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CONTACT: Ginger Tinney, Executive Director

Phone: 405.321.3175 • Toll-free: 888.331.2763 • Cell Phone: 405.202.3075 • Fax: 405.321.8897

Verden teachers choose independent representation in state's sixth union decertification

The trend away from teachers unions continued on Monday when Verden teachers elected the Verden Professional Educators (VPE), an independent local teachers association, to represent teachers. The Verden election was the second in the state this year, and the sixth since Bridge Creek Public School teachers pioneered the movement in 2005.

VPE will eliminate the confrontational collective bargaining tactics typical of unions in favor of the Collaborative Communication Model supported by the Professional Oklahoma Educators (POE), a statewide independent professional association serving more than 4,000 teachers across the state. POE Executive Director Ginger Tinney co-wrote the model in response to teachers' concerns with the union's collective bargaining methods.

In addition to Verden and Bridge Creek schools, Dibble, Hanna, Macomb and Strother Public Schools have made the switch. Tinney said she expects the decertification trend to continue.

"This is a movement that will continue to grow as more and more teachers learn of its success," Tinney said. Teachers want to be a part of this process, and they are choosing independence, collaboration and professionalism over the divisive models of the past."

According to Tinney, the model is all about team work. "Teachers want to be a part of this process," Tinney said. "We need a system that allows them to stay informed and involved so that they can work with school administration to make the best choices for students. The Collaborative Communication Model offers that."

POE has experienced a more than 30 percent leap in membership during the current school year alone. Tinney attributes the growth to an increased demand from teachers for greater professionalism and higher accountability in their association.

"Many educators are not content with the union, and they're making a change," Tinney said. "Professional Oklahoma Educators provides superior protections and incredible benefits to teachers at less than half the cost of the union, and without compromising the values that Oklahoma teachers hold dear."

VPE will be recognized as the official representative for Hanna teachers at the next school board meeting, required to be held within 14 days of the election. Officers of the Verden group are President Janet Edwards, Vice President Pam Venable and Secretary/Treasurer Debra Cobden.

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