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Dear Florida Educators,

You don't know us, so we'll start with this important statement: we are way OK with saying gay, or straight, or LGBTQ+. Though we have a long way to go to become a fully inclusive community, we believe it is an injustice to diminish any individual's gender identity in any way. People should be welcomed to show up as their authentic selves!

This letter is authored by the following individuals:

- 1) Dr. Rupak Gandhi, Superintendent, Fargo Public Schools
- 2) Dr. Tamara Uselman, Director of Equity and Inclusion, Fargo Public Schools
- 3) John Strand, City of Fargo City Commissioner, and former 8-year Fargo Public School Board member
- 4) Representative Josh Boschee, Minority Caucus Leader, ND House of Representatives, District 44

The purpose of our letter is two-fold: 1) to demonstrate support for Florida's LGBTQ+ education community in response to Florida HB 1577; and 2) to share an opportunity to be embraced, welcomed, and celebrated here in Fargo, North Dakota for individuals struggling with what must be a very difficult decision about whether to stay or to leave Florida for a more supportive community. We don't expect nor want educators to leave their state (or their warmth), but if they decide to do so, we want to share what you can expect from your supporters in North Dakota.

This letter shouldn't imply that the Fargo community and Fargo Public Schools (FPS) are perfectly inclusive. Progress has been made, but there is more work to do. And hear us when we say we are doing the work, doggedly moving toward our goal of being "that place," where the uniqueness of everyone is honored and diverse backgrounds, values, and points of view aren't only accepted but actively embraced. With one of every ten North Dakota students attending Fargo Public Schools, we know we can improve outcomes for LGBTQ+ students and staff. We can build a place where all students can live as active agents in their diverse society and where all educators experience a workplace where they can live as their authentic selves.

Collective efforts are building a stronger and more inclusive community and schools and in Fargo. The following information in this letter is to provide a glimpse of what you can expect both from Fargo Public Schools as an employer and from allies in government leadership, should you choose to be an educator here in Fargo, where you can be you, with us.

- Prior to the start of the 2020-2021 school year, Fargo Public Schools became the first school district in the state of North Dakota to hire a Director of Equity and Inclusion. This act was the start to a more concentrated effort to align district resources and priorities in ensuring we are fulfilling our mission of educating and empowering ALL students to succeed.
- In Fargo Public Schools, we believe that equity is a mindset, not an end-state. That means we will always work to improve outcomes where we have evidence that some groups are being marginalized.

- A five-year plan guides the large goals of our FPS Office of Equity and Inclusion. The following goals and micro-projects serve as examples of what we do and how we do it.

Goal	Examples of micro-projects in each goal area
Expand the capacity of FPS staff, students, and parents to learn, lead, and live in a diverse school environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our work is guided by the Parent Equity Advisory Committee for Education (PEACE), comprised of students, parents, support staff, teachers, and administrators • All administrators self-assessed on the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). Professional development followed. • We surveyed staff to learn equity and inclusion readiness (survey and currently through empathy interviews under a NoVo Morale grant). Professional development is being designed to meet educators' needs.
Ensure all students experience learning that is accurate and culturally supportive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborated to create a rubric to assess materials from "culturally destructive to culturally sustaining" • Working with literacy groups to ensure classroom libraries are reflective of the diverse FPS communities
Improve Policy, Practices, and Legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrote in opposition of an anti-trans student athlete bill and supported legislation designed to close the school-to-prison pipeline • Worked with a team to write a <i>Gender Inclusion Guidance</i> document for staff and families as well as a workflow for preferred name and pronouns • Collaborated to design training around expectations within our nondiscrimination and anti-harassment policies and work with administrators to investigate all policy violations
Increase the percentage of on time, Choice Ready, graduates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have begun measuring our success by student demographic groups (including race / ethnicity, cultural-linguistic diversity, socio-economic status, gender, and special education status) to determine access and opportunity barriers and remove them
Diversify the Teaching and Administrative Workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects include Educ8, grow your own via Future Fargo, attending job fairs, addressing implicit bias in our search process, and more

- The Fargo School District was the first school district in the state of North Dakota to implement fully enumerated anti-bullying and discrimination policies for staff and students, raising the bar for the others in the state to see.
- The City of Fargo recently was the first city in the state of North Dakota to enact hate crime bills at the city level, again raising the bar for others in the state to see and on the local level for us to adhere to.
- As a border city to Moorhead, Minnesota, Fargo can compare and contrast growth toward equity and inclusion both in our state and with our neighbors across the river.
- We are proud that the City of Fargo was one of the first in the nation to incorporate an LGBT liaison within the Police Department to build stronger relationships with the LGBT community



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and training within the Police Department, which has expanded into community liaisons focused on various underrepresented groups.

- While we have worked actively, since 2009, to pass a fully inclusive statewide nondiscrimination statute, progress has been made. The state Department of Labor and Human Rights recognizes sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes in housing and employment following the Bostock ruling in 2020.
- 2021 was the first-time anti-LGBT legislation was introduced by legislators in ND. While a ban on trans youth being able to participate in youth sports did pass that session, Governor Burgum vetoed the legislation, and the veto was sustained by the state Senate. Thanks to the advocacy of our local chambers of commerce, travel and tourism industry, employers from throughout the state and citizens, our Governor knows the value that each individual brings to making our state a success.

In summary, please know that Fargo Public Schools and public sectors within the greater Fargo community not only offer a welcome to you but also offer actionable examples of our commitment to becoming an inclusive community that LGBTQ+ people can call home.

Reach out if you have any questions or wish to learn more.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rupak Gandhi".

Dr. Rupak Gandhi

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tamara Uselman".

Dr. Tamara Uselman

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Strand".

Commissioner John Strand

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joshua Bosch".

ND House of Representatives, Joshua Bosch