

The Oklahoma Eagle

"WE MAKE AMERICA BETTER, WHEN WE AID OUR PEOPLE." - E. L. GOODWIN (PUBLISHER, 1936-1978)

SERVING GREATER TULSA SINCE 1921

LEGACY
5,358

Weeks, since the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre and a denial of justice.

NATION
For Black Foster Children, Mentorship Is a Path to Adoption | A11

By SHANTAY ARMSTRONG AND ERICA THOMAS, WORD IN BLACK

NATION
Life Expectancy for Black People Is Up, CDC Reports | A12

By ALEXA SPENCER, WORD IN BLACK

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INSIDE

Parole Board Seeks Stiffer Commutation Requirements
Keaton Ross, Oklahoma Watch, A6

On Leave Over Harassment Complaints, Two OSSM Teachers Allowed to Retire
Jennifer Palmer, Oklahoma Watch, A10

Of 4 charter school proposals, OKCPS board rejected highest-scoring
Bennett Brinkman, NonDoc, A7

'Failed Policies Of The Past': Biden Order, Streamlining Tribal Funding
Maddy Keyes, NonDoc, A10

Navy Federal Denied Over 50% of Black Mortgage Applicants
Bria Overs, Word In Black, A12

Last Week's Headlines
Just in case you missed it. A4

Second Street
Black Business, Cultural District. A4

Jobs & Classifieds
Discover career opportunities. A14

Faith In Tulsa
The Eagle Church Directory. A13



2023: THE YEAR IN JOURNALISM

Oklahomans have fared the year with their resolve intact, faith strengthened and a greater fire within. The new year will once again meet a people prepared.

2023: The Year In Journalism from A1

For many Tulsans the 2023 new year was marked less by traditional celebrations of years past, and more by the hope of a return of normalcy.

By January, the COVID-19 pandemic held fewer Tulsans in fear, but in its wake were the memories of family and friends who they could no longer embrace.

Tulsa Public Schools and Oklahoma’s post-secondary education institutions, a nexus for many of the negative impacts experienced during the pandemic, were central to the COVID-19 series authored by Gary Lee, managing editor for *The Oklahoma Eagle’s*.

Lee’s series builds upon his award-winning effort of 2022, capturing both the broad scope of the pandemic and the personal narratives of those impacted. Tulsa educators and Langston University students shared how they endured the pandemic throughout the pandemic, significant adjustments in family dynamics, and their combined resilience.

As *The Oklahoma Eagle* has reported, no reprieve was granted to TPS educators, parents, or students throughout 2023. Oklahoma Superintendent of Public Instruction, Ryan Walters, continued a year-long assault against Tulsa schools. Public and overt criticism of school administrators, threats of a state takeover and a proposed alignment with right-wing efforts to recast U.S. history, were amongst many unnecessary challenges embraced by Walters.

The resolve of Tulsans committed to the dignity, posthumously, of the slain men, women, and children of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre was further challenged throughout the year.

Jan. 6, Apr. 7 & Apr. 21 Editions - COVID-19

The Oklahoma Eagle’s Jan. 06 edition featured a Word In Black story exploring the pandemic’s ‘deep and lasting negative impact’ on Black families and children. Maya Pottiger, the story author, highlighted the importance of race when considering both the challenge and solutions.

The lingering negative impact on the emotional well-being of Black children was a key aspect of the published article, an analysis undertaken by Dr. Terence Fitzgerald, an internal

consultant with the Council for Mental Wellbeing.

Fitzgerald, although optimistic about the resilience of Black children, cautioned parents to be mindful of signs of trauma, such as how they confront new challenges in school.

As highlighted earlier, Gary Lee’s reporting anchored *The Eagle’s* editorial journey, partnering with Sam Levrault Media to capture the narratives in copy and rich media. We explored how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the nearly 33,000 students in Tulsa Public Schools and the surrounding metropolitan area school districts. *The Oklahoma Eagle* conducted more than four dozen interviews with students, parents, administrators and health officials about how the public-school community in Tulsa — and surrounding school districts — have fared in the three years of the pandemic. The interviewees were drawn from many Tulsa schools, including McLain, Booker T. Washington High School, George Washington Carver Middle School, John Burroughs Elementary School and Emerson Elementary School. We also interviewed teachers and students from Union Public Schools. And we gathered and analyzed the reports and data prepared by TPS and other sources.

Jan. 13 & 20 Editions - TPS School Board

The Tulsa School Board began the new year with the unexpected resignation of District 2 representative, Judith Barba Perez.

Perez’s resignation, and the effort to fill the soon vacant position, set in motion a months-long series of challenges to the process for appointing a new school board member, vetting candidates for consideration and garnering support for preferred candidates, culminating in a vote on Mar. 20.

Diamond Marshall, a 24-year-old educator and community activist, secured majority support from TPS school board members. Her successful candidacy, reflective of the community support present during the board meeting, ushered in a new generation of leadership for District 2. “It took as long as it needed to, and we’re here now, so I’m very excited,” Marshall shared after the board meeting. She remains a significant influence on board policy and practices.

Feb. 03 & Apr. 14 Editions - 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, Mass Graves Investigation

A clear reminder of ‘Tulsans have not forgotten’ framed

The Eagle’s coverage of the City of Tulsa’s 1921 Graves Investigation, of significance, the City of Tulsa’s failure to establish a recorded artifact of virtual committee meetings, providing the public and media with sufficient notice to attend committee meetings, and its [City of Tulsa] practice of filtering information provided to the 1921 Graves Investigation Public Oversight Committee, who were commissioned to ensure transparency.

Randy Hopkins, a contributor to *The Oklahoma Eagle*, is unwavering in his pursuit of a clear and factual response from Tulsa Mayor G.T. Bynum and other city officials. Hopkins revealed that the city failed to disclose the shift in the longstanding practice of recording committee meetings, to placing the burden of memorializing discussions with media and committee members.

Oversight Committee members’ concerns and/or demands were noted as: Investigating the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre within the framework of a homicide; the ‘unilateral downsizing’ of gravesite target demographics; the sudden halt of exhumations after the discovery of a gunshot victim in Nov. 2022; the 16-month delay for resuming exhumations; and the shameful reburial of 19 sets of previously exhumed human remains in Oaklawn on July 30, 2021, undertaken in opposition to the unanimous recommendation of the Oversight Committee.

May 19 - Private School Funding

Tulsa Public Schools, and all state public primary and secondary institutions, learned that they must now compete for funding with private institutions.

John Neal, education contributor for *The Oklahoma Eagle*, revealed how the passage of H.B. 1934, the Parental Choice Tax Credit Act, could further challenge TPS’s ability to serve Tulsa parents and children. The new statute provides “refundable tax credits” from \$5,000 to \$7,500 annually for each student attending a private school or \$1,000 to families homeschooling children.

Neal’s reporting highlighted that ‘grossly underfunded public schools could put to good use of the \$600 million being diverted from taxpayers’ coffers to private school beneficiaries.’

A concern was the Oklahoma Tax Commission’s estimate that there will be a shortfall of \$258 million when comparing expected legitimate claims to be filed compared to the financial caps placed on total tax credits in the Act.

Jul. 21 - 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Lawsuit

The Oklahoma Eagle’s comprehensive coverage of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre case, and its outcome, was bound by Gary Lee’s reporting (Will Justice Prevail For Race Massacre Survivors), a detailed account of the Massacre survivors’ legal journey, national voices in response to the ruling and a

framing of what legal remedy remained for the plaintiffs.

A companion of the lead story, “A Whistle Blew About 5:00 A.M., And The Invasion Of Greenwood Began”, was an analysis of the days-long siege against Historic Greenwood District residents, their testimonials, and a vivid reminder of the state’s culpability and failed accountability.

EXCERPT: “With Tulsa County District Judge Caroline Wall’s dismissal of the Race Massacre survivor’s case for reparations, the burning question was whether there was any remaining hope for justice for the victims of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, the most murderous, violent acts in the city’s history.

The ramifications of Wall’s dismissal of the case reach far beyond Tulsa and Oklahoma. Dozens of Black communities across the U.S. seeking reparations for the ills of slavery were watching the lawsuit closely to determine if the courts might be an avenue to pursue.

