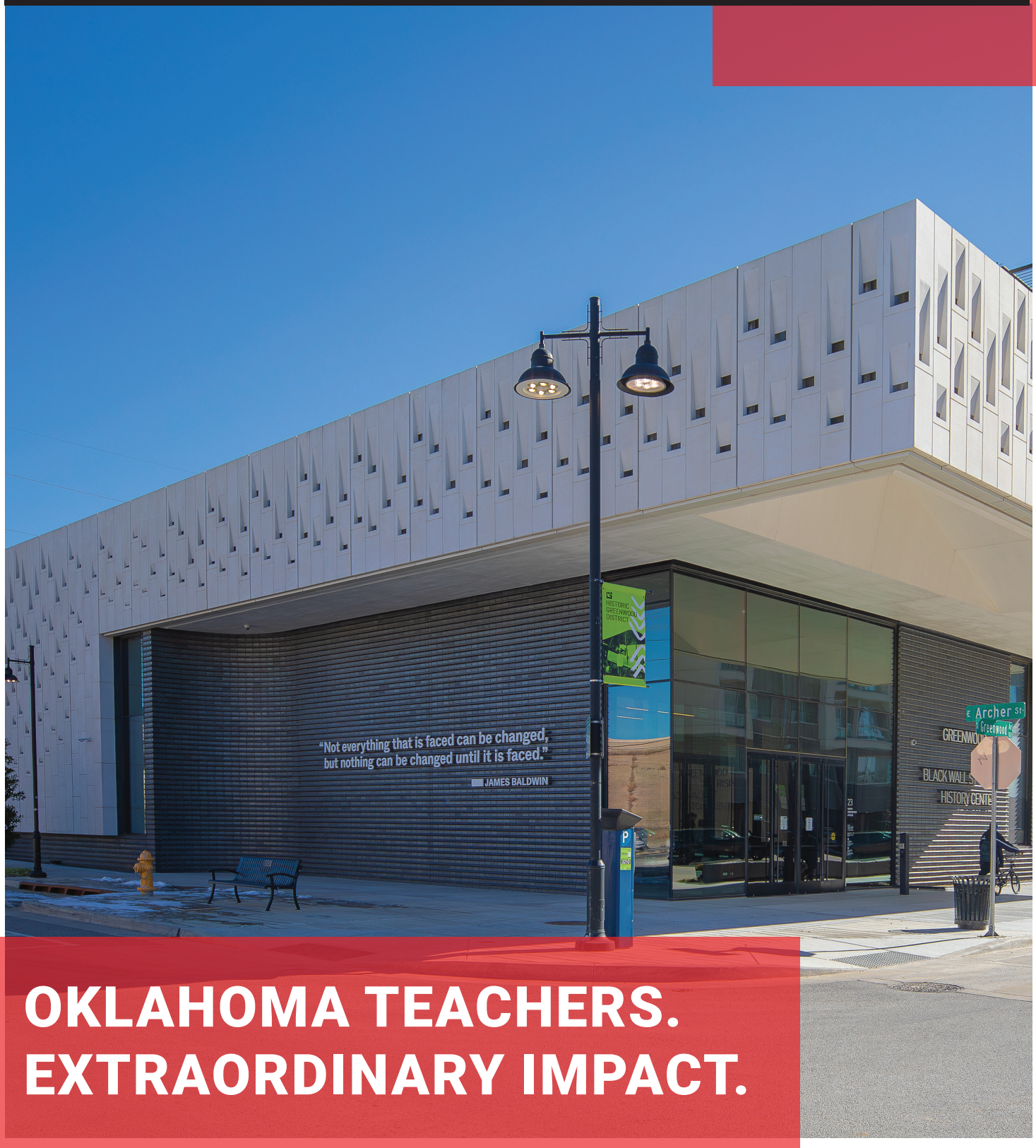
# Education Focus

Oklahoma Education Association

SPRING 2026




## OKLAHOMA TEACHERS. EXTRAORDINARY IMPACT.

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**The Education Focus**
Volume 43, Issue 3
Cari Elledge, President
Zach Grimm, Vice President
Rhonda Harlow, Executive Director
Ivy Riggs, Associate Executive Director
Joe DuVall, Monica Royer, AJ Stegall, Communications Center
Paige Goad, 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
OEA @ The Root Coworking/East Village
110 S. Hartford, Suite 2508, Tulsa, OK 74120
800/331-5143 or 918/665-2282

