CREATING A SAFE & AFFIRMING SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT FOR TRANSGENDER & GENDER NONCONFORMING STUDENTS

CREATING & IMPLEMENTING SCHOOL POLICY

Caitlin McGowan, Psy.D.
Diagnostic Coordinator at South Campus
Kelly George, NCC, LCPC
Psychotherapist at Live Oak, Inc.
Tom Dempsey
Principal at South Campus
GENESIS OF THIS PRESENTATION

- Increasing number of students expressing and questioning a transgender or gender nonconforming identity
- Inquiries regarding school policies and rights of transgender students that are in the process of transitioning from one gender identity to another
- Research findings indicating Illinois schools were not safe for most transgender secondary school students, and that transgender students did not have access to important school resources, nor were they protected by comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment school policies (GLSEN, 2011).
- Lack of a comprehensive and established framework for best practices when working with this population of students
- Dedication to creating a school environment where all students feel safe and accepted
GOALS OF THIS PRESENTATION

- Provide an understanding of language as it relates to sexual orientation and gender identity
- Increase awareness and sensitivity to the struggles and challenges transgender and gender nonconforming students face
- Encourage assessment of the resources and opportunities that are accessible to transgender and gender nonconforming students, and how schools can create a more affirming and welcoming environment for these students
- Share the process in which the Connection Schools created and implemented the “Connections Schools Model Policy Regarding Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students”
- Create a safe space for participants to share experiences and considerations when working with this population of students in efforts to increase sophistication and validate notions on how to better support and ensure safety
SEQUENCE OF THIS PRESENTATION

- Introduction Activity
- Establishing Common Language
- Gingerbread Activity
- Safety and Risk Factors
- Creating an Affirming & Welcoming Environment
- LGBT Supportive Environment Assessment
- Policy Writing, Implementation, & Impact
- Small Group Exercise
- Q & A
INTRODUCTION ACTIVITY
Women Are Women
Regardless of sex
you can be both
or a mix of the two
But people are people
Whatever their parts
And Men are Men
In the same respects
Or you can be neither
If that’s what suits you
Because what really matters
Is inside of our hearts
**GLOSSARY OF TERMINOLOGY**

- **Sex:** Biologically determined, based on chromosomes, hormones, and genital presentation at birth. Biological males have XY chromosomes, androgen heavy hormones, and testes. Biological females have XX chromosomes, estrogen heavy hormones, and ovum.

- **Intersexed:** Someone born with anatomy that does not fit the expected presentation of a biological male or female. Examples include female reproductive organs (ovaries) and male sexual organs (penis/testicles), ambiguous genitals, mosaic genetics (some are XY some are XX), etc. Intersexuality occurs as often as 1 in 100 births.

- **Gender:** Culturally determined, gender is societal expectations based on sex.

- **Gender Identity:** Is how we perceive and label ourselves as either male or female.

- **Sexual Orientation:** Scientific term for the direction of sexual attraction, emotional and/or physical attraction, and its expression. Defining factors of attraction may be tied to anatomical sex, but can also be related to gender identity and gender presentation.
**Kinsey Scale:** Is a seven-point continuum (0-6) developed by Alfred Kinsey and his associates in 1948 to describe sexual orientation. The scale ranges from 0, which denotes exclusive heterosexuality to 6, which denotes exclusive homosexuality, with all possible gradations in between. Most people are located somewhere between the two extremes.

**Queer:** is an umbrella term frequently used to connote a non-heterosexual or nongender conforming identity. In the not too distant past, this term also connoted political activism and sometimes still does. Many younger people prefer this term and use it with less political intent.

**Questioning:** Is a term often used with particular reference to young people who may be genuinely uncertain about issues of sexual orientation in their lives.

