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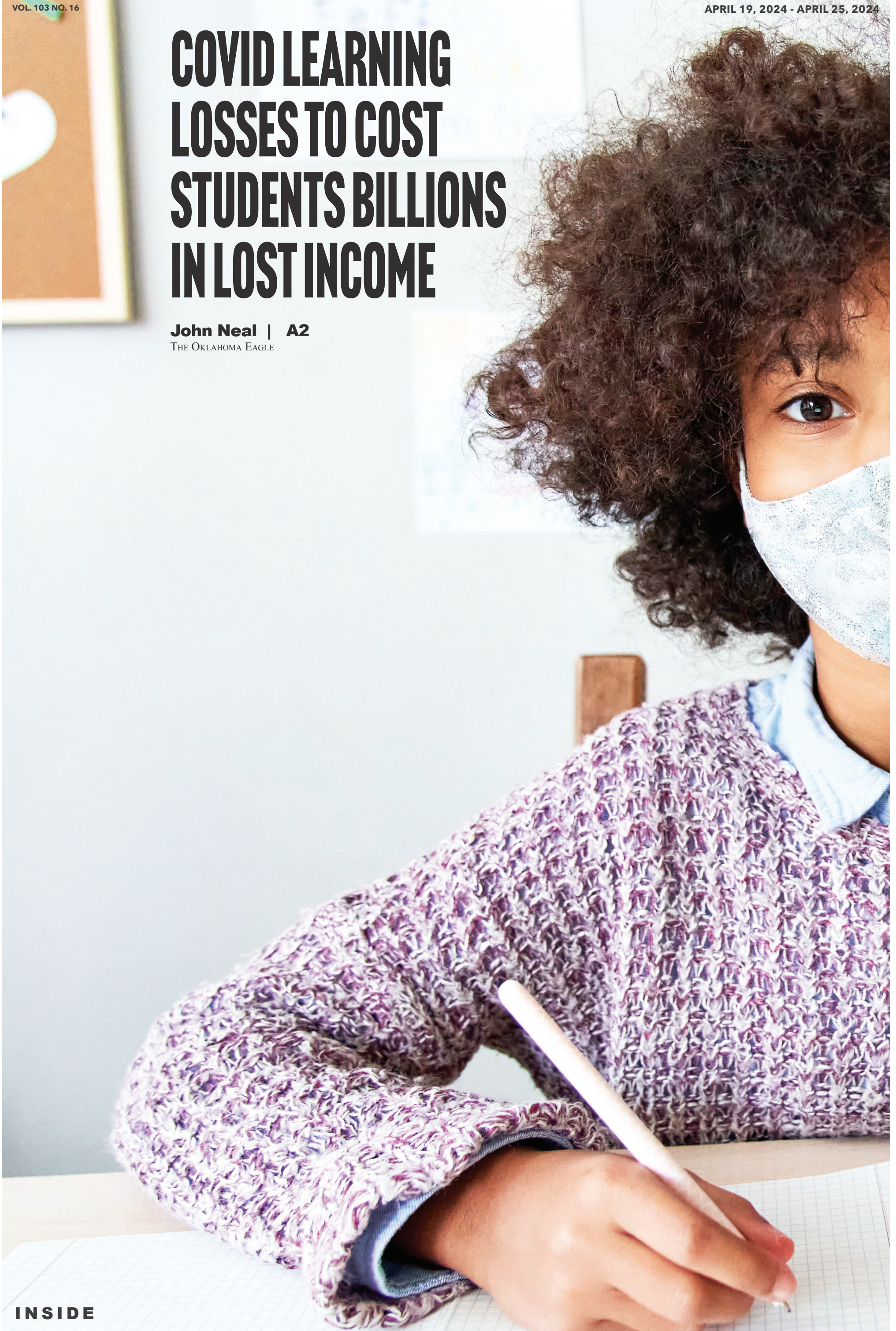
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THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE



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PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

## COVID

# COVID Learning Losses to Cost Students Billions in Lost Income

John Neal  
The Oklahoma Eagle

**Oklahoma Students Will Suffer Most.** For the thousands of pupils in Tulsa – and across Oklahoma - who struggled with school during the COVID-19 pandemic, those challenges are destined to impact their earnings potential in the workplace. Students of the COVID-19 era will likely take home thousands of dollars less in wages annually than they would have had the pandemic not occurred, according to a new education study.

Cont. A3



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

## COVID

# Oklahoma students are expected to be hit hardest, losing almost nine percent in lifetime earnings

From A2

The study, conducted by Hoover Institution professor Eric Hanushek, forecasts that learning losses during the pandemic will cost students nationwide billions of dollars in lost income over a lifetime. Hanushek, an economist, has written extensively on public policy with a special emphasis on the economics of education. Since 2000, he has been a Paul and Jean Hanna Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, an American public policy think tank located at Stanford University in California.

Oklahoma students are expected to be hit hardest, losing almost nine percent in lifetime earnings, more than any other state in the nation, the study found. In one possible scenario, The Oklahoma Eagle, using data from the study for retail workers in Tulsa, concluded the loss would amount to roughly an annual drop in pay from \$33,300 to \$29,800 using current pay scales.

The study comes as the Oklahoma State Board of Education (OSBE) and Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) are currently seeking to address the learning losses pupils suffered during the COVID-19 era. While the OSBE and TPS focus is on improving reading scores, the Hoover Institution study points out that it is the math scores that will most heavily impact the future earnings of students of the coronavirus

# “

**In the 51 states/ jurisdictions where scores were lower in 2022 than in 2019, the size of the score differences ranged from 4 to 13 points. Oklahoma -13.**

**NAEP REPORT CARD: MATHEMATICS, Eighth Grade Public School Students**

disease era.

Massive declines in student math test scores that resulted from the pandemic are “highly correlated with the future earnings of students,” Hanushek told The Oklahoma Eagle in communications about the study.

While the pandemic affected nearly all ethnic-racial groups, Black students, followed by Hispanics, showed the most significant decline in test scores nationwide during the 2020-23 period per the NAEP Long Term-Assessment Results.

### Oklahoma trails the nation

Hanushek published the report, titled, The Economic Cost of the Pandemic: State by State in January 2023. He provided further explanation on its findings and implications to The Oklahoma Eagle in March 2024. Hanushek reported that “Oklahoma had greater learning losses than the nation as a whole, and the economic impacts on affected youth and the state became very large.” He attributed these losses to “school closures and the disruption of schooling because of Covid.”

Hanushek’s study projects Oklahoma’s “learning losses will result in a total loss of 2.9 percent” annually to the Oklahoma economy over the 21st century, or approximately \$176 billion. Black and other students of color leaving school tend to

enter the job market with lower-income jobs, thus bearing a disproportionate burden of the COVID-19 learning loss.

Published reports from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) for the period 2019-2022 show Oklahoma recorded the greatest combined learning losses in reading and math of any state in the nation. During the period using NAEP scoring standards, Oklahoma finished dead last in U.S. states with a loss of 13 score points in mathematics and next to the last in reading with a score decline of eight points among 8th-grade students. All NAEP statistics cited may be found here: <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov>. Professor Hanushek keyed in on 8th graders because these losses, described to The Oklahoma Eagle, “will be permanent unless we can make up the losses while the students are still in school.”

Hanushek warned that, “history indicates that the economic losses will be permanent unless the schools get better. Recovering from the pandemic requires swift and decisive improvements to the schools.”

### Within Oklahoma

In recent months, Tulsa Public Schools (TPS), under State Education Board “orders”, has focused almost exclusively on improving reading scores for

Cont. A6

## Foundation

# Foundation Supports Programs For TPS Pupils

John Neal  
The Oklahoma Eagle

While Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) receives the majority of its funding from state tax dollars, millions of dollars in local grants and contributions boost the TPS education budget annually. Additional charitable donations also support public education in a variety of ways under the auspices of the Foundation for Tulsa Schools (FTS).

Working in conjunction with its philanthropic donors and partners, the Foundation has announced new programs to supplement efforts to assist disadvantaged families. In an interview, Foundation officials discussed its programs with The Oklahoma Eagle.

These local charitable efforts are of interest to The Oklahoma Eagle readership because they support the educational experience and

academic achievement of hundreds of students including many in the north Tulsa community. This supplemental financial assistance strengthens the economic and social networks, making student learning possible. Aid flows directly to TPS educational activities, students, families, and educators.

While Oklahoma has over 200 public educational charitable foundations, surpassing many larger states, the Foundation for Tulsa Schools is an award-winning leader among education charitable efforts in Oklahoma.

Moises Echeverria, president and CEO for the Foundation, told The Oklahoma Eagle that the organization is expanding its activities to combat chronic student absenteeism in Tulsa schools. FTS and its many partners have also announced plans to provide additional resources and services to families at the Parent Resource Center in north Tulsa.

The local charities aimed to boost education efforts as Tulsa Public Schools faced increased pressure but received limited assistance from Ryan Walters, State Superintendent of Public

Instruction, and the Oklahoma State Education Board. New Board orders and rules pose serious accreditation risks for the TPS school district, including the possibility of state takeover if state student test scores fail to meet expectations beginning with April testing. The Oklahoma Eagle has extensively reported the risks TPS faces. <https://theokeagle.com/2024/03/30/tulsa-public-schools-reckoning-imminent/>

### Overcoming chronic absenteeism

In public forums, TPS Superintendent Ebony Johnson has repeatedly raised the issue of chronic absenteeism among Tulsa students.