OEA Oklahoma Education Association
putting education first™



# PRESIDENT'S LETTER

We have hit the home stretch of the 25-26 school year and while we can see the end in sight, educators also know that this can be one of the most challenging yet rewarding times for public education.

Spring activities are in full swing—from academics to athletics, concerts to competitions. At this point in the year, our students are proving what they know and expressing their talents daily. But our students are not the only ones who have made great strides. We also need to celebrate YOUR accomplishments.

This time of the year is equally busy and important to the Oklahoma Education Association. While you are "making it happen" for students, the OEA team is hard at work at the Oklahoma State Capitol.

**And the BEST part about that process?**

We are not doing it alone! YOU have joined us weekly for Civication. Together, we are speaking up, sharing stories, and influencing potential legislation that could impact classrooms across the state.

While we are only a fraction of the way through this process, the OEA has seen some wins worth celebrating as our members advocate for the effects of policy change proposals.

Remember the Senate's education plan? We do, too. The OEA quickly came out with concerns related to how this bill would impact EVERY SINGLE CATEGORY of our membership.

Our members were loud and clear. We need a dedicated, recurring revenue source, and the TRS is NOT the place to find that funding.

Shortly afterward, we learned of a bill that had been completely transformed to target our right to payroll deduct our dues while also requiring members to sign-up for membership yearly – a bill that ultimately did NOT receive a hearing due to YOUR advocacy.

And now, we are learning that the legislature understands how clear we are that the money promised to TRS must remain untouched. In fact, we are also learning that a COLA is being discussed.

**YOUR ADVOCACY MATTERS.**

So, as we each continue to clock in every day, please take a moment to reflect on all you have accomplished. Maybe the wins were not obvious, but what about your student growth? That, my friend, is a HUGE win.

Who knows what wins we will be celebrating in the near future? **We can do great things together!** And I don't know about you, but WE at the OEA cannot wait to see what comes next...

Cari Elledge

# THE ROAD BETWEEN US

## How Oklahoma students are learning history, and each other, through Road to Remembrance

by Joe DuVall




**Greenwood Rising Museum**

On an early morning in Oklahoma, two buses pull onto the turnpike. One leaves Oklahoma City. The other leaves Tulsa. Inside, students settle in for a long day. Phones charge. Conversations drift. Some are still waking up. Others are curious, but most do not yet know exactly what to expect.

At some point along that stretch of highway, the buses pass each other. It is a small moment, easy to miss, but by the end of the day, those two groups of students will be connected in a way that goes far beyond a passing glance on the turnpike.

This is the Road to Remembrance program.

The program brings together high school students from Oklahoma City Public Schools and Tulsa Public Schools for a shared learning experience rooted in two defining moments in Oklahoma history. Students from Oklahoma City travel to Tulsa to visit Greenwood Rising. Students from Tulsa travel to Oklahoma City to visit the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum. Over the course of a single day, both groups experience both sites, then connect with each other to reflect on what they have seen and learned.

For many students, it is their first time encountering one or both of these histories in a meaningful, personal way.

Stephen Evans, Director of Education and Public Programming at the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, came to this work after 16 years in the classroom as an OEA member. That background shapes how he thinks about the program, especially when it comes to what students do and do not know walking in.

"These are two events… very impactful, almost 75 years apart," Evans said. "But if you grow up in Tulsa, you might only be vaguely aware of the Oklahoma City bombing. And same if you're in Oklahoma City about the Tulsa Race Massacre."

That gap in awareness is not a failure of students; it reflects how history is often experienced in isolation, tied to place, taught briefly, or reduced to a single lesson in a textbook. Road to Remembrance gives students the opportunity to step into these stories where they happened and to see them in conversation with each other.

