



October 15, 2020

Dear education partners and community members,

The co-signers of this letter represent the leaders of the Oregon State Board of Education, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE), the Coalition of Oregon School Administrators (COSA), the Oregon Education Association (OEA), the Oregon School Boards Association (OSBA), the Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA), the Oregon School Activities Association (OSAA), the Oregon Association of Education Service Districts (OAESD), and the Oregon Association of Student Councils (OASC). Each of our organizations has been clear about our shared commitment to advancing a racially just future. We each have policies and procedures against discrimination, harassment, and bullying. We are committed to ensuring that all students in Oregon feel safe, welcome, and included in our schools and activities. As part of that commitment, we unequivocally affirm that Black Lives Matter and believe racial discrimination and injustice are intolerable in any form. This letter is a statement of our collective values and comes after reports of educators being harassed for displaying Black Lives Matter symbols.

We fully support Black Lives Matter as a civil rights movement that aims to combat racism and support Black individuals. We stand beside Black Lives Matter, as a statement of social justice and an affirmation of the value and worth of Black people. We can acknowledge that many people have misunderstood or been misinformed about the origin and expression that Black Lives Matter. The need to affirm the Black Lives Matter is rooted in the history and current experiences that have intentionally marginalized Black lives and bodies.

The Oregon State Board of Education recently adopted state rules that prohibit the display of hate symbols, including the noose, swastika, and confederate flag in school settings with the All Students Belong initiative. Black Lives Matter is the opposite of those prohibited symbols; it is a statement of love and acceptance, not a symbol of hate.

The display of the phrase “Black Lives Matter” or Black Lives Matter symbols in school settings does not violate any state policy or law. That being said, this letter does not constitute legal advice and we encourage school districts to consult with their legal counsel if questions around

state and federal law arise. To many educators, Black Lives Matter demonstrates to all of our students that racism has no place in our schools or society. It shows Black students that they matter in our classrooms. Calling attention to racism has a place in our schools because we know that systemic racism and bias continue to hurt students, families, and staff who are Black, Indigenous, Native American, and people of color. In Oregon, Black students are disproportionately impacted by suspension and expulsion, and they are less likely to graduate from high school. These facts do not align with our core values of excellence and equity in education. That is why we say that Black Lives Matter.

We understand that Black Lives Matter elicits many different points of view; Oregon is a large state with many voices. Our support for the Black Lives Matter movement, anti-racist training, and the teaching of the sometimes violent and racist history of the U.S. are not intended to generate guilt or shame for white students and communities. Little positive change can come from the negative space of guilt and shame. However, when we recognize that the current systems we live in are deeply rooted in history and were created to benefit some more than others, together we can take the necessary steps to rectify this long-standing injustice and dismantle systemic racism in our society.

Examining Black Lives Matter in a classroom context may generate conversation. We are all education organizations and we believe in the value of authentic and respectful dialogue. We also condemn any call to harm or harass anyone. The Oregon Department of Education has released [resources](#) to help facilitate challenging conversations. If a conflict arises, we encourage teachers, students, and parents to speak with their school administrator and work together to resolve the issue.

We must be honest about our [racist history as a state](#). We must acknowledge the systemic racism that still exists in our public education system and the harm that it causes. We must commit to an anti-racist stance and to doing better for Black students, families, and educators. It is our responsibility to make sure that all of our students feel seen, safe, and welcome in our schools so they can fulfill their potential and achieve their goals, and we commit to partnering with Black students and community to ensure that our systems change.

Sincerely,

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