Best Practices Guide For Working With Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Individuals
WHY IS THIS GUIDE NEEDED?

According to the Williams Institute, the lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) population is estimated to make up approximately 3.8% of the U.S. population, while it is estimated that at least 0.6% of the U.S. population identifies as transgender. In the state of Florida, those estimates rise slightly to 4.1% of the population who identify as LGB and 0.66% who identify as transgender. This data suggests that in a school district comprised of 75,000 students, approximately 3,075 youth may identify as LGB and approximately 495 may identify as transgender.

Acknowledgements

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- U.S. Department of Education
- National Education Association
- National School Boards Association
- National Association of School Psychologists
- American Psychological Association
- Jackie Jackson-Dean, M.A., M.S., NCSP (lead content developer)

If you have additional questions regarding the information contained in this guide, please contact the Office for Student Support Programs and Services (OSSPS) at (813) 794-2600.
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CHAPTER ONE: Overview
Terminology & Definitions
Words are powerful. The way in which we use words with one another can help or heal, but our words can also hurt. We know that language and terminology are constantly changing. However, becoming familiar with accurate and respectful LGBTQ-related terms is one of the first steps in embracing a school culture that is safe, welcoming, affirming, and respectful. The definitions contained in this guide are intended to provide educators with an understanding of the evolving terms of gender and sexuality and clear up confusion or misconceptions that may exist.

**LGBTQ**: An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (you may also see LGBTQ+ or extended acronyms that include intersex, asexual, ally, and/or two-spirited).

**Lesbian**: A woman who has romantic, physical and/or emotional feelings for another woman.

**Gay**: A term used to describe someone who has romantic, physical and/or emotional feelings for a person of the same sex.

**Bisexual**: A person who is romantically, physically, and/or emotionally attracted to both men and women.

**Transgender**: An umbrella term most often used for individuals whose gender identity, gender expression, or behavior is not congruent with their assigned sex at birth.

**Questioning**: A term used for those who have questions, are unsure, or are exploring their sexuality, sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

**Queer**: Previously considered a derogatory term; however, in recent years some members of the LGBTQ community have embraced it as an umbrella term to describe the LGBTQ community.

**SOGIE**

An acronym for **Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Expression**
Terminology & Definitions (continued)

**Ally:** An individual who speaks out and stands up against anti-LGBTQ bias, discrimination, harassment, and bigotry. Allies support and advocate for sexual and gender diversity.

**Biological Sex:** One’s anatomy and physical attributes assigned at birth. Consists of chromosomes, genitalia, hormones, and internal reproductive organs. Male, female or intersex (reproductive organs and/or physical anatomy do not fit the typical definition of either male or female). Also referred to as one’s *sex assigned at birth*.

**Cisgender:** Individuals whose sex assigned at birth is congruent with their gender identity (and often gender expression). *Cis-* is derived from the Latin meaning of “on the same side.”

**Coming Out:** A life-long process of accepting oneself, and in some cases, revealing their identity with others. If someone is “out,” they may outwardly identify as LGBTQ in their personal and professional lives.

**Gender:** The attitudes, feelings, and behaviors a culture typically associates with being male or female. Currently understood to be made up of one’s gender identity, gender expression, and gender role.

**Gender Expression:** Ways in which one expresses their gender identity to others, such as through their behavior, clothing choice, accessories, hairstyle, etc. *Outwardly visible to others.*

**Gender Identity:** One’s *internal* sense of self as male, female, or something else (may exist on a gender spectrum). Gender identity may or may not match a person’s biological sex assigned at birth. *Not outwardly visible to others.*

**Gender Nonconforming/Expansive/Creative/Fluid:** Umbrella terms for people whose gender expression or behavior differs from traditional gender norms or stereotypes.

**Gender Role:** The commonly expected roles, activities, and behaviors associated with being male or female, per one’s culture or society.

**Heterosexual (Straight):** A person who has romantic, physical and/or emotional feelings for someone of the opposite sex.

**Intersectionality:** The concept that a person’s multiple identities (e.g. race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, etc.) intersect with one another, creating assets or liabilities for that person.

**Sexual Orientation:** An individual’s romantic, emotional and/or physical feelings of attraction to others. Differs from one’s gender identity. *Not outwardly visible.*
Terms to Avoid | Preferred Terminology
---|---
Homo, Homosexual | Gay, lesbian, bisexual
Sexual preference, gay lifestyle | Sexual orientation
Transgendered, trangenders, a transgender, transgenderism | Transgender, transgender individual, transgender person
Tolerate | Acceptance, treat fairly

“As the parent of a student on the LGBTQ spectrum, having staff that support LGBTQ students and their needs, such as preferred names, pronouns, etc., is extremely important to their physical health and emotional well-being.”

-Parent of transgender high school student, Pasco County Schools
**SEX** is biological: internal and external reproductive organs and sex chromosomes.

**SEXUAL ORIENTATION** is our physical, emotional or romantic attraction to others.

**GENDER IDENTITY** is a deeply held sense of being male, female or another gender. Gender identity is not related to sexual orientation.

**GENDER EXPRESSION** is the way individuals show their gender to the world. Gender expression is not related to sexual orientation.

SEX, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY AND GENDER EXPRESSION are distinct concepts, but they combine uniquely in each person to make us who we are. Understanding these terms—and how they do and do not intersect—can help us better appreciate and respect the diverse spectrum of our identities.

*Reprinted with permission of Teaching Tolerance, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center. [www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org)*
Statistics

In recent years, data has become more prevalent on the experiences of LGBTQ youth in schools. The statistics shared on the following pages provide the "compelling why" this best practices guide is necessary. **LGBTQ youth are at increased risk for:**

- **Depression**
- **Self-Injury**
- **Anxiety**
- **Suicidal Ideation**
- **Suicide Attempts**
- **Family Rejection**
- **Homelessness**
- **Harassment**
- **Physical Violence**
- **Truancy**
- **Bullying**
- **Poor Academic Achievement**
- **School Dropout**

Every other year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention publishes data from their Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, which includes the *Youth Risk Behavior Survey* (YRBS). According to the 2015 YRBS:

- **28%** of LGB students reported being bullied through email, chat rooms, instant messaging, websites, or texting
- **34%** of LGB students reported being **bullied on school property**
- **60%** of LGB students reported feeling so sad or helpless almost every day for 2 or more weeks that they stopped engaging in usual activities
- **42%** of LGB students **seriously considered attempting suicide** and almost **30%** had attempted suicide one or more times during the 12 months prior to the survey
- **12.5%** of LGB students **did not attend school** on at least 1 day during the 30 days prior to the survey because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to/from school.

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1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey Questionnaire. Available at: [www.cdc.gov/yrbs](http://www.cdc.gov/yrbs)
Additionally, the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) regularly publishes National School Climate Survey data, as well as individual state data. According to the *School Climate in Florida* (2015 State Snapshot):

- **91%** of LGBTQ students surveyed heard “gay” regularly used in a **negative** way at school
- **73%** of students heard negative remarks about transgender people
- **89%** of students surveyed heard **negative remarks** about gender expression
- **73%** of students experienced **verbal harassment** based on their sexual orientation, while **56%** of student surveyed experienced verbal harassment based on their gender expression
- **28%** of students experienced **physical harassment** based on their sexual orientation and **22%** experienced physical harassment based on their gender expression
- **57%** of students who were victimized **never reported** the incident to school staff

Finally, although approximately 10% of youth across the U.S. identify as LGBTQ, it is estimated that **40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ**.

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**Suicide Attempt Rates**  
(Source: CDC)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Adult Population</th>
<th>Transgender Adults</th>
<th>Heterosexual Students</th>
<th>LGB Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>6.40%</td>
<td>29.40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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2 GLSEN. (2017). *School Climate in Florida (State Snapshot)*. New York: GLSEN  
CHAPTER TWO: Law and Policy
There are a number of laws and policies that support and ensure safe and welcoming schools for all students. An overview of local, state, and federal laws and policies is provided below and intended to be a tool for administrators and educators when creating and communicating about safe and respectful schools.

**Pasco County Schools**

**Non-Discrimination Policy:** Pasco County Schools does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex/gender, religion, national origin, marital status, disability, age or genetic information in its educational programs, services or activities, or in its hiring and employment practices.

**Bullying & Harassment Policy:** Pasco County Schools will not tolerate unlawful bullying and harassment in schools or school campuses, school sponsored buses, school-related or school-sponsored events, or through the use of data or computer software that is accessed through a computer, computer system, or computer network of the district.

**Florida State Policy**

**Non-Discrimination Policy:** Florida Statute 1000.05 prohibits discrimination against students and employees in the Florida K-20 public education system on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, disability, or marital status.

**Bullying & Harassment Policy:** The Jeffrey Johnson Stand Up for All Students Act (Florida Statute 1006.147) prohibits bullying or harassment of any student or employee of a public K-12 educational institution. The statute requires every school district to adopt and review an anti-bullying policy and gives districts the option to establish separate discrimination policies that include categories of students.

**Professional Conduct:** Florida Statute 6A-10.081 states that education professionals shall not harass or discriminate against any student on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, national or ethnic origin, political beliefs, marital status, handicapping condition, sexual orientation, or social and family background and shall make reasonable effort to assure that each student is protected from harassment or discrimination.

**Federal Policy**

There is currently no federal bullying and harassment policy; however, legislation was reintroduced in the Senate in 2015, but has remained stalled since that time.
Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972: “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.”

- In April of 2014, U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights released guidance on public schools’ responsibility to address sex discrimination:
  o The guidance indicated that “Title IX’s sex discrimination prohibition extends to claims of discrimination based on gender identity or failure to conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity or femininity and OCR accepts such complaints for investigation. Similarly, the actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity of the parties does not change a school’s obligations.

- In May of 2016, the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights and the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division released the “Dear Colleague Letter on Transgender Students” summarizing a school’s Title IX obligations regarding transgender students. A document entitled “Examples of Policies and Emerging Practices for Supporting Transgender Supports” accompanied the Dear Colleague letter. The DOE and DOJ encouraged schools to consult this document for practical ways to meet Title IX’s requirements.
  o NOTE: In February of 2017, the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice rescinded the above-referenced guidance, citing the need to “further and more completely consider the legal issues involved.” The withdraw of this guidance does not have a negative impact on transgender students within Pasco County Schools, as we are committed to implementing best practices that create a safe and supportive environment for all students.

Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964: Prohibits discrimination on, among other things, the basis of sex/gender under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.

14th Amendment & the Equal Protection Clause: “No state shall deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

Equal Access Act: Requires federally funded schools to grant equal access to extracurricular clubs. If a school allows at least one student-led non-curricular club, then they must allow other student groups to form and be treated like any other club at the school. In other words, schools who have non-curricular clubs must allow a Gay-Straight Alliance club.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA): Prohibits the disclosure of personally identifiable information from educational records and requires parental (or student) consent prior to disclosure of records.
CHAPTER THREE:
Education Professionals
Teachers

Teachers often play a vital role in the lives of LGBTQ youth. A trusted teacher may be the first adult a student comes out to (for more information about what to do or say if a student comes out to you, please see Chapter 4). Research from GLSEN suggests that supportive school personnel can positively impact a school’s climate and mitigate some of the risk factors for LGBTQ youth.

