Incidents Involving Hate Symbols and/or Hate Speech in Oregon Public Schools

November 2016   Junction City H.S. (Lane)

Students of color receive racist and national origin taunts and threats, along with "Trump for President" signs as they assemble on school grounds before school. Examples of threats include "Now we're going to put you in your place," and "We are going to send you back to where you belong." These incidents occur the next day after (the presidential) Election Day.

November 2016   Arlington Jr./Sr. H.S. (Gilliam)

A mixed-race family (White mother and African American/White student) wake up to Trump election paraphernalia on their front lawn. The family's "Hillary Clinton for President" is destroyed. The mother is a District elementary school teacher, and the student is in 10th grade. These incidents occur the next day after (the presidential) Election Day.

November 2016   North Bend Middle School (Coos):

Students shouted "Go back to Mexico!" at an 11-year-old Colombian American student. North Bend School District superintendent Bill Yester told a local newspaper last week that while the election played a part in the bullying, school personnel dealt with it quickly and held an assembly on harassment. "We're going to be in good shape," he said. "We will continue to watch it, and parents were called about their students' behavior, but if those parents are supportive, this will stop."

December 2016   Clackamas ESD Area District High School (Clackamas)

An African American student returns to her seat in class from a break to find drawings of a hanging noose and a robed "Ku Klux Klan" figure placed in her notebook and textbook.

February 2017   Liberty High School (Washington)

District leaders look for the student or students who painted swastikas inside Liberty High School in Hillsboro. Communications director Beth Graser said, "It's definitely upsetting." Graser says swastika symbols were found in hallways and bathrooms. One was inside or just outside the classroom of a Jewish teacher.

February 2017   North Bend High School (Coos)

A female student wears a hat which displays the Confederate Flag. An African American female student sees the hat and objects. Racial insults and threats were exchanged before a fist fight ensued. The Superintendent bans the symbols of the Confederacy (flag and clothing) from the middle and high schools. Soon afterwards, school alumni and area residents hold a peaceful protest displaying the Confederate and American flags across the street from the high school. High school students leave school (with permission) to join the protest.

April 2017   Eugene area Elementary School Bus Stop (Lane)

Swastikas and other graffiti found at a bus stop used by Eugene elementary students.

September 2017   North Eugene High School (Lane)

Anti-Semitic slurs and white supremist language were graffitied on the exterior of North Eugene High School.

October 2018   Cleveland High School (Multnomah)

Cleveland High School Principal Ayesha Freeman wrote, in a notice to parents Wednesday, that a vice principal, a teacher and the building's head custodian found a swastika and "hateful words" on fliers for the Jewish Student Union one morning in late October. The vandalism at Cleveland was discovered just days after 11 people were shot and killed in a Pittsburgh synagogue, Freeman wrote.

November 2018   Lewis Elementary School (Multnomah)

Lewis Elementary School Principal Emily Glasgow wrote in a Nov. 20 email to parents that anti-Semitic graffiti had been chalked on the exterior walls of the building. A parent had emailed Glasgow, the principal, photos of what looked like "#JEWDIE" on the side of the school. She alerted Portland Public Schools leadership as well as city police. Later in the day, Glasgow wrote, other photos of the alleged vandalism surfaced that made it look like the message may have been "#JEWLIFE."

April 2019   Cleveland High School (Multnomah)

Cleveland High School Principal Ayesha Freeman emailed parents and students to tell them a teacher found string tied like a noose hanging from one of the building's entryways. "We are still gathering facts to determine what happened," Portland Public Schools spokesman Harry Esteve said in a statement. "We want and expect our schools to be places where students feel safe, welcome, included and respected by staff and classmates. Any act of racism, racial insensitivity or discrimination of any sort is completely unacceptable at our schools."

September 2019   Wilson High School (Multnomah)

Wilson High School students said they were horrified to find racial slurs etched into desks. Swastikas carved into trees. That the only way they could fit in with their white peers was to rattle off self-deprecating jokes with racist punchlines. "I'm here because I have a younger brother. I do not want him going through things that we had to go through," sophomore Aslan Newson, president of the school's Black Student Union, said. Newson was one of 11 student panelists who addressed the crowd of about 175 gathered in Southwest Portland's Multnomah Arts Center for a community conversation.

Students said the community meeting was meant to keep the issues they faced at Portland's whitest high school front and center. All of them faced microaggressions that made them feel uncomfortable at school. Sophomore Isa De Los Santos was hounded by students over the way they pronounce their name and that even adults would ask intrusive questions about their race. "You don't look just black. You're mixed, right?" they remember a coach asking unprompted one day. De Los Santos said they're Puerto Rican. The coach asked, "How much?"

Sophomore Eliel Safron recalled students tossing coins on the ground and ordering her to pick them up because she's Jewish. And Aria Morgan said a teacher once asked her how to pronounce Chinese words because she's Asian-American, then spoke with an exaggerated accent. "We have to kind of live with that," she said. "It's sad we can't feel safe at school just for being who we are."

