



WSSWA Guidelines for Supporting Transgender and Nonbinary Students

Rationale

- According to the new [CDC data](#), in 2021,
 - more than a third (37%) of high school students reported they experienced poor mental health during the pandemic, and
 - 44% reported they persistently felt sad or hopeless during the past year, and that **number is higher at 66% for students who are LGBTQ+**
 - 2/3 of LGBTQ students report persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness (2019) and are 4 times more likely to have attempted suicide than their peers
- ([Trevor Project](#)) Be a supportive adult to LGBT youth by using the pronouns/names they request and respecting their identities
 - Trans youth whose pronouns and names are not respected are twice as likely to attempt suicide.
 - The presence of an accepting adult reduces suicide attempts by 40% for LGBT youth.
- “Youth who feel connected at school and at home were found to be as much as 66% less likely to experience health risk behaviors in adulthood.” (CDC report)
- “Youth who feel connected at school have better school attendance, grades, and test scores and stay in school longer ([National Center for Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#) n.d.).
- SBMH professionals are very important for students with marginalized identities, as they bring a trauma sensitive lens and welcoming orientation,
- And, for example, we know the research shows that the presence of an accepting adult reduces suicide attempts by 40% for LGBT youth.
- Supportive adults can help increase students’ interest and excitement in learning, which improves academic outcomes. Supportive adults can also help reduce fear, anxiety, and self-doubt, which detract from learning. (Darling-Hammond & Cook 2018).
- Students who feel connected to school, and who are engaged in classrooms with higher emotional support, are more likely to exert effort to understand difficult concepts (National Center for Safe Supportive Learning Environments n.d.).

- School staff can focus on increasing peer to peer and adult to student relationships for students from marginalized groups to increase belonging, inclusion, and safety.
- School connectedness is associated with fewer suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts among all students, and especially among students who are LGBTQ+ ([JED Foundation](#) n.d.).

When students feel that they are able to express their thoughts and emotions to individuals in the school that they trust, they are more willing to engage in help seeking (JED Foundation n.d.). Knowing who they can go to for help, and being encouraged to seek help, further promote these behaviors.

Guiding Principles:

- Every student has a right to learn in a safe and accepting school environment.
- All adults must act as protective agents committed to the safety and well-being of the youth they serve.
- There are often gaps in trust- grounded in past and current experiences between students, families, and educational institutions- that may impact this process.
- The expression of gender identity is a healthy, appropriate, and typical aspect of human development.
- Ongoing learning is necessary to build a school climate that avoids gender stereotyping and affirms the gender of all children.

-From [Schools in Transition](#), p. 6

State and Federal Laws:

WI Pupil Non-Discrimination Law (State Stat. 118.13) - Public schools may not exclude students from school or school activities or programs on the basis of sexual orientation. Students need to have unrestricted access to complaint process.

WI DPI Administrative Code PI 9.02 - includes “harassment” under definition of “discrimination.”

WI Anti-Bullying Law - Does include “gender identity”, but DPI can’t intervene

1st Amendment - Students have the right to be out.

Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment - Schools must protect LGBTQ students equally

Title IX - Provides implicit protections for students who don’t conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity.

Equal Access Act - Schools must treat GSAs equally

NASW Code of Ethics

- 1.05 Cultural Competence and Social Diversity
- 2.01 Respect

- 4.02 Discrimination
- 6.04 Social and Political Action

ALSO

Mandatory Reporting

State Nondiscrimination Law (housing, employment, public accommodations)

Ways to Support Trans Students

- Advocating for nondiscrimination & anti-bullying policies that protect LGBTQ+ youth while opposing policies that cause harm and discriminate
 - Use the following [statement from WSSWA](#) as guidance for what to include in speaking to your school board or administrators
- Inclusive curriculum
- School climate
- GSAs
- Professional development
- Family Involvement

Types of Transitioning

Social Transition

• Many times, the first step a person takes is to express their internal sense of who they are – living as the “affirmed gender”

- Students can socially transition at any age. People can come out as transgender or non-binary at many different stages in life--during childhood, adolescence or throughout adulthood into their later years.
- Students may use a new name and pronouns that align with their gender identity. They may also change their gender expression in terms of clothing or hairstyle to align with their gender identity.
- Social transitioning does not involve any sort of medical intervention.
- Transitioning, like coming out, is not a one time event. Students may transition in different ways during different times in their lives depending on the amount of support that they have and how clear they feel about their gender identity. Students may also come out at school, before they do at home. Or the opposite can also be true.

