Better Schools

Merry Christmas
And
Happy New Year

2014
In This Issue…

1  From the Executive Director
2  OASA President-Elect
4  Association News
6  Bulletin Board
7  On The Hill/Federal Relations
8  Special Education Update
11 Legal Ease
12 NAESP Membership
13 Book It: The Power of Our Words
15 Professional Development:
   Not Just Another Acronym
17 Book It: Soothing the Savage Beasts
18 Tech Talk
19 Visioning Update

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CCOSA Director’s View

BY STEVEN CRAWFORD
CCOSA Executive Director

We in education find ourselves in interesting times and circumstances. We have a state superintendent who labels us as the education establishment and obstacles to school improvement. We are educators (heart and soul), and we are the individuals that implement changes at the local level to benefit children. I am always amazed at the quality of work you do in our public schools. It is your job to speak up for students and to make sure that improvements to public education will benefit children. It is your job to suggest improvements to reforms that guarantee students benefit from these changes being suggested by individuals who have only ever attended school; never successfully leading a school. While we are characterized as whiners and against change, the truth is that authentic change will only happen if we are the force behind it.

I am still convinced that A-F processes need major improvements and look forward to working with you to make that happen. It is apparent to me that poverty and the numbers of special needs students you serve are the two major factors affecting your school’s grade. I do not think we should ever give up on children who find themselves in these circumstances and I know you never will. CCOSA continues to look for ways to help create an accountability system that is valid, reliable, useful, and capable of providing accurate and timely information to parents, students, and community members. The current A-F system has failed to provide a useful or accurate reflection of a school site or district.

School funding is on the minds of many as we approach the midterm adjustment. I do not believe there is enough available funding to pay for all the new student weights. This is due, in large part, to the passage of State Question 766. This year SQ 766 took approximately $32,000,000.00 of growth revenue from the school funding formula. We must expect the legislature and Governor to replace this lost revenue. Based on information available to me at this time, I am advising school districts to plan for a reduction of at least $10.00 per weighted student in December. It is possible that the amount could be greater. Hopefully those who supported SQ766 will fight as aggressively to have the state replace the funding public school children lost as they did to secure passage of this tax cut! I challenge the supporters of SQ 766 to step up and support the children of Oklahoma who didn’t get to vote to sacrifice their funding.

The renovation of your CCOSA building is almost complete. We hope to be completely finished with the project by December 1, 2013; certainly no later than January 1, 2014. It is our plan to have an open house and reception before the holiday break. Our staff will be sending details about this event to all CCOSA members very soon. In the meantime, if you are in Oklahoma City I personally invite you to come by and enjoy our new and improved facility.

Once again I want to extend my most sincere appreciation for all you do for children. Keep up the good fight for the children of this great state; they need you more now than ever before. Our staff is working hard to help you succeed. Please let us know if we can be of assistance. Have a great holiday season.

Steven Crawford
CCOSA Executive Director
Advocacy – What Can We Do As School Leaders?

BY ROGER HILL
President-Elect, OASA
Superintendent, Altus Public Schools

Wow, what a historic time in public education! The education reform movement is sweeping across America. Just take a look at any state and one will see that it’s not just Oklahoma that is undergoing major changes in public education. Vouchers, charter schools, virtual schools, privatization, high stakes testing, new teacher evaluations, new curriculum standards, and performance-based accountability look very similar from state to state. What does the future have in store for public education? What can we do as school leaders? Like it or not, we are responsible for compliance at the end of the day.

First of all, I don’t know of a more pressing time to be engaged in our professional organization than now. The strength of OASA comes from our membership and those that are actively engaged in the legislative process and serving as an advocate for public education at the local, state, and federal level. It’s through a strong, united front that we can influence policymakers and have a voice at the table to make a difference. Taking a back seat and not making our views known loudly is not an option in today’s politics if we expect to see positive changes to our current education system. We must engage teachers and parents in this process as well if we are to successfully influence policymakers.

Secondly, the election of a State Superintendent of Public Instruction next Fall will be critical. A true advocate for public education is what the State of Oklahoma deserves! Regardless of the candidate that one supports, it’s imperative that the State Superintendent of Public Instruction is a person that will embrace dialogue with stakeholders with the process and implementation phases of the new reform initiatives. Furthermore, we desperately need a State Superintendent of Public Instruction that will fight vigorously for increased funding for public education so that our schools will have the necessary resources to address the many challenges that exist.

