

Oklahoma to impose “America First” loyalty test for teachers from New York and California

Jane Wise
27 August 2025

Oklahoma’s fascist-led education department has announced an “America First” Test for K–12 teachers arriving from California and New York. The exam will be administered by right wing advocacy group PragerU before an applicant can receive an Oklahoma license.

State Superintendent Ryan Walters justifies the measure as protection against “radical leftist ideology fostered in places like California and New York.” A spokesperson for the state’s education department said the test has been finalized and will roll out “very soon.”

The 50-question multiple-choice test delivered before a license is granted will screen applicants from California and New York for views on American exceptionalism and gender ideology that go against the views, allegedly of Oklahoma, in reality of extreme-right Republicans, according to Walters.

By the state’s own data, this test targets vanishingly few people. Since 2020, Oklahoma has reviewed 573 out-of-state certification applications; only 19 came from California and New York combined, roughly four to five per year. The minuscule scale exposes the policy’s real function: setting a precedent for ideological litmus tests across the civil service.

The policy is a bellwether for ideological vetting across the public sector, echoing Hitler’s *Führereid*, the personal loyalty oath imposed in 1934 on the military, civil servants, judges and teachers, or *Gleichschaltung*, or imposed ideological conformity. Trump and his fascist followers have already targeted universities and cultural institutions alike, from coercive funding demands and settlements at Harvard and Columbia to pressure on the Smithsonian to “sanitize” slavery-focused exhibits so that they are less “anti-American.”

This is the logic of the fascistic Trump administration which derides the so-called “elite” and the “radical left” in Democratic cities and has deployed the military in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., while threatening to “take over” sanctuary cities like Chicago and New York.

The content of the America First Test underscores the aim. Alongside pop-quiz civics questions (“What are the two parts of the U.S. Congress?”), the exam features ideologically loaded prompts such as, “Why is freedom of religion important to America’s identity?” with the keyed answer, “It protects religious choice from government control.”

Oklahoma has outsourced the gatekeeper role to a private right-wing propaganda outfit, PragerU. The brainchild of conservative radio talk show host Dennis Prager, PragerU is not a university but a conservative media and advocacy nonprofit, that produces short, polished videos, including “PragerU Kids,” targeting elementary and middle school students, and pitches them to states as “standards-aligned” instructional materials teachers can use in class.

Florida was the first state to greenlight PragerU Kids for classroom use in 2023; since then, Arizona has moved to feature the videos on its state portal, Montana has licensed PragerU as a textbook dealer, New Hampshire has approved a PragerU financial-literacy course, and at least six states now list the content as optional, state-sanctioned resources.

Jonathan Zimmerman of the University of Pennsylvania calls Oklahoma’s contract with PragerU a “watershed moment.” “Instead of Prager simply being a resource that you can draw in an optional way, Prager has become institutionalized as part of the state

system,” he said. “There’s no other way to describe it.”

Under State Superintendent Walters, Oklahoma is becoming the template for a far-right remaking of public education. Over the past 14 months, the state has required Bible instruction, proposed collecting students’ citizenship information, revised social-studies standards to have students examine alleged “discrepancies” in the 2020 election, and sought approval for what would have been the nation’s first religious charter school, which was blocked by the U.S. Supreme Court.

An ideology exam for teacher licensing cuts across basic First Amendment protections: the state may not force political profession or make people recite an official line to get a public job; courts have struck down teacher loyalty oaths and bans on “compelled speech,” and they bar hiring that rewards one viewpoint and punishes another.

Singling out applicants from California and New York raises equal-treatment and right-to-travel problems, and handing the answer key to a private advocacy organization invites due-process and delegation concerns.

If the test folds religious dogma into civics, it edges toward a forbidden religious test for public service. Constitutionally, such a scheme should fail, but under the current circumstances, in which the Supreme Court is aligned with the fascist Trump, upholding the laws of land has become an uncertain proposition.

Democratic officials and the union leadership have minimized this latest threat, casting Oklahoma’s loyalty test as partisan theater and a distraction. AFT president Randi Weingarten charged that Walters’ priority is “getting Donald Trump and other MAGA politicians to notice him,” and added, “Teachers are patriots,” reassuring the ruling class once more that teachers can be counted on to accept the framework imposed on them rather than mobilizing in defense of their democratic rights and the truth.

Democratic state Rep. John Waldron likewise branded the measure “political posturing,” calling it “a textbook definition of indoctrination... a loyalty test for teachers,” and “a sad echo of a more paranoid past.”

Educators, students, and workers must organize independently of both capitalist parties and the union bureaucracies to defeat loyalty tests and the dismantling of their democratic rights. Form rank-and-file

committees in every district to document coercion, defend colleagues, and coordinate collective responses. Only through the mobilization of the working class can the spread of fascism be stopped.



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