

## State Workforce Youth Council

Meeting Date: August 10, 2018

Meeting Time: 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Meeting Location: Oklahoma State University-Oklahoma City  
900 N. Portland, Oklahoma City, OK  
BT 304A, Business Technologies Bldg., 3rd floor

### AGENDA

Welcome & Introductions	Chuck Mills, Co-Chair
	Cecilia Robinson-Woods, Co-Chair
Review of June 8 Meeting Minutes (Vote for approval)	Co-Chairs
Guest speaker presentations with Q&A	Committee chairs
Discussion on Committee's purpose and priorities	Ed Long
Committee Reports Old Business New Business	Co-Chairs
Adjourn	
Next Meeting October 12, 2018	

### ATTACHMENTS

- June 8, 2018 Meeting Minutes (Draft for approval)
- Oklahoma Schools of Character Overview

### GUEST SPEAKERS

**State Senator DeWayne Pemberton**, former principal of Muskogee High School

**Silap Berdiyev**, Director of Academic Affairs from Dove Science Academy charter schools (OKC)

**Madison Tomlinson**, state coordinator for Oklahoma Schools of Character

### ATTENDEES

Chuck Mills, Co-Chair	Mills Machine Company
Francie Moss	Upward Bound, OSU-OKC
Karen Davidson	Southern Workforce Board
Kelly Arrington	Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education

Lance Allee	Lifelong Learning, Oklahoma CareerTech
Marissa Lightsey	Oklahoma Department of Education
Norma Noble	Youth Advocate
Toni Pickle	Pioneer Telephone Cooperative
Jeane Burruss	Oklahoma Office of Workforce Development
Renee Sansom	Department of Rehabilitation Services
Jennifer Thatcher	Oklahoma Juvenile Affairs
Thomas Cassidy	Department of Labor
Melissa Houston	Commissioner of Labor and Education/Workforce Development
Sarah Ashmore	Oklahoma Office of Workforce Development
Dewayne Pemberton	Oklahoma State Senate

## MEETING MINUTES

### Welcome & Introductions

Chuck Mills, co-chair of the Youth Programs Committee, welcomed attendees. He welcomed Melissa Houston, Labor Commissioner and Secretary of Education and Workforce. He expressed his appreciation of her time to attend the committee meeting in addition to the July Governor's Council meeting, identifying an opportunity from the business perspective to have a stronger collaboration with the Labor Commissioner in workforce conversations. He shared some of her background and asked the other attendees to introduce themselves.

### Approval of June 8, 2018 Minutes

Chuck asked for a motion to pass the June 8, 2018 minutes. Toni Pickle moved to accept the June 8, 2018 minutes. Lance Allee seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

### Guest Speaker Presentations with Q&A

Chuck introduced the guest presenters Senator Dewayne Pemberton, Madison Tomlinson, and Silap Berdiyev.

Senator Pemberton thanked Chuck for the opportunity to share more with the committee. He shared the context of his personal background in Arkansas as a coach, which led him to Muskogee where he was a coach, teacher, and school administrator for 36 years before retiring. When he first moved to Muskogee in 1982, there was a large middle class, a small upper middle class, and some poverty but overall a normal school with no security. The 5-A high school had around 2200 students. 8 years later, he transitioned to an administrative role in Hilldale, on the south side of Muskogee in Hilldale. He was in Hilldale until 2007 and returned to a completely different Muskogee that had almost no middle class. The culture had completely changed – test scores were low and fights/discipline issues were prevalent. Muskogee was 85% free and reduced lunch and is still fighting a lot of generational poverty. He became a principal in Muskogee in 2010 and connected with Madison about [www.character.org](http://www.character.org). The administrative team was looking for a way to change the culture of the school – students didn't make eye contact with administrators and there was limited

interaction with teachers and students. The administrators looked at the 11 principles to work on bringing character education into the school. The program started out with an advocacy model with teachers as mentors. The program began in 2008 as a pilot with 15 teachers and 150 students who met weekly and did activities together. The program expanded to 80 teachers and 750 students the following year before it was 100% implemented with all staff members and students in the 2009-2010 school year. The model met the needs of the students and staff to create a model of showing care for each other and building relationships.