Several educational organizations have published position statements and resolutions on meeting the needs of LGBTQ individuals. Position statements state a professional association’s position on an issue for which there may be controversial or critical opinions and are developed through a consensus-building approach and published collectively on behalf of members of the organization.

- The **National Parent Teacher Association** (PTA) adopted a resolution calling for federal policies that specifically protect LGBTQ youth and practices that create and maintain safe, affirming and inclusive learning environments for all students.
  - Recognition of LGBTQ Individuals as a Protected Class

- The **National Education Association** (NEA) believes in the equality of all individuals and has a national training program on safety, bias, and GLBT issues
  - School Employee’s Guide to GLBT Issues, 2nd Edition

- The **American Federation of Teachers** (AFT) has also passed a resolution calling for safe, supportive educational environments for LGBTQ youth.
  - Resolution on School Safety and Educational Opportunity for LGBTQ Students

- The **National Council of Teachers of English** (NCTE) believes “it is the responsibility of all teachers to prepare students for citizenship in a diverse society.”
  - Resolution on Strengthening Teacher Knowledge of LGBT Issues

Each of us has our own set of unique norms, values, and beliefs. However, we have a legal, ethical, and professional obligation to provide a safe environment and show respect for ALL students in our schools.
Teachers can be allies to LGBTQ individuals by teaching students how to respect one another, by including positive representations of LGBTQ people in the curriculum, and working with school staff to create safer, more inclusive schools. Professional development on LGBTQ awareness and sensitivity also facilitates inclusivity of LGBTQ students and staff.

*Adapted from GLSEN’s Safe Space Kit (https://www.glsen.org/safespace)
A number of free lesson plans and resources are available to assist teachers in addressing anti-LGBTQ language and bullying, gender differences, bias and discrimination, etc. in their classrooms.

- **The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)** authors evidence-based resources for educators, partners with decision-makers to ensure that comprehensive and inclusive safe school policies are implemented, supports student-led efforts to positively impact their own schools, and conducts extensive research and evaluation on LGBTQ issues in K-12 education.
  - Changing the Game: The GLSEN Sports Project focuses on the creation of athletic and physical education climates where all students can participate and develop healthy physical fitness.
  - ThinkB4YouSpeak raises awareness about the prevalence and consequences of anti-LGBT bias and behavior in America’s schools.

- **Welcoming Schools** offers professional development tools, lessons aligned with the Common Core State Standards, and additional resources for elementary schools to assist in creating learning environments in which ALL students and families are welcomed and respected. Topics include: embracing family diversity, avoiding gender stereotyping and affirming gender, and ending bullying and name-calling.

- **Teaching Tolerance**, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, is dedicated to reducing prejudice, improving intergroup relations and supporting equitable school experiences for our nation’s children. They provide free educational materials to teachers, including the Teaching Tolerance magazine and curricular kits.

- The **Safe Schools Coalition** is comprised of community organizations, school and government agencies, and individuals who advocate at several levels, provide professional development and community education, reviews policies, and shares resources related to LGTBQ individuals.

- The **American Federation of Teachers’ Share My Lesson** site includes over 400,000 free lesson plans and activities for educators, including a number of LGBTQ and anti-bullying resources.

- **PBS Learning Media** offers a series of digital media resources to help educators understand and effectively address the complex and difficult issues faced by LGBTQ students.
• The **Anti-Defamation League** fights anti-Semitism and all forms of bigotry, while protecting the civil rights and fair treatment of all people. Their K-12 Common Core-aligned curricula assists teachers in fostering an understanding of diverse perspectives within their students, while building the skills and motivation to take action against injustice.

• The **Speak Truth to Power** education curriculum introduces general human rights issues through the stories of remarkable people working in the field, and urges students to become personally involved in the protection of human rights.

• The **Not In Our School** videos, activities and resources showcase the immense capacity, energy, and creativity of young people who are working to create safe schools that are free from stereotypes, intolerance, and hate.

**Ask yourself...** *do my classroom activities and communications home convey a sense of inclusiveness and respect for a range of family structures? For example, when talking about or celebrating Mother’s Day in my classroom, do I provide options for students that may not have a mother present in the home or for those that may have two moms?*
Student Services

Suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and psychological disorders (such as depression and anxiety) among LGBTQ youth are alarmingly higher as compared to straight and cisgender youth. Therefore, Student Services professionals can play a unique and important role in the lives of LGBTQ youth. The following national organizations have published *position or resolution statements* regarding LGBTQ youth:

- **The National Association of School Psychologists** (NASP) supports that all youth have equal opportunities to benefit from educational and mental health services within schools regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.
  - A number of *positions statements* and resolutions are available on safe schools for transgender and gender diverse students and LGBT youth.
  - A joint *Resolution on Gender and Sexual Orientation Diversity in Children and Adolescents in Schools* was adopted by the American Psychological Association's (APA) Council of Representatives (CoR) and the NASP Leadership Assembly.

- **The School Social Work Association of America** (SSWAA) believes all students, regardless of sexual orientation, should be afforded equal educational opportunity in a safe and supportive school environment.
  - *Resolution Statement on LGBT Youth*

- **The National Association of School Nurses** (NASN) believes that all students, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, are entitled to a safe, supportive and inclusive school environment.
  - *Position Statement LGBTQ Students: The Role of the School Nurse*

- **The American School Counselors Association** (ASCA) believes that school counselors should promote equal opportunity and respect for all individuals regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.
  - *The School Counselor & LGBTQ Youth*
SUICIDE PREVENTION...

As previously noted, LGBTQ youth are approximately 4 times more likely to attempt suicide than straight and cisgender youth. Risk factors that contribute to suicidality among LGBTQ youth include depression and anti-LGBTQ experiences, such as stigma, discrimination, harassment, bullying, and family rejection.

However, as a student services professional....

- you can help LGBTQ youth feel connected to school
- encourage their participation in extracurricular activities
- emphasize the need for appropriate conflict resolution and problem-solving skills
- provide appropriate referrals for medical and mental health professionals who will provide culturally competent care
- be a positive and affirming role model
- help students identify their strengths and protective factors
What can Student Services professionals do to support LGBTQ youth?

- Understand that identifying as LGBTQ does not directly cause increased mental health problems or suicidality. Instead, LGBTQ individuals often face increased harassment, discrimination, bullying, oppression, microaggressions, negative reactions from friends or loved ones, and/or family rejection that place them at greater risk for psychological disorders and suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

- Focus on effective and targeted suicide prevention efforts in your school(s). Additionally, know LGBTQ-specific suicide hotlines. See LGBTQ-specific suicide prevention resources and hotlines in the Resources section of this guide.

- Work with administrators and school staff to create inclusive policies, programs and practices that not only prevent bullying and harassment, but also create safe and supportive environments for ALL students and staff.

- Be aware of outside resources available to students and families that are affirming and welcoming.

- Respect a student’s confidentiality. They may come out to you and ask that you hold that information in confidence. Offer unconditional affirmation for their bravery and let them know that you will do your best to support their journey.

- Support students or student-led organizations during LGBTQ-specific events and activities that occur throughout the year:
  - No-Name Calling Week (January)
  - Transgender Day of Visibility (March)
  - Day of Silence (April)
  - LGBT Pride Month (June)
  - Ally Week (September)
  - National Coming Out Day (October)
  - Spirit Day (October)
  - LGBT History Month (October)
  - Transgender Day of Remembrance (November)

- Be careful not to push LGBTQ youth to come out to their parents. They may have very valid fears about family rejection and/or being kicked out of their homes. Understand that coming out is often a multi-layered journey. The student should be the one deciding when and with whom they want to share this information with. For more information about what to do or say if a student comes out to you, please see Chapter 4.

- Understand the unique needs of LGBTQ youth who have been rejected by their families, may be experiencing homelessness, or may be in foster care. Additionally, some LGBTQ youth may become involved in the juvenile justice system.
A Trauma-Informed Approach to Working with LGBTQ Youth

Stress and trauma, in all their forms, impact each of us in unique ways. By implementing a trauma-informed approach within our schools, we can minimize the impact of stress and trauma on students and educators. Trauma-sensitive schools allow LGBTQ youth to feel safe, welcomed, and supported within their learning environments, while increasing their sense of connection to others, and contributing to their overall well-being. As previously noted, LGBTQ youth have higher rates of school failure, truancy, depression and anxiety, homelessness, and family rejection than their heterosexual and cisgender peers. At school, LGBTQ youth may face bullying, harassment, microaggressions, stigma, discrimination, and bias from peers (and in some cases, staff). Additionally, LGBTQ youth with intersecting identities (e.g. gay and African-American) are at an even greater risk. Protective factors can help LGBTQ youth build resiliency and grit. Some of these protective factors include: family acceptance, supportive allies at school, opportunities for involvement at school, positive school climate, presence of a GSA, inclusive and affirming language and curriculums, and access to safe spaces.

Educators can help mitigate the aforementioned risk factors by applying five tenets of trauma-informed care: safety, voice, choice, transparency, and predictability. The table on the next page highlights actionable, trauma-informed strategies you can apply in your school(s).
## Tenets of Trauma-Informed + LGBTQ Youth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safety</th>
<th>Voice</th>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>Transparency</th>
<th>Predictability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safe space stickers</td>
<td>Restroom and locker room usage</td>
<td>Restroom and locker room usage</td>
<td>Posted anti-bullying policies</td>
<td>Participating in LGBTQ-specific events/activities throughout the year (e.g. LGBTQ History Month)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSA or similar club</td>
<td>Participation in GSA or similar club</td>
<td>Asking about names/pronouns</td>
<td>Messaging from administration regarding non-tolerance of harassment and discrimination</td>
<td>Consistent responses from all adults in reference to anti-LGBTQ language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmative support groups within the community</td>
<td>Staff asking about preferred name/pronouns</td>
<td>Gender support plan</td>
<td>”Out” staff members</td>
<td>Consistent enforcement of dress code, PDA, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender support plan</td>
<td>Non-judgmental listening</td>
<td>LGBTQ-friendly books in media center</td>
<td>Safe space stickers</td>
<td>Use of gender support plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff presence at “hot spots”</td>
<td>Involvement in creating their gender support plan</td>
<td>Allowing for opt-out during suicide awareness/prevention presentations</td>
<td>Inclusive paperwork (e.g. NOT mother/father)</td>
<td>Provision of inclusive language (e.g. partner, significant other)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining confidentiality</td>
<td>Educators asking questions and not making assumptions</td>
<td>Acknowledgement of differences in “life stories” if you’re cisgender/straight</td>
<td>Being clear about confidentiality and limits of confidentiality</td>
<td>Ongoing professional development for staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent response from School Resource Officers</td>
<td>Having student present in meetings</td>
<td>Being honest about not knowing answers to questions</td>
<td>Being clear about confidentiality and limits of confidentiality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
You may be wondering why we provide so much information about supporting LGBTQ youth when they make up a smaller percentage of the population as compared to other marginalized groups. It’s important to note that within other marginalized groups, family and community members often provide a buffer and are a “safe” place for youth. Loved ones help children and youth develop a healthy identity and foster a sense of resiliency and confidence when faced with adversity. However, this may not be the case for LGBTQ youth, as some are rejected by disapproving family members. Research from San Francisco State University’s Family Acceptance Project indicates that LGB youth who reported higher levels of family rejection were over 8 times more likely to report attempted suicide and almost 6 times more likely to report high levels of depression.

