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By JENNIFER PORTER GORE, WORD IN BLACK

NATION

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By RENATA WORD IN BLACK

SOCIAL

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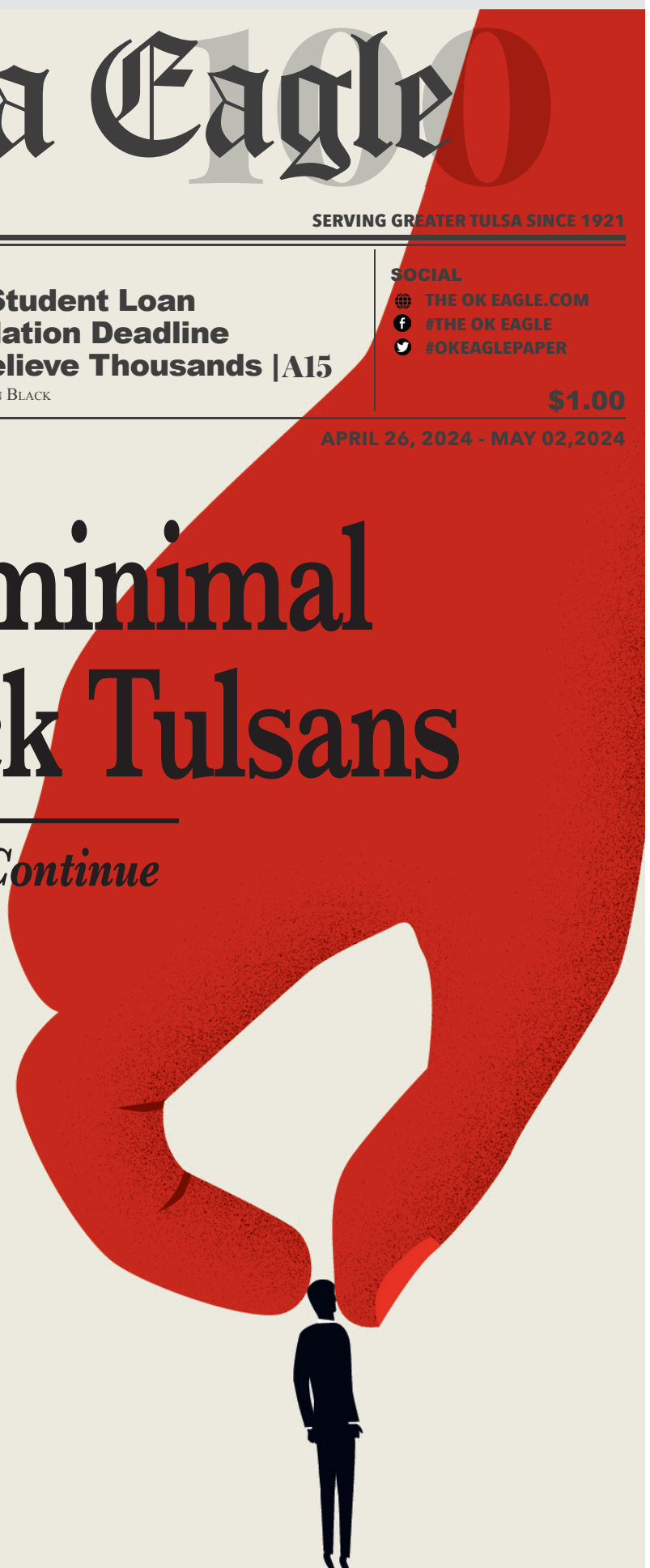
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PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Equality Indicators

Report Shows Minimal Progress For Black Tulsans

John Neal
The Oklahoma Eagle

The City of Tulsa has released its annual Equality Indicators report for 2023 revealing that the needle marking progress in opportunities and well-being for disadvantaged communities has hardly moved during the last six years of reporting. The Indicators reports measure equality disparities among populations across various themes and topics, assessed using more than fifty-four metrics. *The Oklahoma Eagle*, as it has each year, closely examines how racial and community disparities affect North Tulsans.

Cont. A3

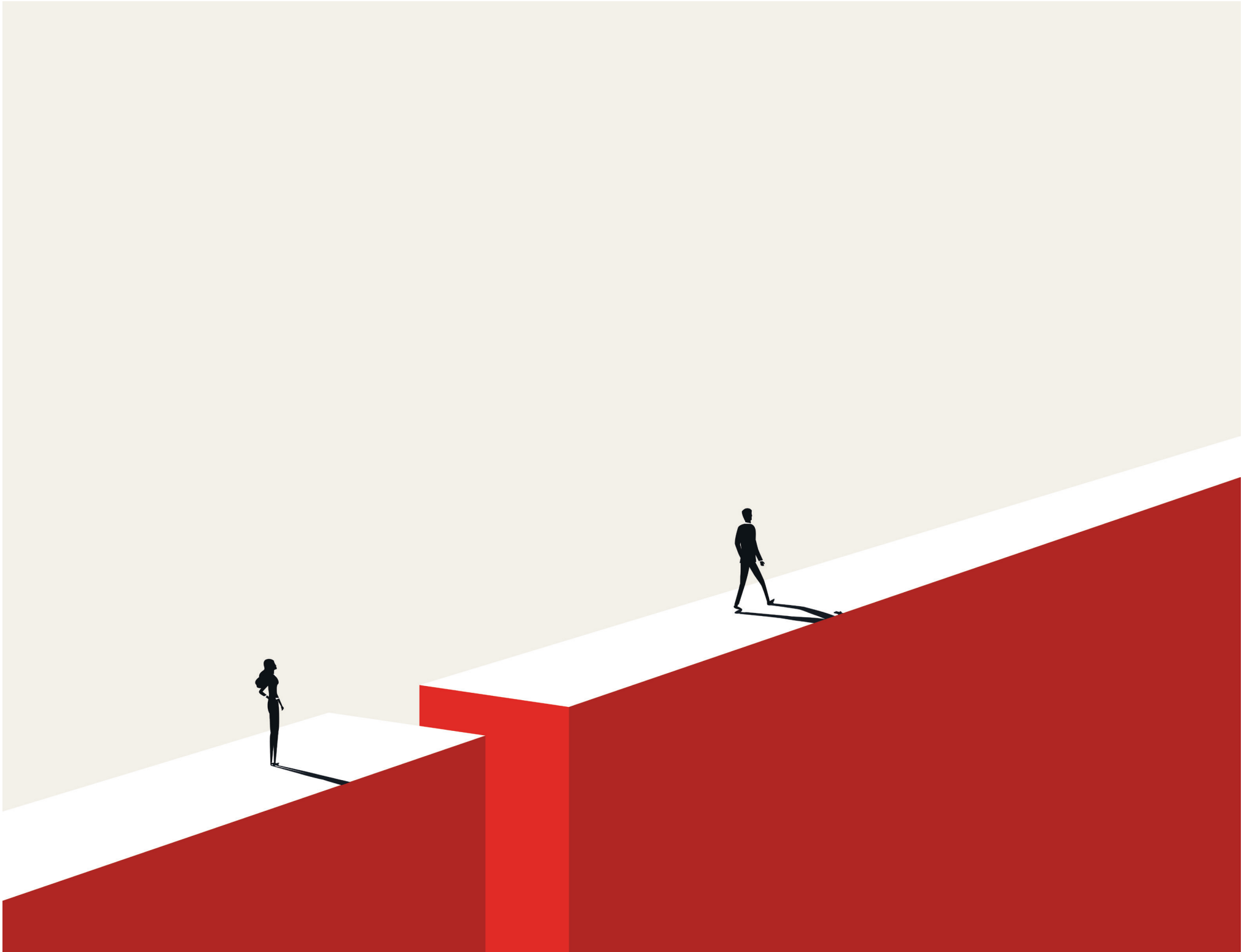


PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Equality Indicators

A clear representation of the stark disparities between racial and ethnic Tulsa communities

From A2

The Equality Indicators report was first used by Tulsa in 2018 to measure and close inequity gaps that thwart economic growth and social justice. The report focuses heavily on ethno-racial and geographic disparities but includes gender, educational attainment, veterans, disabilities, and many other factors that play a role in the city's equality assessment.

While the overall score for Tulsa reflected some modest improvement from 2018, the 2023 score of 42.37 is still below the midpoint on the equality index range of 1 to 100. On that scale, 100 represents equalities among all populations. Equally discouraging, the Justice and Service themes indicators declined over the last six years. The Mayor's Office of Resilience and Equity (MORE), under G.T. Bynum, released a statement noting, "This scoring suggests Tulsa may be improving in regard to equality on some of the 54 indicators."

Tulsa Mayor GT Bynum - The Equality Indicator's report as a tool for assessing, and eventually improving conditions for Black Tulsans.

Tulsa Equality Indicators

Tulsa Equality Indicators was initiated in 2017 by the City of Tulsa and the Community Service Council as a tool to measure and track disparities among subgroups of Tulsans over time. Six years of quantitative data are now available to inform our city and community leaders about inequalities in opportunities and outcomes, and to guide public policy and innovative solutions that will lead to greater equity for all Tulsans.



According to the arc of the reports issued over the past six years, however, the Bynum Administration has brought about little to no positive impact for Black Tulsans during his tenure. Bynum has served as Tulsa Mayor since 2016 and will be leaving office this year.