The school leveraged its unique resource of a state-of-the-art broadcast system to incorporate daily character traits into morning announcements as well as videos created by students in the broadcast classes that emphasized the traits. The school generated student buy-in by listing all of the character traits on screens in the lunch room and asked the students to rank their top traits which came out to be Respect, Opportunity, Achievement, and Determination (ROAD to Success). Videos related to the traits and other successful behaviors were well-received by the school community. Over the course of the program, the school advanced from a state report card rating of F to a B/B+, which held steady over the last three years. Academic scores, attendance rates (increased from 89.4% to 95%), and test scores showed improvement. The school's discipline suspension rate went down 73% and contacts between security and students went down 47%. Honor rolls doubled. The "teacher family" mentorship groups met every Friday for 20 minutes and the teachers prepared activities for building relationships. In 2011, they became the first state school of character and the first national school of character in 2011 as well. Senator Pemberton's successor did not maintain that status during their brief tenure as principal, but he is confident in a recently hired replacement to continue on that path.

Senator Pemberton noted character as a key to the development of soft skills, which is critical for workforce readiness. In his last year at the school before running for public office in 2015, the school began transitioning character into academics. English teachers gave writing prompts related to the Road to Success traits. He said that if he went back into a school, the first thing he'd do is assess the culture and mobilize staff to develop student character. It's important to remember that in education the students move through and it's never the same group of students in a school. That means you're constantly starting over to re-train students and begin the cycle of character development over time. Teacher turnover negatively impacts the stability of school to maintain this. He noted how that has impacted Muskogee schools. He also discussed the challenges in Muskogee related to generational poverty and the training from the work of Dr. Ruby Payne that helped teachers who may have had a different economic background better understand the circumstances of their students. It was a requirement for every new teacher in addition to hours of ongoing staff development. He thanked Madison for his support and ongoing commitment to character education. He was asked about the financial investment to begin using the 11 principles and responded that there was no financial cost, but instead it required a willingness to take it on and spend the time to change the culture and get people on board. There's no reason not to do it, it just takes commitment.

Chuck introduced Silap Berdiyev from Dove Academy schools operating 5 campuses and also implementing the Character.org curriculum. Silap thanked the committee for the opportunity to present and echoed many of Senator Pemberton's remarks. He apologized for his colleague, Marc Julian's absence from the meeting. Silap began by sharing more about Dove Academy public charter schools, which began in 2001 and are located in both Oklahoma City and Tulsa. The program was founded by college professors who identified a need in STEM and college preparation academic focus in Oklahoma. Dove's curriculum always had a character component via character classes for middle school and enrichment activities for all students. Teachers were provided with character curriculum for the elective class, but a class alone did not seem to impact the broader school-wide culture and excitement for character development.

In 2015, the school superintendent began implementing Character.org curriculum. Over the past three years, there has been evidence of transformational change resulting from that curriculum. Silap emphasized the need for a champion of the curriculum at initial implementation to generate teacher buy-in. For Dove Academy, it was the role of the superintendent and his insistence to make the change. Achievements since implementing Character.org curriculum include being named a National Blue Ribbon School, becoming a state and national School of Character through Character.org, and recognized Best Practices from Character.org. He shared teacher and student demographics representing the diversity among both populations.

While the Character.org curriculum has been embedded and implemented across all 5 campuses, Silap stated that he will be focusing on one specific school to show the journey. He shared a list of initial stakeholder participants who had been actively involved in the existing character curriculum at the beginning of the transition to Character.org curriculum. The first step was championing a leader and having each school/district form a committee. There was no financial cost for the initial investment, but there was a significant time commitment required. The committee included senior employees who could influence the culture shift and broader buy-in from the whole staff. The committee studied the framework and 11 principles from Character.org. Through the application process, Character.org provided valuable support and went beyond the evaluator role to mentor the school in preparation for mentorship. The school applied over the course of 3 years and continued to implement the feedback received to improve their applications and become better candidates. They realized that student participation was a gap in the existing program (teacher-led charity week vs. student-led charity month). One of the promising practices that was selected from Dove Academy by Character.org was the incorporation of character in every classes. This also helped with teacher buy-in and make meaningful connections to Dove's core values and state standards for curriculum. They selected one character trait per month to focus on and strategically prioritized them to align with the school year calendar (ex. Discipline in September to build a strong classroom management foundation). The monthly traits were also connected with local and national holidays to help with classroom integration and teacher support. The more

student-led character activities and engagement increased, the more active parent participation became as well.

