Wear the Mask or Face Termination: Plucky Oklahoma Teachers Fight Back Against Unlawful Mandates

https://media.blubrry.com/1462062/mcdn.podbean.com/mf/web/m28vhe/Wear_the_Mask_or_Face_Termination_Plucky_Oklahoma_Teachersb9ho3.mp3

Podcast: Play in new window | **Download** ()
Subscribe: Android | RSS | More

Despite a recent Oklahoma state law (SB 658), the superintendent of the Oklahoma City Public School system has ordered all persons in the school district, including students, teachers, and staff, to wear masks on school grounds. SB 658, passed in the most recent session, made it a state law that the state's public school districts could *not* make the wearing of masks mandatory.

Twelve teachers initially balked at the order issued by the superintendent, Sean McDaniel. Threatened with termination, seven decided to comply, but five stuck to their principles and said they would not do so. As a result, the five teachers were sent home, and termination hearings were scheduled.

AP Images
Sean McDaniel, superintendent of Oklahoma City Public Schools. 2020

One of the five is Dr. James Taylor, a history teacher at Roosevelt Middle School. Taylor is also a church pastor in Norman, Oklahoma, who has challenged fellow Republican Tom Cole for the 4th Congressional District post. An African-American, Taylor is a popular speaker on current political issues, most recently giving multiple presentations against Critical Race Theory.

"I am not trying to be rebellious, nor do I wish to lose my job at OKCPS," Taylor wrote in a letter to the human resources department of the school system. Taylor objected that he was being asked to "break the law." He told the HR department, "Superintendent McDaniel's unlawful mandatory mask policy, which is in clear violation of Oklahoma State Law," would force him to do just that.

"I came to school Monday, August 16, expecting to teach my students, and you sent me home. Superintendent McDaniel does not have the authority to order the students, parents, and the staff to break the law."

Taylor told me that he had asked HR for an opt-out form — McDaniel's order had provided for opt-outs for students on religious grounds as well as medical grounds. However, teachers were not allowed to exercise a religious opt-out. "I have moral and religious objections to being asked to break the law," Taylor told HR.

Taylor and five other teachers were represented by a lawyer, provided by his professional association —

the Professional Oklahoma Educators (POE) — while six other teachers were represented by a teacher in their union, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Taylor told me that this caused some of the AFT members to switch to POE, an organization that does not advocate for progressive political causes.

Oklahoma Attorney General John O'Connor — recently named to the vacant position by Oklahoma's Republican governor, Kevin Stitt — is suing the school district for not following state law, which forbids mask mandates. While a local judge recently ruled that school districts had to allow religious and medical exemptions for students, he was not asked about faculty or staff. The OKC superintendent evidently saw this as a loophole through which he could force his district's teachers to either wear a mask or be fired. This seems to be in clear defiance of the spirit and the letter of the state law.

Taylor also questions the efficacy of masks. "The surgical masks that the district provides to the students do not work," he told HR. "I defy you to present one study that shows they stop any virus. The coronavirus measures .1 micron in diameter, while the smallest holes are 50 times larger than the virus. The Board and the Superintendent say, 'We must follow the science.' There is some science for you, why are we not following that science?" Taylor then offered a link to some studies supporting his position that masks are ineffective against Covid infection.

McDaniel told local media in Oklahoma City that his mask decree included accommodations for medical, personal, and religious reasons but neglected to communicate that these accommodations do not apply to teachers — just students. Only a medical accommodation is acceptable.

"Why do I need any accommodation to obey the law? Shouldn't we be encouraging people to obey the law?" Taylor asked HR in his letter.

Finally, Taylor queried HR about some of the other consequences of the mask order, made in defiance of state law. "What example does it set for the students, when I am back in the classroom, and I ask my students to follow the rules? What would prevent them from saying, 'No, the Superintendent says we do not have to follow state law, so why should I follow your law?"

Americans have a government — including the one in Oklahoma — which is held to the important principle of separation of powers. It is the legislature that makes state law, not the superintendent of the Oklahoma City Public Schools. As an administrator, it is his job to enforce the law and obey it, not defy it. Hopefully, the school board will understand that they have a duty to obey state law, as well, and overrule their superintendent.

Steve Byas is a professor of history and government, and the author of History's Greatest Libels. *He may be contacted at* byassteve@yahoo.com.

Subscribe to the New American

Get exclusive digital access to the most informative,
non-partisan truthful news source for patriotic Americans!

Discover a refreshing blend of time-honored values, principles and insightful
perspectives within the pages of "The New American" magazine. Delve into a
world where tradition is the foundation, and exploration knows no bounds.

From politics and finance to foreign affairs, environment, culture,
and technology, we bring you an unparalleled array of topics that matter most.

What's Included?

24 Issues Per Year
Optional Print Edition
Digital Edition Access
Exclusive Subscriber Content
Audio provided for all articles
Unlimited access to past issues
Coming Soon! Ad FREE
60-Day money back guarantee!
Cancel anytime.

Subscribe