By mid-morning, students are no longer thinking about the bus ride. They are moving through exhibits, reading names, listening to stories, and trying to process what they are taking in. The experiences










**Images provided by Greenwood Rising Museum**

at Greenwood Rising and the Oklahoma City National Memorial are distinct, shaped by different histories and different contexts, and the program does not attempt to blur those differences.

Instead, it allows students to encounter each story on its own terms and then begin making connections.

Dr. Raymond Doswell, Executive Director of Greenwood Rising and a historian focused on preserving and interpreting Black history in Oklahoma, sees that recognition taking shape as students move through both experiences.

"It's fair to say… histories that are almost 100 years apart have a through line," Doswell said. "And in this case, it's hate."

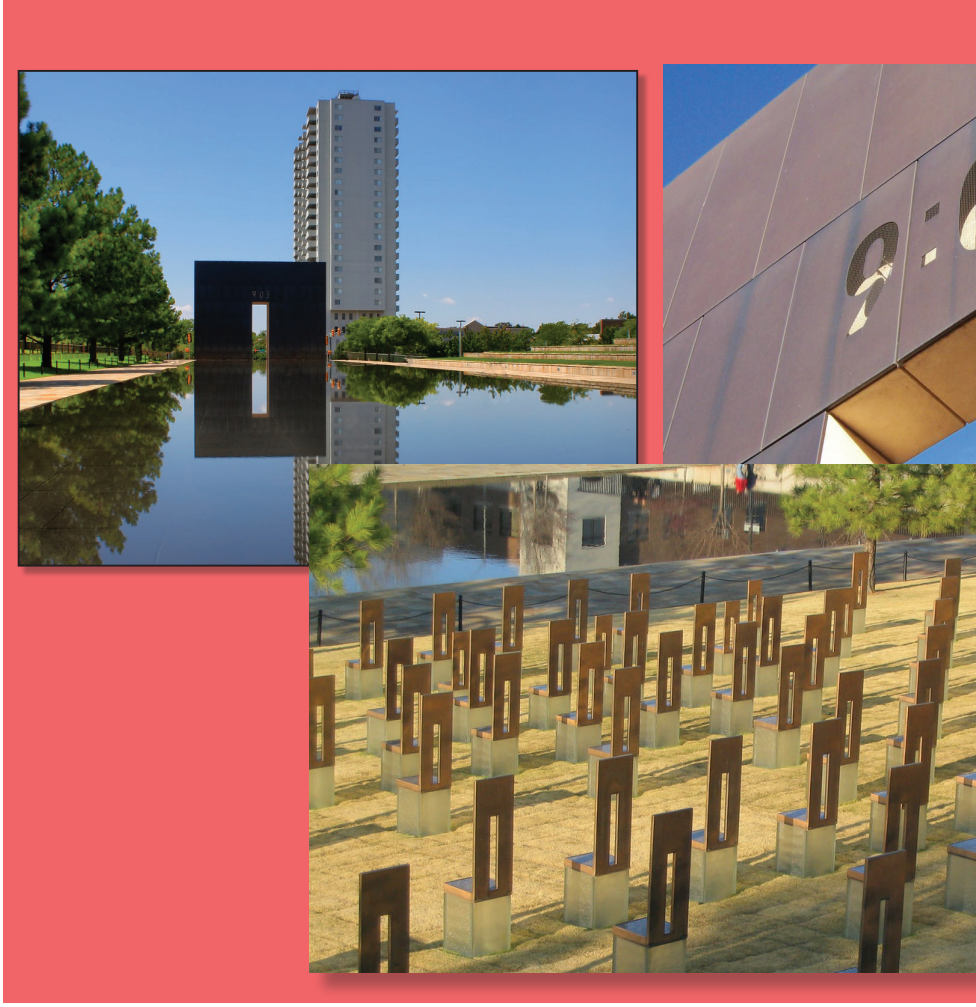
He emphasizes that this connection is not about simplifying history, but about helping students begin to understand it.

