

Education Focus

Oklahoma Education Association

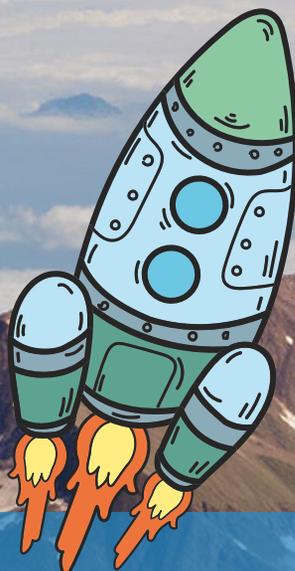
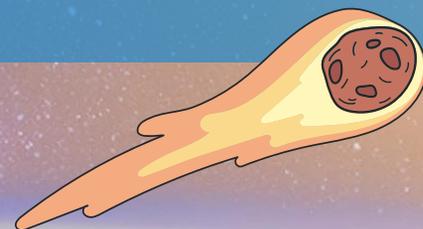
Summer 2024

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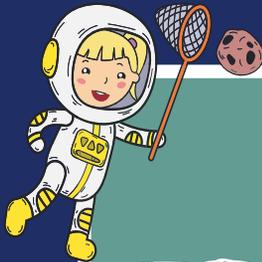


**STEM EDUCATION IS
FOR EVERYBODY** PG.6

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The Education Focus

Volume 41, Issue 4

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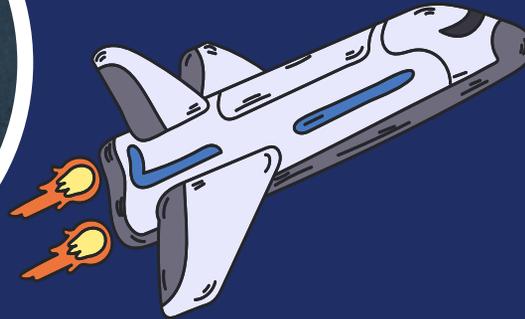
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OEA Oklahoma Education Association
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PRESIDENT'S LETTER



I love when I have the opportunity to attend an OKC Broadway performance and what I really love is at the end when all the cast comes out to take a bow. From the moment that performance ends, the audience is on their feet clapping and cheering. This is exactly how I feel as we end the 2023-24 school year. Every individual in this state should be on their feet clapping and cheering for you! You, the educators of Oklahoma, have done an amazing job.

The beauty of our profession is that our districts are a full-service enterprise, and you are the ones to make it happen. Just think about it -- there is no other profession that starts before the sun comes up to make sure that all of their customers are transported safely to their place of business. You make sure that each individual has something to eat to stay healthy and strong. Each classroom is designed to meet the individual needs of their students. And our top-notch clerical staff has every "I" dotted, and every "T" crossed. Not only does each one of you address and reinforce a student's academic growth, but their whole well-being. And you do this day in and day out without the fanfare or celebrations that you so deserve.

While we may spend the majority of our time in our classrooms, school buildings, or job sites, you are still doing so much more outside those environments. Once again, you have blown it out of the water with our Civication events that were planned. From the fall to early spring, you were in your communities attending dinners that were held so that you could have conversations with your legislators back home. I watched as you sat shoulder to shoulder with your elected officials and you shared your personal stories

of what was happening in your districts. And then you did more by coming to the Capitol during the legislative session. Our Tuesday morning briefings were packed as members brought teams to go visit with their legislators highlighting specific bills and continuing to build those vital relationships. And all the while, you didn't stop with your activism sending emails, text, and phone calls. The difference you made is palpable as we saw bills move through the legislative process.

And if that was not enough, you were back in your communities making a difference as you helped elect pro-public education candidates to school boards. I heard time and time again the threats that were happening in your districts with candidates that had filed for office that wanted nothing more than to dismantle public education. And I saw you as you worked knocking doors, having public forums, and getting out the word as to who was the best candidate. You stood up against well-funded powerhouses as you mobilized your members. And if that didn't speak volumes, our communities across our state passed their bonds to help fund their schools at an overwhelming rate. So don't let anyone tell you that our public doesn't support our schools because they do it repeatedly when they meet and exceed the 60% threshold to pass a bond.

As you are ending your year, please take a moment to reflect on the amazing work that you have done, the precious lives that you have changed, the impact on our legislature, and keeping your communities healthy and whole. We are so proud of you for a job well done. Bravo!

Katherine Bishop

THE IMPORTANCE OF GIVING BACK TO THE PROFESSION

by Monica Royer
Aspiring educators offer help to schools in need



as well. Additionally, they created a STEAM Maker Space in the 6th-grade hallway, completely remodeled their teachers' lounge and restrooms, and kids created "kindness rocks" to memorialize a student from Northwood that passed away recently. Although the school was excited for some much-needed updates, a difficult decision had to be made about a beloved mural.

