

THE EDUCATION FOCUS

FOR THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE OKLAHOMA EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

October/November 2012

**Cast your vote
for public education**



Voting for Education

Education employees should be voting with the future of education in mind. Our biannual election primer gives an overview of two important state questions and lists which candidates are recommended by the OEA Fund for Children and Public Education.

Page 2 State Teacher of the Year Elaine Hutchison shares her thoughts on life in a small town, her path to the classroom, and her new “flipped” classroom.

Pages 3-4 OEA members Lane Matheson, Andrea Brock, Lisa Lamont, Lee Ann Stone, Brenda Roberts and Carol Brinsfield were named Teacher of the Year finalists. Read profiles on each of these outstanding teachers.



Pages 5-8, OEA 2012 Election Primer

Page 5 A look at State Questions 758 and 766. Find out how the passage of these two anti-education measures could affect not only school funding but also your own pocketbook.

Information printed on page 6-8 can be found in the Campaign 2012 area of our Members Only section of okea.org.

Pages 6-7 Races for the general election, with recommendations by the OEA Fund for Children and Public Education.

Page 8 Which judges should we retain for the good of public education? Take a look at the statewide judicial ballot.

Page 9 Teachers are finding tons of ideas on pinterest.com. See which idea is now used school-wide at Will Rogers Elementary in Edmond.

Join the conversation with OEA!



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- Oklahoma Education Association
- Student Oklahoma Education Association
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Our voices need to be heard on all levels

By *Linda Hampton*
OEA President

By this time of the school year, the chalk dust has settled, the classroom rules have been posted and you are well into the routine that will guide you for this school year. You have a sense of your students – their strengths and weaknesses. As all good educators do, you will use their strengths to shore up their weaker areas.

By now, the students are becoming comfortable with you and your teaching style. They trust you to be the person who will challenge them, encourage them, see their potential and open the doors to a successful future. You are a person in their lives who will make a difference.

In addition to all you are doing, we also need your help to defend and promote our profession. Public education is under attack. There are those who want to eliminate public education and turn it into a profit-making business. Equally disturbing, are those who want great public schools but don't want to fund them. Neither of these attacks will benefit Oklahoma's children.

Our children should not be pawns in a business venture nor should they be in underfunded schools. Failing to stand up for our children is not an option. So what do we need to do?

We must be sure our voices are heard on many levels. We need to be the voice of professionalism at our schools. Stay current and informed. OEA provides high-quality programs and trainings that keep you prepared for the changes and challenges that are occurring in our profession.

Two examples are the Common Core Cadre and the Teacher/Leader Evaluation trainings. Both programs are developed and presented by high-

ly effective teacher members who are currently in the classroom. We also provided a myriad of other trainings, all of which are offered at very little or no cost to our members. By uniting, we can provide high quality professional development which helps both teachers and students improve.

We must be the voice of education and Oklahoma's children at the legislature. You are the expert about what is going on in our schools. OEA's team of professionals lobby on your behalf at the Capitol. This past session we were able to preserve your right to collectively bargain and your right to payroll deduct your dues. These things didn't just happen automatically. It was not only the hard work of our team that prevented these pieces of legislation from becoming law, it was the willingness of our members to write letters, make phone calls, lobby at both the Capitol and at home. We must continue to work together as advocates for public education. If we are united, we will persist in making a difference.

We must have a voice at the ballot box. Be sure to vote. Your vote is your voice. Our OEA Fund for Children and Public Education is composed of members who volunteer their time to interview candidates and make recommendations. Before you vote, please check out pages 6 and 7 to see who your fellow teachers recom-



President Linda Hampton

mended based on their stand on public education issues. We cannot afford to vote for anti-public education candidates. United, we have a voice.

We must be a voice in our communities. Whether you are at church, a ball game or the grocery store, you are viewed as a teacher. Your title doesn't stop when you step off your school site. Studies show that the public values and respects teachers. Among our members we have volunteer firefighters, volunteer community leaders, Sunday School teachers, and the list goes on and on. Be a positive voice about our profession. United, we serve our communities and are the face of public education.

