

**THE OKLAHOMA ACADEMY
RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Getting Ready for Work
Education Systems & Future Workforce
2009 Town Hall – October 25-28 in Norman**

PREAMBLE

The Oklahoma Academy 2009 Town Hall focused on the state's educational systems and the education/training needs of the future workforce. Entitled "Getting Ready for Work: Oklahoma's Education Systems and the Future Workforce," the Town Hall conference was held in Norman at the Embassy Suites Hotel & Conference Center Sunday evening October 25 and concluded Wednesday noon October 28, 2009.

The topic focused on all four areas of education and training, and how these areas can best prepare students for life and work in an ever-changing global marketplace.

Oklahoma suffers from individual poverty and a general lack of financial resources, both of which do not add to the state's ability to easily resolve some of the problems faced with the overall health or education of the populace. With that in mind, the Town Hall participants were asked to make "no excuses." In other words, we would not refuse to tackle a problem because it was perceived to result from Oklahoma's high level of individual poverty or from institutional underfunding.

Instead, they were asked to look at ways to enhance/change/transform the education systems to improve the education and skills training outcomes and possibilities for our students of all ages. They were encouraged to be creative, "think outside the box," suggest programs that could be eliminated or legislative mandates that could be eliminated and replaced by better ones.

Finally, the Town Hall recognized Oklahoma's reputation as one of the most progressive and innovative states for Early Childhood Education and childcare programs. For that reason, the following recommendations will not include a related urgent call to action, as the state is already way ahead of almost every other. However, there will be a call to continue this leadership. The complete Town Hall Findings report is replete with suggestions of how to continue and enhance current programs and innovations.

A PRIMARY RECOMMENDATION A STRATEGIC EDUCATIONAL RESET FOR OKLAHOMA

The Oklahoma Academy for State Goals was the original sponsor of Task Force 2000 which led to the adoption of House Bill 1017. That recommendation was made almost 20 years ago. The Town Hall feels strongly that a similar level of examination and action is once again necessary.

The Oklahoma Academy for State Goals recommends that the next Governor of the State of Oklahoma create Task Force 2020. This Task Force will be directed to focus upon outcome-oriented assessments, a results-oriented curriculum and accountability in all four areas of education. These areas include: Early Childhood Education, K through 12 Education, Career and Technology Education, and Higher Education. This Task Force must have appropriate representation all areas of education as well as the private sector, and all geographic areas of the state.

PRE-ELECTION 2010

In preparation for that action, the Academy will sponsor a gubernatorial and state superintendent forum in this election cycle on the subject of a coordinated strategic plan for education. The Forum will be restricted to the Academy Town Hall findings and offer all candidates an opportunity to explain their intent upon election.

POST-ELECTION 2010

The Academy will sponsor a summit for the state superintendent, chancellor of higher education, director of CareerTech and certain invited stakeholders (students, industry, and educators). It is recommended to be a two day event with an outside, prominent moderator to facilitate the discussion.

In support of the creation of Task Force 2020, the Academy recommends that the following elements be included in both structure and agenda:

- Create an Oklahoma teacher (Early Childhood Education through 12th grade) compensation task force to review and recommend the structure funding for fields of study, incentives and amounts of compensation.
- State Regents for Higher Education and the Oklahoma State Department of Education should convene college and university presidents and vice presidents of academic affairs to address the question of existing adequacy of the teacher education and preparation programs and curricula in these programs to meet Oklahoma's social, economic and Pre K through 12 teaching/learning needs.

A PRIMARY RECOMMENDATION DROPOUT PREVENTION FOR OKLAHOMA

Career Technology drop-out/credit recovery programs should be increased in Technology Centers across the state.

The Oklahoma Academy recognizes that educational “drop outs” are a perpetual problem both in Oklahoma and the nation. The Academy recommends a series of coordinated actions to minimize the problem.

Capacity should be addressed in the high dropout areas in the metropolitan areas and new programs implemented in current un-served areas in collaboration with the middle schools and high schools. Policy actions should focus upon working together with education, business and industry, other state agencies and private groups to ensure student success with accountability. These classes could be housed at the Technology Centers or the high schools.

An integrated student identification process is necessary.

Fully develop and implement a shared student identification system to track students through the educational process (Early Childhood Education through 20) to work. This will impact the ability to serve dropouts at all levels. The identification system will properly facilitate interventions to address dropouts and provide data to all levels of education, business and industry.

