Understanding and Supporting Transgender and Gender Diverse Students in Schools and Beyond

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Being Trans

Session Objectives

To enhance participants’ awareness of gender identity and gender diversity matters in schools;

To introduce tools participants can use not only to assess a system’s readiness to accommodate gender diverse students but to determine the support and transition needs of individual gender diverse students as part of the schooling process;

To highlight strategies participants can employ to support gender diverse students and to improve school climate as it pertains to gender diversity.
Background
Definitions

Sex
Think biology - Female/Male

Gender
Social construction that is culturally-mediated -
Girl/Woman, Boy/Man

Gender Identity
Lived/defined by the individual

Gender Expression
How people communicate their gender identity to others

Gender Role
Culturally-mediated ways people live out gender -
Feminine/Masculine

Sexual Orientation
One’s primary psychological, social, emotional, and erotic attractions to other people
Definitions

Cisgender
Gender identity matches the sex and gender one was assigned at birth

Transgender
Gender identity does not match the sex and gender one was assigned at birth

Consistent, persistent, insistent

Gender Diverse
Broader category that captures the range of gender identities
Terminology

Offensive: Transgenders
A Transgender

Preferred: Transgender

Transgender should be used as an adjective, not a noun.

Incorrect: “Tony is a transgender”
Correct: “Tony is a transgender man”

Incorrect: “The parade included transgenders”
Correct: “The parade included transgender people”
Terminology

Offensive: Transgendered

Preferred: Transgender

You would not say Elton John is ‘gayed’ or Ellen DeGeneres is ‘lesbianed,’ therefore you not say Chaz Bono is ’transgendered’
Terminology

Offensive: Transgenderism

Preferred: none

‘Transgenderism’ is a term used by anti-transgender activists to dehumanize transgender people and reduce who they are to a condition.
Terminology

Offensive:  Preferred:

Sex Change;  Transition
Pre-operative, Post Operative

Inaccurately suggests one must have surgery in order to transition.

Avoid overemphasizing surgery when discussing transgender people or the process of transition.
Terminology

Offensive: Biologically Female/Male
Offensive: Genetically Female/Male

Preferred: Assigned Female/Male at Birth
Preferred: Designated Female/Male at Birth

A person’s sex is determined by a number of factors - not simply genetics - and one’s biology does not trump one’s gender identity.
Transgender Youth

- 80% of TG-identified adults knew they were ‘different’ before leaving elementary school

- Less than 4% of TG-identified persons realized they were TG after the age of 18

- Average age of trans-spectrum self-realization: 7.9

- Average age of learning the ‘words’ to communicate feelings: 15.5
  Consistent, Persistent, Insistent

- Transitions pre-puberty are social in-nature; some persons make seek medical transitions around puberty or later

*Hyun, Raff, & Trier (2012)*
Gender Non-Conformity and ASD

- Numerous anecdotal observations and emerging research is demonstrating a correlation between gender non-conformity and autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

- Children and adolescents on the autism spectrum are seven (7) times more likely to be gender non-conforming.

- Children and adolescents at gender clinics are 6-15 times more likely than their same-aged peers to have ASD.

Strang et al. (2017)
School Issues

Transphobia:
School Climate, Bullying, Biased Remarks, Harassment

- 43% report feeling unsafe at school because of the climate
- 38% report avoiding gender-specific spaces because of climate
- 66% report avoiding extra-curricular activities and school functions

GLSEN 2015 National Climate Survey
School Issues

Transphobia:
School Climate, Bullying, Biased Remarks, Harassment

- 31.8% of LGBTQ students missed at least one entire day of school in the past month because of climate and 10% missed four or more days in the past month
- 96% heard negative gender expression remarks
- 86% heard negative trans-specific remarks

GLSEN 2015 National Climate Survey
School Issues

Transphobia: School Climate, Bullying, Biased Remarks, Harassment

- 64% heard negative gender expression remarks from adults
- 55% verbally harassed at school
- 20% physically harassed at school
- 60% LGBTQ sexually harassed at school

GLSEN 2015 National Climate Survey
School Issues

Transphobia:
School Climate, Bullying, Biased Remarks, Harassment

- 49% LGBTQ electronically bullied because of SO or GI/GE
- 58% LGBTQ did not report incidents
- 64% who did report indicated school staff did nothing in response

GLSEN 2015 National Climate Survey
School Issues

Discriminatory School Policies and Practices

- 66% experience anti-LGBT policies and practices
- 16.7% of students were prohibited from discussing or writing about LGBT topics in school assignments, and 16.3% were prohibited from doing so in extracurricular activities
- 30% report being disciplined for PDA

GLSEN 2015 National Climate Survey
School Issues

Discriminatory School Policies and Practices

- 16% prevented from attending a dance or function
- 14% restricted from promoting GSA
- 51% prevented from using declared name
- 60% required to use restrooms and/or locker rooms based on gender assigned (GA) at birth

