

# The Oklahoma Eagle

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

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By AZIAH SHID, WORD IN BLACK

NATION  
Using Music and Education to Undo Unjust Systems | A16

By EBONY JJ CURRY, WORD IN BLACK

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## Public Funds Pay Private Education Expenses

The State of Oklahoma is doling out *public funds to pay for private school tuition* and other fees for school kids across the state including those from very affluent families.

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LAWSUIT DEEPENS RIFTS  
ON THE TULSA SCHOOL BOARD | A7



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Tax Credits

**The Oklahoma Tax Commission** (OTC) website promotes the new program saying, “***Get up to \$7,500 for Private School Expenses.***” Checks will be sent directly to the private schools on behalf of “Oklahoma taxpayers who pay or expect to pay qualified expenses such as tuition and fees to an eligible private school” according to the OTC Oklahoma Program Handbook.

Continued From A1

John Neal  
The Oklahoma Eagle

The program was established by the Oklahoma Parental Choice Tax Credit Act, created through passage of House Bill 1934 in November 2023. The statute stipulates that all families in Oklahoma are eligible for refundable tax credits of \$5,000 to \$7,500 per child to pay for private-school tuition. GOP legislators pushed the statute through for the vote.

Still, implementing this new program has been riddled with problems and cost overruns.

Program disadvantages north Tulsa

The program disadvantages families and school kids in north Tulsa and other low-income neighborhoods in the state. Tulsa has 11 private elementary and high schools with approximately 4,400 students. None of the private schools listed by the Private School Review are located in north Tulsa. No schools on Tulsa’s north side receive funds through the program.

Democratic legislators opposed the new law and continue to launch heavy criticism of it. They describe the program as a boondoggle for the rich that will short-change public education.

In an interview with The Oklahoma Eagle, State

House Rep. Regina Goodwin (D-73) said, Oklahoma public schools educate approximately 90 percent of our students. I voted against the tax scheme which undercuts our public education system and is basically a gift to the rich. The \$5,000 to \$7,500 of public dollars given to each student in a household attending a private school will cost us \$150 million in 2024 and \$250 million by 2026. Public schools are under attack.”

Rep. John Waldron (D-77), whose district also includes north Tulsa said, “This legislation was clearly written to benefit affluent families already enrolled in exclusive private schools,” Waldron told The Oklahoma Eagle. “In the future, we can expect to see

*Cont. A6*





ST. REP REGINA GOODWIN, district 73, at campaign launch event for state senate seat 11. PHOTO THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

Goodwin

TULSA — **State Rep. Regina Goodwin**, District 73, stood before a jubilant crowd on Saturday, Jan. 6, flanked by campaign signs that will soon occupy the landscape of state senate district communities.

The Oklahoma Eagle Staff  
The Oklahoma Eagle

**GOODWIN'S EIGHT-YEAR LEGACY** of service was framed by members of the community, family and friends, each offering a personal and unique testimony.

Praise through song and worship, sincere expressions of gratitude and prayers of hope filled the atrium of the Greenwood Cultural Center as the two-term representative announced her candidacy for the district 11 state senate seat.

“Service is the rent you pay for room and board on earth,” Goodwin quoted her grandmother, as she formally launched her campaign and shared the familial wisdom that has compelled her political career since

being elected in 2015.

People-centered investments in education and public services, criminal justice reform, public official accountability and justice for Tulsans who continue to live within the shadow and impact of the country’s most violent act of domestic terrorism, the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre.

Supporters embraced Goodwin’s state senate candidacy as an evolution of her public service. Wearing “The Power of We” impressed t-shirts, a nob towards her 2022 re-election campaign, event attendees shared their readiness to advance a grassroots initiative necessary to secure victory.

“When you don’t show up, your voice will not be heard,” said Alicia Andrews, Oklahoma Democratic Party chair, and the first state party chair of African-American descent.

St. Rep. Monroe Nichols (District 72nd) , and a current 2024 Tulsa Mayoral candidate, echoed Andrews’ message, reminding event attendees that the funding required for successful campaigns exists, emphasizing that the financial resources are “in our pockets” and should be directed towards supporting “..our campaigns.”

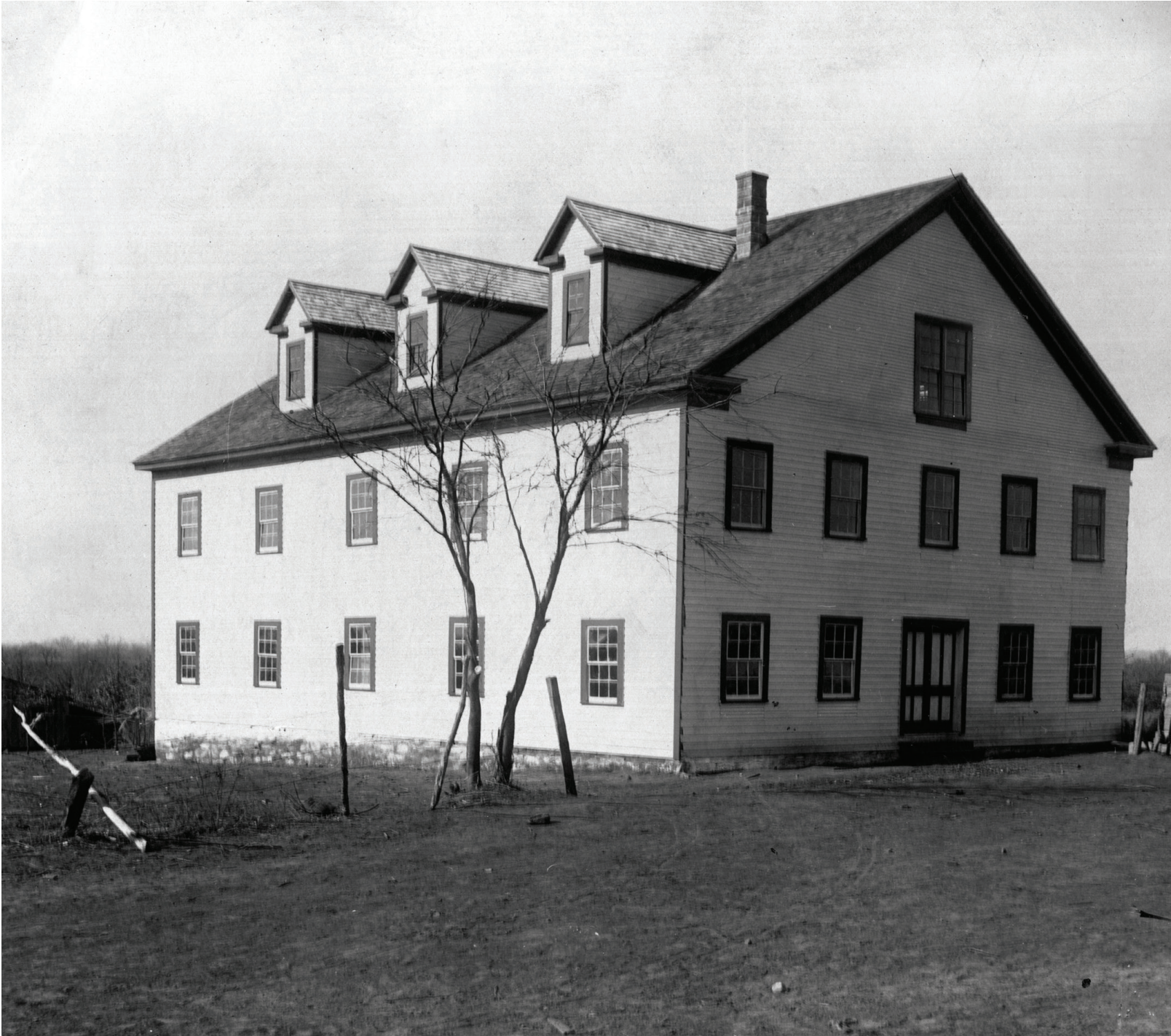
St. Rep. Jason Lowe (District 97), Vanessa Hall-Harper (District 1, Tulsa City Council), Roger Randle (former President Pro Tempore of the Oklahoma Senate), Dr. Wennette Pegues, wife of the late Julius Pegues, James “Jim” O. Goodwin, publisher of The Oklahoma Eagle and other community advocates shared their support for Goodwin’s candidacy.

We have a “shared responsibility”, noted Goodwin, calling upon event attendees and voters to act in the interests of Oklahomans.



# Taft: An Historic Oklahoma 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. Grimmitt 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. In April 2020 the census counted 173 residents.

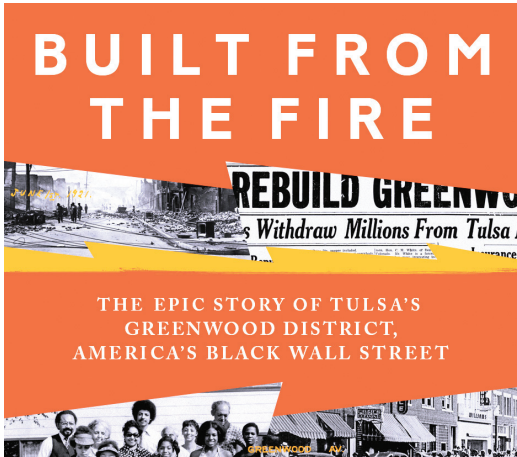
THE OKLAHOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY is an agency of the government of Oklahoma dedicated to promotion and preservation of Oklahoma’s history and its people by collecting, interpreting, and disseminating knowledge and artifacts of Oklahoma.

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

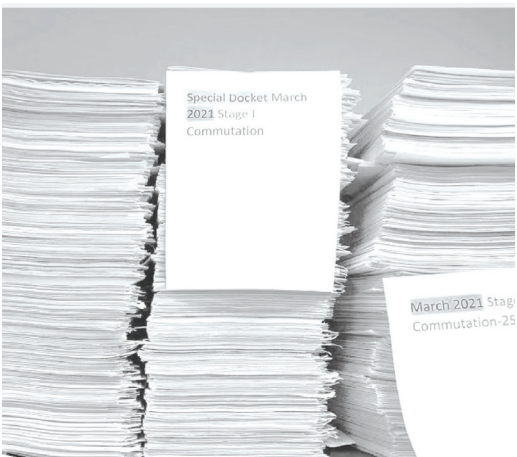
## Featured Last Week



How Would MLK Advise Us To Face Today’s Challenges



The Lingering Legacies Of Urban Renewal To Be Highlighted



The Oklahoma Parole Rate Declines

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Tax Credits

# Every private school student in a family with household incomes up to \$75,000 is eligible for \$7,500 in private school expense payments

From A2

private schools raise tuition since that’s an easier way to capture the tax credit bonanza than hiring more teachers and building more classrooms,” he added.

The Oklahoma State Tax Commission began approving applications in January 2024 for up to \$7,500 annually per private school student expenses. There is no limit on family household income for Oklahoma residents eligible for the private school “tax credit.” Nor is there a limit on the number of students in a family whose expenses will be paid to attend private school. Under the Parental Choice Tax Credit Act passed by the Oklahoma legislature and signed into law in May 2023, households having no tax liability but eligible for the credit will receive a reimbursement check from the state.

