

Organization of Rural Oklahoma Schools

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A Politically Inconvenient Truth

By: Steven Crawford

Executive Director of the Cooperative Council for Oklahoma School Administration

Opponents of S.Q. 744 would have you believe passage of the measure would bankrupt the State of Oklahoma and would not improve the quality of Oklahoma’s public schools. Cost estimates of reaching the regional average range from \$850 million to \$1.4 billion over the measure’s three-year phase-in period. This number has terrified many of Oklahoma’s politically elite. Bureaucrats and politicians insist that S.Q. 744 will take away their ability to appropriate our tax dollars the way they best see fit.

It is fair to question where tax dollars are spent. Common education currently receives approximately 35% of state budgeted dollars; and according to the Oklahoma Policy Institute, funding has actually dropped from 38% of the budget in 2004 to this decreased level. The critical number left out of the conversation is that enrollment has increased to over 640,000 students. The current appropriation provides approximately \$7,683 per student.

According to the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, higher education institutions in Oklahoma educate approximately 127,000 full time students which equates to over \$17,300 per student; making our state 6th in the nation in higher education funding. In addition, the State Regents for Higher Education recently reported that funding for higher education has increased approximately 30% over the past five years. The Oklahoma Policy Institute reports that funding for common education has grown at an average annual rate of 2.6% during that same five-year period.

It was recently reported in *The Oklahoman* that Oklahoma’s funding for transportation comes in 21st nationally at an average \$117,000 spent per controlled mile. According to T.R.U.S.T., a special interest group advocating for transportation funding, the Oklahoma Legislature has "provided significant increases to transportation funding over the last three years, which will provide an anticipated \$625 million over the next

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decade in additional funding." That amount is startlingly close to the \$850 million it will cost to implement S.Q. 744 over its three-year phase-in period.

The hypocrisy of the Oklahoma political elite is abhorrent and distasteful. How is the Legislature able to allocate funds that significantly increase appropriations for higher education and transportation; yet when the discussion turns to adequately funding common education, legislators and special interest groups speak of bankruptcy and shutting down state government?

No one supporting S.Q. 744 would argue that investments in higher education and transportation are unwise. Furthermore, S.Q. 744 would not impact funding for those entities. Currently the Oklahoma Legislature provides the equivalent of three quarters of our state's budgeted dollars to big corporations in the form of tax credits. Well over \$2 billion in taxes (a very conservative estimate), otherwise owed by multi-million dollar companies to our state are forgiven by the political elite. Demonstrating the political courage to close a fraction of these tax credit loopholes would easily pay for S.Q. 744.

Over the course of this debate I have heard that "throwing money we don't have at this problem isn't the solution." The fallacy of that argument is that Oklahoma has never "thrown money" at public schools. Twenty years ago, when HB 1017 was signed into law by Governor Henry Bellmon, Oklahoma ranked 48th in the nation in per pupil expenditures. HB 1017 promised new dollars for public schools. Twenty years later, **Oklahoma ranks 49th in per pupil expenditures.**

Making Oklahoma's public education system a funding priority will advance our schools and improve our economy. Imagine the opportunities that a major investment in public education would cultivate for our students and our state! Oklahoma educators are already working harder than ever to instruct, feed and transport the students entrusted to our care.

School leaders, teachers and community members should be discussing how S.Q. 744 will dramatically change the perception of public education in Oklahoma. To start, S.Q. 744 will give schools a chance to fully comply with the unfunded and underfunded mandates that have been legislatively imposed on districts for many years. Recent examples include ACE legislation, enhanced assessment and reporting systems, background check requirements, and the new teacher evaluation system which lacks any funding for development and implementation.

S.Q. 744 is not just about paying debts owed; reforms will accompany these new funds. From extending the school year and increasing virtual learning opportunities, to purchasing up-to-date classroom resources and preparing for national standards; S.Q. 744 will level the playing field for all of Oklahoma's public school students!

Regardless of how inconvenient it may be, we must tie facts to opinions. Funding for public education in Oklahoma is not a priority. Moving from a dismal ranking of 48th to 49th in the nation is proof positive of that statement. Oklahomans exercised their right under our state's constitution and signed petitions that placed S.Q. 744 on the November ballot. Oklahomans did so because they were fed up with the inadequate treatment our schools receive from the Legislature. S.Q. 744 finally gives Oklahoma voters the opportunity to ensure that public education becomes a funding priority in our state.

