

That's Good for Oklahoma!®

THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

(GIT) The role of education has changed significantly since the days of the one-room school house. What was once state-of-the-art now seems like ancient history. Such changes, many of which often occur rapidly, have increased the challenges faced by those responsible for the oversight and management of education.

The State Department of Education continues to pursue and to meet the challenges posed by the ever-changing educational environment by focusing on efficiency and effectiveness at the local, as well as state, level.



Sandy Garrett

In the last five years, the Department has reduced its budget by 22.8 percent, while continuing to serve more than 600,000 students and some 46,630 educators, as well as directly or indirectly assisting 211 public libraries, 13,680 adult General Education Development (GED) applicants, 550 school districts, 1,832 local schools and their 2,700 local school board members. Efforts designed to improve the state's educational system have been achieved by combining such factors as deregulation, local innovation and technology.

State Superintendent of Schools Sandy Garrett said these methods will help students be more successful and will provide Oklahomans with a stronger and broader knowledge base, helping Oklahoma's public schools meet the needs of today's students and building a foundation from which tomorrow's needs can also be met.

Deregulation

Reducing the role of state government in local decision making has been a rallying call for many in the Capitol's halls. Nowhere does that effort seem to be more clear than in the education arena.

The state Board of Education declared in 1992 that all its rules, except those pertaining to health and safety, were eligible for deregulation. Garrett said she believes that as more districts become aware of ways that deregulation could help them become more successful, more proposals will be developed.

During that first year, only 15 deregulation requests were approved by the board. That number increased to 33 during the 1993-94 school year and nearly tripled one year later to 95 during the 1994-95 school year.

For 1995-96, some 101 deregulation requests were approved by the state Board of Education.

The Legislature, with help from the State Department of Education, has created additional education-deregulation legislation, encouraging more school districts to take initiatives in developing tailor-made programs for their communities.

Local Innovation

Two school districts were not only able to take advantage of deregulation ideology, but have proven themselves pioneers in the area of innovative educational efforts in Oklahoma. As a result, many of their students' test scores sky-rocketed, resulting in statewide and national recognition.

Along with 54 elementary and secondary schools in low-income areas, U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley identified two Oklahoma schools, Emerson Elementary in McAlester and Roosevelt Elementary in Altus, that showed marked success in student achievement through the Title I program. Title I is the U.S. Department of Education's largest program to help children master the basics and more challenging subject matter, providing federal funding for direct instructional services to educationally disadvantaged children in schools and institutions with high concentrations of children from low-income families.

Emerson Elementary and Roosevelt Elementary were first recognized with 27 other top schools by the State Department of Education's Title I program as "Oklahoma Distinguished Schools." Those schools' students had consistent, above-average achievement test score gains in core curriculum areas over a three-year period.

"For the national recognition, Emerson and Roosevelt Elementary schools met the additional criteria of providing opportunities for all children to attain high levels of performance, working closely with their parents and communities, providing continuous professional development for their teachers and having consistent improvement in student achievement," said Garrett.

Superintendent of Roosevelt Elementary School O.D. Wikoff explained that their school implemented programs designed to make learning fun. The school established a resource information center for children, parents and teachers that provides hands-on instructional materials on core curriculum subjects. "We also have math carnivals and other school skills oriented type activities," he added.

Wikoff said that it takes a collaborative community effort and continual learning for their school to attain scholastic achievement. "I'm not reluctant to take from someone else's idea, and as a standard, I take my teachers to visit other schools to review their programs, but most of all, I listen to my community's needs."

The same sentiment was expressed by the principal at McAlester's Emerson Elementary. Jay White said that school districts need to "break away from the traditional mold."

White said that Emerson established a school science lab where students use the lab for combined subject, hands-on training.

MEMBERS OF THE OKLAHOMA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Sandy Garrett, Chairperson

Margaret Erling, Tulsa

Ann Felton, Oklahoma City

Sherman Floyd, Poteau

Linda K. Gragg, Muskogee

(Vacant), Lawton

Michael W. Mitchel, Woodward