In her decision, Wall sided with the City of Tulsa. In earlier filings, the City argued that “simply being connected to a historical event does not provide a person with unlimited rights to seek compensation from any project in any way related to that historical event.

The legal team fighting for the survivors is preparing to appeal Wall’s July 7 decision to reject the case to the Oklahoma Supreme Court. The appeal must be submitted by Aug. 7. The team must launch a new legal battle if the Supreme Court decides to move forward.”

Aug. 18, 25, - TPS State Takeover

Tulsa Public Schools educators, parents and children lived under the threat of a loss of administrative autonomy throughout the year. Ryan Walters’ openly aggressive posture against TPS, reported by *The Oklahoma Eagle* throughout the year, left few options for any action short of a state takeover. The Superintendent of Public Instruction invested his office’s authority and resources in public critiques, personal attacks and demands of TPS administrators.

Union educator groups being likened to a “terrorist organization,” threats against the renewal of accreditation, proposed curriculum that attempted to shift the narrative of and accountability for U.S. slavery, and an embrace of book bans marked Walters’ year.

The Oklahoma Eagle Managing Editor Gary Lee, contributing writers Neal, and Ross D. Johnson offered comprehensive coverage for readers, represented by:

- Tulsans Unite To Oppose Bid For Takeover Of The City’s School System
- Tulsa Philanthropies And Tribes Rally Support for Tulsa Public Schools
- State Superintendent Walters Continues Attack on Tulsa Public Schools
- State Board Poised To Sanction Tulsa Public Schools
- Walters’ Pound of Flesh
- Takeover? What It Means For Tulsa Public Schools

EXCERPTS: “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,” 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.” – Gary Lee, *The*

2023: The Year In Journalism cont. A3



2023: The Year In Journalism cont. A5



Second Street: OKC Black Business & Cultural District

By ANITA G. ARNOLD, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF OKLAHOMA HISTORY AND CULTURE



The African American business and cultural district in Oklahoma City dates to around the turn of the twentieth century. By the 1920s the three hundred block of Northeast Second Street had become known as “Deep Deuce,” “Deep Two,” and “Deep Second.” By day it served as a business district with barbershops, doctors’ offices, beauty shops, clothiers, restaurants, a newspaper office, a cab company, lawyers’ offices, a drugstore, a movie theater, a hardware store, and many other businesses, depending on the decade.

At night Deep Deuce turned into a cultural center for African Americans, with nightclubs, supper clubs, and a legendary dance hall featuring outstanding local talent, many of whom gained national acclaim, such as Jimmy Rushing and Charlie Christian. The Blue Devils, a famous territorial band, called Second Street home. The Pulitzer Prize-winner Ralph Ellison grew up in the district. Deep Deuce was famous for parades,

street dances, breakfast dances, New Orleans-style funerals, and for a Thursday night tradition called “maids night out,” a grand “street” fashion show involving the whole community as either spectators or participants.

The future of African Americans during the early 1900s rested in the activities, resources, and the sharp minds of business people on Second Street. Roscoe Dunjee, editor of the Black Dispatch, located at 324 Northeast Second Street, blazed a civil-rights path unparalleled by anyone in the state. With the power of the press, Dunjee broke down the barriers of segregation in housing, education, transportation, and public facilities. Considered by many to be one of the nation’s foremost civil rights champions, Dunjee used his newspaper, the courts, the Oklahoma Legislature, and the federal government to win justice for African Americans in the state, as well as nationally.

Deep Deuce existed as the place where it all happened for African Americans in Oklahoma City

until the late 1950s. Ironically, many have viewed racial justice and improved opportunity as the major reason for the demise of a thriving business district that had been born of injustice. Integration coupled with more choices in housing, consumer spending, and education sent Deep Deuce into a serious decline and a state of complete deterioration existed at end of the twentieth century.

As a new century dawned, however, Deep Deuce rekindled great interest, resulting in the area’s redevelopment as a residential community adjacent to the entertainment district of Oklahoma City’s “Bricktown.” The name Deep Deuce has been trademarked, and an apartment complex built at the location in 2001 carries that title. The National Register of Historic Places lists three properties in the district: Calvary Baptist Church (NR 78002244), Littlepage Hotel Building (NR 95001500), and Melvin Luster House (NR 83002101). There are few other physical reminders of this legendary marker of a people, a place, and a culture.

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.

ALDRIDGE THEATRE ON SECOND STREET in Oklahoma City (22055.9461, Ray Jacoby Collection, OHS).

Featured Last Week



TPS Promotes Ebony Johnson To Superintendent



Plan Set To Engage More Latinos in Oklahoma Politicss



After Slow Start, Opioid Settlement Money Expected To Flow To Cities

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SERVING GREATER TULSA SINCE 1921

WEEK
5,337

**SINCE THE
1921
TULSA
RACE
MASSACRE**

It's long overdue for the criminals who destroyed the Greenwood community in 1921 to be held accountable. Each week we remember a departed member of our community.

**NATION
FLORIDA EDU., OUR
ANCESTORS BENEFITTED
FROM BEING ENSLAVED** A14

By AZIAH SHED, WORD IN BLACK
FLORIDA SCHOOL CURRICULUM

**NATION
PRES. OBAMA PENS LOVE
LETTER TO LIBRARIANS,
AGAINST BOOK BANS** A15

By AZIAH SHED, WORD IN BLACK
OBAMA, LIBRARIANS

Generational symbols of the profound legacy of Tulsa

2023: The Year In Journalism from A3

newspaper; Laura Pitter, deputy director of the U.S. Program at Human Rights Watch; Damario Solomon-Simmons, attorney, who has represented race massacre survivors, Viola Ford Fletcher, Lessie Benningfield Randle and Hughes Van Ellis; Dreisen Heath, senior coordinator in the United States Program at Human Rights Watch; and Chief Amusan and Kristi Williams, members of the 1921 Graves Investigation Public Oversight Committee.

EXCERPT:
“If we can get it right in Oklahoma, we can get it right anywhere,” declared Dr. Tiffany Crutcher, during closing remarks. A Race Massacre descendant and founder of the Terence Crutcher Foundation, she has been an unwavering voice for restorative justice for Race Massacre survivors and Tulsans disenfranchised by economic, civic, and legal institutions. Crutcher’s remarks were not merely an impassioned parting sentiment, intended to evoke optimism amongst event attendees and those who streamed the session. Her [Crutcher] call to ensure that “these survivors, our descendants... receive the proper repair, the proper respect and the proper restitution” was a stark reminder that the 2001 Commission’s

JUL.21

Will Justice Prevail For Race Massacre Survivors.

“A Whistle Blew About 5:00 A.M., And The Invasion Of Greenwood Began”

COVER PHOTO THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

work was incomplete, that the city’s and state’s rhetoric has once again fallen far too short of a moral obligation.... And that Tulsans have not forgotten.” – Ross Johnson, *The Oklahoma Eagle*, Sep. 29 edition

Nov. 3 & Dec. 1 - Tulsa’s Black Communities At Risk

Tulsa’s challenges throughout the year extended well-beyond threats against its education system. John Neal, contributing writer for *The Oklahoma Eagle*, reported that a new rating system, dubbed the Neighborhood Conditions Index, ranks all north Tulsa in the highest priority except for six predominantly African American neighborhoods – all of which are located in the greater Greenwood residential area.

Neal noted that the 10 majority Black neighborhoods, including the six omitted from the highest priority designation, all have challenging economic, housing, and neighborhood conditions, according to the City’s “data points.”

The Oklahoma Eagle’s reporting reflected both a need to consider “social justice” impacts when accurately calculating condition metrics and a sincere commitment by city officials to strengthen the foundational elements to rebuild

thriving Black neighborhoods.
May 12 & Oct. 6 - Tulsans say goodbye to those well-loved

The Oklahoma Eagle joined the voices of Tulsans who celebrated the lives of James Kavin Ross and Hughes Van Ellis.

Both Ross and Van Ellis were generational symbols of the profound legacy of Tulsa, its resiliency, and the departed’s unparalleled abilities to engender hope and respect.