"It's maybe an oversimplification… but it's a good starting point for understanding discussion on our stories," Doswell said.

As students continue through both sites, they begin to see not only what happened, but how people responded in the aftermath.

"It's not just about the tragedy," Evans said. "It's very much about what came next… the compassion, the empathy, the resilience that came out of that."

Those responses take different forms in Tulsa and Oklahoma City, shaped by different timelines and circumstances. Still, students encounter stories of rebuilding,



remembrance, and the choices communities make in the wake of violence, inspiring the aspirational moniker: “The Oklahoma Way.”

By the time students connect with each other, often over a midday or end-of-day discussion, they are carrying a lot with them. The conversations are not always easy, and they are not always immediate. Some students are ready to talk, but others may need more time; when those moments do come, they can be powerful.

Dr. Doswell recalled one interaction that captured that shift. A student, reflecting on what she had just experienced, stood up and spoke honestly about what she was feeling.

“I am tired, I am angry, and I am annoyed… We just learned in these museums about people running for their lives, and I have the nerve to get mad at my parents for not buying me a cell phone.”

The response from both groups was immediate. Applause, not because the statement was polished, but because it was real. It showed a student placing her own life in the context of what she had just learned and beginning to understand the scale and perspective of those experiences.

For educators, those moments are often the clearest indication that learning is taking hold. It may not always look like a perfect answer, but it shows students making meaning.

“You might not get the words that you want in the feedback,” Evans said. “But then you’ll hear these stories weeks later of conversations happening in that classroom.”

Students return to these experiences in discussions, in assignments, and in conversations outside of school. Some bring those stories home, sharing what they learned with family members who may be encountering these histories for the first time themselves. The impact extends beyond a single day, shaping how students think about their communities and their place within them.

Dr. Doswell sees those conversations as essential, especially as students wrestle with difficult questions.

“You’ve got to sit with tough feelings… trying to understand the whys,” he said.

For educators, especially those early in their careers, guiding students through difficult history can feel challenging. There is a balance between being honest about the past and supporting students as they process it. Programs like Road to Remembrance help provide a framework for doing that work.

“These museums are safe places,” Evans said. “It really immerses you into the story but also gives you a framework and a better way to turn those human emotions into teachable moments.”

The experience gives educators both content knowledge and confidence. It reinforces that students are capable of engaging with complex history when they are given the opportunity and the support to do so thoughtfully.

That belief is central to the program and to the work of both institutions. It is also part of a broader conversation happening in education about how history is taught and what students are allowed to learn.

Dr. Doswell addressed the notion that students cannot handle tough lessons in our history.

“(Attacks on teaching history) are done under the guise of protecting children, and our kids are going to



> **“(Attacks on teaching history) are done under the guise of protecting children, and our kids are going to be fine. We just need to teach them the truth”**

**Images of Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum**

be fine. We just need to teach them the truth,” he said.

For educators, that message is clear. Teaching difficult history is not something to avoid. It is something to approach with care, accuracy, and purpose. It is part of preparing students to understand the world around them and to engage with it in meaningful ways.

The Road to Remembrance program currently operates through partnerships with Oklahoma City Public Schools and Tulsa Public Schools and primarily serves high school students. The logistics are complex, involving transportation, scheduling, and coordination between districts and institutions, but the structure offers a model for what this kind of learning can look like.

For schools outside those districts, opportunities still exist. Both Greenwood Rising and the Oklahoma City National Memorial offer student programming, educator resources, and in many cases free or grant-supported admission. Greenwood Rising also provides virtual experiences and curriculum materials that can be used in classrooms across the state, including in rural communities where travel may be more difficult.

“Regardless of whether they go through the program or not, we want to make it successful as possible for any classroom that wants to come,” Doswell said.

He also points educators toward existing supports, including curriculum partnerships and virtual experiences that can serve as an entry point for students who cannot make the trip.

Expanding access to experiences like this remains a goal, even as challenges such as transportation and funding continue to shape what is possible. Still, the vision is clear.

“Wouldn’t it be wonderful if every school district could have these same opportunities?” Evans said.

