

**Educational Reform in Oklahoma
A Review of Major Legislation and Educational Performance since
1980**

Executive Summary

Study conducted for the Oklahoma Policy Institute

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The full report is available at <http://okpolicy.org/educational-reform-in-Oklahoma-since-1980>

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Executive Summary

The drive to improve education that began with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 has continued for three decades. Education in Oklahoma schools in 2013 is far different than it was thirty years ago. Broad changes have been instituted in curriculum, assessment, teacher credentialing, school administration, and funding. The degree of local control of schools has changed dramatically as the Oklahoma Legislature instituted state standards for what is taught, by whom, and the ways in which effectiveness is measured.

This report, commissioned by the Oklahoma Policy Institute, describes Oklahoma's educational reform efforts since 1980 and the impact of those reforms. The key event in generating significant reform was House Bill 1017, passed in 1990. Most references to this law in the popular press and government reports refer to it as "Oklahoma's landmark education reform legislation." However, other reform legislation did predate HB1017; these included House Bill 1706 in 1980 which addressed teacher education, certification and professional development and House Bill 1816 in 1982 which was a "back-to-basics" bill that also increased high school graduation requirements.

Table 1 (in the report proper) summarizes the major reform initiatives from 1980 to the present. The table groups the reforms chronologically according to the major reform initiatives. The purpose of grouping the reforms in this manner is to facilitate an understanding of the overall reform timeline. Although most of these time periods are five years long, they are not equal; each one covers a logical grouping of reforms. Thus, the first era covers the period from 1980 until the creation of the Oklahoma State Testing Program (OSTP), as the initiation of a state testing program was a major statewide reform. The next period covers 1985 until 1990, when HB 1017 was passed. Because HB 1017 contained such a large number of reforms, it defines its own era. The 1990s are divided into two eras, and the 2000s were divided into the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Achieving Classroom Excellence (ACE) eras.

Table 2 (attached) summarizes the reforms in just one area – student assessment. A review of the table reveals frequent changes in the types of tests, grade levels tested, and subjects tested. Every time a test changed in type or the performance standards were reset, subsequent scores were no longer comparable to previous scores. This makes the evaluation of the effects of state reforms problematic.

Table 2. Timeline, Oklahoma State Testing Program. Norm-referenced assessments are designated by blue font; criterion-referenced (and standards-referenced) tests designated by red font.

Year	Grade Level									
	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1985	MAT6				MAT6			MAT6		
1987					MAT6 Writing			MAT6 Writing		
1989	Oklahoma Educational Indicators Program Initiated. 12 th -grade graduation test authorized.*									
1989	ITBS		ITBS		ITBS		ITBS		ITBS	
1989	Writing test (grades 7 and 10) changed to Stanford Writing Assessment									
1995	ITBS		OCCT		ITBS	OCCT			OCCT	
	OCCTs were phased in. Reading, Math and Science were tested in 1995. Writing was added in 1996 (replacing the Stanford), US History was added in 1997, and Geography and the Arts were added in 1998. Oklahoma History was added to the 11 th -grade test in 1998.									
1999	Oklahoma Performance Index created.									
2000	ITBS	NRT*	OCCT			OCCT	English II and US History EOIs replace 11 th -grade test.			
2001	Performance standards reset on the 5 th and 8 th grade OCCTs.**						Algebra I and Biology EOIs added.			
2002	API baseline year (state average API set to equal 1000).									
2003-2005	OCCT	OCCT	OCCT	OCCT	OCCT	OCCT				
	All NRTs discontinued and new OCCTs phased in for all grades 3-8. New math and reading tests created for Grade 4; Geography test for Grade 7. Arts tests discontinued. OCCTs will measure reading and math at all grades; science, writing, and US history in grades 5&8; geography at grade 7.									
2006	Grade 6 and 7 math and reading tests added. Standards reset for 5 th and 8 th grade Writing tests. **									
2007	New EOIs phased in: Algebra II, English III, Geometry. Standard reset for Algebra I.**									
2009	Standards reset for grade 3-8 reading and math tests.**						Standards reset on English II, Biology, and US History. **			
2010							Alternate assessments added.			
2012	Pearson replaced by CTB/McGraw Hill as the vendor for state assessments.									
2014	PARCC assessments will replace the OSTP Reading/Language Arts and Math tests.									

