

Education Focus

Historic times

Alicia Priest looks back on a career of many highlights

By Doug Folks



After 10 years as an OEA officer, Alicia Priest will step back into the classroom next fall, back in Yukon, teaching Spanish 1 at the

high school.

Alicia was elected vice president in the spring of 2011 by the OEA Board during a hard time at the association. President Becky Felts had just stepped down from office due to health reasons (and would pass away just a few weeks later), requiring then-vice president Linda Hampton to step into the presidency.

In 2015, Linda retired and Alicia was elected the 97th president of the Oklahoma Education Association. During her six years as president, there was a tumultuous change in the office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, a successful campaign to eliminate almost all high-stakes tests, an historic walkout, the election of more than two dozen educators to the state legislature, and a pandemic that shut down schools and forced learning to the virtual classroom. Now, just weeks before she leaves office, Alicia takes time to reflect on her time as the leader of Oklahoma's largest union.

Did you have any specific goals when you became president?

"I wanted to increase member engagement around pay increases and school funding; increase minority engagement, specifically reactivating the caucuses; increase membership growth and our culture of organizing."



President Alicia Priest returns to the classroom this fall. (Photo by Doug Folks.)

Do you think you achieved it?

"As for increasing engagement (around activist issues) we have the evidence of 50,000 people at the Capitol (for the 2018 walkout). Some of that has ebbed and flowed, honestly, because of the increased workload that our members have. It is difficult to keep up heightened engagement because life happens and our attention is taken to different places. The caucuses are engaging folks in ways that are meaningful to them, and that's important. It's getting that groundswell of people who can find a place within the association to put their talents to work."

What did you find challenging about the job that you didn't expect?

"Not knowing what would come, right? Nothing prepares you for a walkout. Nothing prepares you for a pandemic, other than living through them. So, we geared up and we hunkered down and we did everything that we could to support our members and push their issues."

"And, feeling the weight of the world. In this position, you really do feel the weight and the heaviness of getting it right every single time."

What skills do you have now that you didn't when you took office?

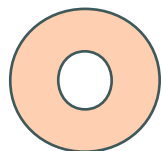
"Being able to speak to the media in succinct

sound bites – most of the time. Holding back for the good of all and knowing when – like the song "The Gambler" – knowing when to hold 'em and when to fold 'em. You really have to be able to work with folks to know when you're going to go all in to win the fight or when you need to compromise to play on for the next battle. It's a skill you have to build. Time management is another one and being able to work on so many different tasks at the same time and get them all done."

See "Q&A with Alicia" on Page 3

SB 683 gives ESPs immediate eligibility in TRS

By Doug Folks



Oklahoma's education support professionals have an important decision to make about their retirement now that SB 683 has been signed into law.

The new law allows ESPs to join the Teachers' Retirement System upon their initial hiring by a school district. They no longer need to work for a year before being allowed to join TRS.

There are some requirements in the law that ESPs need to know. Upon being hired, employees have 30 days to make a one-time, irrevocable election to either opt in or opt out of the TRS. Opting in means they are in the retirement system until they retire or leave school employment and take their money out of the system. Opting out eliminates any chance of ever joining the system in the future.

Current employees can take advantage of this new law, as well. They have until July 31, 2021, to make the same, irrevocable election of either joining TRS or forfeiting their ability to join in the future.

If an employee does not make an official election either way, they are automatically enrolled in TRS.

"Based on problems that have come up in the past with TRS 'elections,' it is important for support employees to keep copies of any election that is provided to their employer," OEA President Alicia Priest said. "Those documents will be important 20 years from now if there is some dispute over what election the employee did or did not make."

Just like certified employees who are part of TRS, ESPs who opt in will pay 7% of their retirement and districts will contribute another 9.5%. Some districts pay both the employee and employer contributions.

For more information or help with the opt-in/opt-out process contact the TRS at 877.738.6365, mail@trs.ok.gov or oklahoma.gov/trs.

To see OEA's complete Frequently Asked Questions about this new law, visit okea.org/683.

Harlow named Associate Exec of Organizing Center

Dr. Rhonda R. Harlow has been named associate executive director for OEA's Organizing and Leadership Development Center, effective July 1.

Rhonda is currently an advocacy specialist for the Northwest Region. Prior to joining the association staff in May 2017, she taught 12 years in Enid Public Schools as a Title I Reading Specialist at the elementary and secondary levels, literacy coach and district-wide instructional coach. She also taught undergrad and graduate level courses for eight years at Northwestern Oklahoma State University. She served the Enid Education Association for multiple terms as president, along with various other committee positions. In addition, Rhonda served as an OEA zone director for five years representing the NW-A Zone.

Rhonda recently earned her Ph.D. in Education in Social Foundations from Oklahoma State University. Her dissertation was entitled, "Lessons Learned from Oral Histories Gathered from the April 2018 Oklahoma Teacher Walkout." She has presented her research at national and international conferences.



OEA
— SUMMER LEADERSHIP ACADEMY —

WHEN THE BONES ARE GOOD...



YOUR GUIDE TO BUILDING STRONG LOCALS

THU. JULY 15
9AM - 2:30PM

The Education Focus

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Alicia Priest, President
Katherine Bishop, Vice President
Carolyn Crowder, Interim Executive Director
Doug Folks, Editor
Carrie Jacobs Coppernoll and Joe DuVall,
Contributing Editors and Writers
Scout Anvar, Center Assistant

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Need help? Contact your regional team.

Oklahoma City Metro, Northwest, Southeast and Southwest Teams
323 E. Madison, Okla. City, OK 73105
800/522-8091 or 405/528-7785

Northeast and Tulsa Metro Teams
10820 E. 45th, Suite. 110, Tulsa, OK, 74146
800/331-5143 or 918/665-2282

OEA Oklahoma Education Association
putting education first.