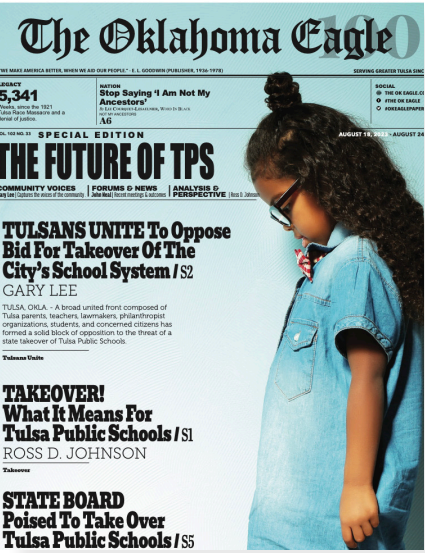
EXCERPT:
“Ross, a stalwart North Tulsa leader who documented the history, culture and life of Black Tulsa for a generation, died Monday, May 8., he was 60.

Ross was a self-styled historian and gifted videographer who used his skills at engaging people and storytelling in interviews of 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre survivors during the 1990s and early 2000s. He worked closely with the late Eddie Faye Gates, Black Tulsa’s best-known historian, to ensure that the survivors’ stories were captured and preserved. Their work has proven crucial to maintaining the integrity of the narrative of that dark but pivotal chapter in Tulsa’s past.” - *The Oklahoma Eagle*, May 12 edition

“As a survivor (Hughes Van Ellis) of the 1921

2023: The Year In Journalism cont. A6

“If we can get it right in Oklahoma, we can get it right anywhere.”



2023: The Year In Journalism from A5

TOP ROW
TULSANS UNITE TO OPPOSE BID FOR TAKEOVER OF THE CITY'S SCHOOL SYSTEM, August 18, 2023 edition. PHOTO THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE.

STATE EDUCATION BOARD TO ALLOW RIGHT-WING CURRICULUM IN SCHOOLS, September 8, 2023 edition. PHOTO THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE.

MANY BLACK NEIGHBORHOODS IN TULSA ARE NOT A CITY PRIORITY, November 3, 2023 edition. PHOTO THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE.

JAMES KAVIN ROSS, May 12, 2023 edition. PHOTO THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE.

MIDDLE ROW
2001 TULSA RACE “RIOT” (MASSACRE) COMMISSION REPORT UPDATE: FROM RHETORIC TO REMEDY, September 29, 2023 edition. PHOTO THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE.

POST PANDEMIC FOOD INSECURITY WORSENS FOR BLACK AMERICANS, December 1, 2023 edition. PHOTO THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE.

HUGHES VAN ELLIS: SURVIVOR, COMMUNITY ADVOCATE, ETERNAL OPTIMIST, October 6, 2023 edition. PHOTO THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE.

BOTTOM ROW
STATE BOARD RENEWS ACCREDITATION FOR TULSA PUBLIC SCHOOLS, August 25, 2023 edition. PHOTO THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE.

Race Massacre, he was making a plea that through legislation, lawmakers could bring about some justice for him and the other two survivors his 109-year-old sister Viola Fletcher and 108-year-old Lessie Benningfield Randle - that the courts had denied. Van Ellis’ speech, along with those of others who testified, was broadcast nationally from the chambers of the U.S. Congress. Listeners tuning in across the country heard – and clung to - his words.

Two and a half years ago, Hughes Van Ellis appeared on the national stage and recounted critical episodes from his life story: of a childhood of poverty; of the discrimination he had faced when he came home from military service in World War II, and of the battles for justice he had fought over the years. The most poignant story he told was of being an infant in the community of north Tulsa in late spring of 1921, when a massacre, highlighted by the murder of over 300 people, wiped out the entire neighborhood.

More than one hundred years old when he told the story, Van Ellis wore his signature black leather U.S. Army cap and the determined look of a man who was proud and humble of the journey behind him and was pushing forward for a greater future.” - Gary Lee, *The Oklahoma Eagle*, October 6 edition

As we venture toward a new year, a year of hope, a year of strengthened resolve, and a year of building our shared legacy, *The Oklahoma Eagle* will remain committed to earning your trust and publishing the unvarnished truth, wherever it leads.

We encourage you, our readers, to remind us of how we may better serve our communities through journalism.

As we enter 2024, *The Oklahoma Eagle* is engaging in a significant initiative to help build and rebuild trust between the newspaper, the staff, and our readers.

The Ecosystem Engagement Project program is spearheaded by the Oklahoma Media Center, an umbrella organization representing more than two dozen media outlets across the state.

The Oklahoma Eagle’s participation is focused on closely engaging you – our readers and potential readers - of both the print and digital versions of the newspaper. We would like to determine how much confidence you have in the news that *The Oklahoma Eagle* publishes. We want to know whether you read the paper and if so, what you like and do not like about what you read. Where there are gaps in your trust in our news reporting, we plan to work to address them. It is all about us delivering content that you feel is reliable and responds to your interests.

We will be soliciting your engagement through direct outreach, focus groups, and other means.

If you have questions or want to be part of our efforts to build trust with our readership, send an e-mail to us at: TrustingNews@TheOkEagle.com.

New restrictions: Oklahoma prisoner commutations

COMANCHE—Three and a half months removed from prison, Kara Chapman is striving to rebuild her life.

Commutations from A1

The 38-year-old mother works most days waiting tables at a catfish restaurant in Comanche. On days off, she volunteers with a local food pantry or drives 30 minutes north to visit her four children in Marlow. She hopes to progress through a transitional program and move into a duplex where she can have overnight visits with her kids.

“When I found out I’m going to prison and I’m going for a cool minute, I had to make a decision on if I believe there’s a plan for my life or if I just go hard and do what I want,” Chapman said. “There’s plenty of drugs in prison. But I made the decision that I’m going

to trust in God’s plan and make the most of this.”

In October 2019, Stephens County Judge Ken Graham handed Chapman a seven-year prison sentence on a child neglect charge. She wasn’t supposed to sniff freedom until late 2024.

But after considering her excellent disciplinary record, educational attainment and volunteer work while incarcerated, the Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board recommended in 2022 that Gov. Kevin Stitt reduce Chapman’s sentence. Stitt signed off on the commutation recommendation and Chapman was released from the Eddie Warrior Correctional Center in Taft on Aug. 23.

The opportunity Chapman had to earn early release could soon be unavailable to the vast majority of Oklahoma prisoners. The Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board is considering an administrative rule change that would place several restrictions on when Oklahoma prisoners may seek commutation.

Current guidelines allow most prisoners to seek commutation at any time, though they must wait at least three years to reapply if an application is rejected. The proposal making its way through the administrative rules process would create the following criteria for commutation eligibility:

- The sentencing range for one or more of a prisoner’s current offenses has statutorily changed. For instance, if a legislative proposal to create a felony classification system is implemented, some prisoners may become eligible for commutation.
- The prisoner does not have a projected release date and has served at least 30 years.
- The prisoner has a favorable recommendation from a trial official, such as a district attorney or judge.
- The prisoner has a favorable recommendation from the governor.

Commutations cont. A9

The Oklahoma Eagle

Our Mission

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



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Despite tying for lowest score, the only school proposed outside northeast OKC was approved

OKCPS Applications from A1

As three of four potential new charter schools seeking authorization from Oklahoma City Public Schools revise their applications, district documents show the one school approved by the board in November tied for the lowest score among applicants.

Schools proposed under the names Oklahoma Montessori Initiative, P3 Urban Montessori, RISE STEAM Academy and Willard C. Pitts Academy all submitted applications to the board Sept. 1. After an OKCPS staff committee reviewed the applications, Superintendent Sean McDaniel recommended Nov. 27 that board members deny each proposal and ask for revisions within 30 days, a common part of the charter application process.

But during a chaotic series of votes that included numerous questions from board members about OKCPS’ entire charter school application process, the two highest-scoring applications were rejected and a school that received just under 55 percent of possible points in the district’s analysis — the Oklahoma Montessori Initiative — was approved after three separate votes.

02

Two of the highest-scoring applications were rejected and a school that received just under 55 percent of possible points in the district’s analysis — the Oklahoma Montessori Initiative — was approved after three separate votes.

