures."

NBCTs are a major resource in

address the assembly. Robyn Hilger, NBCT and Oklahoma Teacher of the Year, will also be on hand, and Bishop will close the morning session.

Participants will attend one of several breakout sessions after the conclusion of the morning general session. A working lunch will feature legislators and other state leaders who will listen to ideas developed during the breakouts. The afternoon general session will consist of a discussion of the day's major recommendations with responses from policymakers.

To close the day, table discussions will be held to decide what actions will need to be taken to effectively implement the recommendations.

"This is sure to be a day full of great ideas and will be a great opportunity for National Board Certified teachers to have a say in their future," Bishop said.

Please register as soon as possible at www.oeka.org/NBCTSummit to reserve a spot today.

Cameron SOEA, PEAL give library a new look

Students at Lawton's Douglas Learning Center have a nice new library to enjoy.

Well, not brand new, but members of Cameron's Student OEA chapter and members of the Professional Educators' Association of Lawton (PEAL) recently gave the library a new look.

Douglas is a special elementary in the Lawton system. It houses a four-year-old program, an extended day program for students as a service to parents, and special education alternative education programs for students up to sixth grade.

Cameron SOEA received a \$992 grant from the National Education Association to pay for supplies for the project, which was organized by Cameron SOEA's officers.

Alison Turner was project coordinator. Other officers are Eryn Killings-

worth, president; Amy Jordan, vice president; Jennifer Downen, treasurer; Alison Hurley, secretary; and Misty Waits, historian. Lorinda Rogers is Cameron's SOEA advisor.

The Douglas library closed for a week while about 25 Cameron students and members of PEAL worked afternoons and evenings. They painted all the walls, and then painted murals on most of them afterward. The group also helped rearrange the library for better flow and enlarged a reading area.

New curtains were made and hung, with help from Cynthia Mason's 7th grade character education class.

The library already had a park theme, complete with a park bench. The college students and teachers redecorated the reading area around the bench to look like a park.



Cameron SOEA's Alison Turner gives a wall a fresh coat of green paint in the top photo while PEAL member Ramona Brownell works on one of the murals in the lower photo.

Share your Read Across America stories with us!

Read Across America has become a year-long celebration, culminating March 2 with Dr. Seuss's birthday. While the Oklahoma Education Association Catavan will once again crisscross the state, many local Associations will celebrate in their own ways.

We want to see and hear about how you promote reading and Read Across America.

Fill out the form below and mail it to Education Focus, OEA, PO Box 18485, Oklahoma City, OK, 73154. Or you can complete the same form online at www.okea.org/RAA/yourstories.

Don't forget to send us two or three of your best color photos, too. Color prints should be sent with the form to the above address. Digital photos are welcome. Shoot them at a high resolution (200 dpi or higher) and email them to dfolks@okea.org along with your event information.

We'll include some of the stories and photos in the April issue of the Education Focus, and on our website.

Remember to obtain photo releases of the students who appear in your pictures. If you need a photo release, call Doug Folks, *Education Focus* editor, at 800/522-8091 or 405/528-7785 in central Oklahoma.

Your name _____

School and Local _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Describe the activity, include who was involved, activities, results, etc.