Q&A with Alicia

Continued from Page 1

If you could go back in time, what would you like to tell yourself six years ago?

“To carve out time (for yourself). It is easy to say now, because I didn’t carve out time in the beginning. There were specific non-negotiables, like I always went to the OU-Texas football game because that’s a family thing. And then we had family vacation that was one week of the year. It is important that you continue to cultivate and grow your current friendships and your family bonds. Being president of the OEA is 24/7, and you have to be able to put parameters on things.”

Over the last six years, there have been several huge events for public education, but how do you think your time in office will be defined?

“Probably the walkout and the pandemic and the things we put in place. I hope it’s the good things because of that. Did we get everything right? No. Were we going to get everything we wanted in one year? No. But that’s why we’re still in the game. That’s why we have continued to get increased funding for public education every year since. And quite frankly, that’s why I am persona non grata over at the Capitol three years later.”

Now that we are three years past the walkout, what do you think of those two weeks?

“Proud. Proud that our members and our coalition partners, our friends, parents, got it. And they did what they needed to do to make sure the legislature understood what they had done. Because it is the legislature that controls the amount of money flowing into education, it took all of us. It took the superintendents finally standing up and saying, ‘Look, we can’t continue to go on this way.’ Instead of trying to hide the class size increases and hide the textbooks being so old, and (not allowing students) to go on field trips and not being able to supply students with lab materials. In the classroom, we knew all of that was happening, but we insulated everyone else from knowing that. We can’t do that anymore, and I think that’s a big lesson we learned from that time period. We re-

ally helped bring that information to light, which helped lead to all of the partners working together to hold the walkout.”

And then the pandemic happened.

“Yes, but once again, we reached out to members to see what they needed and we implemented a lot of the things they said they needed help with, whether it was making sure they had adequate PPE, had appropriate mask policies and safe teaching and learning environments. It



Family always comes first with Alicia, so many times that meant her husband John and daughter Kenna joined her walking for political candidates and participating in other association activities.

also meant supplying a ton of professional development so that all of our members could learn about the platforms they were using (for virtual learning) in a way beyond what their districts had given them, which sometimes was, “Hey, we’re going to be using Google Classroom. Learn it.”

The pandemic changed how OEA did its work. How challenging was that as president?

“It’s hard being an extravert and not being around people. The last three months, we’ve been able to go out and deliver awards to people. I mean, that just opens up your heart, opens up your emotions to a different level that you had shut down. Doing everything on Zoom (had some positive effects): It allowed more people to attend last year’s Summer Leadership Conference; It allowed people to not take off school for

Delegate Assembly because we did it over Zoom in an evening and again the next morning. It opened up things to us that we hadn’t thought about. I wouldn’t call the pandemic a good thing in any stretch of the word, but we learned and we advocated, and we continued educating kids and serving kids. That’s what we’re here for.”

The job of OEA president is one of constant movement and change. How did you deal with that?

“That’s the best thing and the worst thing about this job. You are always doing something different. For an Orange, in the world of True Colors, I love that part of it because I’m never bored. There’s always something different to do. On the flip side of that, it’s exhausting not knowing how things are going to go.”

There are surely a lot of different highlights over the last six years. Which ones stand out?

“Last year, we had our first membership growth in years. That was a huge highlight. Being the scapegoat of legislators, I weirdly take pride in that because that means that they believe we have the power to get things done. Although I don’t love the idea that I’m the one they throw under the bus all the time, it means we’re doing the things we need to do. And we’re winning. The other highlight is the members that we have served over the last 10 years and the people I’ve had the chance to meet. We have some amazing, amazing educators in this state. I get to meet with them and represent them on lots of different levels. What an honor!”

Any regrets?

“Sure. Sometimes my communications style gets insular because I’m thinking through things too much and not communicating enough. I get that. Sometimes I don’t lead with my head, I lead with my mouth. There have been a couple of those instances I wish I could reel back. I reflect each day on my drive home – and sometimes those drives are really long – what’s been going on, what to do better. I just try not to be too hyper-critical of myself and always keep in mind that what we’re doing is not about me. It’s about the association and what’s best for the association. When I frame it like that it’s easier to do the right thing and not have too many regrets.”

Members had tough fights, solid wins in 2021 legislative session

By Carrie Coppernoll Jacobs

In a year when education employees were exhausted and overworked, advocates continued to stand up for their students during a decidedly challenging time in Oklahoma politics.

“OEA members did it all this year,” said Amanda Ewing, the OEA associate executive director for legislative and political organizing. “They called. They wrote letters and emails. They came up to the Capitol when it was safe. They hosted events online and in person. Everybody was so tired this year, but OEA members kept advocating for public education. It was amazing, and it made a real difference.”

Oklahoma lawmakers filed more than 3,000 bills this session – a record. That giant stack of proposals also included a record number of attacks on public schools.

Lawmakers started the session with an unprecedented 13 voucher bills. Those bills had vouchers of every stripe, including tax credit refunds, “grants” and cash handouts. Legislators used a variety of tactics to sneak these bills through. The most common was assigning voucher bills to unrelated committees, such as the Sen-

ate Judiciary Committee and the House Appropriations & Budget Subcommittee on Finance, Revenue & Taxation.

OEA members made hundreds of phone calls and sent hundreds of emails and letters to ask lawmakers to keep public funds in public schools. OEA and other groups formed the Public Funds for Public Schools Oklahoma coalition to take on these bills together.

The advocacy worked for months, as education advocates beat back privatization efforts. However, some end-of-session wheeling and dealing put vouchers back on the table at the last minute, and SB 1080 dramatically expanded tax credit vouchers. If there was a silver lining, it was the bipartisan opposition to the bill.

Another attack public education faced down this session was Senate Bill 634. The bill overhauled the process for education employees who wanted to join a professional association by using payroll deduction. It complicated the process so badly that many larger districts said they would have lost thousands in extra staffing and overtime pay. It passed 25-21 in the Senate and died in the House.

