

OKLAHOMA

OVERALL RANK: 43RD¹
TIER 5 (WEAKEST)

STRONGER WEAKER

OVERALL					43
1. RESOURCES AND MEMBERSHIP					44
2. INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS			26		
3. SCOPE OF BARGAINING					40
4. STATE POLICIES					43
5. PERCEIVED INFLUENCE					46

AREA 1: RESOURCES AND MEMBERSHIP TIED FOR 44TH

Oklahoma’s state teacher unions do not have substantial resources from their members, nor do they see a significant dedication of funds to K-12 education in the state. First, a relatively low proportion of Sooner State teachers are union members—57.5 percent (39th of 51 jurisdictions). The NEA and AFT state-level affiliates bring in just \$233 annually per Oklahoma teacher (38th). Moreover, education spending in Oklahoma is comparatively low. The state directs just 14.3 percent of its own budget into K-12 education, and total per-pupil spending (from all sources, state, federal and local) is \$9,369 per pupil per year, with 52.0 percent of that dedicated to teacher salaries and benefits. Oklahoma ranks among the

bottom ten states in the nation on all three of those spending measures.

AREA 2: INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS² TIED FOR 26TH

Compared with unions in other states, Oklahoma teacher unions rank in the middle of the pack in terms of their political involvement over the past ten years. Their contributions accounted for 0.42 percent of total donations received by candidates for state office (33rd), and 0.18 percent of the total donations to state political parties (46th). However, the unions had a strong presence at the Democratic and Republican national conventions, with 24.2 percent of Oklahoma’s delegates being teacher union members (only three states ranked higher).³

AREA 3: SCOPE OF BARGAINING
40TH

Oklahoma unions have limited, and shrinking, freedom to bargain. Recently the state repealed the law that mandated collective bargaining; in major cities, bargaining is now permitted, but not required (see sidebar). The law also prohibits teacher strikes and prevents unions from automatically collecting agency fees, a key source of union revenue, from non-members. The state is fairly permissive, however, on the scope of bargaining. Of twenty-one items examined in this report, Oklahoma mandates that four be negotiated should districts choose to bargain collectively with unions—wages, hours, terms and conditions of employment, and fringe benefits—and implicitly permits all of the remaining items.

AREA 4: STATE POLICIES
43RD

Compared with other states, Oklahoma policies are largely out of line with traditional teacher union priorities. By law, student achievement is the preponderant criterion in both teacher evaluations and tenure decisions. Teachers are eligible for dismissal after multiple unsatisfactory evaluations, and districts must consider teacher performance (rather than seniority alone) when making layoffs. Likely related, Oklahoma dismisses teachers due to poor performance at the fourth-highest rate in the country. The unfavorable policy environment extends to charter school laws as well: Oklahoma's charters are automatically exempt from collective bargaining agreements, state teacher certification rules, and many other state and district laws and regulations.

AREA 5: PERCEIVED INFLUENCE
46TH

Stakeholders in Oklahoma perceive that the teacher unions are relatively weak. On average, survey respondents rate the teacher unions as less influential than the business roundtable/chamber of commerce, superintendent, and education advocacy organizations. They report that unions are not effective in protecting dollars for education or in warding off reform proposals with which they disagree. Stakeholders also observe that policies proposed by the governor and enacted in the latest legislative session were mostly *not in line* with teacher union priorities.⁴

OVERALL
43RD

Oklahoma's teacher unions are weaker than those in most other states: They claim only limited membership and financial resources, few favorable policies at the state level, and a relatively weak reputation among stakeholders. Like many other states, Oklahoma is experiencing a high degree of flux among state leaders—and their positions—with respect to both unions and education reforms (see sidebar), and its position on any of these indicators is far from certain.

In spring 2012, Oklahoma teacher unions avoided a veritable knockout punch. Anti-labor legislators had already landed a powerful blow the previous year, replacing the law that mandated collective bargaining in public education with one that permitted, but did not require, bargaining in the state's 13 largest cities.⁵ Then, in early 2012, the senate passed SB 1530, also known as the “deregulation bill,” which gave traditional public schools in all cities the same autonomies granted to the state's charter schools—including allowing local school boards to void their existing collective bargaining agreements if they so choose.⁶

Worried that districts would reduce teacher salaries, take away sick and personal leave, and eliminate special-duty pay, the Oklahoma Education Association (OEA) mobilized against the bill.⁷ At the union's annual “Lobby Day,” members bent the ear of Rep. Todd Thomsen, who then asked fellow representatives during the hearing for the bill, “Can you name one thing the legislature has done for teachers' best interest?”⁸ Lawmakers may have been considering those teacher interests instead of the best interests of the students when SB 1530 died in House committee. One superintendent pointed out the negative consequences of the defeat: “[My district] receives about \$30,000 for textbooks...I would rather spend this money on technology and use online books that are a small fraction of the cost”—a sensible solution that would have been possible under SB 1530.⁹

In the wake of this fight, however, the OEA found its image tarnished (a problem made more urgent by the fact that it was losing membership due both to the new bargaining law and to net teacher job losses).^{10,11} The union began a massive “Stand Up for Public Education” campaign, aimed at improving the unions' own public image, preserving the rights of teachers, and increasing funding for the traditional education system. The success of the campaign remains to be seen, but the tide seems to be turning against labor in Oklahoma; ironic for a state whose motto is *Labor Omnia Vincit*: “Labor Conquers All Things.”

