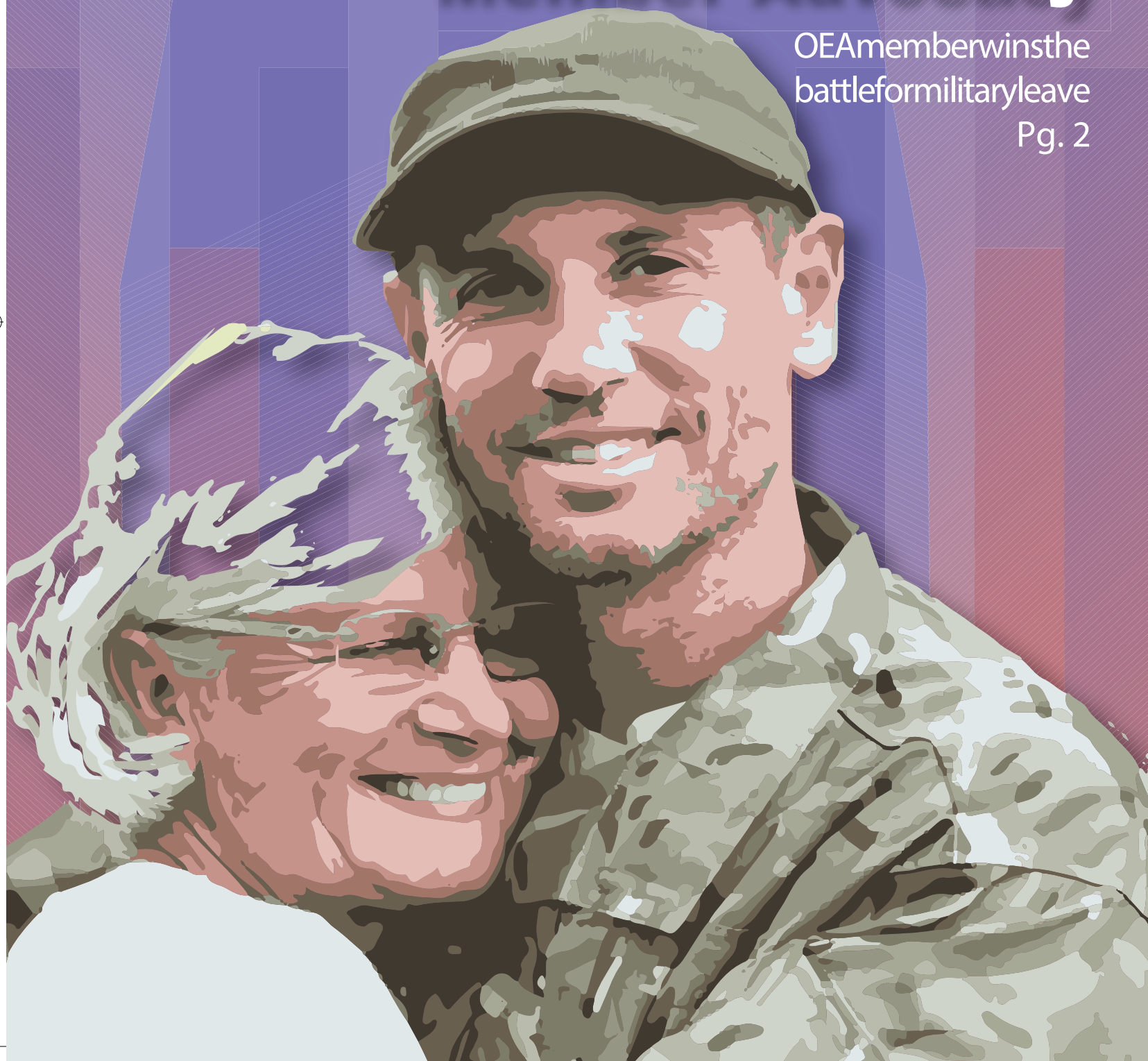


Education Focus

A Salute to Member Advocacy

OEAmemberwins the
battleformilitaryleave
Pg. 2





Lawmakers are connected to so much that impacts public education, yet many are disconnected from the schools in Oklahoma.

As educators, you are the experts. As advocates for your students and your profession, you have the ability to inform our state's leaders on what actually happens inside the classroom. After tremendous success last year, the Oklahoma Education Association is thrilled to again help facilitate those discussions through "Civication," where civics and education meet.

