

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION



October 21, 2021

Dr. Joshua Garcia, Superintendent
Tacoma Public Schools

Dear Dr. Garcia,

October is Disability History Month in Washington State. According to RCW 28A.230.158, *"Annually, during the month of October, each public school shall conduct or promote educational activities that provide instruction, awareness, and understanding of disability history and people with disabilities. The activities may include, but not be limited to, school assemblies or guest speaker presentations."*

We are approaching the end of October, yet there is nothing remarkable to be seen regarding disability history from Tacoma Public Schools. This is a topic that we have brought up in the past, with little movement on the District's part. It is not difficult to acknowledge Disability History Month, in fact there are resources available online that give districts tools to help facilitate meeting this requirement. In the Family and Community Newsletter this month the District has highlighted issues and events from job openings to Superhero's day, but has failed to acknowledge a significant percentage of the student body by highlighting Disability History Month. This topic is required to be addressed at the building and classroom level, but as a district the spirit of celebrating disability history should be a priority that clearly shows the value of what students with disabilities add to our school community. With a plethora of effective tools at your disposal--newsletters, email, robocalls, social media, and public statements--the goal of celebrating this month should be a visible priority. Even a simple message, like the video you recently shared for National School Principal Appreciation Month, would be a start.

The real reason that celebrating Disability History Month is important lies in the spirit of the RCW itself, where it states: *"The legislature further finds that recognizing disability history will increase respect and promote acceptance and inclusion of people with disabilities."* By celebrating other groups of people and not celebrating Disability History, you are further marginalizing over 15% of the student body. Our students are in every school and grade level. They, along with their classmates, deserve to learn the history of their community and celebrate their achievements towards equity.

We have two questions for you. One, why is this not a priority, and something that is acknowledged in our district? Two, when will you make the changes needed to celebrate Disability History Month properly in our District?

We look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

Tacoma Special Education PTA, Board of Directors

Emily Pico, Sue Leusner, Julie Cunningham, Kelci Boyd, Holly Richart, Jasmine Wallace, Katy Scheck