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Administration

Administrators have a critical role in creating and maintaining a safe campus and can set the tone for a school culture that accepts and welcomes ALL students, families, and staff members. The following national organizations have published resolution statements or created resources regarding LGBTQ youth.

- The National School Boards Association (NSBA) has published a helpful resource to support conversations around transgender students in schools.
  - 2016 Transgender Students in Schools

- The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) believes that effective school leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.
  - Position Statement-Transgender Students

- The American Association of School Administrators (AASA), NASSP, and NEA, in conjunction with a number of other reputable organizations, published a resource for administrators and school personnel. This document is intended to provide accurate information regarding sexual orientation in youth.
  - Just the Facts About Sexual Orientation: A Primer for Principals, Educators, and School Personnel

- Additionally, a number of helpful articles have been published in Principal Leadership on supporting LGBTQ youth and legal matters surrounding transgender students and staff.

“Being inclusive of people who are different than us benefit(s) our entire school and community. All of our students deserve to come to a school where it doesn’t matter who they love, who their parents love, or who they befriend. Being aware that families come in many different shapes, sizes, and make-ups keeps us from unintentionally ostracizing children whose experiences may not match ours. The marginalized community (GLBTQQ, immigrant, low socioeconomic status, wealthy, racially diverse, gender, etc.) seeks belonging and kinship just like all people do. Gathering them into our school community enriches our lives and theirs.”

-High School Principal, Pasco County Schools
How can you create an LGBTQ-inclusive school climate?

- Publicly praise staff members who promotive an inclusive school environment.
- Enforce dress codes among all students equally. Does your administrative team apply dress code rules to just some students?
- Use inclusive language when communicating home to families. Do your forms assume that children have a mother and father?
- Respect student’s rights to privacy by not “outing” them to peers or family members.
- Identify bullying “hot spots” and ensure the bullying policy protects all students.
- Prioritize professional development for teachers and staff addressing the use of biased language, bullying, steps to foster an inclusive environment. Make it part of ongoing professional development and ensure all new staff receive the training.
- Support transgender students and staff by using appropriate names and pronouns and consider designating a gender-neutral restroom in your school.

*Adapted from Teaching Tolerance’s Guide for School Leaders

The topic of LGBTQ or gender nonconforming individuals may stir up personal uncertainties or discomfort. It is important that you do not let this interfere with your professional responsibility to protect the safety and well-being of LGBTQ youth in your school.
Talking Points About Gender-Inclusive Schools

Administrators may receive questions or concerns from parents or community members as they strive to develop safer, more gender-inclusive environments for all students. The following talking points may assist you in having these conversations with concerned individuals:

"I heard from my child that a boy was in the girls restroom today!"
- I can’t talk about individual students (just as I would never discuss your child with another parent), as this personal information is confidential and protected under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Is there something we can do to help you or your child better understand gender-related issues?
- I know this can be challenging to understand as this is new territory for many of us. Can I share some information with you about this issue?

"What about my child’s rights?"
- We ask all students to respect physical boundaries and one another’s privacy. If your child is feeling that someone is not respecting his/her privacy or boundaries, I’d like to know more information about what is going on.
- Feeling uncomfortable or uncertain about a transgender student using the same facilities as your child is understandable. However, your child’s rights are not being violated when a transgender student accesses the facilities that correspond to their gender identity. If your child has concerns for their privacy, I’m happy to speak with you and your child to discuss their concerns and any requested accommodations.

"How are you protecting my child in the restroom and locker room?"
- The safety of ALL students at this school is our highest priority. Is your child feeling unsafe? Please tell me about specific situations that made your child feel unsafe.
- Your child’s safety is a priority for me, so I’d like to discuss ways we can work together to make your child feel more comfortable at school.
- As a reminder, bullying and harassment of any student at this school will not be tolerated and we will address inappropriate behavior accordingly.

"So now boys can just come to school one day and say they’re a girl and start using the girl’s restroom or changing alongside girls in the locker room?"
- We have always worked to support each child’s unique and individual needs and have put a great deal of care and planning into gender-related needs. Any student who has identified themselves as transgender has been involved in the planning procedures our district has established.
- A transgender student is not trying to “get away” with something or pretend to be another gender in order to access the boy/girl facilities. If a student violates the code
of conduct by entering a restroom or locker room that does not match their gender identity, we would take appropriate disciplinary action.

- Other large school districts across the country have found that there have not been any incidences of students suddenly choosing to identify as transgender. Additionally, schools and organizations have not identified any instances of a transgender person harassing or acting inappropriate in restroom or locker room facilities.

"Doesn’t talking about this issue cause more people to decide they’re transgender?"

- Someone who identifies as transgender doesn’t choose to do so one day and talking about gender supports will not put the idea in a child’s head. Talking about gender does show students that our schools are welcoming, safe, and affirming places and that we will respect and honor a student regardless of their gender identity/expression.

"How many transgender kids are in my child’s school?"

- I am not allowed to legally share that information with you, but if there are transgender students in our school community, it’s important to remember that they are just like any other student. They come to school to learn and make friends and it is not their intention to upset anyone.

"Why is all of this necessary for transgender kids?"

- Research shows that transgender youth have more positive mental well-being and physical health when they feel accepted and supported. We also know that transgender youth who are bullied, ostracized, or rejected have poorer educational outcomes and are at greater risk for suicide. We take mental health very seriously in this school and can’t ignore the risks.
CHAPTER FOUR: Safe Schools & Environments
An important dimension of school climate is the availability of additional resources and supports for students, including LGBTQ students. Key findings from GLSEN’s 2015 *National School Climate Survey*\(^5\) suggest that LGBTQ students experience a far safer and more positive school environment when schools have supportive student clubs (such as a Gay-Straight Alliance), inclusive curricular resources that teach positive representations of LGBTQ people, supportive school personnel, and school policies addressing bullying, harassment, and assault.

**Addressing Anti-LGBTQ Language in School**

Data provided by GLSEN’s 2015 *National School Climate Survey* indicate that approximately 98% of LGBTQ students reported hearing the word “gay” used in a negative way. Hearing peers or staff use the word “gay” to mean that something or someone is stupid or worthless caused LGBTQ youth to feel bothered or distressed to some degree.

- Harassment does not go away on its own.
- Ignoring name-calling and hurtful teasing allows it to continue and possibly get worse. Not speaking up teaches the student that was targeted, as well as anyone within hearing range, that they will not be protected from harassment.
- Almost any response is better than ignoring the situation. You may not know exactly what to say, but you have an obligation under local policy and state law to stop the harassment.
- Taking action reaffirms limits. Interrupting name-calling and harassment isn’t always easy. With experience, you will become more comfortable in handling it. Practice with colleagues.
- You can always go back to the student and say or do something else if you feel you did not respond well.

**On the following pages, you will find ideas for addressing anti-LGBTQ language in schools.**

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WHAT DO YOU SAY TO ‘THAT’S SO GAY’ & OTHER ANTI-LGBTQ* COMMENTS?

It doesn’t matter if it is a first grader who might not know what the word “gay” means, a sixth grader trying to sound cool, or a tenth grader “teasing” a friend. All of these scenarios have the potential of creating an unsafe classroom or school environment and must be addressed. So, what can caring adults do?

STOP IT...

Keep it simple with quick responses:
- “Remember, we don’t use put-downs in this class.”
- “Do you know what ‘gay’ means?”
- “It’s not OK at this school to use ‘gay’ disrespectfully to mean something is bad.”
- “You may not have meant to be hurtful, but when you use the word ‘gay’ to mean something is bad or stupid, it is hurtful.” Follow-up with, “Do you know why it is hurtful?”
- “Using the word ‘homo’ to tease someone is harassment and is unacceptable.”
- “Even if you didn’t mean to offend people who are gay, it is offensive to call this assignment gay (or queer); if you don’t like something, then say you don’t like it!”
- “It is never OK to say, ‘you act like a girl (or look like a boy)’ as a put-down.”
- “Using the words ‘queer’, ‘dyke’ or ‘fag’ to joke around is not OK. These are hurtful words and can impact anyone who overhears them.”
- “It doesn’t matter who said it, I don’t want to hear that kind of language again. Is that clear?”

DON’T IGNORE IT...

- Harassment does not go away on its own.
- Ignoring mean name-calling and hurtful teasing allows it to continue and possibly get worse.
- If other students do not see action, they get the message there is nothing wrong with it.
- Not speaking up teaches the student targeted, as well as anyone within hearing range, that they will not be protected from harassment.
- Almost any response is better than ignoring the situation. You may not know exactly what to say, but you must stop the harassment.
- Taking action reaffirms limits. Interrupting name-calling and harassment isn’t always easy. With experience you will become more comfortable in handling it. Practice with colleagues.
- You can always go back to the student and say or do something else if you feel you did not respond well.

*LGBTQ: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning

WHY STOP ANTI-LGBTQ COMMENTS?

“Middle-school students called anti-gay names report increased anxiety, depression, personal distress and a lower sense of school belonging regardless of their sexual orientation.”
—V.P. Poteet and D.L. Espelage, 2007

“Both students who are targeted and students who exhibit bullying behavior have lower academic achievement in school.”
—J. Juaron, Y. Wang and G. Espinosa, 2011

“If name-calling or other discrimination happens at school and goes either unnoticed or is not discussed by adults, students infer that the behavior is widely accepted.”
—P.E. Aboud, 2008
EDUCATE...

- If you have the time and opportunity to educate on the spot, do it. If you don’t, make time later.

- If you have been hearing the phrase “That’s gay” or “no homo,” take time during class to make sure that your students know what “gay” means and know why it is hurtful to use as a comment or put-down.

- Be clear that using the word “gay” in a negative way is disrespectful. Be clear that using the phrase “That’s gay” is hurtful to other students who may have family members and friends who are LGBTQ.

- Be prepared to provide accurate information. For the youngest students, keep it simple — for example, “The word ‘gay’ describes a man and a man or a woman and a woman who love each other.” As students get older, they may want more explanations and discussion.

- In lessons on respect, prejudice or civil rights, include information about discrimination against LGBTQ people and the LGBTQ civil rights movement.

“A safe and welcoming school environment is essential for student success. Educators are a critical component in creating an environment that enables all students to thrive!”

— Lily Eskelsen Garcia, President, National Education Association

BE PROACTIVE...

- Develop an environment of respect and caring for all students in your school and classroom using inclusive language, books and other materials.

- Establish clear schoolwide and classroom policies against hurtful teasing and bullying. Ensure that all members of the school community understand what the policies are and why they are important.

- Be explicit that rules against hurtful name-calling include “That’s gay!” “Homo!” “Fag!” “Tranny!” “Sissy!” and other LGBTQ put-downs.