Attorney Talk

By: Terri Thomas

CYBER-BULLYING AND SCHOOLS

Other than the budget crunch, "cyber-bullying" is probably the biggest issue right now facing schools in our nation. What exactly is cyber-bullying? Cyber-bullying is the high-tech offshoot of the more familiar traditional bullying we've been dealing with since the beginning of time. Parry Aftab, founder of the Stop Cyberbullying website, and considered to be one of the foremost authorities on the topic, says cyber-bullying occurs when a child, preteen or teen is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another child, preteen or teen using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies or mobile phones. It has to have a minor on both sides, or at least have been instigated by a minor against another minor.

At the outset of my research on this topic, I must admit I thought I knew all there was to know. Wrong! This stuff is much more pervasive than many people—myself included—might initially think. For example, did you know that cyber-bullying can be accomplished either directly or by proxy? Examples of direct cyber-bullying methods include the following:

- Instant messaging/text messaging harassment
- Stealing passwords
- Blogs and websites
- Sending pictures through e-mail and cell phones
- Internet polling
- Interactive gaming
- Sending malicious code
- Sending porn and other junk e-mail and instant messages
- Impersonation

Cyber-bullying by proxy, on the other hand, occurs when the bully uses other people (often-times without their knowledge) to accomplish the cyber-bullying. Cyber-bullying by proxy is especially dangerous because it often involves adults. Examples of this method can occur in the following ways:

- Parents/school officials get involved by bully taking over victim's computer or posing as victim. Until it's sorted out (if ever), victim may appear to be aggressor.
- "Warning-" or "notify-wars" get adult service providers involved in discipline of the victim.
- Child molesters/hate groups get involved when bully posts personal information about the victim online in those areas (i.e., name, age, address, etc.).

Probably the easiest way to conceptualize this concept of cyber-bullying by proxy is to think in terms of situations where the bully accomplishes the task by getting the victim "in trouble" with adults. It's similar to the old-fashioned scenario where a bully might write a nasty note to someone and put someone else's name on the note. The recipient of the note believes the author to be the person whose name is on it, and tells the teacher. The person whose name is on the note gets blamed for the hurtful contents of the note, even though innocent. In this instance, the teacher becomes the bully "by proxy" because the teacher is (understandably)

taking action against what appears to be the perpetrator. Until it's all sorted out, the bully has accomplished using someone else (i.e., the teachers or parents) to accomplish the bullying on his/her behalf. This type of bullying in the cyber world in a similar fashion, but with the use of technology as opposed to pen and paper.

One thing many of us question is whether there's actually *more* bullying going on now as opposed to, say, twenty years ago, or whether it's just magnified and exacerbated through the use of cyber-bullying. Opinions differ, naturally. We may never know for sure. What we do know, however, is that there is an alarm sounding right now for something to be done about it.

Schools have always had to handle bullying. Why is cyber-bullying different? It's becoming more and more apparent that cyber-bullying, as opposed to traditional bullying, blurs that line between off-campus bullying and on-campus bullying. Twenty years ago, if you had a bully in the schoolyard during school hours, you clearly had jurisdiction to take disciplinary action. Today, however, you may have a series of nasty text messages that began over the weekend but which came to a head on a Monday, causing an uproar at school. It's not nearly as easy to determine jurisdiction when these things bleed into several days and multiple locations—not to mention over the airwaves.

But guess what, schools? As usual, YOU are the ones being called to task. YOU are being told to "do something about it" immediately (...ever notice how nobody singles out *bad parenting* as a root cause...how nobody demands that *parents* fix things?). When things happen, the first thing people say is that it occurred on YOUR watch. Maybe it did, maybe it didn't. But when you have a hurt or dead kid, there's not much you can say in your own defense without appearing heartless and callous. Unfortunately, that's the way it goes. This is why it's critical to amass as much knowledge as possible and to form a game plan for battling this to the extent of your ability as a school district. Training your staff is an important part of this strategy. Training your students, and possibly your community, is also something to consider.

I've developed an hour-long presentation on this topic, targeted to teachers, support staff and administrators. A student-oriented version is going to be available shortly. The presentation I give goes into detail about the cyber-bullying methods mentioned here, plus all the current legal ramifications surrounding the issue. Additional resources and various ways to educate staff, students and community are also part of this seminar. If you are interested in more information about this, give me a call.

