



STATE OF MICHIGAN
LANSING

AGUSTIN ARBULU
DEPARTMENT OF CIVIL RIGHTS

BRIAN J. WHISTON
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

November 15, 2016

A Letter from State Superintendent Brian Whiston and Michigan Department of Civil Rights Director Agustin Arbulu

Now is a time when all of us need to stand together. Every administrator, teacher, staff member, parent, guardian, bus driver and student must stand as one in condemning intolerable conduct regardless of message or motivation.

We are concerned that students and parents may be hearing mixed messages. Each of us must clearly and consistently convey the message that bullying, harassment, violence, property destruction or any other form of intimidation have no place in our schools. It does not matter who is engaging in the intimidation, which student is being targeted, or what the reason is for the intimidation. There are no legitimate reasons and there are no acceptable excuses. The behavior is wrong, and the behavior will not be tolerated.

Each of us has a responsibility to ensure that every teacher, every staff member and every parent/guardian does what they can to make certain that every student hears this message, and understands that the message is shared by everyone. Waiting for an incident to occur or for a complaint to be filed is not acceptable. Appropriate strategies include:

- Review, revise, and if necessary, redistribute your harassment/bullying policies. Outside events may have increased the number of incidents, but the behavior is not new. It should in no way be minimized or taken less seriously based on outside events.
- Monitor attendance.
- Encourage dialogue and open communication.
- Ensure staff knows the signs of anxiety and trauma, observes students for the signs, and knows what to do if signs are detected.
- Ensure staff and student access to trained counselors and support services either in one-on-one settings or in groups.
- Monitor extracurricular events, be aware of social media, and identify concerns raised by students involving outside parties, threats, harassment or intimidation.
- Continue to promote positive learning environments through programs such as PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports), and comprehensive bullying programs.
- Promote restorative justice practices and utilize alternatives to Suspensions and Expulsions.

- Remember that there is no quick fix, no one speaker, or one shot program to address complex issues. Success requires consistent messaging regarding expectations, sound policies, and having evidence-based programs in place that meet the need and are consistently implemented.

We do not intend this letter to suggest that diversity awareness, dispute resolution, cultural competency and other such programs are not important. We encourage you to foster inclusion through the expansion of such programs. However, these programs cannot be effective unless they are presented in a place where students feel safe and welcome. We have included some links below that you may consider incorporating into your future work. Current events, however, demand that we first ensure that students know that an attack on any student is an attack on all of us, and will be met with a swift and decisive response.

We can work through any other issues in time, but we must immediately make our schools a safe place -- where every student is made to feel welcome.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE THROUGH THE MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION:

- For support in **PBIS**, the **Promoting Positive School Climate (PPSC)** project information is at - <https://miblsi.org/application#promoting-positive-school-climate-ppsc> or www.pbis.org
- **OK2Say** reporting – text 652729 (OK2SAY) or through the website at www.ok2say.com
- For local support and resources, Every Michigan School District is served by a **regional school health coordinator** - mishca.org.
 - These regional school health coordinators support training and implementation of the comprehensive K-12 health curriculum **Michigan Model for Health** - www.mmhclearinghouse.org
- Regular surveying students to understand the environment through **school climate surveys** and student health behavior surveys such as the MiPHY (www.michigan.gov/miphy).
- Alternatives to Suspensions and Expulsions Toolkit and http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-74638_72831---,00.html and online restorative justice practice modules http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-74638_72831-358881--,00.html
- Michigan State Board of Education Resolution on Use of American Indian Mascots, Nicknames, and Logos: https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Mascots_330690_7.pdf

- For questions on district anti-bullying policies, please contact Aimee Alaniz, Michigan Department of Education, AlanizaA@michigan.gov or 517-373-8862.

Sincerely,



Brian J. Whiston
State Superintendent
Michigan Department of Education



Agustin Arbulu
Director
Michigan Department of Civil Rights

