



TULSA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

EQUITY CHARACTER EXCELLENCE TEAM JOY

October 24, 2018

Dear Councilors,

While we remain grateful for the City of Tulsa's continued partnership in creating the world-class school system our families deserve, we write today because we are deeply concerned about the proposed school truancy ordinance that is expected to be considered by the Tulsa City Council.

We appreciate the time, energy, and effort that the Truancy Task Force has put into developing and refining the proposed ordinance, and Tulsa Public Schools well understands the urgency of the issue at hand. In the 2017-2018 school year, 11,000 of our students were chronically absent, missing 10% or more of the school year. With attendance closely correlated to academic performance and high school dropout rates, we are working diligently to improve student attendance by engaging with our parents and families, leveraging the support and expertise of local and national partners, and improving the experience that children have in our schools so that they will want to be there. We welcome the City of Tulsa's continued partnership in this work - one great example is the many city employees who volunteer as Reading Partners, creating vital relationships between students and caring adults that help kids stay in school.

Tulsa Public Schools has made a firm commitment to leading with equity, which means taking a hard look at the experiences that our students of color have in our schools and communities. In our district, even as we work to improve outcomes, we continue to see significant disproportionality in the experiences of our most marginalized communities:

- African American students are 1.25 times more likely to be chronically absent than their white peers;
- The chronic absenteeism rate for economically disadvantaged students is 31%, compared to 17% of their non-disadvantaged peers; and
- More than one out of every three African American and Native American students are chronically absent.

We have much work to do on behalf of all of our students, and while we welcome support from the City of Tulsa, this ordinance will disproportionately target both our economically disadvantaged families and our families of color.

DESTINATION EXCELLENCE

3027 SOUTH NEW HAVEN AVENUE | TULSA, OKLAHOMA 74114

918.746.6800 | www.tulsaschools.org

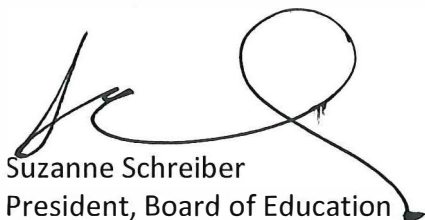
Even with the intent of providing a therapeutic court setting, the proposed ordinance creates a new entry point into the criminal justice system for our most vulnerable children and families. With Oklahoma topping the country for our rate of female incarceration, many of our children come from single parent families. Our children come from homes where one or more family members may be struggling with mental illness. For many families we serve, \$250 can mean the difference between making the rent and being evicted. An ordinance that creates this level of monetary penalty would exacerbate family instability, creating conditions where students are more likely to miss school. An ordinance that has the potential to increase negative interactions between young people and law enforcement could be a tragedy in the making.

We all share a commitment to a brighter future for all Tulsans and to supporting those children and families who have traditionally been at best marginalized and at worst disregarded and disenfranchised. We all know that our beloved city has a long way to go to begin to unravel and resolve centuries of systemic racism, and an ordinance that reinforces racial and socioeconomic disparities is a step in the wrong direction. We ask that the Tulsa City Council put this ordinance on hold and take further time to work with Tulsa-area school districts, community organizations, and other key stakeholders to develop a shared approach using restorative practices and leveraging positive relationships to support our families and keep students on track to success in college, careers, and life.

Best regards,



Deborah A Gist
Superintendent



Suzanne Schreiber
President, Board of Education



Cindy Decker
Vice President, Board of Education