Chuck shared his reflections from observing students in Dove Academy and their engagement as a result of the character education. He emphasized the Youth Council's goal and focus on dropout prevention in partnership with the Career Pathways Committee's focus on dropout recovery. He asked Senator Pemberton about parental engagement in Muskogee at the beginning of the implementation process. Senator Pemberton responded that parent engagement wasn't very good at the beginning. It was part of the culture where parents avoided the school or only associated it with negative things like disciplinary issues. He also commented on the family structures that may be different in lower poverty areas and the way the teacher advocates were effective surrogates for many students.

Madison asked to show more of [www.okcharacter.org](http://www.okcharacter.org) and shared how the normal trend for character education programs is to begin at the elementary school level, but in Oklahoma it began in a high school and then a 7-12<sup>th</sup> grade alternative school. It was followed by more high schools. He shared more about the community background in Muskogee from his time as an assistant principal including race riot, high gang activity, and a volatile school culture in the early 2000s. He talked about the fears that Muskogee high school would become the next Columbine and the statistics from CNN that since Columbine there have been 215,000 students affected by school shootings and 23 school shootings have occurred in the Spring 2018 semester alone. He showed the committee the list of principles on the character website and mentioned the nominal cost for staff training, but reiterated that there is no financial cost to adopt the curriculum. He shared that there are surveys and assessment tools to help schools understand where they are.

Erin Risley-Baird asked the speakers to share how the state and the council can leverage and efficiently scale the impact of character education, especially in response to employer feedback about employability/soft skills. Chuck mentioned the impact of ICAP because of the universal mandate as a way to scale the curriculum. He asked the broad question about who in the state would drive it – Commerce, State Department of Education, etc.? Senator Pemberton mentioned that he makes a point of recognizing state and national schools of character on the Senate and House floors to better education legislators on the programs and their impacts. Part of what needs to happen is education for legislators to know what's out there and make it a priority. Chuck asked Secretary Houston for her view and she noted the new administration as an opportunity to carry new ideas forward to make a mark. She also suggested identifying champions who can sustain the work and serve as a network of support that can be built out. She suggested reaching out to school boards to garner interest and investment in promoting the work.

Chuck emphasized the importance of the committee in mobilizing to get the message out across their organizations, agencies, and networks to broaden interest and promote momentum so that we can scale this initiative. He emphasized the relevance of this type of

program that is not selling a product to Oklahoma schools and their limited resources. Chuck also suggested the possibility of the business community in making an investment in support of their local schools. Sarah mentioned connecting with the business roundtable and Norma suggested leveraging the four workforce regions for support. Chuck emphasized the need for effort coordination and leadership.

Silap noted improvement statewide with workforce development and business partnership with ICAP to develop internship and externship opportunities and emphasized that opportunity for community connection to give students the chance to apply and practice employability skills in a hands-on way.

Chuck thanked the speakers and Madison invited the committee to the Character.org luncheon celebrating 3 national Schools of Character and other schools recognized with Promising Practices.

#### **Discussion on Committee's Purpose and Priorities**

Due to time restrictions, the committee postponed this agenda item to the next meeting on October 12<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Committee Reports**

Due to time restrictions, the committee postponed committee reports to the next meeting on October 12<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Old Business**

None.

#### **New Business**

None.

#### **Next Meeting**

Friday, October 12<sup>th</sup> at 10am  
Oklahoma State University – Oklahoma City  
BT 304A, Business Technologies Building, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor

#### **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at approximately 12:20pm.

*Respectfully submitted,  
Darcee Simon*