

# The Oklahoma Eagle

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LEGACY

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Weeks, since the 1921  
Tulsa Race Massacre and a  
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NATION

Stop Saying 'I Am Not My  
Ancestors'

By LIZ COURQUET-LESAULNIER, WORD IN BLACK  
NOT MY ANCESTORS

A6

SOCIAL

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## THE FUTURE OF TPS

COMMUNITY VOICES

Gary Lee | Captures the voices of the community.

FORUMS & NEWS

John Neal | Recent meetings & outcomes

ANALYSIS &  
PERSPECTIVE

Ross D. Johnson

### TULSANS UNITE To Oppose Bid For Takeover Of The City's School System / S2

GARY LEE

TULSA, OKLA. - A broad united front composed of  
Tulsa parents, teachers, lawmakers, philanthropist  
organizations, students, and concerned citizens has  
formed a solid block of opposition to the threat of a  
state takeover of Tulsa Public Schools.

Tulsans Unite

### TAKEOVER! What It Means For Tulsa Public Schools / S1

ROSS D. JOHNSON

Takeover

### STATE BOARD Poised To Take Over Tulsa Public Schools / S5

JOHN NEAL

State Board

### Tulsa Philanthropies And Tribes Rally Support for Tulsa Public Schools / S6

GARY LEE

TPS Coalition

### State Superintendent Walters Continues Attack on Tulsa Public Schools / S7

JOHN NEAL

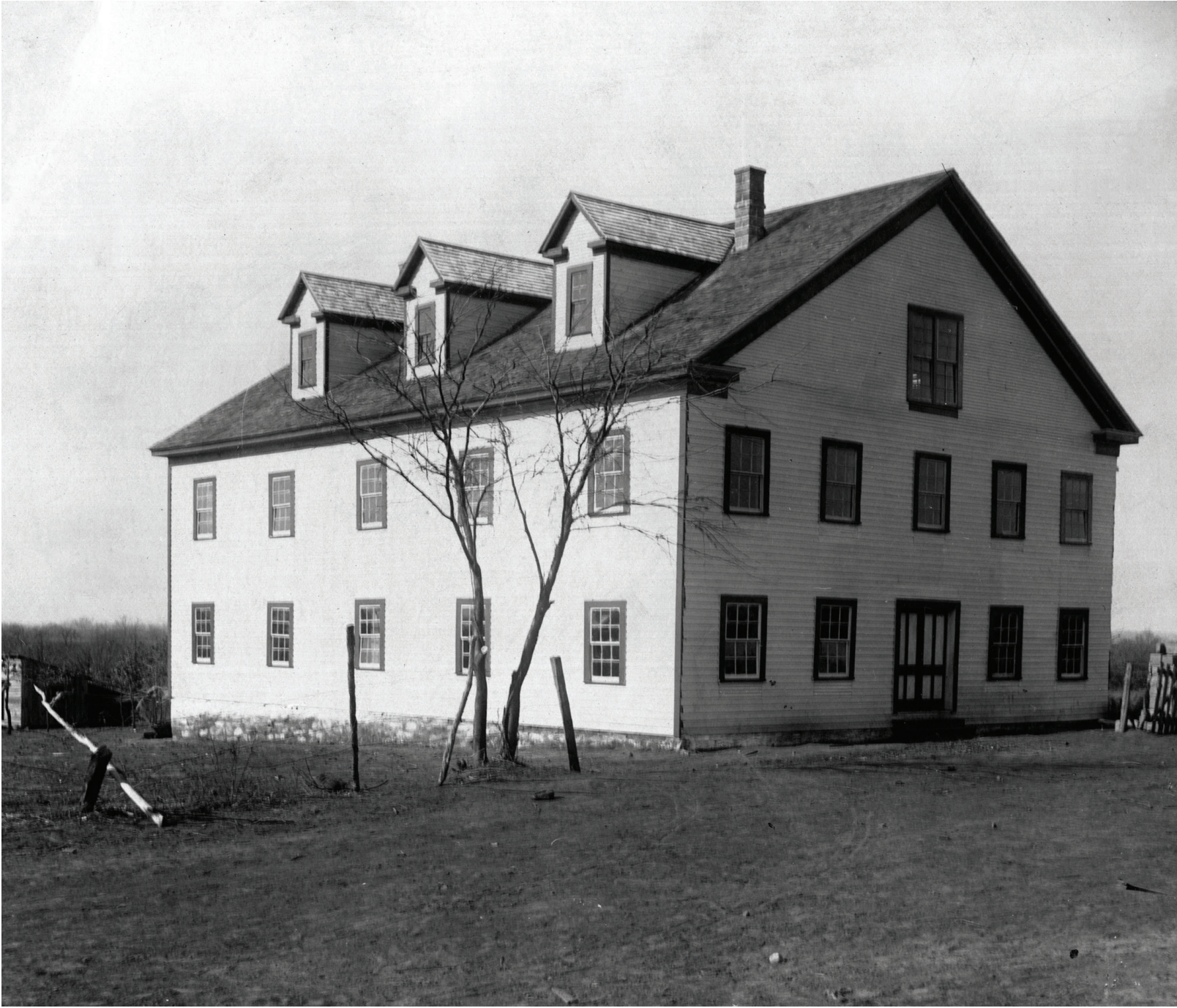
Walters TPS





# Taft: The Historic All-Black Town

By LARRY O'DELL, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF OKLAHOMA HISTORY AND CULTURE



The All-Black town known as Taft started as the community of Twine, which had a post office by 1902. Taft, located eight miles west of Muskogee, in Muskogee County is one of more than fifty All-Black towns of Oklahoma and one of only thirteen still existing. The town name honored William H. Twine, a resident who moved away and edited the Muskogee Cimeter. In 1904 citizens named the town Taft in honor of then Secretary of War (later President) William Howard Taft. The settlement developed in the Creek Nation on land allotted to Creek Freedmen. Early in the town’s history the citizens promoted their new community throughout the South. The Reaves Realty Company advertised Taft as the “fastest growing Colored community in Oklahoma.” Taft had two newspapers, the Enterprise and

the Tribune. The first mayor, Charlie Ford, owned Ford’s Cotton Gin, and W. R. Grimmett operated a sawmill northwest of town. Before 1910 the community supported three general stores, one drugstore, a brickyard, a soda pop factory, a livery stable, a gristmill, a lumberyard, two hotels, a restaurant, a bank, and a funeral home. Educational and state-agency facilities have always been important economic activities. Halochee Institute, founded in 1906, was the first of several educational institutes to locate there: W. T. Vernon School (1908), the Industrial Institute for the Deaf, Blind, and Orphans of the Colored Race (1909), Moton High School, and the State Training School for Negro Girls followed Halochee. In 1934 the Taft State Hospital for the Negro Insane was established. The state later placed two state penitentiaries in Taft: Dr. Eddie Warrior Correctional Center, for women,

and Jess Dunn Correctional Center, for men. From a population of 250 in 1907 Taft grew to 690 by 1937 and then slowly declined; by 1990 the population was four hundred. Taft City Hall is listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NR 84003330). The Reeder Walker House and St. Paul Baptist Church are listed in the Oklahoma Landmarks Inventory. In 1973 the town elected Lelia Foley-Davis as mayor, making her the nation’s first female African American mayor. Davis stepped down in 1989 but was reelected in 1999. Taft reached its peak of population at 772 in 1940 but dropped to a low of 386 in 1960. After rebounding to 525 in 1970, it declined to 400 in 1990. At the approach of the twenty-first century Taft exhibited a strong economy. The 2000 census counted 349 residents, and the 2010 census counted 250.

THE OKLAHOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY is an agency of the government of Oklahoma dedicated to promotion and preservation of Oklahoma’s history and its people by collecting, interpreting, and disseminating knowledge and artifacts of Oklahoma.

TAFT INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL, 4071, Frederick S. Barde Collection, OHS.

## Featured Last Week



Legal Challenge: Publicly Funded Religious Charter School



Experts: Money Alone Can’t Solve Jail Mental Health Access Issues



Meet the Black Girls Cooking Up Health and Hope

## The Oklahoma Eagle

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- Edward L. Goodwin, Jr.**  
Co-Publisher 1980-2014
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PARIS EPPS, a seven-year-old student from Tulsa, received the national title of Tiny Miss Princess of America.. PHOTO PAGEANT MEDIA

# TULSAN PARIS EPPS

## *Wins Tiny Miss Princess of America*

### FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN CROWNED

By PAGEANT MEDIA

**PARIS EPPS**, a seven-year-old student from Tulsa, received the national title of Tiny Miss Princess of America. She is the first African American to receive the title. She is the daughter of Dr. Shavonda Pannell and Willis Epps and the granddaughter of Anthony and Valonda Pannell. Epps is also the great granddaughter of “King Arthur” Pannell, a pioneering businessman, restaurateur, and beloved mentor. The National Princess of America Pageant was held in Branson, Mo., July 23-29.

She also won divisional titles for Casual Wear and Active Wear, and second runner-up for Photogenic. Additionally, the judges awarded her as a Top 10 Superstar finalist, and winner in the following categories: Best Interview, Best Smile, and Miss Personality.

Girls from all over the country competed for the national crown. Required categories of competition included Interview, Personal On-Stage Introduction, Formal Wear, and On-Stage Question for ages seven and older. Participants also had the opportunity to enter optional categories of Talent, Spokesmodel, State Costume, Casual Wear, Photogenic, Crown Cover Model, Top Model, Triple Threat, Active Wear, and “Pink Carpet Couture.”

As a national titleholder, Epps will receive the official custom crown, banner, flowers, crystal award, cash scholarship, travel opportunities, including a Caribbean

**Pagaent judges awarded Paris as a Top 10 Superstar finalist, and winner in multiple categories.**

cruise, as well as many other gifts and prizes during her reign. Winners were treated to a professional photo shoot and gift reception where they received many sponsored gifts from supporters of the Princess of America Pageant. She will spend an exciting year traveling to other states, making appearances to represent the Princess of America organization, and promoting her platform, “Paris to the Rescue,” where she helps to increase awareness and adoption for rescue animals.