Medical Transition

Puberty blockers are a medication that essentially puts puberty on pause.

- When children have just entered early puberty, ages 11 and older, they can start blockers to delay pubertal changes.

- This process is reversible. Children who stop taking blockers will resume puberty in alignment with their biological sex.
- Transgender and non-binary youth may begin taking gender affirming hormones such as estrogen or testosterone at around age 16 with some youth beginning hormones as young as age 14.
- Some people have surgeries beginning at age 18.
- It is important to know and teach others that trans bodies are private and unless you are someone's medical provider or intimate partner, it is inappropriate for you to ask about or talk about whether or not someone has had or will have surgeries.

Resources for Gender Transitions

Best Practices Guide: *Schools in Transition*

Gender Spectrum's Communicating a Change in Gender Status at School

Gender Spectrum's Gender Support Plan

FAQ on Trans Students and School Bathrooms

MAP/GLSEN report on Trans Youth & School Facilities

MAP guide on Nondiscrimination Policies for LGBT People

Gender Support Plan Considerations:

(from Communicating a Change in Gender Status at School)

The Right Plan:

- Factors to consider: child's age, personality and emotional state, the level of family support, the school's organizational design, time of year
- There is no universal 'correct way' for sharing information about a student's change in gender status. Instead, focus on identifying the steps that will create the necessary conditions to make this particular student's experience as positive as possible.

Urgency & Timing

- The level of the student's urgency versus the careful planning of the process must be balanced.

Age & Grade Level

- A younger student may be less involved with designing the actual process, while older students may play a greater role in shaping the experience.

Privacy & 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.

- 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?*
- Familiarize yourself with the protocols and policies in the areas below. If they are not sensitive to the needs of transgender and nonbinary students, advocate for amending and shaping these areas.
 - Student Records - Names & Pronouns
 - Dress Codes
 - Sex-separated Facilities and Activities
 - Discrimination, Harassment, & Bullying
 - Staff Training

How Can I Support Transgender and Nonbinary Youth?

- [Toolkit for "Being there for Nonbinary Youth"](#) - Learning for Justice
- [Policy Makers and Lawmakers Want to Erase Trans Identities; Don't Erase Them in Your School](#) - Learning for Justice
- [A Guide to Being an Ally to Transgender and Nonbinary Youth](#) - Trevor Project
- Student Support
- Family Support
- Facilitate [Gender Support Planning](#) meeting
- Advocate for policies & practices to create safe, gender inclusive schools.
- Connect Students and Families to Resources
 - PATH Clinic, PFLAG Group, etc.
 - Health & Mental Health care

How Can I Show I'm an Ally?

- **In your work environment, indicate ways you are welcoming and inclusive**
 - Examine your physical work space & school
 - Signs, books, magazines, forms, etc.
 - You may have to be creative if your school has policies against this
- Use **inclusive language** in conversations (avoid "ladies and gentlemen" or

“guys” for a mixed gender group)

- Ask pronouns, Avoid assumptions
- **Stand up** when you hear biased language, discriminatory policies, bullying / harassment. This includes speaking at school board meetings when harmful policies are on the agenda. See [WSSWA's statement](#) as a reference.

How Can I Advocate for Students and Families?

- It's okay to ask a student how to help them. For example, ask a student privately what pronouns they want to use. And also ask what pronouns they want you to use with their sibling(s) and also their family (it may be different!)
- Often in families, one member may be further on the path to acceptance than another. Educators need to be sensitive to the family's journey and to have the student's safety and well-being as the center point. Many communities have support groups for parents of transgender and non-binary students. It may be helpful to connect a family with one of these groups.
- Transitioning: students may change paths or adjust according to their identity or what feels "right".
- One of the biggest challenges from the school may be from adults in the school; it is important to train staff on confidentiality and ways to handle difficult conversations in a professional manner.

What Do I Do if a Family is Not Accepting?

- School might be a student's only safe space to be themselves.
- Make sure the student has one or two trusted, supportive staff members.
- We need to work with the student at school to support their gender identity without outing the student to family.
- Schools can support families on the journey to acceptance.