By the end of the day, the buses are heading home. The energy is quieter now. Students are tired, still thinking, still processing. They have spent the day moving through two histories that, while different in many ways, are deeply connected in others. They have seen the impact of hate, but they have also, as Mr. Rogers advised, looked for the helpers. They have seen how people respond to tragedy and hate, how communities rebuild, and how important stories are preserved.

Somewhere along that same stretch of turnpike, another group of students is making the same trip in the opposite direction.

They may not notice each other as they pass.

But they are connected and they now know that.




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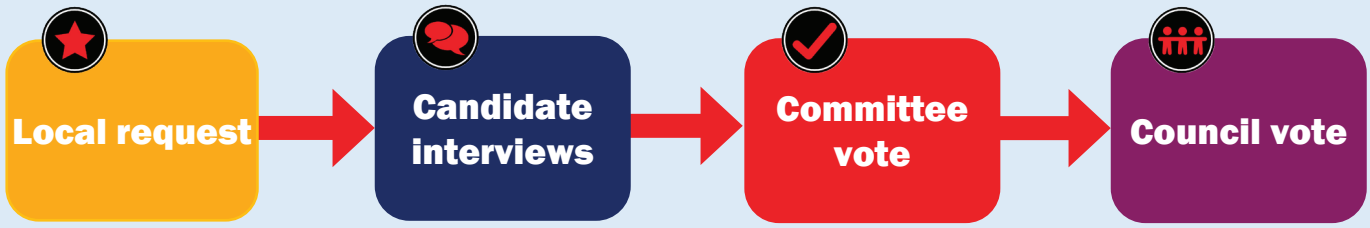
Worth It!

# More Than Our Votes

## Contributing to the FCPE

Every major policy decision affecting education is made by a politician, whether it's the governor, the Oklahoma Legislature or your local school board. That's why many Oklahoma Education Association members choose to make voluntary contributions to OEA's nonpartisan **Fund for Children and Public Education (FCPE).**

## The Process




An OEA member or a local affiliate requests FCPE involvement in a particular race.

An interview committee is created with FCPE donors who live and/or work in that House or Senate district.

The interview committee decides on a candidate recommendation and/or contribution.

The FCPE Council votes on whether to accept the interview committee's candidate recommendation.

## The Facts

- **No dues dollars are involved.** Dues dollars NEVER go to the Fund for Children and Public Education. All donations are voluntary, and all donations come from OEA members.
- **Participation doesn't require big donations.** To sit on these committees doesn't require a large contribution. In fact, the FCPE guidelines recommend a $12/annually or $1/monthly contribution.
- **The council is made up of OEA members** who are elected by the organization membership.

*On average, OEA members vote at a rate 20 percent higher than the general public, but* ***voting isn't enough****. Electing good candidates costs money.*

**To contribute to the FCPE, go to okea.org/FCPE.**

# BUILDING THROUGH ROUGH L

## How Muskogee ESPs built something strong b

by Joe DuVall

> “They stopped waiting and they started organizing.”




It didn’t start with a big moment.

It started in break rooms. In hallways. In bus lots. In the spaces where education support professionals talk honestly about what’s working and what isn’t. In Muskogee Public Schools, those conversations had been happening for a long time, but what changed was what people decided to do next.

They stopped waiting and they started organizing.

Today, that effort is known as the Muskogee United Support Professionals Association, or MUSPA, a growing group of ESPs that is proving what can happen when educators commit to doing the work together.

“We are united and we are also professionals, not just personnel,” said MUSPA President Tabatha Champlain.

Champlain, a bus driver, helped lead the early push to get the group off the ground. Alongside her is a leadership team that reflects the district itself. Vice President Nick Hampton, also a bus driver, has helped carry the work forward. Carolyn Downs, a paraprofessional at Creek Elementary, serves as a building representative and helps keep communication steady at the site level.

None of them would tell you this is easy.

Jennifer Esau, the OEA organizing specialist in the northeast region, who works closely with the group, puts it simply.

“They’ve done the hard, everyday work. Showing up, talking to people, following through. That’s what’s made the difference.”

