

Sunday, August 12, 2018

A Joint Statement on the Need to Counter Hate in Schools

We, the undersigned education and civil rights organizations, work every day for safe, affirming and effective public schools that all students deserve. That is why we are deeply concerned about the rise of discrimination, hatred and bigotry in our society and in our schools. Since October 2017, The Southern Poverty Law Center has reported on 496 episodes of hate in schools across 47 states. Similarly, *Education Week* documented a disturbing number of incidents in the three previous years. And we know, of course, that these figures are the tip of the iceberg.

A recent UCLA study found that teachers are seeing increased incivility, intolerance and polarization in classrooms:

- More than 20 percent of teachers reported heightened polarization on campus and incivility in their classrooms;
- 27.7 percent of teachers reported an increase in students making derogatory remarks about other groups during class discussions; and
- 91.6 percent of teachers surveyed agreed that: "National, state, and local leaders should encourage and model civil exchange and greater understanding across lines of difference."

Such behavior has profound and negative effects on communities and schools.

Our public schools, public institutions, community-based organizations, families, guardians and houses of worship play a critical role in countering prejudice, hatred and discrimination. Together we prepare young people in our diverse society to appreciate differences, overcome conflicts and contribute to society.

As educators, we work to ensure every student's equitable access to a high-quality public education in a safe and supportive environment that fosters certain fundamental qualities:

- a positive sense of their own identity;
- empathy for others;
- the ability to appreciate and move beyond differences;

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- awareness of injustice;
- critical thinking skills to discern fact from fiction; and
- skills and dispositions to take action to solve problems.

In addition to helping our students develop these qualities, we commit to foster school climates in which all children and youth, community members and families feel safe and valued. We will continue to speak out and denounce hate and hateful behavior that denigrates people based on such things as race, religion, ethnic origin, sexual orientation whenever we see it.

Together we will lift the voices of our nation's students from all communities; their experiences must inform the future. We will continue to urge federal, state and local leaders to invest in research-proven supports for students such as counselors, school psychologists and social workers and in programs that foster positive social, behavioral, emotional and academic success for students like restorative justice programs. We will continue to oppose school discipline tactics that do not work, such as zero-tolerance policies that have fed a school to prison pipeline. And we will work collectively to empower our local communities to strengthen policies that protect our students civil rights.

We know that building the great public schools we envision – with welcoming and supportive teaching and learning environments free of gun violence, free of zero-tolerance policies, liberated from the over-criminalization of black and brown students – requires all of us: the students who are lifting their voices, the educators who are standing with them, speaking truth to power, and the decision makers who will hear them and act.

Together, we the undersigned individuals and organizations will work to ensure our public schools are the beacons of our communities that our students, educators and families deserve.

Signed:

Randi Weingarten, President, American Federation of Teachers

Lily Eskelsen Garcia, President, National Education Association

J. Richard Cohen, President, Southern Poverty Law Center

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AASA, The School Superintendents Association

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)

American School Counselor Association

Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESA)

Association for Library Service to Children

Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)

HRC Foundation's Welcoming Schools

National Association of School Psychologists

National Rural Education Advocacy Consortium

National Rural Education Association

National PTA

Rethinking Schools

TESOL International Association

Young Adult Library Services Association

The Dorothy Cotton Institute

Human Rights Educators USA

Thomas J. Dodd Research Center