"For years, a mural, painted by students, has existed along the cafeteria and gymnasium hallway," Aspiring/Early Career Educator Organizer Robin Robinson explained. "It was dated, and the principal has arranged to do a 'wrap' along the hall. Because the original mural had been there for so long, we wanted to memorialize it."

OEA Communications Specialist AJ Stegall was asked to photograph the mural and then the panoramic photos will be stitched together and mounted to be displayed in the trophy case.

In addition, Aspiring/Early Career Educator Organizer Joshua Frazier was able to arrange for another mural to be painted in the entrance of the school with the help of the Seminole Arts Council.

"We purchased the supplies and the Arts Council will be going into the school in the coming weeks and bringing students into the project to help paint the new mural," Robinson shared. "This keeps the school connected to the community and allows

Every year, the Oklahoma Aspiring Educators Association (OAEA) along with OEA staff, community members, students and staff members from the chosen school gather to improve the conditions of a school in need. This annual event is called Outreach to Teach. The goal of OTT is to give back to schools and take some weight off their ever-growing plates.

This year, Northwood Elementary in Seminole was chosen as the recipient. There the group focused on several projects. Two hallways needed repainted, so they cleaned, prepped, and painted those and their trophy case





students at Northwood to become involved in this on-going art project.”

This was an especially memorable OTT for OAEA President, Isabelle Esau. This was her final event as an OAEA member before she graduated in May. Based on her experiences, OTT was equally as transformative for aspiring educators as it was for the school they helped.

“As aspiring educators, we have a unique opportunity to give back to an Oklahoma public school,” Esau reflected. “I truly believe in treating others the way you want to be treated. I hope someone will give back to my future school the way I did for others. With today’s political climate, OTT is one way we can bring hope into a community.”

Following Outreach to Teach was the annual OAEA Spring Convention. While OTT is about giving back to the community, the convention offered an opportunity for education leaders to give back to the student members.

Before starting her teaching career, President Esau wanted to share the importance of being a part of the association and her hope for student

members to continue to be involved. She reflected on her experiences and what she gained.

“I have been fortunate enough to network with individuals across the nation,” Esau shared. “I have grown as an individual and professional.”

Sunny Day, the current Miss Oklahoma and early career educator was the keynote speaker. She also spoke on the importance of being an OEA member and how it has helped her in her career.

“OEA has been instrumental in shaping my journey as an educator,” Day said. “Their support and resources have played a pivotal role in my career development, and I believe in giving back to the community that has supported me.”

In a deeply personal speech, Day opened up about why education has been a core part of her life.

“I shared my story of being a first-generation high school and college graduate and the impact my education and educators have made on my life and my aspiration to become an educator,” Day said.

Since being named Miss Oklahoma, Day has spent time traveling across the state sharing her passion for education. Having met other educators and with years of experience in the classroom, Day felt inspired to connect with the OAEA members.

“Ultimately, I saw this as a chance to not only share my own journey but also to uplift and empower future educators, reminding them that their work truly does matter and that they have the ability to shape the future for generations to come,” Day shared.

With the help of association leaders, staff members, and community members, this weekend helped solidify the importance of the profession for the association’s aspiring educators.



ESP Spotlight

Crystal Maxey Putnam City Public Schools

by Scout Anvar



After spending her early life traveling the country in a military family, Crystal Maxey now lives in Putnam City with her husband Malcom and her son, who attends PC public schools. She is also very close with her two bonus daughters, with one studying communications in college and the other in the Airforce, stationed in Germany.

For the last fourteen years, Maxey has served as an education support professional in the Putnam City school district where, according to her, “there is never a dull day.” She came to the district in search of work that allowed her the flexibility to spend time with her family, and she stayed for the relationships she has built with colleagues. Working for her neighborhood schools has afforded Maxey and her family the opportunity to build strong ties in the local community. Her position in the district also allows her to stay engaged with her son’s education and she often encourages him to pursue some of the many outreach

activities available to families in the area. Maxey graduated from Putnam City High School herself, so her desire to see the district flourish runs deep. While her love for the district is unwavering, she remarks that support professionals are often underappreciated for their hard work. If you work in education spaces, take some time to thank and encourage the many support professionals that keep your schools running.

Maxey has enjoyed bonding with colleagues that have cheered her on through major changes in technology and personnel turnover. She was encouraged to join the OEA in 2021 and is glad she did. “Membership is important because we have a voice, and we deserve to be empowered to use that voice. If you’re frustrated, join in and you will have a support network that you didn’t have before.”

Thank your local support professionals like Maxey today!