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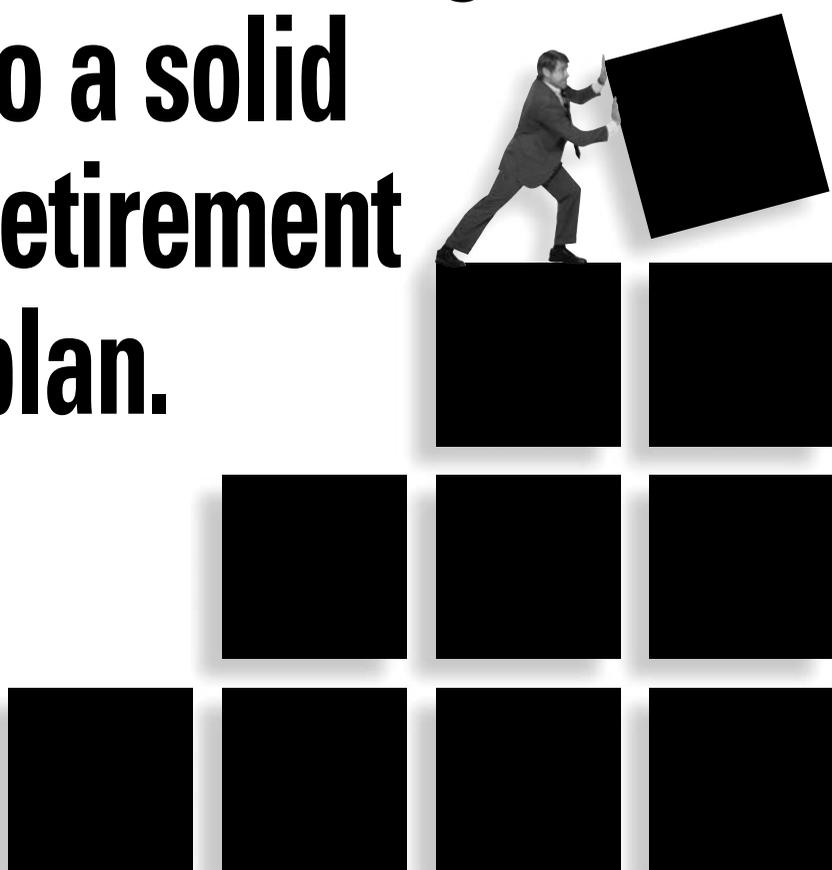
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VB390306

Personal record keeping

What to keep, what to toss

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How long should you hang on to your tax returns and other such documents and paperwork that tend to crowd your home office? Following are some guidelines to consider.

Tax returns & receipts – keep for seven years from filing date. The IRS has three years from filing date to audit your return and six years if they suspect significant underreporting of income.

Pay stubs – keep for one year. Once you receive your annual W-2 form from your employer and check that they match up, you can shred or toss the stubs.

Home & auto titles, home repair

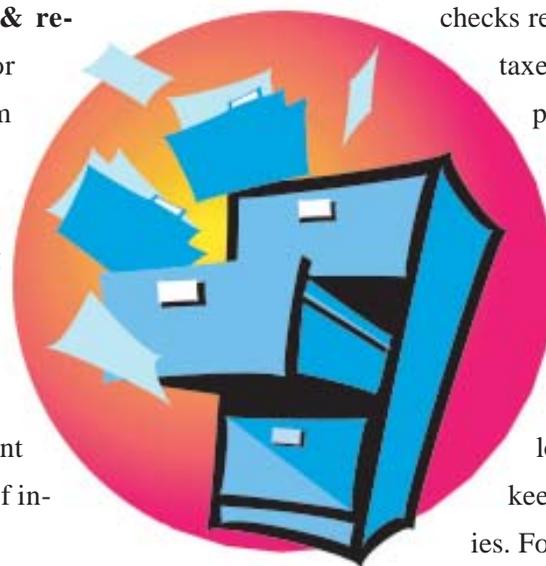
receipts – keep as long as you own the items. Titles are essential to transfer when you sell; receipts are necessary when you sell your house to calculate capital gains.

Bank statements, cancelled checks – keep for six years. Keep

checks related to your taxes, business expenses or mortgage payments, and all bank statements, in case of audit. **Sales receipts and warranties** –how long you should keep these items varies. For insurance purposes, save receipts for

expensive items; keep warranties until they expire.

More detailed information can be found at www.neamb.com/memsvcr/communications/articles/0405_fb.jsp.



APA survey seeks professional development opinions

The American Psychological Association (APA) wants your opinion.

Through its Teachers' Needs Survey, the APA is gathering information about teachers' perceptions of professional development in several areas, including classroom management, instructional practices, classroom diversity, family and community outreach, and other teaching skills and knowledge informed by psychological science. The survey will help inform public policy as well as the creation of

APA professional development courses for teachers based on the needs teachers identify.

APA is seeking a national representative sample of 1,000 teachers from urban, suburban and rural schools by June 2006.

To participate in the survey, visit <http://surveys.apa.org/ed/teacherneeds2/>.

For more information on APA, visit the organization's website at www.apa.org/ed/cpse.