

The Education Focus

For the membership of the Oklahoma Education Association • February 2008

The incredible shrinking education dollar



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10 Educators and Clergy Conference

OEA will host the state's first-ever Educators and Clergy Conference, March 25-26, in Norman. The conference will explore ways in which local Associations can partner with the religious community to work together for great public schools.

The Education Focus

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Everyone can play, so get in the game

By Roy Bishop
OEA President

My favorite season is almost here. Major League Baseball pitchers and catchers report to Spring Training camps in Florida and Arizona on Valentine's Day.

The most important season to all us in education begins 10 days earlier. February 4 is opening day for the second year of the 51st session of the Oklahoma Legislature.

The beauty of politics is that everyone can play, and everyone should. I really hope you won't be a spectator of this year's session, sitting at home eating peanuts and drinking a cool beverage while second guessing the calls made at the Capitol.

Sure, there are prime-time players in this game. Representatives and Senators from across the state will spend the next four months in the spotlight introducing bills, debating issues and casting votes. We will witness offensive strategies (and you can take the meaning of "offensive" in more than one way in this context). We'll watch tenacious defense for pet projects and against issues one party or the other doesn't care for.

But while they wage battle to pass or defeat bills, we can and must be part of the action. Participating in government is the ultimate interactive game. You've heard it said many times before: Every decision made for and about education is a political decision, and that's why we must be involved in the process.

The textbooks and materials you use in the classroom are determined by people elected to office. How much you get paid, when you get paid, how you get paid, are all decisions made ultimately by politicians.

From your local school board to halls of the U.S. Congress in Washington, D.C., elected officials determine everything about your job.

Fortunately, in our system of government, we have a voice and we absolutely must exercise our right to speak out for education.

Legislation isn't a two-team contest of Democrats versus Republicans. It's more complicated than that. Yes, it can be party versus party, but the governor can and does get involved, too. There are rural issues and urban issues. There are issues that affect all people in all corners of the state, like roads and bridges; issues that concern children and others that deal solely with senior citizens. We even see moral issues come before the House and Senate.

At least one issue is nonpartisan, or it should be. Education is everyone's business. Our system of government guarantees every child a free education. We invest in education as a community through our tax system because we're dependent on each other. Our goal is to give every child the best education possible so that every one of them grows up to be a contributing member of our society. In other words, we're all in this together.

If we don't express our opinions and give legislators the facts to help



President Roy Bishop

make decisions, they will decide our fate anyway. That is why we have to be involved in the process.

You can be involved in a number of ways. First, know where your Association stands on education issues. This month's *Education Focus* is our annual legislative preview. Check out the agenda, which was developed by members, on page 3.

Secondly, sign up for the OEA's weekly Legislative Update e-newsletter by sending your home email address to Nancy Garcia (ngarcia@okea.org).

Next, make sure you stay in contact with your local legislators. Call, write and email them with your thoughts on the education issues they look at this session. Host your legislators at forums in your community. And when OEA sponsors a lobby day at the Capitol, do your best to join us in Oklahoma City as we visit with legislators at their place of business.

Now, let's play ball.

NBPTS list includes Liebenau, Smith and Stuever

The list of National Board Certified Teachers published in last month's issue of the *Education Focus* did not include three Oklahoma Education Association members.

Oklahoma had a record 439 teachers earn National Board Certification, including DeeDee Liebenau, a fourth grade teacher at Stillwater's Richmond Elementary; Joyce Smith, a fourth grade teacher at Garfield Elementary in Sand Springs; and Vicki Stuever, an English and psychology teacher at Chisholm High School in Garfield County.

A downward trend

Education is losing it's share of the state budget

Higher pay for education employees and more local money for schools are chief among the Oklahoma Education Association's goals for the coming legislative session.

The OEA isn't alone in asking for improved education funding this year. The State Department of Education has proposed a \$2.9 billion education budget, which represents a \$408 million increase over last year's appropriation. The State Board's proposed budget includes \$2,000 pay increases for teachers, \$35 million to increase support professional pay by 70 cents an hour (matching an increase in the minimum wage), and a 16.6 percent increase in school operations funding.

Sen. Kenneth Corn has authored a bill that would raise teacher pay \$9,000 over the next three years, increase support professional pay 5 percent and pay for 75 percent of family health care coverage of education families.

All of this will no doubt create great optimism among education employees. But lurking in the shadows of the Capitol is an ironic yet troubling trend. While common education has received record dollar amounts in recent years, including nearly \$8,000 in teacher pay raises since 2000, the education dollar has shrunk to its lowest level ever.

As a percentage of the state budget, education funding has plummeted to its lowest levels since the early 90s. While common education received a record \$2.35 billion for

the 2006-07 fiscal year, the figure represented only 35.1 percent of the state budget.

In 1995, common ed received \$1.437 billion, which was 38.1 percent of the state budget. Since 2004 when common ed received an all-time high of 38.2 percent, education's share has fallen to it's lowest point ever at 35.1 percent.

When the OEA filed its Adequacy and Equity lawsuit against the state two years ago, claiming education was underfunded by nearly \$1 billion, OEA President Roy Bishop said if education funding had maintained its share of the state budget, the Association wouldn't be filing the lawsuit.