“You can’t teach them if they are not there,” she has often said, referring to student absences and lagging educational achievement.

Recent studies have documented a double-digit explosion in post-COVID chronic student absenteeism nationwide. However, absences from school are most significant in large urban school districts, particularly

among economically disadvantaged minorities. Chronic absenteeism has soared to over 40 percent of the student population in TPS. Student attendance is a concern in north Tulsa schools at all grade levels and school locations.

TPS has unveiled a new plan to address chronic student absenteeism in a 2024 plan dubbed “Attend to Win.” The Foundation is seeking new sponsors to support the initiative. An outline of the plan in its formative stages points out, “Students who are chronically absent are more likely to suffer academically and socially and are more likely to drop out.” It adds, “Students who live in high levels of poverty are 4x more likely to be chronically absent than others.”

FTS President Echeverria told The Oklahoma Eagle that planning and collaboration with TPS are in its early stages, but elements could include addressing “housing, transportation, safety, physical and mental health needs” and possible “incentives”

Cont. A6

# Leona Pearl Mitchell: An Historic Opera Singer

By **KITTY PITTMAN**, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF OKLAHOMA HISTORY AND CULTURE



Opera singer Leona Mitchell was born October 13, 1949, in Enid, Oklahoma, to Rev. Hulon and Pearl Olive Leatherman Mitchell. Tenth of fifteen children, Leona Mitchell began her musical journey by singing in her father's church choir. She received a scholarship from Oklahoma City University, in 1971 earning a bachelor's degree in music. Her alma mater later conferred upon her an honorary doctorate in music.

Mitchell debuted with the San Francisco Spring Opera Theater in 1972 and received an Opera America grant, which allowed her to study with Ernest St. John Metz in Los Angeles. On December 15, 1975, she made her Metropolitan Opera debut

as Micaela in Bizet's Carmen, the same role she had sung at her debut. This marked the beginning of her many performances in opera houses all over the world, including Geneva, Paris, Madrid, and Sydney. Mitchell performed for eighteen consecutive seasons at the Metropolitan, a testament to her voice and professionalism.

Well known for her performances in operas by Puccini and Verdi, she also sang Bess in the London Records recording of the George Gershwin classic Porgy and Bess, with the Cleveland Orchestra. She has made television as well as film appearances. Her first solo operatic album was Presenting Leona Mitchell with Kurt Herbert Adler: An Operatic

Partnership, recorded in 1979.

Mitchell received numerous Oklahoma awards, including induction into the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame in 2001 and the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 2004. She was given an Outstanding Oklahoman citation in 1975 and was named "Ambassador of Enid" that same year. She was also honored by a joint session of the Oklahoma Legislature in 1985. She has performed for two presidents and at the inauguration of Charles Bradford Henry as governor of Oklahoma in 2003. She married Elmer Bush III and had one son, Elmer Bush IV. At the end of the twentieth century she resided in Houston, Texas.

**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.

**LEONA MITCHELL** (2012.201.B0399.0254, by J. Miller, Oklahoma Publishing Company Photography Collection, OHS).

## Featured Last Week



**Their: The Culture of Hate  
In Oklahoma**



**A Spotlight On Oklahoma's  
2SLGBTQ Community**



**Court Decision: 2010 federal ruling,  
Osage Reservation disestablished**

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# Black Businesses Are Under Attack. Now, So Are Financing Opportunities to Help Them

Getting radical economic redistribution of resources into the hands of masses of Black people will require targeted investments of public dollars.

By Dayvon Love, Word In Black



*The Fearless Fund is a venture capital fund that targets investments in Black and Brown women-owned businesses. This fund was founded by three Black women who recognized the disparities in access to venture capital for Black women-owned businesses and have been working to address this issue.*

A white conservative activist named Edward Blum, through his organization called American Alliance for Equal Rights, has led litigation efforts against the consideration of race in college admissions which resulted in the recent Students for Fair Admissions Supreme Court ruling that significantly reduced the consideration of race in college admissions. His organization sued the Fearless Fund, claiming that its focus on grantmaking for Black women was discriminatory.

Those of us with a radical political worldview would engage initiatives like the Fearless Fund as an example of Black capitalist approaches to problems that do not fundamentally change the existing social and political order. While this effort will help individual Black people get access to resources that might allow them to be in a position to do some social good, these efforts are limited in bringing the revolutionary change needed to truly empower working-class Black people. But, there are important political issues at stake for those of us interested in building revolutionary alternatives to the status quo as it relates to the case against the Fearless Fund.

If we are interested in a radical economic redistribution of resources that we can get into the hands of the masses of Black people, it will require targeted investments of public dollars into entities that have the institutional and administrative infrastructure to receive those investments. Additionally, it will require these entities to have governance structures that ensure democratic community control of these resources. The Fearless Fund lawsuit is important in this regard because a ruling against the Fearless Fund could be weaponized against more revolutionary investments in Black people leaving only universalist, class-based policies that do not address the investments needed to build independent Black infrastructure for working-class people to practice self-determination.

Investing resources in a community is not as simple as just giving people money. This society is structured on white and European colonial domination of every aspect of human endeavor; Black people need to change our relationship to global finance capital. Currently, when resources are invested into our community, the institutions that decide which Black people and communities get resources are not controlled by working-class Black people. These institutions are usually controlled by a white-dominated but multiracial class of gatekeepers who are ultimately accountable to institutions outside of our community. The result of the Fearless Fund is that it is developing institutions that can receive and distribute large sums of resources to people in our community who traditionally would not have access to it.

Getting more Black women entrepreneurs access to venture capital can have a positive impact on those Black women who would not have access to those resources otherwise. However, from my perspective, something larger is at stake, and that is, a ruling that would create additional hurdles to advancing policies that target resources specifically to Black people. The people who are believers in the notion that this system of white monopoly capital can be reformed to serve Black people will pay attention to the Fearless Fund proceedings to assess the potential challenges this poses to other similar efforts. For those of us who are looking for more revolutionary economic alternatives, the Fearless Fund lawsuit is important for us to address the ways this gets weaponized against specific investments in the Black masses.

DAYVON LOVE is director of public policy for the Baltimore-based think tank Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle.

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Foundation

# Hundreds Of Northside Students *Benefit*



TEACHER CANDIDATE AMI ARMSTRONG, right, talks to Kennedy Elementary School Principal Amber Bui, left, and Assistant Principal Gretchen Slate at a job fair in Norman on March 13, 2024. PHOTO TED STREULI/OKLAHOMA WATCH

From A3

for school attendance.

Additionally, to keep more students in school, Tulsa Public Schools announced to The Oklahoma Eagle that it would expand its student meal program to all students in the 2024-25 school year. <https://theokeagle.com/2024/01/09/tulsa-public-schools-to-expand-student-free-meals-program/>

### Parent Resource Center

The following is a list of resources available to parents of TPS pupils.

The Parent Resource Center in the North Star building, located at 525 E. 46th Street North, reported on its website, "Our Parent Resource Center exists to provide services and support to North Tulsa families and families in Tulsa Public Schools." The Foundation for Tulsa Schools annual Impact Report reflects over 3,300 students and families are served through the Center. The location includes resources and services from

seven partner agencies. TPS offers enrollment assistance and computer labs for parents and families.

The Parent Resource Center can be accessed at the following website: <https://www.tulsaschools.org/student-and-family-support/prc>

It lists that the following services are coming soon:

- English-language classes for parents and families
- Support services for jobseekers
- Programs and services to support families during pregnancy, birth, and early childhood through eight years old

### Tulsa Teacher Corps

At its March 28, 2024, Tulsa Public Schools Board meeting, Superintendent Johnson told board members the district can expect over 600 teacher vacancies for the 2024-25 school year. Teacher vacancies and turnover continue to plague Tulsa schools as Oklahoma schools rank among the bottom of states regarding teacher salaries and

per pupil expenditures. Teaching proficiency is highly correlated with student academic achievement.

The TPS board approved Johnson's request to provide one-time \$3,000 signing bonuses to recruit teachers with standard teaching certificates to fill existing and anticipated vacancies. Additionally, of the 1,953 emergency or standard certified Tulsa teachers, 724 are "novice" classroom teachers, according to data released by TPS to The Oklahoma Eagle. Hundreds of new or novice teachers may need assistance to acquire additional college hours, complete testing requirements, or obtain hands-on training to become more effective classroom teachers.

The Tulsa Teacher Corps, funded in part by the Foundation for Tulsa Schools, is one program that provides this development opportunity. As requested by Superintendent Johnson and approved by the school board, teachers lacking standard certifications will receive \$1,000 signing bonuses if they commit to participate in the Tulsa Teacher Corp

program. The Foundation reports over 80% of participants completed this program in 2022-23, and among past cohorts, "over 90% return for a third year in Tulsa Public Schools."

### Other Charitable Support

The most recent Impact Report for the Foundation for Tulsa Schools lists these additional programs for student, school, and educator activities and sponsorship opportunities for Foundation contributors:

- Adopt-A-School
- Explore Oklahoma Field Trips
- School Sponsorship
- Teacher Supplies Program
- Book Series
- Principal Discretionary Funds
- Fine Arts
- Teacher Mental Health
- Expanded Learning
- Choice Neighborhoods
- Any Given Child
- Grants for Great Ideas

In the last five years, the Foundation for Tulsa Schools has provided over \$45 million from philanthropic contributors to "program services" benefiting Tulsa schools, according to its audited financial statements. And its charitable partners have contributed millions more.