According to the review committee scoring rubric, each application could have earned 84 total points from the OKCPS committee, and each was graded on three main areas: educational program design, operations and finance. The OKCPS charter applications were scored from zero to four points on 21 criteria, and results can be reviewed here.

Proposed to serve an area of northwest Oklahoma City that includes Nichols Hills, The Village, Quail Creek, Chisholm Creek and North Highland, the Oklahoma Montessori Initiative was approved despite receiving a score of zero for “facilities” and scores of one in the categories of “finance,” “transportation” and “child nutrition services.”

The approved school’s application received 46 total points, tying it with P3 Urban Montessori School for the lowest analysis among the four applicants.

By comparison, the RISE STEAM Academy and Willard C. Pitts Academy received 61 and 63 points, respectively. Both were denied, along with the P3 Urban Montessori School application. Each of those proposed schools would serve portions of northeast Oklahoma City, a historically Black part of town.

“It doesn’t always happen like this,” OKCPS Board Chairwoman Paula Lewis said Nov.

27 as member moved between votes and asked questions about the process. “This is an interesting jostling of things.”

Under state law, the three charter school applicants initially rejected have 30 days to revise their documentation and resubmit for further consideration. After that Dec. 27 resubmission deadline, the district’s committee will rescure applications, and the OKCPS board will have another 30 days before it must give final approval or denial.

After an OKCPS board meeting Dec. 4 — which could be the district’s final meeting of the year — McDaniel said it would be up to board members whether “to have representatives from each of the applications to come in and present to them.”

“So [the board members] would have the application, you would have the rubric from the committee, and if they want that next layer of, ‘We want to hear directly from representatives,’ then they can do that as well,” McDaniel said.

Charter schools are public schools that operate with their own governing board and additional flexibility on certain requirements. If local school districts reject a proposal, its backers may apply to other entities for authorization, such as higher education institutions, the State Board of Education and sovereign tribal nations.

OKCPS Applications cont. A8

Community Members Seek More Education Options



PHOTO ADOLBE IMAGES

OKCPS Applications from A7

OKCPS concerned with applicant finances, facilities

Led by charter school coordinator Jason Mack, the OKCPS review committee gave each of the four applications a score of two or lower for their finance sections. Both RISE STEAM Academy and Willard C. Pitts Academy — initially rejected Nov. 27 — received twos for their finance scores. The approved Oklahoma Montessori Initiative received a one, while the initially rejected P3 Urban Montessori received a zero. Similarly, all four schools received either a one or a zero for their facilities sections, but board members noted that they believed some of the schools would be able to provide additional information about potential lease agreements when they resubmit.

For each application, the OKCPS review committee noted that each application while each proposed school expected to receive startup funds from the Walton Family Foundation, reviewers said they did not consider that funding to have been secured. Each school also seemed to budget much less for insurance than what the review committee felt would be necessary.

Reviewers also seemed concerned that the P3 Urban Montessori application had not budgeted for facility cost or salary increases within its first five years.

For the Oklahoma Montessori Initiative, reviewers seemed concerned that the applicants had not properly budgeted for all types of teacher salaries.

The Oklahoma Montessori Initiative also received a zero for the facilities section of its application, in which applicants indicated the school will likely need a building of at least 44,000 square feet. The applicants wrote that although they had not yet secured space, all of the options they were considering were larger than 44,000 square feet.

Still, reviewers seemed concerned with the challenge of finding that much space in the school’s proposed operation area, which primarily spans higher-income areas of northwest Oklahoma City.

The OMI application also received scores of one for the new school’s lack of intention to provide student transportation and its lack of details within a nutrition plan.

Scoring higher on the building component than the approved OMI application, the initially rejected P3 Urban Montessori proposal received a one for its facilities section. Reviewers mentioned that while two possible locations had been identified, applicants failed to provide sufficient details on their plan to secure a location.

RISE STEAM Academy similarly received a one for its facilities section, with the review committee noting that some of its identified options seemed unsuitable and that the proposed timeline for securing a facility seemed “unrealistic.”

Willard C. Pitts Academy also received a one for its facility section. The scoring rubric claimed the application did not account for separate spaces for students who might need extra support. Additionally, the review committee

84

According to the review committee scoring rubric, each application could have earned 84 total points from the OKCPS committee, and each was graded on three main areas: educational program design, operations and finance.

seemed concerned about the condition of a proposed site for the school, OKCPS’ former Polk Elementary School just north of Northeast 36th Street and Prospect Avenue. In recent years, the building has been home to Boys & Girls Club and Restore OKC operations.

Applicant: Denial ‘made me work a little bit harder’

Community members who attended the Nov. 27 OKCPS board meeting were predominantly Black, and the board’s decision to approve the only school not proposed for northeast OKC caught the attention of some in the audience. Weeks later, however, the other applicants said they were not frustrated by the board’s decision to send their applications back for revisions, despite the revelation that they scored the same or more points than the lone application approved in November.

Latasha Timberlake, who is leading the effort to create the Willard C. Pitts Academy, said she is excited to resubmit her present her vision to the board.

“I’m just looking forward to the next phase in the process, and (I’m) just eager to actually have an opportunity to tell my story and voice why I am venturing to open Willard C. Pitts Academy Charter School in northeast Oklahoma City,” Timberlake said.

Although Timberlake said she felt there could have been better communication throughout the first phase of the OKCPS charter application process, she said the approval of an application that scored lower than hers was not frustrating.

“That’s why we have processes in place. And according to the process, (...) the review committee gets an opportunity to review the application and decide whether they recommend for approval or not, [and then] it goes to the the board itself and they get to recommend for approval or not,” Timberlake said. “You don’t necessarily have to have approval from the review committee. It can come directly from the school board.”

Carma Barlow, who is leading the effort to create the RISE STEAM Academy, echoed Timberlake’s comments when asked about the lowest-scoring application being the only one approved so far.

“I think it just highlights there is the review committee and then there’s the board, and the process is really trying to satisfy both of those entities and make sure that everybody has a clear understanding about the school,” Barlow said.

Barlow said she submitted her revised application Friday.

“I feel pretty good about the next phase of the process, I think,” Barlow said. “I’ve answered all of the feedback and all of the questions and concerns that were given to me in the executive summary — the scoring documents. So I hope that I have satisfied the review committee’s concerns about the school in my resubmission.”

Both women also said they were particularly excited to address board members directly when the OKCPS governing body next considers their applications. However, as McDaniel

noted, there is no guarantee that those making OKCPS charter applications will provided an opportunity to answer questions about their proposals.

“I hope that that happens,” Barlow said. “I think that’s where some things got lost. Without the ability to have that interaction with the board or even the review committee and just explaining rationale and being able to answer questions — I think without that opportunity, it just made it more difficult for everyone to have a real clear understanding about RISE and what we’re trying to do.”

After watching the Nov. 27 OKCPS board meeting, Timberlake said she felt there was distance between the board and the review committee that could be closed if applicants were able to answer board members’ questions during a meeting.

“It just seems as if there were a lot of things that are not in alignment (with the application process),” Timberlake said. “I feel like there were some things that were being asked (...) at the board meeting but looking at the information that I received from the scores from the (review) committee, maybe there was some disconnect in terms of that being articulated to the board or the board not really being able to review the information whole-heartedly.”

Reached by phone Friday, Rosalyn Robinson said she planned to resubmit her application to create the P3 Urban Montessori school. She said she was not frustrated that a charter school application that received the same score as hers was approved while her application was denied.

“It just gave me an opportunity to make it even cleaner, because I’m going to need that application in the future for other things,” Robinson said. “So they kind of did me a favor — made me work a little bit harder.”

Robinson also said it “would be great” if she received the chance to address OKCPS board members when they next considered her application.

After the Nov. 27 board meeting, members Mark Mann and Lori Bowman said they were open to hearing from the OKCPS charter school applicants. Bowman and Mann both ultimately voted in favor of the approved OMI application.

Rufus Howard, who lead the effort to get the Oklahoma Montessori Initiative authorized by the board, said Friday that although his application had be approved, he was still working on submitting an addendum that would address the review committee’s feedback.

