

Interim Studies Review

November 5, 2018

Senate Seeks to End Bullying in Schools

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Virtual Charter Schools Efficiency Under Review

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New Tech to Prevent Water Shortage

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OK Senate Legislative Updates

Senate GOP Goal to Improve Government Transparency and Efficiencies

Senate leader Greg Treat requested an interim study over the *creation of an Accountability Office*, saying it would create increased transparency and efficiency in state government. Or another way to put it, the new Accountability Office would conduct research for legislators into the effectiveness and overall efficiencies of specific programs within state government. This model has worked very well in the state of New Mexico, where the state has seen an increase in overall government efficiencies. The New Mexico accountability office for years has helped lawmakers eliminate wasteful programs and through data-driven research identify areas for targeted budget increase to make a significant impact in the efficiency of state services being delivered. Senator Treat said the public and lawmakers can look at the recent Health Department scandal as one of the best reasons why an accountability office is needed in Oklahoma to help lawmakers provide oversight of the state budget. Senator Treat said this will be among his legislative priorities next year and said he would actively seek out different avenues that will jumpstart state government spending efficiencies.

Senate Takes on School Bullying

Senator Rob Standridge, R-Norman, requested an interim study focused specifically on examining the *growing problem of bullying in Oklahoma schools*. Bullying is a problem that all individuals would like to see eliminated, no matter what their political affiliation might be. During the meeting, the Senate Education Committee heard testimonials from current students and also child development professionals who specialize in creating programs that combat bullying in schools. The study revealed consistencies within environments that have a low rate of bullying that include positive reinforcement from teachers and students, establishment of inclusivity programs for students, and ensuring school districts abide consistently by their bullying policies. Senator Standridge said the interim study would be useful as he and other lawmakers moving forward looking to enact policies to eliminate bullying.

Virtual Charter Schools Efficiency Under Review

Recent reports of low graduation rate numbers from Oklahoma's virtual charter schools spurred the request for an interim study in mid-September by Senate Education Committee Chairman Gary Stanislawski. The study included a look into multiple education topics including school transfer policies and the graduation rates of students enrolled in virtual charter schools. Senator Stanislawski, R-Tulsa, said it is a possibility that the Legislature may need to consider allowing virtual charter schools to be more selective in their student admissions process in an effort to improve student success rates. As enrollment numbers continue to climb each semester for Oklahoma's virtual charter schools, those in the Senate Education Committee will continue taking an aggressive look into implementing solutions that will increase efficiencies of virtual education.

New Tech to Prevent Water Shortage

One of the greatest assets Oklahoma possesses is our water. In fact, in times of heavy rainfall we possess so much water in some areas of the state that much of our water overflows from reservoirs and aquifers and is wasted. This is a statewide issue that Senator Dave Rader, R-Tulsa, requested be further examined during a Senate Appropriations Committee interim study in late October. The infrastructure and technology to repurpose Oklahoma's wasted water supply for areas in the state that have water shortages is still being explored. Implementing statewide aquifer recharging technology and infrastructure could be costly, but supporters say the investment would negate the need for the state to spend millions of dollars dredging Oklahoma reservoirs to maintain current water capacity levels. While no complete conclusions were drawn from the interim study, this definitely looks like a topic the Senate will pursue and continue learn more about as session draws closer.