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25-130

The Honorable Maria D. Hernandez
Presiding Judge
Orange County Superior Court
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Re: Orange County Department of Education's Response to the 2024-25 Orange County Grand Jury Report on *Hate: What is Orange County Doing About It?*

To the Honorable Maria D. Hernandez:

The Orange County Department of Education ("OCDE") is committed to advancing safe, inclusive and respectful learning environments in collaboration with schools and community partners. OCDE commends the Grand Jury for its time and attention devoted to studying this very important issue and publishing the Grand Jury Report dated June 26, 2025, entitled: *Hate: What is Orange County Doing About It?* ("Report").

OCDE has thoroughly reviewed and considered the Findings and Recommendations in the Report. In accordance with California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the Grand Jury has requested that OCDE respond to Findings and Recommendations made in the Report. OCDE responds to the Grand Jury's Findings and Recommendations with the following:

FINDINGS

F11 Orange County school districts have no centralized database of available materials, resources, and programs for addressing hate crimes and incidents, limiting their ability to effectively combat hate.

Response: OCDE agrees with the finding.

F12 Hate is a learned behavior. Early intervention (before sixth grade) is essential for promoting tolerance and respect.

Response: OCDE agrees in principle with the finding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R11 **OCDE should create a centralized database of up-to-date materials, resources, and programs designed to address hate crimes and incidents in K-12 schools. This should be done by Dec. 31, 2025.**

Response: The recommendation has been implemented.

OCDE has created and published a centralized online collection of tools and resources on its public website to support schools in preventing hate incidents and fostering inclusive, respectful school environments. This shared hub features up-to-date, vetted materials organized by audience and is intended to assist school districts countywide in promoting safe and welcoming learning communities.

R12 **OCDE should implement and expand the current age-appropriate curriculum on tolerance and respect for students in kindergarten through fifth grade, including education programs for parents and caregivers. This should be done by Dec. 31, 2025.**

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented as stated because OCDE does not oversee curriculum decisions or direct instruction in local school districts. However, the department supports the recommendation's intent and will take alternative actions to support the underlying goal.

As a county office of education, OCDE provides support to districts through professional development, technical assistance and student-centered programs. One such initiative is the Peer Assistance Leadership ("PAL") program, which fosters inclusive school climates through youth-led activities that promote empathy, conflict resolution, and peer support.

OCDE continues to explore ways to expand training opportunities for educators, administrators, and families that emphasize respect, belonging and early intervention to prevent hate-based behavior.

In partnership with the Orange County District Attorney's Office, OCDE is coordinating a countywide training for school administrators, educators, counselors and mental health professionals. This comprehensive session will provide practical tools and a clear legal framework for preventing, identifying and responding to hate incidents and hate crimes in school settings. As outlined in California Education Code section 220, the training will emphasize school responsibilities related to anti-discrimination, student safety and positive educational outcomes.

Through a series of presentations and panel discussions, participants will learn about legal definitions, reporting procedures, local trends, restorative practices and tiered interventions aligned with the Multi-Tiered System of Support ("MTSS") framework. The training will also highlight trauma-informed strategies and community-based resources that support students and reinforce safe, inclusive learning environments across Orange County.

In addition, OCDE has developed an elective ethnic studies course that is available to all school districts and charter schools. While the course was originally designed for use in OCDE's alternative education programs, it is offered as a high-quality model that can be freely adopted or adapted by other educational agencies. Shaped by educators, content experts and community feedback, the curriculum is grounded in inclusive values and diverse perspectives to foster civic responsibility, connection and respect among students.

Please accept the information provided herein as OCDE's responses to the Orange County Grand Jury's Factual Findings and Recommendation in the Report. Once again, we appreciate the time and attention the Grand Jury devoted to this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gregory J. Rolen", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Gregory J. Rolen
General Counsel