



TULSA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

EQUITY CHARACTER EXCELLENCE TEAM JOY

June 8, 2023

State Superintendent Ryan Walters
Oliver Hodge Building
2500 North Lincoln Boulevard
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

State Superintendent Walters,

I am confident that you and I have a number of education priorities about which we agree. We are both advocates for fair access and choice to obtain a great education and are aware of the need to improve the Oklahoma teacher pipeline. I believe we also agree that public education should be accountable and high-quality and that parents are our primary partners in educating students. We both understand the importance of learning to read and the necessity for educators to teach using the science of reading.

However, when it comes to your use of the term "Oklahoma values," it seems that we differ. When asked what you consider to be "Oklahoma values," the Tulsa World reported that your spokesperson directed them to the legislative hearing at the beginning of May. During that meeting, you shared a number of topics that I too value such as transparency, age-appropriate books, and results for students. However, you also made inflammatory declarations about Oklahoma teachers and numerous unproductive claims about our schools. These descriptions are completely inconsistent with everything I know and have experienced in Oklahoma public education as a student and as an educator. These are not Oklahoma values.

Like you, I grew up in Oklahoma. I was raised with values such as hard work, honesty, kindness, compassion, and service. In addition to my personal values, I share the five core values of Tulsa Public Schools: equity, character, excellence, team, and joy. Equity is our most closely held value. At its simplest, equity is about fairness. In all my time in Oklahoma, I've always known us to be a state that believes in the principle of fairness. These are what come to mind for me when I think of Oklahoma values.

Your description of "diversity, equity, and inclusion" is also dramatically different from anything I recognize in Oklahoma or Oklahomans. Despite these differences of definition and perspective, we have strived to be responsive to the requirements set forth by you and the State Board of Education on April 27, 2023. You will find our district's "DEI Report" attached to this letter.

To prepare our response, our team conducted a search of the following areas using the terms "diversity, equity, and inclusion" and "DEI":

- employee titles
- professional development
- financial system
- library system

- board agendas

Based on these searches, in the 2022-2023 school year, Tulsa Public Schools spent \$0.

I have enclosed a copy of the one book in our school library system that was identified using the search terms “diversity, equity, and inclusion” and “DEI.” Marley Dias Gets It Done: And So Can You! was written by a 13-year old African American girl. We have four copies of this inspiring book in our library system purchased between 2018 and 2020. I am sharing it with you because it illustrates Tulsa Public School’s definition of diversity, equity, and inclusion more fully than this letter and accompanying report ever could.

Marley Dias teaches us to give each other a chance and to build connections. I hope you see that I am willing and ready to work with you with that spirit in mind. Ms. Dias also encourages us to, “...do something about anything that doesn’t feel right to you.” So, I would be remiss not to point out that there are many things about which you and I strongly disagree and many ways in which I believe change is needed in order for us to truly support Oklahoma children.

Let me share more about Tulsa Public Schools. Our district is *diverse*. We serve 34,000 students, 78% are students of color and 80% are economically disadvantaged. Our students speak 70 world languages, represent 50 Native American tribes, and more than one-third are multilingual. Tulsa Public Schools is made up of children and adults who are diverse in religion, culture, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender identity, income, family values, learning differences, political opinions, beliefs, and so much more.

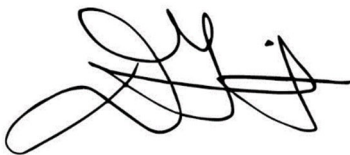
As I shared, *equity* is our district’s most closely-held core value. Equity is about fairness and giving every student what they need, when they need it. It is simple to say, but challenging to achieve; each day, we rededicate ourselves to this worthy goal.

Inclusion is about ensuring that every student in our schools and every adult who serves them feels known, seen, heard, and valued. We want them to be safe and to know that they belong in our school communities. They are loved.

You and I agree that every student in our schools should know that they are special and “are capable of great things.” I also believe that we both seek a free society in which every child, regardless of their identity or the circumstances of their birth, is equipped and empowered with the knowledge, skills, and resources to make Oklahoma the top state in the nation.

Team Tulsa and I invite you to lock arms with us and share the privilege and the weight of this responsibility.

With hope and clear-eyed courage,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Deborah A. Gist', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Deborah A. Gist, EdD
Superintendent
Tulsa Public Schools



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DATE: June 8, 2023

TO: Oklahoma State Board of Education

FROM: Dr. Deborah Gist, Superintendent, Tulsa Public Schools

SUBJECT: Special report pertaining to "DEI" Spending

CC: Tulsa Public Schools Board of Education

I submit this information in response to the April 27, 2023 State Board of Education requirement that Oklahoma school districts submit a special report related to "DEI."

1. A list of all "DEI"-related expenditures made by Tulsa Public Schools during the 2022-2023 school year
 - a. Staff: \$0.
 - b. Materials: \$0
 - c. Third party contractors or vendors: \$0

2. For each of those three subcategories, the list should further separately indicate the amount of state or local funds, the amount of federal funds, and the amount of private funds involved in the expenditure.

Not applicable in Tulsa Public Schools

3. For the final report, the list should include an indication of whether each separate expenditure is expected to continue in the next fiscal year.

Not applicable in Tulsa Public Schools

4. A list of all personnel spending at least 25% of their time operating or assisting with a "DEI" program in the school district during the 2022-2023 school year

Not applicable in Tulsa Public Schools

5. An electronic copy of all materials used by school staff or third-party contractors for "DEI" instruction in the school district during the 2022-2023 school year.

Not applicable in Tulsa Public Schools