



Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence

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Ken Busby Honored for Service

Tulsa Trustee Ken Busby accepts the 2021 Distinguished Service Award from OFE President Jami Rhoades Antonisse during the foundation's Annual Meeting in September. A trustee since 2007, Busby served three times as Academic Awards Banquet chair and helped modify the 2021 celebration to ensure the safety of honorees and their families during the pandemic. He also serves on the foundation's executive committee. Busby is the executive director and CEO of the Route 66 Alliance in Tulsa.

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Recognizing & Encouraging Academic Excellence
in Oklahoma's Public Schools

Fall 2021

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OFE Trustees, Staff Honor Emily Stratton as She Retires After 22 Years as Director

Emily Stratton, the longest serving executive director of the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence, retired Sept. 30, capping off a 22-year tenure that expanded programs impacting countless Oklahoma public school students and teachers.

The foundation's board and staff paid tribute to Stratton at the Annual Board of Trustees meeting in September. "Emily Stratton has touched so many teachers, students and people's lives in her role as our executive director, and we are honored to celebrate her gifts and her legacy," said President Jami Rhoades Antonisse, a 1987 Academic All-State alumna.

Antonisse announced that the next two Academic All-Staters from Stratton's family home of Clinton will receive scholarships presented in her honor, as a gift from past foundation presidents. Stratton received an intricately designed, framed paper blossom, created by Trustee Farooq Karim using paper from foundation marketing materials. Staff and trustees also surprised Stratton with a photo book and video highlighting milestone moments in her OFE career.

"We are grateful for your grace, your kindness, your can-do spirit, your creativity, and your dedication to our mission and the growth of our programs," said OFE Communications Director Brenda Wheelock, reading from the book's dedication. "Thanks to your



OFE President Jami Rhoades Antonisse congratulates Emily Stratton on her retirement as the longest serving executive director in OFE history.

leadership, countless students and teachers in Oklahoma have benefited from the work of our foundation, receiving opportunities for academic growth, professional development and recognition for academic excellence."

Stratton took the helm of the foundation in May 1999, but her involvement dates back to the foundation's beginnings when she was invited to serve as a founding trustee in 1986. During her tenure, the foundation has recognized 2,300 students as Academic All-Staters and 116 educators and educational programs as Medal for Excellence winners. In the past 22 years,

(Continued on page 2)

Grants for K-12 Mentoring Programs Offered

To better support the needs of Oklahoma mentoring organizations, the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence is excited to announce a new funding opportunity: Boren Mentoring Initiative Grants.

For the inaugural year, grants will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis for qualifying applicants. Grant applications and guidelines are available at www.ofe.org. Two categories of grants are available:

Startup Grants – Two startup grants of up to \$3,000 each will be available to new mentoring organizations in their first three years of operation. These grants are designed to encourage communities to start quality mentoring programs.

Opportunity Grants – Six opportunity grants of up to \$1,500 each will be available to existing mentoring groups to help fund programming,

training, materials or other programs that advance excellence in mentoring for K-12 students in Oklahoma.

The David and Molly Boren Mentoring Initiative promotes the growth and development of quality youth mentoring programs statewide. The initiative grew out of the Borens' own commitment to mentoring and the proven impact that mentoring can make on a student's success in and out of the classroom. The program provides on-call support and resources for mentoring organizations, school districts, community leaders, businesses and others seeking information on how to start or strengthen their mentoring program for K-12 students.

For more information, contact Program Coordinator Katy Leffel at (405) 236-0006, Ext. 18.

Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence

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OFE Trustees, Staff Honor Emily Stratton, Continued from Page 1

the Local Education Foundation Outreach Program has served more than 220 public school foundations statewide and has evolved to become the Oklahoma School Foundations Network.

The foundation’s partnership with Colonial Williamsburg has also expanded as Stratton has nurtured connections with Teacher Institute alumni, Mount Vernon, the Oklahoma History Center and others to host Colonial Day at the State Capitol for Oklahoma fifth graders and to promote Colonial Day events in communities across the state.

Stratton has been especially passionate about expanding opportunities for teacher professional development. The foundation launched the Teacher Grants for Professional Development Program in 2003 to send teachers to top quality regional and national conferences. More than 830 teachers have received grants totaling \$1.1 million.

