

SB 834

While local control is an important component of a successful public education system, it is also critical to have rigorous state standards in place to produce the highest quality graduates and ensure achievement and accountability throughout the system. Recognizing the importance of such uniform standards, public and private sector leaders have advocated and implemented numerous reforms in recent years to raise the academic bar for all students and schools.

Senate Bill 834 would essentially turn back the clock on much of that important progress and weaken landmark reforms by allowing school administrators to create their own rules and ignore more rigorous state standards, including, but not limited to, the smaller class size mandates championed by former Gov. Henry Bellmon and Oklahoma voters in the historic passage of House Bill 1017 in 1990. SB 834 would also endanger such worthy programs as full-day kindergarten and alternative education in addition to making optional such critical personnel as school librarians and counselors.

Furthermore, SB 834 does a deliberate disservice to the backbone of the public education system, the public school teacher, by weakening or eliminating educators' rights and benefits, including due process rights guaranteed under the constitution. These provisions would also undermine ongoing efforts to attract and retain the best and brightest teachers in Oklahoma, something that is critically important, particularly for a state that is routinely recognized for having some of the best educators in the nation.

At a time when we are working to send the signal that Oklahoma is serious about improving its education system and producing high-quality graduates who can compete in the 21st Century global economy, it would be a disastrous step backward to approve legislation that weakens state standards, abolishes historic reforms and reduces rights and benefits provided to teachers.