But it wasn't all rough and tumble. Many of public education's strongest allies filed and passed legislation to help

students and employees.

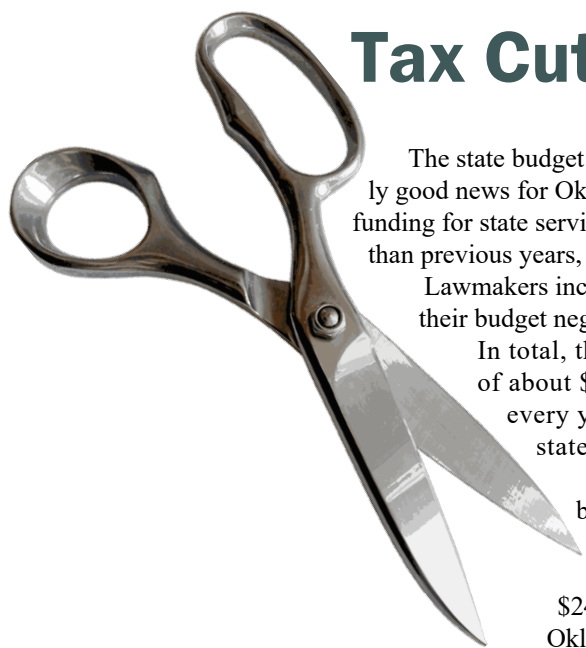
Sen. Chris Kidd (R-Addington) authored payroll protection for support staff in the event of a pandemic or health crisis. Rep. Jacob Rosecrants (D-Norman) pushed for play-based learning. Sen. Carri Hicks (D-Oklahoma City) and Rep. Toni Hasenbeck (R-Elgin) required schools to provide employees time and space to breastfeed or pump. Dozens of other lawmakers took the time to thoughtfully engage with their constituents, including OEA members.

OEA kept tabs on hundreds of education-related bills this session. Here's a look at some of the best and the worst of the bills that became law this session:

Bills OEA Supported

Curriculum: HB 1569 encourages school districts to offer professional development programs on student play-based learning and prohibits districts from banning play-based learning practices.

Curriculum: SB 89 creates new health education standards for all PK-12 students beginning in the 2023-24 school year. It also creates professional development programs to help teachers provide health education instruction.



Tax Cuts and the State Budget

The state budget for Fiscal Year 2022 was generally good news for Oklahomans, who will see improved funding for state services. While spending is still lower than previous years, it's a move in the right direction.

Lawmakers incorporated several tax cuts into their budget negotiations during the 2021 session.

In total, these cuts will result in the loss of about \$350 million in state revenue every year, which is about 4% of the state budget.

Personal income taxes were cut by 0.25% across the board for all taxpayers. This will decrease tax revenue for the state by about \$240 million a year, according to the Oklahoma Policy Institute.

Lawmakers also cut the corporate

income tax rate from 6% to 4%. The reduction will translate to \$110 million lost every year.

One important thing to note about tax cuts in the state of Oklahoma is how difficult it is to restore those cuts if lawmakers change their minds. State Question 640 requires a 3/4 super majority of each of the two chambers to pass any tax increases, including the restoration of any cuts.

Voters approved the state question back in 1992, and since then, lawmakers have only been able to secure that supermajority twice. One of those times was because of the 2018 teacher walkout, but they were only successful after repeatedly failing to hit the supermajority.

Due process: SB 13 allows a teacher whose certificate is suspended by the State Board of Education to be suspended with pay while proceedings for revocation or other action are pending before the State Board.

Funding: SB 229 creates a new, state-dedicated funding source for school districts, including charters, that have little or no access to ad valorem funding.

Mental health: HB 1103 requires school districts to administer the Oklahoma Prevention Needs Assessment Survey every other year. The survey focuses on alcohol, tobacco and drug use, mental health, academic failure and violence.

Professional development: HB 1593 changes several professional development courses to be required less frequently, including digital teaching and learning standards, recognizing and addressing student mental health needs, incorporating workplace safety into curriculum and in-service training on alcohol and drug abuse.

Retired educators: SB 267 improves compensation for retired educators who come back to work. For the next three years, certain educators are eligible to be reemployed as an active classroom teacher with no limitations on earnings. The bill applies to educators who retired by July 1, 2020; who have been receiving a retirement benefit for at least one year; and have not been employed by any public school during that year.

Support staff: SB 807 allows support employees to be paid for any time lost when school is closed because of an

epidemic or because an authorized health officer has mandated the closing.

Certification: HB 2748 creates an emergency certification pathway for early childhood education and elementary education.

Bills OEA Opposed

COVID: SB 658 prohibits the State Board of Education, the Regents for Higher Education and Career Tech from requiring a COVID vaccine to attend school. The bill also requires local school boards to reconsider any mask mandate at each regularly scheduled board meeting.

Curriculum: HB 1775 mandates that no student enrolled in an institution of higher education within The Oklahoma State System of Higher Education shall be required to take mandatory diversity training or counseling, however voluntary training and counseling is not prohibited. The law continues to support the teaching of concepts that align to the Oklahoma Academic Standards, but contains language that has caused confusion among educators, parents and the media on possible implementation. Please contact your OEA advocate staff if you need guidance on what this new law means.

Funding: HB 2078 changes how schools are funded. Beginning in the 2022-23 school year, state school funding will be paid based on the highest enrollment of the first nine weeks of the current year or the preceding school year. (Before this bill, schools could be funded based on enrollment for the current year or two preceding school years.) It also increases the amount of carryover a district is allowed to have each year.

Testing: HB 2030 requires high school students to pass the U.S. naturalization test, beginning with the 2022-23 school year.

