

FACULTY SENATE
The University of Oklahoma
Norman Campus

STATEMENT ON THE OKLAHOMA TEACHER WALKOUT

Approved March 26, 2018

The Faculty Senate at the University of Oklahoma, Norman Campus:

- Supports competitive salaries for Oklahoma public school teachers.
- Supports Oklahoma public school teachers voicing their concerns and expressing their needs in the ways they see appropriate.
- Supports and encourages individual and coordinated assistance for Oklahoma children and families adversely affected by school closings due to the walkout.
- Supports the choices by individual faculty, staff, and students at OU regarding whether and in what ways to support Oklahoma public school teachers and their cause.
- Encourages all units of the OU community to support employees' choices through any means feasible.
- Calls on the entire state to find the will to invest in our community, and support and restore funding for education to healthier levels.

Our Rationale:

1. **We support teachers.** Public school teachers are essential to Oklahoma. They support the cognitive, emotional, academic, social, and civic development of the children and adolescents of our state. Regularly certified public school teachers are professionals who have undergone years of rigorous preparation in academic content, pedagogy, and field experiences. No state has disinvested more from public education over the last five years, and that does not reflect Oklahomans' high regard for teachers and public education.
2. **Education is vital.** Educated citizens are necessary for a functioning democratic society, and quality K12 education enables children to succeed in postsecondary education and in the workplace. For example, **Agricultural education** can prepare students for a lifetime of competing successfully in global agriculture, food, fiber, and natural resources systems, and **Medical research** in Oklahoma has led to the creation of numerous successful companies such as Caisson Biotech, Altheus, and Biolytx, among many others. Oklahoma City has been among the fastest growing cities in the country. Boeing, GE, Amazon, and Google all expanded or moved to Oklahoma. We need to be able to attract and retain companies such as these, which are dependent upon a well-educated workforce that can only be sustained via a functional education system at all levels. These companies and others have helped boost the state's

population by nearly 200,000 from an estimated 3.75 million in July 2010 to an estimated 3.93 million people in July 2017. Education matters, whether at the primary, secondary, or higher levels. The state's 25 colleges are engines of economic development in each of their communities throughout the state.

- 3. Funding education is a smart investment – and it is a choice. Our state's choices have undermined education in Oklahoma.** The state of Oklahoma has not taken a balanced approach to creating a responsible budget. As Oklahomans, we have failed to address the lack of revenue generation to support education and the other vital public services that benefit us all. Oklahoma public schools employ 4,900 fewer workers today compared to 2009 (a 5.3 percent decrease). Over that same time, enrollment in Oklahoma increased by nearly 48,000 students (7.4 percent). Cuts to education continued, even while the economy was improving after the recession. These choices substantially reduce access to quality education in our state. A quarter of school districts in Oklahoma have gone to a four-day school week. Many rural and inner-city schools face closures. Oklahoma is increasingly losing quality teachers to other states and other professions. A state department of education survey found 34% of respondents who left Oklahoma public education did so for better pay or opportunities. In fall 2016, nearly 53,000 students in Oklahoma were taught by teachers granted emergency certification. A high proportion of alternatively certified teachers fill teaching positions in elementary schools, where the focus is basic literacy and numeracy. Thus, Oklahoma's students are being set on a trajectory of substandard education that will have consequences for their future educational possibilities and the rest of their lives. Despite the high number of emergency certifications, there still were more than 800 unfilled teacher vacancies in schools across the state. As our state has chosen to cut funding, costs to students and their families have risen to the point that despite intelligence, drive, and determination, many young people will not have access to college. As an abundance of research has shown, cuts to education undermine a state's economy in the immediate- and longer-term. Some businesses are refusing to relocate here because their employees don't want to put their children in Oklahoma's schools. Underfunding education lowers the life-time earning potential of adults, reduces potential tax revenues, weakens home purchases, increases crime rates, and hurts the state economy for generations to come.

Here are some resources available in our community related to the pending walkout:
<http://facultysenate.ou.edu/SupportingTeachersAndCommunityDuringWalkout.pdf>.



Sarah Ellis
OU-NC Faculty Senate Chair, 2017-18