A closer analysis of the Equality Indicators report by *The Oklahoma Eagle* reveals information that may be incomplete or misleading, in a city deeply divided in equality, particularly between races and city communities. Readers can access the full report here: www.tulsaei.org

Black and White

The theme of Economic Opportunity is the first and most direct measure of the stark differences between specific racial and ethnic communities Tulsa. Black household annual income has ticked upward over the past few years, but at roughly \$40,000, it is still less than two-thirds the income of white households. They earn \$22,600 more on average. Half of Tulsa's Black households earn less than \$40,000 annually, plunging most of these into poverty or near poverty conditions that require state or federal financial program assistance.

Less access to a motor vehicle, lower-paying jobs and other inequalities contributed to the racial income disparity. Additionally, Black employment

rates fell compared to Whites over the six years. Black Tulsans were unemployed at almost three times the rate of their White counterparts in 2023. Whites outnumbered Blacks in business ownership rates at the other end of the financial opportunity spectrum. Consequently, home ownership for Black households also substantially lagged behind Whites, with only one-third of Tulsa Black-Americans residing in a home being purchased or owned in 2023.

The theme of "Justice" had the lowest score of all six themes in the 2023 report. The Justice theme score fell sharply from the baseline score in 2018. "This theme explores disparities in arrests, law enforcement workforce, officer use of force, and violence," the report said.

Among the most serious of the criminal justice disparities are much higher arrest rates of Black Tulsans compared to Whites. For Black Americans in Tulsa - youth and adults alike- arrest rates were more than 2.5 times that of Whites. During this same period, homicide victimization rates grew faster for Blacks than Whites, reaching five times the likelihood of being murdered in Tulsa if you are Black.

Separate and Unequal

The purpose of the Equality Indicators report is "to
Cont. A5

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

DEI programs *should* broaden access to higher education without limiting free speech, inquiry

James Davenport and Mark Griffin
NonDoc

In December, Gov. Kevin Stitt issued Executive Order 2023-31, which prohibits Oklahoma institutions of higher education from using state funds to "grant or support diversity, equity, and inclusion positions, departments, activities, procedures or programs to the extent they grant preferential treatment based on one person's particular race, color, sex, ethnicity, or national origin over another's." The order also required state colleges and universities to conduct a review of their diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs and activities to ensure they do not violate the executive order and to modify or eliminate them if they do. Institutions and agencies are also required to submit a report about their DEI programs by May 31.

Stitt's order followed an interim study by the Oklahoma Senate in which representatives from conservative public policy organizations

such as the Goldwater Institute and The Heritage Foundation provided information critical of DEI programs. Sen. Rob Standridge (R-Norman), who requested the study, had also authored multiple bills for the 2024 legislative session to eliminate DEI programs from the state's colleges and universities.

Critics responded that eliminating these programs threatens needed "safe and inclusive" spaces for "minority and marginalized communities on higher education campuses," amounts to an effort to "erase Native Americans from history," and risks future economic development in the state. The presidents of the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University issued statements referring to Stitt's action as a "step backwards" and affirming their "passion to do what's right." (OU went a step further, initially claiming the order was "eliminating" its DEI programs. Later, OU's president said its DEI programs would simply be rebranded.)

This debate forces us to address an important question: How can we ameliorate

past injustices without hampering academic freedom? As faculty members from two of our state's institutions of higher education, we believe we are in a unique position to offer some important insights on this topic.

Rectifying past discrimination

It should be no secret that Oklahoma has a history of legal discrimination against minorities. Senate Bill 1, the first piece of legislation introduced in the Oklahoma Senate, established racial segregation in public transportation. Similarly, a constitutional amendment instituting a "grandfather clause" was passed soon after statehood to limit voter eligibility among Black residents and prevent African American Rep. A.C. Hamlin (R-Logan County) from being reelected.

The state's history of discrimination can also be found in its institutions of higher education, where two civil rights cases opened up higher education to minorities and formed the foundation for the more famous case of

Brown v. Board of Education in 1954. Both Ada Lois Sipuel v. Board of Regents (1948) and McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents (1950) saw the U.S. Supreme Court strike down racial segregation in higher education programs in Oklahoma.

While the Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned legal discrimination in higher education, many recognized that merely eliminating the prior-existing restrictions would not sufficiently undo the past discrimination against racial, ethnic, religious and gender minorities. Affirmative action programs emerged in higher education to broaden access to historically discriminated-against groups.

At their best, DEI programs continue to expand educational opportunities to groups historically discriminated against by providing them the resources with which they can be successful in college. Critics of DEI programs would do well to recognize that the task of making our university campuses a true reflection of our diverse society is
Cont. A6

Second Street: OKC African American Business District

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



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

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

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

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

Deep Deuce existed as the place where it all happened for African Americans in Oklahoma City until the late 1950s. Ironically, many have viewed

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

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

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

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

Featured Last Week



COVID Learning Losses to Cost Students Billions in Lost Income



Oklahoma Foundation Supports Programs For TPS Pupils



Suicides Up Among Black Youths. Is Anyone Paying Attention?

The Oklahoma Eagle

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Equality Indicators

Education “Improvements” mask long-standing disparities

From A3

measure the extent of disparity over time between the most advantaged and most disadvantaged population groups.” Sometimes the advantages or disadvantages measured is a matter of where Tulsans live. The report strikingly reveals that among the five geographic regions identified within Tulsa, the most significant disparities in equality- resources, services, and consequences- is between North and South Tulsa.

The report also cites the new Neighborhood Conditions Index (NCI) study prepared by the City Planning Department in 2023. The NCI report provided granular community detail and was used by the Eagle in constructing a profile of the greater Greenwood residential area, hereafter “Greenwood,” within North Tulsa. <https://theokeagle.com/2023/11/15/many-black-neighborhoods-are-not-a-city-priority/>

The Equality Indicators (EI) report found that wages are much lower in North Tulsa compared to the south. It would have noted an even greater income disparity if it had taken a deeper dive into its NCI report. The median household income for Greenwood is approximately \$34,000, or \$15,000 less than the city-wide average. The same holds for most comparisons of North to South Tulsa, namely within the Greenwood area of North Tulsa equality disparities are even more significant than those in the south part of the city.

While the EI report finds that North Tulsa has twice the vacant housing units than the south, the Greenwood analysis done by the Eagle using NCI data found a more extensive housing problem. Among the findings were renters and homeowners becoming “cost-burdened,” spending 30% or more of their household income on housing costs. Collectively, the Greenwood area fell in the city’s bottom 25% (worse off) in the “Housing and Neighborhood” NCI data for all of Tulsa. This disparity adds financial pressure and food scarcity problems on low-income families, while much of North Tulsa remains a “food desert”. <https://theokeagle.com/2023/12/06/post-pandemic-food-insecurity-worsens-for-black-americans/>

The EI report documents

Indicator 29: Adult arrests by race						
Arrests: Black compared to White adults						
Report Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Equality Score	40	38	38	36	39	37
Comparison Group A: Number of arrests of Black adults per 1,000 Black adults	89.227	83.740	88.801	108.944	92.356	69.353
Comparison Group B: Number of arrests of White adults per 1,000 White adults	42.895	36.068	37.810	40.612	40.573	26.971
Ratio of Comparison Group A to Comparison Group B	2.080	2.322	2.349	2.683	2.276	2.571

The equality score for this indicator **decreased by 3** since 2018.



Black adults are arrested at a rate that is 2½ times the rate of White adults.

Note: As in previous Equality Indicators reports, the comparison of Blacks to Whites was intentionally selected to reflect the contemporary discourse surrounding this specific indicator.

Indicator 8: Median household income by race						
Median household income: White compared to Black households						
Report Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Equality Score	49	54	48	44	50	58
Comparison Group A: White median household income	\$51,053	\$51,744	\$55,448	\$58,948	\$57,566	\$62,411
Comparison Group B: Black median household income	\$28,399	\$30,902	\$30,463	\$30,864	\$32,701	\$39,779
Ratio of Comparison Group A to Comparison Group B	1.798	1.674	1.820	1.910	1.760	1.569

The equality score for this indicator **increased by 9** since 2018.



Median household income of White households is 57% greater than that of Black households in Tulsa.

extensively some of the consequences of these inequity shortfalls between North and South Tulsa, and Black and White Tulsans. They include greater cardiovascular disease, higher infant mortality rates, and shorter life expectancies. These spawn twice the ratio of emergency room visits in North Tulsa, where health care is sparse and becoming scarcer. <https://theokeagle.com/2024/03/30/after-the-closing-of-juno-medical-tulsa-whats-the-state-of-health-care-for-north-tulsa/>

Eagle Analysis

How is it that given the continued racial disparity for Black Tulsans, particularly in North Tulsa, the overall Equality Indicators score for Tulsa “improved”? To understand this phenomenon, *The Oklahoma*

Eagle staff took a deep dive into the data to examine the increase in the EI score for the Education Theme. The “Student Achievement Topic” within the Education Theme fell, primarily reflecting learning loss due to the pandemic. However, education scores overall showed the greatest improvement of any theme, with an increase of 12 points. Without that increase, the overall Tulsa Equality Indicator score would have fallen below scores for the last three years.