Elizabeth Inbody, executive director of Oklahoma Schools Foundation for Excellence, told The Oklahoma Eagle FTS will receive the 2024 Outstanding Program Award for its Healthy Thriving Schools Initiative.

**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 director when the city won multiple awards for its planning accomplishments. He is now retired and resides in Austin, Texas.

COVID

# Economic disadvantage linked to lower scores

From A3

April 2024 state testing. However, a larger decline in statewide and Tulsa scores occurred in aggregate math scores. <https://oklaschools.com/>

Those students testing "below basic" in math - the State Board preferred measurement standard - worsened by nine percentage points to 38% statewide and by 16 percentage points to 65% in Tulsa Public Schools. Time is running out as test scores on state exams, which have plummeted since 2019, did not improve from 2022 to 2023.

While ethno-racial disparities in the form of lower scores also appear in the Oklahoma School Testing Program (OSTP) test results for the state and Tulsa, the causal correlation is more directly linked to economic disadvantage, English language learning, and among students with disabilities as reflected in OSTP data summaries.

Until recently, the Oklahoma State Board of Education (OSBE) and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters have ignored the record-level drop in state academic achievement test scores, particularly math scores. He and the State Board have focused for months narrowly on TPS reading scores and its so-called "failing schools." It was not until November 2023 that math and reading scores were proposed to be linked statewide to accreditation standards for school districts, and then with sanctions, not assistance.

### Achieving equity

That rule adopted for math and reading scores would place "academic deficiencies" on 62 Oklahoma school districts based on

## Oklahoma School Report Card

### Oklahoma State Scores "Below Basic %"

	2019	2022	2023	% Points Loss
Reading (ELA)	27%	34%	34%	(7)
Math	29%	38%	38%	(9)

The Oklahoma School Report Card Matrix is a visualization tool that allows users to compare school performance across accountability indicators from the Oklahoma School Report Cards (pdf). Additionally, information regarding enrollment and student demographics are presented for each school. For students to be included in reporting, they had to meet the state's inclusion criteria for each indicator (e.g., full academic year status for Academic Achievement). The most recent data available are from the 2022 - 2023 school year.

**Oklahoma School Report Cards**  
Source, Oklahoma Schools.com (<https://oklaschools.com/district/721001/matrix>).

## Oklahoma School Report Card

### Tulsa Public School Scores "Below Basic %"

	2019	2022	2023	% Points Loss
Reading (ELA)	46%	57%	57%	(11)
Math	49%	65%	65%	(16)

The Oklahoma School Report Card Matrix is a visualization tool that allows users to compare school performance across accountability indicators from the Oklahoma School Report Cards (pdf). Additionally, information regarding enrollment and student demographics are presented for each school. For students to be included in reporting, they had to meet the state's inclusion criteria for each indicator (e.g., full academic year status for Academic Achievement). The most recent data available are from the 2022 - 2023 school year.

**Oklahoma School Report Cards**  
Source, Oklahoma Schools.com (<https://oklaschools.com/district/721001/matrix>).

the 2022-23 academic performance analysis done by the Oklahoma Appleseed Center for Law and Justice.

When the Oklahoma Appleseed Center challenged the State Education Department on the "one test metric of performance," the agency provided no criteria or professional justification for the new standard. Instead, the official response was, "The agency believes [emphasis added] that at least half of the students in a school district can achieve the basic [level of] performance...a requirement that competent school districts should be able to meet."

In its official Impact Statement, the agency did not recognize 62 Oklahoma school districts - as analysis by the Appleseed Center revealed - would not be "competent" had the standard been applied to the 2022-23 academic year. The Oklahoma Eagle extended the Appleseed Center analysis to a comparison with pre-pandemic 2019 scores.

Using State Education Department data, The Oklahoma Eagle staff found that only 12 of the 62 school districts would have been sanctioned for violation of the math standard had it been applicable before the pandemic. And 10 of the 12 would have been small rural school districts with enrollments ranging from roughly 50 to 1,100 students.

Tulsa Public Schools would also have cleared the new hurdle in reading and math prior to the pandemic. If the new standard is reasonable as the OSDE proclaims, few school districts in Oklahoma would have received an "academic deficiency" were it not for the

student learning loss incurred by the pandemic.

Instead, for over a year, Walters has sought to call out state school districts over a barrage of "cultural" issues, including book banning, suppression of the teaching of America's racist history, student gender identification, religious freedom, school pronoun use, alleged foreign financial contribution to schools, and targeting minority assistance programs.

Meanwhile, the question for a new generation of students who are entering the workforce in Tulsa and across Oklahoma is whether they are doomed to receiving lower earnings? Or is there a brighter path forward?

If the Hanushek study is correct that recovering from the pandemic requires swift and decisive improvements at the schools, a course correction is clearly needed. Schools will need more resources, not penalties, if Tulsa students are to realize their lifetime income-earning potential."

**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 director when the city won multiple awards for its planning accomplishments. He is now retired and resides in Austin, Texas.



TEACHER CANDIDATE AMI ARMSTRONG, right, talks to Kennedy Elementary School Principal Amber Bui, left, and Assistant Principal Gretchen Slate at a job fair in Norman on March 13, 2024. PHOTO TED STREULI/OKLAHOMA WATCH

Teacher Certifications

# Prospective Teachers Get Clarity After Questions Swirl About Certification Exam

Jennifer Palmer and Paul Monies  
Oklahoma Watch

After weeks of uncertainty, prospective teachers are getting some clarity over whether the State Department of Education will accept one of the state's main teacher certification exams.

Some school districts, universities and teachers started hearing in mid-March that the state would no longer accept Praxis subject tests offered by the Educational Testing Service.

Education message boards on social media sites like Facebook attracted scores of comments from educators who signed up for the Praxis test or already took it and were told by someone at the department the Praxis test may not count for their teacher certification.

Those fears were ultimately unfounded. Department staff sent a note to school superintendents on Tuesday clarifying that Praxis tests are still being accepted for certification.

"In accordance with state statute, OSDE will continue to accept Praxis exams for the purpose of Oklahoma Teacher Certification," agency spokesman Dan Isett said in a separate email to Oklahoma Watch. "Furthermore, OSDE will continuously update our list of approved Praxis exams, which most closely align to Oklahoma certification areas, as changes are made available to us."

The confusion came at a key

time in education, as student teachers wrap up the final part of their training and apply for jobs in the upcoming school year. Most educators take the Oklahoma Subject Area Test, or OSAT. But the state offers the Praxis test as an alternative option, and because multiple states accept Praxis scores, offering it helps reduce barriers for educators coming from out of state who have already passed a Praxis exam. Recruiting out-of-state teachers has been a key policy goal of State Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters.

Praxis tests don't cost the state. Prospective teachers pay for the exam. The Praxis tests in particular are preferred by teachers who are emergency certified and seeking subject-specific certification within a three-year time period to get certification. The OSAT has always been an option for emergency certified teachers.

It's still unclear how the confusion started, or how widely it snowballed on social media. Oklahoma City Public Schools sent an email to its emergency certified teachers on March 25 noting the uncertainty with the Praxis exam.

"Earlier today we learned that at this time, OSDE will no longer be accepting the Praxis Subject Assessment as a subject area certification test," said the email, which was unsigned. "They have not yet updated their website and ETS, the company that administers the Praxis Subject Assessment, has not yet updated their site either."

"If you have already registered

for a test with ETS, OSDE stated that they will honor the registration and test results. However, if you need to take a subject area test and have not yet registered, please ONLY register for the OSAT."

Teacher training programs at colleges and universities also began preparing their students for alternatives after hearing about possible issues with the Praxis test.

Kathren Stehno, an assistant professor of elementary education at Southwestern Christian University, called the department a few weeks ago to double-check that the Praxis test was an option for one of her students. She was told that starting in May, they would no longer accept it, but if the student had already paid, the Department would honor the scores.

Several teachers interviewed by Oklahoma Watch spoke about their experiences, but did not want to use their names. One teacher said they canceled a planned Praxis test after hearing about the issues on social media and being unable to get answers directly from the State Department of Education. The exam costs \$100 to \$150, depending on the subject area, and some teachers were told if they canceled, they would only receive a 50% refund.

The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, which is a separate agency from the State Department of Education, administers the contract with Pearson for the state's other teacher certification test, the OSAT. It also handles the contract for the Praxis Performance

## Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE)

The Oklahoma State Department of Education is the state education agency of the State of Oklahoma charged with determining the policies and directing the administration and supervision of the public school system of Oklahoma. The State Board of Education is composed of the Oklahoma State Superintendent of Public Instruction and six members appointed by the Governor of Oklahoma with the approval of the Oklahoma Senate. The State Superintendent of Public Instruction, in addition to serving as chair of the Board, serves as the chief executive officer of the Department and is elected by the voters of Oklahoma every four years.

The current State Superintendent of Public Instruction is Ryan Walters.

Assessment for Teachers, a separate examination to evaluate teaching strategies.

The state began accepting Praxis tests for certification in June 2022 under former Superintendent Joy Hofmeister, who cited existing Oklahoma law that allows the department to accept certification tests used in a majority of the states. At the time, Hofmeister had switched parties and was running for governor as a Democrat.

"While we grapple with a teacher shortage that the pandemic has only worsened, it is critical that we provide every opportunity for qualified individuals to enter the classroom and devote their professional talents to our students," Hofmeister said in a news release announcing the Praxis tests. "This new suite of Praxis assessments not only ensures prospective teachers have demonstrated mastery of the subjects they will be assigned to teach, but provides a plethora of free test preparation resources."

