



Chair Dave Brown, Vice Chair Brian Shannon, Directors Renee Powell, and Trevor DeHart:

The Oregon School Board Members of Color Caucus is a non-partisan caucus that represents Black, Indigenous and board members of color on public boards of education in Oregon. As the largest caucus of elected officials of color in the state, we represent thousands of BIPOC students and families with a mission to promote quality education for all students with an emphasis on the unique needs of students of color.

We are reaching out to you regarding the growing concern of your scheduled actions to:

1. Ban flags that are regarded as symbols of civil rights and representation of the protection and celebration of Black and LGBTQ+ students and community members.
2. Rescind policy ACB that is mandated by state law "Every Student Belong." The policy was voted on by your board and the minutes of the meeting have already been approved unanimously by your board in the following meeting.
3. Take action to replace your resolution language that commits the district to be inclusive of all students and acknowledges the ongoing need to oppose racism.

We want to highlight the trauma and devastation that have been inflicted on your students, educators, families, and the larger community by moving forward with these actions. Doing so moves far away from the values of your board and community that acknowledge that all students belong and deserve to find schools free of bullying, marginalization, or suppression of their constitutional rights.

We encourage you to listen to your colleagues on the board: members Ines Peña, Brandy Penner and Rebecca Piros. Listen to your BIPOC and LGBTQ+ students and work to gain their trust in your actions. Please consider the following aspects that relate to your decision:

1. Avoid taking actions that are contrary to state or federal law. As board members, we are required by law to follow U.S. and state constitutions and laws thereof and the policies of our own districts. Due diligence in listening to the superintendent as the board educational advisor (policy BBF) is crucial. Please consider requesting and following advice and counsel before taking actions that can be legally questionable.
2. The actions you are considering are sending a message of division and marginalization of students and educators who are part of your community.

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Please consider learning about what the Black Lives Matter movement calls for. What message do you send by banning symbols that call for Black lives to matter and be valued no more, and no less, than other lives? What message do you send by banning symbols that call for the celebration and equal protection under the law for LGBTQ+ students and community members? These symbols are celebratory and elevate the voices of all students.

3. These actions will disrupt district operations. Students have the constitutional right of expression and they will defy your potential actions. They have the right to express their voices and to have educators to teach them about civil rights and racial justice.

Please consider standing with your district values to provide a safe space for all students. Please know that knowingly taking actions against the law (HB 2697-2021) or against your legal counsel may result in losing Division 22 compliance and state funding as a result. It may further cost your district tremendous sums of taxpayer money and state funding for violating federal and state law or your own policies. You are sworn to the office to uphold the law.

As your colleagues across the state, we hope that we will be working together and meeting during conversations and training. While we may have different lived experiences and backgrounds, we believe that we share the same mission to promote quality education and a safe environment for all students to lift up their voices. As such, please consider this a message of concern and care from your peers. As elected officials of color, we are speaking to you with a level of concern and care for students and families who live in your district and see your pending actions in direct contrast to their rights to find safety in schools.

Your first actions in this school year should be to support your superintendent in these difficult times. By doing so you ensure that support is provided for all students amid a school year full of challenges to address the pandemic and the unfair disparities of health and learning outcomes between BIPOC and LGBTQ+ students and their peers.

Please reach out to us, reach out to all of your community and send a clear message that Every Student Belongs. There is no place for racism in Oregon, and that includes Newberg. Matters of racial justice and civil rights are not just political discussions that students need to be aware of -- they are an essential element of inclusive public education.

Sincerely,  
Oregon School Board Members of Color Caucus Executive Team

