



# Building a Stronger Future Workforce for Oklahoma

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Oklahoma's future workforce is in school today. Regarding education policy, the business community can work to ensure Oklahoma's K-12 and post-secondary education systems prepare students for the workforce and hold the state's educational institutions accountable to that goal. Several education policy recommendations will better align Oklahoma's K-12 and post-secondary education systems to the workforce needs of the economy and business community.

## K-12 Education System Accountability

Most education policy is created by the state, but in order to receive Title I federal funding, states must follow [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#). Oklahoma receives [\\$200 million per year in Title I Funding](#) to be used to ensure all children receive a fair, equitable, high-quality education, and close educational gaps.

One of the central focuses of ESSA is a state accountability system. Under ESSA, states must identify schools that are in need of comprehensive support and improvement and need targeted support and improvement. Schools needing comprehensive support and improvement are schools in the bottom 5%, that are not graduating one-third of students. Schools needing targeted support or improvement are consistently underperforming for a subgroup of students. But schools may use a different rating system, so long as these schools are identified; for example, Oklahoma uses an [A-F rating system](#).

The indicators used to determine the school's rating are delineated within ESSA. They are academic achievement, graduation rate, growth, English language proficiency, and a school quality or student success indicator (SQSSI). SQSSIs can include chronic absenteeism, post-secondary opportunities, career/college readiness or other more nuanced metric.

There are [36 states](#) using chronic absenteeism as a metric for elementary, middle and high school, Oklahoma being among them. Though chronic absenteeism has been tied to poor student outcomes, it is not, in itself, a measurement of student success. That is, it is an input, not an output. Moreover, schools often do not have control over when a student is in class or not, so we are measuring school quality based on a variable schools have little ability to improve. This produces a distorted understanding of how well schools and districts are performing their work. While schools can make modest interventions to address chronic absenteeism, its usefulness as a success is limited and is better captured in other indicators.

Meanwhile, a metric showing success in college, career and military readiness (CCMR) is more indicative of a student's success and how well a school is preparing its student body. There are [37 states](#) that utilize CCMR in some fashion as an SQSSI. Oklahoma's post-secondary opportunities while in high school attempts to function as a CCMR indicator but falls short by only five different options to be included. [To be counted in the indicator](#), students must complete one of the following:

- Advance Placement Classes;
- International Baccalaureate Program;
- Dual (concurrent enrollment) in postsecondary course;
- An approved work-based internship or apprenticeship; and/or
- Programs leading to industry certification.

Oklahoma should up the ante on its postsecondary opportunity indicator. Like [Delaware](#) and [South Carolina](#), Oklahoma could include very specific benchmarks to meet for a student to count toward the CCR. Delaware, for example, includes specific scores a student must make on the AP or IB exams to count. South Carolina includes an ACT score of 20 and SAT score of 1020 as a student being counted. Students who fail to meet these marks are not counted in the CCR for the school or state.

Oklahoma could expand what counts towards the indicator. [New Hampshire](#) includes numerous options for accomplishing career readiness. These options include career and technology or industry-recognized credential, scoring a level three or higher on the ASVAB, completing a career pathway, completing an ACT National Career Readiness Certificate, or completing an approved apprenticeship program. Allowing students more than one way to be included in a school's CCR score provides the schools and students flexibility in determining what success looks like. In its state plan, [Kentucky's](#) Workforce Innovation Board works with the Department of Education to determine what industry-recognized credentials are in need and available to high school students. The Department of Education also pays for any assessments needed to obtain the credential.

Oklahoma could also put money behind the indicator so schools have a greater incentive to offering CCMR opportunities. [Texas](#) has implemented perhaps the most full-throated readiness-oriented accountability system in the country using its CCMR program standards as its SSQI. The CCMR program tests students' readiness for college, a career, or the military through a number of indicators from dual credit to earning an associate degree while in high school. This program then provides bonus funding to schools for increasing the number of students meeting the benchmarks, creating a powerful incentive for schools and districts to improve their student readiness outcomes.

Pursuing the avenue of a robust career, college or military readiness standard will help realign a school's focus on preparing the student for post-secondary success, over ensuring the school meets an indicator.