**Cross-Dressing:** When a person dresses in the clothing of the opposite gender (i.e., males who wear traditionally female clothing, hairstyles, make-up, etc. or females who wear traditionally male clothing). Cross-dressing is sometimes referred to as gender non-conforming behavior. Cross-dressing is not indicative of sexual orientation.
Drag: Intentionally wearing the culturally expected dress of the opposite sex, or “cross dress.” An example would be a woman wearing a tuxedo, or a man wearing a dress. Men who do this for performance are known as “drag queens” and women who do this for performance are known as “drag kings.”

Trans* or Transgender: Is an umbrella term encompassing the diversity of gender expression. These individuals, many of whom cluster together to form their own communities, are people whose gender expression is not confined to traditional or socially constructed gender roles. Some trans* individuals experience their anatomical sex as conflicting with their expected gender identity. These individuals may consider themselves transsexual. Some may opt for sexual reassignment surgery, though surgery is not required to identify as transsexual. This is a long, complicated and medically supervised process.
- Female to Male or Transmale/man: Bio female, identifies and may present as male
- Male to Female or Transfemale/woman: Bio male, identifies and may present as female

Androgyny/Pangender/Third Gender/Genderqueer—This is a person who identifies as having characteristics of both male and female genders, or feel they are neither male nor female. They may purposefully present in a fashion that makes their gender difficult to label, or they may simply engage in “bucking the gender norm.”
GLOSSARY OF TERMINOLOGY

- **Cisgender** – The opposite of transgender, it is when one performs gender as is expected for their sex type.

- **Homophobia**: A term developed by behavioral scientists to describe varying degrees of fear, dislike, and hatred of homosexuals or homosexuality. Such feelings may result in prejudice, discrimination, and a hostile behavior toward people believed to be homosexual. **Internalized homophobia** implies a self-hatred or dislike because one is LGBT.

- **Heterosexism**: Refers to the systematic oppression of LGBT youth and families through discriminatory practices that are part of our social structure and institutions.

- **Heterosexual privilege** provides or denies certain social opportunities or benefits solely on the basis of one's sexual orientation.

*Combined and Adapted from: Gary Mallon, DSW Columbia University, Green Chimneys Children’s Services and Lance Toma, MA Horizons Community Services and Nancy Nangeroni Gender Education & Media, Inc. Adapted again: Jeff Levy, LCSW (2006) and Kelly George, LCPC (2013)*
The Genderbread Person v2.0

Gender is one of those things everyone thinks they understand, but most people don’t. Like Inception. Gender isn’t binary. It’s not either/or. In many cases it’s both/and. A bit of this, a dash of that. This tasty little guide is meant to be an appetizer for understanding. It’s okay if you’re hungry for more.
SAFETY AND RISK FACTORS

STAND UP FOR TRANS YOUTH

ONE THIRD OF TRANSGENDER YOUTH HAVE ATTEMPTED SUICIDE

45% HAVE THOUGHT SERIOUSLY ABOUT KILLING THEMSELVES
SAFETY AND RISK FACTORS

- 63.9% of LGBT students reported being verbally harassed, 27.1% reported being physically harassed and 12.4% reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their gender expression.

- 6 in 10 LGBT students (63.5%) reported feeling unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation; and 4 in 10 (43.9%) felt unsafe because of their gender expression.

- LGBT students reported feeling unsafe in specific school spaces, most commonly locker rooms (39.0%), bathrooms (38.8%) and physical education/gym class (32.5%).

- Transgender students experienced more hostile school climates than their nontransgender peers - 80% of transgender students reported feeling unsafe at school because of their gender expression
SAFETY AND RISK FACTORS

• Nearly one third of LGBT students (29.8%) reported skipping a class at least once and 31.8% missed at least one entire day of school in the past month because of safety concerns.

• The reported grade point average of students who were more frequently harassed because of their sexual orientation or gender expression was lower than for students who were less often harassed (2.9 vs. 3.2).

• 60.4% of LGBT students never reported an incident of harassment or assault to school personnel.

• Being out in school had positive and negative repercussions for LGBT students - outness was related to higher levels of victimization, but also higher levels of psychological well-being.