The State Supreme Court eventually dismissed the lawsuit, allowing the legislature to ignore its constitutional duties. But the fact remains Oklahoma schools are \$1 billion short of adequate funding, according to OEA's research and a study commissioned by the Legislature that it has never released publicly.

"While we are very happy that teacher pay is nearly at the regional average – and that's something our members have worked diligently to accomplish – schools are hurting for operational funds," said Bishop.

Increased energy costs, unfunded

and underfunded state and federal mandates, and natural disasters like December's ice storm have socked local budgets.

So where is the money going?

"First of all, it's a change in priorities at the state Capitol," Bishop said. "Fanning the flame is the harsh reality that we have cut our taxes since 2005 at a rate that will reduce state revenue by \$777 million by 2010."

Lottery, gaming and tobacco taxes represent new revenue streams that are projected to bring in \$320 million by 2010, which still leaves the state \$457 million short of making up the revenue lost to tax cuts, he said.

With huge tax cuts and revenue streams that don't come close to making up the shortfall, every state agency suffers. It is well known that Oklahoma roads and bridges are in desperate need of attention. A recent audit showed our prison system is vastly underfunded. State employees haven't received adequate raises in years, and police and fire are underpaid as well.

See "Schools receive" on Page 4



Lt. Gov. Jari Askins (left) talks with Owasso's Iva Lynn Hobson (center) and Annette Sears during the OEA's Legislative Grassroots Conference at the State Capitol in mid-January.

By Doug Folks

2008 Legislative Agenda

The 2008 OEA Legislative Agenda was developed by the Legislative Committee, and approved by the OEA Board of Directors. The agenda will guide the work of the Association during the coming legislative session.

Salaries

- Reach the regional average salary for teachers – a \$2,000 increase with language guaranteeing the raise for all teachers.
- Increase support professional pay by 5 percent.

Negotiations Reform

- Support passage of legislation which will level the playing field for local negotiators at the bargaining table.
- Support passage of legislation to allow for the recall of school board members.

School Reform

- Support referendum to allow local districts to increase up to 5 additional mills for operational costs to implement a school improvement proposal. These dollars would be non-chargeable and the plans would be locally developed.

Extended School Day and /or Year

- Oppose efforts to extend the school day/year prior to salaries being brought up to the regional average and require any additional time be fully reimbursed for both personnel and operating costs.
- Support efforts to require more instructional time within the current school day/year.

Health Insurance

- Support passage of 75 percent family coverage for school employees (state employee equity).
- Support legislation for at least a \$50 monthly increase in the health insurance subsidy for retired educators.

Improving Instruction

- Support passage or expansion of funding of quality instructional development programs including: Connected Math, Children of Poverty (Ruby Payne), mentoring.

School Employee Protection Act

- Support passage of legislation, which provides for VPOs and immunity for school employees when using responsible control and discipline of students at school or in transport. Also provides immunity for school districts in the suspension of students.

College Tuition

- Support efforts to provide free tuition for children of school employees who graduate with at 3.0 or higher GPA (in accordance with New Business Item No. 7 from 2007 Delegate Assembly).

OEA OPPOSES

- ABCTE – an alternative certification program that requires only passage of an online test to earn teacher certification.
- Additional tax or revenue reductions.
- Elimination of *trial de novo* as part of the Teacher Due Process Act.
- Requiring lottery dollars to be sent to schools through the funding formula or sent outside the formula on a per pupil basis.
- Changes to the current restrictions on initiative petition circulation.

Continual contact is vital

Politicians work hardest for the constituency groups that maintain the highest level of communications, so it is vital they hear from teachers, support professionals and administrators 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 if you don't already know.

From www.okea.org/LPO/index.htm, you can access websites for the Oklahoma House of Representatives and the Senate, and send email to legislators, the governor and 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

Significant OEA bills and their authors

Schools receive 67 percent funding from the state

Continued from Page 4

Legislators on both sides of the aisle are carrying bills for the Oklahoma Education Association, bills which meet the goals of the Association's 2008 Legislative Agenda. Following is a look at some of those bills and who is authoring them on behalf of teachers, support professionals and schools. (*Editor's note, at press time, not all bills had been assigned numbers.*)

- An omnibus school funding bill that would raise teacher salaries \$3,000 a year for three years, increase support professional pay by 5 percent, and pay for 75 percent of education employees' family health insurance premiums. By Sen. Kenneth Corn (D, Howe).



Sen. Corn

- A separate bill to provide a 5 percent pay raise for support professionals, which averages about \$1,500 a year. Rep. Ryan Kiesel (D, Seminole).



Rep. Kiesel

- 75% family coverage for all school employees, giving them coverage equitable to what state employees receive. By Rep. Fred Jordan (R, Jenks).



Rep. Jordan

- HJR 1083 and SJR (Senate Joint Resolution) 40 would allow local district patrons to vote an increase of up to five additional mills for operational expenses. The additional revenues raised would be defined as "non-chargeable." By Sen. Jim Wilson (D, Tahlequah) and Rep. Lee Denney (R, Cushing).



Sen. Wilson



Rep. Denney

- A bill that allows the patrons of a school district to vote on issues that are at impasse. Each side would present their last best offer. By Sen. Jeff Rabon (D, Hugo).



Sen. Rabon

- SB 1499 that would set up a procedure for the recall of school board members. The recall election would be called upon the submission of a petition of 25 percent of the electors in the school district. By Sen. Rabon.

