

## Gender Inclusive Schools Framework

*When someone with the authority of a teacher describes the world and you're not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing.*

--Adrienne Rich

### Gender inclusive schools...

- Recognize that gender impacts all students
- Interrupt binary notions of gender
- Acknowledge and account for gender diversity
- Question limited portrayals of gender
- Support students' self-reflection
- Teach empathy and respect

*Gender Inclusive schools ask, "How are we accounting for the unique gender of every student?"*

### Entry Points

When focusing on the intentional development of gender inclusive school settings, it is helpful to think in terms of four discrete approaches, or entry points: **Internal**, **Interpersonal**, **Instructional** and **Institutional**. Through deliberate work in each one of these areas, gender inclusive practices can be woven into the fabric of the institution.

**Internal entry point:** focuses on educators' own knowledge and experiences of gender. Work in this area involves reflecting about how each person's understandings and beliefs about gender impact the work they do with students and applying the lens of gender to their professional practices. This entry point is crucial for the other approaches to be effectively implemented; this foundation of gender literacy should be solidly in place before schools move to the other entry points.

**Interpersonal entry point:** the interactions, intentional behaviors and communications that reinforce the school's commitment to gender inclusion for all. They are designed to interrupt simplistic notions about gender by providing a "counter narrative" to many of the binary assumptions being made about it. Educators operating from this entry point:

#### **Use language that challenges binary messages about gender and "de-genders" objects**

- *Colors are just colors. They don't have a gender. You can like any color you want to.*
- Rather than "boys and girls," "ladies and gentlemen," etc., refer to pupils as "students," "children," "y'all," "folks," your school's mascot (i.e. "Cougars") or another non-gendered term for the group.

#### **Help students understand the difference between patterns and rules**

- *That may be true for some people, but not for everyone.*
- *More common and less common; frequently but not always*

#### **Question limited portrayals of gender**

- *Who decided what things are for boys and what things are for girls?*
- *Sometimes this stuff is confusing. We get messages that some things are for boys and some things are for girls. But these messages are just some people's ideas. They may not be right for you.*

#### **Validate choices people make associated with their personal gender**

- *That looks great! If you like it and it makes you feel good, that's what matters.*
- *You sure are good at that; I wish I could do it as well as you do!*

#### **Teach empathy and respect**

- *How do you think you would feel if people were always asking you about your own gender?*
- *Have you ever been teased? How does it feel when you are teased or treated as an outsider?*

**Acknowledge gender diversity**

- *Ideas and expectations about gender are changing all of the time.*
- *History is full of examples of gender diversity! There have been gender diverse people in every culture and religion, from all over the world and throughout time.*

***Instructional entry point:*** specific ways in which teaching and learning are used to instill greater awareness and understanding about gender. Whether standing alone or integrated into other aspects of instruction, these approaches are the most direct way to impact students. Instructional approaches include:

- Designing lesson plans to expand understandings of gender diversity
- Exploring curriculum areas or units for inserting gender diversity issues or topics
- Using literature that has themes raising gender diversity issues
- Utilizing the arts to explore gender
- Using the social-emotional curriculum to surface gender related themes
- Examining the media and popular culture for gender related messages
- Assigning open ended projects that include gender related topics, readings, or news
- Highlighting transgender or other gender expansive people in the news or from history
- Analyzing data about various trends related to evolving understandings of gender
- Inviting guest speakers who work for greater gender equity in education, law or other fields
- Using video or other media that present specific ideas about gender
- Creating space for students to articulate their own understanding and beliefs about gender
- Integrating gender into curriculum areas through story problems, writing prompts, readings, art assignments, research projects, etc.

***Institutional entry point:*** structural steps that create a foundation for gender inclusive practices to take hold. Work in this area demonstrates to your community that the school/organization recognizes and honors gender diversity and actively works to reflect a more complex understanding about gender. Such approaches include:

- Policies/administrative regulations emphasizing gender as an area of diversity protected and supported by the school
- Systematic staff training that builds the capacity of teachers and other staff to honor the gender diversity of all students
- Student information systems allowing families to specify a child's gender marker, name and pronouns
- Identified staff members functioning as leads around gender diversity work or issues
- Systems and procedures for working with transgender and other gender expansive students
- All gender restroom/facilities that provide options for privacy without stigmatizing any students
- Readily available written materials and information about gender diversity
- Signage/imagery celebrating gender diversity
- Procedures/forms that demonstrate a non-binary understanding of gender