Vouchers: SB 1080 raises the cap on tax credits that incentivize private donations to public or private schools.

Other

Transfers: SB 783 changes the rules for student transfers. Local school boards must determine the number of transfer students that their district can accept in each grade level and program. Transfer applications must be approved in the order in which they are received, with exceptions being made for students with disciplinary or attendance issues.

OEA Lawmakers of the Week 2021

- Sen. Tom Dugger (R-Stillwater)
- Rep. Andy Fugate (D-OKC)
- Sen. Carri Hicks (D-OKC)
- Rep. Ronny Johns (R-Ada)
- Sen. Chris Kidd (R-Addington)
- Sen. Julia Kirt (D-Oklahoma City)
- Rep. Monroe Nichols (D-Tulsa)
- Rep. Daniel Pae (R-Lawton)
- Rep. Jacob Rosecrants (D-Norman)
- Sen. Brenda Stanley (R-OKC)
- Sen. Blake Stephens (R-Tahlequah)
- Rep. Judd Strom (R-Copan)
- Rep. John Talley (R-Stillwater)
- Sen. Roger Thompson (R-Okemah)

Education Budget Highlights

- \$3.2 billion for public schools, the largest state appropriation yet.
- \$173 million more than last year, enough to trigger class-size limits of 20 students for both kindergarten and first grade.
- \$60 million for textbooks, up from \$33 million.
- \$17 million to cover the increasing insurance costs for education employees.
- \$12 million for alternative education, up from \$10 million.

Other budget highlights for our students:

- Funding to expand broadband internet statewide.
- The creation of a mental health unit at OU Children's Hospital.

Making school a safe place

As Jena Nelson angrily stormed down the hallway, Stephen Smallwood stopped her and encouraged her to focus her passion and her anger into his Broken Bow High School drama class.



Deer Creek's Jena Nelson

"This man physically, literally in every way, saved my life," Jena says. She was growing up in a home filled with trauma, abuse, mental illness and fear. Through Smallwood's mentorship, she began to move past her difficult home life and eventually become the first person in her family to attend college.

Today, Jena is the Oklahoma 2020 Teacher of the Year, following in the footsteps of Smallwood, the 1996 State Teacher of the Year. She is also the OEA nominee for the NEA Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence, which is presented as recognition, reward and promotion of excellence in teaching and advocacy for the profession. It is the NEA's highest honor of the teaching profession and includes a \$25,000 cash prize for the winner.

Jena began her teaching career at Tara High School in Baton Rouge, La. She later taught middle school drama in Putnam City and high school drama at Edmond North. When not serving as Oklahoma's ambassador of public education, she teaches eighth grade composition and academic enhancement at Deer Creek Middle School.

Jena's accomplishments make for a lengthy list. As a high school teacher, Jena held bi-monthly "Lunch with Nelson" meetings, where she helped students from all walks of life with college enrollment, scholarship applications and job interview tips. Over time, those students earned more than \$4 million in college scholarships.

As the founder and director of the Creative Spirit Acting Academy, Jena worked with the OEA to stage performances during Read Across America Week. She served as guest clinician and a presenter at the Campina Grande International Music Festival in Campina Grande, Brazil.

Through it all, Jena remembers her past and works to make life better for her students.

"Most importantly, Mrs. Nelson creates a classroom environment where everyone feels accepted, appreciated and valued. It is a safe place from a bad day, and especially from life's more serious situations," wrote a former student in her recommendation letter for the award. "Once you have Mrs. Nelson as a teacher, you have her as a mentor for life."

Going all in for students with disabilities

When Moore Public Schools started looking for business partners for Project SEARCH,

the Norman Regional Health System immediately accepted an invitation to offer internships to special needs students.

Project SEARCH partners with local businesses to work with adult students ages 18-22 who need assistance with employment, independent living and social communications skills and who are not candidates for college or trade school.

In recognition of its contribution to Project SEARCH, the Norman Regional Health System has been named the 2021 winner of the Oklahoma Education Association's Tuskahoma Brown Miller Award.

Tuskahoma Brown Miller Award

Through Project SEARCH, NRHS offers students hands-on learning opportunities through internships. The students spend five hours a day during their senior year of high school working in various departments within the health system. After graduation, students of Project SEARCH receive support to find a job using the skills they learned in the program.

NRHS built a classroom just for Project SEARCH, provided a variety of rotations for students to experience and provided mentors for each student.

"From employees to the CEO, our students have been treated with respect and

kindness as they transition from high school to adulthood," said Rachael Laib, Project SEARCH Instructor at Moore Public Schools in her letter of recommendation. "NRHS truly values inclusivity and diversity as evident in their participation as a host business. They are real champions for students with disabilities by providing them an avenue to successful, fulfilling lives."

One of OEA's Human and Civil Rights Awards, the Tuskahoma Brown Miller Award is presented to a business or group that has contributed significantly to the improvement of education. To be considered, the business must make a significant contribution of time, money or material for the advancement of education, and demonstrate a commitment to equal educational opportunity.

Glenn Snider Human Relations Award

Food on the Move steps up for North Tulsa

Many students throughout Oklahoma depend on public schools to provide breakfast and lunch throughout the week, and some even take backpacks of food home for the weekend. When the pandemic shuttered schools and education turned to digital lessons, many families were without that safety net of school-provided meals.

In Tulsa, Food on the Move stepped up to help overcome some of those food insecurities of students and educators alike, and even helped one school develop a garden in an area of town known as a food desert.

For its efforts during a most trying time, Food on the Move has been named the winner of the 2021 Glenn Snider Human Relations Award, one of the Oklahoma Education Association's Human and Civil Rights Awards. The award comes with a \$250 cash donation to the organization.

Food on the Move provided more than 7,000 Farm to Family food boxes to students and their families. Partnering with several other local organizations, the non-profit also provided food to district staff and their families.