Another piece of this troubling puzzle is how Oklahoma funds its schools. In fiscal year 2006, state schools received 65 percent of its funding from the state, 23 percent from local revenue and 13 percent from federal sources. Bishop said most school funding around the country is the opposite, with schools receiving about two-thirds of their dollars from local revenue and the remaining third from state and federal sources.

"This reality means our state must begin looking at new ways of funding education," Bishop said. "Our schools cannot continue to do more with less. This trend does not bode well for anyone in education, but it will be students that suffer the most."

Bishop said the OEA is exploring new ways the state can shake education's downward funding spiral. For instance, OEA has asked Sen. Jim Wilson (D, Tahlequah) and Rep. Lee Denney (R, Cushing) to author a bill that would allow local communities to increase the mill levy by 5 percent. The additional mills would be considered "nonchargeable" so as to not affect a districts state funding level.

"If we can find ways for schools to be less dependent on the state, everyone can win," Bishop said.

Stay in touch with legislative happenings

During the legislative session, the OEA provides a weekly e-newsletter update of what's happening at the state Capitol.

The Legislative Update keeps members informed of not only what bills are being considered, but also what members can do to advance the OEA legislative agenda. The report is emailed to home email addresses only. If you are not receiving the Legislative Update, send your home email address to Nancy Garcia at ngarcia@okea.org.

For information on how you can get involved with the Association's lobbying efforts, call your regional Legislative and Political Organizing Specialist.

Celebrating Seuss

OEA partners with Pi Phi for another RAA

By Bruce Treadaway

Plan on joining with educators, parents, politicians, celebrities, schools and students across America on March 3 for this year's Read Across America celebration. The annual reading initiative is held in honor of Dr. Seuss, the author whose books epitomize reading fun.

For the second year in a row, the OEA is partnering with the Pi Beta Phi Women's Fraternity to present the Reading Roundup at the Boys and Girls Club of Oklahoma County.

The OEA RAA will again include events which have proven to be tremendously successful, like a blood drive co-sponsored by the OEA, the Oklahoma Blood Institute and Saturn of Oklahoma City. Also, the National Education Association "Cat-a-van" will be visiting locals in Oklahoma City and Tulsa, March 3-4.

Ashley and Courtney Paris are OEA's 2008 honorary co-chairs. The Paris twins have helped turn the University of Oklahoma's women's basketball team into a national title contender. Courtney is a two-time All-American and a candidate for this year's Naismith Trophy as the country's outstanding women's basketball player. Copies of the official OEA RAA poster featuring Ashley and Courtney are available through OEA regional team members.

OEA's Cat in the Hat has emceed the Celebration of Reading event in Norman for the past five years and will continue to do so again this year.

Over 500,000 Oklahoma public school students have received visits from the OEA Cat-A-Van over the last 11 years, more than 25,000 books have been given to chil-

dren, and over 600,000 books have been read in special reading programs.

Last year, close to 50 million people shared books across the nation, and this year's celebration promises to be bigger than ever.

Students love to find new friends in books whether with Seussian characters like Horton and Lorax, detectives like Nate the Great, or unforgettable siblings like Judy Blume's *Pain and the Great One*. NEA provides all the tools and resources needed to create successful RAA activities. Visit the RAA website and you will find:

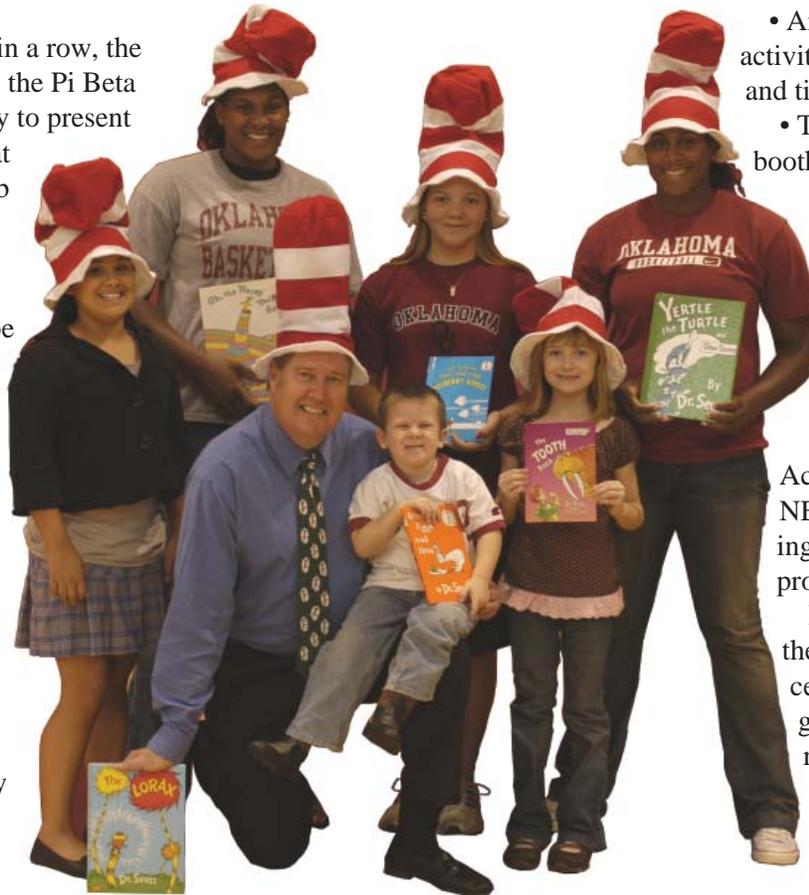
- An online toolkit filled with activity ideas, PR tools, resources and tips
- The RAA traveling exhibit booth schedule
- RAA merchandise from the NEA Professional Library
- National Partner Resources
- Links to state affiliates and local web sites
- Information about Books Across America, Lea con La NEA, Get a Kick Out of Reading and other RAA literacy programs.