The degree to which reforms are funded limits the quality of reform implementation. Poorly-funded reforms are often poorly-implemented reforms. The report includes a summary of the changes in education funding over the past thirty years. Figure 4 shows the amount of state funding per year. Because of funding shortfalls, this is not always the same as the amount *allocated* by the Legislature for the support of common education; it is the amount allocated minus any funding shortfalls. One major purpose of the state formula is to increase the equitable funding of schools across the state.

Reviewing the proportions of funding that come from state, local, and federal sources, over time, is one method of looking at funding equity. The greater the proportion of funding that is local, the more likely it is that we are experiencing funding inequities. Figure 5 displays these proportions; it shows a steadily declining proportion of funds coming from state government.

Figure 4. State Funding for Common Education (in millions)

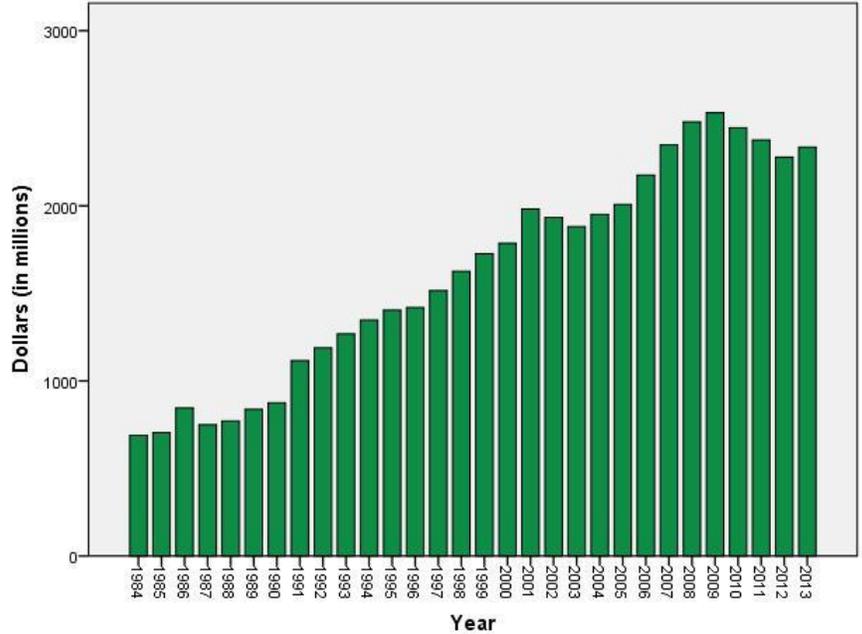
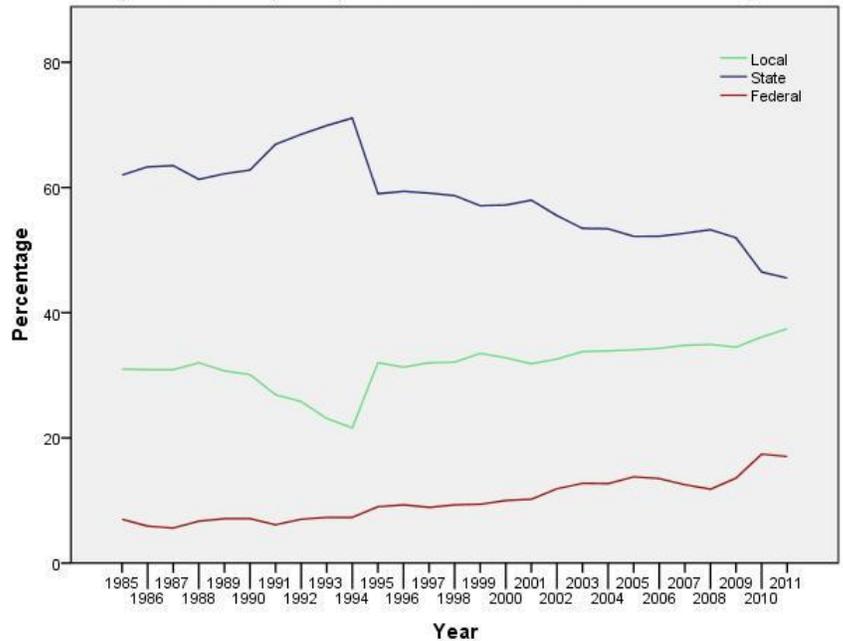
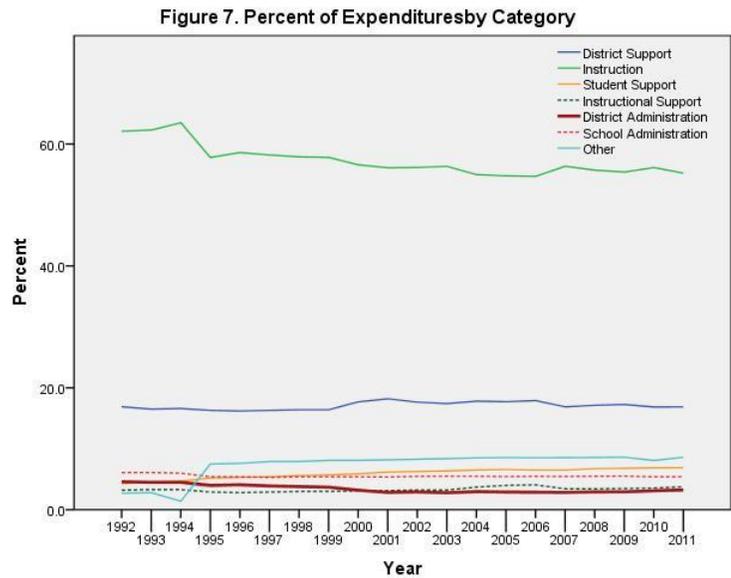
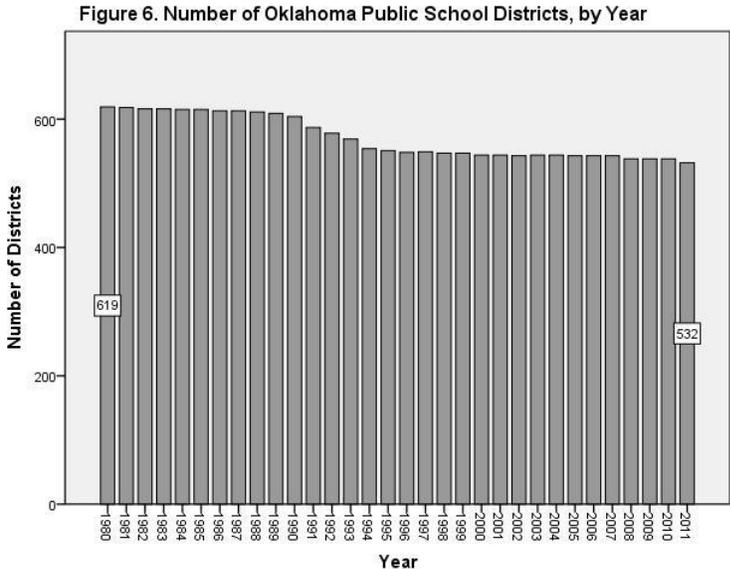


