



May 22, 2024

VIA ONLINE FORM

Oklahoma State Department of Education
Oliver Hodge Bldg.
2500 N. Lincoln Blvd.
Oklahoma City, OK 73105
Via Online Form

Re: Open Records Act Request

Dear Records Access Officer:

Pursuant to the Oklahoma Open Records Act, O.S. tit. 51, §§ 24A.1 et seq., American Oversight makes the following request for records.

Requested Records

American Oversight requests that the Oklahoma State Department of Education produce the following records within five business days:

All email communications (including email messages, complete email chains, calendar invitations, or any attachments thereto) between (a) any of the Oklahoma State Department of Education officials listed below—or anyone communicating on their behalf, such as an assistant or scheduler—and (b) any of the external state education departments listed below, including, but not limited to, anyone communicating from an email address ending in a listed domain.

Oklahoma State Department of Education Officials:

- a. State Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters
- b. Chief Policy Advisor Matt Langston
- c. Former General Counsel Bryan Cleveland, and/or anyone serving in the role of General Counsel in a permanent and/or interim capacity, including anyone completing the duties typically fulfilled by the General Counsel
- d. Anyone serving in the capacity of Chief of Staff and/or Deputy Chief of Staff in the Office of the State Superintendent
- e. The most senior official in the Curriculum & Instruction Division

External State Education Departments:

- a. Arizona Department of Education (azed.gov)
- b. Arkansas Department of Education (ade.arkansas.gov)
- c. Florida Department of Education (fldoe.org)
- d. South Carolina Department of Education (ed.sc.gov)
- e. Tennessee Department of Education (tn.gov)
- f. Texas Education Agency (tea.texas.gov)



g. Virginia Department of Education (doe.virginia.gov)

Please provide all responsive records from January 1, 2024, through the date the search is conducted.

Fee Waiver Request

In accordance with 51 O.S. tit. 51, § 24A.5(4), American Oversight requests that your office charge no search fees in connection with processing this request for records. Release of the requested records “is in the public interest,” because American Oversight, in accordance with its organizational mission, makes this request “to determine whether those entrusted with the affairs of the government are honestly, faithfully, and competently performing their duties as public servants.”¹ Specifically, the requested records have the potential to shed light on how Department of Education officials are communicating on matters of public interest.² Records with the potential to shed light on this matter would contribute significantly to public understanding of how public servants are fulfilling their duties, including with whom and on what issues top Department of Education officials communicate in their official capacities.

American Oversight’s work is aimed solely at serving the public interest.³ As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, American Oversight does not have a commercial purpose and the release of the information requested is not in American Oversight’s financial interest. Rather, American Oversight’s mission is to promote transparency in government, educate the public about government activities, and ensure the accountability of government officials. Similar to members of the news media, American Oversight uses the information gathered, and its analysis of it, to educate the public through reports, press releases, or other media. American Oversight also makes materials it gathers available on its public website and promotes their availability on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter.com.⁴ American Oversight has also demonstrated its commitment to the public disclosure of documents and creation of editorial content through regular substantive analyses posted to its website.⁵

¹ O.S. tit. 51, § 24A.5(4).

² See, e.g., Tyler Kingkade, *How Oklahoma’s Schools Superintendent Became the State’s Top Culture Warrior*, NBC (Aug. 23, 2023, 9:01 AM), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/ryan-walters-oklahoma-schools-superintendent-tulsa-rcna101235>.

³ See O.S. tit. 51, § 24A.5(4).

⁴ American Oversight currently has approximately 16,000 followers on Facebook and 111,400 followers on Twitter.com. American Oversight, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited May 20, 2024); American Oversight (@weareoversight), Twitter.com, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited May 20, 2024).

⁵ See generally *News*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/blog>; *State Investigations*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/states>; see also, e.g., *State Government Contacts with Voting-Restriction Activists*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/state-government-contacts-with-voting-restriction-activists>; *Georgia’s Voting Machines and Election Security*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/georgias-voting->

American Oversight is committed to transparency and makes the responses public bodies provide to public records requests publicly available, and the public's understanding of the government's activities—including whether public servants are honestly, faithfully, and competently performing their duties—would be enhanced through American Oversight's analysis and publication of these records.