From left, Dr. Debra Gist, TPS Superintendent; Shawna Mott-Wright, TCTA President; Chris Walker, Food on the Move; Mary Timmons, Monroe Elementary teacher; Kevin Harper, Food on the Move; Alicia Priest, OEA President; LeeAnne Jimenez, TCTA Vice President; Monroe Principal Rob Kaiser and (kneeling) Taylor Hanson, founder of Food on the Move and the pop group Hanson. (Photo by Doug Folks)

Additionally, Food on the Move helped students at Monroe Demonstration Academy start a community garden. Not only is the garden an educational opportunity on how to grow, market and sell food, it will provide produce in North Tulsa, historically known as a food desert.

"The impact that Food on the Move

will leave in our community is something that won't be able to be quantified as they are providing an opportunity to our students and our school community to learn where our food comes from and ways that we can leverage the production of our food," said Rob Kaiser, interim principal at Monroe.



Edmond's Jake Harris

Education Support Award

The epitome of support

After escaping the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, Jake Harris wound up in Edmond, taking a position as custodian at Northern Hills Elementary. Known to the students, faculty and staff as Mr. Jake, he quickly became an integral part of the Northern Hills family.

Harris has been name winner of the Oklahoma Education Association 2021 ESP Award. The honor is presented to an OEA member whose activities reflect the contributions of the educational support professional to public education, both in their job in the school district as well as their work for the association.

Even at 82 years old, he rarely misses a day of work. As head custodian, Mr. Jake ensures the school is clean and safe for the students. The district has recognized him for his job performance, and he is an active member in the Support Employees of Edmond.

Marci McVey, who nominated Mr. Jake, says, "He is a grandfather figure to the faculty who seek his wisdom and insight. Students absolutely love that at every Christmas program Mr. Jake sings 'O, Holy Night.' He moves us all to tears. He truly is the epitome of support for both teachers and students."

As winner of the OEA ESP Award, Mr. Jake will automatically be nominated for the National Education Association Support Professional of the Year.

CASE remains focused during turmoil

There has been a lot of turmoil in Chickasha during the last six years. The local affiliates of both support and certified employees worked through a vote of no confidence in the superintendent.

Since then, there have been three interim superintendents before the board found a permanent replacement as well as new assistant superintendents, personnel director and payroll clerk.

Through it all, the Chickasha Association of Support Employees remained focused on creating better working conditions and negotiating for better pay. The work paid off for CASE, which has won the 2021 Collective Bargaining Award.

The ESP local has dealt with several issues concerning pay, leave and individual contracts while working with administrators with no experience negotiating an agreement.

CASE stayed diligent, working to complete a procedural agreement that has been in the works for years. They negotiated work calendars for every department and signed a memorandum of understanding with the administration on vacation leave, salaries and an article guaranteeing no one lost leave or salary during the pandemic.



Vice President Katherine Bishop presents the Collective Bargaining Award to CASE negotiating team members Lavon Blalock, Valerie Kyees, Wilma Dudley and Tony Mosley. (Photo by Joe DuVall.)

They also signed an MOU to return to the bargaining table at midyear to reach agreement on step raises and other monetary compensation. CASE won step raises for all, even those off the schedule.

“We feel that our biggest challenge

has been to ensure all of our education support professionals are educated as to our contract, treated fairly and certain that the pay scales are correct and the contract is followed,” CASE President Lavon Blalock said.

Claude A. Dyer Memorial Award

Legislative advocacy benefits public education

Ashley Powell is a tireless political activist for public education. She volunteers for and supports candidates running for office and works to build positive relationships with legislators.

Her efforts to promote public education at the Capitol have earned Ashley the 2021 Claude A. Dyer Memorial Award. The honor is given by the OEA Board of Directors to an Oklahoma educator who has worked to bring about legislative action for equitable salaries and desirable working conditions and has rendered leadership and direction in efforts to protect and advance the civil and human rights and responsibilities of educators.

Ashley is a pre-kindergarten teacher at Tulsa’s Owen Elementary and an active member of the Tulsa Classroom Teachers Association.

She has been a strong promoter of play-based learning as outlined in a bill by Rep. Jacob Rosecrants that became law this session. After TCTA negotiated for Civic Engagement Day, which closes school on major election days, Ashley volunteered as a poll worker.

In her nomination of Ashley, Emily Harris, legislative chair for TCTA, said, “Ashley is first and foremost a teacher with a kind heart, but undoubtedly has made an impact statewide by helping elect candidates such as Rep. John Waldron to the legislature.”



Ashley Powell



Muskogee EA Bargaining Team members (l-r) Gina Batte, Jack Reavis, Jennifer Slader, Sharica Cole, Blane Burge, Roger Wilborn and Mark Peters. (Photo by Doug Folks.)

An assist for military families

The Muskogee Education Association Bargaining Committee takes time throughout the year to hear the challenges and concerns from educators throughout the district. The MEA team then meets monthly with the administration to share the concerns they hear from members.

While the negotiated agreement between MEA and the Muskogee Board of Education is a professional document concerning the working conditions and compensation of teachers, MEA works to protect educators when their personal lives meet their professional lives. Most recently, that goal led to language in the negotiated agreement to help the families of military servicemen and women.

In recognition of this unique language, the Oklahoma Education Association has named MEA a recipient of the 2021 Collective Bargaining Award.

MEA and MPS agreed to make permanent contract language that allows for up to three days of Military Family Leave to be granted twice in a school year. Now, educators are allowed leave to attend military graduations, deployments, returns to stateside and other important milestones for spouses, children, parents, grandchildren and other relatives

Collective Bargaining Award

in the military.

Until now, a Muskogee employee would have to take personal leave to attend those types of events. After experiencing the hardship for herself, Sophia Carter asked MEA to come up with special leave for military families.

