



Assessment in the Omaha Public Schools by John Mackiel

WHEN & WHERE

Happy Thanksgiving
November 22



OEA Retirement Benefits
Workshop
November 27

Interview Team Training
November 28

All meetings begin at 4:15 p.m.
@ OEA unless otherwise noted.

OEA on-line Calendar
[http://omahaoea.org/
members/calendar.htm](http://omahaoea.org/members/calendar.htm)

OEA Tip-Off

The OEA *Tip-Off* is a bi-monthly publication printed for members of the Omaha Education Association.

Direct inquiries to:
Tim Krapp, Editor
Sue Perkins, Reporter
4202 South 57th Street
Omaha, NE 68117
(402) 346-0400 phone
(402) 346-8410 fax
E-mail
timothy.krapp@nsea.org
Visit us on the web at:
www.omahaoea.org

The aftermath of NCLB has brought more than educational inequity—it has brought a perverse view of assessment. The recent Leadership for Classroom Assessment Conference held in Omaha provided an excellent opportunity to review “testing,” and reaffirm its place and purpose in the process of classroom instruction.

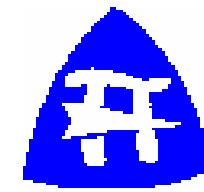
The Omaha Public School District believes that assessment is, and should be, about what happens in the classroom, and assessments are to be used to build upon and improve instruction. Assessment should be an instructional tool, an instrument of guidance toward improved achievement and solid instructional practices.

Unfortunately, when an assessment system with the designed purpose of instructional feedback is used as a policy tool to measure “comparative achievement” between schools and school districts resulting in the labeling of schools, the assessment system becomes twisted into a high-stakes hammer. The Omaha Public Schools deplores the pressure placed on staff and students alike which can occur from the use of classroom-based assessment for purposes other than instructional improvement. Assessment in its true sense is about students and learning and assuring that equitable opportunities to achieve are provided to all students.

The classroom teacher is the professional with the most knowledge about the needs of each student he or she serves. The policy of the Board of Education of the Omaha Public Schools makes it clear that we need to assess students for multiple purposes. Assessment is to improve instructional practices and to meet student needs; to evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of district curriculum and programs; and to measure student achievement of basic and advanced skills to meet rigorous curriculum standards.

Fostering high expectations for all children is accomplished through curricula standards, multiple types of assessment, and other measures of accountability. However, when what we do as teachers and administrators to assess and respond to the needs of individual students is “re-designated” as a state tool with high-stakes consequences, our assessments become events, content becomes the outcome, and our responsibility becomes defined as ensuring children “pass the test.” This is NOT what the Omaha Public Schools believes assessment is all about. We know that if the focus of instruction is in line with curricula standards, if students are involved in the learning process, if goals and objectives are responsive to the needs of students, then student success on tests and other measures of progress will follow.

All OPS staff—teachers, administrators, curriculum specialists, instructional facilitators and the full array of support staff—are essential in providing resource assistance to enable student achievement. Working together, we will keep the focus on classroom instruction and student learning, not just the “test.”



OEA

Tip-Off

November 20, 2007

EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS (ESP's)



RATIFY CONTRACT



COMMUNITY BILINGUAL LIAISONS AND HEAD START FAMILY SUPPORT WORKERS

Congratulations go out to the newest Educational Support Professionals (ESP's) who are full time members of the Omaha Educational Association. The Community Bilingual Liaisons and the Head Start Family Support Workers recently approved their first negotiated contract with the Omaha Public Schools.

Much of the contractual language was modeled after the OEA Sign Language Interpreters Master Agreement. Their first contract with OPS was for the 2001-2002 school year. Many thanks go out to the groundwork laid by the Sign Language Interpreters. Since a bargained agreement had already been in place with the Sign Language Interpreters, the process for the two new ESP groups went much more smoothly. Based on the Sign Language Interpreters contract, the language for the Community Bilingual Liaisons and the Head Start Family Support Workers was agreed upon rather quickly.

Three Memos of Understanding were included as part of the newly approved 2007-2008 Master Agreement. Committees will be formed to review, study, and make recommendations regarding: the appraisal process, job descriptions, and employee handbooks of the Bilingual Community Liaisons and the Head Start Family Support Workers. A separate committee will meet and make recommendations regarding a 2008-2009 salary schedule that takes into account experience and educational background of these two ESP groups.

Committee meetings will begin in January. If you are a member of one of these two new OEA bargaining groups and would like to serve on the committees before we begin bargaining in the Spring of 2008, please contact Lorrie Stuto 346-0400 and volunteer.

TEACHER OF THE YEAR CONFERENCE

Teachers of the Year from throughout the country met with national education leaders, OPS staff and members of Building Bright Futures November 9th-11th to discuss student achievement, teacher quality and administrative leadership. Their goal: empowering the teacher voice in education reform. The conference was funded by the Sherwood and Nord Foundations, NEA, NSEA and OEA.



