



OKLAHOMA ACADEMY
FOR STATE GOALS

ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION: WILL OKLAHOMA PASS OR FAIL?

FOURTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE
NOVEMBER 11-12, 1988
OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA

CONSENSUS RECOMMENDATIONS
JANUARY, 1989

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January, 1989**

OKLAHOMA ACADEMY FOR STATE GOALS

MISSION STATEMENT

The people of Oklahoma have become increasingly concerned about the direction of the state, its institutions and its economic climate. *Moreover*, the people desire a greater voice in controlling their destinies. *However*, no statewide organization currently exists through which thoughtful analysis can be provided to effectively guide the future direction of the state and the development of its resources.

Thus, the mission of the Oklahoma Academy for State Goals is to create a broad-based, statewide organization dedicated to developing information upon which a consensus on programs and policies can be built in order to develop our state's human and natural resources to their fullest potential.

In carrying out its mission, the Academy will focus on the following objectives:

- To identify areas of need and problems facing the state and its people.
- To sponsor and conduct research on subjects selected in order to develop accurate information and to state policy options and alternative solutions. (An important part of the research function will be to act as a clearinghouse for existing and future research in the state in order to avoid waste and duplication in research efforts.)
- To develop consensus on policies and programs designed to meet the needs of the people and the state.
- To develop long-range goals, a strategic plan and agendas for action including priorities to accomplish the Academy's mission.
- To ensure that the people of Oklahoma are informed of Academy goals, plans, and agenda.

OKLAHOMA ACADEMY FOR STATE GOALS

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PREFACE

The 1988 conference of the Oklahoma Academy for State Goals produced stimulating discussion and debate, participation by a broad cross section of Oklahoma citizens and a significant number of worthwhile ideas. The conference titled "Elementary & Secondary Education: Will Oklahoma Pass or Fail?" featured topics of major importance concerning the institution that affects more Oklahomans more profoundly than any other statewide institution - our public schools.

Attendance at the 1988 conference established a new record of over 500 people and further attested to the quality of the program and the recognition of the importance of the Academy and its mission to the future of our state. As has been the case in recent years, participants in the conference came from all sections of the state and virtually all segments of the economy and our society. One of the outstanding features of this conference was the opportunity it provided for teachers to air their views, concerns and frustrations to participants from the private sector. In some instances the wide divergence of points of view made it difficult to arrive at consensus recommendations, but in most cases the lively discussion provided a fertile ground for the exchange of ideas and the production of consensus. What became clear to almost everyone is that teachers, school administrators, businessmen and women and others from the private and public sectors all share a deep concern about education and are willing to listen, talk and blend ideas in an effort to arrive at meaningful solutions.

The topics selected for presentations and discussions covered many, but not all, of the major areas of concern regarding our schools. Preschool Programs, Curriculum K-12, Testing Students Competency, Teachers: Preparation, Performance and Evaluation and School Boards and School District Organization were the topics selected for concurrent sessions and those which generated the bulk of the recommendations contained in this report. Lengthening the concurrent sessions and running each of the sessions twice gave far greater opportunity for participation and input than at any previous conference. By most accounts, including the participants' evaluation sheets, the format and opportunities for participation made the 1988 conference the best ever. Additional presentations and papers were given covering the topics of school consolidation and funding, but since there were no concurrent sessions relating to those topics, few specific recommendations could be generated in these areas.

The recommendations contained in this report include consensus recommendations from the 1988 conference as finally adopted by the Academy's board of directors and certain recommendations which were included in the 1987 report which pertain to our public schools. Although the recommendations, if uniformly followed, would not deal with or solve all problems relating to education in our state, they do represent a comprehensive and coherent program of long term significance which could profoundly change and improve the education and ultimately the quality of life of most Oklahomans.

The outstanding results of the 1988 conference were once again due to the contributions of many people. We are particularly indebted to the principal presentors, panelists and speakers and those who chaired the concurrent sessions whose names are listed (page v). We are also indebted to the corporations, foundations and individuals which provided the funding for the conference and the Academy's general activities. We are also indebted to Julie Conatser, Executive Director, for her organizational skills and efforts in connection with the conference.