Sophia, a 24-year veteran of MPS, had a son join the military in 2016. After learning of his deployment to the Middle East, he asked his mother to be part of the

deployment and post-deployment ceremonies at Camp Pendleton in Southern California. She had to use the three personal days allowed by the district, but to attend both celebrations she was docked two days pay and she had \$500 taken out of her check to cover the substitute.

“I felt that after all that a military family sacrifices, this was unfair,” she said of being docked and paying for her sub.

Thanks to the MEA bargaining team, teachers like Sophia can now take part in those special events and not suffer financially for doing so.

Muskogee EA earns 5 Star Local Award

The 5 Star Local Award program recognizes local associations for work and success in five key areas: Advocacy, Communications, Legislative and Political Organizing, Organizational Development and Teaching and Learning. Muskogee Education Association earned a star in all five categories, demonstrating its dedication to protecting its members and improving their professional lives.



From left, Sharica Cole, Northeast A Zone director and MEA President; MEA Second Vice President Gina Batte, and OEA President Alicia Priest. (Photo by Doug Folks.)

Rosecrants always fights for public education

As a former educator, it is no surprise State Rep. Jacob Rosecrants has become one of public education's strongest champions at the State Capitol. He is a vocal supporter of competitive salaries for public school teachers, improved funding for the classroom and the elimination of high stakes standardized testing.

Likewise, it's not surprising that Rep. Rosecrants has been named OEA's 2021 Outstanding Legislator. The award is presented to legislators for outstanding support of public education and education employees.

Rosecrants has authored several public education bills, including calling for better transparency of private

Outstanding Legislator Award

schools receiving voucher funds, mandating a \$5,000 annual bonus for school psychologists and speech pathologists and reinstating the \$5,000 bonus for National Board Certified teachers.

Most recently, he has led the charge to implement the Oklahoma Play-Based Initiative to complement the current academic standards for early childhood education.

Rep. Rosecrants has a perfect voting record for public education. He is a legislator whom educators can count on to fight for students, teachers and support professionals.

"He is a critical ally in the House of Representatives who OEA contacts for



Rep. Jacob Rosecrants

support in passing or defeating any legislation on the floor," said Emily Harris, legislative chair for Tulsa CTA, in her nomination of Rep. Rosecrants. "He is doing work that is transforming the lives of students and educators throughout our state."



TM A/B Zones win Stan Bryant Award

Tulsa Metro Zone A/B raised \$7,636.04 for the OEA Fund for Children and Public Education last year, an average of \$4.43 per member. The average earned the zone the 2021 Stan R. Bryant Political Action Award

Pictured above are (from left) TM-A Zone Director Kelli Roberts, OEA President Alicia Priest, TCTA Vice President and TM-B Zone Director LeeAnne Jimenez, TCTA President Shawna Mott-Wright, and (seated) Patricia Mott, Zone A/B representative for the FCPE. (Photo by Doug Folks.)

Nondoc sweeps print awards

OEA's Marshall Gregory Awards were established to recognize professional and high school student journalists and their newspapers, websites and radio and television stations for excellence in accurate, positive coverage of public schools, education issues, the education process and the Oklahoma Education Association.

Print Media Awards

News Stories – Award of Excellence: "Fast Money", Tres Savage, Nondoc; **Award of Merit:** "I'm Overwhelmed," Megan Prather, Nondoc

Feature Stories – Award of Excellence: "How One District Does Kindergarten in a Pandemic," Megan Prather, Nondoc; **Award of Merit:** "What Are We Supposed to Do Now?" Matt Patterson

Opinion – Award of Excellence: "Why It Keeps Getting Harder to Reopen Schools Safely," John Thompson, Nondoc

Year-Round Coverage – Award of Excellence: Megan Prather, Nondoc

Broadcast Awards

Year-round coverage – Award of Excellence: Kimberly Jackson, KTUL

Series – Award of Merit: "What's Right With Our Schools," Joe Kozlowski, Westin Hacker, Todd Rich, Brenna Campbell, Cassandra Sweetman, Derek Lofton, Kevin Josefy and Lauren Daniels, KFOR

Katherine Bishop elected president

Vice President Katherine Bishop has taken the next step in her long career as an association leader, winning the race for OEA's 98th president.

Katherine becomes the second person in her house to serve as president of the state's largest education association. Her husband, Roy Bishop, was president from 2003-2009.

In other races, Cari Elledge of Norman won a three-way contest for vice president and Zach Grimm of Moore defeated incumbent Shawna Mott-Wright from Tulsa for NEA Director, OEA's representative on the NEA Board of Directors.

Two OEA Board of Directors seats had races, with Sharica Cole of Muskogee defeating Mandi Jordon of Tahlequah for the Northeast C Zone director and support professional Frank Brazwell winning the Tulsa Metro D zone director position over teacher Betty Collins. Brazwell and Collins both work for Union Public Schools.

The newly elected state officers and zone directors will take office July 6, except for Grimm, who will assume his new duties as NEA Director in September.

OEA Elections, 2021 Official Results

OEA President/Alternate NEA Director/NEA Delegate

✓ **Katherine Bishop, Putnam City ACT, 63%**
Lori Burris, Mid-Del ACT, 37%

OEA Vice President/Alternate NEA Director/NEA Delegate

✓ **Cari Elledge, Professional Educators of Norman, 53%**
Chelsea Foo, Edmond ACT, 47%
Eric Winkle, Putnam City ACT (withdrew before the election)

NEA Director/OEA Board of Directors/NEA Delegate

✓ **Zach Grimm, TEA Moore, 51%**
Shawna Mott-Wright, Tulsa CTA, 49%

OEA Board of Directors

Zone Director/NEA Delegate – (NEA Delegate the end of the first & second year of the three-year term, which expires 2024).

Northwest A, representing Adair, Craig, Delaware, Mayes, Nowata and Ottawa counties.