One thing I am certain of is that you – our OEA members – will continue to do an exemplary job educating Oklahoma's children while also being the voices that are needed to protect and preserve public education. As always, thanks for all you do!

Gilkerson joins OEA as comptroller



James Gilkerson

The OEA recently welcomed James Gilkerson as comptroller for the Association.

A CPA, Gilkerson has a bachelor's in accounting from Quincy University in Illinois. He formerly served as assistant comptroller for Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) in Oklahoma City.

Gilkerson joins the OEA after the retirement of Caryn Roach, who worked in the business office for 22 years.

The pure joy of teaching

Fairview's Hutchison named State Teacher of the Year

By Doug Folks

Elaine Hutchison is the kind of teacher most of us believe is typical of Oklahoma educators. She may work in a small school district, but she is uncompromisingly dedicated to her profession and her students. She is resourceful, continually working to improve her skills, and very humble about every bit of success she gains.

It doesn't take long, though, to realize that Hutchison is among the best of the best, truly worthy of the title State Teacher of the Year. She has laser-sharp focus and intensity coupled with incredible heart and compassion. Teaching for her is, all at one time, a pure joy, a mission and a way of life.

Hutchison teaches Algebra II and pre-Calculus at Fairview High School, and AP Calculus at the Oklahoma School of Science and Mathematics Regional Center at the Northwest Technology Center. She also is an assistant girls basketball coach.

Hutchison recently spoke with the *Education Focus*, talking about life in a small town, her path to the classroom, and her new "flipped" classroom. Following are some highlights of the interview and you can read more in the Media Center at okea.org

Her inspiration to be a teacher – "I just had some amazing teachers in my life: Christie Sheffield, who worked for Great Expectations; Ted Roberts, who was our superintendent and was my pee wee basketball coach. I just saw them do it all, from setting up for ball games to mopping the floor



Photo by Doug Folks.

Teacher of the Year Elaine Hutchison visits with members of her Algebra II class, (from left) juniors Kortney Landes, Rebekah Schmidt and Rowdi Eyer.

to driving the bus when it needed to be done. They never complained; had seven preps a day; had every single student in 7th through 12th grade. They worked their fannies off."

How important college was to her growth – "What I thought I could be when I was in high school was a cafeteria lady, because I saw them every day; a teacher, because that's what my mom did and that's what I saw in our school, women who worked outside of the home; or a wife. That's why my Oklahoma State experience was so important. It just opened up my eyes that I could live outside Ames, Okla., and make it."

Teaching students to persevere – "A lot of times, we think teaching kids is about everything they accomplish, but sometimes it's a little bit about their failures, too. We need to allow them to fail sometimes so that we can show them what to do ... so they don't quit."

The importance of math and science – "It's not an option anymore to be mathematically and scientifically illiterate. The reason why our kids don't want to become scientists and engineers is because they are intimidated by it ... If we're going to com-

pete in this global economy we've got to develop these innovators, these high-tech thinkers."

The key is a personal connection – "'High touch' is developing a relationship with those students in such a way that they know they can text me when they are unsure of an assignment. No matter how great technology becomes, it will never replace the classroom teacher, in my opinion ... students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

On being named State Teacher of the Year – "I tell people I'm not even sure I'm the best teacher in my household. (Her husband, Troy, is a science teacher at Fairview High School) I'm definitely honored to represent the best teachers in the state. It was just a very humbling moment. My mom and dad, I know for a fact that they gave up a lot to raise us on the farm. I'm able to see success because of the foundation they gave me. You want to be able to repay them. I think a lot of time parents think that leaving an inheritance is important, but leaving a heritage is so much more. You would have thought my family won the lottery that day."

Lane Matheson, TOY finalist

Memorial High School, Tulsa • Pre-AP Physics, AP Physics B & C, Digital Electronics, Robotics, and Online Geometry

Question: What do you do after designing the space station for NASA in your 20s?