Figure 5. Federal, State, and Local Share of Education Funding



Figures 6 and 7 display information about the effects of the many reform efforts designed to consolidate schools and reduce administrative costs. Although a significant number of school districts consolidated after the passage of HB 1017, there have been few consolidations since. The percent of school dollars dedicated to administrative costs has been relatively steady since 2001



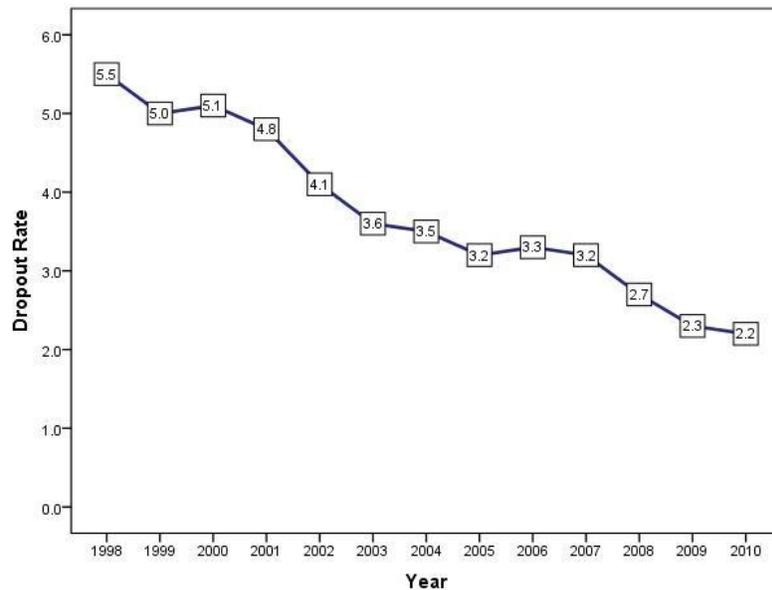
Many of the reforms were designed to improve the teaching profession. A key strategy employed throughout the last three decades was increasing teacher salaries in order to retain good teachers and attract high-quality candidates to the profession. Oklahoma’s efforts to raise teacher salaries to the regional average have been stymied as surrounding states instituted salary increases of their own. Oklahoma has made the greatest efforts in its history to raise teacher salaries without moving its rank out of the bottom 10 states.

The required curriculum for high school students has changed a number of times over the past thirty years. Initially, changes were aimed at simply increasing the number of overall credits

students needed to graduate; later, changes focused on increasing the number of courses students took in specific subject areas. The overall number of courses offered increased slightly from 1996 to 1998, then held relatively constant until 2006 and 2007, when larger increases were noted. The increases from 2005-2008 varied, and nearly all of the gains were lost by 2010. The number of students who have opted out of the ACE curriculum has shown little variability, ranging from 11.8% since it was instituted in 2006-07 to 10.4% in 2009-10.

Figure 21 depicts Oklahoma’s annual dropout rate from 1998-2010. This is the event dropout rate; the percent of students who are reported as dropouts each year. Since this is a one-year estimate, it is much smaller than the 20+% who do not graduate with their classes. Oklahoma’s dropout rate decreased markedly after the Statewide Alternative Education Program was phased in (late 1990s); in fact, the rate has been reduced by more than half. During that time, the only major statewide effort to reduce the dropout rate has been the alternative education program.

Fig. 21. Annual (Event) Dropout Rates in Oklahoma, 1998-2010



The National

Assessment of Educational

Progress (NAEP) is a national assessment, but it is not a single test. It is a method of collecting in-depth assessment data, using sampling methodologies to efficiently determine the progress of the nation and states in core content areas. It is unfortunate that we do not have NAEP data prior to 1992, as that would help us assess the impact of HB 1017 reforms, but the years directly after the 1017 reforms were Oklahoma’s best. Since that time, Oklahoma scores have been either below or not significantly different from the national average. The differences between Oklahoma’s scores and the national scores are not large, and Oklahoma students have increased at approximately the same rate as those of students across the nation. Table 8 (next page) tracks Oklahoma’s NAEP scores over the past two decades. This decade we see:

- § 4th-grade reading: Since 2002, the Oklahoma average improved 2 points while the national average improved 3.
- § 8th-grade reading: Since 2002, the Oklahoma average has declined 1 point while the national average has increased 1.
- § 4th-grade math: Since 2003, the Oklahoma average has increased 8 points, the national average only 6 points.
- § 8th-grade math: Since 2000, the Oklahoma average has increased 7 points, the national average 9 points.

In this decade, Oklahoma’s rate of change has been very close to the national rate of change. The NAEP data can be viewed two ways: (1) Oklahoma is behind, and we are not moving to catch up; or (2) Oklahoma’s education funding is among the lowest in the nation, yet we are holding our own.