Members who subscribe to the RAA e-newsletter will receive the latest literacy news, grant information and tips on reaching minority communities. To subscribe, send a blank email to join-nea-raa-newsletter@list.nea.org.

Locals should log on to www.nea.org/readacross to list their activities

as well as to view what other locals across America have planned. The site provides ideas for conducting reading celebrations, and, as always, locals may call OEA Communications Specialists for help designing and organizing their events.

University of Oklahoma Women's Basketball stars Courtney Paris (back row left above) and Ashley Paris (far right) are OEA's co-honorary chairs for 2008 Read Across America. Joining them at the poster photo shoot were OEA President Roy Bishop (center) and (from left) Darian Covington; Rowdy Story, Maggie Treadaway and Cassidy Moses. Posters are available from OEA staff members.



Tulsa storyteller named top librarian

By Marty Bull

Officially, Barbara McBride-Smith's title is media specialist, but she prefers librarian.

"Kids know who a librarian is and what we do," said the Texas native, who has been a librarian for 34 of her 42-year teaching career. "And they know what a library is – it's an all encompassing word."

It wasn't the title but the work of McBride-Smith that led the Oklahoma Association of School Library Media Specialists (OASLMS) to honor her with the 2007 Polly Clarke Award as the state's outstanding library media specialist.

The Clarke Award honors an individual who has been instrumental in the establishment of an exemplary library media program serving the instructional needs of teachers, students and administrators. McBride-Smith is known for her innovative techniques and is an integral part of the overall learning environment at Tulsa's Hoover Elementary.

"We're not just a planning time for classroom teachers, or babysitters," said McBride-Smith. "Our job is to work collaboratively with the



Weekly readers

Hoover students (from left) Braden Cody, Joshua Cutshaw, Easton Cope, Isabella Lewis, Karis Konkler and Noel Hughes meet weekly with Tulsa's Barbara McBride-Smith for a reading theatre activity based on her book "Tell It Together."

faculty on classroom curriculum and be a part of the teaching team."

The Tulsa Classroom Teachers Association member came to Hoover as its first full-time librarian. Over the last nine years, she has taken a space previously used to exercise students' bodies to one that exercises their minds.

"When I first came here the school had one small library and two gymnasiums," said McBride-Smith, Tulsa Public Schools' 2001 Elementary Teacher of the Year. "I took the smaller gym and turned it into an interactive space."

McBride-Smith came to her love of words through a rich tradition of family storytelling. With no television to entertain the family, she learned the family history through her parents and grandparents. Interpreting through signs and nonverbal body movements for two older deaf sisters added another layer to telling stories.

"I learned about the Depression and World War II through family conversations," said the nationally recognized storyteller. "I was genuinely doomed to be a storyteller."

According to this mother of one, her storytelling skills blossomed in the early 80s and she hasn't stopped "telling" since. She has been featured

Picking a favorite book is tough

When pressed to pick one favorite book, Barbara McBride-Smith chooses John Reynolds Gardiner's "Stone Fox."

"For me it's a book that helps a child empathize with someone else's life," said McBride-Smith. "Until a child empathizes with someone else's plight, they'll never understand the concepts of justice or compassion. I've never known a person who reads this book who doesn't understand what it means."

McBride-Smith recommends parents read the book to kindergarten through second graders, but student's as old as high school can still gain insight from the read.

"Stone Fox" is about 10-year-old Willy, who needs to win the big dogsled race in order to pay the back taxes on his grandfather's farm. But doing so will mean beating the huge Indian mountain man, Stone Fox. The book won 1981 Notable Book Children's Literature Council of Southern California, 1987 Maud Hart Lovelace Reading Project – Minnesota Book Awards, and 1987 George G. Stone Center for Children's Book Recognition of Merit Award.

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

at the National Storytelling Festival in Tennessee, as well as the National Festival of Homiletics and the International Storytelling Festival in Washington, D.C. She has served on the board of the National Storytelling Association and has been honored with several national awards, including the John Henry Faulk Award for outstanding contributions to the art and folkway of storytelling and the National Storytelling Association's Circle of Excellence.

McBride-Smith also helps theological students learn to use storytelling in their ministries at Tulsa's Phillips Theological Seminary. Her

husband, Dr. Dennis Smith, is a professor of theology at the seminary.

But her storytelling talent is not limited to the spoken word; she has also authored two books. "Greek Myths Western Style" (1998) was chosen by the American Library Association as a Top Ten Title for adult new readers, and "Tell It Together" (2001) is a collection of foolproof story theatre scripts which received the 2003 Anne IZard Storytellers' Choice Award. McBride-Smith co-authored a book of stories based on women of the New Testament as part of a series The Storytellers Companion to the Bible. She has recorded three CDs which feature her stories.