Answer: Move to Tulsa, start a high school engineering program and become a State Teacher of the Year finalist.

At least that's how Lane Matheson did it. With a bachelor's in mechanical engineering from Rice, she became part of a group of new college graduates hired by NASA subcontractor McDonnell Douglas who were handed a revolutionary new three-dimensional modeling software.



The end result was the design for the international space station.

When the design phase of the program began shutting down, she moved back to Tulsa and began work on a master's in education at the University of Tulsa. She envisioned going back to the space program, but she met her husband,

Joe, the science department chair at Memorial, and saw the opportunity to recruit more kids, especially girls, into engineering.

"There is simply not enough young people choosing that path, so that's hurting us. While we have this double digit unemployment rate, the STEM fields is starving for people," she said. "We don't really have unemployment, we have skills mismatch."

How do you motivate kids to stay with the tough classes?

"Honestly, it's getting to know the kids, develop a relationship," Matheson said. "My goal is to get them excited about learning to see what the advantages are of getting a good education and being willing to put forth that effort."

Andrea Brock, TOY finalist

West Junior High, Moore • 7th Grade Math, Math Application

Andrea Brock had always wanted to be a teacher, but after one summer with 3-year-olds at Vacation Bible School and she decided accounting would be a better fit.

Fortunately, an experience coaching cheerleading and gymnastics helped her see her future really was in front of students.

Spend a few minutes in her 7th grade classroom at Moore's West Junior High and you see the pas-

sion she has for teaching math and working with junior high students. That love for her students is just one reason Brock was named a State Teacher of the Year finalist.

"Any teaching area is a mission field, but with junior high kids they have so much they are dealing with. I just feel like I can make a difference (at this grade level)," said Brock, now in her ninth year of teaching. "If I can just give them a positive math experi-

ence, that's my goal because I know that math anxiety increases in junior high. They need that immediate feedback."

Brock continually looks for incentives to encourage her students and for methods that make math fun.

"I try to find the easy way; I try to find the fun way to help the kids that struggle," she said.



Lisa Lamont, TOY finalist

Irving Elementary, Muskogee • Kindergarten

When Lisa Lamont began college, she had no plans of becoming a teacher, let alone teaching kindergarten in the exact room where she started her academic life as a five year old.

But that's exactly where she wound up, and as a State Teacher of the Year finalist this year.

Lamont attended Northeastern State University in Tahlequah and majored in business management

while making plans to open a wedding boutique.

While a student at NSU, she agreed to baby-sit the children of adults attending an English as a second language class and fell in love with the children.



"It hooked me. I thought, if I could do this type of work for the rest of my life, I would be so blessed," said Lamont, who is now in her 14th year as a teacher. She followed that passion and is continually amazed by the growth of her young students.

"Every day is a new discovery. Everything they learn is brand new. Everything is an amazing opportunity for them," she said. "When you get over those few 'I can't' moments ... they really believe they can do just about anything. I think (my) job is to make sure they never lose that belief."

Lee Ann Stone, TOY finalist

Early Childhood Center, Woodward • Kindergarten

Lee Ann Stone calls her classroom her “happy place.” She says it’s the place that gives her energy and strength.

For 19 years, Stone has brought positivity, excitement, energy, and a lot of patience to her kindergarten class in Woodward. She said it’s important for her students to know that they will not just sit at a table all day with crayons, that they will be able to relax, have fun and learn something.

“I’m a true believer in fun and laughter,” she said. “Let them be kids and learn as kids.”

Stone, who has a bachelor’s in elementary education from the University of Oklahoma, says that as learning standards are being raised for younger children, she keeps in mind that her young students need instruction tailored for their young minds and bodies.

“Kids learn with their whole body,” she said. “We are constantly doing, and with everything we do, there is learning in the process.”