Discussions about accepting Praxis tests date at least to early 2021. Walters, who was then-Secretary of Education, discussed drafting rules to allow the Praxis exam to be offered alongside the Pearson test for teacher credentialing. That effort, run through the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, never materialized. Hofmeister later sent a memo to the State Board of Education in July 2021 outlining the department's desire to accept the Praxis tests. □



THE GEO GREAT PLAINS CORRECTIONAL FACILITY is considered a minimum-security prison with a total of 1,900 beds. The prison has housed prisoners from states like Oklahoma, California and Arizona. PHOTO LIONEL RAMOS/OKLAHOMA WATCH

## OK Prisoners Sue

# OKLAHOMA PRISONERS Confined to Shower Stalls Sue Corrections Department

Keaton Ross  
Oklahoma Watch

Seven state prisoners who were locked in three-by-three foot shower stalls at the Great Plains Correctional Facility in Hinton last August are suing the Oklahoma Department of Corrections, alleging their prolonged confinement in cramped and unsanitary conditions amounts to cruel and unusual punishment.

Attorneys Richard Labarthe and Alexey Tarasov filed the lawsuit in Oklahoma County District Court on April 9. A hearing date on the matter is pending.

Great Plains administrative staff and Corrections Department Director Steven Harpe are named as defendants in the litigation that seeks a declaratory judgment that the plaintiffs' constitutional rights were violated and an injunction to prevent future violations. The prisoners are also asking for a monetary judgment against Harpe and the Great Plains officials in their personal capacity.

The prisoners allege staff were willfully negligent of their well-being as they forced them into shower stalls covered with human feces. Daniel Salazar claims he was confined to one of the shower stalls for four days and removed only after attempting to hang himself with a t-shirt. Robert D. Johnson stated he was denied access to restrooms and relied on other inmates for necessities like drinking cups.

The conditions caused prisoners severe emotional distress, mental anguish and physical discomfort, the lawsuit states.

"The comprehensive documentation and investigation into these practices at GPCC reveal a pattern of neglect and abuse, indicative of a broader institutional failure to uphold basic human rights standards in inmate treatment," the lawsuit reads.

Labarthe did not return a phone message left Wednesday seeking comment. Corrections department spokesperson Kay Thompson declined to comment, saying the agency would not discuss pending litigation. She said the attorney general's office will represent corrections department personnel in the matter.

In September and early October, several

“  
The comprehensive documentation and investigation into these practices at GPCC reveal a pattern of neglect and abuse, indicative of a broader institutional failure to uphold basic human rights standards in inmate treatment.”

OKLAHOMA INMATE LAWSUIT, Filed by seven state prisoners at the Great Plains Correctional Facility, Hinton, Oklahoma.

prisoners told Oklahoma Watch they were locked inside the shower stalls after refusing housing assignments in eight-man cells. The inmates did not want to be housed in the eight-man cells because they feared gang violence would erupt in the cramped quarters, the prisoners said during brief phone interviews.

Inmate James Shelton said prisoners thought they would be in the shower stalls for 30 minutes to an hour as staff worked to find a solitary cell placement, but in some instances were left in the small space with limited access to basic necessities for more than 24 hours.

Two state correctional officers assigned to alleviate staffing shortages at the facility claim Great Plains officials intentionally placed prisoners in the shower stalls as a punitive measure and publicly chastised staff members who attempted to improve conditions. An internal agency investigation confirmed that prisoners were held in the shower stalls for several hours but was unable to confirm some of the officers' claims conclusively.

"We were informed that the inmates in the shower cells get nothing," one of the officers wrote in an incident report obtained by Oklahoma Watch. "No cups, no blankets, no extra clothes and no bathroom breaks. He stated that they are in the shower stalls for disciplinary reasons and can be there for weeks and it is to make them not want to be there anymore."

Thompson told Oklahoma Watch in November that staff were disciplined following the agency's investigation but declined to elaborate. She said the facility no longer confines prisoners to the shower stalls in any circumstance.

Emily Barnes, founder of the Oklahoma prisoner advocacy group Hooked on Justice, said she's optimistic the lawsuit will spur better conditions in state prisons.

"I'm glad something is finally being done for these men and women whose rights are being violated," Barnes said. "DOC needs to be held accountable for letting this stuff go on inside their prisons."

### Great Plains Correctional Facility

The facility is a 374,384 sq. ft. facility on 69 acres in Hinton, Oklahoma. The newest housing unit additions opened in November 2008 to bring the facility to 1,940 beds and incorporated additional beds in two new buildings primarily constructed of precast concrete panels, precast plank, and concrete block in a first floor and mezzanine arrangement. Additions to the existing support facility include space for dining, classrooms and other inmate services, laundry and warehousing. The renovation portion of the project included additional and remodeled space for food preparation, administration, medical, and processing.

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.

## Judicial Selection Process

# How They Voted: House Rejects Resolution to Change Oklahoma's Judicial Selection Process

Keaton Ross  
Oklahoma Watch

Several dozen House Republicans joined Democrats on Tuesday to reject a measure seeking sweeping changes to Oklahoma's judicial nomination system.

By a vote of 36-60, representatives rejected Senate Joint Resolution 34, which proposed allowing the governor to nominate judicial officers and send names to the Legislature for final confirmation. Because the resolution sought to change the state constitution, it would have required final approval from voters via a state question.

Voters established the Judicial Nominating Commission by state question in 1967, in the aftermath of a bribery scandal involving three state Supreme Court justices, who were forced out after it came to light the judges took

kickbacks for favorable decisions for 25 years.

Rep. Anthony Moore, R-Clinton, was the sole Republican to debate against the measure. He said uprooting the current system would make it more difficult to appoint qualified candidates and have an unintended consequence of delaying court proceedings in some civil and juvenile cases.

"Those that cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it," Moore said. "Unfortunately that's where we are heading today."

The 15-member board, whose members are appointed by the governor, Oklahoma Bar Association and legislative leaders, vets candidates to serve on the state Supreme Court, Court of Criminal Appeals and Court of Civil Appeals. For each vacancy, the commission forwards three candidates to the governor for a final decision.

Judicial Nominating Commission meetings

are not subject to the state's Open Meeting Act, though the body does consider public comment on candidates.

Proponents of the measure said abolishing the Judicial Nominating Commission would boost transparency and allow lawmakers to individually evaluate the merit of a judicial candidate before their appointment. The Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, a right-leaning think tank based in Oklahoma City, lobbied in favor of the measure.

"Right now the only way we have in any of these judicial picks is the speaker gets one appointee and senate pro tem gets one appointee," said the resolution's House sponsor Mark Lepak, R-Claremore. "This brings our body into the process in the way we've not ever had."

Critics of the measure, including the Oklahoma Bar Association and Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr., argued the

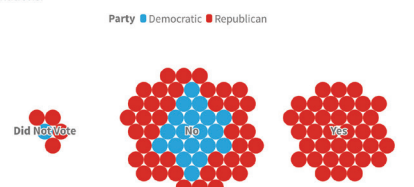
measure would inject unnecessary partisanship and political influence into a process that has worked well for decades. Opponents also expressed concerns that the governor could nominate a candidate for political or financial reasons.

Rep. Monroe Nichols, D-Tulsa, said changes to the system could backfire if the Legislature has a dispute with the executive branch.

"A yes vote throws away the integrity that when we have to lean on the judicial system, we can do so without politics getting in the way of the law," Nichols said. □

### How Oklahoma Representatives Voted on Senate Joint Resolution 34

The Oklahoma House of Representatives voted 36-60 to reject Senate Joint Resolution 34 on Tuesday, April 16. The resolution would ask Oklahoma voters to change the state constitution to give the governor more power over judicial nominations.



Source: Oklahoma State Legislature - Use the tool in the bottom right corner to group by party, vote and area.   
 Party: Democratic (Blue), Republican (Red)   
 \* Percent data visualization.





JIM REA, far left, sits at a table with his attorney, Laurie Phillips, and his campaign manager during a hearing before the Tulsa County Election Board on Tuesday, April 16, 2024. PHOTO TRISTAN LOVELESS

Jim Rea

# Tulsa County Election Board keeps Jim Rea on ballot

Tristan Loveless  
NonDoc

At the end of a nearly three-hour hearing, Tulsa County Election Board Members Bob Jack and Judy Eason McIntyre voted today to retain Democratic candidate Jim Rea on District 2 county commissioner ballot. The board denied a challenge officially filed by Maria Barnes and supported by Sarah Gray, the two other Democratic candidates in the race.

Barnes and Gray argued that Rea has not met residency requirements to run in the district because he filed a homestead exemption on a home he owned in District 3. Rea argued that he moved to a home in District 2 and has since updated his homestead exemption for 2024 to his new address. Ultimately, the board sided with Rea.

"I think this hearing was a great representation of the democratic process and our electoral process," Rea said after the vote. "I believe the result was correct and didn't have much doubt it would be what it was."

Gray, who supported Barnes in the hearing and presented much of the case since Barnes had a sore throat and trouble speaking, said they hoped to inspire other non-attorneys to get involved in the election challenge process.

"This process is meant to be open to all citizens. You don't have to be an attorney to care about election integrity," Gray said. "If you have a question, if you have a concern about a candidate's qualifications to actually run and represent your community, I really encourage you to be brave and file a challenge."

