

OBEC: Henry's signature of education bill to bring accountability to state's system

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OKLAHOMA CITY – A compromise bill that Gov. Brad Henry signed today will introduce accountability in Oklahoma's common education system and allow educators to track student performance during a longitudinal period. Senate Bill 222, which creates the Educational Accountability Reform Act, passed the Senate, 46-0, and the House, 72-28.

"This is a landmark day for children and education in Oklahoma," said Stan Lybarger, CEO of Bank of Oklahoma and chairman of the Oklahoma Business and Education Coalition (OBEC). "Governor Henry and legislators should be congratulated for putting their partisan differences aside for Oklahoma children and their parents.

"The bill creates a powerful system to track student progress so educators can make changes early before it is too late. It launches accountability into the testing system and gives parents and educators a clear picture of where students truly stand."

SB 222 creates and establishes:

- The P-20 Data Coordinating Council
- The Quality Assessment and Accountability Task Force
- The Educational Quality and Accountability Board

The private-public oversight groups will be responsible to review and recommend changes to improve the state's testing system; to review and improve classroom teaching and learning; look for taxpayer savings in the testing system; review the selection and approval process for testing contracts; review and improve all tests administered by the State Department of Education; and review the process for establishing cut scores.

"This legislation is the first step in being transparent with and accountable to Oklahoma children and their parents," Lybarger said. "We must identify where our students need help early in life so they can compete with peers across the country and globally in college and in the workforce. This bill will produce economic benefits for decades to come."

The original Educational Accountability Reform Act, known as SB 1111 and authored by Sen. Clark Jolley, passed the Senate, 26-20, and the House, 58-39, before Henry vetoed it in April. After his veto, Henry and his staff promised to work with Jolley and supporters of the bill to create compromise legislation that would address Henry's concerns while still improving the testing system.

SB 1111 was written after a new study, "Organizing Effective Educational Accountability: The Case of Oklahoma," showed Oklahoma children scoring drastically lower on national tests compared to state tests. It called the gap large compared to other states. The study was commissioned by OBEC.

SB 222 is supported by a large group of educators and business leaders, including The State Chamber of Oklahoma and the Tulsa and Oklahoma City chambers of commerce.

About OBEC: OBEC is a nonprofit organization dedicated to building and implementing a plan to improve public education in Oklahoma. OBEC's concept is straightforward – to join business and education leaders in a partnership to improve K-12 public education. For more information, visit www.obecinfo.com.