Stone says she jokingly apologizes to her husband when she tells people her classroom is “the place she loves

to be.”
A cancer survivor, she says she got through her treatments teaching half days, and was motivated by her students.

“I know it sounds crazy, but this is where I wanted to be because it made me feel better,” she said. “Some years are harder, but it’s worth it overall.”



Brenda Roberts, TOY finalist

Homer Elementary, Byng • 4th Grade

Brenda Roberts once lived happily as a mother and wife, factory worker and volunteer at her children’s school. But she soon found education calling for a place in her heart.

She followed that calling, and is now a 14-year educator and a 2012 Teacher of the Year Finalist.

Roberts came into teaching late after 11 years as a machine operator and payroll clerk at Solo Cup Company. While she worked and raised her children, she spent time volun-

teering at their school. She soon realized the classroom is where she was meant to be.

“It just felt natural,” she said. “It just felt



like, ‘Oh, this is what I was supposed to be doing all along.’”

Roberts returned to school to finish the degree she started before she got married, earned a teaching degree, and later earned her master’s to be a reading specialist.

She says that while the transition seemed seamless because of her years of volunteering, her background gives her a unique ability.

“I think I do approach education differently from my peers. I think I have a little more insight into parents, having been a volunteer in the school with my kids,” Roberts said.

Carol Brinsfield, TOY finalist

Checotah Intermediate • Reading Specialist



Carol Brinsfield has spent a lot of time reflecting on her teaching over the last 18 months.

During that time, she has earned her National

Board Certification and was named a State Teacher of the Year finalist. Going through the two experiences helped her really look deeply into the effectiveness of her practices.

“It has made me think about everything I do,” said Brinsfield, who teaches reading sufficiency to third and fourth graders. “If it’s not going to help a student with (his or her) reading, with their listening ... I’m not going to do it.”

Brinsfield says that she has cut

back on her instructional time, and allows students more time to do things on their own.

“After a while it’s just ‘blah blah blah’ to the kids,” she said. “When they are actually in the process, that’s when they learn the most.”

Making reading fun and taking away the fear of failure are her best tricks of the trade.

“If we have that relationship where we’re comfortable with each other, they aren’t fearful of making a mistake. We all make mistakes and that’s part of learning.”

VOTE FOR EDUCATION

SQ 758 & 766 will damage schools

By Doug Folks

Voters will consider two state questions on the November ballot that, if passed, will be very damaging to public education, according to tax experts and the Oklahoma Policy Institute (OPI).

Passage of State Questions 758 and 766 could mean nearly \$40 million in cuts to education funding, and local property taxes could increase. The Oklahoma Education Association Board of Directors has taken a position of “vote no” on both measures.

According to OPI, passing SQ 766 will reduce common school funding by \$32.5 million. The measure will eliminate the collection of intangible personal property taxes for locally assessed and centrally assessed entities. Currently, only centrally assessed property taxes is being collected.

Centrally assessed property is that which crosses county lines like AT&T, Cox Communications, OG&E, and other utility type companies. Passage of SQ 766 will give tax breaks to these big corporations. Meanwhile, homeowners and farmers will pay higher property taxes as millage rates rise to meet bond obligations as a result of the valuation lost from the exemption gained by those large corporations.

Tax experts believe that if 766 passes, local governments will be forced to raise property taxes and local fees to compensate for the loss of revenue.

The Oklahoma Supreme Court has ruled that most intangible property

is taxable, partly because intangible property makes up more than 40 percent of the value of big service and technology-oriented companies. As technology continues to advance, intangible property will comprise the majority of value, eventually making most of the assets for big technology and communication companies not taxable if SQ 766 passes. This will increase taxable items and property taxes for the average Oklahoman.

The Yes on 766 campaign is running ads that claim – incorrectly – “teaching certificates” and other such items will be taxed if the measure fails.

“Those claims are totally false,” said Linda Hampton, OEA president. “The legislature passed a trailer bill last May – SB 1436 – which will prevent the taxing of homeowners and farmers if SQ 766 fails.