Civication provides opportunities for OEA members to interact with their elected leaders both at home and at the Capitol.

OEA is divided into zones that each elect a member to represent them on the board of directors. For "Civication at Home," those board members will set a zone meeting for members to have dinner and a conversation with their local legislators from December through February. Your legislative and political organizer (LPO) will schedule the meeting with legislators or, if legislators are unable to attend, then LPO staff will host a training for members. Meals for members will be covered by the OEA.

"Civications at the Capitol" will occur every Tuesday in March and April. Members will register and have the option to stay overnight in a double occupancy hotel room. OEA will host a dinner on Monday night and host a legislative briefing and breakfast Tuesday morning. Money for gas, substitute pay, double occupancy hotel room, dinner Monday,

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and breakfast Tuesday will be covered by the OEA. You will have an option to choose a preferred roommate, an assigned roommate, or pay half the cost of the room to stay by yourself.

Many lawmakers may have not physically interacted with schools or their employees in a very long time. It is imperative that educators remind those in power of the importance of public schools to the overall quality of life in Oklahoma and the resources professional educators require to maximize their impact.

Sign up and find out more at okea.org/civication.

The Education Focus

Volume 40, Issue 2

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A Letter from the President



This past June at our training for new board members of the OEA Board of Directors, I posed the question, "Who is your biggest cheerleader?" To help start the conversation, I gave my response first. I said my Dad was my biggest cheerleader. My Dad having four daughters, was always there to encourage all of us in everything we did. When I became a teacher, my Dad was still right there being my biggest cheerleader. He would call or send me a text to say how proud he was that I was a teacher and what a great job I was doing. When I was elected as OEA Vice-President and President, those messages didn't stop. Many of his texts would be - "Sis caught you on the news last night great job." "Keep at it until they give you what you deserve." "No matter what you are doing the right thing keep your head up I'm proud of you." I go back to his text messages often to give me that added boost on days that I feel like I'm walking through quicksand.

November 8th did not bring us all the election results that we would have wanted. And we need to absolutely celebrate the victories where we had them because you worked hard to get friends of public education elected! So, you may be asking yourself - "What now Katherine, what are we going to do...What is OEA going to do?" My friends, let me tell you; OEA was founded on the principles of defending public education and our profession. Elections may not go the way we would have liked, but we will not be swayed. Our mission is the same and we will continue to advocate for education professionals. We will work tirelessly to unite our members and the people of Oklahoma to fulfill the promise of public education. We will never stop working to prepare every student to succeed in a diverse and interdependent world.

And while our mission grounds our purpose, we also have a strategic focus that is very clear and sets a path forward. If we are going to overcome the educator shortage crisis that we are in, we must have competitive pay with professional wages and benefits in line with other professions that have similar education and training requirements. Every student should be able to attend a school that is focused on educating the whole child. We need to make sure that our schools have the needed resources and services for their students. And last but not least, we will continue to make sure that educators' influence is felt in every election cycle and every piece of education legislation at the Oklahoma legislature.

Now, my Dad was my biggest cheerleader, so I'm asking you to look around. Who is your biggest cheerleader? We all have them, and they are there. Have you ever thought about your community partners as your cheerleaders? Parents and patrons that cheer us on every day? There is no doubt in my mind that this next legislative session is going to bring some of our toughest battles. So, now is the time to reach out to our cheerleaders to thank them for their support and make sure they know what is happening in our schools. Our opponents would like nothing more than for us to be frustrated and wanting to just walk away. OEA members, I'm asking you to join me as we stand shoulder to shoulder, cheer each other on and fight for what we believe in.

Our students are Worth It! Our schools are Worth It! Our profession is Worth It! And you are Worth It!

Worth It!

Katherine Bishop

A Salute to Member Advocacy

This past August, Canton Elementary teacher Carrie Compton was flipping through the latest NEA Today magazine when a particular story caught her eye. She read about a fellow teacher and mother from Muskogee who was docked pay when she left to be a part of her son's deployment. Fortunately, this teacher's local association and district were able to come to an agreement for military leave, but Carrie had the sudden realization that she could be facing the same issue in her own district. Her son was attending AIT training for the Army National Guard in Virginia at the time.

When Carrie and her husband began mapping out their plans to be at their son's graduation, they determined that it would be a complex situation and she would have to take a substantial amount of leave.