While Barnes and Gray represented themselves, Rea hired attorney Laurie Phillips to represent

**According to Barnes and Gray, Rea had filed his homestead exemption on a home located in District 3 for the past few years, and they said he continued to claim it in 2023 and 2024.**

him at the hearing. While one might expect an attorney to make such a process move more quickly, Phillips' numerous objections clearly began to annoy the attorney for the election board, Douglas Pewitt.

"This is not a court of law," Pewitt reminded the parties throughout the hearing. "It's more akin to an administrative hearing."

Pewitt, the district attorney for Delaware and Ottawa counties, advised the board during Tuesday's hearing because Rea previously worked for Tulsa County District Attorney Steve Kunzweiler. In exchange, Kunzweiler is set to advise the Delaware County Election Board on Wednesday in a contest of candidacy for their sheriff's race, Pewitt said.

At the conclusion of Tuesday's hearing, McIntyre — a former Democratic state senator — moved to accept Rea's candidacy. Jack seconded the motion, ultimately approving Rea's candidacy.

Contests of candidacy for state offices will be held in front of the Oklahoma State Election Board at 9 a.m. Thursday. The hearings in House Districts 37 and 66 are set to be livestreamed.

## Home is where the homestead's filed

Barnes' contestation of Rea's candidacy listed four reasons he should be disqualified from the ballot, but all four essentially made the same claim: that Rea resided in a house he owns south of the home he claimed on his candidacy filings.

In order to run for county commissioner, a candidate must be a registered voter six months before the election and maintain a "principal residence" within the county commissioner district for six months before the election.

According to Barnes and Gray, Rea had filed his homestead exemption on a home located in District 3 for the past few years, and they said he continued to claim it in 2023 and 2024.

Rea argued that he had updated his homestead exemption for 2024, just after the normal deadline. Rea testified that while homestead exemptions are normally filed between Jan. 1 and March 15, homeowners may also file them within 30 days of receiving an increase in property value assessment from the county assessor, which he testified he had done before the hearing.

## 'She's not an attorney,' 'I think the rules have been exceeded'

Barnes and Gray sat together during Tuesday's hearing, while Rea sat with Phillips and his campaign manager.

At the start of the hearing, Phillips objected to Gray participating at all since she had not filed the challenge and is not a licensed attorney. Gray argued that she was Barnes' counsel, but Pewitt said Gray could not represent Barnes in the case as a non-attorney.

"She's not an attorney. She's a witness," Phillips objected. "She's making arguments for [Barnes]."

While Gray was not technically allowed to present the case, the board allowed her to testify as a witness, and she functionally presented large parts of Barnes' argument after it became clear Barnes had trouble speaking.

"I think the rules have been exceeded," Phillips said. "I think this (filing) is in bad faith, and that's putting it mildly."

Asked how it felt going through the hearing without an attorney, Gray admitted it was a new and tough experience.

"This was definitely a little intimidating to come in and have attorneys to the left (and) to the right," Gray said.

Rea bought \$1.4 million home to run in District 2

Asked about the decision not to hire an attorney, Gray said she and Barnes had to make financial considerations.

"We don't have unlimited resources, and we decided that we don't have to hire an attorney for this, because the facts stand on their own," Gray said.

The majority of the hearing revolved around which of Rea's three Tulsa homes constitutes his primary residence.

At one point during the hearing, Pewitt asked Rea why he purchased the home on his candidate filing paper work in September 2023.

"Your former home is quite close to your new home, is that correct?" Pewitt asked. "What was the purpose of moving from the former home to the new home?"

Rea said he purchased the \$1.4 million home last fall "to establish my residency in the district."

Pewitt had a follow-up question. "When did you decide to run for the District 2 commissioner position?" Pewitt asked.

Rea has served current District 2 Commissioner Karen Keith — a 2024 candidate for mayor of Tulsa — as chief deputy since 2022. He said that's when he decided to run and succeed his boss.

"I looked consistently through a realtor for homes for a year off and on and selected this home," Rea testified. □

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Sealed bids, in the form of Online Bidding only, will be received by the Capital Assets Management, Construction and Properties (CAP) up to 96 hours prior to the time and date indicated below. The bids will be opened and read aloud after the time indicated. Copies of the plans and bid documents may be obtained from the CAP's Online Plan Room accessed from: <https://omes.ok.gov/services/construction-and-properties>. Copies of the bid documents are on file at the Construction and Properties office and are available for public inspection.

CAP Project Number: CAP24-0294

Project Name: Tulsa Region Painting Services

Project Location: Multiple Locations - Tulsa

Using Agency: Oklahoma Military Department

Bid Documents Available: Monday, April 15, 2024, Fee to Submit Online Bid: See Website

Pre-Bid Conference: Mandatory, Refer to "Instructions to Bidders" in Project Manual. In case of adverse weather conditions, please call 405-521-2112 prior to Pre-bid Conference.

Date and Time: Tuesday, April 30, 2024 12:00 P.M.

Location: 3515 Military Circle, OKC, OK 73111

Bid Opening Date: Tuesday, May 7, 2024

Location: Online Bids Only

Bid Opening Time: 2:00 PM

Contact Person(s):  
OMES APM: Andrew Denton - [Andrew.denton@omes.ok.gov](mailto:Andrew.denton@omes.ok.gov)

If the bid exceeds \$100,000, a cashier's check, a certified check or surety bid bond in the amount of five percent (5%) of the total bid shall accompany the sealed bid of each bidder. Security checks will be returned to all but the three lowest bidders after the bid opening. The three lowest bid securities will be retained until the contract is awarded.

By: Andrew Denton  
Assistant Project Manager,  
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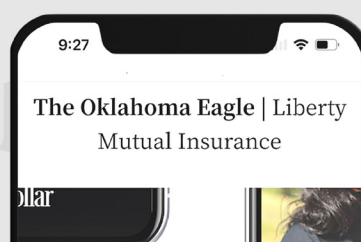


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### Church Of The Living God

1559 E Reading St. Tulsa OK  
(918) 584-3206  
*Minister RJ Smith*  
Sunday school - 9:30am  
Sunday Worship - 10:45am  
Monday Worship - 6:00pm  
Wednesday Bible Study - 5:00pm

### CAPERNAUM MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

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

### Words of Wisdom Ministries FC

Temporarily meeting at the Courtyard Marriot 3340 S 79th E Ave Tulsa OK (918) 230-3022  
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3329 E. 30th St. North • 834-0391  
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Bible Study Wednesday 7 p.m.  
Rev. Emanuel L. Collier, Sr. Pastor

### Gethsemane Baptist Church

727 East 56th St. North (918) 425-6613  
Dr. W. T. Lauderdale  
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Rudisill Regional Library  
1520 N Hartford Ave.  
Tulsa OK 74106  
(918) 409-4899  
Pastor Richard and Cher Lyons  
Sunday Worship: 1pm  
Wed- Healing School: 6:30p - 8p  
"The Righteous Are As Bold As A Lion." - Prov.28:1a

### SOLID ROCK 7th DAY BAPTIST CHURCH

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

### Northside Christ Gospel Church

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

### VERNON AME CHURCH

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

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Sunday TV Worship 11:00 a.m.  
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419 N Elgin Tulsa, Oklahoma

Office: 918-584-0510  
Fax: 918-584-1958  
Prayer Line: 918-584-PRAY  
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Wednesday Bible Study Noon and 7:00



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# Suicides Are Up Among Black Youths. *Is Anyone Paying Attention?*

