

Education Focus

“Nobody told me there’d be days like these. Strange days indeed.” – John Lennon

We are truly living in the strangest of times. No one could have predicted such a sudden turn of events. Our entire lifestyle has ground to a halt. No faculty meetings, no students. No travel. No nights at the movies. Even many church services are only offered digitally.

It’s so easy to feel alone and wonder when we’ll see a light at the end of the tunnel. What you still have is a professional association looking out for you. Our staff may be working from home, but we’re still working for you.

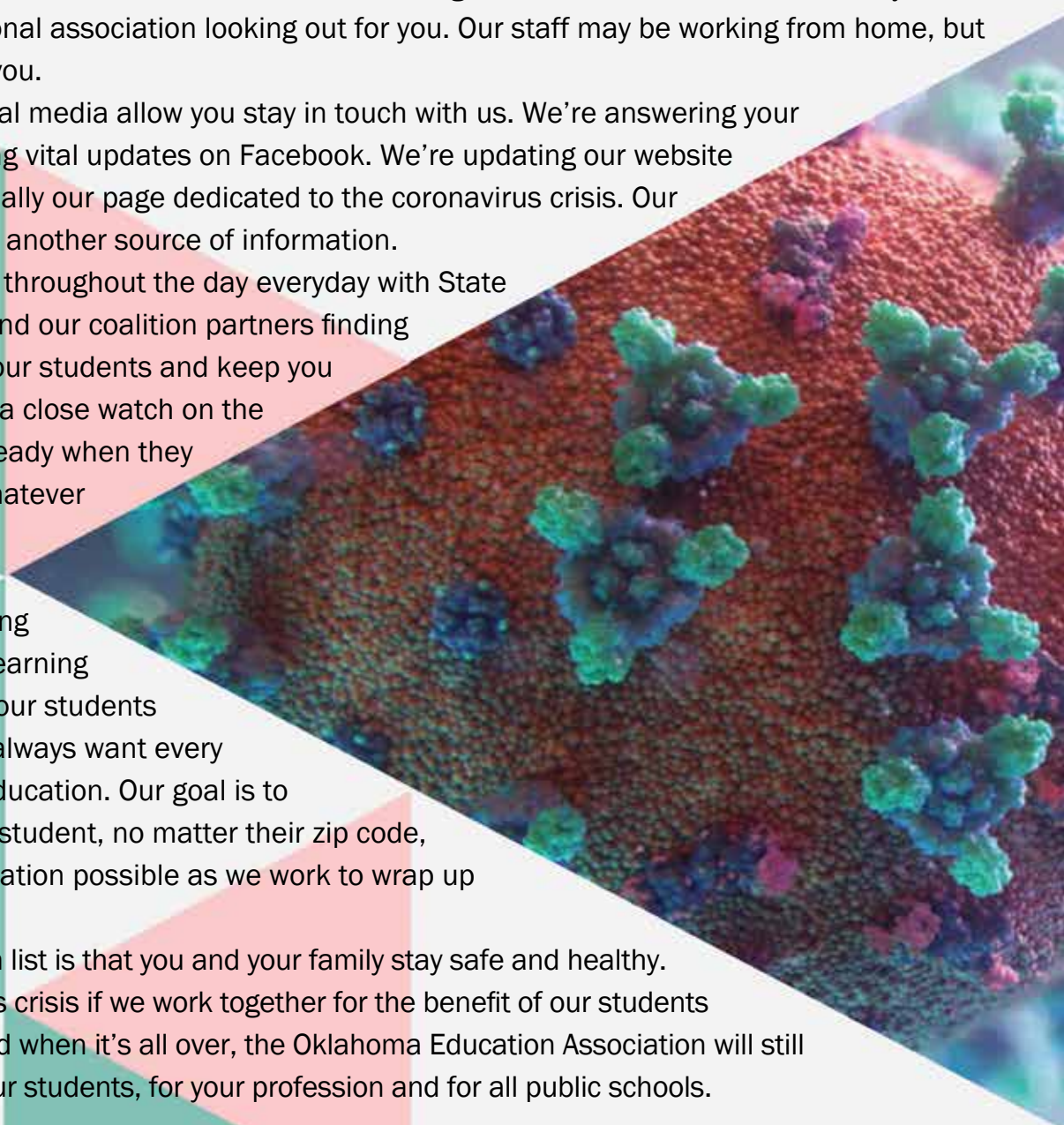
Technology and social media allow you stay in touch with us. We’re answering your questions and providing vital updates on Facebook. We’re updating our website most every day, especially our page dedicated to the coronavirus crisis. Our podcast, friED OKra, is another source of information.

We’re are in contact throughout the day everyday with State Supt. Joy Hofmeister and our coalition partners finding solutions that benefit our students and keep you safe. We also keeping a close watch on the legislature so we are ready when they come back to work, whatever that may look like.

Our staff and our members are developing material for distance learning that will help you get your students through this year. We always want every child to benefit from education. Our goal is to help you ensure every student, no matter their zip code, receives the best education possible as we work to wrap up this school year.