## Program benefits a tiny fraction of Oklahoma schoolkids

Oklahoma joins over 20 states that have enacted some form of public fund payment for private school students. Ed Choice, an advocate of such programs, estimates 770,000 private school students nationwide benefited from state financial aid in the 2022-23 school year. The Oklahoma Tax Commission Impact Statement on the legislation told Oklahoma lawmakers, citing the Private School Review, that 37,668 students in 2023 were attending Oklahoma private schools. This number represents approximately five percent of the 700,000 students in Oklahoma public schools.

Every private school student in a family with household incomes up to \$75,000 is eligible for \$7,500 in private school expense payments. The Oklahoma state average household income is \$61,364, according to the latest U.S. Census estimate. So, most households with students enrolled in private schools are likely to be eligible for the full amount. Families with incomes of \$150,000 or less are eligible for \$7,000 but are still among applicants “to receive priority consideration,” according to the state handbook. For households making more than \$250,000 annually, the reimbursement is “limited” to \$5,000 per year.

This payout is for private school “qualified expenses,” including tuition and fees. The average tuition among Oklahoma’s over 200 private elementary and high schools, not including other reimbursable fees, is \$7,153, per an Oklahoma Tax Commission (OTC) report to legislators. The OTC private school payment for families will be the maximum amount per student based on household income or actual tuition and fees, whichever is less.

The OTC in the state handbook has defined non-tuition qualified expense fees to include textbooks, uniforms, enrollment, registration, application, testing and assessment, activity, and technology fees. Unlike public educational institutions, private schools need not be accredited by the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) to receive state funding. Additionally, in contrast with public schools, most private schools receiving taxpayer funds under this program are religiously affiliated or have a religious curriculum. For example, of the 11 Tulsa private elementary and high schools, only one is non-sectarian.

## The costs and process

The Act sets aside \$150 million in 2024 for private school costs, increasing to \$200 million in 2025 and then to \$250 million in 2026. It also includes \$5 million for home school costs. The legislation directed the Commission to “give first preference” to households with \$150,000

or less incomes.

On May 1, 2023, while the private school funding legislation was still making its way through the respective chambers, the OTC informed lawmakers that these set-aside amounts would need to be increased. The OTC projected “claims for private school expenses to total approximately \$276 million for the tax year 2024, which is in excess of the proposed \$150 million...” and made similar underfunding projections for subsequent years.

Due to the complex processing procedures and large number of claims, application processing was delayed until Dec. 6, 2023, for those households with incomes of \$150,000 or less. The application deadline for this “priority” group was also extended until Feb. 5, 2024. Application processing will follow for households making over \$150,000 in income.

While the Commission has not yet provided a dollar amount in claims currently being processed, applications of more than 30,000 would suggest support for the OTC’s statement that the program is underfunded.

Additionally, administrative costs for the private school reimbursement plan have far exceeded budgeted amounts. The OTC initially put forward an administrative cost of \$1 million but later awarded a contract to a third-party vendor for \$3.9 million. This prompted State Sen. Carri Hicks (D-40), to tweet, “We were told time and again the overhead would not exceed 1M, & here we go again that ‘choice’ is costing taxpayers nearly 4X...”.

## Public education comparison

A statewide private school funding voucher bill narrowly failed in the 2022 Oklahoma legislative session. Rural legislators opposed it because of fear public education could lose funding. The 2022 SB 1647 legislation would have transferred funds from the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) budget into a revolving account students’ parents could use for private school expenses. Critics charge that the Parental Choice Tax Credit Act adopted in 2023 uses tax credits instead of vouchers to cloak the funding source. Critics also assert private school funding will ultimately harm public education.

Opposition to Oklahoma tax credit funding of private schools may also have been blunted by a significant increase in public school spending in that same year. This increase included public teacher pay increases and a more substantial allocation of state aid formula funds to local school districts for the 2023-24 school year.

Yet, a straightforward empirical comparison of state aid in 2024 reflects private school students will likely receive more state aid than their public-school counterparts. For example, the Tulsa Public Schools Preliminary Budget adopted for 2023-24 has less than \$4,600 per TPS student in “Total State Sources of Revenue.” In contrast, private school students will receive \$5,000 to \$7,500, with most recipients trending toward the higher amount.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters presented the proposed OSDE budget for public schools to Oklahoma legislators on Jan. 10, 2024. This proposed budget, as presented by Walters, is a \$47 million reduction over the previous year.

## Parental Choice Tax Credit Program

The Parental Choice Tax Credit program provides a refundable income tax credit of \$5,000-\$7,500 for eligible Oklahoma Taxpayers who pay, or expect to pay, qualified expenses such as tuition and fees to an eligible private school on behalf of an eligible student that attends or plans to attend an eligible private school during that tax year.

Students Household Federal AGI	Maximum Credit Amount Per Student
Up to \$75,000	\$7,500
\$75,001 - \$150,000	\$7,000
\$150,001 - \$225,000	\$6,500
\$225,001 - \$250,000	\$6,000
\$250,001 and up	\$5,000

**Parental Choice Tax Credit**

The credit amount per eligible student is equal to the Maximum Credit Amount Per Student, as shown in the table below, or the anticipated private school tuition and fees for the tax year, whichever is less. The anticipated tuition and fees for the tax year must be reflected on the student's Enrollment Verification Form provided by the eligible school. The Maximum Credit Amount is determined by the total federal AGI of the student's Household during the second preceding tax year.

**JOHN NEAL**, the author, is a former resident of Sand Springs. He is well versed in urban renewal, its uses and abuse, as a former city manager in Oklahoma and departmental consultant for the city of El Paso, Texas. In 2008, he was that city's planning pirector when the city won multiple awards for its planning accomplishments. He is now retired and resides in Austin, Texas.



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TPS Lawsuit

# Lawsuit deepens rifts on school board

John Neal  
The Oklahoma Eagle

Two Tulsa Public School board members have filed a lawsuit charging inappropriate and unlawful conduct by a majority of the board. Among the actions the suit objects to is the appointment of Ebony Johnson to the TPS superintendent position. The board voted 5-2 in favor of the appointment in a meeting on Dec. 11, 2023.

Board members Jennettie Marshall and E'Lena Ashley filed the lawsuit in the State District Court of Tulsa County on Jan. 18. The suit claims that the majority of board members violated the Oklahoma Open Meeting Act, circumvented Board Policy, and manipulated board proceedings.

The lawsuit seeks to invalidate Johnson's appointment and start a national search for a new superintendent of TPS.

The board members were joined by Aaron Griffin as plaintiffs. They directed the suit against TPS Board President Stacey Woolley and other board members, Superintendent Johnson and former TPS Superintendent Deborah Gist. Board member Jerry Griffith is not named as a plaintiff or defendant in the legal action. The suit also seeks to invalidate Gist's Separation Agreement and preclude Johnson from holding the superintendent position until a national search to fill the position is completed.

The lawsuit names the TPS district as an additional defendant. Attorney Marie Mercedes Seidler filed the action on behalf of "Legal Overreach for Parents' School Rights."

The lawsuit comes as Johnson is enmeshed in a battle with the Oklahoma State Board of Education (OSBE) to avoid a state takeover of Tulsa Public Schools. The State Board's Superintendent for Public Instruction Ryan Walters has threatened such action because of what he calls Tulsa's "failing schools."

Allegations and deepening rift

In their court petition, the plaintiffs seek a declaratory action and injunctive relief by the court. They set forth a long list of alleged facts

A common theme in the lawsuit is that the "Majority Members" of the Tulsa School Board sought to politicize the various decisions of the board through a "backroom" or "closeted strategy" to maintain their political power over the board.

that constitute the context for the legal action. Among them are the "academic crisis and administrative mismanagement" of the Tulsa Public Schools district. As factual evidence for this context, Marshall and Ashley cite an ongoing "controversial forensic audit" by the State Auditor. In the filing, the two board members acknowledged they initiated the audit by making the audit request to Gov. Kevin Stitt.

The lawsuit threatens to deepen a long-standing rift among school board members, sometimes involving the school administration. In the July 1, 2022, letter to Stitt requesting the audit, Marshall and Ashley wrote, "There are significant concerns and substantiating evidence that process and state contract laws may have been violated, and this is not a one-time pattern of operation."

The two board members also walked-out of a school board meeting that same month, criticizing then-Superintendent Deborah Gist and President Woolley for a lack of financial transparency. For weeks in early 2023, the two joined forces to block the appointment to fill a vacancy for a district board seat. Marshall told The Oklahoma Eagle in a March 2023 interview that the process was "tainted with shifting directions, unclear milestones and out of quorum meetings."

A common theme in the lawsuit filing is that the "Majority Members" of the Tulsa School Board sought to politicize the various decisions of the board through a "backroom" or "closeted strategy" to maintain their political power over the board. While other board members are named defendants, the petition takes particular aim at TPS School Board President Woolley and former Superintendent Deborah Gist.

The lawsuit contends Woolley and Gist initiated "a series of backroom strategy discussions" to secure Gist's Separation Agreement and appointment of Ebony Johnson as interim superintendent on August 23, 2023. However, both board members Ashely and Marshall voted for the Gist Separation Agreement and the interim appointment of Johnson. In the court filing, these board members state they "felt that exigencies left them no option...". Subsequently, both board members voted against Johnson's permanent appointment, citing process concerns.

Arguments and relief sought

- The plaintiffs assert for multiple pages in the 40-page petition that the deliberations and actions involving these events prove the "Defendants Intentionally Violated the Open Meeting Act." Further, the lawsuit alleges that the Board Policy was violated and that the "Defendants Abused their Discretion and Such Action was Arbitrary and Capricious."
- The Oklahoma Eagle has not received any statements from the defendants, and no court filing has been made in their defense as of the deadline for this article's publication.
- The filing seeks Declaratory Orders by the Court and Preliminary and Permanent Injunctive Relief. The Oklahoma Eagle-excerpting, paraphrasing, and summarizing-describes the relief sought as:
- Invalidate the Deborah Gist Separation Agreement
  - Invalidate the interim and permanent appointment of Ebony Johnson as TPS superintendent
  - Declare that the defendants abused board discretion
  - Void specific other personnel changes made by the superintendent and the board
  - Require a national search for a superintendent by Board Policy
  - Consider ordering financial restitution and requesting a criminal investigation into violation of the Oklahoma Open Meeting Act

At a meeting open to the public this month, Johnson seemed to shrug off the lawsuit. "Yeah, it's a little disheartening because it sends a very divisive message to our constituencies," she said. "It sends a wave of confusion as well to people saying, well, wait a minute; I thought that we were trying to all row in the same direction."





THE OKLAHOMA PARDON AND PAROLE BOARD could vote on proposed commutation eligibility requirements in February.  
PHOTO WHITNEY BRYEN/OKLAHOMA WATCH

Commutation Eligibility Changes

The Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board heard public comments from dozens of speakers who oppose the proposed eligibility requirements.

The Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board will vote next month on proposed rule changes that would add eligibility requirements for prisoners seeking to argue their sentence is excessive or unjust.

The rules, created in response to a May 2022 Oklahoma County Grand Jury report critical of the state’s commutation processes, would require state prisoners to meet the following criteria to file a commutation application with the Pardon and Parole Board:

The sentencing range for one or more of a prisoner’s current offenses has statutorily changed.

The prisoner does not have a projected release date and has served at least 30 years.

The prisoner has received a favorable recommendation from a trial official, such as a district attorney or judge.

