

## **Creating a Culture of Belonging at Ballard**

At Ballard High School, we are committed to providing a safe and supportive learning environment where all students feel like they belong. This means that all students are expected to be respectful to one another and NOT to engage in behaviors that demean or target others on the basis of race, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, disability, appearance, etc. Examples of these behaviors include:

- Derogatory comments made during classroom discussion that target a person's racial identity, sexual orientation, gender, ability, etc.;
- References which negatively single out certain people based on a person's racial identity, sexual orientation, gender, ability, etc.;
- Racial slurs or stereotyping; nicknames for other groups based on a person's racial identity, sexual orientation, gender, ability, etc.; and
- Circulating identity-based memes or videos, etc. on social media. By posting or forwarding these ideas, you are spreading them.

### **What do I need to know?**

- Behaviors that occur outside of school hours, or on social media, become a school problem when they make any student feel targeted or uncomfortable at school. The school has a responsibility to address these situations and may treat them as disciplinary incidents;
- Content that you post on social media never goes away in terms of the impact it can have on others and yourself; and
- Even when you mean something as a joke, demeaning other people is never funny and always a problem. Your friend whose group is the subject of the joke might laugh or say that it's okay, but there is a good chance that they just don't want to be known as the person who "always gets mad" or "is too sensitive."

### **How do I combat racism and other forms of prejudice?**

- Refuse to forward or "like" other people's demeaning comments on social media, and un-follow people who do make these posts;
- Call out put-downs. "That's a stereotype" or "That isn't funny" allow you to take a stand without getting into a long argument with people;
- Remember that no one ever knows what other people experience. Telling people to not take themselves so seriously, or to get a thicker skin, is a way of shifting the problem onto the victim and excusing the offender;
- Report inappropriate behaviors to an adult at school;
- Learn about experiences and perspectives that are different from yours. You can do this by watching movies, reading books and articles, engaging in thoughtful discussions, etc.;
- You can also learn more by attending meetings of groups like Multicultural Club, Black Student Union, Latinx/Hispanic Student Union, Students and Teachers Against Racism, and Gay-Straight Alliance;
- Speak out at staff/student meetings of the Race and Equity Team (RET), Continuous School Improvement Plan Team (CSIP), or Building Leadership Team (BLT).

### **What about freedom of speech?**

Although you have the freedom to express your opinions, there is a difference between stating an opinion in a civil, respectful manner, and making comments that are meant to devalue others and provoke strong reactions. The school has a responsibility to make sure all students feel safe, so any behavior is problematic if it makes people feel unsafe or unwelcome.

### **What if I hear an inappropriate comment that I'm not comfortable addressing?**

Tell an adult. This could be the teacher in whose class you heard the comments, as they may be able to effectively address the issue right away. You can also talk to a counselor or administrator, who will also address the issue.

Because student discipline is confidential, school staff cannot follow up with harassment victims by telling them "what happened to the offender." However, the policy below will give you an idea of the range of consequences we will apply.

### **What happens when an identity-based incident occurs?**

We strongly condemn behaviors that make anyone uncomfortable at school and will work to make this message clear. At the same time, we believe that behavior incidents of this nature offer a "teachable moment" in which the offending student will have a chance to think about and change their attitudes and behavior.

#### **Required:**

- Parent contact, with possible parent-student-administrator conference; and
- The school will communicate issues with staff, students, and the community as appropriate per district policy.

#### **Other potential consequences:**

- Assignment of a research project and reflection related to the incident;
- Assignment of a playlist related to racism or identity prejudice, followed by a reflection paper;
- Detention;
- Restorative meeting set up with offender and harmed person(s); this will happen only with the agreement of the harmed person(s);
- Meeting between a student/staff team, the offending student, and a family member about the specific behavior and its impact on others;
- In-house or at-home suspension; and
- Community service with an organization that serves the group that was targeted.

**What is the staff commitment?** – We are committed to nurturing an environment of safety and belonging. However, like our students, we are learning and growing in this area, and we make mistakes. If something happens with a staff member that makes you uncomfortable, please let them know at an appropriate time. If you don't want to talk to the person on your own (or at all), let a counselor or administrator know, and they will address your concern with the staff member.

Ballard staff and administration will seek further training in issues of race and equity; restorative justice; mediation; acknowledging our own biases; and the impact of white privilege.