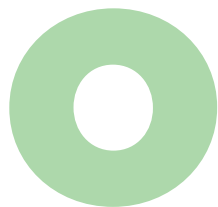
At the top of our wish list is that you and your family stay safe and healthy. We will come out of this crisis if we work together for the benefit of our students and our colleagues. And when it’s all over, the Oklahoma Education Association will still be there fighting for your students, for your profession and for all public schools.

From Your OEA Governance and Staff



NEA grant will provide training for emergency, alternative certified

By Doug Folks



Oklahoma's teacher shortage remains one of the state's biggest problems. In spite of back-to-back years of large raises and more

money in the classroom, the State Board of Education has approved more than 6,000 emergency certificates over the last two years.

Fewer than a third of the state's educators who were emergency certified during the 2017-18 school year have completed requirements for full certification. Just three years earlier, more than half successfully finished the program.

While some attention is being paid to pedagogy, general knowledge and varying content, OEA is finding an overwhelming need for trauma-informed instruction through the lens of racial justice, especially for emergency certified teachers.

With resources from a \$300,000 National Education Association grant, the OEA will soon begin helping emergency certified and alternatively certified teachers become more prepared for the day-to-day challenges of the classroom.

"Nearly half of Oklahoma's children have Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) scores of 3 or higher, and among children with 4 or more ACEs, the state's percentage is the highest in the country," said OEA President Alicia Priest. "With this grant, we will create a cadre of member trainers to provide professional learning in the areas of trauma and cultural competencies needed for the success of our early career educators (ECEs)."

Members of OEA's early career educator group NEON (New Educators of Oklahoma Network) have stated they want professional learning that meets the needs of a flexible schedule. Many of them work multiple jobs, have children, or face other roadblocks that don't allow for them to participate in professional development sessions that are limited by geography or face-to-face participation.

Knowing that most of the participants of the professional development being written through this grant will come from our newest generation of educators, OEA will develop learning opportunities in formats and on platforms that, at times, break away from traditional classroom-style settings. Learning experiences that will be considered will include:

- Blended learning opportunities – face-to-face and virtual meetings;
- Ongoing dialogue through GroupMe, Facebook, Whatsapp, NEA Edcommunities, online discussion boards, and others;
- QR codes that link to discussion

boards or personalized information;

- ECE blogs on web pages, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Google Suite;
- Cohorts of learners, with face-to-face or virtual meetings;
- Social events that build a community of trust; and

Expert training, such as bringing in Dr. Barbara Sorrels, a trauma informed expert.

"We know that the teacher at the front of the classroom is one the most important factors in the success of a student, along with parents," Priest said. "Through this grant, we will be able to make a big difference in the success of our newer teachers. It is just one way the association can be part of the solution to improve our schools."

OEA's Teaching and Learning Center will begin developing the program and recruiting members to serve on the cadre over the next few months. Priest said she hopes the association will start offering training next fall.

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The Education Focus

Volume 37, Vol. 3

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The Education Focus (ISSN 1542-1678) is published four times a year in the fall, winter, spring and summer by the Oklahoma Education Association, 323 E. Madison, Oklahoma City, OK 73105.

Periodicals postage paid at Okla. City, OK, and additional mailing offices.

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

Need help? Contact your regional team.

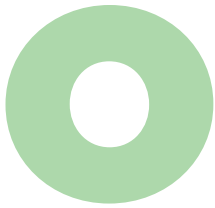
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friED OKra hits the airwaves

By Joe DuVall



Over 100 million Americans listen to a podcast each week.

They also consume, on average, seven shows per week.

It is the medium for this moment and, for the first time, there is an OEA podcast on the menu.

The OEA podcast, ‘friED OKra,’ premiered in early March. friED OKra is not just a delicious Oklahoma delicacy. The simple core mission of this podcast is located right in the middle of its name – to be the main voice for ED in OK.

Episodes will be posted each week and listeners can look forward to three informative segments on the status of education in Oklahoma.

During the legislative session, the first segment of the episode will provide an inside look at what is happening at the Oklahoma Capitol involving education. Our co-hosts, Communications Specialist Carrie Coppernoll Jacobs and President Alicia Priest, will speak with OEA’s Center for Legislative and Political Organizing, or other special guests from the Capitol, to keep members up-to-date with budgets, bills, and business related to public education in the Sooner State.

The second segment will spotlight the efforts of OEA’s incredible members. From NEON to OREA, our members are having a positive impact on the future of Oklahoma. Too often the stories of our educators are drowned out by a cacophony of anti-public education voices with a seemingly endless supply of money. This podcast will afford educators to have their voices heard by not just OEA members, but the entire state of Oklahoma.

The third and final segment will be an opportunity for Priest to share announcements about upcoming OEA events, calls to action, organizing opportunities, discounts for educators, etc.

Over 80% of podcast listeners stay tuned for all or most of each episode, so this new platform for OEA offers a chance to extend its reach to a much broader audience and to deliver what can be dense information in a very digestible way.

You will be able to find episodes on our website at okea.org/friedokra. Download the podcast to your smartphone from iTunes or the Google Play store and subscribe, rate, and review our newest addition to the podcast world.

If you have any information that fits into one of these segments, or you have any questions to potentially be answered on the podcast, please send those to friedokrapodcast@gmail.com.