Someday McBride-Smith hopes to have the time to write books that would find a home on the shelves of the library she helped build at Hoover.

"I already have some ideas for more books," said McBride-Smith. "I have an advantage; I know what kids like and what teachers need."

But even with all the national attention and the fact she could have retired several years ago, this vivacious librarian is having too much fun to quit her day job.

Court reinstates NEA lawsuit against NCLB

WASHINGTON – On the eve of NCLB's sixth anniversary, a federal appeals court delivered yet another major blow to the controversial law. The United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit ruled that Education Secretary Margaret Spellings is violating the Spending Clause of the Constitution by requiring states and school districts to spend their own funds to comply with the law.

Six years ago, President Bush promised to fully fund NCLB. But the president has consistently refused to make good on his promises. Due to Bush's recent veto of the FY 2008 education appropriations bill, there will be a \$14.8 billion gap in funding for NCLB programs. That is on top of the previous cumulative gap of \$56.1 billion.

The ruling is a major victory for the National Education Association and the other plaintiffs – including nine school districts and nine NEA state affiliates – which brought the lawsuit in April 2005 to oppose costly federal regulations that divert money from children and classrooms to paperwork and bureaucracy. The ruling by the appeals court reverses the lower court's November 2005 summary judgment dismissing the lawsuit.

For more information, visit: www.nea.org/esea.

West, Parkhurst join OEA staff

Two new employees joined the Oklahoma Education Association family in January, and both have ties to Tinker Air Force Base.

Kandis West is a new staffer in the Communications Center and on the Oklahoma City Metro Team. Amanda Parkhurst is now receptionist and Southwest Team assistant.

West comes to the OEA from Tinker AFB where she was a staff writer in the public affairs division. A graduate of the University of Oklahoma, she has also worked for the Chickasaw Nation as a media relations specialist and completed internships at KOCO Channel 5, the ABC affiliate in Oklahoma City, and at the Daily Oklahoman.

A graduate of Midwest City High School, West will serve OEA as a writer and media relations coordinator in addition to working with local associations in the Oklahoma City Metro Region. She and her husband Donta and their daughter Peja live in Midwest City.



Kandis West



Amanda Parkhurst

She and her husband Marcus and their son Brent live in Midwest City.

Closing gaps, planting seeds

Moore, Putnam City locals receive NEA Urban grants

By Kandis West

An unknown author said it's not so much what is poured into the student, but what is planted that really counts.

The local teachers' associations in Moore and Putnam City are planting seeds of hope and achievement in their efforts to bridge achievement gaps.

Both associations were among 25 locals to receive a \$5,000 grant from the National Education Association Urban Grants program, a program designed to aid in the development of education reform leadership plans.

The Moore Association of Classroom Teachers was awarded the urban grant this past December. MACT President Jill Dudley said her association's driving force is a quality public education for every child, despite income levels.

"Core to a teacher's moral being is children," said Dudley, a high school math teacher in Moore on leave of absence to serve as MACT's full-time release president.

This is MACT's third year for the grant and over time the Association has gone from feeding hungry little tummies to nourishing minds. About 50 percent of Moore's students qualify for free and reduced lunches.

The first two grants helped develop and sustain a program called Food 4 Kids that provides food for children over the weekend. With this new grant, MACT will provide

a backpack full of food on Fridays to children who have been identified as needing assistance. The backpack will be then returned empty on Monday. On average, it will cost about \$125 per participating child for the school year and Dudley expects to serve about 380 impoverished elementary students in the district.

"During the week, kids get a hot breakfast and lunch," Dudley said "(On the weekends) there are two days when some kids won't have those food opportunities."

The food program is now self-sustaining thanks to a partnership with the Moore and South Oklahoma City Chambers of Commerce and the support of local businesses.

This year's grant will supplement the food program by including educational resources like books and math games in the backpacks. Dudley said access to educational tools outside of the classroom is one of the greatest indicators of success.

"There is a direct correlation between high test scores and access to educational resources," she said. "Many of these children have non-traditional families, may go home to an empty house and just do not have the same opportunity for enrichment."

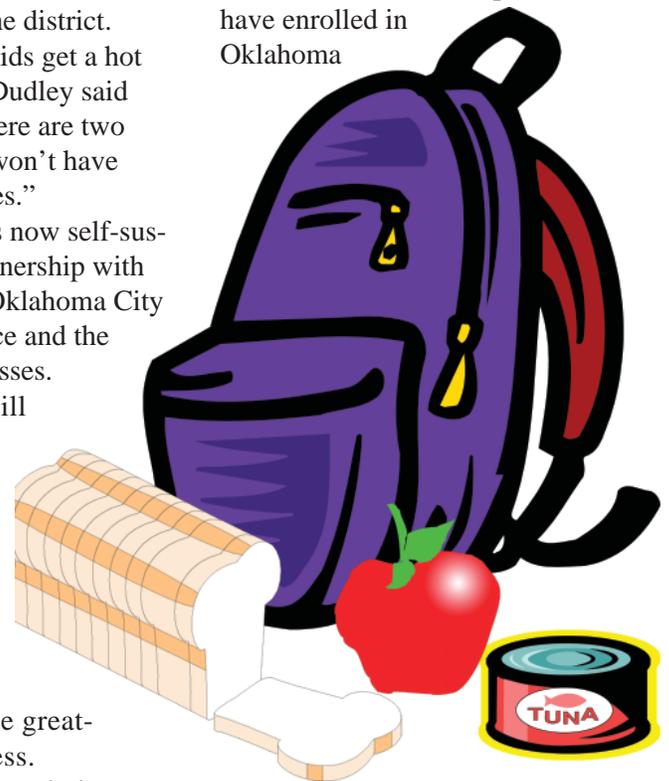
With the grant, the association

plans to solicit new business partners, distribute donated books and supplies, host a family social for the participat-

ing families at each elementary, and develop and implement professional development workshops for teachers and education support professionals on teaching children in poverty. MACT hopes to expand both programs to secondary schools.