"With the way flights were being canceled and rebooked, my husband and I decided to drive the 19 hours, each way, to and from Virginia. We didn't want to run into the chance of missing his graduation. I knew that I would have to use all of my personal days and possibly pay for a sub for two days, out of pocket. I was also concerned that if my son were to be deployed soon, I had no personal days left," Carrie explained.

Concerned about the potential sacrifices she would have to make, she reached out to Patti Serio, an OEA Organizing Specialist and friend. She explained "I have been a member of OEA for roughly 20 years and knew that I could count on them to represent me or guide me through this process if needed."

After hearing from Carrie, Patti's first response was to investigate what other districts in her area were doing in regards to military leave for staff members. Patti determined that no districts in the area had clauses for

By Monica Royer

this type of leave in their contracts. Afterwards, "I encouraged her to have a talk with the principal and even the superintendent about working out something that would not cost her money to attend her son's graduation and departure to serve in the military."

After giving this advice to Carrie, Patti notified the region's OEA Advocate, Jacki McFarland, of the situation who then contacted the Canton Public Schools superintendent and set up a meeting.

Carrie followed the advice of OEA staff members and received a positive response. "My superintendent was very supportive when I talked with him and offered to help in any way he could. I asked to be put on the school board agenda and presented the article I read concerning military leave, to the board members," she stated.

When asked why it was so important to be involved in this case, Patti shared "Carrie has been not only a lifelong OEA member, but she has also become one of my great friends during her tenure at Watonga, and now Canton over the last 18 years or more. When she called me, it was not only for information from OEA, but also as my friend. I knew we had to try our best and get something done."

Once things started to move quickly and escalated to a meeting with the school board, nerves set in for Carrie. Because her school district is small, she was not sure if change could happen.

She reflected "I have always told my children, 'You'll never know unless you ask. The worst thing anyone can tell you is no.' Not only was I presenting the military issue to the school board for myself, but I thought about 'that teacher' in the future that may have exhausted all personal days and would need these days. I have a 19-year-old son who is willing to give his life for our country; it is my duty and honor to support him."

The school board agreed to write a policy providing up to three military days per semester, six per school year, which are paid by the district to attend graduations, deployments, returns to stateside and other important milestones.

Once Patti heard the news, she was emotional. "Carrie Compton has shown that anything that is important to you is worth fighting for. And now all those that run across the need for military leave will have it at Canton Public Schools! This also shows that although we work for OEA, our members become our friends and we truly care about their lives and how we can help them. It's not just a job," she shared.

With support and a little courage, Carrie was successful in making this contract change in only Three weeks and was able to attend her son's graduation. She said, "OEA has helped me in the past, and I am glad to say, they were there to help me again."



(Carrie Compton with her son Wyatt Steed)



Kathy Hale, ESP Attendee

A Network of Support

By Monica Royer



On October 29, 2022, ESPs were invited to come together for collaboration and learning opportunities at conferences in Tulsa and Oklahoma City. One of the attendees was Kathy Hale who has been a member of the support staff at Putnam City Schools for over 25 years, first as a Financial Secretary and now as an Activity Funds Clerk. She frequently attends OEA conferences and is very active in her local association. When asked why, she said, “These conferences are important for support professionals to attend, as we feed off each other and can better our local. I have been fortunate enough to attend two ESP conferences at OEA and the NEA ESP conference in New Orleans. The information we receive is invaluable and the sessions at the NEA conference were extremely informative. I am hoping to attend the National Conference next year and come back with more information for my association.”



Jeannie Verra, Moore-ESP



Brian Johnson, OEA Staff with an ESP participant

By Monica Royer



Brenda Snider, “The Membership Guru,” has dedicated decades of her life to helping members at OEA as our Senior Membership Accounting Coordinator. She will retire after being at OEA for almost 43 years. During this time, she has spent countless hours processing membership information, guiding other processors, pulling reports and being the “keeper” of OEA memorabilia all while supporting OEA’s mission.

“They have opened doors for me. OEA has been instrumental in allowing me to learn new things and do new things,” said Brenda. “NEA gave me the opportunity to travel and teach classes on processing.”

She loved her job because “there’s a satisfaction in it. I like coordinating it so that I know everything is supposed to be on and correct.” She adds, “Working with the payroll clerks to ensure that the accounts are balanced is important to me. Also, training staff on how to work with the current membership system is something that I take pride in doing for our members.”