And finally, there’s no question that educators are feeling the increased stress and pressure for public schools to perform better. Just look at the turnover in schools during the past few years. Teachers feel the frustration from the lack of respect and the increased workload of doing more with less. The lack of quality applicants that are now available to replace the teachers that have retired is alarming. More people are leaving the profession than those entering. There’s no short-term solution to this problem. Keeping our experienced teachers motivated, excited, and committed to a longer career can only offset the teacher shortage temporarily. The culture for the teaching profession must change in order to begin to attract and retain the very best and brightest people. Compensation for teachers must also be addressed. Showcasing the success stories from our local schools in the media and encouraging our young adults to become a teacher is a big part of being an advocate to this profession.

Thank you for what you do and for being an advocate for public education!

“Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world...would do this, it would change the earth.” — William Faulkner
STAR Enterprise™ assessments approved by Oklahoma SDE

We want you to be among the first to know that STAR Enterprise™ assessments, including STAR Early Literacy™ and STAR Reading™, are now approved as formative assessments for the K-3 Reading Sufficiency Act. You will find them on the RSA-Approved List under STAR™ Early Learning Enterprise.

This is great news for Oklahoma educators, because STAR Enterprise editions are the leading computer-adaptive assessments for determining acquisition of reading skills by PreK-3 emerging readers through ongoing screening and progress monitoring.

As directed by the K-3 Reading Sufficiency Act, reading skills such as phonological awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension are to be assessed using a screening instrument approved by the State Board of Education. STAR assessments have now been so approved. They include Student Diagnostic Reports, Screening Reports, and Instructional Planning Reports, which provide a bridge from assessment to instruction.

Call or email your Renaissance Learning™ representatives below for more information:

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Heather Tennyson  
(866) 559-6571  
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Association News

OAESP

by Dr. Gracie Branch, OAESP Executive Director

On November 1st and 2nd, Philip Smith (OAESP President), Meggan Wilson (OAESP President-Elect), Kair Ridenhour (NAESP Zone 8 State Representative), Dr. Lynda McDaniel (Zone 8 Resolutions Chair) and Dr. Gracie Branch (OAESP Executive Director) hosted the 2013 Zone 8 annual meeting with state directors and principals from the following Zone 8 states: Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas, Texas and New Mexico. OAESP would like to extend a special thank you to Jeff Pendleton (Imagine Learning) and David Shand of Lifetouch for sponsoring the Zone 8 dinners for Friday and Saturday evening. Also, OAESP extends a YEEHAW SHOUTOUT to the staff and performers of the Oklahoma Rodeo Opry for putting on such a great show Saturday evening.

Mark your calendars for the OAESP Mid-Winter Conference on Thursday, January 30 and Friday, January 31st at the Reed Conference Center in Midwest City. Conference fees are $150.00 for members and teachers of CCOSA members. OARSA members may attend free of charge!! Online registration is available at https://www.regonline.com/oaespmidwinterconference. So register now to hear keynote speakers John Antonetti (Thursday) and Steve Seskin (Friday). Also remember to fill out a Request to Present and apply for our OAESP Member/Technology Grants. All forms are located online at the CCOSA website www.ccosa.org: HOME> CCOSA>OAESP>CONFERENCES. See you soon!!!

OASSP

by Dr. Vickie Williams, OASSP Executive Director

Join OASSP and NASSP, February 6-8, 2014, in Dallas, TX, for the national conference. At Ignite ’14 you can immerse yourself in an innovative, relevant, and practical professional learning experience that you can customize to fit your needs. Register today at www.nasspconference.org.

The Ignite ’14 Opening Thought Leader Session, “Mind-sets Matter,” led by Carol Dweck and Daniel Wong, will motivate you to understand the impact that your way of thinking has on the students you serve and the people you lead. For more information about this provocative opening session and other innovative programming at Ignite ’14 (February 6-8 in Dallas, TX), visit www.nasspconference.org. Register today.

Experienced author, former leader of the renowned Disney Institute, and founder of Brilliance Institute Inc., Simon T. Bailey will leave you inspired and ready to take action that can lead to profound changes in your personal and professional life.

Oklahoma will host a reception on Friday evening at the Sheraton Conference Hotel from 5:30-7:30. Be sure to join us in Dallas, TX for this unique learning conference built to engage educators and thought leaders focused on developing and implementing dramatic school change. Be prepared to roll up your sleeves and participate in engaging and cutting-edge sessions.

