



TULSA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

EQUITY CHARACTER EXCELLENCE TEAM JOY

Dr. Deborah A. Gist - Biography

Dr. Deborah Gist is the superintendent of Tulsa Public Schools, an urban district serving 33,000 students across 78 schools and charter partners.

Dr. Gist's career as an educator started in a classroom at Kirkpatrick Elementary School in Fort Worth, Texas in 1988. Over the next 33 years, she served as a senior policy analyst for the United States Department of Education, executive director of [Serve DC](#) in the Executive Office of the Mayor, and was named as the first State Superintendent of Education for Washington, DC.

From 2009-2015, Dr. Gist served as Commissioner of Education for the State of Rhode Island overseeing the redesign of the state's education funding formula, a historic increase in high school graduation rates, two successful applications for \$125 million in federal Race to the Top grant funding, implementation of new college- and career-ready standards, and expanded access to high-quality early childhood programming. As a result of her work in Rhode Island, she was named as one of *Time Magazine's* [100 Most Influential People in the World](#) and as one of *The Atlantic's* Brave Thinkers.

In 2015, Dr. Gist returned to her beloved hometown of Tulsa, Oklahoma to lead the 6,000-member team at Tulsa Public Schools. As a proud graduate of Tulsa's Memorial High School and Nimitz Junior High School, serving as superintendent of Tulsa Public Schools fulfills a lifelong dream for Dr. Gist.

During Dr. Gist's tenure, the district has seen sustained increases in high school graduation rates, novice teacher retention, employee engagement, and the percentage of students meeting projected reading and math growth. Tulsa Public Schools has expanded its [dual language programming](#), opened the only two public Montessori programs in the state, implemented the [Seal of Biliteracy](#) for high school students demonstrating proficiency in at least two languages, launched a unified [enrollment](#) system, and successfully passed a five-year \$415 million [bond](#) that will transform teaching and learning experiences across the city.

DESTINATION EXCELLENCE

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The district has also been recognized nationally for its work around [social emotional learning](#), expanded learning, and response to the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) and is considered a national leader in developing and implementing culturally relevant and sustaining curricula about the [1921 Tulsa Race Massacre](#).

Dr. Gist's proudest moment of her superintendency, however, was in April 2018 when she joined more than 100 educators on a [110 mile march to Oklahoma City](#) to advocate for significant increases in state education funding to provide the resources that Oklahoma teachers and children need and deserve.

Dr. Gist holds a bachelor's degree in early childhood education from the University of Oklahoma, a master's degree in elementary education and curriculum from the University of South Florida, a master's of public administration from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, and a doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania. She is a member of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Commission and sits on the boards of Greenwood Rising, the Oklahoma Center for Community and Justice, Junior Achievement of Oklahoma, Tulsa Area United Way, Tulsa Educare, and the Boy Scouts of America Indian Nations Council. She is a founding member of [Chiefs for Change](#) and an Editorial Advisory Board member for [The Line](#), a national publication for K-12 education leaders.

Dr. Gist was recognized as the 2020 Education Pillar community honoree by 100 Black Men of Tulsa and received the 2017 Boomtown Award from Tulsa's Young Professionals, the 2017 Nancy McDonald Award from Oklahomans for Equality, the 2017 Newsmakers Award from the Association for Women in Communications, and the 2016 Madam President Award from the League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Tulsa.

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