



JOINT STATEMENT ON HB 616

APRIL 12, 2022

Last week, the Ohio House introduced HB 616 – a bill that closely resembles the controversial legislation recently enacted by the Florida legislature to regulate classroom discussion about sexual orientation or gender identity in schools. Recognizing the far-reaching effects that this proposed bill could have, including jeopardizing the safety of LGBTQIA+ students and staff and prohibiting culturally responsive lessons, the Columbus City Schools Board of Education, Superintendent Dr. Talisa Dixon, and CCS Union leaders issued the following joint statement to speak out against HB 616 and encourage other leaders to do the same:

“As leaders in Columbus City Schools, we stand united in opposition to the shameful and divisive HB 616, which aims to thoroughly undermine our ability to embrace and support all students fully.

Like the others we see cropping up around the country, this bill amounts to an unprecedented regulation of curriculum and instruction and an unwarranted incursion into local control. It perpetuates hate, encourages intolerance in adults, and has no place in public education.

Ohio’s HB 616 goes a step further than the recent legislation passed in Florida. Not only does the bill devalue our minority and LGBTQIA+ students and communities, but HB 616 also aims to suppress dialogue and perpetuate an inaccurate understanding of our history.

Simply put, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is not taught in Columbus City Schools or anywhere in Ohio’s K-12 education system. We teach U.S. History and the understanding of oneself as part of a community so that students of all backgrounds can see themselves in their work and develop a vision for their future. As a public school district, it is our responsibility to provide a complete and honest rendering of our history in an open, supportive, culturally responsive, and psychologically safe environment for ALL students to learn.

Contrary to this notion, HB 616 would undermine the free flow of information and ideas that serve as the foundation of our democracy. Instead, the bill seeks to place fear in teachers so they reconsider culturally responsive lessons and think twice about providing each child with what is in their best educational interest.

In Columbus City Schools, we celebrate our diversity and utilize equity as a tool to reach equality – giving each child what they deserve to succeed. We strive to create environments in which everyone can learn, work, and live with dignity and respect, free from fear and violence, and protected against discrimination, regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

In fact, Columbus City Schools has been at the forefront of ensuring equal rights and defending against discrimination for students, staff, and families who are part of our city’s LGBTQIA+ community.

Most recently, our community came together to develop our Portrait of a Graduate and said that all students in Columbus City Schools should embody the concept of ‘global empathy’ – to value and engage diverse cultures and unique perspectives through mutual respect and open dialogue while taking action to make the world more equitable and inclusive.

CCS was also one of the first traditional school districts in the state of Ohio to collectively bargain domestic partner benefits with their Union partners, as well as being an early adopter of protections in the workplace and at school on sexual orientation and gender identity, and a leader in developing professional development training for administrators, teachers, and staff designed to create and reinforce environments of affirmation and belonging.

The passage of HB 616 would undermine the core values we cherish in Columbus and destroy the groundwork we have laid to combat discrimination in our community.

We call upon our state legislators to not only vote this bill and others like it down but to vocally speak up against the divisiveness they cause to the students of Ohio. We also ask all other educational institutions, government bodies, students, families, non-profits, businesses, and the community to stand with us and speak out against this proposed limitation of a foundational principle of democracy – education.”

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