The Putnam City Association of Classroom Teachers (PACT) decided to tackle the language barrier that is causing a significant gap in educational achievement in their community.

More than 3,500 Hispanic students have enrolled in Oklahoma



public schools since October 2006. State Superintendent of Education Sandy Garrett said significant demographic changes have created a greater diversity of needs and Putnam City teachers are prepared to address those needs.

"When there is a language barrier, to cross the barrier can seem insurmountable because communication is the basis of learning," said Jan Sands, PACT president.

Although the district has English
See "Grant will help" on Page 10

"Core to a teacher's moral being is children."

Jill Dudley, Moore ACT President

Filing opens Feb. 1 for OEA elections

Filing for 10 seats on the Oklahoma Education Association (OEA) Board of Directors opens February 1. In addition, there are openings for three statewide positions for Delegate Assembly (DA), one state position for the NEA Representative Assembly (RA), and six regional spots for Category I seats at the next RA.

The filing period for all positions closes at 5 p.m., February 29. Ballots for the 2008 elections will be distributed in early March, with newly elected board members taking office July 15. The winners of the statewide DA positions will serve during the 2008 annual meeting, scheduled for April 25-26 in Oklahoma City.

Winners of the RA positions will attend the NEA RA July 1-6 in Washington, D.C.

OEA Board members represent approximately 1,000 Association members, allowing an increased opportunity to participate in the organization's decision-making by providing representation closer to the grassroots level.

OEA Board seats open this election cycle are:

- **Northeast B** – three-year term expires 2011, NEA Delegate 2009,

2010. Represents Muskogee and Wagoner Counties.

- **Tulsa Metro B** – three-year term expires 2011, NEA Delegate 2009, 2010 Represents Tulsa Public Schools.

- **Tulsa Metro D** – three-year term expires 2011; NEA Delegate 2009 and 2010. Represents Oral Roberts University, Langston-Tulsa Campus, Sand Springs, Tulsa Community College, Tulsa Technology Center, Union, and the University of Tulsa.

- **Southwest E** – three-year term expires 2011; NEA Delegate 2009 and 2010. Represents Cleveland and McClain Counties.

- **Northwest B** – three-year term expires 2011; NEA Delegate 2009 and 2010. Represents Kay, Logan, Noble and Payne Counties.

- **Southeast B** – three-year term expires 2011; NEA Delegate 2009 and 2010. Represents Haskell, Hughes, McIntosh, Okfuskee and Okmulgee Counties.

- **Southeast C** – three-year term expires 2011; NEA Delegate 2009 and 2010. Represents Atoka, Choctaw, Coal and Latimer Counties.

- **OKC Metro B** – three-year term expires 2011; NEA Delegate 2009 and 2010. Represents Bethany, Oklahoma City University, Putnam City, Southern Nazarene University, and

Western Heights.

- **OKC Metro C** – one-year unexpired term expires 2009; NEA Delegate 2008. Represents Edmond, Oklahoma City and the University of Central Oklahoma.

- **OKC Metro D** – three-year term expires 2011; NEA Delegate 2009 and 2010. Represents Choctaw/Nicomma Park, Crutcho, Deer Creek, Jones, Luther, Midwest City-Del City, Millwood and Rose State College.

Openings for statewide at-large positions at the 2008 OEA Delegate Assembly positions include OEA/NEA Retired, OEA Administrator, and OEA Ethnic Minority Delegate(s).

Open positions for the 2008 NEA Representative Assembly include NEA Retired Delegate(s)-at-Large.

The number of retired candidates to win at-large positions to the DA is based on total retired membership. The number of ethnic and administrator at-large delegates is determined by number of members in those categories and how many ethnic and administrative members are elected as local delegates.

Positions for this summer's RA, known as Category I Delegates-At-Large, are open in all six geographic regions – Tulsa Metro, Southwest, Northwest, Southeast, Northeast, and Okla. City Metro.

In addition to the races mentioned above, OEA members will be asked to vote for a new NEA Director. Those running for the position are Lori Burriss of Midwest City-Del City, Bruce Harrison of Lawton and Lawrence E. Lane of Checotah.

Filing forms are available on the OEA website, www.okea.org, at OEA headquarters and regional offices. For more information on the 2008 elections or filing, call Janice Trent at 800/522-8091 or 405/528-7785.

Lily Eskelsen coming to NE Zone Day

Teachers from OEA's Northeast Zones A and C will come together for professional development Friday, March 14, at Pryor High School.

Refreshments and registration begins at 8 a.m. with the General Session beginning at 8:50 a.m. when NEA Secretary-Treasurer Lily Eskelsen will provide entertainment and enlightenment.

