

AN OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT-ELECT DONALD TRUMP

January 17, 2017

Dear President-elect Trump,

As the recipients of the 2016 Teaching Tolerance Award for Excellence in Teaching, we are writing with urgent concern for our nation's students. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center's recent report *After Election Day: The Impact of the 2016 Presidential Election on Our Nation's Schools*, more than 2,500 of our fellow educators reported acts of hatred and bigotry against children that can be directly traced to your campaign and election. As educators who adhere to the values of equity, social justice, freedom, inclusion and dignity for all, we call you to action: Be a president for *all* Americans. We also invite you to engage in a productive dialogue with our nation's educators about how we can move forward to support all of our children.

We write to you as American citizens and educators. These dual identities cannot be divorced, as the work we do as educators affects the development and formation of the citizenry of our future generations. Unfortunately, as reported in the *After Election Day* report, thousands of teachers are alarmed by the fact their students are saying things like, "Screw women's rights," "Fag-lover liberal," "Build the wall, lock her up" and "Are they going to do anything to me? Am I safe?" Teachers are struggling because these experiences don't fit our nation's narrative as a place where there is "liberty and justice for all."

As our president, you must model a commitment to justice for all people. To stand idly by as so many students attack those who are different from them flies in the face of our values as educators; inaction condones such attacks. Laws and policies that you have promised to support, such as building a wall between the United States and Mexico and requiring Muslims to register, are nothing short of institutionalized discrimination and oppression. No one in this country—especially children—should fear that their family will be torn apart at the hands of the President of the United States. You can alleviate the fears of our students by supporting legislation that is grounded in equity and justice for all Americans and by surrounding yourself with individuals who believe a diverse America is a great America. Listening to multiple perspectives is key to being a president for all Americans. As one student put it, "Think about the power you've been given, then ask yourself, 'Is what I'm doing right?'"

As educators, we will continue our work toward cultivating kind and intellectual future citizens of this great country. We will do everything in our power to make sure that the students who leave our classrooms are deep thinkers, critical problem solvers and caring stewards of the United States of America, regardless of who occupies the White House. We will also encourage students and their families to share their ideas and expectations for you as our president, and we expect that their voices will be heard and considered.

Many people are concerned that your presidency will not be one "of the people, by the people," but we expect and will not tolerate anything less. We will act collectively and creatively to agitate

for equity and justice. Intolerance and discrimination are not welcome in our schools. Our students represent the great breadth of diversity in this nation, and each student should feel valued, welcomed and loved. Comments and actions that undermine our commitment to equity and inclusion are and always will be swiftly condemned and reversed. We hope our classrooms can serve as models for our nation at large. We hope that you, too, will set an example for the people of our nation.

We want to extend to your administration our expertise as educators. We have seen the power of dialogue and empathy in a diverse population, whether that population is within our classrooms or our own communities. The problems we face as schools and a nation cannot be solved by one person. Complicated problems require compromise and open-mindedness. Divisive language serves no purpose other than to further alienate those who disagree. Furthermore, any action or language that seeks to discriminate only tarnishes the fabric of our collective American identity. Just as a classroom cannot flourish without the feeling of security, society cannot advance if its citizens believe that their leaders do not see the value and wisdom in listening to a variety of viewpoints.

Your actions and those of your administration will make a lasting impact on our students, fellow educators and communities long after you've left the White House, and the eyes of our children and the eyes of history will be watching you. We hope that your administration takes the concerns of our nation's educators and children as seriously as we do.

Sincerely,



Henry "Cody" Miller, English teacher
Gainesville, Florida



Karen Schreiner, 2nd-grade teacher
Oakland, California



Chris Widmaier, science teacher
Rochester, New York

P.S. We're pleased to include messages of advice for you written by students from all over the United States via an online campaign sponsored by Teaching Tolerance called **#StudentsSpeak**.