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— News From The States —

EVENING WRAP



By [Sean Scully](#)

Good evening. It's Tuesday and it also happens to be the day we launched our 36th States Newsroom outlet. Please help us celebrate the launch of the [Oklahoma Voice](#).

The Big Takeaway

Our theme today is schools. And it just so happens that our new team in Oklahoma has much to say on this topic on their inaugural day.

In Tulsa, parents and administrators say the state is putting them in an impossible situation: Telling them to get better (or else) while failing to give them clear goals to meet to avoid a possible state takeover, [the Oklahoma Voice reports](#).

Tulsa Public Schools has long struggled to educate students, but faces high poverty rates and many students who are learning English as a second language. Only 13% of Tulsa students scored at grade level in English language arts, and 6% did so in math, [2022 state tests](#) showed, the Voice reported.

State Superintendent Ryan Walters has given the district just three to four months to come up with a plan or face state intervention. That could be as extreme as dissolving the district completely and pushing out its elected school board and local administrators in favor of direct state control.

“If they don’t fix their problems, I will,” Walters said.



State Superintendent Ryan Walters, possibly threatening to step in and possibly take over Tulsa Public Schools.

(Photo by Brent Fuchs/For Oklahoma Voice)

But state officials sent a confusing message last week when the Oklahoma State Board of Education voted unanimously to approve the latest accreditation of the district, despite the superintendent’s aggressive talk. This left parents wondering what, exactly, the state officials wanted.

“What is the plan?” Tulsa parent James Morton asked. “TPS has a plan. They’re working it through. Certain people, including Walters, have decided they don’t like that plan. Then give us a new one.”

Tulsa parent Carmon Drummond said three months is too short a time to expect this much progress, the Voice wrote.

“We have an unattainable, imaginary goal, but we have the threat that something’s going to come — Ryan Walters is going to take over,” Drummond said.



You'd be forgiven for thinking this was the line for, like, a Taylor Swift concert or something. And you'd be wrong. It's people lining up since before dawn to attend an Oklahoma Board of Education meeting.

(Photo by Brent Fuchs/For Oklahoma Voice)

But Tulsa isn't the only place in Oklahoma that's upset with state education officials. For months, parents, advocates and others have been complaining about public access to the Board of Education meetings.

Earlier this year, the state fire marshal determined that the board's regular meeting room can only safely hold 49 people. Even with the addition of a 25-seat overflow room that shows the meeting by video, people hoping to attend the meetings face long lines and the uncertain prospect of getting in at all, [the Voice reports](#).

"It's confusing to me that this department represents 700,000 children, which works out to be about 1.4 million parents," said retired Tulsa teacher Mike Howe, who arrived before dawn to attend a meeting last week. "Those are the stakeholders, and they have a room for 49 people. Something doesn't compute."

Walters has promised to find a bigger space but says he hasn't finalized details.

“We are actively in talks with some other venues,” he said. “Right now, we’re comparing prices and what that would look like with the audience that shows up.”

Joey Senat, an open government expert and associate professor of journalism at Oklahoma State University, said the state’s open meeting law doesn’t explicitly require boards to meet in a place large enough to accommodate all comers, but the Board of Education’s limits violate the spirit of the law, intended to provide public access to government decision making.

“The law and the principles of good government are two different things,” Senat said. “The Open Meeting Act provides the minimum standards of behavior — what the public body must do and must not do. Principles of good government, the spirit of the act, would call it to do more.”



A place that leaders at Highland Community College would rather not wind up.

(Getty Images)

Over the border in Kansas, meanwhile, federal investigators have ordered rural [Highland Community College](#) to quit discriminating against Black students, [the Kansas Reflector reports](#). The 3,200-student school has been dogged by accusations of racism for years, including a 2020 lawsuit by the ACLU on behalf of four Black students.

Among other allegations, the lawsuit “claimed then-athletic director Bryan Dorrell was strategizing to reduce the number of Black student-athletes through expulsion, excessive scrutiny, and having coaches recruit white student-athletes over Black potential students,” the Reflector wrote.

A separate lawsuit, filed by former coaches of the women’s basketball team, made similar allegations.

The U.S. Department of Justice began investigating in 2022 and announced a settlement this week. It requires new training for staff, new policies for student housing and discipline, a new system for responding to student complaints, and the creation of “safe spaces” for Black students.

“When educational institutions are making decisions about student discipline, race and ethnicity are never relevant factors,” said Kate E. Brubacher, U.S. attorney for Kansas. “Colleges and universities play a powerful role in shaping the development of young people, so it’s imperative that they help set the standard for creating environments where all students are treated with the same level of respect and fairness.”

And at the University of North Carolina, the start of the fall semester was rocked by a fatal shooting in a campus lab building that resulted in a school-wide lockdown and an hours-long manhunt, [NC Newswire reports](#).