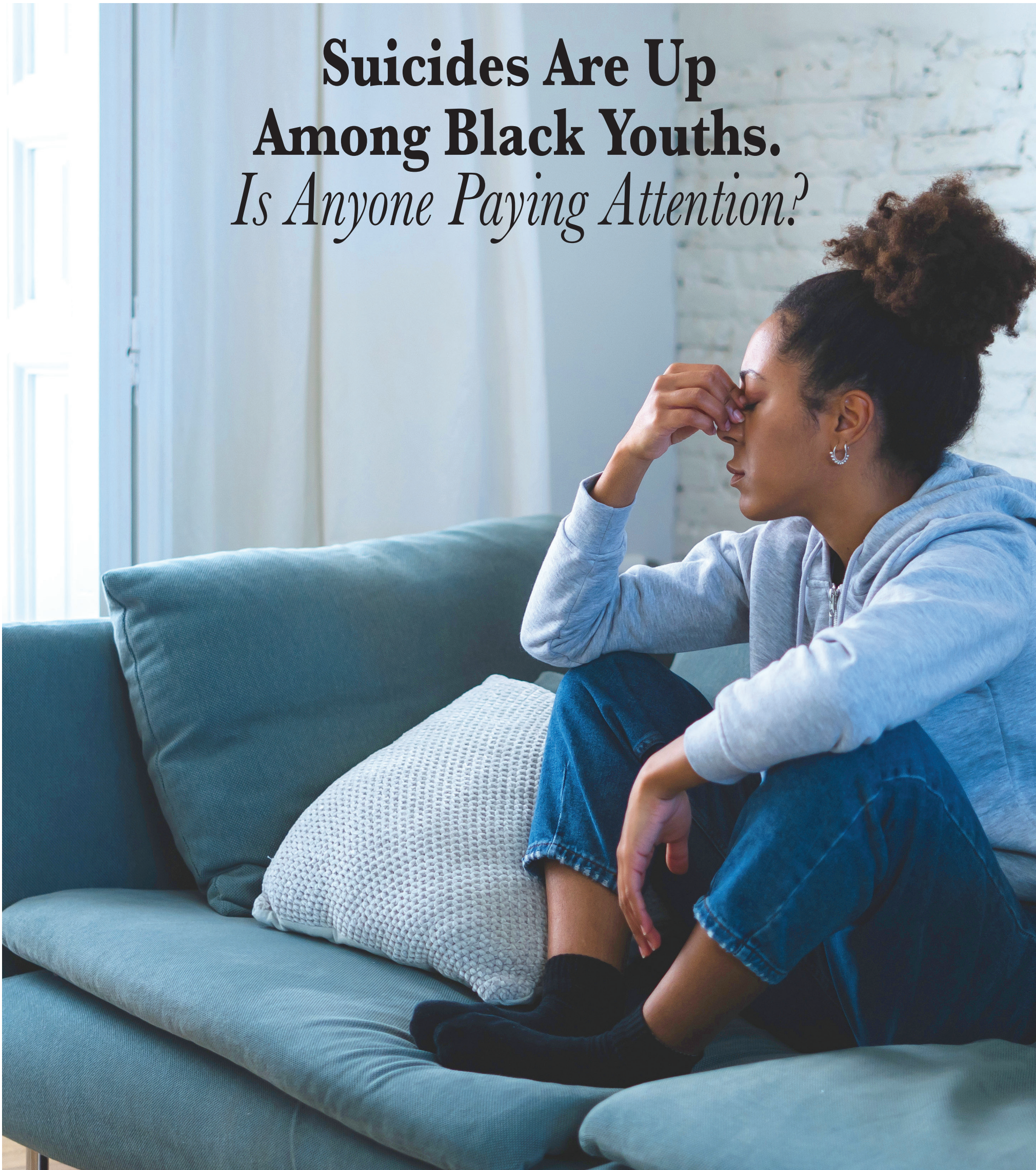


PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

## Black Youth Suicides

Researchers studying suicide haven't included enough Black people,

*but one study points the finger at a familiar cause for a rising rate among Black youths: racism.*

## A hallmark of Structural Racism

Jennifer Porter Gore  
Word In Black

Data on Black teen suicide confirm that the kids are not alright, and the research shows that not enough has been done to understand or confront the problem.

Although suicide has become a leading cause of death for young Black people in the U.S. — and the rate is trending sharply upward — experts say Black people are underrepresented in research on mental health and suicide.

While research on how and why young people commit suicide is still a relatively new discipline, information on suicides among youth of color, and solutions, are hard to find.

What's known is that the typical hallmarks of structural racism, ranging from living in an under-resourced community to a lack of healthcare, increase the risks that a Black teen will kill themselves, according to a report from the Johns Hopkins University Center for Gun Violence Solutions.

Racism "is impacting Black youth at a structural level," according to the report, which was released August 2023.

Jocelyn Meza, a clinical psychologist and psychiatry professor at the University of California — Los Angeles, says it's disturbing

but not surprising that researchers aren't paying attention to the role racism plays in the rising level of Black youth suicides.

"We focus so much on symptom reduction at the individual level, but without really contextualizing these forces that are more systemic," says Meza. "We're really ignoring social structures in our treatment development."

The data itself illustrates the problem.

A February 2023 CDC report found that overall suicide rates among Black youth increased in 2021, even though it had dropped slightly the two years prior. The report also found evidence of sharp and increasing racial disparities in the occurrence of suicidal thoughts and behaviors, which were exacerbated by COVID-19 pandemic.

The rate of Black people ages 10 to 24 years old dying by suicide increased by 36.6%, the largest increase reported, and Black children ages 5 to 12 are twice as likely to die by suicide as White children the same ages. The 10-year trend among high school students in grades 9 through 12 revealed high past-year rates of suicidal thoughts and behaviors, as well as depressive symptoms among youths who experience mental health disparities.

Intersectionality also plays a role. Almost half of all students who identified as

Cont. A13

## Teachers

The toughest issue for Teachers is even tougher for Students

*The number-one concern among teachers — student poverty — is the root of other major problems, like absenteeism and depression.*

Joseph Williams  
Word In Black

In its survey of teachers nationwide, the Pew Research Center found that 53% think poverty is a major problem among students who attend their school. It was the top concern for educators, ahead of absenteeism, mental health, drug use, and gang violence.

It's considered a truism in most Black communities: education is the key to climbing the ladder from poverty into the middle class. But a new survey of teachers has found that teaching kids struggling with poverty is one of the biggest hurdles they face in the classroom each day.

In its survey of teachers nationwide, the Pew Research Center found that 53% think

Cont. A13

## Black Youth Suicides

# Black Teens Underrepresented



From A12

multiracial had the highest rates of persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, as did 22% of lesbian, gay, or questioning students. One-third of students with same-sex partners reported at least one suicide attempt in the previous year, as compared with 6% of youths with only opposite-sex partners.

Arielle H. Sheftall, an associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Rochester Medical Center in New York, says that adverse childhood experiences — also known as ACEs — are factors in suicidal ideation. The experiences include the loss of a family member, witnessing or experiencing domestic violence or financial hardship.

“Unfortunately,” Sheftall says, “Black youth are more likely than their counterparts to be overrepresented in environments where [these] occur, including (but not limited to) low-income neighborhoods and the foster care system.”

Still, the Johns Hopkins report identifies racism as an important factor in suicidal ideation among young Black people.

The harm comes from “living in disinvested, under-resourced communities with reduced access to gainful employment opportunities, affordable, safe housing, and access to other resources like healthcare, social services, and more,” according to the report.

Yet despite suicide ranking as a leading cause of death in the United States and the increasing rate among Black teens, Blacks are underrepresented in research on mental health and suicide, according to the Johns Hopkins report. Efforts to research youth suicide are still relatively new, and suicidal behavior in youth of color is very under-researched.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has a list of several suicide risk factors that parents and anyone around teens should recognize:

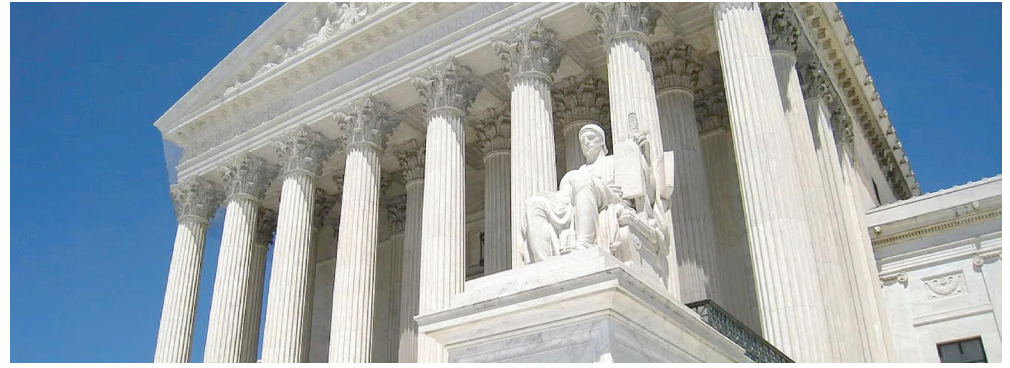
- Loss of a loved one to death, divorce, deployment, deportation or incarceration
- Bullying (in person or online)
- Discrimination, rejection or hostility due to gender identity or sexual orientation
- Racism, discrimination and related inequities and stressors
- Stigma (the belief that it’s wrong or shameful to talk about mental health or suicide)
- Witnessing or suffering violence or domestic abuse
- Financial instability that causes worry and insecurity
- Suicide in their school or friend group
- Major life-changing events, such as a breakup with a dating partner, a change in social connections, academic disappointment or a major health issue
- Self-harming behavior

If you are thinking about suicide, worried about someone else, or need emotional support, call or text the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at 988. Help is available 24/7. TTY users can dial 711 then 988 to get help.

JENNIFER PORTER GORE is a writer living in the Washington, D.C., area.

## SCOTUS

# Supreme Court *Eases Path for Discrimination Claims in Job Transfers*



THE UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT BUILDING in Washington, D.C. PHOTO WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

*The ruling favoring a female police sergeant from St. Louis makes it easier for workers to pursue employment discrimination claims related to job transfers.*

Stacy M. Brown  
Word In Black

The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled in favor of a female police sergeant from St. Louis, making it easier for workers to pursue employment discrimination claims related to job transfers.

The court sided with Sgt. Jatonya Clayborn Muldrow, who alleged she was reassigned to a less prestigious role within the St. Louis Police Department because of her gender.

Muldrow, a Black woman, sued the department under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act after being transferred from the intelligence division in 2017. In her previous role, she had been deputized as an FBI agent, worked a steady weekday schedule, and was involved in investigating public corruption and human trafficking cases. However, her new assignment lacked the same prestige and benefits.

Despite maintaining her pay, Muldrow lost her FBI privileges, had to work patrol, and was assigned weekend shifts. A male sergeant who had previously worked with Muldrow’s male supervisor took over for her.

The central issue before the justices was whether Title VII protects against all discriminatory job transfers or requires employees to demonstrate that the involuntary move resulted in a ‘significant disadvantage,’ such as harm to career prospects or changes in salary or rank.

In a crucial clarification, Justice Elena Kagan, in her opinion piece for the court, pointed out that some lower courts had used the incorrect higher standard. She stated that while an employee must demonstrate some harm from a forced transfer to succeed, they need not meet a ‘significance test.’

Kagan emphasized that Muldrow’s allegations met the court’s new standard “with room to spare” despite her rank and pay remaining unchanged, and her ability to advance to other positions. Legal experts said the decision could lower the bar for employees to proceed with discrimination claims in court, potentially allowing lawsuits that failed under the previous standard to succeed.