When asked what retirement looks like, she joked that she has “as many plans as I have work to do.” Her hobbies include reading, quilting, traveling, training her dogs, oil-based painting and spending time with her family—especially her 2-year-old grandson. She also has been active in her church’s children’s ministry for over 30 years. Once retirement begins, she plans to go on more bus tours with her husband.

Brenda has been known at the office as the “keeper” of things—from extra office supplies, holiday décor, pictures to the discontinued “Lifelong Membership” book. This book is her most prized OEA possession. It is an old record book of members who used to participate in the “Lifelong Membership” program. It represents the history of record-keeping with its handwritten entries and tattered cover, but also the deep dedication that people had to be life-long members. Although this program does not exist anymore, Brenda Snider will always be a lifelong family member of OEA.



Brenda and Her Husband, Adrain, at Mount Denali in Alaska

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 strategies.

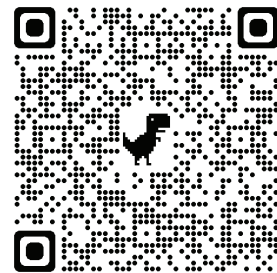


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Stillwater teacher and husband protect daughter in Supreme Court win

Locals Still in Control

By Joe Duvall

Recently, the Oklahoma Supreme Court ruled that Senate Bill 658, a bill that prohibited local school boards from instituting a mask policy unless the governor declared a state of emergency, was unconstitutional and impermissible.

The decision was a win for local control of public schools and one that may not have happened without the voices of two Stillwater parents, including an OEA member.

Jenny Bobo teaches 6th through 9th grade in Stillwater Public Schools and is also the president and lead negotiator for the Stillwater Education Association. Her husband, Dr. Preston Bobo, works as a chemist for Environmental Management. They have a daughter who is deaf from a perforated ear drum and attends Stillwater Public Schools with an IEP (Individual Education Plan).

When SB 658 was passed, their experience in education, science, and the specific needs of their daughter made them uniquely capable of seeing the problematic nature of this law.

"While a lot of the rhetoric surrounding 658 was 'If you're concerned, just protect yourself and you'll be fine.' Well, if you're a deaf girl with a hearing aid, your ability to protect yourself is limited," Preston continued, "We had a robust IEP and worked with the district and this law unilaterally prevented us from protecting our daughter."

"Those decisions need to stay local and specific to the communities where they are being implemented," said Jenny.

The Bobos were concerned this law would create a precedent where all local decisions could be usurped by elected officials in Oklahoma City who had no idea of the issues facing each individual school district.

According to Preston, "I can email any board member and they'll respond to my emails. Even if I don't want to put myself out there and go to meetings and speak, I can

email them, tell them who my kid is, and we can have that personal relationship. If I were to email, even my Senator, who I think is great, he's not going to know who my daughter is. He's not going to know every child in every school district that he covers."

The Bobos' feared retaliation, given Jenny's profession as an educator and the charged political climate, but their fears as parents and determination to do what was right were even stronger. They were one of the first to join the suit, even before the Oklahoma State Medical Association and Native American tribes.

"The more people that got involved, the less worry I had," Jenny recalled. "I did worry there would be backlash for me, but I mostly worried about us not winning. The more people that became involved the better likelihood we had of winning."

The Bobos also received support from the Oklahoma Education Association, who joined forces with the OSMA in bolstering the lawsuit.

The Oklahoma Supreme Court ultimately agreed with the coalition and ruled SB 658 as an overreach on school districts' ability to govern themselves by a 7-2 vote.

And win they did, as the Oklahoma Supreme Court also saw the law as an overreach on school districts' ability to govern themselves.

"Local control of schools is usurped by requiring the Governor to exercise executive authority to declare a state of emergency," Justice Yvonne Kauger wrote in the court's majority opinion.

The Oklahoma State Department of Education announced it would not enforce SB 658 because of the court's decision.

The rebuke of SB 658 is a massive win for local control and the voices of both parents and educators. By getting involved and standing up for what was right, the Bobos inspired voices from across the state to stand up for their community schools and the board members elected to serve them.

"It's bigger than just masks in schools," reiterated Preston. "It's all local decisions. Local communities have said this is what's best for our community."



(Jenny, Preston Lee, Vivyanne, and Preston Bobo)

2022 Election Recap

By Joe Duvall

Time to Represent

OEA candidate filing opens in February

Strong down ballot results overshadowed by devastating losses

Oklahoma held an election last November with several key races across the state with mixed results for the future of students, educators and friends of public education.