In 2006, Stratton led efforts to partner with the National Fund for Teachers to award grants of up to \$5,000 for individual teachers and \$10,000 for teams for self-designed summer professional development opportunities in locations around the world. Since then, more than 915 Oklahoma teachers have received grants totaling over \$3.2 million. Many have shared how their journeys changed the trajectory of their teaching practice and impacted their students and communities.

Stratton was recently honored as the Multicultural

Citizen of the Year in recognition of her leadership of a new online professional development platform for Teachers of English Learners. The pilot project – launched in 2019 – seeks to strengthen learning and improve retention rates of more than 60,000 Oklahoma students who do not speak English as their first language. Stratton has helped lead the program through its pilot phase and transfer to the State Department of Education, where it is now available to teachers statewide.

Stratton also played a critical role in the 2006 launch of our David and Molly Boren Mentoring Initiative, which encourages the growth and development of quality youth mentoring programs. This fall, the program is launching startup and opportunity grants to support mentoring programs serving K-12 students.

With Stratton at the helm, the foundation has received several honors including the 2003 Schusterman Award for Programming and Management Excellence, the 2009 Chapman Charitable Trusts Award in Education presented by the Oklahoma Center for Nonprofits and the 2010 Meritorious Service Award for Leadership in Education presented by the OU College of Education. In addition, Stratton was personally honored with the college’s Meritorious Service Award in 2016.

Annual Meeting Celebrates Foundation Achievements Under Stratton



Past OFE presidents gather with Executive Director Emily Stratton at the Annual Meeting. Pictured from left are Charles Oppenheim, Susie Thurmond, Bert Mackie, Tony Zahn, Ken Fergeson, Stratton, Loyd Benson, Jami Rhoades Antonisse, Bruce Benbrook, Linda Neal, Sharon Bartlett (past banquet chair), Linda Rodgers and Cathryn Render.



President-Elect Andrew Morris presents a framed paper art blossom created by Trustee Farooq Karim in honor of Emily Stratton’s retirement.



OFE Communications Director Brenda Wheelock surprises Emily Stratton with a book (inset) featuring photo highlights from her 22-year OFE career.

Thank You, Continued from Page 3

Thanks also to our volunteers and donors, who are the lifeblood of this foundation. Finally, we must always remember David Boren’s vision of what Oklahoma public education needed. We can never be thankful enough for his dream and for our opportunity to be a part of that dream.

Opportunities for Oklahoma Educators, Students

OFE Academic Awards

The Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence is seeking nominations for its prestigious Academic All-State and Medal for Excellence Awards through an online portal at www.ofe.org.

Submissions for Academic All-State Awards, honoring 100 top public high school seniors, are due by 5 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 2. Nominations for Medal for Excellence Awards, which recognize five exceptional public school educators from elementary through collegiate levels, must be submitted by 5 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 30.

Awards totaling \$125,000 will be presented at the foundation’s 36th Academic Awards Banquet on May 21, 2022, at the Omni Hotel in Oklahoma City and televised statewide on OETA.

Fund for Teachers Fellowships

Oklahoma teachers can apply now through Jan. 20, 2022, for Fund for Teachers Fellowships for self-designed, summer professional development experiences anywhere in the world.

Grants of up to \$5,000 for individuals and \$10,000 for teams of teachers are available for Oklahoma pre-K through 12th-grade teachers in public, private, parochial and charter schools. Applicants must have at least three years of teaching experience, be full-time employees and spend 50 percent or more of their time in a classroom setting.

In addition, applicants must have the intention of returning to their school and/or district following their summer professional development. School administrators are not eligible for the grants. To learn more, visit www.fundforteachers.org

As we move forward in this 36th year, I wish the foundation the very best. We have an exceptional staff, outstanding foundation leaders and generous supporters who believe in and support our magnificent and vital mission. And as today’s theme—Excelsior—says, the future of this foundation is “Ever Upward!”

Colonial Williamsburg Summer Teacher Institute Fellowships

Applications are open for Oklahoma fifth- and eighth-grade teachers interested in attending the 2022 Colonial Williamsburg Teacher Institute next summer in the restored capital city of 18th-century Virginia. The fifth-grade institute is scheduled June 5-11, and the eighth-grade institute is scheduled June 12-18, 2022. While in Colonial Williamsburg, Oklahoma teachers will have the opportunity to meet character interpreters of 18th-century people and be immersed in early American history through hands-on activities and

reenactments of historic events. Applications must be submitted by Feb. 1, 2022, through the foundation website at www.ofe.org.