INTERVIEW TEAM TRAINING

To be a member of the interview team, you **MUST ATTEND** a mandatory training session. The first one will be held November 28, 2007 @ OEA; 4:15-5:15 p.m. Candidate interviews will take place this spring.

Omaha-area legislative candidates are interviewed by teams made up of OEA/NSEA members. If you would like to be part of an interview team, please contact Lorrie Stuto at 346-0400.

OEA-CAF Board of Education Interviews

The OEA-Children's Action Fund (OEA-CAF) invites all candidates for the Omaha Public Schools Board of Education to participate in the OEA-CAF candidate interview process. OEA-CAF members are needed to participate on the interview teams. Your role is to listen to what the candidates have to say and determine if they would best represent the interest of the OEA and the children we serve in the Omaha Public Schools.

The OEA-CAF Board of Directors extends an invitation to all OEA members to become involved in the political process that decides your working conditions by becoming a member of one of our interview teams. Each candidate for the OPS Board of Education is invited to respond to the OEA-CAF survey. Those who chose to respond are invited to interview. Only those candidates who meet with the interview teams will be considered for recommendation from the OEA-CAF membership. School Board Candidate interview teams make recommendations only after consideration of the candidate's position on educational issues, his/her background, and the realities of the political climate in the election. The interview team recommendation is passed on to the OEA-CAF Board of Directors and they in turn place the final recommendation up to a vote of the entire OEA-CAF membership. The OEA-CAF membership shall either ratify or reject the recommendation of the OEA-CAF Board through a majority vote, such vote to be taken at a meeting of the membership.

To be a member of the interview team, you **MUST ATTEND** a one-hour mandatory training session. The first one will be held on Wednesday, November 28th at the OEA at 4:15. Interviews will take place this spring. If you are interested in attending this training, please RSVP to Lorrie at 346-0400. Interview teams will be needed for the following OPS sub-districts: #2, 4, 6, 8, 10 and 12. Our preference is to have teams composed of members who reside in the sub-district (or teach in the sub-district) and include a balance of members according to political affiliation, grade level and gender.

NSEA Legislative and Learning Community Candidate Interviews

All candidates for the Nebraska State Legislature and the Learning Community Coordinating Council are invited to participate in the NSEA's candidate interview process. We need OEA members to participate on the interview team. Your role is to listen to what the candidates have to say and determine if they represent the best interests of public education.

Each candidate for the Nebraska State Legislature and the Learning Community Coordinating Council is invited to respond to the NSEA's survey. Those who choose to respond are invited to interview. Only those candidates who meet with the interview teams will be considered for a recommendation from the NSEA. State Legislature and Learning Community Candidate interview teams make recommendations only after consideration of the candidate's position on educational issues, his/her background, and the realities of the political climate in the election. The interview team recommendation is passed on to the Metro District Board of Directors for consideration.

Interview teams will be needed for legislative districts #3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 23, 31 and 39 and learning community election districts #1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. Our preference is to have teams composed of members who reside in the legislative or learning community election district and include a balance of members according to political affiliation, grade level and gender.

Classroom Discipline Advice

To help keep children on task and to maintain order in the classroom, educators compiled the following tips for classroom management:

Start off on the stern side. It's easier to get easier, and students quickly realize what they will be allowed to get away with. If you allow a lot of disruptions in the beginning of the school year, it will be very hard to establish a stricter classroom management style later on.

- Be fair. You must act fairly for all students if you expect to be respected. Even the best students should be disciplined if they do something wrong.
- Deal with disruptions with as little interruption as possible. Interruptions must be dealt with quickly and without breaking classroom momentum, if you can. If you stop the momentum of your lesson plan to deal with a disruption, you are taking away from the students who want to learn.
- Use a little humor. Sometimes a good laugh can get things back on track in a classroom, especially after a disruption.
- Keep expectations high.
- Avoid free time in the classroom as much as possible. Over-plan your lesson plans.

This message is provided by the A+ NEA Members Auto & Home Insurance Program. Please contact us toll free at **1-877-777-1419** for more information concerning your auto and home insurance.



Lawsuit School Visitations

A retired educator is one of the expert witnesses for the State of Nebraska in the school funding lawsuit OPS and other districts have filed against the state. As part of the lawsuit, he and others will be visiting various Omaha Public Schools during the last week in October and all of November. At all times, they will be escorted by one of the school district's attorneys.

They will be surveying OPS facilities and will also observe classes that are chosen at random. The classroom visits will most likely not be longer than approximately 20 minutes. They will have a camera and have permission to take pictures.

By agreement between OPS lawyers and the state's lawyers, these visitors cannot ask you questions or ask you for any documents. They are in the schools only to observe. In order to maintain compliance with this "observe only" agreement, OPS requests that you not initiate any conversation with these visitors.

If a visit is made to your classroom, you may generally acknowledge the guests, if this would be your normal practice. However, in any event, please go ahead and teach your class just as you have planned for the day. The visit should not disrupt any of your planned activities.