Authorities say graduate student Tailei Qi, 34, fatally shot physics professor Zijie Yan, who has taught at the school since 2019. Qi was arrested a few hours thereafter and was charged with first-degree murder.

The circumstances remain under investigation, but Qi had made a number of online complaints about his “principal investigator,” the faculty member who supervises a graduate student’s research. It’s not yet clear whether Yan was Qi’s PI or not.

More from the It’s All About Education files: [Two dozen Oregon school districts will split \\$53 million for summer, after-school programs](#) ... [AmeriCorps to increase investment in rural Alaska, with tribes](#) ... [Implementation of Arkansas LEARNS Act continues with literacy coach training](#) ... [\(West Virginia\) More than \\$300K in Hope Scholarship funds used at out-of-state schools](#) ... [\(New Hampshire\) Four takeaways from depositions in the ‘divisive concepts’ lawsuit](#) ... [West Texas A&M will no longer require students to pay for textbooks starting next fall](#) ... [\(Maryland\) Educators working second jobs ‘to make ends meet,’ new teachers union poll suggests](#) ... [Teachers strike in southwest Washington delays school year for thousands of students](#)



State of Our Democracy

In Tennessee, it's like *deja vu* all over again as the legislature's Republican leaders silenced a Democratic House member, banning him from commenting on any legislation on the floor for the remainder of the day, [the Tennessee Lookout reports](#).

It just happens that this lawmaker was Justin Jones, one of the two lawmakers expelled earlier this year after Republican leaders said they disrupted proceedings by staging a brief protest over the lack of gun control legislation.

The latest move to silence Jones came Monday as House Speaker Cameron Sexton, R-Crossville, ruled Jones was "off-topic" in his floor remarks on two occasions. That allowed the GOP-led majority to ban him from speaking for the rest of the day.

"Their attempt to silence wasn't about me, but about the people of my district," Jones said. "If they can silence one member, they can silence all members."

The move prompted Democratic House members to walk out in protest.



Democratic Rep. Justin Jones of Nashville and members of the House Democratic Caucus, reminding us that we've been here before.

(Photo: John Partipilo)

The new silencing rule was a response to a series of protests in the House chamber earlier this year, with spectators and lawmakers demanding action on gun control after a school shooting in Nashville.

Jones and fellow Democrat Justin Pearson were expelled but quickly reappointed to their seats by local officials and later returned permanently in a special election.

The legislative mayhem came at the start of week two of a special session called by Republican Gov. Bill Lee in response to the Covenant School shooting where three children and three adults were killed. GOP House leaders declined to take up much in the way of gun legislation.

Although most of the limited legislative action ended last week, it still took a few days for leaders in the two chambers to figure out a way to end the session. It finally wrapped Tuesday afternoon after several days of GOP infighting.

As the two chambers haggled over details, Republican lawmakers in the House had plenty of time to taunt the Democrats for their walkout, the Lookout reports.

“I don’t know why my House colleagues left this chamber while still having business left to conduct,” said House Majority Leader William Lamberth, R-Portland.

More from the Politics is a Funny Game files: [Suit targets gun initiative over Missouri AG claim it would spike rape and murder, cost millions](#) ... [Alabama transgender medicine ban:](#)

[Attorneys want full rehearing on federal court ruling ... Ohio state Rep. Bob Young arrested for second time in last two months ... Auditors: MVD lack of oversight may put Arizonans in danger ... Legislator to resign from Nevada Assembly, pending approval of City of Las Vegas job](#)



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One Last Thing

If you're at all squeamish, stop reading now. I mean it.



Australian television personality Rove McManus holds Sebastian the carpet python at the Taronga Foundations 2007 Establishment Dinner in Sydney, Australia. If he reads this story, which I advise him not to do, I bet he will never get this close ever again.

(Photo by Paul Miller/Getty Images)

OK, still with me? We journey now to Australia, where surgeons got the “shock of their life” when they discovered a live parasitic worm in a woman’s brain, [the BBC reports](#).

The 64-year-old woman had been suffering a variety of problems, including intestinal distress and worsening depression. Doctors were puzzled, but a brain scan eventually revealed an “anomaly” in her frontal lobe.

Surgeons went in to find out what it was. When the lead surgeon probed the unidentified anomaly with forceps, it moved.

"Everyone was shocked. And the worm that we found was happily moving, quite vigorously, outside the brain," said Dr. Hari Priya Bandi.

This is the first documented case of a parasitic worm in a human brain, the BBC reports. Doctors say the worm is common in carpet pythons, which are native to Australia. They aren’t completely sure how it came to be inside the woman, but they speculate that she may have ingested the

parasite's eggs when she harvested and ate native grasses which had been contaminated by python poop.

You're welcome.

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