- Develop the capacity of students and educators to be allies that stand up for students who are harassed.

I wish more teachers could elaborate on it [LGBTQ topic] and talk about it more, instead of like, two sentences and then dismiss the subject.”

— Elena in What Do You Know? Six-to-Twelve-Year Olds Talk About Gays and Lesbians (A Welcoming Schools Film)

RESOURCES

- **Welcoming Schools**
  www.welcomingschools.org
  K – 5 resources on gender, bullying & family inclusive of LGBTQ topics

- **NEA Bully Free Campaign**
  www.nea.org/bullyfree
  Bullying prevention for educators

- **Time to THRIVE**
  www.timetothrive.org
  Annual conference for youth-serving professionals focused on LGBTQ youth

- **PFLAG**
  www.pflag.org
  Parents and allies of LGBTQ youth

- **The Trevor Project**
  www.thetrevorproject.org
  Suicide prevention

- **GLSEN**
  www.glsen.org
  Safe schools for LGBTQ youth

- **Gender Spectrum**
  www.genderspectrum.org
  Gender identity and expression for youth of all ages

- **StopBullying.gov**
  Information and resources from various government agencies

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WHAT DO YOU SAY TO ‘THAT’S SO GAY’

STOP IT
• Keep it simple with quick responses. If you have the time and opportunity to educate on the spot, do it. If you don’t, make time later.
• You could say:
  • “Remember, we don’t use put-downs in this class.”
  • “It’s not OK to say ‘That’s so gay.’”
  • “What did you mean by that?”
  • “Do you know what ‘gay’ means?”
  • “You may not have meant to be hurtful, but when you use the word ‘gay’ to mean something is bad or stupid, it is hurtful.”
  • “Do you know why it is hurtful?”

EDUCATE
• If you have been hearing the phrase “That’s so gay” used to mean that something is bad or stupid, take the time during a class meeting or group time to make sure that your students know what “gay” means.
• A simple definition could be – the word gay describes a man and a man or a woman and a woman, who love each other and become family to each other.
• Be clear with students that when they use the word “gay” in a negative way they are being disrespectful. Be clear that using the phrase “That’s so gay” is hurtful to other students who may have parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, neighbors, friends or other family members who are gay.

BE PROACTIVE
• Build a community of respect and caring for all students in your class and school.
• Establish clear school-wide and classroom policies against name-calling and hurtful teasing.
• Be explicit that rules against name-calling include “That’s so gay” and other anti-gay put-downs.
• In lessons on respect, stereotypes or prejudice include information about discrimination against gay, lesbian, and transgender people. Use materials inclusive of LGBT people.

DON’T IGNORE IT
• Ignoring name-calling and hurtful teasing allows it to continue and possibly get worse. If other students do not see action, they get the message that there is nothing wrong with it.
• Harassment does not go away on its own.

DON’T BE AFRAID OF MAKING THE SITUATION WORSE
• Almost any response is better than ignoring the situation. You may not know exactly what to say, but you must stop the harassment.
• Taking action reaffirms limits.
• Interrupting name-calling isn’t always easy. With experience you will become more comfortable in handling it.

DON’T EXCUSE THE BEHAVIOR
• Saying “Josh doesn’t really know what it means,” or “Sarah was only joking,” excuses hurtful behavior.

DON’T TRY TO JUDGE HOW UPSET THE TARGET IS:
• We have no way of knowing how a student is really feeling. Often, students who are targeted are embarrassed and pretend that they were not offended or hurt.
• Saying “Pablo didn’t seem upset by Aisha’s remark” trivializes the child’s feelings. It tells the harasser that it is OK to make hurtful comments. It teaches not only the child targeted but also anyone in hearing range that they will not be protected from harassment.

DON’T BE IMMOBILIZED BY FEAR
• Making a mistake is far less serious than not acting at all. You can always go back to the student and say or do something else if you feel you did not respond well.
Welcoming Schools

Bias, Bullying, and Bystanders

Over three-quarters of middle school students who are harassed say that the harassment is related to bias about their race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, actual or perceived sexual orientation, religion, or disability.1

Children who experience discrimination based on their race or ethnicity are more likely to report depression and difficulty paying attention in school.

Students targeted with anti-gay put-downs are more likely to report higher levels of depression and anxiety and a lower sense of school belonging regardless of their sexual orientation.

Students in classrooms where teachers establish classroom norms that explicitly value diversity are less likely to be teased based on ethnicity and are more likely to value school, feel like they belong, and get better grades.

Student and adults who perceive that others in their school would jump in to stop bullying are more likely to intervene when they witness bullying.

A team of educators and parents in my school chose books that included three themes – race, economic status, and families with same-sex parents – to include in their language arts curriculum. We hosted a meeting for families to review the books, ask questions, and to learn how this initiative tied into bullying prevention and academic achievement. Many parents said they were uncertain about how to have these conversations with their children and they thanked us for providing a chance to think about these topics.

– Elementary School Principal

Tips for Elementary School Educators

Be an upstander. You are a role model for your students. They watch what you do and will follow your lead. They notice whether you stop hurtful name-calling or comments based on bias: skin color, gender, religion, weight, ability, family structure. They worry if they might be the next target of a mean remark.

Practice. Practice. Practice. Improving your skills at anything takes practice – including stopping hurtful bullying and teasing. Practice with colleagues what you could say to students to stop harassment, to educate, and to let all students know that you expect respect and accept diversity. Practice responding to students’ questions about differences.

Teach your students how to be an ally. Work with your students so they know what they can do if they witness bullying – including talking with or befriending the targeted student, confiding in an adult, talking with the student who is being mean, causing a distraction to help stop the harassment, or speaking up in the moment.

Involve families. Host a family night with a panel of diverse families from your school community. Hold a book night with students or teachers reading from books that show a range of diversity – including racial, ethnic, religious, economic status or family structure.

Use books to engage students.

Read books featuring diverse families such as The Great Big Book of Families by Mary Hoffman or The Family Book by Todd Parr. Create hallway displays with students’ drawings of their families or important adults/relatives in their lives.

Read books such as One by Kathryn Otoshi or Benjamin and the Word / Benjamin y La Palabra by Daniel Olivas to spark discussion of hurtful teasing and ways to be an ally to classmates. Discuss with students the real put-downs they hear, paying close attention to ones that target a child’s or their family’s identity.

I choose books to read to my students as a way to hear from them what they experience in school. When I used the book, One, students came up to me afterwards to tell me ways that they had been hurt and seen others hurt. I let them know that it’s not tattling to try to get someone out of trouble. That’s different than coming to me just to get someone in trouble!

– Elementary School Educator

1 See www.welcomingschools.org for research citations.
What You Can Say to Stop Hurtful Language and Educate

- That was a stereotype. Stereotypes are a kind of lie and they hurt people’s feelings. Everybody is different with their own strengths and own way of being.

- In this classroom, I want everyone to be respected. Making negative comments about a person's skin color is very disrespectful and will not be accepted. It's what's inside that is important.

- Do you know what that word means? It's a put down for someone's religion. There are many different religions in this world and in this school we respect all religions.

- It's unacceptable to say that to a classmate. All students are welcome here at (name of school).

- You may not have meant to hurt anyone, but saying "That's gay" can hurt those around you. Do you know what gay means?

  If no, a simple response could be – the word gay is used to describe a man and a man or a woman and a woman, who love each other and want to be family to each other.

  In the future I expect you to use that word respectfully and not in a hurtful way.

- That is not okay. I will not allow someone to be left out in this classroom because of where they come from or how they talk.

- It is not ok to call someone a "girl" to insult them. When you call someone a girl as a putdown, you are insulting ALL girls.

- It's true that some boys don’t like to play with dolls but some boys do! Just like some of you like to draw and some of you don’t and some of you like to play kickball and others don’t. No one should have to pick and choose what they do just because they are a boy or a girl.

Engage Students in Teachable Moments

When elementary school students use language based on bias about another child’s identity, they may just be repeating what they have heard. They may have no idea how hurtful that language is.

Instead of just, “Don’t say this,” follow-up with open ended questions like “Why do you think that?” and “Do you know what that means?”

Questions that lead to deeper conversations:

- Why do you think it's wrong for boys to wear pink?
- Has anyone called you a name that made you feel bad?
- Why did you think it was okay to make fun of the way someone looks?
- Do you know what the word faggot means?
- Where have you heard that kind of language before?

“When my son was five years old, he went to a party with his classmate wearing a pink shirt and sparkly blue sneakers. An adult mistakenly referred to him as a girl in front of the whole group. One child in the room said, “He’s not a boy. He’s a boy who dresses like a girl.” Most of the children in the room began laughing. Then one child said loudly, “He’s my friend, stop laughing at him!” The laughter stopped immediately. If this young child could speak up and make a difference, then surely we can too.

— Mother of a 3rd grader

www.welcomingschools.org

A PROJECT OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN FOUNDATION
BE PREPARED FOR QUESTIONS AND PUT-DOWNS ON GENDER

Practicing answering questions related to gender or interrupting hurtful teasing based on gender will help you respond more easily when the situation arises. As educators, take the time to practice simple phrases. As teachers, work with your students so that they also have simple responses to gender exclusion or put-downs.

“Why does Martin like pink?”
• There doesn’t have to be boy colors or girl colors. Colors are colors. All people like different colors.
• Do you think it’s wrong for boys to wear pink? Why’s that?
• Why do you like blue, or green, (or whatever color that child likes)? Why don’t you like pink?
• Did you know that pink used to be considered a boys color and blue was the girl’s color?

“Why is her hair so short? She looks like a boy.”
• Girls and women can have hair in many different styles and so can boys or men.
• Hair is hair. That is how she likes it.
• Why does it matter if a girl’s hair is short or a boy’s hair is long?

“Juan plays with dolls. That’s weird.”
• It’s true that some boys don’t like to play with dolls but some boys do! Just like some of you like to draw and some of you don’t. Some of you like to play kickball and others don’t. No one should have to pick and choose what they do just because they are a boy or a girl.
• The dolls are for all children in this classroom.
• Sometimes this is confusing. We get messages about some things being for boys and some things being for girls. They are just for kids!

You overhear a student say to another student who identifies as a girl, “You look like a boy.”
• Why do you say that?
• There is no one way for girls or boys to act or look.
• Girls and women can have short hair. That’s just how she likes it.
• Those are the kinds of clothes that she likes to wear. Why do you like to wear what you’re wearing?

“But he’s a boy, why does he dress like a girl?”
• There are lots of different ways that boys can dress and lots of different ways that girls can dress.
• Some boys like to wear pink or to have long hair. All of these things are OK in our school.
• There are many ways of being a boy (girl), and all are okay ways of being a boy (girl).
• Those are the kinds of clothes that he likes to wear? Why do you like to wear what you’re wearing?

“Dominic is always hanging out with girls. Why?”
• I encourage all boys and girls to play together.
• Dominic hangs out with friends who he likes to spend time with, just like you do with your friends.
• Some boys like the activities that more of the girls are doing and therefore like to play with girls.

