

Student Safety and Educational Equity, Politics, and Social Causes

Rev. 9/16/24

Student Safety and Educational Equity

The Hillsboro School District is committed to creating safe and welcoming spaces for all students, staff, and families; and to treat all people fairly and equitably, regardless of their race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, political beliefs, history of marginalization, or any other status.

In addition to clear district policies against [discrimination](#) and [harassment](#), as well as a policy to promote [educational equity](#), we have a moral obligation to create safe learning and working environments for all students and staff, and to address systemic and individual racism in our schools.

Effective Friday, Sept. 18, 2020, the Oregon State Board of Education adopted the [Every Student Belongs](#) Administrative Rule (OAR) that specifically identifies and prohibits display of three of the most recognizable symbols of hate: the swastika, the Confederate flag, and the noose. In accordance with the rule, HSD updated policies and procedures prohibiting the use or display of these and other symbols of hate in all programs and school-sponsored activities except where used in teaching curriculum that is aligned with the Oregon State Standards.

Politics

Following the last two elections, many students in HSD reported feeling unsafe at school based on their race, color, and/or immigration status. We also heard from students and staff who felt unsafe because of their political or religious beliefs. In addition, we heard from students who say they prefer (and are more successful in) politically neutral classrooms where discussion can be open and inclusive of diverse perspectives.

We have a professional role as public servants and educators to foster safe, neutral learning spaces, and to avoid promoting our personal political views during working hours per the Oregon Secretary of State's [guidelines for public employees](#).

We also have the responsibility to teach our students about civic rights and responsibilities and to encourage civic engagement. Oregon State [Social Science Standards](#) require us to teach students to understand how to become informed and contributing citizens in our democracy. We strive to model civil discourse, teach critical thinking, incorporate multiple perspectives, and teach students how to construct arguments using evidence.

Social Causes

Expressing support of social causes and of people has been classified as freedom of speech, not political speech. Employees may display messaging via posters, buttons, pendants, decals, and clothing. The use of such displays with social justice messages are permitted provided they align with the following expectations:

- Displays must not be used to promote hateful or offensive language.
- Displays must not verbally attack, influence a decision, or urge someone to vote for a particular candidate, political agenda/initiative, ballot measure, etc.

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- Displays by employees must not promote a stance for or against a political agenda, candidate, ballot measure, etc.
- Displays must not condone or promote violence or criminal activity.
- Displays must not disrupt the learning environment.

We have received many questions as to whether or not students and staff can wear and/or display messages about Black Lives Matter (BLM). According to the U.S. Office of Special Counsel, an independent federal agency, and the Oregon School Boards Association, BLM is not a political statement, nor is it associated with a specific candidate or political campaign. Rather, it is a statement of social justice, which is aligned with the District's commitment to authentically affirm the identity(ies) of all students, families, and staff.

As educators, we embrace the opportunity to grapple with complex and difficult topics, and to teach students how to think critically to make their own informed decisions. The process won't always be straightforward or easy, and we ask for partnership, patience and understanding by all involved as we work through the learning together.