Virtual Colonial Days

We are teaming up with educational partners at Colonial Williamsburg, Mount Vernon and here in Oklahoma to offer free Virtual Colonial Days webinars for Oklahoma fifth-grade classes in 2022.

“Agents of Change: Promoting Civil Discourse and Action” is the theme of the Zoom webinar series, which will focus on

the importance of civil discourse and the role it plays in creating positive change in a democracy. The interactive webinars will be held at 10 a.m. Fridays, Jan. 28, Feb. 11, Feb. 25 and March 4, 2022.

Presenters include Stephen Smith as Founding Father Benjamin Franklin; Deidre Cardwell as Agnes, who was enslaved to speaker of the Virginia House of Burgesses Payton Randolph; and Bryan Austin as James Madison, father of the Constitution and fourth president of the United States.

Applications for Virtual Colonial Days open Jan. 3, 2022, at www.ofe.org. Registration is limited.

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Trustee **Dr. Robyn Miller** was named the senior director of operations for Metro Technology Centers.

2020-21 Medal for Excellence winner **Shelley Self** of Coweta High School was named a 2022 Oklahoma Teacher of the Year finalist.

Dr. Kayse Shrum, a trustee and the new president of Oklahoma State University, was named Citizen of the Year by the Coweta Chamber of Commerce.

Dr. Amber Wiley, a 1999 Academic All-Stater and an assistant professor of art history at Rutgers University, is the recipient of a Dumbarton Oaks Mellon Fellowship in Urban Landscape Studies. Through the fellowship, she is studying the work of the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation and the national historic landmarks they designated.

In Memory:

We mourn the passing of **John Dahlem**, a longtime OFE supporter and longtime public school educator, who died June 16, 2021. Our condolences to his wife, Kyle, an OFE founding trustee, and their loved ones.

We are saddened to learn of the passing of 2003 Medal for Excellence winner **Ruth Loeffler** of Norman, who died Sept. 20, 2021. She spent most of her teaching career at Norman High School, where she taught English Literature, Western Civilization and Creative Writing and was coordinator of the Gifted Program.

Oklahoma School Foundation Network Strengthening Support for Local Schools

The Oklahoma School Foundations Network, under the direction of Katy Leffel, has had a productive year providing training, networking and on-call support for Oklahoma’s 209 public school foundations.

For the first time, the School Foundations Network was invited to present a series of breakout sessions of the **Oklahoma Education Leadership Conference** in August hosted by the Oklahoma State School Boards Association and Cooperative Council for School Administration. Nearly 200 people attended the sessions, which covered such topics as education advocacy and strengthening partnerships between foundation and district leaders.

We recently announced the winners of the **2021 Outstanding Program Awards for Local Education Foundations**, which recognize innovative programs sponsored or administered by public

school foundations. Receiving plaques and monetary awards of \$1,000 each were the Trojans Read the Way Bookmobile sponsored by the Jenks Public Schools Foundation; the Get Books, Not Twix! Book Vending Machine sponsored by the Grove Education Foundation for Excellence; and the Community and Schools Together Initiative sponsored by the Putnam City Schools Foundation.

In October, we hosted virtual **Fall Forum Wednesday Webinars** on topics relevant to school foundation success. Sessions, which are now available for viewing on demand, included Using Flipcause for School Foundation Donor Management, Opportunity Tax Credit Law Basics, Planned Giving 101, and Outstanding Program Awards Winners.

In addition to these programs, Leffel leads free board retreats and strategic planning sessions for school foundation leaders. To learn more, visit www.ofe.org.



Oklahoma School Foundations Network Director Katy Leffel (left) is joined by school foundation executive directors (from left) Blair Ellis of Bartlesville, Elizabeth Inbody of Jenks and Mary Mélon of Oklahoma City during the Oklahoma Education Leadership Conference, which partnered with the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence to offer its first series of sessions for school foundation leaders this year.

Foundation Completes Teachers of English Learners Pilot Project, Resource Now Available Statewide

An online professional development platform for Teachers of English Learners created by the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence has completed its pilot phase and is now open for teachers statewide on the Oklahoma State Department of Education Oklahoma EDGE website at <https://osdeconnect.ok.gov>.