You overhear a student call another student who identifies as a boy, a “girl” in an insulting way.
• That’s not OK at our school to call someone a “girl” to insult them or make them feel bad.
• Student: “But he is always playing with the girls and with girl toys!”
• At this school all children can play together. He’s a boy who likes to play with girls and that’s OK. All kinds of toys are for all children.
“Why does she always play with the boys?”
- Those are the activities that she likes to do just as there are different activities that you like to do.
- There are many different ways of being a girl (boy), and that’s great!

You overhear a student say, “Boys are better at math than girls.”
- Some boys are good at math and some are not, and some girls are good at math and some are not. All kids have different things that they are good at.

Sample language when a biological boy socially transitions to a girl.
- Although Angela was born a boy, she has always felt like a girl inside. She wants everyone to call her Angela now and she wants to be able to wear the types of clothes that she likes the most and do the activities that she enjoys.
- Sandy has always felt like a girl deep down inside. That is the way Sandy likes to dress now.

Simple phrases students could say to each other.
- “There’s no such thing as boys’(girls’) clothes (haircuts, toys, colors).”
- “You can’t say, ‘Girls (boys) can’t play.’”
- If someone says, “Boys are better at sports.”
  A student could say, “No group is best. Some are good. Some are not.”
- If someone says, “Girls are better at art.”
  A student could say, “No group is best. Some are good. Some are not.”

Ideas for talking with a student’s parents or guardians.
- Educator: There was an incident at school today in which your child called a boy, a “girl” to intentionally hurt him. At our school we are working on not using gender in a negative way to limit our students. It is important to us that all of our students are physically and emotionally safe to learn here everyday.
- Parent/Guardian: “But my son told me that Bobby wears girls’ clothing, paints his nails, and mostly plays with the girls.”
- Educator: Some boys prefer typical boy activities, some do not. We affirm all of the interests of our students and work hard to not limit children based upon gender. It’s important for children to learn not to tease someone in a hurtful way because of how they dress or who they play with.

When you overhear a colleague make a gender stereotypical remark about a student
- Remark: “Andre’s parents should really try to get him to do some more sports with boys like baseball.”

Sample responses:
- Why do you say that? And then engage in conversation.
- Andre’s parents are trying to do what is best for him. He has always loved gymnastics.

When my son was five years old, he went to a party with his classmate wearing a pink shirt and sparkly blue sneakers. An adult mistakenly referred to him as a girl in front of the whole group. One child in the room said, “He’s not a boy. He’s a boy who dresses like a girl.” Most of the children in the room began laughing. Then one child said loudly, “He’s my friend, stop laughing at him!” The laughter stopped immediately. If this young child could speak up and make a difference, then surely we can too.
- Mother of a 3rd grader.

Ideas based on: The Gender Inclusive School by Gender Spectrum, Graciela Sierensky-Poe, “Not True! Gender Doesn’t Limit You” by Lindsay Lamb, et al. Teaching Tolerance, and Johanna Eager

www.welcomingschools.org
It is imperative that educators do not ignore anti-LGBTQ sentiments, as doing so may send a message that there’s nothing wrong with what is being said/done to LGBTQ youth.

Instead of *That’s So Gay, Try...*

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Safe Spaces

Research shows LGBTQ students who have supportive educators feel safer at school, attend school more often, and have higher academic achievement. Simply knowing that allies exist can be a source of support to LGBTQ youth in our schools. You can show your support for LGBTQ individuals and their allies by displaying the Safe Space symbol, letting others know that you are an ally who accepts and embraces diversity.

GLSEN suggests displaying a Safe Space sticker...

- On a classroom door, window or board
- On the back of your ID badge
  - In locker rooms
- On cell phones, clipboards, or within your email signature

Supportive materials, such as quotes from famous LGBTQ icons, can be posted in classrooms, offices, or throughout the school to demonstrate allyship. Inclusive language, such as “significant other” instead of boyfriend/girlfriend, can also help create safe spaces and shows LGBTQ youth that they can be themselves around you.

Gender and Sexuality Alliances

Student-led clubs, such as Gender & Sexuality Alliances (GSAs - previously referred to as Gay-Straight Alliances) can offer much-needed support to an LGBTQ student. GLSEN’s National School Climate Survey found that students in schools with GSAs heard fewer anti-LGBTQ remarks, experienced less harassment, were more likely to report incidents of harassment or assault, reported a greater sense of belonging in the school, and felt safer at school.

The Equal Access Act, a federal law that applies to all public secondary schools that receive federal funding, indicates that if a school allows non-curricular student groups to meet, they must allow GSAs. Additionally, schools cannot discriminate against GSAs or prohibit them, even if they

“To me, a Safe Space sticker means that I know I can confide and trust whomever has the sticker, and that they’re someone that I can go to for help and I won’t be judged.”

-Pasco County Student, Age 15

“Having a GSA at our school is incredibly important. There are some students who are LGBTQIAA+ who will not feel comfortable ever coming to a meeting or being open at school. However, I hope they will feel more secure just knowing a GSA exists, and at least a small group exists that would accept them if they ever came out, and that they are not alone.”

-High School Teacher, Pasco County Schools
represent an unpopular viewpoint.

For more information about GSAs, visit the GLSEN website ([http://www.glsen.org/jumpstart](http://www.glsen.org/jumpstart)) or the GSA Network’s website ([https://gsanetwork.org/](https://gsanetwork.org/)).

“Being a GSA sponsor has been incredibly rewarding and challenging. I’ve seen students light up just having a GSA. We have been able to provide support and reliable information for one another. We can share our experiences and guide one another.

When a new student finds out there are both teachers and other students who are openly LGBTQIAA+ there is often an instant bond and connection that forms, one that extends beyond all other aspects of personality, because we have that shared facet of our lives. For those students who have been rejected by their families that bond is crucial to their emotional health.”

-GSA Sponsor, Pasco County Schools

Coming Out

Coming out is the process through which an LGBTQ person acknowledges their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and chooses to share this information with others. Often, LGBTQ youth come out to their friends first, followed by a trusted adult at school or their siblings, and lastly, their parents. If a student chooses to come out to you, it’s normal to feel surprised and unsure of how to react. Even if you are shocked, remember that the student is still the same person you knew before they disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity.

There are some things you can say and do to help students feel accepted and affirmed when they come out to you:

- Thank them for trusting you and having the courage to tell you. Feeling comfortable coming out to you often means that the person respects and trusts you.
- Offer support, but understand that not every student will need it. Every coming out experience is different, so take cues from the student about what he/she needs. You may want to ask “Do you need help of any kind? Resources? Someone to listen to you?”
- Remember that coming out is often considered a “journey” and not just a one-time thing. The student may approach you several more times to discuss their journey, including the challenges and joys of being “out.”
• It’s OK to ask questions, but try and be sensitive about how they are feeling – it’s not easy coming out to someone and they may not feel that they have all of the answers.

• Respect their privacy and refrain from talking to anyone else about the student—including their parent(s). In some cases, disclosing a student’s sexual orientation or gender identity can compromise the student’s safety. Let the student know that you will not share the information with anyone else, unless they give you permission to do so.

• Truly listen to them and celebrate the joys of coming out, but also let them know you will be there with them when they face challenges.

• Do not judge them, even if your personal beliefs or values differ.

• Please don’t say “I knew it!” or “are you sure?” to the person. This implies assumptions or suggests they don’t really know who they are.

• Understand that coming out can sometimes be a double-edged sword. In some ways, the student is happy to be out and living their authentic life; however, coming out may also expose them to anti-LGBT sentiments from others. Let the student know that you will be there for them and will do everything you can to prevent and stop anti-LGBT bias.

*Adapted from GLSEN’s Safe Space Kit
CHAPTER FIVE: Transgender & Gender Nonconforming Individuals
Every student has the right to learn in a safe, affirming, and accepting school. There is an increasing number of students who identify as transgender or gender nonconforming who would like to live as their authentic selves. Transgender students fear rejection and face stigma and discrimination regularly. As education professionals, we have the ability to create and nurture a school culture that is welcoming and respectful of ALL students. The following information provides recommendations and best practices when working with transgender and gender nonconforming individuals.

**INSISTENT. PERSISTENT. CONSISTENT.**

**Privacy & Confidentiality**

All students have a right to privacy and disclosing information about a student may be a violation of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Information about a student’s transgender status, their transitioning process (if applicable), legal name or biological sex is considered confidential medical information; therefore, disclosing this information may be a violation of FERPA. Transgender students have the right to discuss and disclose their affirmed gender with others; however, this does not authorize school staff to disclose this information with others, including the student’s parents/guardians. *Disclosure of a person’s transgender status must only be done so with authorization from the individual or when required to legally do so.*

**Names & Pronouns**

Students have the right to be addressed by the name and pronouns that correspond to their gender identity. Students *do not need* to procure a legal name change in order for registrars to enter their preferred name into MyStudent (Demographic<Preferred Name/Nickname) or for staff to refer to the student according to their preferred name/pronouns.

![Preferred Name/Nickname]

Additionally, all unofficial documents should reflect the student’s preferred name (see below for further information about official and unofficial records). It is advised that teachers print out a roster with the student’s preferred name in the event that a sub is in the classroom. Staff members are also encouraged to speak with students on how they would like to be addressed in conferences or in communications home and not assume the parents/caregivers
know and support the student’s gender identity/expression.

It should be noted that the name entered into MyStudent becomes part of the student’s records and would likely be disclosed to parents/guardians in the event they requested access to their child’s records.

**PREFERRED PRONOUNS**

Preferred pronouns are those pronouns that a person uses for themselves. Someone who identifies as a woman or female may prefer to be addressed as “she/her.” Some individuals may prefer gender neutral pronouns, such as “they or them.” For example, “Tristan left school early because they were not feeling well.” Asking someone what their preferred pronouns are conveys a sense of respect and shows that you aren’t going to assume this simply by looking at them (their gender expression). If you’re unsure, ask. You can do this by saying “Hi, I’m Mrs. Jones and I prefer she/her pronouns. What’s your name and preferred pronouns?”

**Official Records**

Schools will maintain mandatory permanent records that includes the student’s legal name and legal gender. Official records may include report cards, diplomas, standardized tests, Individual Education Plans, Section 504 plans, cumulative file, and initial registration paperwork. If a transgender student completes a legal name change, appropriate procedures will be completed by the school’s registrar. If a student legally changes his/her birth certificate, the court will amend the birth sex to reflect gender. Once the parent or student provides a copy of the amended document, all records will be updated to align with the birth certificate. Schools may wish to list the student’s preferred name on their cumulative (official record) as “AKA.”

**Unofficial Documents**: Students shall be permitted to use their preferred name and gender on unofficial documents. These records may include ID badges, yearbooks, class newspapers, and team/class rosters, email addresses, or award certificates.

**School Facilities**

**Restrooms**: Transgender and gender nonconforming students shall have access to the bathroom that corresponds to their consistently held gender identity. If the student, or any other student, expresses the desire for increased privacy, the school can offer access to a single-user restroom or adjust a student’s restroom use schedule. This option should be available for any
student who prefers more privacy. Note: The single-user restroom cannot be any student’s ONLY option. Requiring a transgender student to use a separate facility threatens to “out” the student, and may further marginalize the student. Some schools have created a gender-neutral restroom or private changing area so that ANY student who seeks more privacy can make use of these facilities. Schools may wish to utilize a gender support plan (see Appendix A) that spells out the student’s restroom usage preference.