State Supt. Joy Hofmeister appeared on the second and third episodes of friED OKra, discussing the state’s response to COVID-19 and it’s effects on public education. (Photo by Joe DuVall.)



Search “friED OKra” and look for this logo in the iTunes store or Google Play to subscribe to OEA’s new podcast. You can also stream episodes okea.org/friedokra.

Growing stronger

By Doug Folks

The results may not be obvious to many, but if you take a look at Oklahoma since the 2018 teacher walkout you will find a new education landscape.

Most obvious is the make-up of the legislature. More than 100 people with ties to education filed for office in 2018 and the education caucus at the Capitol grew from a handful to more than two dozen. That change in representation produced raises for teachers, more money into the classroom and, overall, a legislature much more willing to help public education.

One change many may not see is the increased power of the Oklahoma Education Association. Membership has risen and member engagement at the legislature and in education issues continues to soar at a high rate.

Local growth has been exciting. Since 2018, Okemah ESP has created a new local while Mustang ESP, Haskell EA, Hugo EA, Miami ESP and Professional Educators of Glenpool have all won bargaining elections. Their stories appear on the next three pages.

Hugo EA regains bargaining rights

In the early 1980's, Hugo EA won bargaining rights. But after creating a procedural agreement, the local voted to waive those rights, citing the desire to promote positive communication between the teachers and administration. Fast forward to 2018 and the faculty found itself facing a hostile administration and decided things had to change. Hugo EA's leadership team worked hard for a year, organizing their colleagues for a bargaining election. When the vote occurred, Hugo EA won bargaining rights with a 96% "yes" vote. Today, Hugo EA's membership has grown and the teachers have an excellent negotiated agreement that cannot be changed without approval of the membership.



Mustang ESP officers (from left) Treasurer Jennifer Thomas, President Candis Ryczkowski and Vice President Margaret Brown and other local leaders spent four years recruiting members and building relationships before gaining bargaining rights. (Photo by Doug Folks.)

Four years in the making

For Mustang ESP, it was a four-year process to grow from a group of 24 members without an organized association, to today's 121-member local getting ready to bargain its first-ever negotiated agreement.

Candis Ryczkowski, MESP president and technology support specialists supervisor for Mustang Public Schools, said many of her co-workers were intimidated at the thought of becoming a bargaining local.

"They were concerned that if they became a member, or if anyone knew they were a member, they'd lose their jobs," she said. "It took us (four years) to get people to understand we were heading in this direction for them."

Ryczkowski, Vice President Margaret Brown and other local leaders explained to their colleagues around the district that the effort was more about improving respect between the employees and the administration. Some people were leery that bargaining was going to be an aggressive effort when in fact MESP leadership was

just looking for a better way to work with the district.

Spreading the message to 600 support employees in a large suburban school district had its challenges. MESP didn't have access to school email, so if they didn't already have contact information, face-to-face conversations were the only way to communicate.

Educating people who had never been union employees was the first task. For instance, MESP leaders had help their members understand the difference between an employment contract and a negotiated agreement.

"We had to say, 'There are things that are happening that we don't want to happen anymore, so we're going to sit down at a table (with the administration) and negotiate what that's going to look like,'" she said.

MESP had to educate district administrators, too.

Continued on the next page

A determined leadership

For more than a year, leaders of the Professional Educators of Glenpool (PEG) stayed focused and determined to improve the working conditions of its members by winning bargaining rights in the district. Even when one leader left the district, another stepped up.

In January 2019, the faculty became concerned that people were being treated differently. So, they began discussing options with OEA Advocacy Specialist Susan Stowe and Organizing Specialist Marty Bull. Eventually, a decision was made to hold a bargaining election.

The local conducted a drive-thru petition signing at a local park last December, getting more than 50% of the faculty to sign. PEG won bargaining rights with plenty more “yes” votes than needed.



PEG's chief negotiator Allen Ritter, President Shelly Finney, Vice President LeAn Sanders and Treasurer Liz Hackler. (Photo by Doug Folks.)

PEG had only 25 members at the start of the process. Today, they are at 86. They have a procedural agreement in place and have started bargaining with the district's

representative. And even though school sites are closed, PEG is holding digital site meetings to discuss bargaining issues.

Continued from previous page

“We have been building a relationship (with the administration) for the last four years,” Ryczkowski said. “We have made it a point to go in and talk to the powers that be, speak to them before doing things, making sure that there's an understanding that we're not here to be against them, we're here to make this the best freakin' school district there is. And the only way we can do that is together.”

As understanding grew and Mustang support professionals started buying into the idea of collectively bargaining, they started to identify issues they wanted addressed in this new process. At the top of the list of concerns were snow days for ESP, people being shuffled to different

jobs without any rationale or input, and people being demoted without due process or documentation to justify the action.

When the vote was taken last September, Mustang ESP won bargaining rights with a 95% “yes” vote.

Through the entire process, Ryczkowski learned that “...everybody wants to count.”

I think before that, I really just thought about my job, what I was going through,” she said. “I loved my job – I still do. I've always been very fortunate. I have a great boss; I've never had any issues. But when you notice the people around you and what's happening around you, you notice that people need to be treated with respect as an individual.”