The Princess of America Organization is a national pageant system based on the development of confidence and leadership skills for girls, ages 4-24. The growth of each participant is enhanced by friendships fostered across the United States. The pageant places an emphasis on its contestants participating in community service and giving back to their communities to make a positive difference.

Communication skills are furthered through the interview process and on-stage speaking opportunities. Delegates learn how to articulate their thoughts, which helps prepare them to succeed in future endeavors.

Princess of America presents 10 national titles. In addition to one title being awarded in each of the six age divisions, four other national titles are presented. The two “Superstar” titles are awarded to the overall talent winners. The two “Ambassador” titles, one for the junior divisions and one

for the senior divisions, are awarded based on appearances, community service work, and volunteerism during their reign as a state/regional titleholder.

The crown represents far more than winning a pageant. It is a symbol of the dedication it takes to accomplish a goal, and most importantly, it represents the opportunities the title provides to be of service to other people. Each national titleholder selects a platform during their reign for which they will raise funds, awareness, and serve as an advocate.

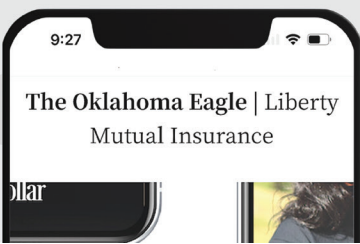
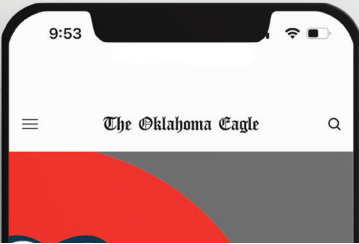
The contestants gain confidence during their journey to the crown. The self-confidence enables the participants to be an effective representative for the national organization as well as their chosen cause. During the pageant, each participant joined in the national service project, which involved collecting non-perishable food items for Christian Action Ministries, a local food pantry serving the Branson area. Over 2,000 non-perishable food items were donated by all the national delegates.

You can follow Epps’ journey this year on social media at @poa\_tinymiss and @parissimoneofficial on Instagram and “Tiny Miss Princess of America” on Facebook. Learn more about the Princess of America organization by visiting [www.princessofamerica.com](http://www.princessofamerica.com)

The Oklahoma Eagle

## Our Mission

To amplify our core value of equity, through journalism and editorial” is the cornerstone of our continued success.





# Brandon Jackson Named Chair Of The City's (Building) Board of Appeals



Brandon Jackson was recently named chair of the City of Tulsa (Building) Board of Appeals.

The body hears and decides on the appeal of orders, decisions, or determinations by building, fire, or other code officials. He has served on the board since 2018. Prior to his service on the Board of Appeals, he is past chair of the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission and Infrastructure Development Advisory Board and a former member of the Tulsa Development Authority. Jackson has over 30 years of real estate experience, including new residential and light office construction, remodels,

residential development, and property management and maintenance. He is president of Tara Custom Homes. The company is a small volume residential builder and land developer. In his role, he manages land acquisition, planning, design and production of single-family home sites and dwelling units. The real estate group also maintains a portfolio of rental dwellings. Jackson is immediate past president of the Oklahoma Home Builders Association and the Home Builders Association of Greater Tulsa. He is a certified HUD 203k rehabilitation

loan consultant and FHA fee inspector. Additionally, he has professional designations from the National Association of Home Builders and the Oklahoma Home Builders Association. He is a graduate of Oklahoma State University with a degree in engineering technology with an emphasis in construction management and fire protection and safety engineering and Booker T. Washington High School in Tulsa.

By DR. JERRY GOODWIN

# National Association of Black Journalists to volunteer at Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma, Aug. 19



Members of the National Association of Black Journalists – Tulsa Chapter will be participating in a community service event at the Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma on Aug. 19. The group will be helping to prepare food for distribution to the Food Bank's partners. The NABJ-Tulsa membership, which includes individuals affiliated with local media outlets, offers volunteer services to a variety of organizations in the area, was formed in 1995. The president is Autumn Brace, anchor/reporter with

KOTV Channel 6 (CBS). NABJ is a nonprofit organization that provides innovative, quality programs, and services to its more than 4,000 members, including emerging, professional, and student journalists, journalism educators, and media professionals. For more information, visit the NABJ-Tulsa Facebook page.

By DR. JERRY GOODWIN

# Supporters of Families with Sickle Cell Disease sponsor "Spreading Hope Back-to-School Bash," Aug. 19



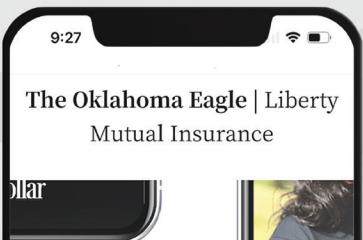
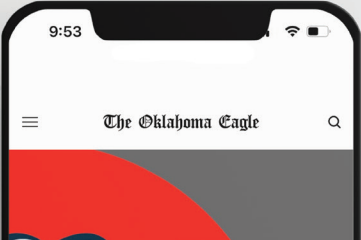
The Supporters of Families with Sickle Cell Disease and its partners are sponsoring "Spreading Hope Back-to-School Bash," their annual beginning of the school year fall semester program. The event is scheduled for Aug. 19 from 11 a.m. – 2 p.m. at B. S. Roberts Park/Langston University-Tulsa, 901/914 N. Greenwood Ave. Registration will begin at 10:30 a.m. This year's event will be the 10th anniversary of hosting the program for elementary, middle, and high school students. As mentioned in a press release, the program will be "a day of fun, connection, and valuable resources." The activities planned for the day are the following: free school supplies, arts and crafts, health and education resource fair (with information from local organizations that serve families), entertainment, and fun-filled activities for children. More than 500 backpacks with school supplies for school-age children (pre-K through 12th grade) will be distributed. Refreshments will also be available.

Free classes on a variety of subjects will be offered. The class schedule is as follows:

- 11:30 a.m. – 12 p.m. – Oklahoma Parent Center – Understanding IEP/504
- 12 p.m. – 12:30 p.m. – Disability Law – Disability Rights
- 12:30 p.m. – 1 p.m. – Disability Services

The mission of the Supporters of Families with Sickle Cell Disease is to increase self-efficacy, improve the overall quality of life for patients living with sickle cell and thalassemia, children, adults, and their families in Oklahoma through systemic changes in patient care, disability policies, education, family support, economic self-sufficiency, awareness, and advocacy. For more information, call (918) 619-6174 or visit [www.sicklecelloklahoma.org](http://www.sicklecelloklahoma.org)

By DR. JERRY GOODWIN





# THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE CHURCH DIRECTORY



**The Oklahoma Eagle publishes news and announcements for churches currently listed in The Oklahoma Eagle's Church Directory. For information, please call our office at (918) 582-7124**

## Church Of The Living God

1559 E Reading St. Tulsa OK  
(918) 584-3206

Minister RJ Smith

Sunday school - 9:30am  
Sunday Worship - 10:45am  
Monday Worship - 6:00pm  
Wednesday Bible Study - 5:00pm

## CAPERNAUM MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

1962 N. Sheridan Rd.  
(918) 834-4747  
Pastor Ruthie I. Howard  
Sunday School 10:00 a.m.  
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.  
Bible Study & Prayer Wednesday 7:00 p.m.  
For Transportation (918) 402-6027

## Words of Wisdom Ministries FC

Temporarily meeting at the Courtyard Marriott 3340 S 79th E Ave Tulsa OK  
(918) 230-3022  
Pastors Wesley & Alfie Gray would like to invite you to come and experience the Word of God in action this Sunday! God has a word for you, He Guarantee's it! You'll be glad you did!!!

## The Oklahoma Eagle Church Directory

List your church in one of the largest church directories in Oklahoma.  
Participation in the directory allows free church announcements/ church news.  
Post events and celebrations. Priority over non-listed churches for news.

## GTOMi

Gospel Tabernacle Outreach Ministries, Inc.  
Traveling Outreach Ministries  
609 E. Zion Street  
Tulsa, Oklahoma  
Elder Julius W. Bland  
Sr., Pastor  
918-810-3882

**ALL ARE WELCOME**

## MOHAWK FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

3329 E. 30th St. North • 834-0391  
Sunday School 9:30 a.m.  
Sunday Morning Worship 11 a.m.  
Bible Study Wednesday 7 p.m.  
Rev. Emanuel L. Collier, Sr. Pastor

## Gethsemane Baptist Church

727 East 56th St. North  
(918) 425-6613  
Dr. W. T. Lauderdale  
Sunday School 9:00 a.m.  
Church Services 11:00 a.m.

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## Zoe' Life Church of Tulsa

Rudisill Regional Library  
1520 N Hartford Ave.  
Tulsa OK 74106  
(918) 409-4899  
Pastor Richard and Cher Lyons  
Sunday Worship: 1pm  
Wed- Healing School: 6:30p - 8p  
"The Righteous Are As Bold As A Lion." - Prov.28:1a

## SOLID ROCK 7th DAY BAPTIST CHURCH

123 E. 59th St. North  
Ph: (918) 425-2077  
Pastor Rick Bruner  
Sabbath School (Saturday) 9:30-10:45 a.m.  
Praise & Worship 11:00 a.m.  
Choir Rehearsal Wednesday 6:00 p.m.  
"The Seventh Day Is Still God's Sabbath"

## Northside Christ Gospel Church

3101 N. M.L King Jr. Blvd.  
Tulsa OK  
(918) 625-2374  
Sunday School - 10 am  
Sunday Morning Worship - 10:45  
Sunday Evening Prayer - 7 pm  
Sunday Worship - 7:30 pm  
Wednesday Prayer - 7:30 pm  
Wednesday worship - 8pm  
Rev. John W. Anderson