As part of its Teacher Professional Development programs, the foundation created the Teachers of English Learners Pilot Project to address a critical need to build instructional capacity of classroom teachers on behalf of their English Learner students. The project uses a collaborative online learning platform to provide professional development, networking and support for classroom teachers in schools with high enrollment of English Learner students. The platform includes a free English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) Certification Test Prep Course.

“Our ultimate goal was to provide an anytime, anyplace professional learning hub for classroom teachers committed to improving instruction for their English Learners,” said Project Manager Lisa Pryor. “This goal was accomplished through

the curation of high-quality content and the ability for teachers to share information and network organically.”

When the foundation launched the platform in February 2020, the program was available to educators in 17 schools with approximately 360 registered teachers. Today, more than 800 Oklahoma educators from 95 districts have utilized the online platform. Organizers are hopeful that the number of teachers will increase exponentially with the new statewide access to the program.

“We are particularly pleased that the State Department of Education is taking on the operations of continuing and expanding these supports to Oklahoma educators,” Pryor said. “We expect that this will translate to improved instruction for English Learners in classrooms across the state.”



Cassandra Walker, Title III English Language Development Coordinator for Jenks Public Schools, was named the BancFirst ESL Teacher of the Year by our foundation in August. The \$3,000 award recognized an exceptional Oklahoma English-as-a-Second-Language teacher who participated in the foundation's Teachers of English Learners Project.

Our Theme This Year: Excelsior – Ever Upward!

For much of history, academic excellence was equated with the study of “the classics,” and Latin was the *lingua franca* of the educated elite. The word “classics” is derived from the Latin adjective *classicus*, meaning “belonging to the highest class of citizens.” In Oklahoma, the “highest class of citizens” in the realm of “academic excellence” very well may be our Academic All-Staters. Case in point? At a recent awards banquet, a former Academic All-Stater observed how rare – and refreshing! – it is to be among people who use the words *alumnus*, *alumna*, and *alumni* correctly!

If you need a refresher, don’t feel bad! Recent surveys suggest that only 20% of K-12 students in the U.S. study any world language and, of those, only 2% study Latin. If you did study Latin, you know that an *alumnus* is a male graduate, and an *alumna* is a female graduate, of a particular school or program. Alumni is the plural form of alumnus but is commonly used in a gender-neutral way. To be truly all-inclusive (and avoid grammatical pitfalls), however, you may opt to use the “modernized” form of these words – *alum* and *alums*.

Modernization (evolution, progress, change...) is omnipresent in education. Hence, after *Sputnik*, Latin gave way to math and science. Some might even say that “academic excellence” is now equated with the study of STEM. Anecdotal evidence certainly suggests that Academic All-Staters are pursuing degrees and careers in STEM more than any other field. But, even as we

speak, STEM is going up in STEAM, as educators embrace research showing that experience in the fine arts boosts innovation and entrepreneurship.

Perhaps we can all agree that what matters most to the pursuit of “academic excellence” is **heart**, regardless of the field of study. As Erin Gruwell, the famous teacher of the “Freedom Writers” who spoke to this year’s class of Academic All-Staters, says, “Everyone has a story, and it is important that we encourage all students to tell theirs.... We want our students to feel impassioned and empowered.” Fittingly, then, our theme for this program year is **EXCELSIOR!**

Excelsior is Latin for “ever upward” and a favorite catch-phrase of our long-serving and much-beloved Executive Director Emily Stratton (and of comic book legend, Stan Lee). Emily retired this fall after 22 years of outstanding service to the foundation. *CARPE DIEM*, Emily – enjoy your well-earned retirement!

— Jami Rhoades Antonisse,
President and 1987 All-State Alumna



Jami Rhoades Antonisse

Thank You for the Opportunity of a Lifetime

Following are excerpts from Emily Stratton’s farewell remarks as executive director, presented at the Annual Meeting of the Board of Trustees.

The past 22 years have truly been extraordinary for me. I have loved serving as executive director of the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence. It has been a privilege to work for this organization and for all of you. Thinking back over these past 22 years, I have so many wonderful memories and want to share a few.

My husband and I attended our first Academic Awards Banquet in 1987 in Oklahoma City since our daughter Paige was in the first class of Academic All-Staters. Sitting near the front of that giant ballroom, I remember thinking, “I have never been to a dinner with this many people!” There were 1,000 or more in attendance. Little did I know it would be the first of many Awards Banquets I would attend—helping to organize and enjoying them tremendously. They gave me many memories to cherish!