Linda Hampton knows that educators are their students’ strongest advocates. She thinks of OEA like “one big family that truly understands the struggles of teaching and the resolve needed to keep going.” This is something the former OEA President learned through her many years of service. Reflecting on her robust teaching and education leadership career, she preaches, “if you help the teacher, you help the child.”

Even after retiring and stepping down from her many roles in her school, district, and in the association, Hampton served on her local school board and remained engaged in the political process. Her heart was truly embedded in Oklahoma schools. Prior to serving in OEA governance roles from 2009-2015, Hampton taught at Pleasant Grove, a small school with many economic challenges, for all of her 34-year career. Despite being presented with opportunities to work in larger schools, she chose to stay because she knew those students needed a strong

supporter in their classroom. Of the many fond memories she recounts about her time in the classroom, the positive relationships she built with students and colleagues from across the state are among her most treasured. In fact, she has been blessed to keep up with many fellow members, colleagues, and students with whom she bonded over the years. Since retiring, Hampton has enjoyed catching up with old friends and devoting more time to her four sons, two stepdaughters, and her grandchildren.

To new and early career educators, Hampton imparts some wisdom, “you have no idea the difference you will make in people’s lives. Once you get to the other end of your career, you will get letters and thank you notes from people you never expected.” Although she shares many frustrations with active educators about education issues that persist in Oklahoma, she reminds us with a friendly smile, “while you can’t control the winds, you certainly can adjust the sails.”

We could all learn a thing or two from Linda Hampton.



OREA Spotlight

Linda Hampton, Retired Educator

“While you can’t control the winds, you certainly can adjust the sails.”

by Scout Anvar

NEON

NEW EDUCATORS OF OKLAHOMA NETWORK

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BEYOND TRAUMA INFORMED

PRESENTATIONS

While many Oklahoma educators have attended professional development on the theory of trauma exposure and how it impacts children, OEA's cadre presentations focus on in-the-moment and curricular

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Beyond Trauma Informed
OEA Trauma Cadre





Before the aviation club, common answers included NFL player or YouTuber. Now, many express interest in engineering, mechanics, or becoming astronauts.”



STEM EDUCATION IS FOR EVERYBODY

How one OEA member turned future YouTubers into future astronauts
by Joe DuVall



her on a path that would profoundly impact her teaching career.

The NASA OKSG program involves a year-long mentorship, including an intensive 10-day summer training focused on STEM education. “We immersed into STEM learning,” Reis explained. “We learned all about the properties of flight, built planes, flew

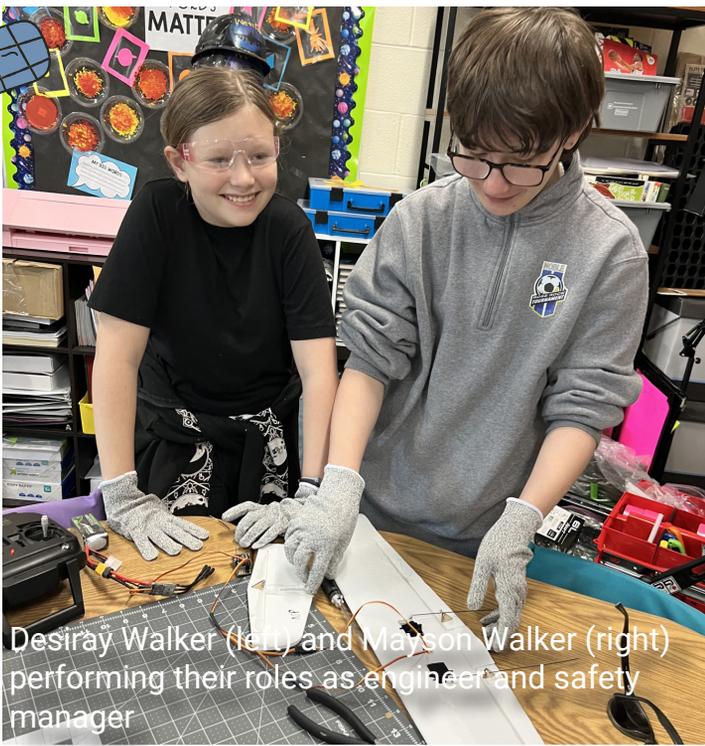
them, and competed.” This hands-on experience was transformative, igniting her passion for aviation and STEM education.

Inspired by her NASA training, Chrystal founded an aviation club at Westfall Elementary. “I wanted to do this with my kids,” she said. With determination and support from her principal, Reis made it

Chrystal Reis, a 5th-grade teacher at Westfall Elementary in the Choctaw-Nicomma Park School District, is a beacon of inspiration in the world of STEM education. Her journey from a last-minute applicant to an award-winning educator highlights her unwavering commitment to bringing science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) to young minds. Her story is one of perseverance, innovation, and a deep-seated belief in the potential of every student.