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Fall Conference Report

By: Perry Willis

Fall Conference attendance was down this year but OROS members were treated to a very good conference. Jim Lamer, Superintendent of Garber and President-Elect of OROS, did an outstanding job of selecting informative presentations for our member schools. The conference began with a welcome from Phillip Ratcliff, President of OROS. The conference opened with Terri Watkins, Director of Communications for the School Land Commission, discussing the status of the School Land Commission and their disbursements to Oklahoma schools. The next

session was a presentation by Senator Susan Paddack, Candidate for State Superintendent, discussing her goals for schools in our state. The conference then took a break and enjoyed some refreshments provided by The Interlocal Purchasing System (TIPS). Following the break Dr. Sharon Lease, Assistant State Superintendent for Accreditation; Mike Mays and Bob Travis, SDE Accreditation Officer; and others; gave an update from the State Department of Education. Dr. David Blatt, Director of Oklahoma Policy Institute, then gave an overview of the Oklahoma budget. The morning session closed out with lunch and a presentation on the Oklahoma Schools Cooperative Property and Casualty program that OROS is sponsoring by Lee Roy Pettyjohn, Director of the Oklahoma Cooperative. The Oklahoma School Cooperative provided the lunch for all conference attendees.

The afternoon session began with Lee Roy Pettyjohn, Pettyjohn Financial Services, giving a presentation on Secrets revealed concerning retirement and health insurance. Terri Thomas, OROS Attorney, then gave a presentation on the new Teacher Due Process requirements. The membership enjoyed another good break with refreshments provided again by TIPS. Following the break Mike Kolenc, Campaign Manager for Yes on 744, discussed the status on State Question 744. The first day closed out with Ed Sheakley, OSSAA Executive Secretary and Mike Wilfong, Director of Media Relations for OSSAA, sharing various issues with school administrators concerning the activities association and the new web page design and plans for the future of the web page.

Lee Roy Pettyjohn, Pettyjohn Financial Group and Agent for Life of the Southwest (LSW), served as host for all the membership and vendors at the Thursday night dinner meeting. After the dinner the organization recognized the President's award recipient Don Ford, Superintendent of Alva, for the dedication he demonstrated while serving as president of OROS, and a Special Services award to Billy Green for the years he served the organization as a board member. Lee Roy Pettyjohn, a Past President of OROS, who now has his own financial services business and works for Life Insurance of the Southwest, was presented the Pioneer Award. The Pioneer Award is the highest award OROS has and Lee Roy now becomes the twenty-seventh recipient of the Pioneer Award. Past Pioneer Award recipients in attendance were Don Hoover, Floyd Gibson, Harry Red Eagle, Steve Crawford, Dale Smart, Jerry Needham, and Perry Willis.

Friday morning began with a breakfast hosted by Wiley Copeland of Mass Group Marketing. President-Elect Jim Lamer welcomed everyone to the second day of the conference and then Phillip Ratcliff introduced Sandy Garrett, State Superintendent, gave her last presentation to the OROS membership consisting of a power point presentation on the status of educational funding and the needs facing schools. The next session was a presentation by Jari Askins, Lieutenant Governor and Candidate for Governor, concerning the overall financial issues facing not only education but all state agencies and her stand on other educational issues. The membership enjoyed another good break with refreshments provided again by TIPS. Following the break, the conference closed out with a legislative update by OROS Legislative Consultant, Megan Benn.

A special thanks goes to Mass Group Marketing; Lee Roy Pettyjohn, Pettyjohn Financial Group and Agent for LSW; The Interlocal Purchasing System (TIPS); Sexton & Sexton School Supplies; The Learning System; Treat's Solutions; Midwest Bus Sales; ARBO Enterprises, Inc.; Professional Oklahoma Educators; Ross Transportation; Oklahoma Schools Cooperative; Oklahoma Association for Pupil Transportation; American Bus Sales; American Fidelity; Romaine Companies; Pro Presenters; FES LLC; and Burggraf Disaster Restoration for their support at the conference.

A very special thanks goes to Mass Group Marketing for sponsoring the breakfast and contributing considerable more to finance the conference, Lee Roy Pettyjohn, Pettyjohn Financial Group and Agent for LSW, for sponsoring the dinner, The Interlocal Purchasing System (TIPS) for sponsoring the breaks, Sexton and Sexton School Supplies for providing the hospitality room and The Oklahoma School Cooperative for providing the lunch.

OROS Calendar

**OROS Board of Directors Meeting
November 17, 2010
OSSAA Conference Room
Oklahoma City, OK
10:00 A.M.**

**OROS Board of Directors Meeting
December 15, 2010
OSSAA Conference Room
Oklahoma City, OK
10:00 A.M.**