



Guide on Supporting Transgender Students Available

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Finding a free, helpful manual for school leaders on the issues faced by transgender students is not easy, but a number of organizations have put a good one together entitled, *Schools in Transition: A Guide for Supporting Transgender Students in K-12 Schools*. It is available for free download at www.nclrights.org/legal-help-resources/resource/schools-in-transition.

“Transgender” is an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression or behavior does not conform to that typically associated with the sex which they were assigned at birth. Such a person does not feel “right” with the body in which they were born.

Students who are transgender often have tough time in school, due to a number of factors: what they are going through; the feeling of being different; expectations of adults and other children; fear of others (sometimes including their parents) finding out that they are transgender; and other obstacles to success.

They are bullied and harassed more frequently than other students. Often these feelings lead to students feeling depressed; they are more likely to use drugs, and, in many cases, attempt (and succeed at) suicide.

This guide starts with a letter written by the superintendent from Benecia, California, who, like many administrators, parents and others, had no real understanding of what having a transgender student meant in terms

*“There’s a gender in your brain
and a gender in your body.*

*For 99 percent of people,
those thigs are in alignment.*

*For transgender people,
they’re mismatched.*

That’s all it is.”

– Chaz Bono

of providing support and ensuring that the child felt safe in the classroom. In her letter, she states that,

“I encourage anyone looking to support a transgender student to always focus on the needs of the transitioning child and think about what they need to feel safe, included and supported. I never had a political agenda; my agenda was to support our students. I listened and tried to understand when I faced obstacles. I worked to be an advocate, not an activist.”

The superintendent’s advice is good and the guide gives other good advice on subjects such as:

- Gender Basics
- Key Considerations
- The Right Plan
- Urgency and Timing
- Privacy and Disclosure
- Practical Tips

continued

- Student Records and Student Information Systems
- Names and Pronouns
- Dress Codes
- Sex-Separated Facilities, Activities and Programs
- Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying
- The Legal Landscape

The guide also contains questions and answers; forms that can be used to help districts create support and transition plans (which the guide says can be very helpful for

the student); and, other information. While the guide is 61 pages, including appendices, it is easy to read and can easily be finished in two sittings.

For many board members, superintendents and other administrators who have never had the experience of working with a transgender student, the obstacles to the student's success may appear daunting. But, take it from one who knows (my son, Dusty, is transgender), being able to ensure that a child reaches full potential, just like you would with any other student, is well worth the time, effort and understanding.

The Guide's Guiding Principles

Even though the needs of transgender students vary tremendously based on a range of factors, a number of guiding principles informed this document. These principles include that:

- Every student has the right to learn in a safe and accepting school environment. Supporting transgender students gives them the equal opportunity that all students need.
- All adults must act as protective agents committed to the safety and well-being of the youth they serve, including those who are transgender or gender-expansive, and should recognize that working as a team is in the best interest of individual students seeking support.
- There are often gaps in trust — grounded in past or current experiences between students, families and educational institutions. This document will also incorporate language, resources and suggestions for navigating these trust gaps and supporting the student's safety and well-being, including strategies for working in adversarial contexts.
- The expression of transgender identity, or any other form of gender-expansive behavior, is a healthy, appropriate and typical aspect of human development. A gender-expansive student should never be asked, encouraged or required to affirm a gender identity or to express their gender in a manner that is not consistent with their self identification or expression. Any such attempts or requests are unethical and will likely cause significant emotional harm. It is irrelevant whether a person's objection to a student's identity or expression is based on sincerely held religious beliefs or the belief that the student lacks capacity or ability to assert their gender identity or expression (e.g., due to age, developmental disability or intellectual disability).
- Ongoing learning is a key element of this process. Educators and administrators need to engage in regular professional development and training to build a school climate that avoids gender stereotyping and affirms the gender of all children. Parents and caregivers must similarly continue to expand their understanding of the shifting concerns facing children as they get older. Professionals must also build their knowledge about the concerns facing educators and families alike.

