

Date: January 13, 2020

To: Superintendents, School Board Members, and Principals

From: Colt Gill, Director of the Oregon Department of Education (ODE)

RE: Clarifying Expectations for a Safe and Inclusive School Environment

At ODE, we are seeing increased reports of harassment based on race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and sexual orientation in our schools and at our school sponsored events. Nationally and internationally we are regularly hearing or seeing reports of attacks on people as well as religious or cultural sites – acts that are centered on people that fall under our protected classes in Oregon. Locally, our children, families, and staff are impacted by these reports. It is our responsibility to create safe, welcoming spaces for all of Oregon’s children so that we can both teach them and foster their resilience so that they may learn and thrive.

While our students and their families regularly experience or witness harassment based on race, gender, or other attributes in our communities, our state, and our nation; we have tools to help prevent and address these offenses in our schools.

Many Oregon educators began 2020 by reestablishing and reteaching classroom expectations introduced back in September. In that same spirit, I encourage you to revisit and reteach expectations, policies and procedures aimed at creating a school community that is welcoming and inclusive to all students, families, and staff.

**Take time this month to review and communicate your policies and procedures related to bullying, intimidation, harassment, and discrimination.**

Oregon law requires school districts to adopt policies on discrimination, harassment, intimidation, bullying, and cyberbullying. Review your policies to ensure you have all of the required policies in place.

- [OAR 581-021-0045\(2\)](#) *No person shall be subjected to discrimination in any public elementary, secondary or community college education program or service, school or interschool activity or in any higher education program or service or interschool activity where the program, service, school, or activity is financed in whole or in part by monies appropriated by the Legislative Assembly.*
- *Discrimination includes [OAR 581-021-0045\(1\)\(a\)](#) “any act that unreasonably differentiates treatment, intended or unintended, or any act that is fair in form but discriminatory in operation, either of which is based on age, disability, national origin, race, color, marital status, religion, sex, and sexual orientation.”*
- [ORS 339.351\(3\)](#) *expands the definition of “Protected class” to mean a group of persons distinguished, or perceived to be distinguished, by race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, marital status, familial status, source of income or disability. This definition applies to harassment and bullying beyond the protected classes of discrimination.*
- [OAR 581-022-2310\(2\)](#) *Each district school board shall adopt a policy in accordance with [ORS 339.356](#) prohibiting harassment, intimidation or bullying and prohibiting cyberbullying. School*

*districts are encouraged to develop the policy after consultation with parents and guardians, school employees, volunteers, students, administrators and community representatives.*

Make sure your district's complaint process is available on your school district homepage. Schools cannot act on bullying, intimidation, harassment, or discrimination if they are not aware it is happening.

- [OAR 581-022-2370\(2\)](#) *A school district's complaint procedure must: (a) Be in writing available at the main administrative office and, if the school district has a website, in a form available on the home page of the school district's website; (b) Include the name of the person, position, or office within the school district with the responsibility for responding to the complaint; and (c) Specify the time period during which the complaint will be addressed and a final decision issued. If the complaint procedure has multiple steps, the procedure must establish the time period for each step as well as the overall time period for completing the complaint procedure.*

With staff, review key definitions and procedures. Make sure your employees (administrators, teachers, counselors, educational assistants, bus drivers, secretaries, custodians, nutrition staff, and others) know how to address complaints of bullying, harassment, or discrimination.

With students and parents, communicate your expectations and provide links to the policies, procedures and complaint process.

## **Remind staff, students, and parents about the [SafeOregon](#) tip line.**

[SafeOregon](#) gives students, parents, and schools a way to report safety threats or potential acts of violence. Access the [SafeOregon](#) tip line:

- Phone: 844-472-3367
- Text: 844-472-3367
- Mobile App for SafeOregon available at the Apple App Store (iPhone) and Google Play (Android)
- [SafeOregon website](#)
- [Email tips to SafeOregon](#)
- [Student, Parent and School resources are available online](#)

**If you see or hear about bullying, violence, drugs, or harm to your school or a student, report a tip using SafeOregon.**

**REPORT A TIP:**

**ONLINE**

[safeoregon.com](http://safeoregon.com)

**EMAIL**

[tip@safeoregon.com](mailto:tip@safeoregon.com)

**CALL OR TEXT**

844-4-SAFE-OR  
(844-472-3367)

**APP**



**Review your district's behavior and discipline practices.**

Oregon, like other states, disproportionately suspends and expels students of color, students navigating poverty, and students with disabilities (source: [Oregon Statewide Annual Report Card](#)). Further studies on disproportionate discipline in Oregon can be found on the [ODE Website](#). Use this opportunity to review your district's behavior and discipline practices for racial equity and institutional bias.

**Consider providing professional learning opportunities related to ensuring a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment for all students, families, and staff.**

Oregon law establishes what many of us know in our own experience to be true – students need a safe and inclusive environment to do their best learning and we create that environment in part through our own example. [ORS 339.353\(1\)](#) states:

*The Legislative Assembly finds that: (a) A safe and civil environment is necessary for students to learn and achieve high academic standards. (b) Harassment, intimidation or bullying and cyberbullying, like other disruptive or violent behavior, are conduct that disrupts a student's ability to learn and a school's ability to educate its students in a safe environment. (c) Students learn by example.*

Please contact [Winston Cornwall](#) on our civil rights team with any questions.

Thank you for your commitment to creating a school community that is welcoming and inclusive to all students, families, and staff. I'm proud to partner with you in fostering equity and excellence for every learner.

Sincerely,

Colt Gill

Director