OASA

OASA has 663 Active members and 31 Associate members. The OASA Legislative Conference is scheduled for January 15, 2014. Registration is open and information can be found on the CCOSA website at www.ccosa.org.

OASA District Representatives for 2013-2014 are:

D1 – Freida Burgess, Goodwell D6 – Rick Kibbe, Catoosa D11 – Max Tanner, Central D16 – Jim Beckham, Blanchard
D2 – Rocky Burchfield, Fairview D7 – Pam Deering, Mid-Del D12 – Rick Garrison, Cheyenne D17 – Cliff Johnson, Latta
D3 – Roydon Tilley, Chisholm D8 – Jeanene Barnett, Bristow D13 – Randy Batt, Cache D18 – Bill Sam Millan, Stuart
D5 – Jarod Mendenhall, Broken Arrow D10 – Jeff Holmes, Coweta D15 – Terry Davidson, Comanche D20 – Tom Stiles, Indian Capital CT

The OASA Executive Committee and all OASA Standing Committees have held recent meetings. The Ethics, Ballot, Constitution, Status & Welfare, Public Relations and Legislative committees welcome any input and suggestions. The next OASA Executive Committee meeting is scheduled for December 11th.
OMLEA

by Dr. Gracie Branch, OMLEA Executive Director

The OMLEA Board and Conference Committee has been busily planning the OMLEA Middle Level Conference scheduled for February 27 – 28 at the Embassy Suites in Norman. The theme of this year’s conference is I Teach! What’s Your Super Power? Online registration is currently available and OMLEA is currently taking Request For Proposals as well as nominations for teacher Super Heroes to spotlight during the conference. All forms can be found online at the CCOSA website www.cosa.org: HOME>CCOSA>OMLEA>CONFERENCES>. Please plan to join us with a team of teachers for this exciting opportunity. Sought after keynote speakers Mark McLeod and Kim Campbell will be joining us for two days of non-stop motivation and inspiration. Kim will discuss strategies and techniques that she has found helpful in motivating, engaging, and working with students. Kim is the author of the books If You Can’t Manage Them, You Can’t Teach Them and A Handbook for Closing the Achievement Gap: S.O.A.R. Back by popular demand, Mark McLeod is one of the most sought after speakers in education. His high energy and dynamic strategies have motivated and influenced numerous educators across the nation.

So mark your calendars for February 27-28 and join us for an outstanding conference!!!

In Our Thoughts….

OMLEA/CCOSA would like to extend their sincerest condolences to Mark and Kelli McLeod on the loss of the son Ryan Jacob McLeod (age 17) on September 21, 2013. Our thoughts and prayers are with the McLeod family during this difficult time.

ODSS

by Andrea Kunkel, CCOSA Staff Attorney/ODSS Director

On October 24 and 25, 2013, ODSS held its Fall Conference. On the first day, Dr. Melody Musgrove, Director of the Office of Special Education Programs, addressed a group of about 230 special and general education administrators and teachers. She explained what was going on in special education at the federal level and its anticipated impact on state and local level efforts and speculated that IDEA reauthorization is likely still three or four years down the road. On the second day, Carol Kosnitsky, education consultant and frequent LRP contributor, guided participants in understanding how to develop IEPs that align to the OAS/CCSS. Every presentation during the conference reflected the increasingly complex requirements associated with meeting the unique educational needs of students with disabilities.

ODSS will hold its Winter Conference on Thursday and Friday, January 23 and 24, 2014, at the Doubletree by Hilton Warren Place Hotel in Tulsa. Friday’s keynote speaker will be entertaining Texas attorney and frequent LRP contributor David Hodgins, who will present the following sessions: (1) Discipline of Students with Disabilities: The Key Rules and Regulations from Removals to Manifestation Determinations; (2) Making Your Point: Communicating Important Special Ed Legal Concerns to Principals; and, if time allows, (3) Nonacademic and Extracurricular Activities: Where Does FAPE End and Access Begin? We hope you’ll join us in Tulsa!
At least 28 percent of students ages 12-18 are bullied at school and 6 percent of students report having been threatened with harm. Maintaining a safe, nurturing school environment for students is any school leader’s top priority. Visit NAESP at www.naesp.org/bullying-prevention-resources for a list of resources to help you combat bullying in your school including:

- Bullying prevention training modules and a useful infographic
- 20 Questions Parents Ask Principals About Bullying…and How You Can Answer
- Ready, Set, Respect! Toolkit from NAESP
- NAESP Article – It’s the Law: Cyberbullying
- Plus resources in Spanish and much more!