Growth in three indicators buoyed the Education Theme score. However, a close look at the “improved” scores reflects no improvement for the “disadvantaged” but rather a deterioration of scores among the historically “advantaged” group. The EI report for Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) education indicators

Indicator 28: Juvenile arrests by race						
Arrests: Black compared to White youths under 18						
Report Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Equality Score	39	35	35	28	39	37
Comparison Group A: Number of arrests of Black youths per 1,000 Black youths	26.721	26.174	21.583	25.535	17.562	12.489
Comparison Group B: Number of arrests of White youths per 1,000 White youths	11.975	9.198	7.809	6.533	7.777	4.991
Ratio of Comparison Group A to Comparison Group B	2.231	2.845	2.764	3.908	2.258	2.502

The equality score for this indicator **decreased by 2** since 2018.



Black youths are arrested at a rate that is 2½ times the rate of White youths.

Note: As in previous Equality Indicators reports, the comparison of Blacks to Whites was intentionally selected to reflect the contemporary discourse surrounding this specific indicator.

provides the following information, comparing 2018 to 2023:

1. Chronic absenteeism by race score “improved” by 58 points.

Discussion: Chronic absenteeism following the pandemic skyrocketed for all races to 45% or more. However, because it affected Asian TPS students (advantaged) proportionally more than Native Americans (disadvantaged) in this indicator, the score reflects meaningless “improvement.”

2. Dropping out of school by income level score “improved” by 41 points.

Discussion: In 2018, low-income TPS 12th-grade students dropped out of school 2.5 times more than high-income students. In 2023, high-income student dropout rates rose to a rate comparable to low-income students, while the low-income student rate remained essentially unchanged. Thus, the “improved” relative score.

3. Emergency teacher certification by geography “improved” by 19 points.

Discussion: Emergency certifications are temporarily granted to teachers who do not meet the standard teaching certification requirements. This indicator measurement compares the number of TPS emergency certifications per 1,000 students with other school districts in Tulsa County. While

the absolute number of emergency certifications per student grew dramatically for all school districts in the county, the growth rate was higher among non-TPS districts. Nevertheless, while more than tripling its reliance on teachers with emergency certifications over the same period,

TPS was awarded an “improved” score.

Without these three score indicators “improvements” in the Education category, the 2023 Equality Indicators score for the Education Theme would be below the 2018 rating. The Eagle found a similar flaw in some of the 2023 non-education indicators- where the disadvantaged did not perform better over time, but the score “improved.”

The Oklahoma Eagle analysis demonstrates most, if not all, of the purported improvement in the Tulsa Equality Indicators score for 2023 compared to the first report of 2018 is due to statistic quirks in the way scores are calculated. Abundant data in the report reflect inequality and injustice have continued unabated over the last six years for Tulsa. This is poignantly true for North Tulsans and Black Americans.

JOHN NEAL is a contributor to *The Oklahoma Eagle* who writes about education and social justice issues.



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Diversity, Equity & Inclusion



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Safetyism *noun* : a culture or belief system in which safety (which includes “emotional safety”) has become a sacred value, which means that people become unwilling to make trade-offs demanded by other practical and moral concerns.

Lukianoff, G and Haidt, J. (2018). *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure*. Penguin Books

From A3

still unfinished business and that intentional institutional efforts are still merited.

Enforcing ideological commitments

However, sometime in the 2010s, DEI programs began to go beyond this core mandate of outreach and support to marginalized communities, with some insisting upon enforcement of ideological commitments that are largely incompatible with the central mission of higher education: the pursuit of knowledge, and the freedom of speech and academic inquiry upon which that pursuit relies.

Recent episodes at Stanford Law School, Hamline University, and Harvard University — among many others — demonstrate a growing hostility to free speech and the freedom of academic inquiry that has emerged on college campuses. In addition, “bias response teams,” which have developed under DEI auspices at universities across the U.S. (see MIT, the University of Maryland, and Smith College as examples), have been active in encouraging students to report (often anonymously) any perceived comments by other students or faculty that they may find “offensive.” The offenders sometimes endure investigations without ever being told what they were investigated for and without the protections of due process. The imposition of “diversity” statements in faculty applications is another example of an attempt to enforce a specific way of thinking upon college faculty.

Oklahoma is not immune to this phenomenon. The 2018 case of Professor Brian McCall of the OU Law School stands as one of the more egregious examples. Branded “homophobic” and “sexist” by The OU Daily, McCall was forced out of his positions as associate dean for academic affairs and associate director of the OU Law Center for controversial passages in his 2014 book *To Build the City of God: Living as Catholics in a Secular Age*, which was aimed at an audience of fellow-traditionalist Catholics.

While we both may disagree with the sentiments expressed in McCall’s book, these beliefs alone provide no grounds for dismissal from administrative positions. They are views held by millions of traditionalist religious adherents, including Muslims and Orthodox Jews who also happen to be our fellow citizens. McCall lost those administrative positions despite an investigation into the matter finding “no evidence of workplace harassment or discrimination.” However, OU eventually settled a lawsuit filed by McCall over the matter. While it does not appear that OU’s DEI office was involved in the campaign against McCall, DEI offices across the nation have been associated with similar activities.

In their 2018 book, *The Coddling of the American Mind*, authors Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt coined the term “Safetyism” to describe the rationale that campus

administrators often use to restrict free speech. According to Lukianoff and Haidt, students have come to expect protection from opinions and ideas that make them feel “uncomfortable.” The authors also chronicle the emergence of an environment where words are considered violence and in which students feel justified using actual violence to stop a campus speech with which they disagree. Safetyism is a rationale that has been used to suppress speech coming from the left as well as the right (and center).

In the name of diversity and inclusion, viewpoint diversity sometimes has been squelched. This constriction of free-speech rights on college campuses is one that DEI supporters have been loath to acknowledge. However, the role some DEI administrators have played in the shrinking of academic freedom should be recognized and addressed.

How to move forward

How do we make our student bodies more diverse without compromising the values of free speech? We advocate an intentional, institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion, which is data-driven and which rejects zero-sum logic.

Harvard economist Roland Fryer argues DEI efforts should be based upon data rather than poorly-informed intuitions. Researchers such as Fryer and others are showing the way by applying the tools of social science to better understand what raw gaps in employment, educational achievement and income do and do not tell us about bias at both the individual and institutional levels.

Interestingly, data suggest either that DEI programs have no established impact on bias, that the impact is not long-lived, or that the impact is, in fact, negative. With the empirical work indicating that how we promote diversity and inclusivity is ineffective and possibly counterproductive, perhaps we should reevaluate what we are doing.

In addition, our efforts must get beyond the notion that we operate in a zero-sum environment. Broadening access to educational opportunities does not have to mean others are excluded from that opportunity. Opponents of DEI institutional efforts need to realize that we all benefit from the creativity and talent from others and should not feel threatened by efforts to recruit students from different socioeconomic backgrounds, racial and ethnic backgrounds and religious backgrounds. Having intelligent and intellectually curious students from all walks of life improves our campus environments and ultimately the societies those campuses serve.

However, universities and institutions that keep the DEI acronym should handle the term “equity” with care. The traditional understanding of equity considers it as providing disadvantaged groups the tools they need to succeed — a notion that merits broad support. However, the zero-sum context in which the term is too often understood



Senate Bill 1

Approved on December 18, 1907, Senate Bill One, also known as the coach law and to most as the state’s first Jim Crow law, easily sailed through Oklahoma’s first legislature. The bill provided that “every railway company, urban or suburban car company, street car or interurban car or railway company . . . shall provide separate coaches or compartments as hereinafter provided for the accommodation of the white and negro races, which separate coaches or cars shall be equal in all points of comfort and convenience.”

Brown v. Board of Education (1954)

In this milestone decision, the Supreme Court ruled that separating children in public schools on the basis of race was unconstitutional. It signaled the end of legalized racial segregation in the schools of the United States, overruling the “separate but equal” principle set forth in the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case.

and implemented presumes that for those same disadvantaged groups to be successful, those from other groups must lose or be prohibited from exercising their rights. Controversy over placing equity considerations above academic standards at the K-12 level and in higher education has received pushback, as such efforts may have actually harmed the very students they were intended to help. As interpreted by some, the principle of equity can become problematic if it presumes the only just outcomes are “equal outcomes.” And some proponents of equity presume any differences in group outcomes to be the result of bias. As Fryer argues in the article referenced above, this is both

“

At their best, DEI programs continue to expand educational opportunities to groups historically discriminated against by providing them the resources with which they can be successful in college.

anti-science and counterproductive.

Finally, we also endorse Harvard Professor of psychology Steven Pinker’s recommendations for protecting academic freedom and the Heterodox Academy’s values of open inquiry, viewpoint diversity and constructive disagreement (called the HxA Way). Ultimately, we do not believe the goals of diversity and inclusion are incompatible with free speech or protections for academic inquiry. In fact, rather than sacrificing one to the other, we must recognize that these goals can and should be mutual.

JAMES DAVENPORT is the Associate Dean for Social Sciences at Rose State College and a member of the political science faculty. He was named the Oklahoma Political Science Association’s Teacher of the Year in 2021.

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PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Class sizes increasing

OKCPS class sizes *increasing* as pandemic funds expire, board approves big bond agreement

Bennett Brinkman
NonDoc

Class sizes for Oklahoma City Public Schools are set to increase next school year as the district spends the last of its pandemic-era stimulus money. While the development has been anticipated for years, it has added stress at district sites where an unknown number of teachers are being notified their positions will not be renewed for the 2024-2025 school year.