## VERNON AME CHURCH

307-311 N. Greenwood Ave.  
P: 918-587-1428  
F: 918-587-0642  
vernonamechurch@sbcglobal.net  
Sunday Church School 8:30 am  
Worship Service 10:00 am  
Wednesday Bible Study 6:00 pm  
Rev. Dr. Robert R. Allen Turner

## FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH NORTH TULSA

THE CHURCH WHERE THE HOLY SPIRIT LEADS US  
Pastor Anthony L. & Mrs. Kelly Scott  
Sunday School - 9:30 a.m.  
Morning Worship - 11:00 a.m.  
Wednesday Prayer Meeting - 6:30 p.m.  
Bible Study - Noon & 7:00 p.m.  
1414 N. Greenwood Ave.  
Tulsa, OK 74103  
918-582-5129  
www.fbcnt.org  
"Teaching Minds Changing Hearts Touching the World"

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## BOSTON AVENUE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

1301 S. Boston  
(918) 583-5181  
Rev. David Wiggs  
Senior Minister  
Sunday Worship 8:30 and 11:00 a.m.  
Sunday School 9:40 a.m.  
Sunday TV Worship 11:00 a.m.  
KTUL Channel 8

## TIMOTHY BAPTIST CHURCH

821 E. 46th St. N. • 425-8021  
REV. TWAN T. JONES  
Sunday School 9:45 a.m.  
Sunday Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.  
"We've come this far by faith"

## NORTH PEORIA CHURCH OF CHRIST

2247 N. Peoria  
Tulsa, Okla. 74106  
(918) 425-1071  
Warren Blakney, Minister  
Sunday Bible School.....9:00 a.m.  
Sunday Morning Worship.....10:00 a.m.  
Sunday Evening Worship.....6:00 p.m.  
There's no place, like this place, anywhere near this place.

## Pettie Chapel CME

19364 S. S. Mingo Road.  
Bixby, 74008  
Phone: (918) 366-8870  
Rev. Robert Givens  
Sunday School 9:30 a.m.  
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.  
"Where Peaceful Waters Flow"

## Church In Power

732 E. 31st North  
Tulsa, OK 74106 - (918) 835-1525

Service times: 9am Sundays, 7pm Wed, and Special Supernatural Breakthrough Services every last Friday and Saturday of every month at 7pm and Sunday at 9am  
Wednesday Bible Study - 6:30 p.m.  
Church Ministries: Children's Church, CIP Praise Dancers, and CIP Praise Tem.



Pastor Bukky and Wunmi Alabi

For Further Information call (918) 835-1525.

"Have Faith In God." Mark 11:22

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2952 S. Peoria Ave. | Tulsa, OK 74114



Mount Zion Baptist Church  
419 N Elgin Tulsa, Oklahoma

Office: 918-584-0510  
Fax: 918-584-1958  
Prayer Line: 918-584-PRAY  
Sunday School 9:30 a.m.  
Morning Worship 10:45  
Wednesday Bible Study Noon and 7:00



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## In The Spirit Christian Church

"Come And Experience The Spirit"

1020 South Garnett  
Tulsa, Okla., 74128  
Phone: (918) 836-6823  
Fax: (918) 836-6833



Rev. Sharyn Cosby-Willis,

Eclectic Praise, Extraordinary Worship, And Spirited Preaching.

Wednesday Services 10:00 a.m. Spirit Seniors 5:30 p.m. Support Groups 6:30 p.m. Community Dinner 7:00 p.m. Bible Study

Sunday Worship Church School 9:45 a.m. Worship 11:00 a.m.

Ministries: Administration, Children's Church, Children's Choir, Spirited Kids, Guest Services, Intercessors, Men's Fellowship, Outreach and much more...



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www.nickblakelyfoundation.org





LACKS’ ESTATE  
FILES SECOND SUIT

The \$2.6 billion company sued for using Lacks’ cell line to produce adeno-associated virus vector-based gene therapy products. **A6**

BLACK JOY  
IN CHICAGO

Like any other big-city parade: floats, marching bands in colorful uniforms; high-stepping, baton-twirling majorettes & beauty queens. **A7**



# Stop Saying ‘I Am Not My Ancestors’

The memes, the reenactments, the folding chair earrings!

By LIZ COURQUET-LESALUNIER, WORD IN BLACK

NOT MY ANCESTORS *from AI*

In the aftermath of the Alabama Brawl, Black America has had a lighthearted few days. Folks have been playing the Crime Mob classic “Knuck If You Buck,” making fun of Jason Aldean’s “Try That in a Small Town,” finding out that the man who invented the folding chair — Nathaniel Alexander — is Black, and celebrating 16-year-old “Aquamayne,” the teen who swam to the rescue.

The minute you saw those brothas SKIPPING along the dock toward the altercation, you already knew those white guys were going to be getting to the “find out” part of life with a quickness.

We definitely know how to channel our trauma into comedy like no one else. By telling jokes about what happened in Montgomery, staging reenactments, laughing about how folding chairs are going to be sold out on Amazon, we process our pain — because we know what would have happened if those Black men had not come to that brotha’s rescue. He may not even be alive today.

But at the same time that I fell out laughing over the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial in Washington, D.C., being digitally altered to feature Dr. King clutching a folding chair, I found myself giving a side-eye to another byproduct of the Montgomery Mollywop: The “I am not my ancestors” T-shirts.

I want to assume the best of the creators of these T-shirts. I want to believe that what they mean is that they’re celebrating that we are no longer enslaved people subjected to the brutality of plantations. Maybe they’re grateful we no longer exist under the yoke of Jim Crow



BLACK AND WHITE SOLDIERS facing each other in 1919 on street sidewalk. PHOTO CHICAGO TRIBUNE STAFF 1919, PUBLIC DOMAIN, VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

with its “whites only” drinking fountains and lunch counters, and they’re glad it’s not a lynchable offense for us to defend ourselves. (At least, not officially, right?)

On the other hand? Not today, Satan.

Given the enduring narratives about Black folks’ “laziness, as well as characteristics of submissiveness, backwardness, lewdness, treachery, and dishonesty,” as the Blacksonian puts it, to even jokingly give credence to the idea that we didn’t resist oppression and racial violence is both foolish and irresponsible.

Make no mistake, our ancestors did fight back, from Day One, and to even hint that they didn’t plays into white supremacist-based beliefs and attitudes.

Seriously, have these T-shirt makers never heard of Nat Turner? Granted, even before Florida’s most recent “anti-woke” efforts, Black history hasn’t exactly been taught well in the nation’s public schools. But at the very least, most of us learned about the 1831 slave rebellion in Southampton, Virginia, that resulted in as many as 65 white people being killed.

That’s not folks sitting around twiddling their thumbs, waiting for benevolent abolitionists to decide that they deserved to be free.

Even before that, the first recorded revolt of enslaved Black people happened in 1521 on Santo Domingo — now the Dominican Republic. And in the American Colonies? One of the earliest recorded was the Gloucester County, Virginia, revolt in 1663.

One of the main reasons the United States refused to **NOT MY ANCESTORS** *cont. A7*

# After a historic settlement with ThermoFisher Scientific, the Lacks estate filed suit against \$2.6 billion corporation, Ultragenyx.

Just one week after the family of Henrietta Lacks reached a historic settlement with a biotech company over its use of Lacks’ cells in their products, the estate is suing a second company for unjustly profiting off of her genetics.

The lawsuit, filed on Thursday in the United States District Court for the District of Maryland, is against Novato, California-based Ultragenyx — a biopharmaceutical corporation “focused on developing first-ever approved treatments for rare and ultrarare diseases.”

The \$2.6 billion company is being sued for using Lacks’ cell line to produce adeno-associated virus vector-based gene therapy products without seeking consent from or compensating her family.

Attorney Benjamin Crump, who’s representing the Lacks estate alongside Seeger Weiss partners Chris Seeger and Chris Ayers, says the company is practicing medical racism.

“Ultragenyx’s choice to continue utilizing HeLa cells despite the cell line’s origin and the concrete harm it inflicts on the Lacks family can only be understood as a choice to embrace a legacy of racial injustice embedded in the U.S. research and medical systems,” he said in a statement.

“Like anyone else, Black people have the right to control their bodies. Just as Ultragenyx takes advantage of Henrietta Lacks’ immortal cell line, they also take advantage of vulnerable individuals

with rare illnesses by price gouging them for essential treatments.”

According to the legal team, Ultragenyx is aware of the “unethical origins” of the immortal HeLa cell line, stolen from Lacks’ body by doctors without her knowledge or consent.

She was a cervical cancer patient at Johns Hopkins Hospital when the 1951 assault happened. In a racially segregated ward, doctors surgically extracted tissue samples and cultivated them into the first immortal human cell line.

Since her death in 1951, her cell line has been used in countless medical advances, from the study of AIDS to the development of the COVID-19 vaccines. She and her family, however, have received little recognition.

It wasn’t until recently that Lacks’ family saw some

justice after winning a settlement against Thermo Fisher Scientific, a \$217 billion company.

Ayers announced at a recent press conference that more companies would be up next. Ultragenyx is just the latest to be held accountable.

“Ultragenyx’s decision to profit from Henrietta Lacks’s cells without permission from her family is a glaring example of a biotech company violating ethical boundaries for financial gain,” Ayers said in a statement.

“Ultragenyx understands—indeed, acknowledges on its own website—that the HeLa cells it cultivates for profit today were stolen from Mrs. Lacks. The company’s business is nothing more than a perpetuation of this theft.”