Source: National Association of Elementary School Principals

“Children from learning enriched homes make jobs easier, children from learning impoverished homes make our jobs important.”

Barbara Coloroso

“...the collective efficacy of the staff is a better predictor of student success than the socioeconomic status of the student.”

Richard DuFour, 2012

Results from the Annual PDK/Gallup Poll on Public Education

A majority of Americans give the public schools in their community an A or B—the highest rating ever recorded by the annual PDK/Gallup poll. Additionally, 65 percent of Americans have trust and confidence in public school principals. Read highlights from the 2013 poll at pdkintl.org/programs-resources/poll/.

Source: The 45th Annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools

A Principal’s Reflections (esheniger.blogspot.com)

Principal Eric Sheninger shares his views on educational leadership, effective technology integration, best practices, and ideas for creating a student-centered learning environment. His recent post on BYOD programs (http://esheniger.blogspot.com/2013/09/byod-begins-with-trust-and-respect.html) is insightful for principals considering a BYOD initiative on their campus.
After the events of the past month, I find it a little ironic that the title of this column is anything about federal relations. Despite the relations that have occurred these past few weeks on the “HILL”, I want to assure you AASA’s advocacy team led by Dan Domenech, Executive Director; Noelle Ellerson, Associate Executive Director of Policy and Advocacy and Sasha Pudelski, Assistant Director of Policy and Advocacy have been and are in the trenches for AASA. Not much has changed the past couple of months for education on the “HILL”. Trying to keep the government open and paying bills has resulted in impact aid schools not expecting to receive an early payment even if requested. Sequestration still looms. It is important to understand the cuts realized in FY 13 and FY14 are but a sliver of the overall savings that need to be realized as required by law. The Budget Control Act requires savings totaling $1.2 trillion over ten years. We must expect and prepare for sequestration cuts to hit schools again in FY15. Beware of the term “portability”. This is the terminology being used to define that funding follows the students...or plainly stated, “vouchers”.

AASA opposed the 2002 reauthorization of ESEA with NCLB from the beginning, and this summer enjoyed the success of the house passing Congressman John Kline’s “Student Success Act (HR-5)”. However, reauthorization of ESEA is long overdue and continues to be an issue. In reauthorization, AASA will oppose any voucher or portability amendment (non-negotiable), support keeping maintenance of effort provisions, support treating charter schools and public schools equitably, and support “All Children Are Equal Act” to allocate Title 1 funds based on the percentage of poverty.

As you are aware, the initiatives we face in Oklahoma are a national movement. None of us are afraid of being held accountable; however, we are afraid of the design to discredit public education. It is imperative that you become involved at the national level and give AASA the membership and support it needs and deserves. Each conference I attend I am amazed at the time, effort, and dedication of AASA. I was not aware that AASA is a “difference maker” for public education until I became involved. Thank you for that opportunity.
Focus on Students with Food Allergies

BY ANDREA KUNKEL
CCOSA Staff Attorney

Students with food allergies are on the minds of lawmakers at both the state and federal levels. During the 2013 legislative session, the Oklahoma Legislature passed House Bill 2101, which provides a mechanism by which school districts may choose to stock their own supplies of epinephrine injectors. If a district makes that choice, then its Board of Education must amend existing school policy that permits the self-administration of inhaled asthma medication by certain students for treatment of asthma and anaphylaxis medication by certain students for treatment of anaphylaxis.

The State Board of Education, in consultation with the State Board of Health (SBH), is required to develop a model policy that districts can use to implement HB 2101. The State Department of Health's August 2013, version of the School Nurse Orientation Manual includes the text of HB 2101 and information about using EpiPens, but does not include a model policy. One is likely in the works. SBE, again in conjunction with SBH, is also required to promulgate rules to implement the new law. Those rules have not been released for public comment.
If a district chooses to stock epinephrine injectors for use with students, it must amend its policy to include the following provisions:

1. The district will inform the parent/guardian of each student – in writing – that a school nurse or another school employee who has been trained by a health care professional or trained in correlation with SDH’s Diabetes Management Annual School Training Program may administer an epinephrine injection to the student when the school nurse/trained employee believes in good faith the student is having an anaphylactic reaction. The student’s parent/guardian must grant permission for the injection, but an order from a health care provider is unnecessary.

2. The district will keep on file a waiver of liability signed by the parent/guardian before the epinephrine injection is administered.

