



# NEWS RELEASE

***For Immediate Release***

***Monday, April 20, 2026***

***Communications Office***

***913-993-6447***

The Shawnee Mission School District (SMSD) affirms in its Strategic Plan several belief statements:

- Every individual has inherent worth and deserves to be valued and celebrated
- A community's strength is derived from its diversity
- Respecting a community's diversity and each individual's dignity demands equitable access.

These beliefs were determined by our community and inform all that we do. They remain our guiding principles and illustrate our commitment to the best interests of our students and adherence to the highest standards of legal compliance.

Our values don't change because of a federal agency's meritless allegations unsupported by what they falsely call an "investigation." Unfortunately, that is what SMSD currently faces with respect to recent interaction with the United States Department of Education. Regardless of SMSD's voluntary provision of information to the Department and the district's clear compliance with law, the Department has made an unfounded allegation that SMSD is in violation of federal law. We reject that accusation in the strongest possible way and are prepared to defend our rights in court.

On Friday April 10, 2026, the SMSD submitted the attached letter to the Office of Civil Rights (OCR). [Click here to view the letter.](#) This letter details the interaction between the school district and the OCR over the course of the last several months and shares the facts related to the SMSD's practices related to OCRs concerns. The letter also explicitly contemplates negotiation toward a voluntary resolution agreement, given SMSD's compliance with law. Instead of providing SMSD with a draft resolution agreement, the Department issued a press release which alleges that SMSD has

violated Title IX and FERPA. Since submitting the April 10 letter, SMSD has received no direct communication from the OCR and learned of their findings only after seeing the press release posted on their website.

The OCR finding was premature, not based on evidence, and potentially damaging to SMSD's ability to continue to provide excellent services to all students. Rather than engage with SMSD and discuss the relevant facts and case law, OCR has chosen to act upon rumor and hearsay. Their press release, issued prior to any direct communication to SMSD, shows that the outcome of their "investigation" was pre-determined. The SMSD has fully cooperated throughout this process and given the facts it shared with the OCR fully expected to be cleared from these allegations. Instead we read online misinformation such as: "Shawnee Mission School District also has policies regarding participation in sports that raise significant compliance concerns." As the attached letter indicates, this allegation is meritless. Despite repeated requests, OCR has not provided SMSD with any evidence that demonstrates unlawful conduct or in any way supports the OCR allegation. To the contrary, it seems as if OCR was determined to issue their so-called "findings" of a Title IX violation regardless of any information provided by SMSD. The truth doesn't seem to matter to the Department, as they are determined to pursue a political agenda by antagonizing a school district despite its clear compliance with law. It seems as if OCR has written a "playbook" and we are simply pawns in this narrative.

It is unclear what steps the Department of Education will take in response to its faulty process and unfounded "finding" of violations of federal law. If the Department seeks to withhold federal funds from SMSD, we will vigorously protect our right to those funds in court. Any such attempt to rescind or withhold funds will suffer from both substantive and procedural defects. There is no legal basis for any enforcement action, and the Department has not gone through the requisite procedural steps necessary to withhold federal funds. Again, SMSD is prepared to make these and other allegations in court and defend both our funds and our adherence to the rule of law.

We affirm to our community that the Shawnee Mission School District has and will continue to follow all state and federal laws and has done so in the instances mentioned in the OCR findings. Let us also affirm that we are One Shawnee Mission. That means that ALL are welcome here. That means that transgender students and staff belong here. The district will continue to work through this "investigation" and will evaluate all potential legal solutions to defend our interests. However, our biggest concern right now is our students and staff. We say directly to them— your district is no different today after reading these findings from the OCR. We will continue to care for each of you and will honor our diversity as a strength...not as something to divide us.

Shawnee Mission School District is the third largest school district in Kansas. The district serves students in Pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade in 34 elementary schools, five middle schools, five high schools, and several educational centers. It has been consistently ranked among the finest school districts nationwide for its high student performance. The district's objective is that each student will have a personalized learning plan that will prepare them for college and careers, with the interpersonal skills they need for life success. The district serves a diverse student population from 14 cities within northeast Johnson County, Kansas, which is 10 miles from downtown Kansas City, Missouri. For more information, visit [www.smsd.org](http://www.smsd.org).