OKLAHOMA RANKINGS BY AREA AND INDICATOR

OVERALL RANK: 43RD

Area and Rank ^a	General Indicator	Sub-Indicator	Sub-Indicator Rank/Status ^b
AREA 1: RESOURCES & MEMBERSHIP 44*	Membership	By rank, what percentage of public-school teachers in the state are union members?	39th
	Revenue	By rank, what is the total yearly revenue (per teacher in the state) of the state-level NEA and/ or AFT affiliate(s)?	38th
	Spending on education	By rank, what percentage of state expenditures (of state general funds, state restricted funds, state bonds, and federal "pass-through" funds) is directed to K-12 education?	44th
		By rank, what is the total annual per-pupil expenditure (of funds from federal, state, and local sources) in the state?	41st
		By rank, what percentage of total annual per-pupil expenditures is directed to teacher salaries and benefits?	41st
AREA 2: INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS 26*	Contributions to candidates and political parties	By rank, what percentage of the total contributions to state candidates was donated by teacher unions?	33rd
		By rank, what percentage of the total contributions to state-level political parties was donated by teacher unions?	46th
	Industry influence	By rank, what percent of the contributions to state candidates from the ten highest-giving sectors was donated by teacher unions?	34th
	Status of delegates	By rank, what percentage of the state's delegates to the Democratic and Republican conventions were members of teacher unions?	4th
AREA 3: SCOPE OF BARGAINING 40	Legal scope of bargaining	What is the legal status of collective bargaining?	Permitted
		By rank, how broad is the scope of collective bargaining?	15th*
	Automatic revenue streams	What is the unions' legal right to automatically collect agency fees from non-members and/or collect member dues via automatic payroll deductions?	Agency fees prohibited
	Right to strike	What is the legal status of teacher strikes?	Prohibited
AREA 4: STATE POLICIES 43	Performance pay	Does the state support performance pay for teachers?	State supports/ encourages
	Retirement	By rank, what is the employer- versus employee-contribution rate to the teacher pension system?	18th
	Evaluations	What is the maximum potential consequence for veteran teachers who receive unsatisfactory evaluation(s)?	Eligible for dismissal
		Is classroom effectiveness included in teacher evaluations? If so, how is it weighted?	Required; Preponderant criterion
	Terms of employment	How long before a teacher earns tenure?	Three years
		Is student/teacher performance considered in tenure decisions? If so, how is it weighted?	Required; Preponderant criterion
		Is seniority considered in teacher layoff decisions? If so, how is it weighted?	Optional; May be considered among other factors
		Is teacher performance included in teacher layoff decisions? If so, how is it weighted?	Required; Considered among other factors
	By rank, what percentage of the teaching workforce was dismissed due to poor performance?	48th	
Class size	Is class size restricted for grades 1-3? If so, is the restriction higher or lower than the national average (20)?	Yes; Higher	

Area and Rank	General Indicator	Sub-Indicator	Sub-Indicator Rank/Status
AREA 4: STATE POLICIES 43 (cont.)	Charter school structural limitations	Is there a cap (limit) placed on the number of charter schools that can operate in the state (or other jurisdiction) and/or on the number of students who can attend charter schools?	State cap with some room for growth
		Does the state allow a variety of charter schools: start-ups, conversions, and virtual schools?	Start-ups and conversions only w/ limited jurisdiction
		How many charter authorizing options exist? How active are those authorizers?	Two or more active/available options
	Charter school exemptions	Are all charter schools automatically exempt from state laws and state/district regulations (except those that safeguard students and fiscal accountability)? If not, are they eligible for exemptions?	Yes
		Are all charter schools automatically exempt from state teacher-certification requirements? If not, are they eligible for exemptions?	Yes
		Are all charter schools automatically exempt from collective bargaining agreements (CBAs)? If not, are they eligible for exemptions?	Yes