Chrystal’s journey began when she stumbled upon an opportunity on social media for the NASA Oklahoma Space Grant Consortium (OKSG). “Two years ago, they opened it up to everybody because they didn’t have enough applications,” she recalled. Despite being a last-minute applicant, she was selected as part of the 2022-23 NASA OKSG Stellar Class, setting





Desiray Walker (left) and Mayson Walker (right) performing their roles as engineer and safety manager

happen. The club, which started with 20 students, met every Thursday after school and culminated with the highlight of competing in Stillwater, where they were the youngest team. "They did an amazing job," Reis proudly stated.

Reis has been at Westfall for seven years but has been a teacher in Oklahoma since 2009. "Before I taught at Westfall, I actually taught at Lake Park with (OEA President) Katherine Bishop."

"The moment I stepped into Chrystal's classroom," Bishop remembered, "(Reis) had that

'with-it-ness' that just comes naturally to some educators. Her classroom was inclusive, interactive, and relationships were immediately built. The students with disabilities that I served were her students and we were an instant team."

Reis has carried that environment through her career to the aviation club; it not only introduced students to the basics of flight, but also instilled a love for engineering and problem-solving. Chrystal emphasizes the importance of hands-on learning: "The biggest impact for me is looking at my curriculum and going, okay, this



Toby McBroom fixing the plane's elevator

is the state standard. How do I make it hands-on, so the students are getting it?" Her goal is to ensure that students engage with the material in a meaningful way to develop critical thinking and resilience.

Chrystal's innovative approach to STEM education did not go unnoticed. In 2023, she was named the Oklahoma Science Teachers Association "Science Elementary Teacher of the Year," the first elementary teacher to receive this prestigious award. This recognition underscores her exceptional contributions to science education and her dedication to her students.

Chrystal's involvement with NASA extended beyond

“STEM education is for everybody, because our hardest students are geodes, the ones that are rough on the outside but beautiful on the inside. Don’t count them out because they don’t look like you’re gifted and talented. Or maybe they’re explosive because they don’t know how to communicate. It doesn’t mean that they can’t engineer.”



the initial training. She was invited to present at an international NASA conference for two consecutive years. “It was eye-opening how STEM translates in every language, every country, no matter how rich or how poor,” she reflected. Her presentations focused on integrating STEM into the classroom, sharing her experiences and lessons learned with educators from around the world.

One of her standout lessons involved a hypothetical mission to the dwarf planet Ceres. “Students discover a mysterious planet called Ceres... they have to determine what the powdered “elements” from Ceres are,” she explains. This hands-on, inquiry-based approach captivated students’ imaginations and demonstrated the practical applications of STEM concepts.

Chrystal’s aviation club has had a profound impact on her students’ aspirations. “Every year at the end of fifth grade, we do a slideshow, and we ask the kids, what do you want to be when you grow up?” she says. Before the aviation club, common answers included NFL player or YouTuber. Now, many students express interest in engineering, mechanics, or becoming astronauts. “We went from zero engineers in the future to probably a good fourth to half of the class wanting to go into engineering,” Reis noted.

This shift in aspirations is a testament to the power of exposure and hands-on learning. By introducing students to STEM careers early on, Reis is helping to shape the next generation of innovators and problem-solvers.

Reis also noticed the benefits of STEM work go beyond academic learning. She recognizes important improvements in social-emotional learning, as well. “You’re raising little humans out here, and hopefully, we’re making them good ones,” she said. One of her favorite stories involves a student who initially struggled with social interactions. “As soon as I accepted her into aviation, she didn’t look back... she was able to make friends and practice and

improve on her social skills,” Reis recalled.

Her vision for the future extends beyond the classroom. Reis aims to become a curriculum coordinator to help other teachers integrate STEM into their lessons. “I want to help teachers to help students,” she explained. She believes that all students, regardless of their background or perceived abilities, can succeed in STEM. “STEM education is often viewed as gifted and talented. I need everyone to stop thinking that way,” Reis urged. “STEM education is for everybody, because our hardest students are geodes, the ones that are rough on the outside but beautiful on the inside. Don’t count them out because they don’t look like your gifted and talented. Or maybe they’re explosive because they don’t know how to communicate. It doesn’t mean that they can’t engineer,” she asserted.

“Every student has potential,” Reis emphasized. “We should work for all of them.”





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PAUL MARSHALL

The Sky is the Limit!

by Scout Anvar

Known as a jack of all trades in the Shawnee School District where he worked as a custodian, bus driver, maintenance worker, coach, and now art teacher, Paul Marshall is an Oklahoma transplant from England that has a strong sense of belonging in Jefferson Elementary School. After wearing many hats in the same district over the last fourteen years, he says that doing so many different jobs helped him to appreciate education more because he has, “seen the workings of a school from many sides.” Marshall just wrapped up his first full year teaching Art and has nothing but wonderful things to say about his experience.