MESP is looking at several ESP contracts for ideas on creating their first one, including agreements from the Education Support Professionals of Moore and Stillwater ESP. They are looking at Mustang EA's contract for similar issues and using the district handbook as well. They are scheduled to begin bargaining in April and Ryczkowski hopes to have a contract in place by the end of June.

Northwest Advocacy Specialist Rhonda Harlow will help MESP behind the scenes, only going to the table with the team if called. For Ryczkowski, Brown and the rest of the team, which includes representatives of nine different departments, actually bargaining will just be the next step of their journey.



Miami ESP's Tonya Reeves and Danielle Goddard. (Photo by Doug Folks.)

Miami ESP finds better representation after becoming an OEA local affiliate

Miami ESP started talking with Advocacy Specialist Melissa Kaltenbaugh about better representation before the 2018 walkout. The employees asked then-bargaining agent ESPO, OEA and POE to share what they could do for Miami. After hearing from all three organizations, Miami support employees asked OEA to represent them.

With help from Kaltenbaugh and Organizing Specialist Jeff Savage, Miami ESP formed as an OEA local affiliate and challenged for bargaining rights. The new local won the May 2019 election with 30 votes (ESPO and “no bargaining agent” each received one vote). Today, Miami ESP has 32 members.



Haskell EA officers vote during the bargaining election in February. From left are Secretary Stacy Ezell, Treasurer Sara Hallum, President Cyndi Ralston, and Vice President Chelsea McLure. (Photo by Doug Folks.)

Haskell EA wins bargaining rights with 40-1 vote

Earlier this year, the Haskell Education Association began organizing its staff for a bargaining election. They had been a local for many years, but had never taken steps to bargain in this small Muskogee County district of 740 students and 54 teachers.

But attitudes began to change at the start of the 2019-20 school year. Faculty members began to see that some teachers were being given extra responsibilities without receiving additional pay. That struck a chord with the HEA leadership.

"We felt like it was time to be able to stand on our own. We needed to make a decision to have backing (of OEA) and be able to communicate with the superintendent effectively to get some things done," said Chelsea McLure, a counselor at the middle and high schools and vice president of HEA.

Cindy Ralston, now in her third year teaching second grade in Haskell, came a much different background. She taught in Broken Arrow for 30 years where she served as a building rep and was a member the bargaining committee. She also ran, unsuccessfully, for the state legislature in 2016.

With Ralston's experience and encouragement, HEA leaders began talking with their colleagues on the benefits of negotiating.

"It was truly just one-on-one conversations with people about what the association should be doing, what we could do," Ralston said. "(Bargaining) is not anything about getting back at anybody. It's doing things to help the teachers with their situations in the classroom and things that we needed for students and teachers. That's what the association is all about."

Some Haskell teachers were hesitant about the idea.

"They didn't understand the process; they've never been in a bargaining district," she said. "They had heard misinformation, so we've had several meetings that involved everybody. They really trust us now."

The bargaining election vote was held on Valentine's Day, which was also an in-service day for the district. HEA provided breakfast for the faculty, who voted as they were entering or leaving the cafeteria. HEA won the right to bargain on a 40-1 vote, with 76% of the faculty casting a ballot.

Now HEA has the task of creating a procedural agreement and negotiating its very first contract.

Okemah ESP takes first steps towards bigger goal

Over the last year or so, support employees in Okemah began to realize big differences between their limited rights under law and what teachers in the district had been able to negotiate. But before they could bargain a contract, they had to form a proper local OEA affiliate.

Julie Butler, Okemah ESP president, received encouragement to organize the district's support staff from her sister, Okemah EA President Marian Klutts. Working with OEA Advocacy Specialist Cal Ware and Organizing Specialist Brian Johnson, Butler and her officers created a constitution and bylaws and gained official status as an OEA/NEA local affiliate.

Gaining affiliation was just the first step to their ultimate goal of winning bargaining rights. This school year, Okemah ESP has gone from never having a meeting to holding monthly site rep meetings and becoming more active on the state level.



Okemah Professional Support Association formed a new local earlier this year. From left, April McIntyre, President Julie Butler, Nikita Hoover and Cheryl McKee.

Are You Missing Out on These Educator Tax Deductions?

From NEA Member Benefits

Tax reform of kept 2017 the \$250 above-the-line deduction for classroom supplies, and it's still available for the 2019 tax year. The \$250 deduction is particularly advantageous because it is above the line on Schedule A, which means you don't have to itemize to take it and it reduces your overall adjusted gross income (AGI).

This becomes even more important under the most recent tax reform, which virtually doubled the standard deduction, setting the threshold even higher for choosing to itemize. Legislation in 2015 indexed the amount to inflation – though it is unchanged at \$250 for 2019 – and allows professional development expenses to be included in the deduction. If both spouses filing jointly are educators, each can claim the deduction, for a total of \$500.

However, the tax reform, officially known as the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, eliminated itemized deductions for employee business expenses starting in 2018 for the 10-year life of the act. This had allowed educators to itemize expenses beyond the \$250 as deductions, subject to the 2% threshold of AGI for miscellaneous deductions.

Many provisions of the tax code have income caps and phase-outs and other wrinkles that may affect your actual tax liability. Be sure to work with a tax advisor or reliable tax software that clearly addresses your situation, especially if you are in the higher income brackets. And keeping receipts or a careful log is critical for the classroom supplies deduction and other tax benefits.