The prisoner has received a favorable recommendation from the governor.

The board may vote to adopt the rules as proposed, vote on a modified version of the rules changes or table the proposal altogether. The board is scheduled to meet Feb. 5-7 at the Oklahoma Health Care Authority building in Oklahoma City.

More than two dozen speakers, all opposed to the proposed rule changes, addressed the board during a public comment period on Monday.

Here’s a sampling of what commenters had to say. Statements were edited for length and clarity:

**Kara Chapman**, commutation recipient: “I was given a year of life that I wouldn’t have otherwise. That may not seem like a lot, but when you have four small children, a year counts. I got to spend Christmas with my children, I saw my oldest turn 13. Since I’ve been released I’ve found a full-time job and become a volunteer in the Heather’s Hope program. If these rules had been in place earlier I would not have been released. I come to you not with legal expertise or not with a lot of knowledge, but as a human being who has been affected by commutation. I am someone who can serve as an example of positive change. Thank you for your work and please remember the humans affected by these cases.”

**William “Trey” Livingston III**, commutation recipient: There are a lot of people in this room that are sitting in the same seat I am. If these rules were passed years ago, I would not have been eligible to be here and to be doing the work I am doing. To be with my family and to do the things I’m doing in the community to give back for my actions when I was younger. My case was one where my sentence was not statutorily excessive, but the board could see I’d do better outside. I’d ask this board to see people for more than their crime and more than their worst mistake. There are so many good people in there. I have so many friends who are still behind those fences that deserve a chance. A sentence may be legal, but it’s still like the Wild West in many ways in those courtrooms. And you all have the power to look in those courtrooms and see the individuals who are doing the right thing.”

**Aaron Cosar**, commutation recipient: “When I think about the commutation process, I would not want your job. But I do believe there are men and women throughout the Department of Corrections who are so grateful to have a second chance. Because of commutation I’ve been given that privilege to be a good, tax-paying citizen. I now work inside a prison as a program manager and I get the opportunity to work with men who are struggling with violence. I

pray that you will look at these considerations and remember that there are a great number of people who committed crimes, are guilty, but would love the opportunity for a second chance.”

**Kris Steele**, former House speaker and criminal justice reform advocate: “When a person feels they’ve been treated unfairly in a court of law, we should immediately look into it. These cases should be looked at post haste. I think the premise of these proposed rule changes is well-intentioned. But if you feel you don’t have enough time to screen cases, there are remedies. Please maintain your responsibility, maintain accountability and perpetuate hope by allowing people to seek relief for excessive and unfair sentences.”

**Lisa Brown**, mother of a state prisoner serving life without the possibility of parole: “I feel like 30 years to be eligible for commutation is excessive, but also to have an exceptional institutional record, that should be reviewed on a case-by-case basis so it’s not eliminating everybody. Thirty years is a long time. My son was 23 when he was convicted. I don’t want it to be 53 until he’s eligible. He’s a good kid and I don’t want him to have to wait that long.”


**T. Sheri Dickerson**, executive director of Black Lives Matter Oklahoma City: “Mercy and compassion must be part of this process. The rules proposed remove those things. I say that as the mother of a son whose life was taken by an 18-year-old man who is currently serving a triple life sentence. As the daughter of a man whose life was taken in 1996. As the sister of a brother who was murdered. It is just, it is fair, and it should be considered. Please have mercy.”

**Francetta Mays**, Tulsa NAACP Chapter President and pastor of the Vernon AME Church: “When you start putting people in a position to lose hope, and that’s what I believe this is, you are adding gasoline to the fire that’s already burning. We all have made bad decisions and have made mistakes. How many times do we reflect on one sin we made? We have to improve the process by listening to the people, and the people are the ones who are incarcerated.”

**Glynn Simmons**, wrongfully convicted man who spent 48 years in Oklahoma prisons: “I would like to suggest this board have kind of oversight for people who have a claim of actual innocence, instead of those who are guilty. Everything is geared towards the guilty man. I’ve done time with men who plead guilty to all kinds of heinous crimes and they appeared before you, and they were granted parole. And they came back to prison within six to eighteen months. The prosecuting attorney sent letters alluding to my innocence, and the victim’s family sent letters alluding to my innocence.”

**Colleen McCarty**, executive director of the Oklahoma Appleseed Center for Law and Justice: “Wrongful convictions and prosecutorial misconduct continue to plague Oklahoma’s courts. Limiting the rules in this way ensures that those who received an unjust or excessive sentence will be the least likely to gain relief.”

KEATON ROSS covers democracy and criminal justice for Oklahoma Watch. Contact him at (405) 831-9753 or Kross@Oklahomawatch.org. Follow him on Twitter at @KeatonRoss.



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THE OKFUSKEE COUNTY COURTHOUSE is located in Okemah, Oklahoma. PHOTO TRES SAVAGE

Subject Matter Jurisdiction

# Ruling changes burden of proof, but tribal citizens retain other affirmative defenses

Oklahoma retains subject matter jurisdiction over crimes committed by Indigenous people in Indian Country, according to a recent decision from the state’s highest criminal court that could draw legal challenges from tribal citizens or nations in federal court.

The Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals released its 3-2 decision in *Deo v. Parish* on Dec. 14. Written by Judge William J. Musseman, the majority decision held that Oklahoma retains subject matter jurisdiction — a procedural prerequisite stipulating that a certain court has the authority to hear a case — over a second-degree burglary case against Billy Zane Deo, a citizen of the Muscogee Nation.

The new decision effectively flips the burden of proof on defendants trying to have state charges dismissed based on Indian status in eastern Oklahoma, which was affirmed as a series of Indian Country reservations in 2020. After the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in *McGirt v. Oklahoma*, state prosecutors generally had to prove subject matter jurisdiction over Indian defendants for a case to proceed. Now, judges must allow cases to continue until defendants raise an objection based on personal and territorial jurisdiction.

Eliminating lack of subject matter jurisdiction as a defense also opens the door to Indian defendants to be prosecuted in state court if they fail to raise their personal and territorial jurisdiction defenses. Unlike subject matter jurisdiction, objections based on other forms of jurisdiction are waived if not raised in the early stages of the criminal case.

Issued the day before a federal court’s dismissal of *Hooper v. City of Tulsa*, the Deo decision lands among other recent rulings from the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals concerning criminal jurisdiction in Indian Country. Tribal leaders responded to the decision with criticism and an eye to federal law that could form the basis for an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

## 3-2

**The Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals released its 3-2 decision in *Deo v. Parish* on Dec. 14.** Written by Judge William J. Musseman, the majority decision held that Oklahoma retains subject matter jurisdiction — a procedural prerequisite stipulating that a certain court has the authority to hear a case — over a second-degree burglary case against Billy Zane Deo, a citizen of the Muscogee Nation.

**Arrested before *McGirt*, but not convicted, Deo lingered in legal limbo**

Deo pleaded guilty to second-degree burglary in August 2018 and received a seven-year deferred sentence. That December, he was charged with grand larceny and knowingly concealing stolen property in Okfuskee County District Court.

In January 2019, he pleaded guilty in exchange for admission to drug court, a specialized venue for handling drug offenders focused on rehabilitation. A month later, prosecutors filed to remove him from drug court, but that motion never received a ruling. In April 2019, he was charged in Okmulgee County District Court with false personation. After another plea, Deo was sentenced to 10 years in prison to run concurrently with his Okfuskee County cases.

In 2012 and 2022, after the *McGirt* decision, Deo’s attorney filed for dismissals by claiming the state court lacked subject matter jurisdiction. Judges in Okfuskee County and Okmulgee County denied the dismissals, and Okfuskee County District Judge Lawrence Parish’s ruling was appealed to the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals. Now, with that court’s Dec. 14 decision, Deo’s case heads back to Okfuskee County District Court for further proceedings.

Department of Corrections records indicate Deo was discharged from the state prison system in May. DOC spokeswoman Kay Thompson said Deo was transferred an to Okfuskee County deputy sheriff, but records indicate Deo now has outstanding warrants related to his case being remanded to district court for further proceedings.

In their Dec. 14 decision, the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals distinguished three types of jurisdiction in its opinion: personal, subject matter and territorial.

Territorial jurisdiction involves the area controlled by a government within which its laws are in effect. Personal jurisdiction refers to whether a court has jurisdiction over the person involved in the case, which usually means that the person has “minimum contacts”

with the territorial jurisdiction. Subject matter jurisdiction limits the type of case that can be heard by a court. For example, bankruptcy courts are special courts with subject matter jurisdiction over bankruptcy cases.

**Musseman: Bracker balancing applies to personal, territorial jurisdiction**

The Deo decision holds that Oklahoma courts’ subject matter jurisdiction over crimes committed by Indians in the state is not preempted by federal law and that objections to jurisdiction based on *McGirt v. Oklahoma* stem from personal and territorial jurisdiction. It also found that the “Bracker balancing test” is only necessary if personal and territorial jurisdiction are at issue.

Deo’s attorney had failed to argue personal or territorial jurisdiction issues earlier and waived the objections by failing to raise them, the appellate court found.

“Therefore, Bracker balancing is only triggered once the territorial and personal jurisdiction components are satisfied and is not impacted by the type of controversy. As a result, Bracker balancing does not operate to preempt Oklahoma district court’s subject matter jurisdiction,” wrote Musseman, who was joined by presiding Judge Scott Rowland and Judge Gary L. Lumpkin, who both wrote concurring opinions.

**Dissenting judges say majority ‘bypassing *McGirt*’**

A dissenting opinion by Judge Robert L. Hudson argued that the Deo decision was sidestepping *McGirt* and ignoring the Bracker test.

“The majority opinion rebrands our consideration of Indian Country jurisdictional challenges based on *McGirt v. Oklahoma* from subject matter jurisdiction under state law to matters involving only personal and territorial jurisdiction — thereby bypassing *McGirt*,” Hudson wrote.

Judge David B. Lewis also wrote a dissent,





WEST BROADWAY STREET, OKEMAH, OKLAHOMA, Okfuskee County. PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Subject Matter Jurisdiction from A9

forcefully arguing that “states have no jurisdiction of crimes committed by Indians in Indian Country unless it is expressly conferred by Congress.”

““No jurisdiction’ means no jurisdiction, no sovereign authority to act,” Lewis wrote. “Congress has never conferred criminal jurisdiction over Indians in Indian Country on the State of Oklahoma.”

Application of Bracker balancing test left ‘for future cases’

The Bracker balancing test originates from Thurgood Marshall’s opinion in the 1980 U.S. Supreme Court case *White Mountain Apache Tribe v. Bracker*. The test is applied to determine whether federal law has preempted state law regulating non-Indians on a reservation by examining the nature of the federal, state and tribal interests at stake and trying to balance each side’s interests.

The Bracker test was brought new life by the June 2022 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Oklahoma v. Castro-Huerta*, where the court used the test to determine that Victor Manuel Castro-Huerta, a non-Indian, could be prosecuted by the state of Oklahoma for a crime against a tribal citizen committed in Indian Country.

Since Castro-Huerta, attorneys for Oklahoma and the City of Tulsa have argued that the Bracker test should be applied to determine if the state has jurisdiction to prosecute Indians for crimes committed in Indian Country.

Applying a Bracker analysis to a tribal citizen in Indian Country would stand as a new development in Indian law, and the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals stopped short of doing so in *Deo v. Parish*.