While working in a classroom comes with many stressors, Marshall revels in a newfound sense of comfort and peace since he began teaching. Throughout his life, Marshall has always loved to create art and now has the privilege to inspire students by teaching them about the joys of artistic expression. His dedication to and appreciation for art education is evident to all his students and colleagues across the district.

Reflecting on his journey through several careers in education, Marshall expresses many thanks to all the supportive administrators and principals throughout his time in Shawnee schools that encouraged him to pursue higher education and a teaching certificate. Marshall has become a pillar in his school community especially for his enthusiastic students and his colleagues at all levels through his many years of service. Marshall loves his school district and often says, “there is nowhere else I’d rather be, everything is just so positive.” He takes pride in his students’ successes and is thankful to stay in contact with some that he used to coach, a few of whom have their own children now. The lasting impact a teacher or coach can have on a student is not lost on Marshall and he works diligently to reach every student he meets.

As an active OEA member, Marshall appreciates the technical support the association provides for certification and other testing such as the Praxis Performance Assessment for Teachers (PPAT), Oklahoma Subject Area Test (OSAT),

and the Oklahoma General Education Test (OGET). “To have the support of OEA, an organization working for the good of the members, is comforting and knowing I can always call for support makes me feel at ease,” Marshall said. “OEA gives me a lot of opportunities to stay engaged too so I always take some time to read through their newsletters and I often learn something new.”

Marshall’s remarkable drive has bolstered his career and has positively impacted his outlook on life and those of his students. Anyone that knows Marshall surely feels his refreshing passion for education and his love for the classroom. To new and aspiring school workers, Marshall imparts some wisdom: “the sky is the limit, and anything is possible.” He recommends that anyone interested in teaching try out substituting or volunteering in a school while they are still working on their credentials. Just talking to current teachers and administrators and learning from those that are already doing the work is extremely valuable. “If you want to be a teacher, talk to one,” Marshall said. “Working in this district and befriending teachers for so long gave me a real advantage when I began my own teaching career.” Students at Jefferson Elementary are lucky to have such an engaged and inspiring teacher.

While classes have ended for the summer months, Marshall is already looking forward to the next school year and is eager to meet all the new students he will teach. In his free time, he plans to enjoy activities like fishing and working in his garden, seeing his children and grandchildren more, and after a long coaching career he will always make time to watch a good soccer game.





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Legislative Roll



Curriculum Changes

HB 1425 – Clay Staires & Dave Rader –
Compels districts to create a policy allowing for an independent entity to provide religious instruction off-campus during the school day. Districts must give elective credit for the course.

HB 2158 – Dick Lowe & Brenda Stanley –
Personal Financial Literacy can only be taken during 10th, 11th, or 12th grade. Adds content to the course related to retirement, credit scores, and online banking. Allows more certifications to teach the class.

HB 3278 – Rhonda Baker & Adam Pugh –
Adds a 4th math credit to graduation requirements for students entering 8th grade in 25-26. Allows for math taken during 8th grade to count towards requirements, as well as computer science, dual credit college courses, CareerTech math courses, and locally approved math-based application courses.

HB 3727 – Jason Lowe & Kevin Matthews –
Directs districts to provide instruction in cursive handwriting for students in the third through fifth grades.



New Requirements Educators Need To Be Aware Of

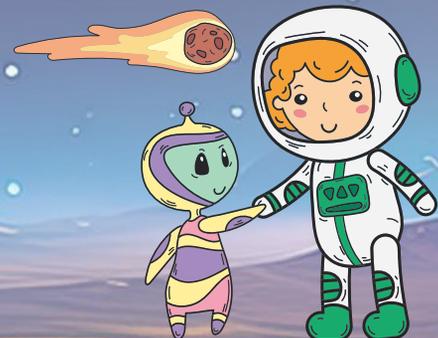
HB 3958 – Sherrie Conley & Adam Pugh –
Prohibits school personnel from engaging in electronic or digital communication with a student without including the guardian of that student. Does not apply to group communications or school approved platforms like Canvas.

SB 362 – Adam Pugh & Rhonda Baker –
Changes the name of the Reading Sufficiency Act to the Strong Readers Act. Eliminates default third grade retention. Prohibits the use of the “three-cueing system” of teaching reading. Directs SDE and OEQA to create reading screening tools. Puts new requirements on schools for communicating with parents and publishing plans to address

Scan Me



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undup

SB 1921 – Paul Rosino & Bob Ed Culver

– Requires coaches have yearly training in first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and use of an automated external defibrillator. Directs districts to develop a sudden cardiac emergency response plan.