GLSEN 2015 National Climate Survey
School Issues

Discriminatory School Policies and Practices

- 22% prevented from wearing clothes considered inappropriate based on GA
- 10.8% were prevented or discouraged from participating in school sports because they were LGBTQ
- 71.2% of LGBTQ students reported their schools engaged in some form of gendered practice in school activities (e.g. attire, royalty courts, photographs)

GLSEN 2015 National Climate Survey
Effects of a Hostile Climate

- Three times more likely to have missed school in the past month
- Have lower GPAs than non-harassed peers
- Twice as likely to report not to pursue PSE

GLSEN 2015 National Climate Survey
Effects of a Hostile Climate

- Twice as likely to have been disciplined at school
- Report higher levels of depression and lower levels of self-esteem
- Report higher rates of substance use/abuse and risk-taking behaviors

GLSEN 2015 National Climate Survey
Legal & Policy Matters

Title IX (Patsy Mink Equal Opportunity in Education Act, 2002)
- U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights considers gender identity and gender expression as protected classes under Title IX
- The DOE-OCR and the U.S. DOJ have filed and won lawsuits in this regard

FERPA
- According to Lambda Legal, students (ages 18+) and/or parents or legal guardians have the right to request a school change the name and gender marker on a student’s records if they are incorrect, misleading, or violate one’s privacy [34 C.F.R. section 99.7(a)(2)(ii)]

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- Gender identity is not a disability in-and-of itself
- Focus on disability in the 504 plan, not on gender identity
- If the disability for which one is seeking accommodations centers on mental health sequelae associated with one’s gender identity and that impacts one’s education, it would be appropriate to develop a 504 plan in this situation
Guidance from the National Center for Transgender Equality

Withdrawing the Departments' guidance letter would not change the law. Title IX protects transgender students, as most courts have agreed. Schools have a legal and a moral duty to support all students, including transgender students.

The federal guidance was based on over a decade of case law and proven best practices from schools around the country. The nation's education leaders-including the leading associations of teachers, principals, pediatricians, and school counselors and psychologists-support treating all students equally and consistent with their gender identity.

Schools nationwide are increasingly supporting and affirming transgender students, and most will continue to do so with or without guidance from the administration. Over 40% of K-12 students attend schools with affirming state or local policies, and that number is rapidly growing.
Guidance from the National Center for Transgender Equality

The guidance and its approach to supporting transgender students are supported by the American Association of Secondary School Principals—which requested the guidance—as well as the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Association of School Psychologists, the American School Counselors Association, the National Parent-Teacher Association, the National Education Association, and the American Federation of Teachers.

The guidance is already working for nearly half of America's students. The federal guidance is based on guidelines from 14 states and DC and from hundreds of other local school districts, with tens of millions of students.

Schools nationwide are increasingly supporting and affirming transgender students, and most will continue to do so with or without guidance from the administration. Over 40% of K-12 students attend schools with affirming state or local policies, and that number of rapidly growing.
Title IX protections are based on more than 15 years of case law. Five federal appeals courts and over a dozen district courts, stretching back over 15 years, have found that federal sex discrimination laws, including Title IX, prohibit discrimination against transgender people. One district court, however, issued a nationwide order last year preventing the Departments from enforcing Title IX in some cases involving transgender students.

Gavin Grimm's case in front of the Supreme Court next month is more important than ever. The questions before the court are to evaluate the guidance and whether the prohibition of sex discrimination under Title IX applies to transgender students seeking to use the restroom in school consistent with their gender identity.

Case law is on our side. Schools can still choose to support their trans students and we need to advocate for that on a local and state level now more than ever.
Beware of ‘Professional’ Organizations

American College of Pediatricians

“A person’s belief that one is something one is not is, at best, a sign of confused thinking; at worst it is a delusion.”
Tools

- For use with individuals
- As applied to systems
For Use with Individuals
Schools In Transition

First-of-its-kind publication providing guidance to schools to ensure safe and supportive environments for transgender and gender diverse students.

Published By: Gender Spectrum (2015)

Schools in Transition Tools: Two Components

1. Gender Support Plan
2. Gender Transition Plan
Gender Support Plan

• Serves as a guide to assist schools in coming to a common understanding of a student’s gender identity and how the school will be accountable in the process of supporting the student

• Ideally, developed collaboratively with the student in question (if appropriate), family members, and school personnel

• Addresses confidentiality, privacy, safety, names, pronouns, records, facilities use, participation in the full range of the educational process, and other considerations
Gender Transition Plan

- Outlines the necessary planning to take place to support students through their social transition process at school.
- Intended to be developed collaboratively with the student in-question (if appropriate), family members, and school personnel.
- Addresses a communications plan, professional development plan, and timelines for accomplishing necessary tasks.
- Aids in the creation of information and lessons determined to meet the needs of the school community.
Assessing Systems
District and School
Transgender and Gender Diverse Readiness Assessment Form
Savage, Springborg, & Lagerstrom (2016)