“To the extent the state has the power to prosecute Indians in Indian Country, that will be for future cases to decide,” Musseman wrote in a footnote.

Oklahoma’s subject matter jurisdiction after the Deo decision

The Deo decision immediately affects Indian

“To the extent the state has the power to prosecute Indians in Indian Country, that will be for future cases to decide,” Musseman wrote in a footnote.

JUDGE WILLIAM J. MUSSEMAN, jurist, Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals

defendants who are asking judges to dismiss their pre-McGirt pleas in cases that have not had a final judgment. Often, those criminal cases involve deferred sentences. Now, such defendants cannot seek relief by arguing that Oklahoma lacks subject matter jurisdiction, one of the few legal defenses that could have been brought up at any time.

The Deo decision also marks the first time an Oklahoma appellate court has asserted subject matter jurisdiction over crimes committed by Indians in Indian Country post-McGirt. In support of their decision, the court referenced a 1945 case, *Ex parte Wallace*, where it had held that an Oklahoma court had subject matter jurisdiction over a first-degree rape case involving a tribal citizen in Indian Country.

The court also made the rare decision to overturn parts of three decisions inconsistent with the new opinion, naming *Magnan v. State*, *Hogner v. State* and *McClain v. State* as partially overruled in a footnote.

Since the decision was made by Oklahoma’s highest criminal court, any request to appeal it would have to be granted by the U.S. Supreme Court. The decision is only binding on Oklahoma state courts and does not affect other states. It is unclear whether any party will seek an appeal.

Crosson, Deo decisions expand state authority in Indian Country

The Deo decision follows another Court of Criminal Appeals opinion, *State v. Crosson*, which held that state judges must issue an arrest warrant for a tribal citizen in Indian Country if there is probable cause for an arrest warrant.

Read together, the opinions mean that state judges must issue arrest warrants for Indigenous defendants when prosecutors present probable cause and that state courts have subject matter jurisdiction to hear those criminal cases.

The decisions flip the burden of proof on the question of criminal jurisdiction in Indian Country. Prior to the decisions, judges were dismissing cases because the state had to prove the court had jurisdiction before the case could proceed. After the decisions, the burden to

prove that the state lacks jurisdiction shifts to defendants in the form of affirmative defenses they either raise or waive in their initial filings.

However, neither the Crosson case nor the Deo decision holds that the state of Oklahoma has criminal jurisdiction over Indians in Indian Country. Indigenous defendants accused of crimes within tribal reservation boundaries can still move for dismissal based on the state lacking personal and territorial jurisdictions.

Nonetheless, the new rulings do represent a notable expansion of state authority in Indian Country.

Tribal leaders criticize Deo decision

As reported by the Tulsa World Muscogee Nation press secretary Jason Salsman and Cherokee Nation Attorney General Chad Harsha issued statements criticizing the Deo decision.

“It is well established in federal law that the state lacks criminal jurisdiction over Indians in Indian Country, and it was Oklahoma’s illegal prosecution of Indians in a reservation that led to the McGirt decision,” Harsha said. “Given this history, the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals decision today is disappointing and we will carefully review it.”

Salsman decried “false rhetoric” surrounding criminal jurisdiction in eastern Oklahoma, and he hinted at the ruling’s potential incongruity with federal law.

“The legal gymnastics used to apply Castro-Huerta in this decision makes it clear that some courts in Oklahoma may be misinformed, embracing the false rhetoric from the political campaign to overturn the McGirt decision, and in a manner contrary to well-established federal law,” Salsman said.

A spokeswoman for Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt’s office did not respond to a request for comment prior to the publication of this story.

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PHOTOS ADOBE IMAGES

As a new year begins, a number of stories from across the world of Oklahoma education that have been ongoing for months or years have seen recent developments. Below, find an Oklahoma education roundup featuring updates on court cases, State Department of Education programs and bills filed for the 2024 legislative session.

Okla. Education Updates from A1

Ron Arthur lawsuit moving forward

A federal lawsuit against Shawnee Public Schools and former athletic director Ron Arthur — who was found guilty in November of sexting a minor — will move forward after a judge on Dec. 29 declined in part and granted in part a motion to dismiss.

The plaintiff, identified only as John Doe in the lawsuit, alleged that Arthur sexually harassed him and that the district knew of Arthur’s misconduct.

“Essentially, the amended complaint asserts that the district’s negligence and deliberate indifference in the face of prior complaints caused plaintiff to become another victim of Arthur’s sexual misconduct,” U. S. District Court Judge David Russell for the Western District of Oklahoma summarized at the beginning of his order.

Russell dismissed without prejudice the plaintiff’s Title IX claim, as well as another claim that the district should be held responsible for the actions of a third party because it “created danger” for the victim. Russell also dismissed the plaintiff’s claim that the district was negligent because it did not have a harassment policy. Because Russell dismissed the claims without prejudice, the plaintiff can refile them later if further evidence supports those claims.

“I’m pleased, and my client is pleased,” Cameron Spradling, the plaintiff’s attorney, said by email.

Teacher recruitment program data released

In three versions of a press release sent Jan. 4, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters touted the success of his teacher recruitment program that offered pre-K through third grade teachers up to \$50,000 when they agreed to teach in certain areas for five years.

In the press release, OSDE spokesman Dan Isett said 523 teachers received bonuses as part of the program. Of those, 67 came from outside Oklahoma. About 395 teachers who received the bonuses signed on to teach in rural or high-poverty areas.

“Innovative solutions like the teacher bonus program are the key to getting Oklahoma schools back on the right track,” Walters said in the release. “Any fake controversy Democrats and Republicans controlled by the teachers unions try to drum up will not dim the overwhelming success of this program. Previous small-scale programs have not worked, so we had to disrupt the market clearly and decisively to invest in our high-need areas. We will continue to disrupt the status quo, introduce free market principles in our education system, and unleash to power of innovation to reward our best teachers and help our students achieve great things.”

Walters had previously said in a KOKH Fox 25 town hall live-streamed on YouTube that the department received 950 applications for the program. In one of Thursday’s press releases,

Isett said 578 applications were eligible to receive bonuses.

The Tulsa World’s Randy Krehbiel wrote in a story Jan. 2 that Epic Charter School and Edmond Public Schools had 35 and 24 respective applications approved, the most of any districts. Other urban school districts also saw larger numbers of applications approved:

- Tulsa Public Schools — 20
- Putnam City Public Schools — 18
- Deer Creek Public Schools — 15
- Norman Public Schools — 15
- Oklahoma City Public Schools — 14

Krehbiel, who received the data as part of a records request relating to a recent subpoena served on the department, also reported that few “low-performing” school districts had teacher applications approved through the program.

NonDoc submitted an open records request to the department Aug. 4 seeking related records but has yet to receive a response.

Infinity Generation lawsuit against state still alive

On Thursday, an Oklahoma County District Court judge declined to dismiss a lawsuit filed against Walters and the State Board of Education but indicated that the plaintiffs — Infinity Generation Preparatory School — could have a steep hill to climb.

Infinity Generation, an Oklahoma City private school that serves about 25 students, filed the lawsuit after the state board voted in August to give the school a status of “nonaccredited” for the 2023-2024 school year.

The state board’s decision came after the Oklahoma State Department of Education recommended nonaccreditation owing to the fact that the school shut down halfway through the 2022-2023 school year, telling its students to find another school for the spring semester. Additionally, school leadership did not communicate with OSDE’s regional accreditation officer from mid-February through June, according to the department’s recommendation summary.

“Infinity Generation Preparatory School received a recommendation of ‘nonaccredited’ status from the accreditation division for the 2022-2023 (sic) school year,” OSDE deputy general counsel Andy Ferguson wrote in the summary. “The two reasons given by State Department of Education staff are failure to operate a school (more specifically closing the school for an entire semester) and a list of statutory and regulatory requirements that could not be verified due to Infinity’s lack of participation in the annual accreditation process.”

In his memo, Ferguson argued that schools are only accredited for one year at a time and that the department evaluates all Oklahoma schools’ accreditation statuses each year.

Okla. Education Updates cont. A12

Quick Facts

Infinity Generation, an Oklahoma City private school that serves about 25 students, filed the lawsuit after the state board voted in August to give the school a status of “nonaccredited” for the 2023-2024 school year.



Oklahoma Teacher Signing

Oklahoma continues to experience acute teacher shortages, most critically in grades PK-3 and special education. To attract classroom teachers to these critical shortage areas, OSDE has allocated \$16M for signing bonuses to new and returning teachers. Certified teachers can earn up to a \$50k signing bonus in return for a 5-year commitment to teaching in PK-3 or special education. They will receive a larger bonus for making a commitment to teach in a rural or high-poverty school. Teachers are eligible for the bonus if they were not employed by an Oklahoma school district in the 2022-2023 school year.

Shawnee Public Schools

A federal lawsuit against Shawnee Public Schools and former athletic director Ron Arthur — who was found guilty in November of sexting a minor — will move forward after a judge on Dec. 29 declined in part and granted in part a motion to dismiss.



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Willfully withholding records relating to death row inmate Richard Glossip’s clemency hearing

Open Records Lawsuit from A1

Two Oklahoma lawmakers are suing District 6 District Attorney Jason Hicks for copies of communications sent before, during and after death row inmate Richard Glossip’s clemency hearing last April.

Reps. Justin Humphrey, R-Lane and Kevin McDugle, R-Broken Arrow, filed the lawsuit against Hicks in Stephens County District Court on Dec. 20. They seek the immediate release of documents outlining communications between Hicks and other District Attorney Council members before, during and after Glossip’s April 26 clemency hearing and reimbursement of attorneys fees.

Hicks, whose jurisdiction covers Caddo, Grady, Jefferson and Stephens Counties, refused to produce records in response to a May open records request, stating the communications were personal and therefore exempt from public inspection. However, Hicks submitted a mileage reimbursement form to the District Attorney Council for travel to and from the hearing in Oklahoma City and spoke with

“If these district attorneys are acting in a manner that I suspect they are, then we need to find out what’s their motive and why would they do that.”

Rep. Justin Humphrey, R-Lane, chair, Oklahoma House Criminal Justice and Corrections Committee.

a Tulsa World reporter about the case in his official capacity, attorney Corbin Brewster wrote in the lawsuit.

Humphrey and McDugle claim Hicks continued to deny follow-up requests for the records over several months. A 2009 opinion from former Attorney General Drew Edmondson affirmed that emails, text messages and other electronic communications sent or received in connection with public business fall under the Oklahoma Open Records Act.

“Notably, other DAC members produced records (including text messages) in response to Plaintiffs’ identical, or nearly identical, open record requests implicitly demonstrating they qualified as open records,” wrote Brewster, who served as Tulsa County Chief Public Defender for six years before stepping down in April. “These facts all contradict any argument that Defendant Hicks was a private citizen.”

Hicks did not respond to telephone messages seeking comment. In a written response filed late on

Open Records Lawsuit cont. A14



# Epic Charter School’s co-founders and former CFO *embezzlement hearing continued to Feb. 15*

**Okla. Education Updates** from A11

But the school’s principal, Gina Darby, and its attorney, Jim Johnson, argued that the department and board violated the school’s due process with their decision. In Infinity’s lawsuit, Darby and Johnson call the August meeting a “sham hearing” and allege that the board and Walters violated the Oklahoma Open Meeting Act and the Oklahoma Administrative Procedures Act.