✓ **Angelia Franke, Nowata CTA (unopposed)**

Northwest C, representing Cherokee and Muskogee counties.

✓ **Sharica Cole, Muskogee EA, 63%**
Mandi Jordan, Tahlequah EA, 37%

Northwest A, representing Alfalfa, Beaver, Cimarron, Custer, Dewey, Ellis, Garfield, Grant, Harper, Major, Texas, Woods and Woodward counties.

✓ **Jennie Scott, Enid EA (unopposed)**



OEA's new leadership team for 2021-2024: Vice President Cari Elledge, President Katherine Bishop and NEA Director Zach Grimm. (Photo by Doug Folks.)

Northwest B, representing Kay, Logan, Noble and Payne counties.

✓ **Zach Murray, Ponca City EA, (unopposed)**

Oklahoma City A, representing Crooked Oak, Harrah, Mid-America Bible College, The EA of Moore, ESP Moore, Oklahoma Christian College and Oklahoma City Community College.

✓ **Zach Grimm, TEA Moore, (unopposed)**

Oklahoma City C, representing Edmond ACT, Edmond ESP, ESE-OKC, OEA-OKC and University of Central Oklahoma.

✓ **Chelsea Foo, Edmond ACT, (unopposed)**

Tulsa Metro A, representing Tulsa CTA.

✓ **Kelli Roberts, Tulsa CTA, (unopposed)**

Tulsa Metro E, representing Berryhill EA, Bixby EA, Broken Arrow EA, Jenks CTA and Jenks ESP.

✓ **Michael Horn, Jenks EA, (unopposed)**

Zone Directors/NEA Delegate – (Two-year unexpired term expires 2023) (NEA Delegate at the end of the first year of the unexpired two-year term in 2022).

Tulsa Metro D, representing Oral Roberts University, Oklahoma State University-Tulsa/Langston, Sand Springs ACT, Tulsa Community College, Tulsa Tech, Union CTA, Union ESP and University of Tulsa.

✓ **Frank Brazwell, Union SPA, 60%**
Betty Collins, Union ACT, 40%

OEA Board of Directors - (Three-year term expires 2024. This position does not serve as an NEA Delegate).

Administrator-at-Large/OEA Board of Directors

No candidates filed; position to be appointed.

See "2021 election results" on Page 12

OEA-OU athletic partnership generates added value

By Joe Duvall

Getting the most impact for the advertising dollar has become more difficult in today's media landscape. While there are more avenues than ever, reaching your intended audience is a challenge.

A year ago, the Oklahoma Education Association applied for and was awarded a \$150,000 grant by the NEA to partner with the University of Oklahoma Athletic Department to enhance the image of the teaching profession, public education and the OEA across the state.

The partnership proved to be an innovative way for OEA to market its brand and its values with the state's most trusted and far-reaching brand. In a modern world with seemingly infinite content choices for consumers, available at their fingertips and at their convenience, it is increasingly difficult for advertising to reach eyes and ears.

A small percentage of viewers actually watch their content live and with advertisements. However, sports are viewed live 99% of the time. It has become one of the only avenues to ensure your message is reaching a captive and engaged audience, and 83% of fans say they would consider switching brands to support a sponsor of OU Athletics.

OEA had a 30-second television commercial air multiple times during live OU football broadcasts. Content promoting our brand

2021 elections results

Continued from Page 11

Delegate Assembly Positions

NEA Retired Delegate(s)-at-Large OEA/Delegate Assembly (elected with no opposition)

- ✓ Linda Long, Elk City (*unopposed*)
- ✓ Patti Ferguson-Palmer, Tulsa (*unopposed*)

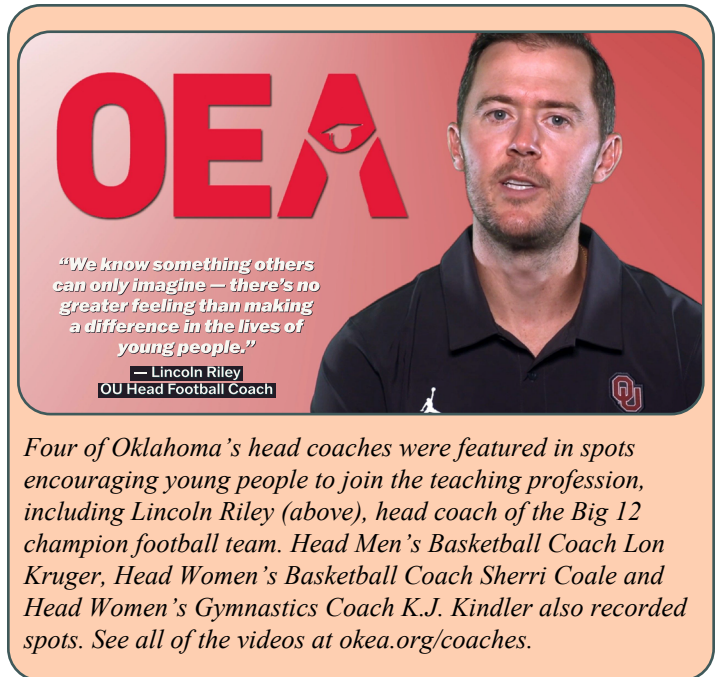
Appointments fill board seats

The OEA Board approved three appointments in early June to three vacant – or soon to be vacant – seats.

Zach Grimm of The Education Association of Moore (TEAM) ran for both NEA Director and for a second term as OKC-A zone director. Since he won the NEA Director race, his zone seat needed a replacement. The board approved Moore's Kamber Clark for the position.

Claremore's Jennifer Esau was appointed to the NE-B seat after Bartlesville's Heather Boyle moved out of the zone.

There were no candidates for the Administrator-At-Large position and the board appointed Edmond Memorial High School Principal Dr. Anthony Rose to the seat.

