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August 23, 2024

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

The Honorable Miguel Cardona
Secretary
United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, Southwest
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Cardona:

I am writing regarding the Oklahoma State Department of Education's (OSDE) administration of federal funds and programs under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). Due to serious concern with OSDE's management of the over \$2.7b in federal funds along with state funds that is entrusted for the benefit of Oklahoma's children and families, I am requesting an investigation by U.S. Department of Education's (USED) Office of Inspector General or the appropriate body into OSDE's management of federal programs and use of funds.

It has come to my attention that under OSDE's current leadership, there have been considerable concerns with the state's implementation of key programs and ensuring that funds under Title I Part, A and IDEA reach our schools to protect and serve the state's most vulnerable learners and to support our lowest performing schools. I have received numerous complaints and allegations from local education agencies (LEAs) and taxpayers that districts and ultimately schools are not receiving timely, accurate and reliable receipt of allocations of formula funds for the second consecutive school year including as recently as the beginning of school year 2024-2025, which jeopardizes our LEAs and schools' ability to provide crucial services to children without interruption.

Further, it is my understanding that OSDE was recently monitored by USED for the aforementioned programs where a range of performance issues indicated that OSDE is failing to meet its basic obligations to administer these programs in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the law. Similar to USED's findings, members of the State legislative body share concerns regarding staff attrition at the agency and its impacts on ensuring OSDE provides accurate and transparent information on school performance, has proper internal controls, completes and submits timely and accurate audits, maintains appropriate records, among other requirements.

Our students, schools, and educators deserve to receive the support and funding that is necessary to ensure each student in Oklahoma receives a high-quality education. It is my expectation that OSDE's Chief State School Officer be a faithful steward of the public funds that are entrusted to their agency.

As you may be aware, I chair the Appropriations and Budget Subcommittee on Education in the Oklahoma House of Representatives. Over the course of the last 18 months, since Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters took charge of the Oklahoma Department of Education, my office has been inundated with information from current and former employees of the Department. These whistleblowers have raised many similar concerns that were outlined in the Report.

These concerns have culminated in the Oklahoma House of Representatives launching an official investigation into the financial practices of the Oklahoma Department of Education which will be led by the non-partisan Legislative Office of Fiscal Transparency (LOFT).

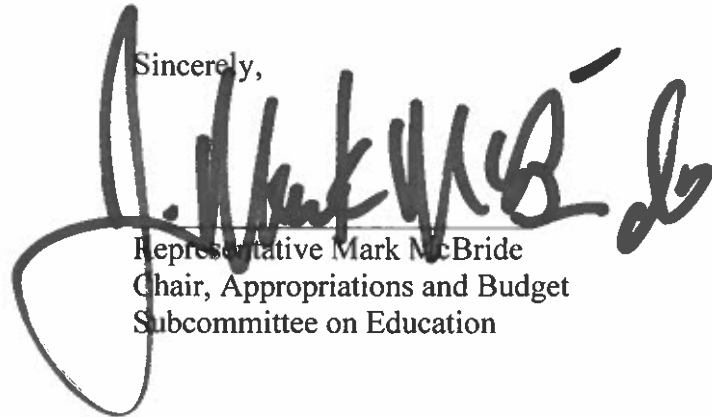
The purpose of this investigation is to determine the fiscal condition of the Department, including the application and administration of Federal Funds.

I am inviting you and the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education to work in conjunction with my office to make sure that the Legislative Office of Fiscal Transparency has access to the information your agency has collected in its oversight mission of Federal Funds to reduce duplication in efforts and ensure a more timely conclusion of our State level investigation.

I appreciate your consideration of my request. Should you or your office have any concerns or questions I would be glad to facilitate any meeting or conversations you deem necessary.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. You can contact me on my cell at (405) 593-5312.

Sincerely,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark McBride', is written over the typed name and title.

Representative Mark McBride
Chair, Appropriations and Budget
Subcommittee on Education