After Thursday’s hearing that kept her litigation alive, Johnson also argued that the board had not properly created rules to govern private school accreditation.

“By the board not promulgating the rules to give notice and not clearly defining the differences between public and private schools (...) it allows the agency to act arbitrarily and capriciously and hurt people, not based on merit, but just because you find them to be a disfavored class of people in society,” Johnson told reporters after the hearing.

In her motion to dismiss, Assistant Attorney General Erin Moore — who is representing Walters and the board — argued that the State Board of Education is not required to give all of Oklahoma’s nearly 540 school districts a due process hearing when it makes accreditation renewal decisions.

Additionally, Infinity Generation can continue to operate as a nonaccredited private school. Private schools voluntarily apply for accreditation from the state board so they can be eligible for federal and state grants and tax credits. State statute allows private schools to accredit private schools “in like manner as public schools.”

Judge Don Andrews did not fully dismiss the case Thursday but he did give Johnson 30 days to amend Infinity’s petition and demonstrate that private schools should be treated separately from public schools in accreditation matters.

## Epic motion hearing set for Friday

In other court news, the criminal case charging Epic Charter School’s co-founders and former chief financial officer with embezzlement was set to have a hearing Friday morning, but it was continued to Feb. 15.

Although neither Ben Harris, David Chaney nor Joshua Brock has actually entered a plea yet (their preliminary hearings having been rescheduled numerous times), the looming hearing involves the state’s motion for a temporary injunction or restraining order preventing the defendants from modifying assets currently held in a Bank of Oklahoma account.

Attorney General Gentner Drummond’s office — which took the case over from the Oklahoma County District Attorney’s Office on his first full day in office — argued in their motion that the injunction or restraining order was necessary because BOK had recently notified the state that it intended to close the account soon.

“In October 2022, the defendants utilized the embezzled funds maintained in Bank of Oklahoma ‘business advantage’ bank account (...) to acquire over \$5 million in investment assets,” wrote Assistant Attorney General McKenzie McMahan. “These investment assets (...) were derived from or realized through a violation of the Oklahoma Racketeer-Influenced Corrupt Organizations Act as alleged in count one of the amended information, and they are subject to criminal forfeiture.”

In response, attorneys for Harris and Chaney argued they should be presumed innocent and that neither has actually entered a plea to the charges yet. Additionally, they argued that a lien filed the same day as the state’s motion against them regarding the account functions similarly to a possible restraining order or injunction.

Oklahoma County District Judge Susan Stallings was set to hear the arguments at 9 a.m. Friday before the hearing was continued to Feb. 15. After all parties make their arguments at the new hearing date, she could issue a ruling from the bench, or she could wait and decide the matter at a later date.

## Politico: Conservative legal activist groups working to promote Oklahoma’s proposed religious charter school

As two lawsuits seeking to block the creation of what could be the nation’s first religious charter school continue to play out in Oklahoma County District Court and before the Oklahoma Supreme Court, Heidi Przybyla of Politico published an in-depth piece Dec. 29 exploring the tight-knit collection of national groups seeking to lay legal groundwork and push the school forward.

Przybyla connected the efforts in Oklahoma to a prominent conservative activist:

*Behind the effort to change the law are Christian conservative groups and legal teams who, over the past decade, have been beneficiaries of the billion-dollar network of nonprofits largely built by (Leonard) Leo, the*



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

“  
I think it’s  
The Christian  
conservative  
legal  
movement,  
which has its  
fingerprints  
all over what’s  
going on in  
Oklahoma, is  
a pretty small,  
tight knit group  
of individuals...  
They recognize  
the opportunity  
to get a state to  
fund a religious  
institution is  
a watershed  
moment.

**Paul Collins** a legal studies and  
politics professor at the University of  
Massachusetts Amherst.

*Federalist Society co-chairman.*

*Leo’s network organized multi-million-dollar campaigns to support the confirmation of most of the (United States Supreme) Court’s six conservative justices. Leo himself served as adviser to President Donald Trump on judicial nominations, including those of Justices Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett.*

*Leo’s multiple hats in recruiting judicial nominees, using his nonprofit war chest to promote their confirmations and then funding legal organizations to craft challenges to longstanding court precedents, has drawn increasing criticism.*

*“The Christian conservative legal movement, which has its fingerprints all over what’s going on in Oklahoma, is a pretty small, tight knit group of individuals,” said Paul Collins, a legal studies and politics professor at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. “They recognize the opportunity to get a state to fund a religious institution is a watershed moment,” said Collins, author of Friends of the Supreme Court: Interest Groups and Judicial Decision Making, adding that “They have a very, very sympathetic audience at the Supreme Court. When you have that on the Supreme Court you’re going to put a lot of resources into bringing these cases quickly.”*

*In Oklahoma, the legal team representing the state’s virtual charter school board, the Alliance Defending Freedom, helped develop arguments that led to the end of Roe v. Wade. It is significantly funded by donor-advised funds that allow their patrons to keep their identities secret but which receive large amounts of money from Leo-aligned groups.*

They include Donors Trust, often called the “dark money ATM” of the conservative movement. In recent years, Donors Trust has been the largest single beneficiary of Leo’s primary dark money group, the Judicial Education Project. Donors Trust, in turn, gave

\$4 million to Leo’s Federalist Society in 2022, according to the IRS filings.

## Summer Boismier federal lawsuit moving forward

Former Norman teacher Summer Boismier’s federal lawsuit filed Aug. 30 against Walters seems to be moving forward after Walters was finally served Dec. 21.

Boismier had filed the suit alleging a number of things, including defamation and slander, after Walters criticized her for allegedly violating HB 1775, the state’s purported “critical race theory” ban.

But three months later, Walters had yet to be served with the suit, and U.S. District Judge Bernard Jones for the Western District of Oklahoma asked Boismier’s lawyer for a status update as to why the case was not moving forward.

Boismier’s lawyer, Brady Henderson, said in a court filing that he had declined to alert the court that Walters had not been served owing to “significant health issues” and the process server’s assertion that Walters is “notoriously difficult to serve.”

With the lawsuit now moving forward, Walters has yet to file a response to Boismier’s allegations yet, but lawyers Timothy Davis and Alexandra Williams with the Texas-based law firm Jackson Walker gave notice Thursday that they would represent Walters in the case.

## Ringling High School principal enters no contest plea

Ringling High School principal and head football coach Phil Koons pleaded no contest last week to one count of misdemeanor outraging public decency in Jefferson County District Court.

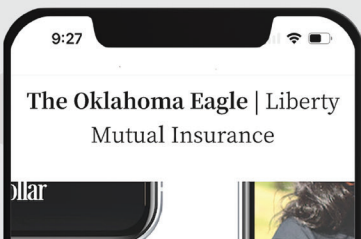
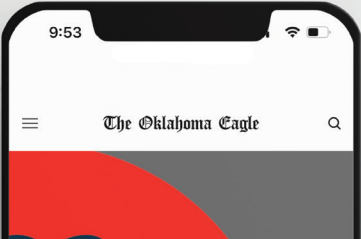
Koons had been under investigation for allegedly regularly using profanity and verbally harassing his players. Molly Young and Murray

**Okla. Education Updates** cont. A14

The Oklahoma Eagle

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





# Former Sec. of Ed. Katherine Curry’s emails reveal office “complexity and political environment.”

Okla. Education Updates from A13

Evans of The Oklahoman reported Wednesday that Associate District Judge Dennis Gay rejected a plea deal Koons had reached with prosecutors after hearing victims’ statements.

KFOR’s Kaylee Olivas posted screenshots of victim impact statements read in court.

“Players are cursed and belittled for missing practice. I was called a pussy when I missed practice because my mother was put in the hospital. I was told I didn’t deserve to play and humiliated in front of the team in the locker room after a game,” one player wrote. “The constant verbal and mental abuse had made some players depressed, anxious, and/or thinking about committing suicide. I have tried to be there for those going through these troubles. (...) One player would get upset after Phillip Koons would call him racial slurs. He felt targeted for his skin color, and we were upset seeing how much this hurt our teammate.”

After Gay rejected the plea deal, which would not have required jail time but would have required Koons to relinquish his teaching certificate for seven years, Koons is expected to be sentenced March 12. He faces up to a year in jail and up to a \$500 fine. Although it is unclear if he has been suspended following his no contest plea, Koons is still listed on Ringling’s website as the school’s principal.

### OSU, Stitt’s office release emails from Katherine Curry

When former Secretary of Education Katherine Curry stepped down from her position after just three months, she cited the “complexity and political environment” of her position as reasons for her resignation.

Months later, Nuria Martinez-Keel and Carmen Forman of the Oklahoma Voice reported Nov. 2 that Curry resigned after she was unable to get budget information from Oklahoma State Department of Education officials.

“I just needed information,” Curry told Oklahoma Voice. “I never received information.”

Curry told Martinez-Keel and Forman that a lack of financial data was “100 percent” the reason for her resignation. Cabinet secretaries are required to sign off on expenses over a certain amount, a task that Curry may have found more concerning amid investigations into Walters’ prior oversight of federal funds.

OSDE spokesman Dan Isett said at the time that the department had no data available to give to Curry because of a lack of financial oversight when Walters took over.

Martinez-Keel’s and Forman’s reporting relied in part on emails they received as part of an open records request from the governor’s

office.

NonDoc made requests for Curry’s emails from her time as Secretary of Education to the governor’s office and OSU in August. Curry was an OSU professor before becoming Secretary of Education and returned to OSU when she resigned.

The governor’s office request was completed Dec. 27. The request to OSU was fulfilled Jan. 5. Although the emails released by the two offices in response to the requests do not show the full extent of Curry’s requests for financial information detailed by the Oklahoma Voice, one email shows Curry asking OSDE’s chief financial officer for information weeks before she resigned.

“I am writing to request a copy of the most recent balance sheet and income/expense statement for the fiscal year ending June 2023. I would also like to request a comparison to the 2023 fiscal year budget,” Curry said in an email to Mathangi Shankar on July 5. “Lastly, could I please see a copy of the 2024 fiscal year budget? When was the most recent audit and are there any audits in progress or anticipated? If an audit has been conducted, may I please have a copy of the audit findings?”

No reply to Curry’s request was included in the emails NonDoc received.

The bulk of emails NonDoc received show back-and-forth communications between

Curry, OSDE and the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability regarding a data-sharing contract that had been awaiting final signatures for a year.

In a June 29 email to an the OSDE chief of staff with Curry and Walters copied, OEQA interim executive director Renée Launey-Rodolf expressed frustration with the contract delays.

“I don’t want to come across as impatient or ungrateful, but each time we have inquired about the status of the MOU we have received the same message — its being reviewed by legal. This has been the case since last summer,” Launey-Rodolf wrote. “We readily welcome the opportunity to review a redlines Word document regarding any potentially problematic terminology so that this agreement can move forward. Please let us know if there is anything that we can do on our part to expedite this.”

Jenna Thomas, OSDE’s chief of staff, responded, “We’ll get it across the finish line.”