Student Resources

SB 1527 – Darrell Weaver & Danny Sterling

– Requires schools to excuse absences of students taken for certain therapies such as speech therapy, occupational therapy or other services related to the child's individualized education program.

SDE Oversight

HB 3523 – Mark Vancuren & Brenda Stanley

– Directs SDE to publish an annual report on adjunct teachers.

SB 1122 – Chuck Hall & Kevin Wallace

– SDE budget limits bill. Provisions to require SDE to apply for all federal grants applied for during 2023 and forbidding SDE funds from being used for the purpose of securing media interviews, public relations, or other public promotional purposes were line item vetoed by the Governor.

SB 1324 – Roger Thompson & Mark Lawson

– Directs the Dept. of Education to make an optional electronic universal application for free or reduced-price lunches available online under the National School Lunch Act.

Continued Voucher Expansion

SB 358 – Julie Daniels & John Echols

– Removes requirement that recipients of the Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program spend the year prior enrolled in a public school if the receiving school serves exclusively homeless students.



OEA

Legislative Dashboard

What?

The OEA Legislative Directory was created to serve as a guide for members to browse a list of Oklahoma legislators, their districts, their contact information and to stay updated on key education issues during legislative session.

Where?

You can find the dashboard in the members area of the website -- OKEA.ORG -- When session begins this will be where to find all the latest up-to-date news coming from the capitol.

www.okea.org/stay-informed/legislative-dashboard

Why?

This guide contains the stances of the OEA Fund for Children and Public Education (FCPE) on all current Oklahoma education issues and each legislator's recommendation status. All legislators previously recommended by the OEA FCPE are indicated on this guide. The OEA FCPE is a member driven political action committee that runs on voluntary donations from OEA members.



Scan for Dashboard

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO FALL IN LOVE WITH SCHOOL

by Monica Royer

One man's promise helps him find passion in being in education



Robert Allen's mom always believed that education was the most important thing. She had a dream that one day he would understand that and pursue a college degree. Allen, however, did not accept this truth until later in life, and now her dream has finally become his reality as he has earned a Master of Arts in Education and completed his eighth year of teaching.

Allen was a student athlete and originally had dreams of pursuing that after high school. His mom, however, restricted him from speaking to scouts and encouraged him to pursue higher education instead. Unfortunately, things did not turn out the way either of them expected.

"It didn't work out the first time I went to college," Allen explained. "I got hurt, I was having trouble, and then eventually I dropped out of school."

Although he left, he was determined not to let that chapter of his life close forever. He promised his mom to complete what he started.

"I always held on to that promise that I was going to go back; I just had to take some time and figure out what direction I wanted to go," Allen said.

Eventually, he decided to fulfill his promise and return to school. This time, however, he did not have scholarships to rely on, so he started back up at a community college in Riverside, California and then transferred to California Baptist University. There he earned his Bachelor of Arts in Behavioral Science.

After earning his BA, Allen worked in group homes and then went on to become a probation officer. Unfortunately, he witnessed some of his friend's cousins and nephews end up in the juvenile detention system and it deeply affected him.

"I wanted to be a stronger influence before teens started to make harmful decisions," Allen said.

He began to do some soul-searching to determine what his long-term goals were. He started coaching baseball, football, and soccer at his alma mater and taking education classes.

"I thought of the people in my life that made the biggest difference and the ones that mentored me the most," Allen reflected. "Of course, my parents and family were always there for me, but so were my teachers and coaches."

During middle and high school, Allen witnessed many of his peers going down the wrong paths early on in life, much like the teens he saw as a probation officer. He also suffered a tragedy during that time that could have pushed him to do the same. Fortunately, Allen had many mentors in school that helped save his life.

"I had friends who were in gangs through middle school and high school," Allen shared. "I didn't participate in those things because I was always involved in sports. During high school, my father passed away. It was my family, coaches, and teachers that kept me going on the right track. They were always there for guidance and for any help I needed." It was with this realization that Allen's purpose in life became obvious.





“That’s the direction I wanted to go” Allen said. “I wanted give back what my teachers and coaches gave to me.”

Allen moved from California to Oklahoma and worked for Dell. After six years, he bridged his knowledge of technology and his desire to work in education and began working at Oklahoma City Community College (OCCC). He worked in the Community Outreach and Education program teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) and technology for adults.

“I had a lot of fun doing that, but I wanted to get into public school education and also be a coach,” Allen said.

Allen went on to work for Oklahoma City Public Schools (OKCPS) as an emergency certified teacher. At first, he was offered a position to teach computer classes, but instead the district wanted him to be an English Language Development (ELD) teacher. It was at that moment when he found passion for this career. He became alternatively certified in psychology, sociology and history, and eventually moved on to Western Heights to teach 7th and 8th grade.

“I think it’s my calling,” Allen shared. “I feel comfortable after growing up in an EL family.”

