

Iowa Safe Schools

STATEMENT OF ANTI-RACIST FRAMEWORK

VALUES STATEMENT

All youth have the right to an education free of fear and discrimination. The safety and wellbeing of LGBTQ youth are inextricably tied to the safety and well-being of all people in the school community, including youth, parents, staff, teachers, and administrators.

Schools cannot be truly safe unless everyone is safe and free from bullying, harassment, discrimination, and violence. As long as any youth – including those marginalized by sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, immigration status, class, age, religion, or disability – face bullying, harassment, discrimination, and violence, all youth are unsafe. We recognize that schools exist within a larger social system and that racism, classism, and prejudice in our society affect how schools are funded, organized, and operated. We also recognize that all kinds of oppression, including racism, homophobia, and transphobia, work together to create and maintain systems of oppression. We acknowledge that regardless of good intentions, we perpetuate racism, classism, and other forms of oppression unless we act intentionally to address these issues in our LGBTQ safe schools work.

We recognize that LGBTQ youth and educators of color, and the issues that concern them, have not historically been adequately included in the safe schools movement, and we are committed to making the movement relevant and welcoming to these important constituencies. We recognize that many LGBTQ people experience other forms of oppression in addition to homophobia and transphobia. In order to make safe schools work relevant and welcoming to everyone, we must be responsive to all of these issues. We affirm our commitment to welcoming people of color in all aspects of the movement, including strategy development and decision-making. We also commit to moving toward a deeper anti-racist framework in ongoing safe schools efforts and toward an overall goal of creating a more racially just society.

Examples of how racism affects our work include:

- Encouraging parents with the financial means to do so to leave public schools to avoid homophobic and transphobic environments rather than working to improve their public school communities undermines our efforts to improve school safety for LGBTQA youth who cannot afford to attend private school.
- Zero tolerance discipline policies are disproportionately used against youth of color and poor youth because these policies exist in the larger system that is racist and classist. Supporting these policies perpetuates a system of punishment that harms youth of color and perpetuates racism.
- Comparing racism and homophobia or transphobia by elevating one form of oppression over the other undermines work to address racism. For instance, saying that “if these were racial slurs, the schools would be doing something about it” implies that racism in schools is adequately dealt with.
- Focusing only on increasing the numbers of youth of color in our movement can be counterproductive. A truly diverse movement cannot be achieved or maintained unless we ensure that we are addressing the substantive issues relevant to youth of color and are creating safe spaces for youth of color (e.g. location, staff, willingness to confront oppression as it arises).
- Assuming that educators of color and students of color will be less open to topics related to sexual orientation and gender. When we make these assumptions we risk excluding individuals as well as entire schools and school districts.
- Supporting the nomination of a person of color to an organization’s board of directors simply because that person adds “diversity” to the group can be tokenizing. Diversity without intention does not adequately address and may perpetuate institutionalized racism. At the same time, fear of tokenism should not serve as a rationale for the failure to diversify decision-making bodies. Organizations must work consciously and conscientiously to integrate all board members, staff, and volunteers into their hiring, advancement, leadership, retention, and professional development practices.

Examples of how we can take steps to work toward a racially just and anti-racist movement and be welcoming to people of color in all aspects of safe schools work, include:

- Ensuring that our meeting spaces are accessible and welcoming to people of color.
- Ensuring that we advertise our events and meetings in ways likely to reach communities of color.
- Collaborating with organizations and groups that employ and work with people of color, which is particularly important for organizations that are not themselves racially diverse.
- Openly supporting the work of groups working against racism and/or on behalf of youth and communities of color (e.g., signing on to petitions, attending events, co-sponsoring events).
- Including people of color in all aspects of our work.
- Actively valuing multiple perspectives in our discussions and decision-making.
- Educating ourselves and our colleagues about oppression and privilege in a systemic way through staff development and ongoing conversations.
- Reviewing our organizations' mission and vision statements and goals to determine if there are ways that our organizations can more directly address racism.
- Seeking input from groups focused on serving communities of color on strategy development.
- Ensuring that we frame safe schools work broadly enough that it embraces the efforts of the many groups that work against discrimination and on behalf of LGBTQA youth, including LGBTQA youth of color, whether this work is called "safe schools" work or something else.
- Seeking and supporting the leadership of people of color as staff and volunteers in your organization.