

STATE NEWS WEEKLY SUMMARY CONTINUED



ation, it's what we can handle."

The board will decide next month what course of action to take regarding its new certified number. According to Roark, it could either accept the lower number, based on the statutorily-cited regulations, or attempt to have the statute altered to more truly reflect department practice.

In a related development, Saffle announced at the beginning of the meeting that he had ordered that inmates be removed from Oklahoma State Penitentiary's east cellhouse. As many as 271 inmates have been housed in the condemned cellhouse. Some 40 inmates were removed from the facility last week, Saffle said, and distributed to other facilities within the system.

—SHAWN ASHLEY
11/18/96

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS: PAINTING BY NUMBERS

■(GIT) Numbers are not a game for the Department of Corrections.

According to a facility capacity report released Monday, the comments of the department's interim director and its governing board, numbers are the most important factor influencing the agency's decision making. Under current conditions, the report, staff and board agreed, that generally means making do with less than what is needed.

That situation was reflected in a supplemental budget request and fiscal year 1998 budget request recently approved by the board for the department. In order to meet the department's anticipated population growth by the end of the current fiscal year, officials say \$25.3 million will be needed. For fiscal year 1998, the department is seeking its largest state appropriation in history — \$350.5 million for operations and \$326.9 million for capital outlay, including the construction of additional prison space.

Currently, department records show, the agency is responsible for the supervision of 51,284 convicted criminals, including:

- ✓ 19,918 inmates;
- ✓ 28,589 probationers; and
- ✓ 2,777 parolees.

Of the inmates, 14,932 are locked up in Department of Corrections facilities, while 1,510 are housed in private prisons in Oklahoma and Texas. An additional 316 are backed up in county jails, waiting to be introduced in the department's system. The remaining inmates are housed in county jails

and other contract facilities, such as halfway houses.

The average inmate in Department of Corrections custody is allotted 94-square-feet of space. That is particularly true for the system's male inmates, whose average space assignment is 95.6-square-feet. Women, however, fare worse, averaging just 77-square-feet.

In the cases of both male and female inmates there are wide swings in the amount of allotted space. Male inmates assigned to the restrictive housing unit at Clara Waters Community Corrections Center in Oklahoma City get an average of 16.7-square-feet per inmate, while inmates locked in the medical unit at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester have an average assigned space of 238.5-square-feet.

The space difference is somewhat less for women inmates. Female offenders incarcerated at the administrative unit of the Mabel Bassett Correctional Center in Oklahoma City have an average of 37.6-square-feet of space, while those at Hollis Community Work Center are afforded 175-square-feet per inmate.

Within the department, those numbers are compared to a state-accepted standard, which may be modified to reflect actual practices, that stipulates a minimum of 120-square-feet per inmate. The facility report, however, recognized that current population trends prevent the department from adhering to that standard.

—SHAWN ASHLEY
11/19/96

EDUCATION

GARRETT ANNOUNCES STATE SCHOOLS CONSIDERED AMONG BEST IN NATION

■(OKLAHOMA CITY) State Superintendent Sandy Garrett announced Monday that she is nominating six Oklahoma schools for the 1996-97 Blue Ribbon Schools Elementary Recognition Program. The program is coordinated by the U.S. Department of Education and recognizes outstanding schools.

"These schools are models of excellence and are recognized as being six of the top 300 best schools in the nation," Garrett said.

The schools nominated for Blue Ribbon status are:

- Almor West Elementary, Lawton Public Schools

- Clara Reynolds Elementary, Harrah Public Schools

- Coronado Heights Elementary, Putnam City Public Schools

- Pershing Elementary, Muskogee Public Schools

- Pioneer Park Elementary, Lawton Public Schools

- Western Oaks Middle School, Putnam City Public Schools

A state review committee comprised of educators reviewed the state Blue Ribbon applications and presented Garrett with its six recommendations. The USDE allows each state to submit six nominations.

Now that the state nominations have been announced, the USDE will arrange to visit and evaluate each school this spring.

Those schools receiving the most favorable evaluations will be named Blue Ribbon Schools by the White House in May.

Edmond's Sequoyah Middle School and Woodward Middle School were selected for the honor last year.

—OKLAHOMA DEPT. OF EDUCATION
11/19/96

ATTORNEY GENERAL: SCHOOL FUND PRINCIPAL INVIOLEATE

■(GIT) The principal in the constitutionally-established permanent school fund should not be diminished but can be used to guarantee bonds issued by state school districts when certain conditions are met, according to a recently-released opinion from the Attorney General's office.

Rob Johnson, secretary of the Commissioners of the Land Office, posed two questions in his request for the Attorney General's opinion:

- Whether the principal of the permanent school fund is inviolate and not subject to being diminished or diverted for any other use or purpose than for the benefit of the state's common schools; and

- Whether the Commissioners of the Land Office's bond guarantee is legal and binding upon the permanent school fund.

According to the opinion prepared by Senior Assistant Attorney General Neal Leader:

- Sections 7 and 9 of the Oklahoma Enabling Act, 34 Stat. 267, 272, 274 (1906), and Section 2 of Article Eleven of the Oklahoma Constitution provide that the permanent school fund consist of all proceeds from

Continued on next page