Before MUSPA, support professionals in Muskogee had representation, but it was not working the way it needed to.

“We had ESPO representing us before we investigated OEA. They were not communicating back to us, and we then found out they were no longer an entity, so we had to do something because we were just spinning our wheels by ourselves,” Champlain said.

That realization forced a decision. Either keep going as things were, or build something new.

MUSPA chose to build.

That meant tough conversations early on. It meant learning how the process works. It meant understanding that change would not come quickly.

“There were hard conversations about the process and some tough love… this would not be a sprint but a marathon,” Champlain said.

That mindset stuck.

A year later, the results are showing.

MUSPA is now at 74 members. That kind of growth does not happen by accident. It comes from people being visible, being consistent, and being willing to talk to their coworkers again and again.

“Feet on the ground, being seen, communication through email and text,” Champlain said. “Building representatives communicate with individuals they work with at their sites.”

It is not flashy work. It is not complicated. It is just work that gets done and it builds trust.

That trust has started to change how things operate in the district.

MUSPA members are helping bring clarity to agreements that people did not fully understand before. They are making sure

# LABOR

## by putting in the work



**Kim Lindsey talks with MUSPA members about member benefits**

processes are followed correctly. They are showing up prepared and informed. They are also learning how to advocate for themselves in ways that matter.

“Learning the proper ways to negotiate was huge for us,” Champlain said. “We do not have to take their word or their first counter-offer. We have the opportunity to discuss and counter back or accept.”

That shift changes everything.

It changes how conversations happen. It changes how decisions get made. It changes how people see themselves in their own workplace.

There have been challenges.

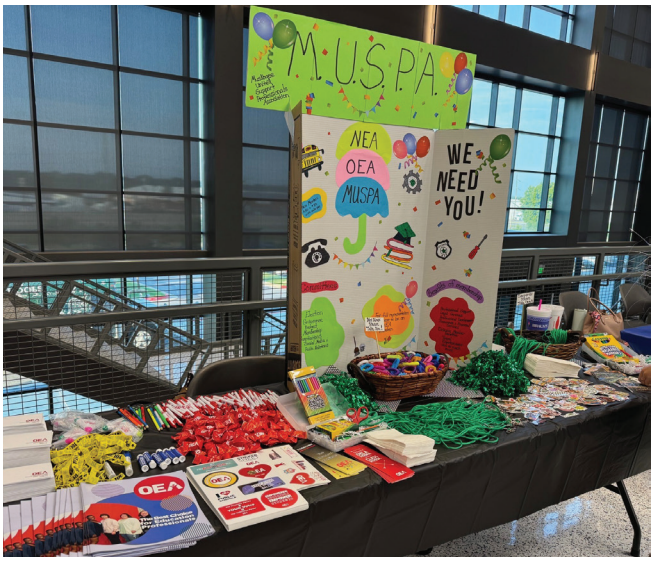
Convincing people to invest in membership has not always been easy. Moving from a minimal dues structure to something that provides real support required honest conversations about value.

Champlain explains it in a way people understand.

“You cannot get fire insurance after the house fire.”

For Champlain, the motivation has always been close to home.

“I would sit around the bus lot and hear employees talk about things they would like, things they needed, and what had been taken away from them,” she said. “I felt their frustration and wanted to help.”




That instinct has shaped the work. MUSPA is not focused on one group. It is focused on all support professionals across the district.

Custodians. Bus drivers. Food service workers. Paraprofessionals. Secretaries. Maintenance. Grounds.

“I am here for all of them to help get them recognition and support to do their jobs efficiently,” Champlain said.

And that recognition is starting to show up. Support professionals are

**MUSPA is now at 74 members. That kind of growth does not happen by accident. It comes from people being visible, being consistent, and being willing to talk to their coworkers again and again.**

being acknowledged in new ways, included more intentionally, and given a stronger voice in how things operate.

Esau sees that as the result of consistency.

"They didn't wait for perfect conditions. They just started doing the work and stuck with it. That's what other groups can take from this."