Although the members of the Academy and conference participants have no illusions that this comprehensive set of recommendations will be immediately or uniformly adopted or implemented, they believe strongly that each and every one of the ideas presented should be given serious consideration by the Governor, the Legislature, the State Board of Education, local school boards and all other Oklahomans interested in or affected by the public school system - which includes almost everyone.

What the members of the Oklahoma Academy believe more strongly and uniformly than anything else is that the subject of education, its reform, improvement and funding must be in the forefront of our collective consciousness and the leading subject of debate, discussion and action if Oklahoma hopes to move forward.

Please read the report carefully. Feel free to copy it and share it with others, and most importantly, do what you can with everyone you know and every group to which you belong to translate these recommendations into concrete action for the betterment of Oklahoma.

Frank McPherson
Conference Chairman

1988 CONSENSUS RECOMMENDATIONS

PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

Background:

Two major battles are being waged in the United States: one to determine whether the American dream that life will be better for this generation of children than it is for their parents can continue to be realized, the second to determine whether the U.S. can remain competitive in a global economy. There is a growing realization that both battles may be won or lost depending on early childhood experiences of our children before they reach age six.

Social and demographic changes require that we look at preschool programs differently today than in the past. Notable among these changes are the number of working mothers, the number of single parent families, and the number of children at risk. Top off these changes with staggering technological and economic changes and it becomes apparent that improvement in preschool programs is vital to our children's welfare and that of our nation. Participation in worthwhile preschool programs should not depend on parental affluence.

Current research reflects increasing national interest in preschool education with special attention being given to disadvantaged children. The results of carefully designed studies of preschool child development programs suggest a pattern of cause and effect that spans early childhood into adulthood. Research and experience confirm that the early years in a child's life are critical and slow development in early years may be irremediable. Very recent research indicates that early experiences may actually affect physical development of the brain itself.

Studies show that economically disadvantaged children are likely to perform less successfully on entering school than their middle-class peers because, in part, they have not developed the skills necessary for success in kindergarten and first grade. This lack often manifests itself in low scores on tests of intellectual and scholastic ability which can result in unnecessary placement in special education, low scholastic achievement, grade retention, feelings of low self-esteem and, later, dropping out of school.

A dominant trend in public preschool programs is that of growing state involvement. For more than

twenty years, the federal government provided the major funding for public preschool education through the Head Start program. But federal programs are only reaching a small percentage of preschoolers. Today, states are providing the impetus to expand existing programs and to create new programs for four year olds. Twenty-eight states are now funding or committed to fund state prekindergarten programs, to supplement Head Start programs and to provide parent education programs. Oklahoma has done very little in these areas.

Recommendations:

- Oklahoma's long-term goal should be to provide publicly supported preschool programs available to all children beginning no later than with four year olds. If this long-term goal cannot be achieved immediately, the minimum short-term objective should be to provide such programs for all "at-risk" children.

The Academy opposes state mandates for preschool or any other programs in any situation in which the mandate is not accompanied by adequate funding or funding sources. Likewise, the Academy is sensitive to fears that funding for preschool programs might take away funding from other critical areas of education, and therefore, emphasizes that funding for preschool programs should not be done in a way that detracts from other education needs.

- State standards should be established and implemented over a reasonable time period dealing with the quality of programs and qualifications and performance of personnel involved in child care and preschool programs both public and private. These standards should augment current standards which deal exclusively with health and safety issues. As standards are developed and implemented, programs and personnel should be put in place to monitor quality on a continuing basis. Failure to establish standards and monitor quality will undoubtedly perpetuate vast differences which exist between high quality programs and warehousing of children, the brunt of which will continue to be borne by those in lower socioeconomic groups.

- In light of the wide diversity of programs and funding sources, there is an urgent necessity for program coordination at the state and particularly the local level. The objectives of such coordination should be improved quality and consistency of programs, achieving more efficient use of funds, and better integration of existing programs with kindergarten and school experiences which follow.
- Adequate funding at the federal, state, and local levels must be provided to ensure that preschool programs are quality programs and that the quality is monitored and maintained. Since it is unlikely that there will be significant additional funding at the federal level, except in the case of Head Start and other programs for the "at-risk" children, the principal sources of public funding in the future will likely be required to come from state and local sources.
- The Academy should immediately establish or be the catalyst for the timely establishment of a task force to review the above recommendations, to recommend the best and most feasible ways to achieve significant improvement in preschool programs throughout the state as quickly as possible, and to recommend specific legislation to accomplish these goals. The task force should be broadly based and should include representation from day-care providers, public school teachers and administrators, government, the private sector, parents, and should represent all regions of the state.