The previous week, students discovered a swastika carved into a tree on campus. Within days, Principal Filip Hristic, who began his tenure at Wilson over the summer, sent a note to students and parents detailing the incident. "I feel like we're being heard, at least so far," Newson told The Oregonian/OregonLive. "I'm trying to stay optimistic."

October 2019   Chapman Elementary School (Multnomah)

Someone found a noose at an elementary school in Northwest Portland, school officials said Thursday. According to officials, a member of Chapman Elementary School's maintenance team found the noose in the fan room under the school building.

Portland Public Schools alerted police, and officers in turn did a threat assessment and opened an investigation. The district said it is also conducting an internal investigation. PPS officials said they have no indication that any students saw or were involved in the incident.

October 2019   Lebanon High School (Linn)

A group of Lebanon teenagers wore blackface at a haunted barn fundraiser over the weekend, sparking outrage and condemnation. The teens were at an event hosted by the local chapter of Future Farmers of America at a school-owned barn. They took a photo, using an offensive hashtag, captioning the photo "N***** Gang."

Superintendent Bo Yates of Lebanon Community Schools released a statement Monday saying in part that he is "saddened that any student would post a racist comment or fail to understand the racist connotations of darkening one's face." Swanson said the incident was deplorable and not representative of Lebanon's values. "It is completely insensitive -- hateful in nature -- what was posted," he said. "We want to make sure students have an avenue to report that so we can address it."

November 2019   Southridge High School (Washington)

At Southridge High School, students recently spray-painted the football field with swastikas. School officials investigated, but never found the culprits, and some students were left feeling uneasy. A Southridge student states, "It's like, I'm Jewish, and I'm also black. So, seeing that kind of stuff and knowing that I go to the school — I go to school with these people who don't like a part of me scares me."

January 2020   Sprague High School (Marion)

The Salem Police Department investigates a graffiti tagging incident as a possible bias crime. Several of the buildings on campus were tagged with homophobic, racist and antisemitic slurs and images. District spokesperson Lillian Govus stated, "Unfortunately, we deal with graffiti and vandalism frequently. But the language and vitriol, that is more unusual than other cases we've had. There are no other words to describe it other than it was despicable."

February 2020   Benson Polytechnic High School (Multnomah)

Portland Police say a noose was found at Benson Polytechnic High School Friday morning. According to Portland Public Schools, a contractor doing work at the school contacted a custodian upon finding a noose Friday morning, Feb. 21, on the school's roof outside. School resource officers with Portland Police Bureau's Youth Services Division responded to the Northeast Portland high school to investigate.

Three Benson High School students will not face criminal charges after they admitted earlier this week to placing a noose on the roof of the school, prompting an investigation by Portland police's bias crimes team. Multnomah County District Attorney Rod Underhill called the students' placement of the noose "alarming, hurtful and completely contradictory to the values our community has of being open and accepting of each other's differences." But he said his office reviewed the case and determined they couldn't punish the kids with criminal charges.

March 2020   Portland Public Schools (Multnomah)

A racist threat prompted Portland police to patrol Northeast Portland's Grant High this week. Asian students experienced discrimination as local tension over the coronavirus pandemic stirred. And a noose was found on the roof of Benson High last week.

These are just a few of the racist incidents Portland Public Schools Superintendent Guadalupe Guerrero spoke out against during Tuesday's school board meeting. He called the events "eerie, painful reminders of the acts of racial terror of our past" and said they're "indicative of the racial injustice our students, families and staff of color face today still."

The superintendent went on to say nooses "continue to be found in our buildings," a nod to the incident at Benson, where three students confessed to placing on the roof earlier this week. The noose found on the Northeast Portland high school's roof was the district's most recent — a Chapman Elementary custodian found a noose earlier this year, and Cleveland High staff found one in that building in 2019.

July 2020   Sandy High School (Clackamas)

A group of Sandy High School students is petitioning and calling on the Oregon Trail School District to ban the Confederate flag, saying the flag is part of a larger culture of racism at the school.

One student said the flag is still displayed on several other students' vehicles, and can be seen on some students' clothing. The flag has also played a part in several racist incidents, according to multiple students of color. "Often when I walk down the halls, I'll see people wearing it on their hats, or on their sweatshirts. Pretty much every day we see it on students' backs," this (first) student said.

Organizers have heard multiple accounts of racism at the school from students of color. The first student recalled what a Black freshman said she experienced, before she transferred schools. "She heard the n-word every day from non-Black students, and more often than not it was within the earshot of teachers, and nothing was done about it," Rothwell said. "Seeing the flag flown, she feels unsafe, unrespected and unheard, and doesn't feel like she doesn't belong at a school like that."

Another student said that schools should implement better efforts into race education. This student also wants teachers to do a better job of holding racist behavior accountable beyond a "slap on the wrist." "Schools are expected to make sure that all of their students feel safe, and are able to learn safely — and that is not what is happening right now," the second student said.

"Just because we are in a school that is 76% white, doesn't mean that we should value the safety of our students of color any less, just because the administration may fear backlash from white students. The fact is, we need students to address how hurtful their actions can be, and how they can actively work toward solving that," the second student added.