Allen has family from Spain and the Philippines, so he was used to hearing multiple languages in his home while growing up. His grandfather alone spoke four. This made ELD programs an essential part of his youth and gave him a deeper understanding of his students.

“My kids and I talk about the same things and share similar experiences,” Allen said. “I understand that sometimes they just need more time to process.”

Once he began working at Western Heights, Allen decided it was time to expand on his original promise to his mom as well as his newfound dreams and earn a Masters in Education from the University of Phoenix.

“I told my mom, ‘I’m gonna get it,’” Allen explained. “I wanted to prove, not only to other people but to myself, that I could keep my promise and I could be successful.”

This was no easy task. Although he had experience under his belt and years of

growth, Allen now had to juggle teaching full-time and coaching on top of his personal schooling.

“It was tiring,” Allen said. “After teaching all day, I’d have to come home and read, answer questions and be engaged.”

Additionally, because of coaching, there were nights he would not come home until after 10:00 or 11:00 pm. Sometimes he even had to stay up past 1:00 am to complete this schoolwork and still get up early to go to work the next day.

“I hope that it also provides motivation for the kids that I’m teaching,” Allen added. “I can say, ‘Look, I came from here, I did this, and I can go even further. I was never the smartest kid in school. I failed sometimes. People might tell you that you can’t, but if I can do it, anyone can do it.’”

For the past two years, he made the sacrifice and pushed through. Although the university offered opportunities for their students to take breaks, he knew it would not be the right choice for him.

“I said, ‘Nope. I’m just going to barrel through it,’” Allen joked. “I know from experience that once you stop something,

it's hard to get back in."

Allen officially earned his M.Ed in Instruction and Curriculum in October. With his degree in hand, he planned to become certified in ESL this summer. Although he achieved these goals, many in his position do not.

The number of emergency certifications was at an all-time high, but unlike Allen, many do not pursue long-term careers in education due to a number of reasons. On his journey, he was fortunate to have other jobs that had transferable skills and had taken education courses. He recognized how much more difficult it is to get into the profession without a formal background or experience.

"I would say classroom management is probably the number one problem," Allen said. "Without that, it's hard to get anything done. They're trying to build relationships with the kids, but they can't get through."

Reflecting on his own struggles and experiences as a student, Allen worked hard to live up to the teachers and coaches he had in his life and avoided

doing the things he hated in school. He believed that honesty was the strongest bridge in connecting with students.

"I tell teachers all the time to be truthful with your students," Allen shared. "Tell them why we're doing this and where we're taking them to. As long as you take time to be real with them, they're okay with it."

Additionally, Allen hoped that schools and associations like OEA will continue to provide resources and support for emergency and alternatively certified educators so that they too can stay in this career and find fulfillment.

"It's fun to see the kids grow," Allen reflected. "You watch them change from semester to semester and you show them how much they've accomplished, and they're always amazed. It feels good to be able to show them how hard they worked."

Even though Allen did not have a traditional path to education, his many achievements proved how strong his

perseverance and passion for this profession was.

"Being able to pass along what I was taught gives a great sense of pride for my mom and my family," Allen shared.

Like his EL students, Allen had much more to learn and prove than others in his position, but he earned his right to be where he belonged. His path was not clear and straight at times, but he did reach his dreams and even went above and beyond a simple promise he made to his mom.



OUR DIFFERENCES ARE OUR SUPERPOWERS

ESL teacher helps students overcome adversity and celebrate who they are

by Monica Royer



Differences can hold people back, but Lauren Divine learned a long time ago that differences can also make people stronger. Unlike most Oklahoman student teachers, Divine started her career all the way in China. Not only did she have the challenge of being in a foreign country, but her two kindergarten classes also represented seven different nationalities and languages, a far cry from the average Oklahoma classroom. Throughout her time in China, she developed a deep understanding of what her students were going through. Although she always aspired to be an international teacher, these experiences helped her to realize her dream of becoming an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher in America.

"Adapting to a new culture and new surroundings is hard enough but when you throw in learning a new language on top of it, it is very overwhelming," Divine reflected. "That experience gave me a new apprecia-

tion for families and students entering the US."

Divine started her career as a general education teacher, but she never forgot her experiences in China and decided after four years to pursue a Master's in Teaching English to Students of Other Languages (TESOL). The Glenpool Elementary teacher has since completed her ninth year of teaching in Oklahoma, and even though she has been an ESL teacher for three years, she still faces new challenges all the time. This past school year, a hearing impaired EL first grader entered their school without any paperwork. His first-grade teacher recognized that he was struggling immediately, but he had no 504 plan, Individualized Education Plan (IEP), or any medical records on file despite being in the district since he was in Pre-K.

