

Oklahoma Statewide Virtual Charter School Board Elects New Chair, Vice Chair
OSVCSB votes to centralize further actions on Epic Charter School, eliminating concerns over conflicts of interest

OKLAHOMA CITY (Dec. 8, 2020) – The Oklahoma Statewide Virtual Charter School Board (OSVCSB) today elected Dr. Robert Franklin as the new chair of the board and Dr. Brandon Tatum as the vice chair, effective immediately.

“Collaborating and working with a committed board to help guide Oklahoma’s policy and governance for virtual charter schools has never been more important,” said Dr. Franklin. **“The global pandemic has brought school design throughout to an inflection point. As many families and students are gravitating toward virtual and e-learning platforms we must keep a clear eye on the North Star of student competency and workforce readiness. Good governance will help reset the parameters of such innovative school design, and I am honored to serve as chair of a board that is tasked with this oversight.”**

Dr. Robert Franklin was appointed to the OSVCSB in 2018 by the Senate Pro Tempore. He is the Associate Superintendent for Student Affairs at Tulsa Tech, a role he has held since January 2010. Dr. Franklin has been in the education profession since his start as a special education classroom teacher at the Hissom Memorial Center in January 1981. He held teaching and leadership positions at Sand Springs Schools, where he worked for 29 years before coming to Tulsa Tech. Dr. Franklin is also involved in a number of community advancement and outreach projects including being the co-founder and camp director for Make Promises Happen, the state’s largest camping and recreational program specializing in serving children and adults with disabilities. He presently serves as a board member of Junior Achievement Tulsa and served as the state trustee to the Oklahoma Education Technology Trust, resigning recently in order to fulfill his role as chairman of the OSVCSB.

“Robert is a man of high moral character, and the right leader for this time in the board’s history,” said Mike Mullins, Member, Sand Springs Public Schools Board of Education. **“Robert is a passionate and commended education professional who will emphasize strong, meaningful educational opportunities for Oklahoma students and families.”**

Dr. Brandon Tatum was appointed by Governor Kevin Stitt in November 2020, following the completion of John Harrington’s 6-year appointment by Governor Mary Fallin.

Dr. Brandon Tatum has spent his career working in both Christian K-12 and higher education. Currently, Dr. Tatum is the CEO and Founder of ConnectEdu, which aims to make higher education affordable and accessible through a high-quality innovative approach. Dr. Tatum's Doctorate of Education is from Abilene Christian University in Organizational Leadership with an emphasis in Higher Education. Previously, he served in various roles including teacher, coach, and was the former President of Oklahoma Christian Academy located in Edmond, Oklahoma. He is also the author of two children's books, *The Adventures of Grit* and *The Diary of a Lousy Book*.

"I'm excited about the opportunity I have to serve on this board," said Dr. Tatum. **"The Oklahoma Statewide Virtual Charter School Board should be at the center of developing innovation in education. We should be the experts in digital learning and be creating the best opportunities for teachers and students to engage in rigorous coursework and meaningful community. Robert Franklin as chair will bring a strengthened and needed sense of accountability. With this reset of leadership, we now need to take a fresh look at all contracts, apply lessons learned, and ensure we are delivering the best virtual education while also being responsible and transparent with Oklahomans' tax dollars. I'm eager to get to work."**

As it pertains to the State Auditor's investigative audit of Epic Charter School and the Attorney General's review, the OSVCSB also voted today to centralize ongoing board decisions relating to Epic to Chairman Dr. Robert Franklin, Vice Chairman Dr. Brandon Tatum, and board member Barry Beauchamp. The board's vote recused two board members, Phyliss Shepherd and Mathew Hamrick, from further decisions related specifically to Epic's current contract due to concerns for conflicts of interest.

"Safely driving through foggy atmospheric conditions prompts drivers to buckle seat belts, switch to low beams and proceed attentively. Similarly, the decision to recuse board members from voting on matters related to the findings and the concerns brought forth as a result of Governor Stitt's request for an investigative audit helps the Oklahoma Statewide Virtual Charter School Board navigate through upcoming decisions involving Epic's future as an approved virtual charter school," said Dr. Franklin. **"Epic's Board of Education, the families and students being served by Epic's staff as well as state taxpayers can feel confident that today's decision to recuse two colleagues insures clarity of purpose and no conflicting interest when upcoming decisions are being made."**

The OSVCSB was established in 2014 as a State government entity providing authorization and oversight of virtual public charter schools in Oklahoma. The OSVCSB is composed of five board members, two appointed by the Speaker of the House, two appointed by the Pro Temp of the State Senate, and one appointed by the Governor. Appointed board members serve 3-year terms. The State Superintendent and the Secretary of Education serve as non-voting members of the board.