More than 25 different workshops will be available to participants, according to OEA Zone Directors Steve Hawkins of Vinita and Kim Meigs of Tahlequah. The day will conclude with door prize give-aways at noon.



Lily Eskelsen

Educators and clergy to discuss common ground

Oklahoma Education Association members are invited to bring local clergy to the first-ever Educators and Clergy Conference, March 25-26, in Norman. The conference will explore ways in which local Associations can partner with the religious community to work together for great public schools.

“A main goal of various faiths is to improve their local communities, and schools are a vital part of the community,” said Carolyn Crowder, NEA executive committee member and a former OEA president. “It’s a natural partnership.”

Crowder, a teacher in Mustang, said while public schools must be respectful of the first amendment in regards to separation of the church and state, they don’t have to be completely secular.

“Public schools can appropriately recognize the religious heritage of our country and the world,” she said.

Religious officials of several faiths and educators statewide are planning sessions addressing topics such as,

- Why we can’t leave out faith in closing the achievement gaps,
- Why should people of faith engage in public schools,
- Being proactive around religion’s role in public education,
- Working with challenges facing the ethnic minority communities, and
- First amendment issues.

Clergy from several different faiths are scheduled to participate in the conference to discuss various issues. NEA Secretary/Treasurer Lily Eskelsen will share the education community’s perspective on the partnership.

“The two-day conference is a chance to just get the conversation started,” said Dr. Dottie Hager, OEA associate executive director.

Both Hager and Crowder said participants should come away from the conference with an action plan.

Crowder said a similar conference last year in Tennessee resulted in local and state initiatives to strengthen partnerships with the clergy.

Local associations are encouraged to invite clergy members to attend the conference with them as a team.

The conference will be held at the Norman Holiday Inn, 1000 N. Interstate Drive. Rooms are \$79 plus tax a night for conference participants, and the OEA will pay for rooms for clergy members who attend.

The deadline to reserve rooms at OEA’s discounted rate is March 14.

Participants must make their own hotel reservations by calling the Holiday Inn at 405/364-2882.

Registration is due by March 3. Attendees can register online at www.okea.org/clergyconference.

To register clergy participants or for more information, contact Jennifer Smith at 800/522-8091, 405/523-4316, or jsmith@okea.org.

Grant will help PCACT address parent needs

Continued from Page 8

language learner classes for Spanish speaking students, the team wanted to develop a program that extended outside of the classroom.

Sands, also a secondary math teacher, said the partnership between Hispanic parents, community leaders, students and teachers increases the chances of success, demonstrating that it truly takes a village to raise a child.

Through NEA’s Community Conversations grant, bilingual community leaders attended training to facilitate the meetings with educators and the Hispanic community. The trained facilitators then taught

Putnam City West parents to become moderators and recorders so parents can develop ownership of the program and sustain it over time. The PCACT has hosted four meetings, with another planned for January 28.

The urban grant will be used to address parents’ needs revealed through the community meetings including better bilingual communication between home and school and information and training on how parents can help their children be successful in school.

“We want the parents to feel welcome and comfortable being involved at their child’s school,” Sands said. “We also want them to

know that every child has a right to an education.”

Putnam City West assistant principal Melanie Pealor said understanding different cultures is also a barrier that can be just as great as the language barrier. With funds from the grant, two teachers will learn to train other teachers on understanding cultural differences. The urban grant will also help develop relevant materials in Spanish and host regularly scheduled training sessions for parents.

Both MACT and PCACT are committed to watching the seeds they plant grow and flourish into the cornerstone of our democracy.

Harassment is defined by law, not personalities

By *Heath Merchen*
Associate General Counsel

If being a jerk were unlawful, many an administrator would find themselves behind bars. Even more attorneys (though our office would of course remain fully staffed). As for insurance company executives, well, the lot of them would be hammering rocks in some uncomfortably hot penal facility down south.

Many a client have come through my door sure that they have been “harassed,” exposed to a “hostile work environment” or otherwise wronged in a manner that is deserving of compensation. Sadly, in the vast majority of cases, neither compensation nor consolation is forthcoming. The simple fact is that being a jackass doesn’t violate any statute or case law standards; in many cases your boss can be mean and get away with it.

From your counsel

Unlawful harassment exists only when there is unwelcome verbal or physical conduct based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age (40 and over), disability or retaliation (for reporting harassment). If the rude behavior isn’t due to one of the factors listed above, it isn’t unlawful. Hence, if your boss just doesn’t like you, he can give you worse assignments, refuse to say hello to you in the hallway, and even insult your choice of shoes (or that of your mother).

However, if he makes a racial slur, insults you because of an ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) qualifying disability, or gives you less favorable assignments because of your religion, then you may have a cause of action.

Similarly, a “hostile work environment” is created only when unwelcome comments or conduct based on the above listed, legally protected characteristics unreasonably interfere with an employee’s work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile (yes, that seems like a circular reference) or office work environment.

If your boss is simply rude and is constantly reprimanding you because he doesn’t like your personality, (i.e. the rudeness isn’t due to your race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age or disability), then it isn’t unlawful. However, if he holds you to a higher standard than other staff because of your race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age (over 40), or disability, then you may have a case.