"His first-grade teacher came to me on the second day of school with the concern that

he might need speech services because he did not produce all of his letter sounds appropriately,” Divine explained.

Divine put his name on a sticky note on her desk so she could remember to keep him at the top of her list and referred him to speech, but she quickly realized that because of their lack of information, it was going to be a much more complex situation. She worked with the school nurse and contacted the school’s Zomi translator to speak with his parents to get the medical paperwork, but because the school could not exclusively screen him for speech, they gave him a full assessment.

“It took a while, but the student was finally given all of the screeners and placed on an IEP for his hearing impairment,” Divine said.

After patiently waiting, Divine and the student’s IEP team met to assess what accommodations they needed to provide the student.

“One of those accommodations was a partner microphone that would connect to his hearing aids through Bluetooth so he could hear his classroom teacher more clearly and not all of the background classroom noise,” Divine explained.

Unfortunately, the team was met with another delay. The school struggled to find one of these devices within their district. When one was finally found, it was too old to connect to his hearing aids. The search continued and the school was in limbo waiting to find something that would work and meet his IEP accommodations. 115 days later, it finally happened.

“When the mic came in, I pulled the student out of class to determine if it worked properly,” Divine said. “Once I paired the partner mic to his hearing aids, he excitedly exclaimed, ‘I hear it! I hear more better!’”

The student then immediately asked if he could take the device to his general education teacher so that he could hear her more clearly. Divine was thrilled to not only witness him being able to hear, but that he was also advocating for himself.

“For 115 days this student’s name was on a sticky note on my desk,” Divine reflected. “For 115 days I was fighting to get the necessary paperwork, tests, and equipment necessary for him to be successful in school!”

With the help of another teacher, Divine explored other opportunities to expand this student’s experience. Together they determined that the device would also connect to an iPad and give him more access to



tools.

“His joy and excitement made all of the struggles and fighting to get him the proper assistance he needed worth it!”

That student’s situation was an extraordinary one, but being an ESL teacher always has its challenges. Whether students come from different places in the world or just different cultural backgrounds, Divine is tasked with helping them to integrate into this society, while also helping them to love and accept their differences. One of the ways she can do that is by helping them see successful people in society who come from similar backgrounds.

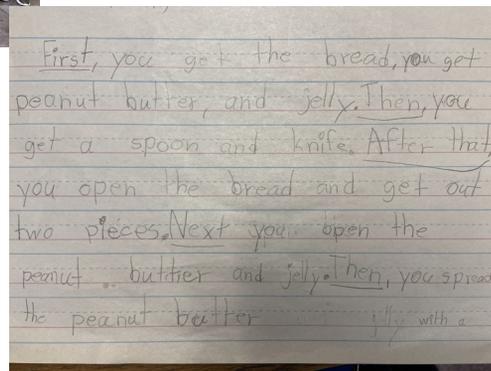
“In January, a local meteorologist posted on her Facebook page that she was looking for schools to give a weather presentation to in Spanish,” Divine shared. “I reached out to her and began the process of arranging a day and time for her to visit our school.”

While preparing for this visit, Divine determined that her school had 29 Spanish-speaking students. On April 2, Emma Landeros from Channel 2 News went to the school and gave an entire lesson and presentation on weather and weather preparedness in Spanish.

“She shared with the kids her struggles growing up being bilingual and having to frequently translate for her parents,” Divine explained. “However, she also said that it is because she is bilingual that she got her current job as a meteorologist.”

Divine was glad that site and district administrators were present to share in this moment.

“Thankfully, our superintendent and assistant superintendent were also able to attend Emma’s presentation,” Divine said. “I can honestly say that even though I didn’t know what was being said most of the time, it melted my heart watching my students engage in this wonderful experience.”



Much like the meteorologist shared, Divine hopes her students can accept their multi-lingual backgrounds as strengths and not weaknesses.

“I always tell my students that their bilingual ability is their “superpower” and I feel like this opportunity validated that in a real-life way,” Divine exclaimed.

For Divine, her job is so much more than being an educator of language. She helps to unlock understanding.

“I think my biggest reason for becoming an ESL teacher is to not only teach the students English, but also to be their advocate,” she explained. “Due to the language barrier, many parents of EL students don’t understand the US public school system, their child’s educational rights, or their rights as parents to speak up on behalf of their child’s education. I do everything I can to come alongside these families, students, and classroom teachers to help be a voice for their child and his or her educational goals.”

Ultimately, Divine just wants her students to embrace who they are even though they are in a new environment.

“I don’t want my students to lose their culture or their native language,” Divine said. “Instead, I want them to cherish that unique part of them and use it to better their lives and the lives of others.”

Because Divine and her colleagues work tirelessly to advocate for their students, they in turn learn to advocate for themselves and realize that what makes them different can also make them stronger.



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