**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](mailto:bennett@nondoc.com).

# Past allegations of illegally collecting probation fees

Open Records Lawsuit from A13



(LEFT) **JASON HICKS**, District Attorney, District 6 (Caddo, Grady, Jefferson and Stephens counties) and (RIGHT) **David Prater**, District Attorney, District 7 (Oklahoma County).  
PHOTO **WHITNEY BRYEN/OKLAHOMA WATCH**

Jan. 5, Sixth District Assistant District Attorney Charles L. Sifers wrote that Humphrey and McDugle’s case should be dismissed because they used an out-of-state attorney to make the records request on their behalf.

“Possessing no legit merit or right to bring this action under the Open Records Act, this case is more clearly seen for what it is: demonstrative of the disdain Representatives McDugle and Humphrey hold against District Attorneys statewide, and as a tool used to attempt to set aside Richard Glossip’s death sentence and to promote their agenda of judicial reform,” Sifers wrote.

Humphrey, who chairs the House Criminal Justice and Corrections Committee, said he and McDugle filed the initial request on a suspicion that district attorneys were coordinating to expedite Glossip’s execution. Both lawmakers have been outspoken advocates of Glossip’s innocence claim, appearing on national television shows and hosting press conferences at the Capitol advocating for his release from death row. Glossip’s execution has been stayed since May pending the outcome of a U.S. Supreme Court decision.

“If these district attorneys are acting in a manner that I suspect they are, then we need

to find out what’s their motive and why would they do that,” Humphrey said. “We hope we get transparency.”

Humphrey faced backlash from the District Attorneys Council last month when he alleged district attorneys were illegally collecting probation fees that were not being used on supervision. In a letter to Attorney General Gentner Drummond, District Attorney’s Council chairman Christopher Boring called the accusations a mischaracterization and misunderstanding of current law.

Hicks, elected District 6 District Attorney in 2011, has been an outspoken opponent of State Question 780 and delays in administering capital punishment. He told KOCO in March that Oklahoma should look to Texas as a model for executing death row prisoners more expeditiously.

“Justice delayed is justice denied,” Hicks told the news station. “We are denying justice to them because we are not getting people executed quickly enough.”

**KEATON ROSS** covers democracy and criminal justice for Oklahoma Watch. Contact him at (405) 831-9753 or [Kross@Oklahomawatch.org](mailto:Kross@Oklahomawatch.org). Follow him on Twitter at [@KeatonRoss](https://twitter.com/KeatonRoss).



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(918) 425-6613

Dr. W. T. Lauderdale

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WHERE OH WHERE HAVE THE  
BLACK SUPERINTENDENTS GONE?  
The ramifications of the lack of racial diversity among chief executives of  
local school systems extend into and beyond the classroom. A18

# Using *Music and Education* to Undo Unjust Systems



DAMIEN CRUTCHER, managing director of Detroit Symphony Orchestra's Detroit Harmony program. PHOTO MICHIGAN CHRONICLE

**Music** is an integral part of Detroit's identity. Incorporating it into the school curriculum means more than just teaching notes and rhythms.

## Education Goes Beyond Textbooks

Ebony JJ Curry, Word In Black

**"The function of education** is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically," said an 18-year-old student in an op-ed for his college newspaper titled "The Purpose of Education." That student was young Martin Luther King Jr., back in 1947. "We must remember that intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character — that is the goal of true education."

Education goes beyond textbooks and quarterly tests when it comes to the well-roundedness of a student; it is extra-curricular activities, volunteering, music, the arts, sports, and social skills that go hand in hand with a true education — especially for the trajectory of inner-city kids.

Additionally, music played an immense role during the Civil Rights Movement. It wasn't just background noise; it was the soundtrack of a revolution. These songs, from Marvin Gaye's, What's Going On, to Wake Up Everybody by Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes, filled with messages of hope, resilience, and struggle, did more than just echo the sentiments of a generation fighting for equality; they educated, mobilized, and united people across various fronts.

Detroit has an undeniable legacy as a music powerhouse that could be the key to revolutionizing education in its schools. The city has a significant Black community,

deemed as the Blackest city in America, and for inner city students, tapping into this rich musical heritage could offer substantial benefits for the educational system.

Pushing this narrative throughout the city of Detroit is Damien Crutcher, managing director of Detroit Symphony Orchestra's Detroit Harmony program.

"I'm a Detroiters who still lives in the city and who went to Detroit Public Schools, and being able to be a part of music in elementary school, middle school, and throughout high school paved the way for me to go to Michigan State and Michigan, so, music education for our inner-city kids is important to me," Crutcher says.

The city has given so much to the musical world, and according to Crutcher, it's time we brought that gift back into our schools. "Watching a kid open up an instrument case for the first time is magical because a lot of our kids just don't know that it is even possible, and I want to make sure that they have the things they need with that, like lessons and people to keep them going throughout the process."

**On a Mission to Transform Lives**

For years, Crutcher has been on a mission to transform the lives of kids through the power of music, such as getting instruments into the

Music and Education cont. A17

## Integrating Black History Builds Better Education Of Advocacy

Aziah Siid, Word In Black

**When Claudine Gay, Harvard's first Black president,** stepped down, it sent shockwaves rippling across the nation — and sparked plenty of worry over the future of education. For months, Republican presidential hopefuls like Nikki Haley and Ron DeSantis have doubled down on whitewashing history, all while colleges and universities ditch their diversity, equity, and inclusion policies.

Integrating Black History cont. A17





PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

# Kids Do Better When They’re Involved In Music

Music and Education from A16

hands of children who might otherwise never have the chance to play a note. Since 2019, under Detroit Harmony’s banner, which was birthed by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Crutcher has managed to give away around 700 instruments to kids in the city of Detroit. This isn’t just about handing out instruments; it’s a commitment to ensuring that every student in Detroit has not only an instrument but also access to quality music education.

Crutcher’s journey in music is as inspiring as it is influential and stands as a testament to the transformative power of music education in the city. A proud graduate of Cass Technical High School, Crutcher’s early exposure to music in Detroit’s vibrant cultural scene laid the foundation for his remarkable career. Crutcher’s academic path took him from the halls of Cass Tech to the esteemed music programs of Michigan State University and later, to the University of Michigan, where he earned his Master of Music degree. These institutions honed his skills and deepened his appreciation for the art of music, setting the stage for his future contributions to the field.

“The backdrop of this is that as Detroiters we have to know that Detroit is the musical capital of the world,” Crutcher says. “When it comes to music our kids must understand that they’re following in the footsteps of Aretha Franklin, Jack White, J Dilla, and the list goes on. That’s a huge part of our structure as we introduce them to the world of music education. That is an impact piece that is important to us.”

Now, what Crutcher has learned on this journey is something we all need to pay attention to. He’s found that these kids have a thirst for music that goes way beyond what anyone might have guessed.

“Kids do better when they’re involved in music,” he says. “Just being on the stage and having someone clap after you play changes their life. Working with other students in a band, choir, an orchestra, or whatever, you have to learn to work with everybody, and that is a life skill.”

It’s a reminder that when we provide our young people with the right resources and opportunities, they excel. We often talk about the lack of resources in our communities, but he is actively changing that narrative, showing us the untapped potential in our kids. Crutcher

has a take on music education much like Martin Luther King Jr’s outlook on education as he argued that education has both a utilitarian and a moral function as he states in “The Purpose of Education”: “It seems to me that education has a two-fold function to perform in the life of man and in society: the one is utility and the other is culture.”

### Aligning With Kingian Principles

Crutcher’s work is more than music education; it’s about shaping a brighter future for our children. This work is vital, not just for cultivating future musicians, but also for enriching the lives and education of our youth. It’s about giving them a voice, a means of expression, and a path to discover their talents. This, in every sense, aligns with the principles of empowerment and opportunity that leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. advocated for.

In a full-circle moment, Crutcher returned to his roots in education. As the director of bands and orchestras at Southfield-Lathrup High School, he influenced a new generation of musicians. Under his guidance, numerous students have pursued successful careers in music, becoming professional musicians, dedicated music teachers, and creative artists. His impact extends beyond technical skill, instilling a passion for music and a commitment to artistic excellence in his students.

Students like Kris Johnson. Johnson, a shining example of Crutcher’s mentorship, now serves as an executive director at the Michigan State University Community Music School of Detroit. His journey, profoundly influenced by Crutcher’s guidance, reflects the transformative power of mentorship in music education.

Under their combined efforts, projects like Detroit Harmony have flourished, offering instruments and rich musical experiences to students without cost, and introducing them to a variety of outreach activities.

### The Value of Mentorship

“MSU Community Music School-Detroit has been fortunate to have partnered with Detroit Harmony since 2022, specifically through their instrument drive,” Johnson said. “Taking advantage of this generous resource has helped supplement our dedication to providing students enrolled in our program with an instrument loan without any charge to families. Additionally, our families and students have participated in several impactful outreach opportunities provided by the DSO and Detroit Harmony, including attending the live performance of the DSO recreating the score to Blank Panther, instrument exploration activities, drum circles, and more.”

This intergenerational mentorship, where seasoned educators like Crutcher uplift emerging leaders like Johnson, mirrors the ethos championed by Martin Luther King Jr. King, a firm believer in the advancement of education for African American students, would have seen

the value in such mentorship, recognizing it as a vital tool for not just academic growth but for building character and community leadership. In essence, the work of Crutcher and Johnson in music education is a continuation of King’s vision, fostering a legacy of empowerment, opportunity, and cultural richness in the community.

“I have had the privilege of being mentored by Damien Crutcher, and I can confidently say that his guidance and mentorship have been invaluable to my personal and professional growth. His unwavering support, deep knowledge, and inspiring leadership have inspired me to strive for excellence and make a positive impact in the field of music education. As I often say: without Damien, there would be no Kris,” Johnson says.

Music is more than just a subject in school; it’s a critical tool for empowerment and change, especially for our kids in the inner cities and our black students. Think about it: In these classrooms, where the beats of hip-hop, the soulfulness of R&B, and the revolutionary sounds of jazz and blues fill the air, music isn’t just about notes and rhythms. It’s about connecting these young minds to a legacy that’s as rich as it is empowering. These are genres that are stitched into the very fabric of African American history and culture. This isn’t just education; it’s a reclamation of identity and a bold statement of pride.

Fast forward to today, this same musical legacy continues to inspire and drive movements for social justice. It’s more than historical; it’s current, it’s urgent. For our kids walking the same path as Crutcher, music is not just a subject to be studied; it’s a vital tool for navigating their world, a way to process their experiences, and a means to drive forward change. It’s education, yes, but it’s also empowerment, community building, and a profound way to keep the flame of justice and equality burning bright.

Plato, the renowned ancient Greek philosopher, insightfully observed, “I would teach children music, physics, and philosophy; but most importantly music, for the patterns in music and all the arts are the keys to learning.” This perspective rings especially true when we consider the historical context of music, which dates back to 400,000 years ago as the earliest known instrument to humankind. Its universal appeal and usage, from the lullabies sung to babies to the melodies that resonate with adults, underscore its enduring significance.

In Detroit, where music is an integral part of the city’s identity, incorporating it into the school curriculum means more than just teaching notes and rhythms. It’s about connecting students with their city’s history —from the soulful eras of Motown to the groundbreaking rhythms of techno. This connection can be a source of pride and inspiration for students, fostering a sense of belonging and identity.

## Using *Music and Education* to Undo Unjust Systems



PHOTO BLACK EDUCATION RESEARCH CENTER

Integrating Black History from A16

But that hasn’t stopped educators from continuing to advocate for incorporating Black studies into education, including at the K-12 level.