That is the part that matters beyond Muskogee.

This is not a story about a one-time win or a unique situation. It is a story about what happens when people organize, communicate, and keep going.

Champlain is clear about what she would tell others thinking about doing the same.

"Do it. Organize a local group of support professionals, get an OEA representative to help you navigate starting a local association, and research other districts' agreements to see what you can advocate for."

She comes back to the same idea that carried them through the first year.

"This is a marathon, not a sprint. You are making changes for your group now, but also for the people who come after you."

There is nothing polished about the work MUSPA has done.

It is steady. It is persistent. It is built on conversations that happen every day in places most people would never notice.

It is, in the best way, a little rough around the edges.

And it is working.




**Back-To-School table at the Muskogee Convocation. MUSPA members: Diana Gilliam, Kathryn Hall, and Carmen McKinney**

# PUBLIC SCHOOLS DAY AT THE CAPITOL

by Joe DuVall

"I don't know about you, but I'm tired of being told that we're 50th," State Senator Carri Hicks, a former classroom teacher and OEA member representing Senate District 40, said. "We have the potential to be first. Investment matters."

That message carried through the Oklahoma State Capitol grounds on Tuesday, March 24, as educators, education support professionals, aspiring educators, and students gathered for Public Schools Day at the Capitol, organized by the Oklahoma Parent Legislative Advocacy Coalition (OKPLAC), a nonpartisan statewide organization.

From the moment participants arrived, the Capitol grounds felt different. The presence of students alongside educators was unmistakable, and the sounds of the Shawnee High School band and spirit squad added to an atmosphere that was both energized and grounded in purpose.

It was a day built around showing up.

Educators were not speaking from a distance. They were in the space, in conversations, and in front of the people making decisions that affect their classrooms. Students were not being spoken about. They were speaking for themselves.

That presence shaped the day.

Students, educators, lawmakers, and statewide leadership were all part of the same conversation, not operating in separate spaces but sharing one. It created a sense of alignment that has not always been present and set a different tone than in years past.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Lindel Fields captured that shift in a way that brought the focus back to the work itself.

"Teaching is the most noble of all professions," Fields said.

It was a grounding moment. A reminder of what sits at the center of every policy discussion, every debate, every decision.

Students reinforced that focus.

Shawnee Public Schools student Jade Valentine spoke about what she has gained through her education and what she expects moving forward.

"Democracy isn't something you inherit," Valentine said. "I've gained resiliency, media literacy, and civic awareness. I can organize and I can encourage you to vote."

She also spoke to the need for stability and trust in the classroom.

"I don't want chaos in my education; I want consistency," she said. "I want curriculum decisions to be made by educators."

Public Schools Day at the Capitol is a reminder that showing up matters. It matters when educators bring their experience into the rooms where decisions are made. It matters when students speak for themselves. It matters when those conversations happen face to face, grounded in real classrooms and real communities.

Days like this move things forward.

They bring real voices into the conversation, and they set the stage for the work that follows.



**Jade Valentine speaks at the Public Schools Day Rally**




**OEA members Shawna Mott-Wright, LeeAnn Jimenez, and Betty Collins in the Public Schools Day Rally**

# Member Awa

***Five educators were awarded the Educator of the Game at OU and OSU games.***

Audra Garrison
Deanna Lewis
Robin Decker
Lindsay Bruno
Mikayla Brimley



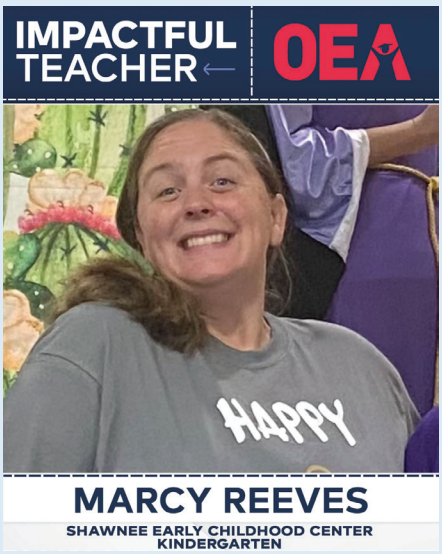

**Everything you do for your students be recognized no matter how big or officially recognized through awards many achievements our membe**




Jeanna Charpentier was recognized as the 2025 TRIO Achiever Award Recipient by the Southwest Association of Student Assistance Programs (SWASAP).

