



GENTNER DRUMMOND
ATTORNEY GENERAL

February 12, 2025

Via Email

Ryan Deatherage
Michael Tinney
Chris VanDenhende
c/o Amy London, Chief Executive Secretary
Amy.london@sde.ok.gov

Dear Messrs. Deatherage, Tinney & VanDenhende:

Congratulations on your appointment to the State Board of Education. Your leadership is sorely needed due to the yearslong “political drama” and mismanagement we have been subjected to by Governor Kevin Stitt and his personally chosen Superintendent of Public Instruction, Ryan Walters.

I am hopeful that you realize your duty is to the People of Oklahoma, not to any politician or his personal agenda. While I welcome the Governor’s apparent “shake-up” of the Board, this action is only necessary because of Governor Stitt’s extremely poor judgement in appointing, promoting, and then endorsing Ryan Walters and his anti-public schools agenda. As a new Board Member, you must act independently of Governor Stitt and Superintendent Walters. The oath of office you take is to the Constitution and Oklahoma law.

The State Board of Education possesses broad constitutional and statutory powers to shepherd Oklahoma’s public school system. Article XIII, section 5 of the Oklahoma Constitution gives to the State Board of Education the power of “supervision of instruction.” Yet, the Superintendent is just one member of the Board. His or her policy views are his or her own; he or she does not control the Board. This independence from the Superintendent and Department entitles you to view proposals from Superintendent and Department of Education with curiosity and reasonable skepticism and to exercise your own independent judgment.


As you assume this new responsibility, I wish to call your attention to certain areas of concern for me and my office.

Under the leadership of Governor Stitt and Superintendent Walters, public education has greatly suffered, as the following examples unequivocally demonstrate:

- Unacceptable educational performance outcomes. In 2024, according to the Nation's Report Card (NAEP), Oklahoma ranked 47th in fourth-grade reading and 48th in eighth-grade reading, with 23% of fourth-graders and 20% of eighth-graders in Oklahoma reading proficiently. For math, Oklahoma ranked 44th and 45th for fourth and eighth grade, with 31% and 17% proficient, respectively;
- Failed administration of \$50 million for school security grants authorized by the Legislature to protect Oklahoma's schoolchildren;
- Illegal denial of access for elected Oklahoma lawmakers to attend executive sessions despite clear legal authority under Open Meeting Act;
- Obstinate refusal to administer inhalers for Oklahoma public schoolchildren despite explicit legislative authorization;
- Poor to zero transparency under the Open Records Act, with numerous complaints necessitating this office's engagement to force disclosure of public records and openness in government;
- Pervasive waste and mismanagement of millions of dollars in public funds for education; and
- Irresponsible and misguided denial of legislatively-authorized maternity leave for teachers.

Consistent with his track record described above, Superintendent Walters also possesses an honesty gap in view of his own expectations for student performance on state-administered tests, having quietly lowered the student performance bar in 2024.¹ The Superintendent's watered-down approach further undermines the integrity of Oklahoma's educational assessments, which the Governor's previous appointees green-lighted. This approach permitted students to score lower while still being considered proficient.²

I encourage you to be a strong and independent voice serving our schools and students—not Governor Stitt or Superintendent Walters. I will not hesitate to take appropriate action if you fail the people of our state.

Respectfully

GENTNER DRUMMOND
Attorney General

¹ <https://oklahomavoice.com/2025/01/29/as-oklahoma-test-scores-languish-lawmakers-question-walters-bible-citizenship-check-policies/#:~:text=Oklahoma%20ranks%20toward%20the%20bottom,graders%2045th%20for%20math%20proficiency.>

² [https://oklahomavoice.com/2024/11/22/oklahoma-education-officials-have-undermined-the-integrity-of-the-student-testing-system/.](https://oklahomavoice.com/2024/11/22/oklahoma-education-officials-have-undermined-the-integrity-of-the-student-testing-system/)