“When we submitted our application, we were just following the process. How they were scored was totally out of our control,” Howard said. “Our model, I believe, set us apart. And consider the fact that Oklahoma City Public Schools wants innovation — I believe that our Montessori model will bring that. And so I’m just appreciative and happy that we are given that opportunity to bring Montessori to Oklahoma City.”

During the Nov. 27 meeting, board members voted three times on the Oklahoma Montessori Initiative application. The first two votes were on motions to accept the district’s



PHOTOS ADOBE IMAGES

Can sentences be excessive?

Commutations from A1

In a summary statement filed with the Secretary of State’s office, Pardon and Parole Board counsel Kyle Counts wrote that the rule changes would promote fairness, transparency, efficiency and consistency in the board’s procedures. During an August 2022 board meeting, Counts said the overhaul of eligibility criteria is partially in response to an Oklahoma County Grand Jury report that criticized the state’s commutation processes.

Pardon and Parole Board Executive Director Tom Bates said the proposed rules would weed out applications with little to no merit, such as a person sentenced to life in prison filing for commutation within months of arriving in state custody. He said some board members are uncomfortable with the notion that they might be overruling a judge or jury.

“Can sentences be excessive?” Bates said. “Yes. We’re just trying to put some guardrails and determinations around that.”

If approved by the board, Bates said the proposed rules are subject to legislative review and final approval. A public comment hearing is set for Jan. 8 at 9 a.m. at the Oklahoma Health Care Authority Building.

Commutations in Oklahoma accelerated in 2017 after the voters passed State Question 780, which reclassified several drug and property offenses from felonies to misdemeanors. Lawmakers made the law retroactive two years later, prompting Gov. Stitt to sign off on the mass commutation of more than 460 state prisoners on Nov. 2, 2019.

In the years following the mass commutation, estimated to be the largest in U.S. history, Stitt and parole board members faced heightened scrutiny from district

SQ
780

Commutations in Oklahoma accelerated in 2017 after the voters passed State Question 780.

attorneys and other law enforcement officials over a perceived lax attitude towards commutations.

That criticism intensified in February 2021, when Laurence Paul Anderson brutally murdered three people in Chickasha less than a year after Stitt approved his commutation application. A grand jury investigation released in May 2022 found that Anderson was improperly placed on the commutation docket in August 2019 after the board rejected an application of his two months earlier.

Morgan Hale is the managing attorney and program manager at Project Commutation, a Tulsa-based nonprofit that represents prisoners who claim they were excessively sentenced. She said adding restrictions would be a major blow to thousands of Oklahoma prisoners who use commutation as motivation to be productive and stay out of trouble while incarcerated. A single misconduct write-up can jeopardize a prisoner’s opportunity to appear before the board, Hale said.

“This has real-life consequences for these people,” Hale said. “Some of them have worked really hard and at the very minimum they should be afforded their five-minute hearing.”

A Washington County judge sentenced William “Trey” Livingston III to 40 years in prison in 2010 for vehicular manslaughter, a crime that requires offenders to serve at least 85% of the sentence before becoming eligible for parole. Livingston, who was 35 years old at sentencing, expected to be incarcerated until at least his late 60s.

“It was hard to come to terms that I had children who were six and nine when I came in, knowing that I just now abandoned them and by the time I get out they’ll have kids or grandkids of their own,” Livingston said. “You also know at that point, OK, my folks will die and my family



will pretty much be gone.”

Livingston worked a full-time job, earned a college degree and started an advocacy program against drunk driving while incarcerated. At the Joseph Harp Correctional Center, he gained the trust of prison staff and created an art guild where prisoners could paint, draw, crochet, and do woodworking.

After years of legal back and forth, the Pardon and Parole Board in 2019 recommended that Livingston’s sentence be reduced from 40 to 15 years. Stitt signed off on the proposal and Livingston was released in January.

Livingston, who lives in Tulsa with his fiancée and works with Project Commutation, said it’s disheartening that prisoners in a similar situation might soon not have a shot at early release.

“There are so many people in there doing the right thing and all they want is a chance to someday get a job, get an apartment, pay their taxes and just be free,” Livingston said. “So many people have learned their lesson but we can’t see past their worst decision and moment.”

Chapman said she plans to attend the Jan. 8 hearing and speak against the proposed rule changes. She said such changes would cause thousands of incarcerated people to lose a key motivation for success.

“There are so many people that

go to prison and don’t do anything or try to change; they just sit in front of their TV,” Chapman said. “For those of us who go in and work hard and try to make positive changes, commutation is the only place that we have to be seen. To not even have the opportunity to present their case makes a lot of people lose hope.”

Bates said the board plans to consider all public input and modifications to the proposal are possible before rules are set for a vote. Written comments can be mailed to the Pardon and Parole Board or emailed to rules@ppb.ok.gov. In-person attendees at the Jan. 8 meeting will be allotted a maximum of three minutes to speak and must sign in by 9:10 a.m.

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OKCPS Applications from A8

recommendation denying the applications. The first vote failed with board members split 4-4. On the second vote to accept the recommendation to deny the application, Bowman switched her vote and voted against the motion, so it failed 3-5. The third vote involving the school was on a motion to approve the application. It passed 6-2, with Mann joining the five others who had already voted in support of the proposed school.

OKCPS board president Paula Lewis did not respond to a request for comment prior to publication of this article. Bowman acknowledged the questions posed to her. Board member Meg McElhaney, who voted in favor of the two Montessori school proposals but against RISE STEAM Academy and Willard C. Pitts Academy, answered a phone call Friday but said she was unavailable to answer questions at the time.

New charter elementary school opening in fall 2024

The Oklahoma Montessori Initiative is not the only new charter school preparing to open in Oklahoma City.

Harding Independence Charter District, which is home to Harding Charter Preparatory High School and Independence Charter Middle School, announced Dec. 12 that it is opening Harding Charter Preparatory Elementary School for the fall 2024 semester. The schools of the charter school district have been authorized by OKCPS for two decades.

The new elementary school will be located at 12600 N. Kelley Ave. in Oklahoma City near HCP’s current high school, and it will have current John Rex Charter Elementary School principal Lana Ingram as its founding principal.



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

“As a district, we believe in establishing a PK-12 grade college preparatory environment through a rigorous teaching and learning model with comprehensive student support while intentionally involving our community in the educational process,” Superintendent Steven Stefanick said in a press release. “Through Lana’s outstanding leadership and elementary experience, we are confident that this new school option will provide more quality educational seats to Oklahoma City families.”

(Editor’s note: The Sustainable Journalism Foundation has received grant funding from the Walton Family Foundation to support coverage of education issues in Oklahoma.)

03

RISE STEAM Academy, Willard C. Pitts Academy and P3 Urban Montessori School would serve portions of northeast Oklahoma City, a historically Black community.

BENNETT BRINKMAN became NonDoc’s education reporter in August 2022 after completing a reporting internship. He holds a bachelor’s degree in journalism from the University of Oklahoma and is originally from Edmond. Email story tips and ideas to bennett@nondoc.com.

OKC Boarding School facing scrutiny for its handling of sexual harassment

OSSM Teachers Retire from A1

Two teachers under investigation for inappropriate behavior with students will retire from the Oklahoma School of Science and Mathematics, a state-funded high school for academically advanced juniors and seniors.

Mark Li and Kurt Bachmann have been on administrative leave since September, following an Oklahoma Watch investigation into more than a decade of sexual harassment complaints at the school. Both have denied wrongdoing.

Staff, students and teachers attending a summer training at the campus reported Li for making inappropriate sexual comments. Bachmann, too, made sexual comments and innuendos, records and interviews revealed, and one student said the teacher humiliated and harassed her over her appearance.

The school’s board of trustees briefly discussed Li and Bachmann in a closed session Tuesday. Director of Public Information Linda Waters confirmed they plan to retire and said there’s no timeframe for when it will occur. Bachmann taught physics and Li taught anatomy.

OSSM, a boarding school located in Oklahoma City, is facing scrutiny for its handling of sexual harassment complaints. Former employee Keli Pueblo sued the school, alleging gender discrimination and a hostile work environment. She said OSSM administrators have for years allowed male employees accused of impropriety to leave on their own terms, and Li and Bachmann’s retirement fits that mold.