"I don't necessarily have the numbers off the top of my head, but the important thing to remember is that every year we go through some contract non-renewals with non-continuing contract teachers," OKCPS deputy superintendent Jason Brown said Monday night.

Discussed at the OKCPS board's March 11 meeting and again mentioned during Monday night's meeting, the end of federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund support will mean fewer educators in district schools next fall.

"We had different strategies that we were using with the ESSER funds. One of the strategies (was) to address what we at the time called unfinished learning — we knew that there was this kind of learning gap that had occurred because of COVID," deputy superintendent Jason Brown told NonDoc on Monday. "One of the strategies that we invested quite a bit of money on is we thought, during this pandemic, if we can get class sizes down as low as possible (...) teachers would have a better opportunity to connect more intimately with each individual student."

Provided by the federal government in three tranches starting in 2020, the ESSER funding was meant to help school districts across the country as students stayed home during shelter-in-place periods and virtual schooling. Program stipulations require districts to encumber all ESSER funds by Sept. 30 or pay the money back. OKCPS has pledged to encumber all of the funds by June 30, the end of Oklahoma's fiscal year.

When that happens, Brown explained that the smaller class sizes OKCPS has enjoyed over the last few years will go back to 2018 and 2019 levels.

"That's the plan that our CFO is working on," Brown told the board March 11. "How do we — without those federal stimulus dollars — continue to get the good results that we got by some of the investments that we made. In some cases, it's a transfer of funds. In some cases, it's making some tough decisions."

During his March 11 presentation, Brown said one of those "tough decisions" involved phasing out "premium staffing" allowed by the additional money.

"We've been preparing — and our principals have been preparing — knowing that those ratios would increase year after year — getting us back to normal staffing ratios, and so next year we'll be back to normal, non-ESSER-inflated staffing ratios," Brown said. "So there will be a difference when you walk into a classroom. It'll take us back to pre-pandemic numbers, which are normal in a sense, but if you've been a principal or a teacher in the last four years, then those numbers are higher — a lot higher — than what you're used to seeing."

After Monday night's marathon board meeting that saw a decision bond project spending and new limitations on how outgoing Superintendent Sean McDaniel can spend money or making hiring decisions, Chairwoman Paula Lewis said the district has been prepared for the looming class size increase.

"Our priority is finding a superintendent right now," Lewis said. "We knew ESSER (funding) was temporary."

'A whiplash to go back to larger numbers'

OKCPS director of communications Crystal Raymond said no teachers were paid with ESSER funds. Brown told NonDoc on Monday evening class sizes could increase because of non-renewal of adjunct teacher contracts and other, non-tenured or less qualified teachers.

"What our goal is, and hope is, is that as we're not renewing employment with some, it is those teachers that we really had to get qualified through adjunct or emergency that we won't necessarily be continuing with, in some cases," Brown said. "Now, some worked out really well, and honestly, we're still going to need emergency-certified

teachers, and probably still a few adjuncts. Hopefully, we'll need fewer of those."

Brown said he thought teachers and students noticed a significant difference in learning during the period of lower class sizes, but he said the district had been preparing for a return to pre-pandemic staffing levels since last year.

"Knowing that it was going to feel like somewhat of a whiplash to go back to larger numbers, last year, we kind of incrementally raised [class sizes]," Brown said. "This year, when we [announced] staffing numbers that were equivalent of what we did prior to the COVID — I mean, we're talking about three, four years of really good numbers — it felt like whiplash to people."

To that end, an OKCPS chart showing the district's average class sizes for the last seven school years and projected averages for next year depicts across-the-board class size increases.

Pre-K class sizes are projected to increase from 20 to 22 students for the first time since 2016. Kindergarten classes are projected to increase from 22 students to 26. Similarly, first and second grade classes are expected to increase from 22 to 28 students, and third and fourth grade classes are expected to increase from 25 to 29 students.

Middle school teachers who handle multiple sections in the same subject areas are projected to take on 15 more students, from 125 to 140. High school teachers are projected to take on 155 students, an increase of 10.

In all, class sizes are projected to return to levels attained during Pathways to Greatness, a process implemented by the district in from 2018 to 2020 to reallocate district resources that lead to a number of district improvements, including smaller class sizes and multiple classes of the same grade at elementary schools.

Board member: Larger OKCPS class sizes 'not sustainable'

One new OKCPS board member voiced concerns regarding the loss of teachers and higher class sizes before she was elected to office.

Jessica Cifuentes was elected April 2 and sworn onto the



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Class sizes increasing

Board member warns: Increases in OKCPS class sizes “Not Sustainable”

From A7

OKCPS board Monday. In a March 29 interview, she said she planned to advocate for retaining as many teachers as possible.

“They’re going to cut more teachers, and not only that, that’s going to create more work for the teachers that are already there. That’s not sustainable, and it saddens me that our students are going through this,” Cifuentes said. “I think that our students need more support.”

During the March 11 meeting, Brown’s explanation of the increased OKCPS class sizes drew little discussion from other board members, although Vice Chairwoman Lori Bowman seemed accepting of the situation.

“I (...) appreciate the candor about starting to prepare and talk openly about the changes that families and our staff will see next year just with the realities of the funding stopping,” Bowman said. “I think that’s important for our families to know and our staff to be prepared for.”

The district is also preparing for the unknowns of future enrollment numbers, as OKCPS has faced declining enrollment in recent years. Although the district’s student population was slightly higher this year compared to last year, its average daily membership is down nearly 3,000 students compared to FY 2020.

OKCPS board approves \$500 million lease-purchase agreement

As OKCPS faces the end of pandemic relief funding, the district is also preparing to spend more than half a billion dollars of bond money.

At the board’s Monday night meeting, members held a lengthy discussion about using a lease-purchase agreement to spend up to \$500 million of bond money faster than if the district relied only on general obligation bonds, which are subject to an issuance cap of 10 percent of the district’s taxable property.

“Although Lewis, the board’s chairwoman, expressed concern about the transparency surrounding the agenda item and urged other board members to table the vote to take it up at a later date and give community members a ‘chance to process it,’ she ultimately voted for the lease-purchase agreement.”

Board members approved the lease-purchase agreement with the Oklahoma Industries Authority after an hour-long discussion where concerns were voiced about timing and transparency. The OIA is a public trust that will be able to charge up to 5.5 percent interest in the leasehold agreements on new and renovated OKCPS school sites.

Board members approved the convoluted and potentially controversial financing arrangement unanimously, and they were told Monday that the interest rate is expected to begin at 5 percent.

Brown, the district’s deputy superintendent who filled in for outgoing Superintendent Sean McDaniel on Monday, pitched the idea in his comments to the board as an obligation to the voters who approved the bond in November 2022.

“The goal is to take advantage of the general obligation that the voters passed, the \$955 million, do a lease-purchase (arrangement) and fulfill our campaign promise where we can actually open buildings in August of 2026 like we told voters we would,” Brown said.

Although Lewis, the board’s chairwoman, expressed concern about the transparency surrounding the agenda item and urged other board members to table the vote to take it up at a later date and give community members a “chance to process it,” she ultimately voted for the lease-purchase agreement.

“(The) \$500 million is more than 50 percent of the bond, and it’s the first time we’re bringing it out to talk about it,” Lewis said.

Lewis was not the only person questioning transparency surrounding the bond. During the public comments section of the meeting, citizen oversight committee member Shawntay Alexander gave an emotional speech decrying a lack of information and the committee’s

apparent “rubber stamp” role in implementing the massive bond projects.

“Post-passage, the committee’s oversight was immediately limited, raising concerns about the bond’s transparency. We were notified by the district that rather than overseeing the entire \$955 million bond expenditure, we would only be provided fragmented updates,” Alexander said. “These updates will solely pertain to the district’s self-reported timeliness and adherence to the budget for campaign projects, effectively eliminating any meaningful oversight for hundreds of millions of dollars.”

Lewis said after the meeting that she believed OKCPS voters “are getting the information they want.”

“We can always do better on transparency,” she said. “There’s never ever going to be a time that we couldn’t do something better on transparency, because we’re a huge district. I don’t think anything nefarious has happened.”

Board members also lowered the superintendent’s spending limit and instituted hiring limitations that will remain in place until McDaniel’s replacement is hired.

McDaniel was absent from Monday’s meeting because he received an award as one of the Journal Record’s Most Admired CEOs at an event that took place at the same time as the meeting.

“Since we are putting news out there that we are going to have increased class sizes because of things, it also shows that the board’s saying, ‘Let’s look at everything. Let’s let a new superintendent get in here and look at everything and decide where money should go — whether it be into classrooms or into a director spot, wherever that may be,’” Lewis said.

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.

Graduation Requirements

Education Watch: Bill Would Revamp Oklahoma’s Graduation Requirements



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Jennifer Palmer
Oklahoma Watch

Rep. Rhonda Baker, R-Yukon, wants to update the state’s high school graduation requirements, giving students more flexibility to choose courses that align with their career goals.

House Bill 3278 would make a few big changes to what courses students must take to earn a diploma.

First, students would have to complete four years of math, upping the current requirement by one year. Two of the credits would need to be algebra 1 and either geometry or algebra 2. The bill grants more flexibility to what counts for the other two math credits, including through real world application courses.

Oklahoma would join 20 states and the District of Columbia that require at least four years of math, according to the Education Commission of the States.