Seeger says it’s time for Lacks’ legacy to change. “The enduring legacy of Henrietta Lacks should be one of acknowledgment, respect, and restitution, not continued exploitation by companies like Ultragenyx,” he said in a statement. “Their actions stand as a grim reminder of America’s history of medical racism and the urgent need to rectify these past wrongs. Our lawsuit aims to help the Lacks family reclaim their ancestor’s story and receive the justice and compensation they deserve.”



HENRIETTA LACKS. The Mother of Modern Medicine by Kadir Nelson, oil on linen, 2017. Collection of the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery and National Museum of African American History and Culture. PHOTO GIFT FROM KADIR NELSON AND THE JKBN GROUP LLC.



# BLACK FOLKS *have a long history of fighting back in this country against racism, period.*

NOT MY ANCESTORS *from A6*



BLACK AND WHITE SOLDIERS facing each other in 1919 on street sidewalk.  
PHOTO CHICAGO TRIBUNE STAFF 1919, PUBLIC DOMAIN, VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

MARCH ON WASHINGTON 1963. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BALTIMORE AFRO-AMERICAN.

diplomatically recognize Haiti after the Haitian Revolution, which ended in 1804, was the widespread fear that our ancestors, the folks being worked to death on plantations, would follow suit.

As National Geographic wrote about the ongoing push for freedom: “Enslaved people didn’t just engage in passive resistance against slaveholders—they planned and participated in armed revolts. Between the 17th and 19th centuries, enslaved Africans and African Americans in British North America and the United States staged hundreds of revolts.”

Need a post-Emancipation “knuck if you buck” example?

I grew up in Chicagoland, and no public school I ever attended taught me about the 1919 Race Riot, which took place from June 27 – Aug. 3. The story goes that the riot began after a white mob murdered 17-year-old Eugene Williams, a teen who floated on a raft across an invisible line in Lake Michigan to the so-called white side of the beach.

Williams’ murder was a response by white people to Black resistance. Zinn Education

Project breaks down what was happening in the vicinity prior to Williams’ murder:

“When a group of Black men and women defied custom and tried to swim at the white beach on 29th Street, they were driven off by a white mob throwing rocks. They returned with larger numbers. The white mob also grew.”

Williams was unaware of what was happening. A white man on the shore began throwing rocks at him as he floated in the water. One of the rocks hit Williams on the head, and the teen drowned.

ZEP points out that “a thousand Black Chicagoans assembled” at the beach demanding the arrest of the white man for murder. When the cops refused, “A Black man named James Crawford, opened fire on a group of police officers. Crawford was immediately shot and killed, but the crowd did not disperse and other Black individuals began to attack whites. By nightfall, rumors of ‘race war’ in white neighborhoods were running rampant, and the rioting began.”

No one wins when 23 Black folks and 15 white folks end up dead, when hundreds of

people are injured, and thousands of homes are destroyed, as was the case in Chicago. But again, our ancestors were not standing around passively, letting mobs of white folks beat on them.

Black folks have a long history of fighting back in this country against racism, period.

We can only hope to be our ancestors, to have the courage they showed in moments of sheer racial terror and violence. We are the descendants of people who fought tooth and nail for freedom, whose blood soaked the soil of these United States.

Their bravery is why “Aquamayne” had the ability to jump in the water in Montgomery and swim to the aid of that dockworker. I certainly would hope it’s in our DNA to protect and defend each other from racial violence.

So don’t get it twisted. We are only free because of the resistance of our ancestors. That “I am not my ancestors” T-shirt? Y’all can keep that.

## The Healing Power of Black Joy Marches on in Chicago

By JOSEPH WILLIAMS, WORD IN BLACK  
HEALING POWER *from A6*

In its basic elements, it’s like any other big-city parade: floats and marching bands in colorful uniforms; high-stepping, baton-twirling majorettes; beauty queens, waving atop convertible sedans; high-profile politicians glad-handing crowds that line the streets.

But Chicago’s annual Bud Billiken Parade and Picnic, set to step out into its 94th edition on Saturday, is not just another parade. Among the largest parades in the nation — and with origins in a storied Black newspaper that fought for civil rights — the Bud Billiken is the only one that’s created by, for, and about Black people.

Created nearly a century ago to honor the children who hawked editions of The Chicago Defender on Windy City street corners, the Bud Billiken Parade and Picnic has evolved into an unabashed celebration of the city’s Black culture.

Held annually on the city’s South Side on the second Saturday in August, the parade winds through the city’s Black neighborhoods and culminates in a massive cookout and festival that draws tens of thousands of people (and big-name performers) to Washington Park.

Bonds of kinship and cultural pride are embedded in the celebration, which serves as a public affirmation of Black humanity, and as a balm against the slow-healing wounds of racism.

“The notion of this 94-year-old parade is the second biggest parade in the U.S., and that it



GOLDEN SUGAR AT THE BUD BILLIKEN PARADE, 2015. PHOTO DANIEL X. O’NEIL FROM USA, CC BY 2.0, VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

centers around the love, joy, and experiences of (Black) people — that is itself joy,” says Dr. Sharon L. Bethea, president of the Association of Black Psychologists Inc., and a counselor education and African/African American studies professor at Northeastern Illinois University.

In the days leading up to the parade, Black Chicago is filled with near-palpable energy, Bethea says, as vendors and food booths set up along the parade route and spectators jockey for the best viewing spots as the hours tick down.

There’s a feeling of pride and ownership, she says, that makes the Bud Billiken Parade and Picnic “the epitome of representation of Black joy. To be around it is infectious.”

Although the parade features elaborate floats, skits, and no small amount of Black pride, the origins of the Billiken Parade are relatively simple. In the mid- to late-1920s, Robert S. Abbott, The Defender’s shrewd publisher, created an advice column aimed at hooking grade-school readers, who would then convince their parents to subscribe to the paper.

Named after a Billiken, the traditional Chinese good-luck statue and patron saint of children, the Bud Billiken column emphasized positivity and optimism for Black children — and it was a hit.

Building on that success, the paper created the namesake parade in 1929, to thank its young newswies for selling the paper, but also mark the unofficial end of summer and help raise money for back-to-school supplies, along with putting Chicago’s Black community in a positive light. Over time, the parade grew from a relatively humble event into a can’t-miss, end-of-summer tradition — rivaled in scope only by the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City and the Rose Bowl Parade in Pasadena, California.

And everyone’s invited, Bethea says: celebrities from Michael Jordan to Oprah Winfrey and then-Senator Barack Obama, running for the White House. Underserved children can get back-to-school supplies. Older kids can say

goodbye to summer with a big party. And adults greet one another at a civic family reunion that has survived the test of time.

Bethea remembers her first time at the parade in the early 2000s, after moving to Chicago from California. Having never heard of the parade, she struck up a conversation with “an elder,” a Black woman who told her of the event’s origin.

“She was 70,” Bethea says. “She said, ‘When I was a kid, I marched in the parade. I’ve been coming every year since.’”

Bethea has, too.

“People come out and cook and share,” she says. “People are barbecuing, selling their wares. Vendors are out. And it ends up in the park where everybody celebrates life.”

But her favorite part of the parade is the battle of the bands, when Chicago’s finest musicians and bands from historically Black colleges and universities — representing blues, jazz, and funk — square off for bragging rights, and to make people move.

And so the Bud Billiken Parade marches on, decade after decade, because it speaks to the resilience of Black people. It celebrates the fullness of who we are. Despite the blows of racism and losses that cut deep, every August, Black Chicago gives us a model of what it looks like to heal through joy and rise — over and over again.

“It’s an amazing event,” Bethea says. “I can’t wait.”

This story was produced in partnership with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.



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**TULSANS UNITE TO OPPOSE  
TAKEOVER OF TPS SCHOOLS**

A united front of community leaders and organizations stand against takeover. S2

**STATE BOARD OF ED. POISED TO  
TAKE ACTION AGAINST TPS**

Board will meet Thursday to consider the downgrading of TPS accreditation. S5



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

“If you were a state shopping for districts to take over, the pandemic provided a golden opportunity by putting more schools on the naughty list.”

*Peter Greene, high school English teacher and senior contributor for Forbes magazine*

TAKEOVER from A1

Oklahoma educators, staff and administrators have shared an unsettling journey throughout the past two years, managing to carefully navigate the faintly painted boundaries of H.B. 1775, surviving threats of violence from parents, being cast as members of a terrorist organization, public exposure of their home addresses by ‘concerned citizens’, downgrades of accreditation, audit revelations and now, the potential takeover of the Tulsa Public School district by the state.

The latter, a broadly GOP-supported action being considered by Oklahoma Superintendent of Public Instruction, Ryan Walters, looms above the Tulsa School District.

The specter of a state takeover of TPS gives rise to the perceived risk of losing local representation in exchange for the weighted hand of state government, and exposure to the politically-charged whims of a state governing administration that is objectively crossed with most Tulsans.

School district takeovers by state agencies, surprisingly, are not uncommon. Since the late 1980s more than 114 state governments have exercised their statutory authority to transfer decision-making power from locally elected school boards to the state.

The impacts of such a forced shift in local representation, and school performance, thereafter, do not consistently reveal a clear set of facts that support such decisions that are far too often motivated by political agendas.

The state’s leading official, Walters, has offered Oklahomans precious few insights regarding a possible TPS takeover throughout the last few months.

A punitive degrading of accreditation, quips against Dr. Deborah A. Gist, TPS’s School Board Superintendent, unprecedented rhetoric against Oklahoma Education Association (OEA) and general critiques of school performance are objectively the extent to which Walters has represented his brand of leadership.

Absent from his discussions are the facts surrounding the potential school district takeover, anticipated and past results from similar experiences nationally and any attempt to address the concerns of Tulsans.

**Context**

The results-based outcomes in education have been an evolving focus of parents, educators and governing officials nationally for more than five decades. The country’s most vigorous effort to achieve equitable outcomes dates back to the mid 1960s, under the Lyndon B. Johnson U.S. Presidential administration.