“They’re going away with celebration, just like Lynn Morgan did,” Pueblo said Tuesday.

Morgan, a former administrator, retired in 2019. Female staff had reported that he had sex with women in his office and gave favorable treatment to women he found attractive.

Title IX regulations, which protect and support victims of sexual harassment, don’t apply to the school because it doesn’t receive federal funds, according to the Oklahoma Attorney General’s Office. It’s state-funded and received more than \$6 million last year.

The school has operated for three decades without an employee handbook or agency rules prohibiting sexual harassment or abuse. Following Pueblo’s lawsuit and Oklahoma Watch’s investigation, the board hired a law firm to write an employee handbook. The board’s personnel subcommittee is reviewing a draft of the handbook and plans to implement it early next year were discussed during the meeting.

Former student Dene Betz said school leaders haven’t done enough to reckon with the past. As a student, Betz in 2013 reported Li for inappropriate behavior, and she was the one kicked off campus.

“I’m super happy they (Bachmann and Li) are off campus …,” Betz said. “I feel like the students are much safer.”

But she said the school should at least release a statement acknowledging the harm done.

Tony Cornforth, named the school’s president this year, did not address Li and Bachmann’s retirement at Tuesday’s meeting.

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THE OKLAHOMA SCHOOL OF SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS is seen in Oklahoma City. PHOTO WHITNEY BRYEN/OKLAHOMA WATCH

TITLE IX REGULATIONS

Protect and support victims of sexual harassment, don’t apply to the school because it doesn’t receive federal funds, according to the Oklahoma Attorney General’s Office.



ILLUSTRATION ADOBE IMAGES

Tribal Funding from A1

WASHINGTON — The beat of drums echoed off the walls of the Department of the Interior auditorium as members of the Native American Women Warriors Color Guard moved toward the stage with tribal flags in hand.

Just minutes before, the room was filled with laughter and boisterous conversation as friends and family gathered together. But as the traditional song filled the space, they fell quiet.

It was the beginning of the Biden-Harris administration’s third annual Tribal Nations Summit, and more than 100 Indigenous leaders from across the nation were gathered to hear President Joe Biden’s plan for strengthening relationships with tribal nations and advancing tribal sovereignty and self-determination.

According to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, approximately 4,200 missing and murdered cases have gone unsolved in the U.S.

“It’s hard work to heal the wrongs of the past, change the course and move forward,” Biden said Wednesday at the summit. “But the actions we’re taking today are key steps into that new era of tribal sovereignty and self determination, a new era grounded in dignity and respect that recognizes your fundamental rights to govern and grow on your own terms.

“That’s what this summit is all about.”

The two-day event presented an opportunity for tribal leaders and top administration officials to come together to discuss important issues facing tribal communities, according to a White House fact sheet. Biden, who has voiced his commitment for supporting Indian Country since he took office, is the first president since Barack Obama to host a Tribal Summit.

‘Disinvestment in Indian Country leads to a great many ailments’

With members of his administration and tribal leaders standing behind him, Biden signed an executive order to reform federal funding and support for tribal nations. As he finished signing his name onto the document, the crowd erupted into cheers and applause.

In part, the new order requires federal agencies to ensure funding for tribes is accessible and equitable; creates The Tribal Access to Capital Clearinghouse, an online one-stop-shop where tribes and Native businesses can find and access grants; and directs the White House Council on Native American Affairs, the Office and Management and Budget, and the White House Domestic Policy Council to measure federal funding shortfalls for tribes and develop recommendations for necessary funding and programs, according to the fact sheet.

“The most important thing for tribes in Oklahoma, certainly from the Cherokee Nation standpoint, is making sure there’s a really efficient way to get

funding to our programs,” said Chuck Hoskin Jr., principal chief of the Cherokee Nation.

Hoskin said the U.S. government has an obligation to fund certain programs and initiatives for Tribal communities, and that having to navigate so many hurdles or compete with states for federal funds goes against a “government-to-government relationship based on respect.”

Gov. Reggie Wassana of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes said oftentimes funds allocated to native communities never make it there, preventing them from making necessary infrastructure repairs or improvements on their land. Wassana said he hopes the Biden administration looks at the policies and regulations that make it difficult for tribes to get necessary federal money.

Wassana said a lack of funding and resources also contributes to the ongoing missing and murdered Indigenous people crisis, which was one of the topics discussed during the first day of the summit.

According to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, approximately 4,200 missing and murdered cases have gone unsolved in the U.S.

“It all comes down to funding,” Wassana said. “They don’t have enough funds to put those many (officers) out into the country to be in those areas where there’s probably a high rate of MMIP events.”

Hoskin shared Wassana’s concern, adding that the missing and murdered Indigenous people crisis is a big issue in Oklahoma and within the Cherokee Nation.

“Disinvestment in Indian Country leads to a great many ailments, including people that are disproportionately victims of violent crime,” Hoskin said. “It’s just the truth.”

Other recent funding developments

In 2021, Biden signed an executive order aimed at improving public safety and criminal justice for Native Americans and address the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous people. This past year, the administration has continued efforts to implement this order by creating the Not Invisible Commission, MMIP Regional Outreach Program and a national plan to end gender-based violence, among other initiatives, according to a 2023 Progress Report for Tribal Nations released during this week’s summit.

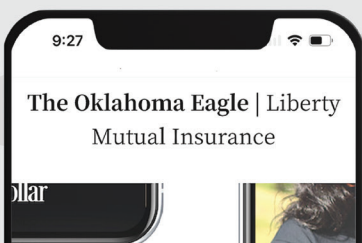
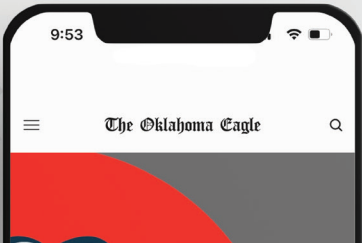
The report, which outlines progress made in the previous year, noted more stable advance funding for the Indian Health Service and the signing more than 190 new tribal agreements to co-manage or co-steward federal lands and waters, a jump from the 20 agreements signed in 2022.

Additionally, through Biden’s Investing in America agenda, this year the Biden-Harris Administration has invested \$45 billion — more than 15-years’ worth of the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ annual budget — in Indian Country, said Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland.

Still, both the Biden administration and tribal leaders said the work is far from over to support native communities and advance tribal sovereignty and self-determination.

“We usher in a new era of relationship between our government and nation-to-nation relationships. We’ve made progress. But we know Indigenous communities still live in the shadows of the failed policies of the past,” Biden said. “That’s why I’m committed to working with you to write a new and better chapter in American history.”

MADDY KEYES is a journalism student in the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Oklahoma. She is a participant of the Gaylord News program in 2023.



LIFE EXPECTANCY FOR BLACK PEOPLE IS UP, CDC REPORTS

Black people are dying less from COVID-19, but kidney disease, pregnancy complications, and birth defects still pose threats. **A12**

NAVY FEDERAL DENIED OVER 50% OF BLACK MORTGAGE APPLICANTS

CNN reported the lending disparity between Black and white homebuyers was greater than any other large mortgage lender in 2022. **A12**

For Black Foster Children, Mentorship Is a Path to Adoption

A new Kidsave Gallup study reveals families who participated in mentorship programs were seven times more likely to adopt children in foster care.

Shantay Armstrong and Erica Thomas, Word In Black



PHOTO GETTY/DIGITALSKILLET

There are too many Black children in foster care waiting to be adopted, and too few Black foster families in the child welfare system.

Black children are overrepresented in the foster care system in America, making up 22% of the children in foster care, but only 14% of the nation’s child population.

There may be a solution to this glaring disparity. A new Kidsave Gallup study showed that families who participated in mentorship programs were seven times more likely to adopt children in foster care. And Black families are thinking about adoption. One in four Black adults has thought a lot about adopting from foster care (26%), compared to about one in six Americans overall (18%).

We know mentorship works. That’s why it’s crucial that our country put more funding, resources, training, and recruitment into relationship-based programs such as mentorship between families and Black foster youth. It’s also important that these relationships are responsive to children’s cultural needs.

We have both witnessed the need for these dedicated resources — through being in foster care in a predominantly white community and working as a foster care caseworker, respectively. We’ve seen the positive impact that culturally responsive adults can have on the lives of Black and Brown foster children.