For example, in 2002, when Colonial Williamsburg Foundation President Colin Campbell was our keynote speaker, he surprised us and brought members of his Fife and Drum Corps. With flair, they led the grand march of the All-Staters into the ballroom. That grand march probably set an all-time record for audience and All-Stater goose bumps!

In 2010, Pulitzer Prize-winning author David McCullough gave an exceptionally inspiring keynote

address. The following Monday, I emailed his daughter, who was my McCullough contact, to report on her dad’s success. She said her whole family had dinner together that Sunday evening and that her parents enjoyed telling their children and grandchildren about the remarkable students and teachers who were honored. Then she wrote, “We ended the evening...on the coast of Maine...with all of us singing ‘Oklahoma!’” What a wonderful compliment for our event and for this foundation.

Thanks to the teamwork of trustees and staff, our programs and program expansions through the years have been well-designed and executed effectively, from Teacher Professional Development grants and Fund for Teachers partnerships to the Boren Mentoring Initiative and the English Learner Project. Likewise successful have been the expansion of existing programs, such as Colonial Day at the Capitol.

(Continued on page 7)



Emily Stratton

In The News:

Dr. Austin Bradshaw, a 2011 Academic All-Stater, serves as a hospitalist for the Department of Veterans Affairs at Royal Johnson Veterans Memorial Hospital in Sioux Falls, S.D.

Trustee **Barbara Braught** of Duncan was appointed to serve a three-year term on the Oklahoma Arts Council.

Trustee **Vanessa Drummond** recently received the Jim Gillie Outstanding Citizen of the Year Award from the Bartlesville Chamber of Commerce. She was recognized for her strong advocacy for Bartlesville Public Schools and parent support groups.

Kathleen Guzman, 2014 Medal for Excellence winner in University Teaching, was named dean of the OU College of Law.

2015 Medal for Excellence winner **Tim Hubin**, a professor of chemistry at Southwestern Oklahoma State University, is among a team of inventors at SWOSU to receive the university’s first patent. Their invention, a synthesis of novel compounds, has applications in antifungal drugs.

Sydney Hutchison, a 2016 Academic All-Stater, is excited to be teaching advanced math courses and serving as Student Council sponsor at Dale High School.

Trustee **Bert Mackie**, former Trustee **Carl Renfro** and 2010 Medal for Excellence winner **David Sabatini** were inducted into the Oklahoma Higher Education Hall of Fame for 2021.

Brian McLaren, a 1991 Academic All-Stater, is senior director of the Product Strategy Innovation Team for the American Institute of Architects in Washington, D.C.

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"Rising Above, Going Beyond"

Highlights from the 35th Academic Awards Celebration



Keynote speaker Erin Gruwell (third from right) gathers with Medal for Excellence-winning educators (from left) Dr. David Bass, Edmond; Dr. Edralin Lucas, Stillwater; Shelley Self, Coweta; Chuck McCauley, Bartlesville; and Michelle Rahn, Claremore.



Anna Swierkosz of MacArthur High School in Lawton introduces herself and her honored teacher during the All-State procession.



Presenting this year's Medal for Excellence awards were distinguished Academic All-State Alumni (from left) Dr. David Kendrick, Cordon DeKock, Dr. Nicole Tintera Tran, Dr. Lynnette Regouby and Stephen G. Butler.

Author-Educator Erin Gruwell Speaks at Awards Celebration



After COVID-19 sidelined our foundation's Academic Awards Banquet in 2020, we were thrilled to host an in-person celebration in May in Tulsa paying tribute to 100 of the state's top public high school seniors and five outstanding educators.

While attendance at the Academic Awards Celebration was limited and activities were modified to protect our guests, the celebration had many special touches – from giving parents the opportunity to present the

All-State Medallions to inviting all attendees to participate in a Q&A session with the keynote speaker.

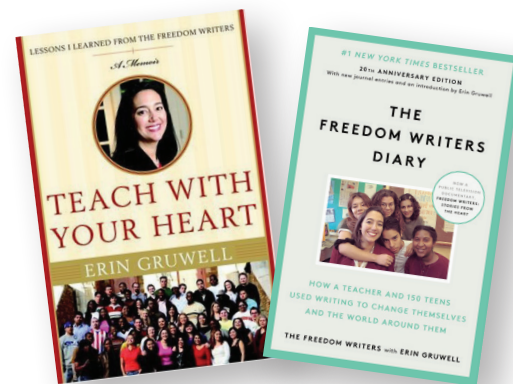
"Rising Above, Going Beyond" was the theme for the event, which featured a keynote address by award-winning teacher and education activist Erin Gruwell. Gruwell shared the story of how she used literature to bring hope and healing to her inner-city students who had been labeled as "unteachable" because of their experiences with violence and poverty.

