

Local School Authority Strengthened

LOCAL school boards will have greater authority than they have had in many years over how children behave on the school grounds and what may be taught in the classrooms when the new term starts.

The legislature brought about this change with adoption of HB 1816 in response to requests from a coalition of public school patrons, farm organizations and other groups.

The bill amends previous laws concerning public school administration largely by changing the word "shall" to "may" in specifying extent of authority of the State Board of Education.

Effect of the revisions will depend, of course, upon how local boards react to their new responsibilities. That in turn depends upon what local school patrons want and demand.

The bill's stated purpose is "to redefine a basic education for the children attending public schools in the State of Oklahoma."

"The local board of education shall adopt a policy for the control

and discipline of all children attending public school in that district," the new law states, granting teachers the same right as parents or guardians to control and discipline children "according to local policies" while in school, in transit or at school functions.

This section could substantially alleviate school discipline problems and make teaching a less hazardous profession.

One place where the word "shall" remained in effect applies to the teaching of fundamentals. It reads that "the State Board of education shall formulate, prescribe, adopt or approve such courses . . . that are necessary to ensure the teaching of the necessary skills of basic learning and communication" including reading, English, writing, the use of numbers and science, and the teaching of citizenship in the United States, Oklahoma and in other countries.

The word "may" applies to teaching of health, safety, physical education, effects of alcohol and drugs, conservation of natural resources,

vocational education, and certain activities, such as programs commemorating Oklahoma Statehood Day and Bill of Rights Day.

The controversial "value orientation" studies program has been eliminated. This was adopted 10 years ago "to teach children their worth so as to instill in them a positive sense of their self-worth which would tend to cause them to reject anything which would detract from that sense of self-worth."

As applied, many parents felt that this program undermined home and church teachings concerning right and wrong, honesty and morality, sexual permissiveness and other principles.

Previously, the legislature had adopted Concurrent Resolution 1025 which set forth its attitudes toward types of textbooks to be adopted. This also was supported by the education coalition.

That resolution has been strengthened by enactment of HB 1816 to restore discretion concerning operation of public schools to local boards, where a large number of citizens think it should be.