Although the court’s judgment was unanimous, Justices Clarence Thomas, Samuel A. Alito Jr., and Brett M. Kavanaugh each wrote separately to explain their differing views on the decision’s impact.

Justice Alito doubted that the decision would make a meaningful difference, suggesting that lower court judges should continue their current practices. Justice Kavanaugh indicated that he would not require any separate showing of harm, stating that “the discrimination is harm” under federal law. Thomas also asserted there was “little practical difference” between the court’s new test and the current practice of appeals court judges.

The Supreme Court’s ruling in favor of Muldrow not only clarifies that Title VII does not require courts to differentiate between job transfers causing significant disadvantages and those causing lesser harm but also significantly strengthens protections against employment discrimination based on sex and other protected characteristics.

Experts further opined that the landmark decision makes it easier for workers like Muldrow to pursue legal remedies for discriminatory job transfers, thereby profoundly impacting workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion programs. □

## Teachers

# Poverty cuts across the urban-rural divide

From A12



EXPERTS say poverty - homelessness, food insecurity, financial strain - are major impediments to learning and student achievement. PHOTO LUMINOLA/GETTY IMAGES

poverty is a major problem among students who attend their school. It was the top concern for educators, ahead of absenteeism, mental health, drug use, and gang violence.

While impoverished students have always been an issue, particularly at under-resourced, majority-Black schools, experts say the problem is affecting rural as well as suburban schools, and it has become more acute after the COVID-19 pandemic. But it hits hardest at urban schools, which typically have the highest concentration of Black students, according to the survey.

“Poverty cuts across the urban-rural divide, with roughly equal shares of teachers in urban schools (62%) and rural schools (60%) saying this is a major problem among their students,” according to the Pew survey, released earlier this month. “In suburban schools, a smaller share of teachers (42%) say the same.”

And it matters because students mired in poverty are more likely to have other serious issues at school, including absenteeism, disruptive behavior, poor academic performance, depression, and other mental health challenges.

Prudence Carter, a Brown University sociologist who specializes in education issues, says that it should be no surprise that poverty is teachers’ top concern. The issue, she says, can sweep in nearly every aspect of a student’s life — from not having enough food at home to not having a home at all.

“Poverty affects children in terms of food. Hungry children have a harder time learning,”

Carter says. “Unhoused children have a harder time learning because of the overall social, psychological, and emotional toll” of not having a permanent, stable home.

At the same time, “Many children who live in poverty, of course, also end up being ‘in loco parentis,’” looking after younger siblings if a parent is absent or at work, Carter says. “We know from research that children who grow up in poverty don’t have proper health care. That can have a significant impact on everything,” including delays in speech and language development.

“If you look across the social sciences at the research on the correlations between poverty and cognitive development, you see just lots of massive adverse effects for poor children,” Carter says.

Poverty is generally defined as not having enough money in a household to meet basic needs, including food and shelter. The federal government has set the national poverty level at \$31,000 a year for a household of four.

According to the US Census Bureau, the median student poverty rate for children in all U.S. school districts in 2021 was 14.5%, though in some areas, it is as high as 1 in 4 students.

According to a report from the National Association of Secondary School Principals, roughly one-fifth of all students in K-12 schools nationwide “are either living in poverty, attending a high-poverty school, or both.” It manifests itself, the report states, in “a variety of different factors that are often symptoms of poverty, like health issues stemming from a

non-nutritional diet, homelessness, lack of food, or the inability to receive medical treatment for illnesses.”

Those factors “often place more stress on a student, which can negatively impact the student’s ability to succeed in a school,” according to the report.

While poor students face more hurdles to academic success, Carter says it’s important to remember that they can succeed with proper encouragement and support.

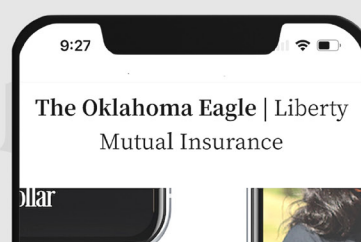
“This is why it’s really important for programs to be in place in school,” including free or reduced-price meals and after-school programs, she says. “Oftentimes, these children also need extra school support with learning aids. If poor kids are exposed to such programs, they can be academically successful and economically mobile as a result.”

Ultimately, “poverty doesn’t necessarily mean it’s 100% that students can’t thrive, particularly if resources can be put in place to supplement,” says Carter. “But it is highly more likely that children who don’t have access to resources will fall further behind.”

JOSEPH WILLIAMS, a veteran journalist, political analyst, and essayist, 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.

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## Tulsans Are Recipients Of National Award



(TOP LEFT) **CARLISHA BRADLEY**, founder of Women Empowering Nations. PHOTO PROVIDED

(TOP CENTER) **TIM NEWTON**, executive director of Tulsa Dream Center. PHOTO PROVIDED

(TOP RIGHT) **MIKEAL VAUGHN**, founder and executive director of Urban Coders Guild. PHOTO PROVIDED

(SECOND ROW, LEFT) **CEDRIC IKPO**, executive director of Thunder Fellows Program at Oklahoma City Thunder. PHOTO PROVIDED

(SECOND ROW, RIGHT) **DION'TRAE HAYES**, executive director for MET Cares Foundation. PHOTO PROVIDED

(THIRD ROW, LEFT) **MARQUESS DENNIS SR.**, executive director, Birthright Living Legacy. PHOTO PROVIDED

(THIRD ROW, RIGHT) **DR. CHRISTOPHER MCNEIL**, founder and executive director of Youth Medical Mentorship. PHOTO PROVIDED

(FOURTH ROW, LEFT) **OMARE JIMMERSON**, executive director of Tulsa Birth Equity Initiative. PHOTO PROVIDED

(FOURTH ROW, RIGHT) **RONDALYN ABODE**, director of development at Crossover Community Impact. PHOTO PROVIDED

(FIFTH ROW, LEFT) **BERTHADDAEUS BAILEY**, managing director of My Brother's Keeper. PHOTO PROVIDED

(BELOW) **NICOLE BRANNON**, park manager at Jane A. Malone Center at Chamberlain Park. PHOTO PROVIDED

**B**Me Community recently announced the honorees of its 2024 Vanguard Awards. The local recipients are Rondalyn Abode, director of development at Crossover Community Impact; BerThaddaeus Bailey, managing director of My Brother's Keeper; Carlisha Bradley, founder of Women Empowering Nations; Nicole Brannon, park manager at Jane A. Malone Center at Chamberlain Park; Marquess Dennis Sr., executive director, Birthright Living Legacy; Dion'trae Hayes, executive director for MET Cares Foundation; Cedric Ikpo, executive director, Thunder Fellows Program at Oklahoma City Thunder; Omare Jimmerson, executive director of Tulsa Birth Equity; Dr. Christopher McNeil, founder and executive director of Youth Medical Mentorship; Tim Newton, executive director of Tulsa Dream Center; and Mikeal Vaughn, founder and executive director of Urban Coders Guild.

The award is a national honor that provides honorees with \$10,000 in unrestricted funds to support their social impact initiatives, along with enrollment in an advanced leadership enrichment program to expand their knowledge, influence, and networks.

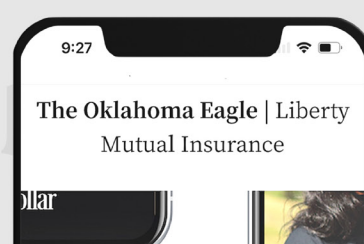
"BMe Vanguards come from all walks of life but share one authentic action-oriented love for humanity," said Trabian Shorters, co-founder and CEO of BMe Community.

The BMe Vanguard program brings inspiring and trusted Black leaders into a community that fosters their well-being, financial empowerment, collaboration, and positive social impact. BMe Vanguard honorees embody the #NextNarrative principle of defining people by their aspirations and contributions, rather than by their limitations or stigmas and are deeply dedicated builders of Black people and all people's freedoms to Live, Own, Vote, and Excel (L.O.V.E.).

Since its inception in 2013, BMe has given over \$4 million in angel grants, launching 260 social impact initiatives and supporting 160 more. On average, those initiatives raised 54 times BMe's angel investment and collectively serve millions of families across the United States. A total of 43 recipients were recognized in 2024.

Sponsors of the BMe Award are the McKnight Foundation, Ballmer Group, NBA Foundation, George Kaiser Family Foundation, and Interfaith America.

For more information, visit [www.bmecomunity.org](http://www.bmecomunity.org).





DANNY M. COHEN, Ph.D., is professor at the School of Education and Social Policy and the Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies at Northwestern University. PHOTO PROVIDED

## Interfaith Holocaust Commemoration To Address ‘Standing At The Threshold: Shaping The Future For Holocaust Education’

Dr. Jerry Goodwin  
The Oklahoma Eagle

The Tulsa Council for Holocaust Education invites the public to the 26th Annual Yom HaShoah: An Interfaith Holocaust Commemoration on May 9 at 7 p.m. at Congregation B’nai Emunah, 1719 S. Owasso Ave. This year’s theme is “Standing at the Threshold: Shaping the Future of Holocaust Education.”

Featured speaker Danny M. Cohen, Ph.D., a professor of instruction in the School of Education and Social Policy and the Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies, will address the topic “Talking With Ghosts: The Possible Futures of Holocaust Memory.”