“Passing this measure will benefit only large corporations. If SQ 766 is defeated everything will remain as it currently is.”

SQ 758 seeks to cap the growth of property values from 5 to 3 percent. The Oklahoma Tax Commission says passage of this measure will reduce the amount of growth revenue to schools by \$6.5 million each year.

“Property values don’t automatically increase every year. I know my property taxes have not increased in recent years,” said Hampton. “Pass-

ing SQ 758 doesn’t mean we’ll all pay more taxes. It would deny schools growth money we need so badly.”

Even if SQ 758 were to pass, there is a scenario that would automatically increase property taxes. If a school district is at its bonded indebted maximum, and it relies on growth money to pay off bonds, property taxes would be increased to cover the payment without voter approval.

While there is a fervor at the state

While there is a fervor at the state capitol to cut taxes, it is often ignored that Oklahoma ranks fourth lowest in the nation in the amount of property taxes paid per person.

capitol to cut taxes, it is often ignored that Oklahoma ranks fourth lowest in the nation in the amount of property taxes paid per person.

Hampton pointed out that Oklahoma schools have already been cut by \$300 million over the last three years. During that same time, the state has added 22,000 new students and lost 1,500 teaching positions. Add in new unfunded or underfunded mandates of Common Core State Standards and a new teacher/principal evaluation system, and schools are struggling to make ends meet.

“We are still 49th in teacher pay and 47th in per pupil expenditure in the country, both rankings dead last in our region,” Hampton said. “Our schools simply cannot manage another multi-million dollar loss in revenue. We must vote no on SQ 758 and SQ 766.”

A new source of inspiration

Teachers find great ideas on Pinterest

By Ashley Knuckles

At first glance, pinterest.com may seem like a site to use when redecorating your home or planning a birthday party. But teachers everywhere are finding it to be a valuable tool for finding new, effective lesson plans and classroom ideas.

Pinterest is a content sharing service that allows members to "pin" images to their virtual pinboards. The pinboards can be on any subject the user chooses, and the pins are links to sites that give the user instructions on how to do a project, or to buy or download a product.

One OEA fan on Facebook calls the site "a treasure trove of teaching ideas." That has definitely been true for Holly Palermo, a second grade teacher at Will Rogers Elementary in Edmond. Palermo heard about the site from a former schoolmate. She didn't join Pinterest looking for ideas for education, but soon learned there is a wealth of teaching material on the site.

"As teachers, our desires are the same – we want fun, engaging, meaty lessons for our students," she said. "Pinterest has connected us. Now we have teachers nationwide that we can pull best practices from."

Palermo often shares her ideas with her colleagues on and off Pinterest. What she calls "a big game-changer" in her classroom is a behavior chart that she found on the social media site. The ladder chart displayed in the classroom rewards students' positive behavior by moving up the rungs with each improved behavior. It's meant to focus on positive actions rather than punish misbehavior.



Everett Shinn (left) and Conner Stuckey change the colors on a behavior chart their teacher, Holly Palermo (right), found on Pinterest.

When the behavior in her classroom improved so dramatically, Palermo shared the idea at a faculty meeting, and the idea was implemented school-wide. After implementation, the faculty and administration found that office referrals and discipline issues had decreased that year.

During the school year, she spends about 30 minutes a week online or using the Pinterest app on her smart phone, searching for classroom and curriculum ideas. After 15 years of teaching, Palermo says Pinterest has helped her tremendously by providing her with new material.

"It's taken my teaching to a whole new level," she said. "It has breathed life back into my teaching."

Tandy Morris, president at Northeast State University's Tahlequah chapter of Student OEA and a teaching intern, is using Pinterest to get a head start in preparing her future classroom.

Morris says social media sites like Pinterest are perfect to help get her prepared for her own classroom. As she interns at Greenwood Elementary in Tahlequah, she has found ideas on the site, and collaborates with her supervising teacher to implement the ideas in the classroom.