**Locker rooms:** Transgender and gender nonconforming students have the right to use the locker room facility that matches their gender identity. Students can be offered a separate changing schedule, use of a nearby single-user restroom, or a private area within the locker room (such as an area separated by a curtain) if they prefer increased privacy. This option should be available for any student who wishes more privacy in the locker room.

### School Activities

**Physical Education:** Students must be permitted to participate in physical education classes that are consistent with their gender identity.

**Athletics:** According to the Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSAA), “All eligible students should have the opportunity to participate in interscholastic athletics in a manner that is consistent with their gender identity and expression, irrespective of the gender listed on a student’s birth certificate and/or records.” Students and parents should contact the administration or athletic director prior to the start of the season. For additional information, please contact the Program Director for Athletics in the Office for Leading and Learning.

**Extracurricular Activities/Afterschool Programs:** Transgender students have the right to access all activities and programs at their school. They have the right to use the restroom that corresponds to their gender identity during extracurricular activities or afterschool programs.

**Overnight Field Trips:** Schools should work with the student and their family to devise a plan for the trip, based on the student’s comfort level. Remember, schools have an obligation to not disclose the student’s transgender status to other students or parents unless the student has provided explicit permission to do so.

### Dress Code

Transgender and gender nonconforming students have the right to dress in clothing that is consistent with their gender identity. However, clothing must meet the rules of dress and appearance as set forth in the Pasco County Schools’ Code of Conduct. School staff should not enforce the dress code more strictly against gender nonconforming students than they would against other students. Schools should refrain from applying gender-specific guidelines for special events, such as requiring that girls wear dresses and boys wear ties.
Communication with Parents/Guardians

It is recommended that teachers privately ask transgender students how they would like to be addressed in correspondence home or in conferences with the student’s parents/guardians. It is best not to assume the student is “out” at home.

Special Circumstances

- **Graduation**: A student’s diploma must read their legal name; however, the student’s preferred name may be read aloud at graduation. When cap/gown colors and/or line placement are differentiated by gender, students are permitted to participate in a manner consistent with their gender identity.

- **Dances**: Students are permitted to wear the dress attire of their choosing, as long as it meets the rules of appearance as set forth in the Pasco County Schools’ Code of Conduct. Additionally, transgender students are permitted to run for the royalty title that corresponds to their gender identity (e.g. a transgender male may run for Homecoming/Prom King).

- **Human Growth & Development**: Pasco County Schools Human Growth & Development instruction is free from bias and personal stories related to sexual orientation/gender identity. Transgender students are permitted to attend gender-specific instruction that corresponds to their gender identity. It may be advisable for a school nurse or other Student Services team member to provide individual follow-up information.

- **Culinary Program/Medical/ROTC**: Schools with programs that require students to change into and wear uniforms should be aware that some transgender students may not feel comfortable changing in front of peers. If this is the case, program supervisors should ensure that students have gender neutral or private facilities available to them or allow the student to change prior to/after their peers.

Student Transitions

In order to ensure that transgender and gender expansive youth feel supported and accepted in the school environment, school teams may wish to use our district’s Gender Support Plan. Gender Spectrum has made a video available for those who would like additional guidance in completing the Gender Support Plan document. It is important to note that not all gender nonconforming students identify as transgender, nor do all transgender people undergo an outwardly visible transition. In cases where students will be transitioning, a Gender Communication Plan is available to school teams. A helpful document entitled
“Communicating a Change in Gender Status at School: Key Considerations” is available in the Appendices section to assist teams in creating a Gender Communication Plan. When selecting members of the gender communication or support team, staff should be mindful of the student’s possible need for privacy. Team members may include administration, student services team members, the student’s teachers, and the family (if they are aware and supportive).

Often, students prefer to transition over the summer break; however, students are not required to do so. Regardless of timing, schools should consider the following age-appropriate suggestions:

**Elementary:** At this age, the student’s parent/guardian most often informs the school of the impending transition. However, if school staff believe that a gender identity or expression issue is presenting itself and creating difficulty for the child at school, approaching parents about the issue would be appropriate at the elementary level. Together, the family and school can then identify appropriate steps to support the student.

**Secondary:** Often, notification of a student’s parent about his or her gender identity, expression or transition is unnecessary, as parents are already aware (and may be supportive). When discussing and planning for a transition, school staff should work closely with the student to assess the degree to which, if any, the parent/guardian will be involved in the process. It should be noted that in some cases, notifying parents carries risks for the student, such as being kicked out of the home.

When a student transitions during the school year, the school shall hold a meeting with the student (and parents if they are involved in the process) to ascertain their desires and concerns. The school should discuss a timeline for the transition in order to create the conditions supporting a safe and accepting environment at the school. Finally, the school shall train school administrators and any educators that interact directly with the student on the transition plan, timelines for transition, and any relevant legal requirements.

*Gender Support Plan and Gender Communication Plan templates are available in their entirety in the Appendices section of this guide.*
Frequently Asked Questions
Can we offer gender-neutral restrooms to transgender students?
Yes, you may offer a gender-neutral restroom; however, you cannot require a transgender individual to only use that restroom. Gender-neutral facilities are a great idea, benefitting all students by providing a safe, private option. We know that if forced to use a private space, transgender students feel further stigmatized and often they will simply not use any bathroom at school, putting them at risk for health problems.

Why is it so important to have conversations and professional development around transgender youth?
Research has shown that transgender youth are different from other protected groups due to increased rates of suicidality (suicidal thoughts, behaviors, attempts) and psychological disorders, higher rates of family rejection, less school belonging, lower educational aspirations, higher rates of truancy, and lower academic achievement.

What if I have students coming to me because they’re not feeling safe or comfortable in the bathroom or locker room with a transgender student?
There is a difference between safety and comfort. A transgender student’s presence in the facility does not make other students unsafe. A student’s discomfort does not trump a transgender student’s right to use the school facility that is consistent with their gender identity. It is best to discern whether it’s a comfort or safety issue. If it’s a safety issue, then appropriate precautions should be taken and consequences made be considered. However, if it’s a comfort issue, you may offer an alternative facility to the student experiencing discomfort.

Can I talk about a student’s gender transition with others?
In most cases, no. A student’s legal name, sex assigned at birth, and gender transition status are protected under FERPA. However, if the student and his/her family gives permission for you to share information, it is recommended that you develop a communication plan with input from the student and his/her family.

What should we do if we suspect a student is saying they’re transgender for inappropriate reasons?
If you have a credible basis for believing that a student’s gender identity is being asserted for an improper purpose, this should be documented and a written response should be provided to the student and, if appropriate, his/her parents/guardians.

I know of students who wish to remain silent on the “Day of Silence.” Can teachers require them to verbally participate during class?
Technically, no. The First Amendment protects the students’ right to free speech, including the right not to speak. Organizers of the Day of Silence suggest that students who wish to participate make arrangements with teachers prior to that day.
Can a transgender male be nominated for/selected as Homecoming or Prom King (or a transgender female be nominated for Queen)?
Yes. Legal experts often support that the First Amendment and the Equal Protection Clause protect a student’s right to express their affirmed gender identity when running for or being selected as dance royalty.

Can I separate two girls or two boys for dancing inappropriately (e.g. getting too close, PDA, etc.) at Homecoming or Prom?
Rules at school-sponsored dances should not be gender-specific. In other words, if your school has a rule regarding proximity when dancing as a couple, then that rule should be applied equally to ALL couples, not just same-sex couples. Additionally, PDA rules as defined in the code of conduct should be applied equally to ALL couples.

Should I be worried about getting sued because I allow transgender students to use the bathroom consistent with their gender identity?
Parents cannot be prevented from bringing suit against a school district; however, it is much more likely that a school district would be sued for violating a transgender student’s rights or failing to protect them from bullying, harassment, or discrimination. Court cases around transgender issues are almost always on behalf of transgender students (and it should be noted that in a majority of cases, the courts have sided with the student).

I have a student who is gender nonconforming. One day they are identifying as a girl, the next day as a boy, and some days as neither. How do I handle the bathroom situation?
Circumstances like this are rare and should be addressed on a case-by-case basis. It is recommended that a Gender Support Plan be developed so that this issue can be handled with input from the student, teachers, administration, etc.

Aren’t elementary-aged students too young to be asserting their gender identity?
No. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, children have a stable sense of their gender identity by the age of four.

What about middle schoolers who identify as bisexual or lesbian/gay? Isn’t that too early?
The American Psychological Association indicates that core attractions typically emerge between middle childhood and early adolescence. Some gay/lesbian people describe feeling “different” as early as 5 or 6 years old.

Why do we need safe space stickers- isn’t our entire school a safe space?
While we do hope that schools are a safe space for all LGBTQ+ students, research shows that schools can be unsafe and even dangerous for our LGBTQ+ youth. Students are often reluctant to approach staff members about anti-LGBQ+ bullying and harassment out of fear that nothing will be done; however, a Safe Space sticker sends a message that the staff member is willing to take action to stop bullying and harassment and prevent future instances.
Additionally, Safe Space stickers not only represent safe, accepting, and welcoming environments, but staff who post these stickers are also often comfortable talking with students about LGBTQ+ issues. Even if the entire school is a safe space, it’s helpful for students to recognize who they can speak to about alleged bullying and harassment or other LGBTQ+ issues without judgment or discomfort.

Staff members who prefer to have broader diversity or affirming signs posted in their classrooms, may be interested in the following options:

- This School Welcomes You... Option #1 and Option #2
- Respect Our Differences
- Safe Zones

If I allow a Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) at my school, could that open the doors for us to have ANY type of club (e.g. Satanic Club, Nazi Club, etc.)? The federal Equal Access Act states that any school that receives government funding and has at least one other non-curricular club must also allow a GSA. The law also says that schools must treat all clubs the same and let them use school resources in the same way. However, clubs must abide by our school board policies, including #2260 NONDISCRIMINATION AND ACCESS TO EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY, which states that the School Board will not discriminate nor tolerate harassment in its educational programs or activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex/gender, disability, pregnancy, marital status, age, religion, military status, or genetic information. Therefore, clubs that are grounded in principles of discrimination or harassment of protected classes of individuals shall not be allowed, as they are in violation of board policy #2260.
RESOURCES
Local Mental Health Resources

**Metro Wellness and Community Centers**
- [https://www.metrotampabay.org/](https://www.metrotampabay.org/)
- (727) 321-3854
- Email: info@metrotampabay.org

**PFLAG-Tampa**
- [http://www.pflagtampa.org/us/](http://www.pflagtampa.org/us/)
- (863) 535-5239
- Email: pflag.tampa@gmail.com

**Crisis Center of Tampa Bay**
- [https://www.crisiscenter.com/](https://www.crisiscenter.com/)
- (813) 964-1964

**National Resources**

The Trevor Project:  [https://www.thetrevorproject.org/](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/)

LGBT National Help Center:  [http://www.glnh.org/](http://www.glnh.org/)

Gender Spectrum:  [https://www.genderspectrum.org/](https://www.genderspectrum.org/)


**National Association of Social Workers:**
- [https://www.socialworkers.org/Practice/LGBT](https://www.socialworkers.org/Practice/LGBT)

**National Association of School Psychologists:**
- [https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/diversity/lgbtq-youth](https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/diversity/lgbtq-youth)

**American School Counselor Association:**

**American Psychological Association:**

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:**
- [https://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth-resources.htm#school](https://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth-resources.htm#school)
Suicide Prevention

Call 1-866-488-7386 (Trevor Project)

Call 1-800-273-TALK (National Suicide Prevention Lifeline)

Call 1-877-565-8860 (Trans Lifeline)

Text HELLO to 741741 (Crisis Text Line)

Talking About Suicide and LGBT Populations

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
APPENDICES
Gender Support Plan

The purpose of this document is to create shared understandings amongst school staff, parents/guardians, and the student about the ways in which the student’s authentic gender will be affirmed and supported at school. **Please note: a Gender Communication Plan is available to assist teams in planning for a student’s change in their gender status at school.**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preferred Name:</th>
<th>Legal Name:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pronouns:</td>
<td>Student #:</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOB:</td>
<td>Grade:</td>
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<tr>
<td>School:</td>
<td>Date of Meeting:</td>
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<td>Gender Support Team Members:</td>
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**PARENT/GUARDIAN INVOLVEMENT**

1) Are the student’s parents/guardians aware of their gender status?  □ Yes  □ No

2) What is the level of parent/guardian support?