Additionally, students would need to complete six credits in subjects that align with their Individual Career and Academic Plan, which is each student’s guide to what they want to achieve after high school. These classes

could be in core subjects or world languages, computer technology, Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps, fine arts, or other approved courses.

One year of fine arts would no longer be required. Two years of world language and physical education would be strongly encouraged, but also not required.

Baker, a former classroom teacher, said the plan increases the relevance of students’ ICAP but still gives students flexibility when their post-high school goals change.

Under the current version of the bill, the total number of credits required for graduation remains at 23. Students would still need four years of English, three years of lab science and three years of history.

The House overwhelmingly passed the bill in March. This week, the Senate Education Committee approved the measure and it’s now eligible to be heard by the full Senate.

Current high school students would not be affected. If signed into law, the new requirements would start with students entering 8th grade in the 2025-26 school year.



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Oklahoma Task Force

‘A patchwork of systems’: One Oklahoma Task Force *talks fees, funding and challenges*

Tres Savage
NonDoc

Six weeks after proposing a potential revision and update to the 2005 Master Deputation Agreement between state and tribal law enforcement agencies, members of the One Oklahoma Task Force instead decided this morning to pursue sub-arrangements under the existing agreement.

In doing so, the gathered leaders of state law enforcement agencies discussed adverse impacts faced by the state owing to complicated differences in adjudication systems, including how fees are and are not collected and remitted following arrests of tribal citizens within Indian Country reservation boundaries.

Deputy Attorney General Justin Wolf said he and his colleagues reviewed the Master Deputation Agreement following the task force’s March 11 meeting.

“At the end of that review, frankly, we believe the challenges outweigh the benefits of working from that document or from trying to edit or otherwise rework the Master Deputization Agreement of 2005,” Wolf said. “It’s been in place and active and signed off on by most parties. So broadly speaking, we believe the better solution would be to work sub-agreements off of that Master Deputization Agreement.”

As conversation ensued over how to standardize state-tribal arrangements on topics like jail contracts, bond schedules, juvenile offender processes, warrant checks and fee remittances, task force members said “boundaries” for agreements would be valuable.

“I would certainly propose toward the recommendations that [we try to create] a universal, consistent technology that works with all 77 county courts and our detention facilities (...) and the (tribal) entities as well,”

The amount of fees no longer secured by Oklahoma Highway Patrol troopers who write tickets and make arrests in Indian Country has been estimated to be about \$2.5 million annually.

said Chairwoman Tricia Everest, who serves as Gov. Kevin Stitt’s secretary of public safety.

Stitt created the task force in December after an altercation inside the Okmulgee County Jail between county detention officers and Muscogee Nation Lighthorse police who were attempting to book a non-tribal drug possession suspect under their authority as cross-commissioned officers for the Grand River Dam Authority’s police force. The Muscogee Nation filed a criminal charge against one jailer, GRDA suspended its cross-commission of Lighthorse officers, and Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond asked a federal court to invalidate the tribe’s charge against the jailer because he is not a tribal citizen. That case is pending.

“There is going to be a lot of value if we can get all 77 counties involved,” said John Weber, third vice president for the Oklahoma State Fraternal Order of Police. “However, I think you guys know a lot of the issues at hand.”

About 30 minutes later, one of those issues drew significant discussion: how arrest and adjudication fees typically paid by offenders to the state are handled for tribal citizens arrested by state law enforcement in eastern Oklahoma.

Marcus Williams, assistant director of the Council on Law Enforcement Education and Training, said CLEET estimates it is no longer receiving about \$1.6 million annually in fees that would have been remitted to the agency by tribal citizens prior to the 2020 landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision in *McGirt v. Oklahoma*.

The decision affirmed the existence of the Muscogee Nation Reservation, and subsequent decisions by the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals have affirmed reservations for the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Seminole, Quapaw, Ottawa and Peoria nations. Tribal citizens arrested within Indian Country reservations can only be prosecuted by tribal

courts or the federal government.

“We’re looking at it from a perspective of fees,” Williams said. “Currently, we have so many different agencies that are doing their own interlocal agreements on citations or whatever the case might be, that \$10 they are supposed to collect and send to CLEET, sometimes the tribal entities they are giving the money back to — whether it’s the sheriff or to the municipalities — so I do think the tribal entities are trying to do what they’re supposed to do, but now from where it left the state to go to tribal entities and they gifted it back to the state, that’s where we’re kind of having the hang-up of, ‘Are we receiving the appropriate dollars we are supposed to?’”

Cherokee County District Attorney Jack Thorp, who praised tribes’ working relationships with his office at the March 11 meeting, said the fee issue should be addressed.

“That’s something that has got to be figured out,” Thorp said.

Williams said the issue affects the Department of Public Safety and the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, as well as his agency.

“CLEET is a small agency, so it greatly affects us,” Williams said. “We didn’t understand this until we started to dig into it, but this is far beyond a traffic ticket. This is every criminal offense that is charged (against a tribal citizen in Indian Country).”

DPS Commissioner Tim Tipton said the amount of fees no longer secured by Oklahoma Highway Patrol troopers who write tickets and make arrests in Indian Country has been estimated to be about \$2.5 million annually.

“I don’t know if there are any state agencies that have any agreements with any tribes to collect that (fee schedule),” Tipton said. “We’ve had tribes tell us, ‘Hey, we’re holding back the state revenue that that would generate,’ but we haven’t even discussed it with them from the

Cont. A10

Oklahoma Task Force

Complicated differences in adjudication systems and myriad agreements with state agencies *create challenges*

From A9

aspect of that (being) in statute. That doesn't just go to DPS. A trooper stops somebody and writes them a ticket, there are very few citations that any revenue comes back (to us) for small specific areas. But to me, that would be circumventing what the Legislature has set up in the whole bonding schedule as to where all that money is divided up amongst all these retirement funds and the indigent defense fund and all this stuff."

Williams agreed, referencing OSBI's laboratory fees and other types of fees. He said CLEET's total budget is about \$10 million.

"It's a lot of shortfalls happening because of that," he said. "For us, it's almost a \$1.6 million loss in fees. (...) That's a very significant amount of money for CLEET."

OSBI director Aungela Spurlock said she mentioned the lost fee revenue during her agency's budget hearing with the Senate earlier this year.

"It's something we have been tracking. So we looked at four years pre-McGirt and four years post-McGirt to find an average of what our fee collection is," Spurlock said. "The Senate had recommended some replacement funds, so I think they're starting to understand the significance of the impact of the fees on some of our agencies."

Indeed, the Senate's OSBI appropriation proposal includes \$1.25 million in "replacement funds for McGirt," among other line items for the agency. The House spreadsheet, however, is about \$27.8 million lower than the Senate's proposal, and that specific line item is not included. Neither chamber has proposed funding specific to the fee issue for either CLEET or DPS.

Luttrell: Tribal leaders 'are interested in what we're finding'

The Oklahoma Legislature has two members on the One Oklahoma Task Force, which Stitt ordered to produce its report of policy recommendations by June 1. Sen. Jessica Garvin (R-Marlow) and Rep. Ken Luttrell (R-Ponca City) both attended Monday's meeting, with Luttrell relaying feedback about the March 11 meeting from tribal leaders, who collectively have chosen not to accept a pair of seats at the table proposed in Stitt's executive order.

"The tribes I have visited with have been very interested with what we are doing here with the task force. Their concern is (...) that we are going to start again from ground zero, which scares the tribal leaders that I've spoken with," Luttrell said. "There are feelings that have been expressed to me that they feel like this task force is going to be productive. They have chosen not to come and sit in the room, but I can assure you they are interested in what we're finding and what we're looking at."

The chosen absence of tribal leaders has left Luttrell, a Cherokee citizen and co-chairman of the Legislature's Native American Caucus, in the position of speaking about tribal governments without speaking on their behalf.

"I think many of the tribal leaders felt like there was just going to be a witch hunt and pointing fingers at the tribes and telling the tribes they need to get along and they need to follow protocol or whatever," he said. "So I am encouraged that you guys came up with (the idea) that we could come up with sub-agreements and add to what is there. That's going to be a lot easier for the tribal leaders to digest."

After the meeting, Luttrell said a clear picture of where the money is flowing and where it is supposed to go statutorily should be sketched out.

"It's concerning, especially when those state agencies have to come to the Legislature looking for what would basically be a supplement, because they're not receiving their funds," Luttrell said. "Part of my concern is where those funds are ending up. Are they being kept by the city and county governments? Are the tribes keeping them? Where's the breakdown? Is it something that we need to fix in the Legislature?"



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

“I think many of the tribal leaders felt like there was just going to be a witch hunt and pointing fingers at the tribes and telling the tribes they need to get along and they need to follow protocol or whatever.”

REP. KEN LUTTRELL (R-Ponca City), a Cherokee citizen and co-chairman of the Legislature's Native American Caucus

Luttrell noted that the Cherokee Nation has numerous agreements with counties and municipalities to remit fees back to those governments, minus a small processing fee. However, he pointed to one municipality as an interesting example of a community not wanting to sign new agreements.

"It was enlightening to me that one of the municipalities — Sallisaw, in particular — their city council would not sign a memorandum of understanding to have those fines — traffic fines, whatever they were — reimbursed to them," Luttrell said. "It scared their [city council] to enter an agreement with Cherokee Nation, and they've had law enforcement cooperation with them for 30 years. But the fines scared them. So they don't have a fee reimbursement agreement with Cherokee Nation from Sallisaw."