CURRICULUM K-12

Background:

Curriculum improvement is fundamental to any efforts to reform and improve our schools. To state the obvious, children generally cannot be expected to learn about subjects or fields of knowledge that are not taught or covered in our schools. Much of the discussion currently taking place concerning ignorance of U.S. students in subjects such as geography, history, language, literature, and science tells us less about the quality of our students or teachers than it does about course requirements, course content, and course availability.

Separating curriculum and instruction is virtually impossible. Curriculum guides include suggestions for teaching which is instruction. Curriculum evaluation requires going into classrooms to observe what

is being taught! Consequently, the importance of curriculum becomes obvious. Curriculum is literally what happens in school.

Curriculum defines what students are supposed to learn, ie. what desired skills and knowledge should be attained. Curriculum should be developed to meet minimum goals, with care being exercised to avoid these minimum goals becoming ceilings.

Recommendations:

- A core curriculum should be developed on a statewide basis. The principal objective of a core curriculum should be the development of attainable standards and the establishment of learner outcomes which will provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to function adequately in the twenty-first century.

The Academy rejects the idea that core curriculum models should vary based on school size. It is recognized that multiple models may be desirable based on differing academic goals of students.

The idea of a national core curriculum should be rejected on numerous grounds including the following:

- It would take too long to develop
- Some diversity is desirable
- Acceptance of a federally imposed curriculum would be difficult to achieve
- Any core curriculum must have as minimal objectives the development of adequate, sufficient skills in reading, writing, computing, thinking critically, knowledge of Oklahoma and United States history and institutions, and familiarity with emerging technologies necessary to ensure that Oklahoma students are competitive with their counterparts in other states. The enumerated skills and knowledge are set forth as minimum illustrations only. The Academy conference was not deemed to be an adequate forum for the development of a specific curriculum.
- The Academy should immediately establish or be the catalyst for the timely establishment of a task force to develop new core curriculum models. This task force should also be broadly based and include representations from public schools, teachers, administrators, the State Department of Education, school board members, parents, the private sector, and should represent all regions of the state.

TESTING STUDENTS COMPETENCY

Background:

What education must be about is the development of students to become useful and productive citizens with the knowledge and skills necessary to function effectively in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Our society has an absolute obligation to see to it that every child achieves his or her full potential. Despite the variety of criticisms of competency testing, it is undeniable that there is no intuitive way to determine whether a child has developed the requisite knowledge and skills without some form of testing. The issue, therefore, is not whether students should be tested, but rather how we adequately prepare our children, fairly test them, and help them out, rather than condemn them if they do not meet established standards.

An outstanding program of competency testing, the results of which are effectively communicated to parents, will not only enable parents to determine their children's progress but will also be an effective catalyst to increased parental involvement in the schools.

In addition, there is steady and increasing pressure for some measurable standard to objectively analyze the educational investment (or lack of it) in Oklahoma. Oklahoma may be the only southern state which does not have criteria-based competency testing.

Recommendations:

- Statewide competency testing should be instituted to ensure that the curriculum is being mastered and that students have developed adequate skills and knowledge to prepare them for the next levels of education and, ultimately, for them to function effectively in society. The tests should be used for promotion, retention, and eventual award of the diploma, as well as to measure aggregate student progress.
- Oklahoma should develop its own competency testing system utilizing, to the extent feasible, the existing programs and tests developed in Oklahoma, as well as the experience of other states with well-developed programs. The testing system must, in order to be effective, include related diagnostic and remedial programs.

Competency tests should be taken periodically by all students, with particular attention given to elementary testing and related remedial programs.