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<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
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<td>(moderate)</td>
<td>(high)</td>
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**If support is low, what considerations must be made in implementing this plan?**

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
CONFIDENTIALITY & PRIVACY

(Pg. 43 in Best Practices Guide)

1) Who will be aware of the student’s affirmed gender (check all that apply)?
   - [ ] Teachers
   - [ ] Student Services Staff
   - [ ] School/Grade Level Administrator(s)
   - [ ] Student will not be openly “out” but the following students are aware of the
     student’s gender: ________________________________
   - [ ] Student is open with adults and peers
   - [ ] Other(s), please describe: ________________________________

2) How will “in the know” teachers/staff respond to any questions about the student’s gender
   from:
   - Peers? ________________________________
   - ________________________________
   - Staff Members? ________________________________
   - ________________________________
   - Parents/Community Members? ________________________________
   - ________________________________

STUDENT SAFETY

1) Who will be the student’s “go to” adult on campus? ________________________________
   *Who is the “back up” if this person is unavailable? ________________________________

2) What, if any, process will be utilized for periodically checking in with the student and/or
   parents/guardians? ________________________________
   ________________________________

3) What are the expectations in the event the student is feeling unsafe/how will the student
   signal their need for assistance?
   - During class ________________________________
   - In hallways ________________________________
Lunchroom
Restroom/locker room
Other:
Other:

4) If necessary, who should the student’s parents/guardians contact with concerns about their child’s treatment at school? ________________________________

NAME, PRONOUNS, RECORDS
(Pgs. 43-44 in Best Practices Guide)

1) What name and gender are listed in official records (myStudent)? ________________

2) What name & pronouns should be used when referring to the student? ________________

3) How will the team address any instances where the incorrect name or pronouns are used by staff or students? ________________

4) What considerations will be made to maintain the student’s privacy in the following situations?
   Registration/enrollment
   Class rosters
   With substitute teachers
   Standardized/district testing
   On IEPs/504s
   Yearbook/ID badge
   When summoned to office
   Clinic
   Awards/certificates
   Other: ________________
   Other: ________________
5) What name/pronouns will be utilized in the following home-school communications?

Letters home ________________________________
Calls/emails from teachers ________________________________
Discipline referrals ________________________________
Calls from clinic ________________________________
Other: ________________________________

USE OF SCHOOL FACILITIES

(Pgs. 44-45 in Best Practices Guide)

1) Student will use the following bathroom(s) on campus ________________________________

2) If enrolled in P.E., where will the student dress out? ________________________________

3) Student will use the following facilities during field trips: ________________________________
   Rooming considerations for overnight trips ________________________________

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES & PROGRAMS/SPORTS

(Pg. 45 in Best Practices Guide)

1) Will the student participate in any extracurricular activities (e.g. theatre, clubs, etc)?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No *If yes, please specify: ________________________________

   If yes, what considerations need to be made to support the student in above activities? ________________________________

2) Will the student participate in school-sponsored sports? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   If yes, what considerations need to be made to support the student’s participation? ________________________________

3) Elementary only: Is the student enrolled in PLACE? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   If yes, what considerations need to be made for supporting the student there? ________________________________
## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

(Pgs. 45-46 in Best Practices Guide)

1) What considerations will need to be made in regards to the dress code? __________

2) Will considerations need to be made for human growth & development lessons?
   - Yes
   - No
   If yes, please specify: ________________________________________________________________

3) Will LGBTQ+ sensitivity trainings for staff be needed in order to build awareness/capacity?
   - Yes
   - No
   If yes, please specify who will contact the district’s LGBTQ+ Liaison to coordinate training:
     __________________________________________________________

4) What mode of transportation will the student use for arrival & dismissal?
   - School bus
   - Bike rider
   - Car rider
   - Walker
   *If student will utilize the school bus, who will speak to the bus driver to ensure confidentiality and affirmation of student’s gender? __________________________

5) Other issues/concerns to be addressed: ____________________________________________
                                            ____________________________________________
                                            ____________________________________________

## SUPPORT PLAN REVIEW & REVISIONS

1) Who will lead the team in monitoring the utilization and effectiveness of this plan?

2) What steps will be taken in the event the Gender Support Plan needs to be revised?
3) Are any future action steps or follow-up tasks necessary?  □ Yes  □ No
   If yes, please specify:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>What?</th>
<th>Who is responsible?</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
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4) Does a follow-up meeting need to be scheduled?  □ Yes  □ No
   If yes, when will it be held and who is responsible for coordinating the meeting?

If you have additional questions regarding the information contained in this guide, please contact the Office for Student Support Programs and Services (OSSPS) at (813) 794-2600.

*Adapted from Gender Spectrum's Gender Support Plan*
Communicating a Change in Gender Status at School: Key Considerations

The Right Plan: For every young person who wishes to share new information about their gender at school, there exists a unique path for doing so. A number of factors will go into the ultimate plan for moving forward with the process. Factors such as the child’s age, personality and emotional state, the level of family support, the school’s organizational design, and the time of year all can impact how this process unfolds. It is important to avoid seeking some universal “correct way,” for sharing information about a student’s change in gender status, and to instead focus on identifying the steps that will create the necessary conditions to make this particular student’s experience as positive as possible. More often than not, the process will be governed by a series of options from which to choose; the key is to ensure that informed choices inform how each of these possible approaches is handled, and that the trade-offs of each are seriously weighed. Every child’s journey will be unique, and while there are a number of important principles and areas of focus to bear in mind along the way, there are many, many ways for reaching the destination.

In preparing for battle, I have often found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable.
Dwight D. Eisenhower

Urgency and Timing: A student’s desire to share a shift in their gender status at school is borne out of a deep need to be seen as one’s authentic self. The level of the student’s urgency versus the careful planning of the process must be balanced. Ideally, the child is currently not experiencing an unmanageably high level of distress at school. This allows the student, school, and family (if appropriate) to work together as a team to establish the most positive conditions in which the information can be shared. This could include training for staff, parents & school community members, and students; various forms of communication with any or all of these; and a carefully laid out plan for the student’s authentic identity to be shared. These steps need not take an inordinate amount of time, and in fact schools must be vigilant about not using this planning process to delay the process unnecessarily. Nonetheless, the ability to thoughtfully plan for this complex process best insures a positive experience for all involved.

However, it may be that the student’s emotional well-being will be compromised if they are asked to delay this process any longer. In such instances where this is the case, the school must quickly lay out a plan for the child’s gender to be recognized, with immediacy as the primary factor. It can be anticipated that there will be a variety of issues that will emerge for which the school must be prepared, including staff members being caught “off-guard,” questions from other students, and concerns from parents among them. This situation is akin to “walking across the bridge while building it,” and will entail, at least initially, the school reactively responding to issues as they arise. This is one of the unfortunate consequences when a school is perceived to be unsupportive of students’ gender diversity and the subsequent sense for some of not feeling fully seen within its walls. This is especially likely when the school has not taken any steps to proactively establish more gender inclusive conditions for all students. In these instances, it then falls to the school to help clear the way for this student’s true self to emerge. It should be noted, however, that often a student’s distress might be reduced once they know there is a “date certain” for the information to be shared, providing the school with an opportunity to get at least some of the key conditions in place.

Age and Grade-level: The age and maturity level of the child is another key variable that will influence how sharing information about a student’s gender will unfold. A younger student may be less involved with designing the actual process, while older students may play a greater role in shaping the experience. Conversely, in situations where a child does not have support at home, the process for a primary grade child will be very difficult, if not impossible without parental buy-in. An older student may ask the school to work with them to keep the process private in order to protect them from any negative consequences they may encounter when not at school. Additionally, the student’s age will also impact what and how the information about their gender will be communicated to the other students, what role, if any, the student will play in the
process, and potential concerns that may be raised by the larger school community. However, it is also important to recognize that the student’s individual personality, and not their age, is frequently the leading factor in determining how the process will unfold.

**Privacy and Disclosure:** The degree to which others will or will not be aware of the student’s gender status is also a major factor in the kind of support that will be necessary and the ensuing plan for generating it. In some cases, this won’t be anyone’s decision; the child is sharing information publicly in a school or community in which they have been known based on their assigned sex for some time. In other situations, the student’s move to a new school setting—say from one level to the next or to a new location—affords the opportunity to privately assert one’s authentic gender. In either case, the issue is not if the school supports the student, but rather how.

**Sharing Publicly:** When communicating a student’s gender status with others, it must be remembered that the student is undergoing an incredibly personal experience; few young people want to be the center of attention, particularly about such a private matter. Though others may have known the child previously, they must still recognize the student’s right to experience this process quietly with dignity and respect. It is incumbent upon the school’s leadership to protect the student’s right to feel safe from others’ comments, questions or rumors. The school must work actively to ensure that the student’s environment remains safe and conducive to learning.

Nonetheless, the school must still be prepared to respond to genuinely innocent confusion or uncertainty that may come up from members of the school community, including setting clear boundaries about questions being directed at the student or family. This often means a delicate balance of providing information about gender diversity broadly while not talking specifically about an individual student. Again, in schools that have proactively worked to be more gender inclusive, a student’s sharing about their gender sits in a larger context of gender acceptance, creating a framework in which a gender-expansive student’s experience can be better understood. However, regardless of how public the process is or the degree to which the student or family are open about its details, the school must not reveal any information about the student that could be seen as a violation of that child’s privacy rights.