Garvin said the task force has a lot to consider based on the day's discussion.

"It's obviously a very complex issue, because while we want to ensure that the fees and fines that are supposed to be going to the state agencies are going there, we have to look at it from the other perspective where our counties and municipalities are really struggling for funding as well," Garvin said. "And so you're basically robbing Peter to pay Paul, and statutorily we have an obligation to be giving those funds to those specific agencies."

Tipton, the DPS commissioner, said after the meeting that each sovereign tribal government with an affirmed Indian Country reservation "looks at this differently."

"Of course, we have tribes like the Chickasaws or Choctaws that are very engaged with us, and we work with them daily. So it varies. It's not just Oklahoma government and how they're working with tribal governments, it's Oklahoma with all these variety of

sovereign government entities and what level of resources they have, what their partnerships look like. A 'patchwork' would be the right term (...) because it's all applied differently from tribe to tribe."

Tipton, who said his son's first job in law enforcement was as a Chickasaw Lighthorse officer, said coordinating technology and systems could make things safer for law enforcement and the public. For instance, he said, even OHP troopers cross-commissioned by a tribe can have trouble trying to check whether a tribal citizen has an active arrest warrant issued by a tribal court.

"It's such a patchwork of systems and clarity of how they apply laws in their particular sovereign reservation area, and so I think that's one of the main things for this task force to do," Tipton said. "I mean, McGirt is McGirt. It's the law of the land. So in a post-McGirt Oklahoma, how do we make this as least cumbersome and as least confusing and as safe for every police officer in the state? Not just troopers and deputies and municipal (officers), but for tribal officers. I want it to be safe for them, too, to be able to do their job. So how do we fix this and work together to get consistency across eastern Oklahoma especially?"

WILLIAM W. SAVAGE III (TRES) has served as the editor in chief of NonDoc since the publication launched in September 2015. He holds a journalism degree from the University of Oklahoma and covered two sessions of the Oklahoma Legislature for eCapitol.net before working in health care for six years. He is a nationally certified Mental Health First Aid instructor.

Education Budget

Education Watch: What's in the House and Senate Budgets for Education?

Jennifer Palmer
Oklahoma Watch

The Oklahoma House of Representatives on Tuesday released an online dashboard for the public to compare each chamber's budget proposal and agency requests. Each allocates more than \$3.8 billion for the state Department of Education.

House Speaker Charles McCall, who is pushing for a quarter-percent personal income tax cut, proposed a mostly flat budget for education.

"The historic education funding that was injected into public education last year, you'll find that reoccurring in this budget," McCall said.

The Senate plan includes a \$100 million boost to fund stipends for school support personnel, plus \$2.65 million to pay student teachers. The

state began paying student teachers in 2021-22 using federal COVID-19 relief dollars, but those funds are set to expire.

Neither chamber's proposal dedicates funding for Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters' Back to Basics plan. Walters proposed spending a combined \$16 million on that plan, which included paid tutoring, bonuses for teachers whose students demonstrate growth and a screener, an online reading assessment program.

The Department of Education in February began requesting bids for a statewide reading screener, estimated to cost \$4.5 million, even though the Legislature has not agreed to fund it.

Negotiations continue with the governor until they agree on a final budget for the state. The budget transparency portal is linked on the homepage of the House website. Questions, comments, story ideas? Please reach out via email or direct message. □



MEAGAN COLE (right) gives her resume to Human Resources Specialist Cheryl Rodgers at the Mustang Public Schools job fair April 11, 2024. PHOTO TED STREULI/OKLAHOMA WATCH

Teacher Pay Raises

Last Year's Teacher Pay Raise *Hasn't Slowed* Resignations — Yet

Jennifer Palmer
Oklahoma Watch

Teacher turnover hit its highest point since the pandemic last school year, when more than 6,000 Oklahoma public school teachers left the classroom.

The crush of school departures occurred even as the state implemented the largest salary increase for educators since 2018 at \$3,000 to \$6,000 per teacher, depending on experience.

“There’s no question: overall, there continues to be a serious crisis,” said Chris Tobler, director of human resources for Mustang Public Schools, the state’s 11th largest district.

According to an analysis of certified teacher data from the Oklahoma Department of Education:

- 6,065 classroom teachers employed in 2022-23 did not return this year. That’s nearly 14% of the total teaching workforce.
- Nearly 1,000 of those who left were in their first year of teaching. Almost half had five or fewer years of experience.
- The number and percentage of teachers who left increased each year since 2019-20, when the coronavirus pandemic began.

Oklahoma’s teacher shortage dates back more than a decade. The number of educators leaving the profession has increased, while enrollment in Oklahoma colleges of education declined 86%

between 2008 and 2021, the most of any state, an analysis by Penn State found. Once a stopgap measure, staffing classrooms with emergency certified teachers, who have a bachelor’s degree but lack formal training in teaching, is now routine.

COVID-19 upended education and continues to have a negative effect on students’ academic performance, emotional well-being and behavior. That makes it harder to teach. In a recent survey, 77% of teachers said their job is frequently stressful and 68% said it’s overwhelming; just over half, 53%, described their job as enjoyable, according to survey data from the Pew Research Center, a source of data and analysis.

The most common reason for dissatisfaction was pay, according to the survey, with only 15% of teachers reporting they are extremely or very satisfied with their salary.

Increases in the minimum salaries for Oklahoma educators went into effect this school year, raising the average salary for a classroom teacher to more than \$61,000. That is helping with retention and recruitment, human resources managers at several Oklahoma school districts said.

Human resources directors at both Mustang and Edmond Public Schools said the number of resignations they are seeing at this point in the school year are down from where they would be normally.

But the candidate pool to fill those positions is still very shallow.

“It’s a struggle,” said Randy Decker, executive director of human resources for Edmond Public Schools.

The legislature has made some big improvements in teacher salaries, he said, but the economy has eaten away a lot of the gains. Salaries need to be a continued, long-term focus, he said.

Bartlesville Public Schools, 45 miles north of Tulsa, had 69 teaching positions to fill the past two years, up from about 50 to 60 in the years before the pandemic, said Granger Meador, the district’s executive director of technology and communications.

“We are grateful that the legislature has been investing in boosting teacher salaries in the past few years,” he said. “Otherwise, we would be back to where we were before 2018, with many teachers taking off for better-paying positions in Kansas, Texas, etc.”

Still, there are other challenges. There’s the state’s total spending per student, which is lower than most states. That means teachers have fewer resources, like small class sizes, counseling, and other supports.

And one in five Oklahoma children lives in poverty, above the national average. Poverty has a negative effect on students’ ability to learn and can impair brain growth and functioning, studies have found.

In addition to better salaries, improving teachers’ working conditions help solve educator shortages, according to the National Education Association. Some of the legislature’s initiatives, like maternity leave and the additional school funding approved for this school year, could help with that.

Tobler, in Mustang, said they are working extra hard to make teachers feel supported.

“The emotional, mental and physical

well-being of our teachers and the support of our teachers is the number one priority right now in Mustang Public Schools, after students, which are always our top priority,” he said.

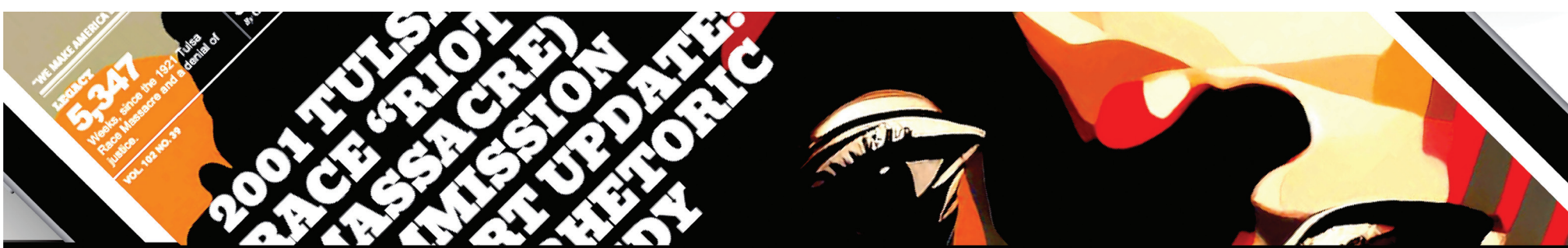
One initiative positively affecting the pipeline of educators is the Inspire to Teach program, passed by the legislature in 2022, said Goldie Thompson, the associate vice chancellor for teacher preparation and special programs at the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education.

Currently, 4,500 students participate in Inspired to Teach, which awards students pursuing a teaching degree \$1,000 to \$2,500 per year, then stipends of \$4,000 per year in their first five years teaching in an Oklahoma public school.

Colleges have seen 10% growth in students in teacher prep programs, Thompson said, and fewer students are leaving the programs before completion. Those types of reward programs, coupled with salary improvements and additional supports for teachers, are what’s needed to end the shortage. But that takes time, she said.

“Whenever you’ve had a decline that started years prior, it’s not going to be a silver bullet to reverse that trend overnight,” Thompson said.

JENNIFER PALMER has been a reporter with Oklahoma Watch since 2016 and covers education. Contact her at (405) 761-0093 or jpalm@oklahomawatch.org. Follow her on Twitter @jpalmerOKC.