AREA 5: PERCEIVED INFLUENCE^c 46	Relative influence of teacher unions	How do you rank the influence of teacher unions on education policy compared with other influential entities?	Fourth-most influential
	Influence over campaigns	On a scale from always to never, how often do Democratic candidates need teacher-union support to get elected?	Often
		On a scale from always to never, how often do Republican candidates need teacher-union support to get elected?	Rarely
	Influence over spending	To what extent, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, do you agree that even in times of cutbacks, teacher unions are effective in protecting dollars for education?	Disagree
		Given recent budgetary constraints, would you say that teacher unions generally make concessions to prevent reductions in pay and benefits or fight hard to prevent those reductions?	Generally fight
	Influence over policy	To what extent, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, do you agree that teacher unions ward off proposals in your state with which they disagree?	Disagree
		On a scale from always to never, how often do existing state education policies reflect teacher-union priorities?	Sometimes
		To what extent, from totally in line to not at all in line, were state education policies proposed by the governor during your state's latest legislative session in line with teacher-union priorities?	Mostly not in line
		To what extent, from totally in line to not at all in line, were legislative outcomes of your state's latest legislative session in line with teacher-union priorities?	Mostly not in line
	Influence over key stakeholders	On a scale from always to never, how often have the priorities of state education leaders aligned with teacher-union positions in the past three years?	Sometimes
Would you say that teacher unions typically compromise with policymakers to ensure that their preferred policies are enacted, or typically need not make concessions?		Compromise	

* Tied with another state

^a Area ranks are calculated using a weighted average of sub-indicators. For a more detailed description, see Appendix A.

^b Where possible, we report a state's rank as compared to other states on a given metric. For example, out of 51 states, Oklahoma has the 39th-highest percentage of teachers who are union members. Otherwise, we report a status: In Oklahoma collective bargaining is permitted, and union agency fees are prohibited. For a more detailed description of our metrics and methodology, see Appendix A. To request the raw data for your state, send an email to uniondata@edexcellence.net.

^c For all survey questions, stakeholders were asked specifically about teacher unions, candidates, policies, and leaders in their state. In addition, we asked about unions and policies in the "current legislative session," but because legislative calendars vary from state to state, responses refer to policies proposed and enacted within the 2010-11 window.

ENDNOTES

¹ A state's overall rank is calculated as follows: First, we score it on multiple sub-indicators (sub-indicator data and scores for Oklahoma are shown in the table, *Oklahoma Rankings by Area and Indicator*). Second, we take a weighted average of the sub-indicators in each of five areas. In each area, we use that average to place the states in rank order: For example, in Area 1: Resources and Membership, Oklahoma is ranked 44th of 51 based on the weighted average of its sub-indicators. To generate the state's overall rank, we average the five area ranks together, then re-order the states. For a more detailed description of data sources and methodology, see Appendix A.

² Readers should note that these figures include only direct donations from unions and union-connected PACs, but not their spending on electioneering/advertising, mobilizing the union's own membership, lobbying, or advocacy. A recent *Wall Street Journal* report found that donations and lobbying activities account for a small share of union political spending compared with their expenditures on member mobilization and advocacy. Even the AFT agreed, making the argument that since its mission is organizing and activism, it will naturally spend significant amounts on these activities. Thus, the percentages we report here are extremely conservative representations of what unions actually spend on politics. For more information, see Appendix A, Area 2; Tom McGinty and Brody Mullins, "Political Spending by Unions Far Exceeds Direct Donations," *Wall Street Journal*, July 10, 2012; and Jeff Hauser, "Wall Street Journal Compares Union Political Spending to Corporate Donations," AFL-CIO, July 10, 2012.

³ At the time of publication, the 2000 conventions were the most recent for which such detailed data were available in forms that met rigorous standards. However, 2008 data provided by the Democratic National Convention were highly correlated with the reliable figures from 2000.

⁴ We asked stakeholders about unions and policies in the "current legislative session," but because legislative calendars vary from state to state, responses refer to policies proposed and enacted within the 2010-11 window.

⁵ Sean Murphy, "Oklahoma Senate Panel Votes To Ax City Union Rights," *Associated Press*, March 28, 2011, <http://normantranscript.com/archive/x10256592/Okla-Senate-panel-votes-to-ax-city-union-rights>.

⁶ Victor Skinner, "Oklahoma's Teachers Unions Determined To Preserve Collective Bargaining," *News Blaze*, April 3, 2012, <http://newsblaze.com/story/20120403111136zzzz.nb/topstory.html>.

⁷ Rob Anderson, "School 'Deregulation' Bill Controversial," *Tahlequah Daily Press*, March 21, 2012, <http://tahlequahdailypress.com/local/x715444021/School-deregulation-bill-controversial>.

⁸ Kandis West, "Inspired Members Help Kill SB 1530," in "The Education Focus," Oklahoma Education Association, April/May 2012, <http://okea.org/assets/files/2012%20April%20May%20Focus%20for%20web.pdf>.

⁹ Anderson.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Stacy Martin and Patrick B. McGuigan, "Oklahoma's Largest Teachers' Union Losing Members," *CapitolBeatOK.com*, June 21, 2011, <http://capitolbeatok.com/reports/oklahomas-largest-teachers-union-losing-members>.