Here are a few additional situations faced by educators preparing their taxes:

Income from outside work

If there is no additional withholding on this outside work, you want to be sure to avoid a penalty for under-withholding—i.e., when your overall tax liability ex-

ceeds the amount of tax you had withheld by certain margins.

If this is the first year you've had extra income, there won't be any penalty, because your withholding at work will cover 100% of your previous year's income. If you regularly have extra income, your best option is to specify a certain additional amount on your W-4 to be withheld. (Previously, it was possible to adjust your withholding by reducing the number of personal exemptions but these have now been removed in the tax reform.) The other remaining option is to make quarterly payments of estimated tax on the additional income.

The outside income should be reported on a Schedule C, where you can also deduct any expenses associated with the outside job. You are also liable for "payroll" taxes (these are the contributions to Social Security and Medicare) on the extra income, which is calculated on a Schedule SE.

Other unreimbursed employment expenses

As noted above, the itemized deductions for employee expenses beyond the \$250 have been eliminated in the tax reform, so that deduction is no longer available.

Rules for deducting expenses for a home office are fairly strict (as well as for equipment such as computers). The home office space must be used exclusively for work purposes, which is a tough criterion.

Continuing education

A last-minute tax revision in Congress in 2019 retroactively extended the deduction for college tuition and fees, which had expired at the end of 2017, to include the tax years 2018, 2019 and 2020. This allows you to deduct up to \$4,000 above the line, so you don't have to itemize to claim it. Those wishing to claim it for 2018 will have to file an amended return.

Extension of the tuition deduction leaves in place the Lifetime Learning Credit for 20% of education expenses

up to \$10,000, or a maximum credit of \$2,000. This is a credit, so it is taken off your tax liability dollar for dollar. However, it is nonrefundable, which means you have to have some tax liability for it to count against.

The American Opportunity Credit, which can apply to the first four years of higher education, is not usually an option for educators since most have already completed a four-year degree. However, this credit can be claimed for their dependent(s). Taxpayers can choose only one of the three options for qualified education expenses.

Savings for NEA members

As an NEA member, you can get exclusive discounts on tax preparation through H&R Block and on TurboTax through the Limited-Time Offers program.

Plus, learn more about tax preparation for educators and find helpful tips about budgeting, credit, managing debt and other financial topics at neamb.com/personal-finance.

OEA/NEA dues less lobbying expenses

Based on tax law enacted for 2018, it appears that professional association dues are no longer deductible as an itemized deduction for miscellaneous expenses. Members should check with their tax preparer or accountant with regards to deductibility. Below is a table showing OEA/NEA dues, less allocable lobbying expenditures:

Active Certified	– \$492.76
Halftime Active Certified	– \$257.88
Active ESP	– \$248.01
Halftime ESP	– \$135.75
Aspiring Educator	– \$24.24

OAEA brightens Cleveland Elementary



Top right, Cameron's Torie Johnson with the inspirational board she created; top photo, Jorge Vielmas and Yesenie Cano outlined most of the Smurfs drawings and painted a few; and bottom photo, Outstanding OAEA Local Chapter Carl Albert State College. (Photos by Doug Folks.)



A fresh coat of paint in the teachers' lounge, inspirational messages in the rest rooms and Smurfs painted on the walls in the gym greeted students and faculty at Lawton's Cleveland Elementary in early March. The work was part of the Oklahoma Aspiring Educators Association's Outreach to Teach and Spring Convention.

More than 50 students from Oklahoma colleges and universities gave Cleveland a mini makeover during the annual day of service. They were joined by Rachel Immerman, NEA Aspiring Educator Chair; OEA President Alicia Priest and Vice President Katherine Bishop and staff.

Cameron University's OAEA chapter played an important part in planning for and hosting the event.

"Outreach to Teach gives students a new reason to fall in love with their school; something to smile at every time they walk in a room," said OAEA President Nancy Melendez.

While giving back was the theme for OTT, receiving professional development was the order of business for the Convention portion of the two-day event. Breakout sessions included Ag in the Classroom curriculum, using music in elementary and secondary classrooms and working children experiencing trauma.

2020 Chapter and Individual Awards

Outstanding OAEA Local Chapter Leader: Cherish Palmer, Carl Albert State College

Ultimate OAEA Chapter Standards Award: Carl Albert State College

Outstanding OAEA Senior: Nancy Melendez, Oklahoma Panhandle State University

OAEA Highest Membership Award: Oral Roberts University

COLA for retirees looks likely

By Carrie Coppernoll Jacobs

After years of lobbying by the OEA and its pension partners, lawmakers have finally come to an agreement to give teachers and other public service retirees a cost-of-living adjustment.

It will be the first COLA for retirees in nearly a dozen years.

But what looked like a done deal just a few weeks ago could be in jeopardy because of the coronavirus.

The pending deal

Two bills from last year were still floating around -- one for 4% and one for 2%. They were sent to an actuary for study last spring, which showed both options are totally feasible.

What lawmakers agreed on is sort of a mash-up.

HB 3350 will give a permanent COLA of 2% for those retired two to five years and 4% for anyone retired longer.

