Oregon Education Association Reaffirms Commitment to Creating Safe and Inclusive Public Schools and Colleges for all Oregon Students

PORTLAND, OR – The Oregon Education Association, the state’s largest union for education professionals, representing roughly 41,000 educators from pre-kindergarten through Oregon’s community colleges, released the following statement reaffirming their commitment to equity and inclusivity initiatives aimed at making public schools and college campuses more welcoming and affirming spaces for students.

“Every Oregon student deserves to receive an honest and accurate education where they see their own lived experience reflected in their curriculum, and they deserve access to a learning environment where they feel not only safe but welcomed. The Oregon Education Association and our 41,000 member educators remain steadfast in our commitment to not only support, but to lead, efforts to create learning environments that are safe and welcoming for every Oregon student, and especially for our Black, Brown and Indigenous students of color who for too long have been disproportionately affected by racism and bias embedded in our public school systems.

It is no secret that our institutions of learning have failed to ensure every student’s fundamental right to a welcoming and inclusive public education. This failing has disproportionately impacted Oregon’s students of color, students living in poverty or experiencing homelessness, LGBTQ+ students, students for whom English is a second language, and students receiving specialized services for their physical, emotional, or intellectual needs.

Many educators throughout the state of Oregon, and across the nation, are dedicated to addressing this shortcoming in our public education system. Students deserve a thoughtful and inclusive educational environment where their unique needs are met and where they have access to the resources necessary to reach their full potential. Our members and their local unions have created collaborative environments with elected officials, local school board, and with their communities to reimagine how our neighborhood public schools and community colleges can better serve every Oregon student. It is vital that we work together to ensure that the promise of a rich and engaging public education is no longer denied to students who have been historically marginalized by our public institutions.
Unfortunately, in some of our communities this important work has not only been met with skepticism or apathy, it has been met with active resistance and outright hostility. Outside political organizations seeking to stoke fear and division have attacked the efforts of educators to create more inclusive and welcoming schools, pushing the false narrative that efforts to provide an honest and inclusive education for every student isn’t possible. These political provocateurs claim that efforts to improve the educational experience for historically marginalized students cannot succeed without diminish the educational experience for students who have always been well-served by our institutions of public education. We know this is a paradigm meant to divide, rather than unite, our communities.

These outside antagonists have gone to great lengths to push their harmful and inaccurate message. Individual educators have been attacked for urging their colleagues and their school administrators to take equity work more seriously, receiving hate-filled messages and death threats for simply demanding that every student in their district receive the education they deserve. School board members with extreme ideologies have flouted the law and wrenched communities apart as they push to halt and reverse efforts to create welcoming and inclusive schools in the districts they are charged with caring for. And many students who, for the first time in their educational career, were finally seeing a concerted effort by our public schools to create an educational system that truly included them - now find themselves at the center of a hate-filled political campaign claiming that their rights and needs should continue to be ignored.

The Oregon Education Association and our 41,000 member educators vehemently reject the false choice being pushed by these outside political agents and remain steadfast in our commitment to lead efforts to build more inclusive and affirming educational environments. We know there is still a great deal of work to be done before every student, regardless of their zip code, economic background, or skin color has access to the education that they deserve and we will continue to work with students, families, and communities throughout the state to advance that work now and in the future.”

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