The Anne and Henry Zarrow School of Social Work stands in support of Oklahoma’s teachers. The state of Oklahoma faces far too many crises regarding a host of complex and related social issues. Currently, our colleagues in education are fighting diligently for their profession and for the wellbeing of young people throughout our great state. The State of Oklahoma ranks 47th in the nation in per pupil spending and leads the nation in cuts to public education (28.2%, between 2008-2018). Additionally, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Oklahoma teachers are the lowest paid in the nation, and despite several attempts by teacher associations and districts, the Oklahoma Legislature has failed to provide any solutions. As a result of these challenges, teachers throughout the state are teaching and managing oversized classrooms with limited or no supplies or textbooks, and many are forced to take on part-time jobs outside of their career to financially support themselves and their families.

Given the deficits and challenges facing teachers and support staff in education, the time has come for social workers, institutions of higher learning, and schools of social work around the State of Oklahoma to come together in solidarity to support educators in their struggle to address the social crisis of education impacting our schools and young people. It is time for all helping professions, educators across levels, and families to begin working together to help address and reform public education in our state, not only through supporting teachers in this fight, but by continuing to support and fight with teachers in their quest to produce the highest quality public education system possible. The future of Oklahoma depends on producing future generations of highly educated critical thinkers who will continue the fight to tackle and address the complex social issues facing Oklahomans. This requires teachers who are fairly compensated and an education system that is fully funded and responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable schools, communities, and students.

As the director of the University of Oklahoma Anne and Henry Zarrow School of Social Work, I ask you to join us in standing with teachers during this difficult time by considering participating in some or all of the following actions:

1. Show your support for teachers by drafting formal statements and sharing them on personal or professional websites and social media.
2. If the legislature does not meet the demands of the OEA (link), join other advocates at the Capitol on April 2nd.
3. Organize events with other schools and departments on campus and in the community that allow for the building of relationships, awareness, and collective actions that support teacher organizing efforts.
4. Work with community groups to help ensure that young people and families in the community, especially those with the fewest resources, are able to access food and childcare needs in the event of district shutdowns.
5. Call and write to elected officials (link) expressing your support of teachers and requesting that they work to address the grievances raised by educators in order to support our young people and public system of education.

Please feel free to post directly to the school’s Facebook timeline (link) any resources for families during this time – we welcome that!

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