



Tulsa Public Schools 2023-2024 Accreditation

At the July 27 meeting of Oklahoma’s State Board of Education, the state board made the unprecedented decision to postpone the vote on Tulsa Public Schools’ accreditation until the August state board meeting. As a result, the district’s status remains “Accredited with Warning.”

Tulsa Public Schools has corrected the deficiencies—late submission of a report and lack of internal controls—identified during this year’s accreditation process and is adhering to the improvement-oriented intent of school accreditation. According to the State Department of Education’s own accreditation officials, the *“deficienc(ies) do not seriously detract from the quality of the school’s educational program.”*

Nevertheless, the State Superintendent is on the record as considering drastic, unjustified measures against Tulsa Public Schools, which could include accreditation with warning (although deficiencies cited in 2022-23 had not been cited before), probation or disaccreditation. Either probation or disaccreditation would hand significant powers over to the State Superintendent and Board of Education to dictate the learning conditions and experiences of Tulsa’s students and educators.

State Accreditation Process

- Accreditation is designed to be a collaborative process focused on improvement and compliance. Sites and districts are given an “Accreditation Checklist” that contains items for audit by the OSDE Regional Accreditation Officer (RAO). The accreditation department then makes a determination of the school or district’s accreditation status based on the RAO’s site audits in the spring.
- Each July, the Oklahoma state superintendent presents accreditation reports for all the state’s school districts and public schools to the state board of education.
- According to the OSDE, a status of “accreditation with warning” occurs when a district or site is cited for the same deficiency for two years in a row.
- In July of 2022, for the first time in history, the state board veered from the established accreditation process by escalating Tulsa’s accreditation from the recommended “Accreditation with Deficiency” to “Accreditation with Warning” due to a disputed claim of a violation of HB 1775. In 2022-23, the District received no HB 1775-related deficiencies. Consequently, the RAOs

recommendation for TPS' Accreditation status for 2022-23 was "Accreditation with Deficiencies" due to different deficiencies (late reporting and lack of internal controls).

OSDE Accreditation Process Irregularities

- The Oklahoma State Department of Education's accreditation division recommended Tulsa Public Schools for "accreditation with deficiencies" for the 2023-24 school year because *"it failed to meet one or more of the standards but the deficiency does not seriously detract from the quality of the school's educational program."*
- The 2022-23 accreditation report noted two district deficiencies. One deficiency was for a one late report (out of over 200 submitted annually), which was sent a week late. The second deficiency was for "lack of internal controls," referring to the embezzlement actions of one former district leader that Dr. Gist reported to law enforcement in 2022.
- Tulsa Public Schools addressed both deficiencies well in advance of July 2023.
- The State Board of Education's decision to postpone voting on Tulsa Public Schools' accreditation was the *only* instance where the State Superintendent of Public Instruction acted against the recommendations of his accreditation staff and encouraged the Board to do the same.
- Rather than taking the recommendation of "Accreditation with Deficiencies" until the August board meeting, the State Board extended Tulsa Public Schools' accreditation status from 2022-23 until the August vote.

Current status and next steps

- Despite significant disruption, Team Tulsa remains fully focused on welcoming our 34,000 students and 3,000 teachers back to school on August 17 as we kick off an exciting school year.
- Tulsa families want us to focus on ensuring that we keep their children safe and have the best teachers and support professionals in our schools that we possibly can.
- We remain committed to following the accreditation process as it was intended. Tulsa Public Schools has been working closely with officials from the State Department of Education to ensure future compliance.