Nine months following the passage and signing of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964, Johnson’s sweeping reform of federal education policy was reflected in a significant leap forward, the

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965). Emphasizing equal access to education, and closing achievement gaps, the act provided federal funding to primary and secondary education, with funds authorized for professional development, instructional materials, resources to support educational programs, and parental involvement promotion.

Oklahoma’s Black children of the era, of no greater or lesser value than today, whose parents shared the same desire for equality and the





PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

# Accreditation Changes & Proposed Takeover Could Negatively Impact Students And Parents

By GARY LEE

## TULSANS UNITE

TULSA, OKLA. - A broad united front composed of Tulsa parents, teachers, lawmakers, philanthropist organizations, students, and concerned citizens has formed a solid block of opposition to the threat of a state takeover of Tulsa Public Schools.

The spectrum of the Stop, The Takeover Movement, represents a rare, diverse cross-section of Tulsans: Blacks and white civic activists who want to preserve the integrity of public education; public officials to protect the educational freedom of their constituents; to support educators wary of the dangers of a state-controlled school system; to involve mothers and fathers desperately fighting for the best education for their kids; to engage philanthropic organizations and public interest groups who know that sound education is at the root of their missions; and to include residents of both north and south Tulsa who know that excellent schooling cuts across all boundaries and socio-economic sectors.

Oklahoma State School Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters is mounting a campaign to support severe action against TPS, including a dramatic downgrading of the system’s accreditation and a plan to take over the operations of public schools across the city.

The opponents to the position that Walters and other conservative politicians are taking are raising their voices in press conferences, strategy meetings, and interviews. They are sending the critics of TPS a simple, singular message: No to a takeover.

### Takeover detrimental to students

Yashaca Armstrong, an African American mother of three children in two different Tulsa Public schools, summed up the sentiments of TPS parents succinctly. “Of course, as a parent, I am concerned about the quality of education in Tulsa schools,”

“I’m disturbed by how little he has reached out to collaborate or work with our school leaders.”

- **ASHLEY DALY**, a Tulsa Public Schools advocate, and mother of a TPS second grader

she said in an interview with The Oklahoma Eagle. “But any unwarranted downgrading of the school district would be detrimental to my kids’ education. It would be disruptive and would not address the problems TPS is having.”

On Thursday, a coalition of leading philanthropic organizations in Tulsa and two major Native American tribes issued a letter protesting the attempts for a state takeover of schools. (See related article on page X in The Oklahoma Eagle.)

Alisa Bell, executive director of J.A.M.E.S Inc., a nonprofit assisting new mothers in Tulsa, is also alarmed at the potential disruption that severe changes in the accreditation and management of Tulsa schools could have on mothers of children in Tulsa’s underserved communities. “It’s already hard enough for the parents we work with to get their kids to school and get them through classes and other activities,” Bell told The Oklahoma Eagle.

“The accreditation changes and proposed takeover would negatively impact students and parents in our network and community.” Bell added that many mothers associated with J.A.M.E.S. are pushing to get their degrees from TPS high schools and fear that losing accreditation would throw them off course.

Bell is also helping to circulate a petition to oppose the proposed accreditation and status changes for TPS. The Change.org petition, launched by Omare Jimmerson, executive director of Tulsa Birth Equity Initiative, has garnered over 4,000 signatures. In addition, Bell organized a webinar via Zoom last week to inform mothers working with JAMES of the issues involved in a potential TPS accreditation change or takeover.

### Protect TPS

Ashley Daly, a Tulsa schools advocate, and mother of a TPS second grader, concurred. She is an outspoken advocate for TPS, the mother of a TPS second grader, and the

founder of Protect TPS, a grassroots group seeking to educate the public about what is happening in Tulsa district public schools and garner support for the school system and its leadership. The group has started rallies during TPS meetings to oppose the downgrading and takeover of TPS.

In an interview with The Oklahoma Eagle, Daly said that she has tracked closely the approach TPS has taken to address learning gaps and other issues facing Tulsa schools. “The system established goals for improvement, and they are meeting those goals,” she said. “The state should be seeking ways to help the district rather than introducing rules that are confusing and unhelpful.”

Daly also voiced dismay at Walters’ aggressive tactics in his treatment of Tulsa schools.

“I’m disturbed by how little he has reached out to collaborate or work with our school leaders,” she said. “He has spent very little time with Tulsa school leaders. He exhibits exactly the opposite kind of behavior that we’re trying to teach our children.”

### Teachers express fear, anxiety

The pushback from Tulsa teachers against Walters’ attacks is expected. Shawna Mott-Wright, who represents hundreds of teachers as president of the Tulsa Classroom Teachers Association, reported that among teachers, the opposition to any takeover runs broad and deep.

“As the debate over the fate of TPS rises, Tulsa teachers are expressing fear, anxiety, and depression,” Mott-Wright told The Oklahoma Eagle. Two teachers have left TPS in the past few weeks due to worries about the fate of TPS, she explained. “We’re already short of teachers and can’t afford to lose others over this nonsense.”

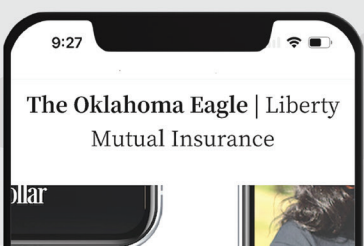
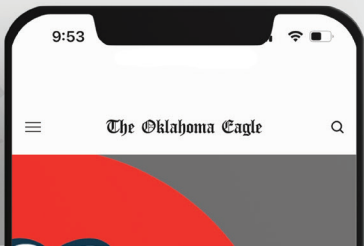
“The message Tulsa teachers want to send Walters and other harsh critics is: Stop it! Our schools, students, and teachers

**TULSANS UNITE** cont. S3

The Oklahoma Eagle

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# Many perceive the state’s potential action as a ‘POWER GRAB’

TULSANS UNITE *from S2*

deserve better.”

In Darryl Bright’s view, the anti-TPS bid that Walters and others are pushing has little to do with concern for the education of Tulsa’s children. “I have listened closely to their reasons for targeting TPS’s accreditation. I have heard nothing from them about plans to improve educational opportunities for the kids,” Bright told The Oklahoma Eagle.

Bright, an African American and longtime director of Citizens United for a Better Educational System (CUBES), has pushed for improvements in north Tulsa schools for over five decades.

“This is about power,” he said, “about the conservative politicians trying to take over everything they can in any way they can. This power grab can’t be allowed to succeed.”

**Lawmakers also join the fight**

St. Rep. Monroe Nichols, Dist. 72, and a recently announced candidate for mayor of the City of Tulsa, also feels that Walters’ campaign is not



about improving educational results.

“If they wanted to bring about better test scores in Tulsa, they had multiple opportunities to focus on that in recent years. They used none of them,” Nichols said in an interview with The Oklahoma Eagle.

He added: “In the end, this

campaign is fueled by a personal attack against the leadership of TPS and against Tulsa itself.

We can’t let the future of Tulsa schools and our school children be sacrificed for personal vendettas.”

On Wednesday, Nichols and St. Rep. John Waldron, Dist. 77,

led a press conference with other local stakeholders to voice their opposition to the attacks on TPS accreditation and proposed takeover. Other lawmakers, including St. Rep. Regina Goodwin, Dist. 73, joined the conference to defend TPS and respond to Walters’ attacks.

“Whatever happens, advocates of Tulsa schools should take this as a wake-up call, CUBES leader Bright said. “What we’re doing isn’t working well. For the sake of our children and grandchildren, we have to take bolder approaches.”



## Concerns regarding America’s ability to compete globally gave rise to calls for additional education reforms and accountability

TAKEOVER *from S1*

opportunity to achieve the ‘American Dream’, continued to challenge the state’s resistance to integrated schools and the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) ruling.

Following decades of legal challenges by community and civil rights leaders in Oklahoma, such as Clara Luper and James O. Goodwin, esquire (Publisher, The Oklahoma Eagle), Oklahoma school districts and local governing authorities reluctantly integrated schools and dismantled taxing models to support the legacy ‘separate schools’ model.

Since 1965, ESEA has been modified and reauthorized by the U.S. Congress several times, to address specific considerations of bilingual education (Bilingual Education Act) and discrimination against students and educators (Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974).

Concerns regarding America’s ability to compete globally gave rise to calls for additional education reforms and accountability. A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform (1983), a U.S. President Ronald Reagan era report that emphasized potential risks to economic security should the country not address education shortfalls, compelled U.S. legislators to further revise the ESEA. National standards-based education, reforms with a core focus on measuring K-12 student’s proficiency in specific disciplines, became the source for what is now believed to be an objective tool for parents and administrators to determine a school’s performance.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) served as the foundation upon which standards-based education would evolve, with a key emphasis on provisions applicable to disadvantaged students. NCLB faced myriad criticisms throughout the 13 years of its application, primarily the lack of federal funding invested to realize the legislators’ goals and a state’s ability to secure waivers from various requirements.

Other federal education standards initiatives, such as Common Core, have been met by the state GOP’s populist conservatives, who herald the virtues of individualism and accountability, but quietly gave way to funding that the state so desperately requires.

114

Since the late 1980s more than 114 state governments have exercised their statutory authority to transfer decision-making power from locally elected school boards to the state.



Today, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) serves as the federal law that governs K-12 education. According to OKPolicy.org, “ESSA largely rolls back the authority of the federal government in education policy. It prohibits the federal government from requiring any specific academic standards or intervention methods. The Act also removes the “highly qualified teacher” provision, and prohibits the federal government from requiring states to have a teacher evaluation system.”

The perceived ‘NCLB light’ standard was embraced by Walter’s predecessor, former State Superintendent of Public Instruction Joy Hofmeister. She noted that “states will now be able to determine the most appropriate, research-based plan to address school improvement and student support for Oklahoma students... This is different from the old ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach of No Child Left Behind.”