Mentoring doesn’t have to be formal. In fact, it’s already happening in most communities. Through our interactions with the foster care system — even having experienced two different sides of the system — we’ve seen this firsthand. There are many Black families already informally mentoring foster youth and children — they just are doing it without the resources to do so to the very best of their abilities.

Many of these families can benefit from additional support. In fact, almost three-quarters of Americans (73%) say training and support would make them more likely to participate in mentoring programs (Kidsave-Gallup, 2023). Connecting foster youth,

especially providing culturally affirming spaces and culturally competent training and opportunities for non-Black families, can increase the connection between families and children.

The research shows a clear link between volunteerism and fostering. According to the study, four in 10 Black adults say knowing they could volunteer with a child of the same racial or ethnic background would make them more likely to consider volunteering with a child in foster care. Mentorship programs that provide an opportunity for families and youth to build a relationship and choose one another can increase the likelihood of adoption for foster youth.

Equipping more willing families with the support and resources they need to mentor, foster, and adopt Black children can also improve the well-being of Black children in foster care. The more people know about mentoring opportunities and the realities of the foster care system and its dedication to providing safe, stable homes, and reunifying children with biological families when available, the better the outcomes for our most vulnerable children.

As two people close to the foster care system, we believe children do best when they stay as close to their home environment as possible, and are placed in safe, stable homes. In our experience, the most stable children had regular visits with their biological family, a compassionate but structured foster placement with a foster parent who understood emotionally and culturally what the child needed, a caring and present case worker willing to speak for the child’s needs, and a judge willing to listen to all parties as objectively as possible. This requires a very nuanced balance of needs and teamwork. A child knows when they are being cared for properly from a very young age. A part of caring that creates continuity is understanding the cultural needs of the child and providing that continuity.

Government funding, policy, and programs that support local mentorship programs can enable more families to engage positively with the foster care system and build connections between families and children. Children who grow up in communities surrounded by mentors and caring adults can thrive, but there is a need for investment in community development at the local level to create more stable communities.

Building and cultivating long-term, long-lasting relationships can shift the trajectory for foster youths who may experience racism, multiple placements (moving from home to home), a lack of stability, and moving schools, all without even one adult they can trust to have their back.

The crisis for Black youth in foster care is ongoing. It’s time to enact systemic change with data-driven research to ensure equitable outcomes for all children. It’s time to dismantle the barriers that have perpetuated the disproportionate representation of Black children in foster care for far too long. We can do that by supporting Black families and creating pathways — like mentorship and culturally competent care — for all families interested in fostering and adopting Black children.

SHANTAY ARMSTRONG is the strategic communications manager for DEI at Kidsave and leads the EMBRACE project, a new initiative aimed at improving outcomes for Black foster youth. Some of her experience includes foster care casework at Seamen’s Society for Children and Families in New York City, and as a teacher therapist for traumatized preschoolers at the Early Childhood Mental Health Program in the Bay area.

HON. ERICA THOMAS is one of the youngest individuals to have membership in any state’s legislative body, and one of the first orphans to hold political office. She has served as a television and film producer, author, speaker, mentor, philanthropist, political consultant, and Former Georgia State Representative, representing Georgia’s 39th house district in Cobb County.

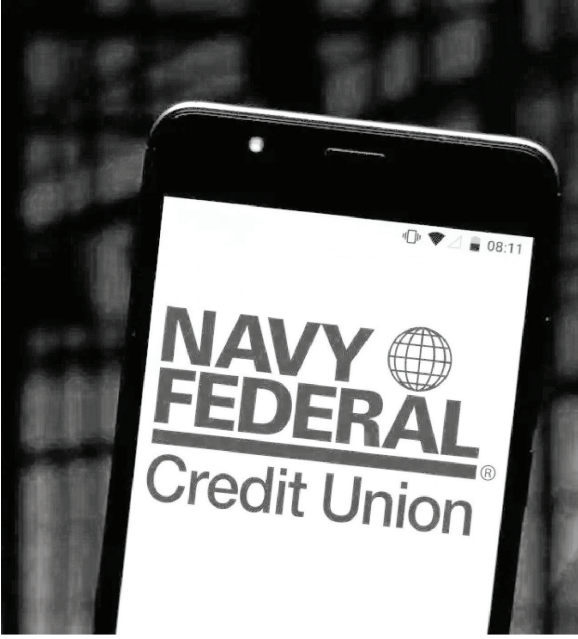


PHOTO BLACK AIDS INSTITUTE, PROVIDED

Navy Federal Denied Over 50% of Black Mortgage Applicants

Bria Overs Word In Black

Navy Federal from A11

A new analysis from CNN found Navy Federal Credit Union, the largest credit union in the US serving military service members and veterans, denied more than half of its Black conventional mortgage applicants. It rejected an estimated 3,700 Black homebuyers last year.

Homeownership is one of the few keys to wealth, next to investing in stocks and other methods. Yet, less than 50% of Black people are homeowners compared to 74.5% of white people, according to the Federal Reserve. The homeownership gap is one of many economic indicators in which Black Americans are disproportionately underrepresented.

CNN analyzed loan application data collected by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau through the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act and reported that Navy Federal’s rate of denials was the “widest of any of the 50 lenders that originated the most mortgage loans last year.” The institution had a near 29-percentage-point gap in approval rates.

It is not uncommon for banks and other institutions to deny Black people loans and other financial opportunities. However, these rejections occurred disproportionately despite similarities between white and Black loan applicants in income, debts, property value, down payment percentage, and location.

In a statement to CNN, Navy Federal spokesperson Bill Pearson said the credit union is “committed to equal and equitable lending practices and strict adherence to all fair lending laws.” But claimed the news organization’s analysis inaccurately reflected their practices because “it did not account for ‘major criteria required by any financial institution to approve a mortgage loan.’”

Pearson highlighted factors like “credit score, available cash deposits, and relationship history with [the] lender.” Although the rate of denials was high, around 18% of conventional loans originating from Navy Federal went to Black borrowers, more than any other lender. And they did approve loans for 48.5% of Black applicants, compared to 77% of white applicants.

In the article, CNN notes its analysis “doesn’t prove that Navy Federal discriminated against any borrowers. But it does show significant disparities in the credit union’s approval rates for borrowers of different races – and that it has larger racial gaps than many other large financial institutions.”



PHOTO THE GOOD BRIGADE VIA GETTY

Life Expectancy for Black People Is Up, CDC Reports

Black people are dying less from COVID-19, but kidney disease, pregnancy complications, and birth defects still pose threats.

Alexa Spencer Word In Black

Life Expectancy from A11

Black people in America are expected to live longer than they did in previous years, according to new data from the federal government.

A report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reveals a 1.6 year increase in lifespan for Black Americans between 2021 and 2022 — extending the average age of death for Black people from 71.2 to 72.8.

Compared to other races and ethnicities during that time frame, Black non-Hispanic Americans had the third greatest increase in life expectancy. American Indian and Alaska Native non-Hispanics gained 2.3 years and Hispanics gained 2.2 years.

The researchers attribute the additional years to a decrease in deaths caused by COVID-19, which took an estimated 1.15 million lives. Black people also saw a decrease in heart disease-, homicide-, diabetes-, and cancer-related deaths.

While progress was made at the end of the pandemic, other illnesses remained a threat. The three leading causes of death for Black folks between 2021 and 2022 were perinatal conditions, birth defects, and kidney disease.

Perinatal Conditions

Perinatal conditions are complications that arise during pregnancy and after birth. The CDC reports that 50,000 American women suffer from pregnancy-related complications each year, but Black women are three times more likely than white women to die from those conditions.

Cardiovascular disorders, such as postpartum cardiomyopathy (heart failure) and preeclampsia and eclampsia (blood pressure disorders), are common causes of maternal death among Black women. Other causes include hemorrhage (severe bleeding) or embolism (blood vessel blockage).

Most pregnancy-related deaths are preventable — but only when care is administered properly. Racial bias leaves some Black mothers ignored, overlooked, and abused by medical professionals.

Congenital Malformations (Birth Defects)

Birth defects — also known as congenital malformations — refer to a portion of an infant’s body that developed abnormally before birth.