Known as a learning scientist, education designer and fiction writer, Cohen specializes in Holocaust memory and the design of human rights education. He is the founder of Unsilence and the author of academic articles and works of fiction, including the short story “Dead Ends,” the choose-your-own-pathway mystery “The 19th Window” and the historical novel “Train,” which was selected as the inaugural text of the national Teacher Fellows Program of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

He is co-chair of the Illinois Holocaust and Genocide Commission. He was a faculty fellow of the Auschwitz Jewish Center and a member of the editorial advisory board of The Holocaust in History and Memory, an academic journal. A London native, Cohen is also a singer-songwriter and a member of the folk-rock band They Won’t Win.

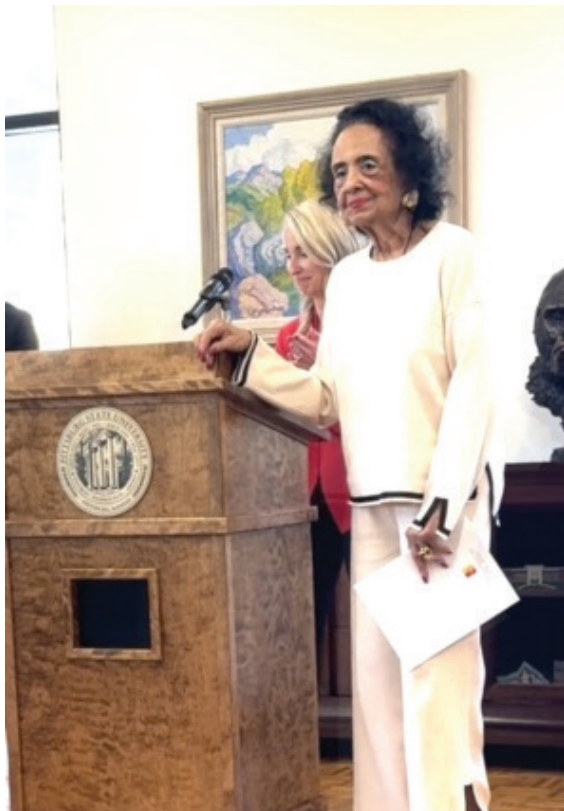
Following the commemoration, Cohen will sign copies of his book “Train,” which will be available for purchase at the event.

The commemoration program is free and recommended for ages 12 and older. Registration is required.

The Holocaust Commemoration is presented by the Tulsa Council for Holocaust Education of the Jewish Federation of Tulsa in partnership with the Tulsa City-County Library, The Sherwin Miller Museum of Jewish Art, Congregation B’nai Emunah and Temple Israel.

Visit [jewishtulsa.org/yomhashoah2024](http://jewishtulsa.org/yomhashoah2024) to register for the commemoration or for more details.

## Gilford Awarded Honor From Alumni Association



JO ANN GILFORD, receives Meritorious Achievement Award from Pittsburg State University Alumni Association. The award is the highest honor a graduate can receive from her alma mater. PHOTO PROVIDED

### She Receives Pittsburg State University’s Highest Graduate Award

Dr. Jerry Goodwin  
The Oklahoma Eagle

Jo Ann Gilford, a retired educator from Tulsa Public Schools, was recently recognized by her former university for career achievement.

Gilford received the highest honor given to a graduate from Pittsburg State University. She was awarded the Meritorious Achievement Award.

Candidates for the award have demonstrated substantial professional growth and advancement over an extended period. The candidates’ activities, including participation and leadership in civic and professional organizations at the local, state, and national levels, are also considered by the awards committee in selecting the recipients.

Gilford graduated from Pittsburg State College, the predecessor of the current university, with a bachelor’s degree in education in 1955. After graduating from

college, she built a resume in primary and secondary education.

The college said Gilford had a very long teaching and consulting career, but she was also a trailblazer beyond the classrooms. She taught in Iowa, Washington D.C., and Germany and was the first Black teacher hired by Burroughs Elementary School in Tulsa. At Burroughs, she began her advocacy for school desegregation, the abolishment of corporal punishment, and an emphasis on child literacy.

Outside the classroom, she served on numerous boards, including Tulsa Public Schools Board of Education, Metropolitan Tulsa Urban League, Greenwood Cultural Center, Tulsa Mental Health Association, and the Tulsa Arts and Humanities Council in addition to the National Education Association and many other organizations. Additional volunteer hours were dedicated to many children’s groups.

Other honors include National Teacher of the Year and induction into the Oklahoma African American Educators Hall of Fame.

Now 90 years of age, she has never really retired and continues to volunteer at a local elementary school and serves as a mentor for young teachers.

Gilford is the daughter of the late E. L. and Jeanne B. Goodwin, who are the founding publishers of The Oklahoma Eagle.

## Noted Author Presents New Book On Black Contribution To Country Music

Alice Randall – First Black Woman To Write A Number-One Song On The Country Charts



ALICE RANDALL, is author of ‘My Black Country: A Journey Through Country Music’s Black Past, Present, and Future.’ PHOTO PROVIDED

Dr. Jerry Goodwin  
The Oklahoma Eagle

Magic Books, Bob Dylan Center, and Woody Guthrie Center will co-present author and professor Alice Randall and her new book, “My Black Country: A Journey Through Country Music’s Black Past, Present, and Future.” The program is scheduled for May 29 at 6:30 p.m. at the Woody Guthrie Center, 122 Reconciliation Way.

A New York Times best-selling novelist, she offers in “My Black Country” a lyrical and introspective account of her galvanizing presence within the world of country music as she searches for the roots of Black creativity and influence within the historically segregated genre.

Randall, a graduate of Harvard University, is the first Black woman to write a number-one song on the Country charts. The song, “XXXs and OOs,” was performed by Trisha Yearwood. She also received honors for an American Country Music Award for Video of the Year with “Is There Life Out There?” starring Reba McEntire.

Randall, also an educator and food activist, will participate in a question-and-answer session, moderated by Magic City Books founder Jeff Martin, with the audience.

For admittance and tickets to the event, contact Woody Guthrie Center, (918) 574-2710. Randall’s website is <https://www.alicerandall.com/>

## Events

### April 2024

#### Apr. 19-25

Nowata Historical Society and Museum, 136 S. Oak St., will be hosting “Voices and Votes: Democracy in America” exhibition. From the Smithsonian’s Museum on Main Street, the exhibition explores the complex history of the nation, including The Revolution, Civil Rights, Suffrage, Elections, Protests, and the Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens. The project is touring the state beginning in Nowata. For more information, visit [www.okhumanities.org](http://www.okhumanities.org) or call (918) 273-1191.

#### Apr. 19

Greenwood Cultural Center hosts its Legacy Award Dinner at the GCC, 322 N. Greenwood Ave., 6:30 p.m., reception; 7 p.m., dinner. The program will honor Geoffrey M. Standing Bear, principal chief of the Osage Nation, and the Osage Nation. Alfie Woodard will serve as the honorary chair. For more information, call (918) 596-1020 or visit [www.greenwoodculturalcenter.com](http://www.greenwoodculturalcenter.com).

#### Apr. 19

Soaring Eagles Youth and Family Services and 100 Black Men of Tulsa presents “Rise Up Young Men! – Third Annual Teen Summit” at the Tulsa Dream Center, 200 W. 46th St., from 9 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Free admission for seventh to 12th graders. For more information, contact [info@soaringeaglesyfs.org](mailto:info@soaringeaglesyfs.org) or call (918) 739-8336.

#### Apr. 19

“Let’s Talk Credit Workshop” will be conducted by Ashley Townsend, vice president and community manager for Chase Bank, 6140 S. Lewis Ave., 1 p.m. – 2 p.m. The free workshop will provide tips, tools, and resources to help one to improve his/her credit score. Space is limited. To RSVP, contact [jpmc.eventscld.com/300030675](mailto:jpmc.eventscld.com/300030675).

#### Apr. 20

Fentanyl Crisis (and other harmful stimulants) Awareness Workshop will be held at Ambassador Christian Center, 3421 N. Delaware Ave., at 10 a.m. Jason Hall, a harm reduction specialist with the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, will present “Demonstration on how to use livesaving Naloxone (Narcan).” Co-sponsor of the program is New Beginnings Christian Church. For more information, call Carolyn Ingram at (918) 407-0234.

#### Apr. 21

“After Sherman” film will explore South Carolina’s Black inheritance and trauma focusing on the resilience of the Gullah Geechee culture. The guest discussant will be Akua Page, a Gullah Geechee historian and naturalist. The free admission program will be shown at Circle Cinema, 10 S. Lewis Ave., at 3:30 p.m. For more information, call (918) 585-3496.

#### Apr. 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).

#### Apr. 26

100 Black Men of Tulsa Annual Gala – 30th Anniversary is planned for the Greenwood Cultural Center, 322 N. Greenwood Ave., 7 p.m. For more information or tickets, see Eventbrite.

#### Apr. 26

The Links Incorporated is hosting “An Evening of Excellence – Awards Ceremony and Gala” at the Tulsa Country Club, 701 N. Union Ave., at 6 p.m. For more information, visit [www.tulsalinks.org](http://www.tulsalinks.org).

#### Apr. 27

Sisserou’s Restaurant celebrates its 10th anniversary with an event at Guthrie Green, 111 Reconciliation Way. The “Caribbean Carnival on The Green” is scheduled for 5 p.m. – 10 p.m. The event will be “bringing all the island vibes with authentic live music, art, dancing, shimmering costumes, and the finest Caribbean refreshments. Dive into the vibrant cultures of the West Indies” according to the organizers. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to A Pocket Full of Hope. For more information, contact (918) 576-6800.