"I stand before you as an ordinary teacher who had extraordinary students who learned to put down a fist and a gun, who learned to pick up a pen and to face a fear, to pick up

a pen and tell a truth – to become authors," Gruwell said. "To become accidental activists, to stand up, to speak up and most importantly to speak out."

Inspired by teen diarists Anne Frank and Zlata Filipović, Gruwell's students discovered a new way to process their experiences through writing. The students' collective writings were printed by the same publishing house that released the "Diary of Anne Frank." Their work, "The Freedom Writers Diary" became a number-one best seller and inspired a feature film. Signed copies were presented to each of the Academic All-Staters.

In closing, Gruwell implored honorees to pick up a pen and "face a fear, tell a truth, stand up, speak up and speak out."



Our Academic All-State scholars and Medal for Excellence Award winners received signed copies of Erin Gruwell's books *The Freedom Writers Diary* and *Teach With Your Heart* as special gifts from the foundation.



Following the ceremony, Rep. John Waldron, a 2013 Medal for Excellence winner, leads a discussion and Q&A with keynote speaker Erin Gruwell.



All-State Alumnus David Postic surprises Erin Gruwell with a 2021 Academic All-State T-shirt.

All-Stater Grateful for Connection at In-Person Awards Celebration



Sean Kuehn
2021 Academic All-Stater

(Editor's Note: Thanks to 2021 All-Stater Sean Kuehn of Sand Springs for being our featured Academic All-State columnist for this issue of HighMarks. He is majoring in political science at Columbia University.)

There are certain moments in life we look forward to. Oftentimes, when we work extremely hard for recognitions or events, the reality of our achievement can sometimes pale in comparison to the long-anticipated, high expectations we set. As a second-generation Academic All-Stater (my mom Catherine Miller was recognized in 1995), the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence banquet was a milestone that I was not only aware of growing up, but actively aspired to experience. While there was no pressure imposed upon me by my family, like many of my fellow students throughout high school, I challenged myself to achieve this high recognition.

As I arrived at the Cox Business Convention Center in downtown Tulsa, I was anxious. Many questions swirled in my mind; how I would look on camera, how the other All-Staters would interact with me, would the banquet or fellow All-Staters meet the high expectations we may have set in our minds?

However, to my relief, the atmosphere in the ballroom was one of ambition and excitement. A certain eagerness and electricity were present that most of us had not experienced in well over a year. After a senior year filled with disappointments, cancellations, and virtual events, to come together

from across Oklahoma to be recognized as a group for our dedication to our academics was truly special. As we prepared to enter the ballroom to begin the ceremony, the lobby was abuzz with connection and conversation. Rather than the competition you might expect with 100 of the most competitive students in our state, there was a relaxation, an exhale after a long year of stress and high expectations. Each of us present was able to relax and enjoy the company of others who had felt the same pressures and expectations that we had.

After a warm welcome from awards banquet emcee Scott Thompson, the 2021 Academic All-Staters were introduced and given the opportunity to recognize their honored educator, a teacher who had made a significant impact on their educational journey to this point. The other Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence awards were given, and the respective honored teachers gave a short message to the audience on the importance of Oklahoma education and the role they play within our state.

The keynote address by Erin Gruwell was the capstone moment of the evening, and while she hit on many important points and stories, what stood out to me was her message of togetherness that her students experienced. Throughout the moving message of her journey with her students, I recognized a common thread that we shared with her students, although our paths up to this point could not have been more different than theirs. We learn better when we are together and thanks to OFE, we were allowed to connect and come together, even just for an evening, to celebrate and reflect on our educational journeys.

As I exited after a long afternoon of recognition and connection, I could not help but feel inspired. After meeting 100 of the most academically dedicated of my peers in our state, I felt confident in our collective ability to build the future we envisioned. Although many of us, like myself, plan to attend college out of state or enter into careers, we all hope to make a difference by improving the world around us, either here at home or wherever we may go.