"I use Pinterest to help get my

creative juices flowing," she said. "My mentor teacher actually has projects that she got from Pinterest hanging up all over her classroom. The students love them! She gets a theme from Pinterest and then uses it throughout the semester."

Morris says she is very comfortable using social media, and can't imagine not using social media to prepare for her career as a teacher.

"I use social media all the time," she said. "I have the apps on my phone and I bring my laptop to class, so I'm never far from Facebook, Twitter or Pinterest. In fact, sometimes I feel that I would be lost without it!"

She uses social sites like Pinterest and StumbleUpon to connect with other educators and find teaching resources.

Find OEA on Pinterest

OEA's Pinterest page features pinboards for important areas for implementing Common Core State Standards in your classroom. Just search "Oklahoma Education Association" or "OEA EduPins" on Pinterest and follow us. We'll update the boards with lesson plans and resources that you can choose from.

The truth behind OEA's “urban legends”



Heath Merchen

*By Heath Merchen
Associate General Counsel*

I'd rather be hated for who I am than loved for whom I am not. Sometimes, however, we are hated for who we are not. Many believe the “urban legends” that have sprouted about the Oklahoma Education Association or classify us among the general “unions” they see as harmful. Some simply don't care enough to find out what we really do and, when the media takes a swipe, they jump on the bandwagon.

From your counsel

I'm okay with people hating us for what we truly are. I have a problem, however, when that disdain is based on misinformation. In hopes of clarifying, I've put together a short synopsis of the most oft cited misconceptions I've heard about OEA. I'll cover the truth about liability insurance and OEA's political activity in this issue. I'll get to some others in the next issue.

Misconception: I can get more insurance coverage for less elsewhere and it will do everything for me that OEA could.

Truth: Various organizations are touting huge “liability” policies as the reason to join them instead of OEA, citing coverage anywhere from \$2 million to \$5 million. That “coverage” is not what it appears to be. For instance, OEA carries a \$1 million liability policy for all of its members

and, in the past decade, there has been only one claim on that policy – a payment of under \$45,000. That's it. Why? Because liability policies only cover the teacher if they are sued for something that occurred within the scope of their employment. If the action is within the scope of employment, the school district's insurance policy already covers it!

So the policy is almost never used and on the rare occasions it is, the amounts involved are minimal – but it sure sounds good in a sales pitch to those who don't understand the difference between a liability policy and legal protection. No teacher-related liability policy covers disputes with the employer or allegations that fall “outside the scope of employment”—and most serious allegations fall outside the scope.

Liability policies will not provide you with an attorney if you are being discriminated against, intimidated into taking unethical or illegal action, assaulted, slandered, harassed, disciplined, fired, criminally charged, have a pay dispute with your employer, or for any of the other situations that make up 100 percent of what we as OEA attorneys work on for teachers. Anyone who says otherwise is either a fool or a liar (maybe both).

Just read the fine print of whatever insurance policy is being touted and it will tell you the real story. A liability policy is entirely different than legal protection, and OEA's focus is on real-world legal representation and protection.

Misconception: OEA is a political organization controlled by liberals.

Truth: Our members are both Democrats and Republicans, liberal and conservative. I, in fact, am a card carrying Republican. OEA members can contribute, voluntarily and separate from dues, to the Fund for Children and Public Education and contributions are made to candidates from both parties. The sole determining factor is the candidate's stance on education issues. We will always oppose candidates who want to privatize public education and who want to impose higher standards on schools while lowering funding, irrespective of their party.

Additionally, the function we serve at the capitol is to answer complex questions about a proposed bill's effect on schools. No legislator can be an expert in every area addressed by statute, and most have very little experience teaching or working in a school setting (contrary to popular belief, attending a public school does not make one an expert on public education). At the capitol, our job is to point out the real effects of legislative decisions on teachers and students. We can't and don't control any legislator, but we do our best to make sure they are fully informed about the consequences to teachers before they vote on an education related bill.

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