

Statement from the Chair on Behalf of the Oregon State Board of Education

In the wake of the outcome of the presidential election, many members of school communities throughout Oregon feel unsafe, unwelcome, and are deeply concerned. They hurt for themselves, their friends and loved ones, and, in many cases, for the country. Although reactions may be acute at this moment, it is important to note that this pain is nothing new for many Oregon students, families, and educational professionals—particularly those who confront racism, discrimination, and other forms of hate speech and acts on a routine basis.

In the context of an election that has heightened divisive political rhetoric, our shared commitment to inclusion presses us to give space to, and respect, multiple viewpoints. Oregon's schools should be venues for critical engagement in these diverse perspectives and for thoughtful dialogue. However, as educators develop strategies to engage these topics with students in a developmentally appropriate manner, we must ensure that all students and families feel safe and are welcomed in our schools. It is not a political act to support each other, to offer kind words, or to listen.

The Oregon State Board of Education stands together with all Oregon students, families, educators, staff, and communities to ensure that our schools are safe, and free from bullying, discrimination, and harassment. No one, regardless of their role, should be made to feel fearful in our schools or during participation in school sponsored events. We must vigorously respond to any incident, however seemingly small, that threatens safety. Moreover, we are steadfast in our commitment to equity and ensuring that ALL Oregon students have access to the full complement of educational resources and the opportunity to reach their maximum potential, regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, and special education status. This commitment is measured by actions, not just words, and we must all do our part. In taking action, we need to give the concerns and experiences of our vulnerable community members standing in our interactions, and we must take the opportunity to learn and understand more about the sociohistorical injustices and struggles that have paved the way for social transformation in the past. These are the lessons we can apply to building renewed momentum for progress on equity and social justice.

We stand behind all efforts by Oregon's educators to support students and to ensure their safety and sense of belongingness. Likewise, we support all efforts to provide a welcoming and inclusive work environment for our dedicated teachers, staff, and administrators who are also affected by their own feelings of vulnerability as they work to support students. This is a time to use our voices to speak up when we detect injustice, and to listen with kindness and acceptance to the lived experiences of those who have suffered injustice. This is not a moment for passivity, but rather boldness; this is a moment to stand behind our commitment to the well-being of students, families, and communities across the state of Oregon.

Charles Martinez, Chair
Oregon State Board of Education