3. The district will designate the employee responsible for obtaining epinephrine injectors at every school site.

HB 2101 attempts to address concerns raised by school districts about liability issues. It provides that the district, its employees and agents incur no liability for injury arising from the stocking/use of epinephrine injectors as provided in the law. It also provides that the district, its employees and agents incur no liability for injury arising from the decision not to stock/use epinephrine injectors.

The new law further provides that a licensed physician who is authorized to write prescriptions may write one for epinephrine injectors “to the school district in the name of the district as a body corporate” as specified by state law. So, for a district that opts to stock epinephrine injectors, the licensed physician would write the prescription to, “Independent [or Elementary] School District Number X of Y County, Oklahoma.” HB 2101 also provides prescribing licensed physicians with protection from liability from injury arising from use of the prescribed injectors.

HB 2101 provides that districts must maintain their supply of epinephrine injectors at school sites in a secure location, with at least two injectors in each school. Because the law requires a minimum of two at each school site, it appears that districts are expected to replenish their stock as needed to ensure they have at least the minimum number available.

The law also provides that if a school employee believes a student is having an anaphylactic reaction, the employee “shall contact 911 as soon as possible.”

For districts that decide to stock epinephrine injectors, they apparently bear the cost. HB 2101 includes no provision for funding.

In October 2013, the U.S. Senate also approved House Resolution 2094, entitled the School Access to Emergency Epinephrine Act, following its earlier approval by the House of Representatives. If signed into law by President Obama, HR 2094 would encourage states to adopt policies to make EpiPens available in schools for use by trained school personnel by giving them an advantage in securing federal asthma-related grants. To take advantage of HR 2094 funding opportunities, the State may determine that it is necessary to amend HB 2101. However, districts will have to wait until the 2014 legislative session begins in February to see if state lawmakers think changes are needed.

In addition to deciding whether to keep its own stock of epinephrine injectors, districts must also remember to heed the requirements of Section 504 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Districts must ensure that they evaluate and determine 504/Title II eligibility for each student whose food allergy does or is suspected to substantially limit the ability to perform a major life activity, such as breathing. In that case, federal law imposes greater obligations on districts than does state law, so compliance with state law alone is insufficient.
Barlow focuses on our federal programs so I can focus on education.

Jerry Needham
Superintendent
Oklahoma Public Schools

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OSAG
On November 8, 2013 the Cooperative Council for Oklahoma School Administration (CCOSA), the United Suburban Schools Association (USSA) and the Oklahoma State School Boards Association (OSSBA) alerted district leaders about an alarming issue concerning state pension systems. Without doubt there are many questions about this alert and whether action our associations requested is actually necessary.

The Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) has approved a new standard referred to as Statement No. 68, Accounting and Financial Reporting for Pensions. Once fully enacted, Statement No. 68 will require governments with defined benefit pension plans to disclose a “net pension liability” on their balance sheets. Unfortunately the change approved by GASB has failed to make an exception for states such as Oklahoma where the legal liability to pay the actual pension obligations is retained by the state.

The result of Statement No. 68 is that the obligation for each retirement system’s unfunded liability will shift from the state to employers. If we do not have legislation to correct this problem, school districts will be saddled with a proportionate share of the Oklahoma Teacher’s Retirement System’s $8+ billion unfunded liability.

Although there are school districts and other governmental entities in Oklahoma that do not use accounting practices pursuant to GASB, it appears unlikely that districts will be able to avoid the effects of GASB Statement No. 68. The reason for this is that pension systems will likely be sending a statement of liability to each school district in the state to account for each district’s proportionate share of the unfunded liability of the Teacher Retirement System. This newly incurred liability of the district will have to be audited locally and will eventually show up on the balance sheets of the local districts. Therefore, it is imperative that all districts unite together to address this problem immediately!

The Oklahoma State Pension Commission recognized that this would be a problem for employers and in September of 2011 officially requested that GASB consider making an exception to Statement No. 68 for jurisdictions like Oklahoma where the legal liability for net pension obligations rests with the state. Unfortunately GASB has declined to make this exception.

Failure to quickly address this situation could result in the state’s pension debt being transferred to local school district balance sheets. Districts would be constitutionally prohibited from paying this debt. Nevertheless, the presence of so much debt on school district balance sheets would negatively impact the credit rating of school districts in the State of Oklahoma.
You’re a principal. You do it all. Every day you field a hundred questions and accomplish a dozen tasks before the second bell rings — and manage to make it look easy. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) lends a hand behind the scenes so you can pay attention to what matters most, leading and building the capacity of your teachers and staff, creating a strong school community and, most of all helping your students achieve.