(ghtsen.org, 2011 National School Climate Survey)
CREATING AN AFFIRMING & WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

SAFE ZONE
I am an Ally.
This is a safe zone. I am understanding, non-judgemental, and willing to provide an atmosphere of acceptance and assistance for members of the LGBT Community.
1. When a student comes to you to discuss concerns around issues associated with their identity, insure confidentiality when possible.

2. Remind all students that you are there to support them in a non-judgmental, safe way.

3. Ensure non-discrimination, be aware of bullying, consider how to ensure safety for the Student.

4. Ask all students their preferred gender pronoun and preferred name.

5. Provide students the ability to express their gender identity, use the appropriate restrooms, participate in the appropriate gendered activities, etc.
6. Provide visible cues and symbols (e.g. rainbow flag, literature, articles, magazines, etc.)

7. Empathize with experiences of discrimination or stigmatization

8. Become knowledgeable, and encourage knowledge in other teachers, school staff, and administrators

9. Recognize relationships student may have, including partners and alternative family structures

10. Don’t presume to know when or how a student should “come out.” Work with them on creating a plan that best ensures their safety if they do choose to come out.
11. Consider the competencies and strengths students may have already acquired through adversity.

12. Honor the diversity of the LGBTQ population.

13. Use non-judgmental language.

14. Avoid labeling, ask students how they identify themselves and work to understand their individual identity.

15. Remember adolescence is a time of transition and change for all students. Give them understanding, and flexibility when possible. Check your own biases and personal beliefs, and get support from your co-workers, administration, etc.
Consider each statement below and write a “T” for those statements that are true in your agency, facility, school or organization (herein referred to as “agency”), and an “N” for those statements that are not true in your agency.

___ My agency offers LGBTQ support groups.
___ My agency’s affirmative action statement/nondiscrimination policy for staff and students includes sexual orientation.
___ My agency’s affirmative action statement/nondiscrimination policy for staff and clients includes gender identity and gender expression.
___ My agency has a clear written policy that prohibits harassment and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, by or against staff and clients.
___ There are openly LGBTQ persons on professional and or administrative staff.
___ I seldom see graffiti or hear slurs that are anti-LGBTQ in my agency.
___ There are openly and prominently displayed materials on LGBTQ issues and concerns in the waiting areas and common spaces of my agency/facility.
___ LGBTQ clients would find my agency/facility a warm and supportive place to receive services.
___ Information and postings about LGBTQ services or issues would not be defaced at my agency/facility.
___ If I were an openly LGBTQ staff person, I would have no reason to fear harassment, violence, or discrimination in my agency setting.
___ I would feel entirely comfortable speaking in support of LGBTQ issues and concerns at my agency/facility.
___ If I were an openly LGBTQ student, I would have no reason to fear harassment, violence, or discrimination in my agency.

I would rate the level of LGBTQ sensitivity and knowledge at my agency as (circle one):

(Adapted from McNally and Finnegan 2002)
POLICY WRITING PROCESS

- Student Needs Assessment & Identification
- School Temperament Assessment & Identification
- Researching Established Policies & Guidelines
- Policy Language & Structure Acquisition
- Administration & Outside Specialist Review
- Student Review
- Student Family and School Team Meeting
Purpose:

This policy is designed to create a safe learning environment for all students and to ensure that every student has equal access to all school programs and activities. This policy sets out guidelines for the Connections Schools to address the needs for transgender and gender nonconforming students. This policy does not anticipate every situation that might occur with respect to a transgender or gender nonconforming student, and the needs of each transgender or gender nonconforming student must be assessed on a case-by-case basis. In all cases, the goal is to ensure safety, comfort, and healthy development of the transgender or gender nonconforming student while maximizing the student’s social integration and minimizing stigmatizing of the student.
Definitions:

The definitions provided here are not meant to label students but are intended to assist in understanding this policy and the obligations of Connections Schools. Students may or may not use these terms to describe themselves.