- An Oklahoma program for competency testing, diagnosis, and remediation must come to grips with and solve the major perceived problems relating to such testing, including possible socioeconomic bias; testing as the outer limit of education; teaching to the tests; inhibitions on student creativity; possible increasing dropouts, and the fear that testing would be unfairly used as a sole standard or politicizing factor relating to the employment or status of teachers.
- The first of such tests should be developed and administered as soon as feasible, with September, 1991 as a target date. In order to put the emphasis on the positive aspects of such testing and to gain maximum acceptance, the tests for the first five years should be "no fault" tests and thus would not contain pass/fail features. The purpose of the first generation tests would be to:
 1. Identify students not able to attain minimum skills
 2. Reward those students who excel
 3. Reconfirm and check the test for problems, bias, or error
 4. Educate patrons on the progress of their children, school system, and its processes
 5. Upgrade curriculum and teaching systems
 6. Set reasonable levels of skill mastery and what skills are genuinely required

While in the initial stages there may be some significant division between socioeconomic levels, this must be clearly ascertained in order to expand programs to those critical "at-risk" students.

- Beginning in FY90, results of all current testing/rating systems should be made public, and the public should be educated to understand results. The state should fund this very necessary public information task.

Disclosure of test results to the public by the State Department should be done in a uniform manner which would educate the public on the

purposes and uses of the test. Disclosure should be made by the State Department of Education in the form of an easy-to-understand report distributed to children, parents, school districts, and the public at large.

- The competency testing and diagnostic program should be funded immediately by an additional state appropriation.
- The Academy should be the catalyst for the establishment of a task force to design a competency testing program and related diagnostic and remedial programs. The task force should be broadly based and should include representation from public schools, teachers, administrators, the State Department of Education, school board members, parents, the private sector, and should represent all regions of the state.

In the development of the competency testing and related programs, **the purpose and focus of the competency testing must be clearly identified.** Consideration should also be given to the impact of such programs on funding, including costs for materials, staff, and alternative, remedial programs.

- An academic diploma should be awarded by the State of Oklahoma on the basis of demonstrated academic accomplishment, not time served in class, and students should be eligible to earn one as early as age sixteen. A free public education should be available to any Oklahoman who wants a high school diploma, regardless of age.
- Oklahoma should initiate an improved, reliable, and useful statewide assessment program. The purpose of the assessment is to gain information on Oklahoma's educational progress, as well as to permit comparisons with other states. Such an assessment should be designed to facilitate comparisons and to draw inferences about success and failure, and should be used as a prod to achieve higher levels of performance.

Such an assessment should include school and district characteristics, such as per pupil expenditures, socioeconomic status, student teacher ratios and the like, as well as longitudinal or time series data to prevent "high scoring" schools and school districts from resting on their laurels. They should be held to progressively higher levels of accomplishment over time.

- Oklahoma should report its assessment findings to the public at large on an annual basis in the form of a "state of the schools" message. The report should be in straight-forward English, not education jargon. The report should contain information pertaining to every district (and every school within a district) by a set of statewide standards, including state test scores, nationally normed tests such as the MAT, as well as behavioral indicators such as absenteeism and truancy.

TEACHERS: PREPARATION, PERFORMANCE, AND EVALUATION

Background:

What is teaching, if it is not carrying students into the future--into the "new world of the mind"? Yet how can teachers do the job of teaching well when they continue to be trained to do "a job that was designed for a society in which most Americans could barely read, in which books besides the Bible were rare, and in which teachers were paid in pumpkins and firewood?"

Our teachers must be reflective of the students we want to produce! Do our children need to be knowledgeable, adaptable to change, with sound self-concepts, comfortable with technology, flexible, life-long learners, reflective, visionary, independent, in control of their destinies, confident, motivated, able to work cooperatively and collaboratively, problem-solvers? Then the significant others in their lives must possess and model those capabilities and capacities. Who beyond family is more significant as a role model to a youngster than a teacher? If teachers are to foster the kind of characteristics we want for future generations, they will need diverse and high level skills. It follows that preparation, performance, and evaluation enhance the progressional growth of teachers and foster the desired characteristics.

Standards and methods regarding preparation, performance, and evaluation cannot simply be imposed upon teachers. They must have the right to participate in shaping these and other programs which so vitally affect them and the students they teach. Society cannot expect high professional standards without correspondingly higher pay for teachers and opportunities for monetary and professional recognition.

