

He said that all subjects were interrelated, and the lab has helped students, teachers and parents think of them collectively.

"The lab also allows students to learn at their own pace."

White said through programs such as "Great Expectations" (a statewide program that instructs teachers as mentors), character education could build students' self-esteem. "We just need to get back to the basics of saying please and thank you. This program instills positive teaching methodology."

In testing, White explained that Emerson uses state and national tests. "You have to have diversity by using every tool available. Superintendent Garrett was on the cutting edge for establishing core curriculum testing for Oklahoma."

Spreading their knowledge, Wikoff and White are always inviting other schools to visit and review their programs. "Quite a few have contacted me already," said White. Wikoff added, "Several schools, such as Lawton, have contacted me and are already in the process of reviewing our school."

Garrett said she was excited about the many new models of innovation being used by schools in the state. To date, she added that 244 school districts have been approved for deregulation from state rules.

Electronic Processing

While giving local school districts more flexibility in reaching their communities' educational goals, the State Department of Education has also undertaken efforts to improve its efficiency and effectiveness. In particular, the department has made sweeping advances in the area of technology in recent years with an eye on improving its overall efficiency at the state level.

And more advances are on the way. Lawmakers announced this week, for example, their plan to fund a statewide student monitoring system. Part of the midterm funding proposal endorsed by a bipartisan group of lawmakers and the governor, the program is designed to assist in efforts to make midterm funding adjustments more equitable.

Other programs have already been put in place. The Oklahoma Cost Accounting System (OCAS), developed in 1990 as a pilot project for ten school districts, now has all 550 school districts reporting all funds to the system. The data is used to meet a number of federal and state reporting requirements. OCAS was modified in 1995 within the State Education Department to make it more efficient and less labor intensive.

While the department already electronically transfers State Land Payments to schools' bank, it worked closely with the State Treasurer's Office to develop a system for direct deposit of State Aid allocations, as well. The system began operating last month. "Schools will now be able to receive their money earlier," said Garrett.

In addition, the annual "Child Count," conducted by the Special Education Services, can now be electronically provided through the use of a specialized computer program. "It will ultimately provide faster and more accurate data reporting from schools and eliminate much of the school staff data work required each spring for reports to the state agency and federal office," explained Garrett.

As for specialized electronic data collection for children's services, last year was the first full year to electronically collect Early Intervention Center (SoonerStart) data. The information is collected using the Department's first custom-developed micro-computer application that was featured at a national special education conference last spring. Also, an electronic claims reimbursement system for Child Nutrition Programs was designed last year by the staff and is being implemented. "This system will improve the speed and accuracy of reports and will contribute to overall efficiency," Garrett said of the system.

At the recommendation of Garrett's Paperwork Commission, future plans are to progressively convert all possible paper data collections to electronic collection. Garrett said the Department has achieved an overall savings of \$21.6 million to date.

"We went from a hierarchical system to a flat system that allows the Department staff to work as a team," she added.

Capitol Network News congratulates the Oklahoma Department of Education and the state Board of Education not only for their efforts to meet the needs of Oklahoma's public school students and educators today, but for also laying the groundwork to meet the challenges ahead.

By finding workable solutions for less state involvement in local decision making, recognizing those schools which successfully take advantage of deregulation and aggressively pursuing efforts at the state level to make oversight of the public education system more efficient, the department and the board are providing the leadership school districts need in their individual efforts.

THAT'S GOOD FOR OKLAHOMA!

SANDY GARRETT

State Superintendent Sandy Garrett was reelected to her second four-year term in 1994.

Born in Muskogee, the former first-grade teacher has almost 30 years experience in education and holds certification as a public school teacher and administrator. Former director of rural education and gifted/talented programs at the Department, she was appointed cabinet secretary for education by Governor Henry Bellmon in 1988, and reappointed by Governor David Walters in 1990. In 1995, she was elected chairperson of the board of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, a research and development consortium of five states headquartered in Austin, Texas.

As part of the constitutional responsibilities of her position, Superintendent Garrett is also chairperson of the State Board of Vocational and Technical Education, a member of the State Board of Equalization, School Land Commission, State Regents for Oklahoma Colleges and the Education Commission of the States.

HISTORY OF THE OKLAHOMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The State Education Department is responsible for all phases of state public school education under the direction of the State Board of Education which consists of seven members. The Superintendent of Public Instruction is elected to a four-year term by the people, or appointed by the Governor to fill an unexpired term, and serves as a voting member and president of the Board. The other six members are appointed by the Governor, and confirmed by the Senate and serve staggered six-year terms.

The Department operates numerous divisions such as Instructional Services, Planning and Information Services, Financial and Administrative Services, and Federal/Special Services Programs. Within the divisions are various sectional functions such as child nutrition programs, teacher evaluation, teacher testing, school finance, school transportation, school accreditation, school plant services, reading/student testing, gifted/talented, community and public relations, adult-community education/literacy, Indian education and multi-cultural equity programs.