A graphic featuring the OEA logo in large red letters on the left. To the right is a portrait of Lincoln Riley, OU Head Football Coach, wearing a dark polo shirt with the OU logo. Below the portrait is a quote in white text: "We know something others can only imagine — there's no greater feeling than making a difference in the lives of young people." Below the quote is a small black box with white text: "— Lincoln Riley, OU Head Football Coach".

Four of Oklahoma's head coaches were featured in spots encouraging young people to join the teaching profession, including Lincoln Riley (above), head coach of the Big 12 champion football team. Head Men's Basketball Coach Lon Kruger, Head Women's Basketball Coach Sherri Coale and Head Women's Gymnastics Coach K.J. Kindler also recorded spots. See all of the videos at okea.org/coaches.

and our values aired an average of three times per football radio broadcast, despite only being contracted for two. Scripts written by OEA were read during each men's basketball, women's basketball, baseball and national champion softball games.

More than 100 OEA spots, including head coaches Lincoln Riley (football), Lon Kruger (men's basketball), Sherri Coale (women's basketball), and K.J. Kindler (women's gymnastics) reading scripts written by OEA, were included across Sooner Sports TV programming. Additionally, Coale, a former educator in Norman, shot and submitted a video of herself reading a book for OEA's Drop Everything and Read Oklahoma campaign.

President Alicia Priest was interviewed during the halftime of the Big 12 Championship Game by the voice of the Sooners, Toby Rowland. Rowland also appeared on OEA's weekly podcast, Fried Okra, to discuss his children's book, "Unhitch the Wagon: The Story of Boomer and Sooner."

OEA and OU, along with Landers Auto Group, also sponsored a Classroom Heroes Award, which rewarded elementary educators making a difference in their community with \$1,000 for their classroom and \$5,000 to the overall winner. (NCAA rules do not allow recognition of secondary teachers.)

Winners were recognized alongside OEA leadership during baseball and basketball games. The campaign culminated in Priest and Vice President Katherine Bishop handing out school supplies during OU's FanFest at their annual spring football game.

The \$150,000 grant ultimately netted \$190,465 in total value.

The grant and partnership have been highlighted across the country by other NEA state affiliates, who are now reaching out to OEA to understand how this can be replicated in their state. It has been so successful the NEA has awarded a \$250,000 grant to OEA to evolve the partnership next year to include the Oklahoma State Athletic Department for a "We're All In This Together" public education campaign.

Joining with the two most powerful brands in Oklahoma not only cements OEA's legitimacy as the authority on education in the state, it shows this association is primed for an even bigger role in shaping the future of the Sooner State in a more positive direction.

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AM-C04553OEA (Feb. 21)



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The Last Word

with Pres. Alicia Priest

As you may know, I LOVE the musical “Hamilton!” I’m obsessed, according to my daughter. Regardless, I’ll be using it as my theme – *One Last Time*. (Cue the song – Google and listen to it or at least look up the lyrics!)

WOW, they say time flies and it surely has! When I was elected vice president in 2011, it was a rough time for the OEA. We had just lost our president Becky Felts, who had been my mentor, cheerleader, and champion (and the same to many). Her strength, love of the OEA and lessons set the stage for my leadership.

Linda Hampton, Lela Odom and I were the executive leadership team. I could not have asked for better leaders to serve with and learn from! Reality check: I turned 40 on my first Delegate Assembly as your vice president and turned 50 during my last DA as your president. We have accomplished so much and have so much left to do.

“Like the scripture says, ‘Everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree and no one shall make them afraid.’” (Hamilton and the Bible). Well, it seems that it is time for me to sit under my own vine and fig tree – or at least sit under the sun pool side. Kenna was 7 when I started this amazing journey. She will be a high school senior this year. I want to sit under my own vine and fig tree with my family who have supported and given up time with me.

“I wanna talk about neutrality.” We, the OEA, cannot afford to be neutral on issues of our Mission and Core Values of equal opportunity, a just society, democracy, professionalism, partnership and collective action – even when speaking up may make us uncomfortable.

“If you stand for nothing, what will you fall for?” We can’t sit out and talk less/smile more. If we aren’t speaking up for our professions and our students, we aren’t living our full calling. We must continue to take bold action to make public education a place where ALL our students are seen, taught and celebrated.

“I wanna warn against partisan fighting.” Our membership is split almost perfectly 50-50 by political party labels. These labels must not define us. Public education should not be defined by partisan politics, labels nor other tactics that set about a divide-and-conquer mentality. Whether political party, urban/suburban/rural, certified/support, administration/rank and file, parents/teachers

– we cannot fall for these labels assigned to divide us. Instead, remember the gains we have made when we have stood strong together. We have the POWER when we choose to stick together and reject labels others assign us.

And for the legacy, I’ll let George Washington and Hamilton reflect it with a few of my own modifications.

“Though, in reviewing the incidents of my administration, I am unconscious of intentional error, I am nevertheless too sensible of my defects not to think it probable that I may have committed many errors. I shall also carry with me the hope that my ‘association’ will view them with indulgence and that after ‘26’ years of my life dedicated to its service with an upright zeal the faults of incompetent abilities will be consigned to oblivion ... In the midst of my fellow citizens, the benign influence of good laws under the ‘leadership of OEA,’ the ever-favorite object of my heart, and the happy reward, as I trust of our mutual cares, labors and dangers.”

OEA, you have taught me and given me more than I could express – the lessons, the leadership skills, the life-long friendships. I will be thankful and cherish you, ALWAYS. You are in more than capable hands with our incoming leadership team of President Katherine Bishop and Vice President Cari Elledge, and I look forward to supporting them over the next three years!

“We can’t sit out and talk less/smile more. If we aren’t speaking up for our professions and our students, we aren’t living our full calling.”



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