- Developed by school-based mental health professionals in collaboration with the parent of a transgender child
- Adapted from the Vulnerability Assessment measure contained in the PREPaRE 1 workshop
- Provides information about a district’s readiness to accommodate and support gender diversity as well as an individual school building’s readiness to do so
- Intended to be completed by a team of school-based personnel
Special Services and Equity Matters

- Access to an LGBTQ+ cultural broker
- Non-LGBTQ+ cultural brokers and language interpreters have received training on gender identity, gender expression, and gender diversity
- Paperwork has multiple gender options to check
- Pre-referral, problem-solving, student assistance, and child study teams and procedures are responsive to gender diversity
- Protocols reliant on gender-based norms are scored using combined-gender norms (if available) or in accordance with the gender-diverse student’s affirmed identity
- Report-writing considerations
- 504 planning and IEP development take into account the unique needs of gender-diverse students
Strategies
Ensuring A Safe and Supportive School Environment

Professional development for all people working within the school community

Policy development
- Non-discrimination policies
- Anti-harassment policies
- Other school policies (e.g., field trips; restroom/locker room use; athletic teams)
- Be proactive versus reactive

Advocacy
- Acceptance
- Legal, ethical, moral considerations
Opportunity to Practice
Case Study #1: Background

- A child who has been in your school district since Kindergarten will be transitioning over the summer between their 6th and 7th grade years, leaving school in the spring as Samantha and returning in the fall as Samuel.

- The child’s parents wish to have the student’s name changed on all school documents (i.e., class rosters, school directories, yearbook listings, lunch account, etc.) to reflect the child’s affirmed identity but they are meeting with resistance from the principal who says the request may take a time to process and would not commit to a date.

- The family meets with 7th grade teachers before school begins to share their story, field questions, and to emphasize the importance of using Sam’s new name and male pronouns. The meeting goes well but, afterwards, you are approached by a teacher who tells you he will not be encouraging this ‘behavior’ by using the name and pronouns. The teacher goes on to tell you this kid is just playing their parents and he refuses to be a part of it.
Case Study #1: Discussion

• Why do you think the principal and teacher are reacting in this way?

• How would you handle this situation?

• Whose help should you enlist and what information can you share to help the teacher and principal understand what it means to be transgender and/or what their obligations are for this child?

• What should you do to ensure this student’s safety, not only within this teacher’s classroom but throughout the school day?
Case Study #2: Background

- A family new to the district enrolls its child in 2nd grade and the parents confide in the principal of your school and to you its child is transgender but they do not plan to share that fact with anyone else.

- This student was assigned male at birth but ever since he could talk, has been insisting she is a girl and she socially transitioned to her true identity before entering Kindergarten.

- There has been no legal change of name nor gender marker on the birth certificate and the principal is voicing concerns about how to handle the ‘bathroom situation.’
Case Study #2: Discussion

- What restroom should the student be allowed to use?

- What is your understanding of federal law in this regard? Upon what resources can you rely to inform not only your own knowledge and practice in this regard, but those of the administration, of teachers and other staff members, and of the school community, in general?

- What measures can you take to be proactive, should other people learn that this child is transgender and raise concerns?
Case Study #3: Background

- An 11th grade student has confided in you they are transgender.
- They also have told you that their parents are completely unsupportive, refusing to use their chosen name and affirmed pronouns and have threatened to kick them out of the home if they continue with ‘this nonsense.’
- Historically a good student, the child’s grades are slipping, they are missing school, and teachers report that the student seems depressed.
Case Study #3: Discussion

- How can you help?
- How do confidentiality and privacy come in to play in this situation? What are your responsibilities to the student and to the family? How do you handle any conflict between your responsibilities and pressure from others to behave in a manner inconsistent with law and ethical principles that apply in the case?
- What resources would you employ to help the student with their home situation?
Monday Morning And Beyond

(Here’s where you come in...)
Monday Morning and Beyond

- Download Schools In Transition and the Transgender and Gender Diverse Readiness Assessment Form

- Schedule a meeting with your school’s decision maker(s)
  - Share what you have learned today
  - Revisit your school’s policies or bring to their attention ones that need to be developed
  - Request professional development for everyone within the school community
  - Ask if they will allow a baseline assessment to be conducted - If you meet with resistance from your administration consider informally completing the assessment
Monday Morning and Beyond

- Re-evaluate your perspective of and interaction with current trans and gender students and their families.
- Let it be known you are the go-to person in the building for questions, resources, and support.
- Recruit staff members to help facilitate a GSA.
  - Middle Schools are doing this across the nation - it isn’t just for high schools anymore.
Monday Morning and Beyond

- Order Safe Space stickers and distribute widely
Monday Morning and Beyond

- Talk to your librarian about ordering age-appropriate books on the subject
Monday Morning and Beyond

• Be an advocate in every aspect of your life - and while you are at it - speak in support of civil rights bills (e.g., “Bathroom Bills”) every chance you get!
Resources

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)
Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)
Transparenthood (Blog)
TransActive Gender Center
Welcoming Schools
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Center
TransYouth Family Allies
Philadelphia Trans-Health Conference
TNET - PFLAG’s Transgender Network
Questions?

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References