Whether you’re a novice or a seasoned pro, NAESP membership serves principals and their school communities with an array of benefits for an unbelievable value!

As the only national association dedicated to serving elementary and middle-level principals, our sole purpose is to help you, your teachers and your school succeed.

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Time is your greatest challenge, so NAESP culls through the latest data and research to find the gems that are practical and relevant to you, your teachers and your school. They make your job easier with:

• Principal magazine – Sit down five times a year and absorb the latest developments in the field, find timely articles and promising practices to share, and gain the perspectives you need to lead your learning community efficiently.

• Timely, vetted resources online – including the twice-weekly Before the Bell news updates; monthly Communicator, with ready-to-use resources for you and your staff; and regular issues of WowEd, with highlights from the latest research.

• Ongoing free professional development webinars and online learning for you and your staff from the leading names in the field.

• The Center for New Principals – a convenient, one-stop site with tips and vital information for those new to the profession.

NAESP connects you.

As an NAESP member, you have 20,000 colleagues facing the same challenges, ready to share breakthroughs, new ideas and best practices with you. Alone? Never!

• Principal’s HelpLine – Use this one-of-a-kind, confidential service to pose your questions and get online advice from our nationally certified principal mentors.

• Join focused discussions and network with others through our online community, Principal2Principal, and follow us on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

Join today! There’s never been a better time to link up with your colleagues and reap the benefit and strength of your greatest supporter – NAESP!
Book It: The Power of Our Words

BY DR. GRACIE BRANCH
OAESP/OMLEA Executive Director

Book Review:
The Power of Our Words:
Teacher Language That Helps Children Learn
by Paula Denton, EdD

Have you ever walked down the hallways of your school building and cringed when you overheard an exchange between a teacher and a student that was less than positive? Have you observed a first year teacher who is struggling to convey to students what they need to be doing or a veteran teacher who has forgotten the value of wait time? If you have answered yes to any of these questions, then this book may be a great resource for you! Read on for more information…

The Power of Language

Language is a critical tool available to all teachers that infuses every aspect of teaching and learning. Psychologist Lev Vygotsky states, “Language actually shapes thoughts, feelings, and experiences. It produces fundamentally new forms of behavior.” Simplistically put, language molds our sense of identity, helps us understand how we think, work, and play as well as influencing the nature of our relationships with others.

The Goals of Teacher Language

In her book The Power of Our Words, Dr. Denton believes that skillful teacher language is language that supports students in three broad ways: developing self-control, building their sense of community, and gaining academic skills and knowledge. Across all of these domains, language is a tool that will aid teachers in the following ways: articulating a vision, conveying faith that students can attain that vision, providing feedback that names students’ strengths and offering guidance that extends students’ skills.
Five Guidelines for Teacher Language

During the course of a school day, teachers constantly find themselves needing to speak with students in a dozen different ways. Dr. Denton provides five simple, yet powerful guidelines to promote effective communication and positive interactions with students.

1. **Be Direct and Authentic** – when we say what we mean and mean what we say, children learn that they can trust us. Moreover, direct and authentic teacher language allows children to feel respected knowing clearly what the teacher means. As many teachers know, it can be easy for sarcasm to slip into our classroom language and while sarcasm may have a place in literature, comedy and other areas, it can be damaging in the classroom.

2. **Convey Faith in Children’s Abilities and Intentions** – Since language is such a powerful tool in shaping the identity and perceptions of children, it is vitally important that teachers use it carefully to open the doors of possibility for children as opposed to closing the door. It is also important to be aware of language patterns that treat boys and girls differently.

3. **Focus on Action** – Focusing our language on action means connecting abstract terms with concrete behaviors and describing children’s behaviors instead of their character or feelings. This type of language allows children to learn at their best and to be their best selves because it tells them how. For example, rather than telling children, “Be responsible,” a teacher might try telling them specifically what she expects them to do. “When you come into class in the morning, first put your things away, and then read the morning message.”

4. **Keep It Brief** – Children need us to speak with brevity (maybe some adults do too!) It’s hard for them to follow long strings of words. Long explanations, although reasoned and well-intentioned, are typically counterproductive. It can be tempting to warn children what will happen if they don’t follow reminders and directions. However, such warnings are generally not effective and too often come across as threats.