<i>Reading</i>					<i>Math</i>				
<i>Grade</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>OK Avg</i>	<i>U.S. Avg.</i>	<i>Sig*</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>OK Avg</i>	<i>U.S. Avg.</i>	<i>Sig*</i>
4	1992	220	215	Y	4	1992	220	219	N
4	1998	220	215	Y	4	2000	225	226	N
4	2002	213	217	Y					
4	2003	214	216	Y	4	2003	229	234	Y
4	2005	214	217	Y	4	2005	234	237	Y
4	2007	217	220	Y	4	2007	237	239	Y
4	2009	217	220	Y	4	2009	237	239	Y
4	2011	215	220	Y	4	2011	237	240	Y
					8	1990	263	262	N
8	1998	265	261	Y	8	1992	268	267	N
8	2002	262	263	N	8	2000	272	274	N
8	2003	262	261	N	8	2003	272	276	Y
8	2005	260	260	N	8	2005	271	278	Y
8	2007	260	261	N	8	2007	275	280	Y
8	2009	259	262	Y	8	2009	276	282	Y
8	2011	260	264	Y	8	2011	279	283	Y

*Designates whether Oklahoma’s scores were significantly different (statistically) from the US average.

Over the past 30 years, Oklahoma has instituted hundreds of reforms; it took 15 pages to briefly describe them. Reforms touched every area of education – finance, administration, the qualifications of teachers and administrators, curriculum, early childhood, alternative learning environments, assessments, class sizes, parent involvement, and counseling. Some of the reforms have been major, involving the restructuring of state agencies or votes of the people on funding issues; some have been small, initiating pilot programs or forming task forces to study problems. Some have been lasting; others have been abandoned the year after they were initiated. Reform efforts often addressed the same topics as prior reform efforts; recurring themes include school consolidation, early-grade reading, teacher quality, academic rigor, and utilizing assessment data for school improvement. All of these reform efforts were initiated with the hope of improving education for Oklahoma’s young people.

There have been so many reforms that it is impossible to state with certainty which ones have worked and which have not, and with the great number of changes from year to year, attribution of results was a real problem. It is easier to assess the impact of programs for programs with evaluation reports (Oklahoma’s Promise, Oklahoma Parents As Teachers, alternative education, early childhood education). The first three of these programs have ample evidence of positive impact, as reviewing their effectiveness was built into the design of the programs. Although evaluation studies were not built into the early childhood education program, studies have shown that it has a positive effect on the school readiness of young children.

For comprehensive programs such as implementing a state curriculum, the effects are so diffuse that they are difficult to sort out. To our knowledge, no studies have been conducted to determine the short-term or long-term effects of the changes in Oklahoma's high school curriculum or for most of the reforms instituted over the past three decades. No specific cause and effect studies have been conducted. To determine the effectiveness of these broad reform efforts, we reviewed Oklahoma's overall standing and its progress over time in comparison with its own past and the progress of the rest of the nation.

The problem with this approach is that it assumes that all reforms are productive, that each one adds value. It may well be, however, that positive effects of one group of reforms are masked by counterproductive effects of a separate set of reforms. There is simply no way to know. The statewide student information system will, no doubt, make it easier to evaluate the effectiveness of specific reforms in the future. Having the data that makes it easy to conduct statistical analyses is one thing; actually conducting those analyses is another. If we are to competently judge the effectiveness of reforms, conducting evaluation studies should be built into the system.

So, where are we now? Oklahoma ranks near the bottom in per-student education funding, yet our rankings in other areas are consistently higher. Rankings on policy inputs tend to be high (1st in public pre-K programs, 13th in teacher quality, 9th in the quality of curriculum standards). Despite our lower per-student funding and higher proportions of low-income students, Oklahoma tends to rank in the middle of the pack on student outcome measures (22nd in dropout rate, 26th in graduation rate, and slightly below the national means on the ACT and NAEP assessments). In 2008, Education Week ranked the states on 150 indicators of education reform and achievement; Oklahoma was in the middle of the pack with a grade of "C."

One could conclude that Oklahoma "gets a lot of bang for its buck" or that Oklahoma has a very long way to go if its children are to be among the best-educated in the country. Both conclusions are valid. The question is, where do we go from here? We can continue adding reform after reform, but a lesson from our own history may be instructive. In 1989-90, a broad-based coalition of state leaders took the time to create a long-term plan for improving Oklahoma's schools; those plans eventually made their way into House Bill 1017. Twenty years later, it may be time to step back and create a long-term, comprehensive plan for education in Oklahoma.

(Note: The full report is available at <http://okpolicy.org/educational-reform-in-Oklahoma-since-1980>)