

To: Oklahoma State Department of Education:

We **first want to thank** Congress, Oklahoma legislators and Oklahoma State Department of Education leaders for your tireless efforts to provide resources and protect people during the unprecedented battle of the COVID19 virus. Your leadership during these most frightening of times is acknowledged and greatly appreciated.

At this time of funding distribution, it is important that we share our **grave concerns about the fund distribution to schools under the CARES Act**. If the purpose of the CARES Act is to remediate education funding gaps caused by present and future funding shortfalls, to take care of the immediate needs of covering payrolls, to provide students meals, and to pay expenses associated with distance learning, then **the current proposed distribution formula fails to equitably do so for all schools**. It is important to share, on behalf of all schools below the state average in funding, the importance of finding a solution, i.e. **funding per pupil--per ADM**, that would allow all schools to participate in present and future federal stimulus monies on an equitable basis.

Of all of the public schools funded below the state average, Deer Creek Schools is the lowest. Historically and presently, great inequities exist in General Fund per pupil funding for Oklahoma's classrooms. The General Fund provides teachers salaries, classroom resources, counseling and elective course opportunities. Attached you will find spreadsheets showing the General Fund and Federal fund dollars from the OSDE database available on the OSDE website. These examples show the current lack of equity in funding teachers and resources throughout the state of Oklahoma. **You will also find a spreadsheet of the proposed additional dollars from CARES allocated through Title 1A. Running the new COVID - 19 stimulus dollars through Title I formula greatly exacerbates these funding inequities**. It is our hope that you will consider a different division of OSDE funds or at a minimum using the additional state allocation to help schools who received low per pupil allocations from the Oklahoma State Department of Education distribution. The reason Deer Creek Schools and others at the bottom of the funding lists do not have smaller class sizes, elective courses, technology and resources for their students is not because of unwise investment of funds but, because the funding of classrooms in the state of Oklahoma is vast in its inequities.

Attached you will find three years of spreadsheet examples ranking all Oklahoma schools high to low in General Fund per pupil funding. These numbers, taken from the OSDE website, contain data clearly supporting the inequity in school funding. This **inequity was increased** by the first round of federal funds distributed through Title I as **clearly shown in the last two attachments Proposed Cares Distribution through Title I and FY19 Per Pupil General Fund Plus CARES**. These spreadsheets show that Deer Creek Schools have been and continue to be at the bottom of per pupil funding for Oklahoma's schools. They clearly show **vast inequalities** in funding Oklahoma's classrooms.

[Deer Creek School District Finance Story FY20](#)

[Statewide Federal Revenue Summary FY11](#)

[Statewide Federal Revenue Summary FY18](#)

[Statewide Federal Revenue Summary FY19](#)

[CARES Distribution as Proposed via Title IA Formula by District Per Pupil Ranked High to Low FY20](#)
[FY19 Per Pupil Funding plus FY2020 CARES Funding Per Pupil](#)

Running stimulus funds through the Title I allocation causes an instant inequity between schools that already have an inequitable situation when it comes to funding. Using Deer Creek and Oklahoma City Schools as an example. The way our state funding formula works, OKC Schools has more than \$3000 per student advantage over Deer Creek students. It is understood some funding is needed to help Oklahoma City's students whose needs may be greater in some areas than the students in Deer Creek. In comparing the funds coming to schools from the CARES Act, Oklahoma City Schools received over \$20,000,000 in Title I funds for FY20 while Deer Creek received approximately \$240,000. As proposed, the CARES Act provides schools with 81% of the above-mentioned funds to assist them in these difficult times. **Therefore, OKC Schools will receive approximately \$475 per student while Deer Creek will receive approximately \$29 per student; yet both districts will experience the same funding shortfalls and challenges of feeding students and providing resources during this time**.

Deer Creek School District is one of the fastest growing districts in the state with a growth that has consistently averaged over 300 new students annually for the past 12 years. Deer Creek's ad valorem tax base is primarily homes with very few businesses within our rural district boundaries. As more and more families move to the district, it has been and continues to be challenging to provide classroom space, desks, chairs, books and technology through bonds that are paid by ad valorem taxes.

We understand that the decision to allocate the money on the basis of the Title I formula under the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (43.9%) portion of monies was one made by Congress, not by the various State Departments of Education. We also understand that the use of the money is more flexible which is great news for those districts that will receive considerable funds in this distribution. It may be too late to affect changes in the CARES Act at this point; **however, if there is an opportunity to do so, we ask for modifications that more fairly balance the distribution of funds.** Just as families are receiving equitable funding dollars to take care of family needs i.e. \$1200 per adult and \$500 per child, the money sent to support the education of each student should be divided **per pupil (per ADM)** to provide device and hotspot access equitably, counseling, academic supplies and educational services. **We implore that you look at equitable ways to distribute the federal stimulus dollars to all public school students in the state.**

If changing the distribution of the first allocation to the OSDE is not possible, there is possibly another round of funding. Also, there are current decisions on **the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (9.8%)** portion of the monies from this round to be made. **We ask that the Governor's dollars and future stimulus dollars be distributed to decrease the inequitable funding from the OSDE allocation through Title I to Oklahoma's 700,000 plus students served by public education. Please consider and advocate using other discretionary or unattached funds (Governor Stitt has \$39 million in discretionary funds) to raise the support of Oklahoma's public schools that did not receive adequate federal funds in this initial distribution. We implore state leaders on behalf of all districts below the state average in funding and CARES distribution that once equity has been attained, the remaining COVID - 19 stimulus dollars be divided to Oklahoma's public schools on a per pupil basis providing equity for all 700,000 plus Oklahoma public school children. We ask that the additional funds receive the same flexibility afforded to the first allocation.** Again, please fill the holes created by distributing funds through Title 1A by using the additional federal dollars for the public schools not equitably funded. All public schools are serving as safety nets in their communities ensuring children have access to food, counseling and academic support. **All of Oklahoma's public schools need equitable direct, flexible funding to meet the unique local needs of their community during this pandemic.** All Oklahoma public schools need per pupil financial resources to prepare for continued on-line blended instruction, mental health counseling and academic support. The Equal Opportunity Scholarship program **does not** have a pandemic related emergency.

Finally, if there are additional funds coming from the federal government to states for the support of local schools, we ask that they be distributed on a per-pupil basis, ADM, so that all Oklahoma public school districts and students benefit equally. Deer Creek is currently the lowest funded public school in the state. Deer Creek is under the state average in per pupil funding by \$2032.54 thus, the teachers, courses, supplies and materials afforded to Deer Creek students are far less. The current plan for distribution of CARES funds through Title 1A exacerbates those inequities in Oklahoma school funding. **Now is the time to begin addressing equity in funding Oklahoma's classrooms.**

Thank you for making education of Oklahoma's children a priority. As fellow Oklahomans, we are proud to stand with you all during these difficult times. I look forward to the opportunity to speak with you soon. I can be reached at 405-642-4435 or ranettippens@dcsok.org. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Respectfully,

Ranet Tippens, Deer Creek Schools Superintendent
Deer Creek Administration