Helping lead the charge is Sonya Douglass, professor of education leadership at Teacher’s College, Columbia University. In 2017, she launched the Black Education Research Collective, creating a powerful alliance of scholars and researchers dedicated to enhancing and improving the educational experiences and outcomes for Black students.

Helping lead the charge is Sonya Douglass, professor of education leadership at Teacher’s College, Columbia University. In 2017, she launched the Black Education Research Collective, creating a powerful alliance of scholars and researchers dedicated to enhancing and improving the educational experiences and outcomes for Black students.

As the director, Douglass helped lead the charge in the development of the first-

ever PK-12 interdisciplinary Black Studies Curriculum being integrated into the classrooms across New York City. The course arose from the Education Equity Action Plan, which mandates schools teach about the heritage of African descendants.

Douglass tells Word In Black that founding the collective “was a chance to bring together our Black doctoral students, faculty, those interested in education” to take action. The group makes connections between history, culture, politics, and identity to broaden opportunities for Black youth, who are systematically sidelined in the nation’s public schools.

To that end, Douglass and her peers have spent the past three years ensuring the curriculum is grounded in the needs of students and the community. In a Teacher’s College interview last fall, she said they’ve dedicated significant time to revising the lessons, and soliciting direct feedback from teachers, principals, and students.

“It’s been a really intense and exciting time given the history of the work that we’re doing,” Douglass said. “Our hope is that the children of New York City, and by extension, across the country, will be able to have access to a deeper and

fuller understanding of the history of this country — because we’re including a Black perspective, and that, as a result of that, it will, I think, really improve cross-cultural understanding, I think a sense of confidence, particularly for students who identify as Black or African American, and really help us to begin to build the type of education that we know all children deserve.”

Since 2021, at least 18 states have passed laws restricting or banning the teaching of supposed critical race theory, the current code word for teaching about Black history. Critical race theory is actually a framework used at the college level, particularly in academic journals. So the odds of Johnny’s teacher slipping it into lessons between math and recess are slim to none.

On the flipside, 12 states — Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Mississippi, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Washington — currently mandate the teaching of Black history, although, as The 74 reported, “several of the 12 states have new laws on the books that limit their curriculum.”

There’s growing recognition that teaching Black studies in schools is part of ensuring students achieve academically — and plenty of

other things need to change in public education for that to happen.

### A Need for System-Wide Change

Though Douglass once dreamed of founding her own socially conscious school, she realized she could spur change within existing systems.

Now, like many educators today, Douglass says it’s “time to build a new house” — and completely rethink our education vision. Families must mobilize across state lines, she urges, while teachers should rediscover their calling.

“It’s really time to sit down and re-envision what we want for education in the United States,” Douglass says. “I actually think we have to change the goals that we’ve set for ourselves.”

TikTok is full of videos from teachers sharing how behind their students. Most parents think their child is at or above grade level in reading and math, but the reality is far from that. And these students — many of whom were already struggling academically — need additional support inside and outside the classroom that teachers simply don’t have the bandwidth for.

**Integrating Black History** cont. A18



# Where Oh Where Have the Black Superintendents Gone?

Joseph Williams, Word In Black

Second only to California in the number of school-age children, Texas is at the vanguard of a long-anticipated national demographic trend: most of the state’s 5.4 million public school students are Black and Latino, surpassing whites as the majority population.

But a new study found that the army of superintendents who run school districts in the Lone Star state — top administrators who control local curriculums, budgets, and disciplinary policies — is dominated by white men.

The University of Texas at Austin study, titled “Untapped Talent: An 11-Year Analysis of the Texas Superintendent Workforce,” also found that women and minorities in the field typically are underpaid compared to whites, more often work in under-resourced urban schools and struggle to advance to higher-paying positions in better-funded schools.

“The superintendent workforce doesn’t reflect the state student population,” resulting in white educators setting policies and standards for Black and brown students, says David DeMatthews, an associate professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of Texas at Austin College of Education. DeMatthews was lead researcher on the study and one of its co-authors.

“About 80% of superintendents in Texas are white, despite the fact that the majority of students in Texas are students of color, and only 27% of students in Texas are white,” DeMatthews says. “And the teachers (41% minority) and principals (roughly 40% minority) are slightly more diverse than the superintendency.”

Moreover, “what we’ve found was women, people of color, and women of color are more likely to serve in school districts that serve higher poverty students,” DeMatthews says. Even though population shifts have brought more minority students to rural areas during the last decade, he says, the superintendent workforces there are still mostly white.

**A National Problem**

While the “Untapped Talent” study revealed problems deep in the heart of Texas, the lack of superintendent diversity “is a national problem,” DeMatthews says. It’s a challenge to get a grasp on the issue, he says, because the federal government “does not collect data on superintendent demographics.”

Examples, however, aren’t hard to find.

In California, there are 947 public school districts but roughly 25 African-American superintendents. Across the country, in Kentucky, there are 171 public school districts but just six Black superintendents. While 18% of Michigan’s public school students are Black, only 4% of its superintendents are — and most of them work in majority-Black, economically disadvantaged districts.

At the same time, though, the nation is experiencing a crisis: more superintendents are quitting, a situation which, in theory, should provide more opportunities for candidates of color.

But the rise of far-right education activists like Moms for Liberty — a group that’s pushed for the banning of certain books, fought against the teaching of slavery’s role in the founding of the U.S., and doesn’t like diversity initiatives — has made it challenging for school districts to hire superintendents of color.

About 80% of superintendents in Texas are white, despite the fact that the majority of students in Texas are students of color, and only 27% of students in Texas are white. Incorporating it into the school curriculum means more than just teaching notes and rhythms.



OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT KYLA JOHNSON-TRAMMELL high fives fourth grade students during a visit to Hoover Elementary in Oakland, Calif., on Thursday, May 11, 2017. PHOTO ANDA CHU/BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

In Tulsa, Oklahoma, for instance, Ryan Walters, the state superintendent of schools — a Moms for Liberty supporter — tried to pressure the city’s school board to reject Dr. Ebony Johnson, a Black woman serving as the interim superintendent. However in December, the board ignored Walters, rebuffed racist attacks against Johnson, and voted 4-2 to confirm her as the city’s first Black superintendent.

### A Microcosm of Trends

Still, Texas has been a microcosm of demographic trends current and aspiring superintendents of color across the country are facing.

According to the report:

- Perhaps not surprisingly, Texas’ city districts have the most diverse superintendent corps. While the percentage of Latino superintendents increased from about 20% in 2011 to 25% in 2023, the percentage of Black superintendents decreased from roughly 21% to about 18% during that same period. Meanwhile, the percentage of white superintendents from 2011 to 2023 held steady at about 60% — the same percentage of Latino students in urban districts.
- Suburban districts in Texas had the largest percentage of Black superintendents in 2021, at roughly 19%, but it had declined slightly by 2023. At the same time, the percentage of Latino superintendents increased by about 3% to 21% by 2023. Whites again made up about 65% of superintendents in those districts.
- In Texas’ small town districts — rural areas outside of the suburbs — whites made up more than 80% of superintendents, even though the Latino student population approached 60% by 2023. While Latino superintendents made up about 18% of superintendents in those districts, Black superintendents remained flat, languishing well below 5%.

DeMatthews says superintendents of color struggle to move up because of bottlenecks in the system.

Women and minorities “tend to move more slowly through the pipeline — from being a teacher to assistant principal and principal and

then into a superintendency position,” he says. “So white folks are still kind of moving faster. And so that clogs up the pipeline to some extent.”

And when districts have superintendent vacancies, they typically rely on search firms and their own networks, which often overlook or exclude women and minorities.

“They’re kind of tied to certain networks. They have a preference for people with experience,” DeMatthews says. “And so if, historically, superintendents have been white and white men, and there’s a preference for experience, that’s going to maintain the status quo in terms of demography of the superintendency.”

### Diversifying School District Leadership

Still, there are ways to diversify school district leadership, DeMatthews says. School boards and community leaders have to be intentional about finding minority or women candidates, and the University of Texas has training and residency programs that can help put teachers on the path to superintendency.

A mostly-white superintendent workforce in the nation’s second most populous state may seem like an esoteric issue for parents who just want their kids to get a quality education. But DeMatthews says the ramifications of the lack of diversity among school administrators extend beyond the classroom.

Besides deciding what students learn and how, superintendents “are the chief executives of local school systems, educators charged with managing a school district’s finances, its instructional vision and programming,” he says. “They’re responsible for communicating with parents and teachers. Some say school superintendents are linchpins holding school systems together.”

Moreover, in an era of book bans, crackdowns on teaching about slavery in the U.S., and the paring down of civics lessons, superintendents “really are critical players in our local democracies.”

**JOSEPH WILLIAMS** A veteran journalist, political analyst, and essayist, Joseph Williams has been published in a wide range of publications, including The New York Times, The Washington Post, Politico, The Boston Globe, The Atlantic, and US News & World Report. A California native, Williams is a graduate of the University Of Richmond and a former Nieman Fellow at Harvard University. He lives and works in metro Washington, D.C.

## Time to *sit down and re-envision* what we want

Integrating Black History from A17

To elevate student achievement, Douglass emphasizes the importance of community support for overburdened teachers. Given the alarming data on students’ learning gaps and academic decline, teachers face significant challenges, often without sufficient support. Douglass advises teachers to practice self-compassion, acknowledging the overwhelming demands placed on them.

### A Collective Effort Is Needed

“One of the first things that is important is for teachers to be kind to themselves and to show themselves some grace and mercy,” Douglass says. She says society puts a “heavy weight” on teachers in a system that “has been struggling for a very long time to do what’s right by children, and it’s going to take a collective effort among teachers and parents and community members, business

industry, media, politics, everyone to decide again, what we want our public education system to look like.”

In addition, Douglass also suggests teachers remind themselves why they decided to educate children in the first place.

“I don’t think we’ve spent enough time looking inward and again, reflecting on who we are. Why did you go into education?” Douglass says. “How does your own cultural identity and background, gender, and

identity inform your work and how you teach? To what extent does that help facilitate learning for students, or maybe even serve as a barrier?”

Even amid the current political pushback to Black studies, culturally relevant teaching is working, Douglass says. Schools should support it through training, peer groups, and learning about students.

“One of the main reasons why this curriculum is important is because I think what we have now is underwhelming,” Douglass says.

“It doesn’t teach the complete and comprehensive truth of what’s happened in our country, and the different experiences that different non-European groups have contributed to the country.”