The length of retirement is calculated as of July 1, 2020.

What, if anything, will be given to folks who have retired within the past year to two years is still being ironed out.

This is an increase in pension payments. It's not a one-time stipend, like two years ago.

Status of HB 3350

The COLA passed the House on March 10.

"We are especially thankful for Rep. Avery Frix, who has led the charge for this COLA and provided tireless leadership to help our retirees," OEA President Alicia Priest said. "The OEA has pushed for a COLA for several years, and we're happy it's finally becoming a reality. When we keep our promises to retirees, we strengthen our teacher pipeline and educators know they can count on Oklahoma after giving a lifetime to educating our children."

The bill is currently stalled in the Senate, which shut down after a staff member tested positive for Covid-19.

The future of the bill is up in the air. In the past, COLA bills have been assigned to the Senate Retirement and Insurance Committee. That committee is chaired by Sen. Marty Quinn, who historically has opposed any COLAs.

If Sen. Quinn refuses to give the bill a hearing, the deal could be introduced to the Joint Committee on Appropriations & Budget, known as JCAB for short. Bills that pass JCAB go directly to the floor and can't be amended.

But as the coronavirus continues to affect all aspects of life, the future of committee meetings and the legislative session is unknown.



Rep. Avery Frix

Other bills we're keeping tabs on...

There are still plenty of bills that need action before the end of the session. Bill that are still alive are now awaiting committee hearings and floor votes in the opposite house of origin. Here a few we're tracking.

Signed into law

HB 1230 (McBride, Weaver) Requires the State Department of Education to share data about the Lindsay Nicole Henry Scholarship voucher program, including financial numbers, non-identifying student data, and information about the private schools receiving the funds. Effective Nov. 1, 2020.

Bills we support

HB 3400 (Baker) – All schools must offer at least four AP courses by 2024. The courses can be at site, virtually, or through career tech.

SB 9 (Dossett) – Removes the statewide U.S. history test, the last state test that is not federally mandated. This bill is carried over from last year.

HB 3382 (Waldron, Provenzano) – Creates a five-year loan repayment program. Educators who work at Title I schools can earn \$4,000 per year for up to five years to repay their student loans. This bill applies to teachers who graduate from accredited Oklahoma colleges of education in school years 20-21 through 25-26.

HB 3966 (McBride) – The Educational Leadership Oklahoma program reinstates the bonus for National Board Certification of \$5,000 per year for five years. It also helps pay for portions of the application and renewal of NBC.

SB 212 (Baker, Stanislawski) – Changes how virtual students are funded so that the midterm adjustment isn't so disruptive to all schools.

HB 3994 (Wright), HB 4029 (McCall), and SB 1445 (Stanley) – All of these bills deal with hiring back retired teachers by lifting the salary cap totally, lifting if the teacher has been retired for one year, or raising the cap to \$25,000.

One we cannot support, no matter what

SB 407 (Rader, Echols) – The Equal Opportunity Scholarship tax credit, aka voucher. This bill is still alive from last year.

Keep up with all current legislation by visiting okea.org/2020session.

Drawings show why schools are safe places for minorities

Andrew Zhang's poster, "In Our School 'WE' Are Safe" won top honors in OEA's "In This Classroom, I Can Tell My Story" poster contest.

Andrew, a sixth grader at Norman's Whittier Middle School, was one of 70 Oklahoma students to enter the contest. In addition to his top-prize winning drawing, first place and honorable mentions were awarded in three grade categories: 3rd-5th grades, 6th-8th grades and 9th-12th grades.

At last May's Delegate Assembly, a New Business Item was passed creating a poster contest for Oklahoma students. NBI #13 read, "I move that the Oklahoma Education Association conduct a student led art submission call, as soon as possible, for original

student artwork that highlights the idea of safe space schools for minority groups including Indigenous People, Immigrants, Dreamers, Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ+, et al. The Human and Civil Rights committee will select one submitted design, for each appropriate age level (elementary, middle and high school), and OEA will make posters available for members to download."

The Human & Civil Rights and Communications committees set the theme of the contest and members of the H&CR Committee served as judges.

You can see all of the winning entries at okea.org/safeplace. All of the winning entries can be downloaded for display, but please give credit to the artists if you do.

Best of Show

"In Our School 'We' Are Safe"

Andrew Zhang, Grade 6

Whittier Middle School, Norman

Grade Level Winners

Grades 3-5

First Place – "Friends," Liliana Garcia, Grade 5, Durant Intermediate School

Honorable Mention – "Song of Your Heart," Stella Rhynes, Grade 5, Durant Intermediate School; "All You Need Is Love," Bridgette Diaz Abarca, Hawthorne Elementary, Tulsa; and "The Joy of Learning," Moriah Palmer, Grade 3, Northwest Heights Elementary, Durant

Grades 6-8

First Place – "Positivity and Sunshine in Positive Ways," Julianne Nhá-Thy Hoang, Grade 6, Fisher Elementary, Moore

Honorable Mention – "In the Classroom, I Can Tell My Story," Jalyynn Dilling, Grade 6, Durant Intermediate School; and "In the Classroom, I Can Tell My Story," Kilah Flowers, Grade 6, Durant Intermediate School