**Takeovers**

State school districts seldom engage residents in a manner to ensure that they are fully informed about the potential consequences of school takeovers. Instead, legislators and state agency officials, similar to Oklahoma, rely upon heated rhetoric and personal attacks to compel residents to support their positions.

The Oklahoma State Board of Education’s website homepage, as of this publishing date, reveals no mention of a potential takeover or the scope of what the state is considering.

Walters, in no productive service to Oklahomans, has only offered broad and seemingly empty proclamations. During the Jul. 27 monthly OSBE meeting he noted that “We are looking at all possible actions with this district to ensure that all state laws or rules are being upheld by that district in a way that benefits those kids,” NonDoc reported.

In ‘State Takeovers: No Silver Bullet for School District Improvement,’ Dr. Beth Schueler, an assistant professor of education & public policy at the University of Virginia, builds upon the work of Kenneth Wong and Francis Shen who examined the impact of school district takeovers prior to NCLB. Schueler’s work, informed by applied federal accountability standards, tracked all 114 state takeovers that had occurred since the earliest cases in the late 1980s through 2016. Most states have experienced some measure of state

school board takeovers. Throughout all regions of the country, 23 states have wrested authority from local school boards.

Lower academic performance is a common metric related to takeovers, however, this point of concern is of lesser significance for school district takeovers that serve a greater share of Black students. Schueler found that state intervention of majority white school districts was compelled by academic performance, while majority Black school district takeovers where not predicated on similar performance standards.

Drawing a direct comparison of test scores was possible by focusing on a subset of the 114 state takeovers. Schueler identified a group of 35 takeovers that occurred between 2011 and 2016 nationally, concluding that overall, no evidence existed that state takeovers improved academic achievement.

The states’ approach to takeover, highlighted in the report, is varied.

**IN THE CASE OF THE NEW ORLEANS, LA.** public school system takeover by Orleans Parish-Recovery School District (RSD), by all objective measures schools were failing. Douglas Harris of Tulane University and Matthew Larsen of Lafayette College, perhaps the most high-profile researchers that have documented the RSD takeover, New Orleans “was the second-worst performing district in one of the worst-performing states.”

Louisiana’s National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) score during the early part of century was regarded as the worst in the nation, with the state earning a last place ranking in 4th and 8th grade math, and ranking near the bottom in reading at both grade levels ranking.

**IN LAWRENCE, MASS., 2011,** the state takeover of public schools was not affected with an approach similar to RSD. Jeffrey Riley, the state selected school district receiver, employed a greater focus on raising and meeting expectations. The former teacher and administrator, Riley, opted not to advance the heavier handed conversion of public schools to charter institutions, but instead relied upon a hybrid model that established a balance between centralized and decentralized authority. Further,

TAKEOVER *cont. S4*



# TAKEOVER

Takeover is least harmful in districts serving large concentrations of Hispanic students, suggesting that takeover has been riskier when implemented in majority-Black contexts.

TAKEOVER from S3

Riley championed initiatives that increased learning time; established a merit-based compensation model; and leveraged data-driven instructional improvements.

The results in both cases, New Orleans and Lawrence, were objectively positive, with the former achieving “dramatic improvements.” The latter, Lawrence, showed significant gains in math and modest improvement in English scores. Graduation rates in Lawrence increased 19 points by 2016, and another seven points by 2022.

What many school districts have realized throughout the decades is that there exists no single approach to takeovers that best produces desired results.

Nationally, the positive impact of district takeovers is selectively lifted by state officials to justify the intent. However, Schueler’s effort revealed “no positive learning impacts of takeover on average,” and documented “substantial” variation in the effect of takeover.

Variations of the positive and negative impacts of takeovers are most apparent when considering the relative academic performance of the target school compared to schools nationally, according to Schueler. Plainly stated, takeover districts may be the lowest performing schools within their state, but not in the country. It is within this paradigm, according to the report, that negative impacts are concentrated.

Of perhaps greater significance, Schueler noted that “takeover is least harmful in districts serving large concentrations of Hispanic students, suggesting that takeover has been riskier when implemented in majority-Black contexts.”

Although not a clearly established predictor of success, the well-regarded research seems to suggest that state officials should view the performance of their state school districts through a broader lens, considering corrective measures that protect local autonomy, and employ remedies that both require and aid improvement.

**MILLARD HOUSE II, THE FORMER HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT (HISD) SUPERINTENDENT,** acutely observed and fairly chronicled the actions of the Texas legislature who successfully litigated the state’s authority to take over the school district in 2023, after a years-long legal battle. “This takeover is not about the quality of education. If you look at the Texas Legislature, several bills have been filed to pre-empt the authority of the city of Houston and other local jurisdictions. HISD happens to be one of those local jurisdictions,” House said.

Houston’s public school district was felled by the populous whim of conservatism. A political ideology, when fully observed, justifies the exercise of power to effect the sentiment of patriotism amongst students, as opposed to providing objective and comprehensive study that empowers youth to assess and determine the vice and virtue of historic events and figures.

**Western Heights School District in Oklahoma City, Okla.,** was the state’s most recent school district to lose its authority of local governance. In April 2021, the Oklahoma State Board of Education placed Western Heights on probation,

after years of complaints registered by parents, significant concerns regarding financial management, failure to provide in-person instructional services to students and a failure to provide food services to students. The district’s graduation rates were among the lowest in the state, according to the audit, while absenteeism was among the highest.

After being placed on probation by OSBE in Apr. 2021, the unanimous decision to suspend the district’s superintendent, Mannix Barnes in Jul. 2021, the implementation of a state-led intervention plan and a months-long legal challenge in county and the Oklahoma Supreme Court, the Western Heights School District & OSBE would commit its focus to resolving immediate challenges identified by auditors.

The state’s decision to shift governing authority away from local representatives was embraced by then-Superintendent of Public Instruction Joy Hofmeister, who shared, “Things are going to change at Western Heights.”

Following a year of varied intervention methods, Interim Superintendent Brayden Savage reported, during an OSBE quarterly meeting in May 2022, that some progress had been realized but that the district’s challenges are “more diverse and widespread.”

An assessment of success, or failure, of the state takeover at this juncture is perhaps premature, given the scope and depth of issues faced. It is worth noting, however, that the intervention approach employed is objectively less heavy-handed than that of Orleans Parish-Recovery School District.

Savage’s engagement with the Western Heights community was centered within “building trust through open communication with the district’s stakeholders.”

Brianna Dodd, a 2011 Western Heights graduate, parent and community organizer, was initially skeptical of Savage, according to reporting by The Oklahoman. Dodd, who attended a community forum led by Savage in Jan. 2022, shared that “I feel that she listened and heard everything that I said, and for the first time in four years, I’ve found peace with the situation.”

Walters’ engagement with Tulsans, as reported by The Oklahoma Eagle on Aug. 8, stands in sharp contrast to both Western Height’s Savage and Lawrence, Mass. officials.

An early August press conference in Tulsa was hastily announced by Walters, just hours before it started. Followed by threats of exclusion or loss of access if the media advisory was shared by outlets, the live-streamed event was yet another chorus of attacks against the TPS board and the introduction of an “Improvement Plan” that would require substantial student reading score improvements by the end of the upcoming academic year.

**Representation Matters**

State takeover consistently results in the removal of local leadership, specifically the district superintendent and often board members.

Tulsa’s 78 unique learning communities, serving more than 33,000 students, are represented by seven board members, each elected by their respective district residents.

TPS board members are not simply elected officials, representatives who’ve gained more than modest popularity within their respective communities and successfully earned a majority share of several hundred votes. Familial ties, of four or more generations at least, give form to a relationship that may only be characterized as “of Tulsa.”

Winning by a margin of 26 votes, out of 1,028 cast, Dr. Jennettie Marshall earned a second term to represent TPS district 3 in Apr. 2021. Dr. Marshall retired from the State of Oklahoma where she worked for the Department of Corrections and the Department of Human Services. The second-term board member also served the City of Tulsa as a police and fire chaplain and was trained in emergency disaster response and hostage negotiation. Being “of Tulsa”, Dr. Marshall shares the interests of her constituents, just like her colleagues.

TPS Superintendent Gist has drawn the apparent ire of Walters, evidenced by his publicly stated desire for her removal. The attacks against Gist and TPS teachers continue to be met by opposition from educators, community organizations, philanthropies and the state’s native tribes, reflected in reporting by The Oklahoma Eagle earlier this week.

“This is nothing more than a witch hunt,” said Shawna Mott-Wright, president of the Tulsa Classroom Teachers Association, during an interview with FOX23, after Walters’ recent press conference on Aug. 7.

Mott-Wright, like many Tulsans, regard Walters’ rhetoric as an attempt to undermine the stability of TPS. In response to learning about Walters’ consultation with Texas Education Commissioner Mike Morath, and discussions about strategies Texas used in its takeover of HISD, she shared, “That’s the plan right... when you’re on a witch hunt and you’re coming after our district, then you make us to where we can’t function how we want to, and then blame us for it.”

Should Walters follow the HISD takeover approach, TPS board representation may be significantly altered. Morath officially announced on Jun. 1 that he has removed Houston ISD’s elected school board and superintendent from power. Governance of the state’s largest school district now rest with an appointed, not elected, team and a new district leader, Mike Miles, former Dallas Independent School District chief.

HISD’s new school board composition includes several Houston ISD parents, business professionals and one former school teacher. Although the board’s composition reflects the racial and ethnic diversity of the school district, seven of the nine appointed members live in Houston’s more-affluent neighborhoods west of downtown.

The shift from representation “of” school district communities in favor of more affluent board members that don’t reside within communities that would likely be most impacted by quickly evolving policies, gives rise to concerns of Tulsa parents.

