

Oklahoma superintendent issues Bible mandate

July 1, 2024

Oklahoma State Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters [issued a directive](#) June 27 requiring all schools to incorporate the Bible and the Ten Commandments into the curriculum, effective immediately.

In a [memo to Oklahoma school superintendents](#), Walters mandated the use of the Bible as a foundational text in the curriculum and required a copy of the Bible in every classroom in grades 5 through 12.

The memo stipulates the Bible and the Ten Commandments “will be referenced as an appropriate study of history, civilization, ethics, comparative religion or the like, as well as for their substantial influence on our nation’s founders and the foundational principles of our Constitution.”

“Adherence to this mandate is compulsory,” the memo states. “Immediate and strict compliance is expected.”

The memo also notes the Oklahoma State Department of Education “may supply teaching materials for the Bible, as permissible, to ensure uniformity in delivery.”

‘Historical and cultural touchstone’

“The Bible is an indispensable historical and cultural touchstone,” Walters said. “Without basic knowledge of it, Oklahoma students are unable to properly contextualize the foundation of our nation, which is why Oklahoma educational standards provide for its instruction.

“This is not merely an educational directive but a crucial step in ensuring

our students grasp the core values and historical context of our country.”

Walters told a [State Board of Education](#) meeting his staff had reviewed state statutes and Oklahoma academic standards.

They determined it was “crystal clear” to them “the Bible is a necessary historical document to teach our kids about the history of this country, to have a complete understanding of Western civilization, to have an understanding about the basis of our legal system and it’s frankly—we’re talking about the Bible—one of the most foundational documents used for the Constitution in the birth of our country.”

Walters issued the mandate two days after the [Oklahoma Supreme Court blocked](#) a publicly funded Catholic charter school—a ruling Walters called “[one of the worst](#)” decisions by the high court. He referred to the separation of church and state as “a myth” that has no constitutional basis.\

Opposition voiced

Advocates for the separation of church and state criticized Walters’ mandate.

“The Walters memo is an outrageous display of Christian nationalism and shows a thorough misunderstanding of American history and constitutional law,” said Amanda Tyler, executive director of the [Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty](#).

“While there are ways to incorporate the academic study of biblical texts in certain courses in age-appropriate ways depending on the subject matter and context, the blanket edict to require Bible instruction in public schools infringes on the religious freedom of students and their families.”

Rachel Laser, president and CEO of [Americans United for Separation of Church and State](#), called the Walters’ mandate “a transparent,

unconstitutional effort to indoctrinate and religiously coerce public school students.”

]“Public schools are not Sunday schools. Oklahoma Superintendent Ryan Walters has repeatedly made clear that he is incapable of distinguishing the difference and is unfit for office,” Laser said.