A PRIMARY RECOMMENDATION NEW EDUCATION MODELS FOR OKLAHOMA

Oklahoma must move away from our current model of education that focuses on “seat time” rather than knowledge and skills success. We must implement a competency-based education model focused on the integration of curriculum and allowing students to advance based on individual needs and successes. To this end, the series of supporting recommendations are offered:

- Oklahoma’s educational systems and the Legislature should provide funding streams dedicated to technology infrastructure, maintenance, personnel and training.
- Consideration should be given to creating an “Early Childhood Education – 20” council comprised of multiple education- interest stakeholders to address ways of enhancing the overall educational offerings.

- Charter schools should be made available to all areas of the state, not just Tulsa and Oklahoma counties. At the minimum, the voters of each county should be offered the option to approve charter schools for that county.
- The effective practices developed and used by charter schools need to benefit all of public education. Because state funds support charter schools, a study should be conducted on the practices and impacts of charter schools (currently 17) in Oklahoma.

SECONDARY THOUGHTS AND CONSIDERATION ADDITIONAL SUPPORTING RECOMMENDATIONS

The unprioritized considerations below were mentioned at the Town Hall and should be incorporated, as is feasible, into the principal recommendations listed above.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

1. The Oklahoma Academy for State Goals should work closely with the legislators to ensure that there is adequate and appropriate access to high-quality early childhood education for all children in Oklahoma. In addition the Academy should work closely with the ACE Interim Study and legislators to ensure that: (a) There are rigorous measures in place to verify EOI competencies; (b) Oklahoma explores a variety of multiple and alternative assessment options including timing and duplication issues; (c) Oklahoma ensures that students maintain maximum time in the classroom and that qualified school counselors are able to maintain a focus of academic and career guidance with students rather than handling non-counselor/guidance paperwork; and (d) Remediation in ACE and adequate funding for staff is critical.

COMMON EDUCATION

1. Track and remedy gaps in specific core or foundational concepts as defined by Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS), for students in K-4 where students receive below average scores. The identification must be made at the time of the in-class assessment and a remediation plan created to leverage existing before/after, mentoring or on-line programs.
2. Oklahoma must develop a reliable and valid student assessment system that measures student growth to be used as a component in the development of a performance-based compensation plan for teachers.
3. Prizes (scholarships and/or cash) should be offered to winners of competitive non-athletic teams (debate, speech, science, mathematics, robotics, etc.) to encourage team building, communications, interpersonal and entrepreneurial skills.
4. The Oklahoma State Department of Education should implement pilot projects that incentivize school districts to employ or subsidize teachers on a 12-month contract. Additional contract days would be used for professional development, summer school for students, collaborative planning and continuous school improvement.

5. Oklahoma should pursue federally funded grants and programs to expand and ensure hard skills and academic benchmarks for students, as well as encouraging current community involvement and community school concepts such as AmeriCorps programs for tutoring parental support.

6. Assure student access to necessary educational resources like textbooks, computers, STEM equipment and materials.

HIGHER EDUCATION

1. Amend Oklahoma's 529 savings plan to: (1) lower or eliminate the initial contribution amount to allow more people into the system (10 states require \$0); (2) make sure the 529 does not count against financial aid calculation; (3) consider a refundable tax credit instead of a tax deduction; and (4) give option on the tax form for part of the refund to go directly into a 529.
2. Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education should authorize colleges and universities to provide relevant professional development opportunities for Oklahoma teachers through public colleges and universities on a space available basis and at no cost for tuition and fees.

PRIVATE SECTOR/CAREER AND TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION

1. Create state contracting language that encourages bidding companies to actively engage students in the classroom and offer internships, field trips, etc.
2. All OHLAP students that receive a degree (2 or 4 year) or industry certification shall qualify for an annual \$1,000 tax credit for each year required for that degree or certification. (i.e. 2 years maximum for a 2-year degree, etc.)
3. The Oklahoma Legislature should create tax incentives that incentivize high tech industries to hire STEM teachers with a degree in the discipline into summer R&D position that make the teacher's 12-month total compensation competitive with private sector positions.
4. In addition to focusing on traditional high school students moving towards higher education and career development, the Governor's Council on Workforce and Economic Development should encourage non-traditional students and lifelong learners to advance their education in pursuit of a degree, license or certification.

2009 Town Hall

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