5. **Know When To Be Silent** – The skillful use of silence can be just as powerful as the skillful use of language. Most importantly, silence allows for children’s voices. It allows time for thinking, rehearsal what to say, and sometimes for gathering the courage to speak at all. Teachers who allow silence usually find that it doesn’t take as long as they thought and that little bits of silence go a long, long way.

This unique book provides a guide to teachers on how to use their words and tone of voice to bring out the best in children. The book is filled with stories and examples for using language effectively to deal with a myriad of challenging situations. It is a wonderful guide for teachers on how their choice of words and tone of voice can make the difference between encouragement or discouragement for children. For administrators, this is a “must have” on your book shelf!
Professional Development:
Not Just Another Acronym

BY MEGGAN WILSON
OAESP, President-Elect
Western Oaks Middle School, Principal, Putnam City Public Schools

Have you noticed that in our profession, educators are prolific users of acronyms? RTI, IEP, NCLB, RSA, CRT, SMART goal, GE, and so on…One such acronym, and the focus of many school administrators on the quest for academic excellence, is PLC—Professional Learning Communities. As a buzz word among educators, it comes with many definitions and connotations. The “official” definition of a PLC according to Robert DuFour is, “a collaboration of teachers, administrators, parents, and students who work together to seek out best practices, test them in the classroom, continue improvement processes, and focus on results.”

The working definition of PLCs at my school is the collaboration of colleagues focused on student learning and continuous improvement to ensure the success of all students. I often tell my staff that Professional Learning Communities are not something we DO; instead it’s who we ARE. To incorporate successful PLCs, administrators must create a culture of shared leadership and collective responsibility that is focused on results. PLCs bridge the gap between knowing and doing.

One of the most important indicators of a successful learning community is a positive school climate. Administrators must work diligently to create a climate of mutual respect that is built on relational trust and is conducive to risk-taking, creativity, and learning for all. In an effort to build relational trust, the first task of all PLCs should be the development of group norms. Effective PLCs are vulnerable because they share strengths and weaknesses. They accept the collective responsibility of ensuring learning for all students and focus on school-wide results. Incremental improvement is focused on results; not intentions.

As the instructional leader of the building, you are responsible for communicating and holding stakeholders accountable to the vision of a collaborative culture that is collectively responsible for high academic success. Administrators must ensure equal access to quality instruction and avoid the educational lottery in which a student gets placed with THAT teacher. You know the one who teaches from lesson plans created fifty years ago and refuses to change. To combat this, PLCs work together to ensure a systemic, school-wide approach to interventions, alignment of curriculum, and data analysis. Every student benefits from the combination of strengths and expertise of an entire school staff and community committed to excellence. Teachers exchange feedback about their professional practice, share resources, research instructional strategies, and hold each other accountable to the school-wide goal.

To create high functioning PLCs, administrators must cast the vision, cultivate a culture of collaboration, and hold all stakeholders accountable. PLCs build the capacity of teachers, and when they become part of the school culture, they breed success. PLCs are not just another acronym or another thing to DO…They should represent who we ARE.
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Book It: Soothing the Savage Beasts

BY SHERRI COATS
ODSS President-Elect
Director of Special Services, Byng Public Schools

Soothing the Savage Beasts! Let me guess, a carousel of pictures of various students you have dealt with flashed through your mind when reading that statement? However, authors Todd Whitaker and Douglas J. Fiore, in their 2001 book, Dealing with Difficult Parents: and Parents in Difficult Situations, use this statement to characterize parents. Now I have a feeling you played a new slide show of pictures of various parents you have dealt with over the years. Oh, the memories!! This book is a quick read and has an arsenal of ready-to-use tools for all educators.

In the current climate of limited budgets and stressful implementation of new and ever changing initiatives, sometimes we forget to keep first things first. More than anything, Whitaker and Fiore provide an important reminder to educators as to the value of parents in education. In my 25 years in education, I have seen parents come in all shapes and sizes with varying degrees of involvement, communication, and even varying degrees of irritation to educators.

One of the most unpalatable tasks for every educator, whether as a classroom teacher, counselor, or administrator, is dealing with difficult parents. How many times have we sat across the desk or listened on the other end of the line to parents who are being difficult? The authors’ simple straightforward style gives practical, step by step guidance to educators who have to deal with these difficult parents.