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SOLICITATION FOR BIDS (BID NOTICE)

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

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,
Construction & Properties
Department

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APRIL 30 STUDENT LOAN CONSOLIDATION
DEADLINE COULD RELIEVE THOUSANDS | A15

TRAINED IN RITES OF PASSAGE, NOW
THEY'RE TRAINING BLACK MALE YOUTH | A14

Black Amputation Rates Are High

Knowing Your Risk Can Lower It.



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Black Amputation Rates

Everyone knows diabetes, high blood pressure and smoking are health hazards, but few know they could lead to peripheral artery disease.

A Fight For Awareness

Jennifer Porter Gore
Word In Black

It's a common cardiovascular disease that leads to some 400 amputations performed each day in the United States. It is a serious medical condition, prevalent in the Black community, that can also lead to stroke, heart attacks and, in some cases, death.

Yet a recent survey has found that while millions of Americans have cardiovascular disease or diabetes, very few are aware of peripheral artery disease, and even fewer have ever had a discussion about it with a medical professional.

PAD causes blockage in the vessels that carry blood from the heart to the legs and affects more than 12 million Americans. Leading risk factors for PAD are the common chronic health conditions that disproportionately impact underserved communities.

"These new insights are particularly concerning among those most at risk and come at a time when a staggering 1 in 20 Americans over 50 years of age experience PAD," said Dr. George D. Dangas, president of the Society for Cardiovascular Angiography & Interventions, and a professor at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City.

The PAD Pulse Alliance Survey, which came out in February, polled 2,000 Americans to learn about their level of awareness of disease symptoms, risk factors, and overall doctor-patient communications around PAD. The survey included responses from 1,000 Black people and Hispanics, which is important given that both populations are at a higher risk of developing PAD and related complications.

The facts tell the story.

Nearly 70% of Americans are not familiar with PAD and its risks.

- Nearly all of the survey respondents (91%) would dismiss limb pain as just part of getting older. But leg pain when walking that stops with rest is one of the first symptoms of PAD.
- Over half (53%) of respondents would wait more than a week with ongoing leg pain before calling their doctor.
- Nearly eight in 10 Black and Hispanic patients never had a doctor or healthcare provider talk with them about PAD.
- Despite 71% of Black adults having one or more risk factors for PAD or knowing someone with one or more risk factors,

Cont. A15

Mentoring Black Male Youth

Trained in Rites of Passage, Now They're Training Black Male Youth

The Baltimore Rites of Passage Initiative has been hard at work raising up a cohort of 16 men who will, in turn, mentor Black male youth ages 11-13.

Rev. Dorothy S. Boulware
Word In Black

It's no secret that America has long promoted a narrative of inferiority about Black boys and men. It's a steady drip of poison that parents, caregivers, and community members have to counteract vigilantly. And that's where rites of passage programs — rituals that transition a person from an old way of being and thinking to a new, more mature, and advanced state — make a difference.

Indeed, in Baltimore, the Baltimore Rites of Passage Initiative has been hard at work

Cont. A15

Black Amputation Rates

Disproportionate Rates



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

From A14

65% report they are at little to no risk at all for developing PAD.

- Three-quarters of Hispanic adults have one or more risk factors for PAD or know someone with one or more risk factors but 70% think they are not at risk for developing PAD.

The survey “confirms what we feared: millions don’t have the tools they need to help start a conversation with their healthcare providers because patients are unaware of their risks and the common signs and symptoms,” Dangas added.

The top three risk factors for PAD are diabetes, high blood pressure, and use of tobacco products — health risks that occur in the Black community at disproportionately high rates compared to whites. Current or former smokers make up 80% of PAD patients. People with diabetes are three to four times more likely to suffer from the disease than the general population and 35% to 55% of people with PAD also have high blood pressure.

Other studies show that higher concentrations of PAD occur in communities that also suffer from high stress and deprivation, which is

also common in many underserved Black communities. Exacerbating the issue: little or no access to nutritious food options and areas to exercise also play an important role.

“We believe that exposure to more distressed circumstances and more access-to-care barriers increases your risk of getting the disease and also getting detected later for the disease,” says Dr. Kim G. Smolderen, an associate professor of medicine and psychiatry at Yale University School of Medicine. “There is a lot of unawareness that is still happening not only in the general public, but also in the medical community that needs to be addressed.”

“The disturbing variations in PAD prevalence, treatments and outcomes underscore another perilous consequence of the health equity gap in managing chronic conditions,” said Foluso Fakorede, MD, CEO of Cardiovascular Solutions of Central Mississippi, co-chair of the Association of Black Cardiologists PAD Initiative. “It’s critical to increase awareness among racial and ethnically marginalized communities and the providers who serve to close the gap.”

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

Student Loan Consolidation

April 30 Student Loan Consolidation Deadline Could Relieve Thousands



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Renata Sago
Word In Black

After decades of what it calls “historical failures in administering student loans,” the U.S. Department of Education is providing relief to college graduates navigating the volatile economy.

Borrowers with multiple federal student loans, such as Perkins Loans, Parent Plus Loans, and Federal Family Education Loans, have until April 30 to apply for consolidation. The process requires applicants to select an income-driven repayment plan, which could, in some situations, lead to total loan cancellation.

“Many people went to school, borrowed to get higher degrees to enter those fields, and don’t make a lot of money,” says Jill DesJean, Senior Policy Analyst at the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators.

The application asks when borrowers originally took out their student loans and how much money they make each month. DesJean says borrowers in certain professions might qualify for public service loan forgiveness.

Debt Disparity

The path after college is often wrought with competition, persistence, and all types of debt. An analysis last year found that Black and African American college graduates had an average of \$52,000 in student loan debt and that four years after college, Black students owe an average of 188% more than white students borrowed.

The federal consolidation program is intended, in part, to improve the tracking of federal loan repayments. Borrowers are supposed to be eligible for complete forgiveness — or cancellation — after a certain amount of time.

“The Department was identifying a lot of instances where students were saying, ‘Hey, I have been in repayment for 20 years or 25 years or more, and when I call my servicer, they don’t have a record of all of my payments,’” DesJeans says. “It’s a necessary thing to fix.”

Today, there are 43 million Americans with federal student loans. Borrowers ages 35-49 hold the most debt. We’ve seen the stagnating effects of outstanding education loans. It affects major career decisions, such as what industry to work in and for how long — and the timing of

traditional milestones, such as settling down to start a family. Debt influences social well-being before borrowers even receive their degrees.

The Mental and Financial Toll

A study published in 2023 found that Black students who took out loans experienced “guilt, sadness, and fatigue,” in addition to stress from coursework expectations and post-graduation goals. Another study published in 2021 found that Black female HBCU students worried significantly about their debt while on campus.

Over the years, student loan repayment has been a contentious topic, with policymakers advocating for a range of solutions — from requiring lower rates on federal and private student loans to canceling a certain amount of debt per borrower.

Student loan debt has been an aggravator of the racial wealth gap, placing financial strain on Black borrowers who are experiencing other racial disparities, such as lower wages compared to their racial or ethnic counterparts. An analysis in 2020 of the racial wage gap found that Black workers often needed more education to out-earn white workers.

Dr. Sonia Lewis, CEO of The Student Loan Doctor, works with Black clients who have master’s or doctoral degrees — some with debt between \$50,000 and \$90,000.

“I have to be so calm and neutral,” says Dr. Lewis, “Because there’s a lot of shame around student loan debt. When we talk to them, I never ask why. I just go into solutions.”

Some of her clients are looking at taking out more loans to support their children or long-term goals. Dr. Lewis wants to see loan forgiveness policies that focus on how much someone is able to borrow in a certain amount of time.

“Just because you forgave somebody’s student loan debt doesn’t mean you helped them with the mindset around money and money management,” she cautions.

While federal student loans are not the only option for Black borrowers to pursue education, these loans often offer greater relief than private lenders whose rates, when unregulated, risk being predatory.

The Biden-Harris administration has canceled an estimated \$153 billion in loans so far through various programs. This student loan consolidation program is expected to help more than 900,000 borrowers. □

Mentoring Black Male Youth

Addressing mental health, suicide prevention, anger management, & decision-making

From A14

raising up a cohort of 16 men who will, in turn, mentor Black male youth ages 11-13.

BROPI is an innovative, multigenerational model, which empowers Black men to embrace positive masculinity and expand their capacity to engage with adolescent Black male youth effectively. The program aims to bolster the ranks of highly skilled Black men equipped to address the pressing challenges confronting Black male youth.

“We’ll talk to them about who we are, about our African connections and traditions, and about how these ties and traditions became severed during slavery,” says David Miller, the co-leader of the program.

Miller is a Baltimore native and activist with a doctorate from Morgan State University’s Department of Social Work. He “dedicates his life to fighting against the economic and social deprivation that communities of color face,” according to the program’s website, and “leads

intergenerational conversations with men and boys about essential topics like managing anger, mental health, and alternatives to violence.”

At an event on April 13, the initiative, in partnership with MENTOR Maryland/DC, honored the hard work of these 16 men, along with family members and community leaders. These 16 men spent six months being trained in every aspect of life — physical, mental, and spiritual — to be mentors and examples.

The men, ranging in age from 24 to 60 and coming from various youth-serving organizations across the city, immersed themselves in sessions focusing on redefining manhood, combating toxic masculinity, delving into African/African American history and culture, and adopting African-centered best practices for engaging Black male youth.

Their program of preparation also addressed mental health needs, suicide prevention, anger management, and decision-making.

