



La Grande

SCHOOL DISTRICT

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SUPERINTENDENT

George Mendoza

July 16, 2021

District Statement: Message of support and care as we remember Jadin Bell and Joe Bell

Content Warning: This letter addresses topics of suicide and suicidal ideation.

To our school community,

On behalf of the La Grande School District (LGSD), I would like to express my deepest sympathy to the family, friends, and community as we remember the tragic loss of student Jadin Bell in February 2013 and the death of his father, Joe Bell, later that year.

Knowing how interconnected our community is, I feel it is important to reach out. When the film debuts, it will be a reminder of a great loss and many among us will need love and support. I also know so many of you have faced difficult struggles of your own. This is a crucial time to reflect on the full range of ways we can all support young people in our communities.

The movie “Joe Bell” will soon be out in theaters on July 23, 2021. Please be aware that the film will have themes related to Jadin growing up as a child and his life experience of not feeling accepted and supported by those around him. He was bullied for being gay, and the effect it had on him was immeasurable, contributing to the circumstances of his suicide.

After Jadin’s death, Joe advocated for students who experience bullying for being gay. He began spreading awareness of the challenges gay children face and the effects those can have. Joe passed away in October 2013, just a few months after his son’s death, while participating on a walk that began as a tribute to his son.

LGBTQ2SIA+ students often experience discrimination, harassment, and bias at school and in their lives. These experiences can send students a message that they do not belong and can lead to depression and other mental health challenges. This may lead to suicidal ideation or suicide. As adults, we have a responsibility to do everything in our power to ensure that young people in our lives are affirmed and supported for exactly who they are.

Our district’s commitment is to ensure we have a positive and inclusive school experience in which all students can thrive academically within an affirming school community. Furthermore, it is our responsibility as professionals to provide a safe and caring setting for every student. (cont.)

If you are an adult and a young person in your life comes to you for understanding, support, and affirmation — whether they are your student, child, or simply someone who trusts you — our school district has plans and resources in place to help. If you are a student and are in crisis or need any kind of mental health support, our district will be there for you. Here are just a few of the resources offered or recommended by our district:

1. Our School Based Health Center and the counseling support we offer through our K-8 day treatment program remain open this summer. In addition, you can reach out by email to your building administrator if any concern arises, and they will call you or have other counseling support staff call you. For more information go to www.lagrandesd.org/cultureofcare.
2. Addressing grief and loss is often difficult and, if students have questions, you may want to be prepared to talk with them about this situation. A good resource to use when talking with young people about suicide is the Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide, www.sptsusa.org.
3. Should you wish to better understand what LGSD has in place to support students who experience bullying or mental health trauma, please go to www.lagrandesd.org/cultureofcare to review LGSD’s Bully Matrix & Reference Guide and our LGSD-Suicide Prevention/Intervention/Postvention plan
4. LGSD has a Gender and Sexuality Alliance club (Formerly Gay-Straight Alliance) that has been in place for the past eight school years. Should you wish to learn more about this club please read the following news article – [The Genders and Sexualities Alliance at LHS](#). If you are concerned about bullying, a tip line is located at <https://www.safeoregon.com/>.

You can also review the new LGSD Culture of Care resources website www.lagrandesd.org/cultureofcare to see the many programs, activities, and resources we have in place.

As we remember Jadin and Joe Bell, let us renew our commitment to ensure that every student is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and affirmed so they can reach their full potential.



George Mendoza
Superintendent
La Grande School District

*The terms used to describe gender identities and sexual orientations are fluid and changing: LGBTQ2SIA+ as an acronym that stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Two-Spirit, Intersex, and Asexual. The plus also indicates that there are many other ways people may identify. Please review our state’s [LGBTQ2SIA+ Plan](#).

Please, also, review the helpful websites on the following page to better understand and support LGBTQ2SIA+ student needs.



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<p>State Laws/Requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every Student Belongs Bill – HB 2697 https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/SchoolSafety/Pages/EveryStudentBelongs.aspx • SB 52 2021 the LGBTQ2SIA+ Plan • SB 52 – Addy’s Act 2019 https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/SchoolSafety/Pages/Suicide-Prevention,-Intervention,-Postvention-(Adi%27s-Act).aspx • Creating a Safe & Supportive School Environment for Transgender Students – 2016 	<p>Oregon Department of Education Integrated Model of Mental Health</p> <p>https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/SchoolSafety/Pages/Integrated-Model-of-Mental-Health.aspx</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ODE believes that mental health is centered within a continuum of care that meets each person’s needs for physical and emotional safety, security, social connection, identity, diversity and purpose. • The ODE Integrated Model of Mental Health recognizes and emphasizes the strengths, resilience, and ways of knowing each individual within a school community and prioritizes voice, choice, empowerment and transparency.
<p>Resources for Families</p> <p>Fierce Families Network: http://www.basicrights.org/get-involved/fierce-families-network/</p> <p>This is a network of families convened by Basic Rights Oregon with a focus on transgender children.</p> <p>Family Acceptance Project: https://familyproject.sfsu.edu/</p> <p>This is an initiative that is intended to support ethnically, racially, and religiously diverse families in their support of LGBTQ2SIA+ children.</p>	<p>Resources for Students</p> <p>The Trevor Project is the leading national organization focused on crisis and suicide prevention efforts among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth. http://www.thetrevorproject.org/</p> <p>The organization a 24 hour text, chat, and phone line for LGBTQ2SIA+ youth and their allies to receive support. These are staffed by a counselor. Additional online resources are available on Trevor Project’s website.</p>
<p>Resources for Educators</p> <p>https://welcomingschools.org/ Created by the Human Rights Campaign, this is a resource for elementary school teachers.</p> <p>https://www.glsen.org/activity/ready-set-respect-elementary-toolkit Created by GLSEN, this is a toolkit for elementary school teachers.</p> <p>Safe Zone Project: https://thesafezoneproject.com/resources/ This organization has several curriculum resources for educators and has its own resource library for other materials, articles, and books.</p>	<p>Resources for Districts</p> <p>Oregon School Activities Association’s Gender Identity Participation Policy Regarding Athletics and June 2020: https://www.osaa.org/docs/handbooks/GenderIdentityParticipationBP.pdf</p> <p>GLSEN published this 2019 report intended to support mental health professionals in working with LGBTQ2SIA+ students https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/Supporting_Safe_and_Healthy_Schools_%20Mental_Health_Professionals_2019.pdf</p>