Black infants are at risk for birth defects due to high rates of premature and low-weight births. Between 2019

and 2021, 14.4% of live Black births occurred before 37 weeks of gestation.

Birth defects include heart conditions, bone growth abnormalities, down syndrome, fetal alcohol syndrome, clubfoot and cleft lip or palate.

Causes include changes in genetics or chromosomes, factors in the environment, or alcohol and drug use. However, many causes remain unknown.

Kidney Disease

An estimated 37 million Americans live with kidney disease, according to the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. Black Americans are four times more likely than white Americans to develop the disease due to high rates of diabetes and high blood pressure.

Chronic kidney disease occurs when the kidneys — two first-sized organs located below the rib cage — fail to clean the blood and filter out extra water. This can cause water and fluid to build up in the blood and may lead to heart disease or stroke.

Without treatment, a person with kidney disease may live a few days or weeks. If they commit to dialysis, the average life expectancy is five to 10 years.



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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 Marriot 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!!!

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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.

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

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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.

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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.

For Further Information call (918) 835-1525.

"Have Faith In God." Mark 11:22



Pastor Bukky and Wunmi Alabi

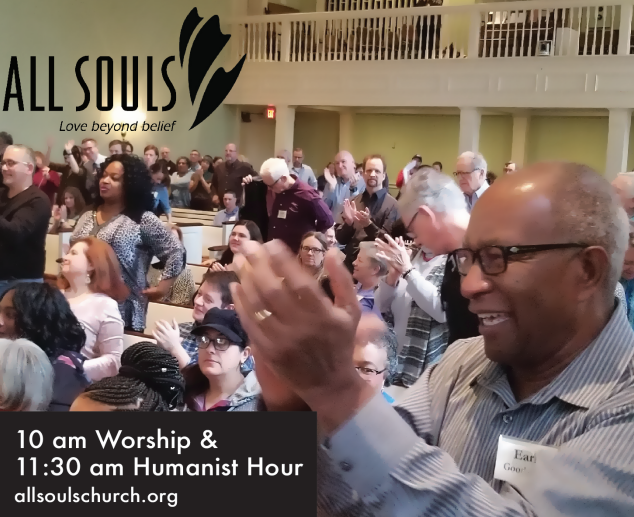
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11:30 am Humanist Hour
allsoulschurch.org



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

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...



Rev. Sharyn
Cosby-Willis,



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Burdex has been selected as a 2023-24 National Leader of Color Fellow

Dr. Jerry Goodwin The Oklahoma Eagle

Michelle Burdex, program coordinator for the Greenwood Cultural Center, has been accepted into the 2023-24 National Leaders of Color Fellows program. She will join 53 other leaders from across the country in a leadership development program.

“Being part of a cohort designed for BIPOC artists and arts administrators offers a unique and intentional opportunity for growth, support, and networking within the arts community,” said Burdex.

During her 25 years at the GCC, Burdex has led in the development of initiatives such as the Young Entrepreneurs’ Summer Program, GCC’s Performing Arts Program, and the Children’s Defense Fund Freedom Schools Summer and After-School Program. She has served as a storyteller and tour guide for the Greenwood area. Particularly, she served as a guide for Pres. Joe Biden during his visit to Tulsa to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the 1921 Race Massacre.

M-AAA said, “(Burdex) gift lies in educating about the tragic legacy of the massacre and the resilience of Black Wall Street, weaving together narratives that resonate deeply.”

Burdex is one of six delegates chosen to represent a six-state region of the Mid-America Arts Alliance. The six states are Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas. This is the second year for the

program.

“The impressive efforts that these arts and cultural leaders have already contributed to the communities that they serve truly inspires us. The impact of their work deserves national attention and support. Our goal is to give them more opportunities to share best practices and create meaningful connections across the country,” said Todd Stein, president and CEO at Mid-America Arts Alliance.

According to the press release, the eight-month program aims to establish multicultural leadership in the creative and cultural sector, providing fellows with access to specialists, strategic learning objectives focused on anti-racist and culturally oriented leadership practices, and opportunities for national-level networking and cohort building.

“Participating in this program offers not only a structured learning experience but also a pathway to long-term engagement, collaboration, and contribution within the arts sector. I am truly honored and appreciate the chance to grow professionally and increase access to the arts in my community,” said Burdex.

The sponsorship of the program includes the United States Regional Arts Organizations comprised of five U. S. regional arts organizations, including Mid-America Arts Alliance, and the Western States Arts Federation.



MICHELLE BURDEX has been named to the 2023-24 National Leader of Color Fellowship program. PHOTO PROVIDED

Jemison receives 2023 Humanitarian of the Year Award

Dr. Jerry Goodwin The Oklahoma Eagle



MAYOR G. T. BYNUM presents the 2023 Humanitarian of the Year award to librarian Keith Jemison. PHOTO PROVIDED

Keith Jemison, manager of the Rudisill Regional Library and founder of the African American Resource Center (AARC), was named the 2023 Humanitarian of the Year Award recipient by the City of Tulsa and the Human Rights Commission. The award recognizes and celebrates Tulsans who have gone above and beyond in humanitarian work, according to the city’s website announcing the award.

“I am humbled and surprised to receive the Humanitarian Award. I am grateful for the Human Rights Commission for honoring me,” said Jemison.

“I strongly support the City of Tulsa’s Resilience Strategy pillar to build an inclusive future that honors ‘all’ Tulsans and one that truly celebrates our diversity.”

In giving the award to Jemison, Mayor G. T. Bynum said, “I am incredibly grateful for the Human

Rights Commission and what it represents, and this yearly award is another great way we are recognizing the amazing work being done by passionate residents in our community.”

Celebrating 50 years with the Tulsa City-County Library, Jemison founded AARC, located at Rudisill, with the purpose to collect, preserve, and provide access to resources honoring and documenting the experiences of people of the African diaspora.

“The Tulsa City County Library’s African American Resource Center at the Rudisill Library is our contribution to Tulsa’s diversity, rich heritage, and culture for all,” said Jemison.

In addition to serving as manager of Rudisill, he is also north regional manager for the TCCL, overseeing branch library operations at Suburban Acres, Judy Z. Kishner, Skiatook, Collinsville, and Kendall-Whittier locations.

Events 2023

DEC
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is hosting its monthly support group for family members, significant others, and friends of people with mental health conditions at St. Augustine Catholic Church, Education Center, 1720 E. Apache St., 6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. The meetings are held on the fourth Monday of each month. (Because the fourth Monday is Christmas Day, call (918) 587-2965 or contact staugustineparishtulsaok@yahoo.com for more information.)

2024
JAN 15
Martin Luther King Holiday

FEB 17, 18 & 24
Theatre North’s “Topdog/Underdog” performance at Tulsa Performing Arts Center, 110 E. 2nd St. For ticket information, call (918) 596-7111.

MAR 13
2024 Women’s Summit at the Doubletree Warren Place, 6110 S. Yale Ave. The program is sponsored by the Greenwood Women’s Business Center, 102 N. Greenwood Ave., Suite 201. For more information, contact info@greenwoodwbc.com or gbcwomensummit.com.

APR 12-13
National Association of Black Journalists Region III conference, Tulsa, Okla. Eleven states, including Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas, will be represented. For more information, contact Eva Coleman, Region III director, at evacolemannabj@gmail.com.

MVP Swing-Out Dance of Tulsa participates in Christmas gift exchange

Dr. Jerry Goodwin The Oklahoma Eagle



MEMBERS OF MVP SWING-OUT DANCE brought gifts to its recent practice session at Lacy Park. PHOTO PROVIDED

MVP Swing-Out Dance, led by Howard Dallayz Barnes, hosted a Secret Santa program. Participating in the gift-giving included (back row, l-r) Regina Guess, Stephanie Bowie, Wanda Guillory, Billy Barnes, and Merlon Jones; (second row, l-r) Carla Foreman, Margaret Thomas, Shelia Harbert, Eliza Jeffries, Trish Williams Smith, and Velma Payne; and (front row, l-r) Su’meko Mayo and Linda Ferguson Drew. Not pictured is Howard Dallayz Barnes, lead instructor.

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