Recommendations:

- A system of fair teacher evaluation and performance standards, as well as teacher training standards, is essential to quality education and, therefore, should be established and maintained throughout Oklahoma's educational system.
- The concept of "participative management" is as valid for schools as it is for the private sector. Teachers should be encouraged to help in developing performance and evaluation standards, as well as teacher training standards. The establishment of peer review programs for performance evaluation should be strongly encouraged.
- Programs should be developed to provide additional financial recognition for teachers to enable them to advance without having to leave the classroom or the profession. "Master teacher" or "career ladder" programs similar to those adopted in other states should be implemented in Oklahoma.
- Admission standards for teachers and administrators should be strengthened with respect to college entrance and to state certification. It should be recognized that any program calling for higher standards must necessarily involve higher pay.
- Stronger programs should be established by the state's colleges to teach and prepare administrators for our K-12 educational system. Such programs should have less emphasis on theory and more on practical applications, particularly in the area of personnel and business management. Requiring practical experience in administration by those teaching it is perhaps the easiest and best way to achieve this objective.
- Oklahoma should support and encourage continuation and growth of projects such as the Oklahoma L.E.A.D. Project. Leadership in Educational Administration Development has as its mission to develop and implement leadership skills training to improve the effectiveness of practicing school administrators in Oklahoma with preference given to beginning principals, women, and minority group members. It is funded from the U.S. Department of Education, with a similar amount of state matching funds and/or services.
- Oklahoma should establish as a goal an increase in teacher salaries to the upper one-

third of the region. As pay is increased, we should seek to increase performance and evaluation standards.

- The education and business communities should work together to increase public awareness of the need for a better educational system. These communities should also work together to foster and encourage a greater appreciation and knowledge of the work of educators as professionals.
- Any program relating to teacher preparation, performance, and evaluation must necessarily involve the establishment of overall goals and objectives for Oklahoma's educational system.
- The Academy should immediately establish or be the catalyst for the timely establishment of a task force to explore evaluation and performance standards at all levels. This task force should be broadly based and should include representation from teachers and administrators, teacher educators, the private sector, parents, school board members, the State Department of Education, and should represent all regions of the state.

One of the functions of the task force should be to consider ways to attract and keep outstanding teachers, and specifically to study the issue of tenure.

FUNDING

Background:

It is clear that money alone will not solve all of Oklahoma's educational problems. Any comprehensive program for improvement must include significant reforms. Members of the Academy strongly believe that true quality education can only be achieved with a combination of significant funding and true educational reform. Even though certain reforms can result in certain efficiencies and cost savings, such potential savings are not likely to produce sufficient funds to enable Oklahoma's schools to be nationally competitive or to produce the quality desired.

Recommendations:

- Oklahoma should, as a first step, establish as a goal an increase in expenditures for education to the top one-third of the region.

- Oklahoma should adequately fund mandated programs, and not issue new mandates unless adequate funding will be provided to implement the mandates.
- Oklahomans should push for adequate ad valorem tax reform to encourage equality between districts and allow for more local input, which will allow control at the lowest possible level. Ad valorem tax reform is absolutely critical to the question of providing the opportunity for adequate funding for common schools. Equity and fairness must be at the heart of all such reform. More specifically, uniform approaches to evaluations and uniform assessment ratios statewide will be necessary for the system to work.
- Although common school funding is to a large degree a state responsibility, the Academy's position is that local jurisdictions must increase their share of the burden of support for common schools. Key to this recommendation is the fact that state tax burdens are not low when compared to other states, but local taxes are low in such comparisons. Effective constitutional millage caps should be adjusted to allow local districts to provide greater support for education.

The Academy believes that in the long run Oklahoma must find tax sources other than, or at least in addition to, property taxes to support common schools. The Oklahoma legislature and the Academy might find it useful to undertake a joint long-range study to identify such sources, including the possibility of establishing trust funds for educational purposes.

SCHOOL BOARDS AND SCHOOL DISTRICT ORGANIZATION: ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE

Background:

School board members have a great impact on achieving excellence, starting with their responsibility for hiring the school superintendent, and being responsible for what is often the largest business in town.