Beginning in June, these men will guide 30 boys through up to 14 weeks of a youth Rites of

Passage process — and not only the boys, but their entire families must be involved to make the process completely effective.

“This rites of passage process has not only enabled me to become a better man but has also equipped me with invaluable tools to enhance my role as a clinician providing mental health services to Black men and boys in Baltimore City,” Bobby Marvin Holmes, a licensed social worker, tells Word In Black.

“I am eager to complete this journey and commence my work with youth over the summer.”

Miller says this is the only program of its kind. “Baltimore is the only city that has a dedicated youth fund. We received a multiyear grant from the Baltimore City Children and Youth Fund, along with additional backing from the United Way of Central Maryland, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Elev8, Keys Development, and the YMCA of Central Maryland.”

And, this program will be evaluated by an outside firm to measure and confirm its success.

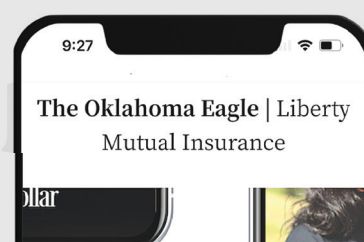


PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

The Oklahoma Eagle

Our Mission

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



Tulsa Public Schools Graduation Dates

Dr. Jerry Goodwin
The Oklahoma Eagle

Tulsa Public Schools has announced its Class of 2024 graduation schedule.

Date	Time	School	Location
May 14	3:00 p.m.	Street School	Will Rogers Methodist Church, 1138 S. Yale Ave.
	5:30 p.m.	North Star Academy	Will Rogers High School, 3909 E. 5th St.
May 15	5:30 p.m.	East Central	University of Tulsa Reynolds Center, 3208 E. 8th St.
	8:00 p.m.	Booker T. Washington	University of Tulsa Reynolds Center, 3208 E. 8th St.
May 16	5:30 p.m.	Will Rogers College	University of Tulsa Reynolds Center, 3208 E. 8th St.
	8:00 p.m.	Edison Preparatory	University of Tulsa Reynolds Center, 3208 E. 8th St.
May 17	5:00 p.m.	Webster	Carbondale Church, 2135 W. 51st St.
	8:00 p.m.	Nathan Hale	Expo Pavilion, 4145 E. 21st St.
May 18	10:00 a.m.	Tulsa MET, Phoenix Rising, and Tulsa Virtual Academy	Expo Pavilion, 4145 E. 21st St.
	12:00 p.m.	Memorial	Expo Pavilion, 4145 E. 21st St.
	3:00 p.m.	Central	Expo Pavilion, 4145 E. 21st St.
	5:30 p.m.	McLain	Expo Pavilion, 4145 E. 21st St.

SOURCE: TULSA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Hall Honored As OU Outstanding Alumni

Dr. Jerry Goodwin
The Oklahoma Eagle



MELVIN HALL, ESQ., is a shareholder with Riggs, Abney, Turpen, Orbison, and Lewis law firm with offices in Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Englewood, Colo. PHOTO BY LABORIE

The University of Oklahoma College of Law recently recognized outstanding alumni who distinguished themselves through their leadership and service in the legal profession.

Melvin Hall, Esq., was one of five individuals honored by the Order of the Owl Hall of Fame. Since its inception in 2011, the Order of the Owl has inducted 37 deserving OU Law alumni.

"This year continues the law school's tradition of honoring several of its most respected alumni," said Katherine Guzman, dean of the OU College of Law. "Our honorees embody OU Law's mission: to educate lawyers and leaders whose lives change ours for the better. We could not be more proud of the varied ways in which their work has had a profoundly positive impact for our state, our nation and our profession..."

After an eight-year public service career with the Cleveland County District Attorney's Office (1980-1983) and as executive director of the Oklahoma Human Rights Commission (1983-1987), Hall joined the Riggs, Abney, Neal, Turpen, Orbison, and Lewis law firm on Jan. 1, 1988.

Hall has focused his practice on civil litigation of matters relating to employment law, business and commercial law, and civil rights law.

In addition to his law practice, Hall is a nationally sought-after speaker and lecturer on employment law and civil

rights issues.

He is currently an adjunct professor at OU, teaching classes on employment law and the civil rights movement. He presented at the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education conference in New Orleans in 2018.

Hall has served on numerous boards and commissions, including a seven-year term as an OU Regent from 1992 through 1999. Currently, he serves on the LegalShield Board of Directors and the Arvest Bank Board of Directors. At OU, he serves on the Executive Committee of the Southwest Center for Human Relations Studies, the Women's and Gender Studies Board of Advocates, and OU Law's Board of Visitors and Oklahoma Innocence Project Advisory Board.

Other Order of the Owl honorees were Jari Askins, former lieutenant governor of the State of Oklahoma; Terence Kern, chief judge for the Northern District of Oklahoma; Clark Musser, oil and gas attorney and recipient of the Eugene Kuntz Award; and Natalie Shirley, chair of the University of Oklahoma Board of Regents.

Additionally, Reagan Bradford, partner in the law firm of Bradford and Wilson, received the Order of the Parliamentarian. This award is given to a recent OU law school graduate for distinguished accomplishments in the first 20 years of the graduate's legal career.

Marks-Jimerson To Perform At Chautauqua In Lawton, June 18-22

Dr. Jerry Goodwin
The Oklahoma Eagle

The Lawton Public Library is sponsoring the 2024 Lawton Chautauqua featuring nationally prominent scholars who will represent portrayals of historical characters, June 18-22. This year's theme is "Lift Every Voice: 60 Years Since the Civil Rights Act." All events are free and open to the public.

In addition to the evening performances from 7 p.m. – 8:30 p.m., the library will be hosting a couple of workshops each day from 10 a.m. – 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. – 3 p.m. The workshop titles are listed on the library's website listed at the end of the article.

The theme for this year's program is to celebrate the fight for rights and equality.

According to the Lawton Public Library, "Our nation's benchmark civil rights legislation and one of the crowning achievements of the civil rights movement, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, forbade segregation in public spaces and banned employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin."

The 2024 Chautauqua will feature five historical characters who figured prominently in the Civil Rights Movement in the 20th century, presented by highly recognized Chautauqua scholars: The Chautauqua movement promoted adult education in the late 19th and early

June 18, Tuesday	Chief Justice Earl Warren CHAUTAQUA SCHOLAR: DOUG MISHLER
June 19, Wednesday	Rosa Parks CHAUTAQUA SCHOLAR: VANESSA ADAMS-HARRIS
June 20, Thursday	Lady Bird Johnson CHAUTAQUA SCHOLAR: LESLIE GODDARD
June 21, Friday	Justice Thurgood Marshall CHAUTAQUA SCHOLAR: DR. JAMES HOLMES ARMISTEAD
June 22, Saturday	Coretta Scott-King CHAUTAQUA SCHOLAR: REBECCA MARIE JIMERSON

20th centuries. The programs bring history to life with in-character and first-person portrayals through performances, workshops, and discussions. A question-and-answer session is an opportunity for the audience to engage the character and scholar.

The program will be held at the Albert Johnson Sr. Conference Center, 91 NE Maine St., in Lawton.

For more information, visit <https://www.lawtonok.gov/departments/library/events/chautauqua>, or call (580) 581-3450 or send an email to libraryhelp@lawtonok.gov

Events

Apr. / May 2024

Apr. 26 - May 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 or call (918) 273-1191.

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.

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.

Rescheduled for Aug. 3 because of inclement weather on April 27

Apr. 29 - 30

Phillips Theological Seminary, 901 N. Mingo Rd., will be hosting "Halim Flowers – Something New, Black Birds (2121)" exhibition on April 29 at 5:30 p.m. Flowers' art features paintings exclusively created for this event. It is a collection of 21 original paintings inspired by the painter's research of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. On April 30 at 6:30 p.m., a reception will be held at Greenwood Rising followed by a discussion with Flowers. The exhibit will be available for the public to see through July 14 at Phillips. For more information, see Art Exhibitions at Phillips Theological Seminary or call (918) 610-8303.

May 04

Tulsa Symphony is hosting the Flint Family Foundation Concert Series. It is a series of concerts around town, including St. Aidan's Episcopal Church, 4045 N. Cincinnati Ave., at 11 a.m. The concert series is related to music from recognizable movies. The movie-themed selections for the "Winds" instrument performances will be from "Colors of the Wind" ("Pocahontas"), "How Far I'll Go" ("Moana"), "Neverland" ("The Story of Peter Pan") in poetry and music (with narration), "Peter and the Wolf" (with narration), and "Under the Sea" ("The Little Mermaid"). For more information, visit <https://www.tulsasymphony.org/flint/>.

May 05

Morning Star Baptist Church, 1014 E. Pine St., will host its Ninth Pastoral Appreciation Celebration for Pastor Dr. Rodney Goss and Lady Veronica Goss at 10 a.m. Guest speaker will be Elder Noah R. Williams Jr., pastor of St. Peter's Primitive Baptist Church, Neptune, N. J. For more information, call (918) 582-8668 or msbc@tulsacoxmail.com.

May 07

Author Hannibal B. Johnson will present his newest book, "10 Ways We Can Advance Social Justice: Without Destroying Each Other" at the Greenwood Cultural Center, 322 N. Greenwood Ave., at 7 p.m. For more information, visit <https://www.hannibalbjohnson.com/>.