“Gender identity” refers to a person’s psychological identification as male, female, both, or neither, regardless of the sex assigned at birth. This includes a student’s gender-related identity, appearance, expression, or behavior.

“Transgender students” refers to students whose gender identity is different from their sex assigned at birth.

“Gender nonconforming students” refers to students whose gender expression differs from stereotypical expectations, such as “feminine” boys, “masculine” girls, and students who are perceived as androgynous.

“Preferred name” refers to the name with which a student identifies and prefers others to use.

“Transition” refers to the personal process a transgender student undergoes to begin to live as their self-identified gender. This may include some or all of the following cultural, legal, and medical adjustments: telling one’s family, friends, and/or classmates; changing one’s style of dress, changing one’s name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly some form of surgical procedure.
Guidance and Practices:

Student Transitions
When a student transitions during the school year, the student’s academic and clinical team shall hold a meeting with the student and their parent(s) or legal guardian(s) to ascertain their desires and concerns prior to making any school related changes. The team will discuss a timeline for the transition in order to create the conditions supporting a safe and accepting environment at the school. Finally, the team shall train any school staff that interacts directly with the student on the transition plan, timelines for transition, and any relevant legal requirements. Should the student and/or their parent(s) or legal guardian(s) request changes to the original timeline or conditions that were created at the first meeting, the student’s team must hold another meeting with the student and their parent(s) or legal guardian(s) prior to making any changes.
Guidance and Practices:

Confidentiality
Connections School’s personnel shall not discuss a student’s transgender status with anyone other than the student and the student’s parent(s) or legal guardian(s), unless the information is necessary in order to accommodate the student, ensure the student’s safety, or the student has given written consent.
Guidance and Practices:

Names and Pronouns
Transgender and gender non-conforming students at Connections Schools will be addressed by their preferred names, and by pronouns corresponding to their gender identity upon their request and parental or guardian approval to do so. A court ordered name or gender change is not required, and the student need not change his or her official records. While staff or students may make inadvertent or honest mistakes in the use of preferred names or pronouns, the intentional or persistent refusal by staff to respect a student’s gender identity is a violation of this policy.
Guidance and Practices:

*Restroom Accessibility*
Students shall have access to the restroom that corresponds to their gender identity, regardless of the student’s sex assigned at birth, consistently asserted at school. This access shall be presented as an option and not a requirement.
Guidance and Practices:

*Gender Segregated Activities*
To the extent possible, Connections Schools should reduce or eliminate the practice of segregating students by gender and maintain only those that have a clear and sound pedagogical purpose. In situations where students are segregated by gender, students should be offered the option to participate in the group that corresponds to their gender identity.
Guidance and Practices:

Official Records
Connections Schools shall maintain records that include a student’s legal name and legal gender. However, to the extent that the schools are not legally required to use a student’s legal name and gender on other school records or documents, the school shall also include the name and gender preferred by the student. The Connections Schools will change a student’s official record to reflect a change in legal name or gender upon receipt of documentation that such change has been made pursuant to a court order, or through amendment of state or federally-issued identification.
Guidance and Practices:

Discrimination/Harassment
It is the school’s responsibility to ensure that transgender and gender nonconforming students have a safe school environment. This includes ensuring that any incident of discrimination, harassment, or violence is given immediate attention (i.e., investigating the incident, taking appropriate corrective action, and providing students and staff with appropriate resources). Complaints alleging discrimination or harassment based on a person’s actual or perceived transgender status or gender nonconforming are to be handled in the same manner as other discrimination or harassment complaints.
POLICY IMPLEMENTATION & IMPACT

- Preparing for Questions and Concerns
- Informing Staff
- Informing Students & Families
- Troubleshooting
- Making Revisions & Amendments
- Staff, Student, School Community, & District Feedback
- Future Goals
WHAT WILL YOU DO TO MAKE SCHOOLS SAFER FOR TRANSGENDER YOUTH...

- In the next 24 hours?
- In the next week?
- In the next month?
- In the next year?
Q & A