While many issues relating to the education and welfare of children can be dealt with by "good parents" or "good citizens" who have little formal training, it must be recognized that in this era an effective school board member will most likely be re-

quired to deal with a wide variety of complex issues relating to financial, legal and personnel matters, education theory and philosophy, and social questions, among others. Although they cannot be expected to be experts in all these areas, it is clear that they should have some minimal level of intelligence, education, and training in order to carry out their responsibilities.

Recommendations:

- The State Department of Education, in conjunction with the Oklahoma State School Boards Association, should establish a "school board academy" to better inform and train school board members concerning their responsibilities and the most effective ways to carry them out. The level of information and training should exceed that which is presently available to school board members.
- School boards and districts should support and push passage of the state question that will be voted on next year setting the ending date for the legislative session. Passage of this state question would eliminate the school district's problem of developing the annual business plan prior to knowing what budget they have with which to operate.
- Recognizing that the practical application of any improvements in K-12 education in Oklahoma rests with over 3,000 elected members of the over 600 local schools boards, the Academy recommends that educational criteria be included in the eligibility requirements of all candidates for election to local school boards. At the very minimum, candidates for election to local school boards should provide to the county election board evidence of having received a high school diploma or its equivalent (GED) prior to filing for office.
- School boards should do their part in elevating community expectations and commitment to the K-12 education program through effective public information campaigns.
- Pilot programs should be implemented whereby parents can choose which schools their children can attend. No longer is there "one best system" to educate Oklahoma youngsters. Teachers, students, and families have different interests, capabilities, and strengths. They should be able to capitalize on those differences, so long as the core curriculum is maintained.

Magnet schools, open enrollment options, alternative schools, and choice among existing schools are all devices cited by the National Governors' Association (NGA) and Committee for Economic Development (CED) as ways to increase "consumer sovereignty" in education. These and other approaches, including the one recently adopted in Minnesota, should be considered as possibilities in the establishment of such pilot programs.

- Oklahoma should provide state incentives for experimental programs for non-traditional organizations which fit the community needs.
- Schools and school districts in the top twenty percent of academic achievement in Oklahoma should be "deregulated" and permitted to escape prescriptive state laws and regulations to organize, manage, and operate themselves as they think best.
- On a selective basis, other schools that show special promise or evidence that they would benefit from "deregulations" could be deregulated by state board action for a specified time period.
- Such districts should still be subject to core curriculum, health and safety requirements, and statewide testing.
- Local schools and districts should be free to design courses and instruction, as long as the schools and districts meet the core curriculum requirements. Local schools should have the financial resources and flexibility to tailor additional offerings to satisfy the interests and needs of their communities.
- A long-term objective should be to set all schools in Oklahoma on a path of managerial and instructional decentralization. Autonomy should be conferred on the school building and its staff; the existing "top down" management strategy of central district command and control should be discontinued. Central offices should become "service centers", while individual schools should have the freedom and responsibility to meet state objectives according to their best lights.
- Districts with histories of low academic performance, many of which have high disadvantaged

pupil concentrations, should be provided with planning and implementation grants to permit them to develop more effective programs and forestall the prospect of academic bankruptcy. If such districts fail to improve their programs after warnings and assistances, then the state should be authorized to take steps to assume whatever degree of control is necessary over the district in order to bring academic performance up to minimum standards.

Implement programs to deal with school for drop-outs by providing alternative schools for drop-outs and potential drop-outs and including programs for special situations.

- The Academy should immediately establish or be the catalyst for the timely establishment of a task force to consider ways for school districts to attract and keep outstanding superintendents. The task force should be broadly based and should include the State Department of Education, school board members, parents, the private sector, and should represent all regions of the state.

Another function of this task force should be to study the issue of school district consolidation.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the recommendations contained in the preceding pages of this report, the Academy has reaffirmed a number of recommendations which were originally contained in its 1987 final key recommendations. In instances where the 1987 recommendations fit with the 1988 topics, they have been included in other sections of this report. Additional 1987 recommendations are as follows:

- The post of the Superintendent of Public Instruction should be filled by gubernatorial appointment, subject to Senate confirmation.
- Oklahoma should resolve to become a national leader in the application of educational technology in public education, including educational television, computer assisted teaching/learning, interactive video disks, and interactive CD-ROM (Compact Disk-Read Only Memory.)