***21 educators were given the OEA/News 9 Impactful Teacher Award.***

Kimberly Duerksen
Kyta Willets
Maria Karpova
Annamarie Ball
Julie Horton
Jennifer Sinclair
Hannah Carr
Marcy Reeves
Margaret Mocabee
Lisa Day
Angie Henson
Cyndi Ring
Renee Blessington
Shayla Ezell
Kendra Butler
Stacy Pinney
Jamie Shaw
Britni Tabor
Walaya Lupp
Sam Marino
Jennifer Walters






Kathy Hale was no for the 2026 NEA E the Year Award.

OKLAHOMA TEACHER of the YEAR



**2026 Finalist**

**Keely Flynn**
Physical Education
Grades Pre-K - 5

Lindbergh Elementary
Tulsa Public Schools

TULSA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

OKLAHOMA TEACHER of the YEAR



**2026 Finalist**

**Tobi Gordon**
Deaf Education
Grades 7 - 8

Brink Junior High School
Moore Public Schools

MOORE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

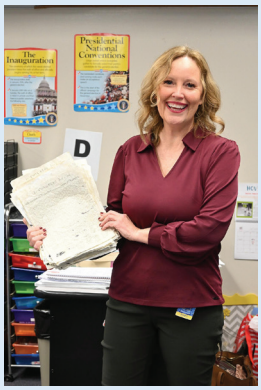
OKL TEACHE



Half of the 2026 Oklahoma Teacher of the Year finalists are OEA members: Keely Flynn, Tobi Gordon, Ser

# rds Assembly

**s and your communities deserves to small. Sometimes those efforts are and opportunities. Here are some of rs have earned this school year:**



Heather Braucher represented Oklahoma in Washington, D.C. as a delegate with the National Council for Social Studies.



Chelsea Cruse was one of four Oklahoma educators to earn National Board Certification.

Danielle Jones Howard earned a placement in a Teachers for Global Classrooms Program.





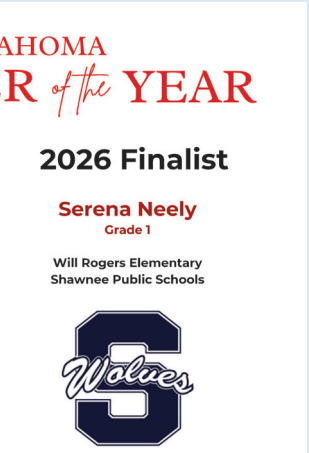
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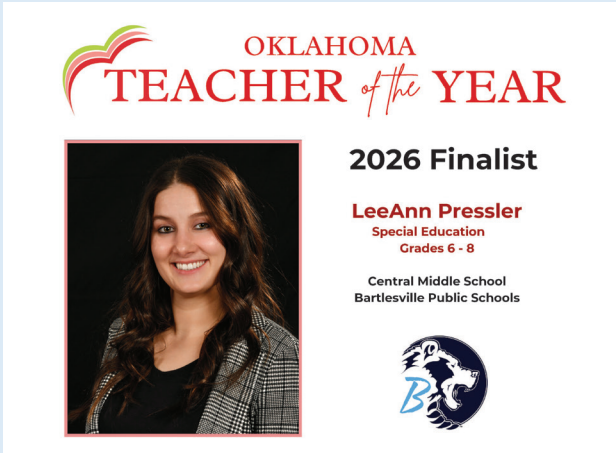


Darcy Pippins was awarded the 2026 Oklahoma Medal for Excellence Awards.




Heather Davis was awarded the 2026 Travelers Award for Teaching Excellenace.







ena Neely, LeeAnn Pressler, Mary Tyree.

Oklahoma Education Association
putting education first

Periodicals


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