Sadly, schools must also be prepared to protectively respond to negative reactions about the child’s change in gender status. Even as they undergo this often-difficult process, these students and their families can be subject to ignorant intrusions and even outright hostility from the larger school community. As such, schools are uniquely positioned to serve as a buffer from the non-accepting judgment of others. Without speaking about the specific student, there are a number of important talking points leaders and other school staff can use to respond to the questions or negative reactions of others. The box at right provides some specific language schools might use to grapple with these concerns from others at the school.

Even with well thought out responses and talking points, it is also important to keep in mind some overarching notions in the face of unkind or bigoted responses to a student’s decision to share information about their gender. Many of the objections that will be voiced can be boiled down to a lack of comfort or familiarity with the idea of transgender people, particularly children or teens. While learning about a child’s

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**Responding to Concerns...**

- I know this is new territory for many of us. Sometimes change is really challenging. Perhaps I can share some information with you about this issue?
- Be assured that the safety, well-being and education of all students remains our highest priority.
- Of course I can’t talk about any individual students, just as I would never talk about your child.
- Schools have always worked to support the needs of individual students in a variety of ways. Like we have always done, we are committed to supporting all of our students.
- Are there specific behaviors of other students that are causing your child to be uncomfortable?
gender might make others (including yourself) feel uncomfortable, that does not negate the child’s need to be safe and supported, nor your responsibility for ensuring that they are.

Keep in mind the following ideas as you consider responding to those expressing concerns regarding a child’s sharing about their gender:

- The bottom line is this: One person’s discomfort never justifies limiting the rights and dignity of someone else
- If someone feels uncomfortable, it does not mean they are unsafe
- Disclosure of any sensitive student information violates that child’s right to privacy, and could be an infraction of HIPPA/FERPA regulations
- Consider for a minute if this were another form of diversity that others “weren’t comfortable with.” How would you respond?

Private Assertions: When a student’s gender status is to remain private, it may be that very few adults (the school’s leader, a counselor, or even someone at the district office) will be aware of the situation. For some educators, this can be uncomfortable. With the best of intentions, they will insist upon the importance of adults knowing about the child’s gender status, in order for them to better support the child. On the one hand, this makes sense; should any issues arise in which the child’s privacy is compromised, adults can potentially intercede on the student’s behalf.

But for many students and their families, the goal is to simply be another kid on campus and not “that transgender student.” They may well recognize any risks associated with few if any adults on site knowing about the child’s gender, and accept them nonetheless. Ultimately, it must be the student’s (and when possible, the family’s) decision about whether, and if so when and to whom, they will reveal this personal information. Even with risks that privacy may entail, some students and their families believe it worthwhile to have a chance at a school experience that is not dominated by this single aspect of the child’s life. However, even in the circumstances where a student’s gender status appears to be completely private, with no imaginable way for others to “find out,” the school, family and student must still think about contingencies should that privacy be somehow compromised.

Student Information Systems: For students seeking to maintain their privacy, one of the significant challenges comes from the various student information systems that schools employ. Frequently driven by the student’s name and gender marker as reflected on a birth certificate, these systems are utilized across the site and between multiple bureaucracies and levels for conveying information and data. As a result, there are a great many ways in which a student’s gender status may inadvertently be revealed. General processes such as completing enrollment, taking attendance, assigning grades and communicating with the home can all easily compromise the student’s privacy. Other typical stumbling points include after-school programs, school photos and class pictures, substitute teachers, outside district personnel or professionals providing a service on campus, yearbooks, ID cards, posted lists, library cards, distribution of texts or other school supplies, and standardized tests.

Too numerous to name, even in the most supportive of school settings, these bureaucratic functions can cause significant harm for a transgender student with literally the click of a computer key. A single instance of the child’s private information being unintentionally made public can have devastating consequences. The difficulty is compounded by unclear definitions of a “legal student record,” often defined legislatively. School officials and IT professionals are placed in very difficult positions as they seek to fulfill their mandated responsibilities on the one hand, while simultaneously protecting the student’s privacy on the other. Fortunately, there is growing recognition of this challenge. Some SIS companies are providing options that allow greater flexibility in this area. There are also a growing number of best practices that serve as “work-arounds” when these technical solutions are not available.
Transgender Students with Unsupportive Parents or Caregivers

Unfortunately, transgender youth often experience high levels of family rejection. A family’s lack of affirmation can have a detrimental effect on a young person’s short- and long-term mental health and well-being. Family rejection significantly increases the likelihood that a transgender student will engage in high-risk behaviors. In such instances, schools can play a critical role in alleviating the psychological distress caused by family rejection. School may be the only place a transgender student feels safe enough to be themselves. As a result, a safe and supportive learning environment is just as important, if not more so, for transgender students who do not have supportive parents as it is for those who do.

When seeking to meet the needs of transgender students, it is essential to first know whether the student’s family affirms their gender, so school officials can avoid putting the student at risk of greater harm. For example, it might work best to manually change attendance sheets to reflect the student’s chosen name, but not alter the entry in the district’s student information system so that any written communication with the parents uses the student’s name as reflected on the birth certificate. Through this process the student and school can collaborate to develop a plan that balances the student’s need to be affirmed at school and the reality that the student does not have that support at home.

In cases with unsupportive parents, school officials should explicitly address the following basic topics and situations as part of the student’s gender support plan:

1. The modifications/accommodations the student is seeking (i.e. use of chosen name and pronouns; use of gender-specific facilities);
2. How to refer to the student when communicating with the student’s parent(s)/guardian(s);
3. How to refer to the student when communicating with the student’s siblings;
4. What information, if any, to share with the student’s teachers;
5. How to address questions from peers (if student’s transgender status is not private); and
6. Support services the school can provide to assist the student in coping with the lack of support at home.

Addressing the student’s needs at school provides a great short-term solution; but where possible, the goal should be to support the student’s family in accepting their child’s gender identity. The number one factor in a transgender student’s ultimate health and well-being is parental support. Thus, in consultation with the student, the school should seek opportunities to foster a better relationship between the student and their family. A parent’s initial negative reaction to their child exhibiting signs that they might be transgender is likely based on inaccurate or incomplete information about gender identity, or out of fear for what this will mean for their child’s future. Those reactions often come from a place of love and protection, and are not intended to harm their child (even though they do).

Sometimes a parent’s rejection is a failed attempt at protection.

Schools can assist the process of family acceptance in myriad ways -- arranging a safe space for the student to disclose their gender identity to their parents, providing counseling services for the whole family, or connecting the family to local resources or other parents of transgender or gender-expansive youth. As part of this effort, it is important to educate the student’s family about the serious consequences of refusing to affirm their child’s gender identity. Sharing the observations of school personnel that highlight the effect that rejection has had on the student may also help encourage parents to begin moving toward acceptance.

Conclusion: Supporting a student’s sharing information about their gender can feel like an overwhelmingly daunting task. Yet through careful planning, appropriate support and ongoing communication, not only can schools manage the process, they can master it. In so doing, they don’t just support a transformative experience that the student will never forget; they may well create a transformative experience for the staff, families and students surrounding the child as well. In the process, a student’s successful experience affirms a school’s commitment and responsiveness to the genuine needs of all of its children.
Gender Communication Plan

The purpose of this document is to plan for a student’s communication with their school & school community regarding a change in one or more aspects of their gender. By developing a communication plan, the school helps set the stage for a successful experience and identifies the specific actions that will be taken by members of the Gender Support & Communication Team. **Please note: a Gender Support Plan is also available to assist teams in creating a shared understanding about the ways in which the student’s authentic gender will be affirmed and supported at school.**

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<tr>
<th>Preferred Name:</th>
<th>Legal Name:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pronouns:</td>
<td>Student #:</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOB:</td>
<td>Grade:</td>
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<tr>
<td>School:</td>
<td>Date of Meeting:</td>
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Gender Support/Communication Team Members:

What does the student wish to communicate about their gender (e.g. change in gender identity, change in name/pronouns, change in gender expression, etc.)? ________________

How urgent are the student’s needs? Is the student currently experiencing distress regarding their gender? ________________

**PARENT/GUARDIAN INVOLVEMENT**

1) Are the student’s parents/guardians aware of their gender status?  
   - Yes  
   - No

2) What is the level of parent/guardian support?

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<td>(moderate)</td>
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**If support is low, what considerations must be made in implementing this plan?**

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

**INITIAL PLANNING & COMMUNICATION DETAILS**

1) Who will be on the communication team? **Check all that apply:**

☐ Student
☐ Parent(s)/Guardian(s)
☐ Teachers
☐ Student Services Staff
☐ School/Grade Level Administrator(s)
☐ Other(s), please describe: _______________________________________

2) What is the specific information that the student wishes to convey? __________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

3) What will be required of others (e.g. use of different name/pronouns, use of facilities, etc.)? ________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

4) Imagine this process goes EXACTLY as the student wishes. What does it look/sound like? How will this information be shared (e.g. a lesson is presented to class, an announcement from the teacher, an announcement from the student, written communication, etc.). Be specific: ________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

5) With whom and when will this information be shared?

☐ Peers in the student’s class(es) Date: __________

☐ Peers in the student’s grade level Date: __________
6) If lessons/activities will be used...
   a) Who will lead them? ____________________________
   b) What will the lessons/activities be? ____________________________
   c) Will the student have a part of the lesson/activity? □ Yes □ No
      If YES, what will this consist of? ____________________________
   d) Will the parents/guardians be present? □ Yes □ No
      If YES, what role, if any, will they play? ____________________________
   e) Other notes & considerations: ____________________________

KEY DECISIONS PRIOR TO STUDENT’S COMMUNICATION

1) Will information be shared with other families about the student’s gender?
   □ Families in child’s class □ Families in child’s grade □ Whole school □ None
   a) Who is responsible for coordinating this? ____________________________
   b) How will it be distributed? ____________________________
   c) What information will be shared? ____________________________

2) Will any training be provided to school staff? □ Yes □ No
   If YES, who is responsible for coordinating the training? ________________
   Who will provide the training? ____________________________
   What information will be shared? ____________________________
3) Does the student have siblings at the school?  □ Yes  □ No
   If YES, what considerations, if any, will need to be made for them (e.g. training in 
   their classrooms, emotional support, etc.)? ______________________________

   ACTIONS TO CONSIDER AFTER COMMUNICATION

1) Does the student have a Gender Support Plan?  □ Yes  □ No
   If NO, will a plan be developed by the team?  □ Yes  □ No
   If YES, who will take the lead? ______________________________

2) Who will lead the team in monitoring the utilization and effectiveness of this plan?
   ______________________________

3) What steps will be taken in the event this Gender Communication Plan needs to be
   revised? ______________________________

Other issues/concerns to be addressed: ______________________________
   ______________________________
   ______________________________
   ______________________________

   Does a follow-up meeting need to be scheduled?  □ Yes  □ No
   If yes, when will it be held and who is responsible for coordinating the meeting?
   ______________________________
Are any future action steps or follow-up tasks necessary?  ☐ Yes  ☐ No

If yes, please specify:

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<tr>
<th>What?</th>
<th>Who is responsible?</th>
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If you have additional questions regarding the information contained in this guide, please contact the Office for Student Support Programs and Services (OSSPS) at (813) 794-2600.

*Adapted from Gender Spectrum’s Gender Communication Plan*