**Why Motive And Intent Are Irrelevant**

It is far too convenient, and perhaps the intended objective of city and state officials who appear to thrive in a climate of manufactured distrust, to immediately speculate about the motives of the red state’s politicians. Such distrust, often the product of hate-filled political rhetoric and the fear it inspires, compels Oklahomans on both sides of the issue to support a course of action that either aligns with public figures viewed favorably, or stand against those who ‘hate them’.

Any discussion anchored by motive and intent encourages Oklahoma parents, teachers and staff to quickly move towards their respective corners... And away from the broad and potentially significant impact of the state’s decision to takeover Tulsa Public Schools.

Walters, representing Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt’s administration regarding public school education, related governance and vision, has well-established himself as a vocal critic of the OEA, Tulsa School Board Superintendent Gist and any effort to cast the history of slavery within the U.S. as being an integral aspect of the country’s founding, its institutions and DNA.

As a candidate for state Superintendent of Public Instruction in late 2022, Walters introduced a desired mandate for “Patriotic Training”, representing the political ideologically conservative Hillsdale College’s program as a tool for ensuring that the state’s educators “know our history”.

State legislators have also advanced bills (House Bill 1775, 2021) that have placed state educators upon a thin wire where they must balance their moral obligations to provide students with an objective and comprehensive history, and now statutory limitations.

The motives and intent of state officials, in the current political environment, are seldom cloaked, disguised or hidden. Walters, as is the case with Oklahoma state legislators, has advocated for nationalist-inspired remedies to real problems, all of which mandate fealty at the expense of personal liberty and the education of children.

Should Oklahoma officials ‘make good’ on their threats of further punitive action against TPS, and takeover the state’s largest school district in pursuit of its perceived Brave New World, Tulsa students and parents will ultimately shoulder the weight of such partisan bias.



# State Board POISED TO TAKE OVER Tulsa Public Schools

By John Neal

STATE BOARD *from AI*

The Oklahoma State Board of Education (OSBE) will meet Thursday to consider the downgrading of Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) accreditation and possible takeover of Tulsa schools. The Board is also scheduled to discuss a so-called “Improvement Plan” proposed by Ryan Walters, Oklahoma State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Walters’ plan, announced earlier this month, would make radical changes in the management of TPS with the purported objective of increasing student test scores, correcting alleged financial mismanagement, and removing Tulsa Public Schools Superintendent Deborah Gist.

The Tulsa School Board and Gist oppose the downgrading of TPS accreditation that would be a prerequisite to forcing the implementation of Walters’ plan. Walters has voiced increasingly sharp critiques of TPS. He has publicly stated the State Board has “the authority under the State constitution” to take over Tulsa Public Schools.



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

The make-up of the OSBE Board tilts against TPS. The other board members are political appointees chosen by Gov. Kevin Stitt, who has also been an outspoken critic of TPS and Gist. While the Board is composed mostly of whites, eighty percent of the Tulsa school enrollment are minorities, including approximately 7,500 Black and 3,500 who self-identify as representing two or more races.

In July, the State Board postponed the accreditation action on TPS while approving over 500 other school districts, reportedly to conduct more research and consider accreditation options. At that meeting, the Board refused to accept the recommendation of its professional staff that the TPS accreditation be renewed.

TPS School Board members acknowledge that the district schools are in a crisis mode. Superintendent Gist called the state board’s inaction in July on TPS “unprecedented.” She pushed for the approval of the accreditation “with one deficiency.” That deficiency would be for a late filing of only one report to the state agency. TPS Board member Jennettie Marshall characterized the crisis as analogous to a clock that displays “11:59 for the destiny of Tulsa Public Schools.” Marshall, who represents District 3, is one of three African American Tulsa School Board members. In its Aug. 7 meeting, the Tulsa School Board and many TPS supporters voiced their opposition to Walters’ accreditation threats and his plan for State Board takeover of the management and operations of TPS.

### What’s at stake

The OSBE’s possible accreditation actions are outlined in the 280-page Standards for Accreditation of Oklahoma Schools. Based on the Education Department’s annual compliance review and findings, the Board is charged with bestowing accreditation status on each Oklahoma school district. These range in order from best to worse: with no deficiencies, with deficiencies, warning, probation, and nonaccreditation.

The downgrade of TPS accreditation to probationary status would give the OSBE sweeping authority to implement Walters’ plan. Gist spoke to this possibility in response to a question posed by The Oklahoma Eagle at a press conference via Zoom on Aug. 9. She said a probationary status was equivalent to a takeover because she said it would give the Board “substantial authority over [TPS] expenditures, policies, and who serves on the district board and as superintendent.”

The Standards for Accreditation states “Accreditation with Probation” results from a finding that a “school site consistently fails to make progress to remove previous years’ deficiencies; and/or, consistently violates regulations; and/or, deliberately and unnecessarily violates one or more of the regulations.” The State Board has yet to identify which regulations TPS has allegedly violated. Indeed, Superintendent Gist and Tulsa Board President Stacey Woolley have publicly stated many of Walters’ complaints about TPS are not violations found in the Standards for Accreditation.

The most severe potential action – the total withdrawal of TPS accreditation – would have extraordinary adverse consequences. However, “nonaccreditation” in Oklahoma law Title 70 requires the State Board to first “provide for warnings and assistance to schools and school districts whenever there is reason to believe a school is endanger of losing its state accreditation.”

Should TPS lose accreditation, the Oklahoma statute states, “... the State Board of Education shall close the school and reassign students to accredited schools within the district or shall annex the district to one or more other districts...” However, at the July meeting, State Board members went to great lengths to explain that TPS “school doors would open, and teachers would be paid.”

### Compliance review irregularities

An OSDE Regional Accreditation Officer submitted this year’s “compliance report” and accreditation recommendation to Tulsa School District officials in May. The official review found only one district-level deficiency for a report submitted to the OSDE because TPS submitted it one week late. In a media conference the day before the July State Board meeting, Superintendent Gist said that the district files “more than 250 reports every year” but that she accepted and signed the “one deficiency” accreditation document, as did the State’s officer. The Oklahoma Eagle has confirmed this, obtaining the document through an open records request. Ryan Pieper, executive director of accreditation, would subsequently tell the State Board that late reporting was the most typical district deficiency and occurred in over 100 district instances statewide for this compliance review period.

However, in July, only days before the State Board meeting, Gist was presented with a superseding report that added an unexpected deficiency. Gist told the media it related to the district being the victim of embezzlement of district funds discovered in 2022, promptly reported to criminal investigation agencies, which was also widely reported by the media. An open records request revealed that this deficiency was described as a “lack of internal controls.”

Gist told the press, later confirmed by The Oklahoma Eagle, that she refused to sign the acknowledgment adding the deficiency, saying the Oklahoma State Department of Education, headed by Walters, added this deficiency after the annual review and without notice. In her media conference, Gist said, “We found it. We reported it. We’ve addressed it.”

### TPS issues and incidents

Nevertheless, the embezzlement involved hundreds of thousands of dollars and a high-ranking TPS district official. That prompted the school board’s the two African American members to call for a complete “forensic audit.” When the superintendent and other school board members rejected their efforts, Jennettie Marshall and E’Lena Ashley asked Gov. Stitt to call for one. The Governor did, and a year later, an audit by the Oklahoma State Auditor and Inspector is still underway.

More recently, Superintendent Walters rebuked TPS officials for a “reprimand” of Tulsa School Board member E’Lena Ashley for a prayer she led at an official school graduation ceremony. Ashley invoked the name of Jesus Christ in her prayer in what is likely a violation of the U.S. Constitution established by prior Supreme Court rulings. In 1962, the Supreme Court agreed with a petitioner that “prayer in its public school system breaches the constitutional wall of separation between Church and State.”

Following Ashley’s prayer, TPS School Board President Stacey Woolley, sent an email to Ashley, which stated Dr. Gist would be sending a letter to school board members providing instructions on such matters. Woolley said the letter would require, in part, “that in the future, all board members must use only the exact language in the scripts provided to them for graduation ceremonies.” Ashley and Walters condemned this communication as violating “religious liberties.” And both Ashley and Walters subsequently called for Gist’s dismissal.

The Oklahoma State Department of Education accreditation officials did not cite low student test scores as a deficiency. Nevertheless, low scores have fueled Superintendent Walters and the State Board’s criticism of the district. Tulsa Public Schools student test scores lag state averages in every category, while Oklahoma is among the lowest performing states. In response to a question at a recent media conference, Gist deflected this criticism by pointing out that test scores in urban areas are generally below both state and national averages. Multiple studies, including the OSDE’s Oklahoma Report Card, show economically disadvantaged students fare poorer on standardized tests. Almost 80 percent of TPS students are economically disadvantaged.

### Troubling history

The OSBE’s consideration of harsher penalties this year is eerily similar to the Board’s action a year earlier. The Board ignored the professional staff recommendation and downgraded TPS to “Accreditation with Warning” for conducting racial “implicit bias” training. That State Board action was taken based on a complaint from a white Memorial High School teacher who griped the course “shame white people for past offenses in history.”

This year’s postponement of Tulsa’s accreditation again brought outcries that TPS is being singled out for punishment. Former Tulsa Public School principal and 30-year experienced educator, Mike Howe, told the Board at its July meeting, “TPS is being targeted, and I don’t understand that.”

Ashley Day, a TPS parent, also said to the State Board she was “really, really scared for my school district.” Walters responded, claiming the Tulsa district has “severe and unique problems” that we need to “dig into...to see if left-wing extremism [is] being pushed into these programs.”

In an Aug. 8 press conference Superintendent Walters continued his criticism of TPS, calling the district “uniquely bad,” laying much of the blame on Superintendent Deborah Gist. Within days after that, Walters’ OSDE website posted a video continuing TPS attacks. This time, the criticism also references Tulsa’s “failing schools” from 2009-14, when Gist was not superintendent.