Grades 9-12

First Place – "We Are One," Haley Hood, Grade 10, Garber High School

Honorable Mention – "Acceptance Is Key," Kylie Johnston, Grade 9, Garber High School; "Safe and Accepted in School," Hannah Herzer, Grade 12, Garber High School' and "Acceptance in the Hall," Allison Speaker, Grade 10, Garber High School



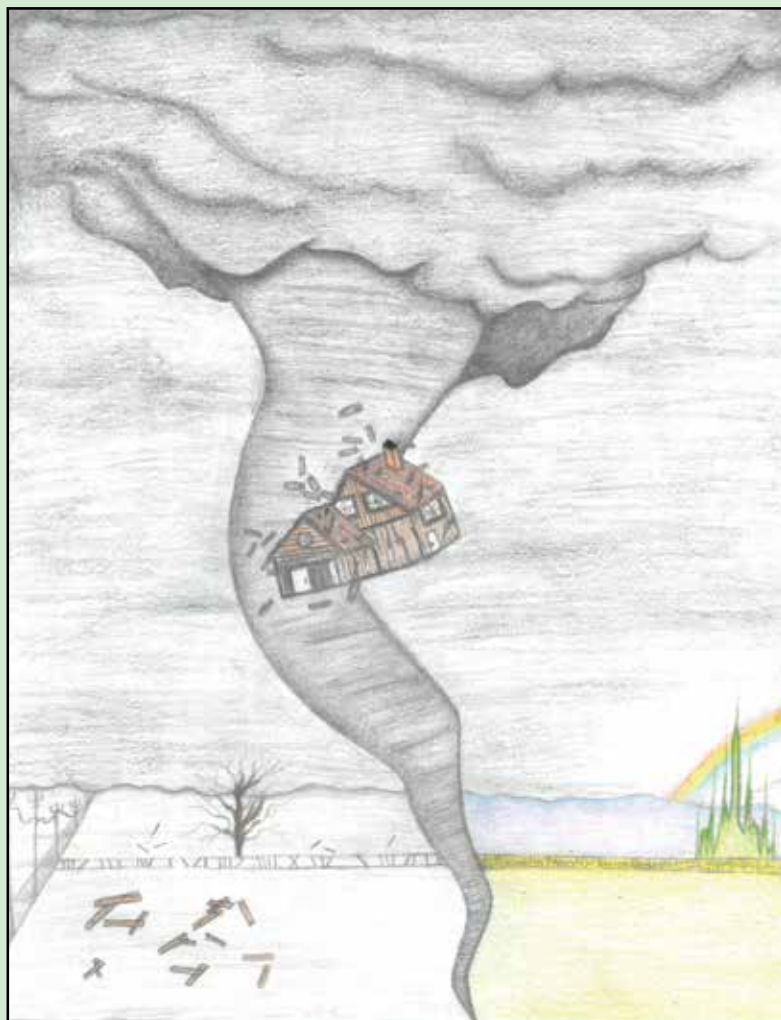
Students draw on weather in literature for inspiration

Olivia Kallin's depiction of the tornado in the Wizard of Oz has been named Best in Show in the OEA's 2020 Read Across America Poster Contest. Olivia is a seventh grader at Pryor Junior High School.

Read Up A Storm was this year's contest theme and more than 852 students accepted the challenge to draw a picture of weather from literature. Entries include drawings of Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs, snow storms, tornadoes, tsunamis, floods and event pleasant sunny days.

Cash prizes will be awarded for Best in Show as well as Awards of Excellence and Awards of Distinction in each category: kindergarten through second grade (a coloring contest), third through fifth grade, sixth through eighth grade, and high school.

See all of the winning pictures along with honorable mentions at okea.org/readupastorm.



Best in Show

"The Twister"

by Olivia Kallin

7th grade, Pryor Junior High

Grade Level Winners

Grades 9-12

Award of Excellence – "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowing Evening," by Kendal Dobrinski, Senior, Pryor High School

Grades 6-8

Award of Excellence – "Storm Runners," by Kaylynn Fisher, 6th grade, Bristow Middle School

Award of Distinction – "Rain or Shine, Read Up A Storm," by Lena Hasan, 6th grade, Whittier Middle School, Norman

Honorable Mention – "Trapped," by Lizzie Cobb, 6th grade, Bristow Middle School; "The Wave is Flooding His Heart," by Stephen Kim, 8th grade, Kenneth Cooper Middle School, Putnam City

Grades 3-5

Award of Excellence – "Read in Wonder, by Ashlin Vanderslice, 5th grade, Holmes Park Elementary, Sapulpa

Award of Distinction – "Reach into the Storm of a Book," by Abby Admire, 5th grade, Holmes Park Elementary, Sapulpa

Honorable Mention – "Read Up a Storm," by Kathryn Edwards & Lander Martin, 4th grade, Holmes Park Elementary, Sapulpa; and "Winnie the Pooh, A Blustery Day," by Maylynn Henry, 4th grade, Emerson Elementary, McAlester

Grades Kindergarten-2, Coloring Contest

Award of Excellence – Wake Richardson, 2nd grade, Sequoyah Elementary School, Shawnee

Award of Distinction – Kali Neese, 2nd grade, Sequoyah Elementary School, Shawnee

Honorable Mention – Jed Reinschmiedt, 1st grade, Garber Elementary School; and Gentry Brooksher, 2nd grade, Horace Mann Elementary, Duncan

A little learning, a little levity

By Joe DuVall

Nearly 200 OEA members found a little fun and a lot of good information in late February at the association's annual Organizing Conference.

