

As the bishops and presidents of the largest networks of African-American denominations in the state of Oklahoma, we have come together because we love the children we serve, and we honor the teachers and educators who serve them. Our congregations are deeply rooted in our communities and have played a vital role in shaping the development of our children. We have a biblical, moral, social and spiritual obligation to advocate for their education and their futures.

The African-American church is a major stakeholder in the education of our children. We are deeply troubled by the high dropout rates and see a link between them and the increasing incarceration rates of our children and the economic disparities in our communities. We are concerned about high stakes testing and the negative impact that it has on our children, our schools, and communities.

In spite of the challenges, we stand by our public schools. We call on our elected and appointed officials on the local and state level to stand with us in making the following changes:

- Resources to fund competitive pay for teachers and to provide the necessary educational materials and supplies.
- Funding for support programs that students need to help them meet their educational and employment requirements.
- Equity in school funding and resources across the state.
- A faster way to get direct services to children who are in crisis.
- A more transparent and understandable Individualized Education Program (IEP) system with education and clear guidelines for parents and guardians.
- A more culturally sensitive approach to words that are used to identify and describe population groups. Care should be taken not to use administrative words to identify our students.
- A greater collaboration between local and state educational officials in assigning the school performance measures. Not using an A-F grading system to label schools.
- We are calling on all of the state superintendent candidates to attend the VOICE accountability session at 3 p.m. June 8 at the Henry J. Freede Wellness Center on the campus of Oklahoma City University, 2501 N Blackwelder Ave.

We are deeply concerned for public education. If education is allowed to become just an industry that is used as a "racket" to push out the poor and disadvantaged, then we have destroyed the very purpose of public education. We believe that the public education system should be equitable to all students and when so, will level the playing field and give fair opportunities to all of the children in our public school system.

We commit to making ourselves available to meet with the state superintendent of education on a quarterly basis to help improve the educational outcomes of children in our state.

Dr. C.W. Whitlow,

Dr. Wayen Dallas,

Dr. Malcolm Colby,

The Rev. Marcellus Fields,

The Rev. James Dorn,

The Rev. Willie J. Tiller,

The Rev. Anthony Scott,

The Rev. Ray Douglas,

The Rev. Clarence Prevost