The OSDE video reminds viewers, perhaps unwittingly, that criticism of Oklahoma’s urban schools is not new, nor is criticism of the State Board’s grading of Oklahoma schools. Archived video footage presents former TPS Superintendent Keith Ballard, who had led opposition to the State’s grading system for school accreditation, saying in 2013, “We need to have a better definition of a failing school.”

In its Pathways to Opportunity Strategic Plan, Tulsa Public Schools has multi-year reading goals using its own independent testing regiment to assess progress. Last month, the district administration reported to the local Board it was “on target” to achieve its ambitious goals of improving K-8th grade reading scores for economically disadvantaged students over the 2022-2027 period.



# A Coalition United With Tulsa Public Schools

TPS COALITION *from AI*

A coalition of leading Tulsa philanthropic organizations and tribal governments is actively opposing Oklahoma State Superintendent Ryan Walters’ threatened takeover of Tulsa Public Schools. Walters has expressed publicly his concern about the accreditation of TPS by the state Board of Education. The coalition is rallying other organizations across Tulsa to stand up against Walters’ efforts to interfere with the administration of TPS. The coalition wrote a letter on Aug. 17 warning of the dangers a state takeover of TPS would pose.

“Any such action would bypass the democratic process and undermine the authority of the TPS Board of Education, which has been entrusted by Tulsa voters with the responsibility to make decisions about what is best for the district,” the letter said. “Any form of a state takeover of TPS would devastate student learning, create chaos and uncertainty for teachers and families, negatively impact businesses that rely on schools to prepare TPS kids for work and life, hinder our region’s efforts to attract and retain businesses, and depreciate home values.”

The signatories of the letter include nine major Tulsa-based philanthropies and the heads of the Cherokee and Muskogee Creek tribal governments. They sent the letter to over 200 organizations across Tulsa, urging them to join in the fight against Walters’ attempted putsch and to do all they could to back TPS.

“We believe this issue impacts all who care about the future of our city—including those of us who directly support K-12 education, as well as anyone who works on other issues, whether it is youth programming, higher education, housing stability, food security, social services, healthcare, and mental health services and much more,” the letter said.

## Call to action

The letter and ensuring campaign amounts to an all-out call to action to stop the campaign of threats Walters and others have made against TPS. This rare show of activism among some of Tulsa’s leading philanthropists expresses their sentiments that the danger facing TPS is dire and imminent. Sent on the eve of the school opening for the 2023-24 school year, it adds urgency and drama to the efforts to save TPS. The letter is one of several efforts that Tulsa parents, schoolteachers, and other concerned locals are taking to support the accreditation of TPS and stop an attempted state takeover.

“Supporting our public schools is always urgent,” said Alexandra Paschal, program manager at the Ed Darby Foundation, in an interview with The Oklahoma Eagle. The Ed Darby Foundation is one of the signatories of the letter. Based in Tulsa, the foundation funds educational, developmental, and community programs that allow economically disadvantaged Tulsa students to fulfill their potential.

“Improving academic outcomes, especially in our schools with students who are at an economic disadvantage, is paramount,” Paschal continued. “Oklahoma schools are underfunded and are facing a teacher shortage. The lack of resources are compounded with having to recover from the impacts of the pandemic. Threats from the state are creating uncertainty about the stability of the district for students, families, and staff. Our schools and educators have never needed support more

than they do today. Forcing them to defend themselves against attacks from the people who should be supporting them the most is unfair and irresponsible.”

The coalition sent the letter to a broad spectrum of more than 200 groups and organizations across Tulsa. “We ask that you consider showing your support for Tulsa Public Schools in ways that feel aligned with your mission and values,” the letter said.

The Oklahoma State Board of Education is scheduled to meet on Aug. 24 to consider the accreditation of TPS. The Board could vote for a state takeover of TPS at that meeting. The letter from philanthropies and tribal leaders urged “all who care about the future” of Tulsa to write to Gov. Kevin Stitt and to members of the State Board of Education to voice support for the accreditation of TPS and opposition to a takeover.

It also suggested other actions Tulsans can take, including attending school board meetings and other gatherings where the TPS issues are being considered.

## Keep TPS in hands of Tulsans

In the interview with The Oklahoma Eagle, Paschal explained the importance of keeping the TPS administration in charge of Tulsa Public Schools. “There is an important distinction between the Tulsa Public Schools Board of Education who were elected by Tulsans and the State Board of Education who were appointed by the state. With the

exception of one individual, the state board is not made up of Tulsans,” she said. “If the State Department of Education strips the rights of the District Board of Education, they are threatening local control and flouting our democratic process. They do not know our community better than we do. They do not have students in our schools, they do not employ staff who would be adversely impacted if their children’s schools lose accreditation.”

Representatives of the following entities signed the letter:

- Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies
- Cherokee Nation
- Cortez Family Foundation
- Ed Darby Foundation
- Flint Family Foundation
- Hille Foundation
- Lobeck Taylor Family Foundation
- Muscogee Creek Nation
- Sanford & Irene Burnstein Family Foundation
- T.D. Williamson
- The Sharna and Irvin Frank Foundation

The letter’s recipients include 100 Black Men of Tulsa, Impact Tulsa, and the Tulsa Dream Center, among dozens of others.

The Oklahoma Eagle reached out to the office of Superintendent Ryan Walters requesting a response to the letter. Walters’ office has not responded by the newspaper’s publication deadline.



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES



# State Superintendent Walters Continues Attack On TPS

WALTERS TPS *from AI*



Oklahoma Superintendent of Public Instruction, Ryan Walters, escalated his attack on Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) in a press conference on Aug. 7. In the hastily arranged meeting, Walters singled out TPS for poor student test scores and alleged financial mismanagement. While he said no decision had been made about TPS’s educational accreditation, he demanded changes and said the school district was “uniquely bad” in the state.

Walters also called for the dismissal of Tulsa Public Schools Superintendent Deborah Gist. Since his election a year ago, Walters has pushed an unabashedly conservative Republican education agenda in his critique of TPS and its administration. His choice of venue for the press conference, the Tulsa GOP party headquarters in south Tulsa, underlined the political undertones of his attacks.

In a regularly scheduled meeting held shortly after Walters’ appearance, the TPS Board of Education discussed the accreditation issue, including Walters’ statements. Superintendent Gist began the tense meeting with a fervent defense of the Tulsa school district, the largest school district in the state.

### A rally for TPS

A chorus of other TPS Board members quickly voiced support for her. A couple of dozen demonstrators gathered outside the meeting at TPS headquarters to protest Walters’ broadscale assault on TPS and rally a defense of Gist. An overflow crowd of people attending the meeting also gave Gist a ringing endorsement.

Gist characterized Walters’ remarks as “inaccurate” and “blatantly false, bordering on a lie.”

Board President Stacey Woolley and Board member John Croisant led Gist through a series of questions rebutting Walters’ allegations. Some Board members were visibly upset about Walters’ attacks. They were cheered on by eruptions of support from the audience.

The Oklahoma State Board of Education (OSBE) plans to take up TPS accreditation later this month. The board was initially scheduled to address TPS last month but postponed the discussion. At the July meeting, the Board declined to accept the State Education Department Accreditation Section’s recommendation that the TPS accreditation be renewed, albeit with “deficiencies.” The deficiencies noted included “one week late” on a report to the agency, and a “lack of internal controls,” which was added after the standard review process, according to Gist. The latter accounting issue related to embezzlement at TPS in 2022, widely reported in the media then.

### Walters’ press conference

In his press conference, Walters accused TPS of “financial mismanagement.” He also claimed this finding had been cited in three

consecutive TPS independent audits. Chief Financial and Operations Officer Jorge Robles told the Board that was not true but related only to the most recent audit when the embezzlement occurred. He said previous audits had “unmodified opinions” that the district “met all established requirements.”

Walters announced his press conference at mid-afternoon on Monday, only a couple of hours before it started. The announcement came with a warning to the media that if the “media advisory is publicly distributed or posted on any social platform, the reporter and the media outlet will be immediately removed from our distribution list.” The public was not invited to Walters’ press event, but it was live streamed on local television networks and social media.

Due to hastily arranged appearance, the school district’s administration, and Board, meeting only minutes after the conclusion of the School Superintendent’s press conference, were unprepared to address all of Walters’ allegations.

Particularly noteworthy was Walters’ call for a TPS “Improvement Plan” that would require substantial student reading score improvements by the end of the upcoming academic year. Dr. Gist and the Board seemed blindsided by this demand and the specific targets, responding only partially to that set of statements.

### TPS board response

TPS Board member Diamond Marshall appeared especially miffed at Walters’ remarks concerning planning, saying, “We have a strategic plan, and we are monitoring our goals.” Marshall, who represents District 2 is one of three African Americans on the Board.

Gist added the district could point to continuous progress on those measures. Marshall also expressed opposition to Superintendent Gist’s removal. Marshall told Gist at the meeting, “You are doing a great job.”

“Of course, TPS has room for improvement,” Marshall said in an interview with The Oklahoma Eagle. “But that is not the fault of Superintendent Gist, who is doing the best possible job. The district is impacted by the limited resources it has to work with.”

Board member Jennettie Marshall, unrelated to Diamond Marshall, expressed deep concern at the possibility of the loss of accreditation, saying, “It is 11:59 for the destiny of Tulsa Public Schools. We cannot afford to lose our accreditation.” Instead, she noted Walters, and the state should be asking, “How can I help you with your needs?” Board member E’Lena Ashley, who had joined Walters in a previous news conference, generally supported Walters’ agenda. “We are failing our children,” she said.

Gist acknowledged, “We have work to do, but we are doing that work.”

“It is 11:59 for the destiny  
of Tulsa Public Schools.  
We cannot afford to lose  
our accreditation.”

DR. JENNETTIE MARSHALL,  
District 3, Tulsa Public School Board Member



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