"Your OEA Voice: Find it. Use it. Raise it." served as the event's theme.

The conference kicked off Friday night with an introduction by President Alicia Priest, a poetry reading by Putnam City ACT member Aaron Baker, a panel of educators from NEON (New Educators of Oklahoma Network). The evening concluded with some levity via a SINGO competition to benefit the Fund for Children and Public Education – complete with lip-sync battles that put Milli Vanilli on alert.

On Saturday, members migrated to the Metro Tech Center and got down to business.

Arizona Education Association President Joe Thomas jump-started the day with keynote address. He shared the history and challenges as president of an association that also endured a walkout in 2018.

Afterwards, members were able to attend a full slate of sessions through-

out the day to advance their skills and knowledge as an organizer for the future of public education. It was a potpourri of options for attendees, who could attend sessions on lobbying from their local, contract language, racial/social justice, member benefits, community building, education support professional organizing, communications, advocacy, classroom management, etc.



Rev. Clark Frailey, lead pastor at Coffee Creek Church in Edmond, and Rev. Dr. Tiffany Nagel-Monroe, St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Shawnee, were part of panel that talked about the efforts of Pastors for Oklahoma Kids. (Photo by Doug Folks.)

During lunch, attendees received a legislative update from Amanda Ewing, OEA associate executive director and chief lobbyist. She discussed happenings at the Oklahoma Capitol related to education – including another zombie bill raising the cap for tax vouchers, a budget with less general revenue than previous years and a COLA for our retirees.

These statewide conferences are also a perfect time for Oklahoma educators from across the state to gather together, share ideas, and organize around shared interests.

"I think it's just awesome that everybody comes from all over the state and they get to know each other, get to network, get to meet other people, and find out that other people have the same struggles as you," said Mustang ESP's Margaret Brown, "And how did they overcome this? How can I help you with this? I just think it's a great collaboration for what we're trying to do with kids."

Which is why the caucus and regional meetings that happened towards the tail-end of the conference were so critical. The Women's Caucus, Black Caucus, Hispanic Caucus, Native American Caucus, LGBTQ Caucus, Republican Caucus, and Democratic Caucus all rendezvoused to check-in on their current goals and the direction of their groups. Regional teams also met to discuss specific strategies related to their precise needs in that area of Oklahoma.



Members of NEON celebrate their win in the lip sync contest. (Photo by Doug Folks.)



Teachers consistently say that they pay for needed classroom supplies out of their own pockets, because they want to make sure their students have the resources they need to excel. Horace Mann, an approved OEA vendor, is a longstanding national sponsor of DonorsChoose, a non-profit organization that connects teachers in need of classroom resources with donors who want to help. Horace Mann representatives can help bring you a four-step solution, and it starts with registering with DonorsChoose.

1. Start a DonorsChoose account.
2. List a fundraising project with a reasonable goal. (DonorsChoose says projects costing \$400 or less are more likely to be completely funded.)
3. Use Facebook and Twitter to promote your project.
4. Email your students' parents. They can donate as little as \$1 toward your project, and whatever they give will help them feel that much more invested in their children's success.

Would you like to learn more?

Contact your local Horace Mann representative to help you learn more about DonorsChoose. They can walk you through the process of creating a project and help you get donors across the country and our local community involved in funding your projects.



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The Last Word

with Pres. Alicia Priest



President Alicia Priest

Imagine that...

Right now, it's hard to think past the immediate; however, I'm going to ask you to do that. Last month, the Governor rolled out the new state branding with the theme, "Imagine That." While it seems ridiculous to many, especially now, is that they spent a quarter of a million dollars to come up with the branding. This gives me an opportunity, gives us an opportunity to imagine some things. While I will try not to get snarky in my imagining, I am going to speak truth.

Locally elected school boards deciding a four-day school week fits the needs of the students and community they serve – Imagine that!

Oklahomans overwhelmingly support and send their children to public schools – Imagine That!

Oklahomans also overwhelmingly do NOT support voucher schemes that take away money from already underfunded public schools – Imagine that!

Medicaid expansion in the form of State Question 802 would help our students and the communities we serve – Imagine that!

Teachers teach their hearts out even when there isn't a punitive system in place or a standardized test that measures their teaching – Imagine that!

Public education employees are at home worrying about their school kids during this crisis.

Janitors and custodial staffs are working in our schools to make sure the kids and staff come back to a virus-free environment and started this cleaning before the state of emergency was declared.

Teachers are wrapping their minds around a long-term school closure and what that means to student learning.

Child nutrition/cafeteria staff are figuring out how to successfully feed students nutritious meals during the school shutdown brought on by our health crisis.

Transportation is working with child nutrition on best ways to deliver meals.

Administrations are working to keep it all going within the limits of the law.

You see, there are a lot of people imagining a lot of things – all to support our students and each other. Let's imagine some patience, grace and good will while we are at it.



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