Step One: Communicate; Step Two: Soothe the Savage Beast; Step Three: Deal with Parents in Difficult Situations; Step Four: Increase Parental Involvement. While all of these steps are important in dealing with difficult parents, I most appreciated the practical advice on how to soothe these savage beasts.

A. Never Let Them See You Sweat – Lower the volume of your voice, move in closer proximity to the parent, and increase eye contact.

B. Be Willing for the Parent to be Right – Honesty is always the best policy; it should never be about winning or losing, but about arriving at a common understanding in a productive manner.

C. Always get the Last Word – with an apology. Sincere apologies do not have to be an admission of guilt. The authors suggest use of a statement that says, “I am sorry that happened”.

D. Don’t be Defensive – We only feel defensive if we know that we are doing something wrong or someone we are attempting to support is doing something wrong.

Dealing with difficult parents is often challenging, but implementation of the tools outlined in this book by staff at all levels will equip educators to soothe the savage beasts! Happy Soothing!
Tech Talk

While contemplating what to write about in this edition of Tech Talk, I decided to describe two current uses of technology that have benefited my staff and students considerably. As administrators, we are constantly inundated with information promising what is to be the next best thing. Often times, we are so busy with the daily routines of school life that we rarely have time to thoroughly research the credibility of such claims. The two uses of technology I am going to mention are proven to garner results and require a rather accessible device—your cell phone.

A common source of strife and discontentment between an administrative team and a corresponding faculty is a perceived lack of communication. If teachers and staff are uninformed, morale will surely suffer. In an effort to bridge this communication gap, I was urged by one of my school counselors to institute a text message program known as Remind 101.

Initially, I was reluctant to try the program fearing a lack of user-friendliness. However, once I accessed the web site and discovered the simplicity of the system, I became hooked. The beauty of Remind 101 is that it is absolutely free and is one-way communication. For example, if I want to remind my staff of a scheduled faculty meeting, I access the app that I have downloaded onto my phone, type my message and hit send. Because the text message can only be received, I am spared the headache of an inbox full of acknowledgement responses. In order to receive reminders, faculty and staff must sign up using information provided via the web site. Again, sign up is simple and can be done at any time during the school year. In addition, the roster or class of those who have signed up remains active from one year to the next and can be updated to reflect changes in personnel.

A number of my teachers and activity sponsors are using Remind 101 to send information to parents and/or students concerning due dates for assignments, upcoming tests or important school events. For more information about this useful piece of technology, visit www.remind101.com.

The second technological resource that I highly recommend is the use of QR codes and scanners. If you own a smart phone, it is as easy as downloading one of the free scanning apps onto your mobile device. Newspapers, food products and coupon books are examples of items that contain QR codes. At our school, a QR code is located on each classroom door. Parents and/or students can use their cell phone to scan the code which will take them to the teacher’s individual web page.

In addition, QR codes were made available at our recent parent/teacher conferences. The computer generated codes were hyperlinked to the district’s online grade book registration site. The ease of navigation was certainly appreciated by those who took advantage of the services. To learn more about QR code generation, simply Google QR codes and follow the accompanying step-by-step instructions.

As you continue to seek ways to effectively communicate within your school setting, utilize either or both of the aforementioned technological applications to help make your job a success.
As we address the many challenges facing us as educators and school leaders, it becomes very clear that we must purposefully engage our communities and change the current dialogue concerning public education. Board members, school administrators, and teachers must become a leading voice in the school reform movement. The Oklahoma Visioning Project can be an important tool to create a foundation for public engagement in the school reform discussion. The committee of 60 school administrators and board members has made significant progress on this CCOSA and OSSBA sponsored project. The collaboration with the University of Oklahoma’s K20 Center has served as a wonderful tool to bring quality review and research analysis that will make our final document relevant and valid.

The committee continues to work on the seven sub-topics identified by the Steering Committee:

1. Teaching, Learning and Assessment
2. Expanded Learning Opportunities
3. Financial Resources
4. Climate, Culture, and Organization
5. Physical Resources
6. Partnerships for Human and Organizational Capital Development
7. Governance, Leadership and Accountability

Committee members have completed research to define the guiding principles and key issues related to each of these topics. And, as we move to the final stage, we continue to identify promising, transformational practices. Committee chairs and members continue to take both a local and national view of school reform as we progress through this process.

Our intent is to complete a draft version of an Oklahoma Visioning Project document in the coming months. It will then be a process of gaining input from various stakeholders across our state to further refine this document so it represents a clear, positive and unified ‘vision’ forward for public education and our mission to serve all students.
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