Therefore, in accordance with O.S. tit. 51, § 24A.5(4), American Oversight respectfully requests that you limit any copying fees to the reasonable, direct costs of record copying, or mechanical reproduction, if any such costs are incurred.

American Oversight asks that if its request for a fee waiver is denied in whole or in part, that you contact us prior to incurring any costs.

Guidance Regarding the Search & Processing of Requested Records

In connection with its request for records, American Oversight provides the following guidance regarding the scope of the records sought and the search and processing of records:

- Please search all locations and systems likely to have responsive records, regardless of format, medium, or physical characteristics. For instance, if the request seeks “communications,” please search all locations likely to contain communications, including relevant hard-copy files, correspondence files, appropriate locations on hard drives and shared drives, emails, text messages or other direct messaging systems (such as iMessage, WhatsApp, Signal, or Twitter.com direct messages), voicemail messages, instant messaging systems such as Lync or ICQ, and shared messages systems such as Slack.
- In conducting your search, please understand the terms “record,” “document,” and “information” in their broadest sense, to include any written, typed, recorded, graphic, printed, or audio material of any kind. We seek records of any kind, including electronic records, audiotapes, videotapes, and photographs, as well as letters, emails, facsimiles, telephone messages, voice mail messages and transcripts, notes, or minutes of any meetings, telephone conversations or discussions.
- Our request for records includes any attachments to those records or other materials enclosed with those records when they were previously transmitted. To the extent that an email is responsive to our request, our request includes all prior messages sent or received in that email chain, as well as any attachments to the email.

[machines-and-election-security](https://www.americanoversight.org/tulsa-health-officials-initially-estimated-trump-rally-would-directly-lead-to-2-to-9-deaths); *Tulsa Health Officials Initially Estimated Trump Rally Would Directly Lead to 2 to 9 Deaths*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/tulsa-health-officials-initially-estimated-trump-rally-would-directly-lead-to-2-to-9-deaths>.

- Please search all relevant records or systems containing records regarding agency business. Do not exclude records regarding agency business contained in files, email accounts, or devices in the personal custody of your officials, such as personal email accounts or text messages.
- In the event some portions of the requested records are properly exempt from disclosure, please disclose any reasonably segregable non-exempt portions of the requested records.⁶ If a request is denied in whole, please state specifically why it is not reasonable to segregate portions of the record for release.
- Please take appropriate steps to ensure that records responsive to this request are not deleted by the agency before the completion of processing for this request. If records potentially responsive to this request are likely to be located on systems where they are subject to potential deletion, including on a scheduled basis, please take steps to prevent that deletion, including, as appropriate, by instituting a litigation hold on those records.

Conclusion

If you have any questions regarding how to construe this request for records or believe that further discussions regarding search and processing would facilitate a more efficient production of records of interest to American Oversight, please do not hesitate to contact American Oversight. American Oversight welcomes an opportunity to discuss its request with you before you undertake your search or incur search or duplication costs. By working together at the outset, American Oversight and your agency can decrease the likelihood of costly and time-consuming litigation in the future.

Where possible, please provide responsive material in an electronic format by email. Alternatively, please provide responsive material in native format or in PDF format on a USB drive. Please send any responsive material being sent by mail to American Oversight, 1030 15th Street NW, Suite B255, Washington, DC 20005. If it will accelerate release of responsive records to American Oversight, please also provide responsive material on a rolling basis.

We share a common mission to promote transparency in government. American Oversight looks forward to working with your agency on this request. If you do not understand any part of this request, please contact Emma Lewis at records@americanoversight.org or 202.919.6303.

Sincerely,

/s/ Emma Lewis
Emma Lewis
on behalf of
American Oversight

⁶ O.S. tit. 51, § 24A.5(2).