The Oklahoma Eagle

## Our Mission

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



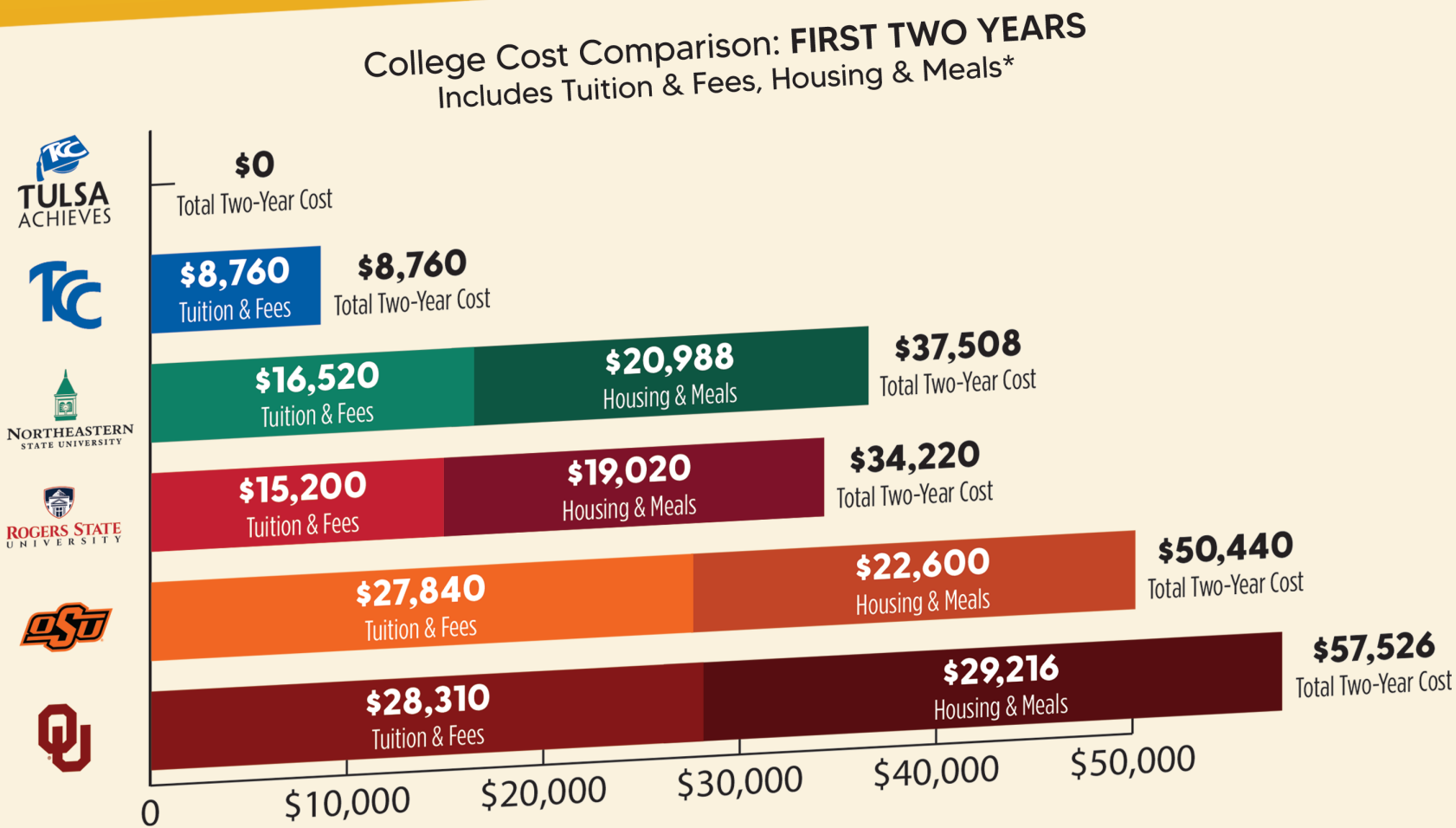


# BLUEPRINT: A TULSA ACHIEVES COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP EVENT

TCC BLUEPRINT is for Students & Parents/Guardians

9:30 a.m., Saturday, Feb. 17

TCC Northeast Campus - 3727 East Apache Street



Have a Blueprint for your child's freshman year at college?

Did you know if you live in Tulsa County, your graduating high school senior can go to TCC for almost free, which can save you tens of thousands in college costs? Did you know 73% of our graduates finish debt free?

TCC Blueprint teaches you everything you need to know about our Tulsa Achieves program. We'll cover eligibility and program requirements, explore academic majors, college resources, and why TCC is the less debt, more value solution to college.

\*Total noted pulled from individual college websites as of 7/26/2023 and reflect two years in college housing.

# TCC



[tulsacc.edu/blueprint](https://tulsacc.edu/blueprint)





ALPHA KAPPA ALPHA SORORITY, Incorporated® initiates new members to the Alpha Chi Omega Chapter in Tulsa. PHOTO PROVIDED

# Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority inducts new members

Dr. Jerry Goodwin The Oklahoma Eagle

The first intercollegiate historically African American sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha, will celebrate its 116th anniversary in 2024. Last month, the Alpha Chi Chapter in Tulsa initiated 11 women into the ranks of the organization on Dec. 10. The following women were inducted into the chapter (l-r): Charlyn Terry, Jarneicka Jones, Rebecca Tyler, Cortni McGilbra, Darling McKinnie, Taneaia Norton, Jasmine Carter, Roshan Gibson, Tonya Cannady, Kimberly Beasley, and K’Vionne Meeks. The officers are Amber Maxwell, president; Christina Armstrong, vice president; Keneshia Kelley, membership chair; and Tracy White-Davidson, membership co-chair.

The sorority was founded at Howard University (Washington, D. C.) on Jan. 15, 1908, by a group of 16 students led by Ethel Hedgemon-Lyle. According to the AKA website, Hedgemon-Lyle “dreamed of creating a support network for women with like minds who would come together for mutual uplift and coalescence of their talents and strengths for the benefit of others.” For more information, see its social media page, <https://www.facebook.com/akaalphachiomega1931>

# Elementary School Sponsors ‘Shark Tank’ For Students



SOLID FOUNDATION PREPARATORY ACADEMY was established in 2004. Today, the private elementary school serves preK-3 through fifth grade. PHOTO PROVIDED

Dr. Jerry Goodwin The Oklahoma Eagle

Solid Foundation Preparatory Arts Academy hosts several student team presentations

Solid Foundation Preparatory Academy sponsored its first elementary student pitch competition last month. The program, similar to the popular television program where a panel of investors selectively decide to invest in businesses presented on “Shark Tank,” included pre-K (beginning with three years

olds) to fifth graders. Prior to the competition, the students studied and learned about economics and the use of money as consumers and producers. The presentations were organized by six teams. Each team created a business concept and developed how to produce it to be sold at the school’s 17th Annual Economics Fair. “This is an amazing event and opportunity for our scholars. We know that 99.9% of the economy is powered by small businesses and some of these businesses are being led by young entrepreneurs,” said Jayme Broome, founder and school administrator. The inspiration for the competition was inspired by the history of the community that includes the historic Greenwood business district and its legacy. “This event will give our scholars the encouragement and empowerment they need to be the future of rebuilding Black Wall Street and contribute to the economic development needed in their communities,” said Broome. Solid Foundation Preparatory Arts Academy, a private school located in north Tulsa, states its purpose is to educate the young, help to raise productive citizens, and encourage and empower its students to be lifelong learners. For more information, contact Jayme Broome at (918) 261-0063 or [jbroomer@sfpaeagles.com](mailto:jbroomer@sfpaeagles.com).

# Tulsa Style Swing-Out Celebrates The Holidays

## Dancing the Night (and Year) Away

Dr. Jerry Goodwin The Oklahoma Eagle

Tulsa Style Swing-Out holds holiday event to close out the year and to ring in the new year. Participating in the Christmas holiday program were (l-r) Lisa Muse, Clayton Wilson, Harriet Brown-Harris, Andrea O’Neal, Walt Bell, Dr. Runako Whittaker, Taneaia Norton, Pam Butler, and Ursula Black Jones. Butler recently served as a judge for the 2023 International Swing Dance Championship in

Houston. She evaluated contestants performing the DFW Swing-Out and Houston 2STEP. She was the only judge from Oklahoma to review the competitors in the program. The next class will begin Jan. 21. This class will offer free DFW Swing-Out classes for ages 8 – 17 years old. For more information, contact Pam Butler at (918) 857-7324 or [plbminer@gmail.com](mailto:plbminer@gmail.com).



TULSA STYLE SWING-OUT ended the year with an event to showcase their talents. PHOTO PROVIDED

# Events

## January

**Jan. 19**  
Watoto Children’s Choir is to perform at In The Spirit Christian Church, 1020 S. Garnett Rd. on Jan. 19 at 6:30 p.m. Doors will open at 5:45 p.m. The choir is described as presenting “a message of God’s unfailing love” through music. For more information, call (918) 836-6823 or [www.inthespiritcc.org](http://www.inthespiritcc.org) and <https://www.watoto.com/>

**Jan. 22**  
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. For more information, call (918) 587-2965 or contact [staugustineparishtulsaok@yahoo.com](mailto:staugustineparishtulsaok@yahoo.com).

## February Black History Month

**Feb. 1**  
“The Lingering Legacies of Urban Renewal” is the third part of a five-part series of a community read of the award-winning book “Built from the Fire: The Epic Story of Tulsa’s Greenwood District, America’s Black Wall Street” at Oklahoma State University – Tulsa, 700 N. Greenwood Ave. at 7 p.m. Author Victor Luckerson and photographer Don Thompson share their research and collection of photography to tell the story of Greenwood. The free community program will cover Chapters 16-20 in the book. For more information, visit <https://humanities.utulsa.edu/deep-greenwood/>.

**Feb. 1**  
Choir Boy is an exploration of the intersection of race and sexuality through brilliant storytelling, music, and syncopated step dancing. The Charles R. Drew Prep School for Boys is dedicated to the creation of strong, ethical black men. Pharus wants nothing more than to take his rightful place as leader of the school’s legendary gospel choir. Can he find his way inside the hallowed halls of this institution if he sings in his own key? Choir Boy is an exploration of the intersection of race and sexuality through brilliant storytelling, music, and syncopated step dancing.

**Feb. 3**  
11th Annual Black Wall Street Heritage and History Festival for Black History Month to be held at Tulsa School of Arts and Sciences, 1202 W. Easton St. , from 11 a.m. – 6 p.m. This year’s theme is “Black Towns Matter.” For vendor or more information, call (918) 770-6020.

**Feb. 3**  
Crowning Glory: The Ameka Premiere Extravaganza at Circle Cinema Kicking off Black History Month, Dr. Tamecca Rogers, a member of the Tulsa-based Artists Creative Fund, is thrilled to present “Crowning Glory: The Ameka Premiere Extravaganza” at Circle Cinema. This red-carpet event is an exclusive celebration of the animated series “Ameka and Her Magical Crown,” created and directed by the visionary Dr. Tamecca Rogers. When: Feb. 3, 2 p.m., Where: Circle Cinema, 10 S. Lewis Ave..

**Feb. 10**  
Tulsa Alumni Chapter Kappa Alpha Psi presents its Annual Scholarship Sweetheart Ball 2024 on Feb. 10 at the Doubletree Hotel by Hilton Tulsa – Warren Place, 6110 S. Yale Ave. For ticket information, visit its Facebook page or call (918) 833-4300.

**Feb. 16**  
20th Anniversary of the Alzheimer’s Diversity Outreach Services “Out of Africa Healthy Brain Strategies Gala at Hyatt Regency Tulsa Downtown, 100 E. 2nd St., VIP Experience: 6 p.m.-7p.m., Dinner: 7:30 p.m. For more information, contact [beverly-baul@alzoutreach.org](mailto:beverly-baul@alzoutreach.org).

**Feb. 17**  
Education for Scholars, Inc. to sponsor United to Fulfil the Dream Annual Fundraiser on Feb. 17 from 1 p.m. – 3 p.m. at Northeastern State University (Administrative Office Building), 3100 E. New Orleans St., in Broken Arrow.