While the OEA Fund for Children and Public Education (FCPE) saw 10 of their 12 endorsed bipartisan state legislature candidates prevail, the results at the top of the ballot were disappointing and concerning.

Governor Kevin Stitt was re-elected for a second term with 55.5% of the vote over State Superintendent Joy Hofmeister, endorsed by the FCPE, who received 41.8% of the vote.

Secretary of Education Ryan Walters was elected the new State Superintendent over 2020 Teacher of the Year Jena Nelson, endorsed by the FCPE, by a 56.8%-43.2% margin.

According to the Oklahoma State Election Board, 42% of Oklahomans and 70% of Republicans voted straight party. Only half of eligible Oklahoma voters cast a ballot, compared to 56% in 2018.

Both Stitt and Walters have expressed several dangerous positions and views towards public education.

They have each voiced an ardent desire to broadly expand voucher programs that would take tax dollars meant for public education and siphon them towards private schools. An investigation by Oklahoma Watch and The Frontier in May found that both Stitt and Walters oversaw a program where \$650,000 in federal pandemic relief money meant for schools went to non-educational items such as smartphones, televisions, video game consoles, Christmas trees and barbecue grills among other items.

Walters has called professional educator associations "mandatory enslavement" and threatened to reject federal funding that constitutes up to 13% of the state's education budget and pays for programs like free and

Filing open: Feb. 1-17

Elections: March (online voting)

The OEA Board of Directors is designed to represent members at the grassroots level. Each zone is made up of at least 1,000 members who elect their representative to the board. There are seven open OEA Board positions for three-year terms which expire in 2026. These board members will serve as NEA Delegates in 2024 and 2025.

Filing forms are available at www.okea.org, OEA Headquarters in Oklahoma City or at the OEA regional office in Tulsa.

For more information on the elections or filing forms, contact Maureen Peters at 800/522-8091, 405/528-7785 or mpeters@okea.org. (The zones and exact number of delegates involved in this election were not determined by press time. This information will be posted in the Election Filing Forms section of the Local Association Forms page on okea.org by February 1.)



reduced lunch, special education, career training, tutoring programs, after school programs, USDA grants, technology in classrooms, and more. Walters also makes at least \$120,000 a year from a dark money advocacy group bankrolled by anti-public education billionaires.

It was not all unwelcome news for public education, though. FCPE endorsed Leslie Osborn won a landslide re-election as Oklahoma Labor Commissioner with 65.7% of the vote. Other FCPE endorsed candidates who won their races include Sen. Julia Kirt, Sen. Carri Hicks, Rep. Bob Ed Culver, Rep. Dell Kerbs, Rep. Trish Ranson, Rep. Jacob Rosecrants, Rep. Suzanne Schreiber, Rep. Jared Deck, Rep. Annie Menz, Rep. Tammy West, Rep. Cyndi Munson, and Rep. Melissa Provenzano (by 392 votes).

"There are real issues facing public education in our state. An educator shortage crisis, oversized classrooms, poverty, lack of counselors and mental health support, and access to resources all require prioritization over national partisan culture wars and voucher schemes," said OEA President Katherine Bishop. "It is our hope that the newest representatives will remember every day that they serve all Oklahomans, not just some."

"OEA will continue its commitment to work with all elected leaders to fight for every student to receive a high-quality public education, as we have done since 1889."

NEXT GEN UNITES

By Monica Royer

Members of OAEA met at UCO on October 29 to hear from guest speakers, collaborate, and network. Attendees participated in breakout sessions and had the opportunity to hear from prominent guest speakers. The keynote speaker was Craig McVay, former El Reno Public Schools Superintendent, who spoke on the impact that educators can have on their students. He also shared encouraging stories about his experiences as a teacher, coach and administrator. Representative John Waldron also spoke to attendees at lunch on the importance of voting and being politically informed and active. Early Career Organizer Joshua Frazier shared his thoughts on the OAEA conferences. "In addition to the professional development component, it's important to have a space to meet and network with other aspiring educators. It's my personal belief that there is value in seeing other people from schools and communities that are different from your own and being able to share experiences," said Joshua.



L-R: Rebekah McPherson-OAEA Vice President
Isabelle Esau- OAEA President
Joshua Frazier- Early Career/Aspiring Ed Organizer
Katelyn Jochmans- OAEA Secretary



Craig McVay, former El Reno Public Schools Superintendent

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