So be careful before accusing your supervisor of harassment as the “common sense” definition of the word doesn’t apply in the employment law arena. As with all legal issues, whether or not you have a viable claim depends on the particular facts of the case and requires the review of someone experienced in the area. Hence, if you believe you are being harassed, contact your advocate immediately.

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Jenks' Robyn Paliotta (right) talks with Rep. Tad Jones, House Education Chair, after OEA members from Bixby, Jenks, Owasso and Sapulpa, presented nearly 2,000 petitions asking the legislature to not add more time to the school calendar with raising teacher pay to the regional average. The petitions were gathered during a special OEA/NEA project in the Tulsa Metro in early November.

Wal-Mart honors B'ville's Derryberry

By Jeff Savage

Bartlesville's Erica Derryberry was proud to be named Wal-Mart State Teacher of the Year, but knowing the nomination was made by students makes the honor even more special.

Derryberry was surprised with the state-wide honor at an all-school assembly, which included her parents sitting on the front row. With the award came numerous tokens for Derryberry and \$10,000 for the school. With the monetary reward for the school, she and the principal purchased multimedia projectors – one for every science teacher. The school also purchased a Promethean interactive whiteboard for the faculty to share.

Her freshman and sophomore science students at Bartlesville Mid-High nominated Derryberry for the local award. As the Bartlesville winner, she received gift cards from Wal-Mart and the Mid-High received \$1,000.

Derryberry grew up in Bartlesville and now teaches with the same teachers who influenced her throughout her childhood. In fact, she teaches next door to the science teacher she had in high school. She brings with her enthusiasm for

teaching “even more than when I first began.”

Making a positive impact on her students is a priority for Derryberry. Even through this award, Derryberry still claims her biggest reward is teaching students in lab and seeing the look on their face when “they get it.”

“As teachers, it is really great to be recognized by different people,” she said. “However, when you get positive feedback from students – that is who we really want to touch.”



Erica Derryberry

10 steps to a perfect retirement

By Liz Picone

NEA Member Benefits

Think of investing as a journey. You start at one place and head for another. The best route may be efficient but boring. Investing is about taking risks. But along the way there are hundreds of distractions and opportunities to get you off the track. Many investors occasionally take way too much risk. Sometimes they don't take as much risk as they should.

Consider these 10 steps when planning for your future to be sure your money outlives you and you do not outlive your money.

Step 1: Determine how much you will *need* to live on in retirement.

Step 2: Determine how much you *want* to live on in retirement.

Step 3: Determine your tolerance for taking risks.

Step 4: Make all your decisions based on what's probable, not what's possible.

Step 5: Determine the kind of assets that will give you the returns you need to achieve your goals.

Step 6: Combine those assets in the right proportions into a portfolio that's tailored specifically for you.

Step 7: Learn to recognize and control the expenses of investing.

Step 8: Make sure you understand enough about the tax laws to avoid giving Uncle Sam a bigger-than-neces-

sary cut of your money.

Step 9: Establish the right distribution plan that will give you the income you need in retirement along with the peace of mind of knowing you won't run out of money.

Step 10: Put everything you do on automatic pilot.

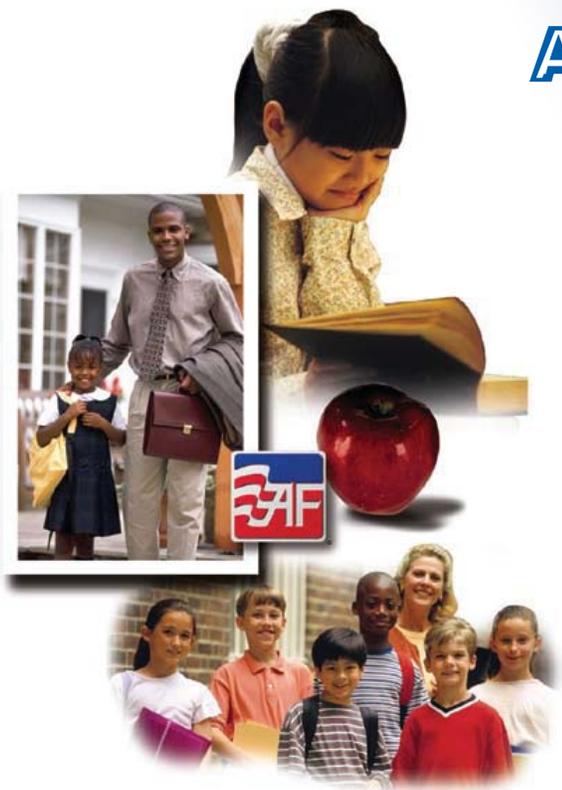
Securing your financial future is an important piece of NEA Member Benefits' mission. Participation in a supplementary retirement savings program can help you reach your retirement goals.

- Learn how the NEA Valuebuilder Program can help you meet your retirement savings needs through a variety of programs and different levels of support.

- In less than five minutes you can take the pulse of your retirement plan. Where are you now and where do you need to be? Answer a few questions and you'll get a retirement savings snapshot plus additional planning resources if you need them.

- For those NEA members who want “do-it-yourself” retirement savings, NEA Valuebuilder DirectInvest is a convenient online savings program. No financial representative is involved. You make all the decisions and save on the fees you would pay for the financial assistance of an advisor. Enroll and select your investment options online with DirectInvest.

For additional information on the above programs, please send an email to lpicone@neamb.com and include your name, school district and preferred contact information.



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